

Conrad Atkinson: *Mining Culture*, 1996, mixed mediums, 9 by 5 by 5 1/2 inches each, at Ronald Feldman.



Conrad Atkinson at Ronald Feldman

From a man whose past work has tackled issues of labor, pollution and hunger, British artist Conrad Atkinson's latest show evidenced anew the union of Conceptual art and politics he's favored since the '70s. The exhibition, "Dorothy Gale Meets Emily Brontë in Technicolor," was a farrago of painting, photography and installation pieces, filled with references, both amusing and oblique, to the movies, the press, nuclear power plants and current immigration policies.

An example of the artist's effort to reveal "culture as the production of meaning," the show aimed to deconstruct the strange bedfellows of entertainment, industry and politics. To this end, Atkinson defaced the front pages of international newspapers, blotting out headlines and articles with metallic paint, and goosed Hollywood's mix of serious business and frivolous entertainment via parodies of the industry trade paper *Variety*. Atkinson seems purposely to employ shoddy, slapdash techniques. In a manner reminiscent of Situationist strategies, he foregrounds dripping paint, crude lettering and images, blatant kitsch and subversive japes, all in the hope of disrupting the seamless lies of the culture industry.

The one consistent trope in Atkinson's diverse show was Otherness, variously evoked by the artist's own ethnographic pho-

tographs of women's hands painted in the Indian ceremonial style Mehndi, references to the questionable origins of Emily Brontë's hero Heathcliff, and a cheap pink dress decorating the gallery wall, which, turned inside out, displays a tag proclaiming "Made Somewhere Else for Someone Else." Ceramic renditions of land mines were arranged on shelves and turned into kitsch curios with appliqué kittens, praying hands and corny endearments. These works reassert Atkinson's obsession with the transformation of politics into culture and suggest the ease with which governmental horrors are forgiven by the citizenry.

For the visitor to this promiscuously far-ranging show, the task of decoding Atkinson's cryptic allusions to a variety of topics was akin to translating the cloistered jargon of academia into comprehensible speech. One left somewhat mystified as to Atkinson's exact intent and puzzled at the smug audacity of lumping such varied, complicated social issues into one show. The result was a cacophony of random accusation which, ironically, mimicked the dizzying sensory overload of the 20th-century capitalism that Atkinson decries.

—Felicia Feaster