

ARTFORUM

Mark Mothersbaugh

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART DENVER (MCA DENVER)

1485 Delgany Street

October 30–April 5

When Kent State shut down after the 1970 shootings, art students Mark Mothersbaugh and Gerald Casale were locked out of their studios and made music at home. They later named their band DEVO, short for “de-evolution,” their term for all the ways the world was falling apart. In collages from the ’70s displayed here, like those in his artist’s book *My Struggle, Booji Boy*, 1977, Mothersbaugh appropriates and disfigures bodies and texts from scientific illustrations, bra ads, and cult screeds. They all seem to be saying the same thing: “This is America, and it is strange!”

Installed across three floors, this exhibition documents Mothersbaugh’s perverse productivity as a writer, draftsman, sculptor, performer, and composer, starting with his avant-garde origins—DEVO’s first performance on a program with Stan Brakhage—and ending with his musical compositions for Wes Anderson’s films and for Peewee’s *Playhouse*. After seven galleries of works in every imaginable medium, the show ends on a surprisingly focused note with a dimly lit gallery full of photo albums, where visitors can flip through the thirty thousand postcards that Mothersbaugh has covered with text and images over the past forty years. One is a simple vintage photo postcard, *Untitled*, 2006, depicting a young girl. The artist used a marker to partially cover her head with what looks like inner tubes or a snake. It’s silly, touching, and elegant. Browsing through the albums, one might wonder where this prolific talent fits in art history or whether this even matters. As opposed to the other rooms, where music videos and concert footage provide constant background noise, the only sound here is that of album pages turning. It’s a hushed, archival conclusion to a thrilling and exuberant show.

— Patrick Greaney



Mark Mothersbaugh, *Untitled*, 2006, ink and marker on vintage postcard, 3 1/2 x 5 1/2".