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## Star-Telegram

### Nathan Mabry puts new face on staid sculpture

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When Nathan Mabry made his first guerilla forays into sculpture parks with the intent to dress bronze works of art with garishly lurid masks and photograph them, it all seemed a bit of a lark.

He'd take photos of his temporary defacements, then bolt. The mash-up of iconic sculptures with creepy or silly masks had an undeniable appeal. The bronze forms gave the pliable masks a solidity and nobility, and the masks animated the frozen bodies. The two seemed to enhance each other.

"This simple gesture created a whole new narrative, recontextualizing that particular sculpture, while questioning the function of public statues and monuments in general," Mabry says in a printed interview with Nasher Sculpture Center curator Jed Morse. The Nasher hosts "Sightings: Nathan Mabry" until July 7.

The Los Angeles-based artist was further encouraged down this path when he found a full-size replica of Auguste Rodin's *Thinker* for sale online. He had to have it. He had to dress it up. He used a rubber cartoon face mask in extreme surprise, tongue hanging out, eyeballs extended 6 inches from the sockets.



STAR-TELEGRAM/JOYCE MARSHALL

JOYCE MARSHALL  
Auguste Rodin's *The Burghers of Calais* are split up and topped with mascot heads in Nathan Mabry's *Process Art* (B-E-A-G-G-R-E-S-S-I-V-E).

You can almost hear the Hanna-Barbera sound effect: "A-oooo-gah!" The mask is like a visualized thought bubble. Can the pensive *Thinker* possibly be imagining something that would induce such a reaction? As Mabry has cast the mask to match the burnished patina of the sculpture, the discordant body language and obscene mask suggest the answer is yes.

For the Nasher exhibition, he used another of Rodin's famous sculptures, *The Burghers of Calais*, and topped them with the heads of sports teams' mascots. In the 14th century when Calais was under siege, the burghers offered themselves in chains as well as the key to the city to the king of England so their town would not be destroyed. Rodin captured this monument of self-sacrifice in one of his most moving works.



JOYCE MARSHALL

Mabry enlarged and altered a Jalisco figure for this work.

STAR-TELEGRAM/JOYCE MARSHALL

Mabry separates the burghers so that their emphatic stances are more evident, places them on a wide staircase in the Nasher's garden as individual works of art, then covers the heads with those of the team mascots -- a bear, pirate, bull, cat and the like. He titles the work *Process Art (B-E-A-G-G-R-E-S-S-I-V-E)*, a popular stadium cheer. Without the body covering of faux-fur costumes, three-fingered gloves and ungainly floppy foot covers, the mascots take on entirely new personas when their heads are paired with the expressive Rodin bodies. Mabry says they are "recontextualized metaphors. Rodin's piece had a very specific narrative. I'm trying to point out the moral ambiguity of monumentizing their sacrifice. Confounding and re-examining that history, resulting in a transformative experience."

More often, Mabry combines antique ethnographic and contemporary minimalist sculptures for a bit of historical subversion. For this exhibit, he took a piece from the Nasher's permanent collection, a 4,000-year-old Jalisco figure, and enlarged it more than 400 percent. He made changes to the face, modestly covered the lap with a blanket (a reference to historical draperies), then cast the figure and seated

it on a cast box that looks like one of Donald Judd's pierced and machine-milled aluminum boxes.

Mabry's box is not slick like Judd's; his does not hide the original materials of corrugated cardboard and plywood. He pairs the Judd-like and Jalisco because, he says, "The way the pre-Columbian or the ethnographic object operated in a ritualistic sense is similar to the way a Donald Judd or a Tony Smith works in society now."

Combining the contemporary, whether it is mass-produced Halloween masks or Judd's rigorously made boxes, with historical artifacts makes something new, familiar yet exotic, and offers a variety of entry points for the viewer. These are interesting works, and they subtly reference the sculptures around them, hopscotching the timeline from then to now and presaging the future.

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