



CANVAS

04/20/05

The Many Faces of Shopping Carts, or the Elegant Insect

Julian Montague at the Black and White Gallery

Stories by Rachel Hyman



Taxonomies, the first New York solo show of Buffalo-based artist Julian Montague at Black and White gallery, explores themes of classification, ruin, and decay. The exhibition includes two groups of related work: 6 inkjet prints of insect work, and selections from the Stray Shopping Cart Project, composed of two found sculptures and 14 prints.

Montague developed a system for classifying stray shopping carts and illustrated the method with photographs. The mock-science of the project allows for a large variety of subject matter in a singular context. Within the system of labeling, the shopping carts become metaphors for a large range of topics: the dilemmas of relocation, excesses of consumer culture, incorporation of trash in natural settings, among others. Montague uses a constant composition, but wide ranging palettes and varied elements allow entirely different aesthetic experiences for each piece. In several of the prints, the decaying natural elements (of riverbeds and creeks where the carts were disposed of) juxtapose with the geometric cart bodies, but to different ends for the viewer.

One cart emerges from a riverbed covered in silt and debris, humorously presenting itself as a B-movie monster gawking at a camera. In another photo, the tone is much darker as the back right wheel of a cart emerges from a water skin covered in weary reflections of bare trees, while beneath the water, other rusting pieces of machines - a car door, tire, pieces of metal- resonate a certain despair in a culture of neglect. Throughout the series,

the anthropomorphized carts range in humorous and telling narratives, accompanied by the coding system of Montague's classifications.

The insect prints detach from the narrative of the shopping carts, and engage a flat elegant overlaying of delicate lines. The dark brown forms are centered on either a light tan or baby blue background, with white delineation of the bug's forms. They are layered atop each other; often creating a density that requests the viewer's time to decipher all the forms. Montague derives all these pieces from the same seven insect shapes, which he scanned and combined in digital mediums. The elegant movements of the insect forms, and the many shapes created by their integration, create larger more grotesque insects - a wing of one emerges from the dominant form, offsetting the symmetry of the composition; in another piece, a thick, dangerous density of the composite implies the creature's implosion.

In the gallery, one cannot and should not divorce the series of insects from the series of stray shopping carts. The insects are familiar objects of classification and taxonomy, which add to the legitimacy of the taxonomic research of the carts; utilizing similar composition and scale, the two sets echo across the gallery space. The role of insects to decompose refuse in nature refutes itself with the carts - which will never fully decompose, but only pile up at the edges of terrain, accenting neglect and vandalism of nature in consumer culture. The critique of cultural decay, as presented by the marginalized voices of shopping carts and bugs, engenders a vast commentary on all encompassing classifications within collapsing systems of social order. The show, most importantly, is subtle, pleasing to look at, gruesome, and, at times, even funny. It will be on view at the Black and White Gallery, located at 483 Driggs Ave, until April 25th.