

DARYL AUSTIN

Steering a narrow course between the laws of probability and the meticulous replication of Herman Rorschach's controversial inkblots, Daryl Austin calls into doubt the tenuous relationship between abstraction and interpretation.

In the context of a work of art each blot is an object, a potent figurative symbol which importantly, in its original clinical use, was deemed to have no *a priori* meaning. Unlike the Swiss psychiatrist it is not Austin's concern that the blots he has borrowed function as a projective technique to unravel the mysteries of the unconscious mind. If there is any similarity, it is to be found in the selection of objects meaningless enough to excite the broadest range of interpretations. The abstract blot is located precisely within the elusive area of personal response.

A picture from the *Rorschach Grids* series demonstrates Austin's interest in why meaning is constructed from an object purported to signify nothing in particular. As the processes of projection and association are activated, the notion of neutrality becomes increasingly irrelevant. Form and the illusion of chance appear to work together as catalysts, inspiring the viewer to make a reading which has no absolute point of departure other than that perceived as personal reality founded on a myriad of contextual variables.

It is not the artist's intent that we experience these processes in the same way that we would automatically when faced with any other work of art, but rather to subvert them. Initially, even the medium is ambiguous. Some of the works have been executed in such a way that they have the appearance of prints, repeated and fragmented, perhaps taped to a larger sheet of paper in a duplicitous twist of *trompe l'œil*. Closer scrutiny however confirms the obvious,

inkblots in ink.

The probability of a chance occurrence, while apparent, is actually non-existent, averted by the careful copying of "random" blots in *Chance, Choice, Artifice and Repetition*, and in an untitled work from the *Deceptions* series. Literally creating and controlling the illusion of randomness, the artist mischievously deceives his audience by luring them into a response which is likely to be incorrect.

Austin is a person who when presented with one of Rorschach's provocative smudges would see only an inkblot.

Blind as introduces a guide dog and a pair of dark glasses as motifs representing the physicality of seeing (or not seeing), in opposition to the more cerebral process motivated by the ubiquitous blot. It is worth noting that those without sight are quite capable of projection and fantasy without the assistance of visual stimuli, just as those with perfect vision are quite capable of failing to see. This is a joke at the expense of the viewer, who is then left to consider the relative validity of the visual and cerebral forms of response.

Austin's perverse view, which counters expectations of what we should be seeing, is extended in *Beautiful Venetian Landscape*, where diverse objects of equivalent meaning gather in an assembly of denial. Colour is denied by the postcard, and the view is obscure. The dark glasses obfuscate vision, and an inkblot (ripe for lengthy interpretations) is contained in the instantaneity of its Polaroid frame. Overall, the irony of a colourless landscape defies the romance of its title.

As we encounter the art of Daryl Austin we meet with a series of paradoxes. His parodies on abstraction are such that the only meaning is no meaning, and the objects which reflect his ideas represent the concept of representation itself.

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