

HIRSCH PERLMAN

BLUM & POE

Hirsch Perlman's black-and-white shots of crude, robotlike figures fashioned from cardboard and propped and piled in an empty bedroom debuted at this gallery in 2001. His second Los Angeles show follows up with four new groups of prints, also black-and-white: doubt-laced attempts to construct something enduring, substantial, meaningful, and grand from the humble and ephemeral materials and fleeting acts of humdrum existence.

For three related series known as "My Reproof," "Sketches," and "Apparatum Armorum Ineptum," Perlman layers more unsure narcissism onto the Pygmalion/Frankenstein impulse of the prior work, creating a mythic and mundane world of friends, phantoms, props, and tools, as well as a kind of possible self. Working at night in an open-air rooftop studio and using long exposures, Perlman "draws" freehand with a penlight, etching figurative white doodles into the photographic image, referencing both the sorts of "ghost" photographs seen on TV shows about the paranormal and attempts to record artistic genius in real time (such as photographer Gjon Mili's 1949 portrait of Picasso, in which a long exposure captured the master drawing a centaur with a small flashlight). Perlman also uses the open shutter to convert repeated and spinning movements of flashlights and glow sticks into almost volumetric forms and to give a conspicuous fog machine time to belch out a haze to be set aglow by ambient city light.

Amid all this shoddily produced atmosphere, Perlman, who appears in many of the photos, comes off as a kind of post-modern Leonardo in the age of Freud, a sad, slightly scary, but also inspiring here-and-now Renaissance man who lounges, contemplates, and tinkers on the rooftop, cloaked in an old coat, accompanied by his books and guitar, and surrounded by

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his inventions. In this world of ghost images, the artist and his accoutrements read as much as figments of the imagination or specters as actual presences. It's all him, and it's all his creation—a little wonderful and a little creepy.

Perlman's other collection of photos, titled "Operation Idiocracy," 2003–2004, consists of images created by pushing around a plastic ball filled with Christmas lights in front of a long-open shutter. The glowing and shadowy results suggest assorted examples and metaphors of illumination: nuclear blasts and sun flares as well as flashes of genius and lightbulbs switching on over our heads. In a few instances where there's a suggestion of a lantern, it's hard not to imagine van Gogh in an Arles café or Orson Welles in a border cantina, or perhaps Ted Kaczynski in his Montana cabin.

Mining from the black-and-white romantic and the goofball fringes of early performance, Perlman—who also, in the two animated videos that accompanied these photos, unfortunately slips into a not-so-interesting midlife (adolescent?) cynicism—manages to produce one of American art's most illuminating impressions of the early twenty-first century: an anxious, murky, slightly paranoid tragedy-comedy of drastic measures, or a quest for secular enlightenment, self-worth, and a better tomorrow.

—Christopher Miles



Hirsch Perlman, *Sketch #7*, 2003–2004, black-and-white photograph, 20½ x 18½".