



FLAG Does Funny

By ALICE LOSK | SEPTEMBER 26, 2012



Photo by Alice Losk for Artsicle

Is there humor in the kind of art produced today? No, not frequently. In modern art? Unlikely. Conceptual art? Forget about it. Art can unintentionally turn into something funny (especially if one does not “get” the content of a painting) but more frequently art is a medium that requires time, reflection, and engagement with layers of subtlety for which the quick pace of humor does not always allow.

Funny, a show that opened last week at the Flag Art Foundation, purports to inject some humor into art and largely succeeds in doing so. Curated by Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson, the CEO and director of the Aspen Art Museum, the show does not necessarily look for an laugh-out-loud reaction (which it does provide, in the form of some droll works by Richard Prince), but rather the humor to be found in the absurdity of life. Many of the works relied on text to engage the viewer and elicit the appropriate humorous reaction; others relied on their physicality for playfulness.

One of the pieces that used physicality was Matt Johnson's *Reclining Nude*. Though resembling a fully functional chair, it was in fact nothing of the sort. Made out of steam bent and laminated red oak, the object mimicked the abstracted lines of a seated woman, her legs stretched out luxuriously and her arms cradled around her head. Her relaxed position had a kind of whimsical swagger that was at once challenging, sly, and coquettish in its ease.

The play on the human form was echoed in Matt Johnson's other piece in the show, *Bather*. Another woman emerged out of a watermelon, this time rendered in hydrocal and acrylic paint though the rind could have fooled me. As I paused to look at it, two older men with gazelle-like arm candy in tow turned to each other, heads bowed. "That," one said, "Is the best piece in the show." The other one nodded thoughtfully, before adding, "Without a doubt." Ironically, neither of them smiled, which made me laugh as I was watching them. I received a raised eyebrow in response.

My favorite piece was *Lover's Carvings* by Friedrich Kunath. A husband and wife are depicted on a raft, presumably castaways. The wife looks on as the husband saws their little raft apart; both have satisfyingly angry expressions. They are carved into wood that is placed on what appears to be loose leaf paper, suggesting the doodlings of both a student, who would presumably not understand the animosity the intimacy of marriage can create, and an

experienced artist, who is taking a break from more erudite pursuits to create a crafty vignette. Also, the figures could have been my parents (or yours, let's be honest).

Right next to Kunath's piece was Untitled (Lion Joke) by Richard Prince. I will refrain from ruining the piece through analysis (but I will say that there were other pieces that had a similar laugh-out-loud humor, such as Lisa Anne Auerbach's Everything I Touch Turns to \$old).

A different type of humor was available in the south gallery. Jack Pierson's DRUGS (PINK AND ORANGE) and LIQUOR cast the room in a neon-pink glow. Jim Hodges' Movements (Stage II) was sandwiched in between the two, compounding the effect of the lights. Together, the three pieces of art made the room into a surreal, pop-up club, commenting on the absurdity of these types of institutions as well as transforming the gallery space. All that was needed was the bass.

Gallerist

Laughing Matters: Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson Brings Humor to Chelsea's FLAG Art Foundation

By ANDREW RUSSETH | SEPTEMBER 18, 2012



'Frank and Jamie' (2002) by Cattelan. (Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery)

"I think the simpler something seems, the harder it actually is to do," Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson, the CEO, director and chief curator of the Aspen Art Museum, told *Gallerist* by telephone earlier this week. She was explaining the challenges posed by an exhibition she has organized for Chelsea's Flag Art Foundation: she'd set herself the task of choosing only artworks that she finds humorous.

It sounds easy, but vanguard art has long had what you might call a humor problem. When was the last time you really burst out laughing while looking at modern or contemporary art? It's tricky to deliver a killer punch line in a field that celebrates things that are multivalent and ambiguous, and has for decades eschewed narrative and everyday life. And abstract art is not funny. Ever.

Ms. Jacobson has assembled pieces by more than 25 artists for the show, which opens Friday and is called "Funny." There is a shelf with a strainer and a soap dispenser in the colors of the American flag (by Haim Steinbach), two life-size wax policemen standing on their heads (Maurizio Cattelan) and "time-tested jokes," courtesy of Richard Prince paintings. Big stuffed animals that appear to be breathing (by Swiss duo Fischli/Weiss) will arrive a bit later, directly from an exhibition at SFMOMA.

"It's my sense of humor, which is not necessarily everyone else's," Ms. Jacobson cautioned. The wily sculptor Darren Bader has made a few pieces about hair; we'll withhold the details in order to preserve the humor.

Jokes tend to work because of their immediacy—you land a punch line. But good art, the cliché goes, takes time. It rewards prolonged contemplation, which is generally the enemy of humor. "Some of the works definitely have that kind of slow burn," Ms. Jacobson said. "If you're looking for a quick laugh, you might get that in some pieces, but if you're looking for a full experience, you might have to dig in a little bit."



Reviews: Warhol, Twombly, Serra



Reviews: Schoolwerth, Kopp, More



Happenings: This Week In New York

Like 3.1k Follow

museums

Laughing Matters: Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson Brings Humor to Chelsea's Flag Art Foundation

Shifting From Events-Only Focus, VIP Art Fair Launches 'Vernissage,' Drops 'Fair' From Name

The Aspen Art Museum director focuses on the funny

By Andrew Russeth 9/18 6:15pm



"I think the simpler something seems, the harder it actually is to do," Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson, the CEO, director and chief curator of the Aspen Art Museum, told Gallerist by telephone earlier this week. She was explaining the challenges posed by an exhibition she has organized for Chelsea's Flag Art Foundation: she'd set herself the task of choosing only artworks that she finds humorous.

It sounds easy, but vanguard art has long had what you might call a humor problem. When was the last time you really burst out laughing while looking at modern or contemporary art? It's tricky to deliver a killer punch line in a field that celebrates things that are multivalent and ambiguous, and has for decades eschewed narrative and everyday life. And abstract art is not funny. Ever.

Enter your email for updates

Send an anonymous tip

Christie's Nets \$412.3 M. at Record Contemporary Art Sale

A Guide to When Chelsea Galleries Are Reopening After Sandy [Updated]

Dedalus President Denies Viewing Allegedly Fake Rothko Sold by



'Frank and Jamie' (2002) by Cattelan.
(Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman
Gallery)

Ms. Jacobson has assembled pieces by more than 25 artists for the show, which opens Friday and is called "Funny." There is a shelf with a strainer and a soap dispenser in the colors of the American flag (by Haim Steinbach), two life-size wax policemen standing on their heads (Maurizio Cattelan) and "time-tested jokes," courtesy of Richard Prince paintings. Big stuffed animals that appear to be breathing (by Swiss duo Fischli/Weiss) will arrive a bit later, directly from an exhibition at SFMOMA.

"It's my sense of humor, which is not necessarily everyone else's," Ms. Jacobson cautioned. The wily sculptor Darren Bader has made a few pieces about hair; we'll withhold the details in order to preserve the humor.

Knoedler

The Hand That Mocked Them and the Heart That Fed: The Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin
Kienholz Return

9 Things to Do in New York's Art World Before November 19

Jokes tend to work because of their immediacy—you *land* a punch line. But good art, the cliché goes, takes time. It rewards prolonged contemplation, which is generally the enemy of humor. "Some of the works definitely have that kind of slow burn," Ms. Jacobson said. "If you're looking for a quick laugh, you might get that in some pieces, but if you're looking for a full experience, you might have to dig in a little bit."

Follow Andrew Russeth on Twitter or via RSS. arusetth@observer.com



See also

Sam Korman Named Assistant Director at White Flag Projects

Sean Kelly Will Move to 22,000-Square-Foot Space North of Chelsea

Robert Lazzarini, Jonah Freeman and Justin Lowe Join Marlborough Chelsea

Supersize Chelsea!: In New York's Main Art District, It's Go Big or Go Home

Pascal Spengemann on His Marlborough Chelsea Hiring: 'There's a Real Opportunity There'

topics: Museums

1 comment

0 Stars



Leave a message...

Discussion

Community

#



Lee Mulcahy PhD • 2 months ago

Perhaps Ms. Zuckerman could bring some of that humour from her NYC show back to Aspen especially after yesterday's front page article: <http://www.aspentimes.com/arti...>

I recently received this from the Aspen Art Museum's attorney in Denver on August 24, 2012:

Dr. Mulcahy:

I am in receipt of the e-mail you sent earlier today to our client, Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson, CEO and Director of the Aspen Art Museum, a copy of which is set forth below.

You are hereby requested to cease all communications, written, electronic or otherwise, with Ms. Zuckerman Jacobson. If you fail to do so, we will pursue a formal restraining order or injunction to prohibit the same.

Very truly yours,

Kent C. Veio, Esq.

From: "Lee Mulcahy, PhD" <skiaspen50@hotmail.com>.

Date: August 24, 2012 1:11:40 AM EDT.

To: Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson <hzj@aspenartmuseum.org>.

Subject: coffee

Heidi, We're a community and we should be able to agree 2 disagree without bannings. In addition, I will win on the Crown banning. Let me know if u want 2 have coffee to discuss the art museum's ban. thanks lee

I was a dues paying member for years but now am banned after this letter to the editor - <http://www.aspendailynews.com/...> for the painting, Meet the art police

<http://www.aspendailynews.com/...>

awkward moments



The New York Times
Hosts Party at *Times*
Panned Restaurant

sandy irritations



Emergency Rooms:
Many Hospitals Still at
Risk from Future
Storms

the day after



Gauging Wall Street's
Post-Election Day
Mood With Bloomberg
TV's Betty Liu

A Guide to When
Chelsea Galleries
Are Reopening
After Sandy
[Updated]

home
The Age of
Evacuation

[About](#) [Terms of Service](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Masthead](#) [Advertise With Us](#)

