



**Harry Harlow Wire Mother Bottle Rack**

**2023**

**Plastic, aluminum, MDF**

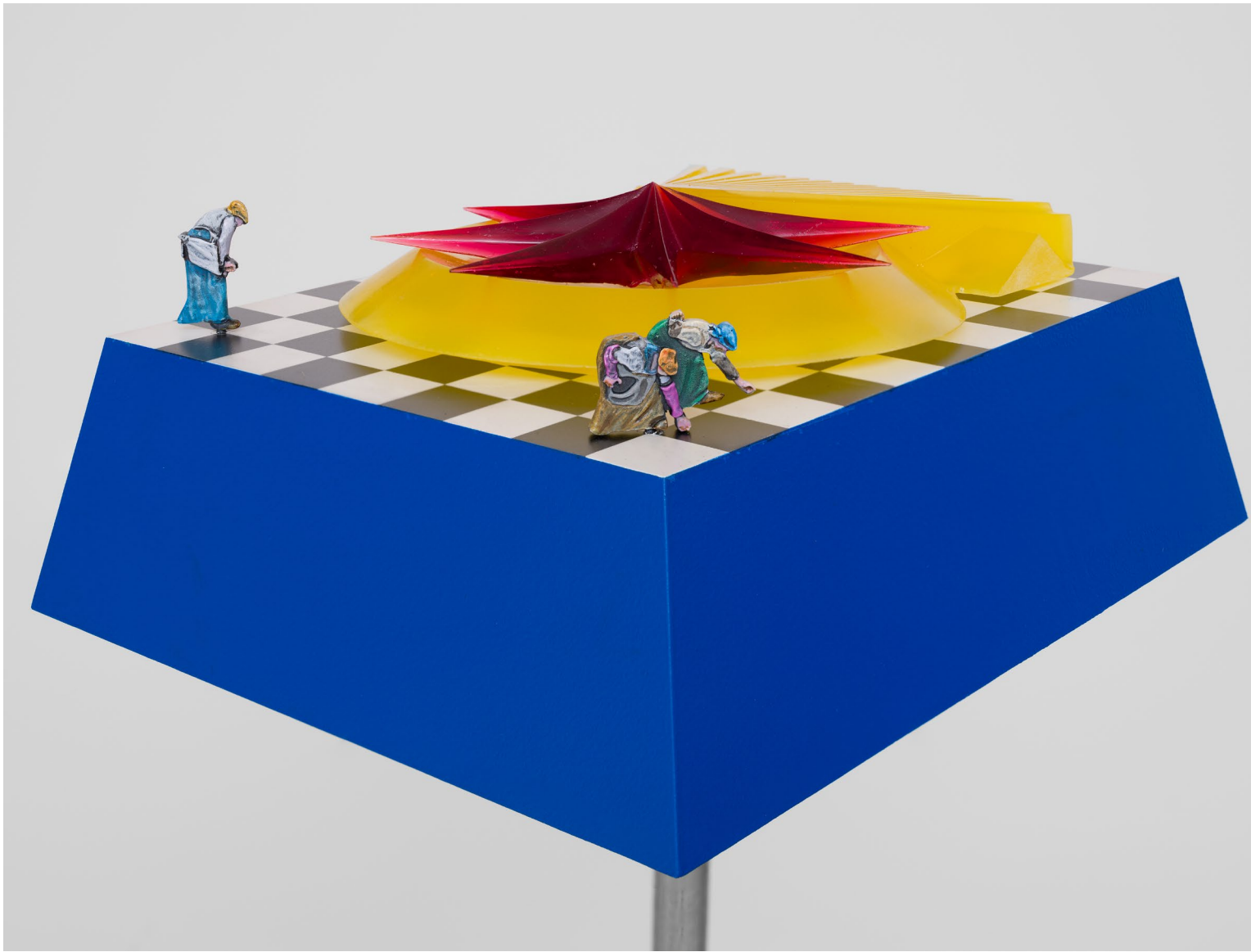
**15<sup>5/8</sup> x 12<sup>1/2</sup> x 12<sup>1/2</sup> inches**



12in x 48in  
12in x 48in  
12in x 48in







**Ultramar Gleaners Tableau**  
**2023**  
**Plastic, MDF**  
**5<sup>1/4</sup> x 10<sup>7/8</sup> x 12<sup>7/8</sup> inches**









**Orcish Shelving System Maquette**

**2023**

**Plastic, MDF**

**14<sup>3/8</sup> x 12<sup>1/2</sup> x 12<sup>1/2</sup> inches**









**Mummy Brown**

**2023**

**Plastic, MDF**

**14<sup>1/2</sup> x 12<sup>1/2</sup> x 12<sup>1/2</sup> inches**









**Orc Plaster-Head**

**2023**

**Plastic, MDF**

**14<sup>1/2</sup> x 12<sup>1/2</sup> x 12<sup>1/2</sup> inches**





# CANNIBAL GALAXIES

was an exhibition by Joseph Buckley, that opened September 7th 2023, at Specialist Gallery in Seattle, USA.

photo credit: [installshots.art](http://installshots.art)

# 2023

"Mummy Brown takes its title from the old pigment Mummy Brown. Not content with raiding the tombs of Egypt, Europeans got really into grinding mummified bodies up to make pigments for paint. The practice lasted from the early-mid 1600s until around 1964. This casual, staggering disrespect intrigues me. I am endlessly fascinated by the vandalism, the hyper-dehumanisation, the history-destruction, that renders a people's honored buried ancestors into brown paint. Similarly, I am fascinated by today's descended processes: of the museological display of human remains.

The work formally consists of two art handler figures (with canoptic jar-esque heads: one a dog, the other an orc), handling the desiccated body of the child of a scribe. Through a process of nesting casts\* the child is suspended inside the a sarcophagus of the same material.

I guess the work comes from the collapse of a few different positions: the continued insult of the handling of the stolen dead that the art handlers are committing; and the economic dynamics that force the handlers to do such potentially morally hazardous work in the first place. I have been an art handler and have been asked and expected to do things I know would upset the estates of dead artists who, were they living, would be my peers or elders.

Finally, I think the work comes somewhat out of longstanding interest in funerary practices and an unexpected experience I had at a museum in 2022. As a new father, I found myself looking down at a display I had looked down at many times before and was surprised as I was overcome by a deep sadness that I felt looking again and properly realizing that the object I was staring at was somebody else's son.

Harry Harlow Wire Mother Bottle Rack's title refers to the three things that are collapsed together to make this sculpture.

Harry Harlow was a behavioral scientist who, essentially, discovered that it isn't really possible to love infant primates too much. Primates thrive under loving, affectionate conditions and the longstanding western cultural expectation that children be treated with violence and contempt was really, really bad (there aren't enough words in the world to go into the European legacy of violence against children but, suffice to say, my family history is threaded through orphanage's, children's homes, workhouses, and Magdalene Laundries and so it's something I've had to think about a lot about on an emotional and intellectual level - whether I've wanted to or not).

We can understand Harlow as a scientist of roughly the same generation as Milgram or Zimbardo, and operating, similarly, in such a way that precipitated the kinds of ethics rules that would prevent such work today. This is to say, Harlow, whilst acknowledging the emotional reality of the animals he was working with, tortured many thousands of them to death: breaking them on the most fundamental and integral levels. I'm somewhat uninterested in making a value judgement against Harlow but I am interested in how he saw himself, justified himself, and what he did after his career. There is a somewhat defensive tone in his interviews with the press, even before public opinion swayed against the profligate expenditure of thinking animals in medical research, and he always insists on the capacity for thought and emotion such animals have, even before the ambient culture generally granted such agency to animals. It seems clear, to me, that on some level, he felt the wrongness of what he was doing. Anyway, he never had children and, in his retirement, when his wife died of old age, he checked himself into the local sanatorium, requesting (and receiving) electro-shock therapy to 'cure him of his grief'.

This moment, of Harlow having himself tortured, is what the sculpture depicts. Harlow wears electrodes upon his temples, and is biting down on a gag to prevent him swallowing his tongue. Inside of his head is the false mother of his wire mother/cloth mother experiments. He is pinned, crucified, and supported by a wire structure: Duchamp's Bottle Rack, specter of Modernity, pinning him in place and supporting him. A galvanically introduced skeleton and scaffolding. Harlow's thorough modernity, its ugliness and complexity, fascinates me. In the aftermath of his own self inflicted torture, one imagines him in his cell, dribbling, moaning in pain: Exemplar! Simultaneous Victim and Perpetrator of American High Modernism. Fascinating!

P.s. I'm not an anti-modernist or anything. And I don't really mind if I'm 'wrong' about any of the details of his life or work.

Orcish Shelving System Maquette is a maquette scaled version of a work I made in 2018. Here is something I wrote about it at the time:

*"This work is derived from three distinct genesis points: diagrams of Africans in the holds of slave ships, photographs of the bunk beds at Belsen concentration camp, and JRR Tolkien's orcs. I came across all three as a child. Tolkien was born in proto-apartheid Colonial South Africa. It is difficult to overstate his foundational impact on the genres of fantasy, science fiction, and (by extension) popular culture. Difficult also to parse out colonial-era racisms and prejudices from the 'fantasy world' that he synthesized. Orcs are described in language that borrows from dated descriptions of black and brown people. Human-shaped things afforded no protections or rights, that exist to be slaughtered by exclusively white protagonists. Welding together histories of slavery, extermination, and dehumanization I sought to present bodies being pressed into the very structures which hold them in bondage. The first time I made orcs, they were scatted individually on a floor. The second time: a small pile. All the times they've existed they've operated in the space between appearing to be dead and appearing to be asleep. I became interested in adding a third point: orcs being grown. That felt like one reason they might all be stacked but there are other reasons too: In what appears to be a world where automation will not set us free... In a world where meaningless toil continues despite the obsolescence of physical labour... In a world where billionaires will not simply allow people to live freely... what is the future of labour? I foresee bleak obscenities. What is the ultimate in dehumanising objectification? It is to be forced to become industrial furniture."*

That work, though not the actual start of me working with orcs (thats like 2013-14), feels like a key checkpoint in my practice. I like the idea of inverting the normal progress of a work (normally: first maquette, then true scale). I like the idea of compromising, compressing, and reusing bits and forms and shapes and body parts. I like the horror of the true scaled thing transmuted into surreal toy-scale. Whilst this work is on view in Seattle, there'll be a true scale version on view at Coffin Farm nearby and I think it'll be really cool to have audience members stand in front of one and realize the scale is fucked versus another one they were just in front of haha.

Orc Plaster-Head is worked from a digital scan of a plaster cast of my head from when I was in my early 20s (note the hairline). I did work, way back in the day, where I was using these plaster casts of my head as building blocks, and then smashing them up, and exploring the dynamic space between a vaunted reliquary and an abject head on a stake. This old work served as the conceptual foundation of a lot of the work I ended up doing and thinking around orcs and dehumanization and so on.

Anyway, I was interested in returning to this prototype orc head I had lying around and updating it. I was interested in the various ways museums will mount fragments of sculpture on vague and undefined mounts that refer to what a full shape might be, and I was thinking about that when I made most of the head but was also thinking a fair bit about chimneys and vents and the various mechanical parts that 'exhale' on machines and engines and was interested in using those for the mouth parts. The slight translucency of the head reveals a screw on the inside. I am emotionally able to understand why I did it, but am intellectually perhaps not able to fully justify this formal decision. Nevertheless, it's something I feel good and correct about and have taken this work (and to a lesser degree this body of work) as a bit of an opportunity to reconnect with this way of feeling ones way through the work.

Ultramar Gleaners Tableau takes its name from the Ultramar star system, a series of worlds in the popular Warhammer 40,000 Science Fiction universe. Ultramar contains worlds that operate hierarchical agrarian societies. There are, most likely, dispossessed peasants on such worlds. Such peasants would, as today, likely eke out an existence gleaned from the waste from harvests. I was struck by the sour bleakness, the savage unfairness of a gleaner in the far future. The 'symbol' is an Ultra (or, an inverted Ohm) and comes out of thinking about almanac cover designs mashed with the brief flowering of constructivist attempts to render agrarian society before all those guys got purged and flattened out for socialist realism. The checker pattern refers to the game-like arbitrary cruelties of social organization, and to games themselves. The figures themselves are double sided reliefs of the figures from the 1857 painting Gleaners by Jean-François Millet, rendered at miniature wargaming scale.