

Propp's Gallery Show

ENCOUNTERS

Curated by Alexis SooHoo

This show features a selection of gallery pieces that exemplify Propp's functions as used in fairy tales. By comparing and contrasting different tales, themes and perspectives, "Encounters" seeks to present classic literary tools in a contemporary setting.

~ TRICKERY ~

Propp's 6th function, trickery, is where the villain attempts to deceive the victim. Within the classic selection of fairy tales, examples of this exist in the Evil Queen's poisoning of Snow White with the half red, half white apple; Mother Gothel tricking the Prince into entering the tower; and Bluebeard luring his wife into the bloody room with a tempting key. Grounded in both these whimsical examples and contemporary ones is the manipulation of perception. Snow, the prince and the wife all embrace the objects of their downfall with welcome arms because they believe in the safety that the object provides. Similarly, we will observe how art uses our preconceived notions to compel a shift in perspective.



Deborah Butterfield (b. 1949)

Vermillion (1989)

Found materials, sculpture

Butterfield's trickery is two-fold. First, she manipulates and paints the metal until it appears to look like wood. This speaks towards the mechanization of modern day, where even the most banal examples of nature can't be trusted. Second, she turns the strength and speed of a horse into a farce by giving it an empty and lifeless vessel, taking away our trust in even the most incredible creatures.



Takashi Murakami (b.1962)

Oval Buddha Gold (2008)

Sterling Silver

Murakami's iconic cartoon motifs and history, pop culture commentary shines through in "Oval Buddha." His trickery lies in the portrayal of a revered deity and reducing it to a childish and caricatured statue. He speaks towards the absurdity of commercialization and religion mixing together.



Robert Therrien (b. 1947)

Under the Table (1994)

Wood, metal and enamel

Therrien's iconic Broad exhibit features an enormous dining set that comfortably allows viewers to walk under, touch and explore. While not explicitly an example of trickery, it *does* take something we take for granted in our every household, and has us experience from a different viewpoint. We could equivalently live the life of our pet or toddler. Alternately, the scale is reminiscent of the Trojan Horse, an object so overwhelming and so quintessential of the ultimate trickery.



Tia Pulitzer

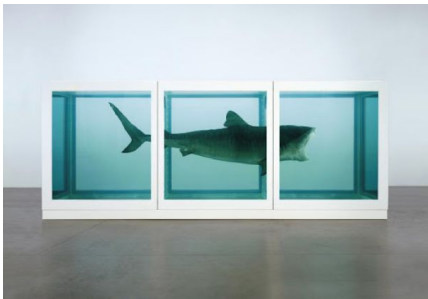
Owe Dear (2009)

Fired clay, automotive paint

This sculpture depicts a mythical creature that appears to be the merge of a deer and a snake wrapped around it. It takes an animal very frequently associated with trickery, the snake, and places it at the mercy of the picture of innocence. The manipulated proportions of the deer speak to the surreal circumstances needed to attain this shift in power.

~ TESTING ~

Testing is Propp's 12th function, and describes the challenges that the hero must face in order to pass the gatekeeper or receive the award. Unlike their Disney counterparts, fairytale heroes often find themselves unable to pass these tests and thus face the alternate hellish consequences to the stakes they accepted. For example, in the Little Mermaid, our princess endures her bleeding feet and voicelessness, only to lose her prince to another. Though initially presented as a test by the sea witch in order to guarantee the permanence of her true love, the little mermaid does not reach her goal and turns to seafoam. We are all the heroes of our own stories, and the tests we face are both internal and external. In today's pieces, we consider the mundane challenges of our lives and the existential conflicts we all face. Ultimately, since the viewer is the hero, it is up to you to decide whether or not you pass your test.



Damien Hirst (b. 1965)
The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living
(1991)
Steel, glass

The notorious shark trapped in formaldehyde gains new significance when considering its title. In looking death in the face for a prolonged period of time, the viewer is forced to acknowledge their own mortality. By using a creature so often associated with strength and immortal childhood fascination, our "hero" must overcome their internal fear to continue in life.



Ai Weiwei (b. 1961)
Sunflower Seeds (2008)
Porcelain

This 10cm tub features exactly 100 million sunflower seeds. On one hand, the installation is reminiscent of tests that occur traditionally in Chinese fairytales, where a protagonist must do things of the tiniest significance in order to prove their worth. For every viewer, it calls attention to scale and the lack of significance everyone's identity and actions are in a sea of 100 million.



David Hockney (b. 1937)
Card Players #1 (2014)
Acrylic on Canvas

David Hockney shows a mundane card game, an afternoon spent enjoying each other's company and avoiding technology. In a COVID world, the impossibility of such a simple act serves as the test, where a technological avalanche may render such events almost obsolete.

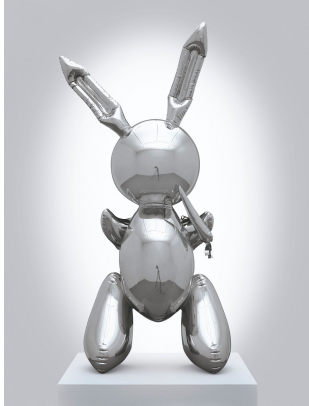


Antony Gormley (b.1950)
Angel of the North (1998)
Steel

This is an anthropomorphic statue based on a cast of Antony Gormley's own body. The wings are angled slightly inward to suggest an embrace, and the sculpture is meant to represent the past, present, and future of the land it stands upon – from coal mining into the information age. The test is the challenge for humanity moving forward when the past seems to drag and haunt at every corner.

~ ACQUISITION ~

The 14th Propp function is Acquisition, and it often describes the reward the hero receives in exchange for passing the test. It can range from information to magical items, and it becomes integral in the hero reaching his goal. In Brothers Grimm's Cinderella, our princess receives a dress of gold and silver from the birds in the hazel tree. It is this dress that leads her Prince Charming to fall madly in love, and it is resultant from her hard work and dedication to her mother. The value of the dress and the artworks to be presented is often not the object in and of itself, it is the tool the hero needs to get to his or her happy ending.



Jeff Koons (b. 1965)
Rabbit (1986)
Stainless Steel sculpture

This small sculpture sold for \$190 million in 2019, the largest sale ever made for a living artist. We are faced with the question of how we assign value to seemingly arbitrary things. The quality of art is defined by public perception and demand instead of a calculation of raw materials or effort exerted.



Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929)
Infinity Mirror Room (1965)
Wood, metal, mirrors, plastic, acrylic, rubber, and LED lighting system

Kusama's immersive and interactive piece holds widescale appeal in transporting the viewer into an alternate reality. She brings something so often thought to be unattainable -- infinity -- and allows viewers to see, touch and record it. Acquisition is questioned here because the experience is often limited to a mere 3 minutes, becoming something so close you can taste but never keep.



Banksy (b. 1973)
Girl with Balloon (2002)
Graffiti, Mural

This is a mural that has been repainted over and over in different parts of the world to support underground political/wars. Banksy notoriously shredded it in 2018 right as it had been sold at auction and retitled it *Love is in the Bin*. He plays with the idea of collective v. private ownership and questions the inherent values of the art market in contrast to the power of art in and of itself.

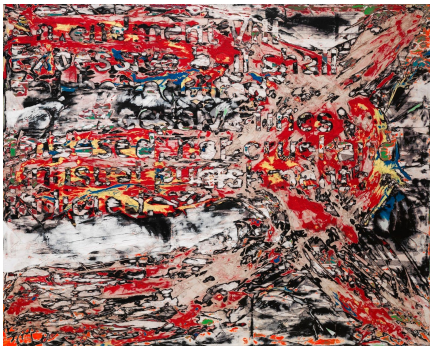


Yue Minjun (b. 1962)
Free and Leisure - 10 (2004)
Oil on canvas

The title of the work implies the idealism where "man and heaven coexist in harmony". In the painting, however, what we see is only irony and absurdity. The piece questions the elusive nature of the thing we all wish to ultimately obtain -- happiness. In capitalist America where we are trained to work to the bone to attain a mythical future happiness, we are trained to treat leisure with a guilty mindset.

~ PUNISHMENT ~

As we near the end of the story, Propp's 31st function stipulates that the false hero or villain is exposed and punished. Our classic fairy tales often feature graphic, extensive and absurd punishments, giving the child audience a feeling of satisfaction that evil will face the violent repercussions they deserve. In "The Juniper Tree," the jealous mother decapitates her step-son, guilts her daughter and feeds her to her father unwittingly. While everyone else is rewarded, the mother has an anvil dropped on her after following the actions of her familial counterparts. In the contemporary art examples, we explore the idea of systemic punishment, retributive punishment and self-inflicted punishment -- both internal and external. We question to whose benefit punishment serves and how even our child selves can recognize and find therapy within it.



Mark Bradford (b. 1961)
Amendment #8 (2014)
Mixed media

The Eighth Amendment of the United States Constitution prohibits the federal government from imposing excessive bail, excessive fines, or cruel and unusual punishments. We can see the text of the amendment hidden between the swirls of drip paint. It presents us with the question of why would we even need an amendment to limit the implementation of such punishment, highlighting the inherent sadism that must be curbed in order to maintain human rights for all.



Tracey Emin (b. 1963)
My Bed (1998)
Cotton, bed frame, mixed media

This controversial win of the Turner Prize was a pseudo-performance piece featuring the artist's unmade bed during her depressive episodes. It allows us to question some self-inflicted punishment, allowing ourselves to wallow in conditions we dislike but cannot escape. In light of the pandemic, we may face many of these questions again.



Grayson Perry (b. 1960)
The Upper Class at Bay (2004)
Wool, cotton, acrylic, polyester and silk tapestry

The old landowning breed is dying out, an old aristocratic stag with its tattered tweed hide being hunted down by the dogs of tax, social change, upkeep and fuel bills. In the background, the new money couple faces their own problems as they will never be accepted nor will they ever escape the social justice pleas of those in lower classes. Everyone in this image lives in their own punishment, unaware of each other's plight.



Rufino Tamayo (b. 1899)
Dos personajes atacados por perros (1983)
Mixography on Paper

Reminiscent of the violence and tragedy of Picasso's Guernica (1937), it also portrays animals as allegories of war and destruction. Two figures -- one male one female -- are being chased by a pair of vicious dogs as a metaphor of how humanity is hunted by its own bestiality, fear, and evil, whilst in the never-ending search for humanism within a cosmic perspective of the world.

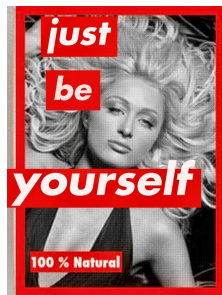
~ EXPOSURE ~

Exposure is Propp's 28th plot point, where the false hero is exposed in the final battle of the hero and often demonstrates cowardice or other non-heroic qualities. In Roald Dahl's version of "Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf," Red quickly realizes the wolf is an imposter, "whips a pistol from her knickers," shoots him dead and sheds her red hood for a wolfskin coat. Exposure of the villain serves simultaneously as another test for the protagonist and a satisfying punishment for the reader. We find ourselves confronted by the disillusionment of rewriting our interpretations of things we used to find comforting, but also reassured by our deeper understanding of the world after the fact.



Kara Walker (b. 1965)
Emancipation Approximation (1999)
Shaped Paper in 134 elements

Kara Walker's caricatured visual fairytale murals highlight the lack of responsibility and identity associated with an immensely dark time for the country. Her silhouettes depicting heinous crimes throughout black history remind viewers that while things have been better in recent years, the shadow of our past are still very much a part of our present.



Barbara Kruger (b. 1945)
Just Be Yourself (1999)
Collage

Collagist and conceptual artist Barbara Kruger ignited biting commentary about beauty standards in her work during The Pictures Generation. This piece exposes the absurdity of female expectations to be "natural" and authentic while society simultaneously wants them to be drop dead gorgeous.



Julie Mehretu (b. 1970)
Stadia II (2004)
Ink and acrylic on canvas

Mehretu uses circular motifs and composition in abstract art to create the impression that we are standing in the three dimensional blueprint of an Olympic stadium. Perhaps representing the opening ceremonies, she conveys the energy and chaos of today's globalized world. She is exposing the false and temporary show of peace that the sporting event promotes, instead highlighting the turmoil and complications that countries have had to deal with in a technologically shifting world.



June Calypso (b. 1989)
A Dream in Green (2016)
Photograph

In a quite literal example of exposure, the young photographer June Calypso studies solitude, desire and femininity through a series of self portraits. She disguised herself with false names and fake job, sneaking into various hotels and bunkers across the country. Only when alone, does she shed the image she creates for herself and embraces herself in whatever absurd fashion she can.

~ BRANDING ~

In Propp 17, the hero is branded through a scar, magical item or any other life changing thing. In an eccentric Beauty and the Beast adaptation, "The Tiger's Bride," the protagonist embraces her beast. As the story concludes and he licks her, "each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin," and she too transforms into a tiger. In this extreme instance of branding, she sheds the woman she was before and embraces a new life after facing the tale's challenges. In the following pieces, we examine the physical marks left from a person or object's past that influences their identity. Some are worn proudly and apparently, while other instances of branding are internal. Nonetheless they change the framework of how a piece is thought of and how it will endure.



Matthew Brandt (b. 1982)
Rainbow Lake WY 1 (2013)
C-print soaked in Rainbow Lake water

Brandt is famous for creating pieces using the items they actually represent -- his painting of bees made from the crushed bodies of bees or a tree painted by its own bark. Each piece is left with the mark of its origin, acting as a built in provenance. Do we all hold the mark of the place we come from? What is the effect of the aging of the piece and the distortion of the materials that go into it?



Yoko Ono
Cut Piece (1964)
Performance

Though most known for being John Lennon's wife, this cultural icon was significant in marking societal reactions to race and gender throughout her long standing career. Demonstrated three times in her life, "Cut Piece" was Yoko Ono's famous performance art where she allowed audience members to cut out her articles of clothing piece by piece. As she grew in reputation and built a cultish brand around herself, the piece turned from a young woman exposing herself to a revered figure standing dignified in old age.



Njideka Akunyili Crosby
I Still Face You (2015)
Acrylic, oil, transfers, colored pencil, charcoal and collage on paper

Crosby perfectly captures the internal branding biculturality indoctrinates in every member of its community. In her collage, she shows how every Nigerian is a culmination of their respective memories. As they shift from place to place, their internal map simply expands.



David McGough
Like a Virgin (2000)
Photograph

In this TimeLife feature, singer Madonna is posing in her boy toy/wedding ensemble at the first MTV Video Music awards. This dress and her song immortalized her reputation as the sexual revolutionary of her generation. Her brand extended beyond our collective memory of the pop star, it seeped into the identity of all her listeners, turning an individual brand into a universal one.