

ARTFORUM

Patrick Jackson

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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 tonguetied 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".

