

ANCIENT & MODERN

MELISSA GORDON: 'TWO-DIMENSIONAL MEN'

PREVIEW WEDNESDAY 2 SEPTEMBER, 6 – 8PM
3 SEPTEMBER – 3 OCTOBER 2009

ANCIENT & MODERN presents new paintings and drawings by Melissa Gordon.

Two Dimensional Men, Gordon's second solo exhibition at the gallery, arises from a number of complex reference points dealing with populist images and socio-historical documents. As in much of her work, the artist seeks not simply to present found images or source material, but to re-present, to recontextualize and create new angles and critiques regarding the cultural circulation and function of objects and ideas over time.

Magnified details of Norman Rockwell paintings are presented alongside similarly enlarged familiar textile patterns and prints. Rockwell was an American painter and illustrator particularly well known for his covers of the Saturday Evening Post, portraying and perpetuating a wholesome American vernacular of Post-War middle-class values about work, family, and leisure.

Extracted from their original context and blown-up so that they dissolve into a matrix of pixilations, the Rockwell details are difficult to decipher, although not entirely unidentifiable. The bracketed titles of the works - (*After 'The Fugitive'*) and (*After 'The Flirt'*) - hint at the individual piece each may hold in a larger puzzle, but one is deliberately left to one's own interpretation: the forms shift into endless possible combinations, each imagining a different final image and accompanying narrative.

Set in two groupings, as compliments to the 'after Rockwell' paintings, three fabric paintings on coarse linen add to the materiality and the cloth/pattern reference of each work. Pinstripe, houndstooth and plaid have become traditional identifiers of particular types of individuals and characters: a banker, an intellectual, a farmer. Gordon is interested in the socio-cultural construction of character and gender identity. As the Rockwell details dissolve in magnified detail, the fabric paintings accompanying them seem to unravel - their signifying properties destabilized, exposed as empty or arbitrary creations.

→

Two-Dimensional Men also includes a series of framed 'word drawings' on paper referencing a different yet closely related document of 1950's Americana. The words Gordon uses are taken from *The Lonely Crowd*, a sociological study that identifies and analyzes three main cultural types, each of which corresponds loosely to a different phase of modern man's character development: from tradition directed, to inner-directed and finally outer-directed - what one might recognise as the dominant contemporary middle-class personality type.

Again, Gordon animates and problematises such seemingly clear-cut definitions of identity and character. Extending and overlapping in and out of each other, the texts are hand-drawn in different classic fonts, and confound each other both literally and metaphorically: they are visually obscured and complicated in surface level reading, as well as confused in deeper meaning and association.

Under the artist's magnifying glass, what appears rigid and readable becomes conflated and colluded. This sense of critique and self-awareness applies not only to the subject matter at hand, but also to the process of painting itself, as each work is careful to refer to or expose its own means of representation. Art works, like histories and identities are revealed to be particularly human constructions.

Melissa Gordon (b. Boston MA, 1981) studied at the Rhode Island School of Design, Cooper Union, New York, and at De Ateliers in Amsterdam. She has previously held solo exhibitions at Galerie Michael Cosar in Düsseldorf and Galerie Juliette Jongma in Amsterdam (both 2006 and 2008). In 2006 she was recipient of the prestigious Koninklijke Prijs voor Vrije Schilderkunst, and in 2007 the ABN AMRO Kunstprijs. Gordon recently complete the Artist in Residence program at the Wiels Contemporary Art Centre in Brussels, where she currently lives and works. She will have solo exhibitions at Ancient & Modern, London and Marianne Boesky Gallery's Project Space, New York, both in September 2009.

Exhibition open Thursdays - Saturdays, 12 - 6pm and by appointment
For more information please contact bruce@ancientandmodern.org