

Matthew Day Jackson Nicole Klagsbrun and Peter Blum

Given the barrage of references—historical, literary, scientific, cultural, artistic—in this pair of exhibitions, it is a surprise that the young, Brooklyn-based Matthew Day Jackson manages to put a personal stamp on such a broad constellation of interests. But that he does, and what emerges is a scattershot but absorbing meditation on how the course of human events and our common consciousness are both predicated on a phenomenon as precarious and pathetic as corporeal existence.

Bodies are everywhere in these shows. At Klagsbrun, “Drawings from Tion” included 12 primarily two-dimensional works from 2008; all but one are at least 8 feet high or wide and, like the viewer, stand on the floor. In *Community Hall* (*Aerial View*), a shadowy news photo of the aftermath of the 1978 mass suicide at Jim Jones’s People’s Temple in Guyana is screened onto an expanse of rough plywood; Kool-Aid colors bathe the surface. On the wall opposite is *Missing Link*, a lightbox-mounted C-print. An X-ray hybrid of man, machine and wood roots cobbled together like Frankenstein’s monster crowds the frame. The source transparencies include the traumatized body of motorcycle daredevil Evel Knievel. A photo of the Trinity test site, cradle of the atomic age, serves as the backdrop.

The human body’s vulnerability is implied even when not depicted. In *Sunrise* (after Roger White), a photo of the sun breaking through a bank of clouds is printed onto a gold-foil, army-issue emergency blanket, grafting an image of sublime Nature onto a reminder of the human organism’s frailty. In a panel below is Buckminster Fuller’s Dymaxion Map drawing, labeled “Our Spaceship Earth.”

With or without the human figure, Jackson’s work is bracingly abstract. “Terranaut,” at Blum, featured a dozen commanding works of tremendous formal power. Another aerial shot of the Jonestown massacre appears in *Here and Now*, in which a tangle of dead cult members’ bodies are cut from brown Formica and pieced together like a dysfunctional jigsaw puzzle. The hall’s roof is represented by an overlay of wood

vener strips angled over the bodies. For this show, the 8-foot panel hung on a wall papered with a detail of Albert Bierstadt’s *Donner Lake From the Summit* in shades of brown and yellow. The view is of a site linked in the popular American imagination to cannibalism: group psychosis meets the imperative of survival at any cost.

The artist seems fixated on the late 1960s, referring in various works to the My Lai massacre, Neil Armstrong’s lunar bootprint and the 1968 American Olympic medalists’ black power salute. In *Lone-some Soldier*, Jackson retools a seminal work of Body Art, Charles Ray’s 1974 *Plank Piece*, propping a life-size space-suit made of military blankets high up the gallery wall with an enormous board.

Three 8-by-12-foot relief works based closely on plates from Goya’s *Disasters of War* are laboriously crafted from charred wood, Formica and inlaid yam of many hues, with touches of abalone and mother-of-pearl. They are curiously marked by the “omnitarian-gulated” surface that characterizes Fuller’s geodesic dome. Goya’s brutal imagery—desecrated corpses, sadistic irregulars—is frequently appropriated by artists, but Jackson’s homage seems heartfelt, even fetishistic.

Recalling *Missing Link* is *Dymaxion Skeleton*, an underlit plywood display case housing a humanoid assemblage of wood, lead and gleaming hardware. (The title again alludes to Fuller.) One arm is a twisting root, the other a broken sledgehammer handle. The case is lined with mirrors, and the viewer regards the spectral figure through a two-way glass. Caught in its reflection’s reflection, innumerable pairs of these broken, tenacious bodies contemplate themselves as they fade into infinite space.

—Stephen Maine



Matthew Day Jackson: *Terminal Velocity* (foreground), *Here and Now* (back wall), *Against the Mythology of Linearity* (right corner) and *As Seen from Outerspace* (left), all 2008; at Peter Blum.

Byron Kim Max Protetch

Byron Kim’s exhibition, “The UN Building, Irwin’s Disc and Other Paintings,” offered relief from the eyeball-sizzling Juvenilia local art often feels mired in. Kim’s paintings (all 2008) do not lend themselves to a one-look

experience. Some degree of commitment and time is required. Without that effort, they may be mistaken for well-behaved reworkings of 20th-century abstraction.

Two of the paintings are based on a black-and-white reproduction of a Robert Irwin disc sculpture in Kirk Varnedoe’s catalogue *Pictures of Nothing*. Irwin’s painted convex aluminum discs of the ‘60s are mounted at a distance from the wall and cast strong—and, when photographed, misleading—shadows, which Kim records in his paintings. Though Kim’s Disc pictures can be categorized as appropriations, they are less brazen than that term would ordinarily suggest. While scaled to the dimensions of Irwin’s original (roughly 5 feet in diameter), Kim’s paintings are faithful to the reproduction, not the art: they are thin, ghostly versions taken from that original ghost, the photograph. To those unaware of the paintings’ obscure source, Kim’s mandala-like Discs may feel New-Agey. Contributing to the milky occult aura, Ron California

Byron Kim: *Irwin’s Disc* (*Pictures of Nothing*), 2008, acrylic on canvas, 72 by 82 inches; at Max Protetch.

