

New Talent

20 Artists to Watch

Our
Tragicomic
Times

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Art Heists
Everywhere

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Reading

COVER ARTIST: MALO CHAPUY

Art in America





Mitchell Charbonneau: *Senseless*, 2023.



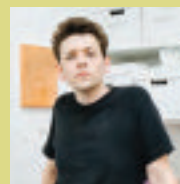
Foundation, 2025.



Table with Monsters (detail), 2023.

Mitchell Charbonneau

Hyperrealist sculptures hide in plain sight.



Mitchell Charbonneau's studio is one of many among a warren of fabrication shops and ateliers at Permanent Maintenance, an artist-run space in the New York neighborhood of Ridgewood, Queens. Upon entering, I moved to place my coat on a worn, half-open folding chair. Looking more closely, I reconsidered, recognizing it as a work of art.

Charbonneau's exhibitions cohere in spare arrangements of banal detritus, with a tight visual vocabulary of things like Little Trees air fresheners, buckling cans of Monster Energy drinks, dinged-up furniture, and burnt-out fluorescent lights. The works seem like laconic readymade tableaux – until you discover that none of them are real.

Charbonneau recreates damaged goods in materials including polyurethane, fiberglass, bronze, copper, aluminum, and lead, painting and treating the surfaces of his sculptures to

near-verisimilitude with exacting care. He roots his hyperrealist method in a childhood love of photography. "I've always thought of the way I work now as still capturing things from the world," he said. "The world has to pass through my whole body, my hands, and these different materials to reproduce those things."

The intimacy and intensity of focus that characterize Charbonneau's process are echoed in the minute inspection that his sculptures invite. He subtly cues his viewers to discern the uncanny from the real. The fragrance-free quality of the air freshener pieces and unusual elongation of the fluorescent light sculptures (from the standard four feet to six) reveal his works as foils to their functional counterparts.

Imbued with pathos by their defects, Charbonneau's everyday objects stand in for bodies that might interact with them. In his 2021 solo exhibition at the New York gallery Off

Paradise, polyurethane replicas of warped and bent folding chairs suggested acts of violence as well as sensuality. Clusters of beverage cans in his 2023 exhibition at the same space simulated the aftermath of an adrenaline-added get-together.

Charbonneau's choice of objects sharpens his work's psychological tenor. The Monster Energy drink brand's audacious slogan – "Unleash the Beast!" – hints at raw energies to be tapped by high doses of glucose and caffeine. In parallel to hints of repressed bestial selves, his series of metal reliefs of concrete cellar walls, titled *Foundations* (2023–ongoing), consider the basement as a sort of crepuscular subconscious, a site of covert activities from poker games to underage inebriation.

In his current exhibition at Off Paradise, on view into July, hand-painted glass and bronze approximate fluorescent tube lights propped and leaning against one another, as if seeking solace. Implying a pun on enlightenment and being kept in the dark, the lightless sculptures prompt considerations of endings, obsolescence, and the outmoded (as fluorescents have been eclipsed by energy-efficient LEDs). Formally and conceptually, Charbonneau stages a dialectic between what is visible and concealed, challenging us to reassess what is hidden in plain sight. His works remind us: Not everything is as it seems.

– Nicole Kaack