

ago, Bloom likened herself to a detective whose interest resides in “reading meanings in details,” rather than in piecing them together into any definitive whole—a description that strongly recalls aspects of Naomi Schor’s theory of a “feminist archaeology.” And, taking in Bloom’s current constellation of works, which carry over long-standing concerns from her career while remaining strikingly fresh, viewers become detectives too, speculating on where to place themselves in relation to works like *Arno Light*, 2007 (in which a chandelier is represented as itself, in a photograph, and as reflected in a mirror). Standing beneath the “real” chandelier, one imagines oneself for a minute to be at the center of things. Yet, as Bloom would have it, and as suddenly becomes clear, there’s no stable or singular center to such experience: It’s all in the details. Which is to say, everywhere and nowhere at once.

—Johanna Burton

## Martin Beck

ORCHARD

The title of Martin Beck’s exhibition at Orchard—“The details are not the details”—is a quotation from Charles Eames, whose thought concludes with the assertion that, indeed, details are hardly mere accoutrements but themselves “make the product. The connections, the connections, the connections.” Beck, who (often in collaboration with Julie Ault) has long been engaged in plumbing the material, historical, and ideological specificities of exhibition practices, structures his own as a kind of hymnal to the detail par excellence: not just connections but literal *connectors* (system connector joints, a type of utilitarian gewgaw that links together other mass-produced parts, to be precise), which came into widespread use in the late 1950s and early 1960s. If the connector joint seems an unlikely muse, it nonetheless offers a succinct exercise in methodological telescoping from micro to macro and back again. For while Beck’s show was itself—indubitably and unapologetically—an exhibition, it simultaneously operated as a kind of self-reflexive object lesson, at once straightforward and symbolic.

The centerpiece of the exhibition was a twelve-minute video installation. Comprising one continuous, seamlessly looped tracking shot, *About the Relative Size of Things in the Universe* (all works 2007) relays a stark dramatic scene. An orderly stack of metal modular tubing and display panels is approached by a man and a woman, who together begin efficiently constructing an obviously temporary structure. Panning out slowly, the camera catches their no-frills labor, which in its repetition assumes the banal poetics common to industrial production and postmodern dance. They are interrupted by a third player, who asks whether they will be able to come to a meeting the next day, in order to discuss workers’ rights. Unable to commit, the man and woman attempt to keep at their job while explaining that they have another exhibition to put up tomorrow; they’ll likely miss the meeting. They complete their task, and the camera holds a wide dilated gaze until the workers begin taking the structure apart, all the while retaining their pace and steadiness. They are interrupted a second time by the dissident worker, who repeats his request for a meeting. He is again put off; the structure is cleanly disassembled as the camera returns to its original position until the scenario begins again.

The modular tubing in Beck’s video is a reconstruction of George Nelson’s Struc-Tube exhibition system, originally created in 1948 for a greeting-card manufacturer. But Struc-Tube is, for Beck, just one in a list of contingencies, all of which play between the promises and perils of utopian modernist ideas and forms. Including other elements of pragmatic “design” in the show (a handful of Poul Cadovious’s



Martin Beck, *About the Relative Size of Things in the Universe*, 2007, still from a color video, 12 minutes.

Abstracta system connector joints, for example), Beck also created a cluster of context, hanging an 1882 plate by Eadweard Muybridge alongside a work by Sol LeWitt and LeWitt’s hand-drawn poster for his 1967 show at Virginia Dwan. LeWitt’s modular sketch looks suspiciously similar to the five silk-screen prints that make up *Diagrams*, drafted by Beck in response to an index of display possibilities laid out in Klaus Franck’s 1961 book *Exhibitions*; but instead of reiterating the now-overfamiliar history in which Conceptual and Minimal art practices were in dialogue with systems theory (and as some would have it were eventually subsumed by the “aesthetics of administration,” which they had initially resisted), Beck foregrounds the construction of such historical narratives and in so doing highlights his own suggestive mode of research-based, while still deeply aesthetic, art-making.

If questions persist here as to whether there ever were any liberatory promises written into the cultural moment in which “universal” systems of production and consumption shared turf with avant-garde practice, Beck pressures the way such narratives themselves are perhaps too smoothly retold or, worse, no longer told at all but instead usurped for merely stylistic effects. Beck proposes an expanded interpretive archive not to provide a final word but in the hope that we will also read between the lines, reanimating there all manner of connections, connections, connections.

—Johanna Burton

## Jason Meadows

TANYA BONAKDAR GALLERY

Considering that Paris Hilton, Richard Pryor, and porn star Nikki Nova have all played the role of subject for Jason Meadows in the past decade, and that the Los Angeles-based artist’s last exhibition at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery was titled after a Captain Beefheart album, the cultural references in his fourth solo outing there seemed almost quaint. The leitmotifs of “Frame Narrative” were two classics of that literary device in which one story contains or structures another, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Frankenstein*. Lewis Carroll and Mary Shelley, like Meadows, consider the marvel—and peril—of turning nothing into something. The artist’s use of their nested tales both as a thematic point of departure and as an allegory for his own practice made for a diverting show. That he went even further, engaging the nine works on view in a sculptural exploration of what is often taken to be a non-sculptural convention, the frame, made for an excellent one.

Installed in the entryway, *Monster Marquee* (all works 2007) nods to *Frankenstein*’s pop-cultural afterlife in its dual images of the brute, spray-painted on overlapping, sliding rectangles of Plexiglas and arranged in a wooden box to resemble a medicine cabinet. If this