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The Art of Taxidermy

LONDON



HANS-PETER FELDMANN

SIMON LEE

Not only does Hans-Peter Feldmann's "Art Exhibition" at Simon Lee manage, in just a couple of rooms, to offer a retrospective of the German artist's career—via a selection of his photographs, sculptural assemblages, and books from the 1970s to the present—but it also gives some insight into Feldmann's engagement with art history. Often, this only amounts to schoolboy joking: the artist alters a found painting to make a cross-eyed Virgin and Child, and turns plaster casts of David and Venus into grotesque, Technicolor cartoon characters. This attack on classical iconography can only bring to mind Dada defaced artwork—amusing, but déjà vu.

Feldmann's take on the artistic tradition only really works when it links the historical with the contemporary. A set of large vitrines filled with everyday tat celebrates the intriguing qualities of the mundane in an ironic cabinet of curiosities, powerfully demonstrating the capacity of a display device to confer the status of artwork on any object; and three kitsch framed carpets, adorned with motifs reminiscent of geometric abstraction, are a good reminder of the multiple bridges existing between high culture and consumable design. But it's perhaps *Dancing Children*, another (undated) found painting, in which all the little characters have been made terrorists by virtue of the black strips masking their eyes, which is the most disturbingly efficient: its parody of the way fear is daily propagated by mass media with elusive and incomplete information couldn't be more timely. —COLINE MILLIARD