

THE FIGURE: 3 + 3 x 3



THE GALLERY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

TRÉ AREZ, FRANCES BAGLEY, FRANK BORN, JAMES COBB



17



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ROSEMARY MEZA, JAMES W. SULLIVAN



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The Figure: 3 + 3 x 3 by Jody Lee

The body may be indispensable to us as human beings, but images of the figure in art have been considered dispensable for some time. Direct, non-object images of the figure are commonly eschewed as retrograde, as if the body's wholeness itself were inappropriately universalizing. Given the climate of doubt as to whether the figure can truly represent us now, there's something provocative and useful about doing a figurative show. It sheds light on the fact that any argument concerning the figure's relevance is gaining in complexity. It may not be a matter of the pendulum swinging back toward figural representation, but rather of the field of assumptions about such images opening up. Among other factors, recent developments in the history of art and in science may contribute to this. Our real ability to clone our pets as well as ourselves may in a far-flung way contribute to a loosening of the narrow identification between the body and the self. Thus the body's actual quasi-dispensability might in turn reposition figurative work as one among many proximities and relationships artists imagine between the body, the self and its context.

The artists in "The Figure: 3+3X3," the show on view in The Gallery at the University of Texas at Arlington, all configure that constellation in very different ways despite their common subject matter. Tre Arenz makes clown-like terracotta figures with a mysterious, diminutive scale. Squat, round and two with striped spheres where their hands should be, they face each other in the gallery but seem unable to communicate fully. In the muffled energy of their group, "Queenie" stands apart with her red crown. A noisy retardation registers in her face and the plump shrug of her shoulders. With lifted and outstretched hands she signals denied culpability, as if disowning the loud sound of something she'd just dropped and shattered. There is an overall sense of withdrawal about Ms. Arenz' pieces. Their diffident gestures bring to mind a tribe of dejected clowns who pass the time by going through the motions of a rather dispirited game.

The atmospheric charge around Ms. Arenz' work continues in Frank Born's paintings. In his pieces, a single figure appears like a trace mineral within the ground. In "Figure Floating or Flying" and "Single Figure," the ground is dense, pure color. Only in "Man Looking Out" does it resolve into a kind of space. But in all three paintings, the solidity of the ground exerts a greater atmospheric pressure than the figure can answer it with. This lends Born's figures their sense of all-over weakening, reminiscent of an immune deficiency. In "Single Figure," the brushwork of the ground becomes emphatic, shoring up a figure that seems oddly weightless on its feet, like someone who has the light-headed realization they're in fact too weak to stand.

This delineation of an all-over pressure is also present in James Sullivan's sculpture, but here it emanates from within, from the weight and power of consciousness. There is a sense in many of his figures, such as "Figure with Black Head" and "Float," of bearing up under the burden of consciousness as under some archaic curse that binds death closely to life. The prickly, quill-hairshirt quality of the materials - straw mixed with plaster, contributes to their mute sense of desolation and loss. Sullivan imbues his figures with a thorny, experiential quality and this helps to locate his work at a point where experience shows itself resistant to being drawn into a syntactical context.

James Cobb has a very different set of concerns. His pieces are images of children, who appear upright but lying down, as if he had photographed them from underneath an MRI berth midway in its slowly rolling path. This structure evokes the aura of a process of documentation in a quasi-medical setting. The most striking aspect of these children is the new skin the artist has given them. Other than their hands, faces and the plaid underpants they wear, their skin is a solid welter of tattoos. The tattoos come from a wide-mouthed river of sources - religion, botany, popular culture and zoology, among others. That breadth makes them resemble the archive of references bequeathed to all of us from birth, as we become socialized. The artist thus weaves together our cultural-historical memory and makes it visible on the litmus paper of the skin. He could be depicting members of a different yet related species, or he could be showing us ourselves, if enculturation were a lightning strike and tangible.

Frances Bagley's figures are centered much more on essence and motion and less on any societal process. Her robust, coral velour-covered piece, "The Age of Bronze," with its tangerine rubber plinth and 1.5 times life scale bends toward the viewer and the floor plane in an arc of unspecified labor. The piece reads as something between an unsung frontier hero and a figure from an Attic jar: its scale, abstract motion and core femaleness all work together to emphasize a spacious sense of our primary orientation between heaven and earth as at the pivot point of the hips. This is perhaps more relevant to women than to men but Bagley's contribution is to portray it with the comfortable force of a blanket summary usually reserved for the male pronoun.

Imposing physicality is present as well in the wall drawings of Rosemary Meza, though in her work there is large-scale historicity and narrative at play as well. Her big women, with their ultra-unapologetic fleshiness, come across less as drawn than as conjured. Entitled "Hijas de la Chingada," or "Daughters of the Fucked," their pacific yet bitter presence refers broadly to the vagaries of colonial history and a now vengeful mythology. Thoroughly acquainted with darkness and consequence, these women exist worlds beyond the flattened road kill of a virgin/whore polarity and confront the viewer with fathomless, malign indifference. Their scale and the tone of their presence suggest a revisitation to a historic scene. Their peace unseats ours as they gaze in equiponderance on what must be a solemn procession, such as the parade of captives before the blood-letting of execution.

Positioned as we are both inside the body and through our minds outside it, figurative images have a whorled resonance that can feel nearly infinite. The uses to which the artists in this show put the figure, diverse and exploratory as they are, acknowledge its potential. They suggest that the resonance of the figure has an inveterate power to address who and where we are in the world, and to such salient riddles, little by little cast the spell of a provisional answer.

Jody Lee is an artist who writes about art, and is represented by Barry Whistler Gallery in Dallas, Texas.

Tré Arenz

Born in Portland, OR
Lives in Austin, TX

MFA, University of Texas at Austin

Selected Recent Exhibitions / Installations:

- 1998 Salt Lake Art Center, Salt Lake City, UT
Elemental Spaces, Contemporary Art Center, Ft. Worth, TX
- 1997 **Tré Arenz: On Touch**, Tyler Museum of Art, Tyler, TX
From the Ground Up - Contemporary Clay in Texas,
Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX
Here, William Campbell Contemporary Art, Ft. Worth, TX
Raw Space, SoFA - Chicago, Navy Pier, Chicago, IL

Frances Bagley

Born in Fayetteville, TN
Lives in Dallas, TX

MFA, North Texas State University, Denton, TX

Selected Recent Exhibitions:

- 2001 **International Show 2001**, New Jersey Center for Visual Arts,
Summit, NJ
41st Annual Invitational, Longview Museum of Fine Art,
Longview, TX
Texas Art 2001, Williams Tower, Assistance League,
Houston, TX
- 2000 Parchman Stremmel Gallery, San Antonio, TX
Ellen Noel Museum, Odessa, TX
Art-Man-Nature, Anniversary Invitational,
Connemara Conservatory, Allen, TX

Frank Born

Born in Port Arthur, TX
Lives in San Francisco, CA

Selected Recent Exhibitions:

- 2002 Artemisia Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2001 **Mirror of the Mind: Contemporary Portraits**,
Museum of Contemporary Art, Ft. Collins, CO
New Langton Arts Annual Auction Exhibition,
New Langton Arts, San Francisco, CA
- 2000 Belcher Studios Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Nagaya City Archives, Nagaya, Japan
- 1998 **Seventh Annual Juried Show**, Luggage Store Gallery,
San Francisco, CA

James Cobb

Born in La Mesa, CA
Lives in San Antonio, TX

Selected Recent Exhibitions:

- 2001 Allan Saxe Mezzanine Gallery, Arlington Museum of Art,
Arlington, TX
- 2000 Finesilver Gallery, San Antonio, TX
MacWorld Digital Art Expo, New York City, San Francisco,
Philadelphia, Louisville, Denver, San Mateo, San Diego
- 1998 Wong Spot Gallery, San Antonio, TX
Phoenix Triennial, Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, AZ
- 1997 Artists' Gallery, San Antonio, TX

Rosemary Meza

Born in Garland, TX
Lives in Dallas, TX

MFA, Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore

Selected Recent Exhibitions:

- 2001 Conduit Gallery Annex Space, Dallas, TX
The Fuzzy Naked Truth, University of Arkansas Gallery,
Little Rock, AR
Por Culpa de las Mujeres, Gallery 414, Ft. Worth, TX
- 1999 **The Passions of Santos/The Ecstasy of Malinche**, 500X Gallery,
Dallas, TX
- 1998 **Mercado Chilango**, Brazos Gallery, Richland College, Dallas, TX
- 1997 MexicArte Museum, Austin, TX

James W. Sullivan

Born in Evanston, IL
Lives in Dallas, TX

MFA, California State University, Long Beach

Selected Recent Exhibitions / Installations:

- 2000 **Garden.**, Collaborative installation with Kaleta Doolin,
20th Anniversary Invitational, Connemara Conservancy,
Plano, TX
- 2000 **Recent Sculpture**, Conduit Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 2000 **James W. Sullivan: Matter and Meaning**,
Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, TX
- 1998 **Sculpture and Drawings**, Longview Museum of Fine Art,
Longview, TX

Checklist of Works in the Exhibition

Tré Arenz

- 1 **One of Us**
2000
ceramic
48" x 19" x 22"
courtesy of Kathleen James Gallery, Austin
- 2 **Satyr**
2000
ceramic
35" x 18.5" x 18"
courtesy of Kathleen James Gallery, Austin
- 3 **Queenie**
2001
ceramic
42" x 24" x 14"
courtesy of Kathleen James Gallery, Austin

Frances Bagley

- 4 **The Age of Bronze**
2001
fabric, plaster, foam
80" x 40" x 55"
- 5 **Shadow**
2001
cast bronze
78" x 20" x 20"
- 6 **Two Piece**
2000
cast bronze
69" x 22" x 15"

Frank Born

- 7 **Figure Floating or Flying**
1998
oil on canvas
20" x 20"
- 8 **Man Looking Out**
1999
oil on canvas
20" x 28"
collection of Lin Yeiser Coonan, San Francisco

- 9 **Single Figure**
1999
oil on canvas
32" x 46"
collection of Michael Rapet, San Francisco

James Cobb

- 10 **Clare**
2000
light jet print on paper
56" x 24"
- 11 **Jack**
2000
light jet print on paper
56" x 25"
- 12 **Valerie**
2000
light jet print on paper
45" x 30"

Rosemary Meza

- 13-15 **Hijas de la Chingada**
2002
conte drawings on 3 walls
79" x 72"; 108" x 35"; 125" x 36"

James W. Sullivan

- 16 **Large Gather**
2000
plaster, straw, wood, steel, pigment
48" x 26" x 20"
- 17 **Figure with Black Head**
1996
plaster, straw, wood, steel, pigment
84" x 24" x 26"
- 18 **Float**
1994-2002
plaster, straw, wood, steel, pigment
78" x 20" x 23"

The Gallery at UTA

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Located in the Fine Arts Building
502 S. Cooper St.

Gallery Hours
Monday - Friday 10 AM - 5 PM
Saturday 12 noon - 5 PM

Benito Huerta, curator
Patricia Healy, curatorial assistant

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