

Los Angeles Times

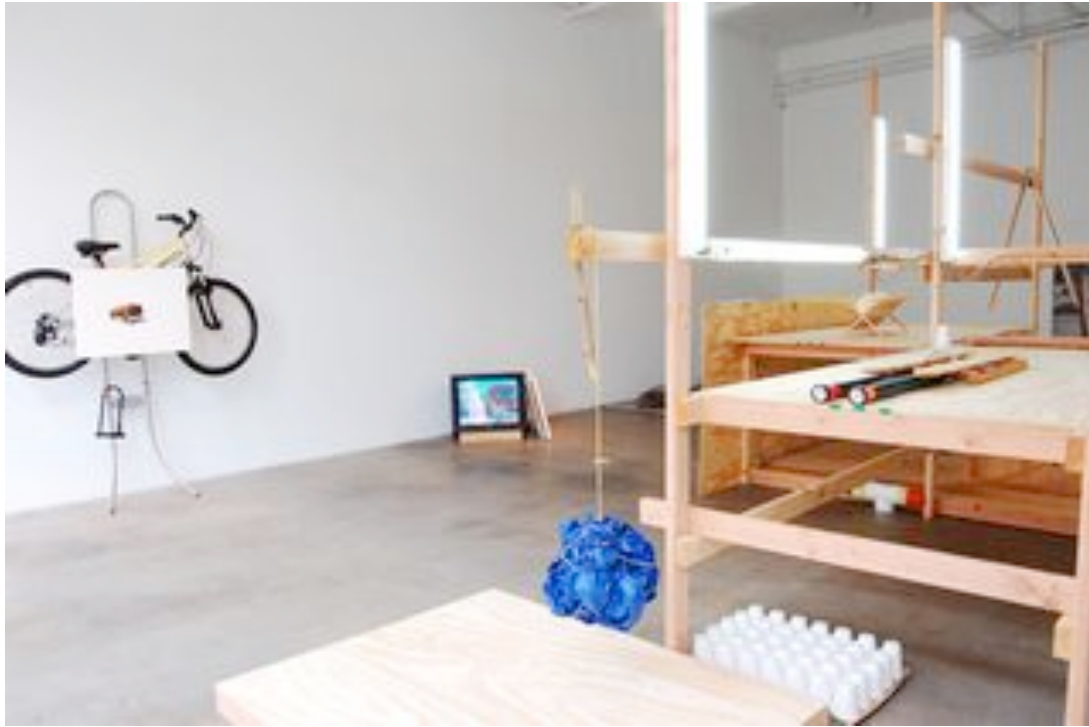
Art review: Koki Tanaka at the Box

February 24, 2011



In this charming show at the Box, L.A. artist Koki Tanaka playfully questions assumptions about art's place and function. The video, "Showing Objects to a Dog," is just what it sounds like: Tanaka tries to get the attention of a dog named Shadey by presenting him with several objects made out of cardboard boxes, Styrofoam cups, a bucket and broom, etc. The conceit of course is patently absurd, but it does shine an alternate light on the bizarre constructions we routinely venerate as art, which to Shadey, are either of no interest at all or are simply playthings — he is particularly taken with a stick attached by string to a large ball of tape. Who's to say whether we have any better use for art?

Another video documents Tanaka's efforts to sell fallen palm fronds at a flea market. Selling something found everywhere in L.A. that people routinely throw away, the gesture is pure commodification. It's not a new idea, but it's entertaining nevertheless to hear a flea market administrator say that she supposes Tanaka's wares qualify as "used goods" because they were used by a tree.



The best pieces in the show document a series of works that the artist made by taking the bus. Using the bike rack on the front of the Metro bus as a traveling gallery, he strapped a painting to his bike, put the bike on the rack and got on the bus. Even better, the painting itself is an image of a painting strapped to a bike on the bike rack of a bus. So while Tanaka is ostensibly using public transit to display and disseminate his work, that work itself is an image of this unconventional system of display. In other hands, this self-referential spiral might seem cynical, but Tanaka's light, humorous touch maintains a gentle sense of wonder at the absurdity of it all.

-- Sharon Mizota

The Box, 977 Chung King Road, L.A., (213) 625-1747, through March 19. Closed Sundays–Tuesdays. www.theboxla.com

Images: Top: Still from video installation "Showing Objects to a Dog," 2010. Credit: Courtesy of Koki Tanaka, The Box, LA and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco. Right: Installation view of "Dog, Bus, Palm Tree," at the Box, 2011. Credit: Courtesy of Koki Tanaka and The Box, LA.

<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2011/02/art-review-merlin-carpenter-at-overduin-and-kite.html>