

out (sometimes it's hard to tell one from the other), while a selection of often pornographic collages, doodles, and druggy fantasy paintings connected the scatological visual impulse that developed in tandem with LAFMS's maniacally cultivated "lowest form" of music. All of this was, however, only a footnote to the show's main draw, a series of weekend performances in the exhibition space by core LAFMS bands Le Forte Four, Doo-Dooettes, and Airway, among others.

Like the best free improvisations, in which individual contributors work pragmatically and democratically to shape one cohesive sound, these various retrospective views jelled into a singular, coherent style. In this context, the sudden passing of LAFMS stalwart Mike Kelley was acutely felt. This milieu shaped his aesthetic outlook as much as he influenced its contours, and hints of Kelley's own genre-bending bricolage and other investigations of authorship could be detected in the group's borrowing from whatever unusual records they could get their hands on, whether Cornelius Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra's 1971 LP, *The Great Learning*, or the Smithsonian Folkways 1958 compilation *Sounds of North American Frogs*. A performance on February 11 by Extended Organ, in which Kelley had been expected to play with Nilsen, Joe Potts, Tom Recchion, and Paul McCarthy, took place regardless, becoming a fitting memorial to the greatly missed artist.

—Ben Carlson

## Brian Bress

CHERRY AND MARTIN

Self-described Abstract Expressionist painter Agnes Martin spent the last three decades of her life in the seclusion of her New Mexico studio. Though she often exhibited alongside Minimalists such as Sol LeWitt and Donald Judd, Martin famously insisted that great art responds purely and unthinkingly to inspiration—a way of working only possible with a vacant mind. Such a notion may seem quaint in the context of much idea-heavy art, but it is only partially alien to the work of Los Angeles-based artist Brian Bress. In his most recent show, the requisite references, slickness, and self-reflexivity of Conceptualism posed awkwardly with the more intuitive, "untheorizable" aspects of the artistic process. Art serves as a painfully literal expressive vehicle in the video *Creative Ideas for Every Season*, 2010, in which a prop car piloted by a Martin look-alike crawls through a cut-and-pasted, chroma-keyed desert. The driver speaks in leaden Martin quotes pulled from various sources—a 1997 interview, a 1987 Skowhegan lecture, the artist's published writings. Her aphorisms glance off the Muppet-like figures that pop in and out of the passenger seat. A jump-suited human mechanic, emerging from a panel in the dashboard, is her faux-naïve, pragmatic straight man. "You know, I have a hard time giving up some of them—some of the ideas," says the driver. "Like evolution." The mechanic's greasy face falls as he whispers in response, "You don't believe in dinosaurs?" The characters' insecurities are the artist's own; their philosophical non sequiturs reveal a reluctant and shaky sincerity.

Out the windows of the car, rich parallax badlands scroll by—a peach-and-gray marble sky collaged with black-and-white mountains, shells, fingerprints, Joshua trees, and Surrealist junk. Timeless, immobile, and vacant, the barren landscape is once more the site of existential contemplation. But in Bress's video, the greater desert is the emptiness of art. The character-driven visual language developed in his earlier work is reduced here to the deflated projections of a resurrected modernism embodied by Martin. Bress's creatures exist in one scene, only to disappear in the next, burdened, perhaps, by their own super-



Brian Bress, *Creative Ideas for Every Season*, 2010, still from a color HD video, 19 minutes 58 seconds.

ficiality. The wooden car is crudely upholstered; the costumes are chunky and handcrafted. The seams of the illusion become corporeal limits—when, for instance, the driver touches the beads sewn to her passenger, pulls one off, and eats it. Sparse vibraphone and piano twinkle, a whistling wind rustles; the car plunges on.

In a series of framed video portraits in the next room, Bress's oddball figures shimmied or rotated in front of painterly backdrops (the Martin-esque grid in *Cowboy*, 2012, for example), appearing as adorable and lifeless as Tomagotchis. With names like *Janus (Max)* and *Family (Devin, John, Jason, Lewis)*, both 2012, these pieces fit classical portraiture into a technically and commercially savvy package without ever claiming to actually represent their effaced subjects. The exhibition's punny title, "Under Performing," was similarly evasive. "Under," as in "not good enough," or as in "supporting," could also mean "file under" or "chalk it up to." The staged levity of this exhibition acted as an escape hatch from the tortured inner workings of the video's superficial vehicle. In so ambivalently illustrating contemporary art's secret attraction to things like "inspiration," "beauty," "history," and "success," *Creative Ideas* parodies itself above all.

In the final scene, the mechanic turns to face the camera, and in his yokel drawl, sucking on his false teeth, sings us a cheesy song: "You know our love is like a circle / It comes around in the end." Might the possibility of beauty or happiness hide in art like true love in music—for Martin, the highest art form? What would happen if we followed her advice and willfully stopped thinking, forgetting everything we thought we knew? And can there be earnestness without altruism? The video raises serious questions, but haunted by Martin's dreamless confidence, it can't charm its way out of a self-imposed loop. Ultimately, though, aren't these vague art-historical echoes little more than empty problems? For Bress, as long as the art car looks good and keeps going, repetition is much safer than a straight answer.

—Travis Diehl

CLAREMONT, CA

## Liz Glynn

PITZER ART GALLERIES

In her exhibition "No Second Troy," Liz Glynn made her own archaeological dig through the epic chronicles of "Priam's Treasure"—the supposed gold of Troy discovered by the German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann in 1873—in order to trace (forward and in reverse) the

movement of the people, objects, ideas, identities, and truths implicated in the story and its historical residue. Taken from Schliemann's excavation site at Hissarlik (in modern-day Turkey), this resplendent cache of axes, pots, jewelry, and other such items was displayed in Berlin until Allied bombing campaigns forced its removal to underground bunkers, from which the Soviet Army seized the lot in 1945. After the war, a set of replicas was produced that are on view today at the city's Neues Museum.

As vessels of symbolic value and fleeting power, these false riches—mere copies of relics that indeed never belonged to King Priam—are of great interest to Glynn, who, for this show, fabricated a full collection of her own from brass-, bronze-, and gold-plated papier-mâché. She displayed these small mimetic objects on double-sided plinths that approximate the actual vitrines used to hold the German copies. Surprisingly handsome, Glynn's gilt items appeared in two cabinets, titled *Trojan Surrogates (Neues Museum Case I)* and *Trojan Surrogates (Neues Museum Case II)*, both 2011–12. The translucence of the artifacts' golden coating subtly revealed the newsprint substrate beneath. A nearby sculpture, *Kreutzberg Hoard*, 2011, had been made using a similar technique, but rather than shredded wastepaper, produce served

Liz Glynn, *Kreutzberg Hoard*, 2011, shopping cart armature, produce, gold leaf, acrylic, 36 x 12 x 10".



as the material support. To this base Glynn had applied gold leaf and gold acrylic paint before strapping the bounty onto the sort of collapsible shopping cart typical of Turkish marketplaces. As the fruits and vegetables rotted, the organic armature shrank from its golden casing, leaving behind wrinkled ingots. Alluding to the ongoing friction between Germans and Turkish immigrants, this work was one of several on view that connected the story of Schliemann's findings and their subsequent displacements to contemporary instances of one culture exploiting the resources (namely, goods and labor) of another.

While such sculptural critiques of current German-Turkish affairs were oblique and perhaps failed to communicate all that they could have, Glynn's three videos, by contrast, were quite resonant. Rooted in conceptually driven actions (arguably the artist's strength), *Untitled Epic Poem (after Homer on the shores of Gallipoli)*, 2011, shows Glynn standing on the beach—the shores of ancient Troy barely visible in the distance—

dropping a series of fabric signs into the water, each bearing a violent or forceful phrase from the *Iliad*: MAN-RUINING WAR, A DISMAL SCENE, THIS, LIVE FOREVER DEATHLESS, WITHOUT AGE. Here, Glynn inscribes Homer's account of the Trojan War onto the site of a more recent battle, the First World War's deadly Gallipoli campaign, from which the Turks emerged victorious. Yet Glynn's poetic but straightforward action is more didactic than reverent, simply connecting one point in history to another, attempting to inhabit both.

The "pilgrimage" depicted in the video *Trojan Return*, 2011, is equally illustrative, with the intention of physically, if only symbolically, bringing the story full circle. This twenty-one-minute work follows Glynn's journey from the Neues Museum and its cases of faux Trojan treasures to the Mediterranean grounds where Schliemann

unearthed the original trove. There, Glynn ducks a railing, enters the excavation site, and buries in the grass five surrogate objects of her own making. It is a humble gesture of repatriation that at once acknowledges the mutability of history and, very efficiently, the pretense of the museum as the principal repository for historical—and often nationalistic—production.

—Catherine Taft

## LONDON

### Renee So

KATE MACGARRY

Until now, you may have given little thought to Assyrian beards. In fact, they are remarkable things, with tiers of spiral-like black curls perfectly aligned to produce an almost architectural construction with which to adorn the face of the Mesopotamian male. Renee So has evidently given considerable thought to the contours of Assyrian facial hair, along with other well-selected highlights in the history of human self-design: In the artist's tabletop-size ceramic sculptures, a variation on this beard is doubled and formed from a repeated pattern of semispheres glistening in delectable metallic glazes. In other sculptures and knitted panel pictures, So invents a uniquely stylized yet simple, almost cartoonlike bearded figure, repeated like a motif across every work. This character has strong, almond-shaped eyes, and on his head he wears a floppy sixteenth-century Dutch black hat (think Rembrandt). His curious balloon trousers are inspired by an image on a Japanese screen from circa 1600.

The artist is evidently fascinated by masculine accoutrements of all sorts: trousers, hats, pipes, walking sticks. Her nameless man is a composite of innumerable males spanning a wide assortment of sources, from the anthropomorphic bellarmines of sixteenth-century Germany to the double-sided king in your deck of cards. The beard on *Captain*, 2010, recalling those worn by the hallucinatory gentlemen who dance through the Beatles' 1968 film, *Yellow Submarine*, expands like a bubbling green potion.

So executes her two-dimensional works using a knitting machine, which precisely translates the artist's simple line drawings into large, carefully worked panels. Drawing and knitting are diametrically different operations; to make a thin line around a shape with the machine requires tremendous effort, interrupting what should be an easy mechanical process with a whole change of yarn color just for a single stitch, row after row. Yet each figure is painstakingly outlined this way. Machine-knitting necessarily builds the image (or the sweater, as the case may be) starting from the bottom, knitting line by line up to the top. Similarly, the sculptural works are built from the bottom up, through the accumulation of many small curved surfaces and flat slabs of clay, eventually rising to form sizable three-

Renee So, *Drunken Bellarmine*, 2012, wool, acrylic, oak-tray frame, 68½ x 48¾ x 2¾".

