

Michael Kimmelman, Art In Review, The New York Times, October 4, 2002, p. E33

**Jim Shaw**

Swiss Institute  
495 Broadway, at Spring Street  
Metro Pictures Gallery 519 West 24th Street  
Both through Oct. 26

Jim Shaw, the California conceptualist, who in his art often pretends to be someone else, usually a bad painter, now gives us an artist named Adam O. Goodman, a believer in a made-up religion, O-ism. O-ism was founded at the same time as Mormonism, we're told. Goodman paints O-ist-inspired abstractions: circular canvases, like targets with brushy passages in the middle. Think Richard Pousette-Dart meets Ken Noland, with a little Adolph Gottlieb thrown in for good measure. They're perfect, which is to say generically awful, deadpan parodies of postwar art in its squishiest, spiritualist mode.

Meanwhile, Goodman, so the story goes, must support himself as an illustrator. Disgraced, he hides behind a pseudonym, Archie Gunn. At the Swiss Institute, then, we find his (that is, Goodman's) circular paintings and also file cabinets (arranged in a circle or O) containing tacky yellowing magazine and newspaper clippings that he (that is, Gunn, who is really Goodman, who is, of course, Mr. Shaw) uses for his illustrations.

All very funny. At Metro Pictures, Shaw elaborates on O-ism with several dozen O-ist thrift store-style paintings, comically clumsy pictures of strange beings, obscure rituals, torture, stagecoaches and much else that makes blissfully little sense. These are by anonymous artists from Nebraska and Iowa, supposedly. The whole project is, as usual with Mr. Shaw, a sly, sardonic take on the mythologies of American art and high-low taste, raised to a clever pitch by his obsessive, black-humored, distinctly absurd sensibility.



Swiss Institute Contemporary Art

38 St Marks Place  
New York, NY 10003

+1 (212) 925-2035  
info@swissinstitute.net

swissinstitute.net  
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