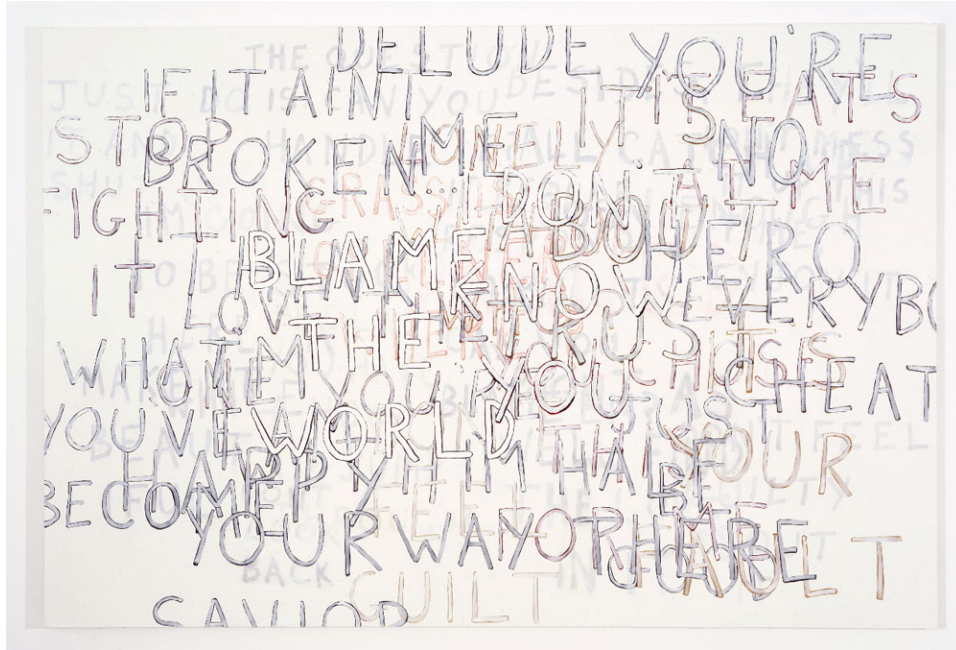


WHITEHOT MAGAZINE TM

Frost, Jess, *Sean Landers* @ Glenn Horowitz, Whitehot Magazine, NYC, December 2009.



Sean Landers, Blame the World, 2008, Oil on Linen, 54 x 80 inches

Sean Landers: Art, Life and God.

Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, East Hampton Art Gallery and Rare Bookstore
October 24, 2009 through January 10, 2010

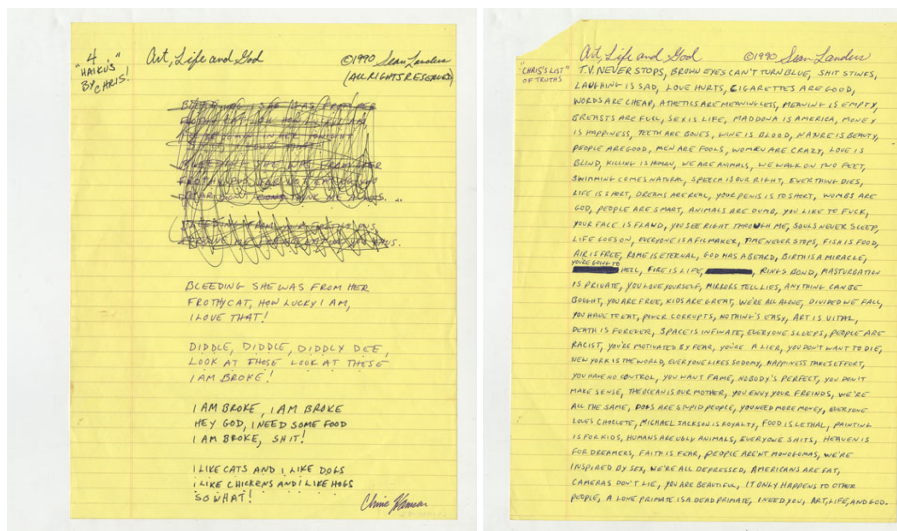
In 1990, Postmasters Gallery in New York presented a solo exhibition titled *Art, Life and God* by then emerging artist Sean Landers. 159 sheets of yellow notebook paper were pinned to the walls containing the diary of the artist's fictional counterpart, sculptor Chris Hamson. These lurid musings on the contemporary art world form a highly personalized rant, part self-flagellation and part brazen self-promotion. Now almost 20 years later, Glenn Horowitz Bookseller in East Hampton presents *Art, Life and God* redux as well as publishing a catalog in which each of the works are reproduced in print for the first time, dog-eared et al.

In the exhibition's original installation, indulging in these blue-chip daydreams and adolescent sex fantasies required standing in the gallery for lengths of time. To read the agonizing accounts of hubris and humiliation in a public space, particularly one as self-conscious as an art gallery, left the viewer feeling more like a voyeur, if not somehow implicated in Chris Hamson's argument by the mere act of observation. The option to read this material in private negates this performative experience to some extent, but also offers the opportunity to spend more empathetic time with the materials.

The most clever aspect of these chronicles are the way in which they intersect with the art world's own clichéd mythology. Begging your family for slide duping funds was almost a kind of hazing prior to the digital age, and I'm sure more than one hungry artist has actually attempted Hamson's fictitious offer to have sex with the Whitney Museum's director in exchange for an invitation to participate in the Biennial. The life of protagonist Chris Hamson typifies art world anecdotes, but as quickly as the "actor" Hamson pleads for the art world's embrace, "director" Landers relentlessly mocks its frigid superficiality. The scenes epitomize a collective gripe that exists amongst artists at the mercy of curators, dealers and critics. Fortunately most artists do this in the privacy of their own home, rather than making it the foundation of their work.

In *Art Life and God*, Chris Hamson clearly acts as a safety net for the artist's provocative assertions. In theory the content is confessional, but the nom de guerre distances the artist from the vulnerability his work suggests, and that detachment in turn keeps the audience questioning the sincerity of his intent.

Since the 1990 exhibition, Landers' subjects have varied from sad sack clowns to satirical portraits of art icons, often referred to as Disney-like. He has adapted other artist's styles to create self-referencing paintings, claiming this as an attempt to align him with their artistic prowess, or evolve his own skills by emulating their techniques. Landers uses his sophisticated understanding of key art movements and their justification as such to defend works that might otherwise appear provincial. When questioned about his slippery stance on conceptualism versus painting, Landers brilliantly spins well-built arguments for the formal value of his work.



Sean Landers, *Haikus*, 1990, Ink on paper, 8.5 x 11 inches, 1 page

Sean Landers, *Chris's List of Truths*, 1990, Ink on paper, 8.5 x 11 inches, 1 page

Landers could be the art world's Andy Kaufman, refuting the presence of parody in his work, to the point of provocation. If he were earnest in his appropriation, in the way that Martin Kippenberger invigorates his precursors by melding their flotsam and jetsam, Landers' works would not be so incendiary. In a monograph published to accompany his 2004 Kunsthalle Zurich exhibition, Landers is put to task by critic Caoimhin Mac Giolla Leith. When asked about his relationship to virtuosity, and the "conscious deskilling of media" in art, Landers replies: "...I always worked to my level at the time. If it looked really naive or had an absence of virtuosity it's because that was the truth of my situation. The idea being that all art earnestly done is essentially self-portraiture. That's why I compared myself directly to painters like Manet and Matisse and Poussin in that 1997 Andrea Rosen Gallery show, because I knew I didn't rate with them on a skill level. I thought that mine was the story of searching for my comfort level in their midst because that is the situation of a painter or an artist. You're always judged in the context of art history, contemporary art history and ancient art history."

The exhibition at Horowitz supplements the original show with a few drawings in which Landers reflects on the 1990 series. It also includes two oil paintings which book-end the spectrum of his work since *Art Life and God*. *Blame the World* is one of a series of text paintings that Landers has consistently worked into his repertoire. The existence of this series of paintings is perhaps what keeps Landers from falling into the abyss of conceptualism. Here he marries the candor of his writings to the sincerity of painting. Like a boiled down version of *Art Life and God*, these works project the full range of insecurity and conceit but without the net of irreverence. Phrases like "Of Course I'm a Fraud" and "Is the Art World a Merritocracy (sic)" ricochet around the canvas with a formal authenticity that doesn't translate elsewhere in Landers' work.

According to the exhibitions curator Jeremy Sanders, “Landers was undoubtedly pivotal to the revival of Conceptual experimentation that occurred in the '90s and he was especially crucial in demonstrating how a Conceptual framework might invigorate painting, drawing and other traditional media to which Conceptualism had previously been thought antithetical.”

The artist's book is a signed and numbered edition of 250, with a deluxe edition of 25 featuring an original work on paper. In one of the drawings that supplement the deluxe edition of the, the artist stands in front of his own work and says “Did I really write this crap?” This exhibition offers the opportunity to view Landers' work in hindsight, revealing the artists complex and idiosyncratic attitude towards art making. Whether or not it was calculated, Sean Landers has cleverly managed to mold his own career into a readymade.

Glenn Horowitz Bookseller is an Art Gallery and Bookstore located at 87 Newtown Lane in East Hampton, NY. *Art, Life and God* will be on view there from October 24th through January 10, 2010. For information about the exhibition or publication contact info@ghbookseller.com or visit www.ghbookseller.com.



Sean Landers, I'm Afraid To Be With My 'Elf, 2005, Oil on Linen, 38 x 32 inches