

Max Hooper Schneider
The Pound
November 7 - December 21, 2014

When a human artist sets out to explore an ontology in which he wishes nonhumans to predominate, he quickly encounters a problem that no human has resolved: i.e., how does a human escape his own particular *Umwelt* and cross-over into the worlds of nonhuman others.

Max Hooper Schneider's new exhibit, **The Pound**, explores this dilemma. While it is easy, even fashionable, to assert that nonhuman objects have existences of their own, it is an impossible thing, a humanist conceit, to assert with any certainty what those existences are. Like a snail or a bone, a treadmill or drawing, a human is impounded in his own mode of knowing. Thus Hooper Schneider's strategy has been to embrace a cynical anthropomorphism. In his hands anthropomorphism becomes a tactic for entering into imaginative combination with his artworks—just as they have in their own specific ways entered into combination with him.

The Pound, as an **aesthetic/conceptual production**, is staged as a plurality and interactivity of sensuous events, deploying bodies in differing modes of materiality—some more or less invisible (thoughts, concepts, ideas), others assemblages of materials with a stronger physical presence (sculptures, drawings). Items 1-5 are suggestive of The Pound's various modes.

1. The Pound is a potential **generator of pathos**. An outpost suspended between a cantina and an abandoned lot, it houses The Residents, artifactual outcasts and sports of nature whose only commonality is their excessiveness: they are superfluous; their usefulness has expired. The Residents take form as mixed media **sculptures** whose bodies are composed of blood, bone, snails, rebar, metal, concrete, water, fruit, and so forth—i.e., Precor Crocodilian 9.1, Aral Spring Trolley, The Conk, Sunset Mythomane, Blood Alcohol Level CH59X, and Genus *Watermeloncholia*; and the Syntropes, acrylic-encased **drawing systems** of paper, pen, and marker which hang from the ceiling. The Residents do not resemble humans in any way. They are perhaps distressing in their ataxonomic unintelligibility. They do not have fur or piteous eyes; they do not have faces. And yet they suffer. They age and decompose; they anticipate a brutal termination. But the Pound is not a death camp. Unlike the *Todeslager*, the Pound harbors both the threat of death and a glimmer of hope: the adoption. The Residents beseech and implore: Hooper Schneider deploys hope, the saddest and most poignant of lures.

2. The **dramaturgy** of the Pound is that of Jakob Von Uexküll's stroll. The biologist asks us to imagine a walk on a sunny day through a flower-strewn meadow and to further imagine that we have built around each animal encountered a soap bubble (*Seifenblase*) to represent that animal's world, or *Umwelt*. He further invites us to step inside one of the bubbles. Seeing through the *Umwelt* of another means that many features of the meadow disappear, others formerly invisible are seen, things that belonged together are severed, new relationships are created: in short, everything is utterly transformed, new worlds emerge. To enter the *Umwelt* of a Resident is to enter the unknown.

3. The Pound's **ontology** is Spinozan. If Spinoza is your guide you will experience the Pound as a swarm of variously formed bodies existing as diverse modifications of a single substance and in a cacophonous state of mutual modification and becoming. There are no autonomous individuals.

The Pound is constituted by the interactions of the bodies present (sculptures, drawings, texts, ideas, dust, heat, gallery visitors, door, street noises, memories, and so forth). Human bodies are granted no special privileges as possessors of agency or as creators and knowers. Each body is conceived as having the power to act and be acted upon, to affect and be affected. Everything is real, everything is alive, nothing is static or complete. As you stroll, you will agitate the molecules and *Umwelten* of other bodies, they will agitate yours, and these encounters will engender effects in accord with the nature of the encounter: a joyful encounter will increase your power of being, a sad encounter will decrease it. You will exit the Pound radically altered—although you may not notice.

4. **Narratives** are bodies that for many humans function as reliable escorts into the *Umwelten* of others. For this reason Hooper Schneider provisions gallery visitors with small literary artworks, 'Sports of Nature' trading cards that sketch the biographic conditions of each Resident. He would like it very much if you allowed The Residents to speak to you directly. But he will not risk your inattention: Residents who are not adopted will die. Thus just as he has created the Residents to tempt you into exploring nonhuman existences, he writes their biographies as an additional lure: these beings, like you, have stories.

5. An optional experience is to see the gallery as an **allegorical death row** in which works of art await their fate.

Open yourself to **molecular and aesthetic agitation**. You are invited. Do come.

— *Barbara Hooper*