

Biography by Hannah Woodroffe (skip it, really):

Derek Erdman is regularly called a Pop Artist, and this is understandable given that his tactics appear to intensify the preoccupations of the Factory tradition. Over the last decade Erdman has developed an increasingly efficient method for producing batches of art that he can make quickly, duplicate easily, and sell cheaply. According to this method his energy is concentrated in the plan (selecting source materials from which he will 'borrow' imagery), and the execution of each piece becomes semi-automatic, a series of choreographed tasks that he can carry out much like an assembly liner or a tap dancer might perform his job. The subjects of his paintings (second-tier celebrities, flash-in-the-pan current events, obsolete advertisements) are almost always borrowed from the moving spotlight of popular attention, and so the pieces themselves take on the form of commercial debris, relics of the recent surface-past. Occasionally they even turn up in thrift stores. In displaying and distributing his work (paintings, but also magazines, CDs, and pranks of all kinds), Erdman has demonstrated an unwavering preference for the banal and the widespread, favoring newsstands, restaurants, building sides, and balloons over galleries. And he has become an expert at harnessing the special hype-magic of the Internet (along with the party and various other spectacle-events that will circulate later in other people's stories), which he uses not only as a mass-marketplace, but also to cultivate his own semi-celebrity, which carries his work, infusing it with everyday myth.

If these strategies suggest a play on Warhol's program, albeit one in which the artist succeeds in single-handedly developing an everyman's art market quite separate from the other one, Erdman's alignment with this tradition is hardly on purpose. (Derek after all has no arts training, nor has he bothered to become particularly familiar with the history of 20th Century high art). Instead, Erdman's Pop tendencies emerged almost accidentally in his attempts to solve practical problems using what he had at hand, which was very little other than a firm grasp of what, at any given moment, was up. As Erdman tells it in one version of his own history, his Career as an artist began one day when he saw a cut-out painted sheep in his Pilsen stairwell, stole it, felt guilty, returned it, and had to figure out how to make one of his own. Regardless of how much stock is put in this story as any kind of beginning (Erdman had already been crafting elaborate pranks for almost twenty years), it shows his driving practical imperative. What began as a simple project—recognize needs, and figure out how to fill them—has over the years blossomed into a full-blown Hucksterism—create popular needs (the need for a hamburger in the mail, say, or a telephoned revenge rap) to fill. (It makes sense then that lately Erdman's work has moved more and more