




# Art review: Jonathan Pylypchuk at China Art Objects Gallery

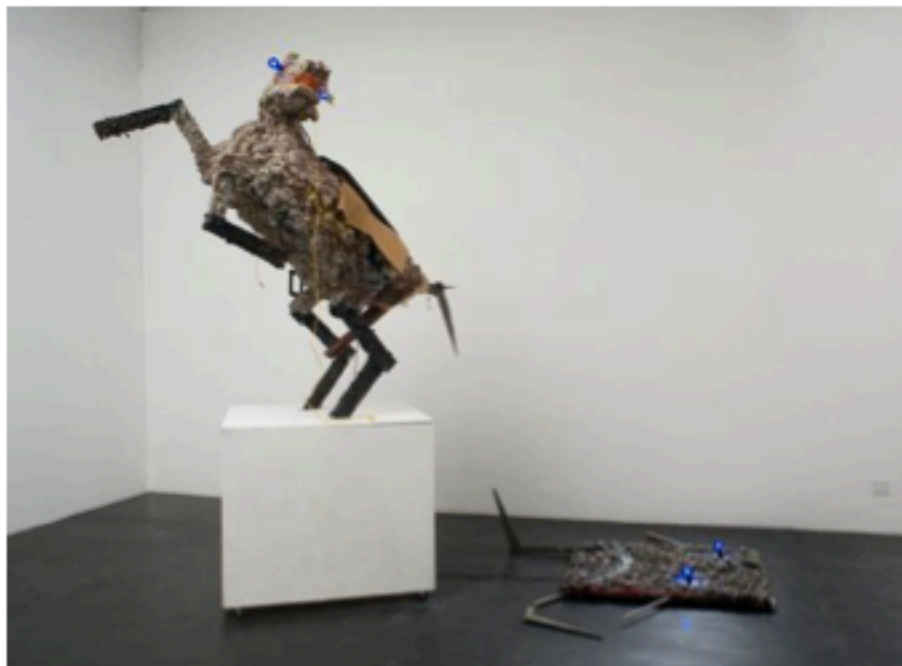
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Jonathan Pylypchuk's terrifically silly sculptures are as accessible as cartoons. They're also smart, heartbreaking and ambitious.

Grounded in a venerated tradition of scrappy, DIY assemblage (with deep roots in postwar California art), the Winnipeg-born artist's figurative works transform failure into a rambunctious celebration of firsthand experience.

The painful beauty of figuring things out for oneself takes defiant, oddly joyous form in Pylypchuk's eighth solo show in Los Angeles, "In the Absence of Human Bastards." The centerpiece of the four-room romp at China Art Objects Gallery is an approximately lifesize equestrian sculpture cobbled together from scraps of wood, chunks of drywall and gobs of expanding foam insulation sprayed over tangled fragments of chicken wire.



Glowing black-light bulbs stand in for the eyes of the horse and rider. From the entrance, you don't notice the rider. All you see is the rearing stallion atop a white pedestal, its repurposed materials momentarily monumentalized by its evocation of bronze statues in civic plazas all over the West.

The horse draws your eyes upward until you nearly stumble over the rider, laying flat on its back on the floor, right behind, and far below, the animal's backside. With a spray-painted frown, stick-figure limbs and big, blocky head, Pylypchuk's figure appears to be the forlorn offspring of SpongeBob SquarePants and a well-used doormat.

The laugh-out-loud humor unexpectedly gives way to old-fashioned empathy. It's easy to imagine what Pylypchuk's figure is feeling, and to see yourself in similar predicaments — knocked-down, overmatched, out of luck. But not finished.

This heart-tugging pull marks Pylypchuk's originality and distinguishes his art from its snide counterparts. All of his diverse assemblages bring underdog sympathy into the picture while leaving sappiness and cynicism behind.

In pitting impulse against will, experience against rumor and reality's roughness against advertising's slickness, Pylypchuk's spunky sculptures invite viewers to pay attention to the down-to-earth dramas that may not make the headlines but are all the more potent for being up close and intimate.

-- David Pagel