



Ray DiCecco, RACHEL / SELF, MERGE 1, 2012, digital image and acrylic mediums, mounted on canvas, 48" x 36"

Art in New York

October 2012 Sample

by John Mendelsohn

Ray DiCecco creates psychological portraiture out of shock and dislocation. Faces of women photographed close up are digitally printed, the images mounted on canvas, and then covered by layers of clear polymer resin, at times streaked with pigment. At Chashama,

the smaller works are like character studies, with each face an index of a particular psychic stress. In his new large pieces, 48"x 36," DiCecco haunts his women with a second image of themselves, or more even disturbingly, the artist's face looming across the surface, at times with mouth agape.

If this description sounds like a horror movie, there is some resemblance: the women's staring faces, the distortion of the printed

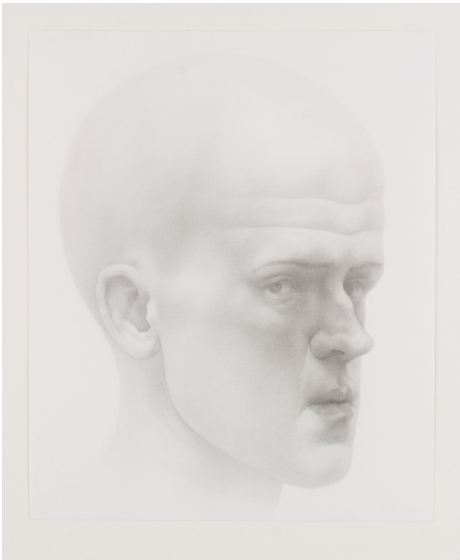
image encased in a riven, plastic surface, the visitation by the superimposed presences. At the same time, there is a pop sensibility at work here – personality as performance, trauma as spectacle – specifically, Warhol comes to mind. The women's faces are framed like celebrities idolized on the cover of *Interview Magazine*. Instead of the aura of fame, DiCecco bestows a kind of obsessive attention to both identity and its vulnerabilities, at any moment subject to the ravages of age and anxiety.

Mark Dagley showed three very large paintings at MINUS SPACE. They are oversized, with each filling a wall, like test cases in the logistics of exhibiting massive abstract art. The sense that we are looking at both paintings in themselves and at a conceptual gambit permeates this installation.

Each painting seems to represent an heroic mode of minimalist painting, simultaneously sincere and parodic. The planar approach – à la Ellsworth Kelly – is typified by Dagley's scalene triangle bisected into red and black. The grid, once an ever-present trope, returns in a multi-colored windowpane field, marked by triple lines in black. Abstract painting as sculptural object is evoked by a pastel striped structure pierced by L-shaped portals.

Each painting sits on aluminum blocks and leans against the wall. This heightens the feeling that what we are looking at is theater, with these objects playing the role of art, elevated yet casual, riding the rails but insulated from contact with the ordinary. Like specimens, the paintings are both real and removed, or like mythic characters, they act out an allegory of art's immersive power.

Rafael Vega is a young artist with 13 intriguing paintings at Guided by Invoices. The paintings are small, abstract, and resolutely true to their material presence. While the geometrical format changes from work to work, they are all constructed



Matthew Miller, *Untitled*, 2012, graphite on wove paper, 17"x14", Courtesy of Pocket Utopia

according to a common procedure: a gradated field is painted on a panel in slowly shifting steps, then the surface is ruptured by a series of saw cuts or ray-like scrafitto or both.

The paintings have a fresh, experimental feeling, with each succeeding work in the series (shown chronologically) opening up for Vega a new way to consider how to make a painting. The best of these works do something more – they evoke a mystery much larger than their modest size and blunt physicality. There is the hint of the cosmic in the calibrated gradations, the forms hanging in darkness, the lines meeting at a vanishing point, and the nebulae of white spray paint on black.

What makes all of these signs and wonders poetic is not their pure symbolic valence. Rather, the mysteries they imply are given a kind of existential poignancy by the sawed lines that interrupt them, bringing us back to the reality of here and now. Like Lucio Fontana's cuts in his canvases, Vega allows the space of our world to break the spell of illusion, while implying an emptiness that is even more real and vast.

Matthew Miller draws himself in a

series of self-portraits in graphite on paper at Pocket Utopia. Pale images of the artist emerge from the paper, mist-like apparitions that are both ethereal and relentlessly *there*. They are drawn with great skill, the subtle tonalities barely betraying the artist's touch.

At the same time there is an obsessive self-focus, with the artist's face projecting its presence, absorbing our attention. His bald head seems to bulge larger in some images, like the cranium of a science fiction character. The faces with their 3/4 turn, suggest the history of the portrait and the academic tradition. But the overwhelming impression is of psychological portraiture and its roots in Northern European painting. Looking at this work, we could imagine the artist's visage appearing in a 15th century religious painting as the condemned thief or the guilty apostle.

Miller's face in the self-portraits, while ostensibly passive, variously conveys a sense of blasted self-



Installation view of Mark Dagley: *Structural Solutions*, Courtesy of MINUS SPACE



Al Taylor, *Untitled (Dole Pineapple Juice)*, ca. 1993, pencil, gouache, and ink with collage on paper, 13 1/8" x 10 1/16". Photo by Ron Amstutz © 2012 The Estate of Al Taylor, courtesy of David Zwirner, New York

effacement, stricken introspection, and spiritual dread. They lead us to wonder if these exquisite drawings are a place of trial where the body and the soul contend for primacy. This sense is deepened by seeing the self-portraits both painted in oil and rendered in graphite at a concurrent show at C. G. Boerner.

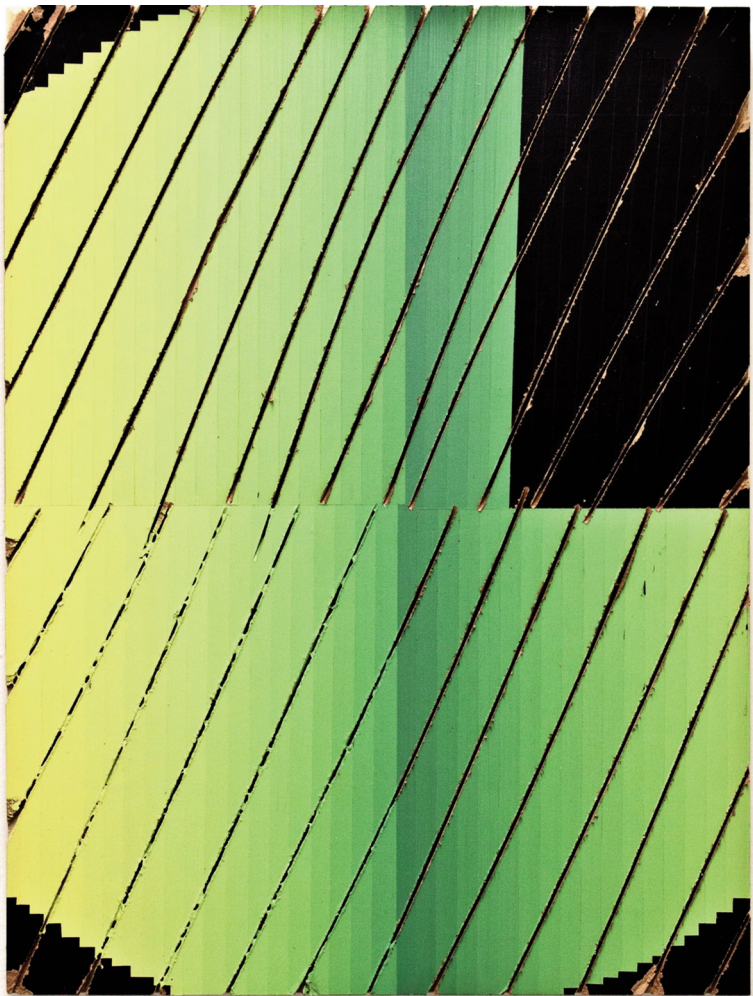
Al Taylor is an artist whose work has received increasing exposure since his passing in 1999. The exhibition at David Zwirner focused on three related series in which he moves between deft drawings, primarily ink on paper with collage and paint, and "drawings in space," his designation for three dimensional work. The spirit here is improvisational, traversing the space between categories and realities.

In his series *Pass the Peas*, Taylor creates works based on looping elements, including hula hoops, garden hoses, and telephone cable. On these suspended coils sit small plastic bottle cap rings, surrogates for the viewer, as

we negotiate these work's roller coaster ride. Accompanying drawings cast us again into the same experience of vertiginous slides and echoing shadows.

Can Studies introduces both tin cans, stripped of their labels, and the labels themselves in miniature in collaged form. The bare cans are arrayed on steel armatures canting from the wall, combined with connecting wires. The drawings emphasize the cans' precarious performance of tipping and balance.

Taken together with the work from the series *Cans and Hoops*, we are left with the feeling that Taylor's true subject was emptiness in the Buddhist sense, the presence that is there after everything else is stripped away. His conjuring with the ordinary, the abstract, and the aesthetic suggests a melding of Rube Goldberg and Samuel Beckett, as an inventor of absurd stratagems designed to catch nothingness.



Rafael Vega, *Untitled #8*, 2012, acrylic spray paint on masonite, Courtesy of Guided by Invoices, 24" x 18"