

# ARTslant

## new york

### Whence Derives a Dérive? by Emily Nathan

**John Bock**

**Anton Kern Gallery**

**532 W. 20th St., New York, NY 10011**

**February 27, 2010 - April 3, 2010**



German Artist John Bock's fifth solo show at Anton Kern Gallery is difficult to summarize. Consisting of a two-channel video projection, a large submarine-like metal contraption and associated video, a series of hanging "soft sculptures" reminiscent of the jumbled, nostalgic pages of a scrap book, and a lecture-dance-performance which took place on opening night and will replay in the form of a slide-projection installation throughout the run of the exhibition, Bock's occupation of the gallery feels much like a high-school theatre group's prop closet. Though such an impression might initially seem distracting or distracted, it is in fact not far off-base, considering Bock's now relatively established reputation as a pan-genre sort of guy. Operating in a vein similar to that of Robert Morris, Bock is known for his integration of sculpture and performance, often enlisting his own constructions as the supporting materials for his highly theatrical enactments. This time, he is at it again—utilizing familiar motifs and materials, he constructs a visual and conceptual vocabulary of exploration and discovery in order to symbolically "map" his experience of the artistic process.

Bock's "soft sculptures" read like personal tapestries; they hang, curtain-like, from wooden rods, stitched segments of printed and solid fabrics mingling with a variety of found objects that find themselves, like souvenirs, sewed, glued and taped together. Each appears to represent some moment—to stand in for an experience or range of experiences—which, though illegible to anyone but its creator, must possess or express something of great significance. In the same way that a collection of ticket stubs, old napkins and burnt matches might hold temporally, philosophically or emotionally salient information for someone who chooses to keep them as memories from a journey, Bock's sculptures appear to "chart" a time or a place, even though the implications of their meanings and combinations are inaccessible to us, symbols of his subjective, personal existence.



The slide-projection that plays on loop and documents the lecture-dance-performance executed on opening night serves to unify and illuminate Bock's investigation. In it, we witness him as he stands in the very spot we stand, in front of the wooden structure, an easel, that we see before us. He inserts one of a number of glass plates into the easel; through its transparent surface we see a performer enter the gallery with the very suitcase that is now displayed against the far wall and take his place on the other side of the glass. Its contents, a gallimaufry of Bock's sculptural creations, become the performer's props; we watch Bock watch him through the glass plate, actively graphing his movements with a variety of utensils, including pen and tape. When he feels that he finished with one plate, he removes it from the easel and inserts another; the resulting products have been displayed at the base of the wooden easel precisely as Bock left them.

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What we are left with, then, are site-and-moment contingent, subjective, directional maps of a performer's subjective performance. Aesthetically, they put one in mind of a football coach's directions for a play, or a strategist's formulations. But we know that they are no more concrete or factual, no more functional as reliable diagrams or tables, than a child's scribble. They do not "map" the performer's performance in any standard, empirical manner, but are rather the products of an entirely individual, and perhaps arbitrary or non-existent logic, a system developed by the man who made them, as he made them, as far as we can tell. The "works of art" we see exhibited in the gallery before us, then, are just that: mutable, subjective, contingent interpretations, the indexes of a subjective world viewed through a subjective lens.



--Emily Nathan

(Images: Untitled (2010), Fabric and objects; Installation view, Dance Lecture (2010); In-progress shot: Untitled (Dance Lecture) (2010), Suite case with objects, drawing-frame with 9 drawings on Plexi-glass and video. Courtesy Anton Kern Gallery)