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Scooter LaForge and the Magic of Monsters

If, as Plato tells us, “You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation,” we must in likelihood know far more about Scooter LaForge than most any other artist. In a highly coded art world where citations, references and appropriations are construed as content amongst an economically-powered connoisseur class and where aesthetics are based on intellectual precepts that are rather more disingenuous than the simplest acts of looking at and experiencing art, Scooter comes on like the one nice kid in the schoolyard who couldn’t give a toss what anybody else thinks, hardly knows the game let alone the rules, but is always down to play. His art reminds us of the incredible creative potential that is unleashed when we shed the gravitas of culture and return to the wide-eyed wonder of an unfettered imagination let loose in the domain of make-believe. His art is a call to enter a diversion that if you follow its amusements will surprisingly get to the real point in the end.

There is fun to be had in LaForge’s art, but it invokes the kind of laughter we all need to shake off melancholy, the kind of joy we take that allays suffering without denying it. Charlie Chaplin explained, “To truly laugh, you must be able to take your pain, and play with it.” His demonology is far more myth and metaphor than matter-of-fact; it’s the pain that lurks within all hearts let loose from the shackles of self to romp free as comic grotesques. Like the monsters in our closets and under our beds it’s the not-looking and the still silence that most terrifies. Brought to light and given form in Scooter’s splendidly lurid and alluring multiverse, they no longer threaten but amuse, the comfortable company of beauty’s ugly friends, the cartoon villains that make us jeer and hiss only to allow us some special grace of empathy when they inevitably meet their slapstick ill-fates. His monsters are made of distress and torn from trauma, but they are born of faith and animated by love.

Scooter LaForge is the kind of artist I believe could do anything because he is motivated by goodwill and activated by an unfailing belief in the uncanny. His art can manifest impossible dreams with glorious candor precisely because it keeps consort with our storybook fictions, racing off the cliff like Wile E. Coyote, as if

jumping down the rabbit hole with Alice, only to soar on the heels of Peter Pan. If for Picasso “all children are artists, the problem is how to remain an artist when he grows up,” Scooter seems to have found the best solution in the deliberate ways he has chosen not to grow up. His is a happy talent that way, and an extremely fertile one. As Jung would see it, “The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct,” and it is this overwhelming sense of novelty here that does in fact allow us to see differently. He makes playthings to share them and with that communion of play to share a greater experience that is not so much his as all of ours. Where does he get these toys and how does he make them come to life we may never fully know, but they are not so much made as they are saved, rescued from growing up and awakened by the kiss of a kind of alchemical and whimsical transmogrification. And they are not new or shiny or perfect; these are old souls whose heavy hearts have been lightened by magic. They are toys yes, but they are memories too, salvaged from that dark, dusty attic of neglect and given new meaning by the innocent eyes of another that has always lived within each and every one of us.