
NEWS RELEASE written by Dr. Wendy Steiner, University of Pennsylvania **November 2007**

JOHN KINDNESS' *ARISTOTLE CONTEMPLATING LAUNDRY* at SLATE GALLERY

October 27 – December 1, 2007

Reception: November 9 2007 6-9 PM

Rembrandt's Aristotle contemplated a bust of Homer. John Kindness's contemplates laundry. The switch seems to be a relief for the old guy: grandiose allegory is a strain these days, and the thoughts inspired by the soapy clothes waft above him in delightful angelic curlicues.

During the two decades of his prodigiously varied art making, John Kindness has been at work recycling images, materials, techniques, styles. He finds a car abandoned beside a canal and paints a rime of white lace on it. Suddenly we see the rusted surface as patina and the burnt-out wreck as sculpture. Are floor mosaics a thing of the past? John revives the practice with toasted soda crackers. Common as dirt, soda crackers, but used as tesserae they are rare and wonderful. Lace cars, cracker mosaics, "Giornati" frescoes, blue jeans armor, designs for a Mummers' entertainment and an opera animation—John's media experiments go on and on. Waste and obsolescence are open provocations to his inventive wit.

Are cereal or toilet cleaner boxes too banal for aesthetic delectation? John recognizes in their design the genius of Old Masters, and with a few adjustments of focus and form, creates a gallery of packaging classics. Some boxes are even three-dimensional, thanks to discarded computer casings discovered near the canal. The source images for the boxes and related works—Madonnas, portraits, the Pergamon Frieze—do well on their scrap surfaces. *Possibly Helena Snakenborg #2*, for example, fills its early Elizabethan source with reassuring confidence. There is no doubt that this is an image of *Possibly Helena Snakenborg*, the paper curlicues and cartoon splats of #2 leaving the actual portrait subject as elusive as ever. The "cereal" works are belated, indebted: *Toilet Virgin (after Sassoferrato)*, *Madonna of the Pinks (after Raphael)*. But however flip and jokey the recycling of images may seem, behind it lies a striking seriousness of intent: "It is my contention that whenever creative effort is put into anything, whether the artist's agenda is religious, secular or commercial, it remains there, possibly hidden or inhibited by cultural prejudice, but it can be retrieved by changing the way we look at it."

Archaeologist, inventor, craftsman, and social critic, John thinks of his art-making as labor and frequently collaborates with skilled craftspeople—lace-makers, casters, ceramicists, printers—insisting that the exclusion of the "useful arts" from the "fine arts" inhibits our appreciation of all art. Born and raised in working-class Belfast, he plays on the kitsch of harp and leprechaun, and mocks Irish sectarian violence with the heroes of classical mythology. James Joyce inspires his punning and kaleidoscopic allusiveness; indeed, *Ulysses's* dark horse "Throwaway" could be John's touchstone. Things that are discarded, forgotten, underestimated, misunderstood become winners through his recycling art.



Slate Gallery

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Knowing this, we should not be surprised if John's aesthetic ecology includes a red herring or two. *Aristotle Contemplating Laundry*, despite its title, is not based on Rembrandt's famous painting, but on an image of Aristotle and his pupil in a thirteenth-century Persian manuscript by Ibn Bakhtishu. As we contemplate *Aristotle Contemplating Laundry*, John reminds us that the Islamic world preserved Western culture during the wasteland of the dark ages.

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John Kindness has had exhibitions at: P.S. 1, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA; Art in General, N.Y., The Drawing Center, N.Y., The Irish Museum of Modern Art and is in many major collections including among others, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Imperial War Museum London; Ulster Museum, Belfast and The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin.

***Above Artwork: John Kindness 'Aristotle Contemplating Laundry' 2007, 36 x 23 inches, Enamel, oil and gold leaf on steel washing machine panel.**

Slate Gallery: 136 Wythe Avenue - Brooklyn New York, 11211 Tel: 718-387-3921
Gallery Hours: Friday - Monday, 1:00 - 6:00 pm, and by appointment
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