

Richard Telles presents new paintings and a large pagoda sculpture by Richard Hawkins, his 10th solo exhibition with the gallery.

For his new suite of “Night Gallery” paintings, Hawkins depicts interior antechambers on whose walls lurk pictures of smug and disapproving old haggards, electric pink ladyboys, and willowy epebes – all hung jerky-janky salon style on bright fat carnival-colored walls. Other smaller “Rainbow Room” paintings take the viewer into more spare quarters, containing only Hawkins’ trademark tri-colored trash barrels billowing smoke and darkened somber windows or, occasionally, handsome youths perched behind gloryholes like Adults-Only versions of kissing-booths. The pagoda sculpture on view, standing over eight feet high on a black table, acts as a possible fulcrum to the exhibition as well as the sculptural shell for the paintings.

Surveying these works, the viewer becomes a tourist in an epithumetic dystopia, the pagoda sculpture its primary spectacle. Named “Smut Palace”, the multi-tiered Orientalist structure, built from cardboard, wood and paint, shelters different floors under its scalloped eaves, slaking different desires and (dis)comforts on every level (signs on the outside offer “Massage”, an “Adult Arcade”, a “Head Shop” ...). The desires addressed within, aside from what the pagoda’s signs offer, skim the surface of lurid exoticist memoirs, alluding to a systematic traipsing through of desire itself and its implications. The particulars of those delights though are long forsaken, leaving one with the definite feeling that the party was pretty much over before it even began. Instead, we are left with Hawkins’ penchant for polychromatic embellishment in the discordant colors that fleck the pagoda itself: a profusion of chroma, equally indebted to Moreau, Bonnard and Sid & Marty Krofft, manifests the promise of pleasures better dreamed-of than sensed or spoken.

The same could be said, in regards to pleasure, of the tri-colored trashcans that punctuate the sculpture and paintings, some of which spew fat bloated clouds of grey billowing smoke. As much as a roundly horizontal tonic to the flat vertical strips of the paintings, they are curious flourishes to Hawkins’s narrative. Smoke, that intangible state of matter, permeates as an absent stench and without knowing what (exactly) is being burned, or what might happen (or has already long-since happened) (or almost but not quite happened) in every cubicle and dusty corner portrayed, Hawkins expands upon his career-long labyrinth of decadent preoccupations in this exhibition, self-referencing the history of his own practice as much he is garnishing it—or corrupting it—for the future.

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