



COURTESY LAUNCHPROJECTS

"Pixilated Gray Scale," left, and "Pixilated RGB," right, are Jennifer Marman's and Daniel Borins' recontextualized versions of an iconic modernist painting by Frank Stella.

ART STAR COUPLE

Canadian duo stir things up with provocative installations

The smart art partners Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins are Canadians, those nice folks along our northern border. While they operate within the legacies of the same North American cultural pool as the U.S., they have a built-in distance on the fractured, rambunctious, deconstructing behemoth to their south. Their current installation "Total Disinformation Awareness" uses the surveillance and information technology network of the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency as their organizing springboard. As I understand it, in the realm of privacy, Canadians like Europeans, have been more proactive enacting laws to govern the use and disclosure of personal information. In the name of preventing terrorist threats, our government uses private contractors (yikes!) to "harvest" (what a creepy word!) and store personal information on humongous databases including our phone calls, credit card usage, medical records, e-mails, social networking habits and who-really-knows-what-else, without permission, awareness, authorization or safeguards.

Two prominent works in this exhibition update the family hearth to our electronic age. Astutely exploiting the domestic character of LAUNCHPROJECTS, which is located in an old home on Palace Avenue, the Marman + Borins' team designed computerized cartoony eyes they dub "Google," using the name of a company so ubiquitous it has become a verb (as well as the business that capitulated to Chinese government censorship). Here "Google's" oversize eyeballs track visitors in the gallery's old drawing room space with a stuttering click, click, click. In addition to being ogled by idiot technology, the fireplace floor is filled with "Burning Books," a component comprised of a tray of burnt books in front of simulated electronic flames on a kinetic screen. This clever configuration of being watched from above while books are being consumed below speaks to the invasion of our homes by services and equipment we have bought, paid for and willingly install in the most private chambers of our houses.

The walls of this altered living room are hung with pristinely produced and beautifully presented flat works that include a group of four "Search List" variations. There is a typewritten list of names that most certainly get you a place on the government list as a "person of interest." Apparently, the artists began searching this alphabetical list and their computer crashed. There is also an "erased" list, a square Plexiglas box of shredded lists and a complete blacked-out solid graphite-on-paper square. Each is a knowing inside the art world nod to formalist modernist, minimalist and conceptual strategies.

An alcove is casually hung with black-and-white renderings of small-scale centrally placed images isolated on expanses of paper. These loose sheets of paper are predominantly head shots of "Bin Laden," anonymous masked figures; "Ratavan, Ratavan," with the war criminal Radovan Karadzic drawn as a dashing younger man and as a white-bearded, spectacled fugitive; and, "Parallax View," a posed Warren Beatty acting in the 1974

film about the Parallax Corp., an enterprise for political assassinations.

Through their years of collaboration Marman + Borins have often "quoted" and recontextualized Modernist paintings to highlight the gaps between the formalist vocabulary of a hermetic art world and the commercially designed and industrially built corporate world of popular culture. There are two versions of an iconic Frank Stella painting that was "Googled" and processed through the computer into very low-resolution square blocks of color — "Pixilated RGB," i.e., red, green and blue; and "Pixilated Gray Scale." The images are then translated back into paint using acrylic-on-board, resulting in surprising wider variation of value in the black-and-white interpretation. It is their practice to use the aesthetics of the subjects they critique. Because they are done with such care it does not come across as parody, but as a combination of intellectual inquiry, pushing limits, including the viewer as performer and, also, homage.

The burnt book theme extends into the second gallery at LAUNCHPROJECTS along with new subject-objects. Toy-like "Evidloers," rumply figures with battery-powered glowing red eyes come in white and black. The white model is a concession to local narratives and is called "Zozobra Remix," "Standing 15-inches high, these look like painted piles of excrement. One of them is placed in a faux cave constructed on-site from foam covered with an adobe coat and titled "Cave with Evidloer (after Magritte)." A favorite little construction is a teeny cave on a shelf that made me wonder whatever happened to Charles Simonds, a master of building miniature reconstructions of archeological sites.

Marman + Borins strike a note for creative collaborations in the lineage of the General Idea Media collection, Gilbert and George, Gilbert and Sullivan, Venturi and Brown. Both are Toronto natives, and they met in 1999 during their third year at the Ontario College of Art and Design. She was a graduate from Western Ontario University in philosophy, and he received his bachelor's degree in art history from McGill University. Anointed an "art star couple" by the Toronto Star in 2008, their relationship is now professional after starting out romantically. In the article they declared: "Any partnership is a fluid thing. But we've always found facing the world is an incredibly easy thing when we do it together."

They started coming to Santa Fe in 2005 as independent exhibitor/vendors in the Art Santa Fe fair, and have attracted an active group of patrons and promoters here. This is their first solo exhibition with LAUNCHPROJECTS and their provocative, savvy installation raises hope that they have blazed the trail for other deft and discriminating Toronto artists who like to stir things up.

If you go

WHAT: Jennifer Marman & Daniel Borins: "Total Disinformation Awareness"

WHERE: LAUNCHPROJECTS, 355 E. Palace Ave.

WHEN: Through Dec. 5

CONTACT: 505-670-9857 or www.launchprojects.com

Art Issues



MALIN WILSON-POWELL

For the Journal



"Evidloer" is a 2010 plastic foam, acrylic paint and electronic figure by Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins.