

ARTFORUM

Aaron Curry

CAPC MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN

7 rue Ferrère

June 28–September 21

The Day-Glo figures gamboling through Aaron Curry's retrospective "Bad Brain" seem like an answer to Wallace Stevens's lament for modern imagination, written exactly a century ago. For the poet of "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," all marvelous fancies have abandoned the middle-class mind, haunted henceforth only by the soberest ghosts.

Curry's exhibition is haunted, too, but with the exuberant nightgowns that Stevens was missing: "purple with green rings/ or green with yellow rings/ or yellow with blue rings.../ with socks of lace/ and beaded ceintures" — or, say, Picasso with H.C. Westerman, Calder with Heehaw, with nods to corporate plaza art and underground comics. But this pile-up of citations produces its own kind of disillusionment, its own late-hour malaise. Curry's sculptures, whose volumes are built out from slats of painted wood and aluminum, approach cultural "flattening" with flat-footed literalness. For this critic, it is almost impossible to say whether they rescue the composite of cultural reference from this flattening through formal panache, or surrender to its senseless accumulation. Curry gamely suspends this ambivalence by presenting an anachronic retrospective, without a speck of narrative resolution in sight. Eighty works produced since 2003 are distributed through the CAPC's central nave and the corridor encircling it, where Curry's collages, including an uncanny series of Greco-Roman busts masked and/or/also disfigured by his intervention, footnote his more monumental figures.

The exhibition, along with two smaller but equally impressive shows by Los Angeles-based artists Carter Mull and Dan Finsel, fêtes fifty years of cultural diplomacy between Bordeaux and LA, which became sister-cities in 1964. What emerges, however, is the age difference. If Bordeaux has more years to its name, LA has a worldly sense of a future subjectivity brokered almost entirely to an image-world. A "bad brain," perhaps, but one inhabited by some fantastic specters.



View of "Bad Brain," 2014.

— Joanna Fiduccia