

canvas, 30" x 52", at Modernism,

out of the picture plane to gouge the eye, and create a touch of panic in the heart.

Blue Ape has this same effect. This portrait of an ape is so intimate as to bring out the human aspects of the drooping face, so that through unfocused

eyes it looks like an unlovely grandmother you might have once known. And yet, the trace of siren-red lipstick smeared on the ape's lips, and the terror in the little too close to home about the secret barbarity of people you may have met.

Daniil Kharms Fable is a newer work, and features the aforementioned gulag image. Scrawled over it is a brief tale about a short man who wishes to be taller, meets a witch who offers to grant him a wish, cannot muster the courage to request it, and ends up an inveterate nail biter. It ends with the sentence: "Reader, think hard about this fable and you will feel pretty strange." Popov's works might have a moral of the same strain: One that is never specific, though we might expect it to be, but instead directly addresses the viewers, and prods them to realize their own discomfort. It is as if Popov already sees the hypocritical palliatives of everyday life, and reminds you to lay them bare in your own heart.

—Jakki Spicer

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Valentin Popov: *Then and Now* closed in August at Modernism, San Francisco.

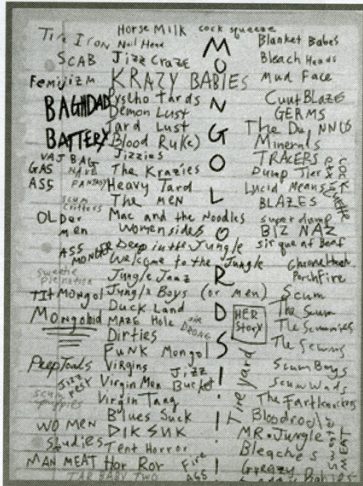
'(EDIT)' at Maniac Gallery

Political and social fantasies intersected in a nexus of unadulterated black humor and historical revisionism in the recent exhibition at Maniac Gallery, *(EDIT) The Uncertain States of America*. The group show included six contemporary emerging artists—Chris Sollars, Mads Lynnerup, NDFTBK (a duo comprising artists Seth and Ryan Hoercher), Erin Allen and Taha Belal—whose work pivots around some of the assumptions underpinning the sociopolitical dimensions of West

Coast liberalism, fraught as it is with lingering artifacts of counterculture and a palpable history of political upheaval waged from the margins.

Through mixed media, painting, video installation and obsessively rendered flowcharts that poke fun at the institutions buttressing the "noble" endeavors of social change, the six assembled artists—all of whom live and work in metropolitan areas of California—offered a tantalizing follow-up to the traveling exhibition from 2006, *The Uncertain States of America*, which surveyed recent

Top: Erin Allen, *Band List Megamix*, 2007, acrylic and oil on canvas, 48" x 36"; bottom: Taha Belal, *Untitled* (sanded), 2007, newspaper, 22" x 24", at Maniac Gallery, Oakland.



developments in millennial art among young American artists.

While the works here were diminutive in number, they offered a fascinating commentary on the diversity of artists working in a distinctly sociopolitical context.

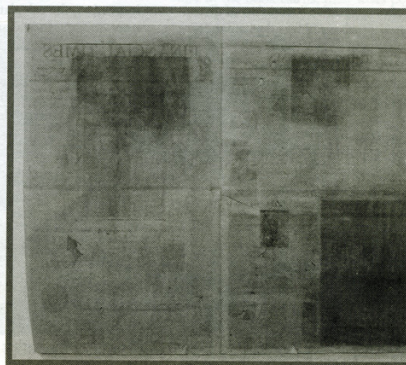
However, the collective refrain was the sort of activist proselytizing one might expect from an artistic meditation on democracy, in all its dystopic renderings. Voices of protest were muffled in a cacophony of signs and symbols, rampant

media misinformation is cheekily represented in cutouts of newspapers, and its version was rerouted through nonsensical buzzwords and riotous bursts of language that well up from the vicissitudes of the unconscious. *EDIT* was essentially a show that offered trenchant commentary on how we talk about and perceive politics and social change in the wake of war and significant geopolitical shifts.

In many ways, the six artists are invested in how reality and the public contract on what constitutes reality. These are works that are based in hype reality, that liminal real posited by postmodern philosophers and other cultural theorists, in which reality and fantasy become confused and obfuscated in the human consciousness. This is particularly salient in technology-driven cultures, but it's also apparent in the mass media, which has the ability to radically alter and shape our experiences. In both politics and the culture of protest, the artists seem to be saying, there is a violent wrenching from the real, which leads to the habitation of newly constructed spaces and realities, both physical and psychological.

In the work of Lynnerup, a dialogue between intended (as well as fortuitous) audiences and the artist occurs in site-specific public settings, in which the manipulation of the psyche is imbricated. In his silkscreen on paper, *You See Anything Interesting...*, a plain injunction in block letters exhorts viewers: "IF YOU SEE ANYTHING INTERESTING PLEASE LET SOMEONE KNOW IMMEDIATELY."

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ly." This piece (which Lynnerup has used to appropriate security information posters in subway stations) examines cultural credos that signify our current milieu of surveillance and the ever-oblique yet perpetual threat of danger. The statement itself becomes an incantatory directive that gets unconsciously filtered into the imagination; even though the message appears to us in an unfamiliar guise (a phrase lacking context or images), it is familiar and has perhaps seeped into our psyches with the same kind of stealth it impugns—with the advertorial urgency of a television jingle, tinged as it is by a subtext of widespread paranoia.

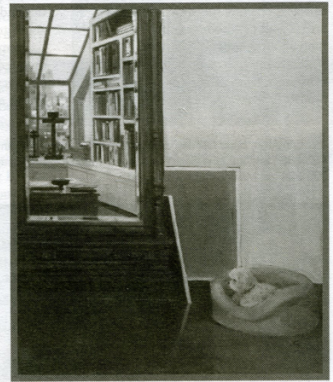
The work of Egyptian-American artist Belal is also interested in how media representations become absorbed by the consciousness. In his work, panels of newspapers are torn, sanded and rubbed out strategically in abstruse patterns to create significant amputations of information. It's a fascinating, if somewhat obvious, commentary on the complex process of guesswork that takes place in our apprehension of the news media, given the indeterminacy of information in the

Information Age. As the attempt to read headlines or make out names and faces gets frustrated, it becomes clear that Belal's work is a literal translation of the incommunicability of information between institutions and individuals, or even between the intellect and emotion. These are pieces that are imbued with a quiet apathy.

Allen's acrylic and oil on canvas work, *Band List Megamix*, is perhaps the least overtly political of all the pieces, but its obsessive associative impulses (rendered in fierce notes that resemble crude scrawls on public bathroom stalls) point to how the state of the nation can enter the language of the unconscious. Ostensibly a list of band names, the piece offers a suggestive succession of disconnected words and ideas that range from profane and menacing to quirky and humorous. Even amidst its utter fragmentation, a complex intersection between gender, nationality and politics emerges.

Sollars's site-specific video installations typically detail consumption, waste and the culture of protest—often in tandem. In the past, he has focused on absurdist pieces such as walking piles of garbage, which elicited reactions pointing to the essential vacuousness of current social values. In *No-Where Protest*, the idea of a collective, communal struggle against injustice is again subverted, as a defeated-looking man slumps in solitary pensiveness against the back of a road sign to which he is locked, along a desolate stretch of highway. In this C-print,

one in a series of five images, context becomes immaterial in the absence of a tangible movement (i.e., we can't read what's on the sign and nor do we know what the man is aiming to do—and it doesn't matter, either). Moreover, the culture of protest becomes conflated with



Glenna Putt, (above) *Dog in the Studio*, 2008, oil on canvas, 30" x 24"; (right) *Glass of Wine*, 1994, oil on canvas, 24-1/2" x 18", at George Krevsky Gallery, San Francisco.

defeatism, insularity, and ineffectuality in the face of a large, often inhospitable terrain of national suspicion and disunity.

NDFTBK is similarly interested in fabricating works that reinvent and depose expectations. There is a deceptive simplicity in the duo's neat, flowchart-style pieces, which resemble PowerPoint graphs mapped on chart paper with sharpies. They make one think of obscure, perplexing plans drawn up in a subterranean office. In the works, a complex graphical junction that appears to explain the larger connections among war, energy, pollution and California demographics assumes authority through a representation of seemingly scientific, cause/effect linearity. However, on closer inspection, the calculations and connections are nonsensical and anarchic, resulting in a refutation of overarching meaning.

While the hybrid nature of *(EDIT)* doesn't always make the relationships between each artist clear or successful, these are pieces in which the indeterminacy of public knowledge and the paradigm of clashing narratives are made excruciatingly real. The elements don't always cohere, but the artists are important because they focus on how the spectrum of political thought has shaped even our most interior landscapes. Moreover, these are works that inhere in a space of contemplation and rumination rather than the haphazard domination of "politics as art," with its often stifling ideology. Rather than pointing to just another ideology, the artists have