

Time Out New York

Matthew Monahan
Anton Kern Gallery, through Fri 29
(see Chelsea).

Brooding, entrancing and heavy on whimsy, Matthew Monahan's third solo show at Anton Kern is an assortment of small, mostly figurative sculptures, which seem to have

drifted into the present from a 2,000-year-old tchotchke shop. Though the works—installed atop pedestals, along shelves and inside vitrines—recall decaying busts of centuries past, Monahan counters his classical leanings with flourishes that lend his show a charming, often comic contemporaneity.

For instance, the installation *At Home He Feels like a Tourist* contains a miniature figure whose face is provided by Andrew Jackson's visage on a crumpled \$20 bill. Or consider *Medusa*, a small bust with a grave expression and an encaustic pretzel-shaped turd resting on its head. *Icono-Spasm* includes a

grimacing face, but Monahan offsets the emotional intensity (characteristic of so much ancient sculpture) by encrusting it with glitter and covering it in hot-pinkencaustic. This antiquity-meets-contemporary art mash-up recalls Smithson (Monahan even uses crystal-shaped glass as encasing for *Dictator Equator*), channeled through Klee and Giacometti.

In *Writer's Block*, the titular phrase is written inconspicuously at the bottom of a tall pedestal that supports a charcoal drawing of a forbidding face, which the artist has shaped into a piñatalike three-dimensional object. If there's a cure for the malady of artist's block, it may be the repurposing of previously unused studio fragments—which is exactly what this show consists of, since many of the objects and drawings date as far back as 1994. Such outtakes could make for tedious viewing, but Monahan enlivens the past—both sculpture's and his own—enough to make this gamble a real success.—Nick Stillman



Matthew Monahan, *Dictator Equator*, 1994/2005.