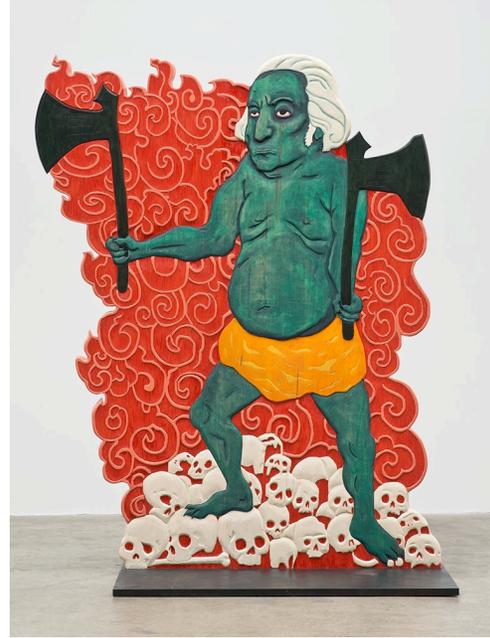


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Erin Cosgrove gives thoughtful
new form to legendary figures

By David Pagel, September 21, 2012



Erin Cosgrove's "Urfather Washington,"
2012, polychrome basswood, 73-1/2 x 55
inches.

Erin Cosgrove's wickedly original portraits of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, [John Adams](#) and [Abraham Lincoln](#) depict the Founding Fathers (plus one) as humble dudes who have come back from the dead to find themselves in a world weirder and wackier than anything they experienced the first time around.

At Angles Gallery, each of Cosgrove's bas-reliefs stands 6 feet tall and portrays its subject in a slew of styles. Ancient Assyrian carvings, Japanese woodblock prints, colonial crafts, medieval etchings, Tibetan totems and Chinese icons lie behind Cosgrove's sculptures. Each gives vivid form to the fact that when the Founding Fathers are evoked today, they are often called upon to support causes that would make their flesh crawl, their blood boil and their skeletons cartwheel.

"Urfather Jefferson" appears to be embarrassed by the role he is supposed to play as Tanuki, a Japanese trickster spirit whose super-sized testicles give him superhero powers. "Urfather Washington" looks like a politician who has grown weary of posing for pictures, particularly for people whose interests he doesn't share and whose misplaced enthusiasm has made his own curdle.

While Adams and Franklin play their parts with an ambiguous mix of glee and desperation, poor Lincoln is nothing but the head of a ventriloquist's puppet, stuck atop a pair of actors in a costume meant to resemble a horse or a dragon.

In the second gallery, two eccentric videos have the presence of TED Talks gone wrong. Like Cosgrove's suite of five drawings in the third gallery and her sculptures in the first, "The March of History" and "In Defense of Ghosts" pile half-truths upon each other so perversely and powerfully that you're left with no choice but to think for yourself.

That's a lesson the Founding Fathers would endorse.