

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Hot Air | Dan Colen's 'A Real Bronx Cheer'

By Bill Powers



A cement-filled whoopee cushion by the artist Dan Colen, who celebrated the release of his new book "A Real Bronx Cheer" last night at Smalls in the West Village. Alexis Dahan

Last night Dan Colen and the publisher Fulton Ryder celebrated the release of Colen's new artist book, "A Real Bronx Cheer," at Smalls Jazz Club in the West Village. The supermodel Stephanie Seymour read God jokes that the artist had found on the Internet, while the magician David Blaine held his breath in a plastic bag onstage next to her. The proceedings were overseen by the legendary concert promoter Ron Delsener, who additionally provided the book's caption text. Colen's drawings from the book — a collaboration with his assistant Matt Kenny — were temporarily taped into frames over existing artwork all over the club. The drawings themselves depict contentious moments in the relationship between a priest and his inflatable God, who is rendered in the tradition of a blow-up sex doll.



Colen's cartoon works were taped over existing artworks in the club. Alexis Dahan

If that sounds like a madcap, disjointed affair, the glue for the evening was the inherent utility of air: be it a saxophone player giving voice to his instrument, hecklers in the crowd demonstrating real Bronx cheers or the whoopee cushion sculptures by Colen peppered about the interior. “They’re filled with cement now so you can’t ever use them again,” he explained of what you might call the joke-proofing of these novelty props, “but they’re also about the faith an artist places in any object he creates.” Colen’s impetus is not without precedent: Jeff Koons has often described his balloon sculptures as the embodiment of human exhalation and Marcel Duchamp famously trapped Parisian air as a ready-made souvenir in his glass ampule almost a century ago. “There’s a magnetism in trying to capture something so ephemeral and abstract,” commented Fabiola Alondra, the director of Fulton Ryder. “In the end, humor stands as our greatest defense mechanism against the unanswerable questions we all carry with us.”



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