

Time Out New York

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Sean Landers

Andrea Rosen Gallery,
through May 22 (see Chelsea).

After my last show in New York was ripped apart by some of you, I don't mind saying I became totally depressed...so I went to my studio and painted pictures just for myself, and lo and behold, the paintings are fucking great." So begins the gallery handout in epistolary form that Sean Landers has addressed to those of us who judge art for a living. Although some might view this statement as Landers practically begging for a critical drubbing, he'll receive no such spanking from me. After looking at his new paintings, I left thinking, What's not to like?

Landers's canvases feature strange, sad imaginary figures—a teddy bear in jacket and tie, for instance, or *King Shitas*, the scatological version of King Midas—and his handling of paint has gotten better since his last show. For the first time, Landers delivers solid visual pleasure beyond his usually engaging content. He's also returned to the allover texts that made him famous in the early '90s, using them as an all-purpose background for his motley crew of alter egos. While no one's likely to peruse every word, what I read was alternately self-deprecating and defiant, frequently hilarious and evincing a poignant sense of all-too-human desires. When Landers writes, "I might be depressed because I've been sick for



Sean Landers, *Career Ego*, 1999.

a week, which means no alcohol and Michelle won't kiss me," I'm honestly moved, if only because every word—sweet or nasty—is sincerely felt.

Career Ego spectacularly exposes Landers's art-world anxieties with its depiction of a tiny naked character with a sagging belly, teeny pecker and oversize ears—all the better to hear negative criticism. I've tried explaining to people who hate his work why I fall for it every time; they, in turn, try to convince me that it is obnoxious, self-congratulatory and unfunny. Sometimes, explaining art like his is like explaining a joke—it never works. So no, this show is unlikely to change anyone's mind about Landers. But it is his most accomplished effort yet.—Bill Arning

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