

BEST OF STAGE

L.A.'s Artaud

Stephen Holman's "Theatre Carnivale" is a zoo of the ridiculous. By Tom Murrin

Could Stephen Holman's "psychological vaudeville" be a worthy successor to Antonin Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty?" Maybe. His troupe, "Theatre Carnivale," was asked not perform at the Troupers' Green Room in Hollywood because they got too much blood on the curtain. The conservative L.A. press called them "Avant Garbage, reeking with cheap jokes, sex and violence."

"We garnered a very extreme press," Holman recalls. "The *High Performance* crowd refused to review it because they didn't consider it performance art."

The London-born Holman moved to L.A. from New York in 1987, bringing with him a strong dose of comic gore and raw theater that he explored in the East Village working as the soundman/D.J. at the now defunct 8 B.C., producing his own comic book, *No Such Thing As Monsters*, and assembling his first theatrical troupe, "Torture Chorus."

Holman is now based in L.A. where he has been earning his living by painting and cartooning. He painted 120 of the 1200 paintings used in the Beastie Boys video "Shadrach." He drew the "El Hombre" character on *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*, and recent-

ly produced and starred in a series of "bumpers" for NBC ("bumpers" are those short bits that come between the regular show and the commercials). Holman plays "P.G.M." (Perpetually Grinning Man), a combination cardboard/human character with a three-foot smile.

Holman's forthcoming show at The Kitchen is entitled: *Self-obliteration of Human Form — Part III*. He describes it as "a kind of zoo, rather than a show. All these characters, in their individual situations, are sort of in cages. The zoo analogy is carried through by the characters being dressed as animals. There are cows, rabbits, chickens, and dogs in the cast. Also there's a band of pigeons in a giant nest."

The cast includes San Francisco painter David West and L.A. actress Donita Sparks. Kris Force and Bond Bergland, dressed as pigeons, will provide the music.

According to Holman, the show is "a surreal expose of the human condition and the complex web of disguises we use to conceal that fact from ourselves." Sounds like Artaud to me.

"Theatre Carnivale," at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th St., Thurs-Sun., Dec. 6 to 9, 8:30 p.m. ★