

GROUNDHOG'S DIARY

by Charlie Finch



Piero Manzoni
Merda d'artista
 1961
 "Manzoni: A Retrospective"
 Gagosian Gallery



"Manzoni: A Retrospective," installation view with "Acromes" and other works, at Gagosian Gallery



Willem de Kooning
Untitled (Summer in Springs)
 1962



Imi Knoebel at Mary Boone Gallery



Jeremy Earhart
The Thin Ice of Modern Life (Installation view)
 2008
 Goff + Rosenthal



Janet Biggs
Vanishing Point, Salt Flats: Approaching Storm
 2008
 Claire Oliver

Now that New York's newest hero, Staten Island Chuck, has munched a chunk out of Mayor Bloomberg's finger, I decided to search for my shadow on a Chelsea Saturday. The sun was bright and everything was copasetic, with no need for any artificial stimulus.

Jason the waiter at Bottino remarked, "Isn't everything supposed to collapse and usher in a new golden era of art?" "It'll happen in April," I replied. I ran into two warriors of past golden ages, Wyn Kramarsky and Robert Mnuchin, with their beautiful wives, at Gagosian's ultracomplete Piero Manzoni show, as compelling as any museum show anywhere, although the guards are surlier. You haven't lived until a guard has screamed at you for carrying a bottle of water near a vitrined can of shit. Nevertheless, Manzoni's "Achromes," glacial off-white wall ruins, are satisfyingly tactile and you can detect his substantial influence on Eva Hesse.

Tucked in to a corner of the Manzoni show is splashy 1962 de Kooning *Summer in Springs*, which looks as if Bill got loose in the house paint in a drunken reverie. De Kooning used to fill the closets of his Springs studio with the best wooden hangers and nothing hanging from them, because he vowed that once he made it, he would never use wire hangers again.

Speaking of the East End, Hamptonite James Solomon was manning the desk at Mary Boone's gorgeous Imi Knoebel exhibition. I asked James if he was opening his Hamptons project space again this summer. "Sure, Charlie, my first show will be curated by Alice Aycock." The Knoebels are essentially Mary Heilmann's glowing palette splashed across window shaped wooden slats which flow down from the curved weathered beams on Boone's ceiling, producing a psychedelic barn-raising effect. Hey, Mary, where's the hay?

Goff and Rosenthal never disappoint in the trippy department. Their current artist, Jeremy Earhart, offers pink Plexiglas butterfly wings and blue transparent waves emerging from the floor and blocking gallery traffic. At night, they glow in the dark.

Installation art didn't fare so well on this tour. Always tightly wound Andrea Zittel seems to have completely lost her gourd at Andrea Rosen with a show billed as a meditation on the arc of her career through studying some drawings by Frank Stella. The result is a row of mini-meathooks on a black leather background connected by drawings of some abstract harness concoction, probably the Stellas, which brought to mind yet another Andrea, the Warhol suicide, Andrea "Whips" Feldman.

At I-20, Los Angeles artists Brian Kennon and Chris Lipomi mount a tribute table of Alice Cooper ephemera with cartoon paintings and logs hanging from the rafters. Men of a certain age will enjoy the framed 1970s centerfolds of *Penthouse Pets*, featuring "au naturel" pubic bushes.

But the worst installation mess is Justin Lieberman's mélange at Zach Feuer Gallery of Nazi flags, baseball cards and the Beatles' infamous dead babies' album cover, drenched in what appears to be solidified come. Now that Jason Rhoades is dead, there should be an indefinite moratorium on this kid of art.

The best piece I witnessed, on its last day at Claire Oliver's space, was Janet Biggs' brilliant video *Vanishing Point*, which juxtaposes a motorcycle speed racer named Porterfield, who is a dead ringer for the actress Linda Hamilton, as she glides across the Salt Flats with footage of the Addiction Rehabilitation Choir, AfAm angels singing an inspirational tune penned by the artist. (Biggs brought them in at 5 pm on the last day of the show to see her video for the first time.)

Vanishing Point brings to mind white male influences such as Michael Snow's *Wavelength* and the Beach Boys' song *Spirit of America*, about land-speed record holder Craig Breedlove. Nevertheless, the "vanishing point" of the video is the American white male point of view, embodied in the support crew and spectators, all middle aged white men, hanging out in the desert to witness Porterfield's record breaking ride. *Vanishing Point*, as mellow and elegiac a piece of poetry as has ever been brought to the screen, belongs in a major museum collection so that everyone may see it.

CHARLIE FINCH is co-author of *Most Art Sucks: Five Years of Coagula* (Smart Art Press).