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Spragga

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Johnny Guerrero | Thesis Artist Statement | *Spragga*
Spring 2014

I produce experience generators: mystifying objects capable of creating their own atmosphere, making subtle but implacable demands for recognition and interaction. In both armature and façade, they manifest the quality of makeshift, quirky, piecemealed entities in which improvised ingenuity has been born out of poverty and necessity. Like favelas clinging to the craggy cliffs overlooking the glamour of Rio or the shantytown pressed up against the perimeter wall of the Addis Ababa Hilton or my own harbor town of Wilmington, California laying at the feet of the exclusive hillside estates of Palos Verdes—lack in the face of luster.

In order to cultivate pieces as evocative as they are provocative, I hybridize, bastardize and stylize any and everything I find interesting. Special attention is given to objects that have been discarded, forgotten or broken (a cracked picture frame, a piece of obsolete audio gear, foam packing material), leaving my studio looking something like The Island of Misfit Toys.

While remaining attune to the vibrational hum that stems from the objects' unique histories, I carefully introduce brand new, fresh-out-of-the-container materials and a discursive struggle ensues. Each object will receive new musculature, texture and color that not only suits, but emboldens their inherent personality. The result? A sculpturized painting that looms over its audience, seductively beckoning the viewer to come closer; or a brightly painted, highly texturized sculpture that writhes on the floor, pulsing with life, threatening to burst out of its color.

I suppose what I do could be called “repurposing found objects,” but that sounds so clean and commercial. It’s not like I’m some eco-genius up in Cupertino making trendy jogging pants out of Coke cans. I’m more like Dr. Frankenstein—part Mary Shelley, part Mel Brooks—taking random bits considered long dead, piecing them together, covering them with skin and willing them to live. The pieces teeter between form and formlessness, between coming together and falling apart, between blind hubris and aching vulnerability.

The work innately reflects the ironical juxtaposition between raw and refined, hidden and vaunted, impoverished and privileged, absurd and serious, but not in a way that focuses on a violent confrontation between the two. I’m more interested in that fleeting moment, the tenuous space in which these two antithetical realities coexist. Though the pieces are unquestionably laden with metaphor and social implications, garnering an intellectual response from the audience is a residual effect rather than my primary intent. I want the viewer to be drawn in and held there long enough in front of a piece until they can feel it. Because ultimately the work isn’t about something, it is something.