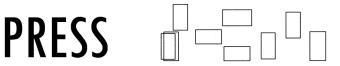
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Jason Rhoades, Four Roads at ICA - Some roads are better than others

By roberta

October 11, 2013 · o Comments

Is it fair to say that the parts are bigger than the whole? That the pleasure lies in the small moments? For me that's the way it was stepping on to Jason Rhoades' Four Roads at ICA.

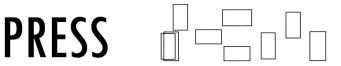


Jason Rhoades, "Garage Renovation New York (Cherry Makita)" (1993), detail

The first floor paths are the most exciting, with all the scatter art. The grayed-out, funereal carnage of "Garage Renovation New York (Cherry Makita)" (1993) sets an austere tone that is completely upset when you round the corner for the big bang of color and noise and junk and stuff of "The Creation Myth" (1998). In both these works, the microcosmic meets the macrocosmic to allow you satisfying big and small moments. Mostly the moments are visual, but there is open content here about life, death, work and play to keep you engaged while you're enjoying the spectacle.



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In this wunderkammer first floor, what looks tossed off but is apparently carefully-placed juxtapositions of this and that gives some hints of personal as well as cultural narrative. If this is not a celebration as well as condemnation of excess then nothing is.



Jason Rhoades, "The Creation Myth" (1998), overhead shot

Most whimsical is "The Creation Myth," a Disneyland ride of an artwork that includes print-outs of pornography, lights, televisions, smoke rings shot out of a cannon, a stuffed animal snake riding a moving model train, and lots and lots of construction debris, conference room tables, cardboard, and wood chips.



Jason Rhoades, The Creation Myth" (1998) detail



The rollercoaster-like arrangement, which takes up the entire second gallery on the first floor, has you circling around it dutifully, in echo of the circle of stuff. At the show's opening, this is where people got stuck, as in, wanted to stay.

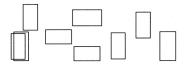


Jason Rhoades, "The Creation Myth" (1998), side view, detail

This accumulation has rhythm, and the cannon shot producing the smoke ring recurs like the chorus of a roundelay suggesting fortune's wheel and the capriciousness of fate. There is no in or out here, no beginning or end (in spite of the construction buckets numbered 1 to whatever).

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Jason Rhoades, "The Creation Myth" (1998), one of the many construction buckets

Whether or not the cannon's action is too pat a reference to the Big Bang (it's corny, but good corny), it adds suspense. It's a moment, too, of Mad Men machismo, of Don Draper producing smoke rings as he smokes and ponders his next drink or conquest.



Jason Rhoades, "The Creation Myth" (1998) (foreground); "Untitled (from My Madinah: in pursuit of my hermitage...)" 2004/2013 (background)

But the artist who made the art on the first floor produced something quite different — stiff and product-like — upstairs. These two later works (from the 2000's, the work downstairs is from the 1990s) feel ponderous with the points they are making. Even the titles are difficult.

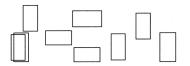


"Untitled (from My Madinah: in pursuit of my hermitage...)" 2004/2013

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Jason Rhoades, "Sutter's Mill" (2000)

The neon signs dangling over beach towel/prayer rugs in "Untitled (from My Madinah: in pursuit of my hermitage...)" (2004/2013) reference product and sales. They are cheery and impose an ambiance not far from that of a club. To know that the neon words and phrases are nicknames for vagina tamps down any possible other interpretation of what the piece is about. It's about women's bodies and the beach towel/prayer rugs reference beach parties and Islam. "Sutter's Mill" (2000) is a construction piece, but without any joy or juice. It, too, seems to be about something big (greed is bad; work is good). As works that seem to have a message for you, there is little you yourself can add. The works seem to want to engage you ("Untitled" is participatory — you walk on the towels), but they are less engaging than the pieces downstairs, which are naturally engaging.

 ${\it Jason Rhoades: Four Roads, through Dec. 29, 2013. \ ICA\ Philadelphia, 118\ S.\ 36th\ St.\ (at\ Sansom).\ Free\ admission}$