

## Mock Bocks in Box



German artist **John Bock** has designed 30 doll-like effigies as a serial self-portrait that he describes as a book, called *Howdy Bamington*. Since much of Bock's art incorporates his own face, a self-portrait made sense when publisher **Christophe Daviet-Thery** asked him to put together a publication. But the idea of something as literal as a printed book felt too ordinary for the prankster artist. At one preparatory meeting in Berlin, Bock "came in with a bike, and on the seat I saw just the head of a puppet sticking out of a plastic bag. He put it on the table and said, 'This is my project,'" recounts Daviet-Thery, who published *Howdy Bamington* earlier this year.

Bock's 30 puppets are all unique, but they are bound together by a shared theme and format. At 16 inches tall, each doll wears a similar outfit—white collared shirt, dark knickerbockers, red

shoulder bag—and carries a cloth scroll (the most straightforward connection to the book concept). The scrolls are embroidered with mysterious hieroglyphics written in an indecipherable made-up language.

The puppets' outfits, which Bock created with the help of his tailor, vary in the details: each has different fabrics, buttons, and threads. And all the dolls wear ski masks with dangling tendrils fashioned in a riot of textures, patterns, and colors, equal parts playful and stylish. (A cartoon rendition of Bock's face peeks out from behind the masks.)

Bock's puppets, which were displayed at New York's Third Streaming gallery last month, are priced from €1,500 to €2,500 per figure. Each arrives in its own handcrafted wooden crate made in Bordeaux. Who says a group of dolls can't be a book?

—Kyle Chayka

John Bock's *Howdy Bamington*, 2011. The artist considers the series of dolls both a self-portrait and a book.