

# Art in America

July 1992

## Sean Landers at Andrea Rosen

This 29-year-old artist's work is a mix of wide-eyed naïveté and disingenuous confessionalism. In the past, Landers has worked with a fictional persona, a very bad young sculptor called "Chris Hamson," who wrote long letters and made little busts so embarrassingly ham-fisted they had to be hidden in plastic bags. Now Landers has dropped the surrogate character, although an air of ambiguity and subterfuge still obtains in the work.

This installation had a disheveled, just-out-of-the-studio look. Strange little clay busts were placed randomly around the room on tall metal poles with metal bases. These pieces treat blue-collar types and have titles like *Cop from South Boston*, *Father Desmond's Favorite Altar Boy* and *The Mick*. They refer to the artist's growing up as a working-class, half-Greek, half-Irish Catholic kid in Palmer, Mass. Landers has a special penchant for modeling men with handlebar mustaches and wraparound hairdos. These small clay heads belong to the caricatural tradition of Daumier's sculpture.

In several slapdash cartoons done on yellow legal-pad paper, Landers lampoons young artists. One drawing depicts a dopey-looking fellow wearing the slogan "I teach art in the Midwest" emblazoned on his T-shirt, to which a cartoon bubble replies, "Big deal." In the snappily edited hour-long video *Anyone's Orgasm*, Landers seems to be



Sean Landers: Installation view of exhibition, 1992; at Andrea Rosen. Photo Peter Muscato.

impersonating the clichéd bohemian, alcoholic artist in his studio, singing along with the radio and masturbating in front of the camera. This ruse seems indebted to William Wegman's woozy '70s videos, yet in Landers's hands the diaristic impulse becomes even more obnoxiously winning. In *Calendar Pages from 1991*—a month-by-month calendar of his activities during that year, hung as 12 separate sheets—he regularly refers to his own workaholicism, European business trips, sex life, spiritual quests and frustration at having to hold down a job renovating Terry Winters's "beautiful loft."

Landers's epistolary pieces

raise issues of authenticity and intent. *Attn. Miss Gonzales*, a letter simply tacked on the gallery wall, addresses the problem of the artist's inability to repay his student loans from Yale. At one point he writes, "Please find this strange letter amusing [sic]. It is a Xerox of one of my artworks. It's [sic] sale facilitated the enclosed payment." In the same piece he exhibits a torn-up check for \$263 that he apparently considered sending. The fact that the letter was never mailed and is probably an elaborate fiction does not detract from its being a powerfully funny document of recession-era angst.

—Brooks Adams