

## ART IN REVIEW

**Jim Shaw**

Swiss Institute  
495 Broadway, at Spring Street,  
SoHo

Metro Pictures Gallery  
519 West 24th Street, Chelsea  
Both through Oct. 26

Jim Shaw, the California conceptualist, who in his art often pretends to be someone else, usually a bad painter, now gives us an artist named Adam O. Goodman, a believer in a made-up religion, O-ism. O-ism was founded at the same time as Mormonism, we're told. Goodman paints O-ist-inspired abstractions: circular canvases, like targets with brushy passages in the middle. Think Richard Pousette-Dart meets Ken Noland, with a little Adolph Gottlieb thrown in for good measure. They're perfect, which is to say generically awful, deadpan parodies of postwar art in its squishiest, spiritualist mode.

Meanwhile, Goodman, so the story goes, must support himself as an illustrator. Disgraced, he hides behind a pseudonym, Archie Gunn. At the Swiss Institute, then, we find his (that is, Goodman's) circular paintings and also file cabinets (arranged in a circle or O) containing tacky yellowing magazine and newspaper clippings that he (that is, Gunn, who is really Goodman, who is, of course, Mr. Shaw) uses for his illustrations.

All very funny. At Metro Pictures, Shaw elaborates on O-ism with several dozen O-ist thrift store-style paintings, comically clumsy pictures of strange beings, obscure rituals, torture, stagecoaches and much else that makes blissfully little sense. These are by anonymous artists from Nebraska and Iowa, supposedly. The whole project is, as usual with Mr. Shaw, a sly, sardonic take on the mythologies of American art and high-low taste, raised to a clever pitch by his obsessive, black-humored, distinctly absurd sensibility.

MICHAEL KIMMELMAN

nies, and a lamp base and light bulb made of a single piece of stainless steel. It will be interesting to see if this artist can take his sensibility into deeper, more complicated waters without getting in over his head.

ROBERTA SMITH

**John Morris****'Drawings for the Austrian School'**

D'Amelio Terras  
525 West 22nd Street, Chelsea  
Through tomorrow

It might be a first, a drawing show sparked by the theories of Joseph Schumpeter, the 20th-century Austrian-born economist who held that economic change came about through the replacement — by entrepreneurs with new ideas — of old business models and practices. But these jottings by John Morris — more than 100 intricately layered sheets in which dots, spots, traceries, patterns, webs, grids and other markings of utmost delicacy are made with different implements on variously treated surfaces — give only faint hints of the theories that spawned them.

Some tightly controlled, almost robotically repetitive in their imagery, others more freehand in their doodling, they evoke man-made and natural phenomena, among them patterns from nature, electronic circuitry, virus colonies, active spermatozoa, musical notations. In "A Drawing for F. A. Hayek No. 1," small white balls are strung in casual rows beneath a white stringlike grid on a black ground; "Untitled (Drawing for the Austrian School)" is a roundish pink haze of tiny dots and larger markings that suggests an agar culture seen under a microscope; and "A Drawing for Mancur Olson No. 1" very much resembles a vertebrate skeleton.

Though the drawings look fragile, they seem to be wired into one another in a way that lends cumulative strength. Altogether, they sen-



Swiss Institute

O-ism: A partial view of Jim Shaw's exhibition at the Swiss Institute.

This piece, like the others, might easily be dismissed as Orientalist fantasy, but Mr. Grey says it faithfully transcribes a vision he had, first in a dream and then on psychoactive drugs. Is his "contemporary sacred art" any less inventive or more conservative than most of the figurative painting around today? Earnestness and a certain clunky pictorial literalism set his work decisively apart, but those are also qualities that make it so transcendently zany.

HOLLAND COTTER

**Alison Smith  
Ellen Aitfest**

Beltwether  
335 Grand Street  
Williamsburg, Brooklyn  
Through Monday

Alison Smith's elaborate museological installation and Ellen Aitfest's close-up paintings of trees and rocks share an impressive, promising intensity, a clarity of focus and industriousness. But their side-by-side solo shows also have complementary, even mutually illuminating strengths and weaknesses.

tity; a wonderful color sense; and intimations of narrative complexities that suggest the down-home equivalent of Matthew Barney.

The main problem, at this point, is that looking at her work feels a little too much like work. Solutions could include making the meaning more accessible or, as with Mr. Barney, providing more aggressive visual compensation. Both seem well within her reach.

ROBERTA SMITH

**Justine Kurland**

Gorney Bravin and Lee  
534 West 26th Street, Chelsea  
Through Oct. 12

These photographs (both color and black-and-white) are staged pictures of nudists in the wilderness, among hollyhocks, planting zinnias, riding horses, bathing in a river, walking through a meadow in slanting light. This is an imaginary utopia, in the here and now, although it's not clear precisely where here is or who these unprepossessing people (middle-aged men and women, young families) are.

The people, though perfectly ordi-