

New York Horticulture

by Ana Finel Honigman



Dieter Roth
Garden Sculpture
1968-92
P.S. 1

Recess prevails at the converted Queens schoolhouse that is the **P.S.1 Art Center**, currently filled with the Fluxus high jinks of German artist **Dieter Roth** (1930-98). While the larger part of the Roth retrospective is on view at MoMA QNS [see "[Loosening Up: Dieter Roth's Tragedy](#)" by [Donald Kuspit](#)], P.S.1 is exhibiting several oversized works, some that represent accumulations maintained over many years.

In the third-floor gymnasium is Roth's 60-foot-long *Garden Sculpture* (1968-92), a sprawling construction of wood scraps, old television sets, mason jars, decaying organic material and other junk that looks like a weird co-operative class project put together by the science nerds and the kids from shop class.

In a long side gallery is *Flat Garbage* (1975-76/ 1992), a series of library shelves stacked with 623 chronologically arranged office binders filled with trash. In each binder Roth collected the debris from whatever he and his friends consumed and discarded. His parsed-down time capsules contain peach pits, used napkins, hotel receipts and many moldy cigarette butts.

Dieter Roth's sense of play -- by all accounts fueled by alcohol, morning till night -- seems to have spread through P.S.1's hallowed halls to several other shows there. **David Shapiro**, a 38-year-old Brooklyn-born artist and filmmaker, has made his own sequel to Roth's trash archives -- *Nickel Bags*, an array of 5,000 tiny clear plastic zip bags pinned to the wall, each containing a found object he plucked off the streets of New York.

Typically storing pot, coke or dope, the bags now hold random urban memorabilia -- a torn photograph, a cut-up credit card, a lost tooth. Shapiro's strangely sweet installation of urban anthropology makes up an affecting, hazy portrait of the city at work and play.

In the adjoining P.S.1 project room are **Tracey Nakayama's** saucy pornographic watercolors, lovingly representing in sepia tones images from woman-oriented erotica from the 1970s. The 30-year-old Williamsburg-based artist, who has shown her work at several Manhattan galleries in recent years, creates an adorable Eden of hippie-girls and their well-hung playmates, who cavort in shower stalls, on beds and in big blissfully, giggly orgies.

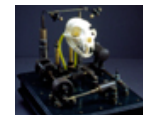
Things seem rather more serious across the Pulaski Bridge in Brooklyn, with **Joshua Stern's** black-and-white photographs of gloomy, even depressive stick figures at **Parker's Box** on Grand Street in Williamsburg. Stern, who doubles as a director of **Plus Ultra**, another Williamsburg gallery, poses hyper-simplified mannequins -- they seem to be made of wooden pegs -- inside diorama-sized replicas of Vermeer's famous interiors.

As a result, some of the most sublime paintings in Western art are

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Dieter Roth
Flat Garbage
1975-76/1999



David Shapiro
Nickel Bags
2004



Installation shot of Tracey
Nakayama's watercolors at P.S. 1



Joshua Stern
Untitled (Figure at Virginal)
 2003
 Parker's Box

turned into dramas of yuppie angst. In *Untitled (Figure at Virginal)*, a lone figure stands in for the pretty pianist from Vermeer's *The Concert*. In another *Untitled (Figure Seated at Table)*, *The Lady Writing a Letter with her Maid* is replaced by a mopping stickman, who remorsefully holds the undefined top of his cylinder head against one unformed arm.

With his pastiche of the much-loved Dutch master, Stern seems to be suggesting that attempts to simplify our contemporary lives have clearly left us with only dim outlines of a much richer past.

A rather furrier group suffers for our sins in the project room at Williamsburg's **Schroeder Romero** gallery, which features animal portraits by the Chicago-based oil painter **Laurie Hogin** that mix the technical talent of Sir Edward Landseer with the politics of anti-corporate activist Naomi Klein. Her disquieting *Bunny Suite #3*, *Fashion Victim* depicts a rabbit with an arresting tiger-striped coat curled in a soft, fluffy ball. Its red-rimmed eyes and pointed ears undermine its Easter-friendly cuteness. With its gilded hand-made frame, this little fur ball seems as haggard and rabid as any boozy old fashionista or famous art legend. The price: \$1,800.



Joshua Stern
Untitled
 2004

Back in Manhattan on Madison Avenue is more animalism, via **Kojo Griffin's** second New York solo exhibition at **Mitchell-Innes & Nash**. A veteran of the 2000 Whitney Biennial Exhibition who lives in Atlanta, Griffin paints plaintive scenes from a domestic world populated not by people but by what look like grown-up stuffed animals. In one, a nicely suited yuppie bear races away from his pregnant spouse with a cup of coffee in his paw, only to be shown in an adjacent black-and-white panel with his jacket off and his tie loosened, guzzling a shot of booze.

In another before-and-after sequence, a pretty bird gets chatted up by an attentive-seeming bear, who gloats shamelessly in the next scene, where they are shown in bed, her bra undone and her hand held remorsefully against her forehead. Just as children use their well-loved but often abused plush toys as surrogates for their budding emotions, Griffin's animals act as moral stunt-doubles for our most seedy, secret desires. The paintings can be had for between \$3,000 and \$19,500.



Laurie Hogin
Bunny Suite #3: Fashion Victim no. 12 Self
 2000
 Schroeder Romero

Mie Yim's adorable, fuzzy and furry creatures, on view in the project space of **Lehmann Maupin** gallery in Chelsea, have as seedy a side as Griffin's anthropomorphized beasts. Even though her palette is sugary and the characters she represents resemble Marshmallow Peeps (those ubiquitous Easter candies), Mie Yim paints strange incoherent rituals, with sexual, cultish and murderous undertones.

On one of the walls, a sizable mural depicts two giant teddy bears blissfully kissing while fluffy chicks, little bears and baby bunnies look on with shocked expressions of condemnation. Off to the side of the scandalous lovers, a funeral party gathers to mourn the death of an enormous cherry colored bear while another massive red teddy sinks into a nearby lake and a small little yellow bear stands on a large rabbit's head, suffocating him in a field of flowers.

Yim's smaller canvases and works on paper, which range in price from \$650 to \$3,950, show more of the creepy practices stuffed animals might engage in once the lights are off and the kids are asleep.



Kojo Griffin
Untitled (#2)
 2004
 Mitchell-Innes & Nash

Recess ends with **Ilyse Soutine's** large-scale color photograph of an old-fashioned classroom desk chair seen at Chelsea's new **Miller/Geisler Gallery**. A showerhead hangs over this piece of scholastic décor, making it appear like an electric chair where a Bloomberg-like adult could flick a switch, and instead of igniting sparks, soak an overheated mind in icy, numbing water. Thankfully, the stuffed animals can take over playing when the kids are stuck dumb in school.



Kojo Griffin
Untitled (#4)
 2004

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Mie Yim
mi-mi-do 2004
Lehmann Maupin



Mie Yim
Puppet Bunny
2004



Ilyse Soutine
Desk and Showerhead
2002
Miller/Geisler

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