

Ludwig Schwarz: The Four Seasons (Season Premier)

Sunday

John Ewing

Ludwig Schwarz' *The Four Seasons (Season Premier)* is a funny, random, all-over-the-place project. Like an improv class, it grabs at whatever's in easy reach and applies a "measure" of humor to see what happens. Well, dross is not exactly spun into gold, but Schwarz' combination of kitchen spices, paintings, video and other odds and ends shows a creative, flexible mind at play, which is itself fun to watch.

Sunday owner and former Texan, C. Sean Horton, turned his Lower East Side storefront gallery over to Schwarz, a Dallas native, who fully co-opted the space. The artist set up a reception area in the front of the gallery with a pair of modish armchairs, a low table and a presentation binder. The vibe is pure salesmanship, a cue (whether literal or ironic) to the dealer Horton to "get busy."

But what is being sold takes some figuring out. An unfinished wall, erected to give the reception area some definition, is used as a display mount for four, six-by-six-foot, oil-and-enamel-on-canvas paintings. One of these is queued up for viewing in the reception area, while the other three wait in the wings, so to speak, propped up casually along a side wall. By design, the large, colorful works can be rotated at whim through the reception area.

Likewise, the paintings—handsome, rough, robust abstractions—are fairly interchangeable. Each is a jazzy riff on pattern, with a recurring motif of a sneaker sole footprint that turns up in various configurations and scales. This urban tattoo is immediately recognizable but pops as a transformed symbol, almost tribal in its graphic zigzags against busy backgrounds of grid lines and blocks of color.

But here's where the random stuff starts. The presentation binder on the reception table has nothing to do with the paintings. It's a very loose collection of candid snapshots of Schwarz and his wife; a typed anecdote, résumé and recipes; images of the artist's disembodied head wearing a chef's toque blanche; and photos of handfuls of what looks like sand.

Behind the reception wall are small heaps of this sandlike mixture strewn on the floor, and a monitor mounted crudely on an overhead beam. The equally crude video program helps explain a few things: four titled segments—black pepper,



salt, paprika, garlic—are shot on a kitchen counter where containers of spices are shaken, spun and generally played with to a rockin' homemade soundtrack. Occasionally, Schwarz' head in the cartoon chef's cap (a.k.a., "The Sloppy Chef") appears superimposed on the containers, where brand names are usually printed.

Schwarz' half-assed, pseudo attempt at hawking his very own "house seasoning" plays out in other areas of the gallery. The outline of his head and toque is used as a phallic decal applied to the gallery window. Also, there's a snare drum on a stand placed in a corner, covered with "The Four Seasons." By the look of the floor, some vigorous playing helped distribute the spice mixture around the room, imparting a savory aroma to the space.

Distribution is the nitty-gritty of any commercial enterprise—whether selling spices or art. At the show's opening, Aaron Comess, drummer for the Spin Doctors, kicked it up a notch with an in-gallery performance. Later, fellow Dallas artist Brandon Kennedy, playing Mr. Pizza Delivery Guy, showed up with a hot pie. Horton paid the bill, a downmarket version of the postopening tradition of feeding the artists.

Ludwig Schwarz, *The Four Seasons (Season Premier)*, 2007
Installation view

As an ensemble of thinly connected gestures, *The Four Seasons* implicates artist, dealer and viewer in a system of production, distribution and consumption—nothing new to contemporary art discourses. And it's been a part of Schwarz' practice for some time, best exemplified in his 2001 exhibition *RENTOWN*, where he turned Angstrom Gallery in Dallas into a functioning appliance/furniture Rent-A-Center with the cooperation of RAC, Inc.

By contrast, something like Rirkrit Tiravanija's "food works" seems downright somber compared to the clowning, goofy hodge-podge of Schwarz' *Four Seasons*. The worldly, profane notions of commodity and consumption are presented with such playfulness—such organic hominess—that they feel anything but oppressive, threatening or damning. But that's the trick of humor (and art, too). It can convince you of most anything.