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## ART

### Eye Exam The Worst of Times

**Michael Workman**

In only its fifth show since opening in September, rowlandcontemporary, the newest space to enter the development now spreading along the Fulton Corridor, finds its place on the Chicago art-world map. In its little space on the corner of Fulton and May, "Death Sex War" offers a probing vision of a media consumerism obsessed with the worst life has to offer. In the main room are large-scale pen-and-ink drawings by Brooklyn artist Joan Linder that showcase the literal and figurative transformations of the human body into objects. The show's signature piece is her approximately life-sized drawing "Seven Eighty Two," which depicts a field-combat soldier in full regalia, including camouflage uniform and night-vision goggles, a figure so removed from the human that it becomes less difficult to understand how bureaucrats can view death tolls as the mundane accumulation of numbers on a pie chart rather than as the elimination of human lives defined by the complexity of their own individual experiences.

Reducing people to numbers serves a distancing purpose not always put to nefarious use, however, as demonstrated by her "05131," an image that depicts a human cadaver post-autopsy, the loose flaps of freshly lifted skin placed back over the lifeless frame like blankets over a sleeper. Linder's remaining images, "Red Rope" and "Pink Rope" I and II, remove the human figure from the image entirely, leaving only the ropes with which those missing figures are tied. It's a sly bit of poetry that the artist has used to transform the bindings that restrict these figures to define their forms entirely, from the knots at their ankles and wrists to the loose section wrapping the torso, mummifying them in their role as prisoners and victims of forces larger than themselves. Forces, in fact, for which their humanity matters as nothing more than as tool toward accomplishing one goal or another, but for which the artist offers no opinion of their relative value.

In the gallery's back room, which also doubles as its office, are a series of digital inkjet prints by Chicago artist Stephen Nyktas. A first-year graduate student at Northwestern, Nyktas has taken to transforming objects by turning them inside out. They're often covered in goo,

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remnants of their former lives as tubes, bottles, boxes or toys, and all are titled after the objects they once were. "Inside Out Milk of Magnesia," for instance. Or "Inside Out Petroleum Jelly," "Inside Out Bath Toy (orange)," and "Inside Out Hand Soap." It's this last among these which is one of the few identifiable objects in his series, with its hand pump clearly visible upside down and suspended in the center of its clear plastic bottle, still filled with liquid soap. It's apt symbolism given the distinctly sexualized visual lexicon employed in Nyktas' eviscerating practice: it's likely no unconscious intention on that the artist has built in a resemblance of many of his objects to the masturbation sleeves ready for purchase at most porno and sex toy shops.

### **Car Park**

Jonathan Gitelson's new show at Peter Miller Gallery is too much fun to miss. Gitelson, the story goes, began taking notice of the flyers left on his car every morning and started collecting them. After accumulating a few thousand, he hand-stitched them together into a car cover, then parked and photographed his car in front of the various nightclubs from which the flyers came. It simultaneously documents and protests, an absurdist reaction to the city's publicity-starved nightlife culture. Gitelson's a long-time part of Miller's stable of young Chicago photographers along with Brian Ulrich and Matt Siber, and it's nice to see him finally getting a little of the spotlight. His camera's perhaps less flamboyant and a bit more searching than his peers, but his images result in the most well-defined humor of the three, an often difficult subject to render properly in photography. These rise successfully to the task. Though Gitelson has had his "Car Project" on display before, this is the first gallery show of the work and worth a visit.

### **Worthy Cause**

Walking out of my office yesterday, I noticed a flyer hanging on the door: as Version>06 approaches, organizers have announced plans for an art auction to raise money for show expenses. Make plans to attend. Titled "It's all about the Benjamins," the auction takes place this Friday night at Heaven Gallery on Milwaukee Avenue with art available from Chicago heavies going for no more than \$100 each. The party will also double as a release party for the latest issue of Lumpen magazine. It's a worthy cause and a chance to own some miraculous work for a pittance. Visitors will enjoy musical performances by "Bird In Hand, Shirrelle C. Limes and the Lemons, and DJ Logan Bay," and shorts scheduled to screen at Version>06 will be offered up at a sneak-peek screening on the back deck roof of the gallery.

*Joan Linder and Stephen Nyktas show at rowlandcontemporary, 1118 West Fulton Market, (312) 421-6275, through April 15. Jonathan Gitelson shows at Peter Miller Gallery, 118 North Peoria, (312)951-1700, through April 22. Version>06 Benefit takes place at Heaven Gallery, 1550 North Milwaukee, March 24, 8pm. \$10 admission.*

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## New York

### Joan Linder at Mixed Greens

No matter what Linder is drawing, technique, not subject matter, drives her process. The drawings in this recent show were made one tiny pen stroke at a time as she inched her way across huge sheets of paper. As a result, the works share a myopic, distorted perspective that gives the subjects a quirky style and jittery presence.

If erotic photographer Nobuyoshi Araki, cartoonist R. Crumb, and feminist artist Mary Kelly could be persuaded to work together, the results might look something like Linder's sensual, comic, and critical "rope drawings." In each, the human figure is invisible, all that is present is the web of rope, which undulates in thickness like overcooked, homemade noodles. This amusing quality undermines the sinister aspect of an assumed captivity. Linder's choice of purple, orange, and red for the ropes and the title of one drawing, *Trussed*, suggest that her subjects may have been willing participants.

Also on view were drawings of a moose's head, armed soldier, golf cart, and shelving unit overflowing with groceries. All are icons of the American landscape, politics, and consumerism, but they don't carry much weight as symbols here. For example, a gun-toting soldier, face covered by night-vision goggles, would normally be a chilling image, but the complicated



Joan Linder, *Still Life*, colored inks on paper (126 x 120 in.), 2005. Courtesy of the artist and Mixed Greens, New York

patterning of his camouflage fatigues is what captures attention. The grocery shelves, punctuated by sunny yellows, and perky greens, and reds, are less an indictment of excess or nervous stockpiling than they are a wonderland of laboriously rendered forms, like the other images in this show.

—*Merrily Kerr*