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Richard Hawkins

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Opening reception on Wednesday, 30 April, 19-21h

"Shinjuku Labyrinth" was inspired by a corner in Tokyo, on Yasakuni-dori next to Kabuki-cho. The city hasn't outlawed smoking (yet) but has strongly discouraged, for some reason, smoking while walking and aside from public signage of strolling cigarettes with big red NO's over them, has only attempted to enforce this loose prohibition by conveniently providing outdoor smoking stations, one of which is at this particular corner. Being so close to the end-stops of two major train lines, this corner is populated at all hours with guys, both young and old, with a few minutes to spare, loitering - a kind of cruising area or at least a viewing platform onto a world of cute guys otherwise apt to brush past you in a crowd.

"Sumimasen, hi o arimasu ka?" = "Excuse me, do you have a light?"

The dilapidated sideshow maze aesthetic is an off-shoot from two haunted dollhouse sculptures from 2007 but another aspect, the Labyrinth's four-sidedness, is derived from my Urbis Paganus project. Important to the latter was an investigation of distinct fronts and backs in pre-modernist sculpture. "Shinjuku Labyrinth" has no particular front, every side has the same back-ness which is equivalent to having front-ness and, though two sides have entrances into the interior of the labyrinth, those also serve as exits. Viewing the labyrinth from a standing position - which is also imagining yourself in its interior - the viewer can see only one or a few figures at a time though the labyrinth is populated by 20 or so guys in a relatively small space, all playing a game of appearance and disappearance. At first the maze seems to be under-populated but a little exploration reveals it to be thriving and bustling.

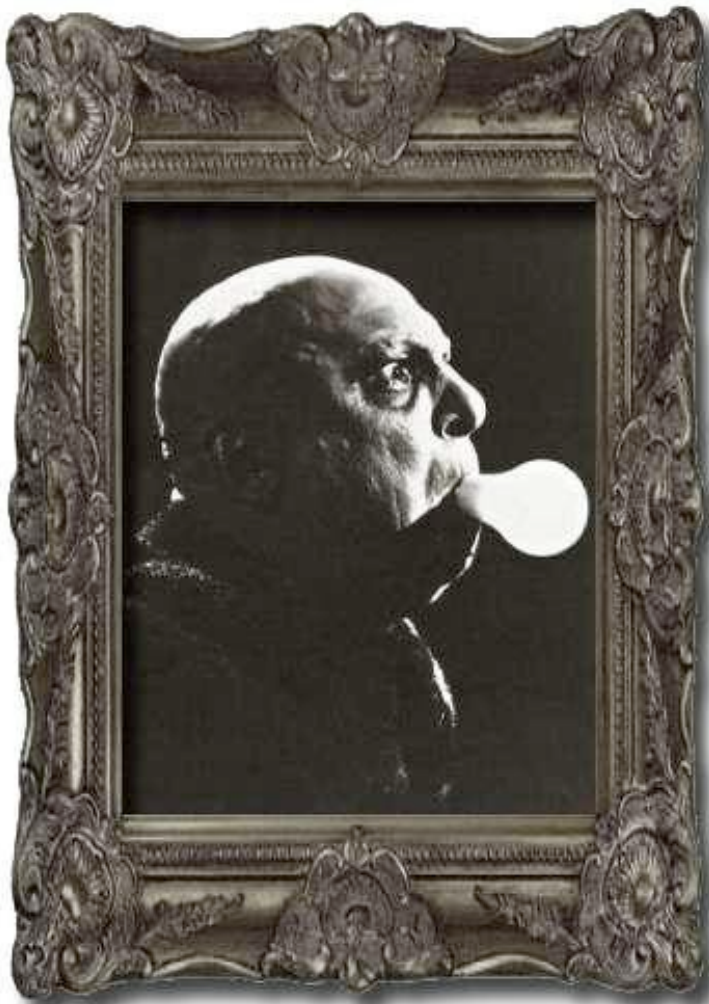


In the studio, new collages usually occur by merging 2 separate stacks of materials. In the case of the "Shinjuku Boy" collages, Japanese fashion magazine research left over from "Labyrinth" was shuffled with the paper sheets used to catch or test the paint from the dollhouses and table sculptures. On one hand, they have

to do with the fact that collage is always limited to the scale of the magazine it's drawn from; placing collage elements on a painted field, discontinuous with the scale of the magazine page, is one solution. I was also hoping that the plaid pants and flashy t-shirts of the fashion models would introduce some color back into work that's been primarily black, white or grey over the past few years.

The collages should be seen in the context of "Shinjuku Labyrinth" (obviously) but also my Tamotsu Yato biography. Though it's too early into my search to conclude much, Yato's investigations into Japanese masculinity and beauty, Tatsumi Hijikata's (the above illustrated is a poster from a 1967 performance of Hijikata) embrace of sexual ambiguity and Yokoo Tadanori's highly symmetrical and oftentimes erotic collage-based practice are things I'm looking at for inspiration.

"House of the Mad Professor" is another convergence of interests springing from both the haunted dollhouses and the Urbis Paganus project. To complement the heavily embellished exteriors of the dollhouses from 2007, I created noir-inspired moody or mysterious interiors through controlled viewpoints and off-stage lighting, theatrical effects which – if one merely adds a mirror or two – have historically been used by stage magicians to create the illusion of disappearances, re-appearances and apparitions. "House" is inhabited by more than a dozen figures, all of which only appear either around corners, through mirrors, mirrors of mirrors or across at least 2 thresholds.



The earlier dollhouses could be seen as fitting gifts from Cousin Itt or Uncle Fester to Wednesday and Pugsley (with the Addams Family in particular, there was always a wondrous embrace of anti-social difference) and used the established reference of readymade dollhouses to bring up the idea of adolescent acculturation through playing with dolls or surrogates. Some of the same intention was applied to “House of the Mad Professor” and hopefully viewers can imagine it as Grandpa’s Sex-Ed training kit for Eddie Munster, a pre-pubescent whose lycanthropic transformations echo another trans, the hormonal change from hairless and sexless to insatiable appetites and the magical appearance of bodyhair. Mad-scientist and vampire Grandpa, always whipping up transformative potions and changing into a bat himself, clues Eddie into not only window-peeping and the apparitional quality of fantasy but also to that other kind of “trans”, chicks-with-dicks.



With the adolescent acculturation scenario established, I attempted to complicate it a bit in “House of the Mad Professor” by creating a structure from scratch and, with the store-bought reference gone, emphasized diminutive scale as something other than miniaturization. I was looking specifically to Thai spirit-houses, elaborate and ornately steepled constructions of brightly painted concrete and mirrors that are meant to appease the ghosts and spirits that previously resided on the property where the spirit houses are placed. In other words, in front of even a weedy shack made from a few planks, bamboo and rusted corrugated tin, there will be a bright, fancy spirit house where, it’s hoped, the spirit will opt to reside should it return. The idea that spirits are seduced by fanciness and elaborateness, that they will always – given the chance – greedily go for the upgrade and that, further, being bodiless, they draw no distinction between a human-scale or miniature house, all ideas I tried to build in to “House of the Mad Professor”.

The relationship of “House of the Mad Professor” to Urbis Paganus is two-fold: hermaphrodites (where the as-yet-unfinished project will end) and flat representations of round sculpture.

-Richard Hawkins, May 2008