

Roberta Smith, "SEAN LANDERS: 'Around the World Alone' and 'A Midnight Conversation,'" *The New York Times*, May 26, 2011.

The New York Times

SEAN LANDERS: 'Around the World Alone' and 'A Midnight Modern Conversation'

By ROBERTA SMITH

Published: May 26, 2011

'Around the World Alone'

*Friedrich Petzel Gallery
537 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
Through June 18*

'A Midnight Modern Conversation'

*Marianne Boesky Gallery
118 East 64th Street, Chelsea
Through June 18*

In the early 1990s Sean Landers became known for baring his success-crazed, chronically adolescent artistic soul. Swinging precariously between grandiosity and abjection, his confessional outpourings first covered sheets of legal paper taped to walls and then filled artist's books; they then leapt to canvas where they were soon mingling with bizarre images (female breasts and chimpanzees, for example). He also made cartoons, bronze busts and statues, and videos, all the while executing abrupt shifts in style and subject that made it hard to take stock.

With these two shows the task becomes a bit easier, and a lot more rewarding. In a turn-of-the-century brownstone that may be among the art world's most eccentric project spaces, Marianne Boesky is showing the first paintings that Mr. Landers made without texts. Dating from 1996 and not previously exhibited in New York, they were inspired by "A Midnight Modern Conversation," William Hogarth's painting of debauched drinkers from about 1732. These five largish Landers canvases depict, with some alterations, different portions of Hogarth's crowded lampoon of an all-male gathering. Mr. Landers's recreations have a wonderful gaucherie, but the real revelations here — as paintings and as human drama — are eight smaller, ancillary works that feature British Redcoats, in which nature, women and death enter the picture and are expressed on a wonderful, shimmering, slurry surface.

Meanwhile, at Friedrich Petzel in Chelsea, Mr. Landers is showing a new series, “Around the World Alone,” which features various sea captains in full clown makeup (red noses, hair and beards) at the wheels of ships surrounded by vast rolling seas and dramatic skies.

Roberta Smith, “SEAN LANDERS: ‘Around the World Alone’ and ‘A Midnight Conversation,’”
The New York Times, May 26, 2011.

One is shown in the Arctic, dressed in fur; another, identified as a hermit, wears rags; a third is a boy skipper in a striped sailor shirt. The lonely-clown-as-man-against-the-elements theme may amount to a double and thus self-canceling triteness. It certainly helps that the rendering is restrained, hovering quietly between painting and illustration, and emphasizing chill light and space over surface.

It is also not hard to detect subtexts of a sort — one being perhaps to render men more convincingly than the painter John Currin, an old friend of Mr. Landers’s, has managed thus far. In any event, these are weirdly convincing portrayals of reasonably self-aware, self-contained men, something of a rarity in Mr. Landers’s turbulent universe.

A version of this review appeared in print on May 27, 2011, on page C25 of the New York edition with the headline: Sean Landers:.