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Matt Bryans: Atlanta Contemporary Art Center

Philip Auslander

Robert Rauschenberg has said of his Erased de Kooning Drawing, 1953, that he initially erased his own drawings but "figured out that the erased drawing had to be from a real work of art" to have significance. Matt Bryans's drawings, produced by erasing images printed on pieces of newspaper recovered from the streets of London, suggest an opposing principle: that erasure can serve as a means of transfiguring humble found material into art.

The way Bryans erases is notably different from Rauschenberg's approach: Whereas the latter sought to eradicate de Kooning's marks, Bryans does not so much remove what is on the newspaper page as edit it. He retains some things from the original images, eliminates others altogether, and allows still others to remain as smeared, ghostly traces. *Untitled, 2005*, a large-scale, ziggurat-shaped wall assemblage of rectangular pieces of newspaper, consists of photographs of faces from which virtually all traces of individuality have been erased except the eyes. These peer out from eerie, masklike visages, occasionally accompanied by hints of a nose or mouth. The work's palette is a grayish brown reminiscent of Analytical Cubism, as is its space, which is broken up into facets by the clippings' edges.

Far from evoking the dispassionate gaze of Analytical Cubism, however, this collection of ashen faces has wide-ranging, disturbing connotations: It suggests the hoods of night-riding Klansmen as much as those of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, the obsessive-compulsive gathering and arranging of photographs undertaken by serial killers as much as mounds of Holocaust dead. (It is worth noting that while *Untitled, 2005*, is one of a series of works that Bryans has been making for several years, not all are as grim. For example, *Untitled, 2002*, [not included in this exhibition], in which the faces have both eyes and mouths and are laughing, is much lighter in tone.)

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Whereas Bryans works mostly with black-and-white images, *Untitled, 2006*, is a large-scale landscape derived from color newspaper photographs. In this case, the action of eraser on newsprint produces textural effects and washes of color that simulate the building-up of paint on a surface. Bryans again retains some elements of the original images: patches of sky and clouds, the moon. Dominated by a dramatic, cobalt blue sky, the work recalls El Greco's turbulent *View of Toledo, 1597-99*, and is similarly suffused with the sense that even an unpeopled landscape may be fraught and portentous. While the disturbing quality of *Untitled, 2005*, is enhanced by the knowledge that the images are documentary in origin, and therefore "real," *Untitled, 2006*, glories in the transformation of the mundane into the poetic.

The third work on view, *Untitled, 2006*, is a sculptural installation consisting of small vertical elements, made by compressing, burning, and stacking aluminum foil and arraying it in an irregular circle. Although the elements are abstract and each rewards individual examination, their impact derives from the collective presentation and their oddly humanoid presence, as if they were chess pieces, a battalion of tin soldiers, or the incomprehensible remnants of some forgotten prehistoric culture. At first, the tiny figures and the intimacy they invite seem to stand in contrast with the heroic scale of the two wall pieces. But in all cases, Bryans's art of waste management remakes aspects of the world from its own detritus.

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