

Meliksetian MB Briggs



Editorial : Features

**John Miller**

**New Horizon**

Meliksetian | Briggs, Dallas, Texas

Review by John Zotos

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John Miller began his career during the era of the “pictures generation.” This survey conveys his outright disdain for the limits of abstraction's refusal to acknowledge social and political conditions that are inescapable.

This forty-year survey explores the varied artistic production of John Miller, an artist associated with the scene at the California Institute of the Arts during the 1970's. His peers from that period, Mike Kelley and Jim Shaw, have reached a high level of notoriety, if not fame, which has eluded Miller, despite his prolific output. This museum quality exhibition argues that he should garner a higher level of recognition and visibility. It brings together representative examples drawn from several bodies of work. In works on paper, paintings, sculpture, and photo-based images, works that date from the late 1980's to the present are on view.

Miller began his career during the era of the “pictures generation” from which he developed his particular approach to figures and social spaces, as well as a pointedly critical approach to the nature of representation. His outright disdain for the limits of abstraction is evident in “Untitled” (1987), where a vertical canvas monolith, painted in his signature burnt sienna brown, exudes a scatological critique of the style and its pretensions to represent authenticity, the artist's subjectivity, and an “art for art's sake” evacuated from the social and political conditions that, he suggests, are completely inescapable.

Sienna brown appears again in new photo-based inkjet on canvas prints, where the impasto rectangles, here a mixture of modeling paste and acrylic, disrupt and

# Meliksetian MB Briggs

soil the spaces they occupy. In “The Set of Facts He Expects to Control” (2021) these additions to a conventional photograph of a contemporary building and European car shatter the composition.

In “Sustained in a Continuing Calm” (2021) twenty of the sienna rectangles in four rows with five each take a position that mirrors an imaginary perspectival wall surging toward a vanishing point, short circuiting the view of a contemporary cityscape where glass skyscrapers, representations of financial power, vie for our attention, such that Miller’s sense of disruptive irony holds sway.

A site-specific piece titled “Reflection” (2023), with its floor to ceiling scale, takes up an entire wall. Here the image is composed of photographs Miller has accumulated over the years in his ever-expanding image archive. To the left two sections, each different, of a deteriorating wall enclose an image of urban buildings with an abandoned lot and some trees at street level. To the right another pristine, but cheap looking, wall-veneer has a circular mirror which reflects a distorted image of another social space that includes Korean signage and another empty lot.

This playful puzzle interacts visually via the circle motif with two other images on a separate wall to the right, a digitally printed painting “Learning to Cope” (1999), and “Stasis” (2017), a painting in latex with an acrylic coating. Both mount a critique of consumer capitalism that zeroes in on the game show phenomenon, in this case the “Price is Right.” In the former, a mandala format

# Meliksetian MB Briggs

features both the repetitive figure of a contestant and multicolored pills, suggesting a drug induced state of mind. In the latter, a double- screen-within-a-screen format depicts the game as a TV screen superimposed over a bisected reality. We are positioned as part of an unseen audience watching the goings on, eagerly expecting their fantasies to come true.

Miller's interventions, editing, and splicing techniques destabilize images of power, rendering a critique of representation and cultural value systems. For this, his first show in Texas, the curators have presented an engaging and challenging exhibition that's both timely and thoughtful.

[Link to website](#)