

EXTREME RELAXATION: MICHAEL MAHALCHICK GOES THE DISTANCE IN PERFORMANCE AT HIS CANADA GALLERY OPENING



Michael Mahalchick during his performance last Saturday at Canada.
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Last Saturday, for the duration of the opening of his current solo show at Canada, which is titled “Skin Game,” Michael Mahalchick was stationed in the main gallery space with his face down on a massage table, staring at his own reflection in a bucket of water. On the back of Mahalchick’s head was an ominous Michael Jackson mask. He stayed that way for two hours.

“Well, the massage table is an old massage table of a friend of mine who died recently,” Mahalchick told me directly after the conclusion of the performance. “This show is about living and dying, so I think that table, with the Michael Jackson mask, it sort of looks like a weird corpse sitting on the table, but then this massage thing is about life and feeling things and your skin,” he continued.

I arrived three quarters into the performance. In that time, Mahalchick moved his legs up and down a few times, but other than that, as far as I could see, he stayed impressively still. Gallerygoers took photos, and some even talked to him. In an email, Mahalchick detailed a few of the things that were said, as well as some nuggets he just happened to overhear.

“Are you OK?”

“Can I touch you?”

“Can I give you a massage?”

“Are you asleep?”

“The medium is the massage.”

“I really like the use of Cheerios in your work.”

“They don’t have this at the Frick.”

“Is that a real person?”

“Is he dead?”

“I can see him breathing.”

“I think it’s a she.”

“I want to go over and slap his ass.”

“Can you see his face?”

As this happened, Mahalchick was surrounded by his own work, loose mixed-media pieces that use a collection of found posters their jumping-off point. “When I moved to New York, the first apartment I moved into, [the show’s] posters were out in front of the apartment going into the garbage, so I brought them all back into the apartment,” the artist said. “I was planning to do something but didn’t until now because it made sense.”

Alongside the massage chair, the patinated posters feel like a time capsule. Alt-rock mainstays Pearl Jam sits next to ’80s goth band Bauhaus, Led Zeppelin, and more contemporary artists like the folk singer Devendra Banhart—interesting, considering Banhart himself used to show at Canada in the gallery’s early days. Local dancehall reggae ads are posted up near a weathered Soul Asylum poster. Collaged and presented together, everything takes on a mysticism that I normally associate with a more singular, bygone era of rock and roll. It all feels old.

The collages are covered with everything from Powerball stubs to old car-service receipts. “If you look at the posters there’s like exhibition postcards and things people have sent me over the years, and there’s also candy wrappers and whatever,” Mahalchick said. “I don’t search out stuff, I sort of let whatever stuff is around, whatever flows in, I don’t really source things necessarily.”

Mahalchick has shown with Canada for over a decade, and in that period has staged a variety of performances. A few highlights include a 2012 piece at Canada wherein the artist created assemblages live in the gallery, as well as a 2013 re-creation of the Jay Z “Picasso Baby” video/durational performance in the basement of Louis B. James Gallery. Over the course of the current exhibition’s run, the artist will do the massage-table performance three more times. “Now the water has absorbed my image—it’s sort of in there,” he said. “Your reflection of water is on the skin of water really, it imprints the water with my identity in some way.”

<http://www.artnews.com/2016/03/30/extreme-relaxation-michael-mahalchick-goes-the-distance-in-performance-at-his-canada-gallery-opening/>

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