

David Lewis

Jeffrey Joyal

by Maxwell Smith-Holmes
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KALEIDOSCOPE

Jeffrey Joyal



JEFFREY JOYAL

One popular method of taxidermy involves freeze-drying a carcass for the duration of several weeks, until the deceased's flesh has become properly solidified. This technique leaves the body hardened and unsusceptible to the gooey effects of decomposition while preserving a sufficiently detectable impression of the animal's *élan vital*. New York-based sculptor Jeffrey Joyal procures stiffened turkey heads from a commercial farm that practices this method as a side business, turning unfortunately deceased birds into cash while honoring the animal's mysterious gravitas. The laborious process of reconstituting a dead animal—wiring its figure into shape, running it through an anti-insect bath, keeping it below freezing temperatures—transforms an obsolete and formless body into the shiny telos of natural history.

In Joyal's work, dead creatures surge with the same anachronistic animism as the distressed hardware and kitschy Americana that have become standard at farm-to-table restaurants and specialty coffee shops. On display last spring in "The Story of O(OO)" at David Lewis in New York, a preserved crab clutched an electrified wire from its perch atop a weathered barrel filled with dainty baby's breath flowers. The crab emerged as a Promethean totem atop an insane beachcomber's assemblage. Now gripping a glowing thread of power, Joyal's washed-up crustacean performed a macabre version of slapstick comedy's synthesis of the mechanical and the living. Unable to fulfill their biological death sentences, taxidermied animals comically efface the circle of life just as the Marx Brothers' bodies fail to react to the world around them. Vestiges of the Industrial Revolution have come

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BY MAXWELL SMITH-HOLMES

Jeffrey Joyal (American, b. 1988) is an artist who lives and works in New York. He is represented by David Lewis Gallery, New York.

Joyal's solo exhibition at David Lewis Gallery is currently on view through 23 October.

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Image:
Leaky Tom, 2016 (detail)
Courtesy of the artist and David Lewis Gallery, New York.

back from the grave, reanimated by nostalgia, to live in bars and restaurants in cities around the world. The faux-vintage Edison light bulbs that Joyal hangs from the necks of frozen turkeys recall the same paradox as the taxidermied birds: the illusion of life depends on the desecration of a living body. For his 2014 exhibition "All The Food Is Poison" with Valerie Keane at Bed Stuy Affair, Joyal cast a latex death mask of the artist and sometimes-gallerist Jared Madere. After rendering Madere's face in a lifeless grey rubber, Joyal sent his creation to a theatrical makeup artist who was charged with painting realistic facial features onto the synthetic effigy. If Joyal's handicraft resides in a demented suburban workshop, then it is just as at home in a basement bar on St. Marks Place or in the common room of a VA senior center.

In his first solo exhibition, "Raze the Little Feelers," currently on view at David Lewis, Joyal further mines undead scraps of Americana in a multifaceted investigation of history, time and authenticity. Opposing temporalities converge on the surfaces of World War II military cots that Joyal has upholstered with latex pressings of ornate tin ceilings and an antique nickel. The coin, a Buffalo Nickel whose details have been filed into the impression of a turkey stuffing a bent-over human, recurs throughout the exhibition, scaled up via a chemical process in one particularly tactile latex field. Joyal's lamps glow beneath turkey heads as they dip below the exhibition's horizon line. Various signifiers, past and present, living and dead, converge in an endless confusion that spans from *prix-fixe* dinners in Lower Manhattan to the deranged storage spaces of aging veterans. 🗨️

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HIGHLIGHTS