

Art in America

Exhibition Reviews

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ALEXI WORTH DC Moore

Alexi Worth constructs paintings that insinuate themselves into the mind's lonely places. A foreboding atmosphere hinting at frustration, alienation and rage reigned over the 17 paintings of muted colors that comprise "States," his recent show at DC Moore. This exhibition title suggests states both mental and physical. In several works, puddles recalling the shape of continents and demonstrators holding placards with odd contours that could represent countries conjure political states as well.

A stenciled upthrust fist has an inevitable iconic connotation of political activism. Worth plays this particular note, as well as one of creative frustration, in four paintings: *Crumpling* (2010–11), *Tink* (2011), *Comma* (2013) and *Transparent Flame-Colored Information* (2013), which each depict a fist holding a piece of crumpled paper, most filled with text. The last two also employ the illusion of a shadow of a head (presumably the artist's, or metaphorically one's own) falling across the painting's surface, emphasizing that the very act of observing the painting has a distancing effect.

The text is curious. It bears no relationship to the imagery through reference to failure or inflammatory political screed. Rather, as fragments of unidentified poetry, the words carry connotations of isolation: "blackness hidden . . . begin to seethe . . . [w]ilderness outside . . . and then a clinking s[ound] from far away tink tink."

In depicting hands, Worth hides the evidence of his own. He both invokes the action performed by hands and conceals his own manual presence through the use of an airbrush. Worth conflates his physical labor of construction and mental labor of design, as well as his own actual and depicted presence.

Every moment of these works has been considered and re-thought for its impact and pictorial possibilities. Texts have been chosen, printed out, selectively crumpled, photographed and deconstructed in Photoshop. Worth then uses stencils he has made himself or had laser-cut to create a schematic airbrushed image on a stretched canvas of very open-weave nylon mesh.

The open weave allows the darkness of the shadowed wall behind the canvas to create complex halftones and deeper blacks than the pigmented canvas, which always reflects a little light. In a nod to traditional oil-on-canvas technique, the lightest and brightest areas are where the mesh becomes completely filled in with paint, and opaque. Selectively allowing misregistrations of stenciled layers, Worth gives us the impression that what we are seeing has been projected rather than painted onto the canvas, as if we were perceiving the subject on the walls of Plato's cave.

Paintings that depict cigarette smoke, shadows and mirrors reflecting blankness also create feelings of disconnection. And two large paintings portray crowds assembled in littered streets



Alexi Worth:
Comma, 2013,
acrylic on nylon
mesh, 42 by 36
inches; at DC Moore.

holding ambiguous shapes that could be shields or protest signs. Diaphanous, airbrushed shadows, again metaphorically our own, fall across the surfaces of both paintings. Titled *Square I* and *Square II* (both 2013), they reference political activity in faraway places that we can merely observe and contemplate but not participate in.

Over the past several years, Worth has gradually repressed a signature goofiness that tempered feelings of anomie lurking just under his surfaces. His balding misfit Gerberman, a rather unconvincing spiritual avatar for the droll, naturally garrulous painter, has disappeared and been replaced by the uneasy physical presence of the paintings themselves.

Worth makes his bid for importance not by representing the world but by representing the emotional implications of our relationships to pictoriality. Immersed in a tsunami of inconsequential electronic images, we may find that our sense of dislocation from images outside our immediate physical experience has become a characteristic part of the Zeitgeist. This feeling becomes the psychological space Worth has attempted to represent.

—Dennis Kardon