

TIF SIGFRIDS

Interview

WYATT KAHN'S PROPER PROPOSAL

By RACHEL SMALL



Current art world phenom Wyatt Kahn, whose fragmented canvases blur the line between painting and sculpture, transcends traditional roles once again as curator for Rachel Uffner Gallery's group show, "Proper Nouns." Having recently attempted a figurative series himself, Kahn wanted to explore the slippery space between abstraction and figuration. Featured works by photographer Lucas Blalock, sculptor Zachary Leener, painter Leonhard Hurlzmeier, and sculptor-performer Jamie Isenstein verge on representative depictions. Also included is the seminal video *Painter* (1995) by Paul McCarthy, which adds to and brings out the show's humorous tones.

At their core, the pieces from the four younger artists consist of commonplace objects. For Blalock, it's piles of hotdogs; for Leener, it's clusters of doorknobs; for Hurlzmeier, it's women in the midst of everyday activities; for Isenstein, it's lamps buried in sand. "'Proper Nouns' comes from the idea that the starting points are nouns," Kahn explains. These "nouns" are depicted in ways that allow an easy slide into abstraction—and as they go in and out of focus, anthropomorphic details surface (Blalock's hot dogs are the most obvious example). "They each reference a body, an actual person beyond [the object itself]," Kahn says. "The title plays on that idea."

Meanwhile, McCarthy's *Painter* plays out loud in the gallery. The 50-minute film is a dark, cartoonish parody of the art world. McCarthy stars as Willem de Kooning, although the character, who spends time in his studio having nervous breakdowns and metaphorically fucking his canvases when he's not terrorizing his gallerist, serves as an archetype for the 20th century male tortured-genius artist.

Before making a bid for *Painter*, Kahn had discussed the video with the other artists, and found that they all recalled it fondly. "Artists often have a hard time being self-critical [or] criticizing the art system," Kahn continues. "*Painter* is one of the few examples of that being done successfully." This off-kilter brand of art world comedy is evoked through the show's other works. "It goes back to our response to objects in our everyday life."

As viewers turn away from the video, Kahn imagines that the audio alone helps unify the multimedia exhibition. "You can listen to the work's sound without having the video—it resonates so strongly, the sound alone. You can hear it when you experience the other works." Installed in the gallery, McCarthy's de Kooning can be heard ranting, sobbing, and mumbling to himself as he struggles to create his next great painting, and thus, another art world barrier is transcended—that between the chaotic, imperfect studio and the polished gallery show.