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Joe Sola: 'American Sex Room and other Works'

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Art in Review

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER

Blackston

29C Ludlow Street, near Hester Street, Lower East Side

Through May 18

A small bell mounted on the inside of the door tinkles as you enter the gallery. A gallery news release explains: "It might look and sound like your standard storekeeper's door bell mounted on the gallery door, but if you had an ear for car engines, and Volvos in particular, you might have guessed that the bell's clapper is actually a piece of piston from the engine of a 1982 Volvo 240 GL — which just happens to be the car in which Joe lost his virginity. Welcome to his world. Mind the gap!"

That description constitutes probably 80 percent of the work, maybe more. (I didn't even notice the bell upon entering the gallery). But this is Joe's world; we're only passing through it. And while the current show doesn't include blockbusters like "Studio Visit" (2005), in which Mr. Sola invited individual curators and collectors to his Los Angeles studio, then jumped out the window, or a recent stunt in which he put a large Laura Owens painting through a wood chipper, it offers a provisional glimpse of his Weltanschauung.

Paintings with "people looking at something abstract" and the simultaneously sober-and-silly still life "violet guns with hot dog" (all works from 2014) look like Philip Guston or Giorgio Morandi filtered through '70s graphic design.

The show's centerpiece, on cardboard box pedestals, features a can of Chef Boyardee ravioli and a glass fish bowl filled with guppies. Speaking in a bad Italian accent (performed by Mr. Sola and played as a soundtrack with the tableau), the ravioli "interrogate" the fish about being and existence. It's dumb, funny and absurd — and authentically Mr. Sola.