

art ltd.



U.S. \$5.99/CAN \$6.99 May/June 2017
www.artitdmag.com

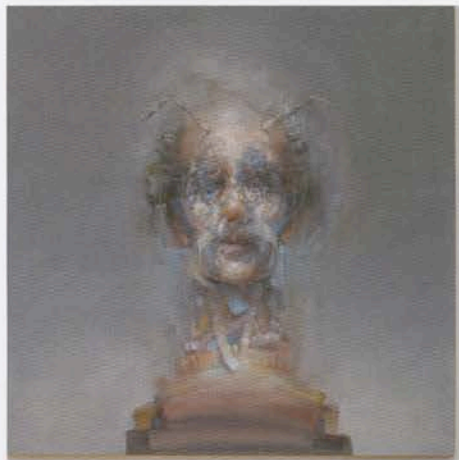


JASON RHOADES
PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS
FRANCIS CELENTANO
SANTA FE: CURRENTS
MARCIANO ART FOUNDATION
SEATTLE CRITIC'S PICKS

BAKERSFIELD, CA

**Stephen Douglas: "Paint + Process"
at Bakersfield Museum of Art**

The artworks in "Paint + Process" straddle the unwieldy divide between painting as a medium that is self-expressive and portraiture as a method in which painting is used to represent the most complex of phenomena, namely the human countenance. As human beings are wont to do, we scan the face of others avidly, looking for signs of all sorts. In more remote times, we sought to determine whether the visage facing us was a friend or foe, food or a predator. In more recent times, we look to determine gender, age, personality, character and degree of familiarity.



"AFTER KAFKA," 2014

Stephen Douglas

OIL ON LINEN, 38" X 38"

PHOTO: COURTESY THE ARTIST
AND BAKERSFIELD MUSEUM OF ART

Stephen Douglas's paintings pit these primordial imperatives against the exquisitely modern pursuit of painting as an autonomous means of expression. These imaginary portraits of his draw on years of realist work in order to create multi-tiered visual puzzles in which the pleasure of the paint handling and the exquisitely drawn out line or paint flurry congeal into a face, an apparition and leaves us to navigate the distance between these two very different means in which paint can be employed.

In a work such as *Waiting* (2014), the gaze in the portrait seems to come out and engage the viewer with a terrifyingly visceral vivacity yet it is clear that what it depicts is almost an archetype, which is to say an emblematic face. Another work titled *Ennui* (2015), alludes to as much in its overarching extension into the realm of human kind. Douglas's work is pervaded by a sense of empathy such that the viewer feels like a kind of X-ray vision into the human condition. At the same time, Douglas's craft carries the work to a level of virtuosity in which the gestures of drawn paint and the application of color are allowed their own entirely unbridled flow and intensity. That is the pleasure of "Paint + Process," and it is the basis of this artist's ongoing research. In one of the most telling works, *After Kafka* (2014), the metamorphosis and transmutation of a gray gorgeous face into an insect becomes an analogy to the way in which portraiture in paint and the use of paint as a uniquely expressive means unchained from the history

of representation, functions in Douglas's practice. His high-wire act is rife with tension and is as rewarding as any profoundly philosophical investigation can be. To be is not opposed to not to be, but rather it is split into to be something and to be something else almost entirely contradictory, all at once.

—JOHN DAVID O'BRIEN