

Michael Pierzynski

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Over the last several years Michael Pierzynski has, slowly and quietly, assembled a body of work so conceptually fleet-footed and stylistically off beat that predictable art world compartmentalisation has not been able to find an appropriate place for it. Pierzynski is best known for transforming thrift store cast-offs into beguiling sculptures full of narrative potential, with an amazing resourcefulness and delicacy of touch. His usual mode of production is to take a piece of suburban detritus – a curvaceous ashtray, coy figurine or cartoonish tree for example – and make a mould of it, keeping the features he likes while manipulating and editing out others. The new and improved forms are often cast in porcelain and dusted with the soft pigmentation of an airbrush to make their contours and surfaces melt and blend in a dreamy haze. Exhibited on simple platforms of unadorned MDF or white plaster plinths, the re-engineered plant, animal and pottery species take on new identities as players and foils in imaginative, dramatic tableaux. Pierzynski's exhibitions are always conceptualised around themes – whether the fantasy landscape of Victorian fairy tales, the mythologised consciousness of Hollywood, or dark fables featuring decapitated forest beasts – each of which come together with cohesive colour schemes and repetitive sculptural motifs.

In his most recent show, 'Sunrise' the artist invokes the feel-good, quasi-Eastern spirituality of the late 60s and early 70s. Sitar twang in one's head while surveying the ascetic room and encountering various arrangements of strange egg-domes that read alternatively as lotus buds or encapsulated universes. A string of narrow paintings adorn one wall, featuring a man and woman in an (un)earthly paradise – unclothed and legs akimbo they embrace as they look out over a mountainous valley as the sun (or is it a moon?) rises above the peaks. The couple are not alone in their bliss, however, as they have been cloned into stuttering figural strings as long as the individual canvases will accommodate. The largest of the three, *Mike and Jane and... (Olive)* (all works 1999), places the stencilled scene on a misty, green monochrome backdrop that darkens at the edges as if it has languished for years on the wall of a head shop and suffered a slow chromatic destabilisation. While the presence of two-dimensional works within the show is unusual for the artist, the creation of the paintings accords with his usual methods of appropriation, in this instance utilising the cover art from an obscure Kraut Rock band, Ash Ra Tempel, known for their utopian, drug-addled, free-form jam sessions.

The genetic engineering evident in the paintings also informs the sculpture, perhaps most directly in *Strand*, where a double helix of egg-domes is placed atop a piece of blood-red, opaque perspex. The source of the forms is the stylised mountain range and smooth dome top of an Evian mineral water bottle. Evian may be the 90s symbol of a pure and virtuous lifestyle (at least while on the way home from the gym, and before stopping off for a Martini and a cigar), but it is more likely the artist is attracted to the vaguely Himalayan/Tibetan spiritualism it alludes to. Throughout the exhibition, the domes are coloured in a range of flesh tones that mimic the spectrum of shades at a cosmetics counter, intimating an idealised universality, as if each one is representative of a different race or nationality. That these colours are the products of market research and focus group testing only adds to Pierzynski's sly send-up of New Age transcendentalism. Irony, however, is not all it's about. There is a sincerity to the artist's work that counter-balances the subtle satire, manifested in the impeccable craftsmanship, attention to seamless colour-co-ordination, and discernible love for his *outré* materials. If Pierzynski is selling his own fantasies as much as he is poking fun



Michael Pierzynski, *Clone Theory*, 1999
Porcelain, mirrored perspex, MDF, 104 x 56 x 48 cm

those of others, viewers are more likely to be seduced first by the aesthetic acumen of his work and only later to come around to the discursive richness of his tropes. As his project continues to grow and diversify, it will become increasingly difficult for him to evade the spotlight of attention that he has rightfully and patiently earned.

Michael Darling
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