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By CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT

Art Critic



A painting of a book of ridiculous paintings
2010, watercolor and pencil on paper, 22 x 22"

Watercolors and a short film

Joe Sola's watercolor, "a painting of a book of ridiculous paintings," is a witty bit of pictorial circular logic. Rendered simply, rather like folk art, its earnest sincerity is as square as the edges of the pink tome depicted. Exactly why an anthology of ridiculous paintings might be compiled between the expensive, labor-intensive covers of a book is a conundrum, but this particular ridiculous painting seems to yearn for inclusion. Rational proof never attends the proposition made by a work of art, no matter how outlandish.

Sola is an absurdist, as another watercolor at the Happy Lion Gallery attests. It shows him tangling with the late German art-prankster Martin Kippenberger. Facing each other, the artists have dropped their *lederhosen* and their penises are entwined in a knot. The very funny image upends the masculine viewpoints that dominate artistic discourse.

The seven watercolors are a coda to "A short film about looking," which is actually a projected DVD. In it, an unblinking artist in his scruffy studio and an equally unblinking art collector in his chic hillside house take turns being momentarily captivated by objects -- staring bug-eyed at raw materials (for the artist) and still life elements (for the collector). The men are brought together in an art gallery by an art dealer, who has set up two chairs in the center of the room.

The men sit, knees to knees, and stare at each other intently until their heads explode -- literally. (It takes only a few moments.) The dealer's head explodes too. The camera pans across the blood-soaked space to a percussionist, who caps the scene with a brief staccato drum solo.

Sola has wicked fun with art's pretensions, all the while partaking of its inescapable delights. Gender relations are an undercurrent -- artist and patron are male, the go-between dealer is female -- but everyone's fate is the same. That's the thing about absurdity: Acceptance is its only demand.

The Happy Lion 962 Chung King Road Chinatown (213) 625-1260 through Feb 12