

### **Alley Apfelbaum**

Polly Apfelbaum coined the term ‘fallen paintings’ in the 1990s to settle an issue of categorisation. This underlines their essentially indeterminate character. Fallen from the wall, or some elevated art history? Maybe down the stairs or off the roof? The artist’s fluency in the funny ha-ha language of the non sequitur and the thrill of colour and shape suggests why, as well her connection to influences and peers among artists at the centre of avant-garde American art history, Apfelbaum has made works about ‘classic’ Walt Disney feature animations and Craig McCracken’s late 1990s animated TV series, *The Powerpuff Girls*.

As regards foundational influences, Apfelbaum has made special reference to the *The Yellow Kid*, a newspaper strip cartoon immensely popular in New York in the 1890s, and Chuck Jones’ animations for Warner Brothers’ Looney Toons in the 1940s and 50s. Richard F. Outcault’s *The Yellow Kid* was an Irish street kid, an immigrant denizen of the fictitious Hogan’s Alley, New York, outfitted in a triangle of nightshirt coloured yellow and inscribed with popular witticisms about life such as “Always Look Out For The Expected See” or “I’m Good Because It Pays” and the state of the nation from the perspective of a surprisingly erudite street kid. Chuck Jones’ most famous tragic clown has to be Wile E. Coyote from *The Adventures of Road Runner*’s. His slapstick shtick and bumpy logic making him the perfect mark for Acme Corporation’s more commercially and technologically innovative mail-order products, such as: the ‘portable hole’, ‘iron bird seed’, ‘building disintegrators’, ‘trick bone’, ‘TNT’, ‘all-purpose farm instrument’, and ‘instant girl’. Like *The Yellow Kid*, the Coyote uses written messages, often “Help”, to communicate with viewers at times of imminent annihilation. Both look out of the frame, straight in your eye. The Kid’s proclamations were aimed squarely at a politically savvy readership. The Coyote, prophet of doom, holding his roughly made wooden sign, has latterly been appropriated by sloganeers heralding the alarming state of the economy.

Terry Pawson describes Visual as “discrete rooms with connecting spaces between, more like the urban configuration of separate buildings, connected by streets and alleyways”; so just the place for a street kid. Like other artists, Apfelbaum has felt a vivid connection between the manufacturing ‘yard goods’ districts in New York, the material sensibility of the artist, and the street savvy of all who grease the wheels of aesthetic experience. In construction, the concrete walls of the Link Gallery that face the long glass curtain wall adjacent to the exterior reflecting pool were poured into oriented strand board ‘shuttering’. The texturing process echoes Le Corbusier’s use of timber planks, but OSB is far from the tree, a compacted gluey jumble of timber waste. Here’s a time tunnel, propelling us through the rise and fall of Modernism and Pop: red sparkle, blue sparkle, yellow dazzle. Apfelbaum’s lengths of fabric, their colour amplified by sequins, dramatise the artist’s relationship to weighty 20<sup>th</sup> century art movements and styles and their migrations from Europe to the U.S. *Stax* alludes directly to Barnett Newman’s ‘Who’s Afraid of Red Yellow and Blue?’ (1967) and Piet Mondrian’s compositions with red, blue and yellow of the 1920s and 30s.

*Stax* is about the link between the monochrome systems of Josef Albers prints (1972) and Daphne Wright’s flipped and ripped resin and marble dust *Stallion* (2009) located to either end of the Link Gallery for Visual’s inaugural show. Apfelbaum’s work seems to be especially *with* these, in both heart

and soul.

Valerie Connor, 2010