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Art review: Stanya Kahn at Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

By Holly Myers



Stanya Kahn is the sort of performer who has only to walk down the street to be riveting — as proven repeatedly in the numerous video works of recent years that feature her mostly doing just that: wandering the streets of L.A. in a Viking hat and a bloody nose, carrying a wedge of fake Swiss cheese in “Can’t Swallow It, Can’t Spit It Out” of 2006; hobbling down urban streets and desert dirt roads on crutches, her head wrapped in bandages, in “It’s Cool, I’m Good” of 2010.

In “Lookin’ Good, Feelin’ Good,” one of four videos in her second solo show at Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, we find her strutting through town in a giant foam penis costume: talking on her cellphone, high-fiving strangers, ordering a hot dog at Wienerschnitzel. The effect is as bizarrely amusing as ever.

More intriguing, however — and no less entertaining — is the departure she makes in the other three videos, removing herself entirely as a character and focusing on what is clearly a highly developed instinct for the visual language of video (one often overshadowed by her charismatic presence) on the activation of inanimate objects.

“Happy Song for You,” a vividly peculiar impressionistic short made last year in collaboration with artist Lynn Foulkes, appears to have served as the launching point for a looser and more richly imaginative exploration of objects.

A pair of wise-cracking puppets made from nothing but crumpled paper wander through a natural landscape cluttered inexplicably with low-budget horror movie monsters in “Arms Are Overrated,” and a poignant saga unfolds among a handful of small plastic children’s toys in the wonderfully lush “Hey Ho, Nobody’s Home” — a work all the more striking, given Kahn’s established facility with a joke, for succeeding without a line of dialogue.