

ARTFORUM

Stanya Kahn

SUSANNE VIELMETTER LOS ANGELES PROJECTS

February 18–March 30



Stanya Kahn, *Happy Song For You*, 2011, still from a color video in HD, 5 minutes 7 seconds.

By Chris Wiley

Like Nathanael West and David Lynch before her, Stanya Kahn makes work that is suffused with Los Angeles's ambient schizophrenia, the sense that it is a kind of hellish paradise. But unlike some of her predecessors, Kahn seems to revel in the dual-minded nature of her home city, content to fiddle while Rome burns, or something close.

Kahn's latest solo exhibition, "A Cave Walks into a Bar," is no exception, though it appears, at first, to skew toward the lighter side of things. The show presents four new video works, a large selection of digital animations, and Kahn's drawings. In the latter, one finds a hilarious assortment of sexed-up worms and technologically impaired sea creatures, and a healthy serving of anthropomorphized feces. Similarly funny are the videos *Lookin' Good*, *Feelin' Good* (all works 2012), in which Kahn rambles through the streets of LA dressed like a giant penis ("Are you a burrito?" one child asks), and *Hey Ho*, *Nobody's Home*, wherein Kahn employs children's toys to spin a loose tale involving dancing robots, harsh weather, and a ninja with a pet seal.

But with *Arms Are Overrated* and the show's cornerstone work, *Happy Song for You*, Kahn wades back into darker territory. The former features a rambling, scatological dialogue between two armless, demonic-looking paper creatures as they hang around in a haunted theme park, which ends with one setting himself accidentally on fire. *Happy Song for You*, realized in collaboration with LA-based painter Llyn Foulkes, features a blindfolded, blood-and-dust-covered Foulkes, and a creepy, wig-faced scarecrow who performs a strange rite with the desiccated body of a dog. Though the pull of these works' murky currents threatens to split the show almost down its center, when considered as a whole, the exhibition functions as a gentle corrective to the dour self-seriousness that afflicts much critical work, without betraying Kahn's undeniably stark outlook. "Sure, things are horrible, and we're all going to die," Kahn seems to say, "but—fuck it—can't we have a little fun before we do?"