



Featured in
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Nicolas Ceccaldi

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BY KARI RITTENBACH IN REVIEWS | 30 MAR 13



Wearable 4, 2012, mixed media, 56 × 51 cm

As John Kelsey and Hal Foster have recently noted, the effect of ‘the digital’ has had unforeseen consequences in the realm of language. The picture worth a thousand words is no longer valued symbolically so much as distributively: it is embedded within a spectacular data flow rife with iconography and commercial interest, producing a long-form message of dubious authorship probably receivable via SMS. Images of words which themselves contain images, figures of speech that engender a new reality – maybe this robust image might even function as a contemporary sort of poetry.

The metaphor at work in ‘Wearables’, Nicolas Ceccaldi’s recent solo exhibition at Real Fine Arts in Brooklyn, takes the readymade sculpture as its medium, flattening the spatial considerations of installation into a nearly two-dimensional plane. The show comprised 15 sets of human-sized manufactured wings which lay pathetically on the hardwood floor – and were presumably, per the title, ‘wearable’. No plinths or other framing mechanisms were noted; lowly gauze orphans lying on bare ground promise to be soon kicked or at least trampled upon, suggesting that they have fallen from grace. Isn’t this man’s general experience of mythical flight? For every Leonardo flying machine sketched there is a painterly rendering of Icarus; for every Gabriel a corresponding Lucifer. As the emblematic narratives embedded in this imagery suggest, hubris proves a stumbling block to glory time and again.

In any case, the concept of the *prêt-à-porter* garment was here rendered inert by the means of display: with no high-tech hanging system or sexy mannequin hinting at just how such *accoutrements* could be worn, the romantic feeling that art objects shouldn't really be handled still niggled on the exhibition's opening evening, a halo buffering around the flocked forms. So perhaps the wings inspired less of a metaphorical leap than they served as a reminder of the naturalization of alienation, without actually requiring any viewer activation. Because in the social ring of the Greater New York art world, costumes are not worn especially lightly – tail feathers must always be out and flapping.

Since the 1990s, artificial wings have been worn by Club Kids, avatars and Victoria's Secret models as a kind of metaphysical drag, invoking a superpower subjectivity based on equipment, rather than utility or even outward appearance (ethereal beauty in an atheistic pop culture is certainly open to interpretation). That Ceccaldi's wings resembled both 19th-century scientific plates of unknown species from the New World (sorted by colour, shape, size, material, artistic treatment) as well as a character selection screen for a first-person shooter in a video game suggests a slippage of symbolisms. Both a certain wariness with regard to the superficial hierarchies of taxonomy and other Western rational systems – which scientifically treat aberrations in style as deviations from a 'norm' – and a modest proposal to leave the categorical behind, to recuperate a sort of 21st-century use-value in art (choose your armour, and your metaphors, wisely). Whether any concrete meaning was derived from its whimsical post-minimal presentation, or later unravelled in conversation, 'Wearables' spoke to the complexity of image-making today. While simply raising proto-ravewear to a serious aesthetic plane, Ceccaldi neither romanticized his material nor forgot the joke. His scrupulous manipulation of *things* – bastard physical objects sprouted from a loose idea – pointed productively to the entanglement of imagery in all sorts of commercial, technological and art-historical regimes, to flout heavy-handed interpretation. So carefully composed, the 'image' of this exhibition bore little relation to the sloppier substance of micro-blogging or cloying gratification of the meme. That a young artist's solo New York debut should address notions touching the linguistic and the poetic is a keen tribute to current discourse, and a refreshing attempt to invigorate the non-representational in art.