

NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chris Wiley

Dingbats

May 23 – June 22, 2014

Opening reception: Friday, May 23, 6-8pm

The time has come for me to really get my shit together. Too many loose ends, too many kinks in the carpet, too many cracks in the credenza, and cobwebs in the corners. So to speak. It's all I can think about, laid up in bed at ungodly hours, night after night, eyes riveted on the darkened ceiling of our bedroom.

No. That's not precise. We'll have to be precise if we're going to get anything accomplished here.

The ceiling of our bedroom is not exactly darkened, which is just one of the goddamn problems. Rather, come sun down it is bathed in the sickly orange light of the street lamp that was recently erected on our tidy cul-du-sac, just outside our window. This so as to better protect us from the burglars and the coyotes and the rampaging hordes of the wronged and beaten down, with their pitchforks and their blazing torches, who hoist high their revolutionary banners, and the other sundry threats that besiege suburban enclaves the nation over. Or so I'm told.

So, I lay awake night after night, with my beloved wife beside me, sleeping sweetly. Let's call her "Mindy". So, I lay awake night after night, with my beloved wife Mindy by my side, sleeping sweetly, and I look up at the never-darkened ceiling, and I listen to the ticking and whirring of the impossibly small gears winding down the time inside my unnecessary analog watch, and I think of all the things in my life that are wrong. Some of them are easily fixed (dog needs more flea shampoo; toenails have grown to unruly lengths), and others less so (haunting sense that life lacks purpose and/or meaning; dog gravely ill, on top of fleas, possibly dying?). I've got to get my shit together.

Starting now.

I throw back the sheets, rousing Mindy and startling the sick dog. "Wake the kids. I'm getting my shit together!" I exclaim with an enthusiasm that, I realize too late, has an edge of menace. But my resolve remains unswayed: I'm going to get this good and done, no matter how it looks. "First thing is, I deal with this light. Who can sleep under the harsh unyielding eye of this artificial sun?" I point out the window at the offending lantern, which blazes smugly. Mindy seems confused. True genius is rarely understood.

Next thing I know I'm tearing down the highway in my nightgown at top speed, headed for the nearest Super WalMart. My palms sweat. I appear to have forgotten a slipper.

Once through the doors of the cavernous big box bunker, which stands as a testament to all that is good and right and free, I am given a sideways glance from the somnolent greeter

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manning the front, likely elicited by my admittedly unhinged appearance. I meet his gaze and stare him down. We both know he has seen much worse.

In the aisles I am alone, or nearly so. Always, I am under the paternal gaze of the security cameras, working obscurely underneath their black plastic domes. This gives me comfort. Like the well-ordered shelves that present the dizzying cornucopia of goods in a way that is eminently easy for you and me to understand, the all-seeing domes give me a sense that nothing here has been left to chance. I feel that as I wander in the light of the shadowless fluorescents I am wandering in the cold, clean light of the Truth.

Unfailingly, I find that Super WalMart meets my needs. This evening they are: tripod, laser pointer, duct tape. Easy. At the checkout, I fear recrimination over the ambiguously terroristic nature of my purchases, but I find that either my intent to spend has handily nudged me beyond reproach, or the cashier is zonked out of his mind on some baroque cocktail of unpronounceable designer drugs, ingested in the valiant attempt to smooth the jagged corners of his life's monotony. Perhaps both? I will not tarry over such questions, as they are beneath me.

Tearing down the highway again, like a man possessed. The brilliance of my solution crackles through my nerve endings like galvanic fire. If they gave a prize for these sorts of things, I'd get that prize. The lines on the road click by like a stuttering ribbon.

At home, Mindy meets me on the lawn. It is plush and well manicured, a pleasure to stand on, slippered or no, as I can confirm now through side-by-side comparison. No problems here. "You scared the kids," she accuses. "You just wait," I respond with pride, on my way through the door and up the stairs.

Mindy doesn't say much when I get done rigging my contraption, but I can tell she is impressed. A thin laser beam now passes out our bedroom window and connects with the offending street lamp's sensor, fooling the dumb thing into thinking daylight has come. It is dark in the room now. I bring the kids in. They say: "Wow."

But I am just getting started. I am unstoppable. I trim my toenails. I alphabetize our spice rack. The clothes in our closets must be organized by color in a manner that corresponds to the order of the visible spectrum: red, orange, yellow, blue, indigo, violet. Naturalized, neat. I attack every errant smudge and scuff with a battalion of Mr. Clean ® Magic Erasers ® and good, old-fashioned elbow grease. I prune back the unruly azalea bushes. I purge unwanted scraps of the past: embarrassing photos, unsent love letters, clothes that were better left unworn. In my wake I leave a trail of perfection.

Days pass. Weeks. I liquidate the family assets and buy gold. "Better to have something one can hold in the hand," I counsel. I quit my job spectacularly, with a real "fuck you" flourish. I pull the kids out of school, over Mindy's protestations, because I'll be damned if I'm going to have some tricky ideas leaking into this house without my knowledge. We go out less and less, and I begin the tedious process of thoroughly vetting the children's grubby friends and their shiftless parents before any further play dates are scheduled. This is not a popular position, but I knew when I started this that idealism breeds contempt. I install dispensers of

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Purell ® Hand Sanitizer in every room of the house. You can't be too careful. I take the dog out behind the shed and shoot it.

"I'm leaving you and taking the kids," says Mindy when she finds out about the dog. "It was sick," I say. "It got better," she opines. Perhaps I overlooked this? I deem that unlikely. "You're insane," she states flatly. I remind her again, as she bundles the mewling children into the car, that true genius is rarely understood. By way of a counter argument, she throws a shoe, which narrowly misses my head. This seems out of character. I am perplexed. She of all people must know how important this all is. Why, then, should she leave? The small bumps in the road always find a way of smoothing themselves out. But as she drives off, tires screeching, I come to a sudden understanding. What a tremendous burden Mindy has lifted off my shoulders! What hosts of unruly contingences have now been cleared off of my already crowded plate! What is the root of love, if not mutual sacrifice? Mindy understands my project, and the sacrifices I must make. Mindy too sacrifices. Mindy and I are in love. It is for her that I continue onwards.

Back in the house, I feel a familiar sense of creeping dissatisfaction, the reopening of a little well of need that seems never to be filled. Everything is in its place. Everything is immaculate. Yet it all suddenly appears so maddeningly arbitrary. This rather ordinary yellow chair, for instance. Why, when considering the inexhaustible panoply of the world's chairs, should this chair be here and not some other? Why this rug? Why this blender? Each object has begun to appear not as itself, but rather as the empty center of an infinite matrix of exclusions, a black hole. There's nothing else to be done: I have to get rid of all of it.

The bonfire doesn't disturb the neighbors nearly as much as I expected. Some even take it as an opportunity to brighten their evening with some uncharacteristic conviviality. Marshmallows are toasted, beers are cracked, fellow feeling is cultivated. At no point does anyone question my endeavor.

In the morning I am left with a pile of smoldering embers and an open question as to my next move. The lawn, of course, must be redone. This much is clear. But the interior of the house still gnaws at me. Cleared out, it feels like an exposed nerve. Raw. It bids me to contemplate questions best left un contemplated. Questions like: "Why is there something, rather than nothing?"; "Might Mindy's shoe have not been thrown out of love?"; "Is it true what they say about every man dying alone?"; and "Objectively speaking, exactly how do these ragged shambles of your former life constitute an even marginally successful attempt to get your shit together?" Well, objectivity can be damned straight to hell. Objectivity is for the birds.

The idea finally comes to me a few days later, as the men I have hired putter about laying fresh sod over the scorched earth, erasing the traces of my fiery purge with a manufactured quilt of verdant lawn. I make a few phone calls. The linoleum begins to arrive the next day.

At first, the workers besiege me with questions, many pertaining to the perceived shakiness of my grounding in reality. "True genius," I invariably reply, "is rarely understood." I get the sense that they think they understand all too well. Time will tell on this matter, but I am guessing I will come out on top. The workers get to work.

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There were a baffling number of possible patterns to choose from, but my decision was never in question. The white marble linoleum resembling stone quarried out of the hillsides of Carrera exuded just the right amount of otherworldly gravitas, while remaining easily cleanable and comparatively cost effective. Power. Purity. Practicality. Now that the house is fully covered in the material, floor to ceiling, inside and out, it lends my once humble home an air of virginity and historical inevitability, like a modern art gallery or an ancient king's tomb. It is everything that I could have wanted. And more.

Once the last worker packs up his things and bids me a not quite sympathetic goodbye, I strip my clothes off and lie in down in the entryway, delighting in the smooth surface that meets my skin, and filling my nostrils with the sharp scent of glue and burlap. I feel as if I am newly born, spit out into this vestibule unencumbered by a past and unrestrained by a blinkering sense of a seemingly preordained future. I am the infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. This floor is the very ground of being.

Some time later—it's hard to say how long— my reverie begins to fade and I find myself gently washed up on the shores of oceanic consciousness, transformed. I am the love that is beyond love. I am everything and nothing. I think of Mindy, and reach for my smart phone. "I've done it," I say when she answers, "I think I might have finally done it." I wait for her reply, but am met with silence. I must have dropped the call. I've always gotten terrible service in this house.

Chris Wiley is an artist and writer. He has written essays for numerous exhibition catalogs, and is a regular contributor to Frieze, ArtForum.com, and Kaleidoscope, where he is also an editor-at-large. He has worked on numerous exhibitions at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, was an assistant curator on the 8th Gwangju Biennial, and served as a curatorial advisor and head catalog writer for "The Encyclopedic Palace" at the 55th Venice Biennale. His work has been presented in recent exhibitions at Marian Goodman Gallery in Paris and MoMA PS1, New York.