

ARTFORUM



View of "Patrick Jackson," 2013.

Patrick Jackson

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 shrunkeness 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