

office

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Chris Johanson X Johanna Jackson / The Middle Riddle



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Just walking into the Middle Riddle installation by artist power couple Chris Johanson and Johanna Jackson, the energy is of absolute humanity.

Media ranging from woodwork, ceramics, textiles, paintings, and drawings immediately transports you from a white-walled gallery space into the eclectic brain-space that epitomizes these two artists and how they strive to exist.

The space is filled with furniture, objects, and wall hangings made by either Jackson or Johanson, and these pieces only emphasize the feeling of being in a home—one that you definitely want to get invited to.

Interview & photos by Anna Zanes

How does this installation reflect your actual living space?

JJ I mean, this is our actual living space. These are our cups. It's hard to part with them. That was my special cup.

CJ Yeah, we were using these just before we left.

Has media affected your living space, and your art? These mediums and practices are so 'old-school', compared TV, electronics, phones... it's almost arcane.

CJ Oh, wow, TV. I mean, I've never lived with a TV, really. And TV kind of mutated so many times over the years—other people think it's normal, but to me I can't even watch it. It's difficult to understand.

JJ We're slow.

CJ I mean, it's crazy, if you really don't watch it very much and you see it again—the people presenting the news don't even act like normal people in any regard. I don't even know-- they're not human.

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JJ It's almost Kobuki Theater. People acting like puppets, moving like wooden statues and talking about human feelings. I like it.



Well, I was also raised without TV so I get that. Parents told me it would melt my brain.

JJ When I do watch it I find myself imitating the expressions on the actors' faces, and they're always distressed. A lot of the gross stuff in me comes from TV. I mean, gross stuff comes from being a baby and wanting to be picked up, though.

CJ And especially when we were kids, enforcing gender stuff-- that bullshit came from TV. If you're a guy you are going to be a good baseball player or girls being ballerinas. You're so saturated as soon as you walk out of the house. To go behind the door and have no TV. You can be tranquil without the cacophony. A space.

Talking about gender, it's interesting in terms of domestic and utilitarian art. How do you think gender roles have affected the evolution of your work?

JJ We reach towards each others' gender. I feel like these domestic materials really interest me. Your body is truly your very first world, and then comes the kitchen. Not even because I am a lady or a 'Hearth-keeper', but...

CJ Well, you need food. And you want the food to be special, like a ritual, to set it out, make it with intention, use good ingredients, cook with color. You have food in a way that is peaceful to eat, the drink that goes with it. It's natural.

JJ Try to be there, feel there, inside both your body and the room.

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I can't even imagine learning all these mediums. What did you start with?

CJ Drawing. Like children, but for ever. But I am not even sure how we got into crafts.

JJ Well, it was basic need. We got this place in Silver Lake that's at the top of 120 outdoor steps, and we didn't feel like carrying a bunch of furniture up them. So we started make it there. Also the economic aspect of things, being working people, we just couldn't afford things.

CJ We just have to make everything.

JJ We get to make everything.

Where do you find the wood for this table?

CJ These legs were found here. The chairs were done but the table wasn't when we got here. T top was made in LA but all the legs we dumpster dove like two blocks from here.

I actually was dumpster diving on the way here, my pockets are full of fridge magnets I found outside the gallery.

CJ This town has gold all over. People don't realize. Just walk around.

That's harder in LA, and that can be lonely. The driving. Do you feel that?

JJ Yes! Walking around here you can see faces, smell them...

CJ You acclimate to the dynamic, though. That isolating layout of the city. You have to go to a specific area, and repeatedly create a walk until you know everybody.

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JJ I have more relationships there, actually. There is so much trickle-down hysteria from the actors. I am hysterical, and I love it. Acting up, the suffering. People really feeling themselves.



And Chris, you're a musician, too, right?

CJ Sort of. I used to put stuff out more. But I'm involved in the music situation still whether or not I am still doing it. I play in a band sometimes though, called Sunfoot.

The convergence between visual art and music seems inescapable. Even if you just practice one.

CJ Well, I think it's because they've both just been happening all these years. It's the most beautiful thing.

JJ Yeah, I don't play, but crafts and music are so similar. Tactile. Our friend, he's a brilliant pianist. That's his painting over there.

He told me he plays piano for six hours a day, and then goes and paints. I see the connection though with these crafts being so hands on.

CJ Well, this is it— life is the art. So if life is the art, then everything you do should be, and can be, artful. We just moved away from professionalism and moved towards 'art life'. That's what this is. A gentle space in a fascist world.

Chris Johnson x Johanna Jackson / The Middle Riddle is on show at The Journal Gallery May 2 - June 18.