

ArtSeen

Aleksandar Duravcevic: Steppenwolf

APR 2017

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Though the intuition is the seed of the senses, intuition lies behind the need to find meaning through logic. Wired with a compulsion to know *why*, to logically define reason, there are yet times of corporeal responses that come wholly unadulterated by conscious thought. However, finding reason through sensing, in a Cartesian hierarchy, is ranked as inferior to meaning gleaned from logic or deduction. In the myriad of artistic and literary movements of the 19th century (Romanticism in particular) concerns for beauty, sensory transcendence, and felt experience prevailed. In the early 20th century (and perhaps more so now, in the early 21st), the turn was towards rationality, language, and explication. At TOTAH, Aleksandar Duravcevic's solo show, *Steppenwolf*, offers an important reminder of our need to cultivate the senses, the need to find distance from logic.



Little dancer (skull), 2016 Carrara stone 18 x 18 inches (45 x 45 cm)?

Duravcevic's body of painting, sculpture, installation, and metalwork awakens a tranquility akin to that of stepping into a cathedral, engendering and encouraging empathy with art, architecture, and people (both living and dead). Loosely mirroring reality as it has historically persisted through time, *Steppenwolf* is a series of subtle absurdities crafted by marrying darkness with beauty. A pristine *memento mori* of a Carrara-stone skull entitled *Little Dancer (skull)* (2016) is adorned with laurels, the Pagan symbol of victory and dignity, though it sits ordered to a corner-facing place on the ground.



Eastern wind , 2012, Installation, variable sizes Artillery shells (brass), air control/compressor

Tucked away in the low-lit basement, Duravcevic's *Eastern Wind* (2012) installation echoes recreational activities of the average child growing up in 1980s-Yugoslavia. Under a warm, meditative spotlight, the serene atmosphere is briefly obliterated (for a moment) on the eleventh minute of every hour by the aggressive blow of an air compressor over two hollow brass artillery shells. As the last bit of air resonates within each shell's hollow opening, a meditative ring emits like that of a Tibetan singing bowl. Tranquility, as it follows an auditory shock, is a simple reminder that beauty exists, however buried, in "dirt." Duravcevic's work is colored with historical, biblical, and biographical interests, though it is impossible to align any of the artist's work with a linear narrative. If anything, the works carry cryptic qualities of familiarity and connection; as a whole, it appears as a visual interrogation of subjects that range from the more concrete, like world history, to the loftier, like dreams and conditions of humanity.

If beauty is defined as "whatever reconciles us to life,"^[1] then to return to the sensory would excite the return to life—an escape from under the thumb of rationality.

Duravcevic mobilizes one's senses in *Steppenwolf*, further energizing a search for beauty in an effort of relief from reality.

[...] Can there be any possible problem with "intense pleasure or deep satisfaction to the mind" [Beauty]? I know those experiences, and I like them. I believe that others know and like them, too. For people without the comfort of religion [...] the experiences may provide a large part of what makes life worth living. Any society that does not respect the reality of "intense pleasure and deep satisfaction to the mind" is a mean society.^[2]

Endnotes

[1] Peter Schjeldahl, "Notes on Beauty."

[2] Schjeldahl

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