“Feelings,” British artist Martin Creed’s first retrospective in North America, was noisy, chaotic, hyperactive, circular, funny, stupid, clever, provocative, elegant, and annoying—all of which qualifies the show with the sensitivity alluded to by the title. Creed’s verbal and visual jokes, far from simply describing physical sensations or emotional states, often mark the distance between a basely informed nonconformist and general allusions to intimate personal experience.

Presented in two concurrent parts at Bard College’s Center for Curatorial Studies (CCS), along with a two-week Manhattan component called “Small Things,” installed in a Chelsea parking lot, the show featured a few early works—a pair of unsmiling paintings, a model of brass sculpture, and an early neon—that give no hint of the richness to come. Most of the work was recent and included drawing, painting, sculpture, installation, performance, video, sound, outdoor projects—and music, if we count the opening-night performance by the artist and his band. In the Heald Museum, the new wing of the CCS, Creed (in conjunction with the curator, Trevor Smith) selected an eclectic mix of art from the institution’s permanent collection to install alongside his own, illustrating a dialogue with influences and noting or establishing other resources along the way.

Work No. 136, 2007, consisting of the word texturized spelled out in tiny inch-high neon letters, was paired with a ceriseous George Baselitz painting, From am Sonnabend, 1981, and read, by comparison, as ironically sterile. Bruce Nauman’s video, Violin Twin D.E.A. D., 1968, in which the artist stands with his back to the camera and repetitively draws a bow across a violin’s strings, underscored Creed’s absorption with the body, movement, and sound, as well as his slightly warped sense of humor. Equally apt was the deadpan absurdism of John Baldessari’s video Teaching a Plant the Alphabet, 1973, veering

from lightness to a decided dourness sensibility, Creed paired his Work No. 264: Two projections from a wall, 2001, with John Corin’s Big Baby, 1993, a portrait of a young woman with grotesquely large breasts. There is plenty of adolescent energy in Creed’s art, and it underwrites his interest in gross-out material. Work No. 600, 2006, an abiding video projection, shows a woman defecating. In Work No. 666, 2006, a woman seems convulsively, There’s also a nice piece: Work No. 668, 2006, that sounds like farting.

The sound of the retrospective was as flatulent, but never lacked for edge. In order to enter and exit the Heald Museum, visitors were directed to walk through Work No. 633: Half the air in a given room, 2001, a woman vacuuming the floor with white balloons. The room reverberated with sounds trapped throughout the exhibition, some with the assistance of a basic form of apparatus who performed various actions: keeping a balloon inflated, for one thing, sending up mantis, and literally running around (Work No. 170, 2006, in fact, consists of “people running”). The infamous Work No. 128: Lights, paper and off, 1993 (which generated much public attention as part of Creed’s Turner Prize show in 2001) in 2004 for its perceived emperor’s new clothes quality) only added to the madness.

Across the action from the Heald Museum in the CCS galleries, Work No. 142, Thirty-nine monochrome objects, each at every speed, 1993–98, is rearchived continually while Work No. 122, 1999, blazed, as clarified by its subtitle: “All the sounds made by a drum machine over the volume in their given order, in a space where the piece lasts for one minute.” Launched to vore the aforementioned sounds of fusing and waving, a snapper of events, and much more.

Besides the foreboding arrogance evident in gestures so simian as to call into question their value as art—Work No. 79: Some Black-Handed Squirrel, rolled into a ball, and Depressed against a wall, 1993—but example—there were extended quiet moments. Mose-Kleis’ works on paper produced by simply filling the air with matter or highpieces we’re barely throughout the exhibition, as were a number of space-looking pencil drawings. Both were the site of beauty, of focus, and the meditative act of marking and re-marking a spot. All of them are files of a certain way, but related to their differences.}\n
—Jean Duplaix