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The Art of Funny: Cartoon Imagery, Often With an Edge

The prevalence of humor in today's art might be historically unprecedented. In Western traditions up to the 1980s, comic art was always a minor genre.

Now, many of our most celebrated artists work in a comic vein. Jeff Koons, Cindy Sherman, Paul McCarthy, and Mike Kelley, among others, is something to ponder: "Pudgy, pot-bellied, portly" at the elegantly spaced SculptureCenter offers a good occasion for doing so.

"An art is an art. It's an avenue, haphazard affair. But because it presents so many different kinds of visual and conceptual humor among works by 25 artists, it's worth having aside questions of aesthetic quality to consider the ways and varieties of funny art."

The show was organized by Baba Jatar, the museum's curator, and the artist Camille Henrot. They were inspired by the move "Who Framed Roger Rabbit." The title of the show was taken from the literary cartoonist Saul Steinberg.

"Pudgy, pot-bellied, portly" runs through Jan. 5 at SculptureCenter, 48-42 Parsons Street, Long Island City, Queens; 718-248-1750, sculptcenter.org.


One room presents works by Steinberg. "Bank Street (Three Books)," pictures what might be a surreal attack: A nervousness causing a slice to groan in an intersection where anthropomorphic rabbits and a missinfaced woman die in the street. A row of bank buildings looks at a possibly nefarious picture of money and politics. Made in 1978, it's an antithetical view as it ever was.

Jordy Wetton's naturalistic montage of photographic and cartoon images annotated by salaciously humorous block letters was shown. "Roger Rabbit" mix of animation and real life, acting, but the expression of anxiety in the act of sexual communion left a much harder edge.

The pairing of Janine Antoni's sculptures with comedian's diaries and autobiography of a cancerous body is more than a bit of "Why Style Bell-Jar Touches.

Mick Peter's sculptures have a smart, New Yorker magazine style caricature drawn on shaped, fixed-standing halls, wedding Modernist abstraction and Middlebrow illustration. Biting on Minimalism, Mickey Mouse's large, fixed-standing transparent panels have cartoon pink backgrounds painted on them, so if they're suffered multiple cuts and bruises.

Consisting mainly of three-dimenional objects, the exhibition takes on comedic art's structural properties like paradox, exaggerated scale and dysfunctional mechanics.

Animation appears in various forms. A sheet metal by Mark Leckey focuses on the tail of Felix the Cat appropriate from old cartoons. It's just a black line, but appears to be dancing and imbued with an exuberant life of its own.

Another view of the robotic machines are across the gallery floor like tar pits and stop helpfully when they're hit. In several pieces, pieces of clear glass resembling sprits of water project pipe fittings attached to walls. Made by Will McCatty, they suggest that the walls are full of water as if in a dream.

Gina Bagin's Minimalist hybrids of paintings and sculptures have black membranes of painted rubber stretched around bent and twisted frames of metal rod. It's as if they were wrestling themselves away from the structures at the flat rectangle.

A nearly life-size assembly by Chadwick Ramston is made up of curry, wooden desktops, a humidifier handset dangling from spiral cords, ballpoint pens dangling from this chain, and other pieces of office equipment attached. It's funny to think of it in relation to "Endless Columns" Brancu-

Pudgy, pot-bellied, portly

SculptureCenter

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