Galerie Daniel Buchholz

R.H. Quaytman
"Cherchez Holopherne, Chapter 21"

13 April – 25 June 2011
Opening reception on Wednesday, April 13, 6-9 pm

Arranged as if in appendix to the antiquarian bookstore to which this gallery is attached, R.H. Quaytman lays this exhibition out according to phenomenologies of the page, the illustration, the sentence and the grammar.

In the hyper-literate world we share with R.H. Quaytman we forget how literature is experienced from outside. From outside the code is a perfect index of an invisible unfolding complexity. Even in the illiteracy of our childhood the code is understood to contain content. But content is indistinguishable from the infinite space that contains it, a space we are cut off from by the wall of code. We cannot hope to know content in it's perfection, but we feel a certainty that the blank ground that holds it, at least, is real. The memory of this perspicuity of text is inscribed into every ordering or stringing together of symbols we behold after -- the invisible rooms ever opening behind the perfect flatness of the page.

When I was a librarian I once had a request for a particular 18th century children's book of "magic eye" illustrations, where, with the careful turn of the head, you're meant to find one easy-to-see image transformed into another previously invisible precisely-rendered image. There was a copy of the rare book at the Orne Library at Massachusetts' Miskatonic University. The Special Collections librarian I talked to knew the book well. "Too well," she said. She told me of one colored etching of innocent children in play. It took her a long time; she turned her head in just the wrong way and glimpsed the secret picture. She would not say what she saw there. She spoke only in general of the foulest, most despicable and debased imagery. She made a copy for a professor, but found that the copied page no longer showed the secret image. She searched again and again. "The frightening thing," she said, "was that the first image, of the rosy-lipped pink-nubbed cherubs dancing in a ring, now itself appeared to me a depiction of the purest evil." I can't say myself, as the book wasn't available for inter-library loan. I remember never trusting that the hidden images we managed to see in these sorts of illustrations when we were children were the correct images we were meant to see.

R.H. Quaytman's precise panels articulate what is ciphered as itself a code. The empty 2 dimensional field presents the archived past that engendered the revealed imagery to begin with. The rooms behind rooms are insistently galleries, each estheticizing a potential revelation of a room behind. Code is ciphered only to cipher a deeper code, and so on. Content's ground emerges from behind to before the painting, the very place we now occupy. There's a vertigo of depth when such a literary infinite is rendered so perfectly visual, a disorienting reversal of all available dimensions. It should be remembered in this regard, that in past chapters, Quaytman explicitly practices op-art and trompe-l'oueil.

I can't inform you here of the archival secrets of every image in this exhibition. I will however inform you that the representative women pictured are not necessarily real. Judith, for instance, that brown-eyed domina who seduced the chief Holofernes only to behead him, began her career as a Greek fiction inscribed into the Hebraic tradition at the service of medieval Christian interests. A disruptive and violent anomaly in poetry and art ever since, she is to this day excluded from the Jewish scriptures. Also Julia Scher, who posed to Quaytman's polaroid on these very premises with whip and veil not six months ago, is a well-known "surveillance artist" and performer.

Let me end by informing you, in the interest of no further disclosure, that I myself hold approximately 25 percent of my variable DNA in common with the artist. R.H. Quaytman has literally saved my life at least twice.

Mark von Schlegell