

# ARTFORUM

## Ifs, Ands, or Butts

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**Joe Sola and Michael Webster, *Shakey's in "Der Hintern in Der Luft"*, 2013.** Performance view, 356 S. Mission Rd., September 14, 2013. Left: Michael Webster. Photo: Colin Brady. Right: Joe Sola. Photo: Marshall Astor.

**EVERYONE HAD KIND OF NOTICED**, but then forgotten, the big yellow woodchipper. But now somebody fired it up; the performers, still dressed in their candy-striped vaudeville getups, sliced through a giant Laura Owens painting with a little branch-clearing chainsaw and fed it piece by piece into the machine's funnel.

Joe Sola and Michael Webster have appeared as Shakey's since 2006. For *Shakey's in "Der Hintern in der Luft,"* held on Saturday, September 14, the duo turned their knack for endearing self-effacement on their willing venue—356 S. Mission, famous in Los Angeles for hosting "12 Paintings by Laura Owens" for all those months, and for throwing wild parties. Even as they gently mocked nearly every art form, and performance above all, Sola and Webster did so earnestly, and at full tilt—because after all, when one's livelihood is made in the spotlight, aplomb is often built on desperation.

All the ingredients were there from the start: an upright piano, the Owens leaned in a corner, props bundled together on a folding table and hoisted into the rafters, and—harnessed to the rope and pulley—a prone Sola. The audience had barely been allowed to take their seats when Webster walked over to the upright and tickled the keys. Sola stood, unclipped the rope, and lowered the bundle. He started and then extinguished a small trash fire. He made small sculptures on little wooden tables. Webster's piano twinkled in time with Sola's exaggerated gestures. Sola whipped up a crappy orangeish mustard cheese-and-glitter sandwich then walked on tiptoes toward a shelf supported by a thin stick. With much ado—the arpeggiating piano skittering higher, quieter—he placed the

sandwich there, and out rang a tinny octave: *Ping!* Sola danced from foot to foot, hands wagging to Webster's rag, which dissolved, dreamlike, into the sound of a doorbell.

Having punctured the myths of contemporary sculpture (indeed, the sandwich was almost an alternate for the exhibition in the adjacent room, "365 Sculptures") Sola turned to drawing. He flipped the folding table up on its end into an easel, stuck a big pad of white paper on there, and went at it with a marker. A jazzy abstraction emerged. Sola put on a policeman's cap and ventured a couple of strongman poses. But soon self-doubt set in; he flipped to the next sheet, slowly, like the drawing weighed ten pounds. He drew a Ship at Sea (an Owens joke?), then a stick figure throwing a knife. Sola marked a bullseye on the gallery wall and tossed his own blade into the outer ring. Then he tossed a hatchet, but missed; and next, Sola mimed a knife-throw into the audience, pulled a hapless volunteer up front, handed him a yellow balloon, and wound up with a giant axe.



But an artist's triumphs always fade into the next project, and the doorbell rang again. Sola shuffled over to the Owens painting, fingered a small rip in the canvas, and dove in. Out flew a bunch of junk—popcorn, more glitter, a surfboard, a wadded up piece of newsprint. Sola ran to center stage and prepared—manically this time—an epic trash fire, with two bags full of crumpled paper and a gallon of gas. But as he wielded a huge fire extinguisher, he tripped. The extinguisher clattered to the cement. Webster played a disconsolate lullaby.

Sola rolled on the ground and squirted out a whipped cream pie, then splatted it in his own face. He tipped over his little sculptures, one by one. He swatted the leg out from the shelf and brought its contents down on his head. Sola slid over and clipped himself to the rope and pulley and hoisted his body into the air, inch by inch, until the seat of his pants formed an abject peak—and all at once the volunteer (still awkwardly standing there, still holding the balloon) belted out in an operatic baritone (piano pounding): "*Der hintern in der luft, der hintern in der luft*"—the butt in the air.

The chipper's cranking motor cut through the applause. The audience played their part, too, sifting through the aftermath of the Owens, looking for good scraps.

*Travis Diehl is a writer based in Los Angeles.*