

SOMEHOW SOMEWHERE NO ONE IS WRONG



Jared Mader, *Untitled*, 2015 (Installation view, Jared Mader, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, October 16, 2015–January 3, 2016). Glass, water, stainless steel, cement, LEDs, remote control, pump, lantern, PVC, Marble dust, tinted chrome, cable ties, nylon rope, fans, wine, scarves, silk bows, candle, burlap, lace, dye, and Italian marble, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist; courtesy David Lewis Gallery, New York. Photograph by Bill Jacobson

By Christopher Y. Lew, Associate Curator

There are some images and signs that are elastic in meaning—that signify something for nearly everyone even though any particular significance remains in flux, varying from one person to another. Certain emoji icons are like this, such as the one with a wide, even grin that is equal parts grimace and smile. It is as noncommittal of a response as one can get from an array of cartoon faces. Tattoos can be like this too. A cursory search of popular tattoos in 2015 yields stars, angel wings, and cherry blossoms.¹ What these adornments truly mean depends on the respective person and, to a lesser extent, its location on someone's body. If placement were not key, the derogatory term “tramp stamp” would not exist and neither would Mike Tyson's late career as a facially tattooed actor. These tattoos

can be very open-ended—at once specific and general—but even so, how can we tally the inordinate time, energy, and meaning invested into the design of one's choosing? 🤔

Jared Mader (b. 1986) makes art that is as open to individual interpretation as these cheeky examples. It is work that is sensitive to the shifting moods of the viewer and can be embedded into daily experience. Drawing on references that are high and low, tacky and serious, Mader looks to public sculpture as one example of how viewers can engage with his work. Public sculpture—no matter how good or how bad—becomes woven into the fabric of everyday life over time. It quickly fades into the background, but it can also function as a symbol of a neighborhood—an object people love or hate, ignore or congregate around. Often it serves all of these roles simultaneously.

It is in this regard that Maderere wants his work to act like the songs one associates with specific experiences and people: a first crush, a childhood humiliation, a true BFF, a life partner, a parent, a son, or a daughter. These associations between music and experience run in two directions. Not only are songs linked to one's memories, but they can shift the feeling of a particular moment: a daily commute is not quite the same when set to "Ride of the Valkyries" as it is to "Smooth Operator." Music—with its portable nature—can provide context or make us reflect upon an existing framework, informing a site or experience. Art and its reception, however, is still predominantly contingent upon the white cube gallery and exhibition format. Maderere's intent is not to abolish these modern conventions of display, but to create a wider gap for context and content to be exchanged.

While Maderere does not avoid references to art history and other aspects of culture, he makes work with various points of entry. To create the most "open" work, Maderere begins with a known form, or what he calls a "dumb thing blank enough to project anything onto it."² For his 2015 exhibition at Armada Gallery in Milan the entry point was a camping scene in which two child-sized figures cooked with a small frying pan over a gas burner.³ One figure, in a coat made of fabric woven to resemble chainmail, holds a wooden spoon while the second figure, in an ornate pink hoodie, appears to pour liquor into the pan. The two are incongruously positioned on a twin bed that is merged with a gold wire-frame dome festooned with real cherries and melted red sealing wax.

The combination of disparate elements lends the untitled installation a fantastical air. The dome structure is visually seductive—the dripping wax complements the deep red cherries and plays against spiraling curlicues of gold colored wire—but it seems to illogically intersect with the bed and figures. It is as if the two parts were haphazardly merged, like a physical version of two superimposed Photoshop layers or the result of a rift in time and space straight out of a Hollywood blockbuster. Throughout the work, the interplay of material and style creates its own logic: embroidered floral patterns, unleavened bread with Italian hard candies baked into it, plaid house slippers, a "bulletproof vest" stuffed with packs of Gauloises cigarettes. Maderere's production notes describe one hat that is "distressed with red smears liked [sic] metallic red smears but not shiny just like shitty paint applied to imitate a smear in a car crash when a cab brushes up on another car and leaves [a] yellow smear."⁴ The combination of



Detail of Jared Maderere (Armada, Milan, June 13–December 7, 2015). Courtesy Armada, Milan and David Lewis Gallery, New York. Photograph by Beppe Raso



Installation view of Jared Maderere (Armada, Milan, June 13–December 7, 2015). Courtesy Armada, Milan and David Lewis Gallery, New York. Photograph by Beppe Raso

styles and modes of fabrication are intended not to point to any one time period or economic system. It is equally plausible that the handcrafted clothes could have originated from a feudal society or an Etsy seller, making it hard to place the work in a particular era. It is not out of time but encompasses as many notions of time as possible. And yet a sense of coherence is preserved mainly due to the narrative implied by the two figures cooking together. While the various elements suggest a variety of associations that seem to have little to do with one another, the work as a whole retains

a conceptual center fixed around an allegory of communing over food.

A sense of implied narrative also grounds the untitled work Madere made for his exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. He draws inspiration from public fountains and the figurative sculpture that often accompanies them. Like public sculpture, fountains often have a range of meanings projected onto them. As sites of hope, love, companionship, nationalism, memory, and religion, they are one of the few places that solicit just a penny for a dream. Whether found in a suburban mall or a city center, fountains still retain some semblance of a civic monument. Madere makes full use of these connotations by exhibiting his version of a fountain in the Museum's John R. Eckel Jr. Foundation Gallery—a space that is always free of admission. The open sensibility of his work is reinforced by the public nature of its place of exhibition.

Madere's fountain depicts a mother and her baby, who is transforming into a harp. The child's body is distorted in two ways: elongated to resemble a sutured intestine or sausage casing and also stretched vertically to assume the form of the stringed instrument. While the work has clear references to Madonna-and-Child imagery, the composition of the figures suggests a more strident connection to classical depictions of Perseus holding the head of Medusa. The mother is not holding her child in a warm embrace, but grasping in an emblazoned manner, with her arm jutting straight out, as if tugging on a lock of the baby's hair.

Madere is also interested in the possibility of multiple dimensions and portals into the past and future. Here, conventional, linear notions of time and space have been abandoned to create a work that he describes as being "shredded through time and space" and "bearing physical evidence of that journey." Madere's fountain is a union of elements that seem to come from the past, present, and future—much like the Armada installation. In a previous 2015 work, he created a sculptural installation depicting a woman being pulled into an interdimensional portal.⁵ For the Whitney presentation, the portal is implied through the impossibly wide range of forms and representational elements. It is as if only through such space-time portals, where linear time is discarded, that a fountain takes the form of a baby made of iron rebar and strands of lights, and a mother, constructed from a metal armature and a terrazzo-like material, wears a bandoleer of water misters and festive bows taken from a Venetian masquerade. To further emphasize

the sense of flux, large swaths of lace ring the mother and are violently held aloft by the high-power fans distributed across her body and throughout the gallery.

This fantastical composition does not stem from a Surrealist unconscious or from a trip down a rabbit hole of online image searches. Instead, it extends in part from an idea of potential and possibility as interpreted through a layman's read of astrophysics and theoretical physics. If more than one universe exists and if string theory opens the door to more than four dimensions, how does that affect our conception of what is real or possible? For Madere, an acknowledgement of multiple universes and dimensions allows his work to be a more accurate response to the powers that be, whether they are laws of physics or higher beings. Describing his approach, he says:

If a universe of infinite possibility and infinite iterations exists then it feels like editing to not allow the raspberries in the jewelry to come along or the cherries and the gold snowman globe covered in wax to come together, something like . . . If I can have the thought that an ornamental gold wire snowman queen covered in wax and cherries exists then it follows somewhere at some point the universe will see to it that this will come to be. In this sense any thought that could occur inside a human/otherwise brain that appears to reference something that would typically be classified as not "real" could be viewed in terms of a remote viewing experience where one is experiencing a far off or otherwise unavailable point in the universe at that present time or in another time, if all possibilities must play themselves out then any thought had or not had will eventually be actualized somehow somewhere.⁶

Madere also blends ideas from physics with a branch of philosophy called Object Oriented Ontology.⁷ Also known as Speculative Realism, it is a branch of thought—primarily advanced by Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, Ray Brassier, and Iain Hamilton—which considers objects and the universe from a nonhuman perspective, one that does not privilege the human mind but considers it simply one actor in a vast world of living and nonliving entities. As cultural critic Steven Shaviro describes it: "Speculative Realism insists upon the independence of the world, and of things in the world, from our own conceptualizations of them."⁸ In other words, which are equally apt for Madere's work, "It's a



Jared Madere, *Untitled*, 2015 (installation view). *The Story of O(OO)*, David Lewis Gallery, New York, April 28–June 28, 2015). Figure: branches, wig, brass wire, Camilla Fabric of Our Forbears maxi dress, and chair, 105 x 63 x 112 in. (266.7 x 160 x 284.5 cm); sheets: bed sheets, mirror, glass, polyurethane glue, aircraft cable, and hardware, 108 x 102 in. (274.3 x 259.1 cm) and 72 x 84 in. (182.9 x 213.4 cm). Courtesy David Lewis Gallery, New York

voyage into the unknown, without any assurance of a proper ending.”⁹

But it is not a trip into the unknown that is without precedent. Madere considers the work of Robert Smithson as one important influence, especially the Land artist’s ability to bring together different histories and futures or what Jack Flam calls “unusual combinations of the imaginary and the real that seemed to evoke the vastness of time itself.”¹⁰ Smithson viewed the industrial and suburban landscape as one full of possibility. His well-known

1967 essay “The Monuments of Passaic” envisions northern New Jersey as prehistoric, complete with “mechanical dinosaurs stripped of their skin,”¹¹ resulting in an apocalyptic scene of Biblical proportions or an image of the future that is already past its expiration date. In another essay, Smithson conjectures, “If time is a place, then innumerable places are possible.”¹²

John Armleder was another important influence for Madere, especially during his time at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Armleder’s broad stylistic range and all-embracing sensibility offered an antidote to the formalist studio critiques of art school. Madere looked to Armleder’s work as an example of art that can be receptive of any reading, and how he short-circuited attempts to discuss the work at a formal level.¹³ Issues of color choice, composition, and material seem to fall by the wayside when abstract paintings are juxtaposed with armchairs, scattering florescent lights, hanging disco balls, and wallpaper. Armleder allows different associations to enter his work depending on the knowledge and interests of each viewer. In a 2006 interview he said: “When I use the guitar of say, Zack Wild, Zack Wild fans will see only him, while others will just see a guitar with a black and yellow target painted on it. The target might make others think of Jasper Johns or Duchamp, while still others might have honey bees at home



Robert Smithson (1938–1973), *Monument with Pontoons: The Pumping Derrick from Monuments of Passaic*, New Jersey, 1967. Six photographs and one cut Photostat map, dimensions variable. The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo, Norway. Photo and art © Holt-Smithson Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, courtesy of James Cohan Gallery, New York/Shanghai



Bed-Stuy Love Affair (est. 2014), Gate, 2015. Photograph by Arnold Brower

and will want to go home to tend them. No one is wrong.”¹⁴

The open embrace of Madere is also present in popular culture, especially movies like Michael Bay’s *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014) and Andy and Lana Wachowski’s *Cloud Atlas* (2012). These films, according to Madere, represent a “paradigm shift” in which there is “no intact narrative and [the movie] assumes a distracted/drunk/high audience.”¹⁵ Spectacle is prioritized over continuity in the *Transformers* series and the shifts in time and storyline in *Cloud Atlas* can be analogous to a drug trip monopolized by visions of Tom Hanks and Halle Berry. Plot becomes a vehicle for visually rich set pieces. When Optimus Prime’s spaceship is hit by a missile while hovering over Central Hong Kong, skids up and down a forested mountain, and ultimately lands in an Asian version of the Rift Valley filled with Dinobots, anyone begging for an explanation has missed the point.¹⁶ For Madere, these blockbusters do not signal a low point for cinema, but offer examples of other ways to approach narrative and linearity. It is an approach that lacks hierarchies of taste and judgment.

So what is left when everything is flattened out? In one instance, it resembles a vehicle from a *Mad Max* film. Painted matte black and equipped with security bars, Madere transformed a 1978 RV

into the artist-run gallery Bed-Stuy Love Affair. Founded in 2014 and initially hosted in the artist’s Brooklyn apartment, the gallery has become an important hub for a community of young artists in New York. By organizing numerous group shows (most recently the gallery has focused on event based programs), Madere has helped foster a network of emerging artists who share similar interests in materiality and narrative. Responding to a question in a grant application about the meaning of his work, Madere wrote without irony: “Fill the hearts of those who would judge with doubt and empower those who won’t.”¹⁷

1. “Top 10 Tattoo Ideas on Hands,” *Newest Tattoo Design*, accessed September 19, 2015, <http://tattoo-trends.net/category/popular-tattoos/>.

2. Jared Madere, conversation with the author, July 22, 2015.

3. This work was exhibited in *Jared Madere* at Armada Gallery, Milan, June 13–July 12, 2015.

4. Jared Madere, unpublished production notes and sketches, 2015.

5. This work was made from branches, wig, brass wire, Camilla Fabric of Our Forbears maxi dress, and chair (figure); bed sheets, mirror, glass, polyurethane glue, aircraft cable, and hardware

(sheets and exhibited in *The Story of O(OO)* at David Lewis, New York, April 28–June 28, 2015.

6. Jared Madere, correspondence with the author, July 7, 2015.

7. See *Story of O(OO)* at David Lewis above.

8. Steven Shaviro, "Speculative Realism—A Primer," *Texte Zur Kunst* 93 (March 2014): 44.

9. Ibid.

10. Jack Flam, "Introduction: Reading Robert Smithson," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), xiv.

11. Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, 71.

12. Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, 11.

13. Jared Madere, conversation with the author, July 7, 2015.

14. Martin Engler, *John M. Armleder: Too Much is Not Enough* (Hannover, Germany: Kunstverein Hannover, 2006), 107.

15. Jared Madere, conversation with the author, July 7, 2015.

16. For just two of many pieces on the *Transformers* narrative, see Jamie Lee Curtis Taete, "What the Fuck Is Going on in 'Transformers: Age of Extinction'?", *Vice Media LLC*, accessed September 22, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/what-the-fuck-is-going-on-in-transformers-age-of-extinction>, and Matt Singer, "Transformers: Age Of Extinction," *PITCHFORK MEDIA INC*, accessed September 22, 2015, <https://thedissolve.com/reviews/894-transformers-age-of-extinction/>.

17. "Jared Madere," *The Rema Hort Mann Foundation*, accessed September 22, 2015, <http://www.remahortmann.org/project/jared-madere/>.