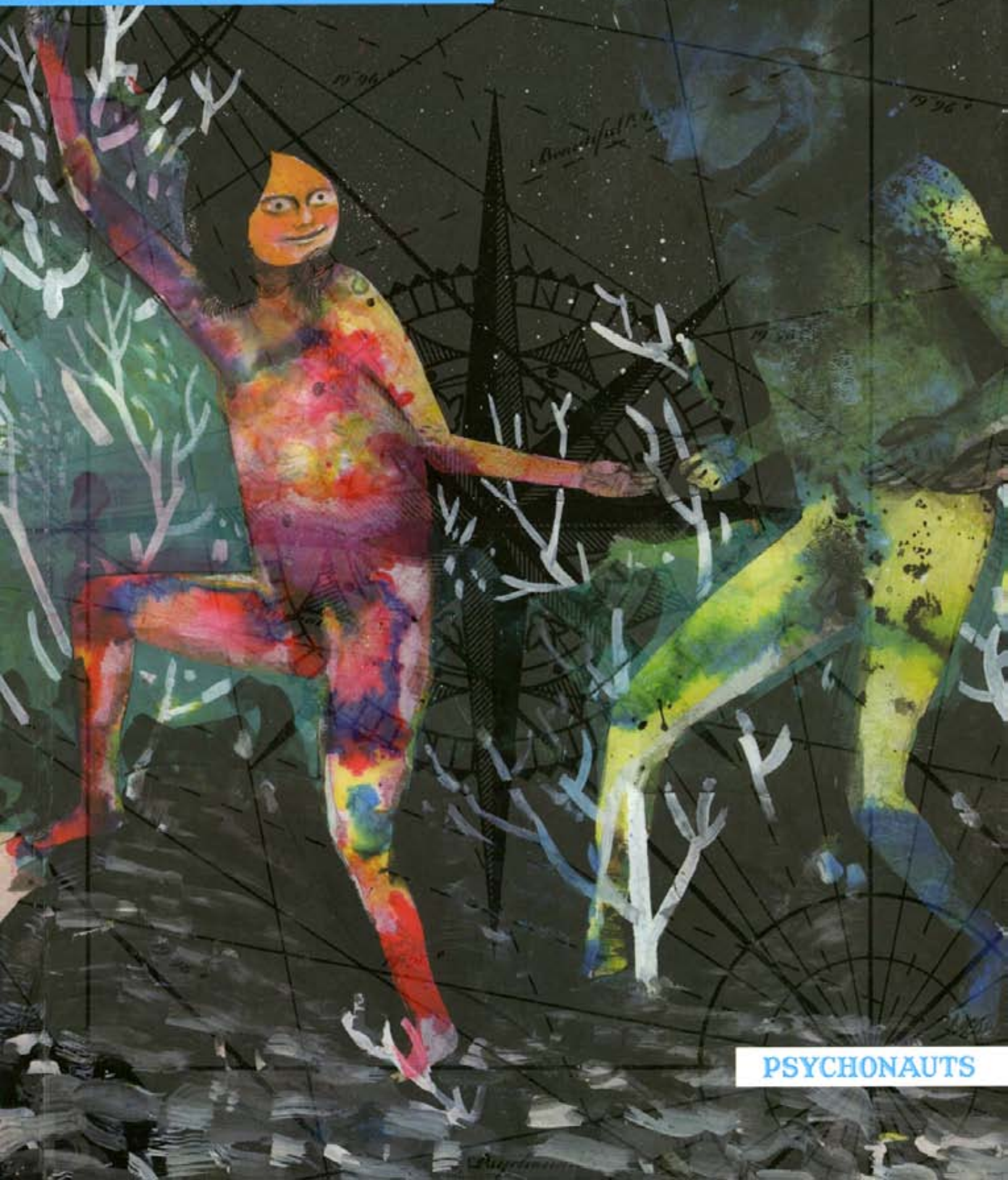


**BEAUTIFUL/  
DECAY**



**PSYCHONAUTS**

14

*The plaster cast woman is severed perfectly in half. Her head of voluminous, ebony acrylic hair cascades toward the cement floor as she levitates off the ground in two autonomous sections, her delicate, chalky toes pointing toward a mid-morning sun just outside the window. She is encased in a wooden magician's illusion box, post-saw, and is seemingly at ease with the situation—given her serenely closed eyes and gently pouting lips. Drilled into the wall of artist Liz Craft's studio, the suspended model is both quietly eerie and beguiling; white sediment from her freshly molded figure peppers the floor beneath her. "I don't know if this will stay here," asserts Craft, as she unwinds an artisanal beaded anklet from the statue's rigid leg. The spheres are textured and bulbous, and emit a muted rattle as she protectively kneads them in her hands. She steps back from the hovering effigy, clearly meditating on its figuration as she nonchalantly continues to paw at the anklet like a homemade strand of worry beads. An assortment of women's shoes are strewn before Craft's feet, and she bends over to pluck a pair of multicolored sequin pumps off the ground, gently placing the beads atop a pile of their larger relatives.*

*"I had toyed with the idea of her wearing shoes... something kind of different, like these," she narrates, as she slides the glittering pumps onto the wan plaster feet of her unwitting subject. Small balls of fuchsia yarn flurry around Craft's feet—refuse from a previous*

*creation—as she darts back to her previous observation point. Her socks are serendipitously color coordinated with the Tribble-like masses gliding across the concrete. "I'm always more interested in capturing a thinking pattern rather than just subject matter, although this reference is obviously very specific," she muses as the glistening pumps splash pastel flecks across the walls. "The theme in many of these can be so powerful that I feel it's important to include the methodology. It can be the integration of two worlds: the imagery is familiar, as is the form, but the methodology can be the abstraction." She shrugs her shoulders as she reaches for the shoes again, remarking, "Although everything is really abstract when making of life, right?" Tossing the pumps back to the ground, Craft moves toward the head of the model, gently adjusting its wig. When probed if the gypsum woman resembles a particular person in Craft's life, she replies, "It's actually my studio assistant, Nicole. She let me do a plaster casting of her face... but it's also supposed to be me." It's unclear if the parallel was intentionally premeditated, but as Craft fusses with her assistant's faux tresses, her meticulous skill as an illusionist is palpable. Fabricating a seamless milieu born of appropriated latent and ostensible realities, her sleight of hand references a truth far stranger than fiction: the idiosyncratic navigation of the earthly and psychological terrain this life affords us.*





PREVIOUS PAGE

"Dancing Skeletons" 2008

Edition of 3

Painted bronze, 84" x 96"

Courtesy of the Artist and Patrick Painter Inc.

Photo credit: Fredrik Nilsen

Perhaps her residency in endearingly ecc-entric Venice Beach provides for a more colorful everyday experience, but Craft maintains that her work is a collage derived from the commonplace and found, rather than being of the "psychedelic" practice her art is oft-mislabeled. "There has to be a better word for it than that," she laments, tilting her head in deliberation. "It's really the everyday stuff of reality; appropriating images of found objects has always been in my work. I'm drawn to stuff like couches on the side of the road or people that I know; people I see in passing...all of which I have used in previous works. The world is surreal enough as it is." Granted, there is some exotic treatment to the "found concepts" that inspire Craft's portrayal of the ordinary; an imperative hybridity that weds the mundane with the peculiar as an illustration of the innately bizarre qualities of society. Guarding the front door to Craft's studio is a mid-sized bronze sculpture related to 2003's "Birdman," which was first shown at Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York in 2003. A starkly rendered man's hand defiantly flips studio entrants "the bird," and the realism of Craft's form is only foiled by the two disproportionate human legs the hand stands upon (as if proportionate legs would somehow reconcile the imagery). It's a distinct piece that garnered much of Craft's work designations like "vulgar," "willful monstrosities," and "repulsive"—typically in conversation with fellow LA artist Paul McCarthy's work—as it was presumed to be a direct reflection of the artist's attitude rather than a harvested, manipula-ted image. "When I was making the piece called 'Death Rider' I had befriended a guy who had a motorcycle shop down the street from me in Echo Park," Craft explains. "He was an authentic older biker, who had this tattoo on his arm of the walking middle finger—that's where the sculpture



TOP

"Venice Witch" 2003

Edition of 3

Bronze, stainless steel, Venetian beads, 63" x 16" x 84"

Courtesy of the Artist

BOTTOM

"Birdman" 2003

Edition 2/3 with 2 AP

Bronze, 57.5" x 33" x 33"

Courtesy of the Artist and Marianne Boesky



ABOVE  
"Tree Lady" 2008  
Edition of 3  
Bronze and aventurine, 84" x 72"  
Courtesy of the Artist and Patrick Painter Inc.  
Photo credit: Fredrik Nilsen



ABOVE

"Mountain Mamas" 2003

Six pieces

Fiberglass and oil paint. Dimensions variable.

Courtesy of the Artist

OPPOSITE

"Ballad of the Hippie" 2003

Edition of 3

Bronze and peacock feathers. 78" x 32" x 29"

Courtesy of the Artist







OPPOSITE  
 "Sea Witch" 2008  
 Bronze, steel, shells. 60" x 67" x 34"  
 Courtesy of the Artist



ABOVE, LEFT  
 "Sea Witch" 2008  
 Bronze, steel, shells. 60" x 67" x 34"  
 Courtesy of the Artist

ABOVE, RIGHT  
 (detail) "Sea Witch" 2008  
 Bronze, steel, shells. 60" x 67" x 34"  
 Courtesy of the Artist



LEFT  
"The Shopping Cart" 2003  
Bronze, 75.5" x 67" x 56"  
Courtesy of the Artist

came from. Then I mixed it with some Rodin. It seemed like a funny thing to make a monument-style sculpture of." She motions to several shelves filled with miniature hands in mid-gesture—some with middle fingers aggressively raised, others in a "rock 'n' roll" or "hang ten" configuration—she adds, "It stuck with me." Trite, domestic signifiers rear their unconventional heads when funneled through Craft's ingenuity. The literal signs that most populations are all too familiar with suddenly become puzzling and unearthly under the supervision of "trompe l'esprit," prompting rumination on how mere representation can instantly conjure an eruption of anthropological associations. The hands seem paused in a dance of social choreography, bulky fingers and wrists upholding the unambiguous gesticulations that signify much more than a mere stand-in for words. The demographical kinship between signifier and agent is neutralized in the (figurative) hands of abstraction, and the popular agreement to interpret these ideograms in the same way suddenly seems unreal. Now ambivalent, they appear somewhat

comical in their re-fabbed talismanic state: "Fuck you!" "Rock on!" and "Hang loose, brah!" read more like "Chubby Giraffe," "E.T.," and "The Lorax"—respectively, to an uncaffeinated author—once removed from their conventional habitats, and facilitate a Magritte-like displacement of communally accepted rules into the realm of the subjective. To derive unprecedented meaning from formerly contrived notions is what makes Craft's art alluringly otherworldly, without fully straying from our own.

Her most recent solo show in Los Angeles—Death of a Clown at Patrick Painter Inc.—featured a potpourri of these domestic-come-supernatural amalgamations. In the spirit of assemblage, the featured works were solitary homages to pedestrian materiality and playful appropriation. Chunky snippets of garish yarn, cast-bronze kitchen containers, and discarded square grates became haphazardly constructed clown faces, oftentimes bearded and suggestively disconnected as their goofy expressions appear both vaguely



TOP  
"A Real Mother For Ya" 2002  
20"x28" poster  
Photo by: Josh White

BOTTOM  
"Venice Witch" 2003  
Bronze, 56" x 108" x 32"  
Courtesy of Sade Coles





familiar and bizarre. Is it a mocking reflection of our own clownish mannerisms, or an exaggerated portrait of Drunken Billy, your friendly neighborhood hobo? The trio of faces surrounded a plaster-sculpted bohemian likeness to Snow White, her petite figure at rest on a retro pink couch instead of a glass sarcophagus. At once, it seemed the gallery installation was merely the interiority of her rapt slumber—a Kafkaesque alternate state of consciousness cobbled together from day-to-day excerpts and the nonsensical stuff of dreams. The interplay between internal and external spaces is something of a revisited motif for Craft, her fascination with the untapped and dormant coming to vibrant fruition in *Death of a Clown*. The Spring 2010 exhibition denotes an aesthetic departure from the white, monochromatic cubes positioned outside her studio's back door—conservatively sized descendents from their five behemoth aluminum predecessors shown at Boesky in 2007. Random nooks carved into the block reveal dwarfed environmental alcoves—some occupied by cacti or biomorphic figures, others bearing the fang-like stalagmites of uncharted caves. The cubes take on an Advent calendar quality, each niche displaying

an unanticipated territory that articulates the mystique of the unknown. Craft eyes their geometric forms, and clarifies, "They're like housing in which loose thoughts can be inserted." She picks a rogue fuzz ball off the nearest abode. "It's the colliding of two different feelings, like integrating the disparate." The dwellings are astutely indicative of Craft's gravitation toward a fluid sensory landscape, the charting of the mind's recessions and wonted surroundings often providing for an equal sense of discovery to the global and exotic. Her equal employment of outlandish transplants and native conceptions recurrently feel like the progeny of Hunter S. Thompson and Stevie Nicks—her candid observation of the human condition is at once hallucinatory and mystical.

Featured in the 2004 Whitney Biennial, Craft's imagery has achieved something of an open-ended vernacular—given her visibility in London, Paris, Linz, New York, and Los Angeles. With a fondness for the work of Giorgio de Chirico, Kurt Schwitters, Alberto Giacometti, Philip Guston, Louise Nevelson, Eva Hesse, and Paul Thek, she sustains a unique penchant for the crossbreeding of iconography, relics, and

PREVIOUS PAGE

"Dancing Skeletons" 2008

Edition of 3

Painted bronze, 84" x 96"

Courtesy of the Artist and Patrick Painter Inc.

Photo credit: Fredrik Nilsen

BELOW

"Rug" 2010

Metal, bronze, and yarn, 48" x 48" x 8"

Courtesy of the Artist and Patrick Painter Inc.

Photo credit: Fredrik Nilsen





ABOVE  
"Candy Colored Clown (Soccer Scarf Beard)" 2010  
Metal, bronze, and yarn, 59" x 48" x 11"  
Courtesy of the Artist and Patrick Painter Inc.  
Photo credit: Fredrik Nilsen



BELOW  
"Candy Colored Clown (Harlequin with Tear)" 2010  
Bronze, 65.5" x 48" x 15"  
Courtesy of the Artist and Patrick Painter Inc.  
Photo credit: Fredrik Nilsen







PREVIOUS PAGES

*'Nicole Couch (Pink, Fuchsia, Orange)'* 2010

Edition 1 of 2, 1 AP

Fiberglass and paint, 32" x 98" x 40"

Courtesy of the Artist and Patrick Painter Inc.

Photo credit: Fredrik Nilsen

ABOVE

*'Laying Down Hairy Guy'* 2006

Bronze, 36" x 24" x 30"

Courtesy of the Artist

the subliminal—a contemporary aria that strikes a diversely resonant chord among a heterogeneous audience. Once dubbed an “artisan of the bizarre,” Craft’s studio feels less like a spectacle of oddity than it does an archival repository. Fragments of her grandmother’s heirlooms, children’s toys, and collected tchotchkes populate her work space, as if a menagerie was kept close for surveillance. Crowded in the corner are several in-progress works, cardboard cylinders reminiscent of totem poles awaiting an initial etching. “I’ve been intrigued by these Native American kachina dolls,” she remarks, extracting a grainy printout from a dozen similar pictures tacked to the wall. “I feel that they go with the magician pieces; they’re related.” She points to a male figure on the ground, his ashen body encased in a similar box to his mid-air female counterpart on the adjacent wall. Within the box he wears a patterned breastplate not overly dissimilar from those donned by the kachinas, as if in mid-transformation from mortal to cosmic spirit. “I found a rug that had a similar design to that pattern,” she notes of the figure’s embellished attire. “He’s turning into a geometric figure or maybe a spiritual being—I’m not really sure yet. One means one thing, and the other means something entirely different, but he’s obviously becoming something else.” She returns the kachina printout to its rightful place among the others, transcendental artifacts that can signify anything from the conceptual or physical realm in relation to a life force. Her gaze wanders to her own shelved mementos, as if making mental note of an intimate compatibility.

Wandering the no man’s land between foreign and ordinary, internal and external, authentic and artifice, Craft’s work continues to mediate between divergent and mercurial actualities that shape our mortality. Flirting with elements of synesthesia, she unearths the camouflaged anomalies hidden within our daily topography, exposing the enchanting unpredictability of experience and the abstract concept of living. What does surreal truly connote when the only guarantee in life is death? Craft’s adept appropriation and coalescence of allusion and illusion is what makes her simultaneously ingenuous and whimsical—her subtle tweaking of reality lifting the curtain on our own macabre theater. No smoke and mirrors here, Ladies and Gentlemen—only naked vitality.

TOP  
 “Henry Guy (with thought balloon)” 2005  
 Bronze, steel, and glass. 77.5” x 70” x 30”.  
 Courtesy of the Artist

BOTTOM  
 “Henry Guy with Zig Zag Balloon,” 2005  
 Bronze, steel, and glass. 34” x 55” x 78.5”.  
 Courtesy of the Artist

