

Saturday, November 3, 2007

Benjamin Jurgensen and Paul Jeffreys at Meat Market

REVIEWED BY KATE SABLE

On Sunday, the Meat Market gallery closed the show *Conscious Inaction*, a two-person exhibition of sculpture by Benjamin Jurgensen and photographs by Paul Jeffreys. Both men aim to examine ideas of contemporary masculinity, through themes of youth culture and materialism in Jurgensen's case, and an exploratory juxtaposition of images of strip joints and hunting trophy rooms in Jeffreys'. The Meat Market gallery can call this show another success, their exhibition design gave the works their due, with a particularly interesting parallel arrangement of Jeffreys' photographs, highlighting the comparison of the subjects, and lending to the message. of many people's lives. The objects seem to reach toward some meaning together, but only in a half.

Jurgensen arranges representations of plainly painted inanimate objects made out of MDF and wood in awkward and often sexual setups, creating short narratives. The arrangements are sometimes perilous, sometimes secure, and the interaction of the objects points directly to the title of the show, *Conscious Inaction*. The objects have been removed from their active context, in position and medium, but do not necessarily take on a new life in their discrete groupings, perhaps highlighting the similar circumstance -hearted manner, as if arranged precisely toward no potential objective. For some, that circumstance would speak volumes.

Paul Jefferey's neutral photographs, on the other hand, utilize places that seem to allude to the man's man of the rural United States. Images of an American sitting room overcrowded with a hunter's preserved trophies of game animals, isolated to a direct comparison with scenery from a over-neglected backstreet strip club point to the misguided intentions of a distinct subculture of men. It would seem that the meaning of preserving an animal for display or creating a stage and lighting to host naked women for view would be to elevate

the subject, somehow enhancing them from their natural states of being. However, isolated or jammed into these unnatural spaces, both subjects are distinctly degraded, the animals by losing their beauty of life, the women by performing in much less than pristine conditions. The images lack the human denizens of the spaces detailed, allowing the viewer to enter and examine the static world presented in the first-person, benefiting in a way from the focus on inactivity.

These viewpoints on the two artists' work bring about an interesting connection, by their focus in this specific context the subjects are degraded to a point of pointlessness. With Jefferey's taxidermy animals, it is clear that people cannot enjoy inhabiting the tiny space left between the multitude of animals. The animals lose the little function left them, they fail to beautify their space, and become an impossibility of reason. The strip club images highlight the dingy and worn qualities of the objects that host the sexual encounters of the people that frequent these places. The objects fail to enhance the space or the experiences held there, but continue to exist only as a matter-of-fact. Similarly, the sculpture objects that Jurgensen creates are also pointless, stripped from their function, happy only in their coexistence with the others in their groupings. Sometimes I suppose, pointlessness does not imply meaninglessness.

posted by artifice at 2:20 pm

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