

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?

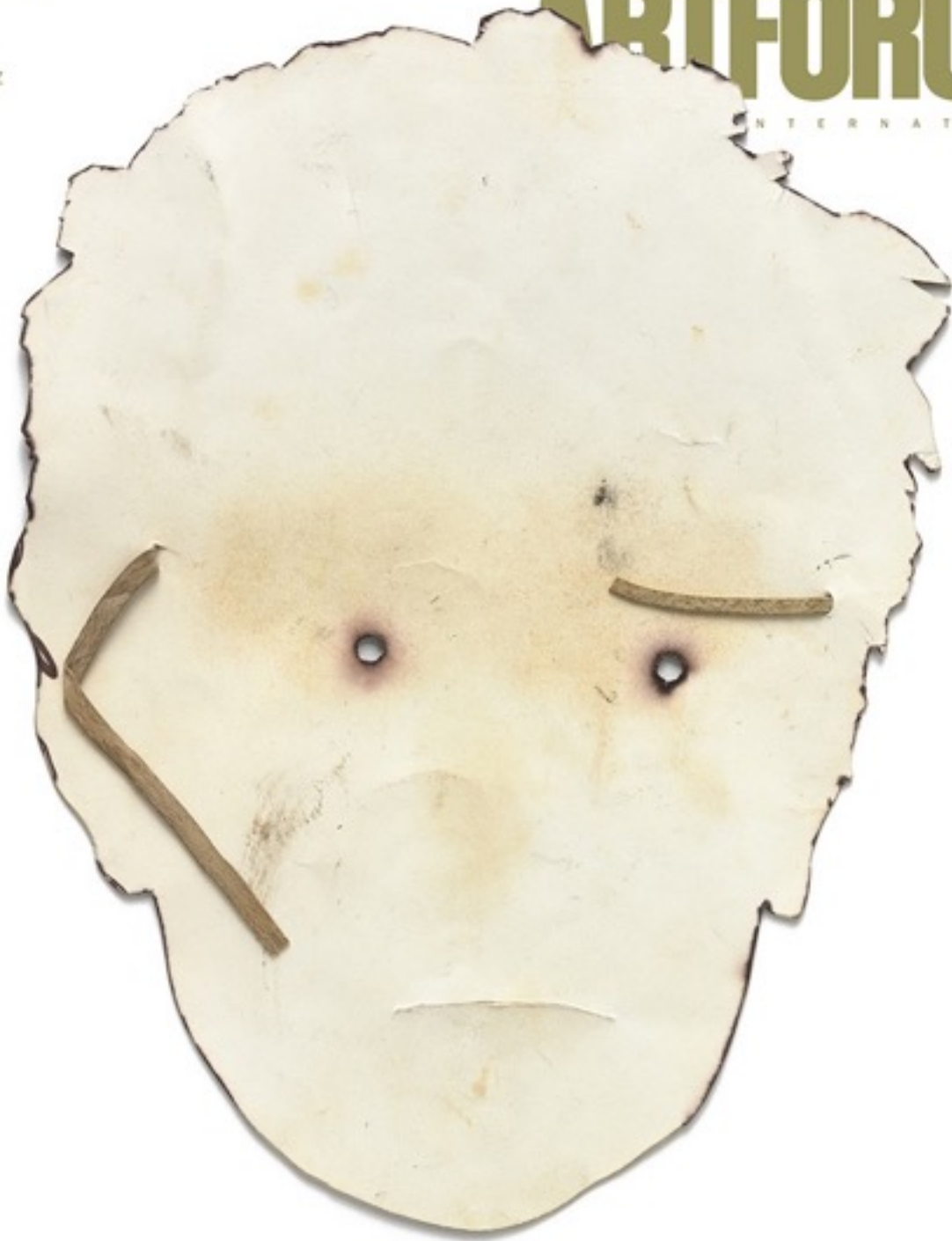
TEXAS ISAIAH

ADELITA HUSNI-BEY

DAVID WOJNAROWICZ

ARTFORUM

INTERNATIONAL



Zoe Pettijohn Schade

KAI MATSUMIYA

The seven densely layered paintings on paper that made up Zoe Pettijohn Schade's exhibition "Shifting Sets" produced a distinctly disorienting effect, especially since the works themselves, all sixty by forty inches, were hung close together in Kai Matsumiya's small storefront space. There was something dizzying about their shifting patterns, and about the way so many of the multitudinous images out of which those patterns are formed seemed to want to jump out and fix themselves in the viewer's gaze as individually significant; they kept the viewer's eye and mind off-balance. In some ways, Pettijohn Schade is reviving ideas previously broached by the artists of the Pattern and Decoration movement of the 1970s. But whereas most of their work was high-spirited and celebratory, she finds darker, more complicated overtones in her decorative structures.

The works on view were the culmination of the artist's practice since 2005; her previous show at this gallery, "Crowds" (2015), consisted of sixteen-by-twenty-two-inch preparatory pieces for those in this exhibition alongside a selection of smaller works. Inspired by eighteenth-century French gouaches that served as prototypes for textiles, Pettijohn Schade's patterns are likewise rendered primarily in gouache, though at first glance one might think they've been printed. She layers and interweaves her patterns so tightly that it becomes impossible to disentangle



Zoe Pettijohn Schade, *Rainbow Tornado*, 2008, gouache, silver leaf, and composite leaf on paper, 60 x 40".

of a monkey was elucidated only by the artist's explanation that this figure was drawn from direct observation of a taxidermy exhibit at a natural-history museum. The point of Pettijohn Schade's juxtapositions and repetitions is not narrative, but both associative and formal. She describes *Rainbow Tornado*, 2008—in which the unraveling paper flowers appear—as a sequence "of embedded shudders, or skips in the way the layers repeat. The deepest landscape layer is most affected, and as the floating layers ascend to the surface, the disturbance is dissipated. The final layer . . . is perfectly stable." That's not to say that surface stability represents a point of resolution; the viewer takes away a sense of the underlying "shudders," which appear like a visual equivalent of glitch music. The smooth, reassuring rhythm of the simple pattern of O's and X's laid on top is equable witness to the fact that any sense of disturbance is no accident.

figure from ground. There is a visual pulse in accordance with which elements come to the fore and recede, but all this occurs in the eye of the beholder. The compositions can also feel claustrophobic, as if each frame were stuffed full, like an attic crammed with too many years' castoffs. Yet in the next moment, a lot of air seems to rush in, and one realizes how much space can be perceived between one superimposed layer and the next. I was reminded of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "new molecular philosophy," which "shows astronomical interspaces betwixt atom and atom, shows that the world is all outside: It has no inside." A visual systole/diastole keeps these works alive.

The imagery that vibrates throughout these pieces is disparate. A feather can exist on the same scale as a cityscape; a phalanx of soldiers aiming their rifles is no more or less disconcerting than a hypnotic moiré pattern; unraveling paper flowers reveal their artifice. The peculiarly expressive yet dead-eyed look

—Barry Schwabsky