

An ugly kind of pretty: The unruly painting of Daniel Crews-Chubb



By DAVID PAGEL APR 14, 2018 | 7:00 AM



Daniel Crews-Chubb's "Chariot (red orange green)," 2018. Oil, acrylic, spray paint, ink, charcoal, coarse pumice gel, sand and collaged fabrics on canvas, 78.75 inches by 141.75 inches (Robert Wedemeyer / Daniel Crews-Chubb and Roberts Projects)

The way people talk about art today is more comical than ever before.

Academic critics wax poetic about art's subversive powers, primarily as they align with French literary theory from the 1960s. Others, who believe that culture can be owned, treat meaning as if it can be controlled; they fret about artists riffing off others.

Dealers, particularly those who prefer to be called gallerists, say just about anything to make a sale. Art flippers talk about market trends. And the wealthiest speculators, who might be seen, more honestly, as money launderers, couldn't care less about aesthetic value: What matters to them is art's capacity to hold its financial value while they hide their loot overseas.

At Roberts Projects in Culver City, seven wonderfully unruly paintings by Daniel Crews-Chubb make raucous fun of the sorry situation in which art finds itself. By turns silly and anarchistic, sassy and savvy, the London-based painter's loosely rendered pictures of ancient charioteers, ferocious beasts, medieval vixens, a Hindu deity, an African warrior and bare-butt selfies play fast and furiously — and very purposefully — with the idea that what is depicted in a painting determines how that painting works in the world.



Daniel Crews-Chubb's "Belfie (green and pink)," 2018. Oil, acrylic, spray paint, ink, charcoal, coarse pumice gel, pastel and collaged fabrics on canvas, 63 inches and 47.5 inches (Robert Wedemeyer / Daniel Crews-Chubb and Roberts Projects)

In other words, Crews-Chubb's rough and tumble compositions are not about Assyrian kings, monkey deities, African freedom fighters, untranslatable codices or belfies. Although all of those subjects are visible in "Chariots, Beasts and Belfies," they are merely the framework on which Crews-Chubb does what he loves: pile shabby scraps of fabric atop one another in a madcap patchwork, stopping only long enough to draw like a demon and paint like a maniac before slapping and stitching and gluing on more layers.

He manhandles big chunks of charcoal, using them like Brobdingnagian pencils to slash whiplash lines across the battered surfaces of his weighty paintings, many of which seem to have come straight out of a cave.

Sometimes he treats paint like a weapon, hurling and smearing it as if his life depended on it. At others he treats it like an enemy, bashing it to a pulp and then kicking dirt on its remains.



Darrel Crews-Chubb's "Beasts With Headresses," 2019. Oil, acrylic, spray paint, ink, pastel, charcoal, coarse putty gel, sand and collaged fabrics on canvas, 63 inches by 141.75 inches. (Robert Wedemeyer / Darrel Crews-Chubb and Roberts Projects)

If Crews-Chubb's paintings were billboards, they'd stop traffic. But there's more going on than immediately meets the eye. To look closely is to see how deliberately, even carefully, each is made.

Their painstaking construction tells a story of starting out, failing miserably, starting over, making do and persevering — sticking to a task whose beginning you can't remember and whose end is nowhere near, somewhere beyond the horizon but not beyond hope.

The physicality of Crews-Chubb's wildly layered paintings is where the truth resides. You don't need to know what they reference in order to come face to face with their beauty, which is down and dirty and so far from pretty that you might start to think that beauty without a touch of grunge or even ugliness is not all it's cracked up to be.

Roberts Projects, 5801 Washington Blvd., L.A. Through April 28, closed Sundays and Mondays. (323) 549-0223, www.robertsprojectsla.com