

Berardini, Andrew, "Chimerical Coitions," *ArtSlant*, November 15, 2011

ARTslant Los Angeles

Chimerical Coitions
by Andrew Berardini

Cornfabulation

Aaron Curry, Richard Hawkins
David Kordansky Gallery
3143 S. La Cienega Blvd., Unit A, Los Angeles, CA 90016
October 28, 2011 - December 10, 2011



Chimera gets close to capturing it. Not in that figurative sense of the impossible wished for thing, but in the old, weird Greek definition of Chimera: a fire-breathing female monster, usually (but not always mind you) part lion, goat, and serpent, and usually combined in ways that are invariably wonky, the goats head poking out of the lion's back or the lions head poking out of the goat's neck, the snake lending itself formally to always simply being the tail. The fact that's totally mythical to the side, I always wondered how the creature might copulate and with which species (are there male chimeras? are both goats and lions open for coupling? Snakes?! etc), and further, what would any of the above coitions look like exactly.

Looking at Richard Hawkins and Aaron Curry's truly collaborative exhibition currently on view at David Kordansky Gallery, I feel like I now have a good idea of chimera sex looks like. Messy, weird, wonderful, immersive, colorful, somewhat frightening, a little overwhelming and downright libidinal.

Curry/Hawkins colab is all of the above and more. It's like modernism as paranormally wrought by gay hillbillies. Hawkins works have often worked with the spooky, his relatively recent diminutive spookhouses are an obvious segue back into the distinguished artist's oeuvre but his early series of hot but decapitated young men had its own sexy, horrorshow effect. This last series was handily and happily mis-appropriated by artist Brian Kennon into pictures that made Hawkins dark sexiness with a few shifts in meaning to be like particularly well-made deathmetal record cover. I mention Kennon here because he, like Curry, is a former student of Hawkins, and both artists engagement with Hawkins work and Hawkins engagement with his students reveal not only Hawkins importance to a group of increasingly significant younger artists, but also attests to the artists under-recognized relevance.

Here the engagement between former teacher and student is rigorous. There are specific sculptures and wall works that fall under both artist's names, but even in the individually wrought works included in the exhibition feel as one through permeating visual motifs and the weird admixture of the somewhat schticky with the discomfiting. Curry's biomorphic sculptures generally looked like modernist throwbacks, but here (in a trend that began in his last solo exhibition at the gallery) look like misplaced monsters, a carnival freak for a Constructivist creep show.

The collaborative works are, according to the press release, called "Trophies" by the artists.

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These "Trophies" have the look and feel of fetishes, and feel like trophies like scalps or shrunken heads might also be "trophies." Though the wallworks have this frisson of backwater corniness and menace, *Karen Black Forever*, 2011, feels particularly spooky. A pedestal clad in the neon cardboard screenprinted with woodgrain with a trick glory hole punched into rests a purple, girlish shoe box ("Forever" written with swirling pink script on its side) which inside holds a shredded rubber mask, a few tufts of hair peeking out. It's the kind of thing if you found in an abandoned barn in Appalachia, you might start running. In a white cube gallery, however converted to hicksville funhouse, the baleful feeling is understated though still creeping in the background, not terribly unlike the reminder that this is of course actually all art.

In an essay published in *Kaleidoscope* in 2010, Hawkins talks about Curry's regular references to Picasso (famous enough in some quarters to be a simple stand in for art as a whole), is less a young low-brow stud trying to mount the great artist, but rather a "foil for the small-mindedness of country culture." But one can't help but feel the adulteration goes both ways, Pablo's obsession with bulls resembled in its way that of quite a few cowboys, his minotaurs another carnie attraction, which like the Chimera finds its way back to the pagans of Greece (Pagan, by the way, derives from the Latin *paganus* which roughly translates to "country people.") I started this writing about Chimeras, and the Chimera isn't just of course the fantastical monster, the Ancient Greek boogeyman with plenty of hifaluting Classical references to hitch it to. But the Chimera is also of course something you could image in a carnie freak show. It's a confluence and a place that easily resembles Curry and Hawkins current collaboration.

—Andrew Berardini