LOS ANGELES

Karl Haendel: "Unwinding Unboxing, Unbending Uncocking" at Night Gallery

It is easy to be seduced by Karl Haendel's draftsmanship, visual acuity, sense of composition, and ability to juxtapose seemingly unrelated elements into something more than meets the eye. His works function on both the visual and intellectual planes and while they can be appreciated on a formal level, figuring out the puzzle of his intentions is part of their allure. Beyond making individual works, Haendel often uses a given wall or an entire exhibition space as the container for his thought-provoking creations. "Unwinding Unboxing, Unbending Uncocking" is a site-specific installation with painted orange, yellow, purple, green, blue and pink walls which emanate from 3-inch-high floor-based corrals of like-colored substances—pink packing popcorn, blue-and-orange dyed lentils, dried green peas, brown rice and cardboard shards. Strategically placed on each wall is a beautifully executed framed pencil drawing depicting women engaged in various yoga positions. Each title is an Indian sounding word, some of which reference Hindu deities while others represent modern missile systems. These drawings are encased in unusually shaped frames that parallel the poses, and placed so they hug the top, bottom and sides of the walls. To experience the entire exhibition requires stepping over or moving through the sandbox-like corrals of substances, disturbing their surfaces.

Scattered throughout the installation are constructions of knee-to-hip-high cardboard pedestals that support unframed graphite drawings. Each of these works is comprised of a drawing of a Zodiac symbol and three to four other objects not necessarily drawn to scale. *Gemini Germ, Bullet Beloved* (2014) juxtaposes the cover of Toni Morrison's book "Beloved," with the symbol for Gemini, a bullet and an oversized germ. Similarly, *Leo Hole, Earbud Buttplug (binky) #2* (2014) is a drawing of those elements. The drawings are full of bodily and medical references as well as sexual objects—i.e. butt plugs, IUDs, specula, cigars, cucumbers and carrots.

Unpacking the exhibition's title gives clues to deeper meanings. Without the "un" there are boxes, bends, cocks and wind. The use of "un" features letters of the same shape, bent in opposite directions, signs for the yin/yang, push/pull—dialectal relationships within the exhibition. Haendel creates a narrative that weaves through the disparate groupings and can be read in any sequence. While the exact nature of the narrative remains ambiguous, it is sifted through the lens of astrology, yoga poses and the interconnectedness of mind and body. The result is an evocative and challenging installation, comprised of individual elements whose meaning when seen in relation to each other is simultaneously finite and open-ended.

—JODY ZELLEN

"The House that Jack Built," 2015
Lisa Bartleson
Cast bio-resin and pigments, 21" x 18¾" x 21¼"
Photo: Lisa Bartleson

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