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The Art Show as Appetizer Plate



Photo by Allard Bovenberg; courtesy Xavier Hufkens, Brussels

An installation view of "Everything You Can Imagine Is Real..." at Xavier Hufkens, Brussels

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By **Scott Indrisek**
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"Everything You Can Imagine Is Real..."
Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Sint-Jorisstraat 6-8 Rue Saint-Georges, Brussels
April 14-May 14, 2011

With 16 artists on hand, this densely packed exhibition brings the aesthetic of an art fair into a gallery setting. This makes sense, really, since "Everything You Can Imagine Is Real..." was open during the weekend of Art Brussels, and part of that weekend's Friday night gallery crawl. Still, this survey pushes the boundaries of what constitutes a cohesive group show — with a title so broad it might as well simply be "The Creative Process," and with a press release that dispenses with any theoretical blather and simply reproduces the bios of the participants. To make solid connections between most or all of those artists would be to flirt with schizophrenic logic. All this said, a gallery representative explained that the show was simply a way to introduce a few

emerging talents along with more established names, and seen from that angle — group show as sampler platter — "Everything You Can Imagine Is Real..." does succeed.

One possible commonality is a sort of au courant casual violence toward the convention of mediums, especially in the painting field. Lesley Vance's two pieces here — an oil and a fantastic watercolor — practice a subversion of content, morphing traditional still-life compositions into abstractions. Ryan Sullivan's "March 19, 2011" is painting-as-chemical-process, with a surface as rippled and warped as just-parchment, all wrinkles and furrows



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DAVID WEINBERG GALLERY



Photo by Allard Bovenberg; courtesy of the artist; Xavier Hufkens, Brussels; Ryan Sullivan's "March 19, 2011," 2011

as ripped and warped as wet parchment, all wrinkles and furrows. Nikolas Gambaroff has three pieces here, paintings made using disfigured newspaper, a conceit that is simultaneously idiotically simple and completely genius. (Perhaps they're saying something about information overload in an age of hypersaturated news. Or, more likely, they're just understated works from an artist who realized that chopping and shredding a Staples sales circular could generate a surprisingly fine abstraction.) Latifa Echakhch's main contribution to this exhibition are three unremarkable charcoal-on-wall works, but her "Sans titre I" (2010) — comprised of plain white paper glued to a panel, forming a rightward-tilting grid — shows the same subtle touch for undramatic materials that Gambaroff possesses.

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Photo by Allard Bovenberg; courtesy of the artist; Xavier Hufkens, Brussels; Lesley Vance's "Untitled (50)," 2011

Those are the highlights, though that's not to say the rest of the work is without merit. There are two Elad Lassry photos — "Bengal" (2011) and "Hoffman (Swirl)" (2011) — and I think I'm finally coming to the realization that, despite how well-respected Lassry is of late, and despite the seductive, confounding appeal of these photos — which are both highly conceptual and plainly decorative, cute, even, given the color-matched frames — I'm having trouble seeing what all the fuss is about. I have a similar reaction, to a heightened degree, when confronted by a Jacob Kassay work (in acrylic and silver deposit on canvas) in the back room. A 2005 David Altmejd sculpture of a monstrous head, with crystalline spikes jutting from various orifices, is a fairly random inclusion as well, and one can't help suspect this older piece was added to the roster following the artist's recent crowd-pleaser at Andrea Rosen. A handful of Mapplethorpe Polaroids from the '70s and '80s cause similar confusion. Why are they here, exactly? Simply by virtue of being a thing that was imagined, later made real?

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To be fair, my reaction to this show may simply be a result of art-fair overload in Brussels, the two days prior having been spent scouring jam-packed booths under florescent lighting. With 16 artists at Xavier Hufkens, it's all too easy to leave the gallery with a similar reaction: You know you saw some damn good stuff, you just can't remember what it was.

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