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Best in Show: 'Under Destruction II' at Swiss Institute
Plus: Jean-Paul Gauthier at Jack Shainman Gallery; 'Crafting Genre: Kathryn Bigelow' at MOMA

Turn the little dial that controls Liz Lerner's Corner Basher and you may experience catharsis, especially if you hold long-simmering grudges against institutional art. A softball-size metal sphere swings in circles on its chain, gathering speed, until—wham!—it smashes a hole in the gallery's wall. Comic destruction, with undertones of malevolence and protest, runs through this loud and engagingly nihilistic group show. It's the second installment of a collection shown last year in Basel at a museum dedicated to the work of Jean Tinguely, who spent his career assembling elaborate contraptions that mocked technological progress.



Here, Tinguely's theme is evident in Johannes Vogl's marvelously absurd machine, in which a carefully engineered process produces only waste. Slices of bread drop onto an inclined conveyor belt, receive a quick squirt of strawberry jam (smoothed by two knives), then slowly rise to the top, where they're dumped onto the floor, to form a growing, and rather disgusting, pile.

Similarly upending notions of mass-production, Michael Landy reversed the cycle of manufacture, purchase, and possession in Breakdown, a 2001 event that he staged inside a London department store (presented on video). In a factory-like setting, workers categorized the 7,227 items that Landy owned at the time, and then methodically destroyed them—a version of Buddhism's renouncement of worldly attachment, ironically turned into performance-art spectacle.

The comedy gets darker in several other pieces that suggest various forms of torture. In one-hour sessions over 10 successive days, Jimmie Durham hurled cobblestones at a refrigerator in a public square, demonizing a symbol of domestic comfort, but turning it, too, into a martyr; the battered appliance, oddly dignified, stands as a sculpture titled St. Frigo. Elsewhere,

Arcangelo Sassolino's hydraulic cylinder crushes, inch by inch, a block of soft pine with bone-crunching sounds—a high-tech form of medieval punishment. In the back room, Christian Marclay's horrific video *Guitar Drag* (2000) addresses more recent history; the artist tied an amplified Fender Stratocaster to the back of a pickup truck, then pulled it across dirt roads in San Antonio, simulating the 1998 murder of African-American James Byrd Jr. in Texas. The screams of the guitar, cranked to an ear-splitting volume, render the work—intentionally and appropriately—nearly unwatchable.

Jean-Pierre Gauthier: 'Recent Work'

Chirping, roaring, and whistling, Jean-Pierre Gauthier's delicate kinetic sculptures hang from the walls like infants in a maternity ward for robots. Each gentle creature exists as an exposed tangle of wires, tubes, rods, and motors draped over an armature of twisting silver pipes. Slow and sometimes imperceptible, the movement of the parts (activated by motion sensors) creates the array of sounds by shaking small microphones across streams of pumped air. Like the work of Tim Hawkinson or Pol Bury, these charming mechanisms do nothing but express joy in their own primitive sentience. Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 W 20th, 212-645-1701, jackshainman.com. Through June 25

'Crafting Genre: Kathryn Bigelow'

The early films of well-known directors often hint at later interests, but Kathryn Bigelow's *The Set-Up*—a 1978 experimental short made when she was a student—appears like a declaration of intent: One man viciously attacks another in slow motion while, on a voiceover track, two cineastes calmly discuss techniques for making filmed violence seductive.

In this behind-the-scenes survey of her filmmaking career, the storyboards, production art, and personal works on paper reveal Bigelow's longtime exploration of moody, and carefully structured, visions of brutality. She made viewers cringe as far back as 1972 with two silhouettes, in red acrylic, of women's heads attacked from behind by a knife and an ax, complete with splattered drops. The images, still visceral today, strangely anticipate the murders in her sixth full-length film, *The Weight of Water* (2000). Those early studies in painting have certainly helped shape sequences like the flaming deaths of the vampires in *Near Dark* or the sniper fire in *The Hurt Locker*—they're thrilling not only for their drama but for their rich textures and compositional tension. The show, which runs in conjunction with a retrospective of Bigelow's films, offers a fascinating, and rare, glimpse of a director's creative core. MOMA, 11 W 53rd, 212-708-940, moma.org. Through October 3