

Vittorio Brodmann  
PRESS



Review: An Honest Mistake, Gregor Staiger, 2013  
By Aoife Rosenmeyer

Art In America  
March 13, 2013

# Art in America

Close Window

Print

## VITTORIO BRODMANN

3/13/13

GREGOR STAIGER

by *aoife rosenmeyer*



**ZURICH** "An Honest Mistake" is what young painter Vittorio Brodmann (b. 1987, Ettingen, Switzerland) titled his first solo exhibition at Gregor Staiger's new location. And honesty is apparent in the video that took center stage in the show, *Comedy in the Cellar* (all works 2012), which features Brodmann's stand-up routine for a performance series at the Halle für Kunst Lüneburg, Germany. In Zurich, the screen was displayed inside a large packing crate so viewers had to hunker down to encounter his practiced but still imperfect attempt at translating life into comedy. "I decided I'm a funny person," Brodmann declares, but still wonders if he has lived experiences worth recounting. The 7½-minute video, in which he describes his method (consulting books on how to be a comedian), raises the question: why would a painter have to make such a show of himself?

Brodmann's artistic training was relatively traditional: he attended art school in Zurich and Geneva. Nonetheless, the cartoonish

outlines and intense monochrome backdrops of his paintings on view eschew formal skill. *Wer Geburtstag hat, kann sich freuen* (If It's Your Birthday, You Can Be Happy) shows a long-haired, long-limbed teenager walking with a slouch, earphones in, while below him a middle-aged man hunches over a laptop, mobile pressed to cheek and to-go coffee cup within reach—two characters that could have stepped out of an episode of a sitcom. As in most other paintings in the show, the figures are limned with graphic black lines and seem too big for the canvas, which in this instance is only around a foot across. Televisual drama infuses all the scenes: Itchy and Scratchy would be at home beside the shaggy dog and catlike creature with bulging eyes in *Wie früher Holz richtig war* (How Wood Used to Be Right). Some of the grotesquerie also harks back to older precedents: the *dramatis personae* are skewered mercilessly as if by the pen of Daumier, as in the bar scene *Daddy Issues*; and in *Tears of Steel*, ghouls and specters writhe like they are melting in Bosch's hell, while a central figure cups its head in its hands.

Despite the historical echoes, however, Brodmann's work seems born of our era of reality television and celebrity culture, a moment defined by an almost pornographic interest in personal details. Today, sincerity is often confused with constant barrages of too much information or—as a reaction to this prevailing mode—buried under heavy irony. Brodmann's paintings, with their caricatures and exaggerated scenes, might seem to take the latter approach. They would have been easier to disregard were it not for the artist's performance in the video. There Brodmann casts himself in the role of the jester, expressing a more complicated, embedded comedic position.

*Photo: Vittorio Brodmann: Wer Geburtstag hat, kann sich freuen (If It's Your Birthday, You Can Be Happy), 2012, oil on canvas, 23½ by 11⅞ inches; at Gregor Staiger.*