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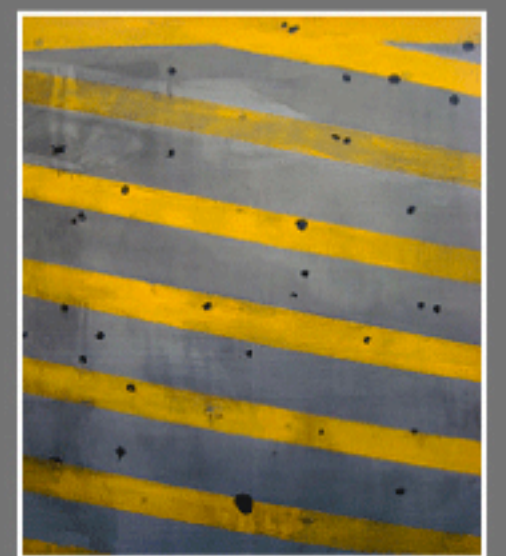
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### Artist Profile: Logan

## Assembling Experience

Heather Campbell turns life into art  
by Dale Thompson | photos by Zoë Rodriguez

Heather Campbell's art explores life experience. Melding polymer clay with a variety of found objects, she creates elaborate narrative pieces that speak to experiences both personal and universal. Her own story begins in Taylorsville, Utah, where she grew up in a home surrounded by art. "I've been doing art in some form or another since I was a child," Campbell says. Her mother was a watercolorist and a ceramicist who often took her to the local craft store or to ceramics classes, where Campbell developed a fondness for clay. Around the holidays, her mother used her skills as a painter to decorate the windows for Halloween or to turn Christmas cookies into individual pieces of art. "She was all about beauty, art, and music," Campbell says.

In ninth grade, Campbell took her first jewelry-making class and discovered she loved the craft. When she continued to college at Brigham Young University (BYU), she explored ceramics and pottery. Her creative pursuits later led her to open a dried flower shop called "Honeysuckle and Ivy" in West Jordan's Gardner Village. Campbell specialized in floral design and she ran the store for nine years, during a time when she was recovering from a painful divorce. "Our family was very close, and that's what pulled me through, was this little business," she says.

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### Artist Spotlights: Provo

## Utah Faux Naïve

A conversation with Andrew Ballstaedt, Fidalis Buehler & Brian Kershisnik

by Kev Nemelka | photographs by Alex Vaughn

Maybe "faux-naïve" art is nothing more than what you'd imagine: simple, modest works by trained artists who choose to draw and paint in a seemingly juvenile manner despite their higher education in the Arts. But maybe there's something more to this art tradition; maybe there are greater reasons for its emerging momentum in the contemporary art scene other than an ever-present irony or a giggle-factor. Because of its consciously contrived nature, some contend that faux-naïve is borderline-kitsch, insincere and premeditated art, but the works of Andrew Ballstaedt, Fidalis Buehler, and Brian Kershisnik—three of Utah's finest folk artists making a name for themselves as American contemporary faux-naïvists—show the positive side of contrivance, that faux-naïve can provoke feelings of nostalgia and insight into real emotions, focusing our attention on adolescent memories or spiritual innocence alluded to in their works rather than on the lack of complexity, precision, or realism often sought after by aficionados of conventional, believable art.

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### Exhibition Review: Provo

## We Can Be Heroes

Supermen and Monsters invade BYU's MOA  
by Laura Hurtado

The first thing you notice when driving up to Brigham Young University's Museum of Art is the long neck of the Loch Ness Monster emerging from within the flower bed. In fact, seeing such an apparition made me laugh, out loud, with both delight and excitement, giddy as I was to see curator Jeff Lambson's much anticipated *We Could Be Heroes: The Mythology of Monsters and Heroes in Contemporary Art*, which runs through April 6th. Giddy because BYU consistently brings a professional caliber to their exhibitions in ways that very few institutions in Utah are able to do. *We Could Be Heroes* is no exception. In the breadth, research and excellent educational resources, it rivals exhibits at some of our nation's finest institutions.

The title boldly declares: We Could Be Heroes. But what is a hero and what are the monsters they face? And, perhaps more importantly, why is this seemingly playful and childish topic relevant beyond comic books and action figures? Well, in fact, our society, and many others before it, has a long obsession with heroic myths: think of the Greek Hercules, the Sumerian Gilgamesh, England's King Arthur, and George Lucas's Luke Skywalker, to name a few.

Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell both believed that every culture, in every place and time, will compulsively rehash certain myths and symbols. Among those continually reprised throughout the ages is the 'hero's journey. Like Jung and Campbell, Ben Saunders, professor of literature at Oregon State, explores the mythology of heroes. His words, in fact, begin the exhibition: "the dream of the superhero is not just a dream of flying, not just a dream about men and women who wield the power of the gods. It's also a dream about men and women who never give up the struggle to be good."

But rather than just celebrate these figures without critique, the exhibition explores, as Lambson explains, "the complexity of the myth of the hero, the hero's relationship to the monster, [and] how a monster or hero is defined by perception." This is done through four central themes: Heroes, Monsters, Violence and Mythology. The exhibition is staged in such a way that you can turn left and face the monsters first or turn right and navigate through heroic figures. Guided by Lambson, I turned right.

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Here are Michael Scoggins' large-scale notebook drawings; [2] Yoram Wolberger's life-size, shiny silver baseball trophy topper; [3] Jason Yarmosky's Caravaggio-like painting of old folks playing cards dressed in superhero costumes; [4] and Cory Arcangel and Paper Rad's video deconstructing the Super Mario game, where systematic breakdown affects Mario's abilities to garner coins or superpowers, impacting his capacity to ever accomplish his futile goal.

Yet it is Ben Turnbull's sculpture, "Bring Me the Head of Saddam Hussein," that is the most bold. [5] The larger-than-life Captain America action figure, covered in a shiny blue plastic spandex, bulging with steroid-induced muscles and a frozen smile, holds the head of a cartoonish Saddam Hussein. In an attempt to mitigate the politically loaded nature of the sculpture, Lambson missteps by using the interpretive labels to discuss biblical references to John the Baptist and art historical similarities to Caravaggio while failing to truly grapple with the gruesomeness and conflictedness of the sculpture. What seems to be at stake in the sculpture is not its dialogue with *Gardener's Art Through the Ages*, but rather, its uncomfortable ambiguity. Is the artist doing this ironically or sincerely? The lack of clarity is unsettling. What are the political implications?

Because, of course, Captain America has a political heritage, as Lambson points out. In a 1941 comic, he punched out Hitler. But what he is doing here is significantly more violent than punching someone out, holding in his outstretched arm the decapitated head of a violent dictator. Certainly, I'm not trying to arouse sympathy for Hussein, but rather to nuance the positioning of this plastic Captain America action figure.

To his credit, Lambson does later nuance the contemporary hero by stating, "We can read about innocent civilian casualties of war or politician's infidelities. Today many of our knights are 'dark,' a more complex reflection of our growing awareness of ourselves and our shrinking planet."

This nuancing of our hero's journey ending in an absolutely happy ending is made complicated in the exhibit's "Mythology" section. Dina Goldstein's "Snowy" makes humorous the absurdity and pervasiveness of the Disney princess who is almost always magically whisked away with her love, on a cloud of pure bliss, happily ever after. [6] In Goldstein's photograph, a tired and annoyed Snow White stares at the camera in frustration, surrounded as she is by diapered crying "dwarfs" as her less-than-polished Prince Charming slouches and watches TV. Reality and maternal jouissance is, of course, more nuanced than mythology.

By contrast, the heroism of the strong, Madonna-like mother dressed in Superman garb and holding her son that we find in Polish artist Elizabetha Jablonska's photograph, "House Games (Washing, Cooking, Laundry)," is obvious. [7] The MOA's use of the image as the exhibition's frontispiece is a strategic move as it helps to mitigate a subject matter otherwise dominated by hyper masculinity, overtly sexualized heroines and male comic book artists.

As for the Monsters, they are wonderfully horrible, uncanny and haunting. Cameron Gainer's "Big Foot" sculpture is positioned in such a way that it caught me off guard, suddenly looming over my shoulder, coming at me in full stride. [8] Jeff Larsen's performance and reappropriation of the Utah Mormon primary song "Once there was a Snowman" is eerie and uncanny: this dowdy monster is lonely and hauntingly confused, not evil, and certainly not villainous or even threatening. [9]

"Sometimes monsters are just misunderstood," says Lambson. "Centered upon our insecurities, monsters often embody the 'other.' As personified points of unfamiliarity, a thing can become monstrous to us when it fails to fall within the bounds of traditional human rationality." Irrationality is exactly what is scary about the snowman. It's not your typical angry Yeti, but in its eeriness, it remains threatening.

What we call and see as monstrous and evil depends, of course, on our perspective.

Violence is what unites heroes and monsters. In Annie Poon's installation and video, "Die Wicked Die!," the viewer encounters a crudely drawn cartoon of some of the most violent sections of the Bible and Book of Mormon: David cutting off the head of Goliath, Ammon chopping off the arms of the Lamanites, and Nephi's beheading of Laban. The style and accoutrements in the room bespeak the 1980s: a wooden-paneled TV with VCR, videocassettes, old looking board games, the wood-trimmed country blue couch with paisley patterns, and haphazardly placed boots and laundry. It's a clear reference to the lived childhood experience of the middle-class Generation X American. Lambson and I are part of this moment in time, where we grew up witnessing the transition from analog to digital technology.

Lambson seems to be hitting his curatorial stylistic stride with *We Could Be Heroes*. Over the past five years Lambson has consistently made efforts to address, recontextualize and historicize artists and themes that emerge out of a 1980s technological paradigm. Think: Michael Whiting 8-bit sculptures, *Mirror*, *Mirror's* exploration of the video game identity and facebook profile identities, and even --though to a lesser extent -- Lambson's exhibition *Matter of Words*, which attested to the transition from books to Kindle. This penchant for 1980s nostalgia isn't only Lambson's, but can be seen as a common theme emerging in contemporary art dialogue, especially for young contemporary artists like BYU's Daniel Everett, who showed recently at the UMFA, and Dutch artist Constant Dullaart, who showed at UMOCA last year.

As for *We Could Be Heroes*, it reflects long afternoons dedicated to Atari video games, superhero action figures & comic books on Lambson's part. But from that childhood origin comes a rich and intelligent language that grapples with our tech-driven and entrenched society. Further, mythologies of heroes and monsters, and the dichotomies these myths create, seem especially current when placed in the context of a post 9/11 psyche where dramatic and sudden monstrous attacks on civic life have come to make up the lived experience of the 21st century. Like so many before us, the hopes in our heroes and the fears of our monsters continue to persist and questions remain. What is our personal hero's journey? How do we battle our monsters? Can we be Heroes?

*We Could Be Heroes: The Mythology of Monsters and Heroes in Contemporary Art* is at the [BYU Museum of Art](#) through April 6.

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Heather Campbell. . . from page 1

When she remarried, Campbell moved with her husband to Logan, a community she says she loves and where she still lives. "[The move to Logan] was the first chance I really had to go back to my real love," she says. Campbell enrolled in a jewelry-making class at the local high school, and while the work was satisfying she felt a desire for something more. "When you do silversmithing everything has to be very precise," she says. "There are only certain colors of metal you can use and it's very limited in certain ways, and I just couldn't do that. I wanted to be more free, so I thought, what else could I do?"

When Zim's, a local craft store, was having a closeout sale, Campbell wandered through the aisles until she came across packages of polymer clay. Next to them was a small sheet that gave instructions on how to condition the clay using a pasta maker, which she promptly bought at a kitchen store. After three months of teaching herself how to work with the clay, she found herself at Michael's, another craft store, where she discovered an abundance of resources. "I was shocked because there was an entire section for polymer clay. They had the clay, the tools, the books to teach you how to do it, and it was all right there in front of me. I had no idea that it was an actual art medium. I was just so excited," she says.

Campbell is fond of polymer clay because of its versatility and the color combinations she can create with the material. "It has so many interesting directions that you can take it," she says. She had found a versatile new material, but she still found jewelry-making too restrictive. "One day I was working on this piece of jewelry and I just stopped. I said this is too tight, it's too small, it doesn't say anything. I have got to do something different," she says. Campbell went out to her studio and found a large frame, which she filled with found materials and other objects she had on hand. "That was the beginning of my assemblage art."

Through her assemblage art, which incorporates a variety of materials into her polymer clay, Campbell found her niche. "All my assemblage pieces have a story, and it's so much more fulfilling to me to work on something with parts and pieces, and problem solving." The complex nature of her work tells rich, intricate stories about the lessons people learn over a lifetime. "The themes that come out in my work are life experiences. Life experience teaches you every lesson you need to know. Humor, tragedy, happiness, beauty, sadness, despair, all those things are part of life and so they're all part of my work. My pieces are about life's complexities," she says.

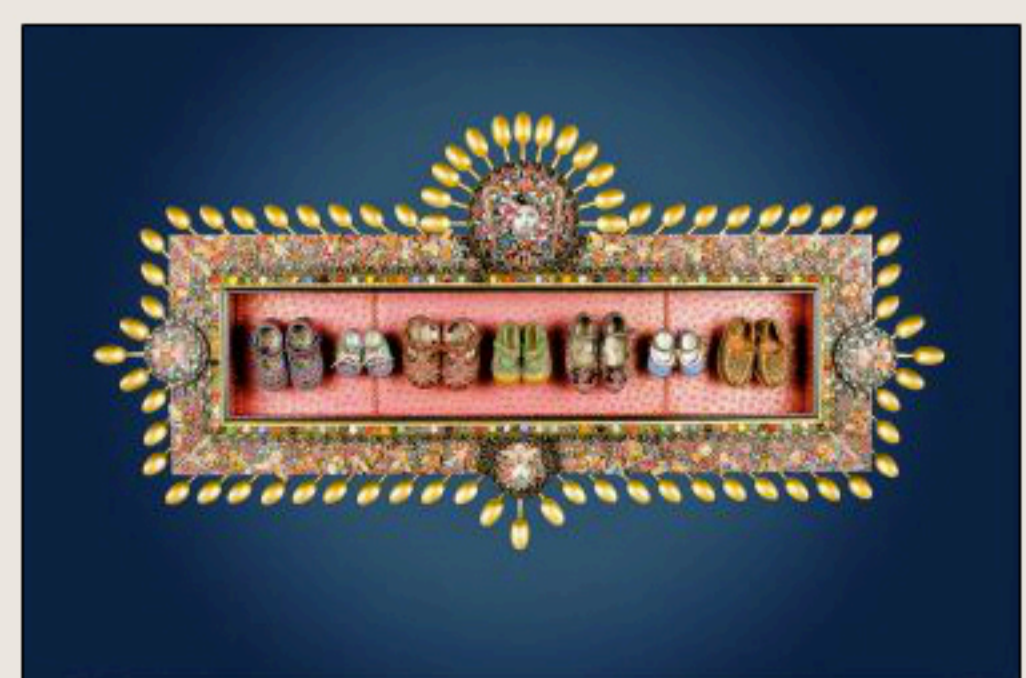
In her "Lost Treasure," an elaborate, intricate mix of materials frames seven pairs of children's shoes. An earthquake that devastated China in 2008, where an estimated 68,000 people lost their lives, inspired the work. "Children were lost in an instant, all that we might have left of them might just be their shoes," Campbell says. When the piece was shown at Meyer Gallery in Park City last July, she says a board member of the United Nation's Children Fund (UNICEF) purchased the work.

"Holding it Together," tells the story of keeping things together, even when life become insurmountable. "It was a hard piece to do because it was very emotional," she says. "It's all about being consumed by rough experience. If you live long enough, you'll be touched by tragedy and sorrow and you will have to figure out if you are courageous enough to hold it together until you find joy again." She created the work by taking a hacksaw to a mannequin and sawing it to pieces, then patching it together again with twine, nails, glue, pins, and other materials. "It is a figure of woman and that's important to me because tragedy hits everybody, but I think it hits women harder, and not only the women but their children as well. Women not only have to make it through themselves with all of this and hold it together, feeling like they're being consumed by this, but they also have to keep feeding and giving, and taking care of others, at the same time as they're trying to hold everything else together." The figure's nipple is pierced by a diaper pin, from which hangs a spoon. "She is constantly the source of nourishment and the source of life while trying to keep herself together."

Her most recent work, "Questions and Answers," reflects on the importance of having the courage to ask questions and to not accept unexamined answers. "It's about working out what you think is true, what you think is right, and having an open mind and being able to ask the questions and use logic and reason to find the answers," she says.

Campbell tackles weighty subjects, but her work is not without a sense of humor. "Moxie" is both a woman and a typewriter, inspired by Campbell's feminist views gleaned from the 1970s. "It's about a woman taking ownership of herself and her life. She's a typewriter and so she is typing out her story and it takes a lot of moxie to do that," Campbell says. "Moxie" was also shown at the Meyer Gallery and Campbell said a woman viewed the work and exclaimed, "That's me!"

That sort of reaction is what has made Campbell's artistic journey worthwhile. "It's the connection that you get with people who love your work as much as you do. And that's what makes it all right to sell them. I get so attached to them and they're so personal to me, but having people react to them in such a visceral way is what it's about," Campbell says.



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Heather Campbell was featured in a two-person exhibition at Park City's Meyer Gallery in early January. More information can be found at Heather Campbell's website: [purpledoorart.com](#) and watch for her work, which will be at the Meyer Gallery in March.

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