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Henry GUNDERSON

*Hyperallergic,
Diagrammatic Paintings of Curious Contraptions*

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Diagrammatic Paintings of Curious Contraptions

Claire Voon October 6, 2015



Henry Gunderson, "Expresser (1. Caramel Crush 2. Ripe Rash 3. Serious Midnight 4. Rose 5. Blue 6. Red 7. Moss 8. Tuscan Sun 9. Embarrassing 10. R Woon 11. Umber 12. Splash Zone 13. Mucus Victim 14. %100 Raw Cotton 15. Guilty Dog 16. Boysenberry 17. Chrome Ox 18. Heavy Pine Bar Width 19. Heavy Pine Bar Height 20. Mud Flap 21. Princess 22. Salmon 23. Sky 24. Heavy Tint 25. Hard Lime 26. Banana Slug 27. From Concentrate 28. Happy Camp 29. Grass Stain 30. Easter Everywhere 31. Coffee Collector 32. Sun Burn 33. Dolphin Kiss 34. Very Berry Juice" (2015)
(all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

Henry Gunderson first made waves in his hometown of San Francisco a couple years ago with eccentric, surreal paintings of humanoid animals that I recall often stumbling upon on various image-sharing websites. Now based in Brooklyn, he's since moved far from those subjects, with recent works at San Francisco's Ever Gold Gallery and Regina Rex revealing more abstract, often playful images that seduce with much slicker brushwork that merits getting up nice and close to the canvas. That same painterly skill wows in naturalistic acrylics in his solo show *Two & Two*, at 247365, that ruminates on the very act of painting.

As the show's title implies, Gunderson's works prod you to piece together information and reach a conclusion. Unlike the idiom's implication, however, that conclusion isn't so obvious or logical here. Each of his paintings, which stand four to five feet tall, present a cluster of familiar objects against a solid background that initially feels sterile; every object is labeled, IKEA diagram-style, with a number that matches it to its name — meticulously listed within parentheses in each work's mouthful of a title. There's an immediate inclination to construct Gunderson's inventions, step-by-step, like following instructions outlined in a manual. But a moment spent doing so makes clear that the products' forms aren't clear — and neither are their functions.



Henry Gunderson, "Hypnoteaser (1. Bare Bone 2. Clockwise Captivator 3. Wicked Appendage 4. Thomas 5. Cool Keeper 6. Energy Belt 7. Steal Head 8. Harness 9. Big Chew 10. Lead Pipe Dream 11. Lead Ring Proposal 12. Cool 13. Power Panel 14. Motive 15. Press (2015)

One electric-crimson picture that hangs on a back wall is christened "Hypnoteaser (1. Bare Bone 2. Clockwise Captivator 3. Wicked Appendage 4. Thomas 5. Cool Keeper 6. Energy Belt 7. Steal Head 8. Harness 9. Big Chew 10. Lead Pipe Dream 11. Lead Ring Proposal 12. Cool 13. Power Panel 14. Motive 15. Pressure)" (2015). We receive some hints of the contraption suggested by the curious names of the 15 pristinely rendered doodads: an innocent carrot is labeled "Motive," bringing to mind a carrot-and-stick purpose, and "Pressure" is a faithful designation for a barometer; but "Bare Bone," a slender framework, just teases its intention — and what does one do

with “Thomas,” a viridian knob embossed with the beaming face of the fictional tank engine?

One may make sense (or nonsense) of “Hypnoteaser” in infinite ways, as is the case for almost all of the other works on view, also designated with names that bring to mind notional technologies. The systematically labeled articles in “Master Chipper (1. Foliage Segment Lower 2. Shred Roller 3. Irrigation System 4. Foliage Segment Upper Middle 5. Foliage Root Segment 6. Foliage Segment Upper 7. Foliage Segment Lower Middle 8. Foliage Segment Top 9. Solid Oak 10. Growth Support)” (2015) should result in some chopping machine, albeit one that doesn’t seem very useful; the aureolin “Processor (1. Tan Tan 2. Turn Turn Turn 3. Protein 4. Mega Mix 5. Little Head 6. Shuriken 7. Oven Rack 8. Hal Ogen 9. C.P.U. 10. Info Adapter 11. Face 12. Extension)” (2015) connects, with little explanation, the prehistoric Venus of Tan-Tan with the tossed bone from the famous match cut in Kubrick’s “2001: A Space Odyssey.” Gunderson is painting to suggest rather than to declare. His canvases present exercises in abstract thinking, laying foundations that coax viewers to form in their minds their own made-up images as a personal reality. The impression is that paintings should create experience, and Gunderson is inspiring his viewer to not only interact with but also invest time in his creations.



Henry Gunderson, “Processor (1. Tan Tan 2. Turn Turn Turn 3. Protein 4. Mega Mix 5. Little Head 6. Shuriken 7. Oven Rack 8. Hal Ogen 9. C.P.U. 10. Info Adapter 11. Face 12. Extension)” (2015)

The group’s outlier emphasizes that intention: clearly meant to be assembled into a painting is “Expresser (1. Caramel Crush 2. Ripe Rash 3. Serious Midnight 4. Rose 5. Blue 6. Red 7. Moss 8. Tuscan Sun 9. Embarrassing 10. R Woon 11. Umber 12. Splash Zone 13. Mucus Victim 14. %100 Raw Cotton 15. Guilty Dog 16. Boysenberry 17. Chrome Ox 18. Heavy Pine Bar Width 19. Heavy Pine Bar Height 20. Mud Flap 21. Princess 22. Salmon 23. Sky 24. Heavy Tint 25. Hard Lime 26. Banana Slug 27. From Concentrate 28. Happy Camp 29. Grass Stain 30. Easter Everywhere 31. Coffee Collector 32. Sun Burn 33. Dolphin Kiss 34. Very Berry Juice” (2015). Gunderson gives us all the ingredients to definitively build a painting, from the canvas to the frame to each absurdly named color. He includes the signature, “R Woon,” too, marking the

representation as a unique work — although through an inscription as mysterious as the daubed one on Duchamp's urinal. It's an overt comment on the process of painting, implying that established models of art-making exist such that you can actually lay out instructions to make a painting. But Gunderson suggests that painting fails when it follows such pre-conceived ideas: the work draws a wry smile, but little of the delight his other paintings stir surfaces here; little of our imagination is needed. What painting is apparently *supposed* to do instead becomes a dry, formal role, one that the work's title — “Expresser” — emphasizes.

While Gunderson's paintings lay bare their components for us to assemble, nine sculptures in a small back room hide their mechanics but also deny total comprehension, stoking our inventiveness. Arranged evenly on three shelves, the works resemble apparatuses that could be both retro or futuristic, offering just inklings of their functions. Each is labeled as an enigmatic “Floor Sample,” and while most have buttons and knobs, these are largely unmarked. Each device seems to have a specific purpose, from receiving radio signals to measuring some aspect of time or the surrounding environment, but these responsibilities, whatever they are, seem noncommittal, inviting wide speculation. The room serves as an echo of the main gallery, transposing the visual stimuli offered in the paintings into a greater sensory experience of mechanical humming and radioed voices. Again, Gunderson serves up signals but forgoes the reason; what we leave with stems from our own deduction, and not having to adhere to absolute, self-evident truths is what lends his works such pleasure.



Henry Gunderson, "Master Chipper (1. Foliage Segment Lower 2. Shred Roller 3. Irrigation System 4. Foliage Segment Upper Middle 5. Foliage Root Segment 6. Foliage Segment Upper 7. Foliage Segment Lower Middle 8. Foliage Segment Top 9. Solid Oak 10. Growth Support)" (2015)



Henry Gunderson, installation view of Two & Two at 247365 gallery



Henry Gunderson, installation view of Two & Two at 247365 gallery



Henry Gunderson, installation view of Two & Two at 247365 gallery



Henry Gunderson, "Floor Sample 02" (2015)



Henry Gunderson, installation view of *Two & Two* at 247365 gallery

Two & Two continues at 247365 (57 Stanton St., Lower East Side, Manhattan) through October 11.