

MODERN PAINTERS

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London:
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PLUS

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resembling drug dens, blown-out methamphetamine labs, and abandoned retail stores. Now the Wadsworth Atheneum has commissioned him to reimagine a gallery space as part of its renowned Matrix program, which for the past 35 years has offered solo shows to young contemporary artists. Lowe has responded by tucking a fun-house installation of three rooms and one long hallway into a space just off one of the Wadsworth's main galleries, which fittingly holds many of the museum's choice Surrealist pieces. One moves from that elegant, staid space into Lowe's exhibition, "Werewolf Karaoke," through a nondescript white door.

Inside, Lowe has carefully re-created the bathroom of



paved with cheap paperbacks, set on their spines so that their pages' outer edges—colored blue, red, yellow, and mauve—face upward. "Feel free to take your shoes off," a guard suggests. Standing on all that pulp fiction feels pretty nice and is not a bad vantage from which to watch a whimsical video by Lowe composed of footage from the 1971 cult classic *Werewolves on Wheels* that loops on a television set.

The decor in the other video room is considerably sparser. Its walls are black, and scenes from two more cult classics—Barbet Schroeder's druggy 1969 *More* and George Greenough's 1973 surfer film *Crystal Voyager*—play over each other. Shots of the sky, abstract forms, and a couple embracing on a deserted beach are all made ominous by the rich, drone-based sound track, by New York's Psychic Ills, that blasts from speakers. The room's one nod to comfort is four modestly stuffed cushions adorned with images of scantily clad ladies, making for a rather exciting reclining experience.

It is here that the lonely, fascinating heart of Lowe's work emerges from what first appears to be obsessively crafted gimmickry. The spaces he creates in "Werewolf Karaoke" are filled with traces of other people: graffiti on the bathroom's walls, the splatters of Pollock's paint, the accumulated dirt on the pages of Lowe's book-floor, and the taste of an eccentric, exacting interior decorator. But they are devoid of actual people, representing places that exist only in a collective cultural unconscious: CBGB is gone; Pollock is too. One day in the future, when memories of the 20th century have subsided, one can imagine people mistaking the two for contemporaries—Pollock and punk, two inventive, expressive

products of a New York that vanished long ago.

Addressing the gentrification of New York neighborhoods that the contemporary-art world has abetted over the past half century, sculptor Robert Morris argued in 2000 that SoHo and Chelsea have been turned into "culture ghettos a step above the theme park," adding that "today there is no margin in big-city life." Lowe creates a smart, loving, and bittersweet tribute to that lost margin: an invitation to spend some time inside that cultural space and, one hopes, recover it.

—Andrew Russeth

LOS ANGELES

Amir Zaki

LAXart // July 17–August 21

"Are they sculptures or animations?" asks a woman watching one of Amir Zaki's video installations at LAXart. The artist, who happens to be standing nearby, responds: "It's an excellent question. They're animations, but sometimes they feel real even to me."

The exchange serves as an apt summary for Zaki's show, which performs a delicate unbalancing act, deliberately disrupting traditional modes of sculpture, viewers' experience of installation art, and the division between material and illusion. His videos

involve household items—bottles, hairbrushes, chairs—arranged into towers that gyrate in dizzying, irregular sequences. But the sculptures are entirely illusory, warped simulacra of mundane domestic objects painstakingly crafted using 3-D software.

The show's title, "Eleven Minus One," plays off the collection's calculated and permeating instability. Zaki has hung 10 animated videos on screens at the gallery's far end in a visually lopsided formation. This layout instills in the viewer a sense of unease and a nagging feeling that something isn't quite right. The show seems to lack a final, 11th piece.

Near the door is the only "real" sculpture of the show: a black paper box, unfolded and printed with photos of one of Zaki's installations taken from various angles. By returning to a traditional mode at the exit, the artist releases viewers from the vertigo evoked by his pieces—here is the 11th work. But the temporary relief dissolves under a torrent of questions: Is this another piece or just secondary documentation of one of the videos? Is it a sculpture or simply photographs displayed on a flat-tened surface? Issues of authenticity swirl like one of Zaki's computer-generated black-and-white chairs, fully materialized, more real than anything, but unanswerable.

—Kit Warchol

FROM TOP:
Justin Lowe
Two installation views
of "Werewolf Karaoke"
at the Wadsworth
Atheneum.

Amir Zaki
Still from *Eleven Minus One*, 2010.
Ten-channel video
installation, dimensions
variable.



the infamous music venue CBGB, which closed in 2006, its Bowery home taken over by a John Varvatos store. The walls of this faux gents are covered with thick layers of spray-painted graffiti and stickers; a decrepit garbage can sits next to the door. Entering the bathroom is unsettling, the discordance deepened by the absence of the other stimuli one would expect: the intermingled smells of urine, spilled beer, and cheap cleaning supplies, the noise from a band. Even more bizarrely, Lowe has hung Jackson Pollock's *Number 8*, 1952 (part of the Wadsworth's collection), on one wall, where it almost blends into the tangled scrawls.

On each side of the reconstructed CBGB lavatory, Lowe has created psychedelic video rooms. The one to the left has been transformed into a 1970s-style space whose two windows, overlooking Hartford's corporate downtown, are tinted a bright purple and a toxic green. Shape-distorting mirrors hang on the walls, and the floor is

