

Arthur Henderson in conversation with Tory Fair

Tory:

Let's start off with the title of the show, "The Hermit's Entourage". There are a couple of different reasons why you might have an entourage. It could be for one's personal image or for safety. Though, isn't somewhat of an oxymoron to be a hermit and have an entourage?

Arthur:

In the context of the show, the Entourage is the objects. The Hermit wants connection but on one condition: that it's through objects, not people. The Entourage, in this case, is this materialist—not materialistic—connection to the world outside. It is a conduit the Hermit creates to the other.

So, for The Hermit, in your case, the conduit to the outside world happens in the studio?

Very much so. The studio is a sacred place, a temple of feeling for me. There's a constant dance between letting the world in and pushing it out. Maybe a better metaphor is a distillery: The mash of circumstance one carries into the studio gets refined and reduced into an elixir of objects. It's a strange dynamic. The studio is a highly private space that functions as a distributor of objects for public consumption. I work alone for strangers.

Which I find interesting considering your own personal timeline. It wasn't that long ago that you lost your best friend, Nate, who was also your longtime studio mate. And then Covid hit and we were collectively sheltering in place. The response to surround yourself with an entourage of sculptures somehow also extends an intimate, if not infinite, conversation with Nate.

*"I work alone for strangers"*

The pandemic turned each of us into possible Grim Reapers. Being together was a risk. Any one of us could bring death home and, worse, we'd be doing it unknowingly. In a moment when we needed each other most, we couldn't be together. Mother Nature's sense of irony is fucking brutal.

Nate died in October of 2019. When he died, he left a bunch of unfinished work. At some point we'll have to mount an exhibition and I'll need to finish some of his pieces. It's nothing huge—mostly just molds and casting—things that are ready to go. This task is in the back of my mind at all



"Chicken Heart", resin, 8 x 8 x 7 inches, 2021

times. I'm confronted with trying to please a dead man, trying to think as he did, make decisions he would have made. I feel grateful for this – keeps him present – I get to talk to my best friend through his work.

How do the particular things that you've included in the show—rainbows, arches, pots of adhesives, a desk, a boxer with no head, a stack of goats—operate as an 'entourage' for The Hermit? Is it a protective layer from the outside world? Are they props? Or is it an aura of sorts for the Hermit not to be lonely or bored?

I think the word prop could be considered pejorative, but that's the idea. The sculpture is the surrogate. It is the prop. Between you and me, the object is the through point. It acts as the conduit. Thinking about arches and rainbows, they are the same. It's such a dead simple shape that you can make infinitely big or small. Finding this form was a framing device to think about how I could keep that internal conversation going. It was a way to consider how to make multiple things and have a literal form and structure to follow.

Coming into VERY it was so good to immediately feel your sense of making. I've known you for a long time and know that you have reverence for making. But I would also say that you often sabotage yourself. You make things really well, but you add an element of failure into the work.

Absolutely. I mean the desk ["A cartographer's panic"], is laminated pine with fixed bread boards floating on pegs to take into consideration the expansion and contraction of the wood so the thing doesn't split. The engineering for the desk uses legit furniture techniques—it's a "real" desk. And then I made a wood burning drawing on top of it, a goofy map of the show's—or the Hermit's—imagery and iconography. It's a moment of self-sabotage to undercut pretention.

Or this beautifully crafted object ["Chicken Heart"], and then there is a kickstand to hold it up.



"Desk (A cartographer's panic)", wood, 29 x 31 x 22 inches, 2021

It's in the way you make it, but then it's in the impotence of the object. You are always showing off the craft of making, but then undermining the ego in the object.

You're right about the failure/impotence theme that keeps cropping up in the objects. I can't avoid those ideas. Fragile male power. Vulnerability is a theme I'm constantly playing with because I think it's a path to empathy.

Let's talk about the stack of goats. They seem to have a purpose as multiples to get to the top of the ceiling. Are they trying to get out? Are they an entourage?

I specifically choose a type of goat called a Jacob's goat. Rumor is they are easy going, a starter type animal. They also have four horns, which allowed for more fun in the making.

Goats are the everything animal. They are landscapers, milk and cheese makers, and sometimes meat. It seemed to me if the Hermit had living companions it would be these low-effort, polymath mammals. Unlike the objects on the shelf, the Goats are a bit unruly – beyond the Hermit's total control – hence the perilous stack/tower.

Does it ever worry you in the studio to contextualize things by addressing what is happening in the world around you? You mentioned you have an extended family that's not all on the same page ideologically concerning coping with Covid. And concurrently there is serious social and cultural upheaval. Do you allow that into the conversation?

*“Vulnerability is a theme I’m constantly playing with because I think it’s a path to empathy”*

I think all this bled into “The Hermit's Entourage.” Sculpture is, for me, a way to talk through objects. These last two years really highlight how effective that “talking” can be. The object is a conduit, and the conduit is unbound – it goes to the underworld and it goes to the friends and family separated in this pandemic. With this show, I want to have shared moment with the viewer as opposed to plopping down some grand vision of the world. I want to meet on the same plane.

That is an interesting point: The more romanticized idea of the muse in the studio versus the idea of The Hermit and The Entourage.

You have to make the muse! That's what the objects are. The muse becomes The Entourage.

And that is the value in trying to welcome a shared viewing space. You even share a gift for viewers to take with them at the end of the show.

The Decoy print ["Coloring Together – Decoy"] is a stack of 2500 oversized coloring pages on a box that are to be taken one by one by viewers for the duration of the show. I wanted to make a gift that seemed as if it had a bit of a demand or a chore attached to it. The image is an arch upon a trough throwing a shadow that reads "Decoy". The person taking the print is encouraged to color it, as one would a page in a child's activity book.

On one hand, it is a very simple and direct conduit– albeit through an art making process– "here's a drawing that you may color." A socially distanced collaboration. On the other hand, I'm trying to be a little sneaky. The word Decoy is important– think those wooden Ducks for hunting– it's a trap. If someone was to take home the print and get to work, they will have spent more time engaging with the imagery of "The Hermit's Entourage" than they did while in the gallery space. A Decoy to get the prize. In this case, the prize is time spent together– though separate, together.