



"UNTITLED, NEW YORK #1-VICTORY LEADING," 2007
Hugo Crosthwaite

GRAPHITE AND CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 84" X 96"
PHOTO: COURTESY NOEL-BAZA FINE ART AND THE ARTIST

depicted in a graphic/Pop Art style influenced by Crosthwaite's recent years in New York and DC comics. Crosthwaite is a superb draftsman, and the fact that he created this work in three weeks in front of an audience is a feat. However, his 'deconstruction' process—masking sections of the drawing and painting over them with white paint creates a stark effect. Influenced by an experience where his mural was destroyed, Crosthwaite sees the blank squares as reflecting loss and providing space for viewers to visually complete the work.

Unfortunately, the squares have the unintended effect of blocking the viewer's gaze.

In contrast, *Bartolomé*, featuring a classically drawn martyr, is powerfully consuming. It hits you on both a visceral and conceptual level. Evoking the collision of sensuality and violence found in a Caravaggio or Delacroix, *Bartolomé* features the saint flayed alive by a cheese knife. Initially, Crosthwaite found humor in the association between the saint and cheese guilds. However, once news of Abu Ghraib broke out during the creation of the piece, it took on a darker tone. Dense space, overlapping figures, and detailed Tijuana architecture encourage contemplation. Hooded figures portraying both the tortured and torturers conjure Abu Ghraib. Like Picasso's *Guernica*, it conveys the human potential for destruction and suffering.

Dark Dreams at Noel-Baza Fine Art covers Crosthwaite's career over the past decade. The standout is *Untitled New York #1-Victory Leading*, (2007). Composed of 21 drawings adhered to create one confrontational graphite and charcoal drawing it reflects the verticality of New York architecture and is a contemporary take on Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*. Crosthwaite's Marianne is a voluptuous pinup with an exploding

breast. Crumbling towers referencing 9/11 are juxtaposed with political slogans on billboards. A foreshortened Daumier-type male with a strategically placed Pop style rocket addresses the propaganda of war. Apt at merging the canons of art history with urban architecture, Crosthwaite renders beautifully brutal works that provoke and engage.

—LAUREN BUSCEMI

SAN FRANCISCO
Gordon Cook: "Paintings, Works on Paper & Sculpture" at George Krevsky Gallery

In 1918, the metaphysical painter Carlo Carrà wrote, "We have little time for those who tell tales of a new world every twenty-four hours ... It seems sufficient to us that the artist should have a clear idea of what he is doing hour by hour." His clear idea was to depict the "secret magnificence" of humble objects. It is probable that the like-minded San Francisco painter/printmaker Gordon Cook has been compared to ancestors like Carrà and Giorgio Morandi, but their shared approach, balancing observation with a calm, measured poetry, is due for revival. Concurrent retrospectives at George Krevsky Gallery and the Bolinas Museum in Marin County made it clear that Cook, who died in 1985, knew exactly what he was doing.

Born in 1927, Cook moved west in 1951, during the golden age of bohemianism encompassing Bay Area Figuration, Beat, and Funk Art. Cook, however, "abhorred any romanticizing about being an artist," according to Don Ed Hardy. "To him, picture making was a job of work, and he treasured the demands of the craft. ... [T]ranscendence ... was mysterious

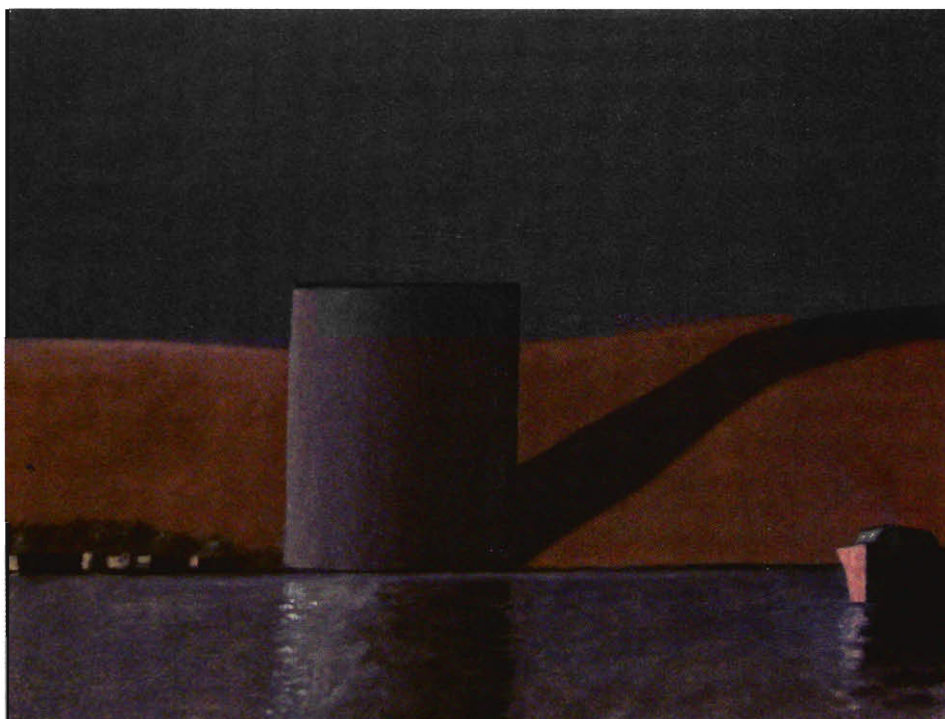
and unpredictable, not something that could ever be calculated or aimed for." Charles Hine remembers Cook's decidedly undramatic advice: "Do one thing, over and over."

That sober Midwestern approach informs all the work, however ultimately strange or funny. *Untitled (Water Tower and Speed Boat)* and *Boathouse* depict marine themes with the emotional force and ambiguous scale of a dream—the water preternaturally becalmed, the skies Existential Gray and cloudless; in the latter, a flagpole perches atop the boathouse like a sentry, awaiting the slightest breeze. *Letter in a Letter Holder*, *Bookends*, and *Lead Milk Bottle on Stand* present everyday household objects with the gravity and presence of icons or monumental architecture. *Black Head with White Dickey* and *Two Stick Figures* depict Cook's wooden figure sculptures; with their paint-clad cubic bodies, "unpainted" wood-grained blockheads, and stripped-branch limbs, they're comic puppets in Cook's stately theater of the absurd.

—DEWITT CHENG

SAN FRANCISCO
Davide Coltro: "[Living Shrouds]" at Mark Wolfe Contemporary Art

One hundred black-and-white portraits, with an emphasis toward the black end of the scale, repetitively line the walls of this solo exhibition by new media Milan-based artist Davide Coltro. Each work measures 16-by-13 inches and is encased in a plastic sleeve; the sole break in the lineup: a screen, similar in size to the portraits, playing a random feed of hundreds of these images, here brightly colored, melding slowly into each other, one



"UNTITLED (WATER TOWER AND SPEED BOAT)"
1980, Gordon Cook, OIL ON CANVAS, 11" X 14"
PHOTO: COURTESY GEORGE KREVSKY GALLERY



"LIVING SHROUDS" (DETAIL - PORTRAIT), 2010, **Davide Coltro**
 LCD SCREEN, WIRELESS MODEM, ALUMINUM FRAME, GLASS. 16" x 13" x 5½"
 PHOTO: COURTESY MARK WOLFE CONTEMPORARY ART

after the next. The portraits, which feature Coltro's friends or people he's met, were created with a standard office photocopier; the subject laid his or her head on the machine. This accounts for the mostly three-quarter or full profiles, with only a few head-on shots. The method also explains the darkness of the images and that everything surrounding the face is black. To create the continually morphing screen feed, the artist uses a proprietary algorithm he wrote, which resizes, colors, and combines the portraits. The screen recalls and further pushes his earlier work "[Systems]," featured in the artist's first exhibition at Mark Wolfe Contemporary (2007), which focused on landscape. As with that show, Coltro here approaches a traditional genre through his lens of unique technology.

While the printouts serve to support the screen module, the combination works well as a whole. The screen steadily presents a never-ending march of faces over time, while the single portraits snaking the gallery walls offer the whole crowd, all at once. And both views upend the genre: whereas portraiture originally highlighted an individual's uniqueness, set him or her apart, these streams of faces remind us that we are one of many. The Xeroxing process, which renders a visual sameness, reinforces this. So stark, unflattering, and similarly produced are the images, beauty and status become a non-factor. The end result is one of equitability and unification.

"NEW THOUGHTS," 2008, **Stephen Sollins**
 CAST BRONZE WITH POWER CABLE
 3¾" x 5½" x 3" WITH 10 FOOT CABLE
 EDITION 1 OF 3
 PHOTO: COURTESY BRIAN GROSS FINE ART

The one off-putting aspect of the show is the plastic encasing of the images; wavy and reflective, it makes the portraits difficult to see. (It's curious to learn that this display was insisted on by the artist.) But still, the show works. The flow of images is harmonious; the screen, especially, is mesmerizing. At its heart a conceptual piece, it is the idea we take with us. We are all a part of this, in it together. There's a comfort in that.

—CHÉRIE L. TURNER

SAN FRANCISCO
Stephen Sollins: "New Thoughts"
at Brian Gross Fine Art

In Borges' story, "The Approach to Almutasim," the narrator discerns the influence of a holy man in the transfigured faces of his followers. Surveying contemporary art, one often glimpses the smiling countenance of Dadaist/proto-conceptualist Marcel Duchamp, who made intellectually rigorous prankishness *de rigueur* for generations of

successors and avatars; one sometimes thinks of those "Matrix" movies with thousands of combative Hugo Weavings.

Stephen Sollins' work manifests a similar Duchampian sensibility: ironic, humorous, skeptical, and even absurdist. The New York conceptualist has previously gutted security envelopes and constructed geometric abstractions from their patterned or colored linings; partially unwoven mass-produced embroideries to reweave the colored threads into the floating squares once beloved of Russian Revolution utopians; created post-minimalist grid paintings (reminiscent of Alan McCollum's impastoed paintings of superimposed grids) by whitening out or drawing over the verbiage in newspaper sports, TV and art schedules, or camping-goods catalogues, sometimes leaving survivor images of camping tents or rubber rafts. He has even constructed word poems from obituaries. "Source materials are very important in my work," writes Sollins. "All have to do with domestic space or the establishment of it." Sollins domesticates commercial artifacts by recontextualizing these humble materials into art that both expands and subverts the idea of art, creating parody-homage hybrids. Two bronze sculptures, paradoxically beautiful, mock the ideas of, respectively, utility and visual legibility. *New Thoughts*, replicating an electric pencil sharpener, replete with presumably functional power cable, shares art DNA with Méret Oppenheim's Surrealist fur-lined teacup and spoon. *Can't Have*, a framed picture shown leaning on a small shelf, back side out, its framing tape, ID label and hardware duplicated in loving detail, recalls James Melchert's descriptively captioned yet visually indecipherable graphite rubbings of Polaroid photographs. Less provocative are *From Planning Ahead*, a dozen sheets of drafting vellum, with preprinted title blocks, onto which images of office supplies—file cabinets, sorting and drawing racks, stools, chairs, and file-storage boxes—have been eccentrically collaged; two similar *Stage Set* collages atop metal foil; and the jewelry-like *Nine Small Monuments* and their associated drawings.

—DEWITT CHENG

