



Ana Mazzei, *Us and Them*, 2018, eleven puppets composed of iron, wood, unfired clay, felt, linen, fabric, and painted ceramics, dimensions variable.

Ana Mazzei

GREEN ART GALLERY

Younger artists working with the vocabulary of Minimalism have joyously embraced its purported theatricality and have cultivated a post-Felix Gonzalez-Torres fascination with affect and the mechanics of its production. This often takes the form of a narrativized sentimentality, coupled with corporeal, alchemical, or mythological overtones. The critical literature on Ana Mazzei’s work has foregrounded the totemic quality of her quasi-Minimalist objects and the possibility that their “activation” may serve yet-unknown ends. Yet the Brazilian artist’s work, often featuring recognizable archetypes, is really not so mysterious. Consider, among the pieces in her recent exhibition “Antechamber,” the suite *Us and Them* (all works 2018). Here, totemic heads or torso-like shapes mounted on iron sticks did not signal any particular narrative, yet Mazzei’s attunement to material and

craft did warrant wonder and lent these puppet—like forms an allegorical dimension. *Us and Them: The Holy Spirit* was as simple as a crown-shaped, off-white piece of felt with three triangular stubs, whereas *Us and Them: The God*, despite its intimate scale, was terrifyingly inexpressive, with its white ceramic mono-lithic head and a rectangular lace collar.

The sculptures in the series “Run Rabbit Run” seemed to embody a cast of characters; often rising to a height around eye level, they are too large to be puppets and are more than decor, as they occupy space in a seemingly human way. Even the most apparently functional elements—the thin wooden rods on which they stand or which frame them—are an integral part of these characters. In *Run Rabbit Run: Rabbit*, a pointy, long-eared rabbit mask sits atop an inverted V of two rods, evoking legs crossed mid-leap, and *Run Rabbit Run: The Camel* itself consists of four such pieces of wood combined at an angle.

The installation *Antechamber (The Waiting Room)* complicated these sculptures’ classically modernist undoing of the distinction between sculpture and pedestal, distributing a panoply of handpainted shapes in various sizes across a stagelike wooden platform floating just off the ground. Although the shapes, reminiscent of toy blocks, remained close to the floor and were kid-friendly in scale, the installation exuded an eerie verticality, thanks to the vaguely Brancusi-inspired forms—think *Bird in Space*, 1928—among them, and to the perspective defined by the concentration of taller shapes toward the rear left. This arrangement might not have had an iconography as self-evident and accessible as that of “Us and Them” or “Run Rabbit Run,” yet its components nonetheless implied subjectivities, either through their awkward contours, their thinly painted colors, or their delicate stacking. Mazzei’s attempt to think of characterization in structural terms, as well as her willingness to expose a relative yet fragile independence from narrative in the process, was breathtaking.

— Gökcan Demirkazik

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