

World of Tomorrow, Jack Pierson

Josie Luciano

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There is no artist statement for Jack Pierson's *Tomorrow's Man* exhibit at the University of Nevada, Reno's Sheppard Contemporary Gallery. There's also no wall text, no names and no titles.

Though some of the work in *Tomorrow's Man* is made by well-known artists, anonymity is the great equalizer for a curator who shows art and artists from all ages and stages—the same way Pinterest users might place an Eva Hesse sculpture next to a Coke ad next to a cool tree on their “Art I Love” pinboard. Everything belongs if you're the chooser.

Pierson has a similarly unstuffy philosophy when it comes to the latest iteration of *Tomorrow's Man*, the acclaimed group exhibit he's curated several times before in places like New York and Paris. Named after a men's physique magazine of the '50s and '60s, *Tomorrow's Man* also shares its title with Pierson's ongoing 12-volume art zine—a winking tribute to homoerotica set against a fine art backdrop, a project Pierson describes as “stuff to look at.”

The “stuff” has a few common threads—nude photographs, abstract and figurative paintings, some environmental photographs and text—but it's not enough to knit a theory out of. Any connections the viewer makes are likely to be created the same way they are on social media, through personal association and preference.

Questions like, “What does this tell me about the curator/poster?” and “Do I like this?” feel more relevant than they would in a less collector-like show.

“Maybe somebody likes fine-line pen and ink drawings of freaky kids in orgy situations, or somebody likes big graphic process painting,” said Pierson, talking about Michael Bilsborough's and Florence Derive's work respectively.

Other highlights include a collaborative “extreme decoration” wallpaper painting by Elisabeth Kley and Tabboo! (a.k.a. Stephen Tashjian), a weird and brightly colored collage series by performance artist and rocker Kembla Pfahler, and three quiet, sparkling paintings by Laurel Sparks that use juvenile materials such as glitter and Play-Doh to draw attention to receding, fading shapes elsewhere on the canvas.

Our complicated relationship with virtual worlds and social media seems to hum in the background of the gallery, given the typical setting for the nude subject matter, text-heavy pieces, and Pinterest-like feel of the show. But there are a few works that demand a direct comparison.

Like Cali Thornhill DeWitt's photographic series of atomic bomb images with headline-y sayings like, “BUILDING MUSCLES” “WORLD NEWS” and “HUMAN HISTORY” layered over the top. It's the sort of in-person meme that's both hard to look at (it's bright) and hard to look

away from (there are explosions).

Or there's Zak Arctander's short black-and-white film. For three-and-a-half minutes, the camera tracks between glass stairwells, crowds in public squares, teens lost in raves, a man getting off in the shower, and—strangely enough—a segment where old Hollywood actress Leslie Caron's face gets Photoshopped into a family portrait. Real or virtual, the beauty captured by Arctander is both intimate and distant, frenetic and peaceful.

Pierson's talent for assembling seemingly unrelated pieces is undeniable. Taken together, Richard Tinkler's gray, geometric oil painting, Bryson Rand's close-up photographs of tangled plant life, and Peter Fend's aluminum sign that reads "Do What Must Be Done As Soon As You Can," all gain an urgent, environmental meaning in proximity to one another. It's a lineup you might come across on your Facebook feed, but in Pierson's show it's deliberate.

For all of *Tomorrow's Man's* allusions to an online world, the exhibit ultimately brings you back to a gallery, a headspace, a piece in front of you where you can't scroll away, though you can walk away. It just takes more effort.