

Cherry and Martin

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ARTFORUM

CRITIC'S PICKS

Los Angeles

Brian Bress

CHERRY AND MARTIN

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Slowed to near stillness, the eight video portraits on view in Brian Bress's latest exhibition, "Under Performing," show their subjects in various states of physical duress. In *Beadman (Parker)*, 2012, a figure decked in thousands of tiny wooden beads jumps on a trampoline. While his colorful getup suggests a clownish whimsy, his leaden hops betray the tremendous burden of his weighty wardrobe. *Janus (Max)*, 2012, shows a two-faced figure rotating before a lakeside scene; he wears a bodysuit and mask painted to match the brushstrokes and color of the background. Though he sits quietly, trying to merge with his surroundings, the sitter continually trembles—and thus bodily reaction causes efforts to fuse with aesthetics to go in vain. Further exploiting the tension between three-dimensional bodies and two-dimensional portraiture is *Fancy Dress Ball (Brian)*, 2012, which features a performer amid a shifting ground that looks part Lichtenstein abstraction and part Art Deco ceramic motifs, trying to contort his camouflaged limbs to blend in.

These are performances that, as the show's title indicates, are meant to fall short—all are acts that are impossible to complete or sustain for very long. Sometimes the roles imperil the actor more dramatically, as with *Cowboy (Brian led by Peter Kirby)*, 2012, where the artist, dressed in a cartoonish foam cowboy suit, unsuccessfully attempts to draw various figures on a glass plane. His misplaced scribbles show how the thick, airless suit has also blinded him.

In *Creative Ideas for Every Season*, 2010, an offbeat road movie, a cardboard car passes through a desolate collaged landscape. The driver, speaking in words appropriated from Agnes Martin, considers with her puppet passengers the impulse that precedes any artistic production, before the assignation of failure or success. Like the astronaut in Bress's *Status Report*, 2009, currently on view at the New Museum, she presses along the endless, video-looped road. "We do not ever stop," she says, "because there's no way to stop."



Brian Bress, *Cowboy (Brian led by Peter Kirby)*, 2012, color video, high definition monitor and player, wall mount, frame, 28 x 22 3/4 x 4".

— Genevieve Yue