

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Andrew Kuo—*I'm Dyin' Over Here!*

April 4 – May 9, 2009

Opening reception Saturday, April 4th, 6-8 PM

For more information please contact info@taxterandspengemann.com

Okay. Andrew Kuo walks into a bar. Doesn't matter which one. Maybe the one where he used to be known as Mr. Feelings. That was back when he would stay out until closing time and end up all soggy from thinking about his dad or that epic break-up. Seems like these days he's more likely to start off grumpy and then get happy and then get fuzzy and then disappear. It's not a habit, exactly. More like a ritual. (Uh-oh. The dudes from the Hold Steady called. They want their lyrical formula back.)

Anyway: Andrew Kuo walks into a bar and orders some tequila. Actually, this will work better if it's not one of his usual bars, so say it's some weird place in some weird neighborhood where he doesn't know anyone. Which would be weird in itself, because usually it seems like he knows everyone, and everyone knows him, or thinks they do. When he's at home staring at his cats he's probably wishing he were at some bar making jokes about Lil Wayne and trying to figure out if that girl (which one?) likes him. And when he's out he probably wishes he were home, staring at his cats or watching the Big Five. (He spelled it out in an email the other day: "Travel Network, Food Network, Bravo, ESPN, and TNT.") Is he really that predictable? And so what if he is?

So Andrew Kuo is in this strange (but not weird, really) bar and he says, "Let me get three Jamesons, neat." He was all about tequila for a while -- Patrón, at first, then Herradura. But now he's back to whiskey. One day, he will analyze the correlation between his intake and his output. He will figure out exactly what he was drinking a few years ago, when he was mainly making these big, fancy-looking pieces out of layered paper, with abstract silk-screened patterns and a shit-ton of tiny holes cut out. He still does some of those. Cutouts, he calls them, and the main ingredients are patience and technique and time. Which means a cutout is another kind of ritual.

Back to the bar: Andrew Kuo is standing there, and he's got his three Jamesons, neat, and he looks like he just ordered a round for his friends, except he's by himself. He's thinking the same thoughts over and over. *God. I gotta make more shit. It's terrifying, man. I'm not stressed. I could live with a mediocre show. There's always other places to prove yourself.* Is that how he feels? Or is he working, trying to come up with text for his next piece? Those cutouts are secretly emo, but he felt like he needed to do something less secret, more obvious, so he decided to turn his feelings into scientific-looking graphs, with captions to tell you exactly what each colored bar or wedge stood for. He tries to be as accurate as possible, and sometimes he changes his mind, or fucks up. Most of his graphs include some corrections or revisions, as well as a date, which helps him keep track of what he was freaking out about when. (One afternoon in his studio, eating Chicken McNuggets, he said, "I feel myself repeating myself." He didn't sound bummed out.)

If you've seen any of those graphs then you can probably predict what happens next: Andrew Kuo is in this bar, and he picks up his first glass of Jameson and downs it like it was a shot. He notices that the bartender has noticed him, so he forces a smile and says, "You'd be pounding whiskey, too, if you had what I have." He has been making graphs for years, now. Sometimes he makes graphs about music for the newspaper, or for his blog. Recently he's gotten into using multiple graphs to create simple pictograms, which is sort of like doodling with a very big, very complicated pen. Two pie charts + one horizontal line graph (with data mapped out to resemble a flattened bell curve) = one frowny face. He's dyin' over there.

As soon as the first whiskey is gone, Andrew Kuo is downing the second one, and when the bartender says, "Wow," sounding impressed and maybe a little bit worried, Andrew Kuo just shrugs and says, "Hey, if you had what I've got, you'd drink like this, too." He was totally satisfied with those graphs, at first. In fact, he's still satisfied with them, but he started thinking about how they were a little bit indirect. What if, instead of making abstract shapes and telling people what they meant, he just started showing people things? What if he started painting pictures? He painted some pictures of his head. He painted a picture of that awkward night with his ex. He painted a picture of Minor Threat. He couldn't quite figure out what he was making, and why. He kind of hoped he never would.

Only one whiskey left, and Andrew Kuo kills it as quickly as he killed the first two. The bartender is like, "Are you okay man?" Andrew Kuo puts the empty glass back on the table and says, "You'd be pounding whiskey, too, if you had what I have." Wait -- that's what he said the first time. So maybe this time, he changes the wording a little bit. Maybe he says, "Yeah I'm fine. But this is the only way I can drink, considering what I have." Point is, he's saying the same thing over and over.

And the bartender finally takes the bait. "You keep saying that," he says. "So what do you have?"

"Two dollars," says Andrew Kuo. He puts the money on the bar and runs out the front door and runs all the way back to his studio.

Kelefa Sanneh
March, 2009



Andrew Kuo *Rodney Dangerfield's Last Breath*, 2009, acrylic on linen 11 x 14 inches