

ANDREW KREPS GALLERY

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**Jamie Isenstein**

*Para Drama*

April 2<sup>nd</sup> – May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015

Opening Reception: Thursday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, 6 pm – 8 pm

The Andrew Kreps Gallery is pleased to present its third solo exhibition with Jamie Isenstein, entitled *Para Drama*. The works in the show explore Isenstein's continued interest in the mercurial nature of truth, illusion, the self, the body and performance as seen through the window of a haunted house.

In the lingo of the ghost hunters, the term *para-drama* is sometimes used to describe the annoyance created when some paranormal investigators enact fake spirit activity often for spectacle on television. But in this world where no one has scientific proof to backup their research, who can say what has been faked and what has not? The exasperation created by this problem has led to terrible infighting in the community, as different groups accuse each other of faking evidence and using claptrap gear. It is a slippery slope between believer and non-believer when those who swear they saw a ghost have to use enhancing gear and theatrical conventions such as darkened lighting to convince others of their claims.

Isenstein has used the disorientation of the *para-drama* as a starting point for work in the exhibition. Much of the work in the show straddles this line between suspension of disbelief and attempts at a transparency and truth. In the sculpture/performance *Mechanical Bed*, 2015, the acts of leaving and coming are made apparent in the shifting of sheets and covers by an unseen actor. The bed appears to make and unmake itself as if a ghost sleeps here. The title refers to a famous 18<sup>th</sup> century automaton, the "Mechanical Turk" that apparently played chess with a human opponent. Eventually, it was revealed that a small chess master inside the case operated the figure. As with *Mechanical Bed*, 2015, the works in the exhibition also ruminate on the paradoxes of creating presence from absence, and vice versa. *Ghost Clothes*, 2014, represents the traditional Halloween costume - a hokey bed sheet with eyes cut in the center - suggesting a present figure is actually absent – or an absent figure present. But here the white ghost costume is hung flat on a white gallery wall so that it camouflages and disappears. Only the eyeholes remain like a mask.

Like the protean body of a ghost, the work in this exhibition often suggests disembodied body parts that morph and change and take on lives of their own. In a corner of the gallery, gloved hands seem to cast a spell on an invisible subject sitting in a chair. Lying on pillows on the floor are harlequin masks that spew fire from their eyes or mouth like fire-eaters or deranged circus performers. And on the wall are a series of photographs of masks wearing masks. By putting on masks the support masks become anthropomorphized into faces so that these inanimate objects come alive. At the same time, the layering of these masks emphasizes their emptiness. Behind the illusions there is nothing. Absurdly, the more masks the masks wear, the deeper the layering of nothingness becomes. *Onions*, 2015, is a sculpture of many masks layered over the hollow head of a mascot costume. The title of the work refers to a monologue in the Henrik Ibsen play *Peer Gynt* in which Peer peels away the layers of an onion as he examines the various roles he has played in his life. Eventually he comes to realize there is nothing substantial at the core.

Jamie Isenstein has had solo exhibitions at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles and more recently at the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery at Reed College in Portland. Her work was recently featured in *Pratfall Tramps* at the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center. She has also exhibited her work at CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, the Manchester International Festival, UK and Tate Liverpool, UK.

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