

## Trevor Shimizu: Again at 47 Canal and Rachel Mason: Starseeds at Envoy Enterprises

March 26, 2014 Written by Elspeth Walker



Trevor Shimizu. *Again*, 2014; installation view, 47 Canal. *Easter Bunny*, 2013; oil on canvas. *Times Square Family*, 2013; oil on canvas. *Goofy*, 2013; oil on canvas. Courtesy of 47 Canal.

*Again*, now at 47 Canal, presents a new set of paintings by Trevor Shimizu featuring more of the artist's characteristically banal domestic caricatures. Of these, Shimizu's sex paintings are his best. Featuring sketches of video monitors displaying stick figures engaged in BDSM porn, a vaginal close-up nestled next to a box of tissues, or a pop-up ad for penis enhancement, the paintings read as swiftly funny one-liners about the lonely, trivial, and frank atmosphere of masturbation. The paintings themselves are cursory in the way masturbation often can be: Shimizu barely paints at all. Consisting of a few impulsive, gestural strokes, sometimes built up in muted hues but often left against a stark white canvas, they flesh out fleeting moments. Shimizu uses painting as a fast way to get his ideas down, and the results are weird, bleak little snapshots. These quick scenes seem ephemeral, somewhat out of reach. Shimizu's simplicity skimpily clothes the intangible.

Rachel Mason's *Starseeds* at envoy enterprises attempts to invoke another kind of "beyond"—one that, though it appeals to transcendence, might present an unlikely key to Shimizu's mundane universe. For this exhibition, Mason has sculpted an army of dolls in the likeness of earthly celebrities that the artist feels belong to an alternate dimension. Mason describes her process as a kind of New Age magic, summoning the likenesses out of intuition. She arrives at her "starseeds" by using "only the subliminal logic of my fingertips to guide my choices of humans." Mason's dolls make for bad caricatures of the celebrities for whom they are supposed to serve as surrogates, almost as if the signal from Mason's "higher plane" had gotten warped as it channeled through her. Both Shimizu's and Mason's exhibitions harness what is deeply creepy and fetishistic about the handmade. Mason's dolls are the labors of fetishization, whereas Shimizu's porn paintings capture the embarrassing consumption of it. Mason's work

is unflinchingly fantasy-oriented, and the installation is loaded with the delightfully obvious symbolism and spiritual self-indulgence so characteristic of New Age metaphysics. The starseeds hang throughout the gallery on fishing line as though soaring through the air, or hover clothed in cloaks of broken mirror slices, sloppily glued together. Meanwhile, a recorded album of songs sung by the artist, each dedicated to a different starseed, pumps through the exhibition space, and an accompanying music video features the artist dressed as one of her dolls, rocking back and forth amid her creations. One has to laugh as well as cringe.

Shimizu's jokes and Mason's dorky seriousness both appear to stem from the same self-conscious sincerity. Shimizu is not a slacker, though his paintings are certainly designed to make some people very mad. The genuine simplicity of his work is audacious, but Shimizu is not trying to get away with anything. His work is easily penetrated, and he lays inconsequential moments simply, self-deprecatingly bare. There is a certain rigor to Shimizu's work, even as his paintings are designed to brush off intellectual posturing; in his intent on using the canvas as a kind of sketchbook, he effectively deconstructs the act of painting, though without becoming abstract (his paintings still cling to the emotional territory of representation). This can be upsetting, as painting is traditionally associated with painstaking labor and, most of all, with time—long stretches of it. *Again* and *Starseeds* both deal in time, but it is the subjective, distorted time of our most private, interior aloneness.

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