

Face Whole Book Foods

Within the astrological calendar, each of the zodiac's twelve constellations has an age. Each age lasts roughly 2,150 years corresponding to a 28,500-year cycle in which the earth's axis gyroscopically shifts its orientation towards the various constellations. According to some, the Age of Aquarius is upon us. Under this rubric, the world's strife and upheaval are mere growing pains. Socio-political revolution--the dismantling of old values and institutions--represents an evolution in human consciousness. In a universe where human affairs are governed by the dawning of a new celestial era, the world falls apart only to come together, putting a premium on a belief in the interconnectedness of all things.

The Age of Aquarius is not a period that has yet to be, but a moment that has come to pass. Indeed, the Age of Aquarius commonly refers to the latter half of the 1960s and early 1970s. It designates a period whose utopian aspirations achieved their fullest expression in alternative lifestyles. These were born of a turbulent decade whose rhetoric devolved from that of effecting social change to that of personal fulfillment: from 1964, in which Lyndon B. Johnson unveiled the "Great Society," to 1969, which Newsweek dubbed "Year of the Commune." Thanks in no small part to youth culture, the period's aspirations found unforgettable expression. An endless celebration of the period, however, overshadows the fact that the retreat from the social into the personal took place against an encroaching sense of disillusionment. As an exercise in cultural memory, the Age of Aquarius yields an irony-riddled nostalgia often taking the form of self-mockery by those proclaiming "been there, done that." But the disavowal of the period by liberals and its demonization by conservatives is what marks the Age of Aquarius' estrangement from the present.

This three-person exhibition features Carol Bove (b. 1971), Amy Grappell (b. 1964), and David Noonan (b. 1969). For this generation of artists, the Age of Aquarius has become an archaeological site whose findings exist as effects of history. These artists are young enough to claim historical objectivity in relation to events of the 1960s, and simultaneously old enough to have a deeply subjective relationship to its effects. As wide-eyed and silent witnesses to the Age of Aquarius, they are granted an arms-length proprietary interest in the period, an ownership but at a critical and critically specific distance. More important than being linked by way of period-based content (free love, mimes, the inherent expressivity of natural forms), is the extent to which these three very different artists allow the period to speak for itself. Under this constraint, the challenge is distinguishing the generation being spoken *for* from the generation being spoken *of*.

Whether it is Bove's plinth-based reliquary, *La Traversée Difficile* (The Difficult Crossing), 2008, a curated selection of objects and images linking the unconscious to the expanded conscious via the

figures of Rene Magritte and Gerald Heard; Grappell's *Quadrangle*, 2009, an unflinching documentary about her parents' spousal swap; or Noonan's sustained mining of the period's dance and theater photo documentation for its expressive excesses, all three artists are engaged in conspicuous appropriation. While forthrightly invoking the period, their work collectively speaks more to the period's estrangement from the present, a predicament mirroring the fate of these artists' generation as it is caught between the "me generation" and digital techno-natives who came of age after the internet's advent. On the one hand, the Age of Aquarius was eclipsed by New Age, a ubiquitous brand of spirituality cum lifestyle that, as a major market force, was more aligned with an ever-burgeoning "quality-of-life-revolution" spawned in the 1980s than any spiritual indulgences attributable to hippies. On the other hand, there is the digital revolution whose generational dividing line is not the presence of the computer, but whether you came of age before social networking. But these artists' generation was weaned on a rhetoric of alternatives and spiritual development that produced an itch neither Whole Foods nor Facebook can scratch. As a result, their soul-searching, at mid-life's eve, has just begun, and what better place to start than the cultural site of their souls' nascence?

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