

Tenderhearted Anarchy

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Chickens, Pollo-Doh in Oliveri's Tenderhearted Anarchy

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It isn't often that a visitor is greeted at the gallery door by two dozen squawking chickens much less chickens whose feathers have been colored lavender, baby pink, soft green and lemon sherbet. Welcome to Michael Oliveri's befowled sensorium at Crossing Gallery full of edible pastels, rustling sawdust and pungent odors wafting-indelicately through the air.

Less interested in making a -spectacle of the chickens than of himself, Oliveri uses them as instruments of an elaborately infantile spoof. Under his wild-eyed supervision they go on a metaphorical journey from happy-go-lucky barnyard beasts into the absurd stuff of art, and live to tell the tale.

This mildly but determinedly psychotic installation/performance adheres to a strict scenario. Oliveri begins with packaged poultry purchased at the supermarket. He loads them into the "chicken cannon ejector," a gleaming apparatus located on the gallery's ground floor. The dead birds are then shot up to the laboratory – ***** -factory on the second floor, where they are separated and loaded into the "ACME Pollo-Doh Converter," which pulverizes them into sculpting material: Pollo-Doh.

The Pollo-Doh is stored in tanks and dispensed (quite like frozen Yogurt) into cans, by day -laborers wearing official Pollo-Doh jump suits. After being sealed, the cans are sent back down a chute to the first floor, where they are displayed in the gallery window as "pasteurized "and homogenized art for the masses, at \$60 a pop.

If Pollo-Doh is glop processed from chickens (and of course it really isn't; the hens are dumped upstairs, and replaced by a drywall compound), this project similarly grinds things up and reconceives them: Jeffrey Vallance's the "Blinky Friendly Hen," Piero Manzoni's signed and numbered cans of artist's excrement, Paul 'McCarthy by way of Jason Rhoades.

Like McCarthy, Oliveri seems to have a mean streak. But in the end, Oliveri's nastiness is all show: The chickens have been saved from the slaughterhouse, are colored with nontoxic food dye and are well cared for. This is tenderhearted anarchy, a relief, a contradiction in terms and provocative enough to pique an interest in this artist's still – nascent ideas.

Crossing Gallery, 1104 S. La Cienega,
(310) 358-9,359, through Dec. 17. Closed Sunday and Monday.