

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Roberta Smith, "Mark Leckey: Drunken Bakers," *The New York Times*, March, 2006

The New York Times



Drunken Bakers
GBE@Passerby
436 West 15th Street, Chelsea
Through April 22

Not all contemporary video art has been conscripted into the Whitney Biennial. One exception is "Drunken Bakers," a deft and pungent bit of appropriation by the British artist Mark Leckey. Its quarry is a raunchy British adult comic strip written by Barney Farmer and drawn by Lee Healey for *Viz* magazine. Given Mr. Leckey's fidelity to this source, his effort should probably be called an adaptation or an homage.

Mr. Leckey is best known for manipulating pop images and music into dreamy, druggy, disjointed variants on music videos. Sometimes his work has a rough-edged energy, as in his 1999 club-life classic, "Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore." More recent efforts like "Londonatella" (2002) and "Parade" (2003) are nocturnal fantasies of beautiful people and consumer culture related to the 1980's photo-based work of Richard Prince. Last month, in a one-week show at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, the mother ship of GBE@Passerby, Mr. Leckey showed two 2005 videos, both using the music of his band Jack2Jack: "The March of the Big White Barbarians," a sarcastic tour of public sculpture in London using only still images, and "Shades of Destroyers," a dark and baroque narrative based on a Graham Greene story about the destruction of a house in post-blitz London.

With "Drunken Bakers," as with "Shades of Destroyers," Mr. Leckey raises his game considerably, but through simplicity not complication. He forsakes collage, color, youth and music, as well as moving images, to dwell on more advanced dissipation: that of two middle-aged Bumstead-like alcoholics haplessly lurching from one disaster and one drink to the next as they attempt to run a bakery. He has ingeniously filmed the comic strip with close-ups and jump-cuts, creating a kind of stop-action animation, and added a skillfully explicit soundtrack replete with convincing belches, slurps, breaking glass and vomiting. (The comic's speech balloons, which Mr. Leckey deleted, are read verbatim by Mr. Leckey and Steven Claydon, a member of Jack2Jack.)

At Passerby, the projection fills one wall of a small, once-pristine white-on-white room whose growing decrepitude adds to the train-wreck-watching atmosphere. While clarifying and savoring the aesthetic compression of Mr. Farmer's dialogue and Mr. Healey's line, Mr. Leckey conveys an oppressive sense of the drinker's irresistible drive for oblivion, excavating the painful realities that often spur comedy.

Mr. Leckey used "Drunken Bakers" without contacting *Viz*, which, in a rare instance of corporate enlightenment, granted him permission retroactively. ROBERTA SMITH