

Jonathan Marshall

Grimm Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Describing something as ‘right now’ is the second most banal thing after calling it ‘new’. But while there are so few things that are truly new, there are a lot that feel ‘right now’. The concept of an ever-repeating present is the theme of Jonathan Marshall’s solo show ‘The Old New World’ at Grimm Gallery, and it significantly reflects his eclectic aesthetic. His works look comfortable inside an exhibition space, yet several visual elements draw from a different imagery than the ones usually experienced between white walls. There are minimal installations – warmed up by association with dirtier objects – as well as maps, so common at art fairs and galleries these days. But there are also the triangles, images of space and graphomania we often see on album covers and concert flyers at hipster venues.

Marshall draws a historical connection between ancient hominids and his Brooklyn friends by tattooing wrinkly, painstakingly crafted mummies with images inspired by the latter (*Pazyryk Maiden*, 2013). The association is made with irony, but also by using a wide-range of materials, which help turn official records into personal notes. While maps become excuses to organize thoughts and stories in a patchwork in *Dictionary of Accepted Ideas (For Bouvard and Pecuchet)* (2013), photos of starry skies are rendered as a series of paintings.

Words definitely play a big aesthetic role throughout the show. Without shying away from typographic explorations – more reminiscent of a Chris Ware book cover than the dry statements common in conceptual art – Marshall bombards the viewer with both inspired one-liners (‘Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt’, a Kurt Vonnegut reference) and compulsively assembled word landscapes (*The Wreck of Hope and Endurance (for C.D. Friedrich and F.A. Worsley)*, 2013). Although the content of Marshall’s writing is not devoid of meaning, legibility is not a priority. The story is there, sometimes explicit and detailed, but trying to grasp it means getting lost. Born in 1981, Marshall is after the youthful wisdom of the traveller, quoting Chatwin and reaching out to the furthest corners of space and time.

Despite his young age, the artist’s first solo show in Europe feels like a retrospective, and an ambitious one at that. Marshall’s uncommonly wide range of media is impressive, but the heterogeneity of such diverse styles and formats in Grimm’s roomy yet not museum-like space is a double-edged

About this review

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By Nicola Bozzi



Jonathan Marshall - *Verso/Recto*, 2012, installation view at Grimm Gallery, Amsterdam

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sword. For example, the average intensity of the series mentioned above – all somehow tying into the ‘Old New World’ theme – is followed by quite a bump when the viewer encounters the few entirely abstract paintings on show.

Mute fillers aside, the installations displayed on the gallery’s floor, *Verso/Recto* (2012) and *Exquisite Corpse II* (2013), confirm Marshall’s versatility. More abstract panels, similar to those standing a little awkwardly on the walls, are repurposed as tiles and combined with pairs of shoes and mysterious objects, arranged tidily on geometrical iron frames. These works appear colder than the maps and the mummies, but they bring together the exhibition’s mystical travel element and a white cube-savviness otherwise masked by the two-dimensional works.

Recognizing an aesthetic as relevant is one thing, confirming its consistency is another. Marshall’s show is both relevant and consistent, if a little over-crowded. And when art so often has irony at its core, intensity is a good thing.

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Frieze

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