

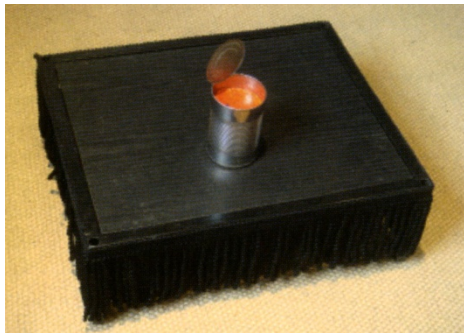
Flash Art

July-September 2010

REVIEWS

KNOCK KNOCK WHO'S THERE? THAT JOKE ISN'T FUNNY ANYMORE FRED TORRES COLLABORATIONS / ARMAND BARTOS FINE ART – NEW YORK

By Andrzej Lawn



SARA GREENBERGER RAFFERTY, *Waiter*, 2009, Painted metal, wood, notions, can, pigmented plastic, fly, 35 x 40 x 51 cm. Courtesy of Fred Torres Collaborations, New York.



Knock Knock Who's There? That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore, 2010. Installation view at Fred Torres Collaborations, New York. Courtesy Fred Torres Collaborations, New York and Armand Bartos Fine Art, New York.

That joke isn't funny anymore precisely because its automatic automated role-playing simulation has become reality. Wherein a 'knock-knock' used to once necessitate an exchange between the joker and the recipient, all one needs now is to continue the masturbatory act that has no climax. What's even more concerning is that no one cares.

Split into two concurrent shows at Fred Torres Collaborations and Armand Bartos, "Knock Knock..." charts a historical path through the use of humor in art. Beginning with the Dadaists to present, one can see how the meaning and usage of irony as devices of learning and protest have evolved into a way to give up with a smile on your face. Guy Richard Smit's video at Fred Torres entitled *In Purgatory* (1999) punctuates this. Impersonating a stand up comic on a makeshift stage, the whole video is devoid of jokes, filled instead with a spattering of inconsequential verbal cruft. Here the joke is that you don't need a joke today because in the end you get left with the same thing: nothing.

On the other side of the spectrum are David Kramer's paintings in which everything becomes a joke. His vernissage must have been quite a party as the message is clear: everything's a cliché and there's nothing to do about it except to succumb and have another drink. The Dadaists also went through a similar crisis and, in the middle of the Dada Congress, someone yelled out, "Dada is Dead! Long Live Dada." This event didn't mark its end but instead the recognition that, for Dada to survive, it must return to its roots to reinvent itself. It's time for today's art to do the same because, without any solid meaning to act as an impetus for action and change, all we will be left with is another tchotchke to console us in our impotence.