

What's Broken Heals Better

Max Hooper Schneider's *Falling Angels* at François Ghebaly evokes both ecological destruction and resurrection, decay and regeneration.

By Jennifer Remenchik, May 29, 2023



Max Hooper Schneider, "Falling Angel" (2023), aircraft wreckage, fluorescent light tubes, Tesla coils, vintage neon signs, chains, crushed concrete, mixed media fiberglass pond, microcontroller, 156 x 99 x 162 inches (all photos Jennifer Remenchik/Hyperallergic)

Max Hooper Schneider

LOS ANGELES — What is broken heals better, or at least more intriguingly. Such is the backdrop of Max Hooper Schneider's *Falling Angels* at François Ghebaly gallery, an exhibition that evokes both ecological destruction and resurrection, decay and regeneration.

Falling Angels opens with a series of genetically engineered bonsai/fruit tree hybrids, announcing to the viewer that they are entering a weird, nature-based world. A classy upgrade to the plastic-plant-assemblage-sculpture in Hooper Schneider past exhibitions, the pieces are dipped in copper electroplating. "Dendrite Bonsai (Corn)" and "Dendrite Bonsai (Banana)" (both 2023) are stand-outs, if only for their phallic — read sexy — undertones. Like much of the artist's work, they call to mind a world after humans but still marked by our existence, in which the genetically modified plants we are now engineering might proliferate on their own.

Moving into the next room, the scene becomes a little more science-fiction with a touch of the death metal aesthetic Hooper Schneider likes to infuse into his work — theatrical, technically impressive gestures that are often dark and nihilistic in tone. A truly creepy sculpture that resembles some sort of robot insect resting upon a replica of a fossilized dinosaur skull confronts the viewer. Titled "Fossil Epizoon (dyrosaurus)" (2021), the piece's genius lies in the oscillation between disgust and fascination that it evokes. While almost cartoonish in its amalgamation of fossil and futuristic insect monster, the piece is saved through detail and precision. In this case, the insect's "legs" move so subtly, even gracefully, that they beckon viewers in and ultimately delight in their delicacy — an impressive accomplishment for what could be written off as the sculpture version of a doodle by a bored adolescent boy.

The exhibition's titular work, the massive "Falling Angel," is composed of aircraft wreckage, fluorescent light tubes, Tesla coils, and many more items. The piece emits intermittent — and very loud — noise, almost like the sound of a construction-grade drill pounding into concrete, or rapid gunfire blasts. The noise blasts coincide with colored lights shooting through the otherwise dim fluorescent tubes. Vintage neon signs encased in a fiberglass pond beneath the tubes come across as a nod to Jason Rhodes, whose influence can be seen throughout Hooper Schneider's art. More neon awaits in a nearby room containing a series of aquarium vitrine pieces that will look familiar to viewers who know his work.

It is in the exhibition's final piece, "ROUTE 666" (2023), that many of Hooper Schneider's themes coalesce. A Satanic take on the infamous Route 66, which runs across the United States, "ROUTE 666" combines death metal vibes with a critique of American excess and consumption. In what looks like a drive-in movie theater for dinosaurs (or ants, based on scale), the artist depicts a post-apocalyptic outdoor theater that continues playing movies for no one, except perhaps the plants that have overgrown the mangled cars still ensconced within the theater's walls.

Throughout *Falling Angels*, Hooper Schneider offers a vision of what the world could look like beyond the end of our species — the future ruins of the habitat we occupy now. Gazing upon the figureless landscape of "ROUTE 666," I was reminded of how clean the air became in notoriously polluted Los Angeles within weeks of the pandemic lockdown. Even with all the damage done, the future could be bright for our miraculously self-repairing planet — what is broken does, in fact, heal better. Our self-destructive species just may not be around.