

## Lothar Hempel, "Kats, Nerves, Shadows & Gin"

★★★★

**Anton Kern Gallery**, through Mar 21  
(see Chelsea)

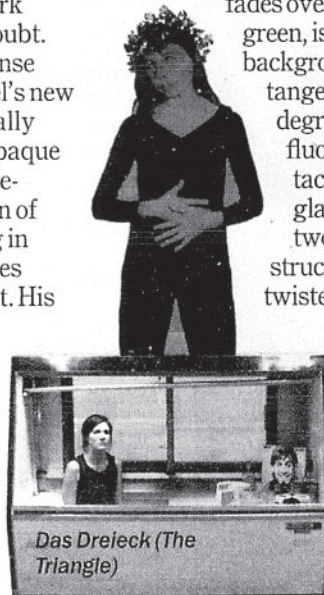
I sometimes have the uncomfortable feeling that the concept of the *gesamtkunstwerk* has been appropriated by artists as a way to cover all of their bases—to sprinkle activity across different media in order to inoculate a work against the viewer's doubt. Certainly, I had that sense visiting Lothar Hempel's new show. While intentionally coded, his work is so opaque that it borders on inside-jokey, and the inclusion of sculpture and painting in addition to C-prints does little to clarify his point. His photo-collages, however, marry theatricality and formal pleasures so seductively that their content becomes irrelevant.

Hempel's source images for the latter

pieces are drawn from snapshots of modern dance from the 1970s. The irreverence with which he treats them points to an unexpected sense of humor. The visage of the muscled figure hurtling over the backs of bowed bodies in *Plakat (Spielende/End of Match)* is beautifully obliterated by what appears to be a water stain on the original photo. This image, which fades overall from blue to purple to green, is inset against a background of red blending into tangerine, set askew at 45 degrees. As punctuation, fluorescent orange fishing tackle pokes through the glassy surface. The other two photos bear the same structure of punctured surface, twisted frame and brilliant

spectrum. We're content to be standing in front of these pieces, drooling, if ignorant of their exact meaning. A show comprising them alone would have been pure delight.

—T.J. Carlin



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