

'Image in the Box' at Hollis Taggart; 'The World Is All That Is the Case' at Hudson Franklin

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Courtesy Hollis Taggart Galleries



2-D Cornell: *Penny Arcade* (circa 1960)

Details:

'Image in the Box'

Hollis Taggart Galleries

958 Madison Avenue, 212-628-4000

Through January 10

Joseph Cornell (1903-72) regularly traveled from his mother's house in Queens to dusty Manhattan shops to seek out chipped glassware, yellowed prints, tired toys, and other nostalgic detritus ripe for the metaphysical transformations found in his box assemblages. In his diaries, Cornell spoke of "sparkings," serendipitous convergences of object, color, light, and maybe an attractive girl glimpsed through a bookstore window—the artist had a bright eye for ballerina-style physiques. Such simple inspirations seemed to orbit in his memory like erratic moons until he fixed them in beautiful juxtapositions that smolder with enigmatic drama. In *Constellation Variant* (1955-58), a brass ring and a print of a dour child have been suspended next to a toy sun smiling out from clotted whitewash; a broken soap-bubble pipe lies along the bottom of this small box, everything connected by wavering arcs radiating from the sun. These mundane objects journey from a playroom of the mind to the vast attic of the cosmos. Cornell's best boxes are as limitless as dreams.

The six other artists in this box-motif show are well situated in the penumbra of Cornell's weird beauty. The magic-realist painter Pierre Roy (1880–1950) depicted such items as wineglasses, fake butterflies, and little stones inside trompe l'oeil wooden frames, which perhaps influenced Cornell's poignant constructions.

Lucas Samaras's 1965 container of cascading hair and

drafting compasses ensnared by webs of fishing line seems a brooding homage to the master. More recently, Ted Victoria has employed lights, motors, and mirrors to project images of paper cups and other banalities onto the surface of his shadow boxes, ragged animations that dovetail with Cornell's detritus aesthetic.

Although less well known, Cornell's 2-D collages also bear scrutiny. *Penny Arcade* (circa 1960) could be read as an elder demonstrating to a young upstart how to achieve grace and impact with minimal fuss: Stenciled blue numbers that might be moonlighting from a Jasper Johns painting hover over the yellowed silhouette and lightly traced outlines of a rocking horse. Just below, a zinc penny on a coarse white ground provides the fulcrum for this small collage's astonishingly vibrant rhythm.

The assemblages that emerged from the basement on Utopia Parkway recall the moment in *Citizen Kane* when Mr. Bernstein muses about a young woman he'd glimpsed half a century earlier: "A white dress she had on.

She was carrying a white parasol. I only saw her for one second. She didn't see me at all, but I'll bet a month hasn't gone by since that I haven't thought of that girl." Cornell is our curator of memories, combining their clarity and slippages into masterpieces of Yankee surrealism.

'The World Is All That Is the Case'

Cribbing its title from Wittgenstein, this group exhibition features 28 framed photographs propped up on shelves, making for easy curatorial rearrangements and multiple affinities. James Welling's *Lock* (1978) captures a heavy length of lumber used to secure a door; its angled shadow is echoed in the background of Hannah Whitaker's *E8* (2008), a color photo of a Spirograph-style diagram of the universe, derived from physicist Garrett Lisi's "An Exceptionally Simple Theory of Everything." This pairing and others, such as a shot of dozens of U-shaped metal hasps next to an image of black balloons stuffed with rocks, set the mind to mulling anew photography's unique ability to mine aesthetics from the plain facts of the world. *Hudson Franklin, 526 W 26th, 212-741-1189. Through December 20.*

Michelangelo

Although Michelangelo (1475–1564) defined himself as a sculptor, this concisely annotated exhibition of his drawings also showcases some printed editions of his many poems, including an epitaph for a 15-year-old boy: "Only this stone delights in possessing him/While the rest of the world all now weeps." Also on view is Michelangelo's hand-scrawled notice admonishing his foreman that unsolicited assistants hanging around the workshop "will not be paid for the day's work." Most compelling, though, among the portraits of the master by other artists and six of Michelangelo's own architectural plans, are the half-dozen of his figure drawings. *Christ in Limbo* portrays Jesus in red pencil, his body twisting dramatically as he strides among faintly drawn supplicants. On another of these fragile, centuries-old sheets, faded pencil sketches surround three brawny nudes in ink whose supple muscles heave a tremendous, unseen weight. *Study for the Head of Leda* (1529-30), probably done of a male assistant, presents handsome beauty in surpassingly delicate pencil strokes. Records from 1699 note that Michelangelo's subsequent painting of Leda and her swan lover was executed "in a manner so vivid and lascivious with passionate love that M. des Noyers, a minister of state under Louis XIII, had it burned." *Palitz Gallery, 11 E 61st, 212-826-0320. Through January 4*