

ARTFORUM

David Snyder

MICHAEL BENEVENTO

Manic humor pervades David Snyder's immersive installations. In his previous solo exhibitions at Michael Benevento, Snyder altered the gallery's architecture to create eerie, fun-house-like settings. In "Face Forward," 2011, the viewer walked through a passage of wall-size, face-like facades, each paired with a distinctive, disembodied voice—imbuing the gallery space with a schizo character. In "Ectoplasms," 2013, a false ceiling in one corner of the gallery would suddenly shake, triggered by a motion sensor when one approached the paintings hung below it. *Portrait of Nugose*, 2013, an enormous, amorphous sculpture of an imaginary being covered in goopy material (including dough and marshmallows), emitted clanking sounds as one got close to a drawing of the creature installed nearby. Objects, substances, and situations were made unfamiliar to create fantastical, yet intensely physical, worlds of irreality.

Unlike Snyder's earlier works, the present exhibition, titled "2THNDNL" (tooth and nail), incorporated more pointedly political matter, as the country gears up for its next presidential election. In the gallery's front rooms, two video works faced off: In a room on the left was *Ronald Reagan, Fathers & Sons*, 2015–16, a video featuring a shifting sea of (mostly Republican) politicians and pundits whose mouths were caught uttering Ronald Reagan. Eyes and mouths were incongruously combined, including those belonging to Reagan himself, George W. Bush and his brother Jeb, Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, Donald Trump, and Barack Obama. A few women also appear, such as Margaret Thatcher and Hillary Clinton (suggesting a parenthetical addition: "Partners & Daughters, Too"). Across from this work, in the right-hand room, was *Swansong*, 2016, composed of clips from home videos of barking dogs. The compiled sound track begins with insistent yapping, which crescendos into violent growling, before climaxing poignantly in howls. When viewed in relation to *Ronald Reagan, Fathers & Sons*, the sorrowful finale of *Swansong* brings to mind the gross inequality—and oppressive poverty for some—resulting from the tax cuts and deregulation that began with Reagan. Instead of "trickling down," wealth has become consolidated in the hands of a few.

These works set the tone for the labyrinthine installation in the adjacent rooms, titled *Porous, Poor us, Por us*, 2016. In this piece, a freestanding, stucco-covered concrete shelf wended its way—like a meandering line—through the room and down a hallway, terminating at the far end of the other back room. Embedded in the concrete and propping up the shelf was an assortment of discarded objects, including a mini-trampoline, spines of Christmas trees, battered suitcases, a shopping cart, an office chair, a single crutch, and a traffic sign that warned ROAD CLOSED AHEAD. On the shelf were table lamps that provided ambient lighting and CD players that softly played recordings from a Christie's auction, a cattle auction, and sales pitches on QVC. Listening to the CD players, placed in different corners of the rooms, one experienced a sharp disconnect between the landscape of immobilized junk—of little or no use



David Snyder, *Porous, Poor us, Por us*, 2016, stucco, ram board, found objects, sound, dimensions variable.
Photo: Jeff McLane.

value—and the sounds of markets in action. One heard the chirpy voices from the shopping channel and the mesmerizing voices of the auctioneers, registering the weightless, dizzying ascents of exchange values in real time (one artwork's price rose from \$58 million to \$95 million in just a few minutes' time). Increased consumption may lead to a larger economy, but it also produces a lot more shit.

Speaking of shit: The exhibition included one more video, titled *The Guano*, 2015–16. A ludicrous twelve-minute pitch for a venture that would turn seventeen hundred defunct Blockbuster stores into bat farms to produce excrement for fertilizer, *The Guano* settles for easy laughs. (That said, it does make one laugh aloud.) A fast-paced montage of architectural renderings and Internet-search images illustrate the video's narrative, which satirically ends with a voice-over proclaiming a social Darwinist vision of America (as it pictures a big fish gulping a little fish, then a centipede devouring a cockroach in its last throes): "America is a glittering yet treacherous constellation of dream versus dream, where one's own may thrive or die and be crunched and swallowed by the dreams of others." To the notion that "only the fittest survive," Bernie Sanders—one presidential candidate whose face, incidentally, does not appear in any of the videos—would retort, "The system is rigged."

—Kavior Moon