



## ELLIOTT HUNDLEY

NEW YORK

Elliott Hundley's exhibition *Agave of the Bacchae* draws from Euripides' tragedy *Bacchae*, a play about the power struggle between the god Dionysus and King Pentheus, who is ultimately killed by his own mother and a band of Dionysus' female worshipers [Andrea Rosen Gallery; March 19—May 1, 2010].

In Hundley's installation—a stage set, where the works stand in for places and characters from the play—the artist explores the “disintegration of old systems of belief and the creation of new ones, questioning the boundaries between intellect and emotion, reality and imagination, reason and madness.”

The play's excess, exaggeration, ecstasy, and exuberance become the perfect subjects for Hundley's explorations. The artist is known for layering his canvases with cutout figures, shapes, and fragments from advertisements. Self-generated or collected from a myriad of appropriated sources, these bits of ephemera are pinned to the surface with varying lengths of gold or silver flathead pins and extend out into the space, giving the three-dimensional collages an undulating depth. As Hundley explores the borderline between two and three-dimension, the works exist on many planes and become architectural in scale.

Text from Euripides' play is scattered throughout the backgrounds of *Agave*, 2010, *Dionysus*, 2010, and *Pentheus*, 2010, like a ransom note. Overlays of large-scale studio photographs feature actors and friends enacting the drama. These are, however, obscured and fragmented by the text. Smaller images of the actors and pictures cut from magazines dot the surface—each is attached to the substrate with a long pin from which strings and bits of cloth often dangle. Magnifying glasses extend from the surface of *Pentheus*, allowing more detailed views of specific aspects. The works attempt to make order from the chaos of accumulation as the elements decorating the surface create new shapes and patterns. Similar colors and images are positioned in relation to each other, further obfuscating the image.

*Stained Cithairon*, 2010, a seemingly-simple, large, yellow-toned painting depicting the mountain where King Pentheus was killed, offers a bit of respite from these dense mixed-media works. Full of symbolism and history, this yellow field becomes a plane for imagined events. Three sculptures evoke thyrsuses—plant-like shafts made from pinecone-topped vines. Atop bases made from pieces of knotted wood, gold-toned plant forms, ribbons, and fragments of paper hang from a lattice of interlocking bamboo, plastic, and metal rods. Bursts of energy emanate from a shaft. They stand for *Agave* and her sisters, Ino and Autonoe, and represent the play of sexuality.

Hundley uses Greek mythology to endow his works with layers of meaning and multiple interpretations. If the *Bacchae* “explores the boundaries between reason and ecstasy and the complicated nexus of justice and violence,” Hundley pushes the limits of this exploration through the juxtaposition of image and text. His *bricolage* is an attempt to fuse antiquity with the modern world. He begins with historic themes and stories, recreating them in his studio. He then assembles text, original photographs of costumed and naked actors, scores of appropriated images including car tires, comic strip text bubbles, scantily clad models, abstract shapes, and body parts, weaving together the past and the present. The frenzy produced by these images makes it difficult to know where to look. Focusing on a fragment reveals a world unto itself and is a delight to behold. Yet, because there is so much to take in, it is impossible for the fragments to add up. The works coalesce in our mind's eye from afar and draw us in. From then on, it is difficult to move away. Hundley, the seducer, indulges in presenting incomplete narratives made from disparate literary sources that resonate because they make popular culture more than the sum of its parts.

—Jody Zellen

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Elliott Hundley, installation view of *Agave of the Bacchae* at Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, March 19—May 1, 2010 (©