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Whimsy and the lack thereof


Sculptor Susan Clausen and painter Lisa Bundy don't have much in common, except for the fact that they're both showing at the same gallery. Clausen's whimsical arrangements of glass dishes, polished stones, copper springs and bits of shell and bone are best described as knick-knacks for the post-modern home. Bundy's mock-classical frescoes, meanwhile, present us with ghostly images of desperation and despair.

Not surprisingly, Clausen's work is the easiest to like. She seems to have great fun putting her sculptures together and somehow manages to preserve that sense of excitement and discovery in her finished work. For all her talents as a sculptor, she's a toymaker at heart.

There are, for example, the two "cats" with bodies of weathered brick, necks of copper spring, and heads of coke bottle-thick glass. They look like new wave variations on the old spring-necked baseball toys that people used to put in the backseats of cars. There is also The Head, fashioned from a chunk of fieldstone with one piece of glass for an eye and another for a mouth, and Wendy's Back Before, a spindly, pained-looking figure study that looks like it's suffering from terminal curvature of the spine.

Lisa Bundy, on the other hand, does not suffer from an excess of whimsy. Her series of haunting portraits, modeled on the blank, staring faces of classical sculpture, give off an almost palpable sense of alienation and discomfort. The technique is deliberately crude. The figures are little more than sketched in with the paintbrush, giving them a rough, unfinished look. They all seem condemned to a kind of neo-classical Hell: one bobs in a marble fountain, another has his hair on fire, another has two sets of lips.

What they might have done to merit this abuse is not immediately clear. What is clear is that Bundy needs a wider range of imagery to make paintings like this succeed. You feel like saying, "Lighten up!..."