

BLADE STUDY

Paige K. B.

Of Course, You Realize, This Means War

May 4 – June 4, 2023

Paige K. B. is an artist and writer who works with painting, collage, and printing methods ranging from the traditional to the digital towards the fashioning of installations that treat authenticity, authorship, and the mythology of the artist like so many rocks to be turned over to expose other creatures, lovable or not, to the light. In this show she continues her exploration of character goods—the merchandising of fictional personae that accompanies a successful media property—into a new body of work that doesn’t so much recall her past ones as insist that, as in a body of water, it would be absurd to insist that one drop should be unique. Her dense, detail-oriented visual aesthetic is research-based and related to the established corpus of her published writing. Her practice darts between signifiers and genres while nodding greetings and salutations at the conventions of contemporary branding and medium specificity.

The centerpiece of this installation is an oil painting that compresses a range of material that could have become an essay into a visual composition where citations of images and texts—rendered by hand or printed out and worked into shape, some plebeian and some sophisticated, a few with contradictory political connotations—lose some of their unique information. This parallels what happens to a digital file for the purposes of circulation and ease of use. In a handmade artwork, a poor image becomes richly rendered once more through preservation and rebuilding, but there’s loss anyway. In gathering so much together, something has to give.

Six smaller paintings and collages on panels serve as that work’s “footnotes,” though their explicative function is here turned into more of a generative complication—like feedback. A few spoonfuls of distortion help the content go down. And if not, we’ll just gun it and have a Sugar Daddy candy bar anyway. Though hardly a dog whistle, the ideological wrapper of choice here is actually that of a book—its spine, netting, signatures, and covers of fine Prussian blue cloth. The paintings are studded with “comments” inline, including further exhibits below and all around, appended like wax seals or a tenderly yellow Post-It. Illuminating, like those old manuscripts, or just yellowed, like a faded note never heeded. *Pense-Bête*—do you remember? Please, he said, take my poetry—throw me a bone over here! Oh M. B., you were so sincere.

Some works here are signed with a single blue initial: P. This is self-promotion at minimum efficiency. The hubris smarts—only a real Prince could get away with that sort of singularity! Devoid of subject matter, the autograph is quaintly generic—just another letter from the alphabet, or a self in a world of selves competing for recognition. Many could identify with this character. Or, as the poet Arthur Rimbaud wrote in a letter to his teacher in May 1871: “I is someone else.”

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You may notice that it would be fair enough to say that this is a show of paintings. One could run with that story, just as many painters today seem to prefer retreading the plains of illusionistic space as if the past 70 years never happened. Listen, you can call Paige many things, but never ahistorical. Her works breed in a barnacled, fluid environment, sweet and acid like juices of certain fruits, open for business like wounds to be operated on. As Corita Kent said in her 1966 essay “Doors Are Like Letters Are Like Love,” these works exist “somewhere in between singing and silent reading, somewhere in between Gutenberg and the image industries.” The commercialism of today’s culture assigns value based on likeness to known quantities, ergo the artist uses techniques and signifiers of ye olde original means of mass reproduction, publishing—that is, transcription and editing of texts into layouts, the ISO-approved standard A4 paper size. Her artworks often rope in documentation of her output, resulting in an off-serial process that constellates toward the elsewhere that’s been dragged back into the house like some old dug-up bones placed expectantly at our feet. Thank you my boy, but don’t stare at me with those ground-up ZERO pigment eyes like black holes. Walk away instead, like a best friend.

The author of that essay with the famous Angel, Walter Benjamin articulated a materialist presentation of history, wherein “to write history, therefore means to *quote* history. But the concept of quotation implies that any given historical object must be ripped out of its context.” The rip, the tear, and the re-placement speak in a contemporary sense to the endless mutability demanded of artists in an economy where attention is king. Here’s the picture one way—don’t like it? Here it is again, same but different, like a two-way street, back and forth, now and then. The beat changes / same instrument. Turn out the lights and we’ll find yet another array of pictures glowing in the dark—this one goes out to all you Romantics out there. I can’t see them now, but it still feels like the cherry blossoms are fluttering down on my dethroned ass anyway. So play “I” in one person, many people.

I’m seeing a vertiginous vermillion all around this room—perhaps it’s 2012? Seems plausible, since it’s all over, as they keep saying. We’ve been through this before though—now the statement looks different, but the content is the same. Who would you be to tell me otherwise? *Noli me tangeri*! I was hoping to be seen by the fire but I might settle for a spell in a chair instead—my slippers are there at the foot, awaiting the feet I’ll be voting with. I’m jumping back a few thousand years now, but just to put this on the table: No more secrets, Anubis—that’s what you tried to say, sitting on a tomb just as a dog might. “We Need Decembers,” as Corita said in another essay, at least to have gotten to this point from which all will spring. ’Tis the season. It’s true. Or, true enough. And now, the eagle has flown—that’s all folks! Congratulations!

— Paige K. Bradley

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Paige K. B. is an artist and writer from Los Angeles based in New York. She studied at the California Institute of the Arts, the National College of Art & Design in Dublin, Ireland, and the Rhode Island School of Design, where she received a BFA in Printmaking. She has staged solo exhibitions at KAJE and Lubov and has been included in group exhibitions at Theta, Kai Matsumiya, and the Broodthaers Society of America, in addition to contributing to Canal Street Research Association's installation for the most recent iteration of "Greater New York" at MoMA PSi. Her work has appeared in the *New Yorker* and *Artforum*, and her writing has been featured in numerous publications and online platforms for the past decade including *Artforum*, *Frieze*, *Viscose*, *GARAGE*, *Topical Cream*, and *Spike*. She authored the monograph *Suellen Rocca: In Dreams, The Last Works* (Matthew Marks, 2022) and has a new essay in a forthcoming catalogue from the Swiss Institute. A long-form article on text-based artworks by Jay Chung and Q Takeki Maeda, Vanessa Place, and Jack Goldstein will be co-published in French by the FRAC Lorraine (France) and mfc-michele didier (Belgium), as well as in an English edition by SIG-Verlag (Germany). In the past year, she has been included in readings at the Drawing Center, organized by art historian and critic Alex Kitnick, and at Artists Space, as part of the prestigious Segue reading series for poetry organized by curators Jay Sanders and Stella Cilman. The artist will also take part in a group show at Simone Subal opening near the end of May.

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