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GALLERY HOP AROUND TOWN WITH CATHERINE WAGLEY

Don't Take it Too Seriously

The Unruly and The Humorous
Angles Gallery
2230 Main St., 2222 Main St., Santa Monica, CA 90405
September 13, 2008 - October 11, 2008



At Angles Gallery, Sumo wrestlers trudge through snow, Buddha sits in a bucket of paint, a battlefield merges with an off-kilter carnival, imaginary machinery runs amuck, and a birthday party resembles a washed out still from a dated horror movie. Yet nothing about *The Unruly and The Humorous*, an exhibition curated by Thomas Whittaker Kidd, seems contrived. The work is genuinely, unpretentiously intractable and strange, which is high praise at a time when humor in art is often equated with whimsical one-liners and unruliness seems to go hand-in-hand with overstated abjection.

Jon Polypchuck's don't go around cursing people may be at once the grimmest and the cutest image in the show. His characteristically downtrodden little figures float through a brine of foamy growths and gooey spills. Paper strips come out of their mouths—at first glance, the papers look like cigarettes—detailing the painting's elusive dialogue. The mini conversation that emerges seems like something that might come out of David Lynch-Wes Anderson collaboration: painfully slow horror with uninflected, self-absorbed quirk.

Standing atop a purple mountain, a defiant character made of blue denim has his copper-colored arms resting on his non-existent hips. "You can't just go around cursing people," he says to no one in particular. A white head with a blonde tuft of hair looks contemplatively downward, semi-apocalyptically saying "Well, you are in fact cursed as well." The third character, a felt figure floating toward the painting's edge, makes a melodramatic plea: "Remember me for having lived an honorable life sweet world." Polypchuck's painting is idiosyncratic, over-the-top, yet still somehow undemanding and self-effacing. It's not meant to be taken seriously.

The understated cleverness of Thomas Whittaker Kidd's *Rescue Party* could easily slip under the radar. The painting has a fanciful, soothing color scheme and, initially, the narrative seems straightforward enough. It's only after a double take that the weirdness of the narrative begins to take hold. Why are the life jackets floating away? Who's rescuing whom? What are those gnome-like characters doing with the buoys and what is everyone looking at? Is the man in that life boat drinking a beer? The narrative is so opaque, so indistinguishable, that suddenly it becomes like a riddle with no answer, the sort of thing you might repeat simply because you like the way it rolls off your tongue.

Paul Cherwick's *Cackhanded into the Bargain*, a black slab of wood and epoxy resin, sits on the floor of the back gallery. The out-of-whack sculpture suggests multiple power struggles and multiple, uncontrollable mishaps. It's as if the elitism of Ayn Rand collided with a dystopian nightmare; the main players still seem to feel the autonomous self-reliance that made them heroic, yet everything around them has gone haywire, with haphazard limbs and horses behinds popping out of the machinery.

The rest of the work—by Kim Dingle, Joe Biel, Antony Dodds, Tim Ebner, Llyn Foulkes, Iva Gueorguieva, Nancy Jackson, Annie Lapin, Kelly McLane, Justin Moore, Allison Schulnik and Jim Shaw—plays into the layered tapestry of wit and tongue-in-cheek absurdity that dictates the exhibition. Every piece in the show does its own thing, plays its own game, and offers its own interpretation of the world, yet the works bounce off each other like well-timed lines in a piquant comedy.

- Catherine Wagley

Posted by [Catherine Wagley](#) on 9/22

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