

## **Musee d'art moderne et contemporain: Alain Sechas - Reviews - Brief**

### **Article**

**ArtForum, Summer, 2001 by Jean-Max Colard**

Whether in the form of sculpture, installation, or video, the work of Alain Sechas always retains a sort of primary allegiance to drawing. Using the style of comics and cartoons to put across his loony worldview, this French artist has populated his exhibitions with a playful and appealing bestiary for more than fifteen years. Yet despite its bright colors and superficially cheerful allure, Sechas's world has nothing childlike or sweet about it. If there were a Disney World la Sechas, it would no doubt feature, in the manner of Paul McCarthy, a guided tour of all our fears, anxieties, and frustrations.

Evidence of this was offered in the spectacular work at the center of this show. Sliding along a rail attached to the ceiling was a cat-headed spider, controlled like a giant marionette by a system of cables and counterweights and moving on padded feet. An enormous mobile, an amusing and anxiety-producing machine, *L'Araignee* (The spider), 2001, dominated the space around it, forcing spectators to watch its passage as it pushed ahead in a way that was both lithesome and despotic. With its bowler hat and its crossed eyes, The Spider, vaguely echoing the paintings of George Grosz or Chaplin's *Great Dictator*, acted as both fairground attraction and allegory of terror.

Not far from the spider, *Les Suspects* (The suspects), 2000, made just as strong an impression as it had made a few months earlier in the exhibition "Au-dela du spectacle" ("Beyond the spectacle") at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. Here again, the arrangement was at first rather amusing. On a pedestal-like platform, several characters--an elephant, an anxious cat, a man, a Martian, a stork, and a dog--each held a number while facing the exhibition's visitors in a dark room, their eyes blinded by the white light of an empty projector. In the background a little night music played--"Silent Night" revisited by Alfred Schnittke--and gradually got on one's nerves. But what are these creatures of various species suspected of? Of having intruded into the art world, comic-book characters that they are? Or are they spectators themselves, as Jean-Pierre Criqui suggests in the exhibition catalogue, viewers mounted on a pedestal, summoned as both actors in and targets of contemporary works?

Sechas's anthropomorphic sculptures (and the drawings and graphic works that accompany them) cover a wide range of emotions, from worry to excitement. And he knows how to play on our anxieties, as in the magnificent installation *Pro fesseur Suicide*, 1995: Gathered around a screen on which the image of a needle skillfully popping inflatable balloons is being

projected, a circle of students is taking a class in suicide (and cinema) from an august professor. Sechas knows, too, how to highlight the unsettling power of animated images. Perhaps to avoid pathos, he also showed *Le Petit Serpent*, 2000, a small snake on a leash; *Martien joyeux* (Happy Martian), 2000, *Martien voyageur* (Martian traveler), 2000, and a third alien letting a few erotic drawings slip from his *Martien carton a dessin* (Martian portfolio), 2000; and the neon sculpture *Chat Basketteur* (Cat playing basketball), 1998, a striking mix of Bruce Nauman and Tom & Jerry. That is to say, he refuses to fully take on the burden of gravity. Maintaining the balance between the tragic and the comic, seriousness and lightheartedness, Sechas is a master of suspense.

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