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Josh Kline

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In its persuasive admixture of real and surreal, dark humor, and formal inventiveness, Kline's new show, "Unemployment," is the sculptural equivalent of a George Saunders short story—which is to say, one of the best things you'll encounter this year. The subject is the built-in obsolescence of the American middle class. The time is the near future (a Presidential election looms in 2031). Shopping carts are piled high with recyclables, a routine-enough sight in New York until you register the fact that the bottles are hands; heaps of cast-off office paraphernalia appear in the tones of beige and brown we call "flesh." The most disturbing disposables are human beings, a quartet of startlingly lifelike figures, dressed in business attire and curled inside clear plastic bags like so much garbage kicked to the curb. (They're 3-D-printed portraits of unemployed people—an accountant, a small-business owner—whom Kline hired to participate in his piece.) Morbid, yes, but what might have devolved into sensationalism instead becomes an engine for empathy.