

Michael Musto

Scooter LaForge

Scooter LaForge manages to plumb the recesses of our imaginations while rummaging through his own. His collages mix found objects, fanciful creatures, and classical references for inspired potpourris of expression that he says are not attempting to comment on any sociopolitical themes—“It’s all in my own head. A lot has to do with my depression and anxiety or my happiness and joy. It has nothing to do with political statements, it’s all what’s going on upstairs. I haven’t watched the news for years, and I don’t even have a TV.” That’s not surprising, considering that “what’s going on upstairs” obviously provides more viewing pleasure than anything you could see with a remote.

How To Create A Monsterpiece—a collection of new works that comprise LaForge’s third solo show in New York—reveals him at his most darkly playful and wickedly ruminative. Using varying textures while bringing together the detritus of urban life, he can charm and seduce as easily as he can unnerve and alarm. In his hands, a totem pole of slightly creepy puppet faces is topped by a green broom head that’s as jaunty as the emotions below it are grotesque. A large grasshopper with a man’s face is painted on cardboard, along with the words of a homeless person’s plea for help. And a riff on Rembrandt’s *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* mixes in some clown noses, exposed lightbulbs, and a tongue-darting animal who’s not out of place at all, since he’s one of LaForge’s self-created “imaginary friends”.

While Kenny Scharf’s kitsch obsession and Salvador Dali’s surrealistic swirl might seem to be big influences, New Mexico-born LaForge says it’s actually Rauschenberg, Guston, and Rembrandt who pilot his inner light. “I’ve read Rembrandt’s biography,” he relates, “and he reminded me of Andy Warhol a lot because he was a total social climber who went in and out of fashion. If one looks at the paintings he did, there’s such imagery in there. You have to open your eyes and see what’s really going on in his work.” The unofficial “Dutch master” of NYC, LaForge shares that gift for imbuing his works with all sorts of eye-popping stuff going on. You don’t just breeze through a Scooter LaForge show en route to your

next engagement; prepare for spending some serious quality time within these walls.

In 2001, after eight years immersed in the arts in San Francisco, LaForge moved to New York, having received a fellowship to study at Cooper Union. There, he went from painting realistically to using bigger brushes, working more from his gut, and ultimately collecting objects and collaging them into conjurings full of the immediate and the imagined. He also does splashy T-shirts and other garments for Patricia Field, clothes that often look like his art pieces with stitching instead of frames. “Eighty percent of the time, I’m working 10-hour days,” admits the introspective creator. “So fame or social media or magazines, I’m mostly unaware of.” But he’s become obsessed with pop culture and keeps up with it through friends and people he meets on frequent nights out. Now that he’s become part of that culture, how does he plan to watch himself on the inevitable TV segments? “I’d probably go to a friend’s house to watch it,” he says, unworried. Or maybe he can just see it in his mind.