

# The New York Times

## Art in Review

By Roberta Smith

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Martin Kersels

Jay Gorney Modern Art

100 Greene Street

SoHo

Through Oct. 19

In the end, the work of most artists is intimately bound up in their identities. But this point has rarely been made as forthrightly or as humorously as in the work of Martin Kersels, a young Los Angeles artist who is having his first show in New York. Mr. Kersels is large: he weighs more than 360 pounds, stands 6 feet 7 inches and looks like an out-of-shape offensive lineman. Much of his Conceptually based work, which seems to lean deliberately toward visual slightness, circles deprecatingly around this bulk.

In a sense, Mr. Kersels seems intent on filtering various aspects of recent art or popular culture through the distinguishing characteristics of his size and appearance. Reliving the task-oriented fixations of early Performance Art, he has himself photographed tossing various male and female friends into the air.

In a similar historicist vein, one that suggests a no-frills version of Bruce Nauman's "Clown Torture," he attempts to raise the temperature of a beaker of water by yelling at it, on tape, from a submerged speaker. (Muffled screams emanating from this science-project-like piece lead one to expect a teensy figure inside.)

On the popular front, he sings hit tunes a cappella as part of a kinetic sculpture, and restages on videotape the final scene of the movie "King Kong" as if to suggest that big guys can be especially lonely. In this piece, the viewer can stand on a metal plate that vibrates to the sound of the heavy footsteps and sighs of the sad ape, played by a stuffed monkey who jumps, not from the Empire State Building, but from a building at U.C.L.A., where Mr. Kersels teaches.

Not all of Mr. Kersels's work is equally good, and some of it is quite inaccessible and cerebral. But there is an easygoing variety, a roving sense of self and subject that has its own weird kind of promise. ROBERTA SMITH