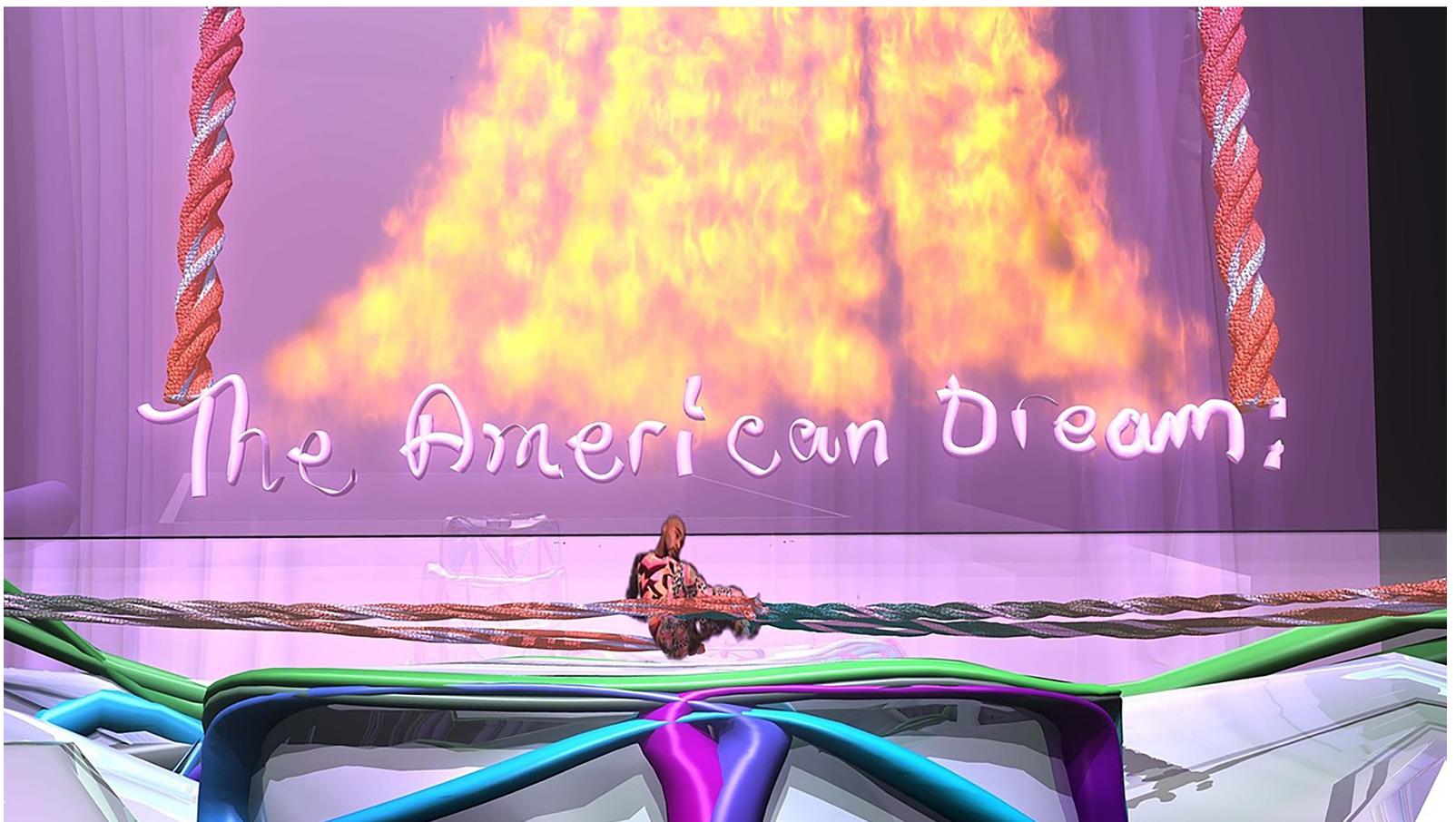


11.07.2018 — Review

# Shonky: The Aesthetics of Awkwardness

Bury Art Museum, Bury  
*by Paul Cordwell*



Jacolby Satterwhite 'Country Ball' 1989 (2012)

Although an actual word signifying anything ‘unreliable’ or ‘dubious’, the pseudo-oxymoronic ‘Shonky’ of the title of Bury Art Museum and Sculpture Centre’s latest exhibition appears to be an enforced collision between ‘shoddy’ and ‘wonky’. The works on display flirt with the shabby-chic aesthetic of the shoddy, whilst hoping for the rug-pulling destabilization of the artfully wonky.

Hijacking the decorative excesses typical of ‘Outsider Art’ and the patterns and construction techniques of handcrafted ornaments is hardly a new ‘aesthetic’, but it is one which has become increasingly prevalent within contemporary UK art.

The opening night of *Shonky* had an extra theatrical dimension, with a performance by loosely knit art group *Plastique Fantastique*. Featuring looped electronic music and participators' chants, projections of men hung upside down, liberal spillings of glitter and handmade mirrored masks; the performance was undertaken in front of large freestanding collages referencing Tarot cards.

The multi-media experimentation within the performance emphasised that 'Shonkiness' pays no respect to medium specificity and the works throughout the exhibition are connected by a driving spirit rather than any particular form of expression.

The hard, graphic lines and bright colours of Duggie Fields' early paintings are evident in 'Stumped' (1976), which combines the pared-down signage of Pop Art and Surrealism's impossible and contradictory picture spaces. In Fields' digital video 'Ignore It' (2015), these elements are updated via basic computer software; figures and furniture from interiors are crudely collaged into street scenes, colours appear overexposed and clothes seem lifted from early eighties pop videos.

Jacolby Satterwhite's video 'Country Ball 1989 – 2012' (2012) shows multiple Satterwhites moving and dancing through computer generated architectural spaces based on his mother's schizophrenic doodles. Benedict Drew's mixed media installation 'A Dyspraxic Techno' (2017) uses pulsing colours, distorted sound and text to imply a temporary rewiring of the brain's perceptual apparatus, while Tim Spooner's 'Natural Habitat' (2017) is a grouping of spindly wire tripods topped with randomly twitching small crude flags of masking tape and cloth.

Other stubbornly sculptural works within the show include Cosima Von Bonin's 'IDLER, LEZZER, TOSSPIECE (THE WDW SWING NOSE & SCALLOP VERSION)' (2010); large soft toy clams with circular cartoon-like eyes gazing out from their perch on an aluminum swing.

Although formally very different, Andrew Logan's gaudy busts of 'Duggie Fields And His Shadow' (1987) and 'Molly Parkin' (1998) share a love of the strident colours evident in Niki de Saint Phalle's small plaster animals and chunky female forms. Upsizing to the scale of the architectural, images of the colourful patchwork of earthenware panels covering Friedensreich Hundertwasser's buildings are presented by printed images on hanging

sheets of white cloth. Arakawa and Madeline Gin's equally ambitious dissection and restructuring of actual public and private spaces are introduced in a short explanatory film and large digital mappings of the projects buildings.

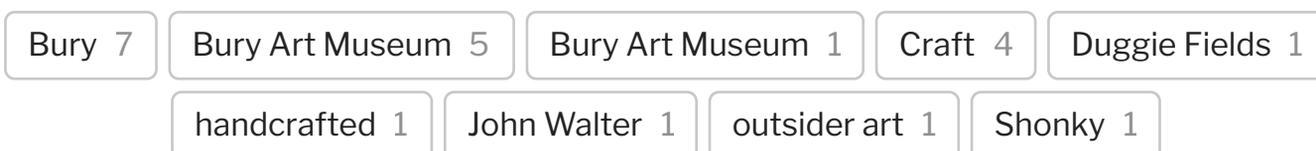
The curator of the show, artist John Walter, is slightly pushing his luck forcing together such a varied range of practitioners but there is a further issue. To qualify as wilfully 'Shonky', conception and construction must co-exist. There is a preplanned tone to the artists' productions and the poetics of 'naffness' which can in itself become a restrictive directive.

However, only a few decades ago many of these works may have seemed camp and unserious, flippant and self-consciously idiosyncratic. Now they cumulatively radiate a politely transgressive critique of the joyless, corporate and banal, demanding the right to a potentially productive playfulness, so desperately lacking in the enforced routines of everyday life.

*Shonky: The Aesthetics of Awkwardness runs until 15 September 2018 at Bury Art Museum and Sculpture Centre.*



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