

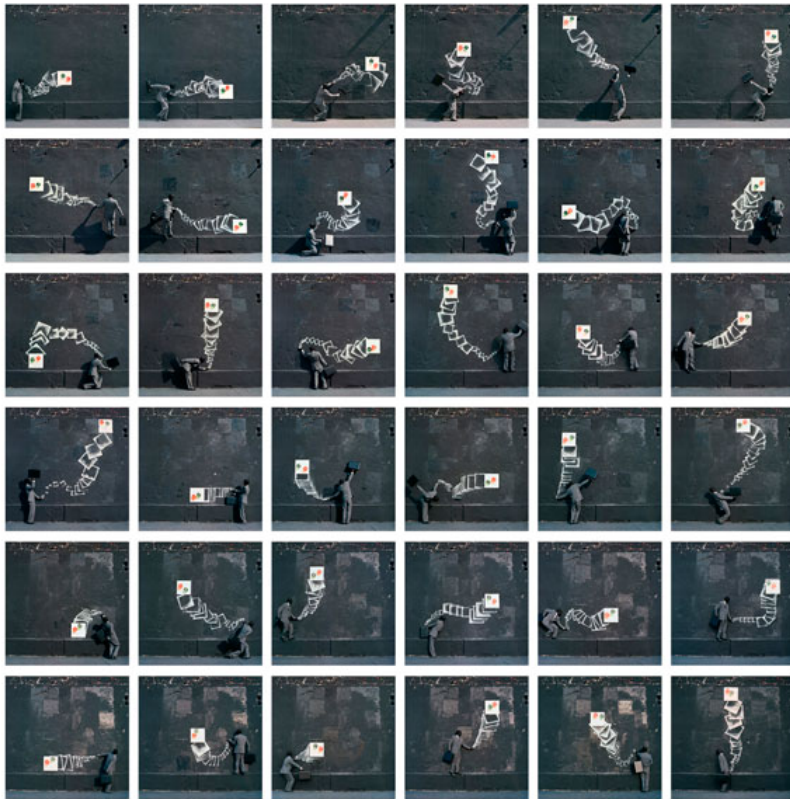


Culture Monster

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME

Art review: Robin Rhode at L&M Arts

March 22, 2012 | 4:05 pm



South African artist Robin Rhode is known for ingenious, storyboard-like narratives depicting a lone figure (sometimes the artist, sometimes not), interacting with drawings on the wall or the ground behind him.

For his first solo outing in an L.A. gallery, Rhode also ventures into more conventional modes of sculpture and photography. An oversized rubber stamp in the shape of the moon and crumpled images of abandoned post-Katrina houses both feel labored, but most of the works on view at L&M Arts are actually quite magical.

“36 Ways a Dice can Roll/Dice,” features 36 images of a man “throwing” an oversized pair of dice drawn on the wall. The panels are arranged in a grid so that the numbers on the dice read in order from top to bottom, in all possible combinations. This arrangement suggests a neat mathematical structure that contrasts with the aura of chance surrounding street corner dice games. But the man is wearing a business suit and holding a briefcase. Given the current economic and political climate, his get-up conjures the machinations of Wall Street: a seemingly ordered system that is actually more like a street hustle.

Other works bring to mind, obliquely, the artist David Hammons, known for selling snowballs on the street and making sculptures out of empty liquor bottles. In the show’s lone video, Rhode uses a tennis racket to hit snowballs onto the smooth metal wall of a Richard Serra sculpture, “decorating” it with an all-over polka dot pattern and reminding us, humorously, that it might easily double as a playground backboard.

In the sequence of photos titled “Rocks” a dark-skinned man holds a bottle of whiskey and an empty glass, appearing to “skate” unsteadily around an asphalt lot. In his wake is a perfect figure eight of ice cubes — a fantasy both lovely and desolate.

It may be tempting to lump Rhode in with other artists who document physical performances, but his work is another species entirely. Each image is carefully staged for the camera — in some cases requiring that an entire wall be repainted for each shot. The resulting sequences suggest a combination of live action and animation, a space somewhere in between the reality we inhabit and the one we imagine.

Although video would seem the perfect medium in which to bring this world to life, I prefer Rhode's storyboards. In the stuttering movie they create in the mind's eye, they seem more elusive, and beguiling.

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-- Sharon Mizota

L&M Arts, 660 S. Venice Blvd., Venice, (310) 821-6400, through April 21. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.lmgallery.com

Photo: Robin Rhode, "36 Ways a Dice can Roll / Dice," 2011. Credit: L&M Arts, Los Angeles. Photo credit: Joshua White/JWPictures.

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