

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Art Issues
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Jason Meadows at MARC FOXX

Christopher Knight

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Seeing the six terrific new sculptures by Jason Meadows in this exhibition sent me back to the catalog introduction for a 1963 exhibition of new sculpture by Anthony Caro at London's Whitechapel Art Gallery, written by Michael Fried. Undertaking such an exercise was both surprising and not. A variety of painters has lately been making new use of old formalist painting ideas from the nineteen sixties and early seventies, a lively and combustible period in which seemingly everything was still in play. Without exception, these have been painters who, at the time, were either babes in arms or not even born yet. Part of their project has been the venerable one of reexamining and reconsidering the potential locked inside the work of art history's "losers," rather than its "winners," at the moment of their arrival into the world. Another part of the impetus has been to pry open the narrow, restrictive academicism characteristic of the nineties, which put a premium on a social-realist orientation for art. So, why not a sculptor, too?

In the Whitechapel essay, three of the four principles that the young critic identified in the young artist's welded and painted steel sculpture also make sense for Meadows's work today. His sculpture is constructed, built, assembled, or arranged, rather than "sculpted" in the old sense. Everything in Meadows's art that is worth looking at--except the color--is in the syntax. And the works evoke a range of bodily feeling and movement. What does not apply is Fried's emphasis on the centrality of abstract expressive gesture to be found in Caro's welded steel sculpture. Meadows's work doesn't strain to recapture any sense of pre-lingual bodily knowledge; think of it instead as post-lingual, appropriate to an overloaded age of mediation and information glut.

Bicycle wheels, a fluorescent lighting fixture, plywood, metal fasteners, mirrors, basketballs, a kitchen table--the materials assembled in Meadows's sculpture pointedly conjure the work of a number of artists in the established pantheon of sculpture ("winners") since the early sixties. The list includes Duchamp, Flavin, Nauman, Judd, Morris, Smithson, Koons, Ray, and more. Surprisingly, these materials are employed in a Caro-like way. Meadows's arrangements lead you to a disconcerting consideration of the orderly yet visually complex relationships among parts. The fluorescent glow in Portal (all works, 2000) bathes a contained, selfenclosed space above a schematic tabletop, and through to the space below, which can only be entered imaginatively. The titled bicycle tires of Supercross skitter in conflicting directions, suggesting a crack-up. The multiple basketballs wedged between mirrors in Untitled are firmly anchored in place, while simultaneously appearing to float in illusionist space. The stacked boxes

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inside the central core of *Monster* seem to tumble erratically, in unexpected contrast to the rational repetition of the Minimalist structure.

And what of color in Meadows's sculpture? Color is a distinctly Caroesque feature of this work.

Whether red, blue, black, or white, the hue is always applied in a flat, inexpressive monochrome. The paint serves to pick out and identify planar surfaces, which are almost uniformly rectilinear. It also makes the material substances from which the sculptures are built mostly optical. The uniform application plays down surface texture, minimizing the tactile associations that the corporeality of sculpture often engenders. As with the example of Ellsworth Kelly, this is sculpture that makes a strong claim on the primacy of perceptual experience.

Fried's otherwise insightful analysis of Caro's sculpture was essentialist at its core, and in 1963 it reflected a back-to-basics urge whose expression in the face of contemporary tumult and upheaval would properly be called reactionary. By contrast, the hybridized impurity of Meadows's sculpture evokes a simple willingness to play--to surf the rolling wave of phenomenological experience, whatever shifting shape it might take and whatever the consequences. We have less need today for art that engages in a conventional exploration of social realities than for one--like Meadows's bracing work--that questions the advertised claims of those realities on our attention.

ADDED MATERIAL

Christopher Knight is the art critic for the Los Angeles Times. His book *Last Chance for Eden* was published by Art issues Press in 1995. Jason Meadows *Monster*, 2000 MDF, wood, paint, aluminum, metal hardware 48" °— 48" °— 34"

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