

REVIEWS

NEW YORK

SEAN LANDERS

ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

In his current exhibition, Sean Landers dispenses with the idle abstractions that percolate in much art devoted to the artist's life and psychology—identity, ego, self, etc.—and gets down to brass tacks. Chucking “Chris Hamson,” the fictionalized alter ego he introduced in a previous show, Landers now apparently feels he can speak for himself in an installation that indulges the nether extremes of confessional art. He owns up to lolling about in bed all day, jerking off, being broke, working shitty jobs, hustling the art world, and feeling sorry for himself. The intimacy implied by the artist's banal and painful self-revelations is thrillingly embarrassing. This is a great show for people who get off on excruciation.

Landers is one of the very few “conceptual” artists who can make standing around and reading from the walls of a gallery into a tolerable and even attractive proposition. The artist pens hilarious epistles, rife with misspellings, to his creditors, to a lousy artist, and to God, employing tones that veer between querulousness, anger, and hangdog depression. Mostly, he apologizes: I'm sorry I'm not rich, I'm sorry I've disappointed you, I'm sorry I got so drunk.

One work consists of the artist's 1991 wall calendar, which documents his various activities and moods in elaborate but unsystematic detail. It makes a great parody of On Kawara or Hanne Darboven's sullen and boring art of marking time, but better yet, it extends the institutional argument about the creation and display of art to ridiculous and self-consuming extremes. The narrative that informs Landers' entire installation might be, “What happens to a promising young guy artist, nurtured on '80s art-world dreams of wealth and superstardom, now that he's stuck in the decidedly unglamorous and financially straitened post-Gulf War art world of the '90s?” Landers faces the dilemma of all sensitive and creative people whose artistic



Sean Landers, *Anyone's Orgasm*, 1992, mixed media. Installation view.

aspirations are not backed up by convenient trust funds.

Landers supplements his texts and videos with a silent chorus of small, glum, unfired clay heads stuck on poles, bearing titles like *The Unfortunate Son of an Irish Drunk*, 1991, *K-Mart Shopper*, 1992, and *Unemployed Auto Worker Who's Angry with Bush and Japan*, 1992. These might be the faces Landers grew up with in Palmer, Massachusetts, the people he might but for the grace of God have become. Several of these surround a TV playing a tape entitled *Anyone's Orgasm*, 1992, of Landers clowning in his studio, a funny compare-and-contrast study but also maybe an implied self-reproach: so you had to grow up special, different, weird, selfish—an artist. Landers maintains an ironic irresolution as to whether his dispensation amounts to boon or dearth, blessing or curse.

At one point, Landers wonders if it's all right to want to be an artist just because one doesn't want to hold down a regular job. Wallowing productively in self-pity, sarcasm, envy, and schadenfreude, Landers explores the desire to make it within capitalism while not abiding by—or at least strategically bending—the system's rules. His show has a lot to offer those of us who still doggedly persist in the belief that the world owes us a living.

—David Rimanelli