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Multifaceted artist Jude Griebel displays *Crafting Ruin* at dc3 Art Projects

March 9, 2017 · by Kevin Pennyfeather · Add Comment



After installing exhibitions around the world, Jude Griebel returns to Edmonton this week for his first solo exhibit at the dc3 Art Projects gallery.

With seven-foot resin figures and bone sculptures the size of a human head, the Alberta-bred artist's 12-sculpture installation, *Crafting Ruin*, tackles modern environmental issues like consumption and wastefulness.

"I've created a dystopic garden setting," Griebel says. "Gardens are traditionally spaces where we sort of manipulate nature and reflect on it, but in my installation it's been pushed to a point of excess, where there's very little nature left."

Crafting Ruin features several representations of humanoid bodies overtaking elements of nature in industrial ways, with a polluted fountain spewing brown water in the centre of the installation.

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"I'm talking about the sort of waste we create and how we separate ourselves from it," Griebel says. "A lot of us don't like to think about ruin and waste and how we consume the world around us in various ways, but it's a reality. Instead of, sort of, pushing that away psychologically, I've brought it all back onto the body. All the waste and the human impact on the natural world is sort of playing out on the surfaces of these bodies."

Griebel says the way he frames perspectives when viewing his sculptures makes the environmental reality of our world easier to engage with.

"Even though the subject is a little heavy, I sort of deal with it in very playful ways," he says. "Most of the figures represent myself and me sort of thinking about or struggling with those thoughts."

Now is the time to materialize those ideas, Griebel says. The emotions he bottles up and struggles with burst through in the sculptures.

"Recently, I just felt like I was being inundated with articles online about environmental spoil and there's just more and more present," he says. "It was all getting so overwhelming, and you almost have to put up a wall just to go about your life and not be too worried. So I was wondering, if we do block out all that stuff, maybe it sits inside of us subconsciously. That's what the sculptures are in a way. They're thinking about those issues and how we carry that weight psychologically."

In that way, he sees Crafting Ruin as more of an exploration than a piece of prescriptive education.

"I'm not really interested in making it a black and white issue or pointing fingers," Griebel says. "I'm more interested in thinking about how I consume."

The process of creating art is a contemplative one for Griebel, and he hopes the details in his work engender the same feeling from its audience.

"By sculpting and putting all that care into something which is like a representation of plastic or thrown away garbage, you're really sort of reflecting," he says. "The actual material is thrown—by bulk—into landfills every day, but when you're creating it and meticulously making it by hand, you're sort of meditating on all that waste."

When you have that accumulation of detail, it really has more of an impact on the viewer. It helps them sort of understand the ideas that I'm trying to express."

Griebel describes one of his exhibited sculptures as thousands of shell fish climbing out of a reef made of plastic garbage and bottles.

"It's almost a giant tourist souvenir shell figure, but it's also all these shellfish sort of separating themselves from the plastic waste in the ocean."

Before touring with his sculptures overseas, Griebel was primarily a painter, but a shift in the way he created his paintings led him naturally to his current medium.

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"I was actually building these things that I ended up painting," Griebel says. "I started realizing that the figures that were my models ... carried a lot more psychological presence than the paintings I was making of them."

Inspired to find a way to make his painting models into a more permanent form of sculpture that he could display, he went back to art school at Concordia University in Montreal to hone his sculpting technique.

"The only experience I really had making more permanent sculptures was building my halloween costumes from papier-mâché as a child, so that's how I began building," Griebel says. "It appealed to me because I'd worked on paper, and with papier-mâché you can paint them when they're finished, so they literally become three-dimensional paintings."

After he graduated from Concordia, he made Crafting Ruin's sculptures through a series of work starting in 2015, working on as many as six sculptures at a time, and putting the finishing touches on each one with the oil paint he's familiar with. Now, he's bringing selections of his work back to the province he hails from.

"I consider the prairies home, and I feel like my upbringing on the prairies really affected the work."

Crafting Ruin is the most comprehensive exhibition of his art that's been shown in Canada, he says. And with sculptures of oil-slicked creatures amidst muddy water, Griebel says he's proud to bring the exhibit home.

"A lot of this work I've shown in Germany and outside of Canada, but I'm really happy to be able to show it on the prairies and have it all assembled here at once."