

# Art in America

INTERNATIONAL ● REVIEW

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## EXHIBITION REVIEWS

### DAVID KENNEDY CUTLER

DEREK ELLER

Looking into Derek Eller gallery from the street during a recent show by David Kennedy Cutler, it was hard to tell what was going on inside. One saw shapes, but what were they? They seemed almost liquid, as if water had been immobilized after being tossed into the air. Walking into the gallery, one expected to pass through some undulating time-space wall straight out of *The Matrix*.

In his striking New York solo gallery debut, the young Brooklyn artist presented nine unique freestanding sculptures. All were from 2009 and shared the show's title, "No More Right Now Forever." Using heat guns, Cutler stretched and molded standard 8-by-4-foot sheets of clear Plexiglas around his elbows, hands, knees and torso, whose gestures evoke a struggle to escape from quicksand; the imprints remained when the material hardened. Unlike the pristine, manufactured sculptures of, say, Anish Kapoor or Urs Fischer, Cutler's almost invisible forms, though elegant, are raw and immediately physical. You feel the urge to fold yourself inside them and try to shape them anew with your own body. Each is a variation on Cutler's gestural theme. Their effect is at once playful and disorienting, given the play of light on the surfaces and the interactivity of seeing one's own fleeting reflection and the bodies of others through the clear material.

There is a history to this type of performative sculpture, but Cutler brings to it a new energy more involved with creation than destruction. Early precedents include the 1955 Gutai performances of Kazuo Shiraga (struggling in massive globs of mud, leaving behind what became a short-lived clay sculpture) and



Saburo Murakami (crashing through packing paper stretched like canvas). Cutler's Plexiglas will remind some of Judd's and Morris's use of common materials; others will recall Nauman's wax sculptures of body parts and videos of himself "performing" in his studio. The iconoclastic James Lee Byars's performances-cum-sculpture also come to mind.

Byars often said, surprisingly, that Rothko was his favorite painter. Seeing Cutler's work, one is reminded more of the stark formlessness cultivated by Ad Reinhardt and Robert Ryman than the obvious precedents of '60s performance art. Most striking about this work is its tendency to disappear. The small confines of the gallery felt like a forest of ghosts. These were not angry shapes, or muscular gestures demanding your attention or forcing you to regard the sculpture in the context of the space. Quite the opposite. They almost begged you not to notice them.

—Michael Rush