

Displaced at Berggruen Gallery

by Joseph del Pesco

Displaced involves two extremes of location: the individual in their immediate environs and the zoomed-out to cruising altitude map where all life is reduced to the size of dust. This distance between macro and human-scale views, between continents and bodies in space, is a key aspect of the dialog between works in Displaced.

A series of watercolor drawings of stow-aways enclosed in an audio speaker, compressed into a glove-box or car seat, remind us why long-time Bay Area artist Julio Morales has found international success. These surreptitious vessels made transparent equate human cargo with contraband, outlining the complications of border politics. Frank Ebert's pencil drawings situate antagonistic relationships between the isolated spectacle of a guitar wanking rocker with ax or jackhammer wielding workers and other unlikely pairings. Jonathan Callan's magazine tear-outs erase identities by drawing with sandpaper, leaving only the mouth or eyes beaming through eerie cloud-like apparitions. Callan's coal-black silicone coverings of land masses read like a cancer, opaque and sticky. Also reconfiguring existing material, Gabrielle Teschner's map cut-outs use the jargon of navigation but defunctionalize through mislabeling. Armando Miguelez's map tracings of border town streets are fragmented by the artists own travel.

What I haven't mentioned are Callan's sculptures in vitrines; not because they don't fit within my binary, but because they speak a different language. They are of objects imposing their material on other objects. In one, a book is invaded by the same tar-like silicone that covers the maps. In another, perhaps a model for a full scale public project, a concrete tower sits upon a Police cruiser. It is both a potentially mobile monument and one that suggests a containment of the law.

This defiantly contemporary exhibition will itself appear displaced to anyone familiar with the decidedly investor safe line-up at Berggruen gallery. While it's ultimately a drawing show with a few small sculptures, it's one of the most adventurous offerings from the gallery who brought us "New Work," "Sculpture and Form" and "Decorator Showcase." Needless to say, Displaced is the most curatorial vision Berggruen has seen since the 90s. Unfortunately, this exhibition is artist/curator Mike Bianco's first and last initiative at the gallery.

Posted December 15, 2007 10:26 AM (361 words)