

TopSpin
Artists of Western New York and Beyond

Patrick Foran: *Defacement*

May 10 - August 9, 2015

Opening reception, with artist talk at 3:00 p.m., Sunday, May 10, 2:00-4:00 p.m.



patrickforan



Riot, 2014, graphite on paper, 50x33 in.

Patrick Foran: *Defacement*

Patrick Foran's work examines the ways in which masks, helmets and coverings obscure the face—providing anonymity and autonomy for the subject. In this exhibiton, a small army of oversized, silent face-offs short-circuit the immediacy of identity. Simultaneously, these veils obstruct any facet of personality. Removing our individuality, for intended purposes of entertainment, biological protection or national defense elevates the opportunity for moral transgression and questionable personal accountability.

The artist's choice of charcoal and graphite mediums on large format, high-grade downy paper initially read as cordial and agreeable. As the subjects illustrated begin to resonate, the juxtaposition between the soft medium and strong content begins to manifest itself. The various materials illustrated, such as Tyvek, molded plastic, fabrics and fiberglass resins, form a protective shell or barrier, functioning as defensive, offensive or, in some cases both, insulating the wearer from physical, biological or social intrusion.

Helmets and facial coverings function as prostheses that afford protection and anonymity, and the body-helmet structures become recognizable symbols for competition, entertainment, military aggression/protection, political ideologies or social protests. Ultimately, these drawings open a critical dialogue regarding a multitude of social and political issues regarding power, identity and personal accountability.

The figures in these images are taken from a range of different contexts. What is the relationship between these images and their original frame of reference? Is the political context important to understanding the work?

The ideas behind this body of work began to emerge in 2014 as I watched two very different events unfold in the media: the Sochi Winter Olympics in Russia and the occupation of Independence Square in Kiev, Ukraine. Here were two massive "competitions," played out in front of the global media, which occupied opposite ends of the political spectrum: one a state-sanctioned theater of sport, the other an anti-government struggle against autocracy. But the connections were intriguing. Each one was a performance of nationalism deployed in the form of (sometimes) violent conflict. The bodies of both the protestors and the athletes were put under duress in very different ways that

resulted in strikingly similar images. And the "gear" being used was nearly identical; the protestors used ski helmets, hockey pads, and baseball bats to confront the military police.

This got me thinking about the type of anonymity that protective headgear provides, and the ways it can identify you as one who administers the law or one who is subject to its authority. I began seeing the same systems at play in many other events with competition or conflict at their core, and I wanted to extract some of those elements to build a visual narrative. I don't think it's necessary that the viewer is aware of the specific political context of each image, but I hope that they will construct their own narratives and begin to see relationships and correspondences between them, all while questioning what sort of "face" is being constructed here.

How does the notion of portraiture function in your work?

I think portraiture has traditionally been concerned with individuality and representation. We say that a good portrait captures an invisible (and indivisible) “truth” about the subject; it is supposed to tether their external appearance to their deeper inner identity. But I think the relationship between these two is actually much more complex and fraught. Identification is more and more associated with tracking and control through biometrics and surveillance. And there is the opposite end of the spectrum: the liberating potential of concealing your identity and remaining unrecognizable. In these works, I want to put some pressure on the received notions of portraiture, to question what it means to draw such an easy connection between the representation and the thing represented. What other elements of identity and identification emerge when we think about a faceless portraiture? Is there an automatic defacement that occurs when images are disseminated through the media? I hope the work can open a critical dialogue about current social and aesthetic issues regarding representation, power, and identity.

How do the sculptures function in your exhibition?

Specifically, how do the augmentations of color and form relate to the highly rendered, black and white aesthetic of the drawings?

The nature of your helmet delimits your position within the system and your relationship to the other participants. It also has a vexed relationship to the face, entombing it between an outer shell of material and the inner scaffolding of the skull, that inner limit which it mirrors on the outside. In a way, the sculptures exaggerate this material excess, illustrating an accretion of form and content: the over-coding of the face. In a way, the impulse to extend and supplement the helmets that form the base of the sculptures is a way of manifesting the many other networks that overlay the face (and the subject)—religious, biometric, nationalistic—and connecting them to the traditions of adornment and embellishment that have been a part of the head since before the invention of the face.

**Michael Beam, Exhibitions and Collections
Interview with the artist conducted in April, 2015.**



(Left to right) *Recon-Face*, 2015, charcoal on paper, 48x60 in.; *Compete-Face*, 2015, charcoal on paper, 60x45; *Range-Face*, 2015, charcoal on paper, 50x60 in.

ARTIST STATEMENT I'm interested in the legibility and opacity of bodies within the framework of global media and systems of representation privileged by late capitalism. With large scale drawings in charcoal and graphite, as well as sculptural objects constructed from sports helmets, I reexamine the idea of “portraiture” in the context of war, political upheaval, health epidemics, nationalist expansion, and the asymmetrical distribution networks of mass media.

The face is a sociological and, increasingly, a technological production. It is a topography, an apparatus that hovers above the head, literally a sur-face (“above appearance”) onto which many forms of representation can be projected. In this way, the face emerges as a contested site of political meaning: the subjectification of the individual and the objectification of the subject. It has been instrumentalized, an apparatus by which to exercise authority, recognition-control, and sovereignty. In this situation, the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari write, the mask has become the face itself, “the abstraction or operation of the face. The inhumanity of the face.”

In these drawings I want to reorient our relationship to the face, to unsettle the automatic processes of identification and recognition that render its ideological operations invisible. These images are not masked or concealed faces; they represent the production of a new face under the domain of a specific semiotic regime. They speak more to the reification of the face, the refiguration of the head into the skull and the helmet, the hardness of which belie the face's apparent motility and expressiveness. They are mobilized as instruments in the service of the military, the CDC, the Super Bowl.

Removing the images from their original context and depicting the head at the same scale as the entire body disrupts our familiarity with the face. Rendering them in a painterly style with brushes and powdered charcoal present a pure flatness while also implying a false depth. These portraits have been rendered featureless, the points of identification excised, but in essence all representations disseminated through the media have been “defaced,” deployed as propaganda for other symbolic orders. Here, there is a potential for deconstructing the facelessness of portraiture and articulating an aesthetic of the unrepresentable, to demonstrate the incommensurability of the face with whatever it is claimed to represent.

Patrick Foran

www.patrickforan.info

Patrick Foran (born Lansing, Michigan) is a second year Master of Fine Arts candidate in the Department of Art at the State University of New York at Buffalo). He holds a Bachelor of Art in English and Film from the University of Michigan and a Master of Arts in English and Visual Studies from Cornell University. His drawings and paintings examine the boundaries between figure and discourse, public history and private memory, the natural and the technological, abstraction and representation. Recent work involves subjects such as the painterly gaze of colonialism, the forensic analysis of archeological remains, the aesthetic connections between sporting events and mass political demonstrations, and the facelessness of portraiture. He lives, works and teaches in Buffalo, NY.

Education

2015 Master of Fine Art, Visual Studies and Art, SUNY at Buffalo, NY

2007 Master of Art, English Literature, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

2001 Bachelor of Art, English Literature, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

Selected Exhibitions

2014 *It's Not Me It's You*, UB Art Gallery, Center for the Arts, SUNY at Buffalo, NY

CEPA Member's Exhibition, CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, NY

Big Orbit Member's Exhibition, Big Orbit Gallery, Buffalo, NY

2013 *Fight Club I Art, Politics, and the Law*, UB Art Gallery, Center for the Arts, SUNY at Buffalo, NY

Visions of Greater Buffalo, CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, NY

From Cradle to Grave, Visual Studies Gallery, Center for

the Arts, SUNY at Buffalo, NY

2011 *Low Light*, Perspective 2 Gallery, Lansing, MI

2009 *One Hundred Percent Image Space*, Olive Tjaden Gallery, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

Related Professional Experience

2013-2015

Graduate Student Instructor, SUNY at Buffalo, NY.

Courses include: Art 135: *Self & Ritual*; Art 207: *Drawing Concepts I*; Art 208: *Drawing Concepts II* and Graduate Assistantship, Visual Studies 150: *Visual Theory, Aesthetics and Criticism*.

2011 Lecturer, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI. Courses included: English 473: *Topics in American Literature*; English 317: *Literature and Culture* and English 328: *Writing and the Environment*.

2010 Writing Instructor, Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America, Princeton University, NJ

2004-09 Graduate Student Instructor, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. Courses included:

English 168: *Cultural Studies: Producing and Consuming Identity*; English 158: *The Family in Fragments: Kinship in American Literature*; English 158: *Visual Culture: Image and Identity in the Age of Technology* and English 168: *Visual Culture: Image, Text and Techne*.

2004-12 Instructor, Center for Talented Youth, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD

Awards and Fellowships

2015 Juror's Selection (Cathleen Chaffee), CEPA Gallery Member's Show, Buffalo, NY

2013-15 Dean's Scholarship, SUNY at Buffalo, NY

Graduate Fellowship, SUNY at Buffalo, NY

2011 *Bat City Review*, The University of Texas at Austin, TX, Art and Writing Collaboration Prize

2009 Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prize, State University of California, Berkeley, CA

Visual Studies Concentration Colloquium, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

2004-08 SAGE Graduate Fellowship, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

2001 Lynda Buell Van Boven Endowed Scholarship, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

1998-2001 Four-Year James B. Angell Scholar, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

1998 Michigan Competitive Scholarship, Lansing, MI

Bibliography and Publications

2013 Culver, Eric. "Everyone is Talking about Fight Club," *The Spectrum*, State University of New York at Buffalo, Student Publication, vol. 63, issue 35, November, 2013.

2010 Featured artist. *Western Humanities Review*, University of Utah, April 10, 2010.

2009 Bomphray, Alistair and Jesse Scaccia. *Hey Teacher, You've Got Chalk on Your Pants: An Anti-Burnout, No-Holds-Barred Guide to the World's Most Important Profession*. Teacher,

Revised Books: New York, NY, 2009.

Lonsinger, Dawn. *The Nested Object*. Dancing Girl Press, Issue 1, 2009.

2005 Namou, Weam. *The Feminine Art*. Hermiz Pub., Detroit, MI, 2005

Exhibition Checklist

Contain-Face, 2014, charcoal on paper, 60x45 in.

Compete-Face, 2015, charcoal on paper, 60x45 in.

Detain-Face, 2015 charcoal on paper, 60x80 in.

Mask 1, 2015, helmet, paint, wood, dimensions variable.

Mask 2, 2015, helmet, paint, steel, twine, dimensions variable.

Mask 3, 2015, helmet, shoulder pads, paint, dimensions variable.

Recon-Face, 2015, charcoal on paper, 48x60 in.

Range-Face, 2015, charcoal on paper, 50x60 in.

Riot, 2014, graphite on paper, 50x33 in.

Sport, 2015, graphite on paper, 50x33 in.

TopSpin

Artists of the Buffalo/Niagara Region

The museum's Tops Gallery—dedicated to the exhibition of work by local and regional artists—presents the **TopSpin** series. **TopSpin** features a broad range of visual expressions, varied in media as well as message, and focuses mainly on new and emerging artists.

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TOPS



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