

LAST CHANCE: MORGAN FALCONER ON JAY HEIKES AT MARIANNE BOESKY, NEW YORK



Installation views

Allegedly, the works in Jay Heikes first New York solo show have their origin in a video in which the artist, dressed in the guise of a stand-up comedian, recounts a joke about a pirate and a disobedient parrot. But, like an apocryphal tale told through a succession of Chinese whispers, the punchline has been long lost and all we are left with are the muddled retellings. Hence, many of the exhibits, in what is a very promising early outing by the New York- and Minneapolis-based artist, have the aura of abandoned stage-sets and dropped props.

There are four, variously titled, curtained, wooden constructions, very much like changing rooms; there are bronze casts of things like long, knarly branches, which were originally constructed from binding together fragments of branches and planks of wood (they seem eerie and vaguely alive, like the wands of some spirit-filled desert prophet); and there is 'Rules of Attraction' (2007), which involves a rope, tied to the wall near the entrance to the gallery, which springs through the air into an adjoining room to suspend a weight above a lump of cheese: it's the echo of some slapstick joke still booming long after the comedian has left the stage.



Of course, Marianne Boesky's gallery was never the scene of the joke's original telling, Heikes did his stunt on a video, and many of the exhibits convey a sharp sense of that. There are several panels leaning against the floor which represent the blurry interference of an untuned television (the 'Everything All at Once' series (2007)); there is a sequence of photocopied and corrupted black and white panels (IV, III, II (2007)) showing images ranging from roman numerals to a dove to maybe some dancers to yet more interference; and, most strikingly of all, the changing rooms' curtains seem to have been splattered with bleach, that lends them the quality of photographic paper which has been damaged with developing fluid: the curtains lie still and yet the splattering animates them violently. (One hates to imagine what kind of transmissions might be going on behind those curtains, but whatever they are, they sure aren't natural.)

In what must surely be a trap set for over-zealous critics, a few blocks away another young American, Jamie Isenstein, is currently having her own, first solo New York show, at Andrew Kreps Gallery, and that is equally lively with intellectual suggestions of magic, comedy and nostalgia for old fashioned entertainment. Without wishing to pronounce the birth of a

trend, it's easy to see why such themes might be attractive to young artists who are about to set foot in an overheated art market. Fearing for (or hoping for?) their art, if they are hoovered up into the awaiting circus of interviews and art fairs and exotic biennales, it would be understandable if they wanted to, somehow, speak through the voice of out-moded forms of entertainment - to re-cast themselves as simple, crowd-pleasing entertainers, with all the interesting anxieties about success and audience reaction that that might imply. Granted, there is the sense of image transmission and reproduction in Heikes' show, but it is an enchanted transmission, and throughout there is the crackle of magic in the air. His influences also seem spirited: there are whiffs of Arte Povera in the ropes and the wands and the strange pair of plaster boots that sit atop one of the changing rooms; and, it must be said, Heikes' panels of painted television interference look rather more like tyre tracks, reminding one of a famous collaboration between Cage and Rauschenberg which mused on chance. There is some obscurity in much of this - and not all of it excused by that lost joke - and there is some grandiosity too, but it's undeniable that Heikes has brought the rabbit out of the hat.

Morgan Falconer

Jay Heikes: Like a Broken Record
Until 10 November
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