

The Old Gold

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2009

Sam Gibbons



Best of Luck, 2008, acrylic on carved wood panel, 66" x 48" x 2"

There are so many things to enjoy about Sam Gibbons' shaped paintings and I'm not sure that they're all that obvious or defined. His work elicits an immediate feeling of nostalgia that after a time turns on you. Instead of exploiting the simultaneously attractive and nasty nature of the characters a by singling them out (I'm thinking of [Nara](#) or [Dzama](#)), they are intertwined to the point that you have no place to rest your eyes, much less contemplate their cuteness.

Check out his show now up at [Claire Oliver](#) through March 14 and see his website [here](#). See the interview below and my previous post on Sam [here](#).

Jon Lutz: I think I'm seeing a lot more bones and blood in this show as opposed to the last...Is there a concept behind a show title like "Bone Meal"?

Sam Gibbons: If there is an overall concept for the show, it would be mortality. That is where Goya's "Disasters" series fits in. His is probably the most poignant series of work on the subject of death. There are bones that appear in all the paintings in the show but they perform different roles. Some are used to prop up bodies, some signify life leaving a body, some spell out messages, some are discarded refuse. A lot of times, the bones connect parts in the paintings like they would in a living skeleton. The title makes reference to the bones that appear in the work but also refers to the idea of accepting ("eating") something unpleasant such as death.

JL: You've also introduced a kind of greeting card text...where does this come from?

SG: The phrases are a sort of farewell message. Their hollow optimism also makes an attempt at trying to counterbalance the unpleasantness in the paintings. They come up a bit short though--- phrases like "best of luck" send you off to deal with a lot of shit, violence and death without a whole lot on your side.



Strung up on a Dead Tree, 2009, acrylic on carved wood panel, 60" x 48" x 2"

JL: As we saw in the [previous post](#), there are some clear formal differences between your earlier, more narrative works and the newer, symmetrical ones. At the same time, distinct, pseudo-iconic cartoon characters have been your muse throughout. To what degree are the characters self-invented vs. directly appropriated?

SG: There was a lot more outside source material used for the characters that appeared in the earlier work. Even in the earlier work though nothing was directly appropriated. I was still figuring out how to draw cartoons so the source material was used mainly as a drawing reference. I liked seeing the allusion to popular figures and styles in the work though. It plays on the idea of there being a history or lineage of cartooning as well as inducing the feelings of nostalgia. It makes reference to the evolution of cartooning but also to my own evolution in creating cartoons.

JL: Particularly in the earlier works, what role did more common/popular cartoon characters have, especially if not copied per se?

SG: These are the types of cartoons that I grew up loving – especially Chuck Jones' Looney Tunes and old Disney comics. These paintings dealt with childhood and ideas of innocence. I was drawn to the characters that I responded to the most in my youth.



Bunny Cummy Buns, 2004, ink on paper, 8" x 8"

JL: What initially drew you to such sources in the presentation of a narrative? How has this changed over time?

SG: In these earlier paintings I was trying to subvert the innate qualities of the cartoons. At the same time they also became an homage to the cartoons that I loved as a child. As my drawing ability developed, the characters became more self-invented. As the paintings developed over time, the characters were created without source material. A lot of the characters did retain remnants of the styles of the original sources that I used when learning to draw cartoons. In the work that I've been doing lately, if there is a

visible outside influence, the characters look less like they are from the Looney Tunes era and have more of an influence from current more adult themed cartoons.

JL: Which ones?

SG: I'm into a lot of the shows that are on Adult Swim on the Cartoon Network. Shows like Aqua Teen Hunger Force, Superjail, Tom Goes to the Mayor. and Home Movies. I also enjoy shows like South Park, Ren and Stimpy, Tim and Eric Awesome Show, and even SpongeBob. This isn't research work though. I just really enjoy all of these shows --- for entertainment as well as their visual appeal.



JL: What visual artists do you see as influences?

SG: For this last group of work, there is a lot of influence from Goya---specifically from the "The Disasters of War" series. There are bits and pieces of images from his etchings scattered in the new work -- in fact one painting is basically a transcription of the etching "Wonderful Heroism! Against Dead Men." I'm a big fan of Peter Saul, Philip Guston, and Takashi Murakami, the obvious attraction to these artists being their use of cartoon elements. I am also attracted to the psychedelic, surrealistic, and transformative nature of their work. Like me, a lot of their inspiration comes from cartoons ---but I think the most interesting aspect of their work is seeing how each of them attempts to transcend or reinvent the use of cartooning.

JL: Are you looking at any artists that one may not assume?

SG: Some slightly less obvious influences are Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy. While they both utilize some cartoon and caricature elements in their work, I am really attracted to their ability to critique societal issues through the use of debasement and transgression. They both have a certain way of walking the fine line between making you want to laugh and making you want to throw up.