



The Material World: ‘Mitchell Charbonneau: Gone In 60 Seconds,’ Team Gallery, New York

By Barry Neuman

The sleight of hand of material illusion often depends on how the slippage of the mind’s eye navigates time and technology in the present moment. Mitchell Charbonneau, in his solo project space exhibition, “Gone In 60 Seconds,” at Team Gallery, New York, updates and upgrades the genre. His works not only trick the eye, but they also heighten a sense of awareness of his chosen subjects – domestic objects that are commonplace and current in character – and, remarkably, the viewer, themselves. As a result, Charbonneau has created a convergence of the still life and the figure.

To walk through Charbonneau’s exhibition is to live modern life twice over. In a space that seems to contain a folding ladder, a folding chair, and two sets of shelves and brackets, it is possible to go back and forth between accepting how the works are like the actual objects they resemble and how they’re not. In doing so, one is drawn into examining how Charbonneau’s artistry and craft skills are inventive and convincing and into a world where one’s senses are amplified. The feeling that a visitor has that they’re developing their perceptual abilities while at “Gone In 60 Seconds” is very real. To take notice of the materials and speculate on the fabrication of each work here is a life-enhancing experience.

In recent years, gallery-going excursions for the public have increasingly become like studio visits for gallerists and curators. Photographic depictions either amplify or diminish the properties of works of art, and to experience the physical/conceptual presence of an artist’s production, it’s necessary to interview their works in-person. Via Instagram, et. al, one can – however educatedly - only guess at the artistic character of a work of art, and, this writer can confidently say that Charbonneau’s works are the real thing.

The littlest details of Charbonneau’s works are intriguing. The edges, sides, and corners of the shelf in “Untitled (Shelf)” – the one on the rear wall - seem completely “right,” but, to an infinitesimal extent, they’re wonky. The layers of wood are visible on the front and lateral sides of the shelf. The roller-applied, white latex paint is smooth on the just-detectably and uniquely grainy top surface. Most conspicuously (if any detail can be said to be conspicuous), there remains a miniscule crest of paint riding the edge of where the top and front sides meet. If one thinks of an ocean wave by Utagawa Hiroshige or of “Milk Drop Coronet,” by Harold Edgerton, and reduces the effect to scale, one can see the elegant concession of the artist’s touch. It’s a hybrid of the mechanical and the handmade, and this remarkably subtle specimen of action painting contributes a great deal to this work being a piece of poetry and not a mere replica.

While regarding “Untitled (Chair)” and “Untitled (Step Ladder),” leaning forward to examine the features of each seems unavoidable. The same goes for encircling each work.



The scale of the folding picnic/beach chair seems to be 98% of the subject's actual size because of the shrinkage that's intrinsic to the casting process, but this calls a visitor's attention to how nearly one-to-one it is. The interwoven strips of fabric, making up the chair's back and seat, look spot-on, and, eccentrically or not, they're jet black. The nap of the fabric is more pronounced than expected; the distinction is slight, and it effectively contributes to the appeal of the work.

The steps and the stool of the ladder appear to be genuine and made of cast plastic or a composite material and capable of holding the weight of an average adult human being. However, one wonders if the material is of a latest-generation substance, a complete invention by the artist, or both.

In either case, maneuvering around, above, and below each work and evaluating/appreciating each aspect, as it presents itself, is a compelling thing for a visitor to do. Unconsciously, a visitor's participatory engagement with these works becomes performative.

In this exhibition, space has been created for visitors to relate to each work. In the pursuit of satisfying their curiosity, it could be said that a visitor completes each work or array of works. In a most economical manner, then, Charbonneau joins the ranks of sculptors who, through ingenuity and benevolent guile, capture the imagination of the public in inspiring them to traverse the invisible boundary between the plaza and the plinth.

Charbonneau's exhibition remains on view through 29 February 2020, having been extended by one week. It is not, however, too soon to visit Team Gallery and experience "Gone In 60 Seconds." Extending the range and depth of one's imagination and perceptual sensibilities is a gift that Charbonneau's work can provide, and, one might ask, "Why not see the show in the here and now?"