



ART REVIEW: Three Mid-Career Artists Get Their “Weird” On at CANADA

April 2, 2014

by Janet Goleas

At CANADA on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, “The Weird Show” features selected sculptures by the famously curious wunderkind Peter Coffin, uproarious and exuberant shadow boxes and motifs by Agathe Snow, and a suite of lenticular shifting images by Toronto-based artist Willy Le Maitre. The work of these three mid-career artists is sure to take the edge off any long-suffering winter blues that may still linger.

Striking a silhouette against the back gallery, a giant wooden hand stands out on a first glance around the gallery. The sculpture, Peter Coffin’s *Untitled (Unfinished Hand Holding A Bell Bubble)*, 2013, is structurally skeletal but robust, cupping an outsize bubble windshield from a Bell 47 helicopter in its grasp. The dome can be lifted to access an interior seating area, and those who sit inside are, so to speak, placed squarely in the palm of Coffin’s hand.

But even more beguiling is the way Coffin’s use of the “Bell Bubble” points to the interstices of the artist’s thinking as it relates to the designer of the Bell 47, Arthur M. Young. A mathematician, engineer and something of a mystic, Young’s theories in relational time and space culminated in the Institute for the Study of Consciousness, established in a Berkeley neighborhood not far from the childhood home of California-born Peter Coffin.

All of which brings us full circle to Coffin’s *modus operandi*, a somewhat unknowable mélange of intense research, associative psychologies, intellectual networking and a dose of vigorous but all in all breezy skepticism that keeps the work biting (and shrewdly) honest.



“Untitled (Unfinished Hand Holding a Bell Bubble)” by Peter Coffin, 2013. Reclaimed wood, hardware and a helicopter windshield, 130 x 65 x 65 inches.



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Coffin is a sort of Brainiac Peter Pan, with interests that range from aura photography to the consciousness of plants, to spirals and circles, physics and phenomenology. Endowed with a passion for complex, often obscure theoretical narratives and assorted oddities, his body of work is fueled by a lucid system of conveyances that traverse the mind like the Coney Island Cyclone. And for this tongue-in-cheek mystic, everything is connected.

In the same gallery, a smoldering volcano piled up on a chunky wood table is puffing out smoke rings at 60-second intervals, measuring time in Coffin's palpable, if diffuse, methodology. But it's not the volcano, per se, that makes the point. The key here is the time-based circles that go about mark-making in thin air, linking sacred geometry and mysticism to Coffin's meandering sense of humor and intellectual circuitry.



"Untitled (Natural Phenomenon, Volcano Model)" by
Peter Coffin, 2014. Mixed Media, 48 x 37 x 37 inches.

Nearby, Agathe Snow's mixed media assemblages and bas-reliefs climb the gallery walls like medals of distinction on a suit of armor. The effect is heraldic and apocalyptic—a massive *memento mori* that combines the artist's frenzied configurations of urban detritus with explicit stone carvings in granite, marble and limestone.

The stone works depict shirt collars, neckties and an array of (mostly flaccid) penises and scrotums, rendering all that cultural dignity associated with marble more or less impotent. Here, the execution in bas-relief is downright impious. More precisely, the carvings have the quality of cultural tchotchkes—the type sold by street vendors at even the most revered historic sites. Rough and minimal, they get the point across while lending a somber, if coquettish, tone to Snow's cacophony of Christmas lights, broken toys, Styrofoam and plastic flowers that have been fossilized within shallow boxes and lush, dissonant configurations.



"Night Out" by Agathe Snow, 2014. Mixed media, 18 x 18 feet.



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The installation, at once hysterical and deeply soulful, shares a sense of placement with assemblages by Dubuffet and Alfonso Ossorio, finding its poetry in the space between object, action and subject. Snow's assemblages transform building blocks and hula hoops into something so ritualized they feel ceremonial, like altarpieces.

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"Strobe" by Agathe Snow, 2014. BBQ grill, hula-hoops, plastic balls and magnet coils, 32 x 32 x 8 inches.



"TV Celebrity" by Agathe Snow, 2014. Papier Mache, vinyl adhesive, painted wood and mixed media, 44 x 35 x 17 inches.

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For Willy Le Maitre, the narrative subject is fractured, squeezed between zones of vision by the use of lenticular printing, the same technology used to create the flip-motion cards we grew up with. Le Maitre's deployment of this relatively low-tech stereoscopic effect results in seductive visual schisms, as in *Route Tracer*, 2013, that shift in the blink of an eye from the ubiquitous Google Earth sedan to an oozing, biomorphic glob.

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"Route Tracer" by Willy Le Maitre, 2013. Lenticular print, 24 x 36 inches.

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The lenticular print is something of a technological anachronism, but it's reinvented here in animated non-sequiturs that fizzle in and out of focus in dreamy, shifting overlays. As the imagery morphs between subjects, there are moments of total collapse when dimensional static intercedes, creating fleeting abstractions that quickly vaporize. The visual residue is intoxicating.

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"Owner of the Tree" by Willy Le Maitre, 2013. Lenticular print, 24 x 36

inches.

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Like the constant subtexts that bombard the visual brain, Le Maitre's shifting syntax is the protagonist in a body of work that circumvents rationale while embracing the phenomenon of sight.

BASIC INFO: "The Weird Show" is on view through April 13, 2014 at CANADA, 333 Broome Street, New York, NY 10002. www.canadanewyork.com.

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