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ARTS IN REVIEW

A Painter's Sculptural Turn and an Insider Art World Favorite

Mark Grotjahn at Anton Kern, Maureen Gallace at 303 and Robert Overby at Andrew Kreps in Fine Art

By **PETER PLAGENS**

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Mark Grotjahn: Painted Sculpture

Anton Kern

532 W. 20th St., (212) 367-9663

Through Thursday

Mark Grotjahn, whose father was a psychiatrist who'd emigrated from Germany in the mid-1930s, was born in 1968. By the time Mr. Grotjahn had become a painter of some repute in Los Angeles, he'd opened and run an art gallery and tried to earn a living playing poker—both, some say, enterprises of chance. Perhaps it's no surprise that Mr. Grotjahn takes a gamble in this show.



Courtesy the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York. © Mark Grotjahn / Photo: Adam Reich

Known for large abstract paintings with dense, radiating lines of color that sometimes include shapes suggesting narrowed cat eyes, or the ocular openings in African masks, the artist exhibits something different here—a series of vertical bronze casts of containers for flat-screen television sets that sit vertically on top of beautifully crafted wood pedestals and sport long, narrow-gauge protruding tubes suggesting piercing spears or schematic genitalia. While the pedestals retain their lovely natural wood color, the boxes and tubes have been raucously painted, by the artist's hands and fingers, with oils.

Allusions to African art persist, and newer vibes—from Dubuffet, Picasso, Miró and Twombly—are included. The installation is superb; the works—each about four feet tall—are spaced to play down their sculptural similarity and highlight their painterly differences. Yet there's something a little too studied about this turn in Mr. Grotjahn's style, something astutely designed, rather than "felt" (as the paint application would have you believe). It looks like the calculated reboot of an artistic brand. Call it VeriBold.