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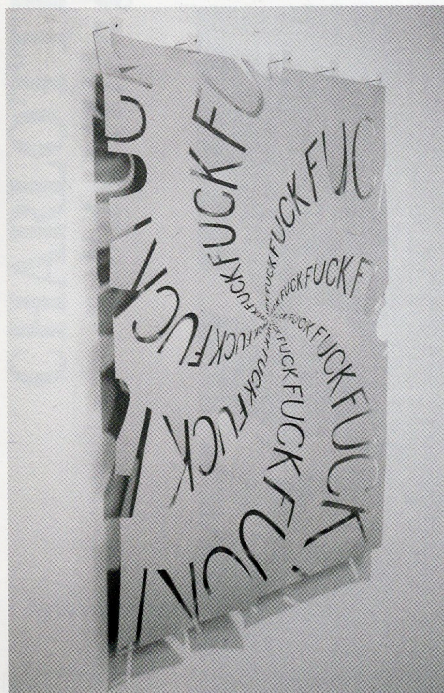
Flash Art



Matthias Weischer
"Untitled"
Oil on canvas



R E V I E W S



HILLARY BLEECKER, *Fuck Drawing*, 2004. Acrylic on cut paper, 48 x 61 cm. Courtesy of Kontainer Gallery, Los Angeles.

“Antiques Roadshow.” But closer inspection reveals that these are not simply your grandfather’s military boots. They are, in fact, recreations of historical objects using a bizarre juxtaposition of found and created substances. Robleto samples materials such as Civil War era dolls and World War I pulp, mixing them with a virtual witch doctor’s pharmacy of ingredients — “dust from every bone in the body,” root and flower oils, and various metals — the culmination of which is as indicative of the artist’s theme of regeneration and recovery as the completed works themselves.

This obsessive attention to detail infuses works such as a weathered snake-oil salesman’s suitcase (containing a Ouija board and various homeopathic remedies presumably employed by the unknown soldier himself on his healing odyssey) and an antique radio that emits a cacophony of sounds (including presidential war declarations, draft lottery recitations, church bells, and Marvin Gaye’s “Sexual Healing,” together sounding like interstellar transmissions from an American history time capsule). The most beguiling piece, *A Defeated Soldier Wishes to Walk His Daughter Down the Wedding Aisle* (2004) depicts a pair of World War I cavalry boots with legs made from the melted vinyl of The Shirelles’ “Soldier Boy” and Skeeter Davis’ “The End of the World,” along with brass, rust, and battlefield dirt, cast in a mold from the wooden and iron leg of a wounded Civil War soldier. The works are displayed in a non-linear, non-chronological fashion, and without the benefit of any guiding text they engage viewers to fill in the blanks and ultimately construct their own stories.

Alex Worman

HILLARY BLEECKER

KONTAINER GALLERY

Although drawing has received its fair share of attention recently, the question of working with paper, and not just on it, has been little investigated. Approaching the question with nods toward figureless abstraction is a frontier niche at best. Fortunately, Hillary Bleecker’s first solo show at Kontainer Gallery announces a unique contribution to these less-charted waters, meanwhile proving that it is wholly possible to cross Ed Ruscha-style Californian pop-noir with patterned, Bridget Riley-esque abstraction.

Knowing and practiced manipulability is at the core of the physical aspect of Bleecker’s project. Drawings such as the yellow, orange, evergreen, and crimson *If Only* take advantage not only of how words can be toggled to form an abstract, tornado-shaped design, but also of how, by hanging paper a few inches from the wall, the color of the reverse side of the paper can create a glow, thereby defining an ethereal space for the drawing. Even with this acute attention to what paper can do, Bleecker does not let herself stray from the conceptual. What makes these drawings less cold, less calculated, is the California native’s seemingly casual choice of words that are strung together and then put through the blender of abstraction. Phrases like “What’s the difference?” belie an apathetic ennui, while “You said ask me anything and I asked what is the meaning of life?”

or “Can’t you take a joke?/Can’t I take a joke?” reveal lingering, conversational vignettes sliced and diced — and made poetic — for and by the drawings. At times, Bleecker’s youthful sensibility falls flat and — in drawings like *Buy This*, in which bull’s-eye shaped rings have been grafted with the words “Buy this drawing” — one feels pangs of a Sam Durant knock-off. But such regret is rare, and though Bleecker’s show, taken as a whole, is less cohesive than one might like, it gives viewers a clear sense of her uncanny and delightful addition to the world of paper.

Melissa Lo

RIDGEFIELD

SHAHZIA SIKANDER

ALDRICH CONTEMPORARY

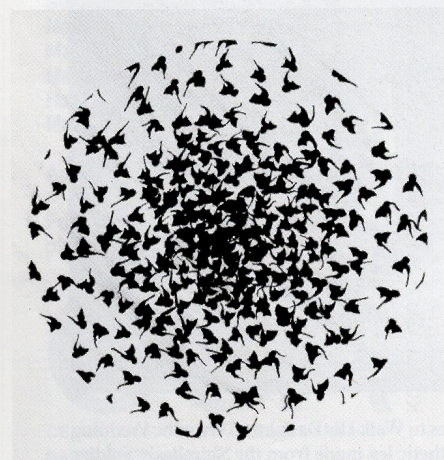
ART MUSEUM

Shahzia Sikander’s painted installation *Duality* (2004) is the first image to greet viewers as they enter the newly renovated Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut. In a circular pattern on the museum’s new 16-square-foot “art wall,” the painting depicts the heads of five men whose lengthy turbans wrap and twist into one another, entwining into new forms. Although the work is painted in variations of grays and whites, it retains a rich, jewel-like quality, and despite its flat surface, the image is dynamic and full of movement, rotating around itself like a whirling dervish. Sikander’s works are inspired by Indo-Persian miniature painting, and she is celebrated for transcending the style’s boundaries without sacrificing its preciousness, vigor, or grace.

In addition to *Duality*, Sikander’s exhibition, “Nemesis,” includes a series of drawings entitled “51 Ways of Looking” (2004), most of which are quite minimal compared to her previous works: a simple rectangle filled in with graphite and centered on the page, or a dotted circle crisscrossed with geometric lines. These works suggest a link to the under-drawings of Indo-Persian miniature paintings, making “51 Ways of Looking” an invitation to contemplate miniature painting as a science and exposing Sikander’s preoccupation with physics, be it of landscapes, human beings, or other subjects.

A highlight of the exhibition is an animated video, *Pursuit Curve* (2004), which the accompanying description explains is “a term in mathematics used to describe the path an object takes when chasing another object.” The seven-minute video, accompanied by the emotionally charged sounds of composer David Abir, is a delightful pursuit of experience, a spectacular but also serene metamorphosis of imagery where all is flux. A line transforms into a curve, then into a row of mountains, which become filled with turbaned men standing majestically in rows, which then transform into starburst shapes, exploding fireworks, and so on. “Nemesis,” in its entirety, is similarly uplifting and filled with revelations about Sikander’s creative trajectory.

Leeza Ahmady



SHAHZIA SIKANDER, *51 Ways of Looking*, 2004. Graphite on paper. Courtesy of Brent Sikkema Gallery, New York.