

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Indrisek, Scott, "Punkt, Absatz, Blumli (period, paragraph, Blumli)", *ARTINFO*, Feb. 7, 2011

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"Punkt, Absatz, Blümlü (period, paragraph, Blümlü)" Gladstone Gallery, 515 West 24th Street, New York January 15-March 5, 2011



Courtesy Gladstone Gallery

A painting from Althoff's *Punkt, Absatz, Blümlü (period, paragraph, Blümlü)*

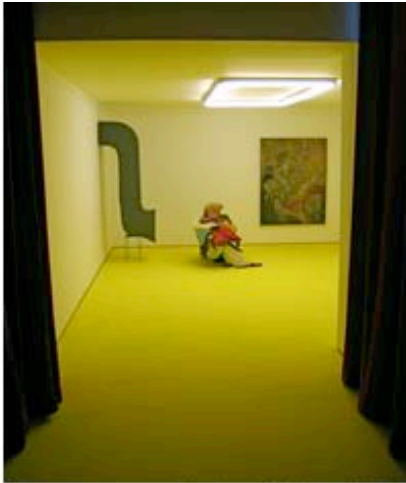
German artist Kai Althoff's second solo show at [Gladstone Gallery](#) left me feeling sad and a bit worn out, much like the materials that the artist employs. This is a compliment, actually. The space Althoff has created here — and it is a unified space, I'd say, not a collection of discrete objects — is part adolescent nightmare, part musty junk shop, part salon of detailed draftsmanship. It's less like entering the mind of a single artist than like stumbling upon a forgotten eccentric's attic. Each individual piece, in its occasional ugliness, calls out to the ugliness of the others; together they achieve a weird unity without an underlying narrative, as if Althoff is hosting an estate sale for a haunted house.

The low-ceilinged main gallery contains most of the paintings, drawings, and sculptures. (At the time of my first visit, Althoff hadn't provided the gallery with a final checklist. He did, later — with the caveat that certain works would be swapped out for others over the course of the exhibition.) The artist has painted the floor unevenly in industrial yellow, a color you'd find in a parking garage. On the first wall, a shaky line drawing, reflecting

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Courtesy Gladstone Gallery

An installation view at Gladstone Gallery

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the same wide-awake yellow-and-orange template, depicts hippy kibbutz residents in Israel. Next to this is an unnerving painting in acrylic, tempera, and varnish on wool, "Untitled (a portrait of Nick Z)" (2010). The titular man stares out at the viewer, his body obscured by rainbow swirls, his gaze both piercing and oddly befuddled. The picture appears purposefully threadbare, both in style and substance, with its outmoded psychedelia and choice of materials, paint caked unevenly into the weave of the wool.

In the same bedraggled vein: A pair of Satanic-seeming dolls, partly made using the craft store staple clay, Sculpey; an enormous rug installed in the center of the room, depicting a vague landscape pattern in pinks, blues, purples, and reds; and another dark-hued painting that looks as if it had been rescued, and improperly restored, from the beginning of the 20th century. In a way, the forty-four-year-old Althoff — a true art-world insider, having shown at the Berlin Biennial in 2006, not to mention the ICA in Boston — is generating his own personal version of outsider art. Everything — from the sculpted man and woman standing against a rack of colorful handmade mugs, to a morose, stuffed cartoon figure, coated in animal hair — reeks of physis malady, abandonment, and loneliness.

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These painted, woven, and sculpted pieces are in contrast to Althoff's more detailed, finely rendered drawings, two of which depict Hassidic families. Maybe it's the influence of the room's overall Day-Glo hysteria, but the men in these look a bit Satanic as well, as do their children. The whole show is infused with a certain dread. A simple colored-pencil drawing of a clerk and a woman in the midst of a commercial transaction in a store is drenched in foreboding. The collection of objects set on the floor below it — a few boxes of paper, a plastic strawberry — loses its innocence in these surroundings. (On a second visit to the gallery, the strawberry had mysteriously disappeared.) Althoff makes a virtue of cheapness, of wear, of decrepitude: plush hearts, brightly colored cups arranged on a shelf. For lack of another term, let's call this the "handmade demonic." It's all a bit heartbreaking, like seeing a child's stuffed animal with its head ripped off.