



## Art & Design

Out Chicago / Issue 158: Mar 6–12, 2008

### Art review

“Slightly Unbalanced”

Chicago Cultural Center, through April 13

The flourishing industry dedicated to our perpetual happiness has made neurosis an increasingly compelling subject for contemporary artists. This diverse group exhibition attempts to illustrate artists’ fascination with obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, paranoia and other “soft” psychological afflictions.

The exhibition’s most compelling section brings together performative videos exploring representations of narcissism. Featured artists Alex Bag, William Pope.L and Tony Oursler have made their careers exploring abnormal self-involvement through stand-ins such as Oursler’s groaning, self-pitying bobble-headed puppets. Dave McKenzie’s *Babel* (2006), recorded at local gallery 40000, documents his attempt to communicate with a crowd of Chicago art enthusiasts with a microphone stuffed in his mouth, its cord twisted around his neck: Their failure to comprehend McKenzie’s strangled speech or his sign-language gestures indicates our culture’s self-obsession and indifference to others.



David Shrigley, *Anti-depressants*, 2002

The show’s smartest works include Mike Kelley’s iconic *Ahh Youth!* (1991), in which Kelley inserts a snapshot of himself as a pimply teenager into a lineup of repugnant dolls and deformed thrift-store stuffed animals. The portrait series elicits great empathy for the human condition: feeling as if one doesn’t belong. David Shrigley’s 2002 photograph of an artist’s studio, dominated by a white one-gallon bucket with the word *anti-depressants* written on its side, sheds playful light on the stereotype of the suffering artist.

While psychiatrists and the profit-driven pharmaceutical industry continue to hash out the definition of “neurotic” behaviors, “Slightly Unbalanced” offers up a multitude of artists’ amusing diagnoses.

— Michelle Grabner