COLLECTOR DAILY

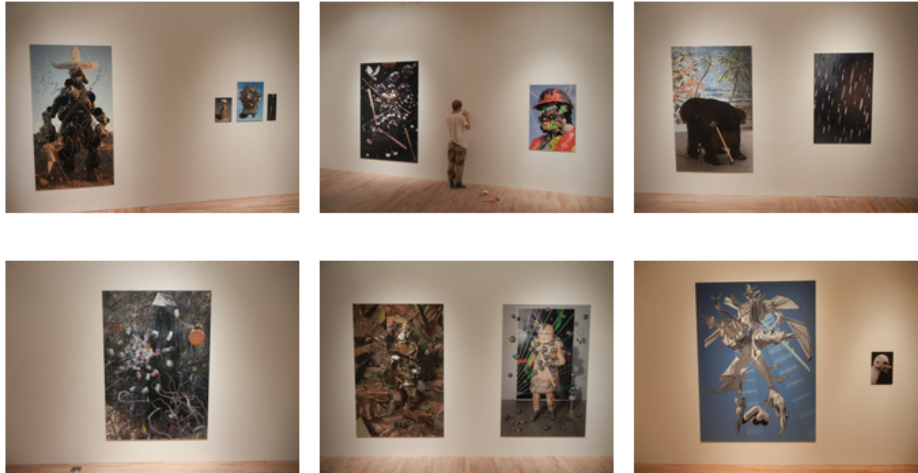## Shamus Clisset, Space God/Magic Guy @Postmasters

By Loring Knoblauch   In Galleries   September 22, 2014

JTF (just the facts): A total of 13 color photographs, unframed and hung against white walls in the single room gallery space. All of the works are digital c-prints, made between 2012 and 2014. Physical sizes range from 16×6 to 90×66, and the prints are available in editions of 5+1AP or 3+1AP.

Comments/Context: Making pictures of gods has always been a tricky business for artists. While capturing them in human or animal form makes the job infinitely easier, much of their unknowable power gets lost in such a translation; we can more readily identify with them in that guise, but their frightening awesomeness is undeniably diminished in the process.

Given its typical predilection for documenting "reality", photography has generally been a terrible medium for god depiction; even when used in montage, collage, or other overtly manipulated processes, it hasn't been all that effective or convincing in showing us the mystical. But with the advent of new software tools being employed by digital artists, it is now more possible to generate imagery that steps beyond the everyday and crosses into the realm of the fantastic (following the lead of Clarke's Third Law that any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.)

Shamus Clisset's ray-traced, 3D modeled gods aren't your ordinary garden variety gods we all can recognize; they're a quirkier, more ephemeral bunch, more like spirits with particular powers. A shaggy grassy figure attracts beer cars with a strong magnetic force, another disappears into shifting planes of deep camouflage, and a third stands in wooden armor surrounded by floating mirrored orbs with impossible reflections. Crisply rendered faceted surfaces seem to self assemble nanotechnology-style into loose approximations of human forms – the black tar man (with a sombrero of floating feathers and a bandolier of unconnected bullets), the creepy bulbous face of the builder god (with mirrored sunglasses and a flame decorated hardhat), and the more abstract space god floating in the sky, seemingly constantly evolving and reforming into inexplicable arms, planes, and wings. Each one mixes portions of plausibly realistic/photographic imagery with obviously software-driven concoctions, adding a dose of subtle comedy and absurdity to the recipe.

Clisset's still lifes use the same techniques to create a world of puzzling impossibility. A dove wears a football helmet (as a member of the olive branch-logoed peace team), a headless grizzly bear has been fashioned into a club chair (complete with a scotch resting on the arm), and a torrential rainstorm of knives slashes through an indeterminate space. It's clear that the software has opened up expansive rooms of imagination for Clisset, allowing him to expand far beyond the normal boundaries of photography.

For some, Clisset's magic will push too far from the comfort zone of cameras, light sensitive film/paper, and shutter clicks to be easily recognized as part of the photographic tradition. But this type of work is a natural progression and extension from straightforward Photoshop tweaking, so we had better get used to that fact that these kinds of contradictory flights of fancy are going to test our definitional limits. Artists like Clisset are dragging photography in new directions, dissolving the distinction between reality and fantasy, and building distinctive and original hybrids. His gods are like the proverbial ghosts in the machine, born of technology and struggling to manifest themselves in recognizably human form, assembled for just fleeting moment, only to vanish into anonymous bits in an instant.

Collector's POV: The prints in this show range in price from $1750 for the smallest images to $10000 for the largest, with multiple intermediate prices based on size variations. Clisset's work has little secondary market history at this point, so gallery retail remains the best option for those collectors interested in following up.