

MICHAEL JOAQUIN GREY

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P.S.1

by saul ostrow



NEW YORK Michael Joaquin Grey (b. 1961) has been known since the early '90s for making works that reference the principles governing the growth and transformation of things living and inanimate. As an ironic reminder of these concerns, a modified copy of Alfred Barr's legendary diagram of modern art's genealogy, titled *MoMA Kindergarten* (2005), hung outside Grey's recent P.S.1 solo show.

On entering the exhibition the visitor was met by the intense bass sound of heartbeats; though one didn't immediately see the video that was their source, they introduced the body as a key subject. Hanging low on the wall facing the door was a Plexiglas case holding a small (6-by-8-inch) LCD screen displaying a looped video, *Artificial Muscle Contraction: Self Organizing System* (1983-2001), which zeroes in microscopically on several of the artist's individual muscle cells clumping together in a test tube. Nearby hung a number of diagrams on paper whose subject matter, according to wall labels, ranged from sexual positions to the body's reaction to seasonal changes, and computer-assisted drawings based on room and body temperature at the date and place of Grey's birth. Taken together, the works offered a variety of ways a complex human object (the body) can be represented by the human subject (the artist).

In the center of the room stood an orange Plexiglas vitrine containing a plasticine sculpture of Snoopy looking down on his own severed left ear, which rests at his feet. The sculpture's lengthy title, *Advanced Neoteny* (2009) (*still from undifferentiated morphology animation*) *dog-preposition-ear-preposition-flatworm (regeneration cycle)*, suggests the complex concerns that inform Grey's work. The term neoteny refers to juvenile features that are retained in an adult animal; this condition seems to be illustrated by the way Snoopy's shape recalls both that of a child and that of a pot-bellied middle-aged man. Morphology, the branch of biology that deals with forms and structures, comes into play in the similar shapes of Snoopy's ear and a flatworm.

The second gallery contained the source of the heartbeat sound: *Perpetual ZOOZ (Madonna and Child)*, 2005-09, a video projection whose images are determined by custom software. In the middle of a yellow field, *The Wizard of Oz* runs in real time, the image frame rotating on its vertical axis as if on a two-sided screen. The artist's software translates the sound of two heartbeats (Grey's in alternation with his mother's, according to press materials) into mountainous landscapes that disrupt the image of the film.

Informed by scientific and linguistic principles, family relationships and the technologizing of human life, Grey's works partake of a shifting and adaptive approach to esthetics and imagery. These elements combine to strike a balance between the accessible and the esoteric.

Photo: Michael Joaquin grey: (left) Northern Romantic Citrus, 2006, and, right, Perpetual ZOOZ (Madonna and Child), 2005-09; at P.S.1.

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