

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

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Installation view at Matthew Marks's 522 West 22nd Street gallery. From far left, Robert Hudson's "Diamond Back" (circa 1964); Peter Vouklos's "Blue and Gray" (1959); Art Green's "Disclosing Enclosure" (1968); and Forcefield's "P Lobe Shroud" (2000).

'What Nerve!'

'Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to the Present'

Matthew Marks Gallery
502, 522 and 526 West 22nd Street,
Chelsea
Through next Friday

This lavish, thrillingly revisionist show challenges the bias of postwar American art history in favor of New York, abstraction and Conceptual art. It presents the core of an earlier, larger version shown last fall at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum in Providence, also titled "What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to the

Present." It has been reconfigured here by one of its curators, Dan Nadel, an expert on underground comics and postwar figurative art from beyond New York. Mr. Nadel seems to know where to find the best stuff in terms of unfamiliar pieces and fascinating ephemera.

This show centers on two caches of works from the 1960s. One is the Pop-Surreal, comics-influenced efforts of Jim Nutt, Art Green, Suellen Rocca, Karl Wirsum, Jim Falconer and Gladys Nilsson, who led Chicago's Hairy Who movement with antic works painted on plexiglass, lawn chairs or canvas. They are joined by the messier idiosyncrasies of California Funk artists like the

ceramist sculptors Ken Price and Robert Arneson and the painters Peter Saul and Roy De Forest, among others.

Mr. Nadel places their often irreverent creations in a continuum with Destroy All Monsters, a Michigan punk band that included Mike Kelley and Jim Shaw and whose members are represented here by drawings, photographs and copies and page mock-ups for the band's magazine. It concludes with Forcefield, a collective from Providence that was featured in the 2002 Whitney Biennial. Consisting of Mat Brinkman, Jim Drain, Leif Goldberg and Ara Peterson, Forcefield specialized in anarchic music and videos, silkscreens and,

most memorably, brightly knit head-to-toe body suits whose patterns zigzag suggestively from the primitive to the digital.

Of the show's two main galleries, one is installed with typical Marksian spaciousness. The other reflects Mr. Nadel's omnivorous interests. Sadly, several important outliers in the first show have been eliminated: H. C. Westermann, William N. Copley, Gary Panter, Christina Ramberg, the superhero comic artist Jack Kirby and Elizabeth Murray, a New York painter from Chicago indebted to the Hairy Who.

But this show, along with the excellent catalog for its original iteration, still teems with ideas that other curators should build on.

ROBERTA SMITH