



"THE HOLY MASTER," 2016, Federico Solmi
LED MONITOR, ANIMATED VIDEO, SOUND, WOOD,
ACRYLIC, GOLD LEAF, PLEXIGLAS, 52" x 34"
PHOTO: COURTESY THE ARTIST AND LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES

LOS ANGELES

Federico Solmi: "The Brotherhood" at Luis De Jesus Los Angeles

The garishly animated figures of Sitting Bull, George Washington, Napoleon Bonaparte, Chancellor Bismarck, Genghis Khan, Pharaoh Ramses, Inca Emperor Pachacuti, Alexander the Great, Christopher Columbus, Pope Benedict XVI, Julius Caesar, Montezuma and Benito Mussolini are among the characters of Federico Solmi's "Brotherhood." This brotherhood of leaders and powerful people is not exclusively male, as Solmi also includes Marie Antoinette and Empress Theodora. Each cavorting and parading caricature is presented on a high definition monitor with lavishly hand-painted edges that vignette the animation. Solmi begins by making elaborate colorful drawings of every detail, facial expression and gesture, which he then scans and composites using 3D modeling software and gaming engines. He meticulously animates the figures placing them in imaginative theatrical settings, exaggerating every gesture while debunking their honor, holiness and power. The works are cutting and ironic with a pop sensibility, and could be described as Red Grooms on steroids.

In *The Brotherhood*, Solmi has woven together a non-linear narrative that develops across 13 monitors. Some of the animations focus on individuals; *Father of this Country* (2016) depicts George Washington on horseback moving through a cheering crowd into a paint splattered void; *The Holy Master* (2016) features the sinister looking, devil-eyed Pope Benedict XVI bowing, smiling and waving to a cheering crowd from his pope-mobile. The centerpiece of the exhibition is a five-monitor installation in a ballroom where Solmi's characters eat, drink and dance together. The monitors are hung on red silk that covers the wall floor-to-ceiling, simulating a plush theater, and accentuating the hoity-toity atmosphere within the animations. The camera pans and moves from close-up to bird's eye view as it follows the action and the individuals amidst a cheesy waltz soundtrack. In this impossible scenario—an environment filled with political figures, warriors and villains from throughout history—there is hilarity to the incongruity of these powerful leaders frolicking and dancing, rather than fighting each other.

In addition to its political content, what sets Solmi's work apart is a hand-drawn funkiness, something missing from many digital animations with this level of technical complexity. In *The Brotherhood Triptych* (2015), Solmi transports figures from the past into the present surrounding the animations with painted icons from pop culture. As his leaders parade down a red carpet with the attitude and aplomb of celebrities, it is difficult to dissociate past abuses of power and not make connections to our current (and future?) leaders.

—JODY ZELLEN