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ART IN REVIEW

Jonathan Ehrenberg: 'A Shadow as Big as a Hat'

By KAREN ROSENBERG

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Nicelle Beauchene

21 Orchard Street, between Canal and Hester Streets

Lower East Side

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In his promising New York solo debut of short videos, Jonathan Ehrenberg applies time-lapse photography and other early cinematic tricks to stage-ready myths (and modern literature with mythic overtones). His productions are performed on German Expressionist-style sets, by actors wearing papier-mâché masks reminiscent of Noh theater — and thanks to Mr. Ehrenberg's visual and narrative restraint, they're well suited to YouTube attention spans.

The minute-long video "Monument" is all scenery: a stark white lake house that splits open to reveal a collapsible forest. Trees and transfiguration also drive the seven-minute "Seed," a variation on Gogol's short story "The Nose." In Mr. Ehrenberg's version, a man losing his nose and several other body parts obtains natural prostheses from a shaman. By the end he's all plant, an Arcimboldo-like figure with branches for hands and a snowy owl in his chest cavity.

Even better is "Moth," one of two earlier works on view in the basement gallery; that work was inspired by Elizabeth Bishop's poem "The Man-Moth," which is also the source of the show's title. In it three men with insect heads explore lonely, de-Chirico-meets-Fritz-Lang cityscapes. The action includes a bawdy shadow-puppet set piece worthy of Kara Walker.

Over all, and despite their grown-up literary sources, Mr. Ehrenberg's videos have an innocuous, storybook quality. They would benefit from a bit of the wickedness invoked by Ms. Walker, Nathalie Djurberg, William Kentridge and other artists working at the nexus of fable, film and theater.