

# Best in Show

## Recommendations by Robert Shuster

### Cameron Hayes: 'Tattles'

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts  
31 Mercer Street  
212-226-3232, feldmangallery.com  
Through May 7

## Mayhem City

Dystopian visions don't get much darker than those of Cameron Hayes. Influenced, it would seem, by Hieronymus Bosch, underground comics, and Richard Scarry's cluttered drawings for kids, the Australian artist paints meticulously detailed panoramas of urban mayhem. From afar, these sprawling cityscapes present loose organizations of motion and color, with cartoonish figures engaged in some vague collective activity. But closer inspection (the richness demands study) reveals a shadowy madness: murder, enslavement, sexual deviancy, and squalor.

If you spend time, too, reading Hayes's descriptions of each work—freely mixing fact and fantasy—you'll discover that he has created imaginative allegories that often touch on recent events, particularly confrontations between the rich and poor. The wild *Kings of Werribee* makes a direct reference to the Australian thugs who, in 2006, filmed themselves defiling a handicapped girl. Before a graffiti-covered wall, malevolent youths loom over their conquests while on the other side, a chaotic factory—replete with its own acts of degradation—appears to be manufacturing clothing. The satire broadens in *Orphanages Make the Best Skyscrapers*. In a sickly yellow fog, chaotic groups of suited men build rickety towers while, in the lowest rooms, fatherless boys—who constantly seek parental approval—are nurtured for corporate success.

Elsewhere, a more straightforward painting depicts another real situation, this one from India's Mumbai Zoo. In a gloomy cage eerily tinted red, two sad monkeys, hanging from ropes, peer down at rats devouring their food. The symbolism could apply to any number of circumstances, but whatever your interpretation, Hayes gives us a striking portrayal of hell.

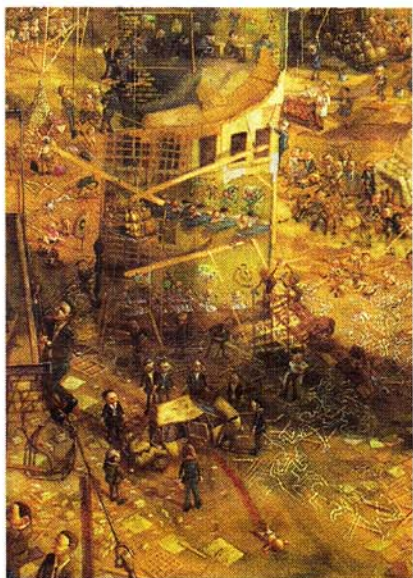
### Józef Robakowski

Sleekly remodeled, the tiny but ambitious satellite gallery of the Goethe-Institut offers an intriguing introduction to experimental filmmaker Józef Robakowski, a prominent figure in his native Poland but little-known here. A sampling of work demonstrates the artist's wide-ranging interests over the past 50 years.

Structuralist investigations of spare imagery define a number of the films. There's the minimalist abstraction of *Test 1*, a 1971 piece that "animates" white circles of light from perforations Robakowski made in the film itself. In the same year, *The Dynamic Rectangle* looked at the purity of a basic form; an oddly compelling geometric exercise set to pulsing electronic music, it plays like an homage to Malevich's Suprematism. In the back room, the more conceptual *Attention: Light!*, echoing synesthesia, flashes colors according to

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Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

certain pitches in an accompanying Chopin mazurka—a collaborative effort

### Orphanages Make the Best Skyscrapers, 2011 (detail)

conceived by Robakowski's fellow avant-gardist Paul Sharits, but one that feels a bit dated now.

Social and political concerns made their mark on later films, notably *From My Window* (1999), a personal look at Poland's recent history. Splicing together two decades of footage shot from his apartment, Robakowski observes and wryly narrates the changing life around a bleak concrete courtyard. In the 1970s, under a regimented Communism, neighbors make predictable but comforting appearances. During the martial law of the 1980s, the space succumbs to authority and becomes a parking lot. Finally, with capitalism, the construction of a five-star hotel eliminates the view entirely—a development that leads, Robakowski ironically states, to "The End." *Ludlow 38*, 38 Ludlow, 212-228-6848. Through May 15

### 'Art/Sewn'

Sewing may never shake its association with grandmothers and tchotchkes, but the nine artists in this quiet, thoughtful show take their work well beyond notions of craft. Emily Barletta uses needle and thread like a pencil, writing dense rows of angular shapes that appear on the paper as personal hieroglyphics. Likewise, Linnea Glatt's *Filled* gives almost imperceptible body to the "drawn" line in an encircled, Agnes Martin-like grid.

A Minimalist spirit continues with Cyrilla Mozenter's soft rectangular containers, made from industrial wool and reminiscent of sculpture by Eva Hesse. Elisa D'Arrigo, too, evokes Hesse in marvelous little wall-reliefs; stitched-together cubes of handmade paper, piled into mounds, suggest living organisms, growing cell by cell. It's also a delight to see another embroidered "brainscape" from Jessica Rankin, whose *Empty Night* connects clusters of black text with sinuous pathways of pale thread on a window-like swath of gray, translucent organdy. *FiveMyles*, 558 St. Johns Place, Brooklyn, 718-783-4438. Through May 8