

Patrick Jackson Puts Ambiguity on the Shelf

At François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, the artist reveals a penchant for duplicates in 'Liquid Clay'

By Matt Stromberg, March 3, 2023



There are two sides to Patrick Jackson's practice on view in his solo show 'Liquid Clay', which opened François Ghebaly's new Hollywood gallery last month. Inside the unrenovated, warehouse space, commonplace objects – towels, blue jeans, shoes, teddy bears – appear to float in pristine glass shelving units made of injection-moulded plastic supports. The other, more rugged, side of Jackson's work manifests in wall-mounted relief sculptures whose knotty protuberances and carnal orifices suggest bodily bits, sliced up and rearranged. The shelves riff on consumerist art projects, such as Jeff Koons's 'New Hoover' readymades (1981–87), and echo the scale and form of Donald Judd's 'untitled' series of cantilevered stacks (1965–93), while the wall reliefs recall funk art, underground comix and horror/sci-fi cinema. (Jackson tells me that David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, 1983, was a major influence.)

'I kept showing the exhibition idea to people, and they would say: "Those works don't seem like they belong together." But I'm really good at ignoring people,' he

tells me over French Dip sandwiches and purple pickled eggs at downtown Los Angeles institution Philippe's. 'But to me, they make perfect sense together, because they're about the same thing: the body, touch and not touching.' By being open and direct, yet somehow shielding the deeper machinations of his mind, Jackson has an almost Warholian way of describing his artworks. In his practice, too, he employs the tools of a magician – mirrors, artifice, misdirection – to hide meaning behind a simple facade.

His 2020 solo show with Ghebaly, 'My Dark Architect', featured earlier versions of the shelf works – containing plastic skulls, fake plants and dice – alongside mounted, black and white photographs of his apartment. People are absent from all the images except one, in which Jackson's disembodied head pokes out from the top of a table: a deadpan, dime-store illusion created with mirrors (*Head on a Table*, 2017). 'I still don't fully understand the image, but I've come to see it as myself as an object, an idea,' he told Lindsay Preston Zappas in an interview for KRCW at the time.

That same year, he exhibited *Heads, Hands, Feet* (2011) at Made in L.A., the Hammer Museum's biennial of Angeleno artists. The piece featured two life-cast mannequins of the artist dressed in denim, sporting flowing locks and a beard, further compounding his penchant for replicas and illusions. Laid out on the floor, their hands clasped over their torsos, the figures appeared lifeless, anti-monumental, though they demanded attention lest visitors tripped over them. Space and how the body navigates it is a central reading of 'Liquid Clay'. *Teddy Bears, Towels and Shoes* (all works 2023) suggest physical actions, where we can imagine drying ourselves after a shower or cuddling a plushie. But Jackson is quick to downplay narrative possibilities in his work. 'It's primarily structural, an array of things that aren't going to tell a story. You put that next to that,' he says as he moves a fork next to a pickle on the table, 'and there's a story. [With the shelves] there's a structure that makes sense, but it's not narrative.'

Jackson began work on the clay reliefs in response to the cool detachment of the shelves. Informed by 25 years of sketches, these hand-sculpted pieces play with scale and perspective. The works feature enlarged body parts, as in *Ear Mouth* (2023), in which crooked teeth sprout from the inside of an ear, which itself is lodged in a gaping mouth. 'The sign of a good sci-fi television show is when they rethink the architecture and the spaces that people go through,' says Jackson. 'In *Star Trek* [1966–69], when you beam somewhere, it destroys your body then remakes it. I'm exploring the way a body moves through space, and what's on the body's mind. The reliefs are about its thoughts.'

The other side of the surrealism that characterizes

Jackson's practice is his work's deeply autobiographical content. His apartment has been both exhibition site and subject for his art, and the size of his reliefs are based on the reach of his arm. Another work that he exhibited at Made in L.A. was *Proposal for a Monument* (2020). Behind a shiny acrylic wedge sat a mid-century furniture set, made by Jackson's grandfather, and taken directly from the artist's childhood home.

Jackson is from LA, but not *that* LA – the Sunset Strip and the Hollywood Hills. Raised in Culver City, the son of a truck driver and a nurse, Jackson reveals in his work a playful ambiguity vis-à-vis Hollywood's image industry. For his 2019 Frieze LA Project, he created *Alley on the Inside*, a faux city street placed in a corridor. The whole thing was located on the Paramount Studios backlot, itself a fake New York streetscape. When Jackson first suggested Philippe's as a meeting spot, I thought it was another game of mirrors, since there is a big hometown rivalry between Philippe's and Cole's, another downtown culinary institution, each claiming to have invented the French Dip. He replied: 'I like the idea of talking art here more than in the restaurants I usually go to where there'd be other artists around,' adding that his father took him there as a child. But I was not convinced. Philippe's is also a short walk from the public fountain in Chinatown that Mike Kelley reproduced in *Framed and Frame* (1999), itself an autobiographical monument to an alternative LA. Jackson waved off such premeditation, as if dismissing a convoluted plot line on a cop show. 'Don't overthink Philippe's,' he advised. 'It's just a place to meet.'