

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

William Heinrich, "Material World," *The New York Observer*, April 2, 2012, p. B5.

## Material World

'THE SPIRIT LEVEL' AT GLADSTONE GALLERY; 'DONALD MOFFETT:  
THE RADIANT FUTURE' AT MARIANNE BOESKY

By William Heinrich

### GALLERIES

"The Spirit Level," curated by Ugo Rondinone into every last corner of Gladstone Gallery's two large spaces in Chelsea, unfolds like a Rosicrucian initiation ceremony, beginning with genuine awe framed in circus colors and simulated horror; moving on through celestial allusions, sex magic, decorative symbols and heavy-handed numerology; and ending in a series of archetypal busts with their crown-chakras open and ready for divine wisdom to pour in.

The ceremony commences at the 21st Street space with Peter Buggenhout's three crouched and leaning constructions, *The Blind Leading the Blind #35, #47 and #48*. Made from foam, epoxy, polyurethane and garbage, and covered with ordinary dust but with the murky, brownish, rat-colored gray of ancient dirt, they look at first like accidental accumulations of wreckage pulled up from the ocean floor, but slowly resolve into forms—the pillar, the crouching rodent—too strong to be vulnerable to any degradations of their surfaces. Paraffin-coated crepe-paper leaves by Martin Boyce drift across the floor and black screen-printed stars by Joe Bradley hang on the walls. The feeling of apocalyptic wreckage is completed by two particolored, unstretched canvases by Sam Gilliam, *Wall Cascade* and *Close to Trees*, hanging from the ceiling. In the back, when the artist isn't walking in it up to the gallery's 24th Street space and back, hangs Kim Jones's wood and

twine "Mudman" costume, along with boots, and a metal bucket of dirt.

Swiss artist Hans Schärer spent two decades painting formally consistent, faux-primitive, chromatically wild variations on an oval, simplified Madonna shaped like an aura diagram or a Japanese *daruma*. Schärer was self-taught, but his Madonnas read as sophisticated, if not necessarily self-conscious, insider homages to outsider unbalance and preoccupation. The 1975 Madonna is striped in white and muddy pink and has a blood-red mandorla-shape third eye that makes an ankh or palm-tree trefoil with the other two; another

An unwrapped,  
painted mop head, by Kim  
Jones, hangs on the wall  
like a scalp.

blood-dripping oval in its breastbone; and a grimace of realistic looking teeth that are actually carefully chosen pebbles. The 1976 Madonna has burnt black lips sewn together with thread. However deeply he leaned over the abyss of discomfort, Schärer at every moment remained distinctly in control. Upstairs, half a dozen headless, hermaphroditic, cigarette-butt Venuses by Al

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Untitled (2004)  
by Andrew Lord.

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Polaroids of his evolving, ever-newly-damaged studio wall (*Hanging Chair* indirectly bringing to mind the "Hanged Man" of the Tarot deck's Major Arcana). Lord's busts are all strictly vessels, but their anatomy is not merely decorative. It determines the proportions—function is not erased, but made subordinate to art. One looks like a Brancusi damsel transfigured by a spiritual trephination; another, with two faces like Janus, cups his hand on the top of his head, as if listening carefully through the hole in his skull.

**DONALD MOFFETT'S NEW SHOW**, "The Radiant Future," is hard to figure out. The paintings are made of innumerable, notionally identical little projecting points of oil paint, which look, depending on whether they're white, ultramarine, Baroque vampire purple or hazard-warning orange, like the florets of a composite flower, a giant's eyelashes or industrial shag carpeting—they're bold or oblique, raunchy or delicate—and are marked with large holes, of different angles and numbers, which extend all the way through the wooden backing panels. But then, as if to weave together two separate artistic practices, they're mounted on pipes bolted to the wall, or installed into more complex sculptures—two, for example, are hung from a long piece of bow-curved rebar stuck through the head of a cast cement Snow White figurine standing on a pedestal made of roughly squared logs held together with ratchet straps. Is the aggressive contrast intentional, and if so, what does it mean? The stacking of the sculptural elements—which also includes cement donkeys and antique-y farm machinery—is so elegant that it suggests an artist making serenely indifferent use of whatever is at hand; but is a yawning disconnect between materials and gesture an achievement or a failure?

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Hansen, from the '70s through the '90s, keep company with Rudolf Schwarzkogler's 13-part photographic series of stagey, gauze-wrapped scenes of medical horror.

At 24th Street, the initiate walks over three pieces by Latifa Echakhch, consisting of five or seven color-coordinated, prayer-rug-style carpets cut into open frames—as al-Hallaj said, "There is nothing in my turban but God!"—through a corridor of six moon paintings by Ann Craven, their circle-on-black simplicity not abstract but mythological. The three on the left duplicate, in reverse, the three on the right, made in *plein air*. An unwrapped, painted mop head, by Kim Jones, hangs on the wall like a scalp.

Sarah Lucas's three four-foot-high, bubblegum-pink, plaster and rubber penises, covered in drips like well-used candles, standing on the floor and each leaning in a different direction, share a room with Klara Liden's two "poster paintings," made by nick-

ing advertising posters, wheat-gluing them together in piles and covering them with sheets of white. The corners bend down, the surface ripples, and bright colors peek around the curling edges. In another room, Hans Josephsohn's small brass odalisques are grouped with Alan Shields's large triangular canvases, painted with acrylic, covered with sewn-on circular patches, like tournament standards for different clans of minor gods, and Amy Granat's stunning, wall-size suite of floral photographs. Sharp-edged silhouettes of lilies and pom-poms are so white they almost look pink.

After passing through all these dramas, the initiate reaches a chamber filled with Andrew Lord's weird and beautiful, ropy, irregularly silver-leafed ceramic busts surrounded by the eight iconic charcoals of Jay DeFeo's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*—seven for natural perfection, perhaps, and an eighth for supernatural—and seven excerpts from Saul Fletcher's ongoing series of