

# ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

## San Francisco

**“AB OVO”**

**STEVEN WOLF FINE ARTS**

**2747 19th Street, Suite A**

**November 3, 2005–December 24, 2005**

Oakland-based artist Steven Hull’s fascinating project—high-concept, multiple-phase curating at its best—manages to tap into the darker psychological recesses of dozens of artists to create mesmerizing visual and literary narratives. Hull invited nineteen artists (Mike Kelley, Martha Rosler, Candice Breitz, and Glenn Ligon among them) to submit to the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory test, which is often used in courtrooms to determine personality types and assess mental health. The results were anonymously handed over to writers (including Lynne Tillman, Ben Ehrenreich, and Millie Wilson) who concocted compact children’s stories starring the scientifically distilled personalities. Those narratives were in turn handed over, again anonymously, to artists to illustrate them. The final results, by the likes of Paul Noble, Marnie Weber, Lamar Peterson, and Thomas Lawson, are displayed without their textual sources, a strategy that presents these quirky visions as distinct entities with eventful yet ambiguous pasts. While described as a tag-team project in the formidable accompanying publication, the vibe is more exquisite corpse, with a surrealistic spin on childhood informing the proceedings—a memorable Freudian brew of nightmares and curdled milk. Some of the works, like Scott Cassidy’s perverse paintings of a hairy monster (for a story by Benjamin Weissman) recall the bizarre dream drawings of Jim Shaw (one of the MMPI subjects), while others, like Junko Shimizu’s sugary, cartoon images of birthday parties and severed limbs (for a text by Jim Krusoe), evoke the comforting weirdness of the picture books that seeded our imaginations at bedtime.

— Glen Helfand