

KYLE BREITENBACH,
Kitty Corner

THE MEETING

FEB 10 – MAR 30, 2024

In *Kitty Corner*, a new presentation of recent paintings by Kyle Breitenbach, the viewer exchanges scrutinies with three large works, each incorporated by four rectangular panels done up in an inky monochrome. They are accompanied by two charcoal drawings that suggest preface and postscript to the tumultuously-stained works found in the main viewing area. Of these two drawings we will not speak again - their Vergilian qualities, acting as both insistent guide and annotator of the teeming shades, are plenty capable of finding a foothold amid the maelstrom. Setting these irrepressible vagabonds to one side, we confine ourselves to the survey of - if it be possible - the turbulent amplitudes of their painted choral brethren.

If the sensible world and our perception of it is conditioned on the premise that “squirring facts exceed the squamous mind” (as Wallace Stevens asserts in a poem dedicated to the spinning hierarchies of order and disorder in a world that is not entirely composed of, and so cannot entirely comprehend, either) then Breitenbach’s new paintings can likewise be classified among that order of elusive shadow-facts that outstrip our attempts to pin them to the mounting-board, to laconically identify them by their constitutive parts. While the various historically-appropriative modes of contemporary art-making can often feel like a visit to the curio-shop or the taxidermist’s storeroom, these paintings instead produce the dread experience of stumbling upon four sets of half-lit eyes in a pitch-dark wood; a grim series of crepuscular observers whose particulars of density and alignment give negative shape to the branch - invisible and yet maddeningly real - upon which they rest. And, here, in the dense murk of our cultural inheritance, we have been seen and marked. We are, after all, the latent afterimages of all recorded history; the fertile, incarnate bodies that continue to emerge in ceaseless montage from that seat of mute oblivion.

But where is the trick, the illusory silhouette, the hidden chamber that conceals the diminutive chessmaster? The elegant ruse is elided in favor of foregrounding the polydirectional legibility as the form-of-forms of these works, their species-being defined by the protolanguage, the fledgling tongue, of their manifold aspects. While the familiar devices of aesthetic consumption are directionally organized by the visible feed-wheels of the mindless scroll (*Y*, or vertical) and its heartless cousin-lover, the swipe (*X*, or horizontal), these works both engage and breach these conventions of trajectory by offering a counterpath to interested parties: that of a diagonal apprehension, an opening of the graphic field which can then be read both successively and simultaneously, an arcane ledger arrayed with the abstractions of calculi and entwined figuration that has largely remained the domain of puzzle-fiends and mercury-ridden astrologers.

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One might then be tempted to embark upon the blind route of explication, to simply append each image-cluster with a bit of interpretive scholia. But these paintings do not resist interpretation so much as they resist the errors that so often attend the more spurious clarities of artistic intention. The augmented sections of these works are instead tethered by *sensibility*, whose ken is the obscure and shifting forces of the subterranean provinces; those many-chambered foundations whose elastic, porous, and propulsive borders are themselves the mysterious, unsteady foothold of human experience. Transformation, divagation and reassemblage - these are the forces that rake the cinders during the passage of fire from one epoch to the next.

The painterly *laws of unconscious falsification* (the phrase is Muybridge's, discussing the failure of painting to accurately represent The Horse's one true gait) have been avoided, or spun to their own use - not by faithful duplication but on the strength of astute historical intervention. The ideal viewer, then, might take it upon themselves to invent a method of practicing nonlinear stratigraphy, or some such study that would better grasp the sediment and spray of this vaporous world in its physical, painted condition - for what appears to have been rendered with the velocity of a mass-printed, mass-assembled, mass-disseminated pamphlet, is applied by hand. The tactility of these paintings, their savor and weight, is embodied not in presence but in the transferential power of this encounter, as though the historical nightmare from which they were pried were but a shadow-play on the wall, acted out by the ink-stained fingers of the printer's apprentice. The abstract stain or printing-error becomes cinematic washout, conveying us bodily down the baffling path of wonderment.

And it is wonderment that remains the universal solvent for the encrusted mind. It might be said that - if not to our regret, then at least to our shame - we have largely anesthetized ourselves against the baroque pleasures of fascination. Wonderment, the twisting pinnacle of fascination, is that exceedingly-rare state of the human animal dissolving into curiosity. In its grasp we are regained in the joyous duties of association, that otherwise ephemeral quality of the psychedelic experience that one remembers, but cannot recall. So, if painting generally fails at accurately capturing the horse - in the way that a photographer or a sturdy piece of rope, expertly applied, can - then so be it. Being the desperate subject of a ceaselessly-shifting environment, we must accept certain limitations. But if painting fails to capture the smoking trace of human experience, then we must stub it out, once and for all. It is in the hand, then, finally - this hand, the hand at work, that scrapes and gathers, that gropes for what remains manifest in the riotous ashes of human experience - that the radiant cinders of that trace can be found.

—Patrick Allen, Thu, Jan 25, 10:24 PM

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Kyle Breitenbach, (b. 1992, Sleepy Hollow, NY) **Education:** BFA, Suny Purchase, Purchase, NY **Solo Exhibitions:** *When the Leaves Come Down*, Shrine, New York, NY, 2019 **Two Person Exhibitions:** *Go Where I am Going*, with Natalie Lerner, Left Field Gallery, Los Osos, CA, 2020 **Group Exhibitions:** *Heaven is a Different Thing*, Unclebrother, Hancock, NY, 2023, *Spielraum*, Cotyledon Projects, Los Angeles, CA, 2022, *Where Y was Thus Released*, Ampersand Gallery, Portland, OR, 2017. **Bibliography:** Heskes, Nicholas, “Kyle Breitenbach: When the Leaves Come Down”, Brooklyn Rail, September, 2019; Schneider, Tim, “Editors’ Pick: 19 Things Not to Miss in New York’s Art World This Week”, Artnet News, August, 2019 **Awards:** Ellen Battel Stoeckel Fellowship, 2013.