



ArtSeen

July 15th, 2014

WEBEXCLUSIVE

This is what sculpture looks like

by Anne Sherwood Pundyk

POSTMASTERS (TRIBECA) | JUNE 14 – AUGUST 2, 2014

To use the chat room term, Postmasters Gallery’s space this summer is articulated IRL (in real life)—in contrast to the virtual space of screens. To counter perceived favoritism toward the medium of painting at the expense of sculpture in the marketplace and in critical discourse, this entertaining show intends to even the score. Bluster is good for business, but the underdog stance of the work doesn’t come as much from it being sculpture as it does from being subversive. An equally good title would be *This Is What Activist Art Looks Like*. Rachel Beach’s handsome prismatic totems are the closest any work in the show comes to conveying a cool, art-world-only solipsism. Most of the other pieces take a stand. As a whole the show is formally eccentric, personal, and often funny. By scanning the cacophonously styled collection of individual sculptures and installations made from materials ranging from living flora and fauna, to tennis balls, or grains of rice, one can gradually decode and digest the exhibition’s politically charged themes, ranging from racial and gender bias and climate change to economic inequity. The works by 16 artists each agitate against denial in their own way.

Mellow pulsing digital sounds draw the visitor into the gallery. These ambient harmonies emanate from speakers nested in a tangle of wires, next to a laptop on a music stand and a square aquarium; they are all elements of Natalie Jeremijenko’s “MUSCLExCHOIR” (2014). The sound comes from the vibrations created by the almost invisible movements of blue mussels living in the tank and is picked up via electrodes attached to their shells. The mussels’ signals are also sent to disco-like blinking colored lights suspended over the tank on a fixture formed into a red cross: a hopeful offer of safe-haven for all sea creatures.

Jeremijenko’s work is the first of many in the show



Molly Crabapple, “Portraits of myself and Lola Montes

advocating exchange and dialogue, whether between species, genders, race or class. Reinforcing these nautical and technological cross currents is the large, unsettling group of tusked, grey vinyl forms resembling beached walruses piled up just inside the entrance to the show in Joanna Malinowska's "Genre Scene With a Fountain" (2014.) Their haphazard arrangement suggests the aftermath of an awkward slapstick disaster. A flat screen on the gallery floor tucked into the corner in Malinowska's piece displays a short video loop of a woman's head in profile spitting water, renaissance fountain style, transposing her into a Frankenstein "wal-maid." Swimming a mile in another creature's skin goes a long way to engendering empathy for her plight.

with things said about us by our contemporaries," 2014.
Acrylic on wood, 60 x 80 x 40"

A large painted wood cut-out head by Molly Crabapple, "Portraits of Myself and Lola Montes with Things Said About Us By Our Contemporaries" (2014), guards the exhibition from the center like a female Janus, goddess of doors and transitions. The artist uses the style of graphic novel illustration to represent the portraits on each side of the disc. Like loosely pricked tattoos in different scripts scattered across both sides of the sculpture are quotes such as "Social misfit," "Seriously psychotic," and "Man killer." Crabapple's piece warns that language, with its vast potential for making connections, can also isolate and subjugate. In stylistic contrast, Kate Ostler stencils and glazes cheery colorful protest slogans onto ceramic trays as part of her "Workers Protest Platters" (2013-14). The dishes are laid out on a plain dining table as if to serve up activist mindfulness with the day's meal.

Several pieces in the show connect the figure with the idea of death. A self-portrait by Saeri Kiritani's "100 pounds of rice" (2013) includes a spot lit life-size naked body molded out of grains of rice. Although technically uneven, Kiritani's sculpture conveys the artist's self-perception as a culturally non-American outsider. The adjacent c-print of the artist covered in white rice and noodles repulses the viewer and highlights the artist's alienation—the grains initially look like white maggots eating her face. "Soul Elsewhere" (2013) is a white, rope bound effigy by Shinique Smith that casts a ghostly shadow. A suspended double pair of jeans whose waistbands connect is sumptuously stuffed to fill their blue curves; it's not hard to imagine the feel of the plush denim along with panic from the rope's restraint. And finally, like a small army of protecting Tinkerbells occupying the exhibit from various vantages on the floor, high on a wall, or suspended from the ceiling are nine of Rachel Mason's doll-sized sculptures of women artists and musicians wearing full bodysuits of small sparkling mirror shards. Glimmering reflections surround each one with heroic auras, reminding us of important role models, some of whom are no longer with us, from Shannon Funchess to Eva Hesse.



Caitlin Cherry, "Mute City, Big Blue, Port Town," 2014.
Swimming pool (wood, ceramic tiles, plexiglass, water, chlorine) mounted over painting (oil on canvas), 87 x 79.5 x 12".

Works dealing with environmental degradation also feature prominently. Light plays on the Mylar

reflecting “tide pool” filled with three dimensional rune letters called “Glyph Garland Resonator” (2014) by Brenna Murphy. The piece looks like ancient alien text, reformatted by a 3-D printer, which has just floated up from the deep—another SOS from our earth broadcast on the gallery’s ceiling and walls. In one of several architectural installations in the show, “Evening Composition # 017” (2014), Daria Irincheeva has perched sage-green, spiky, fist-sized airplants, (which live without soil on nutrients gathered from the air) throughout an elegant jerry-rigged structure of slender unpainted pieces of wood. Pairs of un-mortared bricks form the base of the work. A tall, dark hued, collaged architectural fragment looms against the wall. Nature can (and possibly will) thrive without us by adapting to post-apocalyptic environments.

Caitlin Cherry’s “Mute City, Big Blue, Port Town” (2014) combines painting and sculpture with deadpan humor. Around the edge of Cherry’s one-foot deep, white tiled swimming pool (about the size of an actual hot tub) two striped towels are casually draped. This pool hails from an exotic resort in a strange, foreign place. Under the surface of the water, a painting is visible through a layer of plexiglass at the bottom of the pool. Depicting a figure composed of blocky forms in bright tropical colors, the creature looks to be a part human, part animal animation character. A small circle-slash, mosaic glyph along the edge of the pool shows a women swan diving into a hard surface, warning swimmers against this risky action. A crown of red spikes glows on her upside-down head; knowledge of pain is her reward. This woman represents all the hardheaded women in this show.

CONTRIBUTOR

Anne Sherwood Pundyk

is a painter and writer based in Manhattan.

RECOMMENDED ARTICLES



Sculpture after Artschwager

by Michael Pepi

NOV 2013 | ARTSEEN

Artist and writer Ian Wallace recently remarked that we “hear a lot about ‘Artschwagerian wit,’ but there’s never been much of an attempt to define it.” We could approach *Sculpture after Artschwager*, a modest selection of post-war objects at David Nolan Gallery, as an attempt at such a definition.

ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW *Sculpture Undone, 1955-1972*

by William Corwin