



## Uptown and in Chelsea, Two Shows Exemplify the New Surreal

John Newman's works throw a fabulous "Fit"

By R. C. Baker Wednesday, May 14 2014

**At first glance**, John Newman's sculptures might look like the spawn of some aberrant Google algorithm for "texture." Given a bit of contemplation, however, their formal tumult coheres into a sagacious beauty. Take, for example, *Colors balance on a silver rope trick* (2013): a writhing jumble of "palladium-gilded cast bronze" tapers upward into a slender pedestal supporting a three-and-a-half-foot-long chain of colorful rectangles that curl like car-lot banners. Allusions abound, encouraged by the titles — in this one you might flash on an Indian fakir enticing a flaccid rope to stiffen taut enough to climb. (A good guess, as Newman's rigid flags indeed strike an exquisitely garish equipoise.)

The two-foot-long *Discussion stick with a cool head* (2014) is fabricated from Plexiglas, resins, bronze rods, marble, wood putty, wood, and vibrant stripes of acrylic paint. The wildly varying shapes could conjure a serpent sunning on a rock, while a semi-transparent blue oval, facing upright like a mask, seems eager for a dialogue with the viewer, perhaps concerning sin and salvation.

A selection of Newman's far-ranging drawings reveals both the cutting-edge gyrations of computer plotting and the graceful gradations of chalk and pencil that signal classical training. It is always a pleasure to see a sculptor's sketches — young painters can learn as much from David Smith's volumetric spray drawings as from acres of Abstract Expressionist canvases — and Newman's studies convey a keen sense of the leaps of consciousness that allow humans to segue between represented and actual dimensions as if they are one and the same.

*Hanging in there with a shiny center*, 2013,  
quartz, glass, aluminum armature wire, epoxy paste, wood,  
wood putty, papier mâché, sisal, Japanese paper,  
foam, nylon micro-filament, acrylic paint, palladium leaf,  
21 x 16 x 10 1/2 inches



The Surrealists aimed to transport us between realities, and you can feel Newman updating that long-in-the-tooth movement through the elegant contortions of his clashing forms. Consider *Out of the blue* (2014), seemingly an azure giant's uvula suspended from a three-and-a-half-foot arc propped upon gloopily extruded columns of bright aluminum and painted resin. Viewed from above, the curve beckons with smooth labia that surround an opening suggesting an organic drain, recalling ceramicist Ken Price's DayGlo confections of the erotic and the excretory, which themselves were variations on Surrealism's forbidden dreams. This beguiling amalgamation, with its allusions to the vault of the heavens distilled down to bodily orifices, sits directly under a skylight in the gallery. During a visit, a sunray illuminated the piece, and lyrics from a song of the same title, by Roxy Music — a band that knew plenty about mixing textures — sprang to mind: "Out of the sky came the sun/Out of left field came a lucky day." Sometimes that's what art was put here to do.

**As a youngster**, the now 57-year-old Don Joint noticed the many amusement-park prizes that were stamped "Made in Japan." In his lush new collage paintings, Joint expands on those memories by combining turn-of-last-century blueprints of Coney Island with ukiyo-e prints from Japan: woodblock scenes from roughly the 17th to 19th century that depict a metaphorically "floating world" of prosperous hedonism.

Joint blends thickly applied paint — often rich indigos, inspired by the building plans — with the vivid woodblock graphics to create a world with the vertiginous dynamism of a roller coaster ride and the sumptuous ambiance of a courtesan's boudoir. Collaged snippets of opulent fabric drift like celestial jellyfish through diagrams of your grandpa's thrill rides, imagery reminiscent of Joseph Cornell's genius for ensnaring the cosmos in a box. The lithe paint handling entwines the pungent abstract contours Joint's scissors have extracted from the ancient prints, summoning the spirits of the original narratives to populate fresh vistas of lovely abandon.