



Round 7, Simulacra

By Betsy Heute

Since 1979, Lawndale Art Center has been a bastion of the Houston arts community, starting as an extension of the University of Houston and gradually transforming itself into its own organization, eventually becoming one of the premier non-profit art venues in town. Lawndale underwent a major renovation in 2005, and along with it came the Lawndale Artist Studio Program. It is a residency that gives three artists nine months of studio space, a stipend, and an exhibition. Now in its seventh year (hence the exhibition title Round 7), Lawndale's John M. O'Quinn Gallery is showing the work of residents Domokos Benczedi (including his band Future Blondes O.O.O.O.), Nancy Douthey, and Patrick Turk.

Domokos Benczedi has been a staple of the Houston noise and underground music scene for probably the past two decades. He has been involved with everything from current project Future Blondes to Rusted Shut to Black Leather Jesus. The Future Blondes O.O.O.O. sound, while of course varying from track to track, is hauntingly repetitive and mesmerizing, emanating what can only be described as a sepulchral pixilation. Frustratingly, the strongest components of Benczedi's work do not appear in Round 7.

As the viewer enters the O'Quinn Gallery, she encounters Sioux Dance (2013), a mostly black and white installation comprising a variety of materials: a large collage print, white washed speakers, and about twenty to thirty salt chlorinator unit covers just to name a few. The installation is set up like a stage—the 8'x5' collage forms the background, while the speakers and false walls flank the sides and what Benczedi coins as a blueprint floor assemblage covers the floor. With the exception of a video collage on a small TV monitor on the left, it's a stage where nothing happens, and that's how all the work feels. He performed original sound work via Future Blondes and brought in other local musical acts on June 8th, but the work without his sound comes across as artifacts or props for a concert, not standing on its own. And the one



sound piece, *Your Eyes My World* (2012), is barely, if at all, audible, competing with Justin Boyd's sound installation upstairs and Douthey's barking dog nearby.

Nancy Douthey is a performance and video artist who confronts, utilizes, and mimics various performative and feminist art historical tropes. As the viewer paces across the gallery, he encounters a ninety-degree angle freestanding wall with three video monitors mounted to it, two on adjacent walls and one on the opposite side. The *Green Room*

(Kubrick, *Ocean, Numb*) (2013) shows Douthey sitting presumably in a bedroom, closely facing the camera. She is thoroughly, roughly massaging her cheeks and face, staring doe-eyed off into the distance. Her movements recall the bodily performances experimented by Vito Acconci and Bruce Nauman of the '60s and ends with her face bitch-slapped by what appears to be a male hand. *The Yellow Bathroom (Mom, Dad, Superman)* (2013) conjures Cindy Sherman as Douthey sits on the edge of her bathtub robed in matronly and floral silk. Again, she faces the camera, crying while mouthing the words "mom" and "dad," occasionally lip syncing to the accompanying music.

While Douthey convincingly melds absurdity and sincerity in these performances (she seems to be legitimately crying in *The Yellow Bathroom*), her most effective and thought provoking work derives from the piece where she isn't doing much at all. *The Fireplace (Not to be reproduced)* (2013) is a bifurcated video loop of two Doutheys side by side, standing (waiting?) on two different sides of the same living room mantle. This time Douthey, neither of them, face the camera, but instead stands at a three quarter stance with her back mostly to the camera, only giving the viewer occasional glances of her profile. While the camera is clearly facing the mirror, it quickly becomes obvious that she is intentionally blocking her reflection with the back of her own head. *The Fireplace* is reminiscent of Jeff Wall's *Picture for Women* (1979), where he photographs a woman facing the mirror. The viewer here is implicated as voyeur, staring at the woman. But the woman confronts the "male gaze," staring



straight back at the viewer. However, Douthey in her piece not only undercuts the viewer's gaze but also her own. In denying both the gaze and her confrontation of it, Douthey provides a thoughtfully vulnerable and ambivalent portrait of what it is to be a woman and be perceived by others in an era of self-revealing social media and slutcore pop stars.



Turk, The Superorganism: Concrecence

On the opposite end of the gallery one will find Patrick Turk's The Superorganism: Concrecence and The Superorganism: Entropy (both 2013). Both pieces consist of densely applied paper collages. Microcosms of animals, plant life, and human body parts circulate throughout the collages. The figures pop up three dimensionally from the background and feel simultaneously anxious, maneuvering through traffic, and frozen, as if these characters are buried like deeply compacted sediment. Both works are mounted on circular pieces of plywood, each nearly four feet in diameter.

Turk, at least according to his statement, hopes for his pieces to be immersive for his audience, "bring(ing) them into an exotic reality where the body becomes more than



it seems.” The Superorganism series delivers a far cry from that immersion. On the contrary, it is trite, glittery, and a little dorky, as if Lisa Frank and a biology illustrator bore a lovechild—and it really works. Turk’s clearly labor-intensive process of cutting and collaging feels sweetly heroic, as if he’s hell-bent on narrating a macabre children’s story of the follies and beauty of concurrently living beings.

Round 7 provides a wide range of the kind of work that should be conducted in a residency: work that breaks through, struggles, falls flat, and successfully asks questions. It arouses the curiosity of what will come not only for Domokos Benczedi, Nancy Douthey, and Patrick Turk, but also for the eighth round of Lawndale residents.