

...might be good

One for All

Trinity University Art Gallery, San Antonio

Through April 10, 2010

by Wendy Atwell



Emily Joyce
Grand Graham Bow Wow, 2009
 Oil on canvas
 19 5/8 x 19 1/4 inches
 Courtesy of the artist and Inman Gallery



José Lerma, *Portrait of Carlos II de España*, 2010

Only one of Jim Torok's small, postcard-sized portraits is included in *One for All*, at Trinity University. Yet the potency of this 4-by-5-inch painting overwhelms Torok's other work on view and carries its weight amidst multiple pieces, all larger in scale, by the three other artists included in the show. Curator Jessica Halonen's choice to exhibit just one of Torok's tiny portraits, hung directly across from Jose Lerma's large-scale portrait of a Spanish king made from carpet, reinforces the varied ways in which the artists push the traditional boundaries of portraiture. These artists dispatch with decorous notions of celebration and honor to face the deeper issues that inspire portraits: power, mortality, and the question of how well one can really know another.

Because of their finely detailed renderings, Torok's portraits, which are frontal and cropped from the shoulders up, have been compared with Northern Renaissance painting. Torok paints a composite image of his subjects (friends, family, fellow artists, himself) based on a series of photographs. The multiple sources of images give the painting an uncanny knowledge that seems to compensate for what gets left out, information that isn't visible or accessible in either a sitting or a two-dimensional image.

Traditionally, portraitists included extraneous objects to symbolize details about the subject's life. In 1533, Hans Holbein painted a mysterious anamorphic skull in *The Ambassadors*, bringing up issues of power and mortality. Compositionally, the skull begins to eclipse the figure as a point of interest in the painting. Today, Joey Fauerso takes this concept a step further. Fauerso's figures appear and disappear, or are smeared, their existence literally giving way to the negative space surrounding them. These formal decisions become metaphors for metaphysical issues of being, time, and space. In the hand drawn animation, *Four Ways To Disappear*, Fauerso erases a figure slowly in four different ways. In one version, the silent disappearance of the figure ends with a blue smear across the white ground. In another, the figure is consumed by white clouds. Fauerso's blurs and erasures of the figure suspend it between positive and negative space, subsuming the individual or ego. The model for this animation is Fauerso's brother, Neil. She frequently uses Neil as a subject, and this adds poignancy to the work, as if she is sacrificing him to the void.

Jose Lerma's *Portrait of Carlos II de España*, created on site with the help of Trinity art students, is a large-scale image of the last Hapsburg king made from commercial carpet in hues of green, brown and blue. Historical accounts describe this man's life as one of madness, deformity and illness. Lerma captures the residue of these accounts in the relief of the collaged carpet. This sculptural piece drapes dramatically from the wall, an historic subject transposed into a non-traditional, base material. Lerma's use of carpet mocks portraiture as a recording of royal legacy, denying the portrait's subject the illustriousness of paint and the expectations of immortality that accompany it. In Emily Joyce's playful paintings, hands replace portraiture's traditional subject, the face. A fist is painted with two black dots and lines to imply eyes and brows; the natural curve of the hand over the thumb creates a surprisingly effective frown, which wakes up the viewer's predisposition to recognize a human face and even attribute emotions to it.

One for All removes the boundaries of traditional portraiture to imply a nearly infinite content within a single portrait, a content that extends beyond the individual into philosophical questions of power, psychology and spirituality.

Wendy Atwell received her M.A. in Art History and Criticism from The University of Texas at San Antonio.