

CHUCK NANNEY Jenny's, Los Angeles

Los Angeles: overlooking the dry, late-summer scrub of a lot adjacent to Sunset Boulevard is a nondescript open-air corridor, which leads past a custom sign shop to the back tenants of Suite B. The small, freshly painted studio/office/spare room found here is the recently established gallery, Jenny's, which devoted its second show to a new body of work by American artist Chuck Nanney – his first solo presentation since 2003.

Active in New York and then Paris through the mid-1980s and '90s, Nanney may be best remembered as one of only a handful of male artists included in the 1994 feminist exhibition 'Bad Girls', staged by Marcia Tucker at New York's New Museum. The series of Nanney's photographs included in that show, entitled 'Dress Code' (1994), portray the artist in various poses and positions as dictated by his selection of attire – ranging from the school-marm's below-the-knee pleated khaki frock to the trim tailoring of that era's Calvin Klein Collection suit. Nanney's stylish gender-bending might well have reflected the limited market for menswear at the time, although the strictly codified differences among his collection of looks casually annotates the cultural identity politics that were then at a height. That the series was accompanied by a cage-like plywood sculpture containing the various outfits modelled by the artist alludes to a more precise act of queering evident in the photographs themselves. In whatever garb, Nanney's long chestnut locks, broad shoulders, unwavering gaze and goatee remain unmistakable: a testament to the unruly boundlessness of socially constructed identity.

This tension between surface and imperfect underlying structure informed a series of Nanney's monochrome paintings on canvas produced around the same time as 'Dress Code'. Made with industrial paints, each of these works is considered by Nanney to be a 'psychologically digested landscape, one perceived peripherally from the perspective of the driver's seat of a car' – an activation of the muddy theatricality of daily life in suburban America, after Tony Smith. Towards the end of the 1990s, Nanney



applied unstretched canvases directly to walls or pierced and hung them by means of paper-clip chains, pushpins, staples and binder rings – a nimble, economic method for fastening these swatches to the gallery's clinical contours that also playfully alluded to the sadomasochism of organizational stationery. Yet with titles such as hot wired heart/appendage (1999), reticent infection (1998) and colostomy (1998), the contradiction of depleted bone density and loose flesh that is wasted, though ultimately kept alive by, the scientific introduction of a 'triple cocktail' of AIDS drugs (first made available in 1996) at once comes into sharp focus. (Nanney is HIV positive.)

His pop-savvy installation at Jenny's – a series of painted pine and plywood sculptures – jumped across and along all four walls (and the ceiling) while sensuously attending to, or rhyming with, the room's extruding beams, electrical sockets and cable raceways. The fasteners here are steel brackets and zinc or brass hinges; layered and scraped acrylics are psychedelic in their near-fluorescent hues. Nanney's pastiche of recognizable historical forms is joyously (because anthropometrically) scaled, and also catalogues a certain phallogocentric fixation: in the repetition of El Lissitzky's upward-thrusting 'proun' (multi color composition proun, pink corner composition proun and phantom composition proun, all 2014), Constantin Brâncuși's infinite vertical (truncated endless column viewer, 2014) and an Anthony Caro-esque splay of nubs and pointed spikes (telepath, 2014). This energetic potential is affirmed by the kineticism of works on wheels (mobile brain in a box, 2014) or hinges that invite a pinch, push, stroke or other light touch. One might imagine the gentle swinging gesture needed to part the door-like wings of mobile secret love spell corner (2014) to be almost prayerful in concentrated motion – a sort of cheeky liberation from such architectonic acts of bunging up as Kazimir Malevich's Black Quadrilateral, Carl Andre's copper floor plates or Robert Morris's grey corners.

This encouragement towards the open also resonated through symphonic vibrations collaged together by Nanney from sci-fi film soliloquies, Memphis field recordings and flashes of cut-up poetry or experimental pop that pulse in the airy, ten-hour-long drone accompanying his visual display (Untitled, 2003–14). Embedded in the exhibition's restrained sunniness is a lived, devotional quality – the complex response of a survivor, which rebuffs the entrepreneurial edge of 21st-century wellbeing industries. Because flesh – the 'body parts' examined here – endures despite the holy moral compass of the iPhone and other oracles.

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