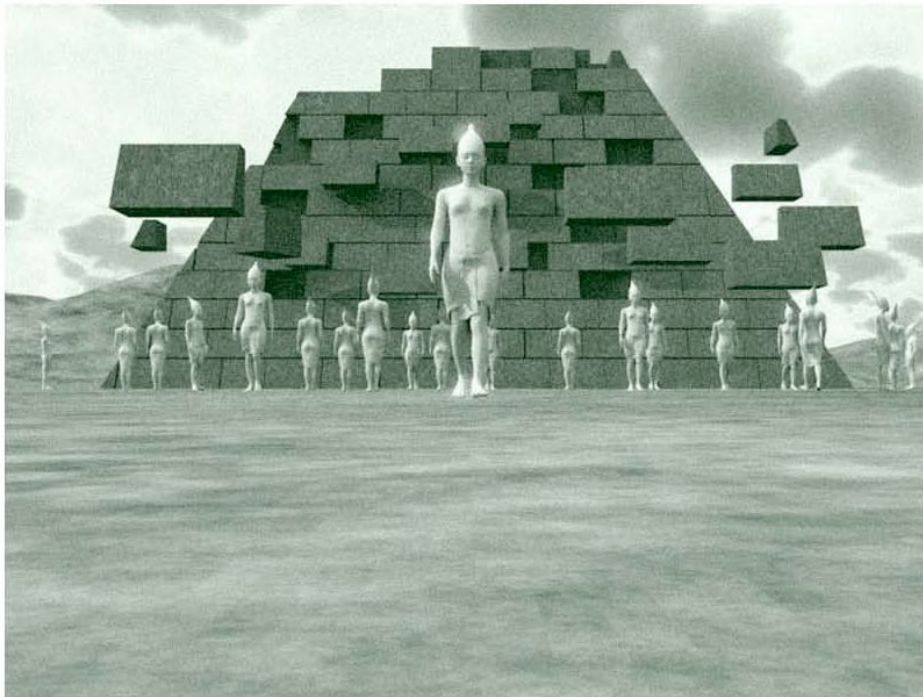


## Art in America 2009

# Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW



PARIS Like many exhibitions lately, Mircea Cantor's felt like a rebus, and a test. Called "White Sugar for Black Days," it was eclectic in medium, message and emotional pitch. Scattered throughout the gallery's two rooms was the show's trademark work, *7 Future Gifts* (2008)—a series of concrete ribbons tied around nothing. The invisible gifts ranged from a forlorn little thing placed in a far corner to a towering absence more than 12 feet high. Along with the show's title, these ribbons, all topped with schematic bows, suggested a warning, perhaps to beware of empty promises. Or, to relinquish the hope that refined sweeteners can brighten our dark times, relieve our real and spiritual hunger.

Or maybe the carbonishly simple sculptures are simply wrappers for a set of brainy games. From certain sightlines, they literally framed the show's other equally cryptic works, one a canoe shape made of a cut-open tire and filled with corncobs in which kernels have been pecked out in the form of the titular words, *What should we do with the pearls* (2008). *Io* (2009) is pair of small black-and-white photographs that seem identical but tonally reversed; both show a small boy standing in a train looking out the window at what appears in one image as the ominous mouth of a dark tunnel, in its mate as the proverbial light at that tunnel's end. Cantor commissioned a graphic artist to make the drawings for *Easy* (2008), a storyboard representing two fingers walking toward and leaping (easily) over a little cardboard barrier. The banner of the *New York Times* is reduced by one word to form the spliced phrase at the center of the collage *Untitled (The New Times)*, 2009.

Each of these modest works marks a position on a grid of meaning, in which the axes could be labeled authenticity and risk, journalism and fiction, promise and deception. Only the 3-minute animated video *Zooooooooom* (2006, revised 2009) covers considerable territory of its own. It features platoons of identical gray cone-headed figures that first advance robotically toward a massive pyramid, then disperse to follow the structure's constituent stone blocks as they detach themselves and sail outward in every direction. That the cone-heads are mindlessly following the lead of global capital is suggested by the video's blindingly fast conclusion: the pyramid returns as the Masonic symbol on a U.S. dollar bill, which is shown being lifted from a wallet taken from the back pocket of an oblivious culture consumer as the camera zooms back—hence the title—to show that he is standing under the pyramidal entrance to the Louvre. The Seine and the Tuileries, France and the planet are compressed in a Google-Earth flash.

The young Romanian-born Cantor has, similarly, been circulating globally over the past half-dozen years. Smart and graceful, his work walks a tightrope between masterful concision and coy withholding. Generally, he makes the act's poise its own reward. And here he reminds us with particular force that the appetite for meaning may be one of our most insatiable cravings.