

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

HYPERALLERGIC

Eggsploding the White Cube

Benjamin Sutton

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Step carefully as you enter Kate Werble Gallery. Artist Christopher Chiappa has installed 7,000 hyperrealistic sculptures of sunny-side-up eggs all over the gallery's pristine white walls, concrete floors, steel ducts, fluorescent lights, and reception desk. The resulting installation and exhibition, *Livestrong*, is simultaneously delightful and unnerving.

One, two, or even a half-dozen bright yellow eggs might evoke the quaint comforts of a greasy spoon diner, but by the thousands they can be quite ominous, like the elevators-full-of-blood scene in some breakfast-themed remake of *The Shining*. Even the show's title is double-edged, referencing the disgraced US cycling great Lance Armstrong and the millions of cheery yellow bracelets sold in his name. Like the frenzy for buying and wearing bracelets to broadcast one's charitable gestures, there's a queasy, group-think quality to Chiappa's hordes of fried eggs, like good intentions (and ingredients) hurled mindlessly at a trendy cause.

However, when you're face-to-yoke with the droves of seemingly gooey, filmy, and droopy eggs, the force of their cumulative effect is more formal than thematic. What are they made of? How long did it take to make and install 7,000 of them? Were they all handmade or does Chiappa's studio have some sort of automated fake egg assembly line? Was any gallery surface spared? The sheer how'd-he-do-that feat initially overwhelms any kind of considered analysis. (For the record, each plaster egg was cast, sanded, and painted by hand over the past five years, and installed over the course of many hours on every gallery surface save a tiny back room — where a small painting of yellow polka-dots hearkens back to the origins of Chiappa's obsession.)

The care given to each individual egg and group of merged eggs extends to the installation itself. There are no obvious patterns or discernible movements to the sculptures' choreography; here and there, a few coalesce into face-like configurations of yellow dots and darkened edges, but the overall effect is one of overwhelming randomness. Finally, the illusion's sharpness, the quasi-Surrealist totality of this bizarre and delicious disaster, may undermine Chiappa's nuanced themes of promise and disappointment — of eggs once fertile with potential fried up and cast off, and of sports icons once inspirational now shameful.

Christopher Chiappa's Livestrong continues at Kate Werble Gallery (83 Vandam Street, West SoHo, Manhattan) through January 9.