

WEBEXCLUSIVE

Aggregate (Clare Gasson, Nick Hornby, Connor Linskey)

by Kathy Battista

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In the midst of a sea of blue-chip spaces in Chelsea, an oasis exists in a tiny storefront called Churner and Churner on Tenth Avenue. Within this modest footprint two sisters of the eponymous gallery—Rachel and Leah Churner—have mounted a series of exhibitions that seems more fitting for the Lower East Side than their West Chelsea headquarters. Rachel, an art historian who is writing her doctoral thesis on Kurt Schwitters, is the public face of this nascent gallery, which opened less than a year ago in March 2011. Unlike most of their neighbors, they have avoided representing artists, resisting overt commercialism and opting for an experimental approach to exhibition making.

Aggregate, curated by Kathleen Madden, features three artists from the U.K.: Clare Gasson, Nick Hornby, and Connor Linskey are young artists who live and work in London. While their work is quite disparate, and spans the media of sculpture, photography, film, and video, Madden integrated them into a cohesive and thought-provoking show that investigates both the blurring of concepts and media: Hornby's sculptures layer seminal art historical references; Linskey's works effortlessly combine photography, film, and installation; Gasson's work finds inspiration from the history of film and popular culture as well as her personal narrative.

In the front room, a large sculpture by Hornby, visible from the street, dominates the space. "I never wanted to weigh more heavily on a man than a bird (Coco Chanel)" (2010) is a pristine white piece constructed of marble resin composite. Like a riddle unpacked in real time, the work's shapes have resonance in its title. Standing at over eight feet in height, the seemingly abstract form morphs into various shapes as one perambulates around it. While it appears nonrepresentational, the piece unfolds as a multilayered reference to three iconic sculptures: Brancusi's "Bird in Space" (1928) is legible in the thinnest slice of the piece; at its widest point Rodin's "Walking Man" (1877 – 8) is seen in profile; and finally, Barbara Hepworth's U.N.-commissioned sculpture "Single Form" (1961 – 4) becomes visible from the back side of the monolith. Hornby's large work is the centerpiece of the show, and acts as a semaphore for what is to come in the rear galleries.

Another smaller work by Hornby is shown on a plinth further back in the front room. Located at eye level, this piece connotes a traditional bust, yet is emblematic of his practice, which encompasses both classical techniques (casting) and contemporary media (CAD). Typical of Hornby's sculptures, the title recalls the period from which the source material is derived, in this case the early 19th century: "Vanity working on a weak head produces every sort of mischief (Jane Austen)" (2011). Between this work and Hornby's larger contribution, a small color photogram, "Untitled" (2011) by Connor Linskey, faces the reception desk. This finds its contemporary context with artists that experiment with camera-less photography, including James Welling and Walead Beshty. Harkening back to the techniques of European pioneers such as Man Ray and Anna Atkins, "Untitled" echoes Hornby's three-dimensional work on an intimate scale. Representation is occluded by a hybrid of forms, which unfold and elaborate upon further inspection. What appears as one thing morphs into another, and forms oscillate in the viewer's experience.

This experience of revealing and concealing continues in the moving imagery of Linskey and Gasson to the rear of the gallery. Linskey's "Carousel" (2011), which is listed as a 16 mm film in the exhibition checklist, is in fact an installation that encompasses a three-dimensional object, projection, and sound. A movie projector, which plays a film that shows the spinning spokes and infrastructure of a bicycle wheel, is situated in the center of this interim gallery space. One marvels at the simplicity of gesture in Linskey's work. Referencing the ultimate purveyor of artistic alchemy, the artist's homage to Duchamp finds both formal and conceptual frames. The rotating bicycle wheel transfixes the viewer, as it is perfectly aligned with the whirring reels of the antiquated projector. In addition, the sound created by this machine calls attention to the mass-produced device and, in turn, the process of creating the artwork. Linskey exposes the wizard behind the curtain and suggests that making art is nothing like magic, but more akin to mechanical and intellectual precision.

In the adjacent space, Clare Gasson's video "7" (2010) echoes themes found in both the still and moving works that precede it. The video shows a black-gloved set of hands that reveal cards on a green table while a narrative unfolds in the duration of seven minutes. This multilayered work conjures notions of gambling—the green surface suggests a casino table—as well as chance and divination in the form of cards that are revealed over time. The female narrator speaks of the seen and unseen while the cards portray architectural spaces, film posters, and simple text. Gasson's sophisticated work is shot in one take and the artist acknowledges a debt to Antonioni's *The Passenger*. The video also finds contemporary relevance in the work of directors as diverse as P.T. Anderson and Steve McQueen. The hypnotic quality of "7" is a fitting conclusion to this small gem of a show. Each element of the work adds a subtext of meaning—the cards, the narration, the single shot. Together, they create a subtle work with a big impact, a metonym for the exhibition itself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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