



Stefan Altenburger Photography Zürich / Hauser & Wirth

Martin Creed's "Work No. 2340" (2015) consists of colorful plastic shopping bags stuffed tightly in a frame.

ART REVIEW

By Charles Desmarais

Waters remodels our home

We often talk about "the art world" as someplace different from the world, and in at least two senses, it is. The phrase, of course, is generally understood to encompass concentric circles of artists, professionals and enthusiasts (artists, curators, dealers, teachers, collectors, audience, etc.). Let's call that a subset of the larger world.

But there's a different kind of art world — an alternate realm, artificial by design. It is the place we have made out of objects we had to create because

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Exhibit's art comes out of the ordinary

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they did not exist. The world we wish we had been given.

So what does John Waters do when asked to curate an exhibition of art? He proposes a third possibility: an inverted world. The perversely funny, always perceptive filmmaker-photographer pulls together a show that teasingly reminds us just how stuck we are with the world the gods, so damn almighty and controlling, have dictated for us. In doing so, he invites artists who contrive new objects, gloriously flawed, to replace the tediously perfect original.

The show is "Home Improvements," and it is the first regular exhibition at FraenkelLab, the new mid-Market outpost of San Francisco's well-known Fraenkel Gallery. It includes the work of 13 artists (counting Waters, who, typically for a guy who never met a taboo he didn't try to break, includes his own work). All of them take a more or less philosophical approach to the world as we find it, an almost slacker attitude that seems, at first, willing to accept the mundane on its own, dull terms.

I hesitate to say too much about individual works because I really don't want to take away the fun and challenge of unraveling the exhibition's many visual puns

That's why the work fits John Waters' concept so well: It's more like something you'd pick up at the big-box store than see at New York's Museum of Modern Art.

and mental psychs. (Props to film and book critics, who learn to write substantively about their subjects while avoiding the dreaded spoiler.)

But how can I resist telling you the one about the toilet paper? George Stoll is an artist whose work I have loved for 20 years, though he's never quite gotten the attention he deserves. His 1997 work "Untitled (wall inset toilet paper roll, hung backwards)" is a small sculpture, carefully made of painted copper and wood, with a streamer of silk chiffon. But if you saw it hung in the wrong place, you might unintentionally abuse the piece: It is an utterly convincing replica of what the title tells us it is.

The work was made more than a decade after Robert Gober showed his famous sinks, but, while indebted to Gober, it works in an entirely different way. The sinks are meant to read as sculpture — there are no fixtures, no handles or spouts, to begin with, and they are of substantial scale. The toilet paper roll is meant to come just about as close as possible to being ignored (without falling on the other side of that line, of course).

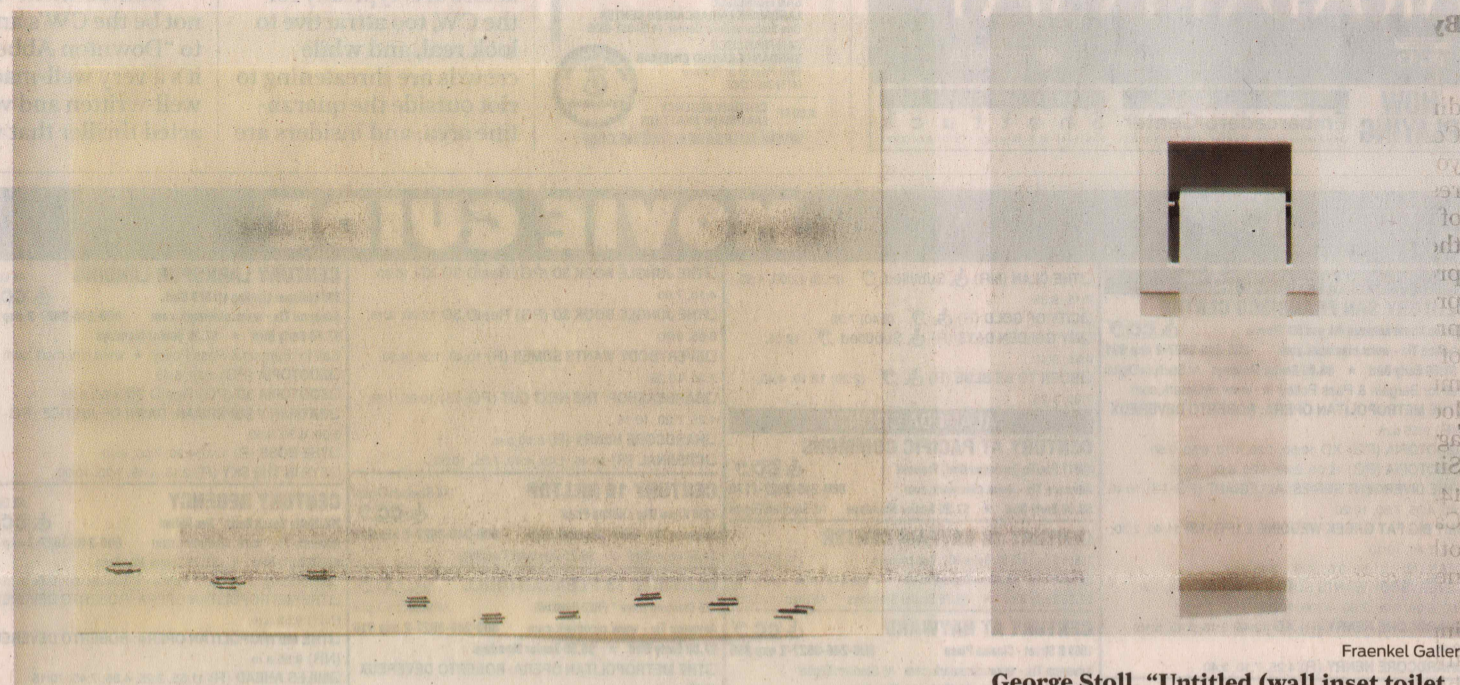
That is why Stoll's work fits the Waters concept of "Home Improvement" so well: It's more like something you'd pick up at the big-box store than see at New York's Museum of Modern Art. I also particularly love that the roll is hung "backwards" — a first-order faux pas only within the most bourgeois of social codes.

The English artist Martin Creed is best known for his notorious presentation at



Fraenkel Gallery

Filmmaker and photographer John Waters curated "Home Improvements," the first exhibition at the new FraenkelLab.



Fraenkel Gallery

Esther Schipper

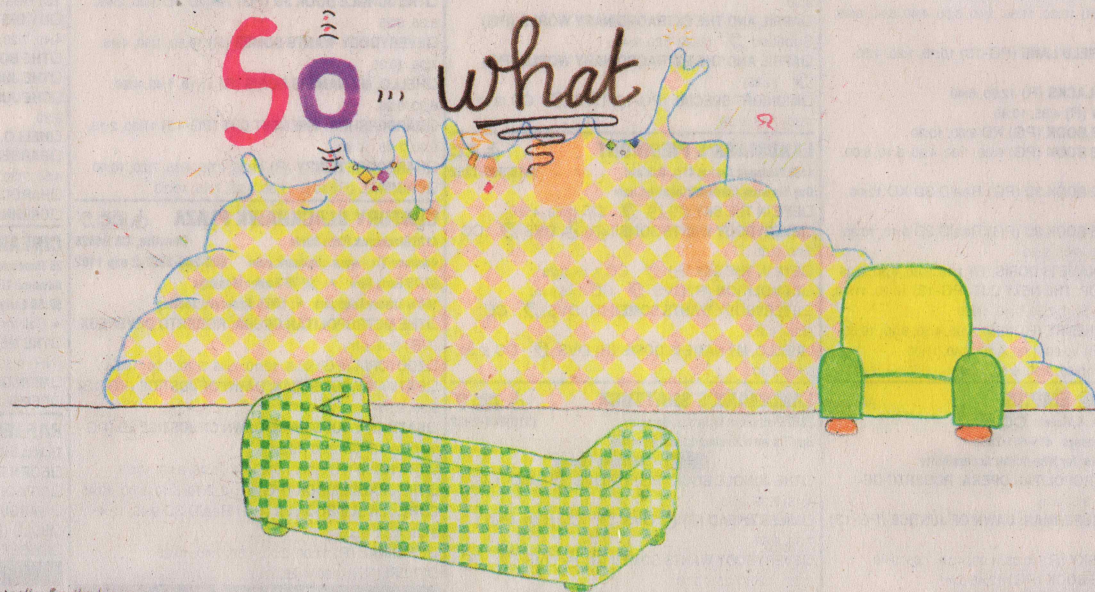
George Stoll, "Untitled (wall inset toilet paper roll, hung backwards)" (1997).

Home Improvements: Curated by John Waters:

5-9 p.m. Wednesdays-Fridays, noon-9 p.m. Saturdays, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Sundays and by appointment. Through May 28. FraenkelLab, 1632 Market St., S.F. (415) 347-8366. www.fraenkelgallery.com/fraenkelab

Above: Artist Karin Sander uses an office stapler to create maximally minimal works such as "KS 94 51" (1994).

Right: Lily van der Stokker, "So What" (2008). Colored pencil on paper.



Koenig & Clinton

Tate Britain of "Work No. 227: The Lights Going On and Off" (yes, really — but we should talk: I do like that work and, as a curator, showed a variant years ago). For this outing, he is represented by "Work No. 2340" (2015), composed of colorful plastic bags — the kind in which you transport your home improvement purchases — stuffed in a frame, pressed against the glass.

We can't know (because, even if we asked, he could choose to lie) if Creed arranged the bags into a care-

ful composition, or if the unconventional "painting" is a byproduct of chance. But the white passage imprinted "Ryman" certainly amused the artist, as it does us, knowing Robert Ryman's great, extended series of all-white paintings.

There are paintings you might miss (to the delight of the artist and the curator), and objects that will make half the visitors laugh, and the other half angry. There are the maximally minimal works of Karin Sander, who "draws" with an office sta-

pler, and Gedi Sibony, whose found-object works start out as art even before he has his way with them. There's a sculpture by the artist collective Gelitin that ... well, just depress the pedal on its base and you'll see.

It all adds up to great fun, but with a serious intent: to make us look, but to bring a healthy skepticism to what we see. In that sense, you might find it a bit didactic — but what better way for a gallery known internationally for its extraordinary photography program to introduce a

new direction at its satellite?

More rewardingly, "Home Improvement" works against the idea of the heroic artist, insisting upon our attention and defining our world. These are art objects that infiltrate, rather than command; insinuate, rather than vociferate. How rare, and how refreshing.

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