



ART REVIEW: Brian Gaman Prints Occupy Space between Images and Objects

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by Eric Ernst

In the sculptures and photographic pigment prints of the late Brian Gaman currently on display at the [Parrish Art Museum](#), the artist offers a type of abstraction that is distinctive in its evocation of powerfully atmospheric emotional echoes.

But what is particularly interesting is that the prints are images derived from actual objects, so their relationship to pure abstraction becomes a bit murkier than most non-figurative approaches. The reason for this can be traced to Gaman's creative process, which entailed digitally scanning his own photographs and then enlarging them on a massive scale until their original physical subjects became only tangentially recognizable.

As a result, the images' relationship to their original objective source becomes distorted: they become a manifestation of creative capriciousness while maintaining elements of their original corporeal configuration. In this way, the prints on view transcend the somewhat limiting constraints of pure nonrepresentationalism. They embody Brancusi's observation that "that which they call abstract is the most realistic, because what is real is not the exterior but the idea, the essence of things."

Further, beyond blurring the boundaries between abstract and figurative impulses, Gaman's insistence on developing an ambiguous picture plane also serves to force the viewer to find new avenues of pictorial interpretation. This allows for disparate connections to emerge that liberate the act of "seeing," shifting from a dependence on form and substituting instead a psychological framework that then dictates a work's particular emotive impact.

In essence, the artist is channeling both [Andre Kertesz](#)'s admonition that "seeing is not enough; you have to feel what you photograph" as well as [Willem de Kooning](#)'s observation that "content is a glimpse."

This effect is particularly apparent in those works in which the artist scanned photographs of bottles and then enlarged them to the point that, absent the titles, it would be difficult to determine what their original physical subject might have been.

In three works that carry the same title, *Untitled (Bottle Scan) 2002* (pigment print on watercolor paper), there is no indication of the images' derivation. On the other hand, in *Untitled (Bottle Scan) 2005-2010* (digital pigment on watercolor paper), enough of the bottle shape and label is visible to allow a hint as to the subject, even as the shadows and distorted imagery maintain an overwhelming air of mystery and visual ambiguity in the composition itself.



“Untitled (Bottle Scan) 2002” by Brian Gaman. Pigment print on watercolor paper.



“Untitled (Bottle Scan) 2005-2010” by Brian Gaman. Pigment print on watercolor paper.

This subjective indistinctness is even more apparent in works such as *Untitled 2011* (pigment print on paper), *Untitled 2008* (pigment print on paper), and *Untitled 2009* (pigment print on paper), all of which carry an enigmatically hazy atmosphere and are reminiscent, by turns, of either dark clouds or Rorschach drawings.



“Untitled 2011” by Brian Gaman. Pigment print on paper.



“Untitled 2008” by Brian Gaman. Pigment print on paper.

In other works, by contrast, Gaman introduces elements of geometric influences that echo [Ad Reinhardt](#)’s black paintings from the 1950s in pieces such as *Untitled 2014* (pigment print on canvas). And *Untitled 2011* (pigment print on paper, two sheets) carries profoundly architectonic overtones that call to mind aspects of the external curved walls of Frank Lloyd Wright’s [Guggenheim Museum](#) in New York.



“Untitled 2014” by Brian Gaman. Pigment print on paper.



"Untitled 2011" by Brian Gaman. Pigment print on paper.

In the sculptural works on view at the Parrish, the artist maintains his air of atmospherically enigmatic opacity. The works hint at aspects of form and interaction that liberate them from sheer "objecthood."

These pieces may have elements that allow the viewer to correlate them with objects they resemble. Still, the aesthetic conversations they instigate between themselves and the viewer continually raise questions that transcend narrative and instead allow emotion to determine the response. This kind of narrative transcendence seems particularly clear in such works as *Untitled 1998* (sand cast aluminum), *Untitled 1987* (cast aluminum), *Untitled 1989-90* (glass and steel), and *Studio Installation 1987* (cast iron, aluminum, and steel).



"Untitled 1998" by Brian Gaman. Sand cast aluminum.



"Studio Installation 1987" by Brian Gaman. Cast Iron, aluminum and steel.

BASIC FACTS: "Brian Gaman: Vanishing Point" is exhibited March 13 to April 24, 2016 at the Parrish Art Museum, 279 Montauk Highway, Water Mill, NY 11976. www.parrishart.org.

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