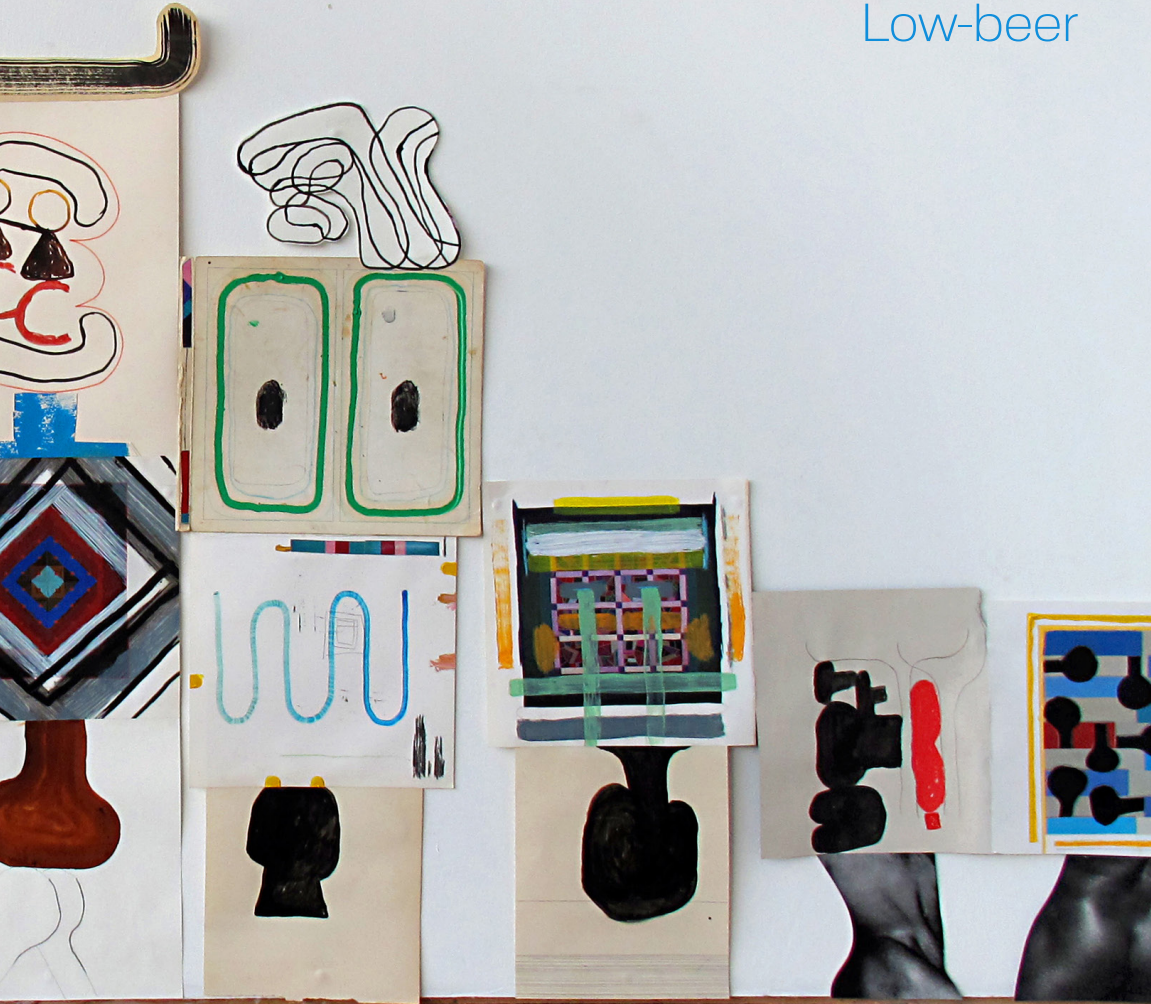


The Order of Things

or, The Second Conference of the
International Network of Personal Relationships (INPR)

Leif
Low-beer





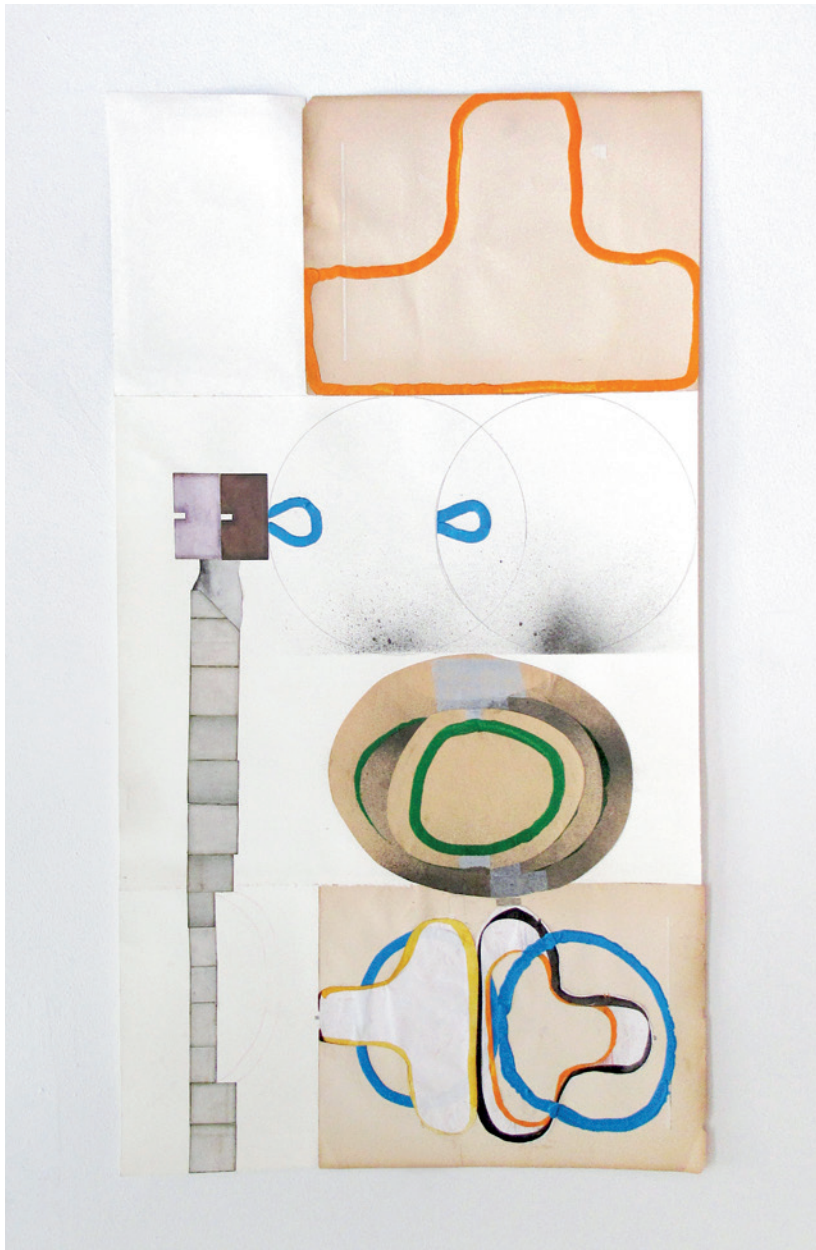
Essay
by
Shani
K
Parsons



The Order of Things

It was, unfortunately, les mots et les choses (the order of things), 2012
Mixed media on paper
88 x 34 inches

AMASSED ON A WALL, a bevy of enigmatic drawings and collages invites the curious eye. Like a kit of richly varied paper parts, individual artworks — some colourful, some cryptic — are affixed to the wall and one another to form a roughly pyramidal composition. Upon closer analysis, the arrangement resolves into a series of discrete stacks rising up from the floor, suggesting an array of abstracted figures; fragmented faces atop tenuous bodies. As each stack or column coalesces around a unique personality or identity relative to the others, the effect is suggestive of certain social situations or configurations; an abstracted family portrait, or police line-up perhaps. But in fact this is just one possible arrangement of many. Titled *It was, unfortunately, les mots et les choses (the order of things)*, this site-specific work changes shape and name over time and place, in response to new contexts and considerations.



Indeed, representation undertakes to represent itself here in all its elements, with its images, the eyes to which it is being offered, the faces it makes visible, the gestures that call it into being.

Michel Foucault
The Order of Things

THE ORDER OF THINGS, or, *The Second Conference of the International Network of Personal Relationships (INPR)* is an exhibition of new and recent work by Leif Low-Beer, an artist who engages in a playful reordering of ideas, images, and expectations through the use of constructed, multipart, and/or recombined compositions of drawings, collages, assemblages, and sculptural tableaux. The exhibition takes its name from the title of the aforementioned wall-based work, which in turn references Foucault's seminal 1970 book, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. In the book's preface, the philosopher launches his inquiry into the foundations of contemporary intellectual culture with a passage from Borges which "shattered ... all the familiar landmarks of my thought — our thought ..., breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things." This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopedia' in which it is written that animals are divided accordingly:

- (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies' (Foucault 1970, xv).

In his delight at this seeming absurdity, the philosopher comes to the realization that "the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought" is nothing less than the fundamental, even shocking, limitation of our own (xv). Only through this realization can we begin to question our most basic presumptions of exactly what "order" means in contemporary culture, where those presumptions come from, and how they may or may not be accurate, appropriate, or legitimate representations of our common social reality.





ABOUT THE ARTIST

I approach my work both literally and metaphorically as a gathering place — a place where a collection of languages and gestures come together, where I can explore the relationships between a variety of objects. In this place, eyes can play between light and dark, foreground and background, people and objects. Much remains ambiguous, allowing the viewer to bring his or her own experience to the work, an experience that will hopefully evolve and expand over time.

By placing different works together and working on multiple pieces over long periods of time, I stay spontaneous. New ideas meet old interests, heavy paint meets light pencil, abstract meets pictorial. Momentary flashes of inspiration come together, creating the exciting possibility of telling a story I did not know I knew.

It seems that the “what now?” void left by the Abstract Expressionists has often been filled by concept-heavy work that can be explained away through language. This deification of “idea” seems at times to threaten the basic appreciation of beauty, mystery, and perhaps even whimsy. In opposition to this, artists like Philip Guston, Cy Twombly and Jean Dubuffet use the decisive mark of the hand to access moments of immediacy, spontaneity, and clarity. Through such a mark, the viewer transcends idea and moves towards experience. With this in mind, I have come to embrace the liberating effects of “do” rather than “think” — to regard artmaking as process and play, a mode of visual contemplation.

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ARTIST'S BIO

Leif Low-Beer is an artist based in Brooklyn, NY. Growing up in Toronto, he attended Guelph University (ON), then the School of Visual Art (NY), garnering degrees in philosophy, visual art, and design. His sculptures and drawings have been shown in solo shows at Buffalo Arts Studio (Buffalo, NY), Beginnings (Brooklyn, NY), Okay Mountain (Austin, TX), and Wild Project (New York, NY). A large-scale installation at Socrates Sculpture Park (Queens, NY) was part of the VISTA exhibition in 2011. *The Order of Things* is Low-beer's first solo show in Canada.

www.leiflow-beer.com