

ART

AGATHE SNOW'S EVOLUTION

By RACHEL SMALL

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It's felt like a while since [Agathe Snow](#) has been a regular presence in New York City's art world, having retreated from a whirlwind downtown scene to Long Island in 2008. But Snow, who is best known for socially oriented performances, was always planning to return. And, since her 5-year old son has started school, she is back in action. In August, she commemorated the 10th anniversary of a 24-hour party-as-performance piece with a [restaging](#) at the Guggenheim alongside a documentary of the first one. In September, she had a show at Albertz Benda that explored individual identities behind immigration (Snow herself immigrated from Corsica) and she invited immigrants to tell their stories in a series of live performances.

Now, a solo show at The Journal Gallery titled "Continuum" presents a new series of sculptures, another part of her practice. Past works relayed a touch of chaos, comprising a miscellany of objects from disco balls to coffee grounds. While her latest works are also partially assemblages, she conceived these with a specific concept in mind: They are totems, she explains, that represent facets of the "human clan." The idea emerged as she thought about the future for immigrants and their descendants, including her own son. The forms, fascinating as they are inscrutable, were inspired by her son's interest in Pokémon and dinosaurs, as well as Fernand Léger's 1954 painting *The Big Parade*, a whimsical depiction of a circus, from which she borrowed the color scheme, shapes, details like triangular hats, and the totem as the show-wide motif. Symbolically, the totems are also meant to evoke imagined, perhaps utopian, possibilities for human evolution.

The series represents a personal evolution for Snow as well. As she never attended art school, previous experiments with sculptures were just that—trial and error with whatever materials she had on hand, frequently scavenging the sidewalk. With the change of pace in Long Island, she has had time to learn about art history and the basics of heavy-duty tools, while learning to



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work comfortably with mediums like resin, wood, and paper-mâché. For "Continuum," she was able to assemble components like windsurfing equipment, hula-hoops, and an array of other toys and knickknacks so "nothing falls off, everything holds on," she says.

The night of the opening, Snow was joined by longtime friends like [Nate Lowman](#), [Dan Colen](#), and [Hanna Liden](#), all core members of her old circle with her late husband, Dash Snow. The trio has also recently organized a [show](#) of Dash's work at The Brant Foundation Art Study Center.

We spoke with Snow the next morning.

RACHEL SMALL: How did you develop these sculptures?

AGATHE SNOW: I only started working on it a month ago. In terms of the works, I actually used the same elements as in a lot of previous shows. So, for me, it's a continuation. I did a project recently on immigration, which is something that has always been close to my heart. For me, immigration was the way to evolve, to make people better. But, the whole assembling of it has to do with my kid, because of his obsession with the dinosaurs and Pokémon. *[laughs]* And so I mixed the two together, and for me, the mixing was the evolution. That was the initial conversation.

So, I started with the creation of life, with sea creatures and dinosaurs. The idea evolved to, "What's next?" You have the little mermaid, dropping her tail for legs...and, what kind of legs will it be? What comes next, in terms of physical prowess? And then, the whole idea that culture prompts evolution at this point...and that human beings are more moved by culture, by their own creations, than they are by the environment. The environment is reacting to them, instead of them reacting to the environment. That's the basis for the show. It's a dream about the forms that things can take.

The painting bits of it, the way that looks is from a painting by Fernand Léger called *The Big Parade*. It's got a bunch of crown-ish things, and horses, and pointy hats, and it's got a factory on one side, like a cityscape, and a totem pole on the other side with flags. If you look at it, all the elements in there are in the show.

And then, I thought about: How do you make a portrait of the human clan, as a whole? People have used totems in the past for that. So, there are all kinds of totems, that's the whole show. And from there—it's always the same for me—there's this trust in human nature, and that humans will figure it out no matter what. They make mistakes, they come back. Always, this life after death, this constant revolution that just adds on and creates more, and sometimes we back away, and then we start again. It's a very simple show; it's the human clan.

SMALL: Can you talk a little bit more about how it relates to immigration?

SNOW: I looked at it, for this show, as human evolution based on immigration. At Albertz Benda in Chelsea in September, I invited people to come over and tell their stories along different themes. And it was through poetry, through writing, through dancing—you could express

yourself in different ways. I had people from everywhere, at every age. There were amazing stories; every single one of them is individual. Everyone is put in this big mass of "immigrant" and it's a nightmare, but they all have such compelling stories and such beautiful hearts.

SMALL: What did you take away from it?

SNOW: Be resourceful, have heart, and curiosity. We always move forward, no matter what. Everyone moves here for reason. You need a reason to leave everything behind. What is in human nature that makes you able to drop it all and start again? And, it continues so your next of kin will have a better life than you. We're not just here for ourselves. To the broader scheme of things, we are all connected. I think that realization was why I wanted to do the show at Journal with the totems. It's not just you; it's also the 12 people that came before you, and the 12 people that come after you. And you go back 1,000 and you go back 2,000...you know, we're all connected. I think that's what I wanted to say in the show, and that's what the immigration show also came to make clear.

SMALL: Now that you're seeing them all together in the gallery, how do you feel?

SNOW: Honestly, for the first time, I could say, "I know how to make my work." It was exactly me and I knew how to make it. It took me a long time. For five years I didn't really work because I was taking care of my kid. I just decided I had to learn. I went into this art thing, like I can't believe that's what I was doing for a living. I didn't go to art school. So, I never had this moment of taking time to actually learn how to make things and learn about art history and learn about people that came before me. So I did. For three years, that's all I did. To see it all in a room for the first time was an affirmation that I know how to make my things. I can trust that they can live on their own.

SMALL: That's your evolution too...So, you had an idea beforehand about what you wanted them to look like?

SNOW: Yeah, I knew exactly what I wanted it to look like. I just made it happen. It was amazing. From start to finish I knew exactly what I wanted. I have a friend, Patrick—who is now a set designer for TV shows in New Mexico so I don't get him as much as I would like—but he always come for the first few days to install, because I always feel like I don't know how to express myself. I need to be with people that understand my language. But it was also nice also to realize that it was just so clear, it was a plan that anybody can understand.

SMALL: And that's different from your previous sculptures...

SNOW: Yeah, I'm the only one that understands what's going on, exactly. *[laughs]*

SMALL: Have you seen Dash Snow at The Brant Foundation?

SNOW: I haven't gone yet at all. It feels so weird. And, there's a momentum—no matter what you do, people are always going to be interested in Dash. He did five shows in his life. There are

still a few pieces and people still want to see them and so I think it's wonderful. It's good that Hanna [Liden], Nate [Lowman], and Dan [Colen] care enough that they would spend a month and a half there trying to make sense of a nightmare. Like me, he's not an easy person to catalog into folders.

SMALL: Yeah. I feel in the last few months, after what has seemed like a long break, you've had several projects in New York in rapid succession. Do you feel like you're re-entering the art scene in the city?

SNOW: Definitely, yeah. My kid has his life now. It's so much fun, are you kidding me? It's not like I didn't want to do it. The end of [my time living in New York] was a tough whirlwind, when we moved out here. Everything crashed... it was time to regroup. I needed a moment. But no matter what, that's where I want to be, in New York City making art, obviously.

SMALL: What have you noticed, now that you've been back for a bit?

SNOW: When I get back into the city, it doesn't matter where you plop me down, I have my friends around me and I feel so blessed. You know? I think we all just love to be together and there are just not enough reasons to be together. I have a really privileged New York, and that's my friends. The city...everyone gets to have it for a little bit, the energy. On the other hand, I do go back and I am *totally* lost. The amount of money that you have to have to be in the city now is insane.

SMALL: It's so crazy.

SNOW: How can you get rid of all youth and all creative power in the city? It doesn't make any sense. It's very bad. I go back and see my friends and they did great, they have money to rent an apartment. But when you see [younger artists], that's the energy, you know? The ones after us. They're supposed to move things, but there's no way to move things when you can't live there, you know? It's a big problem for the city. They are losing their youth and their creative energy.

SMALL: It's so sad...

SNOW: I don't understand it. In the '80s and '90s they would put aside whole neighborhoods for artists, because it is so important to have a creative cell in the city. Or the city dies...it's just dirt and walls, you know? And somehow they forgot about that. I couldn't afford to live there anymore, and I don't want to. The worst thing about it is that after a while you just don't want to be there. I love lawyers and bankers, they are my family, but I don't want to live with them. I don't know how to say it, it's an awful thing to say, but it doesn't make a city. You need people with brain and heart and soul that give it all, you know? You need young people on skateboards and you need people running around making noise, and there's none of that.

SMALL: Totally. Those are the young people who are risking more, bringing that sense of that unpredictability and spontaneity.

SNOW: I mean, there's no place to meet. You can't get together on a street corner, you can't get together at a park. When we could afford to drink, we would go into a park or something. Now, it's so policed, you can't do that. The last places that you could possibly [afford] as a young person, now it's lawyers coming to buy the apartments to raise their family. It does not work. There is a big problem. There's something terribly wrong and I don't know if people will ever listen to it. You go to midtown, you still have the buzzing. You still have the New York energy and the movement. But the real heart, soul, is gone, it's moving out so fast.

SMALL: I feel like there are still pockets, they're just tinier pockets and you have to look harder.

SNOW: That's the thing, there's a place for it to happen again, you know? Like, Occupy happened, there is a place for the voice of the youth. Let's get together and say we need a spot for young people. Like, we need it, and it's possible. I think if people put their heads together...it's just very scary and it doesn't pay back right away and people have jobs and don't have time, but...I think that's what it's about at this point, there is a need for people to get together and say, "Stop this," you know? It's enough. Maybe when I'm in the city next I'll start doing something.

"AGATHE SNOW: CONTINUUM" WILL BE ON VIEW AT [THE JOURNAL GALLERY](#) THROUGH DECEMBER 20, 2015.