

ARTFORUM

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ROME

“Homo Mundus Minor”

T293

In the twenty-first century, identity has become more malleable than ever before, and no version of selfhood goes untested or unquestioned. This shift provided the fundamental premise for the group show “*Homo Mundus Minor*,” organized by Rome’s T293. The exhibit included the gallery’s own Simon Denny alongside Lucas Blalock, Maggie Lee, Woody Othello, Hannah Perry, Lui Shtini, and Anna Uddenberg. On display were sculptural, two-dimensional, and video works that explored the titular phrase, which expresses the idea that each person contains a micro-version of the world’s essential complexities, or that each individual or group is a composite system in flux. Visitors to the show were immediately struck by *Savage #8 (furrie ride)* and *Savage #9 (bea ride)*, both made by Uddenberg in 2017 and displayed to the right of the entrance. The two works comprise full-size female fiberglass mannequins riding trolley suitcases, rodeo style. These lithe and impossibly acrobatic figures evoke the kind of jet-setting millennial art worker for whom taking breakfast and lunch in different countries is virtually the norm. Uddenberg conveys both the reality and absurdity of lives lived in constant flux, oscillating between territories. One can’t help but wonder if the heroism of holding onto the rodeo bull (or, in this case, the suitcase) hides a deep inability to simply stay still for a minute.

Othello also alluded to contemporary neuroses, through a group of simple sculptures including *Untitled (Combs)* and *Lights Out Night Out*, both from 2016. The former features two combs on a shelf, replete with wiry enmeshed hair, while the latter consists of a small yellow soap basin with a sliver of soap. Similar to some of the artist’s other works in the show, such as *Mourning Morning*, 2016 (a disembodied head facedown on a pillow), these ceramic pieces appear almost aimless, as if constructed by a shaky hand, invoking the uncertain rendering of spaces and masses when illness takes hold of reality.

Simon Denny’s multimedia work *TBT*, 2016, addresses macro-identities on a political level. Envelopes, coins, stamps, a shield, and a flag all reference the Free Republic of Liberland, an autonomous libertarian nation located in a 2.7-mile-square zone between Croatia and Serbia that remains the subject of dispute between those countries. Placed on a temporary stage roughly seven feet wide and three feet deep, this sculptural collage revealed scrawling graffiti that posed questions about the future of the fledgling nation, such as *IS LIBERLARIANISM COMPATIBLE WITH MONARCHY?* The work considered and interrogated ever more topical questions about the fragility of the supposedly most steadfast of entities: the nation-state.

In a small room, Maggie Lee projected a looped, fifty-six-minute digital montage of footage from her own life and that of her late mother. The affecting presentation served both as a personal tribute via chronological accumulation and a montage of video, audio, photographs, texts, and animations (assembled and edited with the “to.be” iPhone app), as a record of ever-changing diaristic formats and styles. Early on, the artist’s father (a professional magician) feigns a trick in which Lee disappears; later we learn of his own disappearance, when he left the artist’s mother to run a Chinese restaurant and raise her two daughters alone. In subsequent chapters the artist negotiates love, friendship, work, and—finally—grief. Lee’s film speaks to our need to construct and conserve our identity, and prompts us to reflect on just how tenuous and contradictory that identity is.

In contrast to the human figures that populated these works, Shtini’s painting *Carbonio*, 2015, presented a shadowy abstract form, although its textures evoked hair and genital features. What is perhaps so unsettling about this image—one that is typical of the artist’s practice—is the extent to which it evokes the humane. We are, after all, in a constant state of becoming.

—Mike Watson