

Robert Overby
at Le Consortium, Dijon

A FESTIVE ATMOSPHERE

Despite this exhibition's title, most works on view here were produced between 1970 and 1975. Because Robert Overby (1935-1993) made his living as a graphic designer (the ubiquitous TOYOTA logo is his), his later art production was a little sporadic. But between 1969 and 1973, he produced 336 works, as documented in his little, handheld red book.

Sue SPAID

When Robert Overby did devote time to art-making, he routinely switched gears, suddenly bursting through new portholes. Consider that between 1970 and 1975, he experimented with: heating PVC sheets; casting architectural features in latex, concrete or Fiberglass; using casts as patterns to sew canvas maps; painting figures from Renaissance paintings and sensuous, over-sized nude torsos; making lithographs; and even displaying BDSM imagery like Alex Katz cut-outs! How Overby gained access to BDSM imagery is anyone's guess. This show seems to suggest that his intimate familiarity with latex rubber aroused his awareness of ancillary applications. Given his predilection for latex when casting kitchen cabinets, walls, windows, charred door frames, doors, and many other architectural features, porn's bondage imagery must have felt ripe for the taking. That Le Consortium's opening coincided with the premiere of 'Fifty Shades of Grey,' Friday the

13th, Carnival, and Valentine's Day could hardly have been more fitting. Yearnings for titillation subtly infect this exhibition's festive atmosphere, as giant, ooey-gooey chocolate bonbons float across one gal pal's nude torso, while face paint and latex masks disguise four faces. Every time people turn a corner, they must wonder what racy treats next await them.

LEE MANSO

Long before anyone used a mouse to perform the obligatory 'cut and paste,' Overby envisioned computers' collage capabilities. The oil painting 'Computer Whiz' (1987) reconstructs a face from 25 different multi-colored fragments. Nearby, one notices five photo-montages, one of which is this painting's study, spliced-and-diced by hand (not yet a computerized). For his 1976 series of

photo-montages, he collaged fragmented imagery to generate over-the-top fantastical orgies. Apparently, Lee Manso was that era's leading collage artist, so no wonder he titled a very tight-knit painting (could easily have been a New Wave album cover) 'Thanks Lee Manso' (1987).

Overby's lasting conversation remains more with his artist peers than yesteryear's pop culture. Another of that era's Angelino artists, Bruce Nauman, famously cast the space beneath his chair. Nauman claims to prefer casts' parting lines and seams, because they help to locate an object's structure. No less focused on in-between spaces, Overby rather captured lines and seams located on casts' surfaces. In fact, Overby went out of his way to amplify lines and seams. The most obvious examples are his stretch paintings and objects, for which he heated clear and tinted PVC panes and then dragged things like a coke

bottle or clothes pin across them, thus transforming otherwise flat plates into permanently wrinkled sheets.

In retrospect, Overby's approach seems an obvious diss on 'Finish Fetish,' that era's reigning Los Angeles art movement, while Nauman's works seen especially forthright. I imagine Finish Fetishists sanding everything perfectly smooth, making their timeless objects feel fabricated. Alternatively, Overby's work complements that era's fascination with process as emphasized by the Whitney Museum of American Art's 'Anti-Illusion' (1969). Unlike Nauman, Overby didn't just leave objects' rawness intact, he accentuated their rawness, though for good reason. A cast rubber sock looks especially rumpled. Overby's nonlatex casts like 'Blue Fiberglass Door,' 'Concrete Door Handle,' and 'Concrete Screen Door' appear particularly rough-hewn, elevating ruffled edges to Ab Ex zips.

In 1969, Jean Dubuffet exhibited 'simulacres,' black and white sculptures that he considered ghosts of people, trees, and furniture. Overby also produced simulacra, though his ghostlike, white sewn canvas maps from 1972 record his casts' straight and irregular edges in perpetuity. Given Overby's ability to paint really well, something rarely encouraged back then, it's fascinating that he succumbed to minimalist painting at its most minimal. Unlike Robert Ryman's painted surfaces or Agnes Martin's meditative lines, Overby gained satisfaction from a muddled white canvas 'White Grid (plan B in the case that Monster Blue)' and a now-brownish latex grid '4-Square Scrap'. Anyone interested in collage, process art, figuration, lost histories, missing links, or art's capacity to restore memory will enjoy this fascinating sliver of art history, mostly called from the seventies.



Robert Overby, Installation Shot 'Works 1969-1987' (left to right 'Black Hands' (1977), 'Two Window Wall Map' (20 August 1972), 'Magnetic Stretch' (5 July 1970) plus stretch experiments (both 1970) in vitrines

Robert Overby 'Works 1969-1987' until 17 May at Le Consortium, Dijon, FR, leconsortium.fr