

# ARTnews

## Francis Upritchard

**Anton Kern**

This arresting show of ambiguously posed manikins and faux pottery was best seen back to front. It was in the smaller, rear space of the gallery where Francis Upritchard (who represented New Zealand at the 2009 Venice Biennale) showed the full power of her compressed artistic energy.

In *A Beat* (2013), a defiantly posed humanoid figure of no specific gender faced the viewer, its sullen face painted Native American-style with blue, green, pink, and orange triangles on its forehead, cheeks, and chin. A painted body (face and hands) whose marking might mean something in another culture, could only signify an esthetic intention in this context: the human body comes into nature unmarked, but culture defines itself against nature by transforming it into a civilized person. This idea was enhanced by the vases and tankards made of painted modeling material that were arrayed along the room's surrounding walls.

In the main gallery space, Upritchard assembled eight figures (all between 70 and 80 inches high, including the pedestals, which are themselves essential parts of the ensemble). Titles like *White Knight*, *Lunge*, *Sneaky*, or *Archer* (all 2012), merely rendered the manikins more uncertain: "archer" has no bow, "sneaky" is wearing a beautifully knit wool chain-mail vest, "white knight" bears no resemblance to the Lewis Carroll character, and "lunge" isn't lunging. The figures all, nevertheless, constitute attitudes—that is, poses—reminding us again of the artificiality of culture, the fact that art differentiates humans from the rest of creation.

So what might appear to be whimsy is nothing of the sort. Upritchard simultaneously pays homage to the origins of human artistic expression and captures that idea in figures not-quite human but human enough, to show that we dwell on a mysterious borderland. We live in nature, but we are not of nature. Our world, like that of Upritchard's figures, is what we create.

—Alfred Mac Adam



Francis Upritchard, *White Knight*, 2012, modeling material, wire, fabric, leather and shell buttons, 70 1/4" x 23 5/8" x 15". Anton Kern.