

EXHIBITION REVIEWS

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View of Tom Holmes's exhibition "Painted Bones—some reliquaries," 2011; at Bureau.



TOM HOLMES BUREAU

Tom Holmes combines found images and quotidian materials in layered artworks from which emerge unexpected ideas and associations. While these works may take the form of photographs, watercolors, sculptures or installations, a persistent theme runs throughout: the eruption of the radical, the uncontainable and the transcendent in society and in life.

Holmes's second one-person show at Bureau was in many ways a follow-up to his first, in 2010, which consisted solely of a grave marker made of yellow-painted cinderblocks and a Trix cereal box-cum-urn filled with cremated human remains. Around these two items, which were paired with a fuck-you letter to the city of New York from a fictional character named Bobby, coalesced a dark narrative of fear and loathing, exclusion and rage. In the recent show, Holmes once more took funereal accoutrements as a starting point for his art, this time shifting his production from urns and gravestones to several reliquaries and a shroud.

As in the past, these objects are an elegant fusion of pop and minimal forms. A metal folding chair provides the pedestal for the first of the reliquaries: a General Mills Boo Berry cereal box, flattened, wrapped around a cinderblock and neatly secured with baling wire. Under the wire is tucked a painted fragment of human skull, its pale blue color and irregular shape mirroring those of the cereal's ghostly mascot.

The Boo Berry character appeared again in an adjacent sculpture—this time as an image worked in blots of blue, yellow, black and purple dye on a length of rough muslin. This psychedelic version of the Shroud of Turin is in turn draped from a shaped and folded piece of sheet aluminum. While less successful than other works in the show, the piece conjures Robert Rauschenberg's *Hoarfrosts*, *Jammers* and *Venetians* of the 1970s. It prompts consideration of other parallels between Holmes and Rauschenberg, particularly their use of readymade objects and images to convey psychic states, both overtly collective and covertly personal.

A second reliquary features both a skeleton hand, painted in rainbow colors, and a tuft of golden tinsel wired onto a plywood armature—the implication being that the party is over (or perhaps just beginning). A third involves three human ribs, painted respectively red, green and black. As before, the exhibition was accompanied by a text. This time it was a transcript of a psychic reading given to the artist—a liturgical chant for a secular age. When taken with the color schemes borrowed from the flags of the Black Power and Gay Liberation social movements, and the cartoonish resident ghost, the text suggests that the underlying theme of the show was modern-day translations of notions of family, God and country.

Holmes's methods are low-tech and unfretted; his attitude is irreverent but not ironic. Here, in repurposing anonymous bones and low-grade, '70s-era cultural signs and artifacts, he gives them new life in the world, both as abstract forms and conveyers of socio-political and autobiographical meaning.

—Anne Doran