

## John Bock

By Coline Millard

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### The Curve, Barbican Art Gallery, London

The German oddball strikes again. John Bock, best known for his “lectures” — combining performance, sculptures and installations, has devised for the Barbican’s Curve Gallery an idiosyncratic vehicle mounted on the chassis of a London cab. Made of four stacked-up ovoid volumes — a “sleeping area,” “music pod,” “living space,” and “diagram room” — this rickety cart is meant to roam up and down the oversized corridor, and to interact with three spider-like structures — a noodle bar, a clothing shop, and a clock store — that hang from the gallery’s walls and ceiling with long metal legs. Everything is full to the brim with tatty knick-knacks, Chinese lanterns and bowls, shirts and timepieces, but also LPs, maps, and decorated plates, among dozens of other obscure implements. The ensemble feels like a Paul-McCarthy-meets-Andrea-Zittel idea of survival, as if human beings’ primary needs were to be fed, dressed and on time.

The wheeled machine and hanging pods are sprayed with the bright colors of a 1960s kindergarten schoolroom or a Le Corbusier building, and this is no coincidence. Built between 1965 and 1976 on a World War II bombsite, the Barbican Estate is a late example of the modernist dream that self-sufficient communities could be created and fostered by architecture. In the original plan, a shopping arcade was to be right above the Curve Gallery. With his retro-futurist constructions, Bock re-injects some of this utopia in the ground floor gallery of London’s city-within-a-city.

A film documenting Bock’s lecture, performed in the gallery by a group of actors, is projected at the exhibition’s entrance. Young explorers set off in the makeshift cart to find “the time complex,” realize on the way that worms have invaded their bellies, and try to get rid of them with the help of the hanging shops’ sultry attendants. The lecture is a Gargantua-esque soup of references ranging from Théâtre de l’absurde to philosophy (one of the characters cries out: “The world is not its shadow!”) and Dada poetry — hard to make sense of, but this could be precisely the point. Abstract ideas provoke sensorial pleasures and artworks are meant to be used, the artist seems to claim. His precarious assemblages are here the indispensable accessories of a scatologico-metaphysical quest.



John Bock’s “Curve-Vehicle incl. π-Man-(-),” 2010



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