



## BENJAMIN JURGENSEN WASHINGTON, DC

instrument tucked beneath her chin, she becomes more or less abstract according to the sounds she makes. This self-portrait invokes the dissolution and reformation of the ego in the surrounding now of the cosmos. Leonardo was reputed to be quite a fiddler, too.

The next space is a pitch-black hallway. Disorientation as an exhibition strategy never worked better. Between darkened video spaces, massive installations, and unexpected curtained doorways, it becomes almost impossible to know where you are in the building, or even where one piece is situated in relation to another. Multiple meanderings don't change much in this regard: you still feel more lost than found. This forces you to confront the here-and-now of the work in front of you, disallowing the distanced overview implied by the term "retrospective."

Steina's reputation is entirely warranted: her work is stunningly inventive and consistently engaging, without any compromise of intellect or experiment. Of all the excellent pieces on view, *Pyroglyphs*, 1995, was most appealing. Made in collaboration with artist and blacksmith Tom Joyce, it combines a three-channel projection of various aspects of the element of fire with multi-channelled, digital sonic manipulations. These images and sounds are all derived from the sparks, smoke, flames, and hammering of Joyce's metalsmithing process. The work is absolutely hypnotic and abstract, in the sense that elements are largely unidentifiable in any specific sense. Postmodern and utterly primal, the massive walls of manipulated images create a pyromaniac's fantasy world. You start sweating in the imaginary heat the videos generate. My five-year-old didn't want to leave and volunteered, as we exited the venue, "I liked the fire designs best." How's that for universality?

—Jon Carver

Benjamin Jurgensen's *Don't Ready To Die Anymore* stands as one of those rare exhibitions that resonate mentally long after the body has left the gallery [Meat Market Gallery; May 2—31, 2008]. The exhibition comprises visually intriguing and thought-provoking compositions that draw from campus life, rap music, the Disneyfication of reality, and a half dozen art movements. As a result, it forces us to stop, look and listen, take note of the potential meanings, then review the work again.

Jurgensen tags intriguing collections of objects with equally compelling titles. In *the new white flight flat packs, propelling expectations of hover parents, affectionless, despondent, twenty-two and never free*, 2008, for example, an overturned lamp is combined with a cutting board bearing a knife and two halves of an avocado, and a small drawer/storage unit. An obviously fake faecal deposit rests in the open drawer of the latter. The entire work has been painted a generic tan, except for a copy of *Fibromyalgia for Dummies (Second Edition)*. This potent ode to the pandemonium and puerility of dormitory life effectively conjures up all the conflicting feelings and inexplicably rash behavior brought forth by this bubble of pseudo-independence. The artist's representation of real incidents—the avocados symbolize a love story, the faecal matter an actual dormitory prank—heightens the work's intensity and disquieting impact.

The visual effectiveness of many pieces is heightened by Jurgensen's reliance on a single color for all but one of their components. In *every-ting crash, this is a chaos race, not your typical dark skinned disney villains*, 2008, which references the film *Cool Runnings*, several cartons of fresh eggs stop a black go-cart/bobsled flying down a steep black slope from crashing into the floor. Evoking the danger and risk of embarrassment generated by precipitous thrills, the sculpture also eschews the repressive stereotyping of commercial media. In *painting*, 2008, a beige pair of bricks supports an off-

white panel next to this work. Smaller in scale, lighter in weight, and positioned at the same angle as *every-ting crash*, *painting* engages in humorous conversation with its neighbor in addition to upending notions of minimal art's seriousness. It also throws light on the fact that most of the works in the gallery are made of MDF carved or constructed to mimic the appearance of real objects.

The back gallery environment, *title unresolved—on it all night, folding unis all day, shadows only cast if comic book courage amounts to anything more than tattered sheets and exploded ankles*, 2008, is Jurgensen's most accomplished work. Here, the artist beguilingly explores surface, shapes, texture, and space in the form of kryptonite crystals, land mines, a cluster bomb, and bicycle locks. Inspired by *Superman* comics and the breakup of Yugoslavia, the eerily green floor, sculpted platforms, minimalist wall pieces, and replica of a Yugo bicycle that rises into the air like a triumphant stallion evoke toxicity, hollow victory, and desperate realities.

The complexity of Jurgensen's output is challenging and exciting. Stylistically, his work vacillates between realism and minimalist abstraction, while bearing the influence of pop art, surrealism, found object art, and assemblage. He also surprises us by randomly placing cellphone towers in the gallery. Untitled and not part of any work, their inconspicuous presence causes us to question our abilities to comprehend. In his video *solastalgia loop*, 2008, a scene from *The Graduate* continuously interrupts *The Little Mermaid*. The sight and sounds of Dustin Hoffman walking through a kitchen while sheathed in a wet suit exude a tangible feeling of dislocation that counteracts the ready appeal and unreality of sugar-coated fantasies. Packed with energy and emotion, the work possesses an unequivocal honesty. *Don't Ready to Die Anymore* exalts a perplexing world of strange coincidences and intense experiences, delivering a highly positive, if jagged, vibe.

—John Gayer

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Steina Vasulka, *Tokyo Four*, 1991, four video/four audio channel installation, color, sound, 19:45 minutes, looped, initial editing and consultation: Hope Atterbury [courtesy of the artist and SITE Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM; photo: Eric Swanson]; Brian Jurgensen, *title unresolved—on it all night, folding unis all day, shadows only cast if comic book courage amounts to anything more than tattered sheets and exploded ankles*, 2008, MDF and latex paint [courtesy of the artist and Meat Market Gallery, Washington, DC]