

## REVIEWS

### BOSTON

#### Radcliffe Bailey

Samsøen // April 1–May 28

SPILLWAYS, CURRENTS, TRAP-doors, portals: All of the work in Bailey's exhibition at Samsøen conjures passage of some kind. The liminal sculpture and collaged pieces produce an array of channels for navigating fraught historical depths. Two very different vessels near the entrance to the gallery set the

prop full of latent magic to be put to use in reshaping the present. Further into the gallery, *Fourth Ward*, 2013, quite literally creates a gateway. Covered in luminous gold leaf on one side and worn white paint on the other, the tall wooden door stands as a threshold between our world and another.

There's a Dante-esque quality to the work in this show; one almost feels Bailey has given us a set of guides for opening up a space between the living and the dead. A set of 12 exceptional small works on paper from the "Notes from Tervuren" series look a bit like pages from a manual for various stages of a journey. Combining gouache, collage, and ink on sheet music, they depict collaged statuettes, totems, and saxophones inside a colorful, aqueous space where sea and sky join and classical music motifs peek through from the sheet music beneath. The figures vary—one sits half kneeling on a skiff with an old rifle; some stand patiently atop a peak or a planet; another rests at the edge of a table, palms out as if to receive an offering; others still simply drift through the vibrant cosmic tides. The saxophones in "Notes from Tervuren" rise definitively from the water, spitting out volcanic expressions into the ether. But the fact that each palimpsest bears traces of the original musical score only reinforces the fact that Bailey's final products operate like new compositions. These musical spells from elsewhere offer up another notation altogether and, in doing so, present alternative routes through our infernal histories.

—Anthony Hawley

stage for this. If *Blue Black Blue Cool*, 2016, a glass heart with ventricles tinted a ghostly blue (presumably by the violent indigo stain covering the Sheetrock and floor below it), suggests an expulsion, *Top Hat*, 2014, an upside-down hat lined with rabbit fur and adorned with a red rooster feather, conjures an invitation. Taken metaphorically, *Blue Black Blue Cool* might be seen as a kind of ritual exorcising of history, cleansing the organ of its contents, while *Top Hat* serves as a performative

ABOVE: **Radcliffe Bailey**  
*Notes from Tervuren*, 2014.  
Gouache, collage, and ink on sheet music, 12 x 9 in.

RIGHT: **Jean Dubuffet**  
*Cingria blanc sur champ sombre*, 1947. Oil and mixed media on canvas, 57½ x 44¼ in.

### NEW YORK

#### Jean Dubuffet

Acquavella Galleries // April 15–June 10

WITH ITS POLISHED marble floors and limestone walls, Acquavella Galleries on Manhattan's Upper East Side is not the first location that comes to mind as the ideal setting for an exhibition exploring the early career of the French painter and Art Brut pioneer Jean Dubuffet. The sleek Neoclassical mansion's architecture offers a stark and appealing visual contrast to these dramatic, wildly expressive compositions.

Curated by Mark Rosenthal, this presentation focuses on the formative years of Dubuffet's career, from 1943 to 1959, when the artist began using unconventional mediums in his paintings like mud, sand, and broken glass. An early champion of what is now called "outsider" art, Dubuffet drew inspiration from and advocated for work by those existing beyond what was considered the cultural norm, such as children and the mentally ill. To Dubuffet, the unfiltered imagination of Art Brut, un-

cumbered by the restraints of what constituted taste or beauty, was truer art than that taught at any academy.

Divided into four rooms organized by a combination of subject-matter and chronology, the first opens with a grouping of Dubuffet's explosive and provocative early portraits. Their loose forms and proportional approximations are all that is needed to explain what is meant by "brut," translated literally, it is "raw" art, although "brutal" would work just as well, given the devastating ways the artist rendered bodies and landscapes. His 1946 portrait *Will to Power* is a key example of the artist's unsparing eye; its subject stands completely naked at the center of the canvas, his arms tucked behind his back and legs severely foreshortened to fit within the frame. His gritted teeth are made of stone, while his eyes are chips of glass. The subject's hairstyle and mustache make explicit what is implied by the title: This is the raw, vulnerable underbelly of National Socialism. The artist has transformed someone who is at first perceived as a threat into a comical, human figure.

Dubuffet began producing art in the thick of World War II in then-occupied France. His rejection of classic technique and materials is as much an artistic choice as it is a rejection of the ideals that helped lead to the period's ruinous conflict. It's with a bit of irony, then, that Dubuffet should find a home in the center of the established art world. His anticultural perspective is firmly rooted in art history now. Yet Dubuffet's work has the power to catch even contemporary viewers off-guard; its richly impastoed and earthen surfaces still hold life decades later. —Danielle Whalen



FROM LEFT: RADCLIFFE BAILEY; KENT PELL AND ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK/ADAGP, PARIS