CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Matthew Brannon's Skirting the Issue
September 10 – October 24
Opening Thursday, September 10, 6 – 8PM

Casey Kaplan is pleased to present Matthew Brannon's Skirting the Issue, the artist's second solo exhibition at the gallery. Following a recent three-year "textploration," which included the composition of novels and text-based films and paintings, Brannon introduces an anomalous, primarily image-centered installation. Featuring twelve large-scale works on paper, this exhibition focuses on the pictorial and graphic systems that have been ever-present within the artist's practice. In pursuit of a visual language tendered in a similarly suggestive manner to that of the written word through themes informed by paradigms of 21st century cultural and social establishments, Brannon undertakes traditional methods of printmaking, including letterpress prints, silkscreens, and lush hand painting on paper.

The underlying story of the exhibition ventures into American history as Brannon explores emotional registers within the context of the Vietnam/American War, and that of America's suggested transition from anti-colonial to anti-communist. In an attempt to better understand the period's ambitions and anxieties, Brannon storyboards and stages, not as a historian, academic or politician, but obliquely (in the sense of Derrida) as an artist. Palpable references to universal yet explicit notions are made; a suspended moment in time holds subliminal connotations that provoke larger queries into social ideals and our personal crises within these constraints.

The imagery and objects rendered allude to the mass consumerism that rapidly developed during the lead-in to this moment (the '40s and '50s) in a resounding response to pop cultural idioms provided by television, film, advertisements, and literature. In much of the work there is a playful duality: a diploma rests opposite imagery of stereo equipment; perfume is paired with a Western Union telegram; and comfort food is viewed in tandem with the U.S. capitol, exposing a grand delusion. One of Brannon's desires is to destabilize perception and allow for multiple interpretations within non-linear compositions of diverging pictorial and temporal elements. Skirting the Issue carries this through, releasing the experience by creating a forum where nothing is more suspicious than innocence.

[ARTIST STATEMENT]

Not too long ago I stood in a gallery looking at the work of one of my peers and had the thought – this is contemporary art. By that I mean that both the subject and the form of their work was very contemporary and very much about art. As a response, I had the liberating recognition that my own art, long known to have the form of the last century, also took as its subject the last century. Limitations are often productive.

I've been quoted as having once said my art addresses how we are own worst enemies. I no longer ask that question. I know the answer.* I'd like now to concentrate on the broader, more complex question of how America is its own worst enemy.

I was born in 1971, 6 years into the Vietnam War, just after the '68 Tet Offensive and before '73 Paris Accords. Richard Nixon was President. I had entered a world battered from events that left the country's identity in jeopardy and Luce's concept of the "American Century" shattered. The context from which my generation was to respond was a response to those traumatic times. I didn't realize it at the time but the '80s seemed very much an act of forgetting. In psychoanalytic terms, a trauma not dealt with always finds a way to return.

I've long flirted with this Cold War context. But I'd like now to pursue a more concentrated research into the decision-making and events seen from the perspective of a new century. To be clear my research is a personal one. I do this not as a historian, or academic or politician but as an artist might begin to address a history.

When I was young, for a few years there was nothing more important than Star Wars. I saw it in the theatre with my family in 1977 in Alaska after multiple attempts standing in lines to see sold out shows. I can't explain the excitement that film had for everyone in my 6 year-old age group. Interesting that it comes out essentially a year after the Saigon airlift evacuation. A

traumatic, sad, complicated, messy, unsatisfactory end of a war that no one "won." But in Star Wars everything was reversed: we are the good guys. We fight the guerilla warfare, we are united with diverse nations. This isn't post-colonial fall out. The evil Empire has the nuclear bomb and they use it. We win in the end using ancient/spiritual tactics and then receive awards in a massive star-studded ceremony. Everyone I knew loved this film and we bought the toys spawned from it like crack. And now, again, with the U.S. deeply entangled in a highly debatable situation on foreign lands that can't be summed up or resolved simply - on the horizon the country braces for yet again, forty years later… Star Wars.

- Matthew Brannon

No, because what is commonly assumed to be past history is actually as much a part of the living present as William Faulkner insisted. Furtive, implacable and tricky, it inspirits both the observer and the scene observed, artifacts, manners and atmosphere and it speaks even when no one wills to listen. And so, as I listen, things once obscure began falling into place. Odd things, unexpected things… Perhaps it was also to remind me that war could, with art, be transformed into something deeper and more meaningful than its surface violence… Ralph Ellison, 1981

* Short term solutions are easier and provide immediate stress relief, unfortunately they have long-term consequences.

Matthew Brannon (b. 1971, St. Maries, ID) lives and works in New York, NY. In recent years, Brannon has presented solo exhibitions at the Marino Marini Museum, Florence, IT (2013); David Kordansky, Los Angeles (2013); Glen Horowitz, East Hampton, NY (2013) and Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, Germany (2011). The artist has participated in group exhibitions such as Office Baroque, Brussels (2015); Cortesi Contemporary, Lugano, Switzerland (2013); the Aspen Art Museum, Aspen (2013); and The Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2008). Recently featured in "The Manifest Destiny Billboard Project," LAND (Los Angeles Nomadic Division) throughout Los Angeles, Brannon is also included in a three-person exhibition this September at Mary Mary, Glasgow. Brannon's work is included in permanent collections such as the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. His most recent novel, "An Irresponsible Biography of the Actor Laurence Harvey," a biography of the late actor, was published by Onestar Press, Paris in 2014.

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MODERNPAINTERS
ART / ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN / PERFORMANCE / FILM

REVIEWS IN BRIEF NEW YORK

Matthew Brannon

Casey Kaplan // September 10–October 24

Safety in Numbers, 2015.

These Vietnam War–themed works are crafted using letterpress, serigraph, and silkscreen. But the thematic focus is obscured by the nostalgic pull of Brannon's aesthetic. Most of the pieces depict objects and products suspended in midair. Brand names predominate—Western Union, Heinz—with the occasional outlier item: a bottle of Liquid Paper beneath a diploma from the New York Psychoanalytic Society. The pall of war is mostly lost amid the clutter of domesticity and consumer goods, which is, perhaps, the point.

"Reviews in Brief: Matthew Brannon", Modern Painters, December, 2015

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the PARIS REVIEW

LOOK

Skirting the Issue

September 28, 2015 | by Dan Piepenbring

Six paintings from Matthew Brannon's "Skirting the Issue," an exhibition at Casey Kaplan Gallery through October 24. In this series, Brannon uses traditional printmaking methods—letterpress, silkscreening—to depict the domestic and cultural trappings of America during the Vietnam War, when he was born: "I had entered a world battered from events that left the country's identity in jeopardy," he writes, "and Luce's concept of the American Century shattered." Brannon's work is consumed with the question of "how America is its own worst enemy."

Dispatches, 2015, letterpress and serigraph on paper with hand painting, 24 x 18".

Dominoes, 2015, letterpress and serigraph on paper with hand painting, 24" x 18".

Ready or Not, 2015, letterpress and serigraph on paper with hand painting, 24 x 18".

Matthew Brannon, Bad Check, 2015, 59" x 42"

Safety in Numbers, 2015, silk screen on paper with hand painting, 55" x 42".

Camelot, 2015, silk screen on paper with hand painting, 59" x 42".

Piepenbring, Dan, "Look: Skirting the Issue", The Paris Review (online), September 28, 2015

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BLOUIN ARTINFO

5 Must-See Gallery Shows in New York: Ron Nagle, Keegan McHargue, and More

BY SCOTT INDRISEK | SEPTEMBER 21, 2015

Matthew Brannon at Casey Kaplan Gallery, through October 24 (121 West 27th Street)

Brannon's series of new works — mainly using a letterpress, serigraph, or silkscreen technique — purports to "explore emotional registers within the context of the Vietnam/American War." That mission, however, is obscured, or at least softened, by the nostalgic pull of Brannon's aesthetic. Most of the pieces are forms of still life in which various objects and products seemingly suspended in midair. Brand names dominate — Chesterfield, Western Union, Heinz, Sno Sheen — with the occasional outlier item provoking a joke: a bottle of Liquid Paper, for instance, beneath a diploma from the New York Psychoanalytic Society, as if poking fun at Freud's mistakes. The pall of war is mostly lost amid the clutter of domesticity and consumer goods, which is, perhaps, the point. A hint of the wider world, though, pops up in "Ready or Not," 2015, in which a folded Order to Report for Armed Forces Physical Examination sits alongside a box of corn flakes, a novelty greeting card displaying Snoopy as Joe Cool, and a shuttlecock.

Indrisek, Scott, "5 Must See Gallery Shows in New York", Blouin Artinfo (online), September 21, 2015

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ARTFORUM

MATTHEW BRANNON

CASEY KAPLAN
121 West 27th Street
September 10–October 24

In Matthew Brannon's latest output, candy-colored arrangements of objects and text—a wedding cake, a pack of Lucky Strikes, a bottle of vanilla extract—address the Vietnam War with a decorative aestheticism. This strategy may feel absurd, but Brannon deliberately avoids picturing scenes of violence, instead focusing on commodities, from a shuttlecock to a bottle of Heinz ketchup. These assemblages suppress violence almost to the point of invisibility, evoking a wartime America proceeding as if in an unaltered peacetime. In First Base (all works 2015), what initially seems a straightforward still life comprised of recreational equipment—a playing card, a World's Fair souvenir, a record—is complicated by the fact that the record is a single of Barry McGuire's 1965 protest song Eve of Destruction.

Matthew Brannon, First Base, 2015, paint, letterpress, and serigraph on paper, 24 x 18".

Leisure time and conflict are threaded through each other, and war mostly comes through indirect signifiers—world maps and international brand names that place the particularly "American" iconography within a larger context of global politics—or through civic imagery that has been so diluted as to be almost meaningless, as in an advertisement-like view of Washington's monuments (Camelot). Clues to this latent violence abound. In Purple Heart, Brannon places a historically accurate draft notice, carefully reproduced via letterpress, among comparatively carefree detritus (a Peanuts greeting card, a box of Corn Flakes).

Concentrating on the conflict at home rather than on scenes of violence means that the images can also be funny. Three pictures of 1960s interiors, for example, are so pitch-perfectly bourgeois it's easy to laugh: a rubber duck in the corner of a doctor's office, a modish Braun radio. This comedic, almost satirical aspect offsets some of the nostalgia that underlies the abundance of domestically coded objects: If history is experienced through sentimental recollection in Brannon's spare montages, farce can also subject that sentiment to critical reevaluation.

— *Nicholas Chittenden Morgan*

Morgan, Nicholas Chittenden, "Critics' Picks: Matthew Brannon", Artforum (online), September 18, 2015.

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ArtReview

Martin Herbert picks ten September 2015 shows you don't want to miss

in Lyon, New York, London, Basel, Los Angeles, Malmö, Vienna, San Francisco, Berlin and Glasgow

By Martin Herbert

I Hope to God You're Not As Dumb As You Make Out at Mary Mary, Glasgow, 26 September – 7 November

'I hope to god you're not as dumb as you make out' is, you will recognise, a line from Orange Juice's 1983 song Rip It Up. It's also the title of Mary Mary's three-person show, and since Matthew Brannon's in it, dumbness is unlikely. Here, Brannon's graphic luxe trappings, which devolve into deep lexical ambiguities, are joined by two complementary if lesser-known practices. LA-based Milano Chow's tight domestic drawings skew similarly to elegance and void, and suggest the classy obscurity of Alain Robbe-Grillet: mantelpieces framing empty space and accoutred with drawn postcards are a favoured format. Alan Reid, meanwhile, draws heiresses and fashionistas; his works have been described, entertainingly enough, as 'provocatively light'. You see where this is going. Restraint, decorum, low-watt angst, the discreet charm of the bourgeoisie, etc. It sounds, in its way, perfect.

Herbert, Martin, "Martin Herbert picks ten September 2015 shows you don't want to miss", Art Review, September 2015

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THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE

HAPPENINGS

A Two-Year, 100-Billboard Celebration of Going West

CULTURE | BY SU WU | JUNE 23, 2015 2:19 PM

A rendering of the 10th and final chapter in the project, Matthew Brannon's "Certain Snakes," 2015, installed this week in Los Angeles. Photo courtesy of LAND (Los Angeles Nomadic Division)

Though blizzards and rent checks will always revive New Yorkers' dreams of avocado trees and sunshine, for a certain set of creatives, the allure of the American West is so passé it's history. Starting tonight, the "Manifest Destiny Billboard Project," a two-year, 100-billboard journey from sea to shining sea along Interstate 10, kicks off its culminating festivities in Los Angeles. "Transit west has a long and speckled past, a combination of the best and worst things about what we do," says the director of the public-art nonprofit Los Angeles Nomadic Division, Shamim Momin,

who co-curated two Whitney Biennials before herself moving to California. The vision of manifest destiny, she says, has had “all sorts of applications over time, many of which have been devastating to different communities. And yet it is also so ingrained in the history of being American, the way we think about aspiration and ambition, achievement and taking. It ties to everything from the capitalist impulse to notions of exploration, and to the desire to know.”

In addition to an exhibition at LAND of some of the commissioned billboards — from artists including John Baldessari, Jeremy Shaw and Shana Lutker — the beach celebration will also involve a sequentially unfolding 10-course dinner from the Fainting Club, a “ribbon-tying” ceremony, a perfume-making workshop distilling the smell of L.A. and film screenings and panels all week, including one at the carousel at the end of the Santa Monica Pier. “When I finally made my way to New York and then Los Angeles, I had to wrestle with a profound disappointment,” says the artist Matthew Brannon, whose series of 10 billboards advertising imagined narratives such as “New New York Sucks” is the last “chapter” of the more than 2,700-mile project. “With each billboard, I wanted its interpretation to be not just open but frustrating. Is ‘New New York’ Los Angeles itself? And why does it suck? Or is it really just a tease or reference to the ongoing, endless and silly opinions each city has about the other?”

Coasts may demarcate edges, but the looming “Manifest Destiny” billboards in-between, from Mobile to New Orleans to Palm Springs, offered another sort of unboundedness. In Las Cruces, N.M., works by the artist Daniel R. Small featuring a made-up typography — a combination of Greek, Hebrew and proofreading marks — inspired a reported protest at the base of a sign over concern about the infiltration of terrorist messages. In Houston, the artist Eve Fowler opened free lending libraries at gas stations of texts related to her pieces, which featured excerpts from the writings of Gertrude Stein. “A nomad isn’t someone who is an itinerant: that’s how they live and practice their life. They still have places they go back to or ways of doing things that they carry with them,” says Momin, who first conceived of the cross-country billboard project with co-curator Zoe Crosher during a period when the artist commuted through the Mojave, the “anticipatory desert” a physical reminder of the mythos of finally arriving in L.A. “Unlike travelers, nomads will stay in certain places for a certain amount of time, so there is investment in their place and site,” Momin says. “It just isn’t permanent.”

Wu, Su, “A Two-Year, 100 Billboard Celebration going West”, T: The New York Times Style Magazine (online), June 23, 2015.

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“Matthew Brannon: In Conversation with Chris Sharp,” Wax Magazine. Winter 2014

Photography by
Naho Kubota

Matthew Brannon

The artist and writer on unlikability, his favorite moments in literature and the attractiveness of frustrated content.

In conversation with Chris Sharp

New York-based artist Matthew Brannon might seem like an unlikely surfer, given that he grew up in Montana, but a stint studying at UCLA helps to explain his affinity for waves. His graphic prints and sculptures are known to draw upon the clean, spare style of post-war American advertising, whose sophisticated, self-assured optimism becomes the whipping boy of Brannon's incisive and acerbic wit. Chris Sharp engages him about his growing investment in writing, his interest in literature and the stakes of artistic commitment.

Chris Sharp: So here we find ourselves in an issue of WAX Magazine dedicated to theme of *flux* and the relationship of the word to art history. The latter issue seems to bear some relationship with your work...

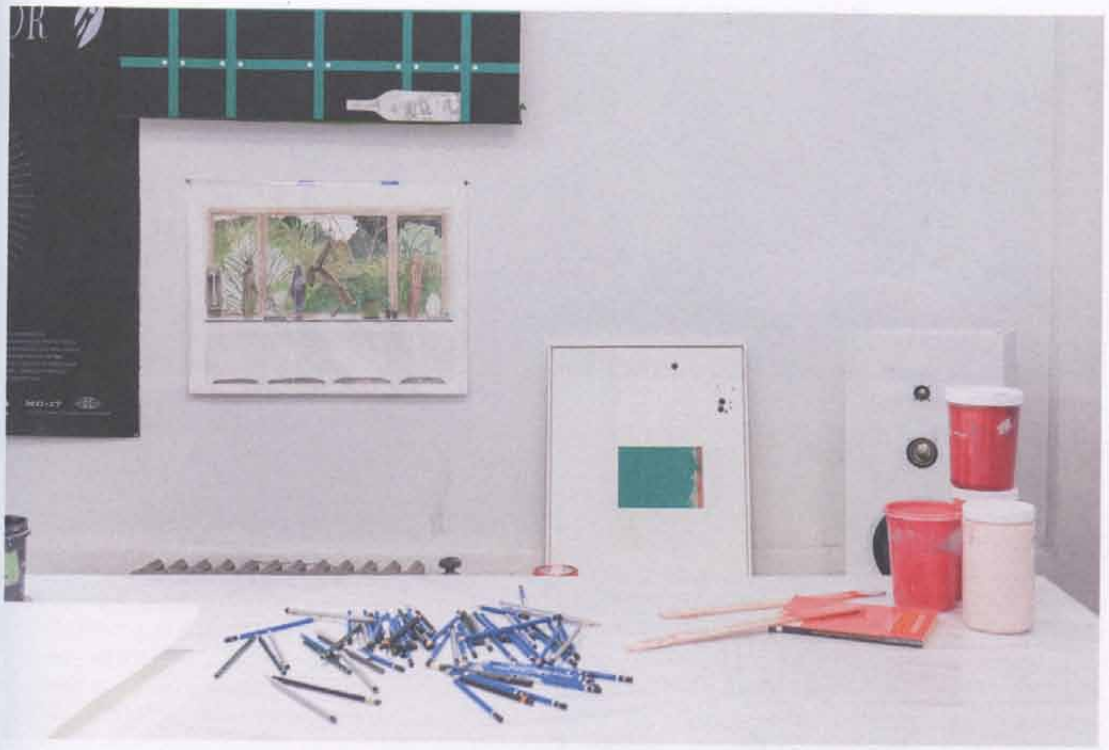
Matthew Brannon: I once titled a show *Where Were We*. But I'm sort of over looking back. In many ways the art world that exists today bears little, if any, resemblance to the art world I entered in the mid Ninties. When I was young it was very important to me that you knew that I hated everything you liked. Now we live in a culture of obsessive consensus where consideration is distilled into everyone 'liking' things. So the question I'm asking myself now is—how can I keep it interesting or potent or disruptive given the current flattening conditions?

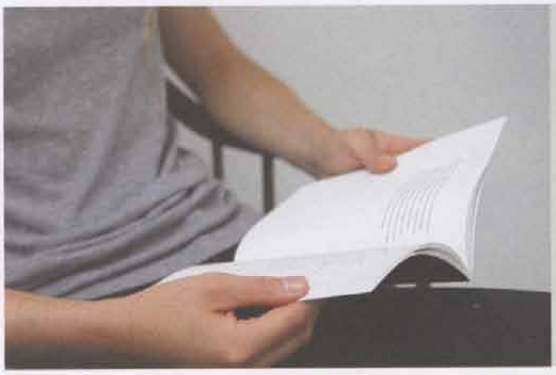
CS: It would seem that the solution to that dilemma is to become definitively 'unlikable.' But that too seems to be an exhausted strategy... However, in such a context of radically reductive, ready-made language (*like*—can that even be called *language* anymore?), the irruption of language itself becomes potentially disruptive. That said, I remember in a recent conversation we had, you spoke about moving away from text in your prints, and yet at the same time you're writing more and more fiction, such as the publication for your recent exhibition at the Museo Marino Marini in Florence. Maybe you could say a few words about your fictional pursuits?

MB: Between the pages is definitely where my mind is. Literature always retains its one-to-one radicality. Ideas or feelings a hundred years old can feel personal and direct through language. In many ways the text in my work has always been its center. And the images I've used have always been the camouflage to bring the writing forward. I want someone to swallow it first and then feel sick later. I'm always shooting for the delayed reaction. But every strategy eventually grows stale. I sometimes fear my initial formula of an absurdist collision of text and image now seems formulaic. The idea now is instead of having one medium piggy back on the other, to place them side by side.

So I'm putting the writing in it's proper place. Writing short novels you can take with you on the train. Except there's nothing proper about them. They're pretty nasty things. In Italy I published a novella called *Antelope* about a radical theatre group who uses a department store at night for readymade sets. Except things go horribly wrong and before summer's end a few people are dead. But telling you about the plot of course is not really telling you anything about what it's about. That's something different. I can't say how many people saw the exhibition actually read the book. The fact that it's a lot to ask of an audience is part of the point for me. *Of course you wouldn't bother.*

CS: Is that last italicized comment a work? If not, it could be. One also pictures the likes of Truman Capote slurring it at someone at, say, closing time in a bar in NY circa 1975... It's interesting what you say about the enduring impact of the written word. I have always felt that literature possesses more romance than art somehow. Perhaps this is because—and even if this is just a myth—it has a closer link with lived experience, the every day, whereas art tends to be something apart. One also goes in your pocket, while the other requires a whole infrastructure... If I am not mistaken, *Antelope* will have a follow up? Can you tell us anything about that?





LEOPARD

You're talking. You're saying something important. Its taken you a tremendous amount of energy to say what you're saying. It's obvious you've given it a great amount of thought. I want you to know I'm listening and that what you're saying is registering deeply. But I'm dying to tell you a large bug has landed on your shoulder and its intentions are nothing but bad.

I didn't have sex for a year. I made the decision not to. My thoughts were completely and constantly lurid. I tortured myself. I could do nothing but imagine taking everyone's pants off. Bending them over tables and spreading their legs. Gnawing on their necks. Shoving my cock into every hole imaginable and then some. My dick felt like the size of my arm. I denied myself masturbation. I wanted my thoughts to fester into a coral of perversion. For unfed desire to calcify layer upon layer into a thick shell resting at the very base of my feelings. I wanted to make sex again

You're talking. You're saying something important. Its taken you a tremendous amount of energy to say what you're saying. It's obvious you've given it a great amount of thought. I want you to know I'm listening and that what you're saying is registering deeply. But I'm dying to tell you a large bug has landed on your shoulder and its intentions are nothing but bad.

MB: Funny you mention a pocket. The follow up book to *Antelope* is called *Leopard* and it comes literally inserted into the side of a large painting. I've made what looks like brass mailbox slots that hold the books inside the paintings with only the spine showing. It's a ridiculous idea that grew out of a number of conversations this summer while I was teaching at Skowhegan in Maine. I've been thinking of them as vaginas or as where the content resides. It's a very flat-footed continuation of my theme of a polite exterior countered by a more complex interior.

Leopard is a sequel of sorts where the actors hole up in a old house for the summer taking everything to extremes and end it all by having an orgy on a plane that they intentionally crash into the ocean. All the while they're filming everything and making an archive for others to see. It's a bit much but I felt like it had to be, considering its secret home.

I've also made a video of someone reading the book to themselves in real time in one sitting and another video of the entire text scrolling by. I'm showing the viewer that someone did read it. I'm offering proof it exists and that its thoughts have passed from myself to the page and into another mind all without the viewers inclusion. For me part of it is about access.

CS: Here I would like to ask you a kind of formulaic interview question, such as, if you weren't an artist, what would you be? But I think I already know the answer to that question. So here's another one, which is lot easier and less cheesy than you might think: what are, today, at the time of this interview, your three favorite moments from literature? (Normally I would ask five, but space feels limited) Which is not to say, favorite books, but actual moments, it could be a scene, a mood, a detail. And why?

MB: I used to wish I was a surgeon but I think that was a fantasy. I sometimes wish to be the guy who changes the posters in the subway. But that's a different fantasy. Now I'm trying on this writer's hat. But I still feel like a bit of a fake or like someone who's pulling up a seat where there wasn't one before. As for my three favorite moments in literature... off the *very* tip of my brain and because it's us talking, I'll say:

The scene when the young boy falls into the cave they believe is home to a demon in Roberto Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives*. He describes this group hovering around the lip (or mouth) of this black abyss deciding who will go in. For me, it's about fear and death and being very alone. And I felt less alone reading it.

There's an unhealthy side of myself that loves (or returns to) the very moment towards the end of Bret Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero* when they're in the elevator going to see Julian's John and Clay says "I realize that the money doesn't matter. That all that does is that I want to see the worst." This testing of the extremes is something I wrestle with. And in Ellis's condensed fashion he's putting a pin directly at its center.

For a third I'll say the first twenty and last twenty or so pages of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. To appreciate them one must read the six hundred or so pages in between. But the beginning when everything is pleasant (and very funny) and the end where everything is awful (and not funny) I found to be very moving. You have a sense on a very personal level of how horrific and intrusive and disregarding war is.

I could revise this list all day. I mean– am I really this dark? I hope not. I guess I'm listing personal emotional triggers for which I'm not entirely responsible. I also keep thinking of a moment this summer when at a dinner party in the kitchen a friend opened up Sheila Heti's *How Should a Person Be?* and had me read this one mind melting sex scene. *(pg. 120 in the HB)*

> CS: It's funny. These are all great moments. I remembering reading *The Magic Mountain* in my early twenties and being very marked by the conflict between the intellect and charisma that takes place in the novel, as if these two different forces (mind and body, one being disembodied thought and hesitation and the other being pure, embodied vitalism) were battling over Hans Castorp's soul. It's this weirdly Cartesian dilemma that has always haunted me. Like Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty in *On The Road*. Same dilemma. Just this morning I was thinking about how Roberto Bolaño used to write in his kitchen in Blanes, Spain. It makes sense that such a vitalistic writer should work in the most vitalistic part of the home in order not to succumb to the monotony of what is ultimately a very disembodied, non-vitalistic activity: writing (isn't it curious how it is an almost perfect contradiction about what I wrote with regard to literature above?). But allow me to indulge in another straight interview question: If you could own any piece of art, which one would it be, and why?

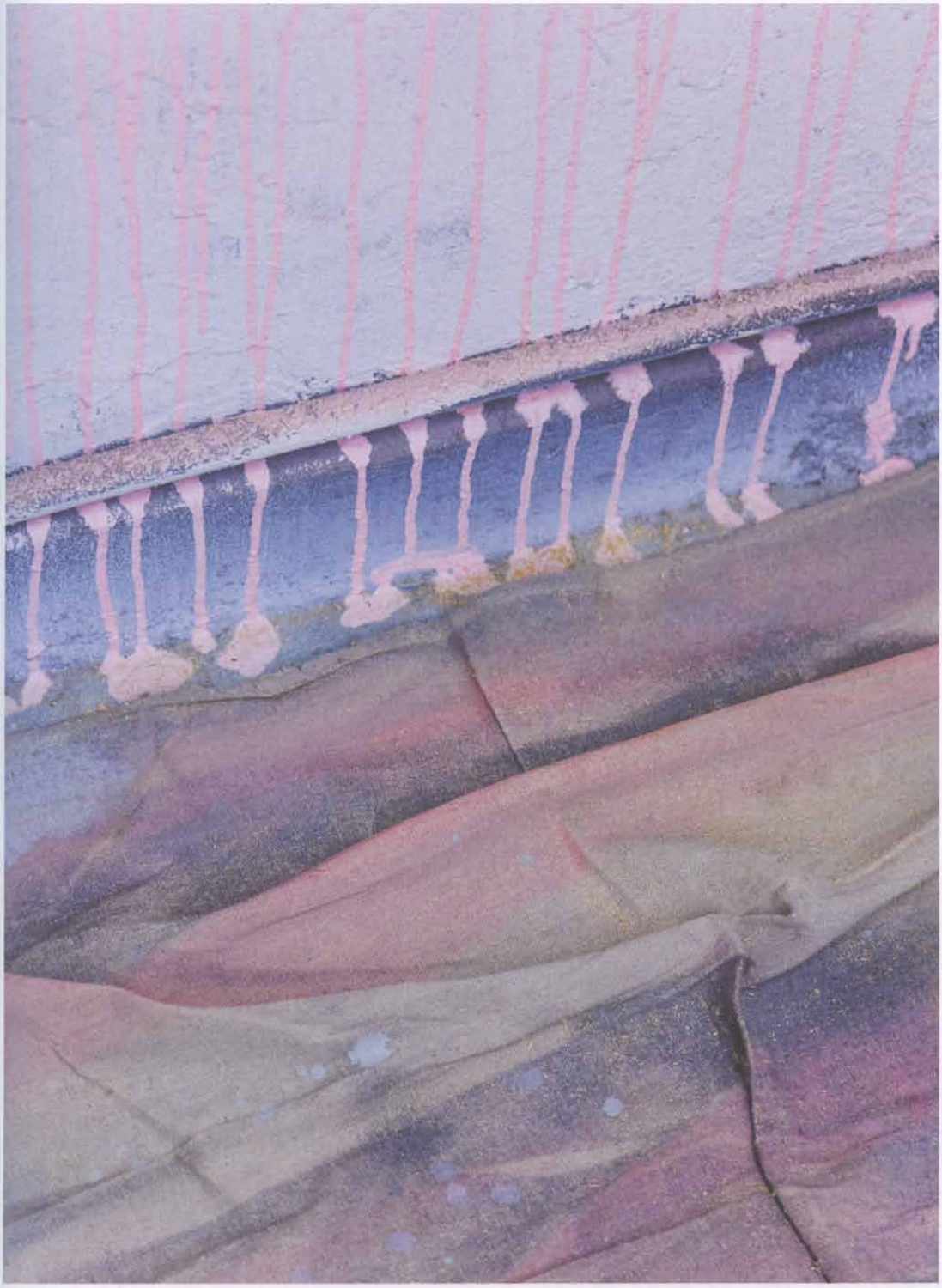
MB: I've been asked this before and my answer has changed. I'm more suspicious of good looking things and even more suspicious of bad looking things these days. I'm now very attracted to frustrated content, ambitious transgression, conceptual accountability and total creative indulgence so I'm going to say the full set of Mike Kelley's 1985 *Plato's Cave, Rothko's Chapel, Lincoln's Profile*. Or since I don't believe I'm ever having a child I'll take whomevers childrens' drawings. Everytime I see one I feel jealous of their mark making.

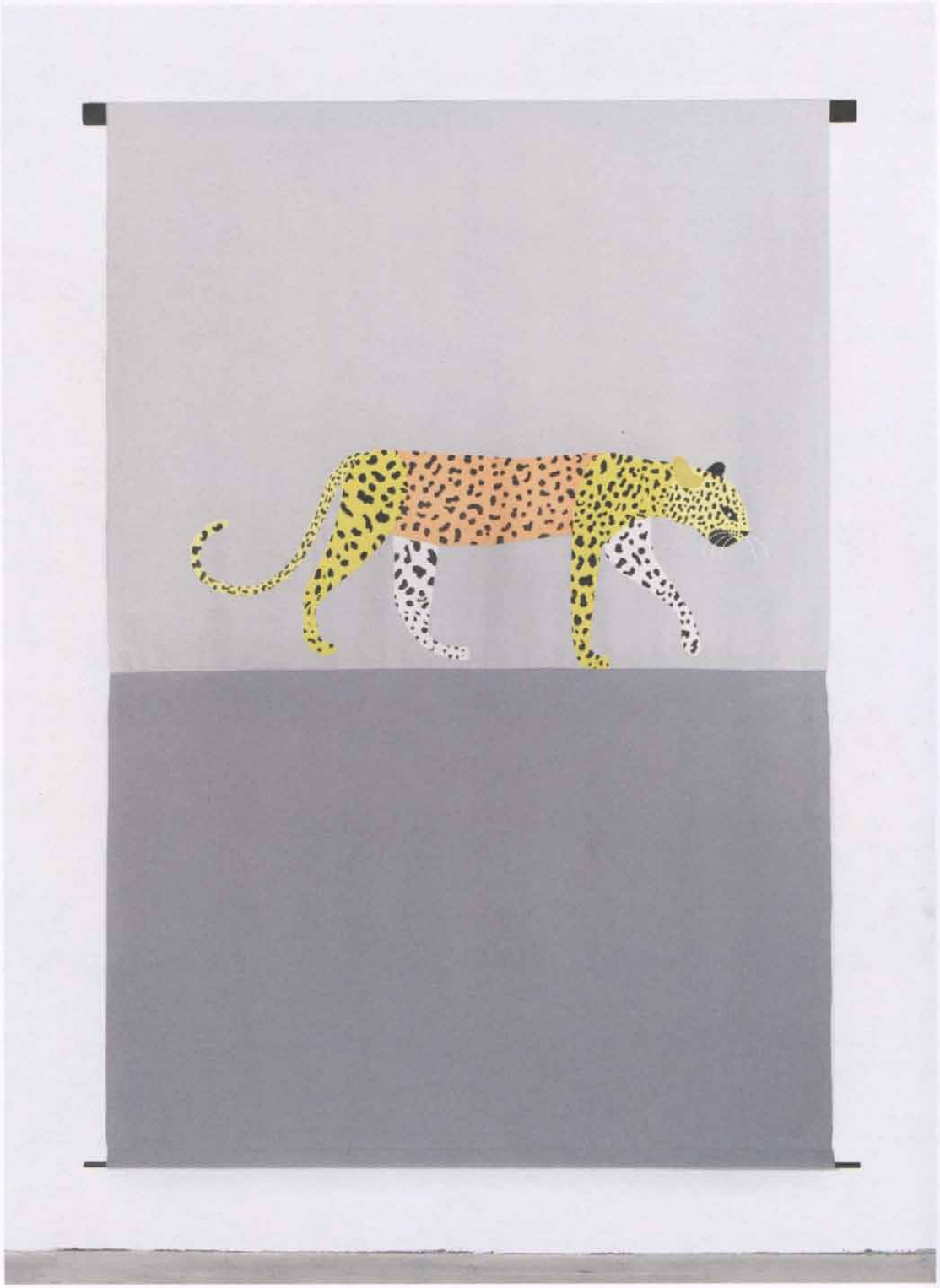
> CS: Indeed, one becomes suspicious. It's hard to have clear, identifiable criteria, as they are always changing. Lately, I feel like I can't get behind a given artist unless the work has a real, fundamental problem– and not necessarily in the world, but in itself—that it is trying to solve, and when I say *real, fundamental problem,* I mean, not borrowed, not some chic and fashionable malaise lifted from the super mall of contemporary art. Something needs to be really wrong. And yet at the same time, so right. This is very difficult to account for. That said, I'm curious to know how your answer has changed and why?

MB: It has much to do with what you so described so well. As I suggested before with this "culture of consensus," the way we see it internalized for artists is that they often work until they find some sort of endorsement (financial, critical, institutional) and then they churn out endless variants of the same idea. It's the same thing as retiring really. One idea, different colors. This is all very condescending of me to say, but I think these are real challenges we need to present ourselves. Sometimes I worry I'm too old to be an artist anymore. Maybe the best artists are the younger ones. Art making is frustrating business (as is writing) but the understandable search for comfort or assurance or security is boring us to death.

> CS: And lastly how do feel about being in a surf magazine? Personally, I don't feel so out of place; being a skater in high school, I hung out in the 'back parking lot,' which was predominantly the turf of surfers and skaters (I'm from the bay area). We all got wasted together. The main difference was that when they cut school, they went to the beach; and when we did, we went to the Embarcadero (this was the early '90s).

MB: I like it! Surfing for me is all about breaking a perspective. One minute I'm in my cement box apartment then forty five minutes later I'm in the water facing the land getting my ass handed to me. Nothing could be healthier. I've always admired surfers and skaters. It's such a cult thing. By that I mean it's successes are almost impossible to measure. Funny enough they're also very fluid when it comes to wordplay. Recently an Italian friend of mine had to ask me what someone meant when they used the phrase *sick*.





Sexual Tension, 2013. Silkscreen on canvas, Wool, Wood, Steel. 95" × 70" × 1" in.

Unlearn, 2012. Wood, enamel, acrylic, high-density hand carved foam, silkscreen on paper. 58.5" × 41" × 6" in.
Courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York. Photography: Cathy Carver.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Matthew Brannon
CASEY KAPLAN

ARTFORUM

The flat, graphic style of Matthew Brannon's work derives from the visual innovations of Madison Avenue during its midcentury golden age. In this exhibition, that coolly nostalgic look surfaced in silkscreen and letterpress prints, as well as in paintings, sculptures, and cloth uniforms (the lastmade in collaboration with menswear designer Carlo Brandelli). These works were installed across three galleries, each of which suggested a discrete room-or, more precisely, a theatrical set. For each gallery corresponded to an "act" in a play, written by the artist, the plot ofwhich is elliptically described yet never disclosed in broadsides hanging on the walls.

The texts on these placards are clipped and listlike. In the "Act I"gallery, the first of them read, in part, "A bar of long wall mounted glass shelves lined with endless bottles. A curved banquette with a seahorse motif running in metal relief along the bottom. Pink neon recessed behind it all. High stools with monogrammed back rests. Walls of mirrors. Signs pointing to restrooms, exits and phones ... " That scene was further suggested by the installation of objects, which included EarLy Retirement, 2011, a rack of black, gold, and pink liquor bottles carved from foam, and As it turns out . .. , 2011, a Charley Harper-esque silk screen of a pay phone, its receiver off the hook. Across the gallery, a rectangular mint-green sign juts from the wall, its height, proportions, and lettering style suggesting that it might once have 'hung above the entrance to a 1940s restroom-although rather than a demure LADIES or GENTLEMEN, one side of it read SUBLIMINAL and the other MASSAGE. In the following two rooms, there were more props (a cartoony chandelier, an office desk) and more silk screens (black squares with keyholes resembling safes) as well as letterpress prints suggesting forelorn characters confronting tragedy and despair (a forty-year-old professor contemplating an affair with a student, a heroin-addicted commercial airline pilot who commits suicide by crashing his plane).

Matthew Brannon, *Early Retirement*, 2011,
metal, wood, hand-carved high density foam, acrylic, enamel,
56';' x 111'/, x 9"

As sets, these installations have a precedent in Marcel Broodthaers's Decor: A Conquest, 1975, a pair of museal "period rooms" furnished with candelabras, guns, chairs, and potted plants that simultaneously suggest cinematic sound stages. At the same time, Brannon's sets refer to the decorative, that category of modernism that flirts dangerously wild superfluity and ornament. In the second and third rooms, large, Matisse-like, and perhaps somewhat bad abstractions evoking flowers and vegetation were at once "tasteful" paintings adorning the room and signifiers of wallpaper that we imagine extending beyond the frame to embellish me scene. Throughout the show, both object and text serve as stand-ins, surrogates for the things they describe or represent, which parallels the structure of the commodity form, whose duplicitousness was only intensified in the postwar moment to which Brannon's work refers. The inventory-like texts, gliding from object to object, from surface to surface, evoke the cool detachment of a cinematic pan, or a metonymic slide through language-the movement of desire as it pursues, futilely, an ineffable satisfaction. In this exhibition, the lack that propels desire was embodied by the absent plot of Brannon's play. Appropriately enough, the missing narrative is titled Gentleman's Relish, a euphemism for the aftermath of jouissance.

-Lloyd Wise

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

DAVID
KORDANSKY
GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Matthew Brannon
Leopard
November 16, 2013 – January 18, 2014

David Kordansky Gallery is very pleased to announce Leopard, an exhibition of new work by Matthew Brannon. The show will open on November 16, 2013 and run through January 18, 2014. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, November 16 from 6:00 until 9:00pm.

Leopard offers a radical reimagining of the role played by text and literary narrative in visual art. Though language and associated cultural signifiers—graphic, in both senses of the word—have long been central to Brannon's work, this exhibition puts linguistic syntax at the literal center of the equation, like genitalia. The core of the exhibition is an erotic novella, written by Brannon, entitled "Leopard." However, the novella itself, in physical form, is buried in the show and cannot be directly accessed.

The text of the book will only be present in the form of a video work on two monitors installed in the center of the gallery. Surrounding the monitors is a suite of paintings whose primary role is containment, their role as visual documents in some way secondary to their role as vessels for language. To this end, a slot has been cut into the side of each painting; inserted in the slot is a book, one copy of an edition of "Leopard" limited to the number of paintings in the show. Though viewers cannot turn its pages, they are, in effect, inside its world. The impulse to experience the narrative by reading it is subverted. It is replaced by the phenomenological experience of the objects 'on view'—paintings pregnant with language they obscure.

Brannon has literally, even sculpturally, emptied out painting, transforming it into a void to be filled. The 'unique' painting is subject to the presence of a reproduced book, a reminder that the inversion of reproduction technologies has played an important generative role in the development of Brannon's practice. The early letterpress works for which he became known were issued in editions of one, highlighting the sculptural and painterly possibilities inherent to a medium designed to disseminate text and other seemingly 'flat' information. This continuum of crossed genres (printing-painting, painting-sculpture, sculpture-video) becomes a place of fecundity as well as free-floating anxiety, one in which the physical manifestation of an artwork is always attentive to the conceptual structures that give rise to it.

This applies to the compositions that appear on the paintings as well, which are made not with brushes and oil, but via printing processes. Swooping, stuttering lines punctuated by dots of color, these compositions have been screened onto canvas chosen for its own physical and visual properties. Like Pop-revisionist takes on Twombly, or a slasher flick villain's attempt at modernist abstractions, the paintings are a sinister interior decorator's wet dream. Their beauty is insidious, and though they are indicative of Brannon's particular graphic vocabulary, it is impossible to ignore their participation in the broader formal debates specific to contemporary painting.

The video work adds the durational aspect of reading text into the space of the exhibition. On one monitor, a woman reads the "Leopard" book to herself; on another the text scrolls upwards like the credits to a film. The implication is that the viewer sees what the woman sees, but her thoughts fall outside the frame. Even here, with the act of reading mirrored back to the viewer, Brannon keeps the text itself in a fleeting, ephemeral state, and keeps it from ever being a physical thing that can be held in the hands.

However, this does not prevent the perversity and sheer strangeness of the novella from seeping into the viewer's consciousness, where it lingers as a kind of infection. The narrative is a particularly intense distillation of the fictional universe that Brannon has created over the course of his career, one that seems to intersect with our own and call attention to its anxieties and obsessions. But it also brings together an idiosyncratic array of cultural touchstones, including surrealist literature (the proto-surrealist Les Chants de Maldoror by the Comte de Lautréamont comes to mind), avant-garde film, and the theater of the absurd. Like any fiction, it is a construction, a conceptual machine that reflects, dismantles, and ultimately generates an experience of the physical world that surrounds it.

Matthew Brannon (b. 1971) has been the subject of numerous one-person exhibitions, including Department Store at Night (Five Impossible Films, I), Marino Marini Museum, Florence, Italy; A question answered with a quote, Portikus, Frankfurt, Germany; Mouse Trap, Light Switch, Museum M, Leuven, Belgium; Where We Were, Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria, New York; and Try and Be Grateful, Art Gallery of York University, Toronto. Recent group exhibitions include Brannon, Büttner, Kierulf, Kierulf, Kilpper, Bergen Kunsthall, Norway; In the Name of the Artists, Contemporary American Art from the Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo Biennial Pavilion, Brazil; After Hours: Murals on the Bowery, Art Production Fund and the New Museum, New York; For Love Not Money, 15th Tallinn Print Triennial, KUMU Art Museum, Tallinn, Estonia; and At Home/Not at Home: Works from the Collection of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Retsina, Christ, "Dealer Spotlight," Blouin ArtInfo, Miami Fairs Edition, December 6-8, 2013, p.20

BLOUIN ARTINFO

DEALER SPOTLIGHT

CASEY KAPLAN GALLERY
NEW YORK, N.Y., U.S.A.

Matthew Brannon, ***Pretending to Remember,***

When asked how to service an art fair, Casey Kaplan quips, "It's no big secret: I keep a mini-fridge at the booth with cold tequila inside." He should know; he's participated in every Art Basel in Miami Beach since the fair's 2002 inception.

Kaplan began his career in the early '90s as an archivist at Pace Gallery. Staying for two years, he had the opportunity to work with such artists as Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, and Robert Ryman. During this period Kaplan decided that he wanted to have his own space, working with artists of his own generation, and in March of 1995 founded his own gallery in a Broadway loft in SoHo. A year later, Kaplan moved to a space on Greene Street, then again in 2000 to West 14th Street in the meatpacking district, before settling into his current Chelsea location in 2005.

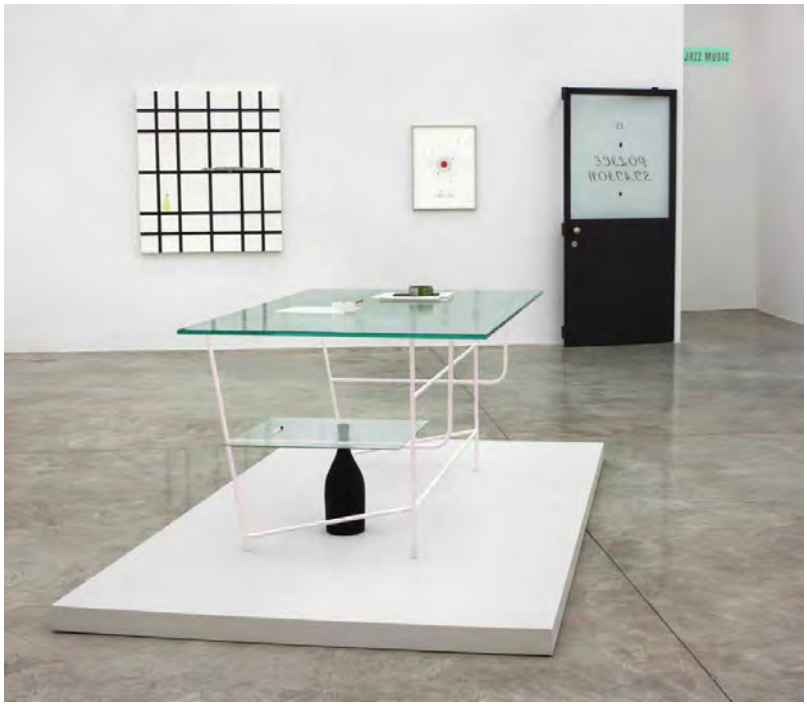
Describing ABMB Kaplan says, "Miami has become the true American fair. It seems to be the one art fair that the American art world travels to." And "after the vernissage," he says, "the fairs take the form of an exhibition. They provide the local community with the opportunity to view art from around the world."

This year Kaplan is showing conceptual artist Liam Gillick's powder-coated aluminum piece "Ingrained Production," 2012, as well as several paintings by multimedia artist Sanya Kantarovsky. The booth also features a series of untitled Digital C-prints by Marlo Pascual, as well as Matthew Brannon's silkscreened and hand-painted "Constant Enthusiasm" 2013, and "Pretending to Remember," 2013.

Chris Retsina

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

aspenartmuseum



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Trapping Lions in the Scottish Highlands

November 15, 2013- February 2, 2014
Opening Reception: December 19, 2013

Borrowing its title from Alfred Hitchcock's explanation of the MacGuffin, the seemingly indispensible but ultimately arbitrary device by which narrative is propelled, Trapping Lions in the Scottish Highlands examines questions of narrative complexity, disjunction, and ambiguity in recent art. Often combining fictional narration with seemingly archival or documentary footage, the works in the exhibition employ a range of tactics to blur the line between fiction and reality, weaving fragmentary stories around elusive or even entirely absent centers. From the elegant parsing of sound and image to the complex aesthetics of the murder mystery, these works employ a range of tactics to create narrative tension even while casting doubt on their own credibility. At the same time that the viewer is often put in the position of a kind of detective, oftentimes narrative itself ultimately becomes a kind of MacGuffin, important not so much for itself but for the formal and conceptual moves it makes possible.

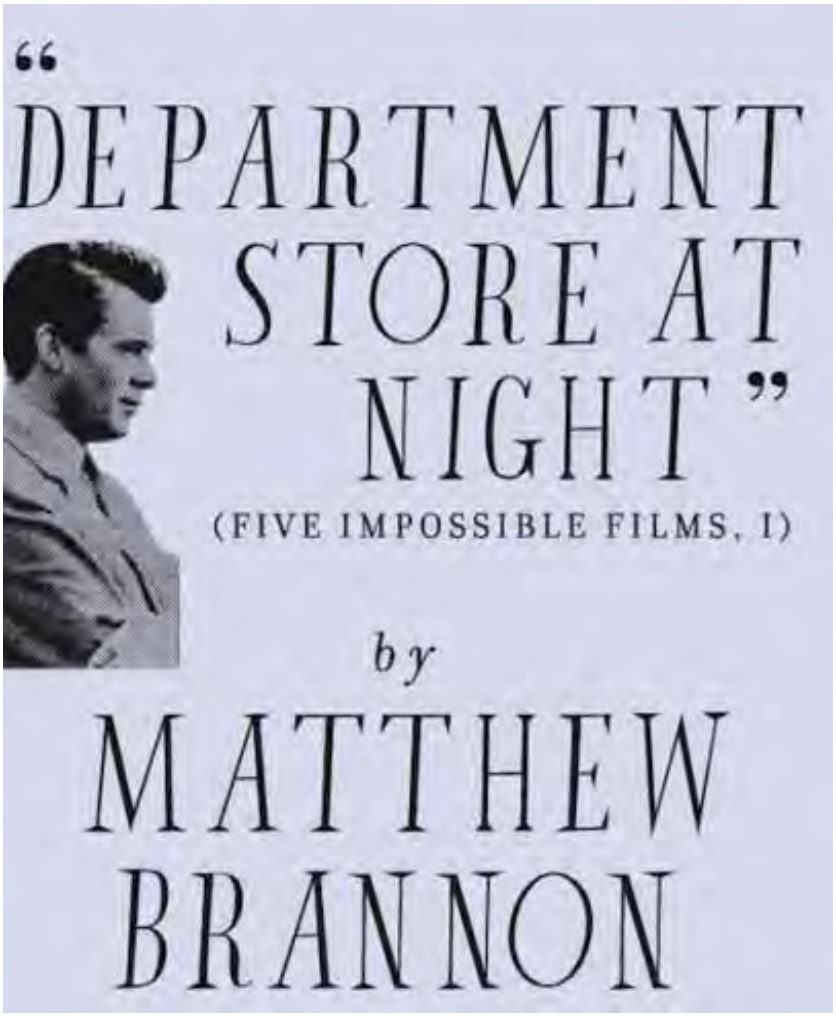
Trapping Lions in the Scottish Highlands includes works by Mac Adams, Matthew Brannon, Victor Burgin, Katarina Burin, Gerard Byrne, Alejandro Cesarco, Saskia Olde Wolbers, John Smith, and Kerry Tribe.

Trapping Lions in the Scottish Highlands is organized by the AAM and funded in part by the AAM National Council with additional exhibition support provided by the Bruce T. Halle Family Foundation for Latin American Art. General exhibition support is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Exhibition lectures are presented as part of the Questrom Lecture Series and educational outreach programming is made possible by the Questrom Education Fund.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

museo marino marini
fondazione marini san pancrazio firenze

Matthew Brannon - Department Store at Night (Five Impossible Films, I)
20 April - 8 June 2013



In the last ten years Brannon has created works in which the tension between text and image has always been present as a genuinely constitutive part of the work, even though this relationship has never been conceived as a narrative element between the two parts.

Brannon has recently turned his attention to writing. The books he has written, in the form of a long story, acquire their own autonomy with respect to the sculptures and prints that have always been the centre of his output. By distancing the image from the text, Brannon moves towards a new mode of approach, of proximity between the two, operating in such a way that the works act like amplifiers for the text accompanying them. The viewer/reader assumes an active role in deciphering the story, becoming an element of construction of the whole narrative, completing the experience of the reading with that of the visit to the museum.

At the Museo Marino Marini, Brannon has constructed a department store at night, where sculptures, prints, fabric flooring and a book recount the cruel and strange nocturnal episode at the heart of a mystery that needs solving.
The fiction element draws on ideas and impressions the artist had while inspecting the museum – the crypt space, now used for exhibition projects, a place with centuries of history and a repository of facts and events unknown to us – and while visiting Florence, where the department store is now the distinguishing feature of a city centre completely given over to trade of all kinds. Here, a lively daytime life alternates with a flat, almost dead, night life, animated by typical provincial news events in which everything can appear exceptional.

A theatre company occupies the department store illegally in the night, and the crime at the base of the story, of the noir that always intrigues the public, takes place during the reading of an important twentieth-century text, Freud's civilization and its discontents. In this work, Freud deals with the delicate relationship between the individual and civilization, the clash between the search and desire for personal instinctive freedom and civilization, which necessarily requires the exact opposite, dulling instincts through laws and restrictions. This encounter/clash, according to Freud, tends to instil feelings of discontent and, in the evolution of what is now almost secular thinking,

associates the idea of civilization with the gratification of consumption as an element for mitigating and controlling instinctiveness.

Brannon's work on the medium of representation can be defined as a phenomenological vectorial construction, linked precisely to the activity of connecting and organizing elements, thanks to which a subject engages with a world, that of the museum and of the city of florence, as meaning.

The American artist's work thus interlaces the concept of the Kantian definition of the work, ergon, that is to say, being inside the work, with the Derridian one of parergon, that is, being outside the work. In other words, being inside the pictorial frame, inside the picture's space of representation, inside given rules, inside the laws of the genre, and so within an aesthetic autonomy of thought and content, to then bring the content of the work out towards the experience of a lived moment, whether fiction (that built by the artist in the story) or real (that built by the viewer by combining the reading of the book with the visit to the show), evoking moments and personal stories like that of visual training, which, for the artist's generation, still took place through direct experience, for instance by going to cinemas or other places considered to be personally important.
Besides the book, the exhibition consists of three clusters of works, conceived and realized as fully fledged theatre and cinema sets.

The exhibition opens with the large sculpture unlearn, a perfume showcase near to which is found the body of the dead girl that gives rise to the story. Everything is simulation – there are no perfume bottles. But there is the memory of a period in the artist's life when, as he wanted to be a doctor, he used to spend time in a morgue, and the smells of that experience have remained in his memory. Here it is the evocation through the object that produces the first moment of encounter between text and image. Next comes a large installation, where sculptures and rugs create a single work that conjures up the setting of the department store, the place where the story takes place. The sculptures have a glass section on which there are some handwritten words evocative of 1950s department stores. The words have a meaning associated with the contrast between social choices and individual choices, and reference both industrial production and the commercialization of the place, in this case Florence. The third section of the exhibition is a print and a theatre-cinema poster featuring a series of playbills of big and important films that have shaped the ability of many of us to define narration, to follow and construct stories deriving both from reality and from fiction. The work is a tribute to the art cinemas that still survive today in the USA – and in some cases in Italy as well – where the artist's film culture was formed.

It is a show conceived as the pages of a book, traversed by the public visiting the museum, where the text generates the images, which are not really explanations of the text – two works that run parallel and refer to each other.

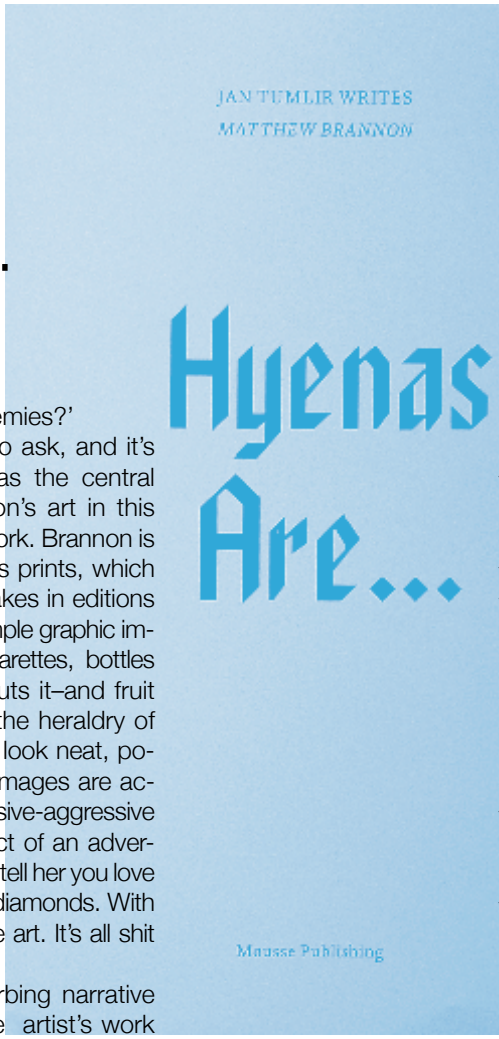
CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Art Review:

Monograph

Matthew Brannon: Hyenas Are…

By Jan Tumlir
Mousse Publishing



'Why are people their own worst enemies?' This is as good a question as any to ask, and it's the one that Jan Tumlir identifies as the central problem posed by Matthew Brannon's art in this sparkling, polished response to his work. Brannon is best known for his elegant letterpress prints, which the artist contrarily, or confidently, makes in editions of one. These are characterised by simple graphic images of lobsters, martini glasses, cigarettes, bottles of wine–'adult pacifiers', as Tumlir puts it–and fruit bowls, steak knives, chessboards–'the heraldry of the metropolitan subject'. The prints look neat, polite and New Yorker-ish, though the images are accompanied by despairing, often passive-aggressive fragments of text that mimic the effect of an advertisement or a movie poster: 'This year tell her you love her all over again. With a grab bag of diamonds. With mouthfuls of caviar.' Or: 'You keep the art. It's all shit anyway. I'll take the house.'

Tumlir creates a curiously absorbing narrative to this text, chiefly by describing the artist's work throughout as if it were a character – a technique that succeeds due to the strong sense of personality that the artist conveys in his works. His prints are 'suggestive of clean white shirts and dark-gray suits', though 'careful to allow for the occasional jaunty splash of primary color on the tie, pocket scarf, and/or socks'. He points out the 'lures' in Brannon's works – drawings of fish and eels, which mark the start of exhibitions – that 'greet the viewer gladly'; like generous hosts, they are attractive and appear to be perfectly genial. We are dropped clues and offered intriguing conversational fragments like so many titbits of gossip over cocktails. Indeed, if anything, Tumlir writes about Brannon as a Gatsby-like figure, fascinated by the double role the artist is able to play within his work – polite, charming and sexy, yet leaden with failure, guilt and nastiness. But like Fitzgerald's famous character, Brannon has something to hide. He mocks the macho ridiculousness of painting – a letterpressed image of a Pollock-like drip (the action of neat and crisp edged paper-pressing utterly antithetical to the languorous dripping and flicking of fluid) is accompanied by the words 'Yes. Yes. Fuck yes. Oh yes' etc – but that's because Brannon wants to paint too! He is quoted as miserably berating himself for being 'a grown man who makes things out of paper'. He recently turned to making paintings himself, however, with titles that appear to admit this love that previously dared not speak its name: Now you know and it doesn't change anything (2011).

Indeed, when it comes to desire, Tumlir writes that he hears that Brannon's work particularly appeals to women, and tries to prove this by looking at people of both genders looking at the work in photographs. 'It is largely a man's world that Brannon's work represents', writes Tumlir, 'and one still redolent of postwar machismo and misogyny. However, much like the television show Mad Men (which also appeals to women, incidentally) it is not only of, but also about, such things.' Brannon, Tumlir continues, makes the authority assumed by men one of his central subjects, and in drawing attention to this, forfeits the right to assume it himself.

Tumlir swims easily around the subjects in the artist's work: the thinning divide between reality and fantasy, and the crisp guiding hand of the market. And in doing so, he writes not only one of the best books about an artist that I have read this year, but one of the best books full stop. Brannon often displays closed stacks of publications in his exhibitions; the viewer is able to read none of them. But Tumlir tells us that they contain these words: 'I'm a very private person. I wouldn't ever confide in you. I wouldn't tell you a thing. This art is a sham.' If Brannon's art is a sham, however, what does that mean for those who look at it or read about it? Brannon's sham feelings are perhaps best conveyed in a reported episode in which the artist experiences a moment of panicked shame upon seeing hyenas at the Berlin Zoo looking out at him and laughing. These, then, are the hyenas of the title: they are a projection, the part of you that knows you are a sham and cackles hysterically as you try to greet and charm the world. The image of you being your own worst enemy.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Sarah Suzuki
Print People: A Brief Taxonomy of Contemporary Prinkmaking

Matthew Brannon, Song & Dance, 2011, letterpress on paper, sheet: 24 x 18 in, (61 x 45-7 cm), edition of one (artwork © Matthew Brannon; photograph by Cathy Carver. provided by the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York)

"Aren't Print people just the best?' So reads a T-shirt recently produced by Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE), one of the giants of American print publishing. Playing off one of the signature characteristics of numerous print techniques, the texton the shirt appears in reverse, printed against a dark ground whose irregular outline suggests a lithographic stone-one of those venerable
slabson which lithigraphs have historically been drawn. The message reveals itself when reflected in a mirror, or seen by those "in the know" : the constallation of publishers, printers, papermakers, dealers, collectors, shcolars, and curators who make up the so-called print world. ULAE's coded message reflects an often-repeated sentiment, one which suggests that the desireable qualities of the meduims to which we are devoted-democratic reach, earthbound price points, and inherently collaborative nature-are somehow reflected through us.

Matthew Brannon's artistic output revels in the not-yet-obsolete charms of letterpress. Brannon's work often addresses the anxiety of failure and success in modern society, frequently with an eye toward the rarefied an world in which he operates. The look and style of retro printed ephemera, promotional materials, and posters inform his aesthetic, but he has opted to imbue both form and content with his own subversive twist, undermining the issues of reproduction that are inherent to printmaking. His early movie posters for invented horror films are executed in traditional techniques of screenprint and letterpress, rather than the easier, more expedient, and more "modern" choice of digital printing, and exist only in single examples rather than in the multitude that one might naturally expect from a movie poster.

Brannon's letterpress prints also exist solely as unique examples. Inspired in part by Marimekko fabrics in his childhood home, and the clean look of retro posters, mid-century design, and corporate logos, his schematized renderings pair perfectly with letterpress's clean-edged, slightly nostalgic air. The images are paired with his own, equally well-edited texts, fragments and phrases that paint forlornly cinematic pictures of insufficiency, disappointment, and regret. Song & Dance sets quotidian elements-a hanger, a syringe, an invitation-against an interior monologue of professional ennui: "I'm turning on the autopilot. Undoing my seatbelt. Loosening my tie. Leaving the cockpit. Making small talk with the stewardesses. Walking to tlle rear of the plane. Taking a seat. Pouring myself a drink ..."

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Matthew Brannon, *The New Yorker*, December 19 & 26, 2011, pg. 18-20.

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

Matthew Brannon

Gentleman's Relish

Casey Kaplan
525 West 21st Street, Chelsea
Through December 17, 2011

You can almost hear the ice clinking in a highball glass of Scotch at this debonair stage set of a show, with its prop-like sculptures (shelves of bottles painted pink and black, an Art Deco chandelier) and backdrop-like paintings (grisaille floral patterns, a rare misstep from the artist). Brannon's signature letterpress prints and silk screens--still his strongest mediums-present images and texts that hint at a mystery unfolding in three acts. The highly stylized allusions to nostalgia, infidelity, and ennui may recall the films of Wes Anderson, but there are worse affinities.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Beeson, John, "Matthew Brannon 'A question answered with a quote'," Spike Art Quarterly, Issue 27, p. 129-130.

MATTHEW BRANNON
»A question answered with a quote«
Portikus, Frankfurt am Main
29.1.–3.4.2011

SECOND HAND INFORMATION

Just inside the entrance to the gallery of Portikus, a multicolored letterpress print entitled Regrets Only (2008) introduces several tendencies in Matthew Brannon's repertoire. Hanging down from the top of the page are two ghostly legs—below, an overturned champagne bottle, a radio, and the line of text: »Not another word.« An implicit reference to suicide is a fitting preface to this exhibition, which, with a forked tongue-in-cheek, often smuggles harsh language and macabre subject matter in the form of charmingly illustrative imagery.

Altogether, twenty-four prints in a similar format are positioned on eight wooden, viewing structures, as if providing a compendium of instructive parables; images and texts sit on white paper, set in black frames against a painted black surface, tilted back to promote direct, individual viewing. Supplementing these printed works are a decorative wallpaper along the back wall, a hanging sculpture of a light bulb painted black, and the sound installation Gag (2010)—gulps, coughs, and gasps resounding throughout the space with only moments of intervening silence. Stifling, disturbing, and arresting, the soundtrack speaks to the printed works' didacticism and is only one example of the exhibition's constant, self-reflexive interplay between consumption and excess.

New York-based artist Matthew Brannon (*1971) comes from a background of painting and book design, and his subjects and styling have drawn references to authors and filmmakers—from Capote to Calvino, Saki to Nabokov, Fitzgerald, Freud and, regularly, Jean Renoir—as well as to 50s American advertising-chic. Brannon's sensitivity to detail can be seen in his flawless employment of traditional letterpress printing; that selfsame sensitivity to detail also motivates the total, aesthetic nature of the exhibition. From the elegant design of the print-viewing structures to their eccentric, off-axis arrangement in the space, this site-specific installation underscores the material and social attentiveness that Brannon's work embodies and critiques.While standing in front of More Than Enough (2010)—a print depicting three iPods—viewers can glimpse, against the wall

MATTHEW BRANNON
Installation view/ Installationsansicht »A question answered with a quote«, Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, 2011
Photo: Katrin Schilling

behind the print, the electronic equipment producing the sound installation. Creating a formally striking composition, the lustrous, black record player stands in stark contrast to the pure white of the record and the deep red of its label; this chic, minimal arrangement connotes material and social means at the same time that it displays an aesthetic that is popular in installations of contemporary art.

In the printed works, the broad array of iconography composes a real-life variety of personal possessions, from the tawdry to the extravagant. Although forms and references are often abstract to the point of evoking association, their consistent stylization specifically recalls the artist. Sometimes Brannon's images and texts would seem to reference his own experience, or one like his, such as when he narrates the self-conscious thoughts of a professional artist in an art supplies store: »In front of you the undergraduate with a shopping list. Behind you the retired hobbyist.« The various texts' constant oscillation from a voice of self-doubt, to one of cynicism, to one of resolution constitutes an earnest, effective humanity. Sometimes addressing viewers, sometimes provoking them, and sometimes speaking on behalf of them, the field of subject matter can be consuming, and its tone can evoke an emotional response, drawing the viewer into its reality. Nevertheless, in the last print in the far corner of the gallery space—once again, More Than Enough (2010)—Brannon addresses the ever-present possibility that he is presenting artifice: »So I finish my story and he says, ›wait, is this second hand information?‹« One can sense Brannon everywhere but, perhaps, never see him. What is most poignant and magnanimous in this offering is neither the abstraction of his visual language, nor the beauty of his stylized material, but rather the work's candor, which collapses the distance between it and reality. So beautifully produced and installed, the art, itself, embraces indulgence but remains, in its textual referents, always self-conscious and critical. Brannon's work speaks neither purely from a position of submission, nor from one of pure incisiveness, but of a consciousness of better habits. Here is a penetrating cross-section of contemporary life—distilled, made aesthetic, dramatized, and reified. After all, as one text concedes: »…how could you not drink. Not watch television?« Found elsewhere, it comes as no real surprise: »I can't say I didn't enjoy it.«

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Núñez-Fernández, Lupe, The Shape of Things to Come: New Sculpture, London: Saatchi Gallery, 2011, p. 111.

MATTHEW BRANNON

Matthew Brannon was born in St Maries, Idaho in 1971. Since graduating with an MFA from Columbia University in 1999 he has exhibited widely including shows at PS1 New York, the ICA, London and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Brannon was included in the 2008 Whitney Biennial. He lives in New York.

The title of Matthew Brannon's sculpture Nevertheless (2009) is an appropriately oblique 'giveaway' from an artist known for the subtlety and humour of his language, objects and prints: "Nevertheless," he points out, "is an adverb comprised of three words: never - the - less. It became my stance against the panic that ensued from the economic collapse. An attempt to answer the question: what can we make when we shouldn't be making anything?"

Brannon's answer to the question is to create shop window-like displays and make-believe theatrical sets. Nevertheless was made on the occasion of Brannon's first show in London in 2009, and it was the perfect departure from other work being made at the time around urban malaise. Brannon, based in New York, dedicated the London show to the idea of the transatlantic sea voyage.

"As I was working I was rereading Evelyn Waugh's short autobiographical book The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold, viewing the cruise episode of his televised Brideshead Revisited, and digesting the ship passage in Vladimir Nabokov's Ada. There's much to be said about such close quarters. About being in between lands and lost at sea."

What Brannon has made is a sculpture of an installation, like a set for an untold story, in which seduction and frustration are masterfully ever unfolding. The scene's suggestive props (water, curtains, handrails, dirty magazines under the mattress) contrast with an exit sign and rope cordoning off the piece, preventing anyone from entering the installation, and leaving the narrative up to the viewer.

"It's not interactive but you can imagine it being interacted with. I told everyone it was the set of a play. Of a play about a murder on a ship. It's true I did write it, but that's another story. What you're shown here is just the set. I'm allowing you to put the pieces together yourself. To do what you would with it."

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NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

SAATCHI ONLINE Magazine

McClemont, Doug, "Top Ten November Shows in NYC," Saatchi Online Magazine, November 15, 2011.

Top Ten November shows in NYC by Doug McClemont

*Above: Matthew Brannon, Parental Consent, 2011, Wood, metal, hand-carved high density foam, glass, enamel, canvas, 80 x 38 x 8" / 203.2 x 96.5 x 20.3cm, Unique

Matthew Brannon-"Gentleman's Relish" at Casey Kaplan Arguably the most theatrical and genre-busting show currently on view in New York. Brannon is known for his letterpress prints, cryptic-but-familiar dialogue snippets written by the artist himself, and props that seem to have stepped directly out of his two-dimensional work. For Brannon's first show at Kaplan, the artist has created a visual narrative that is a wonderfully suspicious and confusing detective story. Brannon told me that the title of the show come's from a British anchovy paste and that he "always had the ambition to write a proper novel, in this case I'm writing a play with a noir plot to it." A brilliant exhibition by a singular artist.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

PORTIKUS

Matthew Brannon
A question answered with a quote
29 January — 3 April 2011

From January 29 until April 3, 2011, Portikus will present Matthew Brannon's exhibition A question answered with a quote. Matthew Brannon (b. St. Maries, 1971) has developed a site-specific installation, as part of which he will also show several new works.

In his art, Brannon, proceeding rigorously and sometimes with macabre enthusiasm, dissects a consumerist society that seems to be teetering on the edge of destruction. Immoderation, greed, excesses, and most gravely, indomitable hedonism: these, it seems, are central elements of contemporary life as Brannon sees it. In prints, wallpapers, films, sound pieces, and writings, and most recently also in paintings, the artist articulates his personal views of what the filmmaker Jean Renoir—whom Brannon often cites—has called a "rotten society." The imagery to which the artist's works refer is only too familiar, featuring messy banquet leftovers, abandoned office landscapes, adult toys and other accessories made by the entertainment industry, pseudo-luxury versions of articles of daily use, and various alcoholic beverages and culinary delights—the stereotypes of a globalized jet-set culture. Brannon's prints combine the superficiality of simplified form and content with acerbic narrative texts, uncovering a deeper—and sometimes abysmal—meaning concealed in these banal situations. Language, the beholder realizes, is just as important to Brannon as any object or representational content. In his work, words and writing become catalysts of sorts, making precisely calibrated suggestions as to the multifaceted possible readings of the various scenarios.

Matthew Brannon, "Gag," 2010. Installation view.

At Portikus, Brannon will show his prints as well as an ornamental wallpaper design and a sound piece entitled Gag. Once again, he is playing with language as a medium as well as its failure: to "gag" someone means to choke him or shut him up—that is, to render him incapable of speaking—but the word also refers to the telling of jokes. In such paradoxical confrontations, Matthew Brannon examines not just the complexity of socially established signs and the various interpretations that can be put on them; he also solicits the meanings generated by the beholder's bafflement.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Coulson, Amanda, "Germany: Matthew Brannon, Portikus Frankfurt am Main," Frieze, Issue 138, April 2011, p. 141

frieze

GERMANY

Matthew Brannon
Portikus Frankfurt am Main

What do 'Coronet Brandy' and 'El Producto Cigar' have in common? Certainly they'd make for a nice combination, but their logos were both created (in 1941 and 1952, respectively) by the legendary American graphic designer, Paul Rand. Beginning in the 1940s, Rand is known for having revolutionized graphic design, producing globally recognized corporate logos for the likes of IBM and UPS. The works on view in Matthew Brannon's solo show, 'A question answered with a quote', appeared at first glance to be an homage to this venerable star of advertising and communication: simple images, clean lines, bright block colours depicting consumer items in cleverly stacked graphic collages. From a distance they seem to be vintage ads, something Mad Men's Don Draper might have thought up.

The items depicted in Brannon's letterpress prints – exhibited here on tilted wooden stands resembling rudimentary drafting tables – are straight out of a fashion or luxury lifestyle magazine. Lobsters, wine glasses, ladies' stockings, a Rolex watch and the inevitable array of super-sexy 'i's – iPod, iPad, iPhone – all look glossy, vibrant and attractive. Yet the discreet texts underneath, where one would expect a catchy slogan, turn out to be unexpectedly caustic: some imply a blackly humorous narrative while others make mordant observations on modern life.

Indeed, while most of the depicted objects are lusted-after luxury items, many are actually in a state of decay – worn, used, leftover – adding a kind of jadedness or shabbiness to the scenes. The champagne bottles and glasses, indicated by simple black profiles, are always empty and tipped on their sides (such as in Ladies Choice, 2007, or Regrets Only, 2008). The dark-red rose, which also looks like a full glass of red wine, in A Difference of Hours (2010), is past its peak, the leaves are beginning to fall and the petals will soon follow. Excerpts of text – 'Dress Rehearsal/Closing Party', 'Cancelled Reservations', 'Who killed who the night before' – imply shattered hope and disappointed expectations, just as the rose-as-wine-glass conjures images of the jilted, lonely drinker. These verses deny any of the relaxed sophistication one might have imagined and instead replace it with a sense of desperate striving to attain or maintain a certain social level through constant show and consumerism.

In the corner of the exhibition space, set off by Brannon's two-tone graphic wallpaper, was a sculptural/sound piece comprising a white pedestal with black cubic speakers on either side – like a kind of sculptural Malevich – and a black record player with a white vinyl record on the turntable. A small shelf holds the white album cover with the piece's title: Gag. Again, Brannon uses language to both emphasize and confuse: is it all a joke? Or is the gag a metaphorical restraint, or does it all make you sick?

Brannon's barbed narrative texts are, according to the press release, meant to be a critical comment on 'Immoderation, greed, excesses, and most gravely, indomitable hedonism.' The artist is therefore making a criticism of the consumers' world with the very means intended to make the punters buy. It sounds clever and subversive but somehow the visuals are simply too pretty or too catchy to really deliver a hard punch. One needs to remember that Brannon is selling something too – not only his work but also the intellectual ideas behind them, and it's ultimately highly ironic to think of one of these prints ending up on a wealthy collector's wall.

Rand struggled to bring elements of high art to graphic design and advertising, to lend it credibility and depth. Brannon is doing the reverse: taking the shallow language of advertising and trying to make it deeper. The show's title 'A question answered with a quote' implies another kind of shallowness, an interrogative hoping for a profound response answered with a glib one-liner. Maybe, then, the best way to conclude is with one of Rand's famous quotes: 'Don't try to be original; just try to be good.'

Amanda Coulson

Matthew Brannon
'A question answered with a quote'
2011
Installation view

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATTHEW BRANNON
GENTLEMAN'S RELISH

EXHIBITION DATES: OCTOBER 27 – DECEMBER 17, 2011
OPENING: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27 6:00-8:00PM

Casey Kaplan is extremely proud to present the gallery's first solo exhibition Gentleman's Relish with New York based artist, Matthew Brannon. Utilizing our three separate gallery spaces, the project presents: new silkscreen and letterpress prints, paintings, sculptures, and a series of collaborative artworks with the designer and artist, Carlo Brandelli. These artworks suggest various props, personas, sets, dialogues, and scenarios of an unpublished noir mystery narrative (written by Brannon) – the plot of which involves a sexually frustrated private detective who is hired to investigate a murder whose prime suspect is a sexually deviant dentist.

The exhibition is structured as three separate locales within the three rooms of the gallery. Sculptural doors with handpainted signage written backwards: "Adult's Only," "Powder Room," and "Police Station" displace the viewer into a fictitious world. Silkscreen and letterpress text-based prints, labeled "Act I," "Act II," and "Act III," imply events that may yet happen or have already occurred.

The first gallery presents a sculptural bar housing innumerable hand-carved liquor bottles and glasses, alluding to decadence and excess, and the room is charged with a sense of impending demise. In the second gallery, the suspense heightens within two simultaneously occurring scenes – an elaborate apartment party and the crowded lobby leading to it – where two characters run into each other, and someone is killed. A desk with a single letter resides in the third gallery. On the wall, a text-based silkscreen begins, "In his office. End of the night. Difficult Jazz Playing in the Background. Sound of air conditioning. Sound of breaking pencils. Hitting the delete button…," and ends, "…He'd been hired to help someone but he knew the real job was murder. All your life you think you're this one person and then you find out you're not and it's only a moment before it's over."

The plot is nearly revealed, however intrigue prevails, as the climax remains unseen. It is set in the bar of a London central train station where a character, guilty of murder, is waiting for the police to arrest him. Brannon's solo presentation at Frieze Art Fair in London (October 12 – 16, 2011) has functioned both as the prologue and the finale of this exhibition.

The adaptation of Brannon's noir mystery attests to the crucial role of text and narrative within his practice. The exhibition exemplifies the diversity of media within it; his trademark letterpress and silkscreen prints anchor the plot, and are aided by sculptural elements and objects such as hand carved foam and wood works, larger installations, and floral and collaged prop-like paintings. The disjunction of the narrative and its displaced presentation – both spatially and temporally – emphasize the complexities of Brannon's work, whose practice interweaves fiction and sublimated desires, with reality and satire.

Coinciding with the exhibition is the publication of a monograph entitled Hyena's Are…, published by Mousse Publishing, Milano. Traversing Brannon's entire oeuvre, this compact volume includes an intricate and illuminating essay by Jan Tumlir. Accompanied by a vast repertoire of image reproductions of artworks, including other reference images, Tumlir's chapters provide a deeper understanding of the complexity of Brannon's work and practice to date.

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NEW YORK NY 10001
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FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW
November 2011, pp 154-163.

MATTHEW BRANNON
IN THE STUDIO WITH STEEL STILLMAN

GIVEN THE SOPHISTICATION *of Matthew Brannon's artwork, you might not guess that he was raised in sparsely populated North American wildernesses. Born in 1971 in St. Maries, Idaho, where his father was embarking on a career with the U.S. Forest Service, Brannon grew up at a remove that in fact honed his fascination for the metropolitan mien-for its mix of glamour and insecurity. In his late teens, Brannon gravitated toward city life. After a brief stint at Rutgers University he moved to Los Angeles, where he completed his undergraduate studies at UCLA in 1995 before relocating to New York. He earned an MFA from Columbia in 1999. In the late 1990s, Brannon discovered a model for his esthetics in B-movie posters from the '40s and '50s. Since then, he has produced silkscreen and letterpress prints, in which he juxtaposes simply colored silhouetted imagery of everyday, often upscale objects with texts that he writes himself, deploying a mimic's skill to conjure a host of familiar-sounding cosmopolitan voices. (A writer as well, he has a novel in progress). Attentive viewers will find an occasional iPod depicted amid the outdated bric-a-brac in works that, predating "Mad Men," have a deceptively nostalgic look-and an undertone of noirish aggression. Over time, the prints have spawned sculptures and complex stagelike installations, but the core subject for all Brannon's work has remained consistent: the anxious desires that make his imaginary characters seem real.*

Brannon's career accelerated quickly after graduate school: he has had 19 solo exhibitions and been in nearly 70 group shows in the U.S., Europe and China since 2000, including the 2008 Whitney Biennial. As befits an artist whose exhibitions are often thematic assemblies of disparate objects, Brannon possesses a curator's sensibility, and he has organized a half-dozen group shows. The most recent, "Not So Subtle Subtitle," at Casey Kaplan Gallery in New York in 2008, included work by Christopher Williams, Matt Keegan and Shannon Ebner, among others.

Brannon lives and works in New York and is married to the artist Michelle Elzay. In August, we met for lunch at his well-organized studio in the garment district and talked for much of the afternoon.

CURRENTLY ON VIEW

"Gentleman's Relish" at Casey Kaplan, New York, through Dec. 17

STEEL STILLMAN It sounds like you moved around a good deal when you were younger.

MATTHEW BRANNON By the time I graduated from high school in 1989, in Kalispell, Montana, I'd already lived in eight remote towns in six states, including Alaska, and I couldn't wait to get away from the woods. I enrolled at Rutgers as an art major-my parents had always supported my creative side-but I was immediately distracted by New York City, and didn't get any work done. When a high school girlfriend needed a roommate in Santa Monica, I dropped out of Rutgers and moved to L.A., where I worked in record stores. After a year or two, I went back to school and studied graphic design at Santa Monica College of Design, Art and Architecture, and began pre-med courses at Santa Monica College.

STILLMAN So, when you transferred to UCLA in the fall of 1992, you were planning to become a doctor.

BRANNON I was, and sometimes I regret not sticking with it. But earlier that year MOCA had put on its "Helter Skelter" exhibition, and art looked to me like a more open-ended career choice. UCLA's program was interdisciplinary, and I worked in painting, photography, filmmaking and music. I also made performance videos-there was a lot of nudity in them-in which I played a doctor or a nurse. It was a productive time and I got to tryout many things.

Matthew Brannon in his studio, 2011. Photo Paolo Ferrario

Steak Dinner, 2007, letterpress on paper, 24 by 18 inches

STILLMAN What kind of work did you do in graduate school?
BRANNON I struggled with painting but lost its thread. Instead, I turned my attention to art as decor, and built mock office and domestic interiors as settings for my paintings. But gradually I became more interested in the rooms themselves. I was trying to understand what art's role could be. Eventually I stopped painting and began curating a series of real and imaginary exhibitions. For these, I made invitations, press releases and posters, and all that printed matter became my first serious artwork. My thesis exhibition consisted of every poster I'd made in an installation surrounded by security mirrors.
STILLMAN There seems to be a connection between your interest in posters and your having grown up in places where culture was hard to come by.

Next Page: View of "Where Were We," 2007, at the Whitney Museum at Altria, New York.

All photos this article, unless otherwise noted, courtesy Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles.

BRANNON In Alaska in the '70s, I would see ads for a movie like Star Wars on TV but would have to wait a year to see the actual movie Similarly, a decade later, when I was a teenager in Montana and interested in punk rock, there was no scene for hundreds of miles. So I would drool over things long before I had them,
and fetishize whatever I could get my hands on. I began collecting posters then-it's something I still do-and I loved everything about them, from the quality of the paper to whether
they were folded or rolled, the color of the images and the word choices and fonts. The handmade silkscreens I made at Columbia were my attempts to emulate soon-to-be-forgotten work from the pre-digital era.
STILLMAN What led to the faux movie posters that you began in 2001?
BRANNON Things changed after school. I was asked to participate in group shows and would often contribute an announcement or a
poster. But I felt I needed stronger content. I'd been watching a lot of haunted house films, when one day it occurred to me that these movies and group shows had distinct
similarities. In both cases a diverse group of skeptics and believers are invited to assess a haunting, and each participant must overcome (or succumb to) the competing agendas
of his fellow invitees, as well as his own inner demons. Inspired by these films, I started a series of posters-one was called Satan's
Bedroom [2001]-that reflected my youthful ambivalence toward the art world. I was torn between seeking praise and biting the hand that was beginning to feed me.

“UNLIKE THE FILM POSTERS, WHERE THE TEXT WAS CONFINED TO THE CREDITS, THE LETTERPRESS PRINTS GAVE WORDS EQUAL BILLING. I BEGAN WRITING DESCRIPTION AND DIALOGUE AND QUICKLY BECAME A VENTRILOQUIST.”

STILLMAN When did you get involved with letterpress printing?
BRANNON By 2004 my posters were becoming less about film and more about interior spaces and psychological themes. I was working on some tapestries-flora and fauna embroidered and stenciled on unstretched canvas-which I thought of as hanging in the haunted houses. But then I met a printer who introduced me to letterpress and I knew immediately that I was onto something. Letterpress prints have an amazingly rich, almost sculptural presence that results from image and text being literally pressed into the paper. After experimenting a bit, in 2006, I started work on a series of letterpress prints that had almost nothing to do with movies and that granted greater autonomy to image, title and caption. I figured that if I let each syntactical element have a narrative of its own, there would be no limit to what their recombinations might mean. I’d discovered a platform with which I could say anything.
STILLMAN Your 2007 exhibition “Where Were We” at the Whitney Museum’s Altria space suggested that you’d also discovered a subject in the foibles of upwardly mobile urbanites of the ‘50s and ‘60s.
BRANNON The location of the Altria space-across the street from Grand Central Station-provided a context. I decided to do a show about New York, and imagined corporate commuters seeing my art on their way to work. I wanted to speak their language, which, of course, I only really knew from films. Taking my cue from letterpress’s strengths and limitations, I developed a graphic style that referenced midcentury design’s

View of the installation *Nevertheless*, 2009, wood, steel, aluminum, string and mixed media. Courtesy of the Approach, London. Photo FXP Photography, London

poaching of modern art. Hence, the commuter became a man in a gray flannel suit.
Having arrived in New York in the late '90s, when the economy was booming, as it still was in the 2000s, I wanted to deal with status and its anxieties
without being autobiographical. Using imagery that evoked outdated and cliched markers of success, like lobster or steak dinners, provided a comfortable degree of abstraction.

STILLMAN Language plays a stronger role in the letterpress prints than it had in the film posters, twisting what are essentially still-life images in a
narrative direction.

BRANNON Unlike the film posters, where text was confined to the credits, the letterpress prints gave words equal billing. I began writing description
and dialogue and quickly became a ventriloquist. Steak Dinner [2007] tweaked the language of advertising: "This year tell her you love her all over
again. With a grab bag of diamonds. [...J And a soft slap on her bare ass." But You Do It Anyway [2007]
was closer to film noir: "[...] The hum of the air conditioning. The drips in the tub. An unanswered
phone ringing in the dark." When I was studying painting a UCLA, one of my teachers, Lari Pittman, would describe art as having two reads, a quick initial take followed by a more thought-out one. In my own work, I decided to make the second read the more compelling one. And I went about it quite literally: image, then text. The first read should be well-dressed and familiar. The second, somewhat rude and discomforting.

STILLMAN Why are your prints unique, and not in multiples? And what led you to create easel-like
pedestals and freestanding walls to display them on?

BRANNON In an art world that privileges unique works, prints are poor cousins, so limiting them to an edition of one might look like a marketing
strategy. And yet the truth is letterpress prints are hard to make, and sometimes you can only get one good one. Likewise, in many art contexts, prints are viewed in diminished circumstances, away from
painting and sculpture. Designing display units became a way to put them center stage. My hope for viewers has been that they would move from inside out, from the sound of the words in their heads to the print itself, then to the frame, the thing the frame hangs on, and out into the world. If it were up to me, I'd design the walls, the lighting, the ventilation
ducts, everything!

STILLMAN You had another solo show in 2007, "Try and Be Grateful," at the Art Gallery of York University

Left, *As It's Its Own*, 2011, oil on linen, 72 by 60 inches.

Opposite, *Useful-Useless-Used,* 2010, collage and acrylic on canvas, 32 by 28 inches

in Toronto, which featured, in addition to prints, a sound recording and a play that were both called Hyena. The installation partly suggested a theater set.

BRANNON In 2005 I had a show in Berlin and celebrated a little too much after the opening. The next morning, with a blinding hangover, I went to the zoo, where, for the first time in my life, I encountered a hyena and its unbelievable sound-like a human
trapped inside an animal's body. The hyena seemed to be mocking me. A few months later I went back to Berlin to record the hyena's cackle, but the result was more playful than what I'd remembered. Still, the recording seemed like it could be part of something,
so I began to write a play about humiliation, centered on a theater director directing a play called Hyena.
As I wrote, I made "props": director's chairs, lightbulbs, bookshelves and other things. Realistically designed and to scale, but not functional, these objects were more more signs of things than things themselves.
They looked like they'd walked right out of my prints. I think of the setlike installations as sculptures, with each object operating in much the way individual motifs operate within the prints, that is, as elements in a larger construct.
In "Try and Be Grateful"
black-bound copies of the text of Hyena were piled on director's chairs and on the floor. The book could also be purchased in the museum store and the recording itself played on turntables off to the side.

STILLMAN You've since written other books, including a series of murder mysteries that so far have been accessible to only a few people.

BRANNON After Hyena, I began writing Raymond Chandler/Graham Greene-like novellas and hiding them in plain sight, making sculptures out of
rows of books installed on bookshelves, which hang out of reach of gallerygoers. Basically, I wanted to

“WHEN I BEGAN MY CAREER, IT OCCURED TO ME THAT MOST ARTISTS MAKE CONSERVATIVE VERSIONS OF RADICAL ART. SO I DECIDED THAT ONE OF MY GOALS WOULD BE TO MAKE RADICAL VERSIONS OF CONSERVATIVE ART”

see if I could get away with murder. What would happen if I wrote whatever I wanted, even about the people I was involved with, but only let those who actually bought the sculptures read what I’d written?
The first book was called Mosquito and others include Poodle, Rat and Iguana. Some are better than others, and someday I’d like to publish them in a low-priced compendium and sell them at regular bookstores.

STILLMAN You’ve continued to make installationlike sculptures organized around narrative constructs. For the 2008 Whitney Biennial, the setting was an apartment in a Manhattan high-rise, and for a solo that year at Friedrich Petzel Gallery, you conjured up a sushi restaurant and two stores. Then in 2009, you staged Nevertheless at The Approach, in London.

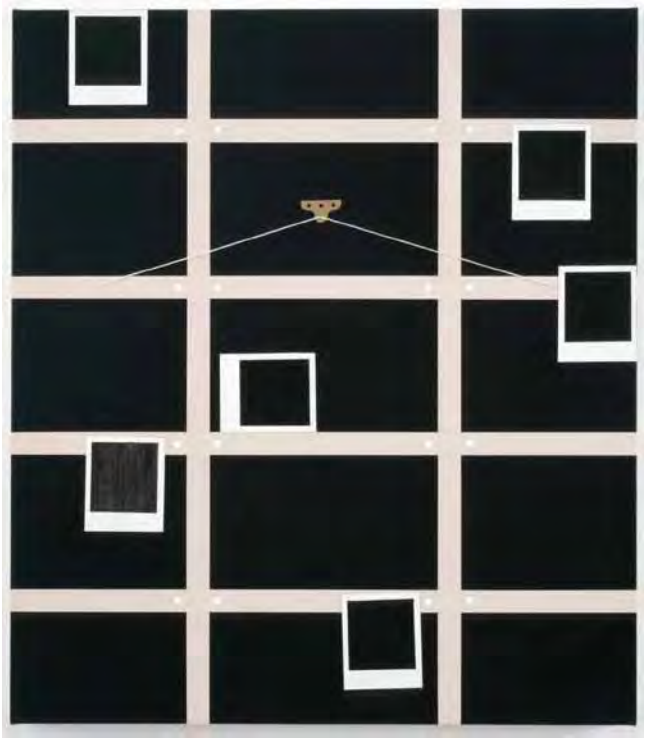
BRANNON Nevertheless was my first solo show in London, and was conceived in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis. The title “never/the/less” was my cheeky response to the pressure to make diet art. Having no money didn’t mean we couldn’t afford
Ideas. The setting was meant to suggest a ship on a transatlantic voyage, and was inspired by an Evelyn Waugh novel, The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold, about an alcoholic writer undergoing a psychotic breakdown. On a low plinth, I created three contiguous spacesthe
ship’s deck, a bar and a stateroom- and then I scattered around an assortment of “props” and a storebought sound-canceling machine, like those found in psychoanalysts’ offices. The whole exhibition occupied the back third of the gallery and was roped off
with a cord borrowed from the Tate Modern, where it had been used to keep people from touching artworks. I wanted viewers to feel they were behind police tape at a crime scene.

STILLMAN I’m glad you mentioned the white noise machine, because sound has become a vital aspect of your work. I’m particularly curious about the recording Gag [2010). which you featured in two recent solo shows

BRANNON I’d wanted to do a performance
that involved gagging for several years-the verb itself has such an interesting combination of meanings, from choking, to silencing, to playing for laughter-but I
knew I didn’t have the endurance to do it myself. So I found a woman, an adult film star, and recorded her in a sound studio gagging on a dildo for an hour or two, and then edited out all the overtly sexual bits.
I was only interested in the body’s reflex.
In gagging the body tries to turn itself inside out, making sounds that are beyond language. Gag is hard to listen to, but if you can get past the first minute or two the sound becomes abstract, nearly musical, almost like a bird singing. In the exhibitions where I’ve used it, Gag became a kind of soundtrack, highlighting the subject of taste in the other artworks, and raising viewers’ suspicions.

STILLMAN For the past several years you’ve been making what appear to be pseudo paintings, or perhaps they are puns of paintings. They hang on the wall but are often seen as If from the back, with their stretchers showing. Where do they fit in?

BRANNON Cliched representations of artists, writers and film directors figure in many of my prints and scenarios, and those sculptures masquerading as
paintings are mini-sets unto themselves. Most include crude trompe l’oeil representations of objects, such as a bottle of aftershave perched on a stretcher bar, or a bra slung over the top. Several have electrical outlets painted on their sides or straight razors hidden on the uppermost edge, stashed away like murder weapons.



“MUCH OF MY WORK IS ABOUT WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE, MYSELF INCLUDED. WHAT DO WE WANT? WHAT DO WE THINK WE WANT? AND, OF COURSE: WHERE DID WE GO WRONG?”

Some of the first ones were made for art fairs and had price tags hanging from them.

STILLMAN And yet for all their mocking humor, they’ve made you into a real oil painter again.

BRANNON I needed to confront my own resistance. So far the paintings have been based on drawings I’ve made in landscape settings. Most are of leaves and flowers and are painted with a reduced palette. I’m
Very conscious of their traditional qualities.
When I began my career, it occurred to me that most artists make conservative versions of radical art. So I decided that one of my goals would be to make radical
versions of conservative art. I hope this somehow applies to the paintings.

STILLMAN Psychoanalysis shows up regularly in the subject matter of your prints and sculpture. Its reflective procedures also seem important to your ways
of thinking and working.

BRANNON I’ve been in analysis for a number of years and part of its effect on my work is that it has made me comfortable with the conflict between what happens on the surface and what goes on underneath, with what Freud described, speaking of dreams, as the difference between their manifest and latent contents.
Much of my work is about what motivates people, myself included. What do we want? What do we think we want? And, of
course: Where did we go wrong?

STILLMAN Tell me about your show at Casey Kaplan.

BRANNON It is called “Gentleman’s Relish” and describes a private detective with erectile dysfunction who is hired to investigate a sexually deviant dentist. The exhibition incorporates sculpture, prints and paintings and is organized around three sets: a powder
room, a bar and an apartment lobby. Two additional “scenes” will be staged at London’s Frieze art fair. A prologue takes place in the detective’s office and an epilogue at a train station. In the end, the private detective kills somebody and falls in love with a British film director. But of course it won’t be theater; it will be an art show.

STEEL STILLMAN is an artist and writer based in New York.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Rees, Simon, "Matthew Brannon," *The 15th Tallinn Print Triennial: For Love Not Money,* Kumu Art Museum, January 20 - May 8, 2011, Estonia: Tallinn Book Printers, 2011, p. 81-84.

Müüt
Myth

Matthew Brannon

1. Halvad kombed
Bad Manners
käsiladu / letterpress
56 x 41 cm, 2008

2. Rough Trade
käsiladu / letterpress
56 x 41 cm, 2008

3. Toateenindus
Room Service
käsiladu / letterpress
56 x 41 cm, 2008

Halvad kombed
Bad Manners

Rough Trade

Matthew Brannon

Matthew Brannon loob ja lammutab kunstnikuks olemise ja New Yorgis elamise müüti. Tema elegantseid käsilaos graafilisi teoseid näidatakse tihti keset laialipillutud esemeid, mis esindavad seda elustiili või mille kohta võiks eeldatavasti lugeda klantslehe “midakaasa-pakkida” rubriigist: lennukohver, viin, ühelinnaseviski, siidisukad, kondoomid, kanged tabletid phomeluse ravimiseks. Vahel peidab ta esemed ära, jättes samas seinajuhise, mis paljastab nende olemasolu kuskil ruumis. Näiliselt romantilised installatsioonid on palju tõredamad kui esmapilgul võiks arvata: need on läbi imbunud New Yorki kirjandushiidude Wolfe’i, Rothi, Maileri ja Salingeri künismist. Brannoni ihamantra - maneerid ja Martinid - on pigem kõhedust tekitav kui ligitõmbav, pannes mõtlema, kas New York on ikkagi unelmatepaik. Ameerika menuka telesarja “Pöörased” tegelaste elus on rohkesti karisid, hoolimata nende sätitud riietusest ja klanitud soengutest. Whitney biennaalit külastajapiletit jäljendav töö “Piletiraha” (2008) püstitab konkreetsemalt küsimuse selle kohta, mis hinda maksab kunstnik kunstimaailma tormijooksuga ühinemiseks, lootuse eest võimaldada endale uhket äraelamist.

(Simon Rees)

Matthew Brannon’s work constructs and deconstructs myths about being an artist and living in New York. His elegant letterpress prints are often shown amongst installations of a clutter of objects that are artifacts of that lifestyle or that one might read in a “what-to-pack” vignette in a glossy magazine: airline bag, vodka, single malt scotch, silk stockings, condoms, strong pills to combat hangovers. Sometimes he hides the artifacts but makes sure to leave a wall-label telling you of their presence somewhere in the room. The seemingly romantic arrangements are rather more dyspeptic than they seem at first glance: they are steeped in the cynicism of the New York literary giants Wolfe, Roth, Mailer, and Salinger. His mantra of desire—manners and martinist—is chilling rather than appealing and makes us wonder if NYC is really the stuff of dreams? There are plenty of downslopes for the people depicted in the hit American television series Mad Men despite the tailoring of their clothes and perfection of their haircuts. The work Price of Admission (2008), a simulacrum of a Whitney Museum biennial visitor’s ticket, poses a more specific question about the cost of an artist joining the rat-race, the art-system, or aspiring to afford a swanky living situation.

(Simon Rees)

sünd 1971 USA-s b. 1971 USA Elab ja töötab USA-s New Yorgis. Lives and works in New York, USA. Valik isiknäitusi Selected Solo Exhibitions 2010 Matthew Brannon-M, Museum Leuven 2010 Reservations, Ursula Blickle Foundation, Kraichtal-Unteröwisheim, Germany 2007 Where Were We, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York Valik grupinäitusi Selected Group Exhibitions 2010 an unpardonable sin, castillo/corrales, Paris 2009 CODE SHARE: 5 continents, 10 biennales, 20 artists, Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius 2009 Learn To Read: A History of Printed Matter, PS1 MoMA, New York & Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe Valikbibliograafia Selected Reading Jennifer Higgie, “The Embarrasing Truth” Frieze, November-December 2008 Philip Monk, “More Than You Know” Matthew Brannon To Say the Very Least, Art Galley of York, 2008 Martha Schwendener, “Not So Subtle Subtitle” The New Yorker, 21.7.2008

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

M VAN
MUSEUM
LEUVEN

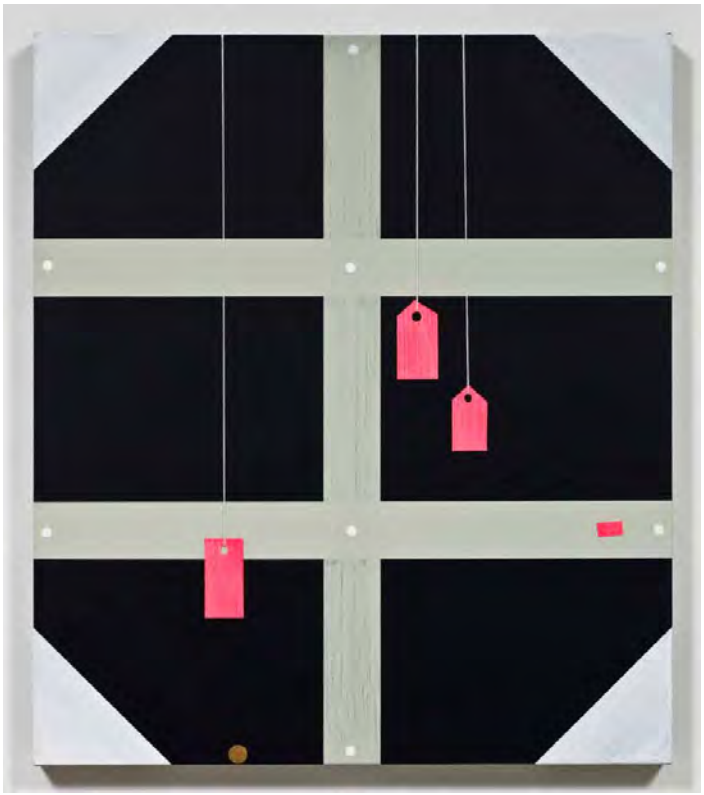
PRESS KIT

Leuven, 7 October, 2010

Matthew Brannon

‘Mouse Trap, Light Switch’

8 October - 5 December 2010



This autumn M is presenting Belgium’s first solo show by the American artist Matthew Brannon (°1971, New York). Brannon gets inspired by everyday objects and disposable items such as take-out-menus, advertisements and posters as well as slips-of-the-tongue and overheard conversations. Elements from these massproduced sources are reworked in own designs and artworks, using more traditional or labour intensive techniques such as letter-press or screen printing. His compositions combine in a special way recognizable images with poetic fragments.

This autumn M is presenting Belgium's first solo show by the American artist Matthew Brannon (°1971, New York). Brannon makes paintings, prints, spatial installations and sound works, drawing inspiration from ordinary objects and throwaways like menus, advertisements and posters, but also from amusing slips of the tongue and overheard snippets of conversation. He incorporates elements from all these things into new objects, regularly making use of slightly antiquated or labour-intensive techniques such as letterpress or screen prints to produce highly original prints. His compositions combine recognizable images and poetic passages of text in an unusual manner. Pictures of lobsters, crabs, shrimps, sushi, high-heeled shoes, stockings, pencils, champagne, sake and cigarettes are poised above stories taken from interviews and cocktail party chit-chat. *"No it wasn't something I ate. Don't give me that look. I was only being nice. All your hard work isn't going to get you a promotion. They think you're a joke. The way you chew with your mouth open. How you mispronounced laissez-fair. And then ordered his daughter a drink."* (from 'Sorry Excuse', 2009)

His art revolves around success and failure, trust and agreements. Everything is tinged with a certain distrust of images as illustration, and the realization that the written word cannot explain what art is really about. Brannon has created an inventive visual language which the onlooker can easily recognize, irrespective of the medium or material he uses. At first glance his works show a certain elegance, but that veneer conceals a darker world. Brannon's art is a quest for "productive frustration," as he himself describes it. It explores the borders between the visual and language, and goes in search of the verbal moment that lies between the two levels of expression.

Brannon's spatial installations allude to anonymous, urban environments. The setting might be a block of flats, the lobby of a company or an airport lounge and the space is filled with household appurtenances. His installations sometimes look like a crime scene from a *film noir* with familiar elements arranged in mysterious configurations. The first impression is that these objects are ordinary and innocuous, but after a while they become more enigmatic and their artificiality is revealed. An (American) socket, a light switch, a lamp, EXIT signs or a mousetrap are banal and at the same time – in their new form and composition – by-pass the legibility of the space. The installation entitled 'Paragraph' (2010) shown at M is a defining theatrical space which throws into relief the viewers' sense of self-awareness and our complicity in deciphering and completing meaning. A constant in his installations are small sound-cancelling devices of the kind found in a psychoanalyst's practice. They create a subtle white noise which isolates the spectator auditively and induces a sense of privacy.

The exhibition at M presents a series of extraordinary prints, sculptural work made to measure for the
M gallery, two sound works and a number of new paintings. This exhibition is part of the series of oneman shows in which emerging artists combine new work with a selection of existing artworks.

'Mouse Trap / Light Switch' is a revised and enlarged version of an earlier exhibition entitled 'Reservations' mounted at the Ursula Blickle Foundation near Stuttgart and curated by Daniel Birnbaum. A third exhibition will be organized at Portikus in Frankfurt in January 2011.

BIOGRAPHY

Matthew Brannon was born in St. Maries, Idaho, in 1971. He grew up with the deathrock scene which had emerged in Los Angeles in 1979. Brannon studied visual art, art theory and psychology at the University of California in Los Angeles and at Columbia University in New York. He now lives and works in New York. His work has been shown at numerous international exhibitions, most recently at Friedrich Petzel Gallery in New York and The Approach in London. Brannon has forthcoming exhibitions at David Kordansky in Los Angeles, Gio Marconi in Milan and Office Baroque in Antwerp.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Brannon, Matthew, Where We Were, V Magazine, Summer 2009, p. 48 (ill.)

WHERE WE WERE

ARTIST MATTHEW BRANNON NEVER MET A CULTURAL CONCEIT HE COULDN'T SKEWER. IN A FARCICAL "REVIEW" OF NEXT MONTH'S ART BASEL EVENTS, HE LAMPOONS THE BIG CHARACTERS AND INSECURITIES OF THE GLOBAL ART SET

On the plane over, I chew orange Nicorette and Xanax and reread the first half of A Handful of Dust. When I check into the Swiss hotel, I bribe the concierge to let me see the onscreen guest list. There are a few new names, but it's the absentees that are the most interesting. Who didn't show. If only they had realized that by staying home they would be drawing more attention to themselves than if they had come.

I make sure my room is beside Los Angeles dealer ... and below New York consultant ... That way I can find out if the rumors are really true. The first is confirmed. (Incredible that a grown man struggles with bulimia.) But it's ...'s sad morning Pilates routine that requires I change my room. In the end, I'm in a corner room just past another artist way too excited for his own good. He makes me feel as old as I am, and I do everything I can to avoid him in the hall.

The first night's requisite dinner is at Chez Donati, among curators, museum directors, artists, writers, and a very intoxicated Slavoj Zizek. Beside the sunset-tinged water, I find myself truly enjoying the evening. We discuss which galleries will close, what we're wearing, Daniel Birnbaum's hair, Barack Obama, Mickey Rourke, how many calories are in each dish, how painful cold sores are, and whether or not it's true that if you receive oral sex from someone who has one you can get genital herpes. We try to delineate what was planned before the crash and what is intentional.

Opening night at the fair, I'm impressed by the turnout. You could say that those who have decided to come have gotten over themselves. No one is suffering from the shock that traumatized Frieze or the resentment that consumed the Armory. Like soldiers meeting at base camp, anxious dealers kiss cheeks and shake hands, prepared to fight for survival in an unregulated industry. I stay on the outskirts, not wanting to disrupt business. I slurp complimentary Moët and make mental lists.

The award for most-knocked-off artist goes to Wade Guyton. A few of them really good too. The artist-from-whom-there's-just-too-much-and-no-one-wants-any-of-it goes to ... The artist-who isn't-very-good-but-somehow-I-really-like-tonight goes to ... The artist-who-I-followed-but-now-totally-question goes to ... The best-dressed dealer is undoubtedly ... The worst, without question, is ... The booth-that-looks-the-most-expensive (...) also wins for least-interesting. The most-timid ... The most-obvious ... The most-stuff ...The sure-to-not-get-in-next-year goes to ... The can't-believe-they're-here-this-year ... The people I have to avoid start to exceed those I have to see, so I go home early, proud I haven't said anything I'll regret.

Next day, I run into an old friend from UCLA. We joke about how they named the sections "Unlimited," "Statements," "Premiere," and "Conversations." Please. We avoid discussing how embarrassing it is to be an artist at an art fair. We make plans we won't keep and part. I run into someone else I'm glad to run into, and I'm just on the verge of getting that much-desired Kunstverein show when ..., who is at the top of everyone's most-annoying- artist list, cock-blocks me. He loudly lists all the places he's come across everyone-none of any note. I begin to fear I'm

just as transparent. There's a new app for your iPhone that lets you fake an incoming call. I put it to use and excuse myself. Across the room I take my place on the panel discussion concerning "difficult art." In between answering questions, Andy Stillpass and I slip notes back and forth. I catch myself quoting Lacan and cringe at how obnoxious and insecure it sounds.

The next night, running on fumes, we resign ourselves to drinking at the Kunsthalle. Tom Burr and I pretend we've never met and let a collector explain each other's work to one another. We're surrounded by the few surviving consultants. Without fail they ask you what you saw that you liked. I list the work of five friends, a dead artist everyone likes, and one whose artwork you wouldn't think I would like, just to make it all sound earnest. Sarah Morris rolls her eyes at me. We all stay too long. And then, well, you know what happened.

Just for the record, I love art critics. I've been known to let a few buy me drinks. For most of them, being a critic is really just a part-time job. Most are actually teachers, historians, novelists, curators, or veterinarians-their criticism is only a second income. But it's this role as "critic" that defines them. Dooms them, so to speak.. They masochistically and publicly say what we mutter. It's a job with many pitfalls. Most of them burn out after a few years, finding themselves backed into a corner defending words written in an hour's time, years before. All this is to say that we should really get over what happened to ... that night. It was really awful, and there's nothing funny about it. Especially considering someone lost an eye. We should all feel guilty.

I can't pretend that I don't remember how I ended up where I woke up. Age difference is more distressing in the morning light, and I leave determined to spend my last two days in my hotel room. I finish A Handful of Dust and try to read The Road, but decide to leave it in the room after twenty pages. I call New York to check my answering machine for the first time in four days. Seems a parrot flew into an open window and none of the neighbors will claim it. It's living off Kashi cereal and shitting all over my new rug. Seems my doctor has decided not to renew my Ambien prescription. Seems I was supposed to be talking at NYU, but failed to turn up, so the class has been cancelled. My new "Hollywood" agent called and wants me to change the art dealer character because he's just too recognizable. The police call to say I have two active driver's licenses. My machine tells me it's full, and I press the pound key to erase all messages.

The thing that people who say "I told you so" always fail to understand is that no one likes them. Matthew Brannon

Where We Were, 2009
Artwork Matthew Brannon
Courtesy Friedrich Petzel Gallery, NYC

Art Basel runs June 10-14, 2009; www.artbasel.com

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Dorment, Richard, Matthew Brannon's Nevertheless at the Approach, review, Telegraph.co.uk, September 14, 2009

Matthew Brannon's Nevertheless at The Approach, review

Matthew Brannon's Nevertheless at The Approach demonstrates that he is a master of seduction and insinuation.

by Richard Dorment

American artist Matthew Brannon asked us not to publish his photograph with this review. It wasn't because he is modest, but because the less you know about his identity, the more his work gets under your skin. With a background in graphic design, Brannon makes elegant letterpress prints in which he combines words and images to parody both the high-end marketing of luxury goods and the kind of art that hotel chains and multinational companies buy in bulk to fill empty walls.

But look beyond the reassuringly bland surfaces of Brannon's work and you discover a master of seduction and insinuation, the Edgar Allan Poe of modern urban decadence.

Brannon is also a sculptor. Nevertheless, the new work he has made for his first show in this country, at London's Approach Gallery, looks like a highly stylised simulacrum of an ocean liner dating from the days of transatlantic travel – including a luxury stateroom, cocktail bar, deck, and railings. After a minute or two, you spot the "Exit" sign just behind the work and realise that we are meant to be looking not at a real ocean liner, but at a stage set for the performance of a play set on board a ship. A low barrier between the viewer and the stage signifies the line between the real and fictional worlds.

Just as the placement of images, words and colours in one of Brannon's works on paper are as exquisitely calculated as those in a Japanese print, here he builds a formal three- dimensional composition in which every shape and colour is used like a brushstroke on a canvas. For example, the white-on-white walls and floors of the art deco interior are offset by the rhythmic repetition of the light green colour of the seahorse pattern on the curtain in the stateroom, the bottles arranged on shelves in the bar, and the lightbulbs on deck.

That Brannon drew the seahorse by hand and carved the wooden bottles and lightbulbs himself is, I think, less important than the super-subtle visual and psychological relationships he creates between forms.

There is little to indicate the nature of the characters who might be on board ship, but a stack of stylised Playboy and Penthouse magazines just visible under the bed sets the scene for a mildly risqué tale set in the late 1950s or 1960s.

Having led us to expect some sort of storyline, however, Brannon then withholds it. All he does is conjure up an atmosphere. What goes on in his "play" he leaves up to us, for the essence of all his work lies in things we can't see but sense are there – in this case wit, desire, sophistication and intelligence that we unconsciously associate with plays, novels and films set on transatlantic liners.

We all carry them around in our heads, don't we? Charles Ryder making love to Julia Flyte in Brideshead Revisited; Evelyn Waugh cracking up in The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold; the screwball repartee between Barbara Stanwyck and Henry Fonda in The Lady Eve; the sinking of the Titanic in A Night to Remember.

In prints by Brannon I've seen, he explores a nebulous, in-between world of persuasion and manipulation. The ones he is showing at the Approach feel more like possible scenarios for the shipboard drama that didn't take place. All are inspired by games – backgammon, chess, dominos and cards and all contain texts that could be lines in a script or sometimes stage directions. As so often in his work, the written word either undermines the meaning of the image or changes the context in which we see it.

My favourite shows a backgammon board set up for a game between white and green draughts. The text reads "It's okay. Happens to everyone. Cough it up. Get it out of your system. That's it. You're going to be just fine. Here, wipe your chin and put this wet towel on your forehead. Now tell me. You were with whom? You went where? You did what?" You could put the words in the mouths of lovers or gangsters and the effect on the image would be the same. Suddenly, the triangular points on the backgammon board become drawn daggers or bared teeth the opponents will use to tear each other apart.

It doesn't surprise me that Brannon is also a novelist – but one who won't let anyone read his books, meticulously arranged on a shelf hung on the wall out of our reach. Engaging with Brannon's work is like talking to a man who never finishes a sentence, or finishes every sentence by contradicting what he'd said at the beginning.

"Perverse" is the word I wrote in my notes – and perversity, like decadence and wit, is the weapon of choice for aesthetes and dandies such as Ronald Firbank and Aubrey Beardsley. I don't know what they make of his work in America, but here in England he should feel right at home.

* Matthew Brannon "Nevertheless" until November 1. www.theapproach.co.uk

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Brannon, Matthew, Liam Gillick, Interview, June/July 2009, p. 74-78

LIAM GILLICK

lives near the United Nations, which might explain why an Englishman who calls New York home is representing Germany at this year's Venice Biennale. Gillick's art is universal

by MATTHEW BRANNON

LIAM GILLICK: Needlessly difficult? Embarrassingly simple? A curator's artist? An artist's curator? A post-conceptual-intellectual crowd-pleaser? It's hard to sum up an artist whose work feels simultaneously so familiar, casual, and playful, and at the same time so considered, political, and obtuse. Gillick, who was born in 1964, is probably most recognized for his handsome color-coded Plexiglas and aluminum sculptures often found in public spaces (such as his façade of London's Home Office headquarters). But what you see is not always what you get. And these seemingly elementary freestanding grids and lattices are but the tip of the iceberg in the 45-year-old artist's hefty output. His work also takes the form of wall drawings, wall texts, furniture, façades, books, plays, films, and more—all of which more often suggest possibilities rather than illustrations. I was a fan before I met him in 1998, shortly after I moved to New York. Now, he's a friend. So how could Liam Gillick, an artist who never seems to catch his breath, be having a three-part mid-career survey already? And what is he doing representing Germany at the 53rd Venice Biennale? The answer (to borrow a signal Gillick trope) is why not? and what if?

MATTHEW BRANNON: Interviews are complicated because they have so much to do with setups.

LIAM GILLICK: You should do this one likeCharlie Rose, by asking the question and then having the answer within the question. [laughs]

BRANNON: Well, one way I thought we could start is by talking about how we met. I was a student at university, and you were a visiting artist, so that would have been in 1998 . . .

GILLICK: You were then in your second year at Columbia.

BRANNON: I believe it was my first year. I remember I had already given up painting and wasn't sure what to do next. I was making those "installations" of office spaces. And you were the first person who I didn't need to defend what I was making to. Most of the faculty and students didn't even consider that kind of work art.

GILLICK: It was really obvious to me that the questions or problems that you were having with art were interesting. They seemed to be positive problems.

BRANNON: Good problems to have . . .

GILLICK: Yeah. But it was very hard for me because I'd always resisted teaching as a job. I liked the idea of being there and being connected, but I was very irresponsible, in the sense that I would look for certain people who were interesting . . . At that time, you were the most interesting person there—maybe because you were having the same productive problems that I was having.

BRANNON: So now you're on the verge of your first major U.S. retrospective in Chicago and, of course, you're representing Germany in the -Venice Biennale. I think this is something we should talk about because it teases the idea of what it means to be mid-career. What will looking backward mean for you? There are definitely expectations, both personal and public. And then it's also inevitable that certain backlashes await you . . .

GILLICK: How about just tolerance and warm acceptance? I'm a really tolerant person who accepts lots of things. [laughs] Philippe Parreno and I used to say this to one another: "It's not a competition." It's true that my generation has tried to get into situations in orderto avoid critique. One of the phrases that used toget knocked around a lot was the notion of the "non-critiqueable," which was the idea that you could temporarily avoid that moment of judgment. I mean, the fact is that the show in Chicago and the one in Venice are both a continuation of what I've been doing, except that they'll be viewed more by people who haven't thought about the work very much, or who feel quite correctly that someone is telling them that they ought to take the work seriously, or that it's -supposed to be good. What's funny is doing interviews in Germany. They've mostly been very nice and earnest and serious, but two of the questions I've been asked have really stood out. One is, "What makes you the best?" That was a question

I got from the evening newspaper in Munich. Another question from a newspaper was, "When you win the Golden Lion for Germany, how will you feel?" And I thought these two questions perfectly sum up the situation I'm in—because, of course, my work has been an elaborate attempt to avoid questions like, "What makes you so good?" or "What is the idea behind the work?" They're the wrong questions, in a way. The question of how you might feel in terms of winning the Golden Lion and those kinds of things is completely irrelevant. Which is not to say that when Bruce Nauman wins the Golden Lion for the u.s. he'll feel any different—he'll also feel like he just does his work and looks after his horses and has been trying to quietly do the right thing for the last 40 years . . .

BRANNON: I guess it's very revealing of who I am that, as an artist, I generally focus on my critics—of which I'm probably the harshest.

GILLICK: I know—me too. I never believe people who say that they don't read the stuff. I read everything. I read a snide five-line exhibition summation in Time Out. I read all of it . . . I'm going to get us some more wine.

BRANNON: Is there a pause button on this recorder?

GILLICK: No, we don't need to pause it. I'll be right back . . . We've just got to make sure the red light is still on.

BRANNON: Can I record you from there? No.

GILLICK: [from a distance] Probably not. You okay for a drink?

BRANNON: Yeah, I'm good . . . So I was thinking about your voracious output, and it reminded me of Woody Allen, who supposedly has three films going at any one time: one which is in the theaters; one which is being shot; and then one which he's currently writing. Supposedly, Woody has done this for 30 years, and he swears that he's never looked back. He swears that he hasn't seen Annie Hall [1977] since he first showed the film.

GILLICK: Well, I think sometimes Woody ought to look back a bit more . . . But, you know, I identify with that completely. I did an exhibition in 2000 in Kitakyushu in Japan and, because I knew that the exhibition would never get out of Japan and no one would ever hear about it, I called it "Woody."

BRANNON: I remember that one.

GILLICK: Maybe I told you about it. It's very odd because I think that most people who make reference to Woody Allen concentrate on what he has actually done, but I was quite interested in his methodology, the way he keeps moving on to the next film relentlessly. I identify with that way of working, and I also recognize it as a weakness maybe. So in the little catalogue, I actually put at the very back an appendix of all of the films that Woody Allen had done up to that point.

BRANNON: Having this three-part retrospective is not the most comfortable position for you, because you're someone who is very self-conscious about what it means to have a retrospective.

GILLICK: Yes. I mean, I don't see why I can't have one, although it doesn't necessarily make sense . . . It's related to what I think I identified in your work at Columbia, which was a feeling that you didn't accept what other people were doing but that you didn't have any other ideas either. [Brannon laughs] I had that feeling, definitely. When I left art school, I didn't know what to do, and I didn't have any ideas. I didn't have a vision. But I didn't accept that I should just leave the art world to other people. I think when people struggle with the problem of trying to understand the art world as an idea, they misunderstand it. They think it's a world of visionaries or opportunists. But it also includes people who want to take part in this cultural exercise but don't have the required stuff—they don't have the ideas or the production. It's the same thing with this idea of retrospective. There are a couple of classic models of the retrospective. One is the Lawrence Weiner model. He's an artist who is really interesting, and there's a moment in his body of work where there's a breakthrough. So you can always do a retrospective of Lawrence's work because you can say, "This was the day he had an idea, and he did something." And the alternative model would be the Gordon Matta-Clark model, where you can say, "Well, there's no original idea, but here's a photo of something happening somewhere else at another time, here's a fragment of evidence of something that happened, and here's a sculptural object."

"People who were born years before us have no concept of us at all. I don't know why, but we were really like orphans."

And all of that is problematic for me. A lot of our understanding about the retrospective, or the origins of the artist, are based on Christian myths. They're based on transubstantiation—the idea that water turns into wine or that something happens. And, of course, I've worked all my life to try to avoid those things. So, of course, you're going to have a problem doing a retrospective of my work. Everyone will look around and say, "Well, where's the moment where something happened?" And my intention has always been that people will ask that about themselves or actually look at the work and try to understand what it might be about. Then you can see real differences. But we've been in a period where critics have either been near-philosophical, which is quite good, or they've been hacks.

BRANNON: Maybe we should start with hacks...

GILLICK: I mean, I like hacks. I find them interesting. What they do creates this daily comparative Mad Money idea of how the art world is going.

BRANNON: Something I learned early on at UCLA is that there's a difference between the first read of an artwork and the second read. You want the first to be very accessible—and perhaps even generous—and then you want the second to be more frustrating, more productive. And this is actually the reverse of what I see in a lot of art today. It tends to be that the first read is very confusing, as in wacky or dirty . . .

GILLICK: I think that's a perfect way of looking at it. In the mid-'90s, in France, I had a show at Air de Paris, and they said, "Some man wants to talk to you." So I said, "Okay, I'll go meet him." I went to the bar on the corner, and there was a nice-looking old man sitting there drinking a drink, having a cigarette. He didn't speak very good English, and we tried to muddle through in the mixture of languages, and then he looked around and said, "I have a question: Is it okay to like your work?" And I said, "Well, of course it's okay to like my work." He went [gasps and puts glass down on table] and shook my hand and then just left. He'd been suffering from this feeling that there was something that he couldn't get from the work—he was visually attracted to it, and he knew it had something to do with modernism, that it had something to do with these ideas about finishing and projection. But he didn't want to know anything about that. He wanted to know, from my perspective, if I was making a dogmatic work that was very didactic, or if it was okay to just like the work. I think that was a kind of great breakthrough for me because I realized that that question was urgent in a way...

BRANNON: Okay, I have some cheap questions for you. Just answer yes or no: Do you have a Porsche cell phone?

GILLICK: Right.

BRANNON: Yes?

GILLICK: Yes.

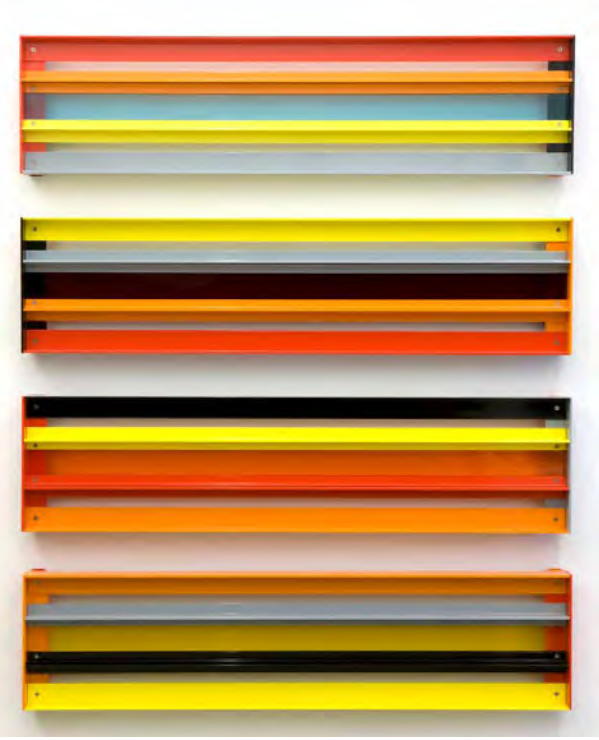
BRANNON: Can you change a spare tire?

GILLICK: Yes, of course.

BRANNON: Did you name your son after Orson Welles?

GILLICK: No.

BRANNON: Do you make entire shows on your laptop?



GILLICK: Yes.

BRANNON: Have you ever been to Los Angeles?

GILLICK: No.

BRANNON: Did you once open for Gang of Four?

GILLICK: Yes.

BRANNON: I've often been given the career advice to not wear too many hats—which, of course, has just encouraged me to wear other hats, such as being a writer, being a curator, or just doing anything outside of the definition of an artist . . . What's the question here?

GILLICK: Well, what do I think?

BRANNON: [laughs] Are we really so constrained?

GILLICK: No, but that has made me anxious, too. Of course, I remember when I first met you, being much younger than you are now, and people worrying about me at that time. They'd actually say, "I worry about you . . ." [laughs] But I always knew exactly what I was doing. I have to say, though, there have been times when I've thought, not that I'm worried about what you're doing as an artist, but that you could be so good in so many contexts that you could easily slip away from the problem of making art—which, in the end, is a problem, whether you like it or not. It's like a philosophical problem.

BRANNON: My definition of art is whatever an artist calls art. Us speaking could be an artwork—us sitting in the near-dark in your kitchen beside the dirty dishes and smoking, me thinking of what to say next . . .

GILLICK: Sure.

BRANNON: Making your bed could be a piece of art, and writing a book could be a piece of art. You could also write a book that's not a piece of art, but that is a book, and it could be a book that was written by an artist . . .

GILLICK: Absolutely. Your definition of art—which is, if I say it's art, then it's art—is kind of the basic definition of modern art, right? But something that I thought fairly early on was, Okay, what if I say this is a book, but I still want it judged and valued within the terms of art? In fact, when I did a book, I wanted it to be understood as a book—not as an artwork as a book, or as a book as an artwork, but as a book. I had this problem in a group show at the -Lisson -Gallery in London in '95. I'd just published Erasmus Is Late, and I didn't want it to be stolen, so I designed an enormous table and put the book in the middle so that people couldn't reach it. For me, this was just a perfect example of my mentality. The table exists because it's a way of stopping people from stealing the book, so it's a pragmatic thing because it's a well-designed table. I haven't turned a table into a work of art, but if you want to buy the book and signify it as an artwork, then it goes very well with this enormous table, which stops your bourgeois friends from getting their grubby fingers on it. I remember Adrian Searle [the British art critic from The Guardian]walked into the opening and said, "Oh, I understand . . . So I have to read the book to understand the table." And I said to him, "Well, I don't know about you, but I don't need to read a book to understand a table."

BRANNON: Do you ever have any anxiety about art?

GILLICK: I remain interested in the potential of art, except I've always been more struck by applied modernism than high modernism. It's partly because of feminist theory and being brought up in the '70s, with questioning who is speaking, and why, and what authority they're carrying. And I think these are good things, and that I learned to look elsewhere for my sources. But I'm also operating in the gap—and I think you are, too—between the trajectory of modernity and the trajectory of modernism. So what people think is design is not design—it's my attempt to engage with the trajectory of modernity.

BRANNON: It's funny, then, that your work would be criticized for its familiarity.

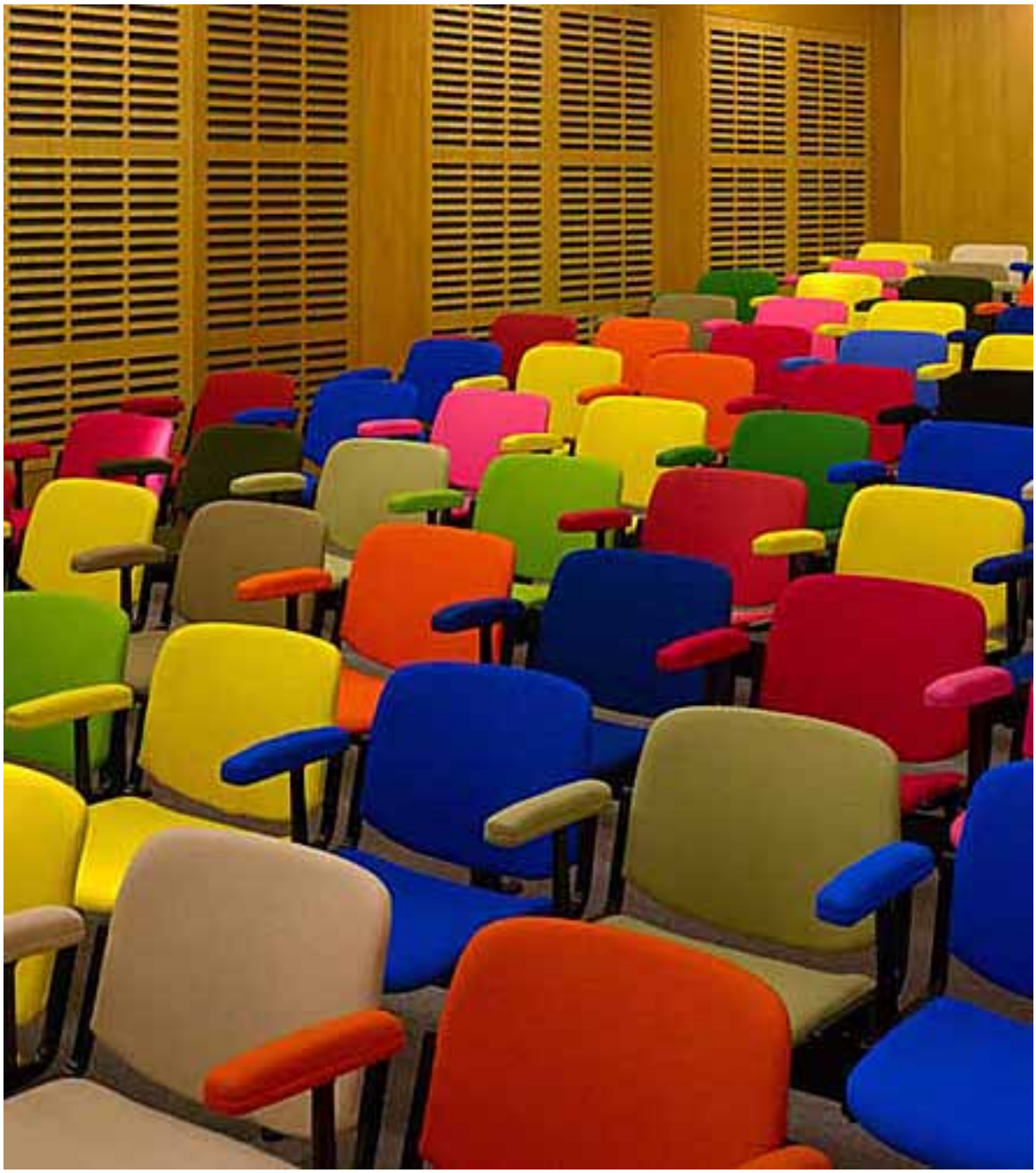
GILLICK: As critiques go, that would be a success. There's a French-Caribbean writer, Édouard Glissant, who talks about this concept of the archipelago of the idea. He talked about this idea of the "tremblement"—this trembling that you get in good ideas. And I think there's something to this idea, that you can reach a point where you're not looking for profundity -necessarily...

BRANNON: I call it a productive frustration.

GILLICK: Now, the problem with all this is that people could say, "Well, so what? That's very nice. Once more, we're at the end of ideas, or the end of history, or the end of productiveness, and it leads to a kind of self-conscious collapse . . ." But I don't think that's true. I think the work then becomes political or philosophical—it becomes about what you think of the profound questions of daily life.

BRANNON: Americans are obsessed with this idea right now. We are at war. We have a young president. This has created an impulsive and anxious state. It's either the end of times or we need to have the answer immediately.

GILLICK: But the U.S. has always been a contradiction. It's always been a deeply protectionist, institutional place, where you're not allowed to smoke, and you're not allowed to do this, and you're not allowed to do that . . . And then, on the other hand, it's completely libertarian in a way. So it's got this weird mixture of being incredibly authoritarian and incredibly open at the same time. I go back to something that Philippe and I also used to say to each other: I'm a passenger, not a customer. In Europe, there's been



ABOVE | Prototype Conference Room, 2002-2009. Courtesy of Whitechapel Gallery, London. OPPOSITE | Developmental, 2008. Courtesy of Casey Kaplan, New York. All images © Liam Gillick. | Watch an original video and see more work by Liam Gillick at INTERVIEWMAGAZINE.COM

such a semiotic game with the language and the relationship between individuals and the states. In the early '90s, following the high years of deregulation in Britain, they started to refer to people on the train as customers. So the train would stop at the station and they'd say, "We'd like to apologize to the customers for the delay." Now, everyone thinks that America is this kind of evil, consumer, capitalist culture, but if they announced on the subway tomorrow, "We're sorry to our customers," then there would be a kind of uproar. But in Europe, this has already happened. So when it comes to my work, what people in the U.S. have to understand is that there is sometimes a deep political content that's rooted in this postwar reconfiguration in Europe. I'm still a foreigner in America. I'm someone who's bringing nuanced stories from somewhere else that will always be harder to take. But I'm at least given the space here to articulate some of these things.

BRANNON: Everyone's favorite topic right now is how the economy will affect the art world. So how will it affect it, for better or for worse?

GILLICK: Contemporary art might have a difficult time. I've noticed that I don't use that term anymore. When I talk about contemporary art, I mean other things. "Contemporary art" for me is now a kind of historical term that describes the 40 years between the Berlin Wall going up and then coming down. I'm not sure who will come up with a better term to describe art right now, but I think contemporary art is actually done for.

BRANNON: [laughs] Did I say contemporary art?

GILLICK: No, I did. But you were asking me about the art market. People think that the art market is about opportunists and hedge-fund managers getting broken art, but what really happened is that there was a new configuration of bourgeois values in the U.S. and an acceptance among the bourgeoisie of contemporary art as an idea. Now, that doesn't mean that I'm rejecting "contemporary art" as a term because I think that bourgeois people are horrible. As Lawrence Weiner once pointed out, the bourgeoisie are the only people who want to help me. The enlightened bourgeoisie are the only ones who ever buy anything, look after it, and don't ask for a discount. They want to look after you. But at some point the bourgeoisie reconfigured how it identified itself in relation to art, and what's ironic is that this has -happened right at the time when there's a crisis in credit. So, to a certain extent, it's a bourgeois -crisis . . . Now everyone thinks this is going to result in a battle between -artists and -galleries, but the demands on the bourgeoisie have really come from the development of -nonprofit spaces and the New Museum and Artists Space and White Columns. They've helped build this -bourgeoisie and made them feel included, but they've also drained them. People make simpleminded comments about the hedge-fund people and the dealers, but you also have to look at the behavior of the institutions. They have been complicit in that process because, as an artist, it's been clear that the price of art has nothing to do with you—it has to do with an idea of what the market will tolerate. These institutions have earnestly and honestly thought, "We'll push it for the future because these are good times right now, and we can charge this much . . . It all goes toward the functioning of the school, and if we've got any extra, toward the endowment, and—in the future—that will be good for somebody." And this is an argument that no one has actually transcended . . . I'm going to go pee. [Brannon laughs] I've never done an interview after four glasses of white wine.

BRANNON: Okay, before you go, I want you to tell me whether or not the following people or things are overrated. You can answer yes or no. Firstly, Martin Kippenberger?

GILLICK: No.
BRANNON: Marcel Broodthaers?
GILLICK: No.
BRANNON: Jenny Holzer?
GILLICK: No, funnily enough.
BRANNON: Peter Saville?
GILLICK: Yes. [laughs] Definitely.
BRANNON: Daniel Birnbaum?
GILLICK: Yes. Definitely.
BRANNON: Francesco Bonami.
GILLICK: No, because I've always wanted to be his friend.
BRANNON: Pornography?
GILLICK: No.
BRANNON: Young artists?
GILLICK: No.
BRANNON: Yourself ?
GILLICK: Am I overrated? Is that the question?
BRANNON: Yeah. Yes or no?
GILLICK: Uh, no.
BRANNON: What about me?
GILLICK: Yes.
BRANNON: Certainly. [laughs]
GILLICK: The trouble with a lot of these things, of course, is that it depends who's making the judgment. The biggest problem for my generation is that people who were born years before us have no concept of us at all. There's a massive gap. I don't know why, but we were really like orphans. Those people competed against us—they hated us and fought for things—and yet they had no interest in our work. No one born in the 1950s took much interest in my generation, and all we've done is try to fix it by talking to the people who came after us . . . I don't hang out with anyone who is 10 years older than I am, but I hang out with a lot of people who are 10 years younger. It doesn't make me good—like a good person hangs out with younger people—but it must have to do with something they encountered. I was eager and interested.
BRANNON: There are interesting 25-year-olds. Not many, but a few . . . I think that both of us make very polite work . . .
GILLICK: [laughs] Now I'm going to be tough. You know who makes polite work? People like Thomas Hirschhorn. People who clearly represent the fancy idea of the Swiss designer of what looks like arty work because they're polite enough to play the role. They're invited to play it. With you or with me, you're not sure, because there is deep content in the work that is extremely nasty and difficult to deal with . . .
BRANNON: Well, when I said polite, I meant that its form could potentially be very pleasant. I often think of it in terms of tact—the art of revealing potentially stressful information. Not that all of my content is dark . . .
GILLICK: It's impolite as an artist at someone's house to go to bed at nine o'clock in the evening. Or say, "I'm leaving now!" That would be impolite. [laughs]
BRANNON: Yeah, of course people are disappointed if you're not entertaining—and to be entertaining often means to be drunk.

GILLICK: And don't forget to leave your fully curated discussion panel at home.

Matthew Brannon is an artist living in New York. His work is currently on view at David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles, Baibakov Art Projects in Moscow, and at the ICA in London. His solo exhibition, "Iguana," opens this fall at The Approach gallery in London.

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CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Brannon, Matthew, "Hung & Drawn: Matthew Brannon," Dazed and Confused, October 2009 Issue 78, p. 208.

MATTHEW BRANNON

THE AMERICANA-INSPIRED ARTIST GIVES US THE INSIDE TRACK ON HIS CONCEPTUAL GRAPHICS

Matthew Brannon is one of the most fetishised artists of the past few years. Like the much-loved television show Mad Men, his work plays with the visual heritage of 1950s and 60s Americana. The graphic brilliance of Saul Bass or Paul Rand is transformed into brilliant conceptual works full of humour under his hand. Here, he shares his most formative influences.

1. The climactic penthouse apartment set from the 1933 film Baby Face. Of all the films about the price of admission, this is my favorite. Each of Barbara Stanwyck's sexual escapades, wherein she 'uses men', results in a new and more decadent apartment. The finale is something only Hollywood could provide.
2. The poster of Joseph Losey's The Accident. Losey's The Servant is a more important film for me, but I've had this poster on my studio wall for years. My love of the irresolvable tension between text and image began by mimicking film posters.
3. Conceptual art. You have to appreciate the irony. Art that was initially defined by its oppositiong to object-based art becomes for later generations the 'look' most associated with intelligence. Being terribly insecure about seeming smart, I never shook this impression.
4. My collection of Bauhaus seven-inch singles from when I was 15. We all had to start somewhere and I'm sure these pretentious yet kitchen sink designs informed my sense of graphics long before I set foot in a museum.
5. Any food that signalled fancy when I was growing up—steak, lobster, shrimp cocktail, escargot, caviar, blue cheese, croissants. Francesca Gavin

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CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Brannon, Matthew, Like It, or Not: Matthew Brannon on Lynn Spigel's TV By Design, Artforum, Febraury 2009, pp. 57-589.

Like It, or Not

MATTHEW BRANNON ON LYNN SPIGEL'S TV BY DESIGN

THE AUDIENCE FOR ART is never static, but it is limited. I have always thought that if your ambition is actually to "change minds" on a large scale, at least in the United States, you need to move to Hollywood. If you want to "talk" to the public, you can't wait for tourists to pay twenty dollars on an annual vacation to New York to walk by your art in a museum. You have to bring it into their living rooms by working in television, or film, or (gulp) advertising. I know this sounds snarky and defensive. Television? Please. In the words of John Waters, I wouldn't suck your lousy dick if I was suffocating and there was oxygen in your balls. We wouldn't even consider working in television. Our egos could never survive the system.

But art and television weren't always so opposed. They weren't always mocking each other at cocktail parties to mask their mutual envy. In TV by Design, Lynn Spigel, professor of screen cultures at Northwestern University, initiates a discussion of the arts' oft-ignored participation in the first decades of television, from the 1940s through the '60s. She investigates a time when—despite fears of what FCC chairman Newton Minow called the "vast wasteland" of commercial television—many in the art world, including those at the Museum of Modern Art, saw television as a place of almost utopian possibility. The book contradicts our peculiar amnesia regarding these early interactions, ones very different from later, better known experimental endeavors. Spigel draws on extensive research into early programming, commercials, and networks to illustrate how the mass medium was actively engaged and utilized by many on both sides of the high/low divide. She even suggests that advertisers, far from being desperate leeches, were some of the most visually savvy players in television—capable of treating their audience as culturally literate, if not curious.

Art and television weren't always so opposed. They weren't always mocking each other at cocktail parties to mask their mutual envy.

For better or worse, many Americans first experienced modern art in their living rooms, where they watched illuminated images of others living better lives in pretend places. Television gave us access to appearances and opinions of a range previously unknown. What you watched and what you didn't said a lot about who you were—and, more important, who you wanted to be. TV by Design describes how commercial networks were acutely aware of the associated "brow" levels: the "TV snob," who would never; the "quality" viewer, who knew how to steer the dial; and the lover of camp, who knowingly and eagerly watched what he or she shouldn't. Initially, television targeted all three of these levels, and "highbrow" institutions likewise aimed to exploit television's potential reach. Suddenly, without leaving your chair, you could watch a Duke Ellington special, visit an Eames-furnished living room complete with Calder knockoffs, take a tour of a museum or studio, or enjoy the trompe l'oeil antics of Ernie Kovacs.

By the mid-'50s, television had become the ultimate barometer of taste. Postwar water-cooler chitchat fed our cold-war desire to replace Paris with New York City as the world's cultural capital. (Only later did we move to Los Angeles.) Market researcher Pierre Martineau stated at the time, "As a nation we have suddenly developed a taste for taste," underscoring the distinctly political character of such sophistication. Modern art was encouraged and fertilized, not only in the corridors of MoMA and the State Department but also on television. And how great it must have been to have had this taste for taste, or to have had an opinion. To feel that how you dressed, what you read, whether you knew how to use chopsticks, whether you could pronounce—let alone spell— "hors d'oeuvres," and whether you could recognize a Mondrian meant something. It was inevitable that we would lose this. These days, you might be able to have a firm sense of the history of painting, or catch up on your theory, or watch enough film, but we are too far along to do it all. Our lives are but our own niche editorial choices.

CBS creative director of advertising and sales promotion William Golden, in his office, New York, ca. 1956. Photo: Bill Warnecke/CBS Photo Archive/Getty Images.

SPIGEL CONCENTRATES ON the early history of CBS to show how a few individuals developed sweeping ambitions for the televisual transmission of culture—in tandem with graphic design, modern art, and architecture. CBS was the leading network of its day; its success was partly seen as the result of its dedication to a new, crisp, modern look. The network granted its creative director of advertising and sales promotion, William Golden, almost total control. Golden created CBS's famous "eye" logo, elegantly and adamantly administering its dissemination. He remained highly aware of his company's objectives and his audience's attention span without compromising visual rigor. (Indeed, his maniacal attention to detail extended to customizing the ink in the postage primer so that it matched his CBS stationery!) Reading about Golden makes me cringe at how relaxed and sloppy our current graphic

Andy Warhol as himself with Vicki Peterson (Barbara Bach) in The Love Boat (ABC, 1985).

do it yourself?) In the '50s (and this might be my fantasy), when you went to the bank or the airport or watched television, you were often entering articulated space. By 1960, Spigel tells us, a "design explosion" had occurred in the visual field of television, helping to reinforce America's image of itself as forward-thinking: Advertising, title art, and set design were meticulously crafted by the likes of Ben Shahn and Paul Rand.

I should also confess that, despite Sixth Avenue's "Black Rock" being one of my favorite skyscrapers in New York, I never really appreciated that Eero Saarinen designed the building specifically for CBS. Talk about understated. Or that Saarinen's wife, Aline, translated her role of art critic from print to television, making regular appearances on NBC's Today Show and Sunday, even becoming a correspondent for NBC News in 1964. Spigel suggests that Aline was both appreciative of her new audience and resigned to the medium's limits. In a Today Show press release, she describes her viewers as "men shaving in motels [and] women doing their housework," although she insists she never "tried to talk down to anybody."

Even so, Spigel describes how mid-'50s advertising directors and designers already knew that the average audience held strong opinions of its own. In particular, audiences were overwhelmed and even annoyed by the amount of advertising; in response, commercials quickly adopted the less-is-more model. Visuals soon dominated text, and art directors began to draw freely from high culture. Many took note. As early as 1955, MoMA mounted an exhibition of United Productions of America films, highlighting their graphic commercials. By 1966, we have Stanley Kubrick saying, "I think some of the most imaginative filmmaking, stylistically, is to be found in TV commercials."

Art advertised, too: MOMA was the first museum in the United States to present itself on television, in a 1939 broadcast in which Alfred H. Barr and Nelson Rockefeller discussed Brancusi's Bird in Space. Almost unbelievably, by 1949 MOMA was participating in a television production nearly every other week. Granted, modern art on television especially abstract painting—was more frequently mimicked, mocked, or lampooned than it was praised. (If you think it's hard to take seriously now, imagine fifty years ago.) And of course, most viewers couldn't tell a Picasso from a Pollock. They just ... knew it was new. Artists were often portrayed as cliché bohemians. Viewers saw crazy paintings made by coffee-drinking, chain-smoking, wine-guzzling, insomniac beatniks-without day jobs! A common plot involved a wife being deceived by a lecherous phony to pose nude as a model. But, to repeat, in the end they did see it.

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATED by the construction of taste. It's almost impossible to discuss this without dissecting one's own precarious, pretentious, and embarrassing personal development. In a psychoanalytic sense, everything is understood, or in this case appreciated, by what preceded it. There is no purity or neutrality. I remember seeing spoofs of Ingmar Bergman on comedy shows and then seeing Bergman defended by Woody Allen, long before I saw any Bergman films—eventually growing to like and then to dislike them. (I'm prepared to revisit this judgment when I'm elderly and have more time to think about my death.) I'm sure I saw a Rolls-Royce on a Grey Poupon advert before I saw one in real life. And so it goes. Spigel's book begins to address our fear of admitting the provenance of many of our initial impressions. Of particular interest to me was the positive example of late-night programming that Spigel recounts. By the beginning of the '60s, networks had discovered a preVHS demand for older Hollywood films and "art house" European cinema. Replacing dead air with late-night movies, programmers created a new culture of film buffs. I remember reading Joe LeSueur's memoir of Frank O'Hara and marveling at how many evenings their friends would gather to watch old films. Better yet, I recently saw a clip of Cindy Sherman on Andy Warhol's television version of Interview, saying, "If I had a history it was probably just from watching TV and old movies."

Warhol gets his own chapter. And as tired as I am of thinking about him, Spigel put me back in the mood. She takes a long look at Warhol's courting of the vulgar medium, a behavior now largely dismissed as belonging to the" bad Warhol." But Warhol loved television from the beginning: He was its employee, its subject, and ultimately its producer. He created a great deal of rarely seen title art for CBS and NBC (he was considered the poor man's Shahn!). His unfinished film Soap Opera (1964) betrays his delirious curiosity about the medium. Silent segments of actors performing limited actions—smoking, dancing, arguing, making eye contact, slapping one another in the face, masturbating—are spliced with appropriated commercials for carpet cleaners, meat slicers, toaster ovens, Secret deodorant. Best of all is a wonderfully horrifying five-minute advert for Seven Day Beauty Set Shampoo, which Warhol forces us to sit through twice. Since advertisers take for granted that their job is to sell, they are denied that most dangerously available solipsistic avenue that fine art borders: I don't care what you think. I would argue that Warhol's early involvement in graphic design and television spared him much naïvete with regard to just what's for sale. As he showed us, looking at advertising can be a great education in visual communication: how to say much with little; how to persuade someone without insulting them. I'm as interested in tact as I am in taste.

Spigel even suggests that Warhol's shameless portraits were necessary funding sources for his late television escapades, hours and hours of cable-access fashion shows, interviews, and so on. Of his 1981 cameo on Saturday Night Live, he says, "I think comedians should be good-looking and boring." In the two-hundredth episode of The Love Boat, Warhol famously plays himself. His entourage consists of two models and his "executive assistant," Romaine. Vicki, the captain's daughter, asks, "How does an artist know a painting is truly successful?" To which Romaine responds, "When the check clears." Exactly. *

MATIHEW BRANNON IS ANEW YORK-BASED ARTIST.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Turvey, Lisa, Matthew Brannon, Whitney Biennial 2008, exhibition catalogue, 2008 p.108-109.

Steak Dinner, 2007, Letterpress print on paper, 24 x 18 in. (61 x 45.7cm). Collection of the artist.

opposite: Stage (We're writing a play. It starts with an orgy. With animals tearing each other's guts out. With sound. Of breaking glass. Then it's tedious, without direction. More boring than uncomfortable. For like another hour. There's no satisfaction. No closure. No reward. You can leave after fifteen minutes. It's called "HYENA."), 2007. Wood, metal, leather, screenprint on canvas, and screenprint on paper, 192 x 96 x 48 in. (487.7 x 243.8 x 121.9cm). Rennie Collection, Vancouver, Canada

Born 1971 in Saint Maries, Idaho; lives in New York, New York

Matthew Brannon's work turns on the opposition—and ever-mounting imbrication—of art and design. After an early stint as a painter, he began to draw his inspiration from those printed materials that mediate everyday life in late-capitalist, early twenty first- century America, from posters and advertisements to promotional flyers and take-out menus. But if Brannon's iconography conjures mass-produced, throwaway sources, his methods are laboriously handcrafted, even old-fashioned: screenprint, letterpress, and lithograph works, often executed in a limited palette and consistent in their graphic rigor. His art seems on first glance disarmingly direct. But as one turns to the text paired with his images for explication or illumination, disorder intervenes. An early series recalls the conventions of posters for horror films: in Sick Decisions (2004), the driveway leading to a stately house is cloaked by shadows cast by bare, looming trees. In place of what look to be credits in the lower part of the work, however, is a string of pithy non sequiturs: this film is "A Desperate Appeal Release," starring, among others, "Abuse of Education" and "Misplaced Trust," with a screenplay by "101 Unanswered Phone Calls."

In recent work Brannon pictures signifiers of contemporary metropolitan life ranging from the quotidian (an alarm clock, a tube of toothpaste, a banana peel) to the more rarefied (oysters, sushi, champagne). Here again, the straightforward quality of each depiction is offset by bewildering, quasi-poetic phrases running below it, what the artist has called a "salad of language." One line of text under the silhouette of a lobster reads, "this is how it ends" (The Price of Admission, 2007); another, below the rendering of a showerhead and bar of soap, "And when he's home at night trying to sleep/ He sees himself as a gross pig that everyone hates" (Alarm Clock, 2007). Behind the veneer of convenience, plenty, and success implied by the content and format of his images, Brannon seems to suggest, reside darker imperatives—abuse, excess, careerism, insecurity, and failure.

Previous installations of Brannon's work have suggested environments such as a corporate lobby or an airport lounge, and his contribution to the 2008 Biennial evokes a similar example of anonymous urban architecture. In a setting that could be a high-rise apartment, a hotel room, or even a conference area, swaths of elegant drapery frame a faux window and painted graphic of the New York City skyline; domestic accoutrements fill the space. As is often the case with the artist's work, these items initially appear innocuous and then grow more puzzling: small sound-canceling devices, typically found in psychoanalysts' offices, create subtle white noise that aurally isolates the viewer and bolsters a sense of privacy, and the contents of a bookshelf are just out of reach. These volumes, penned by the artist yet devoid of any identifying markings on spine or cover, evade legibility to become instead enigmatically sculptural. Negotiating this theatrical space underscores viewers' sense of self-consciousness and throws into relief a constant of Brannon's work—our own complicity in deciphering and completing meaning. LISA TURVEY

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

VMAGAZINE.COM

6.24.08 SUBTLE SELECTION *By Mr. V*

Photography Simon Castets

"Not So Subtle Subtitle" runs through August 1, 2008, at Casey Kaplan, NYC.

Nothing stops Matthew Brannon. Last week, just after the closing of a room devoted to his work at the Whitney Biennial (and less than a month into his impeccable solo show at Friedrich Petzel), Brannon opened "Not So Subtle Subtitle," a 24-artist exhibition he curated for Casey Kaplan gallery. An expected unexpectedness pervades the endeavor, which succeeds in bringing together works that seem unrelated but end up creating delicate encounters, such as Garth Weiser's Drawing #10 (2008) and Guy de Cointet's You Don't Know the Russians (1983). The artist, who says to "disregard the idea of scene," was given carte blanche to gather all the impressions of a "Saturday summer stroll through Chelsea, with iced coffee to arrest your hangover." Rather than a classical summer show, "Not So Subtle Subtitle" produces a sense of fiction, mirrored in the urbane collection of texts that accompanies the exhibition. Brannon's empirical choice of pieces produces a show in which his equally persuasive artistic work is continued in the form of a successful curatorial enterprise. Welcome to Planet Brannon.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Brannon, Matthew, To Say the Very Least. Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 2008. pg. 143-153.

More Than You Know

Philip Monk

Reader, if I told you, what would you make of the gift from artist to author of a copy of Sigmund Freud's Civilization and Its Discontents? Would it be admission of the artist's analytical sessions? A key to unlock the content of his pictures: a clue to both iconography and autobiography in his works? Or perhaps the answer to Brannon's question, "Why are people their own worst enemies?" If Freud answers this question, from this very book and others, Brannon does not transpose psychoanalysis's solutions to entitle his enterprise. His work still expresses a lack not a solution in its uncertain treading of the line between success and failure, concealment and exposure. Nevertheless, with Freud as a reference, we expect, at the least, that what underlies Brannon's prints is visible to see-and read-as symptoms on the surface of their artifact. For in the artifice of Brannon's prints, it is always a matter of seeing and reading, literally and in that order.

Although a slim mass-market paperback, this particular edition of Freud is singular. As part of Penguin Books Great Ideas series, it has been treated specially with an embossed cover on which the author's name and book title have been elegantly overprinted in black and red type. Brannon's gift thus hints at his own letterpress prints in an attempt perhaps not so much to explain his work but to egregiously assert its worth by mimetic rivalry. That is, if in the end he really felt himself worthy of such a comparison.

Passed from hand to hand like a cultural fetish, this book is token of a secret sharing invisible to scrutiny or sight. A gift, however, we have to admit, is no key. Receiving it, what would I have to admit here in order to write about Matthew Brannon? Or to be read? Would I have to confess, for instance, that I am writing this drunk?... deceptively? .. self-deceptively? .. or with malice? Whatever the case, I would not have the resources Brannon commands, which are given, in fact, in and by the very medium of his artwork: printmaking. What was receptive to touch in the private transmission between Matthew and me becomes the imprint of a very public presentation in the artist's work.

This is a story of mastery and failure, elegance and embarrassment. Up or down, in or out, no one comes out unscathed.

The Tractable Matthew Brannon

> Of course all life is a process of breaking down, but the blows that do the dramatic side of the work—the big sudden blows that come, or seem to come, from outside—the ones you remember and blame things on and, in moments of weakness, tell your friends about, don't show their effect all at once. There is another sort of blow that comes from within—that you don't feel until it's too late to do anything about it, until you realize with finality that in some regard you will never be as good a man again. The first sort of breakage seems to happen quick-the second kind happens almost without your knowing it but is realized suddenly indeed.
>
> -F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Crack-Up

Everything takes place on the surface, or just under it in Brannon's work, just as everything there is public or takes place in public. We shall try to find the relation between these two statements-and their two correlates-as together they define Brannon's work.

By public, first of all I mean not only that these prints are exposed in exhibition but also that they assume public forms. That is, they not only mimic genres but also are generic in their very use of word and image following the models of advertisements and posters, acquiring their easy elegance from the history of design. Take some of the earliest exemplars: Sick Decisions and House of Rot (both 2004). Sick Decisions and House of Rot reproduce movie posters of the 'B' or horror variety. Yet, Brannon's posters advertise only themselves or advertise only their titles, not any actual movie. Their referential function is short-circuited: there is no other product they send us to. Rather, they identify their own contents, which then must be interpreted according to their titles. Contents are given by a series of phrases that occupy the lower band of the print consistent with the placement of movie poster credits. Names of the production company, director, screenwriter, stars and co-stars, etc., have been oddly replaced by phrases such as, "A Frustrated Power Production-A Desperate Appeal Release-Sick Decisions- STARRING- Good Prison Visit-The Guilt Which Organizes Your Fear-Abuse of Education-Misplaced Trust-Not for Lack of Funds-", etc.

Are these collections of phrases symptomatic of "sick decisions" and "houses of rot" or are they merely the compilations of a smart-ass wordsmith who is keen "to brand or market phrases?" Who yet can say? In a 2006 interview, Brannon said, "I seek a play with words that is both specific in meaning and conversely teetering with inappropriate reception. But most often the poetry takes the form of a list, a roll call, or credit to one's delusional life." Disregarding Brannon's "but," we might wonder whether, teetering, inappropriate reception is not only intimately linked to specific meaning but to the language dynamics of delusion, as well.

At any rate, these prints gather together images, titles, and phrases that play within ready-made genres-the horror picture in particular rather than the movie poster per se-which unite the individual (that is, sick decisions) to what Freud calls the "family romance" (that is, house of rot). (This gothic character is further exaggerated in the similarly structured works mimicking movie posters, Premature Ejaculation and Grotesque Desperate from 2005), Not the typical haunted house, but, as we expect, the family home is not far behind-literally. It is obscured by the overlay of decorative motifs: circles of scrollwork as if details of an ornate ironwork gate through which the screened-back images of suburban homes can be glimpsed. Language, too, acts equally to obscure the background image but not through any imprecision of meaning or reference: both decoration and titles alike draw the eye to the surface. It is a case, as Derrida says, of the text "not there to say the saying inasmuch as it withholds from seeing."

Seeing and reading are implicated in one another, but not in any immediately legible way. Other than the interjected titles, illustrations command attention. In the hierarchy of presentation, other text is secondary and usually appears below. Because of the texts' placement and point size, we have to bend over in front of a print to read them. Yet, writing here, I take the easy path or the unconscious route of treating Brannon's texts as the content of his work. Here is the first contradiction of my text. Then again, how does one write about illustration or decoration, which are usually secondary to any presentation? These elements, traditionally parerga, which include the works' titles, infiltrate centre stage. Here we have the second and third contradictions, but now of the work. However, we will never be sure where centre stage is in these works, indeed, what is central and what is peripheral, what is on view and what puts to view. (To remind

ourselves of the "insistent atopics of the parergon: neither work [ergon] nor outside the work {hors d'oeuvres}, neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it gives rise to the work. It is no longer merely around the work. That which it puts in place-the instances of the frame, the title, the signature, the legend, etc.-does not stop disturbing the internal order of discourse on painting, its works, its commerce, its evaluations, its surplusvalues, its speculation, its law, and its hierarchies.")

The series Loss of Words, Distraction Becomes You, Submission, and Drunk Baptism (all 2004) exploit a less obvious form of signage, namely wine bottle labels (which themselves have their own history of typographic discernment). The embossed labels are only part of an overall illustrational schema, along with other accoutrements that drinking signifies (and effects consumption supposedly originate): boa feathers, champagne flutes, overturned wine bottles, broken glasses, and evanescent bubbles that prick the paper support. The language of the titles, for instance, "distraction becomes you" and "submission," might be seductions and slogans for perfume advertising campaigns more than for liquor consumption, but they are turned, in the contrary logic of the pharmakon, towards ill consequences and unpardonable acts. For instance, in Submission, "9 glasses later, everything you say will come back to hurt you." We might think that this language is turned around and against the apparatus of its appearance, that it counters advertising as a critique. But it is just as imagined or imaginary as advertising, and more self-delusional perhaps than corporate sell. Each print houses a little scenario, or back-story, easily overlooked as they are disguised typographically as faux wine labels and then, moreover, reversed in part. The label for Distraction Becomes You reads as if an obligatory government warning, "champagne headache/web-like distrust," and then in reverse type, "unable to feel or care or make decisions." Similarly, Drunk Baptism reads, "vin fin de table de God/the fear which organizes your guilt," followed in reverse type by "everything I want, you have." In the ambiguity of address here, we have to yet wonder who so authoritatively is speaking and to whom?

The deviation of the text is not disingenuous. Reversal obscures only what is in plain sight. It admits what is difficult to say personally or publicly. This device is a guarded moment of truth telling. Irony serves the same veiled purpose. So does the decorum of decoration. Adolph Loos said ornament is a crime, but the perfect crime would be decor. Purloined letters would be invisible there. What could an acute observer of society hide within the invisible visibility of decoration that would reflect a culture unaware back to itself?

In the last few years there has been a widespread return in print advertising from photography to illustration, which has particularly played on the retro styles and fashions of the 1950s. Brannon's prints evoke illustrative styles of the past as if they were, for instance, decorations to cookbooks or cocktail manuals but now enlarged and having inverted their secondary relationship to the main text. This domestic turn and suburban return has an uncomfortable edge in Brannon's hands: kitchen knives, severed goosenecks and cocks' heads, interspersed with scatterings of pinecones and needles in themselves are innocent enough without need to refer to a possible castration complex. (Freud, of course, was popularized in America in the 1950s.) But as in Douglas Sirk's 1950s Hollywood melodramas, domestic artifacts and decor are symbols of societal constraints and vain achievements (such as his famous framed mirrors and

trophies). Another of Brannon's print series from 2004, thus, says it all in one of its title: Country Club Upset. Indeed, the reverse text in these prints precis mini-melodramas of derailed individuals as if TV Guide entries: Disappointed Critic: "diet pill paranoia & plastic trophies"; End of the Family Line: "delusional self-importance builds"; Limp Consideration: "career train wreck alcoholic workaholic seeks same."

"The million-dollar question I appreciate," Brannon has said, is "Why are people their own worst enemies?" Then as if offering a compendium of the content of his work, he goes on to list "topics which satellite around this question involve careerism, sexual misadventure, substance abuse, alcoholism, poor finances, poor parenting."[4] His images, though, betray none of these issues. How could a design of coral and tropical fish illustrate career failure or personal pathologies as suggested by the titles Fatal Career Misstep or Belligerent Euphoria (2005)? Their respective texts explain nothing of the conditions or consequences, nor do their lists of phrases themselves resolve into any coherent narrative any more than Brannon's compendium quoted at the start of this paragraph. At a stretch, they might indicate a cluster of symptoms, but usually the lists collect different orders or registers of language use.

While we might see Brannon as a successor to earlier work on the social constructs of masculinity (Richard Prince) or the confusion of corporate and sociopathic behaviour in American culture (Cady Noland), he belongs to a longer line from which his work receives its drunk baptism. At least, the work, not the artist's life, takes its themes from this tradition, which stems from the "literary drunkenness" of Edgar Allan Poe, to use Baudelaire's phrase about this unhappy, failed American artist. Poe's career is emblematic of the constraints of a commercial culture on its arts and the compromises artists need make, extending even to genres they work in-or invent. On the East Coast, the relationships of writers and artists to Madison Avenue and on the West Coast to Hollywood, especially since the 1950s, have spawned their own genre in books and movies. (A subcategory includes the relation of artists to the domestic in the melodramas of suburban commuter culture).

We could very crudely characterize these relationships for artists by the following diagram:

In this schema, the extremes of success and failure and those of art and alcoholism are not necessarily correlated (art and success or alcoholism and failure). In fact, we are not charting structural oppositions or terminal positions but a perceptual process that is not necessary overtly visible. This process is not apparent in the image but occurs in a narrative or happens during a monologue a character tells him- or herself in an excoriating moment of self-realization and confession. Thus, the two prints both titled The last thing you remember was staring at the little white tiles (2006), with

their respective his and hers matched set of trophies (or are they king or queen chess-pieces?), now read differently as scenarios rather than just lists of phrases. Something similarly happens in both cases to reveal the individuals to themselves and to us. Here is the "his" version:

> —WALL TO WALL MIRRORS IN A PRIVATE BATHROOM AT A PARTY YOU NEED TO LEAVE—PALM TREES BRUSH THE WINDOWS-OUTSIDE THE SOUND OF INSECTS-THE CREDIT CARD DOESN'T HAVE YOUR NAME ON IT-SLIDE THE MIRROR RIGHT-SCAN THE PRESCRIPTIONS-SLIDE THE MIRROR LEFT-NOTE THE MOUTHWASH AND BAND AIDS-AN ASHED CIGARETTE INSIDE A FORTY FIVE DOLLAR SCENTED CANDLE-BLACK SOAP IN THE SHAPE OF A DOG-PERFUME & POWDER BOTTLES-LOOK AT YOUR GRAY FACE-RUN YOUR HANDS UNDER COLD WATER-RUN YOUR TONGUE OVER YOUR TEETH-TASTE BLOOD-BREATH IN AND FLINCH-YOUR COCK NOW HALF ITS SIZE-SWALLOW BITTER PHLEGM-FIGHT THE PANIC-FIGHT THE NAUSEA-THIS ISN'T PART OF YOUR JOB DESCRIPTION-THIS ISN'T THE WAY IT ENDS-THIS IS THE AWFUL LAST OF IT-HOLD THE SINK ON THE WAY TO THE FLOOR-LAY YOUR HEAD IN THE PISS SOAKED RUG-TRY TO FOCUS-WAVES OF HEAT & PRESSURE-SOMEONE IS KNOCKING-EVERYONE IS LAUGHING-WISH THAT CANDLE WAS OUT-

"Whatever could have happened for things to have come to this?" Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari ask in relation to F. Scott Fitzgerald's essay The Crack-Up. They continue, "It is better to think of it as an affair of perception: you enter a room and perceive something as already there, as just having happened, even though it has not yet been done. Or you know that what is in the process of happening is happening for the last time, it's already over with. You hear an 'I love you' you know is the last one. Perceptual semiotics. God, whatever could have happened, even though everything is and remains imperceptible, and in order for everything to be and remain imperceptible forever?"[5]

Something has happened, but this "something happened," for us, is inflected by the telling. Phrases accumulate as if they are edits of film shots not just the consciousness of the character. Descriptions become imperatives of seeing: "slide the mirror right-scan the prescriptions-note the mouthwash and band aids." In this cross-over of film and writing, writing shades the situation with a tinge of noir. The genre precipitates the "action" or the fall, which is the imperceptible change. On the model of film noir, we could call Brannon's works decor noir-perceptual semiotics obscured by decorative motifs.

Given this stylization of the text by genre, we realize that we are not dealing with individuals but character types. These types are defined by genre. No individual is confessing here-certainly not the artist/author, even if we are tempted to attribute "wanted to talk about abusive lifestyles-wanted to address how it all goes wrong" from Raw Bar to him. The expressions are already cultural and commonplace. (Even though Brannon invents them, they have the ring of the ready-made with their immediately recognizable connotations).

Noir heroes are already on a downward slide, even before a precipitous new turn of events. Often living on the borderline between inside and outside society and operating, like artists, between the high life and riff raff, they are well poised to observe

the corruptions and illusions of society, once they have seen past their own lack of innocence. The noir crisis of consciousness, sometimes precipitated by a temporal disjunction (waking up beside a dead man not knowing how you got there), is the closest we have in our culture to the past function of the memento mori. In the past, these paintings, which allegorized death and sin in luxurious images such as table settings of overflowing flowers, fruit, fish, and fowl or simple juxtapositions of a skull and candle, reminded us of our mortality: remember you will die. With their ordinary domestic images disguising some other content, Brannon's prints address our guilty consciousness or guilty identifications through a subtext that is only revealed secondarily and as a crisis to the self. Thus, Slut Best Friend with its shrimp cocktail, More Autopsy Than Diagnosis with its lobster and tableware, and Don't Call, Don't Even Write with its side table decor of lamp, horse figurine, and clump of coral (all 2006). Thus, the turn within the text in Slut Best Friend from "-go to restaurants few can afford collect art-breed miniature dogs-buy clothes few could wear-attempt hardcore-" to "-beg for another chance-once exotic now tedious-always the alcoholic-even in sobriety-even on days off-especially tonight-"; or, the turn within consciousness of Bad Manners (2008): "Halfway across the intersection you catch yourself midthought. The unfinished plate. The second house. A too tight watch. A tap on the shoulder. He wouldn't dare. He hasn't the nerve. This is my sand castle."

In such genre paintings, we do not look into their images as if through a window but see ourselves reflected back in the objects they depict. They are otherwise known as vanitas or vanity paintings and find their model, of course, in mirrors. It's not surprising then to see Brannon's prints reproducing this relationship as if our image is only temporarily absent in the open door of a vanity cabinet, the contents of toiletries and pills exposed: as in Pulling Out, the appropriately titled Not So Young, or The Men in Your Life with its skeletal hand menacing its toilette scene (all 2007).

Through this unavoidable daily image practice, a society binds an individual to it not so much only by its products as through its significations. Advertising takes up this vanitas mirror model, reflecting our desires back to us-and not without necessarily suppressing the guilt factor. Indeed, advertising often plays up excess without guilt, or excess beyond guilt. (See Steak Dinner, 2007: "-This year tell her you love her all over again-with a grab bag of diamonds-with mouthfuls of caviar-with your ren~ in clothes-a credit card of hotel rooms-stockings-champagne-plane tickets-and a soft slap on her bare ass-") Don't expect Brannon to perform a salutary critique countering advertising through its own language. Advertising supplies the language model for all occasions. Pigs, Like Us repeats the formula of Steak Dinner: "-they had to pump her stomach-amazing what they found-among the arugula, watercress, blue-fin tuna, age-dried steak-there it is-your heart-and look ... a bunch of razor blades-little light bulbs-cocaine-little travel bottles-anti-depressants-your old untouched job application-"

Language holds this list together containing this odd assortment in some sort of equivalency of ingestion. It's an equivalency commodities otherwise share, that is, when they are displayed in shop windows. These prints not only mirror mirrors but their equivalent: shop windows. And in mirroring shop windows, they mirror our culture. Here we find all we desire and more ... more than you know-even humiliation and abjection. Culture holds all these together, civilization and its discontents, not as

an accumulation only of products but of symptoms, as well. A recent print depicts a hanging shark, its exposed stomach a collection of bottles, bones, and skeletal hands. Would it surprise you to know that it's title is The Profits and Losses of Biting the Hand that Feeds and that it premiered at a prestigious art fair?

The Intractable Matthew Brannon

> The inward directed craving for destruction mostly eludes our perception, of course, unless it is tinged with eroticism.
>
> -Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents

Calculating the profits and losses of biting the hand that feeds you is risky business. It can end in success or failure. At the same time, it makes a game of success and failure. You can't see this tightrope Brannon walks because of how you participate in the game. The way you participate is how you automatically attribute success or failure or have it attributed to you. Walking the tightrope, Brannon teeters now inside, now outside the system, anticipating the risks of biting the hand that feeds him.[6] We are mistaken to think that, at any time, he stands altogether outside the system making a critique of it: he is a full participant. So much there depends on chance. He's calculated the odds in how things stand right now. You can't offend collectors with work today. They'll clamour and compete for it even if it insults them to their face. Brannon has staked his success on this. Can you trust the man? Or what he says? At the least, you would have to interpret everything he says as if he was a patient on a psychoanalyst's couch and then qualify his aggression.

Yet, Brannon only reveals the system by exposing himself. He masters the system to do so. This is the reason for the panoplied effects of his work: the care-or control- he asserts in framing devices from invitations and posters to hanging systems and exhibition design. I've implied that parergonal effects also enter into the works themselves but now to other effect than mastery. Everyone knows that printmaking is a debased medium in the hierarchy of art making. Brannon makes it otherwise so elegant. For such mastery in a debased medium, he would have to unmaster and debase himself. At least, it appears that the work's process is (a) debasing.

Over the couch or on it, Brannon would have it both ways. That is, he would always only repeat what was already in his own work. Above and below. Over and under the surface. In "public" and in "private." And between the two.

Symptoms are telling, that is, if we can separate public and private and not see what is advertised in public (not just as advertising but as public, the res publica) as symptoms that otherwise condemn the individual. Symptoms are secreted in the individual. Nevertheless, this is a public affair. Matthew Brannon makes it so. He only repeats in public what is already given there.

Over the couch, obviously, as decoration, and on it in analysis. The print splits itself in two. It is subject to this system of division and, in necessarily splitting itself, it casts part of itself below. In so doing, however, it also represses this division.

On the one hand, with the decorative print over the couch, Brannon takes advantage of the situation by using decor to expose the system, but only formally, that is

to say, by the work's elegant mask. The artwork expands out to the system's support: from the frame, to the context, to the institution, to the market. Yet only by exposing himself below do these parergonal effects return in the work to characterize the system as a whole.[7]

But on the other hand, in the ways of the couch-that is, on it, so to speak, as the subject in analysis-this exposure is guarded and devious, although it (he) tells its (his) truth through some deviancy. Deviancy merely means displacement, not deception, perhaps only a displacement of where to look or expect to look. The image, as always, is both central and distracting. But lower down, secondarily and in its secondary place, text debases itself, meanwhile debasing the individual. Whatever is said there, however low, would still be in your face.

A print is pliable; it takes an impression. Paper is tractable to an impression offering just so much resistance in its reception of an imprint. Not just receptive, printmaking is an articulated medium. Articulation disappears in the process, though, in the mirror of a print's making-from a plate, platen, or stone-leaving only an image. Although at first, in Brannon's case, only an imprint takes. At first take. Then the singular impression is repeated in colour to reveal the image. The impression does not disappear altogether from sight as if repressed from consciousness, as in the mystic writing-pad. The effects of the operation slide under and down, as if there were two subjectiles of one work supporting and relating image and text.[8] What falls beneath or what is only thrown down below or beneath would rise in the work capturing our attention like a slap on the face-or worse.

I can't help but think of another very different artist who said shit to the world, Antonin Artaud who wrote: "you will realize/from my maladroit drawings/but so crafty/and so adroit/that say SHIT to this world." Derrida glosses this statement with a discussion of Artaud's drawings thus:

> To throw something right in someone's face, like an insult frank and straight and direct, addressed to this world with no detour, to spit at that face the figure of excrement, in a word, shit, that sums it all up: gestures, grammar, arithmetic, and the Kabbala that shits at the other and on the other. The crafty person, who comes to correct some wrong, is a sort of copula between the right of the adroit and the right of the awkward. The drawings are awkward because they are crafty, skillful, sly, adroit, indirect stratagems for plaguing this world with its norms and values, its expectations, its Art, its police, its psychiatry: in a word, its rights. Artaud is speaking to these sick rights to force them to say shit and saying it to those rights. To these rights, and at them, casting out the very word like excrement as well as excrement as a word. There would be a lot to say about the notions of address and law and rights, precisely, and the directions of the throw or the spurt [le jet], of the rejection [le rejet], the dejection, and the excrement. You can cast or spurt in all directions, whether with a projectile weapon or to send some gift, even some help. But sometimes it's enough to say "cast" or "throw" [jeter] in order to suggest the connotation of the cast or thrown away [le dechet] as it is rejected or abandoned. Usually, I throw on the floor anything that seems to me without value, or shoddy. But excrement, a perfectly shaped model of what is thus rejected downward, can also be of value as a weapon or as a present. And it can be thrown upon as well as at. At the

> but we should also note that the subjectile was constituted in this world and in the traditional history of its Art as an excrement itself: what doesn't belong to the body of the work is found beneath it, an epigraph, a matter exterior and parergonal sometimes dropped.-

"Adroit" and "maladroit" are only other signifiers for terms by which we have considered Brannon's works. The truth Brannon tells of America would not be Artaud's in France, but the two artists resort to similar means with different vehemence to let their work have its effect.

The tractable Matthew Brannon would be the man of mastery, yet conforming to the system with all the signs merely of rebellion. He would offer what was for sale. The intractable Matthew Brannon would be otherwise. Maybe a bit too familiar to us. Where would we draw the intractable division between mastery and conformity, between, as A Lot like Trash has it, "a conservative version of radical-a radical version of conservative?" Where would you like it, reader: Right in the face?

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

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Letterpress print on paper by Matthew Brannon, 2008. (Friedrich Petzel Gallery)

The artist Matthew Brannon's screen prints and lithographs of banana peels and barbecue grills are deceptively straightforward. The Idaho native and T contributor, whose second solo show, "the question is a compliment," opens at the Friedrich Petzel Gallery tonight, takes simple 50s-style advertising iconography and turns it on its head. The artist, who is also represented in the 2008 Whitney Biennial, pairs his simple cut outs with his own strange and ironic haikus about consumption and excess. For a recent work, "Alarm Clock (2007)," he showed a showerhead and a bar of soap with the accompanying text: "And when he's home at night trying to sleep/ he sees himself as a gross pig that everyone hates." His depictions of luxury objects from champagne to sushi, is not at all about the good life, but rather the darker, desperate side of keeping up with the Joneses. You can bet the question is certainly not a compliment.

Maura Egan

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Rosenberg, Karen, Matthew Brannon: The Question is a Compliment, New York Times, Friday, June 13, 2008, pg. E26.

The New York Times

Matthew Brannon

The Question Is a Compliment

Friedrich Petzel
537 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
Through July 11

Successful artists who never quite severed their ties to the commercial sphere — Andy Warhol, Richard Prince — are the model for Matthew Brannon. Using letterpress, silk-screens and other commercial printing methods, Mr. Brannon elevates graphic design to the level of text-based contemporary art (or is it the other way around?). He has also organized a literary-inspired group exhibition at Casey Kaplan, "Not So Subtle Subtitle," opening on Thursday.

The bulk of the show at Petzel consists of a series of letterpress prints of women's high-heel shoes, worthy of Carrie Bradshaw's walk-in closet. These cheerful images are accompanied by the bitter and frustrated ruminations of various characters: "an effete young man, a handsome yet weary detective addicted to painkillers, a group of art enthusiasts, several irresponsible waiters, two bookish hairdressers, a nympho florist, a frustrated critic, a tireless reporter."

Lest the prints seem too novelistic, Mr. Brannon displays them on handmade rigs of fiberboard, oak veneer and stainless steel. He also makes subtle sculptural and architectural interventions throughout the gallery. In the front hall he has suspended a "light bulb" (actually a polystyrene carving) from a wooden drop ceiling. He has also placed white-noise machines around the gallery and installed a small bookshelf high on the wall.

Like many young artists, Mr. Brannon sometimes relies too much on titles, news releases and other contextualizers. In the back gallery, a series of silk-screens on newsprint depict colorful discs (said to represent pornographic DVDs, but otherwise innocuous).

Mr. Brannon's texts tend to regurgitate urban clichés, just as his images recycle mid-century design. The sum of these parts, however, speaks directly and authentically to the aspirations and anxieties of young, creative New Yorkers.

KAREN ROSENBERG

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Brannon, Matthew, "Without Baggage, With Pistoletto: Thoughts on Eileen Quinlan's Photographs," *Mousse Magazine,* Issue #16, December/January 2009, p. 31-33.

WITHOUT BAGGAGE, WITH PISTOLETTO
Thoughts on Eileen Quinlan's photographs

Matthew Brannon

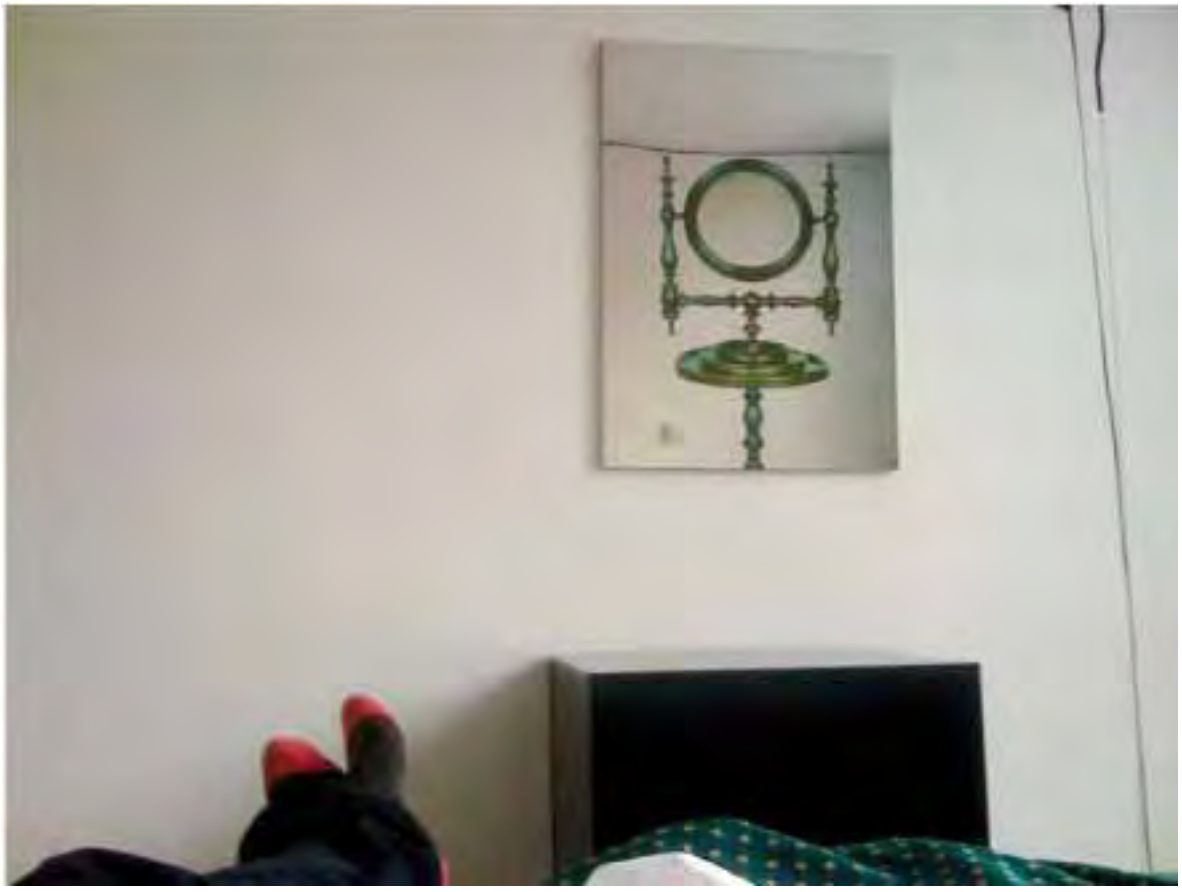


Photo: Matthew Brannon

I know what I'm looking at. You don't have to explain it to me. I know how it was made. You don't have to say a word. I understand what this is.

I don't understand what I'm looking at. I don't get how this was made. I'm not sure what to do with this. Could you explain it to me?

On the list of things not to use in your art – mirrors make the top ten, trumped only perhaps by skulls, drips and the color red. Because mirrors are the worst cliché their use is often an embarrassing attempt at content in work that's sorely without. I could possibly speak of a splintering of personality or a self-reflexivity when considering film but at this point in contemporary art I wouldn't grant mirrors such default interpretation.

Upon landing in Turin I'm notified Air Italia has lost my luggage and it will be at least another 24 hours before I see it. Luckily I have a novel [ironically – Horace McCoy's "I should have stayed home"! 1938] and enough Euros to make it to my hotel. I'm staying at the unassuming but decadent Park du Residence along the avenue not far from the Palazzo della Promotrice delle Belle Arti and walking distance to where Nietzsche supposedly broke down crying over a beaten horse. My room is about four times the size of my entire apartment in New York and is decorated with black lacquered furniture and floor length drapes. Best of all it has a 1974 Pistoletto in the bedroom. And suddenly I can exhale about my luggage.

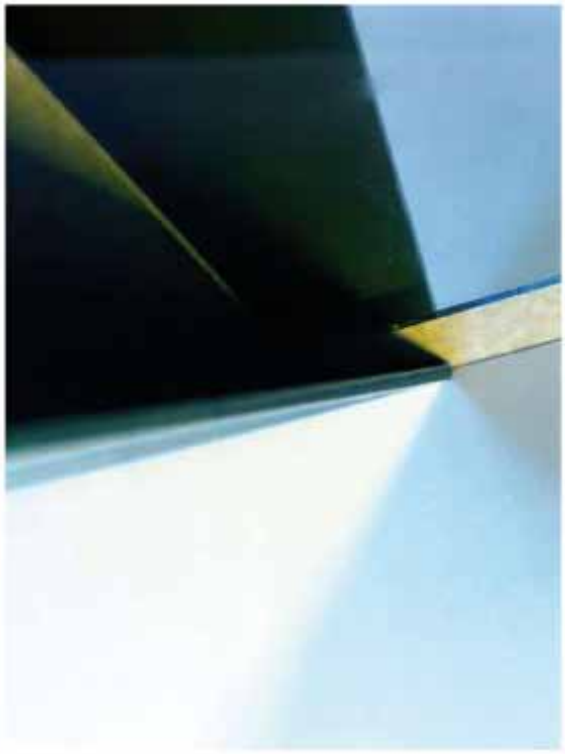
The Pistoletto is a silkscreen on polished metal. [See photo] The first thing any enthusiast of Pistolettos will tell you is that it isn't a mirror – it's polished metal. [I'm not sure the difference]. But regardless, in this case what's pictured, in seemingly actual size, is a mirror. So one could say it's a mirror of a mirror. Perhaps a poor mirror to apply your makeup in, but a great mirror to stare at from a hotel bed for hours. And while Pistoletto may have his reasons for using the polished metal I've never seen them as cheap shots. I see them as irresistible shiny surfaces that surpass painting in their autonomy and ability to isolate objects. The fact that they are mirrors seems to have more to do with this graphic quality than with any trite metaphor.

Eileen Quinlan also uses reproductive means, in her case photography, to make pictures of mirrors [and other things] by using mirrors. And just as successfully, she dodges the bullet of my insecure fears. [I say insecure because my desire for art to be somehow "intelligent" often gets in the way of my enjoyment.] And again against my own personal criteria I find myself liking work that uses mirrors. Of course like my hotel room's Pistoletto – Quinlin's mirrors reflect only themselves. What appears in the mirror is other mirrors. Our footing is fragile, and as far as I know, always denied figures. The reflective qualities are an economical strategy to make the most elegant imagery with the simplest means. The photos have a casual and almost accidental quality that I imagine is heavily edited more than the images are anticipated. That is to say they feel accidentally exceptional. They allow us to appreciate modern qualities of composition while reminding us that what we seek may not only be found on museum walls but also in abandoned buildings, smoke filled hallways, shattered windshields, and on cutting room floors.

But it's also possible that they are two-way glass. That for all of my impressions that's all they remain and that Eileen has her own camouflaged intention. That just beyond this sheet of paper is another room. And that my lack of sleep and disorientation has kept me in my waiting room staring at the photo on the wall.

Eileen Quinlan (from left to right)
Smoke & Mirrors #209, 2007 - courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York
Fahrenheit #32, 2008 - courtesy: Sutton Lane, London / Paris
Yellow Goya, 2007 - courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York
Smoke & Mirrors #208, 2007 - courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York
The Black & White Version of Smoke & Mirrors #233, 2007 - courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York
Night Flight #8, 2008 - courtesy: Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne / Berlin
Orchidism, 2007 - courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York
Red Edges, 2007 - courtesy: Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York






CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
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FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Monk, Phillip, *Matthew Brannon,* Frieze, May 2008, p. 200 (ill.)

Stephen Prina, A Structural Analysis and Reconstruction of MS7098 as Determined by the Difference Between the Measurements of Duration and Displacement
(1990)
Mixed media
Dimensions variable

What should change?
America. You wouldn't know it, but the States has great resources of intelligent people. Unfortunately no one is utilizing them.

Matthew Brannon

What was the first piece of art that really mattered to you?
'Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–75' show at the former Temporary Contemporary in Los Angeles in 1995. It was perfect timing for me. Young, impressionable, curious. Maybe today it would come across as naive or quaint, due to the current post-commerce *laissez-faire*, but it set the tone for me. Each of us is responsible for our own work. Some conversations larger, some smaller.
What image keeps you company in the space where you work?
My studio is beside New York's Port Authority. A bus terminal and all it implies. From my windows I see the windows of hundreds of others working away. Across the street the always-lit floors of the new building of *The New York Times* (which served as inspiration for my last show, 'Where Were We'). On my studio walls a revolving film poster collection: currently Joseph Losey's *The Accident* (1967).
If you could live with only one piece of art, what would it be?
Stephen Prina's *A Structural Analysis and Reconstruction of MS7098 as Determined by the Difference Between the Measurements of Duration and Displacement* (1990) or the set from Guy de Cointet's *Tell Me* (1979) or maybe Charles Sheeler's *Americana* (1931).
What is your favourite title of an art work?
Once a Noun, Now a Verb (1998) by Lari Pittman.
What is art for?
A productive frustration and a pleasant irritation.
What film has most influenced you?
As much as I would like to be esoteric, I'll take my seat and say *Rules of the Game* by Jean Renoir (1939). The politest of films about how rotten we are.
What are you reading?
Bit dyslexic these days. Bedside: *Billy Baldwin Decorates* (1972); office: Jacques Derrida's *On the Name* (1995); subway: press releases, poetry, various turn-on/turn-off lists.
What music are you listening to?
While writing, I fantasize about being a good writer. And I listen to music while I do this. Lately: heavy on the Scott Walker, especially *Scott 2* (1968), Bill Evans' *Bill Evans Trio with Symphony Orchestra* (1965), some Chopin, some Satie. I work alone, if that explains anything. Then I edit. And I think of myself as a terrible writer. I cleanse my palate with obscure Goth vinyl: The Cultural Decay, X Beliebig, early Coitus Int., early Siglo XX ...
What do you like the look of?
Conceptual art.
What should stay the same?
Can I say this? Architecture. I like to be in boxes, not triangles.
What could you imagine doing if you didn't do what you do?
I still regret not staying in science. Becoming a doctor. Being an artist is sometimes embarrassing. Especially when you're explaining just what it is you do to a stranger. Or you find yourself buying art supplies at the art supply store. Is this really a job for an adult? I guess so.
What do you wish you knew?
How to spell. How to dance.

Matthew Brannon is an artist based in New York. His work is included in the 2008 Whitney Biennial (6 March – 1 June), and a comprehensive monograph of his work, To say the very least, will be published in May 2008 by the Art Gallery of York University, Toronto, with a text by Philip Monk

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

The Embarrassing Truth

The elegant aesthetic of **Matthew Brannon**'s pictures and sculptures belies a witty, acerbic take on the human condition.
by Jennifer Higgie

'Art is the triumph over chaos.'
John Cheever

You know how it is. You see a show you really like. You spend time with it and as you're thinking and walking around and looking, you jot down some words in your notebook. Then you go on your way, and the images stay with you and you recall them with accurate, complex pleasure; but after a while life takes over, and those once crisp lines begin to blur. And then the days and weeks and months pass, and all you have left of those tangled, illuminating ideas that you so enjoyed when you looked so hard at those pictures and objects are the few words you hastily scribbled in your notebook, because you said to yourself: I don't need to write the details of my thinking down, because these thoughts are so good they will never be forgotten.

Oh, but they will. So much interpretation (read: art, life) is clouded and driven by the fallacies of memory, about the slippage between actuality and recollection. Trying to mine slivers of meaning from the residue of an experience that has, inevitably, cracked and crumbled with time can complicate or cool your initial engagement with something or someone (not necessarily a bad thing). Case study: a couple of months ago I spent a good while looking at Matthew Brannon's pictures and sculptures, and I liked them a lot, with a rare, dizzy shot of recognition—as though they were things I wanted to know about before I realized they existed, if you know what I mean. Like Surrealist tableaux dreamt up by advertising executives in the 1950s, they were at once the freshest and most old-fashioned things I had seen in a very long time. (I must also add that they prompted, although no alcohol had passed my lips, a martini-soaked daydream, which endeared them to me immediately.) I loved the work's brittle originality (weird how that word has become so old-fashioned), its wit and restraint and the way its good-looking friendliness belied its tricky aspirations. I also enjoyed how the spectre of Andy Warhol's youthful, advertorial self seemed to haunt the younger artist's creations like a genial great-uncle.

More recently, revisiting the results of Brannon's toil, I still liked them a lot, but for reasons that were more difficult to articulate. Why this was so was initially unclear to me. Perhaps it was because: a) like they always do, things change, even the static ones; or b) I was now forced to write down my thoughts, an activity that tends to cast an anxious pall over subjects once heartily enjoyed; or c) it had been raining for longer than it ever had before in the history of rain; or d) I was older. But whatever, in a short space of time I had shifted from thinking about Brannon's work in an ice-clinking-in-a-tumbler-on-a-balmy-evening sort of way and had started associating it with the words of a writer whose name I can't remember, who said that living in the modern world was like having fun at a picnic while keeping your ear cocked for the distant rumble of thunder.

The thing is, Brannon's prolific output lends itself to easy readings, despite its complexity, because it's simply so enjoyable—hence my confusion. However, if you choose to spend some time with its charmingly superficial qualities, hidden depths gradually reveal themselves (but depths, I hasten to add, that cling fondly to their

Before we begin: I'd like to thank everyone who made this evening possible. First there's ... whose countless hours and faith in this project... And ... who took the bullet when... And ... whose selfless service operated many doors once closed. And of course ... who knew what questions to ask and which to avoid, who provided the zest when there was none. And to the late ... you are in all our thoughts tonight.

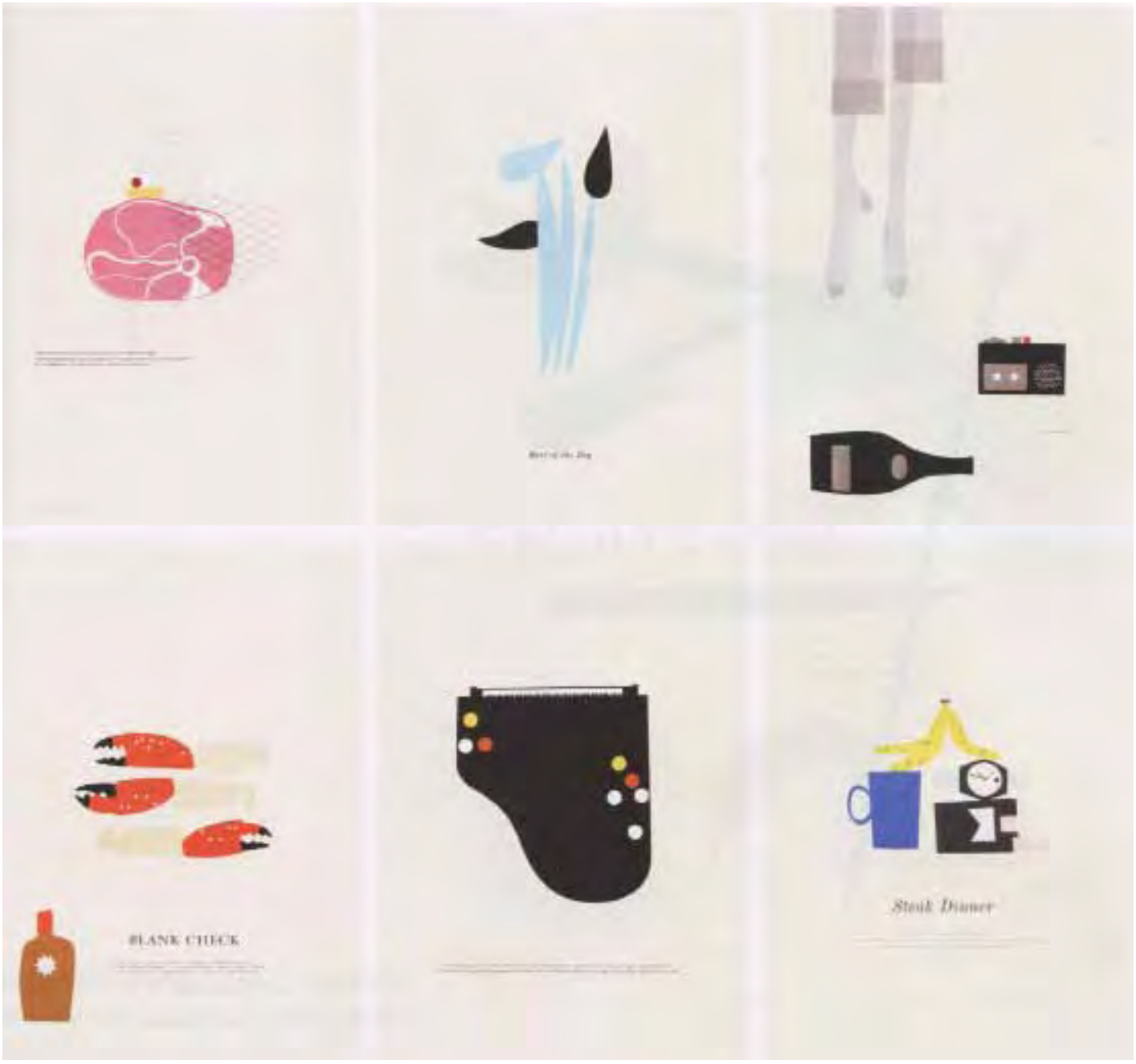
immaculate wrappings). Often displayed in cabinets that recall museums circa 1952, the work can swing, in the blink of any eye, from a sort of Ernest Hemingwayish macho will-to-truth to a mood of urbane malaise *à la* Truman Capote, to a discreet Minimalism or a wilful absurdism. Another sly level of confusion is, of course, the work's twisted relationship to nostalgia, about which Brannon declares: 'The current art world participates in a conservative version of radical. I am more interested in a radical version of conservative.'[1] It's no coincidence that the artist has chosen both to pay homage to and undermine the look of advertisements from the 1950s—the most confident decade in the history of the USA and the one in which everyone seemed to smoke, when alcoholism was the norm and disappointment was admitted to only in novels. It was, in other words, the last decade before the cracks began to show on a grand scale. Brannon's disorientating strategies are apparent in his approach both to individual works and to his exhibition designs: he often sets his type so tiny that you have to lean in close to read it, and combines unexpected, almost invisible, objects and inaccessible sculptures with more apparently conventional elements (for example, he has placed minute poems in the spine of *Artforum* and told me about wanting to bury a screenplay in a wall). At his recent exhibition at the Friedrich Petzel Gallery in New York, it would have been easy to overlook two handmade wooden light bulbs, a fake light switch and a pile of 25 black books and a wooden cup on a shelf so high up it was impossible to read them (*Rat*, 2008). The books were misleadingly described as 'novels' but are, according to the artist, 'more like 64-page prose poems' [2] (he has also written *Hyena* and *Mosquito*, 2007, and *Poodle*, 2008). Their inaccessibility is intentional. Brannon told me that: 'No one so far has read them aside from my wife and an editor although maybe the collectors who bought them have snuck a peek. I've been pretty careful to make sure the dealers don't'.[3] He also placed a 'sleep-sounds cancelling device' in the gallery with the stated purpose of creating a peaceful ambience, although I suspect it was included because anything as predictable as not including a 'sleep-sounds cancelling device' would make Brannon fret about the possibility of closure. It's as if he likes to seduce everyone with the sunny charm of his work and then, *whammo*, allow scenarios to spiral into something that Patricia Highsmith (who liked to keep snails in her bra, by the way) might have dreamt up in the Ripley books. (It makes sense that a few years ago he re-worked posters for horror movies.)

The dislocation Brannon mines so well mirrors the problems not only of interpretation but also, obviously, of life itself (no one is flawless). This is apparent in the gulf between what the work looks like (anachronistic, chic, insane) and what the, if not brutal, then at least acerbic (and often hilarious) texts that often accompany the images declare. (That Sigmund Freud's The Joke and Its Relationship to the Unconscious, from 1905, is one of the artist's favourite books should come as no surprise.) Brannon describes his rationale thus: 'I seek a play with words that is both specific in meaning and conversely teetering with inappropriate reception'.[4] It's a strategy that both mirrors the schizophrenic relationship of advertising to reality and functions as a form of resistance to a culture nurtured on quickfix sound-bites. Accordingly, words (the original ready-made) are often the most free-associated and abstract element of the pictures. They can be terse, deadpan and literal—as in 'Finish your drink, we're leaving', written beneath an image of a smouldering cigarette and a soda siphon—or deranged micro-stories or concrete poems. Almost all of them, however, deal with, on some level, failure—of words to communicate, of alcohol to animate, of critics to criticize, of relationships to offer solace or of representation to represent. Below a picture of scattered coins, for instance, is written: 'He's telling me he didn't like the show. It's nothing more than graphic design. The writing is trite and full of gimmicks. The work is embarrassingly self-conscious, boring, over-rated, and in the end, totally unnecessary. I look away, set down my espresso and mutter who asked you?' Brannon also mines non sequiturs within an inch of their baffling lives: for example, the words 'Steak Dinner' underline an image of bananas, while another picture of what appears to be a pot of fish is captioned 'Compliance & Resentment'. A silhouette of a blackbird, some pencils, an iPod, paper clips and a coffee stain is accompanied by the words 'Pigs Like Us', beneath which, in tiny type, is written: 'They had to pump her stomach. Amazing what they found. Among the arugula, watercress, blue-fin tuna, age-dried steak. There it is. Your heart. And Look ... a bunch of razor blades. Little light bulbs. Cocaine. Little travel bottles. Anti-depressants. Your old untouched job application.'

Mosquito
2007
Oak, brass, steel. offset print on paper, plastic
22 x 51 x 22cm

Brannon both pays homage to and undermines the 1950s - the most confident decade in the history of the USA, when everyone smoked, alcoholism was the norm and disappointment was admitted to only in novels.

Blank Check, Blow Hard, Tight Ass
2007
Letterpress on paper. wood
170 x 197 x 66 cm



Top:
Bad Manners
2008
Letterpress print on paper
56x41 cm

Halfway across the intersection you catch yourself in mid-thought. The unfinished plate. The second house. A too tight watch. A tap on the shoulder. He wouldn't dare. He hasn't the nerve. This is my sand castle.

Above:
Blank Cbeck
2007
Letterpress print on paper
61x46cm

• That's not what I'm saying· You've got it all wrong • It has nothing to do with ... I don't know the first thing about ... I've never even been to ... Now pull yourself together • You know I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important • It's nothing you haven't done before •

Top:
Hair of tbe Dog
2006
Silkscreen print on paper
76 x 58cm

Above:
Rough Trade
2008
Letterpress print on paper
56 x 41cm

Guess. No guess again. Think back. No that's not even close. Remember when I told you I did something I shouldn't have done? In New York, That guy in the piano bar? Yeah. Well I did. I fucked him, And he's here tonight. And you were right. He is the author.

Top:
Regrets Only
2008
Silkscreen print on paper
61 x 46cm

Not another word.

Above:
Steak Dinner
2007
Letterpress print on paper
61 x 46cm

• This year tell her you love her all over again • With a grab bag of diamonds • With mouthfuls of caviar • With your rent in clothes • A credit card of hotel rooms· Stockings• Champagne• Plane tickets• And a soft slap on her bare ass •

Disappointed Critic
2004
Letterpress print on paper
61x46cm

Diet pill paranoia & plastic trophies

Getting absorbed in these textual mini-dramas can overwhelm the sheer range of nuance and visual reference in Brannon's work. In response to his show at Petzel I noted down things and themes that leapt out: 'ennui, language as material, sincerity (?), a 1950s' palette, women's shoes and Warhol, self-deprecation, knives (double-edged), laughter (high-pitched), drinking (as in alcohol), heels (all types), typewriters, cigarettes and cities, vodka and wine, jazz (generally), John Updike, getting tight, Richard Prince, suburbs, East Coast Pae White, *Revolutionary Road* (as in the novel), Stan Getz? Bill Evans? Vignettes, biter glances, the joy of surfaces (and superficiality?), dislocation, flatness, light bulbs, linoleum, being literal, allusive and vague (i.e., human), the embarrassment of art and sex and combinations thereof, disillusion, poems, America and hyenas.' (There's a lot more of the same, including 'the future?', 'melancholy' and 'the smell of tweed after rain', but I think you've got the idea.) Re-reading this, the only thing that stumped me, apart from the amount of question marks, was hyenas. What did they have to do with anything?

I had no idea. So I lay down in a cool, dark room and tried to remember every moment of my visit to Brannon's show and then studio, where I recalled he had greeted me in friendly fashion, in vivid green loafers. He was articulate and self-deprecating and showed me lots of things and talked about them well. He was at once very interested in the craft of his pictures (letterpress is a somewhat antiquated printmaking technique that is undergoing a revival) and in the way words can simultaneously reflect, misrepresent and complicate a situation. (Non sequiturs are a case in point: eavesdrop on a bus or a dinner party, and they're all you hear— it's a form of communication more common than you might assume.) Then I remembered something else: just when Brannon was showing me one of his exquisite prints (most of which are made in an edition of one, like paintings), without warning, he asked me if I wanted to listen to a recording he had made in Berlin of a hyena. I said yes, so we sat on his couch and listened to a wild caged animal howl, but then, as far as I remember, we changed the subject. How could I have forgotten that this happened? It was like buying tickets for a flute concerto and finding yourself at a shooting range.

(While we're on the topic of wild animals, I'd like to make a slight detour for a moment. Few people have observed—and punctured the complacencies of polite society with as much wit as the Edwardian writer Saki, who is like a prewar British literary equivalent of Brannon. The two seem to share the belief that civilization is protected by a veneer so thin it struggles to keep the beasts—the

Wind in tbe Sails
2008
Letterpress print on paper
61x46cm

It would be an understatement
to say I'm overreacting.

Market Price
2008
Letterpress print on paper
61x46cm

You order your second before
you're done with the first.
Telling yourself what you want
to hear. Listening only to what
works. No one here knows.
Everyone thinks you're right.
You wear it well. And the plan
is ... once you get to her place,
once the drugs take effect. after
the answering machine picks
up ... that you let her read the
letter. Let her know just how
much you lost. How there is no
tomorrow.

If Tbey Only Knew
2008
Letterpress print on paper
61 x46cm

Created under duress over
the course of six weeks.
Directly following the most
exhausting production to date.
Immediately following a minor
but destabilizing medical
procedure. With the perceptual
din ofjackhammers outside. At
the cost of a marriage. With the
delusion that it mattered.

Brannon is interested in the way words can simultaneously reflect, misrepresent and complicate a situation.

metaphorical and literal ones—at bay. Take this exchange from Saki's short story 'The She-WoIf' (1914): "'I wish you would turn me into a wolf, Mr. Bilsiter,' said his hostess at luncheon the day after his arrival. 'My dear Mary,' said Colonel Hampton, 'I never knew you had a craving in that direction.' 'A she-wolf, of course,' continued Mrs. Hampton; 'it would be too confusing to change one's sex as well as one's species at a moment's notice.'"[5]

Anyway, thinking about all of the above, I read every interview Brannon has given, and in one of them the hyena once again makes a sudden entrance. 'Did you know', he asks his interrogator, who in terms of animals has so far mentioned only ostriches, 'that hyenas are the only predators of lions outside of man? They are portrayed as frightened scavengers, but in reality a hyena eats and hunts about the same as the lion. When a hyena eats another animal, it eats everything, cracking huge bones and swallowing it all. Its faeces are often white from bone.'[6] Then Brannon's gritty conversational gambit suddenly changes gear. 'Truth', he says, 'is also another loaded term. I would like to remain on the cynical and sarcastic side and say truth is an embarrassment. But it has been said that lying is moral, which I can understand. So that leaves us with a question of responsibility to the audience. People frequently read much of my text as auto-biographical. Perhaps they are right, but it wasn't my intention. I'm even suspicious of my own intentions.'[7] In other words, Brannon's work may not be literally autobiographical, but the core of it — its simultaneous distrust of, and flirtation with, absolutes—is. This makes sense to me. Why, he seems to ask, would you trust a picture in the first place? After all, even the smartest of them are simply pictures, not sentient beings. He makes clear that our (and by 'our' I mean people who live in big, Western cities) seemingly watertight understanding of the world is, in fact, as leaky as hell—which, though a pretty sad state of affairs, doesn't, thankfully, mean we can't have fun getting wet.

Jennifer Higgie is co-editor of frieze.

1 Rosa Vanina Pavone, 'Innocent Accidental Unintentional Indulgent. Never: An Interview with Matthew Brannon', *Uovo*, April 2006, p.154
2 Email from Matthew Brannon to the author, 30 September 2008
3 Ibid., email from Matthew Brannon
4 Ibid., Pavone, p.150
5 Saki, 'The She-Wolf', from *Beasts and Super-Beasts*, London, 1914
6 Ibid., Pavone, p. 148
7 Ibid., p.148

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Turvey, Lisa, *Matthew Brannon,* Artforum, September 2008, p. 460 (ill.)

ARTFORUM

Matthew Brannon

FREIDRICH PETZEL GALLERY

Spike-heeled, peep-toed, platform-soled, or sling-backed, the gaily colored silhouettes of footwear in Matthew Brannon's recent letterpress prints summon Andy Warhol's late-1950s shoe drawings in dash and whimsy, if not function. Warhol's shoes, used in ads, were among his earliest successes; Brannon's illustrate failure. The paragraphs that appear below them voice the plaints of various urban subjects who are unlucky in love or unhappy at work, facing middle age in the middle distance, and dithering in stews of regret, jealousy, and alcohol. In *Role Playing*, 2008, lace boots are paired with the musings of a woman on a miserable date (I'LL NEVER GET OUT OF HERE), while in *Dedication*, 2008, pumps accompany recriminations addressed to an ex-lover, among them, AND WHEN I TOOK MY LAPTOP INSTEAD OF THE CAT FROM OUR BURNING APARTMENT, IT WASN'T MY WORST MISTAKE.

Fancy shoes join sushi and champagne in the repertoire of metropolitan- consumer signs that Brannon has depicted in the past several years, and his exceedingly smart second solo outing at Friedrich Petzel Gallery extended earlier critical gambits: picturing the commodity using a serial format but spurning its commercial logic by printing the works only once, and aping midcentury advertising's crisp designs in image while flouting its good looks in word. His texts, like the pithy dialogical devastations of Raymond Carver or Amy Hempel, go down

easy and then twist the knife, often seeming, as T. J. Clark once wrote about Hans Hofmann's paintings, "to be blurting out a dirty secret which the rest of the decor is conspiring to keep." Such oscillations between taste and crassness resounded in the installation. The prints hang on stained oak rigs that are elemental to the work yet also reminiscent of structures intended, in other contexts, to be temporary and inconspicuous. Those painted black or shades of white are modest enough, but some are covered in a streaked, unabashedly tacky purple that gives the lie to their neutrality; these are apparatuses, after all, of the sort constructed for art-fair displays.

Brannon's sensitivity to framing—his arrangement here alluding to consumer psychology, in the 2008 Whitney Biennial to a penthouse—was manifest throughout, with other objects registering the fluctuations between control and losing it that are operative in the prints themselves. A ladder-like wooden overhang built between the reception and gallery spaces might have remained unnoticed if not for a carved Styrofoam lightbulb suspended from one of its beams, just as the faint thrum generated by two sound-canceling devices, typically found in analysts' offices, might have gone undetected if the machines hadn't been noted on the checklist as a work (*Not So Subtle Subtitle*, 2008). Private pathologies always underpin public fronts, the artist suggests, and indeed even what might read as rhe best-behaved selections open onto latent content. Silk-screened grids of concentric circles bear titles including *Cum Bucket* and *3 on 1* (both 2008), turning the discs into adult DVDs and the back room in which they were shown into the exhibirion's red-light district, complete with its own crimson lightbulb sculpture. This was Brannon's least representational project yet, and his shrewd takes on abstraction's bent toward the decorative—tacking some prints to the wall, enclosing others in kitschy tomato-red frames indicate a promising future direction. For all of its confessional overtures, this show courted the theme of unavailability as readily as it did that of access. Twenty-five copies of Brannon's novel *Rat* (2008) sat on a high shelf, nearly out of sight line, and the two blocky wall enamels exhibited (*Not Necessary and Not Necessarily*, both 2008) resemble the stretcher bars of paintings whose rectos are flat up against the wall. In what could be construed as a cautionary summa on the crazed profligacy of the contemporary art world, they imply that what is most desired remains not only out of reach but unknown in the first place.

—Lisa Turvey

Matthew Brannon
***Tasteless,* 2008**
letterpress print on paper, 24 x 18".

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Droitcour, Brian, Matthew Brannon, Artforum.com, Critic's Pick, Thursday, June 19, 2008

ARTFORUM

Matthew Brannon

FRIEDRICH PETZEL GALLERY
535-537 West 22nd Street
May 22—July 11

View of "The Question Is a Compliment."

Matthew Brannon arranges flat shapes to conjure familiar objects, as though playing with tangrams. A series of semiabstract prints at the rear of his latest exhibition appears to document his experiments with drawing in two dimensions. But these works are an exception. The generous amount of text in most of these letterpress prints marks a slow public metamorphosis from artist to novelist, and, for Brannon, literary concerns ultimately trump formal ones. Flatness is more than a condition imposed by the medium; it is a trope for the flimsy skins of personality that the characters of his elliptical vignettes sometimes let slip or that Brannon, as the author, withdraws to expose their anxieties. The images these stories accompany are Chelsea-approved signs of hipness, like designer footwear and sushi. Brannon divides them from snippets of narrative with plenty of blank space. The paper's white looks whiter against the colored boards the prints are installed on, and its flat, bright void suggests a suffocating isolation, exacerbated by lines like: "I'm rotting from the inside out. I know it's over. The lights are on. The audience has left."

Several purple patches lurk in the margins of this exhibition: white-noise generators; the aforementioned text-free prints; an out-of-reach shelf stocked with copies of Brannon's latest novella, Rat, which no one is allowed to read; blocks of dark enamel paint applied directly to the gallery's walls; and a pencil scribble that, really, a four-year-old could have drawn. The hermetic secrecy of these pieces raises associations with the privacy of the creative process, and the apprehensions of artmaking become a foil for the social ones Brannon writes about. Loose Change, a stray print best visible on exiting the gallery, has a fictional artist describing an encounter with a critic, who slams his show (which, incidentally, sounds a bit like Brannon's), calling it, among other things, "embarrassingly self-conscious." His tirade elicits the artist's acid response: "Who asked you?" But in "The Question Is a Compliment" and its world of fragile loneliness, any expression of interest is a hand extended across a chasm and should be accepted with gratitude.

— Brian Droitcour

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Chen, Howie, "Chapter 11," Where Were We exhibition catalogue, The Whitney Museum of American Art, pp. 3-18.

CHAPTER 11

Without attendant punctuation or context, Matthew Brannon's exhibition title *Where Were We* makes itself irreducible to a single interpretation. Its ambiguity and incompleteness as a phrase belies its seemingly reductive economy and alliterative simplicity. It points to a loss of bearings—uttered perhaps after an interruption in conversation, a regrettable shared experience, or a period of unconsciousness, during which we lost our expectation, register, or direction. A diversion has occurred.

Through the proliferation of speculative narratives stemming from this short indeterminate phrase, we are introduced to the nature of Brannon's artistic practice and strategies: even in the most simple and apparently vacated form, text and images are loaded with meanings that slide past and inform each other without ever fully fixing themselves or their associations. Intimated in these signifying operations is the specter of the psychological unconscious, which may be understood as being structured much like language and similarly discloses itself through jokes, slips, breakdowns, and unexpected ruptures.[1]

With a nuanced understanding of psychoanalytic theory, the artist juxtaposes image and text to bring the viewer into a play of associations between language and representation. At the same time, he has designed the exhibition to structure the viewer's visual experience around the act of reading and that which is revealed in the systems of pictures, narratives, objects, and space.

[Opposite] *The Price of Admission*, 2007 (installation view)
Matte PVC foil on glass, 316 x 131in. (02.6 x 332.7cm)

RESTRUCTURING

Brannon employs a signature combination of printed images, design strategies, and text in work that leverages the forms, visual currency, and circulation of promotional materials. The postcards, posters, and other ephemera that he creates at once announce the exhibition and comprise its formal elements, expanding the idea of whar constitutes an exhibition to include all of its considered and diffuse material extensions.[2]

With *Where Were We,* the exhibition and the act of reading begin with the announcement and invitation, designed by the artist. The opening reception invitation, in the form of a letter-press "business card," and a poster are presented together in a custom envelope, evoking a bureaucratic aesthetic and formality. A provisional logo—a coiled black eel that is a recurring graphic motif in Brannon's work—lends the envelope and card a similar impression. The four-color poster unfolds to reveal a stark photograph of an anonymous urban office building "attached" to the page by a large trompe l'oeil paper clip, creating a representational play at hand with the metal clip actually holding the elements together.[3] Here we enter the realm of language.

The poster clearly cites the conventional information—the artist's name, the dates, location, and address of the exhibition. Where the image and exhibition credits are usually located, however, there are instead texts that simultaneously displace the announcement's authorship, function, and context. The photograph was taken by an artist (Michelle Elzay) other than Brannon and who otherwise has no presence in the exhibition; in the fine print typical of illustration captions, the text running along the left margin unexpectedly reveals itself as a short narrative:

Promotional poster for *Where Were We*, 2007. Offset print on paper, 22 x 17in. (55.9 x 43.2cm)

> Above our heads the weight of a city block. Tons of poured cement. Miles of phone and electric. Enough glass to sink a ship. Palms, ferns, soft soap, calculators, vending machines, and fluorescent lighting. Picture one person at their desk in the very center. Pen in mouth. Slight hangover. Answering a phone call they don't want to take.

Brannon demonstrates that in a determined form such as a promotional poster there remain spaces to inscribe content that transforms the reading of the object itself. Even the relationship of the promotional ephemera to the exhibition may be reconsidered: he typically invites artist friends to design his posters

featuring their own images, subverting the reading and expectations of the exhibition with their seemingly unrelated aesthetics and subject. Previous posters have been designed by Carol Bove, Liam Gillick, Wade Guyton, Patrick Hill, Sarah Morris, Richard Phillips, Lari Pittman, and Stephen Prina.

Throughout Brannon's oeuvre, the spaces he prefers to work with tend to be marginal or overlooked in relation to the overall form, yet through his manipulations they become integral to the piece's ongoing interpretation. This pattern began with earlier works, inspired by horror films, in which he explored the movie poster form. In the area traditionally reserved for production credits, he inserted instead short text and narrative

segments, as in *Sick Designs* (2004) and *Grotesque Desperate* (2005). Sometimes Brannon's text completely overtakes the form and image, pointing to what may be happening behind the scenes as possibly the most revealing thing. An extreme example is Brannon's film *Unending Horrible* (2004), in which the scrolling introductory film credits ("KNEEJERK NEGATIVITY WITH/GREAT WHITE SHARK HEART STUDIOS AND/SHIT FUN FILMS/PRESENTS/COLD GENITALS/IN A/NIGHTS SWEATS IDEA FOR") become the entirety of the work.[4]

From these invitation materials-—a business card, a picture of an office building, and a reluctant employee—a scene is set for the exhibition.

[OPPOSITE LEFT] *Sick Decisions,* 2004. Screenprint on paper, 40 x 26in. (55.9 x 66cm)
[OPPOSITE RIGHT] *Grotesque Desperate,* 2005. Silkscreen on paper, 30 x 22in. (76.2 x 55.88cm)
[ABOVE] *Where Were We,* 2007 (installation view)

JFK International Airport

Steak Dinner

Raw Bar

[PAGE 8] *Signature*, 2007. Letterpress on paper, 38 x 29in. (96.5 x 73.7cm) [PAGE 9] *Who Takes Who Home Tonight,* 2007. Silkscreen on paper, two parts, 38 x 29in. (96.5 x 73.7cm) each [PAGE 10] *Steak Dinner*, 2007. Letterpress on paper, 24 x 18in. (61 x 45.7cm) [PAGE 11] *Raw Bar,* 2007. Letterpress on paper 24 x 18in. (61 x 45.7cm) [ABOVE] *Pulling Out,* 2007. Letterpress on paper, 24 x 18in. (61 x 45.7cm)

MERGERS

Brannon cites as an ongoing reference Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), an epic poem eclipsed by convoluted annotations and eventually revealed as a novel whose form Nabokov has exploited to scrutinize and expand the genre.[5] Brannon similarly uses the form of the exhibition to describe a visual field of images and text through the language of printmaking, graphic and textile design, writing, and display. Against this backdrop, he explores the underlying psychologies inherent in the production, interpretation, and distribution of image-making.

Upon entering the exhibition space, viewers immediately discover the coiled black eel graphic first seen on the invitation, now in the form of a 26-foot-tall decal on the windows of the Whitney Museum at Altria's Sculpture Court, facing 42nd Street. The massive presence, stark black against muted gray concrete surroundings, here confounds its previous manifestation as an ad hoc graphic logo. With the addition of a title, *The Price of Admission* (2007), the piece attains a new, binary status as artwork and symbol. Viewable from both outside and inside the Whitney at Altria, a corporate building in the heart of midtown and the Times Square area, the eel takes on the promotional proportions of commercial street signage. For the artist, the eel continues to develop as a symbol of abjectness, refinement, and wealth—its conflicted meanings in contrast to its simple and alluring graphic manifestation. Brannon also relates the eel graphic to the image of a coiled whip, which he has employed in other works to evoke the psychological dynamics of power and domination.

The main gallery features three scaffoldlike display structures, designed by the artist and inspired by director's chairs (also a recurring symbol in Brannon's work), on which Brannon's framed letterpress and silkscreen prints arranged in rows. A single gray wall marching the hues found in both the announcement poster and the exhibited prints serves as a cool, neutral background for the graphic black surfaces. The structures provide the support and spatial organization for the framed prints, creating what Brannon refers to as a "cadence" in viewing akin to reading pages arranged in chapters with no particular sequence.

A transitional moment occurs with the third display structure, which is fixed to the wall. Whereas the two freestanding structures have usurped the default display function of the gallery walls, this one has assimilated itself into the wall, creating an unusual doubling effect: a display surface supporting another display surface. These shifts in presentation, including the two works in the exhibition which are hung on the wall itself (*untitled*, 1993, and *Signature*, 2007), accentuate the varying contexts at play in the viewer's experience and interpretation of the exhibition.

MISCONDUCT

Psychoanalysis suggests that much of our fascination with image culture, including advertising, art, and cinema, is informed by the concept of cathexis—the ways we invest emotional energy in objects, ideas, or other people.

Brannon employs reflexive operations to explore how these psychological impulses can become overinvested and repressed, manifesting in such obsessive pathologies as megalomania, self-destruction, and perversion. He begins with a presentational

form, such as an exhibition and its promotional materials, graphic elements, objects, and publication. Then he introduces what he refers to as an "irritant," a disjunctive text/narrative or a formal/compositional aberration that displaces the interpretation of the work—sometimes overtaking it entirely. As we see here, such devices include inviting other artists to occupy his promotional posters and allowing his accompanying text (including titles) to commandeer the reading of his visual images.

Where Were We draws its initial contextual and visual narrative from its location in commercial midtown and the constructed imagery that Brannon presents. Each print in the exhibition features a simple graphic composition that evokes a generic and stylistically anachronistic iconography of corporate, commuter, and after-hours cosmopolitan lifestyles. The color palette is decorative and modern in flat, unmodulated colors and with a nostalgic Pop patina. *Steak Dinner* (2007) presents a deadpan arrangement of a limp yellow banana peel resting on top of a coffee mug, a luxury watch, and a pack of cigarettes: *Raw Bar* (2007) features a suggestive configuration of goods including a stiletto-heeled shoe, lowball glass, hotel key, and coat-check ticket.

With the addition of Brannon's fractured texts, what appear to be simple assortments of office stationery, commuter accoutrements, and luxury items and comestibles become loaded compositions detailing personality disorders, status anxiety, private transgressions, and other dysfunctions and trespasses. The text in *Pigs, Like Us* (2007) turns what could be a coffee-stained desktop strewn with pencils and an iPod into a tainted scene recounting spiraling self-indulgence and negligence. A large silkscreen diptych flatly depicting a sushi dinner is betrayed by its title, *Who Takes Who Home Tonight* (2007), which renders the tableau a disingenuous prelude to sexual indiscretion.

In the transition from the works on the display structures to the pieces on the gallery wall, formal abstraction appears in the work, creating a dramatic, schizophrenic foil for the hard-edged graphic figuration. Drawing from a canon of aesthetic abstraction including Expressionist mark-making (*untitled*, 1993), Optical art (*Signature*, 2007), and Geometric Minimalism (*Pigeon*, 2007), Brannon stages a slippery moment in which an artwork doubles as domestic decoration or an emblem of a lifestyle. This juxtaposition highlights our perception of "art" and the values we assign to certain aesthetics, display strategies, and modes of production. The twist is that all the prints in the exhibition are unique and made with the same methods, leveling expectations both of the endless reproducibility of poster works and of the privileging of one aesthetic over the other.

ACCOUNTABILITY

In *What Were We*, a single voice is not apparent. Even within individual pieces the point of view is constantly shifting and ambiguous, conflating fragments of personal dialogue, anonymous verbal affronts, imaginary advertising copy, and narrative. Separated into short sentences and text segments, the story, like the images, relies on the viewer to string together words and phrases to form uniquely subjective associations and interpretations.

Pulling Out (2007) considers:

> A BIT AGGRESSIVE / WOULDN'T YOU SAY? / DIDN'T SEE THAT COMING / THE WAY HE SEEMED PREPARED TO ARGUE AT EVERY TURN / AND WHERE DID HE EVER GET THAT ABOUT YOU KNOW WHAT / SO ANGRY / SOMEWHAT LOST I FEAR / WORRIES ME THOUGH / IT'S AS IF HE'S DETERMINED TO DRAG US DOWN WITH HIM

Themes materialize and coalesce throughout Brannon's work as his constructions focus on the psychology of display and promotion in relation to power, ambition, art, and taste. In *Where Were We*, Brannon delineates an Everyman beset by job anxieties, material desires, and personal dysfunction—a typology especially salient in the context of the exhibition's corporate midtown location. At the same time, the text reveals an alternate voice that self consciously speaks about the act of writing and artmaking—even addressing the viewer about the work itself. *Adult Education* (2007) contends:

IT'S ABSTRACT / IT'S TOTALLY ABSTRACT / I COPIED IT / I STOLE IT FROM YOU / I RIPPED THE PAGE RIGHT OUT OF THE BOOK / WORD FOR WORD / YOU WEREN'T DOING MUCH WITH IT ANYWAY...

With the fusing of these narratives, the subject, form, and interpretation of the work are addressed all at once.

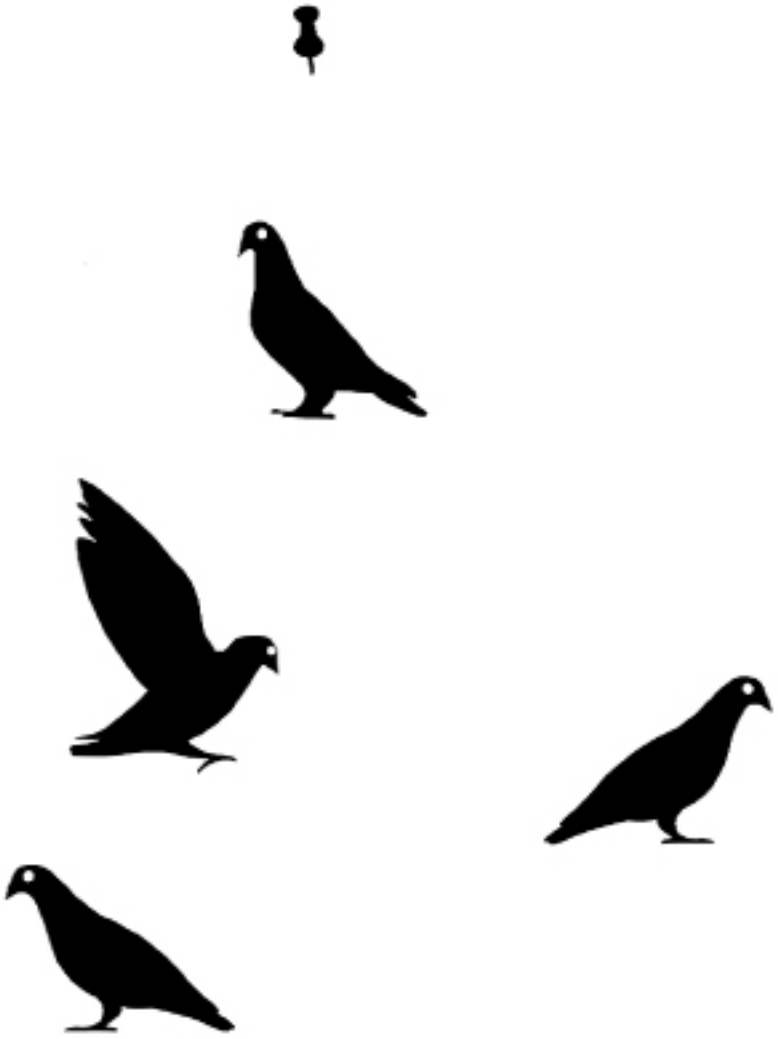
This series of identification and misrecognition is central to Brannon's text and image constructions, underlining the psychoanalytic and linguistic considerations of his work. Similar to the narrative voice, the implied reader is not fully determined but is revealed individually through the process of interpretation and inferences drawn. • By actively responding to the pieces, filling in visual and narrative gaps, the viewer becomes situated in the construction of meaning of the work and the installation.

TERMINATION PROCEDURES

The interruptions and diversions implied by the title *Where Were We* may refer as well to the gaps and disjunctions we negotiate throughout the exhibition. They invite a chain of symbols and meanings that must be sutured together, much like cinema as an experience is derived from a narrative space of successive, discrete images. Through constructed scenarios and mise-en-scenes, it requires us to synthesize our viewing experience as a coherent whole while remaining subconsciously aware of its fragmented visual and narrative elements. Another reminder of how Brannon's ongoing interest in cinema can be seen as influencing his entire body of work, the cinema as a metaphor may also describe the way we (mis)identify ourselves with the images presented to us. *Where Were We* is similarly an active textual space that takes the form of and reflects our anxieties about misrecognition and uncertainty of meaning. If our unconscious is truly structured like language, Brannon posits, much is to be revealed in the ways we read ourselves and our surroundings together.

Howie Chen

1. **Jacques Lacan**, *The Four Fundamenta! Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, **ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998); originally published as** *Les quatre concepts fundamenteaux de la psychoanalyse* (1973).
2. **Brannon considers exhibitions' announcement materials discrete works In themselves that pro vide a space for both image and information. Matthew Brannon, Interview by Roger White (***Brooklyn Rail***, April 2004).**
3. The building is Renzo Plano's New York Times building, partially lit and stili under construction, as it appears from Brannon's studio window.



4. "You don't have to watch the film to know the story. It's about sex, money, and power. It's about self-destructive Impulses and fear. You don't have to watch the film to know the story." from the artist's statement for *The Unending Horrible*, **Southflrst, Brooklyn, 2004. S. This type of rhetorical device, using one medium of art to describe another as a way of illuminating the former, is known as "ecphrasis."**
6. See Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* **(Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); originally published as** *Der Akt des Lesens* **(1976).**

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Art

Reviews

Matthew Brannon, Steak Dinner

Scott, Andrea K., *Matthew Brannon, "Where Were We"*, Time Out New York, April 12 - 18, 2007, p. 86 (ill.)

Matthew Brannon, "Where Were We"

Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria, through Aug 31 (see Museums)

A New York artist puts his letterpress stamp on the Whitney Altria's outpost. By **Andrea K. Scott**

The title of Matthew Brannon's elegant if sparse exhibition, "Where Were We," implies a memory lapse, and the structure of the phrase follows suit. First *where* loses its *h*, then the *r* and an e disappear. Given the pivotal role that text plays in the letterpress works of the New York artist—not to mention his conceptual precision—it's unlikely that this is just a happy accident.

The erosive, elusive nature of things—from language and creative inspiration to social status and erotic fixation—is Brannon's subject, and he's chosen a fittingly slippery emblem to announce it: a 26-foot eel. Titled *The Price of Admission* (a joke, since this branch of the Whitney is free), the black-vinyl silhouette is installed in the East 42nd Street windows of the Altria's atrium. You can see where Brannon is trying to go with the giant decal—branding the corporate skin of the building with his own uncanny logo. But like any temporary tattoo, it's not all that subversive. It is also the most grandiose gesture in a show that is otherwise refreshingly short on spectacle.

The real draw is the suite of 12 modestly scaled letterpress prints pairing text and image, displayed on three easel-like racks inside the gallery. A set of subtitles runs along the bottom of the page, as if Brannon's art were a swank foreign film. (Also on view are a faux–Ab Ex lithograph dating from the artist's undergraduate years and a drab embroidered banner of diagonal stripes. Neither work merits inclusion.)

Brannon borrows the vernacular of graphic design, an approach that echoes the more established hybrids of artists like Andrea Zittel and Jorge Pardo (whose dreadful shredded lamps and wine-storage credenzas, on view now at Friedrich Petzel, must be the nadir of design-as-art). In the process, Brannon critiques the "aspirational lifestyle" hawked in fashion, food and shelter magazines using a restrictive palette of tertiary colors that J. Crew might label *aqua,brick* and *citrine*.

Brannon's prints have an appealingly anachronistic, almost midcentury-modern look and have an affinity with the movie posters and title sequences of Saul Bass, the mastermind behind the classic designs for Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and Otto Preminger's *The Man with the Golden Arm*, who went on to create the graphic identities for AT&T and United Airlines. (The posters of German bad boy Martin Kippenberger are another touchstone.)

The artist's disjunctive pairings of text and image—the phrase *steak dinner* is accompanied by a meatless still life with a Rolex and a bunch of bananas, for example—could double as illustrations of Freud's theories that seemingly trivial verbal slips reveal our hidden ambitions, fears and fantasies. Parts show up in the wrong wholes. A print titled *Alarm Clock* depicts a yellow towel on a blue hook and a tan oval that is either a bath mat or a bar of soap; meanwhile, the black box of a travel clock makes a cameo appearance in a piece called *Pulling Out*. Sexual innuendo abounds: Raw Bar features a black stiletto shoe and a coat-check ticket stamped with the number 69; oysters on ice show up in the final image. It's called Say It Again, and its subtitle begins with the end: WHEN YOU READ THIS I WILL BE DEAD.

The prints succeed in more than psycholinguistic subversions: They defy expectation about their medium. Each is a unique object rather than one of a numbered edition. At a time when many of his peers are exploring post-Warholian notions of production and "distributed media," Brannon is free-associating with fetishes from a pre-digital age. "America is a mistake, a giant mistake," said Freud, and Brannon is reveling in it.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Schwendener, Martha, *Material Muse for Some Strange Bedfellows*, The New York Times, April 6, 2007, p. E34 (ill.)

Material Muse for Some Strange Bedfellows

ART REVIEW

MARTHA SCHWENDENER

In the 1950s art and poetry were the hottest couple in downtown Manhattan. Painters referenced poetry. Poets wrote art criticism. John Ashbery claimed to approach words ''abstractly, as an artist uses paint.'' In the 1960s, however, poetry's influence faded and advertising became art's favored muse.

Now, in a small, tight show at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria, organized by the branch's manager, Howie Chen, and titled ''Where Were We,'' Matthew Brannon brings these subjects -- art, poetry and advertising -- back together, after a fashion.

Art in this context is no longer the big, gestural, heroic painting it was in the 1950s, but neatly composed poster-size prints. Mr. Brannon's silkscreen, lithograph and letterpress images borrow from traditional art sources like Japanese ukiyo-e prints, but more significantly from mid-20th-century advertising layouts, corporate reports and the textile designs of the Swedish artist Astrid Sampe and the Finnish company Marimekko.

Poetry is reconceived as a cross between pop-music lyrics and advertising slogans. And advertising? The public relations arm of the American Dream, with its winning blend of snappy text and eye-catching image, is presented here as a roiling stew of poisoned psychology where nothing is possible. (Mr. Brannon titled an earlier series of posters ''A Pessimistic Production.'')

''Pigs, Like Us'' features silhouette images of office supplies (paper clips, pencils, Post-its) and an iPod -- emblems of the white-collar worker -- rendered in crisp, atomic-era advertising colors: red, black and sky blue. There is also an expressionist touch in the form of a ring of coffee from a mug. Below these pictogramlike images is text, standard for Mr. Brannon in its emphasis on paranoia, careerism, consumption and excess. It reads, ''They had to pump her stomach/ amazing what they found/among the arugula, watercress, bluefin tuna, age-dried steak/there it is/your heart/and look /a bunch of razor blades/little light bulbs/cocaine/little travel bottles/anti-depressants/your old untouched job application.''

''Say It Again'' shows a 1950s-style

Where Were We

Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria

"Pulling Out," (2007) on letterpress on paper.

"Matthew Brannon: Where Were We" continues through Aug. 31 at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria, 120 Park Avenue, at 42nd Street (917) 663-2453.

backyard grill rendered in atomic blue and an existential rumination: ''When you read this I will be dead/Well if not really dead -- then one day/and you too -- one day/will be dead/but even then/ one could say/that you had read this/ but that's not what matters now.''

Artistic concerns collapse into noir halfway through ''Adult Education,'' a poster populated with black silhouettes of pigeons. ''It's abstract,'' Mr. Brannon starts, ''it's totally abstract/I copied it/I stole it from you/I ripped the page right out of the book/word for word/you weren't doing much with it anyway/uh/ when we pull off we make a right/then it's about five miles before we turn left onto the dirt road/you should see it on the right/the place where the bodies were found.''

In his writing, Mr. Brannon has carved out a niche between classic Conceptualism, with its cerebral, perceptual musings, and the fragmented borrowing of Language poetry (and perhaps even the crime fiction of Jim Thompson). Mr. Brannon also owes plenty to Mike Kelley, Richard Prince and Barbara Kruger, artists who have mined the depths of mainstream consumer culture and employed text in their works.

But where irony has been a mainstay for Mr. Prince and Mr. Kelley, with the artist standing apart from mass culture and commenting on it like a disinterested viewer, everyone is implicated in Mr. Brannon's work -- even the contemporary artist who wants, as much as any American, an iPod, organic produce and someone perfect to love him.

Two posters without text particularly recall Ms. Sampe's textile designs and include items from a sushi dinner, depicted as colorful geometric motifs and laid out against pink and light-blue grounds. In the upper corner of one poster is an abstracted but identifiable image of an American Express card, a reminder that tasteful objects and our desire for them is tied to the world of commerce and advertising.

In this context, referencing mid-20th-century visual culture -- and especially design, with its populist, utopian view toward outfitting the world with attractive, modern accessories -- seems particularly appropriate. Mr. Brannon generally avoids specific historical markers, mixing contemporary images with styles from the past, but he throws up a tiny flare in one work: a letterpress print with an abstract motif -- a large, unbounded square filled with smaller black and yellow squares -- that simply reads, ''JFK International Airport.'' The work serves as a terse nod to an age when everything seemed possible, even flying to the moon.

We've been there and done that, of course. Yet, Mr. Brannon reminds us, even that didn't sate our desires, cure

"The Awful Last of It," by Matthew Brannon, on letterpress on paper.

Where art is no longer the big, gestural, heroic painting it was in the 1950s.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Wolff, Rachel, "Young Masters," *New York Magazine,* October 15, 2007, p. 48, ill.

YOUNG MASTERS

A portrait gallery of ten of the most promising New York artists to have emerged from the boom.

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARETH MCCONNELL
TEXT BY RACHEL WOLFF

Matthew Brannon, 36,
—
PRINTMAKER

"It's not stuff I want my parents reading," Brannon says of the raunchy text that accompanies some of his graphic-design-heavy images. (He slapped the label SLUT BEST FRIEND on a letterpress rendering of a shrimp cocktail, and SICK WHORE on a silk screen of a limp plant.) But the sly, kicky one-liners are both charming and marketable, especially since Brannon's prints and silk screens are, in a medium-defying move, one-off. His work, says MoMA curator Christian Rattemeyer, plays with "an extremely underground and an extremely refined stratum of culture." Following up on a widely praised show at the Whitney's Altria location, Brannon is currently putting together pieces for Art Basel Miami.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Kunitz, Daniel, "A Wicked Ventriloquist", *The New York Sun,* June 14, 2007, p. 20 (ill.)

A Wicked Ventriloquist

By DANIEL KUNITZ

In America—where, as Wallace Stevens once wrote, "money is a kind of poetry"—it makes sense that advertising might be seen as a kind of art. From Gerald Murphy and Charles Sheeler to Andy Warhol and James Rosenquist, our artists have imitated and drawn inspiration from advertising graphics. Similarly, advertisements often copy the look of such graphic-art pioneers as the Constructivists.

MATTHEW BRANNON:
Where Were We

Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria

Matthew Brannon, a young New York artist, uses the look of promotional graphic design and the conventions of marketing to create artworks that explore the poetry of money, status, and taste. His first solo museum show, "Where Were We," opened this spring at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria, where it remains on view through August.

Consisting of 12 letterpress prints on paper, with sharp-edged Mod graphics illustrating a title, and accompanying text, the show is arrayed in custom display cases that tilt the prints toward the viewer for easy reading. You can absorb the texts, which convert the phrasing of marketing speak into waspish poetry, individually or follow them as a loose narrative.

Throughout, the colors remain muted and the design sense restrained, spare, and exquisite. Mr. Brannon doesn't pack in the imagery but rather allows a few silhouetted objects to relate to each other. All the letterpress prints were made in 2007 and appear in a uniform 24-by- 18 inch format.

"Ladies Choice" combines a light blue champagne bucket, black bottle, and flutes,

Matthew Brannon, 'Pulling Out' (2007)

a light bulb, and, in the lower left, two wall sockets. The jabbing text reads: "It looks right / But it isn't / Just looks like something you already think you like / But maybe / Just maybe / You don't like it at all / I could be wrong."

Reading it, you catch whiffs of the New York School poets, Frank O'Hara in particular — a Museum of Modern Art curator who collaborated with his artist friends — though the pastiche of marketing speak, of promotional pamphlets and TV ad voiceovers, is pitch-perfect. Indeed, the poetry makes this work sing. I didn't come across a single clunker.

And, while the roots of this work nourish themselves on 'zine culture, samizdat, and such pop-culture ephemera as dime store novels, movie posters, and other types of graphic design, it bears thinking of it, for a moment, in the context of pop art. Though thoroughly enjoyable to look at, pop art, despite claims made on its behalf, never fully succeeded in criticizing the mass culture it mimicked. Mr. Brannon's work is much less celebratory than pop art.

He can be a wicked ventriloquist, accurately throwing the corporate marketing voice, and pointing out something hollow in it, without sounding shrill. Here, for instance, is "Steak Dinner": "This year tell her you love her all over again / With a grab bag of diamonds / With mouthfuls of caviar / With your rent in clothes / A credit card of hotel rooms / Stockings / Champagne / Plane tickets / And a soft slap on her bare ass." His witticisms are not, however, confined to text. Above the words and title stands a little pyramid of objects: a blue coffee mug, a black cell phone on its side, supporting a watch, and, crowning this trio, a speckled banana peel — in case you weren't aware that we often slip, and trip, on what we desire.

Of course, in order to be any good, a poet, whether he works in concrete, visual signs, or words, must have a range of tones. I was pleased, and a bit surprised, to find that Mr. Brannon can be affecting as well as needling. In "Alarm Clock," a yellow towel drips by an oval mat. "When he writes he sees himself as someone else / As someone who writes well / And when he talks to others about what it is he does / He pictures someone else / A conversationalist beyond compare / And when he's home at night trying to sleep / He sees himself as a gross pig that everyone hates." With such a confession, you can't help wondering if the towel above the text isn't dripping on an autobiographical mat.

Beyond the suite of letterpress works, one finds a couple of larger prints, colorful treatments of Japanese food that could pass as restaurant poster art. In one, abstracted pieces of sushi are arrayed on a pink ground; in the other, a sake bottle, business card, and bill complement a stylized Japanese meal. One can only guess whether Mr. Brannon's black, 30-foot coiled eel printed on vinyl film gracing the public windows of Altria's Sculpture Court will eventually find itself on the menu. The accompanying literature explains that the eel is a "conflicted logo for abjectness, refinement, and wealth."

However, guarding the Midtown lobby of a corporate building, which, for the time being, houses art that mocks — gently, tastefully — its host, the eel would seem more accurately to be an emblem of the slippery artist who made it. Then again, the setting for this show seems ideal: Workers and visitors can stop in, have a thoroughly engaging interruption to their day, before returning — as if to a conversation — to say, Where were we?

Until August 26 (120 Park Ave. at 42nd Street, 917-663-2453).

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Brown, Nicholas, "The Language of Success: Anxiety and Excess in Matthew Brannon's 'Try and be Grateful,'" *Color Magazine*, July 2007, p. 98-107.

THE LANGUAGE OF SUCCESS:

anxiety and excess in matthew brannon's *try & be grateful*

words by nicholas brown images courtesy **of york university gallery**

Competitiveness reveals an insecure core only satiated by others' praise/ Left with an unceasing pressure/ The heavily guarded pecking order never allows rest/ The tightrope walk of confidence/ A few visual gimmicks mask conservative, ill thought out, desperate pleas for attention.

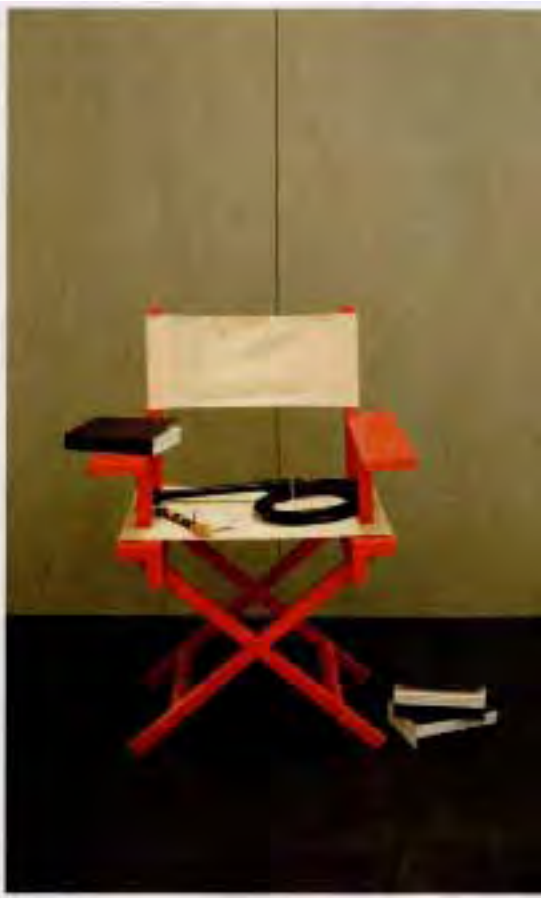
(from *More Autopsy Than Diagnosis*, detail opposite page)
letterpress on paper (2006)
(collection of Thea Westreich and
Ethan Wagner, New York).

More Autopsy Than Diagnosis

COMPETITIVENESS REVEALS AN INSECURE CORE ONLY SATIATED BY OTHERS' PRAISE
LEFT WITH AN UNCEASING PRESSURE THE HEAVILY GUARDED PECKING ORDER NEVER ALLOWS REST THE TIGHTROPE WALK OF CONFIDENCE
A FEW VISUAL GIMMICKS MASK CONSERVATIVE, ILL THOUGHT OUT, DESPERATE PLEAS FOR ATTENTION

Vultures & Collectors

PRESSED AGAINST THE WINDOW. PUSHED AGAINST THE TILE. PINNED TO THE FLOOR.
A BODY FOUND IN THE AFTERNOON. BRIGHT LIGHT ON AN UNMADE BED. CAT RESTS ON BACK.
NEVER LIKED TO DANCE. DROVE INTO A PERSONAL WALL. NEVER LIKED JAZZ.



OPPOSITE.
detail of *Vultures & Collectors* (2006)
letterpress on paper
(Rubell Family Collection, Miami Beach).

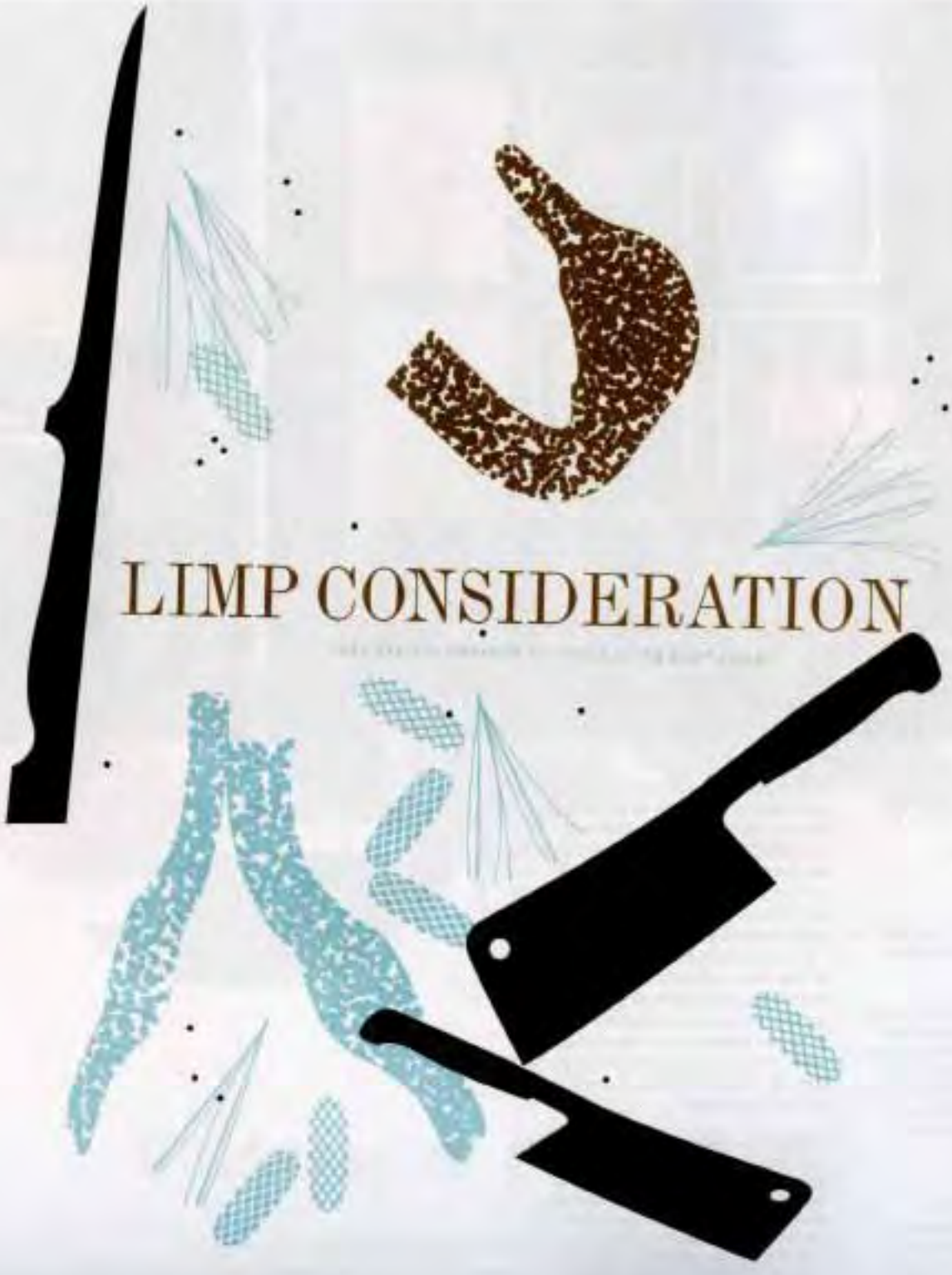
ABOVE.
installation shot of *Untitled* (2006)
wood, leather, silkscreen on canvas, ink on paper
(courtesy of the artist and Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York).

Hot Psychology (2006), Silkscren and foil stamping
Soft History (2006), Silkscreen and foil stamping
Shrimp Cocktail (2006), Silkscreen and foil stamping
Cold Dinner (2006), Silkscreen and foil stamping
Young Plumbing (2006), Silkscreen and foil stamping
Goth Tease (2006), Silkscreen and foil stamping
(private collection, courtesy of BFAS Blondeau Fine Art Services, Geneva).

RIGHT.
installation detail shot of *Untitled* (2006)
Wood, leather, silkscreen on canvas, ink on paper
(courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles).

Browsing the career-spanning assortment of works at Matthew Brannon's recent exhibition *Try & Be Grateful*, it would be difficult to avoid an all-too literal association between the text-laden prints and our impressions of the artist himself. Here's a young artist enjoying a retrospective at 35—an impressive feat as much as a sign of the times—as he prepares for an upcoming solo show at the Whitney. As we scan the large collection of prints, our eyes glance at another smallish print emblazoned with the words "Fatal Career Misstep", and we can't help but think, "not likely!"

Brannon's subject matter mixes messages of substance abuse, sexual excess and pathological career maneuvering with flat graphic images that recall mid-50s advertising tropes of "the good life." Even the installation itself, its temporary plywood walls that overtly reference the tradeshow aesthetic of an art fair (glorified trade shows where money parades as culture), suggests that the artist is putting his life and career up for examination. Another piece, "More Autopsy Than Diagnosis," implies the brutal outcome.


LIMP CONSIDERATION

OPPOSITE.
detail of *Limp Consideration* (2004)
letterpress on paper

HERE.
From the Library of... (2006)
silkscreen on paper

courtesy of the artist

But we know better than to trust Brannon at his word, especially when such words and phrases come plucked from every available source, especially the world of advertising, with which the artist so closely aligns himself. With a background in book design as well as painting, Brannon has for years contributed promotional materials to other artists and galleries. He is more than adept at pilfering lines from advertisements—especially earnest public service announcements like "Spanking Hurts More Than You Think" (lifted from a Toronto subway ad)—and arranging them to form dark narratives of anxiety and excess. Such strategies will be familiar to anyone who's ever read an interview with contemporary Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan, whose practice of cobbling together interview responses from existing artist interviews has made him an equally unreliable candidate.

But what is so frustratingly satisfying about Brannon's approach is the way he weaves these falsehoods into the fabric of his practice. Even the artist's exhibition invitations can't be trusted, displaying the work of other artists in place of what would conventionally sample his own oeuvre. The artist has joked that the only place to get reliable information is on the exhibition poster. Once you show up, however, all bets are off. The exhibition posters themselves—designed by artist friends like Liam Gillick, Richard Phillips, and for the AGYU exhibition, Lari Pittman—are equally withholding, offering a glimpse of something that will not ultimately payoff. What you see you won't get, and what you do get is a pack of lies.

What amounts to out-and-out disingenuousness in Brannon's use of language might lapse into cynicism—a charge that has been leveled at the artist by critics and viewers in the past—but for the materiality of his work. A truly cynical artist would deny the viewer anything tangible to connect with, foisting off an endless series of deferrals and rejections, but Brannon's one-off screen prints are rich in texture and linework, and engaging even at their most ambiguous. The colours are flat with muted greys and blues that allow a series of posters to amicably cohabitate the space of a wall. Posters are rarely individuated, offering instead the diffuse quality of serial repetition. Others feature snappy and bright hues, like the red lobster that attends the provocative "Autopsy" piece. Brannon's laborious processes of screen printing and letterpress, both outdated and inconvenient techniques compared to their digital alternatives, similarly lend the work a sincerity that would appear to contradict the prevailing tone of sarcasm.

Despite the deliberately pessimistic framing of the AGYU retrospective—Brannon's "Fatal career misstep" up for consideration—and the appropriately flippant curatorial gesture of aping the art fair, it is worth considering the merits of packing so much material under one roof. Repetition is a major component of the work, and the recurring images of birds, lobsters, knives and trophies put the specificities of each text piece into relief. Virtually identical images, but for some minor changes in colour and layout, amplify the centrality of text, especially since it often appears so small. Forced to squint at fragments of text, the viewer is rewarded with such friendly remarks as: "Career train wreck alcoholic workoholic seeks same" Not only is this text rendered in faint pastel blue, it's printed in reverse. "Limp Consideration" is the work's title, stamped in large, bold type. The overt impotence of the title, in the context of floating knives and decapitated goose heads (it doesn't take Sigmund Freud to understand that castration is implied), should give ample warning to any potential "personals" reader looking to hook up. But it's never as simple as loading one image with one stable meaning when that image is bound to repeat, each time accompanying a different set of equally loaded text. That's what makes this work so rich, and still so elusive.

It has been said of Brannon's work that it spares no one, the artist included. Perhaps this is a way to read the many non-text pieces that lurk around every corner' the directors' chairs (left untitled) armed with whips lying at the ready, and the numerous perched falcons that face left and right (ominously titled "From the Library Of... "). We're being watched here, scrutinized at every step. Once we consider the subjects of so many of the text works—overconsumption, dieting, alcohol, any number of garden variety anxieties—we suddenly invest the absent movie director and the leering falcon with the penetrating gaze of the one who knows. We're compelled to face our own anxieties, vulgar careerist sensibilities and excessive tendencies, or face being ostracized by the exhibition itself. This is the power of Brannon's work, in spite of his own coy incitement to consider these works as "visual gimmicks" that "mask conservative, ill thought out, desperate pleas for attention." But we know better. ☐

installation shot of *Untitled* (2006)
wood, leather, silkscreen on canvas, ink on paper
(courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky
Gallery, Los Angeles).

OPPOSITE.
From the Library Of... (2006). silkscreen on paper
(courtesy of the artist).


DISAPPOINTED CRITIC

installation shot of *Pulling Out* (2006)
silkscreen and embroidery on canvas

Price of Admission (2006), silkscreen and embroidery on canvas.
(courtesy of the artist and Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York).

OPPOSITE.
detail of *Disappointed Critic* (2004)
letterpress on paper
(courtesy of the artist).

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
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INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Brannon, Matthew, *Who is Guy de Cointet?* Artforum, Summer 2007, p. 414

ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2007

Who Is Guy de Cointet?

MATTHEW BRANNON

GROWING UP in places like Alaska in the 1970s and Montana in the '80s, I was used to seeing advertisements before I saw the real thing. Eventually, I realized that everything was right there—in the posters, the previews, the signs, the reviews. You could become obsessed with, say, a film from the posters alone; you didn't have to see the movie to understand. Later, in graduate school, after making a few terrible paintings, I curated student shows and ran the visiting artist program, finally becoming more interested in the promotional residue than in the events themselves. Today posters form the core of my work: They loosely mimic advertising through the balance of text and image; their flat-footed appearance and immediacy are countered by their poetic component; they are full of content but fail to deliver. These are lessons I learned from Guy de Cointet.

Guy de Cointet, *A Page from My Intimate Journal (Part I)*, 1974, ink on paper, 30 x 22 1/2". Photo: Billy Jim.

I'm sure I first heard of Cointet in Paul McCarthy's New Genres class at UCLA, but I didn't really take note until another student, Jon Pestoni, a living archive of the esoteric and obscure, showed me Cointet's work on paper ("on paper" being very significant in terms of the above). Like Conceptual art with a capital C, the work was something you could imagine yourself producing. But more important, I thought, you literally felt yourself reading; you were very aware of the fact that you were looking at ink on the page. The work was visually hard to define, yet somehow very familiar; it looked pretentious but also casual; it was intimidating but full of humor; and it never seemed a discrete end unto itself. In other words, everything looked like a prop. I loved it before I understood it.

And yet, in fact, before you read anything, you've already understood so much. The choice of type, of color, the layout, how it was printed, the paper—all this tells you an almost infinite amount before you read something. Designers understand this. And it is something Cointet understood. He forces us to focus on the components of language we typically ignore. He pokes fun at the clarity one usually demands from a text and instead draws our attention to textual limits—something he also managed to do in his performances, using language in an open-ended way, employing it in a literary fashion, or using street, camp, or popular tongues. In all these endeavors, you suspect the joke's on you. But you also feel flattered to be involved in the construction of meaning.

Consider a print Cointet made in 1974, called A Page from My Intimate Journal (Part 1). The title is handwritten at the top of the work and is as important as the printed letters below: It suggests that the artist is disrupting the idea of, and demand for, autobiography (another lesson I learned from Cointet). I doubt the work is truly a page

from his diary. But even if it were, and even if we could translate the text, how would his private life inform ours? Just what is it we need art for—to find a person in a paper trail? In this regard, I think that Cointet's fabled interest in the soap-opera genre is telling. Indeed, I like to think that the title of this work is pure camp: *Sure, it might look like an eye doctor's exam, but it's actually something deep and private, something I'm sharing.*

Of course, an artist is free to speak in voices other than his own. And the time between an author's writing and an audience's reading is potentially infinite. Yet writing is nevertheless a self-conscious act; one anticipates that people will bring to your work not only intellect but also biases about what art is and has been. It makes perfect sense to me that Cointet would, then, make work disallowing a passive reception; work for those who love language and everything messy about it; work that some will easily dismiss, believing it will never add up to anything. In this regard, I know that to write about Cointet today is to participate in a form of mythmaking. Yet perhaps his general obscurity in the history books to date may still be attributed to his art, which is resistant to just what we desire to discover in him. And so Cointet's work will never fit.

Matthew Brannon is an artist living in New York. His exhibition "Where We Were" is on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria in New York through August 26.

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
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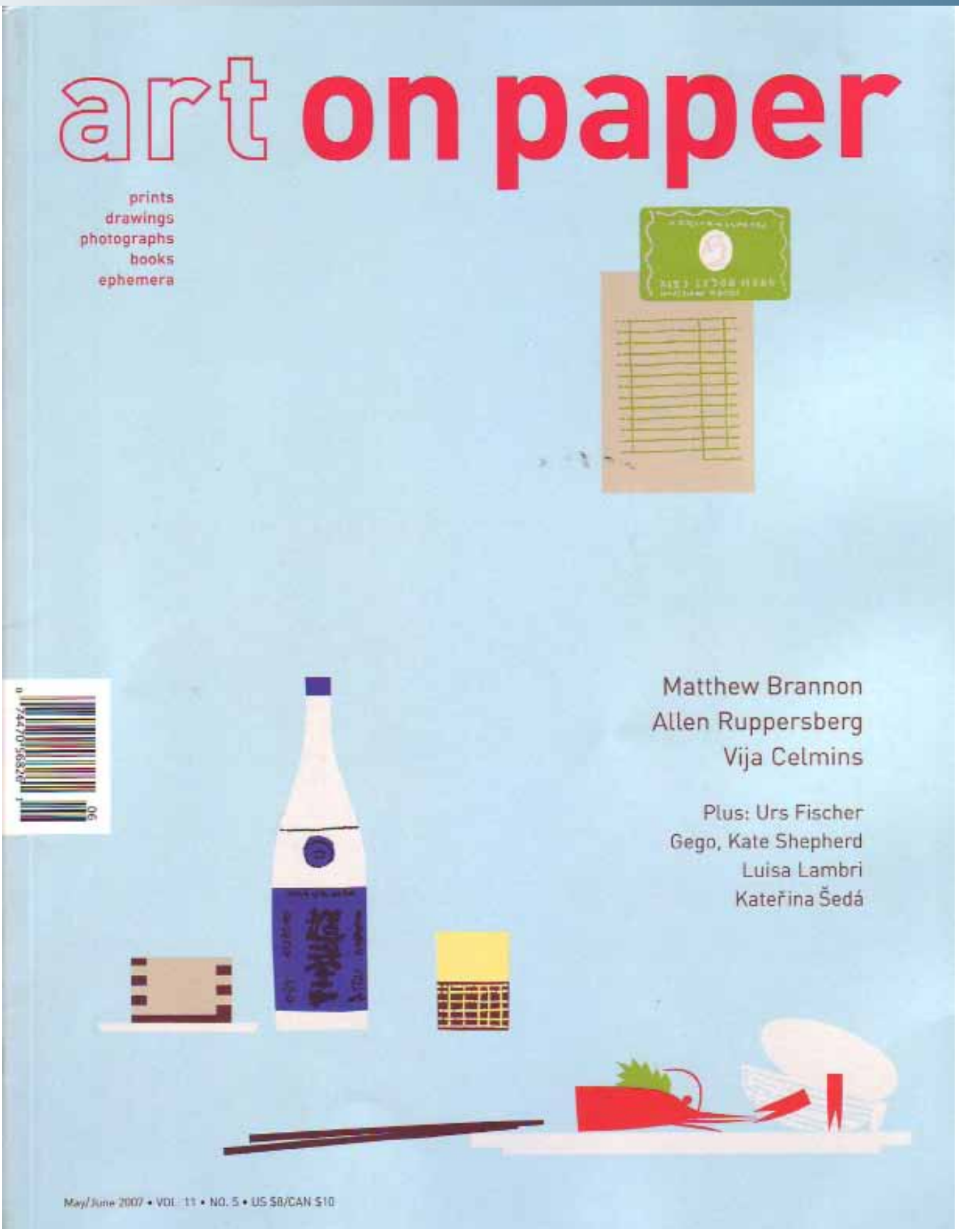


Tongue in Radical Chic

The guilty pleasures of looking at Matthew Brannon's slyly subversive posters

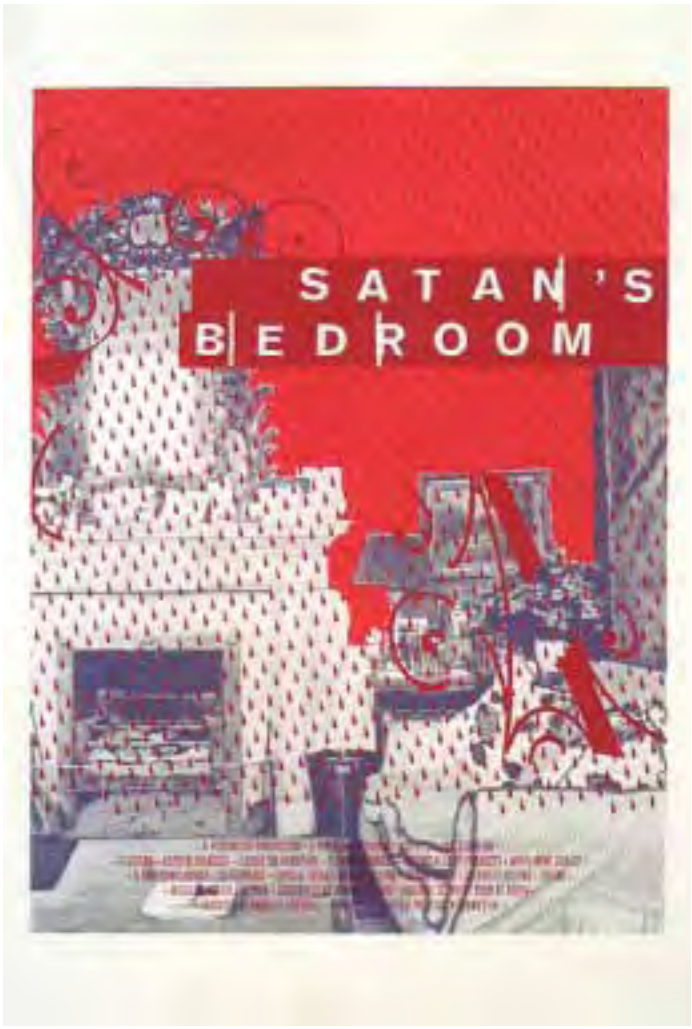
by Megan Ratner

The Price of Admission

Like an arsenic-laced angel food cake, Matthew Brannon's new work appears at first sweet, light, and harmless. combining classic printmaking techniques (e.g., letterpress, silkscreen) with the enticing graphic symbols and hyperventilated language of invitation, reassurance, even pampering. His graphic pronouncements, often produced as unique pieces that mimic advertising folly, are dotted with dainty renditions of items as pedestrian as a tube of toothpaste, a rat, or a paper clip. But look harder: The titles and text refuse to inform, offering little more than *Through the Looking-Glass* enlightenment. They are centerless, blown apart, containing fragments of iconography and meaning. "The current art world participates in a conservative version of radical," says Brannon. "I am more interested in a radical version of conservative."

Posters have long been aligned with advertising, dating back to when Jules Chéret's posters first hit the street in the mid-nineteenth century, at least. They are also ownable art for the masses and are a staple of museum gift shops. Brannon's work draws on both these traditions—the graphics are lifted from high-tone print ads—but also on more vernacular sources such as take-out menus and flyers.

His early posters explored the graphic conventions of spirit-ridden horror films set in Fancy estates or idealized retreats. With their predictable collections of heretics, and the incredulous and unseen powers that demand a reckoning, these spirit melodramas reminded Brannon of the machinations of the art world. More recent work features modern life's own oddities—quotidian domestic objects—printed in a pastel-leaning palette that mimics the soothing comfort colors of tasteful living, and peppered with shards of language that echo overheard talk and advertising mumbo jumbo. *Not Young* (2007), for example, features men's toiletries, including a telltale cold-cream jar—presumably part of the arsenal against time's unstoppable march. The phrases below sound like justifications for wreaking ecological havoc to maintain our own comforts: DRAGGING THE OCEAN FLOORS, SETTING FIRE TO A NEST, or SERVING THE LAST OF THE MEAT. Even more pointed is *Steak Dinner* (2007), in which a coffee mug,



Page 50: Matthew Brannon. *Alarm Clock*. letterpress on paper (24 x 18 in.), 2007. Photo by Lamay Photo. All Images courtesy the artist and Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York

Page 51: *Price of Admission*, letterpress on paper (24 x 18in.), 2006. Photo by Noah Sheldon

Above: *Satan's Bedroom* ,silkscreen on paper (30 x 22 in.), 2003. Photo by Noah Sheldon

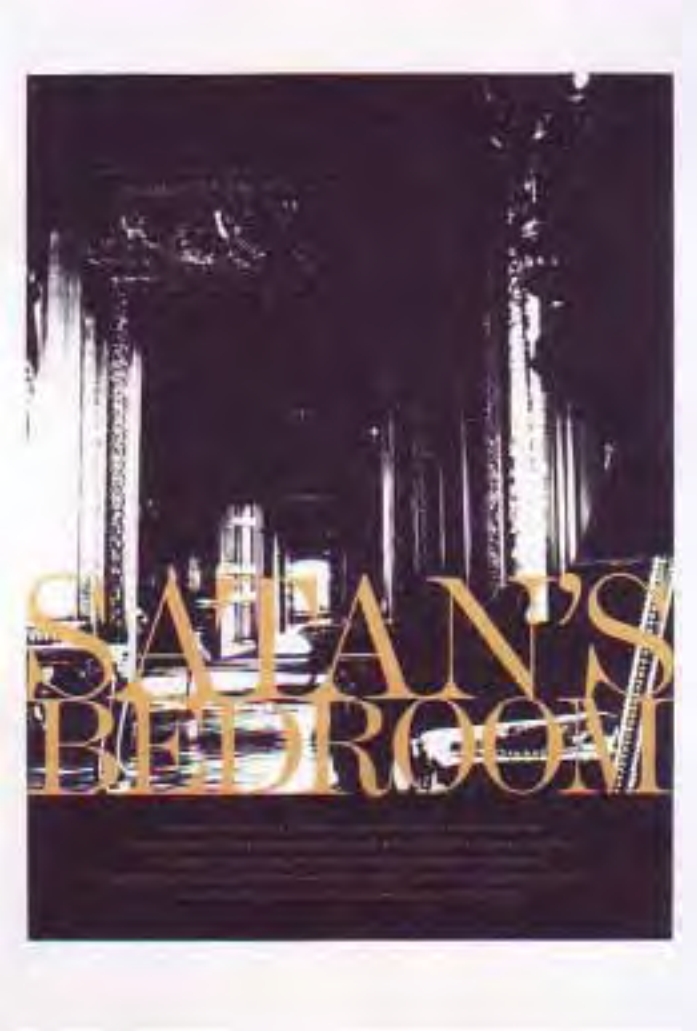
Opposite: *Pulling Out*, letterpress on paper (24 x 18in.), 2007

Pulling Out

a pack of cigarettes, and a pricey watch are crowned with a banana peel and captioned with phrases such as THIS YEAR TELL HER YOU LOVE HER ALL OVER AGAIN, WITH A GRAB BAG OF DIAMONDS, WITH YOUR RENT IN CLOTHES, AND A SOFT SLAP ON HER BARE ASS. Visually dainty and alluring as these pieces are, each leaves a slightly acrid residue of commercial inducement.

For his exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria (on view through August), Brannon displays these works on easel-size wood displays that look like music stands. As befits work with such close references to advertising, the installation encourages close viewing, promising a certain cozy familiarity. Brannon heightens this effect by placing the work off the wall, at eye level—making each print a separate but readable portion of an unseen whole that, in its spacing. establishes what he calls a "cadence." This musical reference provides a key to the work: Trying to glean meaning from the individual posters results in a great deal of frustration, but taken as a graphic translation of music, they pull together. Bullets separate his verbal phrases, less a full stop than a full note, like the conclusion of a musical phrase. The linguistic bits and pieces, even the disparate illustrative elements, have about them something of a remembered refrain—or the viselike grip of an advertising jingle.

Brannon's use of fractured language and graphics frees his posters from the burden of reference, giving them a lightness that calls to mind Italo Calvino's *Six Memos for the next Millennium*. In those lectures, published after his death, Calvino described his working method as "more often than not involved in the subtraction of weight ... from the structure of stories and from language." Brannon's work, as insouciant as it is, feels as though it has been subjected to a similar process.



Opposite: *Who Takes Who Home Tonight*. left panel of diptych, silkscreen on paper (each panel 38 x 29in.), 2007. Photo by Lamay Photo

Above: *Satan's Bedroom*, silkscreen on paper (30 x 22 in.), 2001. Photo by Noah Sheldon

CASEY KAPLAN
121 WEST 27TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10001
TEL +1 212 645 7335
FAX +1 212 645 7835
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Payone, Rosa, *Never Innocent, Casual, or Involuntary. An Interview with Matthew Brannon*, Uovo, April 2006, pp. 138- 155 (ill)

INNOCENT ACCIDENTAL UNINTENTIONAL INDULGENT. NEVER.

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Matthew BRANNON

BY ROSA VAN NA PAYONE

Pavone, Rosa. *Never Innocent, Casual, or Involuntary: An Interview with Matthew Brannon*, Uovo, April 2006, pp. 138-155 (ill)

Pavone, Rosa, *Never Innocent, Casual, or Involuntary: An Interview with Matthew Brannon*, Uovo, April 2006, pp. 138- 155 (ill)

ROSA VAN NA PAVONE: When does a consideration limp?
MATTHEW BRANNON: Most often.

RVP: Would you mind telling me how it limps? And why? Is it a natural damage, maybe an accident?
MB: Consideration is a loaded term. I would define it as involving an act of engagement. For many it is threatening and exhausting.

RVP: Seeing your work on knives brought Hitchcock's *Blackmail* to mind. "Knife" is the word that pursues Anny Ondra after having committed a murder in escape from a rape, a penetration. Two versions of this movie exist: one silent, the other sound. In the silent version, the obsession with the crime weapon is translated into written words (words substituted by sound in the second version): "KNIFE" invades the screen, over and over. "Penetration"? Deep action?
MB: The wall drawings of knives (*Criminal Heat, The Never that Lasts Forever*, and *Other's Pathologies Become Yours*) were all initially my cheeky take on public art. Public art is often dreadful and embarrassing. I was musing about the supposed sedative qualities of these artworks in airports, banks, and lounges. The use value is to calm and to distract. My wall drawings are in a way proposals that will never be fully realized (i.e., put into public spaces). Visually, the knives are meant to play on an almost sculptural level. But the meaning of knives for me is something very different. Knives can translate, in a psychoanalytical sense, into a fear of penetration. It is for each who echoes this image to interpret. For me, I'm thinking beyond the sexual interpretation, which is the most obvious, towards a deeper threat to the fragile scaffold of our personalities. People live and act in response to a fear of exposure. It is a form of haunting resulting from previous experiences of humiliation.

"It is a form of haunting resulting from previous experiences of humiliation."

Pavone, Rosa. *Never Innocent, Casual, or Involuntary: An Interview with Matthew Brannon*. Uovo, April 2006, pp. 138–155 (ill)

Pavone, Rosa, *Never Innocent, Casual, or Involuntary: An Interview with Matthew Brannon*, Uovo, Aprd 2006, pp. 138- 155 (ill)

RVP Ruttmann, Moholy-Nagy, Man Ray

MB Great names. Not where I would start, but great. My real influences are too embarrassing to mention or too pretentious to list. This question seeks to touch on the initial creative impulse. I don't think it can ever really be answered. But I would say I am influenced as much, if not more, from outside sources than internal art world ones. My favorite artists are more individuals that act as punctures in history more than links. Thinking of artists and influences reminds me of this Schopenhauer aphorism: "If you want to earn the gratitude of your own age you must keep in step with it. But if you do that you will produce nothing great."

RVP How does the osmotic process work between the bullying, the "other than you," and your creative personality?

MB Without being too autobiographical. I grew up in very remote areas of America (Idaho, Alaska, Montana) at a time before the "information" age. All my culture came filtered and most of it was advertised in television and in papers months if not years in advance. I grew up very anxious to make up for lost time. I never saw museum-grade art outside of books. By the time I saw any "art" I was just as fascinated by music, movies, books, design, drugs, and sex. Art education is a complicated process.

"Art education is a complicated process."

Pavone, Rosa. *Never Innocent, Casual, or Involuntary: An Interview with Matthew Brannon.* **Uovo**, April 2006, pp. 138- 155 (ill)

Pavone, Rosa, *Never Innocent, Casual, or Involuntary: An Interview with Matthew Brannon*, Uovo, April 2006, pp. 138- 155 (ill)

RVP: totally agree, great to hear it from you. By the way, ostriches do not have teeth; food grinding happens in their stomach thanks to the ingestion of small stones. Ostriches eat stones for a very precise reason: To defend themselves from attack, ostriches, like many other birds, flatten to the ground and stretch out their necks, hoping their enemy will ignore them. But it is not true they put their head under the sand, an image they are famous for. How important is the truth in (artistic) action and (artistic) motivation?

MB: Good story. Did you know hyenas are the only predator of lions outside of man? They are portrayed as frightened scavengers but in reality a hyena eats and hunts about the same as the lion. When a hyena eats another animal it eats everything, cracking huge bones and swallowing it all. Its feces are often white from bone. Truth is also another loaded term. I would like to remain on the cynical and sarcastic side and say truth is an embarrassment. But it has been said that lying is moral, which I can understand. So that leaves us with a question of responsibility to the audience. People frequently read much of my text as autobiographical. Perhaps they are right but it wasn't my intention. I'm even suspicious of my own intentions.

RVP: Violence aside, how did you live your experience as a curator?

MB: From *Good Titles From Bad Books* by Matthew Brannon, 17.3.2005: "I decided to curate a group show like I'd plan a dinner party; I chose my guests on the basis of their ability to instigate discussion, while casting their individual histories aside. I wanted these individuals to meet so that I could see their work under one roof, without the narrow confines of an illustrational or thematic rubric. I have no intention of being didactic with the artists or the audience. Instead, over the course of the night, I imagined talk about appropriation, decor, material as meaning, humor as a device, the art of avoiding painting, and the use of text. Or perhaps a detour into the arena of "off" topics: divorce, prescription drugs, Iraq, bands from the '70s, the worst artists with the best careers, films, student loans, books ..."

RVP: Is thinking an artist might have a social role today a romantic vision?

MB: If you want to actually have a social role from the creative industry, you have to work from Hollywood, California. Art is a small, educated community. I really wouldn't ever make claims to educate or advise and I am very suspicious of anyone that does, especially teachers. At best I am attempting to communicate and sympathize on a small level. If I ever add "inspire" to the list, please remind me not to take myself seriously.

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How It All Ends

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RVP: Is a certain kind of violence implicit in the curator's role, by violence I mean the will to reduce the artistic world, the artistic present, to what is art for now?

MB: Umm, yes, I try to avoid theme-oriented shows. Curation should be another layer or a response and not the act of holding hands. Most people and their projects are passive. But artists need to take responsibility for the shows they participate in or how their work functions within whatever show. Complaining is passive. Saying no can be your greatest power.

Sick Whore

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Police Officer Giving Up

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RVP: Is there something conservative, opposed to progress meant as advancement in seriality? Is seriality something static?

MB: The current art world participates in a conservative version of radical. I am more interested in a radical version of conservative. Again, seriality helps to reinforce identity, whether it's legitimate or not. For an artist to chisel any presence for him/herself, a lot is demanded of some claim to authorship. I believe unfortunately most of this is a misinterpretation of style. I always attempt to sneak in one piece per exhibition that contradicts the completeness of the other works. In the end, I'm admitting I am actively engaged in this endgame. I do endorse the opposite impulse to check out and never repeat oneself but often that results in a frustrating solipsistic position.

RVP: Decorum and decoration: does the canvas represent the point of etymological proximity between those two terms?

MB: Painting's greatest strength is its autonomy. Or at least that's what I am most jealous of. However, the conversation around painting gets boring quickly. We will never kill it. Paintings I tend to like are either hard and graphic or brutal and primitive. Demonstrations of skill or picture making to me are sad.

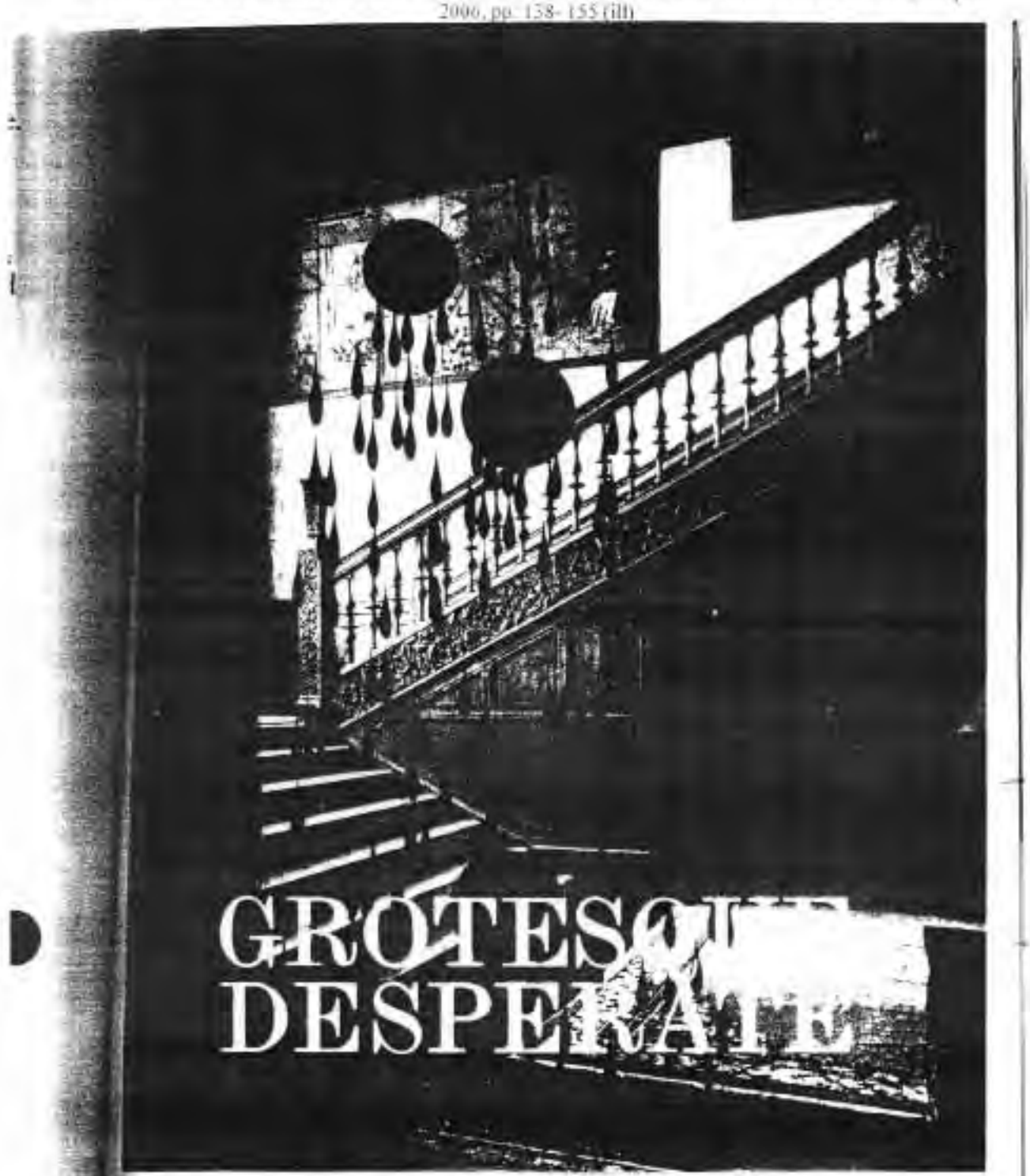
RVP: Buñuel wrote in his biography: "I'm an atheist, thank God". What are you? Thanks to whom?

MB: I'm too young to talk in quotes. However:

Procrastination is never innocent.
Forgetting is not accidental
Being late is never unintentional
and depression is indulgent.

"Demonstrations of skill or picture making to me are sad."

Pavone Rosa. *Never Innocent, Casual, or Involuntary: An Interview with Matthew Brannon*. Uova, April 2006, pp. 138-155 (ill)



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RVP: An Italian poet wrote a sentence I find extremely beautiful: a man can appeal perhaps between entreaty and injunction. Montale says: *non chiedere la parola che squadri da ogni lato l'animo nostro informe* ("Don't ask for the word that might frame from every side our formless soul"). You'll ask yourself "what's the point?" I think so too. I just wanted to share that. But I'm deeply interested in asking you what the merit is of words, you seem to care much more about them than language.

MB: I still haven't ever labeled myself a writer. I am still very uncomfortable with words. Much of what I write will perhaps not translate or survive time. I seek a play with words that is both specific in meaning and conversely teetering with inappropriate reception. I'm still building a model of how text functions within my work. I have to contend with a lot of expectations. Again like the knives, first there is the visual presentation to the words. The poster format I present text in is already very different from a book or a neon sign. The printed form and typography already speaks a lot. Hopefully it suggests a promotion of sorts; a kind of misplacement. I'm trying to use language that isn't innocent. I would like the text to function as poetry.

RVP: Words are not often alone, but rather in couples or more groups. Their pairing might mean nothing, but you don't [illegible] what you want to play with?

MB: I've always been a fan of absurdity; the pairing of inappropriate material. Freud's "The Joke and It's Relation to the Unconscious" attempts to dissect how this tickles our fancy – unloading unconsciousness. For him it relates to a psychological economy. My take would hopefully be to retard an easy interpretation. I am very interested in the language of marketing and signage. Often when traveling you find some real gems. Toronto – "Spanking Hurts More Than You Think," Oslo – "Body Talk," Chicago – "Young's Plumbing." The day-to-day world is full of awkward and poorly written forced language. Pornographic novels are a treasure chest of this material. To your original question, the words together in groups often become like names for me, first and last. But most often the poetry takes the form of a list, a roll call, or credit to one's delusional life.

"I'm trying to use language that isn't innocent."

Pavone, Rosa, *Never Innocent, Casual, or Involuntary: An Interview with Matthew Brannon*, Untitled, April 2006, pp. 138–155 (ill.)

Hair of the Dog

Pavone, Rosa. *Never Innocent, Casual, or Involuntary: An Interview with Matthew Brannon*. **Uovo**, April 2006. pp. 138- 155 (ill)

Pavone, Rosa, *Never Innocent, Casual, or Involuntary: An Interview with Matthew Brannon*, Uovo, April 2006, pp. 138- 155 (ill)

RVP Word and language. Gesture and body, instead.

MB Umm. Yes. A life of their own. I'd rather not write too much about writing just yet. Often the core of my work for me at least can be found in the text. The million-dollar question I appreciate is "Why are people their own worst enemies?"
Topics which satellite around this question involve careerism, sexual misadventure, substance abuse, alcoholism, poor finances, poor parenting. We could talk a lot about words and language, endlessly in fact. I am fearful of making any claims to anything new, but an attempt is made in a very literary fashion to both construct a poem and to almost brand or market phrases.

RVP You've produced rarely. Is this a casual choice of working, a choice similar, perhaps, to this one casual of horror movie posters. Horror, a genre ... a concept closely linked to Hollywood production and the seriality of this production dedicated to profit. As you might have guessed: I'd like to speak about seriality, production, profit.

MB Seriality is a method to gain authority ... if only as an impostor. The fifth encounter with an artist's work is very different from the first. Most of my work benefits from the presence of other pieces. Two posters reinforce and disrupt expectations.
For me, production-wise, this room named Andy Warhol closed the book. Other artists are currently seeking a contemporary version of production and authenticity that I would not like to be confused with. The prints I make now are single editions and all take advantage of very outdated methods. For me, for something to be silk-screened is closer to being hand drawn than printed digitally. On the other hand, and this might be contradictory, I do appreciate the implication that design is dismissive towards originality. Profit is something I am currently not so familiar with.

"I am fearful of making any claims to anything new"