

Industry of the ordinary: Sic Transit Gloria Mundi (trans ~ “Worldly things are fleeting”)

Industry Of The Ordinary (IOTO) are of their own species. One of the notions I have of art is the term ‘Singularity’ where in an oeuvre is distinct, strong and independent as if the creator picked a tangent and rode it out to where it may. This is how edges and boundaries get pushed and pressed and fields expanded. In one sense it provides for art that is instantly recognizable in the way a Cy Twombly announces itself. The IOTO take a different tack where each work is almost strategically different from all the others. Like kids separating M+M’s into color piles the IOTO covers all the bases and makes works including but not limited to: a liquor still, a fur coat, video projections, video screens, prints, paintings, photographs, interactive video, molds, poetry, sculptures, Lego’s, drawings, actions, performances, photoshop and anything else you might care to mention. The show looks and feels far less like the retrospective of one duo than of a ranging multidisciplinary group show. I’ve seen MFA thesis exhibitions with less variety.

It is difficult to talk about their work because the boundaries are so wide and the disciplines so expansive that any sort of generalization is impossible. Thematically IOTO fights you at every turn to avoid repetition and they may have used some artistic slide rule to get this sort of disparate precision. Partly this is due to the heavy participation of other artists who contribute whole works or are involved in a process and this ensures a level of unevenness that is difficult to attain.

There is some shell game though, there is little in the show that is actually ‘ordinary’ save one video where the two of them (Adam Brooks and Mathew Wilson) sit in a bar booth with beers. Warhol made his bones with things ordinary; comics, newspapers, soup, soda and all that and moved on to other things that were ordinary like animals, celebrity culture, urine and pornography. I honestly can’t tell if their elevation of things ‘ordinary’ is a knowing wink, clever framing, a technique for endearment (because for whatever reason you ‘want’ to like them), false modesty, populism or something else. It’s unlikely we will ever know but either way the show, and their approach, is strong.

We have to keep in mind the pressures to “sell it”, sure you can go to their website and buy a few things (prints, tshirts) but really, they have not immersed themselves into the bedrock commerce of the art world. I didn’t see a single gallery card with the usual ‘on loan from’ or ‘from the collection of’ and one has to think that this is available



to them, or could be, if they were willing to compromise. Alas, no, and this gives them the artistic purity to throw darts at the totality of human experience and make art out of where they may land.

To pick a couple I am entranced by their baby made out of beeswax. Despite that they might sting you bees are incredibly tender, aflutter from one flower to another collecting in tiny amounts the makings of a home for their queen. Bees are of a matriarchal society where all is devoted to her but this one flips it all and the child becomes the center. If you imagine thousand of bee flight-hours and thousand of flowers giving up their pollen it's not hard to picture the care and time we devote to the young. It's a great work.

The short lived IOTO:Celebrity and the Peculiar was a collection of plastic tents that housed the perfumes as sold by assorted celebrities (ie Justin Beber, Jennifer Lopez) and was less to look at but much to think about. They looked more like poorly made torture chambers for people with chemical sensitivity issues but on reflection were compelling. Perfumery might have once been assorted flower pressings and natural ingredients but today it's pure laboratory chemistry. These scents are no less made in the lab than the individuals who grace the covers of the boxes with their Auto-Tune vocals, photoshoped features, press and PR agents and all the rest of the mold pressing that being a celebrity now entails. Hero worship is inevitably a bit vicarious but it's an odd aspiration to want to smell like your heroes but I guess that's where we have gotten to.

Every now and then you are at an exhibit and you run across some ephemera of the art world, a series of booklets detailing various actions published by some group in 1950's Brazil or strange notions on architecture put out in 1970's France and you look back through them into some heated moment of inspired creation. I get the sensation same from IOTO, or perhaps they are crazy rock stars in Iceland or Catalonia or somewhere and when they get off the plane there are a couple thousand people there waving flags and chanting their name, it would only be fitting.

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