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LOL: A DECADE OF ANTIC ART BALTIMORE

Writing on Dada's perpetual reinvention in the Summer 2003 issue of *October*, Helen Molesworth identifies "play with artistic labor" as a recurrent dimension of critical artistic production across generations. This play is directed at both the institutions of art and the capitalist expectations of work that still inform our definition of life. In the survey exhibition *LOL: A Decade of Antic Art*, curator Sue Spaid catalogs this practice's most recent manifestations, juxtaposing performance documents and ephemera, web-based art, and material objects that humorously comment on or intervene in everyday life [The Contemporary Museum; June 10—September 4, 2011].

Spaid has previously organized antic events in non-gallery settings, including a Hollywood grocery store and the Staten Island ferry. Still, the introduction of the leftovers of live, political work into a museum environment requires careful curatorial consideration, so as to not entirely neuter its intended radical impact. Fitting the show's anarchic premise, the museum is made labyrinthine and rough at the edges—white, black, and grey paint is spattered heavily on the concrete floor; a tiny white cube housing David Schafer's cacophonous sound piece bubbles off a narrow, makeshift corridor; Kahty Chen Milstead's shiny, conjoined performance costumes for *Boywatching Blind, London, 2001*, hang on dressmakers' mannequins, positioned as if in line for the nearby restroom. William Powhida's comic-style works on paper, including the scathing infographic *How the New Museum Committed Suicide with Banality, 2009*—citing dilution of its progressive remit by wealthy collector/board members—provocatively hang opposite a permanent plaque that categorizes the Contemporary's own donors.

Following Dada's example, *LOL*'s artists generally prefer strategy to aesthetic form, though their subjects and processes are decidedly contemporary. Rob Pruitt's *Killers, 2010*, replaces montage's manual editing with virtual Google Image searching to investigate an absurd online community dedicated to white cats with black

"Hitler" moustaches. These images are conventionally printed and displayed on the wall, as is photographer Larry Hammerness' monumental, glossy grid of embarrassing celebrity breast shots that undulates in the breeze of a nearby fan decked with festive streamers. Given these images' origins in commonplace digital culture, some interactivity—such as a searchable Flickr page—might have increased both works' relevance to the world outside of the museum.

Activist artist Gianni Motti provides the most explicit articulation of the museum's problematic "freezing" effect. Excluding documentation of his infamous social interventions from the show, he simply shows a static, framed poster, *Gianni Motti is Innocent, 1998*. Other artists experiment thoughtfully with documentary modes. Katie Kehoe installs a fishing rod, makeshift deck, and oversized blue-and-white lifebuoy in the gallery to stand in for her durational performance *One Year, One Month and Eleven Days of Fishing, 2010-2011*. A small LCD screen is embedded in the buoy, displaying personal anecdotes from the project.

Instructions—another Dadaist trope—energize the exhibition with potentiality. Patrizia Giambi advises on painting an illegal pedestrian crossing. Subverting corporate authority, The Yes Men's satirical website *survivalball.com, 2006*, promotes a fictitious suit designed to keep top management staff safe from global warming. Xeroxed screenshots of the site reveal the implied manufacturer: Halliburton. In the same cheap display case is a laminated bookmark printed with step-by-step directions on replicating and disseminating the project's spirit, substituting one's unethical corporation of choice for the controversial energy giant.

Gathered under the deliberately inane title *LOL*, these anti-institutional acts smack of adolescence. Yet they exemplify the sophisticated measures that artists take in order to live and work, as Molesworth puts it, aware of the "baffling contradictions of capitalism, in a way that has some kind of provisional legitimacy."

—Becky Hunter