

# frieze

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## David Snyder

MICHAEL BENEVENTO, LOS ANGELES, USA



David Snyder, Put Up a Good Front, But There's Always That Little Voice (2011)

‘That old defence – an inch deep smile and a suitcase out the back window.’ It’s a great line, and it comes half-way through David Snyder’s exhibition ‘Face Forward’. To give it a bit of context, we must step away from the CD player from which it emanates, back out through the doorway in the wooden façade that spans the middle of the space, past another CD player and another yammering voice, out the door of the gallery and onto the street.

The exhibition begins at the front of the building, onto which Snyder has fixed a new door and a white stucco wall with two small, high windows. An unusually low (and window-less) window box completes the effect: this

is a face. (Apples on each windowsill become the eyes' cartoony pupils and the window box the mouth.)

On the interior of this expressionless frontage is a small CD player from which comes a high-pitched and high-strung monologue concerning the comings and goings on the street outside. The installation's title, *Put Up a Good Front, But There's Always That Little Voice* (all works 2011) tells us all we need to know about the dynamic of doubt and paranoia that it describes. Too much, perhaps.

The piece might risk reductiveness were it not for a further façade a few steps into the gallery. *Between Me and You* is an architecturally senseless amalgam of clapboards, scalloping, round arches and triangular surrounds. It's utterly pretentious, and deliberately so. The recording that accompanies it (again, on a CD player plugged in behind) betrays a character devoid of self-awareness or humility. While the voice in *Put Up a Good Front...* was engaged only in an internal monologue, this man seems to address his unseen, unheard partner: 'It's not you; it's definitely not me' ... 'I'm talking about myself again'. He's unbearable.



David Snyder, *Struggle with the Mess Age* (2011)

These are separate works, but their sequential installation hints that we're peeling a psychic onion. The third piece in the show, *Struggle With the Mess Age*, reinforces this impression. Having moved from weatherproof, blank stucco through fancy, thin plywood, we arrive at a wall of household junk covered in torn scraps of painted polythene, which looks unpleasantly like raw meat (think of Lady Gaga's MTV awards dress). The character whose voice emerges here is a pathetic slob. He wonders what kind of tattoo would represent him best and settles on 'a pizza ... an alien pizza'.

Since the layers of Snyder's onion become more flimsy as we move closer to its core, it is fitting that the ultimate work in the show is essentially dematerialized. A video, projected in a darkened room, shows a wooden façade (with a door and two windows, the most 'house-like' so far) mysteriously trundling down the middle of nocturnal streets. Periodically, the footage cuts to shots of the same house being licked with flames. The voiceover here is all reassurance and encouragement – 'I can't see any problems – none whatsoever. Things are looking great' – but the visuals tell another story.

Night Conversations With None Other is, like all the works in the show, voiced by Snyder himself. (He uses simple software to alter pitch and speed.) Its humour and poignancy, also like the other works, rests on the character's lack of self-awareness; Snyder seems not to share this fault. The exhibition would not beguile the way it does, however, if there were not a whiff of confession about these portraits, or if they were not so easy to relate to. (Aren't we all occasionally confounded by the voices in our heads?)

But more curious is Snyder's insight into the symbiosis between people's construction of personae and their construction of spaces or facades to shelter them. This is the 'old defence' that Snyder refers to, and which, particularly in Los Angeles, is both a metaphor and an architectural reality.