

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS - New York

“SKIN SO SOFT”

GRESHAM'S GHOST

401 Broadway, Second Floor

May 26–June 25

“The future,” not quite as distant as it once seemed, generates both anxious curiosity and romantic infatuation. Gresham's Ghost, Ajay Kurian's itinerant curatorial project, hosts “SKIN SO SOFT,” a rather forward-thinking group show organized by Josh Kline that introduces a future that may already be here. The seven artists in the exhibition playfully and persuasively address the questions of, in Kline's formulation, “how we're living today and how we'll be living tomorrow,” engaging performance and digital projects as well as New Agey materials including kudzu extract, tofu, acidophilus, and mango coconut nutrient gel.

Timely yet depoliticized, this exhibition turns to body consciousness in an exploration of the human as consumer, but also as an organism on the verge of turbulent evolution. Brian Clifton's photograph, *Bodies Behind Glass*, 2009, for one, suggests an Atwoodian avian-human-engineering nightmare unfolding at your local butcher's counter. Demonstrating the more aggressive aspects of “survival of the fittest,” A. K. Burns's videos document the artist stoically miming genres of YouTube fetish footage in which destruction (whether cucumbers being crushed or balloons being popped) piques the libido. Perhaps the most apt example of the future as annihilation is *Untitled*, 2011, a photograph by Michele Abeles that has the artist shearing her lauded imagery to fashion a sparse mosaic: sacrifice offered in exchange for salvation.

Doom and gloom are not the only offerings in this exhibition; an affably neophilic prospect persists. Kline's own contribution, hand-sanitizer dispensers containing not antibacterial gel but inoculated agar, provides a contagious bon mot for our bacteriophobic culture. And as an antidote to abounding anxieties and fears of the future, the collaborative Yemenwed has altruistically installed what appears to be a surreal doctor's waiting room replete with sponged wall paintings, geometric furnishings, and a skillfully engineered faux pharmaceutical commercial in which a businesswoman's spirits and self are lifted by the effects of an enigmatic, pulsating wall plug-in. From here, the day after tomorrow looks quite manageable. Enjoyable, even.



Yemenwed, *No Image, No. 2*, 2011, mixed media, dimensions variable. Installation view

- Beau Rutland
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