

The New York Times

Michael Jones McKean

The Discipline of Astronomy
and Wind

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Side

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If the New Museum's coming inaugural show, "Unmonumental," is any indication, young artists are turning to assemblage to express fragility and fragmentation. Michael Jones McKean is not one of them. The amalgamations of found and handmade objects on shelves in his New York debut have a robust, formal poetry, although their associations can sometimes feel forced.

Mr. McKean's precedents include the sculptor Jessica Stockholder's harmonious marriages of mass-produced items, as well as the younger artist Dario Robleto's archaeological use of materials. "The Freeing of Cosmonaut Volynov and Pitcher Gooden's Song" displays a papier-mâché replica of a helmet worn by the space-disaster survivor Boris Volynov and a neatly folded, white-on-white copy of a 1986 Dwight Gooden jersey. Spectacular flameout is the presumed theme.

Buried in a few of the works here are allusions to Mr. McKean's earlier, conceptual projects, inspired by failed expeditions. "The Ancients" contains a wood fragment from the Teignmouth Electron, a trimaran helmed by Donald Crowhurst in his unsuccessful 1969 attempt to sail around the world without stopping. Last year Mr. McKean purchased the remains of the vessel; his gesture would be more interesting if the film artist

Tacita Dean had not already obsessed over the same subject.

Still, this is a promising start for Mr. McKean. He is drawn to epic narratives and to the rich vernacular of postminimal sculpture, but is still searching for the right syntax.

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