

HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

September 25, 2013

The Girl Gore Aesthetics of White Lace, Ghosted Bodies, and Animal Menageries at Expo Chicago

-Alicia Eler

CHICAGO — I didn't want to go to the art fair. I never do. A lot of stuff at art fairs is the same-ish, as artist William Powhida recently mused, and galleries are trying their best to sell the most. Yet the art fairs keep coming, and as the market has proven Chicago is no exception. This year I went and discovered an aesthetic throughline — the girl gore aesthetic — and that strung me along from one sculpture to the next. I want to tell you about it. But first I want to tell you about Expo Chicago, which is now in its second year.

This fair marks a triumphant comeback and response to the Midwestern loss of Art Chicago that got the city talking again. As I wrote last year, Expo marked the beginning of Chicago's new art identity in the post-Mayor Daley era. Now in its sophomore year, Expo Chicago director Tony Karman boasted that the fair was making more sales, which is a good thing we assume. It would be great to see an international art fair sustain itself in Chicago. This year I went to Expo Chicago not looking for what was showing at "big name" galleries like David Zwirner, Rhona Hoffmann and Marianne Boesky, but rather the adolescent dreaming of what could be — much like Karman and the fair itself.

I discovered the girl gore aesthetic, which commingles Kiki Smith muscle memories, Yayoi Kusama bodily expenditures, and Banksy street art barf sprinkled with human teeth, white lace, lip stick, pink flowers, and the emotional labor of repetition and revision. This aesthetic occupies space between the white walls of the art world, and bypasses any reference to the internet-only teen-girl tumblr aesthetic. This work is raw and best experienced IRL. Here is a curated collection of an aesthetic that you may have passed by, or seen and passed through — a distant memory of a former ghost, you.

Lorna Williams

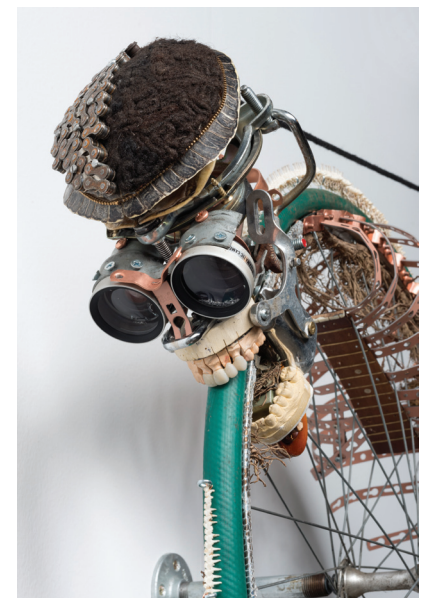
A rib cage plucked from an anonymous metallic body wraps itself around a wire-y bike tire padded with the spine of a tiny lizard and the scales of a dead snake. It used to spin through the mouth of a skeleton, which has since consumed the brakepads, eating the wheel every chance it gets. A rope attached to the top of the head is carefully hung and balanced by a chunk of cement, which acts more like a balancing mechanism to this precarious situation. Genderless and weightless, this figure — girl gored — hangs suspended with parts, eyes, teeth, and spine exposed. The wheels are turning, but they're not spinning in the way that bikes do. She is suspended, hanging, perfectly in balance.

Laurel Nakadate

The muddled moments of a frenzied spill of fluids marked by dragged handprints, painted in black, and lipstick kisses is splayed out across a single strip of pink-rose-covered wallpaper. The hyper feminine pink rose, a symbol of girlish innocence, is marked by a frenzy of adult moves, sexual encounters that the viewer will leave wondering about — did they ever happen? And does it matter? The girl is gone, gone, gone.



Lorna Williams, "Ouroboros" (2013) at DODGEgallery



Lorna Williams, "Ouroboros" (2013) detail, at DODGEgallery

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Amy Cutler

Tiny horses gallop out of the torso of a woman whose body has disappeared from the waist down. Her eyes are wide open, as if in the middle of a psychic vision or hallucination. There is no blood of childbirth or ripping apart of bodily membranes; here we only see tiny horses leaving one world and entering another.

Yayoi Kusama

Tiny phallic-shaped white fungi grow out of pink-and-beige-colored wisps of hair-like, tumbleweed-esque material. This chair looks like it could have been on the set of Grey Gardens, where Jackie O.'s first cousin "little Edie" became a woman yet remained a girl. Kusama's work often times evokes an aesthetic of unnatural nature — a world that could only exist in faux fairytales of the painfully psychedelic and hypnotic nature, where the girl goes to snooze, maybe till she dies.

LaToya Ruby Frazier

Framed against a sheet covered in pink and yellow flowers, Ruby Frazier's one-minute video work Momme Portrait Series (Wrestle) wrangles the emotional moments between a mother and her daughter, or a daughter and her mother. First on top of the sheet and then behind it or underneath — it's unclear whether this video was shot from above, which means they are lying on the sheet, or in a straightforward manner so that the sheet is hanging from the ceiling — the artist and her mother wrestle, roll and tumble around, digging into one another's tiny crevices, those personality ticks and relational taps that only close family knows.

Tameka Norris

Located toward the western end of the long EXPO showroom, Norris' piece created a literal passage way from the hallway behind Lombard Freid Gallery, and opening into the gallery space itself. Swinging like a porch door in the Southern heat, this simply titled work, "Untitled, Door," uses the curiously complicated material of lace, which marks both virgins and whores, the veils of brides and saints, young girls (think Taylor Swift's single 22), and mourners at funerals. Lace marks this literal and metaphorical passage-way from one side to another. Passing from one side to another is deceptively simple and perhaps too easy — especially in the context of an art fair.



Laurel Nakadate, detail of "Interior, II," (2012), ink, lipstick on wallpaper, at Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects



EXPO Chicago: The International Exposition of Contemporary & Modern Art ran September 19–22 at Chicago's Navy Pier Festival Hall (600 E Grand, Chicago).

Yayoi Kusama, "Pollen" (1984), mixed media on chair, 34 x 19 x 23 inches, at Vivian Horan Fine Art