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## This 'Bad-Boy' Artist Has Lots of Thoughts on Love : Art: Sean Landers' 'Thought Bubble' at Regan Projects may look racy to critics but 'people confuse total honesty with being bad.'

March 18, 1994 | HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP | SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Just as everyone in New York art society was waking up from the 1980s with what felt like a bad hangover, Sean Landers came onto the scene. His 1990 show at the Postmasters Gallery included a group of clay sculptures covered in plastic trash bags to disguise their apparent mediocrity. Sheets of yellow ledger paper taped to the gallery walls were filled with the diaristic writings of an artist whose life consisted of explicit but demeaning sexual exploits, grinding poverty and humiliating encounters with big-name galleries.

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### For the Record

Los Angeles Times Saturday March 19, 1994 Home Edition Calendar Part F Page 9 Column 1 Entertainment Desk 1 inches; 22 words Type of Material: Correction

Gallery name-- The name of the gallery representing the art of Sean Landers was misspelled in a Calendar profile on Friday; the gallery is Regan Projects.

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This was the opposite of the anonymous or authoritarian voice typical of most of the text-based art of the '80s. The show received positive reviews, especially in the New Yorker, where the quality of the artist's writing was duly noted.

The writing was bracing and witty. It was obviously and heart-rendingly based on true-life experience, yet it was signed with the pseudonym of Chris Hamson. The actual author, Sean Landers, says that at that time he was "too timid to talk about these things. Once I found it wasn't that bad, I used myself. The character you see in the writings now, I like to think it's 100% me."

In his current show at Regan Projects Landers shows a 14-by-17 1/2-foot canvas that rolls off the wall and onto the floor. Titled "Thought Bubble," it obsessively chronicles Landers' thoughts on the relative usefulness of art, sex with Donna Reed, international relations, narcissism, low self-esteem and the future. By the time a typical gallery visitor finishes reading, he or she would be hard pressed to go on to the next canvas.

It is shorter but written in script. "They are meant to be read all the way through. It's about art and life but my most frequent topic is love," says Landers.

Doesn't he mean sex? "The sex is graphically described, so the fact that it's about love gets hidden," he counters.

Landers, 31, is tall and athletically built with broad features, very pale skin and black chin-length hair. He grew up in Palmer, a town of about 4,000 in western

Massachusetts, and his ironic humor and deadpan delivery reveal his New England origins. He writes about Palmer and love in his new hand-written novel titled "(Sic)," published as a limited edition art book by Public Sphere. Already sold out, it is now being negotiated as a trade publication.

"(My parents) loved my book but wished I hadn't used so many swear words. Also, I named a lot of people in our hometown and my mother wishes I'd changed the names," the artist says.

Landers' family history is clearly one source for his writing. His Irish father is a policeman who also works for the phone company. Both his mother and grandmother are artists, and he learned to draw and paint from them. "I can do realistic drawing and painting, no problem," he says. "But the stuff I was making was always seen and scrutinized by them right away. So the private stuff came out in my writing--which I was showing to nobody."

Landers received his undergraduate degree from Philadelphia College of Art; then he went on to graduate studies at Yale. There, he was most impressed by the liberal arts courses. "It felt like the college experience I hadn't had."

Yale had a high-profile visiting artist program, which had the paradoxical effect of deflating Landers' expectations. "All these art personalities I'd looked up to, it was myth-breaking. You'd expect a genius and get just another normal person," he recalls.

"One teacher helped me," he continues. "An old figure-modeling teacher everybody wanted to kick out of the department who really knew how to sculpt a figure out of clay. I'd always scoffed at that notion but I was able to appreciate it more because of this visiting artist program."

Several years later, Landers began his wet-clay sculptures of casually observed characters like "Woman at K-Mart." His last show included a series of terra cotta leprechauns, undoubtedly a reference to his Irish ancestry.

"I drew for years and that's the best way to learn sculpture. Then I tried to avoid studio skills because I thought I had to be making real art," he says. "It's not like I think my work in clay is more art than the videotapes I make. It's all related. Though if I'm going through the (Metropolitan Museum of Art), I'll probably dwell more on the European paintings from the 1800s or the Greek sculpture."

Landers says he needs to write and make objects, that one activity feeds into the other. He writes about whatever comes to mind while standing with a wet brush in front of the canvas.

He doesn't edit, revise or, clearly, use a dictionary. His explicit descriptions of sexual yearning have caused critics to include him among the rosters of "bad-boy" artists for the '90s. "People confuse total honesty with being bad," Landers says. "I don't use it as a strategy to get people to look. This is how people think and it's not always pretty. It would be a facade to be politically correct in my fantasies."

*\* Sean Landers' "Thought Bubble" continues at Regan Projects, 629 N. Almont Drive, through April 9.*