

REVIEWS

subject in various combinations of watercolor, gouache, crayon, colored pencil, and collage. Scher's skills as a draftsman are on par with his gifts as a colorist: Animals, figures, and faces rendered in spare hatch marks or simple monochrome are as texturally elaborate as those built from confident strokes of watercolor or in tandem with abstract painterly passages. Many works include collage elements, and while Scher often relies on the medium's standard fare (a ticket stub, a beer-bottle label, an assortment of French ephemera), he is one of few contemporary artists to employ those free commercial postcards found on racks outside restaurant bathrooms, sixty-four of which were used as supports for the small paintings filmed in *Tropic*.

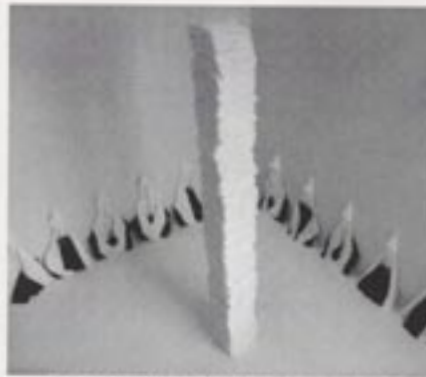
*Tropic* is the densest work in the exhibition. Its monitor screen is trisected, each third strobing with a different postcard image upon which is superimposed a drawing of a comely female face. Movement proceeds from left to right in a rapid, braided undulation, but the effect is oddly less mesmerizing than that of the show's strongest video, *Coke Girl*. Its subject looks at first like a diseased-blondie: An all-American girl drinking the all-American drink, she raises the Coke to her lips and takes a swig with a smile worthy of the Kennedys and none of the awkwardness that often accompanies a big gulp from an oversize bottle. It's (pop) culture as narrative, sustenance as natural as can be. But in this loop, and in the size large watercolors of the same woman, Scher manages to convey a startling range of nuance and character (which may explain the wait list for his "video portraits," the first of which was made for gal-about-town Susan Shin). The subject—indeed, even a trace of subjectivity—is evoked from the most banal of gestures, the specific boon of the everyday. Scher's experimentation across media is rendered no less serious by his humor; the two characteristics intersect in *Monstrous Mickey*, a video shot from a set of 170 Disney-brand pair color swatches on which he has painted perhaps the most anti-Mickey icon imaginable, a human skull.

—Lisa Paparellio

KEITH FARQUHAR

NYEHAUS

Relatively unknown in the United States, Edinburgh-based artist Keith Farquhar has been exhibiting cool, humorous, at times obliquely political drawings, paintings, and sculptures in Europe for nearly a decade. Deadpan figures made of clothing have



Keith Farquhar, *Atomized*, 2006, hooded sweatshirts, jeans, and aluminum. Installation view.



Adam Ovsjanin, *Litled (I)*, fabric and house.

largely become a signature form—blue jeans for legs, hooded shell jackets or sweatshirts for the upper body. Pinned against walls or other supports, the characters are draped and creased to give them slight but distinct expressions; but such "individuation" only makes them appear more generic, whether they're alone or arrayed into ritualistic room-size tableaux. It's a vision of post-individual malaise both comic and sinister, a Gap window display gone wrong.

Farquhar's New York debut featured a big, brand-new installation as its centerpiece, *Atomized* (all works 2005), comprised a sixteen-foot-tall column of neatly folded white sweatshirts surrounded by slouchy white hoodie-and-Levi's males sitting around the room's perimeter.

Farquhar's mobs can be menacing; cf. *Our New Parliament*, 2004, in which dark-colored hoodie-men surround a Pilsener beer with red-blue sweatshirts—a different tribe?—laid out like corpses. But the germs of *Atomized*, salivary against the yellow walls, seem downcast—and for good reason, apparently. The work draws its title from the British edition of Michel Houellebecq's novel *The Elementary Particles* (1998), which caps its scabrous anti-humanism by contemplating the abandonment of sexual reproduction in favor of cloning and the distribution of genital pleasure receptors all over the body. The joyless drones of *Atomized*, regarding a totem composed of their own raw materials with a funereal air, seem destined not for replication but for recycling. Thus the reverently attended column stands as an ironic memorial to getting it up, and ultimately to masculinity itself.

Up on the gallery's balcony—from which *Atomized* looked best—a six-by-five-foot

mock-up of a CD case by Farquhar's defunct band the Male Nurse served as a sly, gender-muddled transitional object to a suite of works in another room. Literally gynocentric, it consists of six two-and-a-half-foot-high stylized vaginas sculpted in permutations of red, yellow, and blue neon tubing and mounted on the walls, plus one glowing a gummy "natural" pink. In this light Farquhar, with his impacted narratives, repetitions, and gender fixation, looks like a kind of artistic cousin to the ADD-afflicted Jason Rhoades. More explicitly than in *Atomized*, Farquhar here renders sex an abstraction; and the joke of those lifeless shells "turning on" these pinball-machine cunts is hilariously blunt. Still, the degree to which these works sour your mood may well depend upon on your knee-jerk response to, well, neon vaginas. For me, the reference to Barnett Newman (who's afraid of red, yellow, and blue . . . get it!) seems an oddly polite coup de grâce.

The show was accompanied by a catalogue titled *Bastards: The Creatures Made from Clothes*. Excellent in its own right, it gave *Atomized* the air of a postscript; and indeed, Farquhar's introduction to New York had a paradoxically summary air. You start to think, no wonder those sweat-shirt bastards look tired. Yet Farquhar's wit and uninhibited intellectual play stood out in the local season's opening fortnight, his take on dystopia a refreshing contrast to the parade of joyless banalities reacting, belatedly, to Robert Smithson or, grimly, to current politics. Perhaps it takes a citizen of Betanania to teach Americans how to have a laugh while one's empire—of gender or geopolitics—goes down the tubes.

—Domenek Attias

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