

COLA 2016

Marsian De Lellis



Introduction

Exhibition

History

ARTISTS

Paolo Davanzo

Marsian De Lellis

Keiko Fukazawa

Megan Geckler

Won Ju Lim

Sarah Maclay

Blue McRight

Sandeep Mukherjee

Christine Nguyen

Claudia Rodriguez

Jim Skuldt

Lynne Thompson



Marsian De Lellis, photo: William Short

Catalog

Credits

Contact

MARSIAN DE LELLIS: *(In)/Animate Objects*

"Life is nothing if you're not obsessed," claimed the cult filmmaker John Waters. I imagine he would find a kindred spirit in the visual and performance artist Marsian De Lellis, whose handmade spectacles memorialize obsessional lives. Drawing inspiration from the offbeat characters whose private manias become public fodder for tabloids, talk shows, and reality television, De Lellis's creations are the hybrid offspring of fact and fiction, his productions equal parts art, performance, and object lesson on polymorphous perversity.

As you may recall from Psych 101, Freud believed that polymorphous perversity is our libidinal state of origin. (1) Children attempt to derive erotic pleasure in whatever form it is available, through every object possible, and in every conceivable direction. As we move into adulthood, our promiscuous relationship with the world of things is relinquished through social pressure and repression, the cultural reinforcement of morality, shame, and disgust. There are those, however, who get derailed on the journey to normative adult relationships. While they are often the target of passing gapes and psychological rubbernecking, De Lellis erects a roadside attraction for them at the crossroads between object performance and performance art (a terrain he has dubbed "puppetry adjacent"). By utilizing dolls, puppets, costumes, masks, craft

supplies, and everything else at his disposal to embroider the details of displaced obsession and desire, he draws out their "problemagic" capacities for troubling subjecthood, gender, and identity.

(In)/Animate Objects is the second half of a diptych on the relational world of De Lellis's fictional protagonist Andrea Lowe, an "objectum sexual" (a real psychological phenomenon in which a person develops romantic and sexual feelings for inanimate objects). Its companion piece, *Object of Her Affection*, is a solo puppetry performance that charts Andrea's relationship history, from losing her virginity to a hunting rifle as an adolescent, to successive heartbreaks with a series of landmark statues, buildings, and bridges, until a final fatal encounter with a crumbling urban tenement. (2) Puppets and props shift scale throughout the performance, exteriorizing Andrea's emotional vicissitudes, while De Lellis takes up multiple positions, at points serving simultaneously as narrator, character, and set piece. (In a feat of remarkable multidexterity, he manipulates both an Andrea puppet and her female nemesis Marcy while dressed as the Golden Gate Bridge.) Such polymorphic conversions are a playful invitation to childhood regression, a primal call to suspend the distinctions between subject and object, animate and inanimate, and self and other.

The stand-alone installation for the 2016 C.O.L.A. exhibition offers viewers a window into Andrea's psychic and relational world through an encounter with the obsessions of her doll-hoarding grandmother. More than a thousand rag dolls in various states of disrepair—each individually handcrafted and distressed by the artist and an extended network of friends and family—testify to the insatiable need for love at the heart of the obsessional life. Like all De Lellis's productions, *(In)/Animate Objects* employs artificial excess in the service of a camp sensibility that inspires ambivalence between identification and abjection. It also exemplifies Susan Sontag's assertion that camp, for all its droll irony, "relishes, rather than judges," performing "a kind of love, love for human nature." (3)

—Allison de Fren

Notes

1. See Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (London: Imago, 1949).
2. Presented at Automata and REDCAT as part of the 2014 New Original Works Festival.
3. Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp'" (1964), in *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 2001), 291.

Marsian De Lellis

Born Cambridge, MA
Lives and works in Los Angeles

Education

MFA, puppetry and theater design, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, 2009
BFA, studio art, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2001

Selected Exhibitions

2015 *Art Bern*, Future Studio, Los Angeles (group)
2014 *Object of Her Affection*, Automata, Los Angeles, and REDCAT, Los Angeles (solo)
2010 *Growing Up Linda: Fudgie's Death*, Great Small Works 9th International Toy

Theater Festival, St. Ann's Warehouse, Brooklyn, and International Festival of Animated Objects, Calgary, Alberta (solo)
2010 *Bride of Wildenstein: The Musical*, Velaslavasay Panorama, Los Angeles (solo)
2008 *Growing Up Linda*, Venue 13, Edinburgh Fringe Festival (solo)
2007 *Handmade Puppet Dreams*, Grand Central Art Center, Santa Ana, CA (group)
2004 *Puppet Trash*, AS220, Providence, RI (solo)
2004 *Finnocchio: The Holiday Classic*, Dirt Palace, Providence, RI (solo)

Selected Bibliography

De Lellis, Marsian. "Finnocchio: The Holiday Classic." *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 14, no. 2 (2005): 89–92.

———. "Why Puppetry? Musings of a Solo Puppet Artist." *HowlRound* (<http://howlround.com/why-puppetry-musings-of-a-solo-puppet-artist>), August 31, 2015.

Jeffries, Lynn. "40 under 40." *Puppetry International*, no. 25 (Spring–Summer 2009): 30.

Kuppers, Petra. *The Scar of Visibility: Medical Performances and Contemporary Art*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Morris, Steven Leigh. "REDCAT's New Original Works Festival: From a Table-Puppet Show to a Hip-Hop Ballet." *LA Weekly*, August 7, 2014, 38.

Artist's Website

www.marsiandelellis.com (<http://www.marsiandelellis.com>)