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24 February 2015

A Wrinkle in Time

*The Forever Now* exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art juxtaposes the present and the past, showing that humans have had the same concerns and motivations at the forefront of their minds since the Neanderthals first scratched ochre on cave walls and the Babylonians first put chisel to stone. The ideas most prevalent seem to be wonder (childlike innocence) and self-reflexivity, as viewers see in the work of Laura Owens and Michael Williams, respectively.

Laura Owens’s work embodies the childlike quality of the Gen Ys and Gen Zs, who grew up on Disney, *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*, superhero and fairytale movies, and anime. They reach puberty and then adulthood, but they still have youthful interests and minds. They collect and display toys, read comic books and/or graphic novels, dress up for Halloween, watch children’s movies in the theater, and visit Disneyland, even though they do not yet have children. Owens shows this through a giant canvas with a page from a child’s composition book. The story is simple: A queen tells her daughter she must marry a monster. The princess refuses and runs away. Viewers get the impression that a child wrote this due to the poor spelling and lack of detail. The solution is simple but ‘right.’ The princess does not want to be the object of the monster’s “Gase” (gaze), so she leaves. As with the ‘and they lived happily ever after’ endings of fairytales, viewers do not know how the princess survives after fleeing. She just does. This story is different though. We know a child could not have written it because of the complex understanding the author has of the frightening and limiting way patriarchy operates. A woman subjects another woman to the male gaze, helping to objectify her. To retain her autonomy, the princess must leave her family and society. This work is the perfect encapsulation of both the adult’s and the child’s perspective.

Michael Williams’s “Wall Dog” depicts a different aspect of contemporary life: self-reflexivity. Ever since the emergence of the Internet, we have found new ways to communicate and to share about ourselves and our lives: Tumblr, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, just to name a few. “Wall Dog” seems to show this trend through space, color, lines, and even strange object placement. On a dull green canvas lie figures, shapes, and organic, geometric, and expressive lines in myriad bright colors. Some figures are upside down and backwards. This gives the impression that viewers are hanging from the ceiling and looking through a mirror (as though they form a reflection). Whoever is on the other side sees this busy, confused mess in the mirror; they see us. Interestingly, because we are the reflection, we are also the “they” on the other side watching. We both project and examine ourselves. This seems to be the perfect way to represent a world in which we share the pivotal moments of our lives through Facebook status updates and/or live tweeting.

Owens and Williams show us the wonder and simplicity of fairytale and the self-reflexivity of the digital age. These are not new. The Neanderthals created bestiaries, particularly of animals they did not see every day, animals that inspired them. The Babylonians closely examined behavior, carefully carving 282 laws and punishments into a human-size stele. *The Forever Now* somehow manages to capture both the ‘feel’ of the present moment and of every point that came before.