

ArtReview

JJ PEET *MAGICSTANCE*

On Stellar Rays, New York 17 June – 31 July

MAGICSTANCE is a small exhibition, the first impression of which is quite modest. Attached to the walls are several mixed-media sculptures from New York-based artist JJ PEET's *Stilifes* series and one large work on canvas. For those who merely glance round the show, the sculptures may appear naive or simply quirky, like little protruding stage sets. Closer inspection of them, however, reveals the depth and sensitivity of PEET's practice.

'Sculpture' feels inadequate as a description of these intricate and multifaceted works, an example of which might combine ceramic elements, a newspaper photograph, pine, aluminium, acrylic, rope and paint (*INTO*, 2013). Rather, each piece comes off as a kind of microcosm – a marvel of subject matter distilled not into minimal or highly finished form, but into a new configuration infused, literally, with the artist's touch and characterised by an idiosyncratic approach to composition. *INTO*, for example, features a coil of cream-coloured rope hanging from its left side and a turdlike ceramic shape

(one suspects PEET wouldn't object to the simile) with six even holes punched through the back of it and dimpled all over by the pressure of the artist's fingers; puttylike, it curls over the side of a ceramic cutout of a camera. Two tiny orange-red cylindrical shapes are affixed to the acrylic base, which protrudes horizontally and also supports a small earthenware disc with a hole in the middle and a horizontal black rectangle whose bottom right corner has been painted white. The left side of the composition is pockmarked, scratched aluminium, the right a page taken from an American newspaper, the title of which has been roughly painted over in broad strokes of black, leaving only a central phrase, 'LATE CITY FINAL', and the price, '\$1.00'. Below this is a horrifying photograph of men on motorcycles brandishing pistols and dragging a half-stripped body along the road. A pinkish stain marks the tarmac, and all the faces have been whited out.

If the above description appears to shift from drawing quite a personal, tactile sensation

from humble or found materials to a subject altogether less intimate, this would begin to introduce PEET's approach in *Stilifes*. The series is partly addressed to a passive mode of receiving news from media sources and through electronic devices. PEET's work has been likened to guerrilla journalism. But as reflections on contemporary society and imagery, these works come across as a very pure, direct kind of art in which the surrounding context is absorbed and reformatted by the artist into a new, interpretive object or community of forms.

As such, the exhibition conveys real confidence in the power both of materials and of objects to convey meaning. Also clear is PEET's attachment to and respect for the media in which he works (though it should be noted that his practice extends to painting, drawing and video). There is an underlying awareness of the potential of relatively small scale work to invite and reward curiosity, and of collage to conjure productive visual relationships. The *Stilifes* are affective sums of carefully chosen parts. *Iona Whittaker*



INTO, 2013,

stoneware, photograph, pine, aluminium, acrylic, rope, paint, 48 × 81 × 18 cm.

Photo: Lisa Albaugh. Courtesy On Stellar Rays, New York