

Mathis Altmann
PRESS

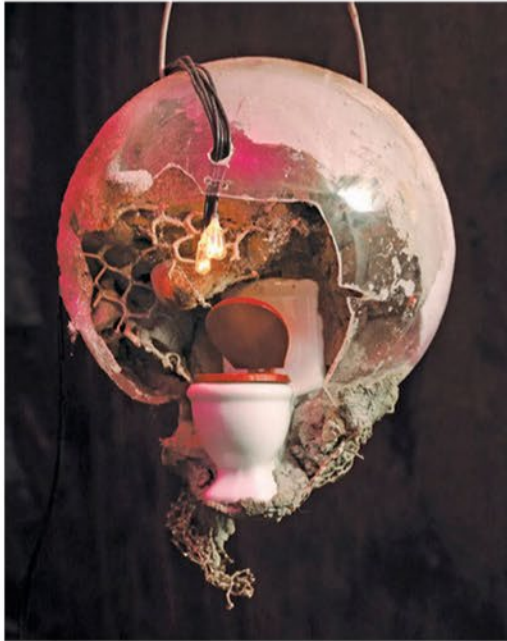


Review: Psycho Bombs, Freedman Fitzpatrick, 2014
By Eli Diner

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ARTFORUM

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FREEDMAN FITZPATRICK



Mathis Altmann, *Common Pressure*, 2014, concrete, chicken and pork bones, metal, plastic, LED light, wire, miniature, paper, 7 x 6 x 6".

Amid the rubble lay a bottle of booze. A toilet was wedged in the wreckage. The pope, perched atop an ash heap, spread his arms in benediction. These were just a few of the chintzy plastic miniatures lodged among the crags and craters of Mathis Altmann's dozen grapefruit-size assemblages that dangled from the ceiling, over a thick carpet of mulch, in his recent exhibition "Psycho Bombs." The viewer, once drawn in to scrutinize these ruptured concrete-and-detritus globes, might have looked quizzically upon the seeming incongruity between the whimsical toys and the desolation of their settings. Maybe this perplexity was evidence of literary critic Susan Stewart's claim that the "reduction in scale which the miniature presents skews the time and space relations of the everyday lifeworld"?

Or maybe it was just the lights. Fluorescent grow lamps, their light filtered through a plastic tarp, slowly fried the viewer's eyes and mind, giving off an aura of diffuse toxicity. This blariness-inducing ultraviolet mood lighting seemed to offer a couple of nods to the city outside: one toward the marijuana dispensaries that now grace every block in Hollywood; the other, perhaps sarcastically, to Los Angeles's Light and Space artists of the 1960s. The installation felt, for a moment, like the work of James Turrell's evil twin out to explore the phenomenology of clouded perception and the impurity of light.

Still a third Los Angeles resonance was evident, as the work seemed mired in the city's seemingly inescapable complex of shibboleths: post-apocalyptic sci-fi and dystopian noir. Viewed as a whole, the installation resembled a junkyard planetarium, each sculpture a model for a devastated planet. And, in a sense, they are. Altmann cast his sculptures in spherical plastic terraria that cracked and broke like eggshells, so that the globes' surfaces are alternately transparent plastic and scabrous concrete. From the bombed-out grottoes of Altmann's little worlds spill guts of metal, plastic, and stray electric wires; chicken bones and chicken wire, jagged metal bolts, and LED lights serve as trim. Shreds of newspaper also peek through the debris. *IMAGINE . . . PUTTING THE WORLD ON STANDBY* reads the clipping in *Cockroach Brained*, 2014. *The world on standby*: The phrase reads like a weepy reminder of the moment just before the plague, war, zombies, or robots arrive—of humanity's unheeded last chance to avert disaster.

Yet Altmann ultimately seems less concerned with archaeologies of the future than with confusions of the present. In his terraria—swaying beneath the glow of grow lights—he cultivates a jumble of the organic and the inorganic, the living and the lifeless, perhaps in mockery of the apparent tension between the cult of sustainability and the sheer mass of crap we've accumulated. According to the bromides of environmentalism, we need only find new styles of consumption in order to fend off impending doom—as though hybrid cars and farmers' markets could save us from ourselves. But, of course, the commodity form itself is what has brought about calamity, and we may not be able shop our way out of this one.

All of this junk serves another function. Altmann privileges visceral strangeness over the cool estrangement of those of his peers fascinated with the glistening seductions of the digital image. His is an art of eruptions and leakages—of oozing and belching and coarse materiality. A tangle of electric wires connected the dozen spheres, lighting up LED bulbs in each; the clutter wasn't a network so much as an electric grid, exposed and unruly. The wires, low-grade plastics, and concrete offered a humorous reminder—to anyone who needed it—that we do still live among these materials. We're still surrounded by this crap. "Psycho Bombs" was definitely not wireless.

—*Eli Diner*