

## Henning: A World of His Own

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Who knows what to do with work by German artist Anton Henning? It doesn't fit any of the normal pigeonholes of contemporary art. It doesn't make clear what its goals could be, or how it relates to other works we might have seen. That's what makes it so intriguing.

In "Cranberry Juice, Virus and Band-Aid," an exhibition -- or is it a multi-room installation? -- at Zach Feuer Gallery, Henning paints the gallery walls with bright stripes and fields of color, then fills its spaces with paintings and sculptures, even a single projected video, that play by their own rules.

There are surreal, poppy, almost Peter Max moments in some paintings: A snake emerges from a woman's mouth in one, and others have bold floral themes. Still other canvases are covered with Bauhaus squares, or with abstract patterns of snaking lines and colored patches, like beautifully wrought doodles. Several pictures are housed in simple, finely crafted wood frames that look almost art deco, except for the fluorescent bulbs that lurk along their top edges and light the works below.

A scattering of sculptures transfers the paintings' twists into three dimensions, with shades of Henry Moore and Möbius strips. One larger object could be a curving room partition, or maybe a high bench, except that it's proudly placed on the kind of pristine white pedestal reserved for Important Art. Its shape defines a minimal arc, like something by Richard Serra or Maya Lin, but its surface is covered with some of the same twisting, ornate abstraction as the canvases. The video projection explores the twisting lines in one of the paintings the way a low-flying helicopter might trace the course of an Amazon tributary.

You could imagine that there was an ironic edge to all of this -- a takedown of the pretenses of high art by favoring a goofy nonchalance. The gallery handout says the works "subvert the notion of the White Cube," but they seem far too carefully made to boil down to such a banal gesture of subversion. Maybe it's better to think of Henning as working in the rich tradition of all those many artists, from Hieronymus Bosch to Thomas Cole to Max Ernst, who have spent their time creating alternate worlds where we can lose ourselves.

Visiting Henning's current installation is like going to a show on Earth II, in a universe whose art history diverged from ours somewhere, say, in the 1950s. He's created a kind of alternate art world that hangs together perfectly, but that demands different views and different tastes than we learn on Earth I.

At Zach Feuer Gallery, 530 W. 24th St., through Nov. 11. Call 212-989-7700 or visit <http://www.zachfeuer.com>.

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From Anton Henning's exhibition "Cranberry Juice, Virus and Band-Aid." (By Blake Gopnik -- The Washington Post)

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