

# MICHAEL MAHALCHICK

# Art Review:

**Michael Mahalchick: *IT***  
Canada, New York  
7 March – 22 April

**Michael Mahalchick's *IT*** is less an exhibition than an assault on the senses. Composed of mixed-media sculptural works ranging in quality from pointless to transcendent, it manages to transmit the feeling that one is not in a gallery so much as in some kind of waiting room for the dead. Using subtle touches, such as the smell of rot that wafts from jars of raw bacon in *Milking Machine* (all works 2012), which also includes a coffee table propped up by gay pornography magazines, or the quietly persistent background noise of a Los Angeles radio station reporting on the aftermath of the 1994 Northridge earthquake in *Youthquake*, an installation that includes a futon, a room divider, a tape player and a pair of Budweiser-can speakers, Mahalchick has created a realm haunted by hairy-bellied spirits.

The exhibition opens with assemblages that bear Mahalchick's signature touch: objects composed of thrift-store materials. In *The Bachelor* a ripped and burned T-shirt hangs from a Japanese paper screen (punctured by a steak knife), along with a pink tie, the cord from an Apple mouse and other sundry objects. Near the shirt is a crumpled photograph of an unidentified airline pilot, adding a touch of horror-film menace to the otherwise innocuous materials. In *La Burubruja*, melted wax candles, orange peels and a dirty bong look like carefully stored objects from an abandoned seance.

The back room of the gallery roils with a *Beetlejuice* kind of energy. In *The Bride*, a black totem pole consisting of speakers, a pot and an old telephone is wrapped with white gauze and animated by a flashing strobe light. In the eponymous *IT*, a water-stained piece of drywall is pinned with an old, frayed Chinese finger trap. The space is viscerally dirty, soiled by association with the smell, the sight and the sound of senescence.

Alone, most sculptures in the exhibition would lose their power to disgust. Empty, though pretty, wall pieces such as *Roses Turn*, a mixed-media work of dried rose petals on a blue

background, would make appealing acquisitions for collectors who buy art on the Internet. And the larger assemblages, such as *The Queen*, which is composed of a wheelchair, a dirty pillow and an electric guitar wrapped in women's underwear, look too amateurish, too many *posts*-post-Gordon Matta-Clark, to be acquired by a respectable museum. But that may be exactly the point. By displaying objects that fall short of the iconic, Mahalchick frees them from having to mean anything, and in doing so, allows them to be inhabited by something otherworldly.

**BRIENNE WALSH**





# ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2004

## MICHAEL MAHALCHICK CANADA GALLERY

Michael Mahalchick weaves and stitches scraps of scavenged cloth into raggedy wall hangings, lumpy totems, and squat, motley creatures, celebrating both quiet industry and its flip side, sensual languor. One favorite trope is to take properly horizontal forms and give them the primacy, and display value, of the vertical. Quiltlike drapery *No. 34 (Let Your Freak Flag Fly)*, 2003, was inspired by Gee's Bend; to form the two perfectly titled *To Die Dreamings*, 2004, which together evoke a pair of slatted swinging doors, the artist wove strips of old clothes onto futon frames. As installed in this gallery—an ideal setting, at once expansive and warrenlike—the fabric grids and swaths mocked up windows and curtains to suggest the hideaway of a stoner Bachelard, with the floor sculptures—short and personable, lumpy or stick thin, wrapped in fur and bound in ribbons—suggesting imaginary friends.

Contra Bachelard, Mahalchick acknowledges the presence of adult concerns in his childhood-evoking ur-home, as well as the presence of the child in the adult world. Take those imaginary friends: *Stevie*, 2003, a fur-cloaked sprite, pokes fun at the mystic Beuys of *I Like America and America Likes Me*; *Terry*, 2003, a roly-poly bear, embodies the convergence of caretaking, play, and erotics that extended throughout the show. At the gallery's door hung a drooping net of patterned strips like a deboned God's eye, woven using a mini-trampoline as a frame. Its red, pink, and turquoise bull's-eye is encircled by fuzzy orange-red yarn that flowers here and there into unkempt tufts, leading a chain of association from cunt to womb to home to bed and thereby back again. But the warmth manifest in Mahalchick's self-described "love objects" is not focused on *la boue*.

His materials are clean, and his compositions—like the lyrical *I Am the Resolution* 2003, a field of port-colored tatters and marble-size blue, turquoise, marigold, and lemon beads sewn onto a bedcover that's been belted at the middle—are highly structured.

When Mike Kelley brings craft objects into the gallery, he's interrogating the value systems in which blankies, sock monkeys, etc., are embedded. Mahalchick's art, despite its knowingness, seems to embody a retreat from adult language. Its quasi autism is curious for an artist heretofore focused on music, video, and performance and who is committed enough to live acts to arrange a five-night-a-week performance series for the run of his exhibition. These events peopled Mahalchick's dreamy pad with an array of creatures still odder than his own: a pair of dancers in scary masks, fedoras, and gold chains like Afro-Hasidic gnome-pimps; black-clad musicians grinding themselves into zombiedom by repeating a single phrase by Satie for three hours. The highlight of a strong dance lineup, Jeremy Wade's thrashings in a darkened adjacent office were transmitted into the gallery via night-vision closed-circuit video, evoking both pioneering work in that medium and the visual vocabulary of mediated war. On the final night Mahalchick assembled almost every one of his performers into a live-action montage, drawing the curtain on the series and his show by strumming a guitar and leading a "We Are the World"-style sing-along ("We are beautiful, no matter what they say") with an intensity—a refraction of the weaver's nervous hands?—that belied the artworks' laid-back air.

—Domenick Ammirati



Michael Mahalchick, *Terry*, 2003, futon, fabric, leather, artificial fur, and string, 41 x 46 x 39".

# ARTFORUM

**Michael Mahalchick**

CANADA

55 Chrystie Street

October 20–December 04



*The Illuminator*, 2005.

Michael Mahalchick's compassion for destitute objects compels him to knot them into gentle, dirty bundles, bandage them one around the other, and tie them together so that they may never be lonely again. Taking as his working material the unlovely, soft refuse of urban existence—unwanted clothing, used bedsheets, matted stuffed animals—Mahalchick transfigures it through his particular form of assemblage magic: wrapping. Some sculptures disclose armatures of found chairs, picture frames, or carpet rolls, while others, like the disco-ball-esque *Form.a*, 2005, seem constructed, from core to surface, of layer upon layer of fabric, strung together to make a stable whole. The results range from the abstract to the nearly figurative, as in *Sleeper*, 2005, which evokes the bodily form of a multiple amputee, hooded in red sequins and resting on a fabric-covered cot. If this work almost too literally engenders pathos, others express a more subtle desire to rescue the rejected. *Resurrection*, 2005, may bear a weighty title, but it challenges one to recognize the life-giving quality of an artistic process that salvages cheap silk flowers, scrap wood, clashing fabrics, and mucky brown fake fur into a suspended sculpture worth looking at. And having really looked, one then exits the gallery to find that much more to look at on the street.

—Lori Waxman



# contemporary

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## MICHAEL MAHALCHICK

DOMENICK AMMIRATI

MICHAEL Mahalchick is a talented sculptor; over the past few years his fabric-based works, which resemble fantastic creatures or pieces of mutely moody scenery, have appeared in solo shows at the Frankfurter Kunstverein and Canada Gallery in New York. At the same time, he has become increasingly well known for organising rowdy performance events that draw on live genres including rock concerts, pop rallies and post-judson dance, evincing the New York-based artist's romances with trash, misrule, and, in a way, America. In *We Are Legion* (2004) he populated Los Angeles's Schindler House, an icon of Modernist idealism, with a small army of flower-toting zombies; it was a trenchant riff on recent exhumations of the modern – not to mention stereotypes of California – and just in time for Halloween. For P.S. 1's mega-survey 'Greater New York 2005' (which also included his sculpture), he created the similarly ghoulish *HEXEN* (2005). Producing nearly as many performers as there were invitees, he crammed all and sundry into a small, damp basement room, where an echoing soundtrack of eerie oscillations and a repetitive video slideshow intensified the claustrophobia. The troupe – a mix of night-owl pros and amateurs, many half-naked and all in outlandish yet simple costumes – variously addressed the crowd and enacted types of 'possession', comic and otherwise: A Goth chick declaimed from *A Lover's Discourse*; a man in a *Hills Have Eyes* mask, tube socks and briefs paused every few scuttling steps to lock a spectator's eyes, lick his lips and touch his left hand to his right foot. Mahalchick's performances rely on audience/performer distance only to erode it – an unexpected sing-along, a free can of PBR, a mute entreaty to dance from a sticky-handed girl wearing no trousers – as if truly powerful emotions, catharsis or ecstasy, can be achieved only by bridging that conventional gap.

Today's Mahalchick, an architect of pseudo-anarchy, is a relatively new one. Prior to 2003, his primary output was music. The Experimental Makeup, a DIY synth-and-sequencer band comprising him and analogue sound artist David Galbraith, began in 1999 (the duo provided *HEXEN*'s soundscape), and Mahalchick still creates compositions for dance, most recently in collaboration with avant-garde cellist Okkyung Lee. Mahalchick's solo four-track recordings, which tend towards collage, took on an unexpectedly vital role for the artist after grad school, when he found himself back home in the depleted coal country of eastern Pennsylvania. 'To keep myself sane,' as he puts it, he began distributing his home recordings through that staple of punk and indie scenes, the cassettes-only label. The project not only saw him through a creatively fallow period, but kept him in touch with old friends like fellow CalArts'er Galbraith and introduced him to new ones like Discoteca Flaming Star, a 'hardcore karaoke' art band from Berlin who deskill rock into a persona-driven train wreck, and with whom Mahalchick has performed in Germany and the US. His favourite number, typically dysphoric: a mash-up of ABBA's *Thank You for the Music* and AC/DC's *Big Balls*.

That Mahalchick meshed with Discoteca's self-proclaimed 'dissolute fans' should come as no surprise. While his own production is in fact more aesthetic than anti-aesthetic, and his sophistication is clear from his integration of the teachings of rogues like Mike Kelley, Bruce Nauman and Jack Smith, his approach to art making is essentially punk; that is, the difference between creator and fan is simply who happens to be holding the guitar at any given moment. (His early solo acts, self-abnegating and confrontational, appreciatively deformed the songs of [queer] pop icons like Madonna and Whitney Houston.) His performance work resembles that of Catherine Sullivan; but where Sullivan's theatre background leads her to turn inward, corkscrewing formal concerns of stage and acting, Mahalchick's history urges him out, towards the audience – towards a community. Sometimes I think his ambitions have grown large not for himself but for his friends, so he can smuggle more of them on stage, get more of them in on the fun.

DOMENICK AMMIRATI IS A WRITER BASED IN NEW YORK AND AN EDITOR OF ARTJUS MAGAZINE.

# Flash Art

THE WORLD'S LEADING ART MAGAZINE

PARIS

## Brian Belott and Michael Mahalchick

Part arts-and-crafts, part Dionysian insouciance, and plain old flouting of conventional discourse, the work of Brian Belott and Michael Mahalchick meets in a merrily marginal place. Kicked-off by a performance in which Mahalchick emerged querulously crooning from a cocoon composed of colorful, bound-together rags. The leftover sculpture/installation was evocative of a sumptuous surfeit of Muppet viscera. This show at Atelier Cardenas Bellanger otherwise consisted of collages and artists books by Belott and wall-hangings/quilts by Mahalchick.

Belott's endearingly clunky, do-it-yourself artist's books contained pasted and painted found imagery, while his motley, many-hued collages were often marked by a leitmotif (animals, eyes) that teemed with impish exultance. The ludic, un-masculine wall hanging quilts of Mahalchick, made from rags, fabrics and



various other materials, generally consisted of geometric, abstract forms — the whole affair reminiscent of the aesthetic spirit of Joe Brainard.

—Chris Sharp

**Michael Mahalchick, Experimental Makeup, 2005. Mixed media, 64 x 33 cm. Courtesy Atelier Cardenas Bellanger, Paris.**



## Jocelyn Shipley and Michael Mahalchick

Canada, New York

'Transmogrification' was recently on view at Canada, a jewel of transgression in New York's Lower East Side. Jocelyn Shipley and Michael Mahalchick frequently combine to form the power music duo Turducken, whose performances tend to be electric, colourful and noisy: Shipley's screaming baritone plays with gender expectations while Mahalchick errs on the glam side. Both wear costume fur, pancake

'Transmogrification' introduces the handmade world of two freaks truly liberated by the subcultures from which they draw their inspiration.



make-up and fake blood. 'Do you really want to hurt me?', Mahalchick asks in a sheepish falsetto, and Shipley grunts 'Yes!' Sometimes the roles are reversed.

While the aesthetics employed by Shipley and Mahalchick heavily reference the work of abject daddies Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelley, 'Transmogrification' somehow transcends the pathetic. Instead, it brings us into the handmade world of two freaks who seem to have been truly liberated by the subcultures from which they draw their inspiration. There is dry land beyond nihilism in sculpture, their work seems to say, and Expressionism can elicit love, lust, sex and death, especially between inanimate objects.

The front room of the gallery is packed; all available space on the floor

and wall is covered. Among the works on show is an installation by Shipley equipped with a soundtrack somewhere between spooky Halloween music and John Zorn's rendition of Ennio Morricone's spaghetti Western themes. Utilizing 'tape mâché' – a sculptural process that uses tape to build forms from the starting point of a balloon – Shipley constructs the blotchy masses of flesh that become her myth-inspired characters. Among her favourite bands is Burzum, a Black Metal ensemble that advocates church-burning.

In a piece entitled *Circle of Hell* (all works 2002), which consists of at least 20 different pedestals, numerous action figures and plastic creatures suffer from various wounds. These beasts are positioned alongside the kinds of porcelain collectables and macramé candle-holders that might decorate your grandmother's house. Enconced on a motorized, spinning pedestal is a ruddy warlord who valiantly rides a badly wounded yet somehow still dutiful hell-sheep-bunny-dog. Undoubtedly, these victims will be spinning perpetually backwards like record lyrics bound together by eternal suffering and damnation.

Another work that aggressively greets the viewer entering the gallery is *Disco Mace*, a combination of disco ball and medieval mace that hangs from the ceiling and slowly spins its mirrored spikes of death. Also of note are *Tail* and *Zephyrous*, the stuffed tail and head of a dragon, mounted on mahogany-like accoutrements in the trophy room of an imperialist action figure serial killer who truly loved her victims.

Set furtively in the back room is a group of silent, swollen sculptures by Mahalchick allegedly made from a bag of clothing left behind by a former roommate. With titles such as *Clown*, *Receiver*, *Sacrifice* and *Lost*, and drawing their inspiration from a stratum of homosexual culture that fetishizes large, hairy men, these pieces of stuffed animal bondage are distended with desire and cuteness. In a small floor sculpture, *Excitable Boy*, cloth becomes flesh when Mahalchick takes two meanings of the word 'bear' and collapses the space between them by visually focusing on

their soft and stuffed equivalences. Thus a teddy bear takes on the sexual prowess of a man, while this same man is made vulnerable and lovable like his childhood playmate counterpart. In a pointed departure from Kelly's use of stuffed animals, Mahalchick's sexy teddies love each other, even though there is no one around to count love hours.

The subtlest work in the show, *Birth*, is made from woven and crocheted strips of piqué cotton underwear. These lurid fabric forms, stuffed with blazing desire, become taut, genitalia-like creatures, hungry and yearning for a caress. And fittingly, you want to touch them, cuddle them and release them from their frustration. Mahalchick has created a quiet and abstract drama that draws its power from the love implicit in prowling sexuality and also, somehow, rug-weaving.

Of the few wall pieces the most notable is *Model Actor*, a collage that combines a Calvin Klein underwear model bottom and a breast fetish porn star top. This exquisite corpse of sorts provides the key to how Mahalchick draws relationships between flesh and fabric, soft and hard.

This convergence of sub-domestic handicrafts and carnal desire perhaps provides an antidote to the listless and disenfranchised state of Expressionism in sculpture. I have never been so willing to believe in other people's objects of fetish. Both Shipley and Mahalchick manage to replace the abject with a hand-crafted optimism; a sweet approach to blood and lust.

Lisi Raskin



Left: Mici Mahalchick  
*Birth*  
2002  
Cotton fabric  
91 x 41 cm

Jocelyn Shipley  
*Zephyrous*  
2002  
Latex, taxidermy  
styrofoam  
63 x 53 x



# The New York Times

## Art in Review

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2009

### Michael Mahalchick

'For What It's Worth'

Canada

55 Chrystie Street, near Canal  
Street, Lower East Side  
Through Feb. 22

Assemblage is everywhere, but few artists are truly able to coax a Rauschenberg or a Schwitters from a pile of castoffs. Michael Mahalchick is a happy exception. He is better known for his performances and his fabric sculptures, but his redemptive humor and love of craft translate well to the clusters of found objects in his third solo at Canada.

Discarded paintings provide a foundation for several works. In "Don't Look at Me" Mr. Mahalchick layers a fanny pack, a surgical glove and strips of tinsel over an art-class study of a nude. In "One Way Out" an unfinished portrait of an Asian couple peeks out from behind a curtain of cut and torn suede and a length of beaded fringe.

The most ambitious creation is "You Want This?," a riotous jumble of lottery tickets, Post-it-size Warhol reproductions, stuffed bears, audio equipment, plastic-foam peanuts and unidentifiable flotsam. It looks, to quote the press release, as though Mr. Mahalchick has upended "his psychic everything drawer."

Smaller, poetic works on canvas show that Mr. Mahalchick is also capable of restraint. "Opalescence" combines packaging from a tooth-whitening gel with evenly spaced white pearl beads. And in "Ain't It Rich?" twigs and glass cabochons are glued to gray burlap.

The works also benefit from a strong sense of place. Many of their components were scavenged from the streets of the gallery's Chinatown neighborhood — not all that far, coincidentally, from Rauschenberg's early studios on Pearl Street and at Coenties Slip.

KAREN ROSENBERG



# Art in Review

## Michael Mahalchick

'It'

*Canada*  
55 Chrystie Street, near Canal  
Street, Lower East Side  
Through April 22

Assemblage has a long history and, at the moment, enjoys a broad popularity. With its emphasis on recycled and rescued materials, it is the perfect medium to express ambivalence about finished art objects while making an overt connection to reality, which too much art is glibly accused of ignoring these days.

In his fourth solo show at this gallery, Michael Mahalchick plays this romance for all it is worth. His latest sculptures and wall pieces employ all kinds of

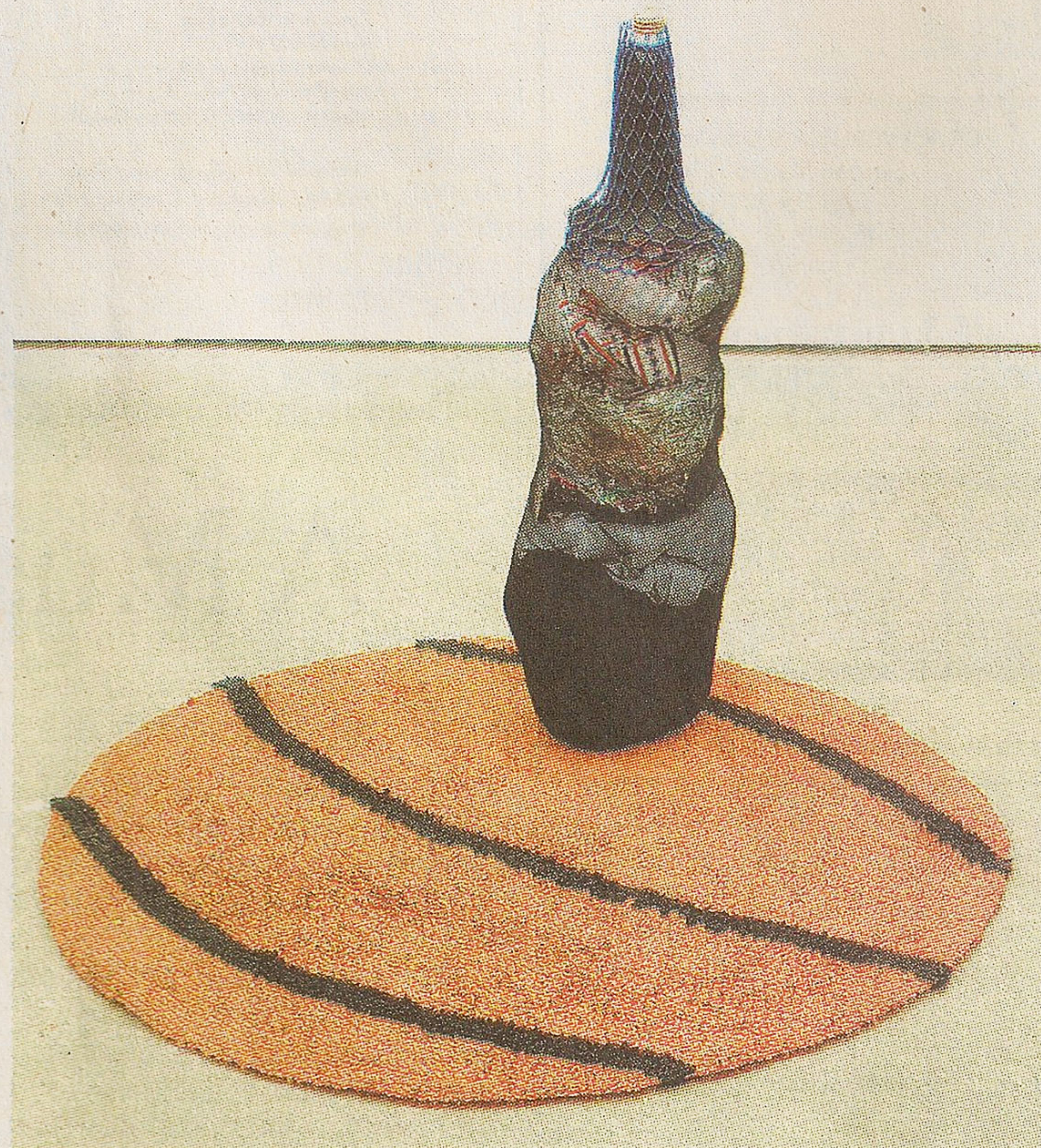
detritus and discarded whatnots — from broken-down furniture to Christmas tree tinsel, and including some fried bacon — and were concocted during a performance at the exhibition's opening. (Photographs showing some of the before, during and after can be viewed on the gallery's Web site.)

It is impossible to distinguish the effects of planning, artistic experience or last-minute inspiration, but in some instances the trash remains foremost trash; in others it is transformed into something more, helped along by associations variously shamanic and modernist. Several small wall pieces resemble decrepit riffs on Robert Ryman and Agnes Martin, although one titled "Unshaven Leg," which affixes shards of mirror and raw canvas to a small board, is more distinctive.

Repurposing a clear plastic bookcase, "La Burubruja" (loose translation: lizard witch) evokes a small shrine, complete with offerings and intimations of a seated deity at its center, thanks to a bong encircled by red-tinted tubing. And "Basketball Wife" achieves a sense of self-contained comic menace with a torsolike bottle form made of black webbing stuffed with paper and foil that rests on a small, round orange rug, whose curving black lines denote a basketball.

In Mr. Mahalchick's best work an almost devotional sense of precision shines through a thin veneer of slovenliness. Elsewhere the veneer thickens.

ROBERTA SMITH



CANADA

"The Basketball Wife" and other pieces by Michael Mahalchick were created in a performance at the Canada gallery.



# The New York Times

Smith, Roberta. "A Point in Space Is a Place for an Argument." *The New York Times* (July 20, 2007): E29



A gallery view of the exhibition "A Point in Space Is a Place for an Argument" at David Zwirner in Chelsea.

## 'A Point in Space Is A Place for an Argument'

David Zwirner  
525 West 19th Street, Chelsea  
Through Aug. 10

The exhibition's title is from Ludwig Wittgenstein, but you don't have to be a philosopher to know that arguments can happen anywhere, anytime — or, to narrow things down a bit, that art, at base, is argument made visual. It's all a matter of more or less convincing arguments.

Although every artwork is an argument about what art should be, there doesn't seem to be a lot of disagreement in this sprawling exhibition, just an inspiring range of work, quite a bit of it drawn from the margins and beautifully installed. There is, however, a shared opposition to tradition, to standard definitions of greatness, to accepted notions of material or finish or the separation of art mediums.

The show unfolds over five galleries, presenting 56 works by 30 artists. In the first space, color is mostly held at bay and decay is embraced, whether in Julien Bismuth's salt-covered canvases, Steven Parrino's partly stretched, crumpled painting, Dieter Roth's unidentified organic materials or Gordon Matta-Clark's inchoate idea of a musical score. Rachel Khedoori, Mike Kelley and Paul Thek contribute.

A new Mary Heilmann painting, oddly architectural and awash with turquoise, looks as if it should be in the second gallery, where color and painting, usually but not always together, have their say in both two and three dimensions. Joe Overstreet, Forrest Bess and Alfred Jensen (represented by bright, bristling diagrammatic paintings on paper) hold the walls. Lynda Benglis picks up where Pollock left off, pouring globs of polyurethane foam pigmented red, green and orange on the floor (in 1968 just before Robert Rauschenberg began his outdoor rundown earthworks). Her piece is a cheerful retort to Eva Hesse's somber latex coil. Contemporaneously, Paul McCarthy drags himself through paint in a black-and-white video. Three small polygonal sculptures from 1999 by Kay Schimert add geometry to Ms. Benglis's proposition. Jason Rhoades, Michael Mahalchick and Vincent Fecteau raise the quirkiness quotient.

In a small gallery in the middle, the intriguing Scottish artist Cathy Wilkes comes closest to talking back to the rest of the show with an installation titled "We Are Pro-Choice." It looks both dated (a store mannequin on a toilet?) and fresh at the same time — related to the British artist Sarah Lucas, only more refined, and to Giacometti's "Palace at 4 A.M.," only raunchier and a lot bigger.

Simple sculptural forms or structures prevail in the final two galleries, constantly switching between outlines and filled-in shapes. The cobbled together forms of Al Taylor and Hans Accola mingle with the elastic lines of Fred Sandback, a video of Bruce Nauman working on the range and the molded and carved concrete of Isa Genzken and the carved foam rubber of John Chamberlain. Raoul De Keyser's paintings and Claes Oldenburg's sculpture of bread reiterate Mr. Chamberlain's loaf shape. Blasts from the past, a more argumentative time, come from Lee Lozano, Niki de Saint Phalle and Andre Cadere.

ROBERTA SMITH



# The New York Times

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## ART IN REVIEW

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NEW YORK, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2004

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### Michael Mahalchick

Canada

55 Chrystie Street, near Canal  
Street, Lower East Side  
Through March 7

Thanks to the last Whitney Biennial, mainstream New York critics have finally started to pay attention to so-called sound art or soundwork, though artists have been producing it for decades. You can catch recent examples of the genre at Canada, which has been holding nightly performance events as part of the first New York solo show of Michael Mahalchick, himself a performer and sculptor.

Mr. Mahalchick's sculptures of scavenged materials are the fixed element here. Wall sculptures are made from pieces of tape, plastic or cloth stretched tautly over open-work supports that look like fragments of lawn furniture. Some of the free-standing pieces are stacked bundles of bright-colored fabrics or other materials, tightly bound with ribbons and straps, suggesting a backpacker's version of bondage. A couple of wall hangings sewn with baubles and beads have an abject decorative flair.

The spirit of the sculptures, improvisatory and fanciful but also intensely concentrated, is reflected in certain of the gallery's February performances, which are on view as projected videos. Outstanding among them is a hypnotic synthesizer-based piece by David Galbraith and Teresa Secmann and a video-and-dance extravaganza conceived by the uncategorizably odd — meaning good — artist Marcos Rosales, working with Jeremy Wade. The artist collective PFFR, smart and inventive, did a show last weekend; and Mr. Mahalchick himself will perform on March 6 in a program titled "When There Is No Room in Hell, the Dead Will Walk the Earth." There is reason to expect a night to remember.

HOLLAND COTTER



# The New York Times

ART REVIEW

## A Grand Finale of Group Show Fireworks

Canada

By ROBERTA SMITH

"You Are My Sunshine, You Is My Sunshine," at Canada on the Lower East Side, also has its finger on the pulse, albeit with some dirt under the fingernails. Devoted to artwork and mixed tapes by musician-artists and artist-musicians, it maps the current proximity of contemporary art and music, pinpointing collage, or sampling, as a major connecting link. It teems with an anarchic, do-it-yourself spirit, visible in the drawings of the musicians from the band Caroliner; the collages and handmade books of Brian Belott (which find an exact aural equivalent in his musical combinations of found sound); the fairy-tale drawings of Tara Burke, who records as Fursaxa; and Jocelyn Shipley.

Michael Mahalchick, an artist and a member of the band Experimental Makeup, who is somewhat marginalized in the Greene Naftali show, makes a stronger impression here with one of his outrageous fabric sculptures; it is both a garment and a kind of body at once.

The standouts here are a wall of often scratched and gouged Polaroids by Tim Rutili mostly taken while touring with his band, Califone, and the small, eccentric ink drawings of Devendra Banhart, whose CD "Oh Me Oh My the Way the Day Goes By the Sun Is Setting Dogs Are Dreaming Lovesongs of the Christmas Spirit" (Young God Records) was a surprise indie hit last year.

Mr. Banhart's drawings, which also appear on his CD covers, depict simple images like simple houses and clusters of little hands that have the intimacy and spirituality of present-day ex-votos.



# artUS

**Michael Mahalchick** BY DOMENICK AMMIRATI

P.S.1/MoMA, New York NY April 30, 2005



Performances at P.S.1: Michael Mahalchick, Amy Granat, New Humans. There was a tight door policy, not just first-come, first-serve, but RSVP invites to a select few. It seemed very un-Mahalchick, and another good excuse to gripe about Greater New York.

Though I live mere blocks from P.S.1, I met my friend Ann in Manhattan at Miranda Lichtenstein's opening at Elizabeth Dee—nice big pictures in the style of lifestyle magazines of Americans seeking spiritual fulfillment in isolation tanks, ripped-off Santeria rituals, mass suicide. Of course we ran late getting back into Queens; and once in Long Island City we couldn't resist stopping at my place for drinks. Mahalchick's performance, titled *Hexer*, was going to be some kind of a coven; mescal seemed appropriate. In the end we were only half an hour late, arriving just as it all was starting.

What ensued happened fluidly, often at once, in a destabilizing no man's land between the sinister and the campy. We crammed into seats on clammy steps in one of P.S.1's basement bunkers, on the front row, the floor at our feet unpleasantly, inexplicably wet. Then began oscillating atmospheric music by the Experimental Makeup, Mahalchick's band with David Galbraith, and in the background a video slide-show projection of Halloweenish scenes. The performers began streaming in from behind us, stepping uncomfortably over and through the crowd, moaning; each was dressed in an odd, cheap but well-tuned costume and performed a series of gestures in a kind of daze, as if possessed: a woman in a wig and see-through stockings stuffed full of crumpled paper to the proportions of an R. Crumb caricature dragged herself across the floor; a guy in a horrible old-man mask, white jockey shorts, and white tube socks to his knees, flicked his tongue horribly, like a guy on Haldol too long, and touched his right hand to his left toe in a spastic kick.

Over the course of twenty minutes, as the music mounted in force and tempo, the twitchy ghouls attempted to interact with the reluctant audience—myself included. At our feet a guy wearing a hernia belt, a flat, flesh-colored paper mask, and otherwise naked but for a piece of metal through the tip of his dick, set up a basin of green muck and handed us sticky plastic tubes, for sucking or blowing bubbles. We demurred. A heavily swaddled woman with

one plastic breast protruding from beneath her rags grabbed my hand and entreated me in Russian. A few minutes later, a naked girl with an amazing ass—and, straight from a sexy-librarian fantasy, nerdy plastic-framed eyeglasses—grabbed one end of my tube and started howling into it; we alternated placing it to our ears while the other moaned. Something sticky from the tube was now on my hands and my mouth. I decided that the performance was one of the best I'd ever seen.

Then, unexpectedly, the *Tales from the Crypt* soundscape snapped off and "YMCA" came on. The possessed all started dancing awkwardly, like it was a high school prom. A guy in an enormous afro wig, huge black plastic shades, and drag queen makeup like the Joker (or Robert Melee's mom), leeringly tried to get me onto the floor; I said, Get off me, ghou! I've got a girlfriend! With zombies you can't be too polite.

Between acts, we shanghaied Tom Johnson back to my house for more mescal. Tom, one of those perverts who look painfully normal—Dockers, generic-brand polo shirts—is in Greater New York himself. For a few hours every Saturday he stands in P.S.1's courtyard confined inside a narrow metal box with only his head sticking out; it's a great way to meet girls, apparently. Tom informed us that the evening's next event was some kind of Brakhage-esque film, a prospect so depressing he went home. I wanted to call Mahalchick to congratulate him, but he is old

school, no cell phone; we ended up running into him later, though, at Matthew Barney's warehouse in Greenpoint, where some bands were playing—Clamp, etc. We were once again late and missed everything, except for some stupid bitch trying to set the studio's gigantic American flag on fire. I had a great terror a grainy video of it would end up on Fox News.

It was only around 1 AM at this point, so we walked with Mahalchick in the rain to yet another party. He was happy, indifferent to his long hair and beard soaking up the downpour while we debriefed on the street with a bottle of polish vodka. Turns out the terrifying guy in the old man mask and tighty-whities was Robert Melee.

This last party, at the clubhouse of some young artists, was full of young people, and thus it went on and on. The building, three stories of musical instruments, computer equipment, and thrift-store art, was a voyeur's paradise: interior windows, hidden stairways, a mezzanine, and roof access with a view of the backyard and a skylight view into the apartment below. Around 3 AM Ann and I found ourselves sobering up in this very spot, peering down at a twitchy huddle of folks, some GNY artists among them. They were doing line after line of no-doubt cheap cocaine off what appeared to be a piece of yellow construction paper, listening to Jethro Tull and the Allman Brothers on a cranked-up Fisher-Price. The high was so dirty that, even through Plexiglas, it kept me up all night.