

JOE SOLA - *American Sex Room and other Works* -- April 6th through May 18th, 2014

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Blackston is pleased to present *American Sex Room and other Works*, Los Angeles-based artist Joe Sola's solo exhibition of paintings and a sculptural installation project.

Upon entering the exhibition you'll hear "A sound before and after looking at art". It might look and sound like your standard storekeeper's door bell mounted on the gallery door, but if you had an ear for car engines, and Volvos in particular, you might have guessed that the bell's clapper is actually a piece of piston from the engine of a 1982 Volvo 240 GL -- which just happens to be the car in which Joe lost his virginity. Welcome to his world. Mind the gap!

In the front gallery, Sola presents four new oil paintings which offer a view into some of the artist's concerns: the minefield of American mass culture and the role Sola finds in sorting through the detritus -- and the relationship between creativity, sex and violence. Two still life compositions, rendered once in pink and once in violet, present a vase containing rifles and shotguns positioned next to a plump hot dog. An elegant, modern couple contemplates a landscape of abstract painting headstones. A nine-piece composition of bulls-eyes, erasers and a cluster of lines hovering above the palm of a figure (vaguely resembling the artist's father) address the artist's mark making process.

Joe Sola's new installation at the back of the gallery is a typically humorous commentary on the systems that inform the way we live our lives. Placing his introspective macro lens squarely on the continued exploration of his own sexual identity, Sola questions the concept of autonomy in the context of the American experience.

In a windowless room, the walls and floor covered in the words "American sex", two products manufactured exclusively for consumption (and art installations), a can of Chef Boyardee beef ravioli and a bowlful of feed guppies, engage in a philosophical discussion. Interrogating the feed guppies, the can of ravioli learns that they basically swim around, look at things, mate and die. In answer to his question "eh why-a so-a many-a of-a you-a" they explain that they often get eaten. The can of ravioli can relate. The slightly cannibalistic evocation of a can of food covered in a picture of a man only makes their existential plight more poignant. You might, if you were that way inclined (and Joe is) take the cannibalism theme even further and consider the tomato sauce and white bite-sized ravioli as a tasty analogue of the body and blood of Christ. And the Eucharist, an emblematic resonance in the American cultural landscape brings us to the textual context of the interrogation. American sex, American sex, American sex, American sex, American sex, American sex, American sex, American sex, which is what it all boils down to.

Nothing is off limits in Sola's practice. Recently, in *Shakey's in "Der Hintern in Der Luft"* at 356 Mission Road in Los Angeles, the artist put a large-scale painting by Laura Owens through a wood chipper. He has made an entire painting exhibition that fits in his Los Angeles dealer's ear (*Portraits: An Exhibition in Tif Sigfrid's Ear*, 2013). In his video *some blood of an artist* (2011), exhibited in *The Senior Discount* at Blackston in 2011, a lone male figure engages in grotesque and violent acts on corpses, all played by Sola, transforming body parts into paintings and sculptures. Sola has also jumped out of windows (*Studio Visit*, 2005), been run over by a team of high school football players from Ohio (*Saint Henry Composition*, 2001), and rode roller coasters with male porn stars (*Riding with adult video performers*, 2002). In performances he has had male fashion models make art (*Male Fashion Models Make Conceptual Art*, 2005-9) and talked about his drawings with female escorts, (*Talking About My Drawings with Female Escorts*, 2010).

Joe Sola was born in Chicago in 1966, and received his BA from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and his MFA from Otis College of Art and Design. His work has been exhibited extensively in the US and abroad. He has had solo shows with Blackston, Tif Sigfrids and Happy Lion Gallery in Los Angeles, the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio and Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, among others. Recent group exhibitions have included *Damage Control: Art and Destruction Since 1950*, curated by Kerry Broucher and Russell Ferguson, at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, *Me Gusta El Plastico* at the Museo de los Pintores Oaxaqueños, Oaxaca City, Mexico, *The Studio Sessions* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, *Mixed Signals* at the Cranbrook Art Museum, and *Hard Targets: Masculinity and American Sport* at Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In 2009 he was commissioned to make a public sculpture for the Vancouver Biennale. Sola has been invited to perform at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, MOT International, London. His videos have been screened internationally, among other venues, at the The J. Paul Getty Museum and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico, and The Havana Biennial, Havana, Cuba.