



“Frankenstein (or, it’s all fun and games until someone loses an eye),”
installation view, 2003.

“Frankenstein (or, it’s all fun and games until someone loses an eye)”

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, through Fri 22 (see Chelsea).

It usually falls to the literary critic or English professor to point out that the Frankenstein of Mary Shelley’s eponymous novel was the scientist, Victor Frankenstein, not the monster. This fundamental point gets lost because the monster was so colorful (in the movie version), but the novel was a 19th-century rumination on the unpredictable and volatile nature of science and the creative act—not simply a prequel to the Hulk or the Terminator.

“Frankenstein (or, it’s all fun and games until someone loses an eye)” pays playful homage to Shelley’s novel, showcasing work whose final form is determined by something (or someone) other than the artist. Angela Bulloch’s rectilinear wall-drawing in progress is made by a machine that viewers control with a foot pedal. Sam Kusack

contributes a motor-powered carbide bit that produces a horrible screech as it slowly cuts into a huge rock—a sculpture that “carves” itself, eliminating the hand of the artist. Renee Coppola and Roxy Paine depend on polymers that behave like chemistry experiments, overflowing their vessels to create Lynda Benglis-style effusions. One of the most haunting works on view is a sculpture by Ivan Navarro that uses the heat of an oil lamp to power a radio. Others, like Katy Grannan’s photos of offbeat folks upstate and Erwin Wurm’s C-print of a woman’s legs sticking out of a window, are more Frankensteinian in mood than method. But ultimately, all the artists here fall short of the literary model: They may cede a certain degree of control, but they never relinquish it entirely. Their experiments are well tempered and amusing and generate food for thought—not the wreckage of Shelley’s Romantic excess and abandon.—*Martha Schwendener*