

The Most Powerfully Advertised Commercial Product

by Anthony Elms

Carol Jackson offers fractured modulation and reflective surface and blank scene together as sculptures to give form to a measure of structural fatigue in medias res. In the same car. The wheels have long since come loose and the chassis is forcibly wrapped around some obstruction or bystander— again. *Every chance, every chance that I take*. This wreckage she crafts is marvelously ornate, thankfully, for those of us gathered together at the scene. Jackson incongruously welds a wide range of vernacular traditions and sights— mid-century social realism, old timey book illustrations, foregone epic idiom, Americana of a most vibrantly irrational resonance, celebratory decoration, and promissory signage— onto craft materials and techniques—tooled leather, enamel, papier-mâché, souvenir, wood working, decoupage— resulting in objects that simultaneously seduce and repel. *I take it on the road...* Within sculptural folds and kinks seethes a bitter movement past roiling waves of us-and- them moral certainty, to enter a raging ethical undertow of we-all-load-the-truck empathetic complicity.

Identification with sculpted detailing fuels the quotidian affects of Jackson's sculptures (and let's not forget her prints and drawings), not with pop art celebration, but rather a cheap picturesque of the grandiose innately wrong. *I was always looking left and right...* Similar to novelist JG Ballard who delivered offhanded brilliance in a body of writing and collection of quip-filled interviews that still to this day read as a multi-volume owner's manual to the rollovers of the infernal combustion engine that is history. Rereading Ballard periodically, you recognize how some accidents are so fractured and piecemeal and psychotic that the reports take time to file.

From a 1983 interview:

The American Dream has run out of gas. The car has stopped. It no longer supplies the world with its images, its dreams, its fantasies. No more. It's over. It

supplies the world with its nightmares now: the Kennedy assassination, Watergate, Vietnam.

Dated examples, and yet Ballard gives us our due. The United States of America has always invested heavily in nightmares. Perhaps it was just a fluke that we developed any profitable holdings in images, dreams, and fantasies to begin with?

Take our architectural replication disorder. *Jasmine, I saw you peeping*. We recombine incongruous past styles tirelessly atop one another in cornices and balustrades and framing and wainscoting and molding; if not always in physical form, in operative function. This is particularly true even when all is bangs and mod and tonal elision masking rearview perspective in our machines for living. Americana is live theater staging minus resolved plot, and is in wildly erratic performance everywhere coast-to-coast. It plays fantastically in Peoria.

Take the Chippendale rococo Jackson has been using recently as a source. It isn't rococo exhilaration. It isn't a form of Orientalism othering (not that this would be a good thing). It isn't neoclassical even if it reads somewhat stately. It's a little of this-and-that bluster somehow appealing in bricolage monstrosity. As form, it is neither an outline of a rational brain nor the inner functioning of bodiless desire; it is more a physical haunting via various ways we think we once were or wanted to be. This isn't just true of Chippendale rococo; it is true of history, social forms, political paths, conflicts, and aesthetics—big and small. It can be found growing barnacle-like on most of our foundations; as a consequence we find our present stress fractured by the whims of ghosts and conjectures too convoluted to rationalize with or against. *As I pushed my foot down to the floor*. So we keep on tried and true paths routed as if the future was a wall. What's worse, we crave this whiplash rush, accelerating the rate of bastardized rearguard invention and thereby feeding nostalgic morass with irrational exuberance.

Ballard, ghost writing the infliction—again: “The advanced societies of the future will not be governed by reason. They will be driven by irrationality, by competing

systems of psychopathology.” We are that future. Jackson sculpts this future. In this current body of works, exuberant red forms and exhortations are everywhere, décor traveling at a speed of 94 decades per hour brought to a sudden stop. Jackson has identified influences and sources: Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and government webcams, American copies of European architectural forms and *High Plains Drifter*. The confluence of these (and other) psychopathologies in these sculptures and in our future is bitterly humorous, in a maddeningly convoluted freeway interchange, pins and needles, kind of way. ...*I was always going round and round*. In *Paradise Lost* Satan presides over council in Pandemonium. I imagine a kind of C-Span live coverage. Satan is charismatic but also a politician sort; no need to assume he is any brighter than the rest of us. He might begin: “Well, right now I don’t feel too agreeable.” And continue on. Looking to project just the right mix of epic arrogance rolling around sad thumping moments and resolve. Of course he’d need guidance to address the assembled and stay on point. To which an ongoing series of “Cue Cards for Satan” by Jackson help him enunciate the expired pleas. If we can’t quite read the meticulous forms and patterns and curves of the red pseudo-writing Jackson offers, that’s OK, Satan can. And anyway, in this setting there is no mistaking what the folds contain.

Spurned medals in honor of a hollow, violent, and unstable American empire, are littered throughout the sculptures of Carol Jackson. In the old west “they say the dead don’t rest without a marker of some kind.” A rather paranoid approach to society and its haunting, foreshadowing retribution as a just foundation for civic charter and not the arbitrary narrative device it actually is. Free will returned as a periodically administered road test. Still, Jackson is working her damndest on that marker; inscribed: “Somebody left the door open and the wrong dogs came home.” An oft-desired plot styled with quantities of speed, power, morality, trauma, and belief that by now we should know well enough to temper. *Oh, but I’m always crashing...*