

the nature of anger and devotion. Birza dares us to find beauty in the tragic faces of human suffering, yet he refrains from empathy, sustaining an emotional detachment that challenges us to discover more complex truths on our own.

—David Coggins

## ZURICH

### Anselm Reyle at the Kunsthalle Zurich

This survey, titled “Ars Nova,” featured 15 recent, large-scale sculptures, room-sized installations and expansive two-dimensional pieces by 36-year-old Berlin-based German artist Anselm Reyle. At first, this gaudy and cacophonous show resembled a group exhibition of artists who make outlandish and vulgarized renditions of works by modernist masters. Hung near the museum entrance, for instance, an enormous canvas (12 by 8 feet), *Two Nude Figures (Nudes Against a Pink Ground)*, 2005, is an overblown homage to Léger. Appropriating a 1923 Léger painting well known to Swiss audiences as a major work in the Kunstmuseum Basel, Reyle inflates the figures to billboard size and, in a caustic Pop art gesture, paints the background a lurid hot pink. Elsewhere, Reyle presents several large canvases based on works by the pioneer German abstractionist Otto Freundlich, who co-organized with Max Ernst the first Dada exhibition in Cologne in 1919. The small facets of color in the earlier compositions, however, are here enlarged to big, decorative swatches in all-over patterns that transpose Freundlich’s intimate, personal vision into a grandiose, if not bombastic, statement.

One particularly striking work plays on Yves Klein’s blue monochrome paintings. Reyle covers the surface of a large vertical untitled canvas with many yards of gathered purple-blue reflective foil. As mesmerizing as the piece may be, its glitzy demeanor thwarts a sense of the spiritual that Klein aimed for in his work. Standing nearby, a 9-foot-tall untitled abstract bronze sculpture is equally absurd. Inspired by an African woodcarving, the work could be a tribute to modernist sculptors such as Arp or Archipenko, but chrome-plated in bright red-orange, Reyle’s piece is more akin to a shiny car-hood ornament.

Some of the most outrageous offerings reference Color Field painting, produced, as all the works are, with the help of teams of assistants. A mural-sized canvas, *Sunset at Lake Geneva*, over 9 by 22 feet, features wide, multicolored horizontal bands, à la Kenneth Noland, while enormous compositions of vertical pours of Day-Glo pigments conjure Larry Poons’s paintings of the 1970s or more recent works by the Swiss artist John Armleder. At one point in the show, visitors pass through an empty gallery painted chartreuse. Harshly lit by white neon, the installation, titled *Fresh Yellow*, appears to be a nod to certain early Bruce Nauman works, though entirely devoid of the existential gravity that one might associate with Nauman. Filling another gallery, an untitled installation featuring 119 found neon tubes was an additional exercise in excess. Recalling a work by Keith Sonnier, the long, thin, glowing multicolored tubes haphazardly clustered on the floor and suspended from the ceiling provide a dazzling display but lack any kind of formal restraint. In this piece, and in every aspect of his boisterous pastiche, Reyle is remarkably consistent in the way he pokes fun at modernism’s conceits while underscoring its purely sensational elements.

—David Ebony

## BERLIN

### John Bock at Klosterfelde

“UNSUITABLE FOR CHILDREN” read a cardboard sign greeting visitors to John Bock’s recent exhibition, “Lüte mit Rucola” (Li’l One with Arugula). On the floor nearby lay children’s drawings and some crayons. It was unclear at first whether they were part of the show or an actual provision for visiting children.

Two small doors led into walled-off spaces, one a recreation of a vandalized living room, the other a screening space with a projected video and a few seats. The living room was small, with old-fashioned furniture and curtains, an odd assembly of decorative knickknacks, a record player and a TV. It was all very petty bourgeois, circa 1980. But everything was in an awful mess: blood—or rather red paint—was splattered all over, severed limbs made of plastic

were scattered about and many objects were broken.

In the other room, the video demonstrated how this state might have come about. It shows the film’s main protagonist, played by Bock, torturing and mutilating another actor in an increasingly brutal and frenzied attack, in a nearly identical living room. The artist employs a panoply of horror-movie illusions. At one point, the victim is bound on a cross, his tormentor pulling out his teeth in a scene reminiscent of Laurence Olivier’s performance as a Nazi dentist in the 1976 film *Marathon Man*, though here the quality of the filming and special effects is comparable to that of a low-budget B-movie. Occasionally, the torturer leaves the room to chat or eat with his daughter, who plays in the corridor; he then re-enters the living room, telling her he’s got to get back to work.

That “work” turns into slaughter. After extracting his victim’s teeth, Bock rips out his fingernails, drills holes in his skull and severs his limbs. Toward the end of the video, his actions become even more bizarre: directing a large beetle into one ear and sucking it out of the other, or biting the tongue out of the victim’s mouth and mounting it on a little machine so that it continuously licks the inside of a bicycle fender. The performance touches on religious sacrifice and ritual killings, yet also functions as a pastiche of horror movies with a mad scientist who freaks out when his victim dies—in this case, to the song “Same Sane” by the Ameri-



View of John Bock’s installation *Li’l One with Arugula*, 2006; at Klosterfelde.

can band Blackmail. Despite the obvious artifice, the duration of the torture scenes, along with their increasing violence, makes for very unnerving viewing.

The 41-year-old Bock has of late been a fixture on the international scene. He is a master of performance and installation who often uses video to record his lectures/performances, which he then plays as part of his installations. In this show, he creates an uncomfortable viewing experience, and then re-creates the space in which it was filmed to provide a sense of location. Both film and living room have as their theme the normality and ordinariness of crime and violence, and though it remained clear that it was all a creation, it still was a relief to leave the show behind.

—Axel Lapp

Rob Birza: *Beautiful Misery #17*, 2006, india ink on paper, 53 3/4 by 65 1/2 inches; at Fons Welters.

