

PUPPETS AND BLACK SABBATH

Tom Thayer's genuine gesture

FOR TOM THAYER'S January 2011 solo show at Tracy Williams, in New York, the gallery was ornamented with paper sculptures of herons. Some were hung on string in delicate assemblages, like puppets; others were collaged onto painted canvases. The herons had previously been used to create a video work, *Scenographic Play*, which featured stop-motion animation and fantastical puppetry. During the exhibition's run, the artist staged an improvisational performance—a signature event that combines theater and sound art. Thayer projected the live animation onto a large screen while he and a group of artists created a soundscape in front of it—playing a keyboard, deflating and popping balloons, and dragging a metal walking stick across the floor. These integrated elements are all part of the artist's endeavor to tap into what he calls a “genuine gesture.”

While this kind of multimedia work feels perfectly natural in today's contemporary art world, with many artists moving easily from medium to medium, the Chicago-born Thayer has been mining this territory for 20 years. He has felt slightly out of step with the art world, until now: His work is currently included in the Whitney Biennial, and later this month he'll be staging a solo show at **Derek Eller Gallery**, in New York, on view April 27 through May 26. At press time, many details of the exhibition are unclear—even to Thayer. The artist's process, he says, evolves as a result of “being present physically” in the space and “working the ideas.” Thayer did divulge that he has been listening to a lot of Black Sabbath and that the music is giving him a visual inspiration for the show. —ROZALIA JOVANOVIC

Tom Thayer
Scenographic Play, 2011.
Animation and performance stills.

FOR OUR Q&A WITH THE ARTIST >>> ARTINFO.COM

