

ARTslant



Elias Hansen: We Used to Get So High

Eli Hansen

Lawrimore Project

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We'll Always Get That High

by Jessica Powers

A discussion about memory and drugs is always going to be trickier than it sounds.

Elias Hansen's new show is either a step towards a semblance of sobriety, or just a new form of crazy, or both simultaneously. Having known Elias in various professional and personal contexts for the last 3 years doesn't help deciding the matter much, and I think he likes it that way. Collecting over 30 pieces of work in film, glass, paint, and wood, the exhibition could feel like a long and multifarious career survey of sorts but despite the high number and variety of works, this appearance of an all-out survey is actually motivated by two impulses, bifurcated like a snake's tongue: the ahistorical and the druidic.



While Hansen's work evokes utopian communes, 60s and 70s counterculture, and the simple memory of lived events, taken together this exhibition presents itself singularly, stripped of history. Linear time or tradition for Hansen are actually the symptoms of psychic events, states of mind rather than places in time. References to the past and memory serve as camouflage for the darker ideas, and sugar to make the medicine go down. Nostalgia is merely a trigger. The first drink of beer, the exploration of an abandoned house, Hansen plugs into these memories and lets the reveries shift perception. But it's not about how great first times are or even what the passage of time means. Pieces like *This Is An Exact Replica Of How I Remember*, all works 2010, (a table with an intricate array of vessels, glass stills, and tubes) demonstrate Hansen's explicitly anti-time point of view. It is irrelevant whether there was a history before this object, whether it references anything, whether itself becomes another reference in a book. It hints at its real purpose: the psychic topography of existence, the place where a single nanosecond of time is every emotion you'll ever know, but in Slurpee form.



Psychedelics (and sundry other psychotropics) are known to induce this phenomena, where time disappears. A whole new host of signs and durations arise that are time invariant, but it's most certainly not about drugs. Plenty of psychos, gurus, and other mystical-psychic types know exactly the Hansen's mindset and method: Searching for the hazy clues of something more important than the continual decaying reality around us. The end of this tunnel isn't finding God, getting sober, or becoming a serious human being. At the end of the tunnel lies the most seriously beautiful shit you've ever seen. It lacks meaning and expressible propositions, but none of that gets in the way of its realness. Still, you need a special kind of person to channel that energy.

The shaman or druid has been used in art as a reference to mysticism, religion, power, or magic. Hansen does not make art about these folk, he makes art from the point of view of them. Even the cleanest items in the show, the series of chemical bond diagram-style paintings might as well be scrawled by troglodytes daubing the cave walls.

Arcane and elaborate instructions and symbols, Hansen finds ways to break out of reality and get too real for it. There has always been a strong practical or pragmatic streak in the artist's work, right down to the fact that he makes real object type art.

Now we realize, perhaps too late, that less than it is practical, his art is instrumental. And furthermore, less than pragmatic it is ritualistic. Elias Hansen makes charms, implements for incantation and summoning. When the planar overlay comes, and the world gets more or less real than it is now, art like this will retain its importance: secrecy, power, direct psychic experience, and the powerful knowledge to transmute.

(Images: Elias Hansen, *Do You Want In?*, 2010, Glass. steel, found object. Installation View of *We Used to Get So High. I Don't Remember*, 2010. Photograph, glass. All Images courtesy the artist and Lawrimore Project.)