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Chelsea^{now}

Muckrakers and mudslingers on 27th St.

Too Much, Too Little, Too Late

Scott Hug

Through November 21

John Connelly Presents

25 West 27th Street (between 11th/ 12th Ave)

(212-337-9563, john@johnconnellypresents.com)

Year Of The Pig Sty

Hany Armanious

Foxy Production

Through December 5

17 West 27th Street

(212-239-2758, www.foxyproduction.com)



In a time of embedded journalists and the corporate push to legalize media monopolies, we can't watch the news or pick up a paper without getting our daily dose of infotainment. Lindsey Lohan's rehab hustle is touted as news while important events go uncovered. Scott Hug's gutsy show "Too Much, Too Little, Too Late," at John Connelly Presents, takes aim at the mainstream media's stratagem of distraction. The centerpiece of the show is a larger-than-life

free-standing print of a Time Magazine cover featuring media mogul Rupert Murdoch. Hug's cutout portrays Murdoch as a ghoulish Halloween pumpkin head. The second "page" of this diptych reads "nice day for a revolution." In the same dimly lit room, a smoke machine generates a befuddling fog, a "smoke screen," clouding the images. Overhead, a video called "Spin Control"

with its continuous centrifugal oscillation (based on the whirling Macintosh icon for data processing), amplifies the hypnotic effect of smoke and mirrors.

Hug's metaphor of smoke and mirrors is also evident in "Cry Baby" and "JFK," two diptychs with black mirrors, installed at 45-degree angles in the corners of the room. "Cry Baby" makes us squint in order to figure out what we are looking at. Through the reflection of the picture glass we see a crying Paris Hilton behind yet another glass window of her limo. A third reflection on the car window, perhaps of a photographer or journalist, shows the figure trying to peer inside. In "JFK" we see an image of the president in dark sunglasses echoed in a black mirror and the reflection of what appears to be a cloudy landscape in his dark glasses.

In the large room are a series of monochromatic silk-screened headshots of celebrities, culled from the pages of The New York Post, each a bright color and closely cropped like a mug shot. There's an intentional mimicking of Warhol's style here, which seems to elicit a comparison to his compulsive adoration of celebrities and his posture of art for money and fame's sake. Hug adds his own Hallmark commentary underneath each celeb, which serves to undermine the image and render these personalities powerless in the hands of the media that defines them.

Hany Armanious' work is often compared to the work of Joseph Beuys, Warhol's "nemesis," and there couldn't be two more different shows next door to each other than Hug and Armanious.

Armanious is an Australian artist whose medium is mud and other found materials, and "Year of the Pig Sty" at Foxy Production is his first New York show. There are other artists who have

played with mud, like Kim Jones and his alter ego, Mudman, and Charles Simmonds' Lilliputian civilizations. The use of mud brings to mind all sorts of associations from the abject to the archeological.

Indeed, at first encounter, "Year of the Pig Sty" looks like one big mess. But there's an elusive narrative being woven between the offbeat elements. Something odd has taken place and it's up to the audience to put the pieces together. In the corner of the room we find a disheveled pile of overturned shoeboxes with cast rubber feet, wearing cast Crocs and Birkenstocks. On the far wall is a crenellated Styrofoam pigpen strewn with shredded paper that insinuates straw, giant truffles and mud balls. At the entrance to the gallery there's a trough filled with mud and a doormat. Mud from the Crocs is wiped on the doormat, its symmetrical holes used as a mold for casting small cork-like objects. The small corks are then dried under a Snooker table lamp using hydroponic grow lights. Finally, the small bricks are put together to make clay Pool cues.

The word Snooker, also called Billiards or Pool, has other connotations as well. In the late 19th century it was a popular game played by British Army officers in India. The word was also used as slang for a new and inexperienced army officer and an inexperienced player of the game. To be snookered is to be fooled or duped, led into a situation with no way out.

There's a feeling of frustration or defeat one experiences from the nonsensical activity that has taken place here, an existential activity with an absurd purpose. And perhaps Harmonious implies that the year of the pig has us all wallowing in the mud.