



View of "Darren Bader," 2012.

of "Ford" (Tom, perhaps?), is less so. However, of the bunch, it offers viewers the closest thing that Bader's absurdist practice has to a guiding principle. "Stuff: the precise affinity between the generic and the specific," it decrees. Accordingly, throughout the exhibition's gallery space, where one would expect to find the products of artistic labor, *stuff* appears instead, and, in so doing, bogarts the formal presentation of art for a casual indifference more familiar to the fields of cultural production that optimize their products for the widest possible audience—

namely, mainstream entertainment.

Bader's prioritizing of the generic, of stuff, as the operative kernel of his exhibition strategy is accomplished by the way in which he blithely administers its institutional frame. Supplementing his presentation of art objects themselves, Bader deploys conventional exhibition devices—explanatory wall texts, descriptive labels, display pedestals, rope partitions, and even promotional posters for membership-outreach initiatives such as public parties (alongside the exhibition, Bader hosted the DJ event E-Party in the museum's courtyard) and artist-inspired menus—but in a casual (and, to some, humorous) manner.

Throughout the exhibit, one finds other artists' works, which, due to the absence of a checklist, have their authorship concealed. Wall texts are traded out for informal, stream-of-consciousness artists' statements. Labels include only the artworks' playful titles (*Cat Made Out of Crab Meat*, 2012). A grid of pedestals served as seats for fruits and veggies, which were later utilized as salad fixings and served to visitors. Diminutive, ankle-high stanchions ineffectually restrict access to a kitsch Buddha, a marble snowman, and a masterfully crafted glazed ceramic garbage can. Two nonvegetarian burritos perform a motionless pas de deux in a cheaply carpeted gallery, sound tracked to a looped clip from Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone," as if the room has been abandoned by museumgoers for one of the institution's signature dance parties. While a poster for the horror film *Saw V* hints at a deeper perversity strategically employed by the artist—it depicts the visage of the film's villain used as a mask—it also treats the gallery's walls as just another surface on which to slather a spunky guerilla-marketing campaign directed by the profit imperatives of entertainment culture. But rather than a demented mastermind, the subject-object dyad of Bader's art might be closer in spirit to that of a marketing executive who sells his product by exploiting the generalized appeal of, say, cavemen and a Cockney-accented reptile. By what coincidence is it, then, that an adoptable iguana, alongside a live litter of orphaned cats, are also exhibited in the nominal site of his artistic product?

The installation of these disparate components in "Images" appears predicated on the entertainment value to be found on allowing art to conform to the consensus-manufactured criteria that mobilizes contemporary cultural markets, of persuading art's institutions to pay closer attention to the rules of the culture from which it generally immunizes itself, pushing audiences away from reactionary exclamations of "*n'importe quoi!*" toward praises of "OMG so random!" In a way, Bader is something of a Bart Simpson character, whose clarion call, "Don't have a cow!" neatly dovetails with the artistically reorganized institutional practices conditioned by contemporary neoliberal markets—practices, one might note, that MOMA PS1 has pioneered.

Beyond offering the sheer entertainment value of petting a cat after having paid the institution's admission fee, Bader sets up a potentially overwhelming task for the viewer—that of processing the sheer mass of incommensurable stuff on view—that has been simplified, in part, by the very economies of attention from which the exhibition displays its dehierarchized components. Multitabbed online browsing, which homologizes a heterogeneous glut of data into an operational plane of experience, yielding noise (pop-up advertisements being the most obvious example) in tandem with informed content, might be one interface through which to effectively cohere Bader's "Images." Given its extensively dedifferentiated organizational structure, this is an exhibition to navigate like one's morning e-mails.

—Sam Pulitzer

## Per-Oskar Leu TRIPLE CANOPY

If the history of the twentieth-century could be distilled to just a few key episodes, one of them might be Bertolt Brecht's appearance before a US House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) panel in 1947. Speaking with great deliberation in his thick German accent, Brecht point by point dismantled his interrogators' claims about the danger of his works and of "political" poetry more generally. Employing Brechtian-inspired *Verfremdungseffekte*, or distancing effects, Norwegian artist Per-Oskar Leu weaves a fabric of real voices and fictional characters to stage an innovative reimagining of this historic event. The twenty-seven-minute video at the core of the installation *Crisis and Critique*, 2012, includes audio from the HUAC testimony dubbed over appropriated footage from German-language films of the 1930s and '40s—Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933), and G. W. Pabst's 1931 version of Brecht's own *The Threepenny Opera*, among others—with the voice of theater critic and Brecht scholar Eric Bentley (lifted from a 1963 recording) providing narration and commentary. Thus, the famous kangaroo-court sequence in *M*, in which Peter Lorre's serial-killer character is tried by the Berlin criminal underworld, becomes the HUAC proceeding, with a leather-jacketed tough standing in for House Committee chairman John Parnell Thomas of New Jersey. Brecht is portrayed as Dr. Mabuse, a criminal mastermind writing of his evil deeds while silhouetted against a backlit cloth scrim in his mental-asylum cell. At the center of Leu's montage is a hilarious World War II propaganda cartoon starring Donald Duck, trapped in a nightmare Third Reich, where he is forced to fabricate ever more absurdly sized missiles on a frantically sped-up assembly line.

Leu draws the viewer into his narrative using a film-within-a-film framing device: A man hunted by Nazi police hides out in a cinema (the footage is from Lang's *Hangmen Also Die!* [1943]) as the film we see unfolds. In a fascinating *mise en abyme*, the indelible hurdy-gurdy music of the Brecht and Kurt Weill composition "Mack the Knife" fills the movie hall. Bentley's voice explains that in October 1947 HUAC undertook "hearings regarding Communist infiltration of the motion picture



Per-Oskar Leu, *Crisis and Critique* (detail), 2012, still from the twenty-seven-minute black-and-white video component of a mixed-media installation.

industry,” calling numerous Hollywood notables, including notorious red-baiters Walt Disney and Ronald Reagan, and eleven so-called unfriendly witnesses, of whom only Brecht gave testimony. The others took the Fifth Amendment and were later jailed for contempt of Congress. Brecht, though a Marxist, had never joined the Communist Party, while others of the Hollywood Ten had; yet his polite but firm declarations condemned the entire HUAC undertaking as injudicious. As Brecht points out, his own ostensibly revolutionary activities were in fact directed against fascist Germany, presumably a common enemy of the US government. Brecht boarded a plane for Europe the day after his congressional appearance, and never again returned to the States.

The masterfully collaged and captivating video is a tour de force, as is Otto Freundlich's 1931 essay "The Artist and the Economic Crisis," which was translated into English for the first time, printed on a poster, and distributed to visitors free. Elements accompanying the installation seemed somewhat labored in comparison. Five leather IKEA armchair slipcovers draped over speakers hung from the ceiling—referencing, among other things, Brecht's own leather-jacket-as-working-class gear—and four twin mattresses on the floor provided seating, their sheets printed with the German words and phrases for "close," "not," "your ear," and "to misfortune" (the words come from placards brandished by beggars in *The Threepenny Opera*). A red curtain—a former East German Communist flag—separated the gallery entrance from the video. Take all these props away: The video's expert montage confers new urgency upon Brecht's already stirring moment of political conscience. Combined with the Freundlich text, it points to the dialogic relationship between artists and economic hardship, and the necessity of speaking frankly about those conditions.

—Eva Díaz

## BOSTON

### Josh Mannis

ANTHONY GREANEY

The rather beguiling title of Josh Mannis's exhibition "Zeal for the Law" interconnects what might otherwise seem to be a rather disparate body of work. Such an emphatic allusion to authority also invites appraisal of the artist's drawing, collage, and video work as successful citations of art-historical styles and provocative explorations of genre. His compilation of procedures, which hits all the right contemporary signifiers, emits a distinct whiff of *le bon ton*; yet, with equal aplomb, Mannis transgresses these very same aesthetic regulations.

For example, *The Law*, 2011, is a hanging tartan textile adorned with two safety pins, each fastening a gold-plated brass nipple from which an ample golden chain dangles to the floor. As this work cleverly



Josh Mannis, *Zeal for the Law*, 2012, still from a color HD video, 7 minutes 56 seconds.

explores the hybrid possibilities of painting, it is difficult to fathom whether Mannis is also evoking the symbol of Scottish nationalism, if not steampunk sexual fetishism. Across the room, the eight ink drawings of *Nadia Comaneci Generation*, 2011, partially incorporate the color palette of the Romanian flag in lines resembling the nation's 1976 Olympic leotard. Yet yellow and red, in Mannis's drawings, are joined by green rather than blue, and the exceptional gymnast named in the title—noted for scoring the first ever "perfect ten" in an Olympic event—here appears as a stout-legged creature with arms resembling crustacean claws. In a related work, *Nadia Comaneci*, 2011 (an ink portrait of the gymnast in wild abandon), the athlete's likeness has been punctuated by a newspaper image in which she appears an elegant waif.

In both tributes, Mannis has transformed perfection into the grotesque, a declassifying and degrading gesture continued in *Zeal for the Law*, 2012, a hypnotic video showing the artist barefoot, repeating a sequence of ritualistic movements to a sound track of industrial bass and a backdrop of streaming dark clouds. Wearing scruffy tartan pants (matching the tartan painting), a sleeveless white shirt that barely covers his paunch and the edges of his farmer's tan, an abundant blond wig, and a rubber mask painted white around the nose and mouth, Mannis manipulates the same golden chain that he subsequently worked into *The Law*, repurposing the "erect nipple" baubles as potentially sadistic knuckle rings. The artist whose corpulent body is a far cry from the fourteen-year-old Comaneci's lithe physique, follows the music's downbeat and, with each forceful stomp, makes hand signs to the camera, alternatively holding up one, two, three, or four fingers. In this performance, which scrambles codes of masculinity and femininity, Mannis animates the fiend that inhabits the law; it's Comaneci's inner drag queen if only she had been allowed to take a day off from training, go to art school, and wolf down a few hamburgers.

The exhibition's cumulative effect suggests that there is only a tiny difference between a passion for the law and bondage to it, or between earnest adherence to the rules and their perversion. Mannis suggests that, whether regarding the conventions of art or competitive sports, identity of the nation-state or constructs of gender, the law is fundamentally unstable. Paradoxically, of course, he also exploits an arsenal of well-honed contemporary strategies to communicate these ideals of misbehavior, as, for example, by transforming the surface of painting into kinky assemblage or using video as a space for the queering of identity. The frisson of transgression here treads carefully along the periphery of normativity though, pointing to the difficulty of ever truly operating beyond the rules. Given these limits, Mannis is most impressive in his video work, through which he embraces the simulacral as the very condition of the creative act. In ways that recall the work of artists such as Ryan Trecartin and Brian Bress, Mannis uses irreverent pastiche to reprocess the ciphers of contemporary experience and carve out an original image zone where new rules might yet be formulated. Yet he is also acutely aware that in an era when "acting out" is a democratic prerogative facilitated by such distribution platforms as YouTube and Tumblr, the gallery still functions as "the law" by sanctioning the name of art.

—Nuit Banai

## NEW ORLEANS

### "Spaces: Antenna, the Front, Good Children Gallery"

CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

Here's an intimidating curatorial gambit: a museum exhibition venturing to manifest a palpable web of energy spun by a triad of emerging