

Scott Indrisek, "Keep Chelsea Weird," **Whitewall**, Issue #12, Winter 2008/2009, pp. 46-47



Olaf Breuning
Smoke Bombs
2008
Mounted C-print on 6mm
60 x 75 inches

KEEP CHELSEA WEIRD

OLAF BREUNING'S SOLO SHOW AT METRO PICTURES CAPTURES THE A.D.D. GENERATION

BY SCOTT INDRISEK

Olaf Breuning's SoHo basement studio used to be a massage parlor, one that the Swiss-born artist frequented after moving to New York in 2001. The entrance sign is covered with Dora the Explorer stickers and a "No Spitting" notice. It's a fitting workspace for such an odd artist, one whose video output critics have compared to the MTV show *Jackass*, and whose large-scale photographs occasionally focus on big groups of people wearing ridiculous costumes. *Whitewall* paid Breuning a visit to check out his latest work, which was part of a solo show on view at Metro Pictures in October. (He's in good company – work by Cindy Sherman will follow immediately afterward.) The exhibition includes 80 black-and-white drawings, six sculptures, and eight photographs, most measuring 60 by 75 inches.

In one of those photos, Breuning has re-created an Internet-famous shot of a young African-American girl, her hair done up in the shape of a helicopter. In a Sherrie Levine move for the digital generation, his version is nearly identical, with a friend cast as the model. *Smoke Bombs* (2008) is a photograph of a colorful firework assemblage that Breuning pulled off using a team of eight people in Pennsylvania. Elsewhere he continues the prickly cultural dialogue that informed his excellent video works *Home* (2008) and *Home 2* (2008). The latter, which was a highlight of the 2008 Whitney Biennial, shows five young Ghanaian boys smiling and displaying \$20 bills provided by the artist. Photographed against

a desolate background of dusty rubble, they're reminiscent of Pieter Hugo's "Hyena Men" portraits from Nigeria, with a sly twist. "In New York, I would hire people to be models in my photographs, [and] give them money – but definitely they wouldn't hold it in front of them," Breuning explains, noting that his own interactions with the Third World are complicated by having grown up in the wealthy security of Switzerland.

Another photo, untitled as we go to press, combines landscape with irreverent portraiture: The addition of a yellow inner tube and a canoe turn a rock into a makeshift elephant. *Brian* (2008) is a grotesque portrait of the artist's regular collaborator (and *Home* narrator) Brian Kerstetter. He's wearing pickles on his fingers and sporting magenta Crocs – the goofy footwear crops up with surprising regularity in Breuning's work. The photo is a decade-later "remake" of a similar portrait the artist made of his then-girlfriend, Sibylle.

When Breuning talks about his emphasis on the "Google/YouTube generation," what he's implying is a mindset that lets us skip, haphazardly, from one interest and obsession to another. "When you see the history [of] what you Google, there's no continuity," he explains. "You Google one time 'Britney Spears' and then you Google 'chess game.' This show is like short attention span of different things." He is adamant that the show is themeless, beyond being "colorful." And while it's hard to accept that the choice of photos is entirely arbitrary, what narrative could a sane person derive from

a girl with crazy hair, a pachyderm rock, a Photoshopped cityscape on fire, and a giant assemblage spewing colorful chemical plumes? Breuning's own attention-deficit nature when it comes to flip-flopping between mediums.



Olaf Breuning
20 Dollar Bill
 2008
 Mounted C-print on 6mm sintra, framed
 48 x 60 inches
 Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York



Olaf Breuning
Mammoth
 2008
 Mounted C-print on 6mm sintra, framed
 60 x 75 inches
 Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York

