

NEW YORK IN REVIEW

Shock value still counts for quite a bit in the art world, as does entertainment value. There is a perpetual craving not merely for the new but for the newly titillating, provocative, spectacular, excessive. Whether it is a question of ushering in banality, or courting the iconoclastic, the contemporary art practices that seem to count for something today, or gain the most notoriety (perhaps these two conditions are now interchangeable), are those which usually attract the most attention to themselves. Furthermore, these are the practices that attempt to outdistance or outcompete the visual language of mass culture—i.e., television, the movies, advertising, etc. This can be achieved through ironic manipulation of predetermined codes in a critically complicit manner—or through some attempt to offer an outrageously idiosyncratic or eccentric counter to the prevailing fascination with the mass media. The new work of **Sean Landers** presented at Postmasters (November 16–December 15) under the title *Art, Life and God*, falls towards the second of the aforementioned categories. In the artist's first one-person show last season, Landers offered a group of sculptures composed of mass-produced classical and traditional busts embedded within translucent, cylindrical blocks of resin placed upon hybrid-column pedestals. A virtual sea change has occurred since that point. This show comprised a series of short narrative stories handwritten on standard yellow-lined sheets of paper that are attached directly to the gallery wall. In a reference to his previous show, Landers installed a grouping of what might be described as anti-sculptures—clay busts covered in garbage bags and placed on “readymade” pedestals



Sean Landers, *Art, Life and God*, Installation view, 1990. Courtesy Postmasters Gallery.

(e.g., a foot ladder, a stool, etc.), and organized to replicate the installation of work (same floorplan) as in his previous show. But now, Landers has distanced himself from his own practice by inventing a sort of alter-ego artistic character who goes by the name of Chris Hamson. According to Landers, the writings and sculptures are the result of Chris's artistic endeavors—even

though Landers does sign the writing and copyrights it in his own name (although “Chris” also signs the writings). Here, Landers is creating a deliberate and self-conscious confusion of authorship, and of whether these vulgar, cathartic, scatological, awkward, and ultimately confessional writings are some form of autobiographical narrative by Landers—or a pseudo-biographical account of Chris's life. In the end, it is a murky admixture. There are some additional subtexts in this installation: the sculptures are meant to be cast in bronze on purchase, and the writings are supposed to be elements of a screenplay for an eventual movie. Yes, art, life, and God are all discussed by the composite Landers/Hamson character; sex, art career, relationships, lack of money, desire for money, family, friendship, and just about everything else is included in these apparently stream-of-consciousness utterances. This is just thought spilled as quickly onto the page as possible, without the assistance of supplementary editing; if there is a mode of editing, it is simply what cannot be unrepressed or desublimated. Landers's/Hamson's writing has a raw energy that is sophomoric in a reflexively sophisticated manner; because the writing is quite unrelenting in its jackhammer delivery, it is best taken in small doses. What is provocative about this show is the degree to which Landers (after all, it is his work!) is not in complete control of what he is engaged in; this lack of control, which is both self-conscious in its cultivation and utterly “authentic,” facilitates a shoot-your-wad type of unexpurgated excess that is at once gratuitous and potentially subversive.

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