

## **FANTASY ISLAND**

**Thursday 6 February – 14 March 2020**

**HOLTERMANN Fine Art**

**30 Cork Street**

**London**

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*Fantasy Island* is a place with its own laws and customs, its own habitats and microclimates. From the street to the canopy, it is a place of imagination, materialisation and manipulation - and a zone for sculpture and sculptural thinking.

*Fantasy Island* is a small, in-focus group exhibition that offers insight into the rich and vibrant life of contemporary sculpture through the work of six exciting North American artists: Borden Capalino (b. 1980), Tony Matelli (b. 1971), Charlie Roberts (b. 1983), Sterling Ruby (b. 1972), Lizzie Fitch (b. 1981) and Ryan Trecartin (b. 1981). Together they demonstrate some of the issues that charge sculpture today, showing a variety of approaches to objects, images and materials.

Across the five works on display, we find a range of sculpture cultures, incorporating assemblage, montage, casting and carving and moving between two and three dimensions. There is a panoply of materials, from traditional bronze, wood and ceramic, to a variety of found objects, such as dried fruit, artificial plants, shells and shoes. Paint, pigment and bold colour are found throughout, as we are presented with both the hyper-real and the illusionistic the resolutely manually-made and the expressionistic.

The works can be read as sculptural tableaux: set pieces, still lives or object-environments, combining found, bought and made, and bringing together the unusual and quotidian, the unique and mass produced. These artists experiment with various quasi-anthropological narratives across their ensembles, as we are faced with works that gently unsettle our sense of the natural/unnatural, the organic/synthetic, the animate/inanimate, the real/make believe. They draw our attention to the instability of such object orders and categories, pointing to the fantastical within the everyday, and the contingencies of material things.

Some read as plant sculptures or 'hortisculptures', offering up discordant and disorientating accounts of the natural world - anti-arcadias fabricated, manipulated and re-assembled - beginning their stories from the ground up, emerging from the soil, the pavement and the shop floor. The circular, island-like and wheeled composition of Fitch & Trecartin's 'Free Shot' (2015) has a striking self-sufficiency and mobility. The feet and legs stand in close proximity to the upright target and metal plant, rather like the way antique figures are portrayed attached to tree stumps or columns to provide a stable base. It reads as both trophy and target, and if collected and assembled in earlier times one might imagine it under a bell-jar, suspending in time and space an unsettling mixture of toys, ornaments, knick-knacks and weapons.

Sterling Ruby's 'Basin Theology' (2014) is another island-like object-environment that shares this quality of disorientating self-sufficiency. Made in clay, it also contains fragments of other works,

previously damaged or destroyed. Through this it might read as a crucible, a melting pot of former forms, ideas and, in turn, belief systems. The 'basin' of 'Basin Theology' thus suggests a horizontal, shared level for things, with all the parts of the work melded together through glazing and kiln firing. There is also an archaeological quality to 'Basin Theology': a larger container holds together a small collection of clay fragments of the kind that also might have been unearthed on a dig - evidence of earlier customs that soon then blur into the present life of the ceramic sculpture.

Such self-sufficiencies are echoed in the self-seeding resilience of Tony Matelli's 'Weed 274' (2012). Just under a foot tall, this bronze plant sprouts from a crack in the ground in the corner where the wall meets the floor. It is a plant at its peak - about to seed and its outer leaves about to turn - but this state has been meticulously captured in bronze and paint, frozen in time. Matelli's sculpture is a form of *memento mori*, a celebration of the overlooked and disregarded thriving against the odds.

Borden Capalino's 'Island Sunset' (2015) is a comparable act of homage and attention-paying to plants unloved. Capalino searches freecycle and home sale websites focussing on the photographs of the objects on offer, such as lamps, tables, chairs, vases, plants, as well as things pictured around them. Found pictures of found objects like these Capalino magnifies, creating larger collaged images that he adorns with other objects, glued to the surface of the photographs. In the case of 'Island Sunset', a photo-montaged house plant has been encrusted with dried tangerines, cow's hooves, pig snouts, and walnut and pistachio shells.

Charlie Roberts' paintings and sculptures often centre around groups of people together: configurations of dream-like personae locked into some obscure or ambiguous activity or ritual. 'Get Thee Behind Me Satan' (2012) is one of a number of painted wooden totemic works Roberts has made in recent years. Like a totem, it reads as both tree and tribe, pointing to rituals and belief systems about which we can only speculate. The carved and painted imagery of this sculpture comprises single male and female figures (one a cyclops and one holding a skull), conjoined male and female figures and a large green snake. Such figurations, combined with the title, might suggest the Garden of Eden as a possible setting for the narrative of this work, alerting us to possible religious iconographies in play at the same time as suggesting other more popular culture-orientated references.

In spirit, the works on display in *Fantasy Island* all combine seriousness and playfulness, asking that we consider sculpture and its enigmas in dynamic relation to the real and imaginary worlds it has been created to inhabit. Together, they highlight many of the ideas that charge contemporary sculpture, both across the Atlantic and here in Britain, reminding of the vibrancy of sculpture today and its special ability to communicate our material and emotional relationships to the changing worlds around us.