



**ART ON PAPER 2008**  
GREENSBORO, NC

For the 40th Art on Paper exhibition curator Kendra Eden has put together such varied work that almost every one of the seventy-five pieces on display—drawings, paintings, cutouts, collages, 3-D—requires a slightly different sensibility (Weatherspoon Museum of Art, October 19, 2008—January 25, 2009). Despite some expected simplicities, much of the biennial is subtle and complex. But for me, at least, the show raises an obvious question—is there something about art on paper that distinguishes it from work on other surfaces? Sometimes Elliott Hundley's striking assemblage *The Body of Polyborus*, 2008, enlists a host of materials, including paper. Other artists have employed other surfaces—even steel and aluminum—for similar work.

Paper is, however, almost inevitable in Michael Kauke's ironic *Mallock's Revenge (Portrait of Tom Phillips)*, 2008, where ink and graphite form streams of tiny letters that in turn create the portrait. The title, of course, refers to Tom Phillips' superb treated book *A NUMUMENT*, that plucks words and phrases out of W. H. Mallock's late Victorian novel *A Human Document* to construct a new tale within the novel as world. Kauke's lines return us to Mallock's original.

Will Yaskulic's *Metric Reversal*, 2008, was simply produced by typing asterisks and periods to create long parallel lines across a page. A thin wash of watercolor turns these rigid lines into flowing line and sky, a black gouache sun hangs opaquely in the upper half.

Some of the show's most inventive pieces were conjured by altering standard paper forms such as a business envelope and a pink doily. *Thermidor*, 2008, one of Dylan Graham's brilliant hand-cut paper cutouts, can be quite deceptive: seen from a slight distance, the interior of the oblong doily shape edgily by carefully crafted blossoms seems to contain a number of human-like figures. A closer view reveals the unmistakably savage outlines of the French guillotine, complete with bleeding heads.

But work on paper is not necessarily simple. Ebony G. Patterson's *Untitled (Breed from Ganges for Life)*, 2008, one of the most strikingly original pieces on view is part of a series that explores conflicts and parallels in Jamaican dancehall culture by yoking, as one puts it, "beauty and the grotesque," or beauty in the grotesque. Playing with the skin bleaching practice of young Jamaican males, she provides a ghostly, indeed ghastly, head whose whiteness is interrupted only by lightly penciled features and heavily glossed red lips—all surrounded by bright glitter, bright blossoms, and fish out of water. Canons of beauty and ugliness brace each other in Heather McGill's *Black Venus*, 2007, where tiny, dark versions of the *Venus of Willendorf* are delicately laser-cut and painted around openings to a lower layer of brightly lit flowers. The work glazes like a stained-glass window. Beauty and the grotesque merge even more tightly in Iina Merri's *Kaivan's Sheng-Lu*, 2007, where comic heads poke through clouds of blues, greens, browns, and reds that billow and tumble in a thoroughly unstable universe painted also roughly textured Korean mulberry paper.

Not surprisingly, many works seem to echo our currently dark national mood. In Tony De Las Reyes' somber red bistre diptych *Regus*, 2008, a vessel self-destructively breaks into splashes of paint. Black suns, seen in Yaskulic's piece, also rise in Thomas Hackett's *The Last Horizon*, 2008. Likewise in John O'Connor's *Appals*, 2008, where he has scrawled "Two Thousand and Thirty-Six," a reference to the year when, zettrometers predict, a meteor may slam into the Earth with the kind of force that once ended the age of dinosaurs.

Some pieces are more obviously political. Michael Elliot Smith's pen and ink *Violent Reaction*, 2007, exhibits the kind of serious comic playfulness we find in Peter Saul's work. So dense and lightly woven that we may require some time to separate its inked figures.

Cecilia Camacho de Las Flores' *Condoleeza's Rice*, 2008, contains some comic figures but is sparsely playful. Some abstractions partake of the same mood, in Danielle Tegoni's *Panorama-Cascade System of Destruction and Explosions*, 2007, for example: lines and forms move through and fracture space.

Eden also notes that work on paper may tend to be labor intensive. Adam Fowler's *Untitled*, 2007, for example, consists of fourteen layers of thin strings of grey hand-cut paper. The effect may not always be inspiring. On the other hand, Amy Myers' tall *Sailor's Constant*, 2007, with its sense of crystalline surfaces and depths, pulses with life. So too does the show as a whole.

—Max Halperin

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Blanca Comito, *Untitled*, 2008, watercolor and casein on paper, 27 x 22 inches (courtesy of the artist)

Tomory Dozga, *Cloud*, 2007, watercolor on rag paper, 18 x 12 inches (courtesy of the artist and ACME, Los Angeles)