



Joseph Cohen: *422 with sound*, 2015/2017. Pigment, diamond dust, gold, and varnish on canvas over oak, 81" x 60" high.

Between the Lines

BY MARIAN S. MCLELLAN

JOSEPH COHEN
Octavia Art Gallery
New Orleans, LA

KATHRYN HUNTER
Le Mieux Galleries
New Orleans, LA

JOSE-MARIA CUNDIN
Callan Contemporary
New Orleans, LA

ARE ADVANCES IN materials and our access to these materials governing the modus operandi of contemporary artists? Or, are artists consciously using nontraditional media to reflect the ever-increasing din of corporate infiltration? Perhaps they are simply acknowledging the ever-diminishing line that separates one thing from another.

Whatever the case, the very premise of Houston-based Joseph Cohen's "Ode to A Flower" at Octavia Art Gallery, recalls an NPR Radiolab segment about a carefully dissected caterpillar

revealing the makings of a butterfly, pre chrysalis. A very magical situation that would otherwise go unnoticed when merely gazing upon a caterpillar crawling across the hibiscus. Such awareness challenges our view of the caterpillar, i.e., there is more than meets the eye. The American physicist Richard Feynman expressed a similar sentiment in his 1981 "Ode to A Flower" interview, to which Cohen pays homage. In the interview, Feynman discussed the occupational viewpoints of an artist and scientist with regard to the beauty of a flower. In his artist's statement, Cohen says "... the human eye has certain limits; a designed myopia, where the eye cannot see what the intellect understands. Breakthroughs in material science have allowed me to work with specialized substances...to relieve these types of blind spots."

Thus, Cohen's interest in both what and how we see are in evidence at Octavia where the majority of paintings are monochromatic, most often dripping from three-dimensional birch panels. *Proposition 429*, a pigment, diamond dust, gold and varnish on birch, oozes the color red while an entire wall of variations on blue and white soothes human need for out-of-doors. Included in this litany is *Proposition 451*, whose uneven lower edge seems to allude to another interest of Cohen's, that being the sound of color.



Kathryn Hunter: *Can't Breathe 1*, 2017. Papercut, relief printing on mulberry paper, 25" x 18" high.

Only one of the pieces displayed actually incorporates auditory components, *Proposition 422 with sound*, a large, uneven surface of yellow pigment on canvas over oak containing diamond dust, gold and varnish.

WHEN WE SEE a printed bear we might think of the Grizzly emblazoned on the state flag of California. Or, we might think of the many bears in Louisiana printmaker Kathryn Hunter's "The Concurrence of Things" at LeMieux Galleries. LeMieux's website lists Hunter as being from Alabama's story-telling country which she left in search of the mountains in Montana and Wyoming, home to much wildlife and in particular, the Grizzly. Animals have been an ongoing feature of Hunter's mixed media linocuts. In this current outing, her strongest yet, creatures again take center stage, particularly the Black bear, and are oftentimes dressed or featured like masks on human torsos, adding to Hunter's strong sense of narration.

But, in "The Concurrence of Things," we are not partaking of Pooh's delight with a jar of honey or Goldilocks encounter with bowls of porridge. Rather, young and old be forewarned,

Hunter's bears are at times screaming in pain or downright defiant. Furthermore, an overall sense of alchemy is apparent in the artist's repetitive use of diamonds, snakes and string art to accompany her fables. *Can't Breathe 1*, a paper cut with relief printing on mulberry paper, is a smaller version of the mural *Can't Breathe 2*. In both, an anthropomorphic bear wearing a dress holds the United States flag and stands beside a dog whose chest is decorated with pistols. The sash across the bear's chest reads "Can't Breathe." The bear and dog in the mural version are made from laser cut steel, surrounded by an army of linocut swifts mounted on wood.

As with *Can't Breathe 2*, Hunter's larger works are the more confrontational pieces of "The Concurrence of Things." The 67"x39"x7" *Abduction 2* presents a laser cut steel bear mounted onto a yellow diamond that's been painted directly on the wall. Steel arrows pierce the screaming bear's belly containing an embroidered caduceus formation. Additional statements relating to guns are in a mixed media series of silhouetted paper cutouts of human figures with embroidered animal heads. Each figure holds a gun, with the titles *Won't Shoot*, *Don't Shoot*, and *Will Shoot*.



Jose-Maria Cundin: *The Supreme Leader*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 9.4 x 7.4 ft.

A CONJURING OF the soft, ethereal glow of twilight is recommended in order to assume the right frame of mind and full appreciation of Spanish-born Jose-Maria Cundin’s “The Supreme Leader and Other Ponderables” at Callan Contemporary. That, and an unbridled Bosch tintured with a tad of anime. Cundin, who moved to New Orleans in 1964 and resides in Folsom, presents a series of playful, oil on canvas satires that emit a warm glow of light from one painting to the next. Animating each painting are atmospheric smatterings of color that either define one of Cundin’s characters or the space therein. *The Unqualified Candidate*’s main attraction is the empty, pale yellow chair that offers a prop to an indecipherable, predominantly orange, figure.

Comedic by virtue of implication are *The Museum Visit* and *Exercises on Levitation (Extreme Yoga)*. In the former, one of

Cundin’s fanciful, doll-like creations is displayed atop a platform alongside the museumgoer shrouded in blues and at a loss for clarification. *Exercises on Levitation* is more descriptive, allowing us concrete information of pointing hands and ascending feet. *The Supreme Leader* is the largest painting in the exhibit, measuring over nine feet tall, and like most of the paintings is from 2017 and adorned with an elaborate frame. Here, a foppish fellow stands amid a state of disarray, his frightened cat clutching a doll beneath a wobbly table. If not for its size, the painting would fit quite nicely into a clothed version of “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” □