

The New York Times

John Bock Bendix Harms

*Anton Kern Gallery
532 West 20th Street, Chelsea
Through tomorrow*

Through video, performance and installation art, the German artist John Bock has become known for an inspired, unpredictable clownishness, so it may be fitting that his third solo show here incorporates both hits and misses.

The misses are two sculptures made of the artist's signature sewn and stuffed forms supplemented by cold-rolled steel, in which he cleans up his act to a dismaying degree. The hits are two videos in which Mr. Bock's messily imaginative grasp of the medium continues to develop, effortlessly merging formalism, documentary and transgressive fantasy into a hallucinatory Process Art that is often created as we watch.

In "Astronaut," a spacey space odyssey to a tune by the Cure, Mr. Bock alternates between a crudely conjured spacecraft, where he is ritualistically smothered in goo, and open terrain, where he roams around wearing one of his stuffed sculptures, playing air guitar and going eyeball-to-eyeball with nature. The camera-work is especially good.

In the second video, visible on a monitor in the front gallery, Mr. Bock conducts one of his zany lecture-demonstrations, making a sculpture that incorporates the freshly cut hair of a trusting assistant. The action occurs in a cramped crawl space — available for viewing by the exceptionally limber — beneath the floor of a large steel cube in the middle of the gallery.

Because Mr. Bock rarely uses walls, he has generously yielded the ones here to Bendix Harms, a young German painter who approaches his work with a similar self-deprecating flair. Mr. Harms's goofy Expressionism has many antecedents, but offers its own touch and oddly light, Rococo palette. Not quite a hit but definitely not a miss, it is worth watching. **ROBERTA SMITH**