

“Tricknology”

New sculpture and sound works by Ben Hall

“Fanatical about language, obsessive about details, and meticulous in his planning, Hall is clearly moving toward something with great determination—and that something includes receiving an MFA from one of the country’s most prestigious universities. But a deeper look at the projects and lifestyle infrastructure that Hall has constructed indicate that he is not, as he says, trying to “be an artist,” and especially not trying to make things that “look like art.” Rather, art is just one of a number of mechanisms—one with which it must be noted he has great fluency—that he’s using to drive toward bigger priorities.”

Rosie Sharp, Art Critic, Detroit, November 2015

Statement

Tricknology (or Br’er Rabbit’s commentary on monies and objects)

“If first you don't succeed try, try again

Step up to the mic and die again

This is the next lifetime and you want to battle

Either you like reincarnation or the smell of carnations

The sample's the flesh and the beat's the skeleton

You got beef but there's worms in your Wellington

I'll put a hole in your skull and extract the skeleton”

-Vast Aire, Harlem, 2000.

This is mostly a product of us sitting in the bunker, talking to ourselves. We produced an industry, and that industry stimulated its own inflation. We weren’t looking for perfection. We were looking for advantage. We used to be all parade horses and fresh water, but now it’s just the strain of waiting and avoiding the surface—the same way the hungry predator avoids the diseased body. Ever since we heard Ray Davies ask, “Where have all the good times gone?,” we’ve been asking ourselves the same thing. We’re just like everybody else who’s had enough: We’d like a little more. We feel broke, brave spending too much on beads for squaw. All art starts with shopping—that is, what we choose, what we enjoy as a consumer. Everybody here gots some degree of PTSD, and everybody is afraid to go up and see what earth looks like now.

What changes things is how people think about power. To build our present tense we used a theory of exploitation based on theft of labor and labor time. It was a therapeutic use exception because our system wouldn’t survive otherwise. But the system was so successful that other people began to have their own economic heft and as a result we feared we’d cease to occupy the same throne-like, Barcelona-chair, Design-Within-Reach Chinese knock-off position of power we formerly had. The more you move away from your original position—the more you have to navigate—the more likely you are to run the ship into the shoals. At this point, the hull is more patch than boat.

Much of our experience comes from rescue, simultaneously trying to rescue and survive. That might seem self-important, but the first priority of rescue is yourself. Rescue divides resources. We use the buddy system because it's harder to solve problems alone. We started out with rescues while diving. First of all, water is 800x denser than air. (Now that's an impediment.) We try to avoid the conditions that create the tired diver, the panicked diver. We have to worry about the problems other than exhaustion and appropriate exposure protection.

The longer you wait, the less the likelihood for survival. The deeper you go, the less your lungs expand, the more the color bleaches out. The lost diver experiences *verfremdungseffekt*. This translates as "defamiliarization effect," often mistranslated as "alienation effect." The rescuer must use a compass, making the square of inquiry slightly bigger with each pass, moving slightly faster than not at all. You can't do CPR to someone on the ocean floor or in the riverbed. We want to minimize delays to restart the heart. You any good at Scrabble or Boggle? Do you know the most common anagram for the word heart?

We maintain the mixed or complex identity to make instrumentalization more difficult, but most people welcome the hypnotist's watch. Recently, we met a woman who didn't believe us when she saw how we were building our escape plan. To her, all our decisions seemed absolutely arbitrary—as though we could just as well have selected anything at all—and therefore there was no meaning. That made it ugly to her. So we told her that if we were to describe the way she was dressed, it might sound very much like what she'd been saying. For instance, she had feathers on her head, an enamel brooch with a picture of Sarah Siddons on it pinned to her breast, and a button on her bag that said "Reality Asylum Shaved Women." And around her neck she had what she would call mink but what could also be described as the skin of a dead animal. Her overcoat was the hair of a lamb, which could be the floor of a barbershop. On her feet a dead cow and on her legs stockings that are nothing more than the cocoon produced by insect larvae. Well, at first she was offended, and we apologized for the description, then we started to talk about it and work together.