

The New York Times

Art in Review

John Bock

*Anton Kern Gallery
532 West 20th Street, Chelsea
Through Feb. 15*

John Bock's "Maltreated Frigate," a video and sculptural documentation of an ambitious performance work involving himself and two actors, is one of the standouts in "Skin Fruit" at the New Museum. In his fifth solo show in New York (and at Kern), he demonstrates his ability to pare down, lighten up and also diversify.

For all of the aforementioned, I recommend Mr. Bock's new wall hangings; tied to them are garments and/or pillowlike stuffed shapes that one — presumably their owner — can wear, presumably in private performance. I can imagine the most complex of these pieces being purchased by a professional portrait photographer and used as a prop by her sitters, somewhat the way Irving Penn used his narrow corner and expanses of felt.

The centerpieces of the exhibition are the rather delicate remnants of an untitled "lecture dance" performed in the gallery just before the show's opening. During that performance, Mr. Bock wrote and drew on plastic, while a dancer executed movements choreographed by Mr. Bock. Both are seen on video, sometimes studying each other through the plastic. The calmness of the piece is something of a departure for Mr. Bock. (A reference to Joseph Beuys and his blackboard is probably not.)

Nearby, a black metal sculpture — it evokes a combination of nautilus, coffin and furnace — exemplifies the extremely confined performance space that Mr. Bock is most associated with. On the wall a small video projection shows him in typical close-up inside it, cast in a demonic light. The performance, which involved a second actor, was an impromptu event staged in Seoul, which is also the setting for a video on view in the gallery's back space.

On double screens, cameras follow a man and a fairly violent woman through that city's streets, parks and abandoned buildings. The characters interact with strangers, Mr. Bock's sculptures and each other. The mood is increasingly if quietly demented; the piece more than lives up to its title: "PARA-SCHIZO, ensnarled."

This subtle show reveals new sides of Mr. Bock's often manic, sometimes brilliant sensibility.

ROBERTA SMITH