

Nick Cave, Until, MassMoCA, North Adams, U.S.A.

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Number 90, Spring–Summer 2017

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/85613ac>

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Publisher(s)

Les éditions esse

ISSN

0831-859X (print)

1929-3577 (digital)

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Cite this review

Bock, A. (2017). Review of [Nick Cave, Until, MassMoCA, North Adams, U.S.A.] *esse arts + opinions*, (90), 96–97.



Nick Cave

← *Until*, installation view at opening, MassMoCA, North Adams, 2016.

Photo : Douglas Mason

↑ *Until*, installation detail, 2016.

Photo : James Prinz

→ *Until*, installation detail, 2016.

Photo : Grace Clark

Nick Cave

Until

Nick Cave's expansive installation at MassMoCA, *Until*, transmits the same energetic charge as the performances that he is known for. Every cubic metre of the cavernous hall is filled with colour and movement: thousands of shiny metallic lawn ornaments hang from the ceiling like strings of beads. They capture the light and send it every which way through the space, the structure of which is further dematerialized by a reflective floor at the entrance. After weaving through this odd forest of sorts, we come to a clearing; overhead are two gigantic crystal clouds. The effect is enchanting, and curiosity compels us to climb up the long ladders: what could possibly be on that shimmering cloud? Abundance! Hundreds upon hundreds of ornamental birds, butterflies, and other animals are gathered as if in a lush heavenly nest. After we descend again to the terrestrial horizon, the exhibition leads us through a colourful beaded topography of mountainous proportions.

Although the sensorial impact of *Until* is strong, overall the exhibition is more semiotic than haptic. Prior knowledge of the cultural legacies of Cave's materials fills them with resonance and allows the installation to surpass its "wow" effect. Of the twenty thousand wind-spinners, for example, a good proportion depict handguns, bullets, and targets, which speaks to a troubling collision between childhood imaginative play and real-life street violence. Rainbows and peace symbols are beaded right into the net-like cliff, lending the army-like enclosure connotations of warmth and shelter. They also make a graphic connection among the vastly different worlds of prehistoric cave painting, urban graffiti, and digital emoticons. The mass-produced ornamental sculptures inhabiting the cloud are perhaps the most semiotically laden: ceramic animals speak of the advent of kitsch in the history of the bourgeois; black-faced garden jockeys are stark reminders of objectification and oppression; gilded golden

pigs conjure up images of hedonistic pleasure and ostentatious religious rituals; and the millions of crystals connote both cheap costume jewellery and royal luxury.

Collected and compiled by Cave, these already legible units of meaning are composed into a complex syntax of cultural tension, resistance, and change. Take, for example, the small deer and its racoon companion that inhabit the shimmering forest. The animal of prey is shielded by a lace-like armour of beads, and what at first look like multiple deep bullet wounds are in fact an outcrop of colourful little lampshade-like protrusions. This small still life, like the exhibition as a whole, demonstrates Cave's optimism that a lasting cultural transformation can be mobilized through the power of the imagination.

Overall, *Until* offers viewers an inside view of how historically loaded materials can be reappropriated and reinscribed in an effort to envision a brighter future, full of whimsy as well as justice. Up high on the sparkling clouds, the black-faced jockeys figure as dream catchers. It is as if they have captured in their elaborate butterfly nets the workings of the collective imagination that, however much racism it may still contain, is not fixed: it is within an individual's and a culture's capacity to change it.

Anja Bock

MassMoCA, North Adams, U.S.A.,
October 16, 2016—August 31, 2017

