

ARTFORUM

Shimon Okshteyn

11.18.08

Author: Francine Koslow Miller

10.23.08-12.06.08 Stefan Stux Gallery

Ukrainian-born, New York-based artist Shimon Okshteyn focuses on addiction, gluttony, carnal pleasures, and personal reckoning in “Dangerous Pleasures,” his second solo show at this gallery. The exhibition opens with *Self Portrait*, 2008, which positions a white life-size cast of the nude, pot-bellied, and masturbating artist in front of a large black-and-white painting, which appropriates a detail of the somber expression and craggy face of Rembrandt in his 1659 *Self-Portrait*. Five variously sized round vanity mirrors are arranged within the oversize depiction of Rembrandt, so as not only to reflect the former Soviet-bloc artist freely pleasuring himself but also to invite viewers to gaze at their own images. The majority of the eleven works in this obscenely funny and outrageously well-crafted exhibition are mirrors lovingly coated with primarily black and white oil paints. Signature magic-realist still lifes portray illegal drugs and paraphernalia, prescription drugs (including Cialis), and an ashtray filled with cigarette butts. The most caustic drug-related image is the painting *Cocaine*, 2008, an immaculate illusionist depiction of a razor that has ostensibly divided a white powdery substance into five lines on an actual mirror. Below the thick white trails, expressionist paint swirls accentuate the effort of cutting the forbidden substance. Many of Okshteyn’s works betray tongue-in-cheek mischievousness, but they are also poignant meditations on time, aging, and mortality.