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Not With A Bang But With A "Pleh": Gobby at Shoot the Lobster

by Nate Cohan



Although Shoot the Lobster, Martos Gallery's nimbler "project space," just tunneled into its new half-basement Lower East Side location this March, its monthlyish shows seem well adapted to the seemingly unrefurbished, tin-ceilinged room that used to house a fish market: "The Grand Opening" was hung

around a puddle of brackish water apparently still circling the drain in the center of the room, and the space was then taken over by the grimy, sexually and formally avant-garde shorts of Japanese filmmaker Toshio Matsumoto. Now, through August 10, the cramped space houses "*Pleh*": six years of comics and drawings by Manhattan-based artist and musician Gobby; three installed Gobby music videos

(all 2014) and the hand-puppet who stars in one; and foam-and-paper diorama set-pieces from the videos produced in collaboration with artist Nicholas Buffon and set designer Allegra Crowther.

The earliest drawings date back to the 25-year-old's high school days. You can tell both because they're drawn on math homework and because the apocalyptic sexual frustration they express could only come out of feeling "really fucking horny all the time," Gobby told *A.i.A.* during an installation visit, and humiliated by the IRL unavailability of the Zap Comix-style archetypal bimbos his illustrated alter egos lust after. One drooling, hoodied troll buggers three blondes in a triptych arrayed across a Chinese food menu; another is hunted and publicly burned at the stake for his sexual incompetence.



Gobby's more recent comics jettison the sexual martyrdom and the one-off confessionalism of his juvenilia, but sublimate their fever-dream vertigo—what allows a protagonist to be hounded in the street for failing to fuck—into the formal structure of a longer, disjointed narrative. The majority of Shoot the Lobster's main room is hung with this new ongoing series, begun last year with *Dancing Cactus*: Gobby's first commercially available comic book. In the 12-page volume, two companions sneak up on the titular plant, and after one accidentally spooks it the other detaches his own head and seems to half-consent to being assimilated into the body of the cactus. After squeezing into it lengthwise, he emerges as a nightmarishly cheery Carmen Miranda clone. It makes me feel sick in the way that Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" does, as the Officer slowly consents to feminized dismemberment by his own pet machine—*Dancing Cactus* ends, though, with the protagonist having to live out a physical integration into this hostile alien life form.

The remaining finished issues in this new series take place in the same universe, but follow different variously humanoid characters. Narratives tend to implode as soon as they appear, derailed by crises in the space-time fabric of Gobby's world: in one scene the walls of a hotel room grope towards a protagonist with the half-liquid body parts of previous and extra-dimensional inhabitants. A refusal to commit to narrative development also runs through Gobby's musical and video work. In *Lil Pizza Face* a puppet wakes up, humps his pillow, eats old pizza, and walks down the street. In conversation, Gobby and Buffon seemed disinterested in nailing down the relationship between *Red Seal*'s demonic marionette protagonists—they're either lovers, roommates, or resident and home invader, maybe all three.

Even outside the videos it's often released with, Gobby's musical output distinguishes him from the peers with whom he shares bills and a record label (UNO) in its self-imposed exclusion from cool, tongue-in-cheek HD slickness: the kind that floats you to the end of every song on rolling hi-hats and choral pads or gentrified Bushwick techno. It's chunky, arts-and-crafty, and irritating in the way the best comics in "*Pleh*" are, which habitually sabotage their own development to pick at affective scabs of shame and complicity.