



L. Troy Brauntuch, *Bag with Garbage 3*, 2009; Conté on cotton, 30 x 40 inches

R. *Stamps*, 1975–2007; rubber stamps; dimensions variable; courtesy Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York



NEW YORK

Troy Brauntuch Friedrich Petzel Gallery

Troy Brauntuch is a key figure among the Pictures Generation, recently celebrated with a sweeping survey at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Taking representation head on, these artists—including Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo and Cindy Sherman—have never gone out of fashion, nor have the thorny issues surrounding appropriation in their work ever been fully resolved or abandoned. Consequently, the successes of relative newcomers like Carol Bove and Seth Price make Brauntuch look new again, despite the fact that he has made work in essentially the same way for nearly three decades.

Given that consistency, it's remarkable that we are still trying to get a bead on Brauntuch. Incorporating serigraphy, photo-stats and other reproduced imagery, his oeuvre remains fugitive, as demonstrated in this quasi-retrospective spread over Petzel's adjacent gallery spaces. The exhibition features recent works but also includes pieces dating back to the late seventies, as well as sketches, handwritten notes, rubber stamps, photographs and original source materials inspiring thirty years of practice.

What appears constant across the work of the Pictures artists is a quality best described as "calculated ambiguity," to quote *Artforum's* David Rimaneli. Whether drawn from newspapers, advertisements or found ephemera, the imagery is a "random" grab bag of military figures, transportation accidents, animals, shop windows, architectural details, movie stars, etc. For Brauntuch and his cohorts, the source of the image has never been as important as how it is deployed. In *Interview* magazine in 1983, Brauntuch demystified this "calculated ambiguity" to a surprising degree: "No matter what it is, it all ends up being detail. It's all fragments. It's the dilemma of consciousness trying to decide what to make us see."

Critical to his project, Brauntuch has no interest in easing that dilemma. His inscrutable Conté-on-cotton "paintings" would be exasperating if they weren't so seductive. In monochromatic black, wine, dark blue or green, the panels of cotton provide a hushed stage for barely perceptible drawings of appropriately titled subjects [*Bag with Garbage 1, 2 and 3*, *Foot*, and *Untitled (Studio 1 and 2)*]. The soft blackness of the crayon gives the images a spectral presence that infuses rather than marks the material's surface.

Decorously framed behind glass, the resulting reflections compete with the works, threatening to overwhelm the drawn images or forcing the viewer to shift about for a better vantage point. The reflection (of viewer and surrounding gallery) is stronger than the image, but that's a matter of sensory perception, not a critique of the works' content. Or is it? As an important element in Brauntuch's art from the beginning, this competition for the viewer's attention is clearly part of the package.

Elsewhere in the gallery, a barrel-vaulted alcove with shelves holds a selection of rubber stamps that Brauntuch has used throughout his career. Seeing the recognizable images in this form—reversed and in red rubber, with workmanlike wooden handles—makes an important point: every manipulation of an image is a step away from the source, from the moment, an echo of an echo. This objectification, which increases with each iteration, is matched only by the processes of consciousness that take us from lived experience to the outer reaches of representation. The transformation appears in the artworks, but it happens first in our heads.

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