

# ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

NOVEMBER 11, 2019 BY ETTY YANIV

## Peter Gynd – Jody MacDonald: Freaks, Geeks, and Strange Girls at Radiator

In Dialogue with Peter Gynd on Jody MacDonald's upcoming solo exhibition he curated at Radiator



*Jody MacDonald, Conjoined Twins, 2019, mixed media, 26 x 26 x 24 in.*

Peter Gynd is an artist, curator and gallerist whose recent curatorial project is currently on view at Radiator, a solo show featuring new works by the Canadian born and NYC based Jody MacDonald. MacDonald's sculptural dioramas explore a set of characters on the fringe by merging fact, fiction, and art history. In this Art Spiel interview Peter Gynd elaborates on the genesis of the exhibition.

**AS: Since *Freaks, Geeks, and Strange Girls* is a solo show, let's start with the artist. What drew you to her work?**

**PG:** I've known Jody for several years now and have always held an interest in her work. There is something very unapologetic about her practice and she is packing so many layers into the work. Much more than you see in a lot of artwork out there right now.

**AS: Tell me about the premise of the show.**

**PG:** The show evolved over a period of time. I'd originally done a studio visit with Jody in June 2018 and we'd talked about working together on a solo show.

Fast forward a little and Jody was awarded a Queens Council on the Arts grant to help produce this work. So it was a bit of a perfect storm in that we'd been wanting to work together for some time, and I'd also been wanting to curate an exhibition at Radiator for several years; luckily everything fell into place.

The premise for the exhibition really has to do with Jody's practice. These are themes she has been investigating and intermerging for some time now. It's about the levels and layers of focus and detail that an artist can install into a body of work; and Jody takes things to the next level in this show.

There really is an abundant amount of thought and symbolism put into every last detail. She goes down the rabbit hole in this work, and she's not afraid to drag us along with her.

**AS: The PR for the show is one of the clearest and detailed I have seen for a while. You give some detailed examples to your assertion that "the artworks meld sideshow influence with contemporary culture and art history." Can you elaborate here a bit on one of them?**

**PG:** Thank you, I'm not a fan of over-complicated text.

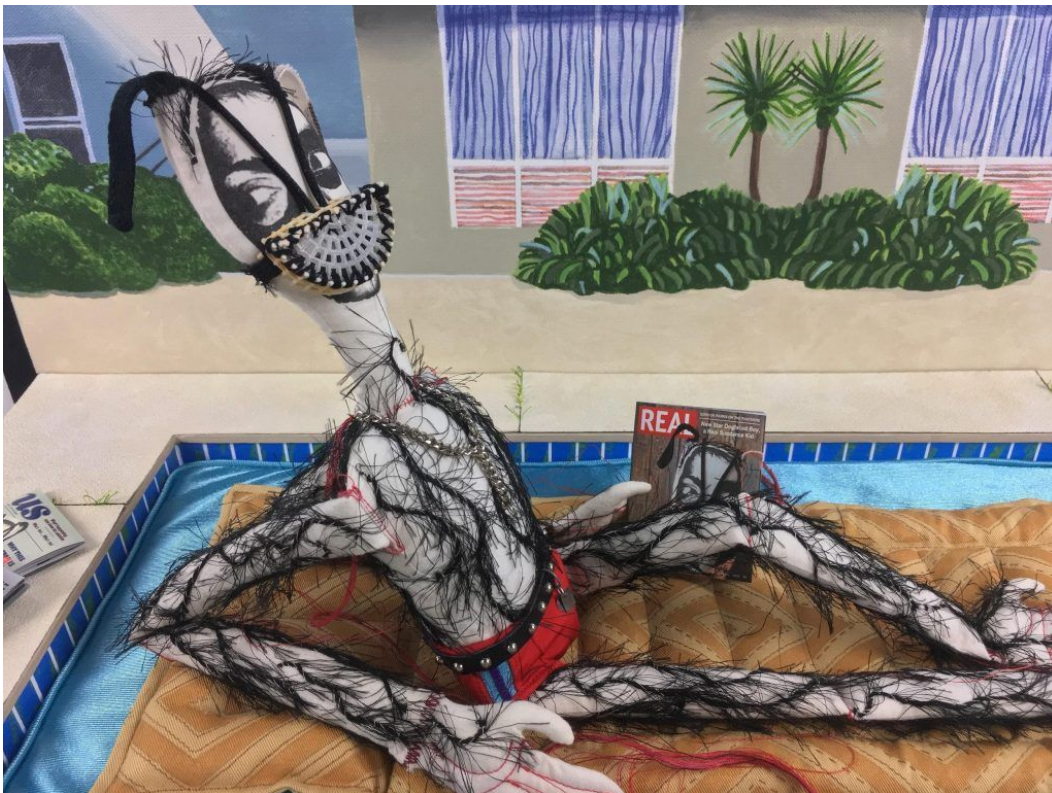
There are several great examples in the works of merging sideshow with art and contemporary/popular culture.

*Monkey Grrl*—a half-monkey half-girl boxer staged for the prize fight—is a great example of this. The character is the fusion of an original sideshow banner, melded with the feminist artist activist group, The Guerrilla Girls; the Basquiat/Warhol boxing poster for the 1985 show *Paintings*; and the punk feminist movement Riot Grrrl, of the 1990s.

Or *Dogfaced Boy*—a character totally self-absorbed—reading weekly magazines featuring himself on the cover, while lounging in a pool in front of a backdrop mimicking David Hockney's *Portrait of Nick Wilder*. There is even a readable article written specifically by the Jody for the miniature publication.

But I don't want to say too much. The work should be a discovery.

I will say though, that all of this is subtly dominated by the fact the artist's own face has been photo-transferred onto each character. Making them all, in essence, some degree of self-portraiture.



Jody MacDonald, *Dogfaced Boy* (detail), 2019, mixed media, 35 x 35 x 15 in.



Jody MacDonald, *Dogfaced Boy* (detail), 2019

**AS:** The work takes its influence—along with the exhibition’s title—from a book of the same name published in 1996 showcasing an anthology of banners, backdrops and advertisements created for 19th and early 20th century American sideshows. How does this imagery inform Jody MacDonald’s body of work?

**PG:** Jody has been thinking about this body of work in some form since 2011. She began by collecting books and researching sideshow when she came across *Freaks, Geeks, & Strange Girls: Sideshow Banners of the Great American Midway* and something resonated with her. Not only is it an incredible collection of visual material but it is also a dual presentation of sideshow history and the banners historical context and use; each banner as art objects in and of itself.

From there Jody really took it down her own path, musing on her own imaginative absurdities into what is now a fictional set of characters.

**AS:** The show opens in Nov 15<sup>th</sup> and closes in January 17<sup>th</sup> of 2020 – that is a long run. Do you have events planned for the show for viewers who may not be able to attend the opening?

**PG:** Yes, Tamas Veszi and Daniela Kostova who run the gallery felt that with all the holidays coming up we should run the show a little longer. This also gives us the ability to host a couple of events throughout the course of the exhibition.

Aside from the opening event on Friday, November 15th, from 6–9pm, there will be an artist talk by Jody in conversation with myself on December 6th and a closing brunch on the final Sunday of the show.

**Artist Talk: Jody MacDonald in conversation with Peter Gynd Friday, December 6, 7pm ; Closing Brunch: Sunday, January 12**



*Jody MacDonald, Lionfaced Man (side detail), 2019, mixed media, 31 x 35 x 12 in.*

**Jody MacDonald: *Freaks, Geeks, and Strange Girls* runs through January 17, 2020**

**Opening Reception: Friday, November 15, 6–9pm**

**Radiator Arts, 10-61 Jackson Ave, LIC, New York 11106**

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