

PHAIDON

Vitamin 2D: Karl Haendel

By Michele Grabner

May 2013

Karl Haendel engages the long process of language building. His exacting drawings are the idioms that he deploys to assemble his syntactical, room-filling installations and architectural display conceits. The result is a gathering of hand-drawn images that when selectively juxtaposed with each other form a visual analogy that is similar to literary enterprises. For example, clusters of varied graphite-wrought images suggest humorous self-deprecating free verse or complex prose punctuated with neologisms, metaphors and popular signs. More simply, Haendel uses his drawings as words and punctuation, referring to each drawing in his visual vocabulary as a 'concept/image/word'. In a recent installation, he inserts drawings of ampersands among irregular arrangements of imagery and signifiers. These logograms function as connective tissue for a range of picture-types that challenge the limitations and the attributes of the medium. Yet individually his drawings also command aesthetic and semiotic examination: as critical signs, gestures of unoriginal creativity, and as dimensional objects with densely worked carbon surfaces. With his dedication to dexterity and verisimilitude, he indulges in the perceptual pleasure of illusionism, regardless of composition and picture-type.  Haendel appropriates, copies and remakes images into new representations. These found images or photographs of found things are enlarged, often to near monumental scale when translated into drawings. They are always graphically rendered in the shades and tonal values intrinsic to black and white photography. They are also negligibly edited and cropped but rarely to the point where they could be mistaken for an original composition. As fodder for elasticizing representation, his ever-multiplying oeuvre of pencil renderings nevertheless resist all systems of classification. Neither indexical nor random, images of medieval knights, studio paraphernalia, kosher salt packaging, cartoons, explorers, broken mirrors, newspaper clippings, doodles, and hard-edge abstractions all stand ready to be pressed into service.  Labour is also content in Haendel's drawings. It is indicated in the scale, quantity and ambition of his project, and in the accumulation of line, the trace of the hand, and the physical build-up of graphite. Haendel's dedication to hard work, diligence and manual labour imbues his found and appropriated imagery, giving a tribute-like quality to many of his compositions. His slow and painstaking process evinced in each drawing correlates to his conviction in critical reading and active interpretation. We construct meaning, opinions and belief systems through the consumption of signs and images, and Haendel's drawing project slows down the process for us, exposing the bias and speed inherent in the information industry. At the same time, his drawings also underscore the pleasures of study and interpretation in a cultural field of infinite signs.

 Michelle Grabner

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2.



1. *Exclamation Point with Bullet Holes #1*, 2011. Pencil on paper, bullet holes and gunpowder residue, 76 × 56 cm
2. *Dr. Strangelove*, 2010. Pencil on folded paper, 165 × 131 cm
3. *Arab Spring*, 2012. Pencil on paper, 150 × 213 cm
4. *Thumbprint #12*, 2011. Crayon and enamel on paper, 145 × 114 cm
5. *Wedding Geometry #1*, 2012. Pencil on cut paper, 186 × 130 cm

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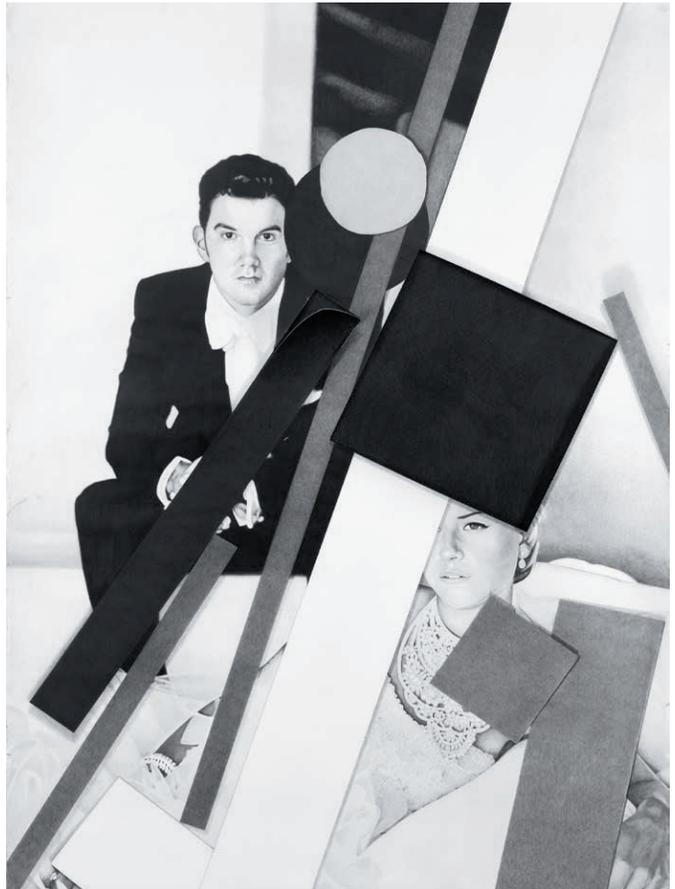


3.



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