



Bjarne Melgaard, *The Synthetic Slut*, 2010, mixed media, installation view.
Greene Naftali.

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More is never enough for Bjarne Melgaard, the Australian-born, Norway-raised bad-boy artist. He appeared on the European scene in the '90s with grandiose ideas and a deranged thrift-shop esthetic. His waxwork figurines, drawings, photographs, posters, and paintings—all with noirish homoerotic overtones—are connected by cat's cradles of string and a wildly undisciplined but impressive sense of form.

Here, in "The Synthetic Slut: A Novel by Bjarne Melgaard," the artist took outrageousness over the top. The putative novel's chapters, spewing unprintable vitriol, were lettered across the floor in lavender, aqua, and orange. Strewn about were disemboweled sofas, expressionistic paintings sprayed with rude graffiti, comical platypus sculptures, figures of centaurlike men merging with stairways, posters stabbed by knives, child-porn photos of horny nude boys, a camouflage bed, paint tubes, pill bottles, crates of sand, a rack of clothes, an aquarium with gorgeous live Australian fish, and images of Serbian uniforms and African boy soldiers, plus references to the notorious killer Arkan, the "N" word, "pig art" and "slut sculpture," and more. It was an artist's apparently lived-in studio, teeming with testosterone, self-hatred, and allusions to rough gay sex.

Melgaard calls it "a reality without any excuses." But this installation seemed to make identity politics and scatter works

left a worktable in the gallery topped with leftover chicken salad, ginger-ale cans, coffee dregs in paper cups, and a jar of honey, which, unless I'm missing something, seems entirely too healthy for the tone of the work.

"The Synthetic Slut" may have been a disaster by an intriguing artist whose work has been led astray by the need for old-fashioned modernist shock effects.

—Kim Levin

Sarah Kaufman

Soho Photo

There's an unusual sense of solitude and withholding in the 13 nudes that made up this quietly provocative show. Most of Sarah Kaufman's subjects seem preoccupied, or merely oblivious to the camera. They stare out of windows, gaze into space, curl up in the fetal position to nap, or—as in *Untitled (Blue Smoke)*, 2008—get lost in the simple act of puffing on a cigarette.

What is most interesting is how the unclothed bodies don't come across as objects on display. Instead, the nudity gives us a sense of the intimacy of the

too autobiographical. It melded inexcusable content with leftover conceptual anti-matter. And then, with one small detail, the artist intentionally or unintentionally annihilated the whole bad-boy illusion his work tries so hard to create: he

environments to which we've been allowed entry. The subjects are often in the two most private rooms of the home—the bathroom and bedroom. Where there are windows, oversaturated light frequently blocks any view of the world outside. The young woman we see in *Untitled (Fighting Fish)*, 2010, is doubly closed off—a reflection in a large round mirror is all we can see of her.

But the sense of isolation in these photographs is neither claustrophobic nor anxiety inducing. Hazy sunlight surrounds the people in the images with a comforting, dreamlike aura. In *Untitled (Small Sunset)*, 2009, a woman standing in a laundry room with her back to us appears to be bathed in an almost Pre-Raphaelite glow of white light. The young man in *Untitled (Shaker Gourd)*, 2010, sleeps next to a window filled with a similar luminescence.

Kaufman says that her goal in taking these pictures was to "reveal the possibility for a quiet intensity within the



Sarah Kaufman, *Untitled (Small Sunset)*, 2009, digital C-print from medium-format film, natural available light, 20" x 20" print on 24" x 24" paper. Soho Photo.

everyday and ideally allow the viewer to soak in the gestures and details within another person's domestic space and routine," which she accomplishes. Highly adept at lighting and composition, as well as at getting her subjects to let themselves go in front of the camera, she creates a distinctive and appealing world in these unassuming images. —Steve Barnes