

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Frieze
September 2001

Jason Meadows

TANYA BONAKDAR GALLERY, NEW YORK, USA

Jason Meadows chose to open his recent exhibition with a disaster. Calamity (all works 2001) looks like the result of a teleportation accident in the gallery office. An angular fusion of laminated chipboard shelving units and rough aluminium struts, it functions as a kind of light industrial doodle. While each component has been exploded sufficiently to upset its original use, none has been skewed so radically that it is not immediately recognizable. Although the structure displays a certain precariousness, there is no illusionistic trickery involved.

Calamity is unusual in being the only work in the show that is never resolved into a single image. All the other sculptures are, to a greater or lesser degree, illustrative of their titles. So the blue geometric armatures, criss-cross metal scaffold and irregular flat plywood cut-out of No Survivors, for example, come together as the stylized model of a doomed jumbo jet, flames pouring from its tail as it plummets earthwards. Live on the Sunset Strip is more literal still, a flat-pack stylization of cult comic Richard Pryor, mounted on what looks something like a laboratory retort. What Meadows does might itself be called stand-up of a kind; the humour may be muted, but his improvisational streak is undeniable. As the lead of Pryor's microphone falls to the floor and trails off into nothingness, we are returned to the raw materials and basic DIY techniques from which the tableau is pieced together. It's an anti-punchline, a shaggy-dog haiku.

The figure of the eponymous comic book superhero in Web of Spiderman is more loosely rendered. A suitably arachnoid tangle of red basketball hoops and blue anodized aluminium poles suggests both the subject's qualities and costume, while pools of black netting play their part as his weapon of choice. In attempting to walk the line between form and content Meadows sets himself a tough task. Web of Spiderman makes physical the act of continual withdrawal that this process entails; as figuration is approached, so it must be refused; as meaning settles, so must the rug be pulled unceremoniously from beneath its feet. A walk around the work (like everything here, it is on a comfortable and collectable domestic scale), sees it alternately coalesce and dissolve, unforgivingly aggressive one moment and almost cute the next. In his own attempts to define this particular quality Meadows has shown an unfortunate tendency to revive hoary musical metaphors. Evoking the forceful imprecision of Punk, its disdain for the fixed and the polished, and the rhythmic juxtapositions of the Hip-Hop DJ, he struggles to verbalize the *raison d'être* of an oeuvre that deals primarily in the fundamental thingness of things.

With Nikki Nova Meadows pays tribute to another larger-than-life character, this time a porn star. Made not from silicone but from grey and purple-painted wood, its repeated, interlocking shapes give it the look of a construction toy or molecular model. At a stretch there could be an open

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pair of legs in there, perhaps a triangle of pubic hair, and undeniably a profusion of orifices, but it is hard to avoid thinking of Gary Webb and his chirpy post-Pop 'unfurniture' before anyone or anything more seductive. A neighbouring trio of spray-paintings on paper depict a shattered

pane of glass, a floating metallic ring and a field of leopardskin respectively. Even as an index to the artist's sources, these felt insubstantial - doodles as opposed to sculptures of doodles. A treelike neo-Cubist assemblage, Untitled, sprouts green wire in place of leaves and comes complete with its own built-in fence (or at least the components thereof). It is also a dead cert for ugliest object in the show, horribly reminiscent of that prop from the school play which gets recycled year after year for want of something less lumpen to take its place. If Web of Spiderman scrapes by on the inclusion of halfway-interesting objects left pretty much alone, Untitled falls flat through the evidence of too much labour and too little poetry.

Meadows is a graduate of UCLA's sculpture school, where he studied under Charles Ray and Mike Kelley. But the younger artist seems to have inherited little or nothing of his mentors' genrebending iconoclasm, looking instead to canonical sources such as Anthony Caro. Beneath the prerequisite veneer of Pop cultural references and youthful rhetoric lurks serious sculpture, its Formalist credentials present and correct.

Michael Wilson

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