

REVIEW

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Allan Harding MacKay

Grunwald & Watterson,
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In this exhibition of current works on paper, artist Allan Harding MacKay focused on domestic interiors. Each of the images in the "*Domestic Incident*" series is composed of a representation of a household room, over which an "incident" is crystalized. The result is a thought-provoking twist of what we recognize and take for granted.

Domestic Incident #5 takes place in a room dominated by hot, juicy, red-orange walls, drapery, and the voluptuous curves of flat cherubs. In contrast, a neat silhouette of a woman tentatively occupies a doorway. Against this lush backdrop a pair of cats mate. Their magnified size is out of proportion to the room setting; the coupled cats are indeed superimposing. The comparison between the aloof and anonymous woman and the substantial heat from the furnishings and animals is undeniable. The component parts of the image are all ordinary, but their sum amounts to something extraordinary, as if to enquire "do you really know this?"

Domestic Incident #s 1 & 2 heighten this tension of the unknown. In both pictures the active figures upset the calm of the supposedly still life. They are drawn in glowing lines and read like ghosts, memories of past events and presences. If they are not to be taken as jabs at our assumptions, they at least point out the mitigating factors in our knowing. Empty rooms are populated with past events; seemingly direct knowledge is built up, for better or for worse, in layers of association.

Domestic Incident #8 pushes the relationship of its parts to the extremes. In this night scene, a contemporary living room interior is overlaid with a traditional Indian representation of a couple united in erotic embrace. The duality of the images verges on the confounding. Who are these medieval lovers blissfully perched on the coffee table?

Like the ghostly figures of the other incidents, the lovers are drawn in a vibrant line. Against the darkened night scene they jump into bold, optical relief. Their shimmering outlines imply a reality greater than the mundane background. But the moving quality of the light line, its transience, registers them as events of energy rather than as people or personalities.

MacKay uses a similar, highlighting line in *A Limited Tradition of Authorized Hyperbole*. It is a 315 in. stretch of continuous, crashing wave. Here, too, we have a record of the energetic passage of events within an accepted scenario,

except that now the tension is initiated by a frame of words that echoes the title. The words, in effect, update the time-honoured tradition of the landscape by emphasizing the perceptual relationship with the post-modern viewer,

This function persists in the floral still lifes. *In Resist Takeover*, a few stormy flowers are gathered in a tall vase against a dark, information blank background. Across the top are inscribed the words "*Amasse, Accumulate, Acquire*," and on the bottom are the title words. It is as if the key words of consumerism have leapt off the daily newspaper to become the didactic background that, in another era, would have been faithfully reproduced.

It is often said that drawing or painting is the artist's way of understanding the world, his way of coming to terms with it. In depicting the world, he inevitably presents his view. This generality became especially true in the particulars of this exhibition.

Studying MacKay's images, we discover how much baggage we cart along in the process of knowing or understanding: memories, anticipations, sensations - both obfuscating and delightful. His view is an engaging and truthful anatomy of knowing.

Caption:

Allan Harding MacKay, *Aggregation of Misery*, pastel and oil on paper, 63 x 49 in.

Photo courtesy Grunwald & Watterson.