

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Yablonsky, Linda, "Artifacts – Kai Althoff's Crash Pad", NY Times, Jan.26, 2011



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Artifacts | Kai Althoff's Crash Pad

CULTURE | By LINDA YABLONSKY | JANUARY 26, 2011, 2:33 PM



Images courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York

Artwork by Kai Althoff featured in his exhibition "Punkt, Absatz, Blüml."

The Barbara Gladstone Gallery has vanished. Well, not really. It's still at its usual location in Chelsea, but now it's a walk-in painting.

Step past the reception desk and you face a floor-to-ceiling red satin curtain portending a drama about to unfold. Enter the main exhibition space and you are in a bachelor pad

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decorated by a freak for the 1960s named Blümli. A thick raised carpet that simultaneously evokes both a conversation pit and a water bed sits in the center of the room. Piles of discarded clothing lie here and there. The gallery's 15-foot ceilings are now half their usual height and have a yellow cast; a rectangle of white fluorescent tubes runs the length of them. The sectioned shelves of a room divider display a collection of hand-painted mugs. A life-size couple of young papier-mâché lovers, one of whom may be Blümli, stand beside it, staring into each other's eyes as if under a spell.

The show itself is likely to have the same effect on its viewers.

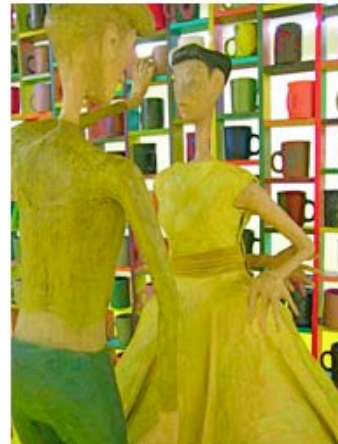
The place feels so private that walking around it can feel like trespassing. That's because it is basically the interior world of Kai Althoff, a 44-year-old artist from Cologne, Germany, who now lives in New York. Blümli is an alter ego, a peacock of a lonesome aesthete blessed with an active imagination and afflicted by longing.

At the show's opening last week, when the sculptured couple melted into a crowd of chattering artists, collectors and curators from MoMA, the Whitney and the New Museum, it really felt like a house party hosted by a dandy.

The curators seemed especially taken by an installation in the gallery's project room, where a fabric duct pipe rises from a heater warmed by a red cloth heart. Before it, a flattened stuffed doll painted with Blümli's face lies on an ermine-covered cot with one eye open — the better to spot anyone who might be tiptoeing closer in order to tuck him in.

This sigh-worthy scene might be sickly sweet if not for the absurdist humor Althoff imparts to it. The same is true of the paintings in the main room. Hung just below eye level, as if for a child, they force viewers into a downward gaze, the kind that insulates a person from the rest of the world and opens into a dream state.

Althoff's images each seem cut from an illustrated storybook fable based on real life — that is, on a real person's fantasies of traveling through time into both history and the psyche. Most of them are strange. One



An untitled work from 2010.



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painting pictures a green male figure tangling with a crocodile on totally mauve ground. Another features a goofy Hasid who grins at the viewer from a street out of another century. In a multipart drawing, the hand of a grimacing man in one panel reaches for the arm of an unseen stranger in another.



An untitled work from 2010.

Throughout, assignments are made and hopes are dashed, only to be rekindled by new flames — and new paintings. Althoff has a roomful of artworks in a makeshift studio behind his curtains. Like a mad decorator who can't help rearranging his home, he will be rotating the objects in the gallery throughout the run of the show.

In the past, other artists on Gladstone's roster have transported the gallery's mundane white cube into another sphere. Using cardboard, packing tape and aluminum foil, **Thomas Hirschhorn** turned it into an underground cave for smarty-pants revolutionaries who either have survived an apocalypse or are making plans for one to happen. **Gregor Schneider** created a forbidding back alley open to the street 24 hours a day. It even had its own address, and late at night it was really creepy.

Althoff's more hipsterlike theatrics frame the beguiling innocence embedded in his work. They also provide him with a showroom tailored to suit his persona — that of a self-absorbed flamboyant having a great time at his own party.

"Kai Althoff: Punkt, Absatz, Blümli (period, paragraph, Blümli)" continues through March 5 at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery, 515 West 24th Street.

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