

GLADSTONE GALLERY

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

ALL INCLUSIVE

by Peter Schjeldahl

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Among European makers of messy, welcome-to-my-world installations since Joseph Beuys and Dieter Roth—including the lately inevitable Thomas Hirschhorn and John Bock—the most appealing is Kai Althoff, a forty-one-year-old Cologne artist best known here for strong, soulful little paintings in a mélange of antique symbolist and Expressionist styles. Althoff and a Brooklyn graffiti artist, Nick Z, have brimmed the Gladstone gallery with pictures, sculptures, spray-paint tags, furniture, toys, a video, loose stuffs (fabrics, lumber, slathered makeup), and varied light. References to childhood, religion, love, and politics may be obscure, but a uniform tone of intelligent, even tasteful wonderment disarms. In Althoff's hands, scatterly installation becomes a mature art form, epitomizing the creative process between inspiration and completion, when all its options are in play. The show wryly demurs to the present art world with a central item: a purple-and-red paper cash register, its empty drawer stuck out like a panting tongue.

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ILLUSTRATION JEROEN KOOLHAAS

