Donald Kuspit on Beauty and the Beast: Hanna Hansdotter and Ry David Bradley at The Hole

Hanna Hansdotter, Baby Baroque, 2020, Mould blown glass, mirrored, 22 x 8 x 8 in. Courtesy of The Hole.

Ry David Bradley and Hanna Hansdotter: *Once Twice*

The Hole

February 18 through March 28, 2021

By DONALD KUSPIT, February 2021

It's a marriage that could only happen in the artistic heaven of an art gallery—or rather in The Hole, an adventurous gallery which is not unlike the Wonderland that Alice entered when she fell "down the rabbit hole," the gate into a new world, an underground of new artistic surprises, which is what a gallery should be. Hanna Hansdotter's glass *Kiss My Lips*, 2020, a wonderful biomorphic baroque Magna Mater, as her numerous breasts make clear—she's a sort of classy, seductive, heavenly update of the primitive, earthy *Venus de Willendorf*, made some 25,000 years ago (but without her head, but who needs the Great Mother's head when it's her bountiful breasts that we all need)—and Ry David Bradley's grotesque, morbid *App Death*, 2021, an in-your-face expressionistic monster made of acrylic cloth, make a wildly odd couple. All of Bradley's male faces—there are no bodies, only heads—*Candle Master, Once Then, Click World, Unsent X, The Seer, Why Chain*, all 2021-- are an unholy, unsavory mix of black, white, and gray, and all are aggressively, maliciously in-your-face. They bring to mind the visionary insanity of Ludwig Meidner's pre-World War I apocalyptic faces and of Georg Baselitz's post-World War II pandemonium portraits. Bradley's faces have the same morbid, self-destructive look—convey the same death anxiety, the same angry suffering. Hansdotter's female torsos—there are no heads, only bodies-- are as alive with color as Bradley's male faces are black with death (rotting into grayness). The luminous yellow *Baby Baroque*, 2020 is her signature work. The pure white forms, many elliptical or egg-shaped, marked with sperm-like black marks, suggest ova in the process of being fertilized. *Quilted*, 2020 is another Magna Mater, her breasts now shaped like ova, their integration making her outer and inner female attributes seamlessly one.

Ry David Bradley, App Death, 2021, Acrylic tapestry, 63 x 55 in. Courtesy of The Hole.

Hansdotter's sculptures are biomorphic; the fluidity of molten glass lends itself to biomorphic expressionism, the artistic assertion of biophilia, "the urge to affiliate with other forms of life," as the biologist Edward O. Wilson defines it, "love for life" or having "an affinity for life," as the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm defines it. Fluid glass seems full of life—as fluid and flexible and malleable as life. Given sculptural form, glass seems to embody life: Hansdotter's biomorphic sculptures idolize life. Indeed, her idolization of the female body is an idealization of life, for life generates in it, as *Baby Baroque*, indicates. Fromm contrasts biophilia with necrophilia, having "an affinity for what is dead." Bradley's painterly tapestries are major examples of what might be called necrophiliac expressionism—like Meidner's and Baselitz's expressionism, but even more necrophiliac, indeed, materially necrophiliac, for they are made of acrylic thread, an inorganic thermoplastic and with that dead material, rather than paint, an organic mastic and with that living material. Acrylic thread suits Bradley's purpose perfectly: innately dead, it is the ideal material to weave his images of death, more particularly of death heads. There are no bodies in his works, apart from the mangled body in *Why Chain*—which has a bizarre affinity with Arcimboldo's portrait heads composed of fruits, vegetables, flowers, and fish, that is, of organic materials, of flourishing forms of life—confirming that his personages are dead rather than alive, as Arcimboldo's personages are, however much Bradley's personages seem nominally brought to life by his flourish of gestures, raised from the grave of art by his artful gestures, his necrophiliac intensity. **WM**

DONALD KUSPIT

Donald Kuspit is one of America's most distinguished art critics. In 1983 he received the prestigious Frank Jewett Mather Award for Distinction in Art Criticism, given by the College Art Association. In 1993 he received an honorary doctorate in fine arts from Davidson College, in 1996 from the San Francisco Art Institute, and in 2007 from the New York Academy of Art. In 1997 the National Association of the Schools of Art and Design presented him with a Citation for Distinguished Service to the Visual Arts. In 1998 he received an honorary doctorate of humane letters from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In 2000 he delivered the Getty Lectures at the University of Southern California. In 2005 he was the Robertson Fellow at the University of Glasgow. In 2008 he received the Tenth Annual Award for Excellence in the Arts from the Newington-Cropsey Foundation. In 2013 he received the First Annual Award for Excellence in Art Criticism from the Gabarron Foundation. He has received fellowships from the Ford Foundation, Fulbright Commission, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, Guggenheim Foundation, and Asian Cultural Council, among other organizations.

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