



# Matthew Higgs

MATTHEW HIGGS IS A NEW YORK-BASED ARTIST, CURATOR, AND WRITER. A REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR TO *ARTFORUM*, HE IS CURRENTLY THE DIRECTOR OF WHITE COLUMNS, NEW YORK'S OLDEST ALTERNATIVE ART SPACE, CELEBRATING ITS FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY NEXT YEAR.

**1** Klara Liden, *Elda för kråkorna* (Heating the Crows) (Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York) At Reena Spaulings's Lower East Side space, the Berlin-based Swedish artist Liden constructed a temporary waiting room—cum-antechamber that prevented access to the unseen gallery space beyond it. Upon entering the claustrophobic structure, the



Klara Liden, *Elda för kråkorna* (Heating the Crows) (detail), 2008, mixed media. Installation view, Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York.

viewer was unaware that Liden had left the gallery's street-facing windows wide open, encouraging the neighborhood's pigeons to take up residence in the walled-off space where birdseed had been strategically placed. Inside Liden's melancholic lair, one sat in a gloomy silence, interrupted only by the occasional scrapings of birds' feet—an unsettling sound track to a maudlin yet strangely moving experience.

**2** "Jeff Koons Versailles" (Château de Versailles, France) Wow.



Jeff Koons, *New Hoover Convertibles Green, Green, Red, New Hoover Deluxe Shampoo Polishers, New Shelton Wet/Dry 5-Gallon, Displaced Tripledecker, 1981-87*, three Hoover vacuum cleaners, four Hoover Deluxe Shampoo Polishers, Shelton Wet/Dry 5-Gallon, Plexiglas, fluorescent lights. Installation view, Château de Versailles, France, 2008. Photo: Laurent Lecat/Éditions Xavier Barral.

**3** "Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?" (Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York)

Conceived by artist Urs Fischer and art dealer Gavin Brown, this aesthetically and conceptually flamboyant group show served to remind us just how little experimentation takes place with the exhibition format. On top of 1:1 scale photomurals of Shafrazi's previous exhibition—images that included not only the artworks but the ceilings, the wall fixtures, and even the security guards—Fischer and Brown (with notable assistance from artists Lily van der Stokker, Rudolf Stingel, and Rob Pruitt) installed a haphazard, but not random, collection of blue-chip works by artists ranging from Francis Picabia to Rirkrit Tiravanija. A thrilling *Gesamtkunstwerk* was created: a genuinely disorientating tableau of overlapping and overlaid imagery in which art and images of art were consumed by one another and their setting. I saw this show at least six times, and it only became more complicated with each viewing.



View of "Who's Afraid of Jasper Johns?" 2008, Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York. From left: Gilbert & George, *MENTAL* NO. 4, 1976; Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled (Easel)*, 1983; Kenny Scharf, *The Fun's Inside*, 1983; Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #175*, 1987. Floor: Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled*, 2008.

**4** Dark Fair (Swiss Institute, New York) At the time of this writing, the art world's economy was starting to look precarious (once again). This past spring's inaugural Dark Fair, organized by the Milwaukee International collective for New York's Swiss Institute, was a poignant argument to advocate for more artist-created marketplaces. While employing the formal grammar of conventional art fairs—booths, commissioned projects, even early VIP access, etc.—the Dark Fair's sardonic twist was that the proceedings took place in total darkness, with the art illuminated only by candles, flashlights, and the like. With some thirty participating galleries as different as London's Maureen Paley and Winnipeg's Other Gallery, the weekend-long bacchanal was a joyous, combined invocation of a nightclub, a ghost house, and the high-spirited camaraderie of New York's 2003 blackout—everything that an art fair typically isn't. That any business was done at all was a small miracle.



James Fuentes LLC booth at Dark Fair, 2008, Swiss Institute, New York.