

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*