

## REVIEWS

## NEW YORK



Sean Landers, *Art, Life and God*, 1990, mixed media. Installation view.

## SEAN LANDERS

### POSTMASTERS

The '80s fascination with success has lately given way to explorations of failure in the work of artists such as Nancy Barton, just as high-gloss cool has been replaced by rude, crude, and messy manners in art by the likes of Mike Kelley. Sean Landers, who previously exhibited sculpted heads floating in resin cylinders, has recently been presenting the ruminations of imaginary alter ego Chris Hamson in the form of letters scrawled in ballpoint on legal paper. Hamson is the artist-as-failure, confused, full of self-doubt, and given to explosions of rage at his pitiful position on the bottom of the art heap. Though isolated letters have appeared previously in group shows, here Landers presents a gallery full of missives. More diaristic than epistolary, these jottings flesh out Hamson's character, baring his tortured soul in all its wayward dimensions. Hamson obsesses over girls, love, sex, and masturbation; God, death, and the afterlife; the indifference of galleries and the blindness of critics; and the perpetual poverty that forces him to exist for days on rice, go without electricity, default on the student loans accumulated during his Ivy League education, and cajole money from Mom.

The writings refer to real-world figures from power dealer Larry Gagosian (who rejects his slides) to critic Donald Kuspit (who gives an idolatrous lecture on Joseph Beuys), as well as

to familiar downtown locales. At the center of the room a cluster of sculptures covered with opaque plastic garbage bags, arranged in a manner identical to that of the works in the artist's previous exhibition, encourages identification of Landers with Hamson.

Hamson is a prefeminist male caught in post-feminist times (alternately obsessed with and guilty about his sexual activities), a romantic hero plunked down in a heated art market who happens to be preoccupied with art as a route to spiritual redemption as well as financial solvency. These candid if debased self-revelations take their place in the tradition ushered in by Rousseau's *Confessions*, 1782, but their diction is updated, and they are endowed with a seamy physicality (Hamson, in his ever-horny state, fucks not only women but one of his own sculptures). As a rule, a small dose of such self-indulgence goes a long way, but it's surprisingly easy to get absorbed in Hamson's sad, hilarious monologues. Moreover, Hamson's chaotic emotions are constantly reigned in by his elaborate internal checks, by self-interrogations that leaven the arrogance. It would be hard to love this guy, but even harder to hate him. More importantly, the condition his missives conjure up rings true; we all know a Hamson or two, and even recognize parts of ourselves in him. The Hamson letters tap the all-too-human forces bottled up during the '80s, and the heat they generate is as uncomfortable as it is provocative.

—Lois E. Nesbitt