

Art and Cake May 21, 2017

Rosson Crow: *The Happiest People on Earth*
Honor Fraser
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By Jody Zellen



The deserts of California have a mystical appeal. Their landscape is unique and their communities legendary. Rich mix with poor. Old with new. Rosson Crow uses the desert landscape as a point of departure for a new series of large-scale paintings, moving away from the surreal interiors of her previous work, to the natural landscape— painting the trash, relics and plant-life populating the desert floor.

Her exhibition, *The Happiest People on Earth*, raises questions about who the happiest people on earth might be. As there are no people depicted in her paintings, it is the plants and detritus that exude a vitality and spirit, becoming metaphors for humans in the natural world. The large-scale works are brightly colored, and present dense areas cluttered with cacti, some glowing in hot pink and red apparently toned by reflections of the setting sun. Embedded into these realistically rendered, albeit expressive and gestural landscapes are photographic transfers of discarded objects, toys, bumper stickers and myriad kitsch tchotchkes that reference the past. Crow is conscious of the relationship between these two modes of representation— photographic veracity as opposed to painted renditions.



Relics of the Truth Tellers (2017) is a nine by twelve foot acrylic, spray paint, enamel and oil painting of a building in the desert. On the building, a mural of a yellow circle (the setting sun) bisects a pink sky above blue water. This crumbling facade is surrounded by cacti as well as a utility pole. Positioned above the building is a faded palm reader's sign— a nod to the counter culture and spirituality that exists in some desert communities. Discarded tires, photos of topless women as well as posters, beer cans and bumper stickers from the recent election are scattered about the sandy ground. The plants obscure the facade, preventing access to what might exist beyond. In *The Rusky-Dusky Neon Dust* (2016) an assortment of pink, orange, red and yellow cacti are situated in front of a chain-link fence in the seven by ten foot painting. Beyond the fence is a field of desert bushes and shrubs that extend toward distant mountains. In the paintings mid-ground is a hand-lettered sign with a rendering of a rifle that warns: This community is protected by Smith – Wesson. The foreground is cluttered with smaller potted plants and towers of empty beer cans as well as stickers that juxtapose 'Have A Happy Day' with the threatening warning to 'stay away.'

Crow has remarked that she likes to paint spaces large enough so the viewer can enter and experience them. She facilitates this need in these depictions of the desert as the cacti feel life sized and the landscapes perspectives are inviting and believable. Crow is also interested "in how time changes the way we view [historic] events, and how histories get layered onto one another." Her densely layered paintings juxtapose images, artifacts and icons from different time periods, presenting them as discarded equivalents. Dissecting the works becomes a treasure hunt in which viewers must decipher the relationship between the man made and natural worlds while pondering their symbiotic relationship.

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