



Mark Newport, *Ends-man*, hand-knit acrylic and buttons, 80" x 23" x 6", 2010

SUPERHEROES

516 ARTS

516 CENTRAL AVENUE SW, ALBUQUERQUE

BAM! HERE COMES 516 ARTS with another killer exhibition. *Superheroes* is an all-good, twenty-plus-artist showing of aesthetic defenders kicking you in the kisser. Like you're minding your own business when outta nowhere—POP, ZING, ZOWIE—you're attacked by a buncha evildoers, and at the end of some horrendously freaky ordeal you emerge with a bizarre set of powers that set you apart from the rest of the world forever... Okay, so maybe it didn't quite happen like that. But WHAMMO!—from your newfound vantage point upon the human race you see humanity in all its struggling frailness, vulnerabilities exposed, and you have to decide: Do I save the planet and all humanity with my amazing new superpowers, or SMASH!, flatten them all like I'm a hedgefunder and they're just little bugs.

Pondering this question, you are greeted at the door by *Mr. Bends*, a larger-than-life scuba-diving cyclops created by Esteban Bojorques of Santa Fe. Hard not to like and hard not to fear. His pose suggests, with perfectly balanced ambiguity, either an extreme of love and acceptance, or a zombielike desire to destroy everything in his path. Bojorques has created the sculptural embodiment of a character with no middle ground, the absolute absolutist, and the self-dueling dualist, opposing himself in both directions, immobilized in big monster-boots of indecision. It doesn't have to be one way or another. It's almost always both and neither. That's what you want to tell the big lug, but he's not asking you.

So, faster than a speeding bullet you make for the telephone booth in the center of the space. You'll duck in there, shed your street clothes, and emerge in the form of... but wait, someone has already been here. On the floor of the booth is a pile of clothes—men's slacks with the belt still in them, a white shirt, and a dollop of tie.

The brilliance of ABQ artist Benjamin Johnsen's installation is a focus on the obsolescence of Clark Kent's clothing to the narrative of the Superman storyline. Removing a layer to emerge in a new identity propels the rising action as our hero then immediately flies into the air to conquer some more eeevil. If the camera were to linger—like Goddard—scrap the old up, up, and away, and instead come close-in on the phone booth and pan down to the floor, they'd see you as a homeless guy going through the pockets of the clothes the last super-dude left behind, before ducking into the phone booth and changing into them yourself. You emerge in your newfound secret identity, with Clark Kent's wallet and watch to boot. DA DA! Ordinary Guy. You proceed unrecognized, yet ready for action. And boy do you get it. Mark Newport is in permanent motion, knitting non-stop. Knitting full-body superhero costumes is a commitment, and one that Newport takes seriously. In a video, we see the artist sitting in profile, in a head-to-toe knit suit of beige, creating all-yarn bodysuits for such tough guys as *Argyle Man*. The fact that he's got six or so of these life-size hand-knit suits on display seems like an almost superhuman feat itself. As Ordinary Guy you are stunned by his fortitude and the issues it raises for you and your super ordinary sexuality in relation to your inherited concept of the ultra sexuality of the hero crowd. Regardless, Newport is a force for good.

Yet, we suffer for our art as tireless crimefighters and lazy, crazy-headed supervillians. Witness the digital prints of Boneface from Liverpool, UK (though soon to conquer the world.) These are the heroes down on their luck, socked in the jaw, bloody-nosed and all portrayed in playful Pop colors like deflating balloons making the pain of the party more perfectly, poignantly dismal. Or what about the psychic break implied by the classic *Alone*, a brilliant short film realized by Gerard Freixes Ribera using old *Lone Ranger* footage with all the other characters digitally removed. So he talks to Tonto, but Tonto isn't there, and, hilariously, he fights a non-existent bad guy. The extreme of the individualist ethic of the hero extends clearly into the realm of madness. Think Joe Arpaio and just how *tonto* the all-alone Ranger looks in this 2008 Ribera masterpiece.

Of course, the real superheroes these days are those occupying Wall Street in their stand for peace and economic justice. Hats and everything else off to them for taking that super-brave step into the street, to employ that best and most mighty superpower humans have going—cooperation for our mutual betterment—in order to make economic justice real. *Superheroes* is up through the first week of January 2012. So don your cape and boots, jump out your window, and fly your super-ass down to Albuquerque to occupy 516 ARTS.

—JON CARVER