

## ART

## AROUND THE GALLERIES

# Much irony to chew on

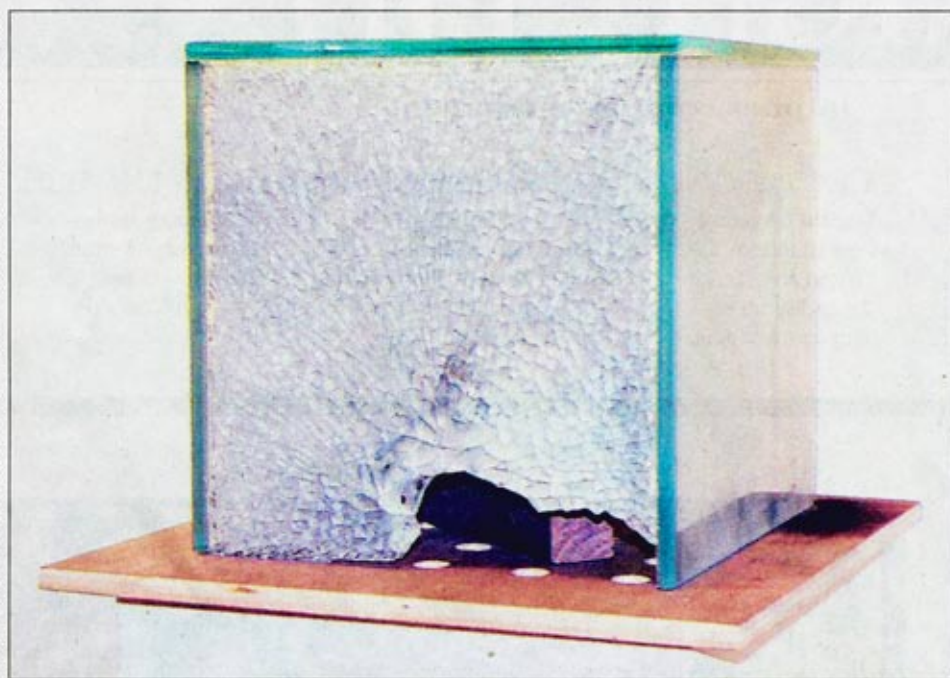
BY HOLLY MYERS

The premise of Jason Kraus' second solo show at Redling Fine Art, appropriately titled "Dinner Repeated," is an exercise in compulsive reiteration. On each of the first seven nights of the exhibition, the New York-based artist served a nearly identical meal: the same four-course menu to the same 12 people, on a plywood table of like design with matching dishes, glasses and flatware.

After each meal, he dismantled the table and used the wood to build a free-standing shelving unit, then cleaned all the dishes and stacked them neatly inside. At the end of the week, the installation was complete: seven apparently uniform cabinets, most stocked with 12 identical place settings, spaced around the floor of the gallery.

The concept of residue has had a lot of currency in recent years: work generated from the marks or stains made by the unfolding of a performance or event. (Note Cai Guo-Qiang's recent firework paintings at MOCA.) In a curious twist on this trope, Kraus has done the opposite: made every attempt to erase the imprint of the events, emphasizing the generic nature of his mass-produced materials.

Look closely, however, and poignant vestiges emerge: There are wine stains visible here and there on the plywood; several of the dishes and glasses are missing, presumably broken over the course of an evening. One cabinet is missing an entire place setting. These faint traces of human activity create a kind of energetic echo, as in an imper-



JASON KRAUS

**JASON KRAUS' "Untitled (Contained Explosions @#3)," 2010, fireworks, glass and wood, is included in his "Dinner Repeated" solo show at Redling Fine Art.**

fectly cleaned motel room or at a table in a restaurant that's just turned over.

The only direct documentation of the seven-day performance is contained in a box all but hidden away in the gallery's office: handwritten notes from the unnamed dinner guests that will be released in book form at the end of the show.

Sloppy, often stained, laced with evidence of intoxication, and fragmentary almost to incoherence, the notes provide little reportage but testify to the vigor of human society, its capacity to animate ritual, transform repetition into evolution and development, and personalize the blank slate of consumer culture.

Only its 12 participants can speak to the effect of the performance. (I was not among them.) The effect of the confidently understated exhibition, however, is to hold an intriguing number of conceptual dichotomies in balance: presence and absence, stain and erasure, ritual and spontaneity, the generic and the personal, public and private, documentation and experience. The cool, clean demeanor of the installation doesn't cancel out the messiness of the performance so much as fix it in a faintly ironic state of con-

trast, illuminating the tension between life and the forms we pour it into.

**Redling Fine Art, 6757 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, (323) 230-7415, through May 12. Closed Sunday and Monday. [redlingfineart.com](http://redlingfineart.com)**

## Awkward shift beyond

Elad Lassry has received attention in recent years for his engagingly odd photographic work, which blends a keen instinct for the language of images — the kooky and awkward as well as the luscious — with a calculated disregard for traditional photographic boundaries of the sort that keep the activity of taking pictures cordoned off from the activity of appropriating them. (He does both, indiscriminately.)

In his second exhibition at David Kordansky Gallery, it's clear that he's angling to get past photography into the more fashionable territory of the multi-disciplinarian, and is evidently being given the resources to do so.

He's moved the gallery's walls around, replaced roughly half of the photo-

graphs with drawings (of whose authorship isn't clear), and thrown in a strikingly inconsequential sculpture. Just before the show's opening, he orchestrated a performance in which members of the New York City Ballet tottered en pointe around a number of big rolling sculptures painted the color of Easter eggs — a lackluster endeavor that left one longing for a choreographer.

Despite a press release filled with illustrious nonsense — Lassry "anchors tangible artworks in an elusive experience to which direct access can no longer be granted" — the production falls so flat as to risk calling into question even the appeal of the earlier work.

If the indiscriminate shuffling of the banal and the beautiful left one occasionally wondering what it all amounted to, the answer offered here is not much. Not yet, at least. If some portion of the energy that went into the eager colonization of other media were channeled into thinking the ideas through, substantiating some of the vague speculations concerning "the picture as an ontological category," the result would likely be a more satisfying show, one that came closer to embodying the formal tautness

and vitality of which Lassry is clearly capable.

**David Kordansky Gallery, 3143 S. La Cienega Blvd., Unit A, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, (310) 558-3030, through May 26. Closed Sunday and Monday. [www.davidkordanskygallery.com](http://www.davidkordanskygallery.com)**

## Identity issues given heft, grace

The work of Dominican-born, New York-based painter Firelei Báez, on view in her L.A. debut at Richard Heller Gallery, is a captivating fusion of lightness and heft, agility and brawn.

Her figures — nearly all of them female — are fleshy and substantial, with an animalistic quality, in several cases, that suggests a mythological undercurrent.

Yet they're entangled in wreathes of wispy ornament: curling hair, leaves, fur, birds, patterned drapery and decoration. Most of the works are gouache on paper, with elements of graphite, ink and silk-screen. The figures float as if weightless across the white space of each page, with the air of being in constant motion, whether barefoot or in heels (as many are).

Báez has packed the work with erudite allusions — Dick Hebdige's writing on British punk subcultures, Islamic miniature painting and black Creole fashion in 18th century New Orleans — geared to fleshing out tangled concepts of race and the formation of cultural identity.

In this, the work has a familiar ring, building on a growing tradition of smart, racially charged feminist work by artists like Kara Walker and Wangechi Mutu. There's something distinctive, however, in the intricacy of her imagery and in the careful balance of elegance and force.

**Richard Heller Gallery, 2525 Michigan Ave. B-5a, Santa Monica, (310) 453-9191, through May 5. Closed Sunday and Monday. [www.richardhellergallery.com](http://www.richardhellergallery.com)**

## Shaky synthesis of paint, wood

The work in New York artist Sarah Braman's first solo show in Los Angeles, at International Art Objects (formerly China Art Objects), confronts viewers with one of the great existential questions of contemporary abstraction: Is it a painting? Or is it wood with paint on it? Is it a sculpture? Or is it scrap wood?

If we consider a painting to be an object in which paint and wood (or, in the case of one of Braman's works, cardboard) are mysteriously synthesized, whether by effort, skill or accident, into an object of energetic resonance clearly in excess of the sum of its parts, only one of the four contenders in this show leans toward qualifying: an unaccountably lively piece called "Tuesday," in which a thin wash of blue on one panel balances nimbly against several darker patches of blue on an adjoining panel.

The show's four sculptures — large-scale plywood and Plexiglas cubes that tip and tilt across the floor with little apparent interference from gravity — fare somewhat better, filling the space of each room with a degree, at least, of companionable bulk. They aren't near as dynamic as those in Braman's other recent exhibitions in New York, however, many of which incorporate chunks of furniture, buildings and automobiles, which leads one to wonder what might have been lost in the translation of transcontinental shipping.

It is an occupational hazard of this mode of working that spontaneity and spirited intention don't always get a work off the ground. This appears to be one of those times.

**International Art Objects, 6086 Comey Ave., Los Angeles, (323) 965-2264, through May 5. Closed Sunday and Monday. [www.internationalartobjects.com](http://www.internationalartobjects.com)**

[calendar@latimes.com](mailto:calendar@latimes.com)