

GHEBALY

PATRICK JACKSON





POPPIES IN JULY

BY SABRINA TARASOFF



"There's a lot of life going here. I wanted to believe and I tried my damndest to believe in the rainbow that I tried to get over and I couldn't. *SO WHAT!*"
—Judy Garland

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Dorothy sighs, gazing across the poppy field at the shimmering Emerald City, assuming that the Wiz must be a really stellar guy if he lives like that, and feeling preemptively positive about having finally arrived, because after all they've been through on the brick road, how hard will it be to get through a [deadly] poppy field? Can't get to their final destination fast enough, so they run, the Tin Man and Scarecrow in the lead calling come on—come on—come on—hurry—*hurry*—as though they are unfashionably late to an appointment, and to one in *Emerald City* of all places, *quelle faux pas!* Dorothy sprints, staggers in her ruby slippers, then slows to throw a heavy hand against her head so as to say she can't run anymore, she's so—

—*sleepy.*

Dorothy lies down among the little hell flames, stilling clumsy hysteria into a cohort who can't quite grasp what she did that for, even as it dawns on them all, as the Lion empathically accompanies her into an involuntary nap of his own, that all this exhaustion has an eldritch sheen to it. (The instrumentals intensify; it's the Wicked Witch's doing!) There is no solution to their somnolent setback. Neither wailing nor ailing will make Dorothy or the Lion budge or bestir themselves. Stammering, frightened, without a clue as to how to proceed, the Tin Man and the Scarecrow come to typify the sense of anti-heroism—what Salman Rushdie called their "apparent lack of Great Qualities"—that makes the gang so relatable. Placing aside the moral of the story—"that we already possess what we seek most fervently"¹—here all the quartet's creative solutions (read: heart, head, courage, wonder) turn into deadly fatigue, panic, and anxiety. The glimmering delusion of the chlorophyll castle—the delusion of some psycho-aesthetic home and its infinite bounty—risks being pushed up with the daisies, or poppies, or whatever. Think of it as a Plathian splash of self-exhaustion, or the exhaustion of self-discovery:

And it exhausts me to watch you
Flickering like that, wrinkly and clear red, like the skin of a mouth.²

That field of poppies is not only the obligatory last stretch every fairy tale needs to make the feat feel worth it and the victory well deserved. It is also about being seduced by the sinful perfumeries of sleep, or, to stretch one's imagination, to savor, like Marcel Proust (!) "the last shreds of sleep, that is to say the only source of invention, the only novelty that exists in story-telling, since none of our narrations in the waking state, even when embellished with literary graces, admit those mysterious differences from which beauty derives."³ (Come to think of it, maybe L. Frank Baum had *The Captive* in mind when writing this scene, given that Proust's next lines precaution how "easy it is to speak of the beauty created by opium.") That Dorothy can sleep, maybe dream, and certainly die is a cruel reminder of Oz's actuality; ...or the sometimes fatal impact of following your dreams; ...or something to the effect of fantasy's capacity to pry you out of being; ...or maybe just seriously question it. What would have become of Dorothy if they'd simply left her lying there comatose? Would she fall through the field into an Oz beyond the poppies? Or would she sleep on and on, as the witch warned, subject to a fate worse than death—not quite there, yet exempt of a subconscious? Recall the iconic shot of Dorothy recumbent in the "bloody skirts"⁴ of the field, and note the unyielding blankness of her expression. Whatever's happening in her half-dead head dazzles at the surface yet denies us access to an interior. Where is she? Away with the fairies, or witches, or poison opiates? The story is put through the centrifuge of sleep. Back in blah-Kansas the message is clear:

"It wasn't a dream, it was a place! A real, truly live place!"

What unsettles the most is the adults' refusal to acknowledge this "place" as a "place." As Ellen Handler Spitz has written on the psychology of fairy tales, "We accept irrational elements of faerie and its enchantments in the same way we acknowledge that parts of our minds are unconscious—unknown and unknowable—and yet very much *there*, extant, real, true, significant."⁵ Considering how much time I spend in my head, the psyche sometimes feels more reliable than any room I could occupy; the mind is my miniature dollhouse to test out all kinds of mad theories. To this end, Dorothy going lights-out in the poppies is a final attempt to refuse the conventional idea of home. What we are to take from her slumber is the novel idea that the imagined world could become so real, it might just take you out. Or, to pursue an even scarier and more sublime thought, our inner spaces might just have enough valence to get us where we want to be.

Anyway, I never bought MGM's rewriting of the finale, that now-iconic denouement where the whole bedazzled spectacle of self-discovery ends with those ruby heels click-clacked to the tack of a sentimental, conservative slogan, only for Dorothy to land back in a dead-end, grayscale life plagued by the patronizing rejection of her grand tour through

1. Salman Rushdie, "Revisiting 'The Wizard of Oz,'" *New Yorker*, May 11, 1992, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1992/05/11/out-of-kansas>.

2. Sylvia Plath, "Poppies in July," in *Ariel* (New York: Harper and Row, 1992), 81.

3. Marcel Proust, "The Captive and the Fugitive," vol. 5 of *In Search of Lost Time* (New York: Random House, 1993), 157.

4. Sylvia Plath, "Poppies in July," 81.

5. Ellen Handler Spitz, "The Irresistible Psychology of Fairy Tales," *New Republic*, December 28, 2015, <https://newrepublic.com/article/126582/irresistible-psychology-fairy-tales>.

Munchkinland. In Baum's order of things, Dorothy goes back to Oz on multiple occasions, and is eventually crowned princess. As Handler Spitz puts it, "This, in other words, is 'truth' as a form of resistance to convention, a reversal of expectations: truth as social protest and as dreams come true."⁶ To Dorothy, whether Oz was a dream or not is beside the point. Like the "mysterious differences" Proust found in his sleep states, Oz rattled itself into existence. Even if it had been an entirely fantastical figment of Dorothy's imagination, she believes with childish wonder in this better place, its depth and color, its inspired embrace of dreams, hope, and slight horror (while learning something about the "half unbeautiful"⁷ concept of self, frailty included). And so it becomes an actuality. No, not only that—it becomes *home*. Cue Rushdie, cool dude:

"Over the Rainbow" is, or ought to be, the anthem of all the world's migrants, all those who go in search of the place where "the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true." It is a celebration of Escape, a grand paean to the Uprooted Self, a hymn—the hymn—to Elsewhere.⁸

To Elsewhere! (From here on, my new *salute*.) Rushdie's take is a consolation to my own uprootedness, although the caprice of living as a part of the precariat, in search of stability and subtleties, lost time, hardly feels like chasing dreams. More like chasing my own rather onerous inexistence by being glamorously unhoused—and this mostly as metaphor to match the immaterial conditions of contemporary living. Not only Dorothy but a real live therapist has me convinced that the mind is a—is like a²—set of interiors, a home, which like all spaces impels the occasional escape, or alternately compels to reclusion, and like some spaces will move you from one place to another within the confines of whatever psychological shelter it has to offer. It's a cop-out way of providing security, but I'll gladly take it. I'd happily imagine myself as part of a script happening elsewhere, and just as easily as fate and magic are accepted as causal in most faeries, acquiesce to my own unsettled narratives, because:

if we take that point of view, we can understand that our vulnerability or susceptibility stems from a persistence in the mind of a receptivity we had when all the world was new. Fairy tale carries us back to the primordial kind of attention, the attention we gave the world when everything was "for the first time." . . . The narrative will be disjunctive, lacking formal reason, yet filled with all that truly matters: filled with what was seen, heard, tasted, touched, smelled, felt.⁹

Which pretty much sums up my state of mind after a few months spent hopping around the Eurozone in search of mythic Julie Becker experiences at the ICA London, picking bouquets of wild rose for Finnish midsummer magic, writing (or trying to write) during a residency *elsewhere* in France, while watching the "art scene" go by from afar like a little cloud I'd be hard pressed to guess the shape of. Here's what went down: chronic fatigue, satanic panic, *decreation*, alien abductions, Fragonard, mass media, *malheur*, i.e. bad happiness, deflation, Grimes & Elon Musk, a rejection of cynicism, *coups* of rosé, psychosomatic illness, paranoid plots, something about the Russians, naps in the grass and vague multiple personality disorder. I discovered who I could drink under the table, and also who I could not. Found cause to recover memories, mainly via Proust, who taught me of sleep's somber magic in absentia. Etched into mind was a workshopped diagram about contemporary writing conditions post-Kraus, with the words "total anxiety" and "delusion" scribbled on opposite ends. At that point, I figured I'd switch from reading auto-fiction to fairy tales because at least the latter owned up its fictitiousness.

But *basta!* Summer's over: a whole writing residency went by in playful, stuporous (which Pages keeps autocorrecting to "stupider," and who am I to refute that) discovery—by which I mean endless evenings of delectably cheap talk, bequeathed Anne Boyer read for the sheer pleasure of reading, while languidly waving a *bonjour* to *tristesse* in states of Jane Bowles—ey writing distress, and as my fellow resident Max Grau put it: "I only used the word 'neoliberal' like one or two times." (!!) A wicked mess of World Cup rowdiness and the exquisite pleasure of being away. The terms "displacement" and "projection" came up quite often courtesy of my pal Adam Stamp, whose soft-focus Hollywood visions made their imaginative leap into the French countryside by way of "four displacements and one projection," as he put it. A series of four drawings drafted in the image of floral arabesques found on peeling wallpapers in one of the Treignac apartments, and a fifth of imaginary—and off-the-record—wall-pinnings, the dislocations migrated patterns from their original rooms to mismatch with others while the "projection" externalized the psyche-as-décor.

On one hand, these tiny drawings on Treignac letterhead appeared from the vulnerable charms of being in an unfamiliar city, which as Louis-Ferdinand Céline once wrote, is a "fine thing . . . the time and place when you can suppose that all

6. Ibid.

7. Salman Rushdie, "Revisiting 'The Wizard of Oz.'"

8. Ibid.

9. Ellen Handler Spitz, "The Irresistible Psychology of Fairy Tales."



Julie Becker, *Suburban Legend*, 1999, *I must create a Master Piece to pay the Rent*
installation view at The Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 2018.
Courtesy: Greene Naftali, New York. Photo: Mark Blower



Julie Becker, *Transformation and Seduction* (stills), 1993/2000.
Courtesy: Greene Naftali, New York





Above and below - Patrick Jackson, *KNOW YER CITY*, 2017, *Scripts for the Pageant (Part 1)* installation views at Kristina Kite Gallery, Los Angeles, 2018. Organized by Nancy Lupo. Courtesy: Kristina Kite Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Jeff McLane



Opposite - Oto Gillen, *New York*, 2015-2017, *Scripts for the Pageant (Part 1)* installation views at Kristina Kite Gallery, Los Angeles, 2018. Organized by Nancy Lupo. Courtesy: Kristina Kite Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Jeff McLane

the people you meet are nice.”¹⁰ It’s dream time, he says, and moves to equate feelings of foreignness with a creative mastery over your own life. On the other hand, Stamp’s bemused patterns also refer back to an origin. They batten the desire to be displaced with a reconciliation that there is no place *like* home because home can be “anywhere—and everywhere—except the place from which we began.”¹¹ Like so, the elsewhere gains merit as a half-formed thought about ourselves, a surface that can become our double.

Despite eventually immersing so deep into foreign experience that my whole self felt like a figment of the imagination, no fabled accounts nor worlds of faerie, not even a tall tale, was brought back in writing—but a sense of “self” forged out of the residency’s paratactic pace. (Like any fairy tale, this essay is just one version in an ongoing negotiation of what meaning I should prise out of it all; it’s an attempt to fill in the negative spaces in some midsummer storyline). Back in reality, and who ever thought I’d call Los Angeles “the real,” I found a most apposite lesson incanted by the fairy godmother of fantasy lit. crit., Marina Warner. In *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (1994), she writes:

The store of fairy tales, that blue chamber where stories lie waiting to be rediscovered, holds out the promise of just those creative enchantments, not only for its own characters caught in its own plotlines; it offers magical metamorphoses to the one who opens the door, who passes on what was found there, and to those who hear what the storyteller brings. The faculty of wonder, like curiosity can make things happen; it is time for wishful thinking to have its due.¹²

Once in a while, my newly discovered primordial attention span would latch onto glimmering tidbits of news, like *Scripts for a Pageant*, an exhibition put together by Nancy Lupo at Los Angeles’s Kristina Kite. Tripping on its own syntax, Lupo’s “organiz-ization” skips across eerie reformulations of an American political landscape. Certainly not the Technicolor Oz Dorothy drew us into, the exhibition still offers magical metamorphoses to those who wonder through it. (Imagine a dream where you’re stuck somewhere between Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* and the deadly poppy field). Crash land into the unremittingly hellish waiting room of Patrick Jackson’s political imaginary, then slip past its thick curtains to Oto Gillen’s photo-roman *New York* (2015–17) to see what invisible forces move the metropolis over a period of two years. In *Know Yer City* (2017) Jackson is preoccupied by props, facades, fronts, fakes, masks, and veneers, or to put it differently, the giant heads and hot air of showbiz. They fall on the deaf ears of state, think Proust: “For the... curtains listened to them without replying, but in an attitude such as people adopt who shrug their shoulders and raise their eyebrows to indicate that the sight of a third person irritates them.”¹³ Behind the bombast, we come across the city’s double in Gillen’s projection. One is not necessarily a representation of the other, but rather the two New Yorks are like two versions of the same story: “historically bound but highly idiosyncratic.”¹⁴ (In fact, the giant heads propped in *Know Yer City* were sourced from billboards in East L.A., making it a false cognate). Cause for something like, hmm, wishful thinking that the former wasn’t so intricately coupled with its counterpart in the reel “real”—that in fact, like MGM’s studio city “Kansas,” it would be more unreal than real, more unrealistically powerful.

Beyond the curtain’s austere curl hides another small surreality: a bright bouquet that changes each successive week, or such was the intention, courtesy of Alex Da Corte. Sent along with cryptic epistles like “because I eat a lot of werewolves” or “zzzzzzzzzz,” the flowers lured the viewer out of the exhibition’s urban sprawl into more fabled realms. Though the flower comes off with the fixity of an archetype, its visual language is fluid and shape-shifting. Call it a part of ad culture’s subliminal messages, that is, the malappropriation of man and his symbols; call it courtship’s illusions or A Horse By A Different Color You’ve Heard Of—the blossoms provided the most obvious earthly “magic,” prone to the exquisite changes of decay, and shifting on Da Corte’s whim, their meaning stayed unfixed in form. A rose is not a rose, princesses are witches, bouquets become poetic props. (Rumor has it that during a reading organized as a part of the exhibition by Andrew Durbin, an invited poet used the final bouquet as an unsuspecting *point d’appui*).

After missing all of the summer’s scheduled events, I managed to catch the last of Da Corte’s sporadic bouquets in situ: a cloud of lavender roses tucked shyly away on a table. According to my Victorian flower guide, the enchanted hue is said to symbolize the mystery and quick-witted witchcraft of first love. Their recipient is asked to see the sender and/or existence with wide-eyed innocence, as though for the first time. Too late to make a claim for my virtue, all I can say is that the bouquet all but carries the emotional weight of the exhibition; it knocks you out cold and renders possible the leap *elsewhere*.

Given that America’s collective id has unleashed a rather dark fairy tale, pushing magical, wishful thinking and wicked dreams as a part of a political agenda probably goes against all didascal logic out there. But whatever: no one questioned Joan Didion when in the throes of grief she wrote her disquisition on fantastical causal relationships, shutting us all up with the simple line, “We tell ourselves stories to survive.” Disneyfication of grim tales aside, no one questions what makes no pretense to be part of the real.

10. Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Journey to the End of the Night* (London: Alma Classics, 2012), 329.

11. Salman Rushdie, “Revisiting ‘The Wizard of Oz.’”

12. Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994).

13. Marcel Proust, *Swann’s Way* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), 717.

14. Ellen Handler Spitz, “The Irresistible Psychology of Fairy Tales.”

Au contraire, what goes away with the fairies is veiled in an enchanting lack of detail, and so catches interest by pointing to what it lacks.

My summer reading tells me that these spellbound blank slates attract because of their projective valence (which is applied to adult life via its sticky cognate, the more psychoanalytic “projective identification”), which is pushed ahead like sheer fascination, curiosity, and wonder by simple questions like *why?* Or, for that matter, the also wonderful *how’s*, *where’s*, *whom’s*, *whicholwich*—the wicked witch!—*wiζζerdovotζ*, *wiζζovawiζζ*... What?

In my work I try to mimic the process of how we think and how we integrate ourselves into the world so that we can see without impediments. Locations taken out of books and movies, characters abstracted from real life, all of them interact within these walls and invite the viewer to travel with them. I hope that my work moves people—from one place to another! The viewer, by way of being in the installation, becomes a character too.¹⁵

Turn a final page to Julie Becker, as quoted here in Ali Subotnik’s 2009 book *Nine Lives: Visionary Artists From L.A.* Becker kept coming up all summer as someone who paid attention to the world on faerie terms. With glittering imagery and golden auras, shiny surfaces, woodland wanderers, (magic) mirrors, bedrooms, and pillow books, she made more leaps than Dorothy between the “real, truly live places” within her head and their counterparts in a cultural imaginary. Characters like Kay Thompson’s Eloise at the Plaza (1955) and Danny from *The Shining* (1980) are puzzles Becker felt drawn to solve; she made their inner lives appear *ex machina* like Glinda descending in her sparkling bubble. This summer, some forty of her better-known works were on display in a frail survey titled *I must create a Master Piece to pay the Rent* at London’s Institute of Contemporary Arts. Curated by Richard Birkett and Stefan Kalmár, the exhibition moved through Becker’s disjunctive logic as it found odd cognates within a realm of imagery that defies common, ordinary sense. Her work is made with the dazzle and force of a girl emboldened by bejeweled shoes to follow a path of pure fiction—fiction that promises to lead to a version of truth. But where to look?

—such providence!—but *The Wizard of Oz*? In *Suburban Legend* (1999), Becker claims title as another possible princess-auteur of the story-land. She invites us—Elsewhere!—along with Dorothy, straight into that realm of sparkling fairies and wicked heels, gales of orange smoke striking against all those gem-tones and distilled scents—ah! (So fabulous). Taking the stoner myth that mashes Oz against Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon*, Becker keeps us on course with all the synchronicities between the two, leaving a remote control for fast-forwarding to chosen eerie moments; think Dorothy letting the poppies’ sleepy liquors seep into her while “On the Run” knocks you out with its manic whirls. Certainly, confirmation bias kicks in quickly when given all the cues to look at something a certain way—full of surprise, controlled delight and quelled doubt—especially when the patterns defy logic, or connections seem arbitrary if there to begin with. We are beckoned to conspire with these false coherences: Call it a dispossession of the real. Call it the surrealistically unreal. Call it a fairy truth found in the volte-face of expectation—*Suburban Legend* twins its twisted inward journeys so as to sanction the spirited off, all uncharted realms, and invented spectacles. She moves to you to believe in that fragile fantasy of “self,” or at least a version thereof, though most importantly it does not come without admonition: “I wasn’t sure it was possible, but I remember standing in front of my window looking out at the city around five in the morning when I became transfixed by the connections of elements all round me. I challenged myself to create this experience. Now it’s in bits and pieces and scattered all about. I didn’t have enough to keep going, and it all came tumbling down.”¹⁶

Seated at a weathered picnic table, a resident asked if I had learned anything in life. *Quelle horreur*: imagine being zonked out in the sun, squinting away any or all fragility associated with whatever exists outside of your bubble, only to be confronted with a casual parlor-game-esque question about what you’ve done with your twenty-seven years. No rosé, no sunlight, babbling brook, and thickets of birch trees (hiding youngsters on benches orally servicing each other, nonetheless) could halt the trembling. I froze over with a question in return: What about this summer? Catching my drift, he said: “That life exists. Elsewhere.”

15. Ali Subotnik, “Julie Becker,” in *Nine Lives: Visionary Artists from L.A.* (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, 2009), 31.



Photo: Sabrina Tarasoff

16. *Ibid.*, 32–33.

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ARTFORUM



View of "Patrick Jackson," 2018. Photo: Gil Gentile.

Patrick Jackson

GHEBALY GALLERY

Starting with its title, Patrick Jackson's summer exhibition "DUM MUD" was a palindrome. Typeset on the invitation in large, bubbly letters dripping like cartoon blood (or perhaps more obviously like mud), the made-up word established the tone—and material—of the show. Palindromes are, after all, allegorical representations that upend the linear sequence of language and, in so doing, ping-pong time, focusing a reader's attention equally on the form and the meaning of a word.

Staged "off-site" in the artist's one-bedroom apartment, this unconventional exhibition invited visitors to come off a residential Los Angeleno street and into the amber glow of the artist's living room, where orange gels coated the windows, painting a perpetual sunset, a Vegas hour. The apartment stood eerily vacant, the sparse items of furniture having been pushed against the walls. Thin bamboo blinds, dark wood paneling, and crimson carpeting struck the nostalgic tone of a certain generation's childhood. The artist, like a fixture, was always present, contained by his own fiction, acclimated to the space, hostage to the open hours. Covering just a few rooms, the walk-through was paced to offer the viewer the terrifyingly convincing impression of having stumbled into someone else's subconscious, a B-horror-film sequence in which the screen had swallowed her whole and the grisly parts were still to come.

A few reliefs protruded from the paneling, their molds carved in clay but cast in plaster, the pale and brittle material contrasting with its dark, shadowy support. Each work represented some combination of grotesquely enlarged body parts: teeth, bumpy and undulating skin, bug eyes, droopy breasts, and two soles reminiscent of Andrea Mantegna's *Lamentation of Christ*, ca. 1480, a painting whose gruesome angle foreshortened its scene from the vantage point of the corpse's feet.

At the far end of the living room, the bathroom exerted a powerful pull. It was empty and likewise filtered; its brightness beckoned, and, increasingly, the apocalyptically deep blaze of this hot light seemed to imply an uncomfortable proximity to the sun behind the thin membrane of the glass window. In fact, the opaqueness of the glass, compounded by the muffled aural details of the exterior, implanted the irrational fear that this soundstage-like space might have been suddenly severed from the world.

Around the corner, a tightly made bed was covered with a deep brown duvet, generic and prop-like. Across from it, the room's closet was left ajar to reveal an upscale, fetishistic display of mirrored shelves—out of place in the otherwise modest and unexceptional bedroom—on which rested a series of brightly colored shoe-shaped ceramic works. The comically oversized, tactile objects were coated with cracked glaze, crushed seashells, resin, and paint chunks, resembling clusters of microorganisms clinging to worn leather. The mirrors above and below facilitated a perverted gaze into their orifices, in which things seemed to grow—an infinite ecosystem of the synthetic and organic. This hall of mirrors of worlds and their refractions was polytemporal, much like the multidirectionality of the exhibition's title.

Almost all the objects in this show were new, yet they sampled from a vocabulary Jackson has cultivated over time, enhancing the sense of world building. Indeed, losing oneself in the reflection of those ceramic microcosms while in the hushed standstill of the apartment's unnerving glow, one felt a sense of deep remove. The allegory of the cave is arguably palindromic in that it proposes the human condition as bound to experiences that are in turn filtered by the senses. And since the senses are the wheelhouse of art, shows like this make the case for art and culture's capacity not only to mirror reality but also to be one. It is, in fact, a case for the potential of aggregated objects, however "dum," to create something greater than their parts.

Works of fantasy, science fiction, and horror often have been employed as parables for social conditions, but in this instance the proposition itself was more monstrous: It created a fiction as an impermeable reality, an insular and self-referential world that effectively divorced its viewer from the exterior. At this heated hour, it should be noted that, in order to achieve this separation, the artist very intentionally vacated the institution.

— *Lauren Mackler*

The Object of the City

Eli Diner on the art of Patrick Jackson

Where the most ambiguous activities of the living are pursued, the inanimate may sometimes catch a reflection of their most secret motives: our cities are thus peopled with unrecognized sphinxes, which will not stop the musing passer-by and ask him mortal questions. But if in his wisdom he can guess them, then let him question them, and it will still be his own depths which, thanks to these faceless monsters, he will once again plumb.

— Louis Aragon, *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926)

Lined with loading docks and blunt one- and two-story buildings, Mirasol Street, south of Olympic Boulevard, is a row of small manufacturers — sweatshops and workshops for metal plating, LED lighting and women's apparel. The facades are windowless; on a few you can see where someone, at some point, having deemed windows problematic, decided to block them out. I wouldn't want to make too much of this scene — a world of activity (and of course exploitation, *always* exploitation) behind bricked-over windows; disjunction between inside and out; goods produced on an anonymous street in LA's Boyle Heights dispersed into the ornamentation of the life of the city, of another city — but General Brite Plating Company seems to want me to. General Brite's building is brick and stucco painted a pale earth tone, but its website is a small marvel, a hackneyed hymn to teeming urban life. The landing page swoons with time-lapse scenes of Los Angeles at night — the glittering skyscrapers of downtown, cars coursing through the 2nd Street Tunnel and circling the illuminated pylons at LAX, the pedestrian crowds along Hollywood Boulevard and the Santa Monica Promenade — set to languid strings and piano, which I've learned comes from the soundtrack to the TV show *Lost*. General Brite dreams a nocturnal Los Angeles, not that of film noir, but nevertheless framed by Hollywood. Glimmering and smooth, it's a city where nothing is made; things are always already in motion.

On the other side of Mirasol from General Brite is a building that houses a couple dozen artist studios, and there Patrick Jackson (b. 1979, US) showed me some of the work for "Know Yer City," the show he was preparing for the Wattis Institute in San Francisco. He gave me a tour of the model he'd made for the exhibition, the space divided twice by fabric partitions, spanning the width of the room, suspended from above and scrunched into accordion folds, while faces lined the two long walls of the gallery. Needless to say, viewing things in miniature, with a God's-eye view, is not the same as being there, but as the show was built on the play of interiority and exteriority, the dollhouse version seemed oddly appropriate, like both prospectus and punch line. That titular directive to know your city has something of the impossible about it, hints that the city is, after all, unknowable. Because it's *your* city — or *yours* — which means not only that it's necessarily partial, but also that it's the one carried around in your head, composed of appearances and countless memories, of threadbare or half-remembered myths, scenes from a million movies about this place. It is a dream object, at once shared and unsharable.

"Know Yer City" — it is also an anagram of New York City, which is not where the work was made nor where the artist lives, but it does feature in the show. Jackson created the partitions by stitching together theater backdrops depicting New York — a staging of the city as a composite image. The accordion folds, however, transform these painted canvases from backdrops into something closer to theater curtains. So we have a reversal — from setting to cover, back to front — that skips over the drama itself, elides substance and subject. In a more literal sense, the folds make the images on the backdrop-curtains illegible — at least they do in the model. I suspect the effect will be the same in real life.

Los Angeles appears in the other two components of the exhibition. There are a dozen five-by-seven-foot

*Previous page:
Joints (detail; 2016)
Courtesy the Artist
and Ghebaly Gallery,
Los Angeles
Photography by
Jeff McLane*



This page:
 "The Third Floor"
 Installation view at Ghebaly
 Gallery, Los Angeles (2013)
 Courtesy the Artist
 and Ghebaly Gallery,
 Los Angeles
 Photography by
 Robert Wedemeyer

Next page:
 Tchotchke Stacks (2010)
 Courtesy the Artist
 and Ghebaly Gallery,
 Los Angeles

segments cut from used billboard vinyl, stretched like canvas, each with a human face looking straight ahead. Previously they all dotted the landscape of the Southland. They range in framing from head-and-shoulders to top-of-the-head-lopped-off close-up, and the group is racially diverse and split pretty evenly between men and women. Evidently, a few of these faces belong to B-list celebrities, but I couldn't identify any of them, and neither could Jackson. Thus anonymized and decontextualized, they form a kind of serial photography of the face, not unlike that of several familiar genres — yearbook, headshot, mug shot — while testifying to the banality of diversity in advertising. Whatever distinct signification we see in, say, the stoic black male youth or the menacing bearded white guy, the overall effect of this typology of countenances is, more than anything, the surface and texture of urban experience.

The final piece consists of a series of black-and-white photographs either documenting public sculpture in Los Angeles or else depicting Jackson himself, or some part of his body, inside of his apartment. Notwithstanding the affectless photoconceptual style of the pictures, they recall an earlier, wilder work that similarly contrasted the inside of an apartment with a totemic Los Angeles exterior — Julie Becker's video *Federal Building* (2002) — a comparison that occurred to me, for obvious reasons, as I examined Jackson's model of the Wattis. Over a

soundtrack of Mexican rancheras, Becker cuts between shots of the hulking concrete California Federal building in Echo Park, which she could see from the window of her apartment, and a model of the building placed in various settings. Sometimes the model looks very much a model — as when it's being lowered through a hole in floor — but other times it can be hard to tell whether the building you're seeing is the big one or the little one, outside or in.

"Know Yer City" synthesizes a number of themes that Jackson has been working on over the past several years. Interior spaces have served for him as a metonym for the psyche, and this has sometimes translated into theatrical installations. He modeled his 2013 exhibition "The Third Floor" at Ghebaly Gallery, in Los Angeles, on Freud's tripartite structure: An upstairs superego, containing only *Black Statue* (2013), a five-foot-tall resin sculpture of a boy with gaping, empty eye sockets; a ground-floor ego, sparse and carpeted white, featuring wall-mounted ceramic works, slightly abstracted curtains and windows; and a subterranean id space with dozens of ceramic vessels of cracked black glazing and colorful oversized mugs containing psychedelic epoxy goop and resin crystals.

Jackson shared with me a collection of journal entries, going back to 2011, which was to be made into a pamphlet that would be distributed at the Wattis show.





Although he subsequently decided not to use these as part of the exhibition, they reveal a lot about his thinking. An entry from 2012 may well have been the kernel out of which “The Third Floor” grew. It discusses precisely the spatial mapping of an interior described above, though tellingly it does so under the rubric of “Notes on Public Sculpture”:

Public art is oppressive, it tells us how we should be. Think Washington, DC, other cemeteries, Rome. They’re like the superego:

“You ought to be like this.”

“You may not be like that.”

The *Psycho* house is layered like the mind: id, ego, superego / basement, main floor, top floor. Come to think of it, the mom in *Psycho* (the superego on the top floor) is a sculpture — dead, moved around and posed. And like other figurative work, it tells us what to do ... or at least it tells Norman.

The slippage from moralizing public sculpture to the psychic totality of the interior is conditioned by movies. And movies are like cities, experienced at once as shared and individuated. Jackson’s 2011 exhibition “House of Double” sounds like a film noir you can’t remember whether you’ve seen. But never mind — you’ve already internalized the tropes. Mounted in an empty two-bedroom apartment in the building where he lived, the show played on the eerily familiar. Jackson staged groupings of domestic objects in the kitchen — a cane, a wrench, a sponge, a plate — and installed in the living room a set of sculptures made of dirt and epoxy atop vintage coffee tables, though it was hard to tell which part was uglier. The bedrooms each contained a nearly identical denim-clad bearded figure, barefoot, lying on the floor, eyes closed, fingers interlaced on the stomach. Titled *Head Hands Feet* (2011), each of those eponymous parts were made in a different manner, each evoking a distinct kind of dummy. The head (silicone and hair) reminds us of something from a special effects studio, the hands (silicone) sex toys, and the feet (epoxy) mannequins.

This kind of attention to material and texture characterizes much of Jackson’s work. His ceramics have strange and captivating surfaces. Often craggy and blistered and wildly colored, as if by a child’s crayons, they possess a cartoon violence and appeal simultaneously to the optic and haptic. Otherwise, they are dull and dark, like something unearthed from an archeological dig. At the same time, his practice as likely entails the arrangement or alteration of found objects, as with most of the work in “Know Yer City” or his *Tchotchke Stacks*, vertically climbing layers of knickknacks and figurines sandwiched between sheets of glass. Yet these two approaches to sculpture might not be so different in Jackson’s case. Both seem to depend on a common attitude toward objects, something like Freud’s famous line on the origin of adult sexuality in pre-oedipal relations, that “the finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it.” Even those things we make are always contained within, and containers of, memory — whether conscious or unconscious.



In *Nadja*, André Breton hunts the flea markets of Paris in search of strange and startling objects. The city itself for him is a great repository of defamiliarizing things, not least of which is *Nadja* herself. Jackson’s project might be seen then as a search for the refamiliarizing object. The uncanny too is a trope; experiences and memories are predicted in the movies. You already know yer city.

Patrick Jackson’s exhibition “Know Yer City” opens at CCA Wattis Institute in San Francisco on June 1, 2017. It will be on view until July 29, 2017.

Eli Diner is Flash Art associate editor.

Previous page, from top: Penis Head and T.V. (2008) Courtesy the Artist and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles Photography by Jeff McLane

Eyes (2015) Courtesy the Artist and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles Photography by Jeff McLane

This page: Black Statue (2013) Courtesy the Artist and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles Photography by Robert Wedemeyer

Patrick Jackson

GHEBALY GALLERY

2245 E Washington Blvd.

June 11, 2016–July 30, 2016

While the title of Patrick Jackson's current solo exhibition, "Drawings and Reliefs," offers a seemingly straightforward description of the series of works on paper and wall-mounted sculptures on view, it also alludes to the more sensual propositions at stake for the artist: Both drawings *and* reliefs are conceived as images that appeal not exclusively to vision but also to touch.

Depicting bodily forms in surreal combinations, seventeen notebook-size drawings comprise a prelude to, and source material for, the six flesh-toned sculptures occupying the second gallery. Composed with drippy watercolors, waxy oil paint, and pen, Jackson's illustrations are sometimes narrative and sentimental—in *Box*, 2004, two forlorn figures are haunted by toothy monsters atop a steep pedestal, their fall seeming imminent—at other times, the works are menacing and confessional. In *Mouth Behind Curtain*, 2013, plump red lips with Chiclet-shaped teeth and braces float eerily behind deep-blue drapery. These folds reappear in supple relief in *Curtain*, 2016, where the fleshy, finger-thick ripples now surround an elongated neck—a form that becomes recognizable only when one walks away and looks back at the subtle shifts in the surface, where a nipple-like blip latently materializes as an Adam's apple.

Jackson cast these works in Plasticine after modeling them first in WED—Walt E. Disney—clay, an especially soft medium first developed by the eponymous animator to create more lifelike animatronics. Just as in the sculptures, where imagery is informed intimately by the artist's touch, in the drawing *Hand on Chest*, 2014, phalangeal impressions function indexically: an eerie red palm hovers above a headless torso covered in a pockmarked rash made from the artist's thumbprints. Such physical and psychic motifs circle between drawings and reliefs; grids, folds, and cuts repeat and resurface in exaggerations that ultimately imagine our bodies as malleable and incommensurable images.



Patrick Jackson, *Curtain*, 2016, Plasticine, polyurethane, epoxy, 34 x 26 1/2 x 7 1/2".

— *Olivian Cha*

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LOS ANGELES

THREE LEVELS

BY ANDREW BERARDINI



Patrick Jackson's works are crowded with things. They are throngs of objects painstakingly arranged, gutted of their (albeit feeble) emotional appeal, exploited as parts of a more encompassing endeavor. Hence the innumerable statuettes sustaining panes of glass to form elegant infinite pillars; hundreds of low-cost Atlases, upon closer inspection. Or the many types of breakfast mugs, encrusted and installed amidst the scaffolding of a basement crawlspace visitors can enter; or the rebus objects at the scene of the presumed homicide/suicide of two identical twins. Andrew Berardini has reverently pondered all the artist's settings in search of meaning, capturing murmurs on the verge of an eternally postponed confession.

"Tchotchke Stacks" installation view at Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York, 2010. Courtesy: the artist and Nicole Klagsbrun, New York

Bodies and objects, time and possibilities.

According to some, between the nothing of a single point and the infinity of all possibilities for all times there are merely ten lines, up to the tenth dimension. We cannot conceive of that which lies beyond, so we're stuck at ten. Of course there are other theories, too.

For sculpture, we have three. One working definition of sculpture is art in three dimensions. A thing in space. Plunked on a plinth, craned onto a plaza, mantled over your fireplace, we can saunter around it, maybe even pick it up, a thing intended to be viewed as such. Sculpture is our body next to its body. Our humanness next to its thingness. Artworks are effigies, made by us, stand-ins for humans more mortally fragile than their creations.

What dimension contains the animating spirit, the past history that formed it and the potential futures and desires that compel it forward, the needs that make it a thing, the complex interactions that make it a self? Perhaps it's all in the tenth, and maybe so are we. Form and concept have never been indissoluble. Bodies are things, things that are us. So is art.

Here with Patrick Jackson, we have things. Lowbrow tchotchkes and high-concept installations, mysterious bodies and hollow mannequins, heaps of mud and collections of mugs. And we have bodies. His and ours. All displayed just so.

I half-hate tchotchkes, the lowliest of sculptures. Those small decorative objects displayed, piled, arranged around certain houses. That half-hate oozes from the love I have for the things they appear to feebly mimic: icons and relics, effigies and totems, things handcrafted and carefully wrought. Objects can hold memory, inscribed or exalted with a self, a family, a civilization, histories, dreams, but tchotchkes seem like a flimsy approximation of the same: cheap and disposable, carelessly made, easily acquired, and superficially admired. Sad-faced clowns and weeping Virgins, abstracted Southwestern coyotes and smirky Texas cowboys, weepy kittens with glossed oversized eyes and white-winged angels with shit-eating grins, a busted John F. Kennedy and Michelangelo's *David* in every size, shape and color, they are invented to collect dust on doilies, to clutter and oppress, built to be broken, tossed.

Mostly it is not hate, really, but apathy. There is a dollop of sympathy too. Tchotchkes divulge a few of the tawdrier secrets about us, our families, our civilizations, though the stories they tell aren't all bad. One defensible aspect of their weakish aura is the democratization of art objects, of sculpture. Many people have something decorating their walls, an Ansel Adams print or a knock-off of Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* clustered into the framed photographs of Olan Mills staged family portraits and first day of school snapshots, so why can't things act similarly, with the same inoffensive ornamental intent? Both tchotchkes and poster art are readily found at your local Salvation Army. For some the anodyne is worse than the offensive. I would rather offend.

Mike Kelley thriftstored the core of one of his most beloved sculptures *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid*, (1987), a tapestry of hand-woven toys and afghans, a morass from a thousand grandmas for a thousand grandchildren ash-canned into the bins of the second-hand shop and recovered forever here as evidence by Kelley. Working-class people give gifts and relate and love through the making of objects, while rich folks just buy things. Kelley has often handled tchotchkes too, as the outcropping of a distinctly American psychic terrain, of a sentiment standing in for so much else. Though unlike the afghans and sock-monkeys, the tchotchkes are mass-produced. So many objects, so cheaply produced, make all objects feel somehow a little more meaningless, all human emotion a little less, to some nefarious purpose, no doubt.

Houses cluttered with cheap knickknacks are flimsy bulwarks for their owners. So many things made with so little love can't help but fail to hold back the meaninglessness that threatens to tsunami us all. It might be better if their owners' affections were instead bestowed upon living creatures, rather than these statues made to look like them, cartoonish people and generic animals, these hollow ceramic things.

Patrick Jackson employs these petty statues beloved by housefraus and sentimental sirs as pillars between perfectly stacked sheets of glass for his own endless columns. He Brancused a handful of glass sheets in an earlier installation, *A City Unborn* (2008), odd items resting on glass surfaces alongside the Romanian's iconic and theoretically interminable repeating shapes. For these columns, all other merits or considerations have been emptied out of his trinkets; they are as purely new and totally modern as those interlocking diamonds of the *Endless Column* (1935-38). They are judged purely by their strength and

size, the glass uniting them into sculptures. Haim Steinbach's shelved displays make an easy reference, though Jackson doesn't do it to uncover the hidden meanings of the objects, but to erase them. Displayed so, they can't help but appear as purely commercial, contained and clean and likely for sale. All those things and all that glass. The French don't call it *lèche-vitrine* for nothing.

By removing all meaning but their size and structural durability, Jackson runs the risk of sucking away the one thing tchotchkes had going for them: that they were loved by people. As much as I don't care for tchotchkes, I care for others. My mother keeps tchotchkes. The boundary between the person and her things is blurry. I would as soon mock one of them to her as I would her.

Accompanying their inaugural display however, Jackson made a poster that quietly revealed and redeemed. Above the announcement of the artist, the gallery, the fair, two cartoon characters from the Simpsons stand side by side: the thick, ponytailed comic-book dealer and the insidious oligarch Mr. Burns. Each has a long, well-written speech talk-bubbled above. The comics dealer states that these tchotchke stacks make "an exceptional prop for a contemporary Dario Argento film, used to first foreshadow, and ultimately to execute, the untimely and gruesome death of a beautiful young thrift store clerk." Mr. Burns replies, "Cats, dogs, various forms of hugs and other signs of love—the perfect decorations for some drone's cubicle. Dust collecting representations of hopes and dreams won't fill in for anything their hollow lives lack. However, the one tchotchke titled 'bundle of joy' is rather endearing."



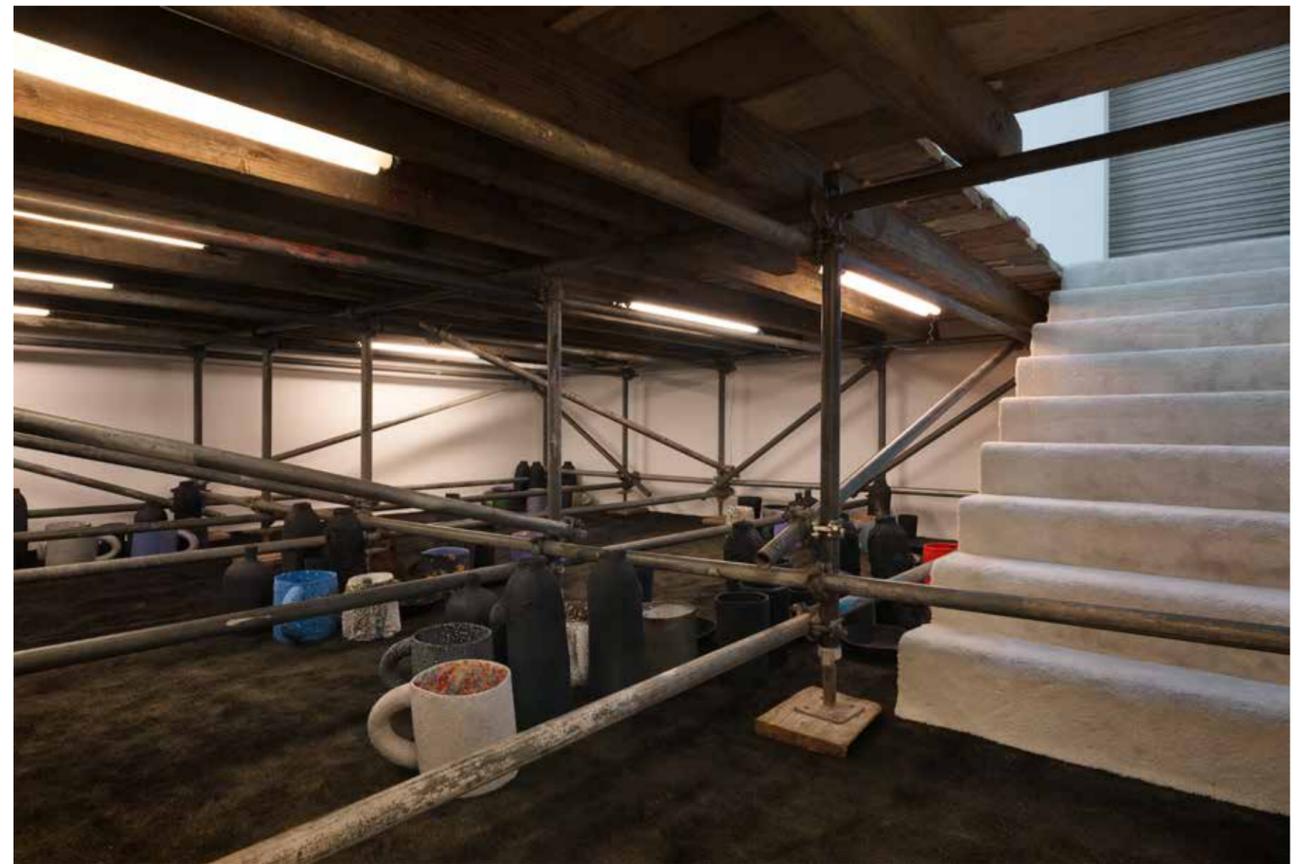
"City Unborn", François Ghebaly Gallery (formerly Chung King Project), Los Angeles, 2008. Courtesy: the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles

They are props, objects meant to be employed in a fiction, things to be animated only by actions. Also, despite their cheapness, they can still be endearing.

On a leafy Los Angeles street, a door opens to blood red shag carpet, an apartment emptied of the normal accoutrements of living. On the left, in the kitchen stripped of appliances, countertops naked, two charcoal gray blankets lie stacked mostly useful things, one jumbled and the other carefully arrayed, both placed just so on the linoleum tile patterned to look like parquet. A hammer, a cane, a broom. A knife, a wrench, a baseball bat. Over in the living room, bare walls frame nine different coffee tables piled with mounds of dirt, fists of mud like piles of dinosaur shit. In the two bedrooms beyond are two bodies. Identically clad in denim jumpsuits, faces shrouded in long black beards and hair, hands folded, feet unshod and lined with veins, eyes closed. A funereal repose, twin bikers lying in state, neither fully seen simultaneously. The corpses differ in that one wears red latex gloves and the other black. You may not know their face, but I do. It's Patrick Jackson.



Black Statue, 2013, "The Third Floor" installation view at François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, 2013. Courtesy: the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles



"The Third Floor" installation view at François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, 2013. Courtesy: the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles



Dirt Piles on Tables, 2011, "House of Double" installation view at François Ghebaly Gallery, 2011. Courtesy: the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles

At the opening people sip cold beer and wander in and out of the apartment, making idle chatter amidst this strange tableau, cycling in and out, unable to unriddle the scene. I try to imagine that this isn't an art show, but a door I stumbled upon, open. What circumstance might make such a series of objects possible? A murder maybe? What is murder but an action that metamorphoses a person into a thing? Dead bodies are merely things anyway, once they've been emptied of life, of the spirit that makes a person. Skulls sometimes are just tchotchkes on morbid collectors desks, skeletons dangling in biology classrooms are teaching tools, no longer persons. Finger the flesh and you know it's just latex, but that does not make it any more explicable.

Menace still hovers over this scene, even as an art show; some serene madness carefully arranged these things. The apartment emptied but arranged like a tomb, mysteriously made atop a carpet like an ocean of blood. A set for a movie never shot whose story will always elude us.

Cinematic nearly wears into cliché these days, but it can mean a setting plump with an unknown story that we yearn to be told.

We are not always gratified in that desire.

Across town, a couple of years later, a building that surely houses an art gallery: anonymous looking objects hang on the wall, aspirational two-dimensional vaguely minimalist, each a prop: windows, curtains, and blinds. The trio hangs above a perfectly manicured white carpet. But there, a staircase has been cut into the snowy white floor, leading below. Dyed a smeary and patchy black, the stairs lead down into a basement crawlspace. A complex erector set of metal scaffolding supports the floor above, and clusters of oversized ceramic milk bottles, wine jugs, and coffee mugs are tucked around it. Most bear a smooth coating of burnt cork black, but the oversized mugs vary wildly in color and texture, their surfaces glazed in odd ways; some foam with diseased pustules, others repeat spermy patterns, the colors unreal, chemical, strange. Tchotchkes maybe, but too weird to ever grace a granny's breakfast nook. You can crawl through the support bars and peer into the mugs. At the bottom of each lies a different substance, a different story: resinous clumps and black fingers covered in flies, epoxies and crystals and plastic ice cubes floating in congealed liquids, milky and translucent, white and red.

Outside and up another staircase, a third room overlooks the first two. A figure is clothed in black, with black hair, barefoot with matte black skin, hollowed eyes. He (it?) stands away from the stairwell, related to it and the scene below, but not positioned so as to be eyelessly looking down. Mannequins always shiver and creep out of context, misproportioned (see: Charles Ray), too much like bodies without being them. This one, an effigy of a child, with odd hands and feet, is even more unnerving. It takes me a few different visits to take in each thing, to notice the odd proportions of the boy mannequin, to register all the substances and surfaces of these ceramics, to return again and again to plumb whatever story is revealed. Nothing so literal as a plot is forthcoming. A singularity, a doubling, a triple. Three levels. Nothing explained.

Modernism endeavored to make it new, a revolution of image and idea, of form and object. The suggestion of Brancusi's *Endless Column* (1935-38) is that it and the revolution it represents can go on forever in either direction, even if it doesn't. The part that we see is only a moment, caught in the middle of infinity.

Brancusi's monument at Târgu Jiu was meant to symbolize the infinite sacrifice of Romanian soldiers, those men who in defense of their home turned their bodies into things, embracing their own infinity.

Objects and bodies, relating to each other, mocking each other.

Both the apartment and the three-leveled gallery, carpeted and displayed, are installations by Jackson. They are collections of things, framed resolutely just so, not explained at all, yet they seem to quietly seethe with danger. The story that can never plot itself out, that is always a suggestion but never seemingly enacted, is a story of things and people, bodies and objects, never easily summed up and always elusively teased. Even the humble tchotchke can stand in for the dream of the permanent revolution.

The sculpture here is more than just a thing in space, its time like a clock that ticks but never moves forward; it is the possibility of what might happen, and it hangs there, pendulous, pregnant, but never realized.

CHUNG KING PROJECT

IN THE MIND, WHEN AN OBJECT REVERTS, IT DOESN'T TURN INTO RAW MATERIAL, IT BECOMES A FORMER CONCEPT OF ITSELF. A TOUCH-TONE PHONE BECOMES A ROTARY PHONE, AND NEXT, ONE OF THOSE OLD CRANK PHONES. INSIDE THE IDEA OF THE PHONE ARE NOT FORMLESS METALS AND PLASTICS, BUT ALL THE PHONES OF THE PAST. JUST AS THE MAN CONTAINS—NOT THE BOY, OR FLESH AND BLOOD—BUT EARLIER MEN.

YOU WILL RECEIVE YOUR INSTILLATIONS IN MANY WAYS, FROM BOOKS, STREET SIGNS, FILMS, IN SOME CASES FROM AGENTS WHO PURPORT TO BE AND MAY BE MEMBERS OF THE ORGANIZATION. THERE IS NO CERTAINTY, THOSE WHO NEED CERTAINTY ARE OF NO INTEREST TO THIS DEPARTMENT. THIS IS IN POINT OF FACT A NON-ORGANIZATION THE AIM OF WHICH IS TO EMANIPULATE OUR AGENTS AGAINST FEAR OF DEPAIR AND DEATH. WE INTEND TO BREAK THE BIRTH-DEATH CYCLE.

LOL! MEN HAVE BECOME THE TOOLS OF THEIR TOOLS!

IS THE MATERIAL THE MESSAGE...OR IS THE MESSAGE THE MATERIAL? WHAT IS THIS STUFF THAT MAKES UP OUR WORLD? HOW FAR BACK CAN THE MOST BASIC MATERIAL TAKE US? AND WHAT OF THE MOST BASIC WORD...OR SYMBOL?

HISTORY BEGAN A LONG TIME AGO.

TODAY'S HIPPIES...ALL SURFACE AND NO VALUES.

FROM MAY 3RD TO JUNE 7TH 2008 CHUNG KING PROJECT WILL HOST PATRICK JACKSON'S DEBUT SOLO EXHIBITION ENTITLED "CITY UNBORN".

JACKSON'S SCULPTURE INSTALLATION IS MADE OF NUMEROUS FIBERBOARD BOXES, PAINTED WITH CAR PAINT AND ALTERNATELY STACKED WITH CEMENT TETRAHEDRA AND SHEETS OF GLASS. THE ARRANGEMENT FORMS A KIND OF CITY LAYOUT, AT TABLETOP HEIGHT. THE INSTALLATION DOES NOT REPRESENT ANY CITY PER SE, BUT IT DOES TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION ITS PLACE IN A STOREFRONT, IN CHINATOWN, IN LOS ANGELES.

HE SURE HAS A WAY WITH WORDS!

IT'S THE ACCENT.

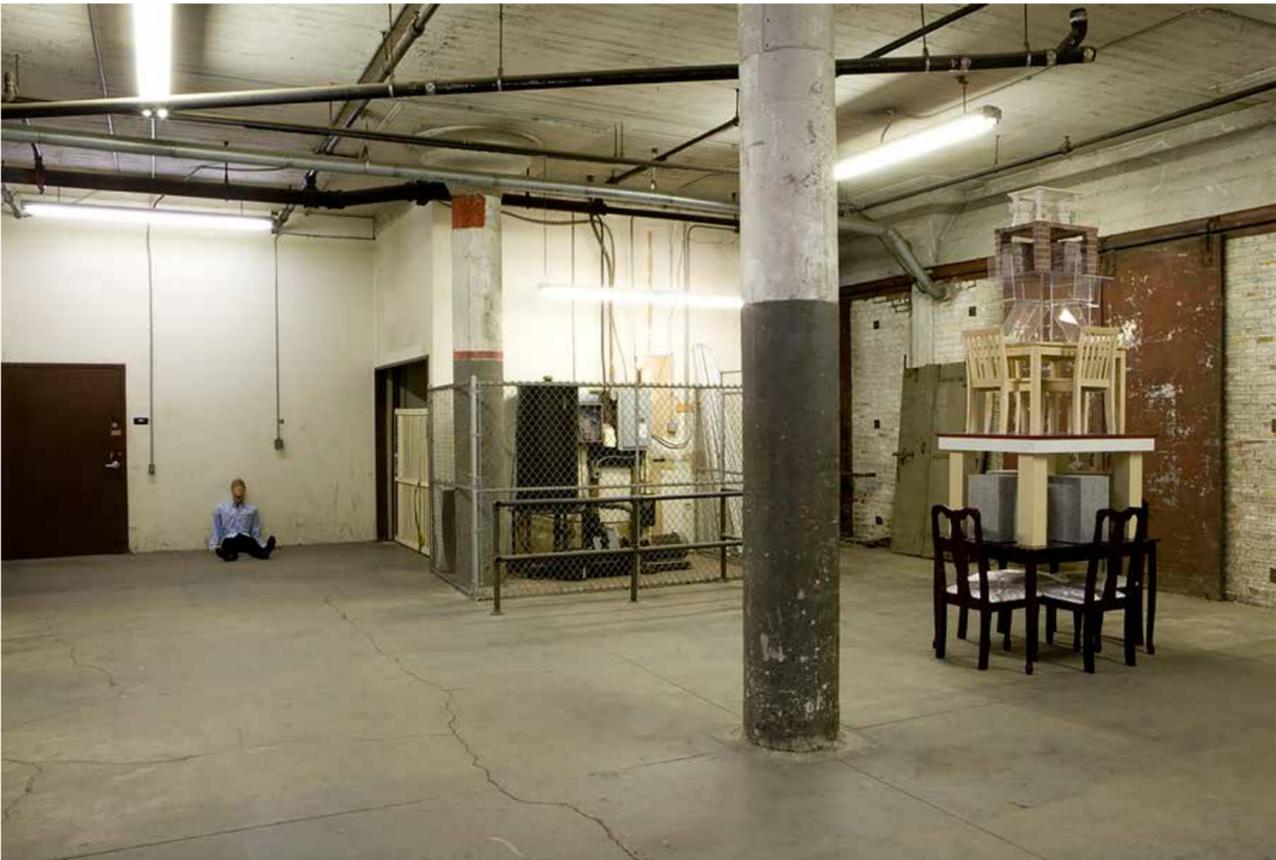
THE OPENING IS MAY 3RD FROM 7-9 PM.

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T + 1 213 625 1802
www.chungkingproject.com

Press Release of "City Unborn", François Ghebaly Gallery (formerly Chung King Project), Los Angeles, 2008. Courtesy: the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles

THREE LEVELS

di Andrew Berardini



“All Cut Up” installation view at François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, 2012. Courtesy: the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles

Il lavori di Patrick Jackson sono affollati di cose, sono folle di oggetti disposti in maniera studiata, svuotati dell’attrattiva delle loro (deboli) proprietà affettive per diventare parte di un progetto più vasto. Così le innumerevoli statuine che reggono lastre di vetro a formare eleganti colonne infinite e che, da vicino, rivelano centinaia di telamoni low-cost. Oppure le numerose tipologie di tazze da colazione incrostate e installate fra le impalcature edilizie di un’intercapedine sotteranea praticabile; o gli oggetti rebus sulla scena del presunto omicidio/suicidio di due gemelli omozigoti. Andrew Berardini ha religiosamente percorso tutti gli scenari dell’artista alla ricerca di un senso, raccogliendo bisbiglii in pro-cinto di una confessione perennemente rimandata.

Corpi e oggetti, tempo e possibilità.

Secondo alcuni, tra il nulla di un punto singolo e l’infinità di tutte le possibilità, per tutti i tempi, vi sono soltanto dieci linee, che ci consentono di arrivare fino alla decima dimensione [si tratta di concetti inerenti la teoria delle stringhe in Fisica, n.d.T]. Non siamo in grado di concepire ciò che si trova oltre, per cui siamo bloccati a dieci. Naturalmente ci sono anche altre teorie.

Per la scultura ne abbiamo tre. Una definizione comunemente utilizzata della scultura è quella di arte a tre dimensioni. Una cosa nello spazio. Collocata di peso sopra un basamento, issata con una gru sopra una piazza, posata sulla mensola del caminetto, possiamo passeggiarci intorno, forse persino prenderla in mano: è una cosa pensata per essere guardata in quanto tale. La scultura è il nostro corpo accanto al suo corpo. È il nostro essere umani accanto al suo essere un oggetto. Le opere d’arte sono effigi realizzate da noi, sostituiti di esseri umani più mortalmente fragili delle loro creazioni.

Quale dimensione contiene lo spirito di vita, la storia passata che l’ha formato e i futuri potenziali e i desideri che lo costringono ad andare avanti, i

bisogni che lo trasformano in oggetto, le complesse interazioni che lo trasformano in un Sé? Forse si trova tutto nella decima dimensione, e forse è lì che siamo anche noi.

La forma e il concetto non sono mai stati indissolubili. I corpi sono cose, cose che siamo noi. E così è anche l’arte.

Qui, con Patrick Jackson, abbiamo delle cose. Piccoli oggetti ornamentali senza pretese intellettuali e installazioni high-concept, corpi misteriosi e manichini vuoti, mucchi di fango e collezioni di tazze. E poi abbiamo i corpi. Il suo e i nostri. Tutti messi in mostra, così, semplicemente.

Provo un leggero odio per i ninnoli, le forme più basse di scultura. Quei piccoli oggetti decorativi che si trovano esposti, ammassati e collocati in giro per certe case. Quel leggero odio rivela l’amore che provo per le cose che tali ninnoli sembrano poco efficacemente imitare: icone e reliquie, effigi e totem, cose fatte a mano e lavorate con cura. Gli oggetti possono preservare la memoria, portando iscritti in sé o esaltando l’identità di un individuo, una famiglia, una civiltà, storie, sogni; i ninnoli, però, sembrano un’inconsistente approssimazione di quelle produzioni: di poco valore, usa e getta, realizzati con scarsa cura, facili da reperire e oggetto di una superficiale ammirazione. Clown dal volto triste e vergini che piangono, astratti coyote del Sudovest e cowboy texani che sorridono con aria furba, gattini strappalacrime con grandi occhiini luccicanti e angeli dalle ali bianche e i sorrisi da stronzi, un busto di John F. Kennedy e il David di Michelangelo in qualunque dimensione, foggia e colore, tutti inventati per prendere la polvere appoggiati sopra dei centrini, per creare confusione e senso di oppressione, costruiti per rompersi e per essere buttati via.

Per lo più il mio non è realmente odio, ma apatia. C’è perfino una punta di simpatia. I ninnoli rivelano alcuni dei segreti più vergognosi riguardo a noi, alle

nostre famiglie, alle nostre civiltà, benché le storie che raccontano non siano tutte negative. Con la loro aura deboluccia hanno però almeno un aspetto positivo: la democratizzazione degli oggetti artistici, della scultura. Molte persone hanno qualcosa che decora le pareti delle loro case, una stampa di Ansel Adams o una copia de *L’ultima cena* di Leonardo Da Vinci. Questi trovano posto accanto ai foritratti di famiglia in posa realizzati da Olan Mills o alle immagini del primo giorno di scuola dei figli. Perché allora queste cose non dovrebbero poter agire allo stesso modo, con lo stesso intento innocuamente ornamentale? Sia i ninnoli sia la poster art sono facilmente reperibili nella sede più vicina dell’Esercito della Salvezza. Per alcuni essere anodino è peggio di essere offensivo. lo preferirei offendere.

Mike Kelley ha recuperato da vari mercatini delle pulci gli oggetti che costituiscono il nucleo centrale di una delle sue sculture più amate, *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid*, (1987), un arazzo composto con giocattoli fatti a mano e coperte lavorate a maglia, una giungla di cose realizzate da un migliaio di nonne per un migliaio di nipoti, gettate nei bidoni della spazzatura di un negozio dell’usato e recuperate, a mo’ di prove, da Kelley. Le persone appartenenti alla classe operaia fanno i loro doni, intessono relazioni ed esprimono il loro amore creando degli oggetti, i ricchi, invece, si limitano a comprare delle cose. Anche Kelley si è spesso occupato di ninnoli come se fossero affioramenti di un terreno psichico tipicamente statunitense e di un sentimento che rappresenta molto altro, benché, a differenza delle coperte a maglia e delle scimmie fatte con i calzini, i ninnoli siano prodotti industrialmente. Questa moltitudine di oggetti industriali di scarso valore fa apparire tutti gli oggetti un po’ più privi di significato, tutte le emozioni umane un po’ meno importanti, certamente per qualche scopo nefasto.

Le case straripanti di gingilli da quattro soldi sono deboli baluardi per i loro proprietari. Tutte quelle cose, realizzate con così poco amore, non possono

che fallire nel compito di ostacolare l’assenza di senso che minaccia di spazzarci via tutti. Sarebbe meglio se i sentimenti dei loro proprietari fossero riversati su delle creature viventi anziché su delle statue fatte per somigliare a quelle creature: persone simili a personaggi di un fumetto e animali generici, vuoti oggetti di ceramica.

Patrick Jackson utilizza queste insignificanti statuette, così amate dalle casalinghe stile anni Cinquanta e dai signori sentimentali, come pilastri di sostegno per le lastre di vetro perfettamente sovrapposte che formano le sue immense colonne. Jackson aveva già “brancusizzato” alcune lastre di vetro in una precedente installazione, *A City Unborn* (2008), in cui strani oggetti erano posati su superfici di vetro accanto alle forme iconiche e teoricamente ripetute all’infinito dell’artista rumeno. Per formare queste colonne, i ninnoli vengono svuotati di qualsiasi valore e considerazione ulteriore; sono qualcosa di assolutamente nuovo e di totalmente moderno, proprio come i diamanti intrecciati di *Colonna Infinita* (1935-38). Essi sono valutati esclusivamente in base della loro resistenza e alla loro dimensione, mentre il vetro funge da elemento di collegamento che li trasforma in sculture. Gli oggetti esposti su mensole di Haim Steinbach potrebbero costituire un facile riferimento, tuttavia Jackson non si propone di scoprire i significati nascosti di questi oggetti, ma di cancellarli. Così esposti non possono che apparire puramente commerciali, sobri, puliti e con ogni probabilità destinati alla vendita. Tutte quelle cose e tutto quel vetro. Non per niente i francesi parlano di lèche-vitrine.

Privando completamente gli oggetti del loro significato e mantenendone solo la dimensione e la resistenza strutturale, Jackson corre il rischio di svuotare tali ninnoli dell’unica caratteristica positiva che possedevano: il fatto di essere amati dalle persone. Per quanto non mi importi nulla dei ninnoli, mi importa delle altre persone. Mia madre possiede ninnoli come quelli. Il confine tra una persona e le sue cose è sfumato. Non mi permetterei mai di prendere in giro uno di quegli oggetti di fronte a lei, proprio come non mi permetterei di prendermi gioco di lei.

Per accompagnarne la prima esposizione, tuttavia, Jackson ha realizzato una locandina che, benché tacitamente, svolge una funzione rivelatrice e re-dentrica. Sopra l’annuncio dell’artista, della galleria e della mostra, troviamo due personaggi dei Simpson, uno accanto all’altro: il venditore di fumetti, grasso e con la coda di cavallo, e l’infido oligarca Mr. Burns. Sopra ciascuno dei due vi è una nuvoletta in cui è riportato un discorso ben scritto. Il venditore di fumetti afferma che queste pile di ninnoli rappresentano “un’attrezzatura scenica perfetta per un film contemporaneo di Dario Argento, attrezzatura impiegata prima per preannunciare e poi per perpetrare la morte, prematura e cruenta, di una bellissima e giovane commessa di un negozio di articoli usati”. Mr. Burns dal canto suo risponde: “Gatti, cani, varie forme di abbracci e altri segni d’amore: le decorazioni perfette per i cubicoli di persone che svolgono lavori noiosi e ripetitivi. Le rappresentazioni, destinate a raccogliere la polvere, di speranze e sogni non riusciranno a rimpiazzare ciò che manca nelle loro vite insignificanti. Però quei piccoli oggetti di pessimo gusto sono molto teneri”.

Sono oggetti scenici, pensati per essere usati in una finzione, cose che possono essere animate solo attraverso le azioni. Inoltre, nonostante siano cose da quattro soldi, possono risultare tenere.

In una strada ricoperta di foglie di Los Angeles, una porta si apre su una folta moquette color rosso sangue e su un appartamento svuotato di tutti i normali accessori della vita quotidiana. Sul pavimento di linoleum effetto parquet di una spoglia cucina sono posate due coperte color antracite ricoperte da utensili gettati alla rinfusa – un coltello, una chiave inglese, una mazza da baseball – su una, accuratamente disposti – un martello, un bastone, una scopa – sull’altra. Nel soggiorno le pareti bianche incorniciano nove diversi tavolini da caffè su cui si trovano cumuli di terra, palate di fango che sembrano merda di dinosauro. Nelle due camere da letto oltre il soggiorno vi sono due corpi. Entrambi indossano tute in denim identiche, hanno i volti coperti da barbe nere e lunghi capelli, le mani giunte, i piedi scalzi e rigati da vene azzurre, gli occhi chiusi. Una quiete funerea aleggia sui gemelli motociclisti esposti nella camera ardente, nessuno dei due completamente e simultaneamente visibile. I cadaveri differiscono per il fatto che uno indossa guanti in lattice rossi, l’altro

neri. Forse voi non conoscete il loro volto, ma io sì. Si tratta di quello di Patrick Jackson.

All’inaugurazione le persone sorseggiano birra ghiacciata e vagano per l’appartamento, chiacchierando del più e del meno nel bel mezzo di questo curioso tableau, entrando e uscendo ciclicamente, incapaci di decifrare la scena. Provo a immaginare di non trovarmi a una mostra, ma di essermi imbattuto in una porta aperta ed essere entrato. Che circostanza potrebbe aver reso possibile la presenza di una simile serie di oggetti? Un omicidio forse? Che cos’è l’omicidio se non un’azione che tramuta una persona in una cosa? I corpi morti sono semplicemente delle cose, dopotutto, una volta che sono stati svuotati della vita, dello spirito che fa una persona. I teschi, a volte, sono solo dei ninnoli sulle scrivanie di collezionisti morbosi, mentre gli scheletri appesi nei laboratori di biologia sono solamente strumenti di insegnamento e non più persone. Tastate la carne e scoprirete che si tratta solamente di lattice, ma questo non rende la cosa più spiegabile.

Un senso di minaccia continua ad aleggiare sulla scena, anche se si tratta di una mostra d’arte; una sorta di quieta pazzia sembra essere alla base della disposizione di queste cose. L’appartamento è svuotato, organizzato come una tomba, misteriosamente edificata sopra una moquette simile a un oceano di sangue. La scenografia di un film mai girato, la cui storia ci sfuggirà sempre.

Ciò che è cinematografico scivola quasi nel cliché ai giorni nostri, ma può voler dire anche trovarsi in presenza di uno scenario che racchiude in sé una storia che desideriamo venga raccontata.

Non sempre, però, quel desiderio viene soddisfatto.

Dall’altra parte della città, un paio d’anni fa, in un edificio che sicuramente ospita una galleria d’arte, degli oggetti anonimi, aspiranti alla bidimensionalità, e vagamente minimalisti dall’aspetto anonimo pendono dalla parete. Ognuno di essi è un oggetto scenico: finestre, tende, tapparelle. Tale trio è appeso sopra un tappeto bianco perfettamente curato. Tuttavia in questo biancore niveo è stata ritagliata un’apertura per una scala che conduce al piano inferiore. Di un nero untuoso e chiazzato, le scale conducono a una intercapedine sotto il pavimento. Una complessa impalcatura di metallo sostiene il pavimento soprastante e ammassi di enormi bottiglie del latte, caraffe per il vino e tazze da caffè, tutti in ceramica, sono posizionati intorno ad essa. La maggior parte di essi è coperta da un sottile strato nero di sughero bruciato, ma le gigantesche tazze da caffè variano notevolmente in quanto a colore e aspetto, con le superfici smaltate in modi strani; alcune sembrano punteggiate da pustole di qualche malattia, altre presentano motivi che fanno pensare allo sperma; i colori sono irreali, chimici, strani. Si tratta di ninnoli, forse, ma troppo eccentrici per poter adornare il tavolino di una nonna. Si può strisciare tra le barre metalliche dell’impalcatura e sbirciare dentro le tazze. Sul fondo di ciascuna di esse si trova una sostanza differente, una storia diversa: grumi resinosi e dita annerite ricoperte di mosche, resine epossidiche e cristalli e cubetti di ghiaccio in plastica che galleggiano dentro liquidi rappresi, lattiginosi e traslucidi, rossi e neri.

Uscendo e salendo un’altra scala si giunge in una terza stanza che domina le prime due. Qui troviamo una figura maschile, vestita di nero, con i capelli neri, scalza, con la pelle nera e opaca e gli occhi incavati. Egli (esso?) sta in piedi lontano dalla scala, in relazione con essa e con la scena sottostante, ma posizionato in modo da non rivolgere verso il basso il suo sguardo privo di occhi. I manichini fanno sempre venire i brividi quando sono fuori contesto, sproporzionati (cfr. Charles Ray), troppo simili a dei corpi senza però esserlo. Questo, l’effigie di un bambino con bizzarri mani e piedi, è anche più inquietante. Mi occorrono ripetute visite per riuscire a cogliere ogni particolare, per osservare le strane proporzioni del manichino bambino, per prendere nota di tutte le sostanze e le superfici di queste ceramiche, per tornare continuamente a sondare qualunque storia venga rivelata. Niente di letterario, come un intreccio, si prospetta all’orizzonte. Una singolarità, uno sdoppiamento, un triplicamento. Tre livelli. Nulla che venga spiegato.

Il Modernismo ha cercato di produrre un rinnovamento, di compiere una rivoluzione a livello d’immagini e d’idee, di forma e di oggetto. La *Colonna Infinita* (1935-38) di Brancusi sembra suggerire che

la rivoluzione che incarna possa proseguire per sempre, in entrambe le direzioni, anche se in realtà non è ciò che accade. La parte che vediamo è solo un momento, accurato nel mezzo dell’infinità.

Il monumento di Brancusi a Târgu Jiu è stato pensato per simboleggiare il sacrificio infinito dei soldati romeni, quegli uomini che, per difendere la loro patria, hanno trasformato i loro corpi in cose, abbracciando la propria infinità.

Oggetti e corpi, che si pongono in relazione gli uni con gli altri, che si fanno beffe gli uni degli altri.

Sia l’appartamento sia la galleria su tre piani, ricoperti di moquette e messi in mostra, sono installazioni di Jackson. Sono raccolte di cose, semplicemente incorniciate, senza alcuna spiegazione. Eppure, nella loro quieta compostezza, sembrano emanare un’aura di pericolo. La storia che non può mai svolgersi, che rimane sempre un suggerimento ma che non è mai messa in atto, è una storia di cose e di persone, di corpi e di oggetti, che non può mai essere riassunta con facilità e che è sempre accennata in modo sfuggente. Anche l’umile ninnolo può simboleggiare il sogno della rivoluzione permanente.

Qui la scultura è più di una cosa nello spazio, il suo tempo è quello di un orologio che ticchetta senza che le lancette si spostino; è la possibilità latente, appesa lì, pendula, gravida, ma mai realizzata.

LOS ANGELES

Patrick Jackson

FRANÇOIS GHEBALY GALLERY

The best things tend to be hidden underground: The tiered, tripartite structure that Patrick Jackson created for his latest show (the last at the gallery's Culver City location) prompted a Freudian read in which the upstairs hovered as the superego, the street level lined up with the ego, and the id lay repressed below in the cellar. Jackson's layered space paralleled the stratified logic of his previous "Tchotchke Stacks," 2009–10, insinuating an ornamental role for viewers to play in relation to the art.



The solitary figure of a teenage boy, *Black Statue* (all works 2013), was stationed on the balcony overlooking the exhibition below like a lone sentinel; vigilance stood in for personal conscience. With hair, jeans, sweatshirt, and the exposed "skin" of his face, hands, and bare feet all monochromatically black (matching the floor), the sculpture was an undead, ghostly presence. The slight shrunkenness of its head was particularly disturbing, but not nearly as unsettling as its gaping, empty eye sockets. Such a blank, straight-ahead stare recalled Greek and Roman funerary masks but also gave the boy a spellbound look, as if possessed by a vision that filled him with anticipation.

Jackson's middle (street) level was covered with thick white wall-to-wall carpeting, transforming the stiff white cube into a slightly cozier and more domestic version of itself. Three dark (black or blue) rectangular works, hung one per wall, were abstract markers of interiors and interiority—respectively titled *Curtain*, *Window*, and *Blinds*—that pointedly analogized the ego as a clean, well-lit, and austere professional space. Nearby was a low-slung, slab-built ceramic box, blackened and with burst seams, with a hole cut into its lid, exposing a dark interior of overlapping levels, making the work appear like a crude architectural model of some nightmarish psychology, a Pandora's box, or perhaps a toy miniature of the gallery itself, in which a similarly proportioned hole cut in the floor led downstairs to the lowest level.

A work's Barthesian meanings are always left up to the viewer, and any of the floors at François Ghebaly could have been the one referred to by Jackson's exhibition title "The Third Floor." Yet this show's most intense aesthetic attraction clearly lay in its lowest floor, seeming to insist that that was where Jackson wanted his viewers to get off.

Descent into the id required crouching below ego's threshold, where trespassers discovered a whole substructure of scaffolding crisscrossing a subterranean crawl space. The basement was populated, as by a party or growing horde, with ceramic vessels that bridged contemporaneity and antiquity in scattered clusters of cartoonishly oversize mugs alongside the more classical silhouettes of urns, tall vases, and jugs. Seeing the

works up close required crawling on all fours, carefully ducking under and slinking over obstacles in a compromised, doggy-style position.

Jackson's underground delivered a Mike Kelley–esque combination of sinister and exhilarating, dark and playful, noxious and erotic effects. The palette was mostly polarized between the ashen, charred, and volcanic and the brightly toxic, psychedelic, fluorescent, and cosmetic. Often garishly decorated on their surfaces, his mugs contained curious, eye-catching innards like fecal mud pies, colorful stalagmites, dried-up foams, and a cultworthy concoction that looked like Kool-Aid on the rocks; Jackson thrives in the current vogue for ceramics, investing the medium with narrative drama. The vessels, as perennial signifiers of the body, flaunted roughly textured and highly damaged skin that looked incinerated or diseased, pitted with lesions and acid-burned. Rarely do ceramics so viscerally convey the denaturing, solar intensity of a kiln's fire. These made the thought of Pompeii ricochet from the archaeological scene downstairs to the burned-out husk of a boy upstairs, sounding a semiapocalyptic note that resonated with that still-fresh notion of "post-empire" that is making the rounds, especially in Hollywood, today.

—Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer

Los Angeles Times

CULTURE MONSTER
ALL ARTS, ALL THE TIME

Review: Patrick Jackson at François Ghebaly Gallery
Mizota, Sharon
December 16 2013



Patrick Jackson, "The Third Floor" Installation View, 2013 (Courtesy of the Artist and François Ghebaly Gallery)

Patrick Jackson's show brought me to my knees—literally. The artist has remodeled François Ghebaly's split-level gallery, building an entry-level floor above the semi-subterranean main space. Carpeted like a model home in thick white wall-to-wall, it makes the space seem less vertiginous and more like a traditional gallery. That is, until you see the hole in the floor.

Stairs lead down to what is perhaps best described as a half-floor, laced with metal scaffolding and dirt-colored carpet. For anyone larger than a small child, standing upright is impossible. The basement-like space forces you to stoop or kneel, and then completes your obeisance by asking you to clamber unceremoniously over and through the metal bars.

Adding to the peril of the situation are many, many ceramic pots, clustered mercifully around the scaffolding's uprights. Most are black and charred looking, but several are brightly colored and textured, resembling oversize, grotesquely cheery coffee mugs. They are variously filled with what look like crystals, ice cubes, fingers or dung (complete with flies). The overall effect is of a crazy, long-neglected basement laboratory—perhaps once staffed by dwarves.

Upstairs on the walls are more docile abstract ceramic pieces titled "Blinds," "Window," and "Curtains," suggesting comforts of domesticity that mask roiling pots of chaos below.

Patrick Jackson

NICOLE KLAGSBRUN

Patrick Jackson's "Tchotchke Stacks," 2010, comprise just that: stacks of trinkets separated by sheets of glass in five, six, and seven layers. Each layer holds just four trinkets, some on little mirrored pedestals that equalize their varying heights, and this generous spacing, plus the invisible glass and mirrored boxes, makes them appear to float.

These figurines, models, souvenirs, and statuettes, which the artist buys at thrift stores, seem to be arranged with studied randomness, as if to express the very variety of the medium: Michelangelo's *David* appears multiple times, as a bust and in full figure, along with big-eyed children, praying hands, classical busts, mothers and children, ladies and gentlemen in Regency dress. The favored mode is a kind of cartoonish realism, although a style that tilts toward expressionist is occasionally represented (as, for instance, by a twisting figure, marked "allergic to life," which looks to have been run through a wringer). Jackson has in fact arranged his tchotchkes according to structural soundness—to the amount of weight, of other tchotchkes, they can bear, with the sturdiest at the bottom of each stack and the most delicate at the top. Sometimes, giving the

logic a topsy-turvy feel, a bottom layer is occupied by four very small objects. But despite the artist's attention to the physics of load bearing, the stacks seem fragile unto absurdity; one tiptoes around them, barely breathing.

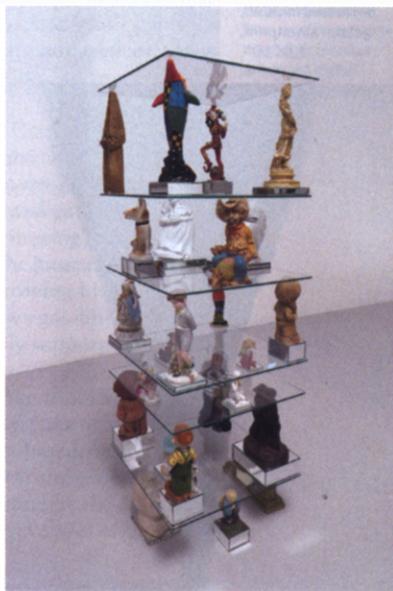
The result, which intermingles religion, sentiment, and high and low aesthetics, makes what is visible nearly irrelevant, conjuring an effect both annoying and thrilling: It is somehow philosophically disturbing to encounter a taxonomy that doesn't correspond to anything immediately tangible—and the work seems to ask you to solve it, to penetrate the stacks' code—but the disturbance turns out to be not unpleasant, more like an ongoing itch you may scratch at your leisure.

Artists have been taking quotidian objects out of context for a long time. Here, this operation creates less a democracy of iconography than a semantic vacuum. Each tchotchke acquires an aura of nothingness rather than of specialness; despite the nearly reverent display, the objects become very hard to individually see and name. This creates a very odd feeling of radical defamiliarization, of being nearly tongue-tied in front of something commonplace.

The "Tchotchke Stacks" invariably bring to mind the word *inventory*, but it is an inventory of things whose value is impossible to calculate, partly because of the ways an object's significance—whether it be financial, emotional, conceptual—changes when the object has been discarded and refound. The space and nothingness of Jackson's stacking technique come across as reverent, but whether the works are an affirmation of lost value or an ironic (and somewhat cold) commentary on silly objects remains an open question; the stacks themselves shift from serious seeming to trifling and back again, leaving us to ponder how—and if—these generally useless objects are now useful and valuable, and what operation has made them so.

—Emily Hall

Patrick Jackson,
Tchotchke Stack 14,
2010, tchotchkes,
glass, mirrors, wood,
coins, 58½ x 20".



CHARLIE SCHULTZ DOES THE ROUNDS

The Glass
by Charlie Schultz

Tchotchke Stacks
Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery
526 W.26th St. #213, New York,
NY 10001
September 10, 2010 - October 23, 2010



September 12, 2010

A thirsty man in a lounge chair once asked, “if you throw an empty glass into a swimming pool, is it still an empty glass?” He was an artist, and what he was getting at was the question of content. Posed slightly differently, if you make an artwork with random and/or largely unconsidered subject matter but concentrate heavily on the process of making the work, will the work be devoid of content?

The Los Angeles based artist, Patrick Jackson, just opened a solo exhibition at Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery called *Tchotchke Stacks* and it presents that very conundrum. Jackson, who was trained as a sculptor (he became a Master in 2007 at the University of Southern California), is a thrift store aficionado. To create his Stacks Jackson traveled from store to store, selecting objects for their structural durability; subject matter was irrelevant. (Short list: the Virgin Mary, clowns, cuddly goats, kitties, little boys, angles, a DEA agent and his K-9 hurdling a window sill, etc.) Depending on the strength of the object, whether it could hold a little or a lot of weight, Jackson incorporated it into a Stack. The stronger pieces went to the bottom, the weaker ones to the top. Jackson’s mastery came into play during assembly.

There are fourteen Stacks in the exhibition, mostly around five and a half feet tall. Each stack (except for one) has six levels. On each level are four tchotchkes that support a piece of glass, which the tchotchkes on the next level up rest upon. Since the tchotchkes are obviously not uniform in height Jackson’s built little mirrored plinths that even everything out. He uses coins to fine-tune the balancing act (gallery floors aren’t perfectly level it turns out).

If the pieces seem trite or dumb, well, keep in mind that Andy Warhol’s Brillo Boxes were too at first. Jackson’s formal arrangement of so many campy knick-knacks seems to fuse the low-brow sensibility of Pop artists like Warhol with the structural approach of sculptors like Donald Judd or Richard Serra (both of whom have made their own “Stacks”). It’s impressive that it’s all-freestanding, and because of that walking through Stacks almost feels dangerous, like getting drunk in a glass house.

Beyond the constructive element the collected objects resonate with renewed purpose. They’re architectural now. Transformed. Questions of content point to regenerative cycles of use. The empty glass thrown in the pool becomes a submerged glass until it’s removed from the pool and is full of water.

--Charlie Schultz

Images: Details and installation views of *Tchotchke Stacks* (2009), mixed media. Courtesy the artist and Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery.



MODERN PAINTERS

DECEMBER 2010/JANUARY 2011

MEME

THE COLLECTORS

Art from keys, postcards, kitten statues, and eBay

Contemporary artists are ensuring that collecting is less a hobby than an aesthetic statement. Consider Jean Shin and Brian Ripel. Before the duo began creating the work displayed through January 2, 2011, in “Unlocking” at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art in Arizona, they had to gather a few things—specifically, about thirty thousand disused keys from local businesses and willing individuals. “One friend,” Shin says, “donated the key to her first and favorite car, a 1965 Ford Mustang that she drove to her senior prom.” For Shin and Ripel, keys link their owners to a specific location and time. Their cuts and grooves also look quite a bit like the mountainous Arizona skyline, a resemblance emphasized in a room-size projection of their jagged profiles. The symbolic and visual relationships add up to a community-oriented art experience that encourages viewers to reflect on places they’ve left behind, as well as on the local topography.

The connections among geography, technology, and memory are explored in a different manner by Zoe Leonard, whose installation *You see I am here after all* is on view through January 9 at Dia Beacon. The work is composed of several thousand postcards of Niagara Falls collected from online sites and flea markets. Dating to the first half of the 20th century, many exhibit early forms of photo manipulation, such as hand coloring, cropping, and overpainting. Individually each card is a vessel for a single memory. Taken as a whole, they represent a moment in the history of photography when technology began transforming natural wonders into tourist destinations.

Another avid collector, Patrick Jackson builds his “Tchotchke Stacks” out of kitschy statuettes bought at thrift stores. The Virgin Mary, sad clowns, goats, and kittens all inhabit the works, which can be seen at Nicole Klagsbun’s Art Basel Miami booth or through February 11 in the group show “Fetishes of Crisis” at CAPC Musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux. Jackson is most interested in the weight-bearing capacity of his knickknacks, which he meticulously stacks on sheets of glass, making them function architecturally. Others prefer to scour eBay for their raw material, as Hanne Mugaas does in *Secondary Market*, 2010, an assortment of online-purchased goods repurposed as an installation, on view as part of the New Museum’s exhibition “Free” through January 23, 2011. For all these artists, the goal is to collect in quantity, but this never diminishes each object’s individuality.

—CHARLIE SCHULTZ



Patrick Jackson *Tchotchke Stack 22*, 2010. Statuettes, glass, mirrors, wood, coins, 57 x 20 in.

ARTFORUM

“Patrick Jackson: Picks 5.21.08”

Mizota, Sharon

May 21, 2008



Black and Midnight Blue, 2008

05.03.08-06.07.08 Chung King Project / Francois Ghebaly

Like a model city built from an exotic Tinkertoy set, Patrick Jackson’s exhibition “City Unborn” blends references to early modernism, Surrealism, and finish fetish to create an ur-city, the id of urban planning. The eight table-height sculptures that compose the installation are made of fiberboard boxes of varying dimensions, painted with generic shades of lustrous car paint and topped with alternating layers of clear glass and small gray cement pyramids. Seen from across the room, the stacks of pyramids form undulating columns, reminiscent of Constantin Brancusi’s *Endless Column*, 1938, itself an ur-form connecting heaven and earth. Viewed from above, they cast complex reflections in the glass that suggest the fractured planes of a Futurist drawing. These delicate structures would almost be classic modernist sculptures were they not punctuated with decidedly less streamlined objects. In one piece, glass shelves rise from a slim ochre base to display a wrench, a wooden cane, a huge lollipop, and a black plastic comb. In another, a long, skinny box is laced with an industrial metal chain; the smooth blue surface of a third is inset with a rusty sewer grate.

These mundane incursions, with their surreal scalar and tonal contrasts, disrupt the purity of the rectilinear sculptures and amplify their status as imaginary, dreamlike forms. While the modern city plan is typically proposed in the name of reason and order, these fragile, uncanny structures gently point out the irrational underside of the utopian enterprise.