REVIEWS:

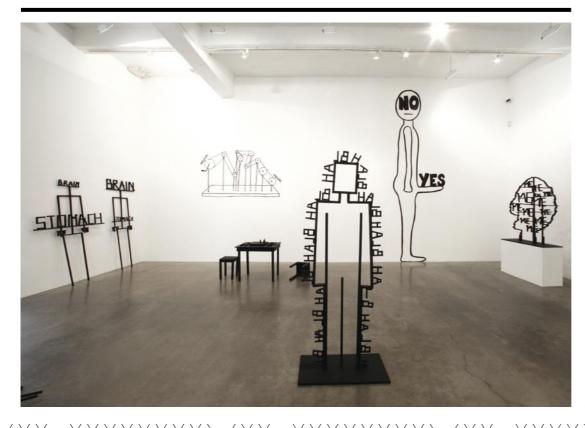
The humorous, provocative art of Olaf Breuning is tough to define, since he has fearlessly used just about all possible media in his work. This newest grouping of sculptures, wall drawings and photographs, however, seems less reliant on the outrageous tackiness of his previous work and more like a sad-sack, introspective artist making things for himself in his humble workshop.

Filling the first two rooms of Metro Pictures are sculptures and wall drawings that are essentially enlargements of small pencil drawings the artist made while spending five days alone in his room aboard the *Queen Mary II*. The wood sculptures, generally made of small pieces that are fastened together and painted black, have a playful quality, although it is clear the artist is also dealing with issues of self-doubt, failure and depression. The sardonic *Wheel of Death* (all works 2009), presenting the possible ages of someone's lifespan in the form of a vertical roulette wheel, and *Life Is a Rollercoaster* are downright grim. The wall drawings, projected from small originals and painted with black paint are essentially crudely drawn cartoons. Similar to David Shrigley's and Dan Perjovschi's drawings, their charm is in their simplicity. *Yes/No* is the most overtly comical and sexual, with the word 'no' written on a man's face while the word 'yes' rests along the length of his erect penis. Although both rooms are full of hit-and-miss pieces, the overall grouping succeeds on a purely formal level. The cohesiveness of the installation seems a bit cautious compared to his previous show at the same gallery, in 2008, when audacious ceramic and mixed-media sculptures, drawings and photographs coexisted in the same room.

Investigations into paint's physicality, visual impact and relationship to art history take up the third, smaller gallery, whose walls are painted black to contrast with the first two rooms. The framed c-print *Bridget* features a voluptuous female model painted black and lying on her side, with thick pours of yellow, green, blue and red paint dripping down her body, while *Color Drip I* is essentially the same work with thinner paint stripes and no model. *Grid Drip*, a painted sculpture that was then photographed, brings to mind the chequerboard lines of Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942–3). Recalling Yves Klein, stain painting and the canvases Niki de Saint Phalle shot with a .22 calibre rifle back in the 1960s, Breuning revels in the optical qualities of pure colour, using simple but effective methods to emphasise its intense materiality. The drop-dead gorgeous *Colour Bubbles* relies on lighting rather than paint to achieve a similar, though more delicate, effect on floating soap bubbles; and allowing the lights themselves to be clearly visible at the top of the composition is comparable to other Breuning photos in which the staging is revealed. Nothing in *Small Brain Big Stomach* is as memorable as Breuning's dark and surreal narrative video *Home* (2004), but for an artist with a startling number of solo shows per year, it is obvious this guy is in overdrive. *Chris Bors*

Olaf Breuning Small Brain Big Stomach

Metro Pictures, New York 29 October – 5 December



Small Brain Big Stomach, 2009 (installation view). Courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures, London