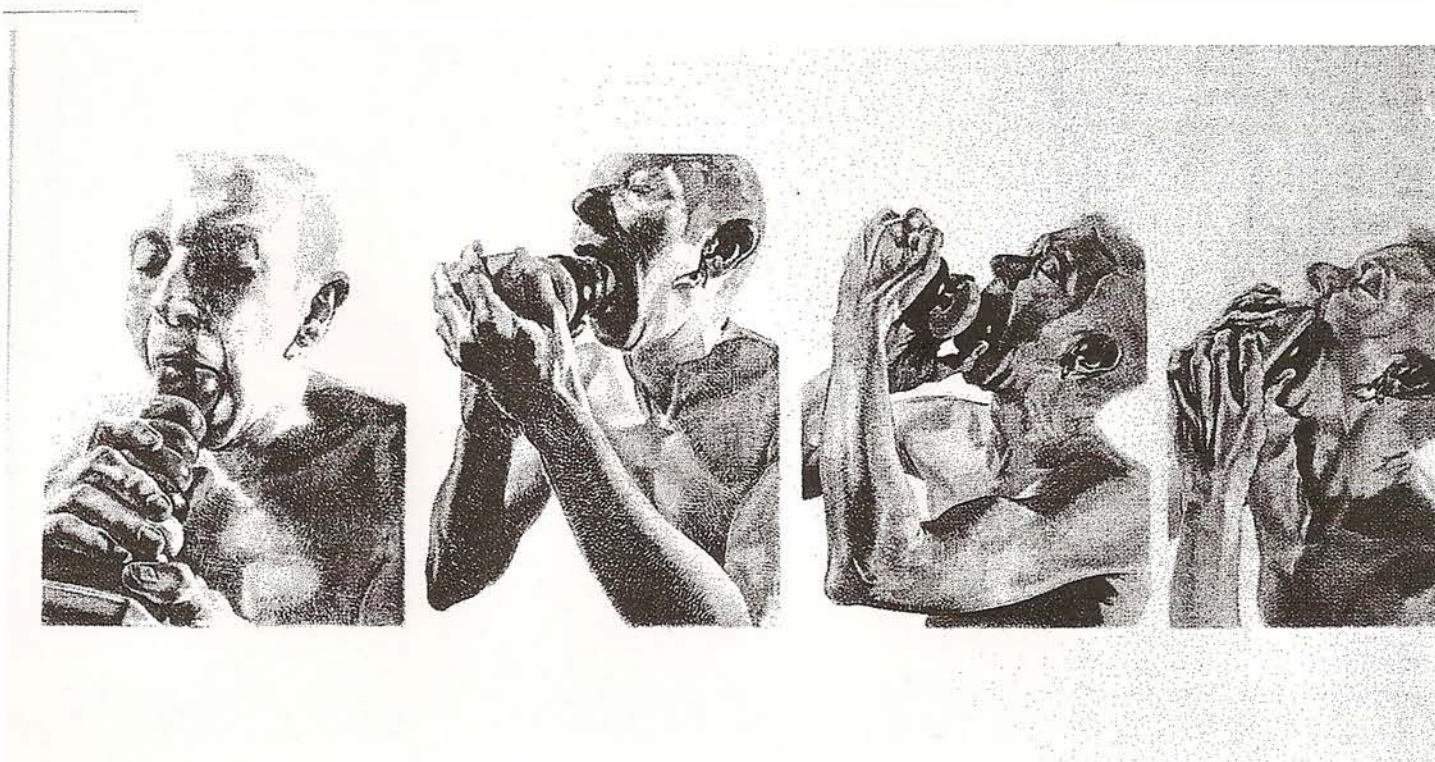


Art in America

January 2006



Brett Reichman: *All Consuming Identity*, 2005, watercolor and gouache on paper, 26 by 41 inches; at P.P.O.W.

Brett Reichman at P.P.O.W.

Brett Reichman's second one-person show at P.P.O.W., titled "Rainbow Play Systems," offered oil paintings and works on paper from 2003-05. While there were no actual depictions of rainbows crossing the sky, a colorful toy and lush fabric, rendered in the multiple hues that can signify cultural identity, were to be found throughout.

The toy is a rainbow stacker, an early childhood plaything that consists of wooden rings of different colors and sizes that fit on a short stand, with a small ball on top. Several gouaches focus on the toy itself, the rings arranged in various orders. *Rainbow Cycle* (2003) has the added elements of a blooming rose, the skeleton of a hand and carved rococo finials.

In several self-portraits in gouache and watercolor from 2005, the rainbow stacker becomes a sex toy. *Lick It, Fuck It, Suck It* depicts the artist, a

white man with earrings and close-cropped hair, in three separate poses, licking the object, holding it in his hands like a hard-on and sucking the knob. In *All Consuming Identity*, he swallows the stacker like a sword, in four stages, his eyes closed and neck muscles taut, his skin appearing to reflect the colors he consumes. In each piece, the action seems perfunctory, signs of titillation absent.

The realism in these works is virtuoso à la Paul Cadmus, the brushstrokes deployed with precision. Equally impressive for its verisimilitude is the show's title piece, *Rainbow Play Systems* (2004), an outside (8 by 4 feet) and rather extravagant representation in oil of twisted, bright-striped fabric arranged atop solid-colored, balled-up cloth in many hues. Gold Christmas bells and braided tassels attached here and there add an odd decorative whimsy to forms that coil like

intestines. A companion piece, the 10-foot-tall, 30-inch-wide *Holding on to Happiness* (2003), offers a torrent of high-camp drapery, with the skeleton of a hand clutching the knotted cloth at the bottom of the canvas.

In this work, Reichman, who teaches at the San Francisco Art Institute, conjures the rainbow flag of queer culture, provoking his viewers to consider how this symbol might take on further resonance through acts of transgression, subversion and sublimation. At the same time, the artist reminds us that sex, death and beauty make well-suited bedfellows. —Carl Little