

GENESIS BELANGER, MELISSA BROWN, ROY DE FOREST, MIMI GROSS

Curated by Dan Nadel

March 17 - April 15, 2017

OPENING RECEPTION: Friday, March 17, 2017, 6-8pm



Melissa Brown, *Instructions from a Blonde*, 2017, silkscreen, Flashe, acrylic, oil, resin, lottery scratch-off ink on corrugated aluminum, 60 x 40 inches.

Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to present a group exhibition curated by Dan Nadel. In works spanning seven decades, each artist in this show is making images and objects through often fantastic examinations of the figure and landscape via observation, psychological examination, and ecstatic states. These pictures and bodily objects emerge through a focus on close-up hand-work and drawing, as well as heightened color palettes, uncanny juxtapositions, and unlikely sights. All of these modes confront, and invite the viewer into, an intuitive and spirit-laden way of thinking and seeing.

Genesis Belanger's hand-sculpted fired stoneware objects dovetail the socially charged Surrealism of Robert Gober and the absurdist juxtapositions of Magritte. The deep beige and solidity of her material, allows us to focus on the immaculate strangeness of her forms: a Henry Moore sculpture made miniature and turned into a malformed hand, as though winking at the possibilities for mid-20th century forms in 2017; the absurdity of a resting arm atop a gaseous receptacle, balanced on a faucet-like pair of jeans with a bulging crotch, for instance, or a perfect Victorian flower arrangement atop a slice of a female torso, perched like a sphinx. The violence done to bodies in Belanger's world is glaring, and yet in its poe-faced restraint, quite funny. She is a 2016 Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grantee and a 2017 Pioneer Works Spring/Summer Fellow.

Melissa Brown's latest series of paintings are on aluminum panels with gently rounded edges. Cards, chance, and the Tarot have been ongoing interests, and here those concepts are used to undergird her images. Each painting is a unique playing card (the backs are all screen printed with a pattern), made with a

heady mix of gestural paint handling, silkscreen printing, scratch-off ink, and spray paint stencil. These complex surfaces support the multiple readings that Brown encourages in her allegorical pictures. The works feature strong women in control of cars (so much so that a highly decorated foot can control all that horse power), art, and even time, all occurring in landscapes or interiors that maintain continuity from picture to picture via motifs including a clock, a window, and the undulating patterns of water. In her scenes of the macro and the micro of American life, Brown is one of the few heirs to Roger Brown (to whom she pays tribute with a collapsing midwestern skyscraper) and Grant Wood. She is a member of the artist-run gallery Essex Flowers and has mounted solo exhibitions most recently at Roberto Paradise, San Juan and Magenta Plains, New York, and has participated in group exhibitions at Mass MOCA, Canada, Gavin Brown's Enterprise, and Musée International Des Arts Modestes.

Roy De Forest's drawings from the 1970s represent the peak of a career that began in the early 1950s. Based in Northern California for his entire half-century artistic life, De Forest draws an imagined Western pastoral which is an accumulation of calligraphic lines, jagged dogs, totemic heads, and windy happenings, that if not natural, seem like they ought to be. His sense of color might be likened to that of a cartographer mapping out the terrain in front of him with quick swathes of pastel and crayon. Edward Hicks and Joan Miro were among his stated influences, and both are evident in the flat spaces and wavy forms of these drawings. De Forest's confident marks and sure sense of composition may come from the first part of his artistic life dedicated to Abstract Expressionism. He gradually found his way to figuration in the early 1960s, with elaborate wall-hanging constructions and paintings. It was this latter work that earned him a place in the Funk Art exhibition at the University Art Museum, UC Berkeley, in 1967, alongside his friends and peers Robert Arneson, Peter Saul, and William T. Wiley. all of whom, like De Forest, taught at the University of California, Davis. De Forest, who was

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featured in *What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to the Present*, Providence and New York, will be the subject of a retrospective at the Oakland Museum of California opening in April. Collections include Centre Georges Pompidou, The Whitney Museum of American Art, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Mimi Gross has been an integral part of the New York art world since the 1950s. Her early observational drawings from 1958 to 1975 feature performers, musicians, nightscapes, fellow artists and friends. Gross is casual and clear, employing expressive figuration and coloration built upon the lessons of modernism but unbound by its strictures. Her earliest works in this show offer a scattershot portrait of New York and Provincetown Bohemia in the middle of the last century. Her diverse interests in figuration, fantasy, and vernacular imagery evidence a sensibility shared with artists as diverse as Alex Katz, Bob Thompson, and, later, Karl Wirsum. In the late 1960s, she embarked on a series of portraits, real and imagined, drawn from life as well from photographs and Sears Roebuck catalogs. These flat, stained-glass like pictures are composed of brightly lit color ways that, winding through objects and figures, collapse space into a single plane. They, like all her work, have the feeling of a particularly vibrant memory — whether one lived in space, or observed on a page. The largest drawing on view is a panoramic representation of all of her research into rodeo life and culture for an installation at the Modern Art Museum, Fort Worth in 1976. Gross's work has included collaborative installation and films with Red Grooms, including *Ruckus Manhattan*, 1975-6, *City of Chicago*, 1968, *Shoot the Moon*, 1962-4; *Fat Feet*, 1966; *Tappy Toes*, 1968-9. She is currently featured in *Inventing Downtown: Artist-Run Galleries in New York City, 1952–1965* at the Grey Art Gallery.

The diverse interests and approaches of these four artists offer object lessons in personal art-making that emerges from no school or movement, but rather a tough minded belief in image-making and representation as an elastic category in which everything from autobiography to metaphysics can be explored.

Text by: Dan Nadel

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 300 Broome Street between Eldridge Street and Forsyth Street. Hours are Wednesday-Sunday 11am to 6pm and Tuesday by appointment. For further information please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit www.derekeller.com.