



Stephen Prina, *Exquisite Corpse: The Complete Paintings of Manet*, 216 of 556, *Bal Masqué à l'Opéra et Polichinelle I*, (Masked Ball at the Opera with Punchinello), 1873, Mrs. Horace Havemeyer Collection, New York, April 4, 2009, Left panel: Ink wash on rag; Framed size: 27 1/8 x 32 3/8 inches, Right panel: Offset lithography on paper;

BOSTON

Stephen Prina

BARBARA KRAKOW GALLERY

Stephen Prina suspended five lushly painted, fifteen-foot-long window blinds from the ceiling in his recent show, so that no matter where one stood, at least some of the work was hidden from view. Even the gallery staff were obscured, partly blocked by a burnt orange, sponge-painted blind adjusted so that it hung about an inch above the reception desk. These barriers—whose repeated diagonal strokes transformed them into postpainterly abstractions in their own right—were key to the show, which suggested that concealment can, paradoxically, be revealing.

Prina is known to work in series, which he adds to over extended periods of time. And here, near a pair of violet and green blinds, were three new diptychs augmenting the series “*Exquisite Corpse: The Complete Paintings of Manet*,” begun in 1988. The right panel is the same in each: a framed lithographic print with a grid of 555 small light tan rectangles of varied lengths and widths, and a single miniature silhouette of a painter’s palette. These tiny units each correspond to an entry from a Manet catalogue raisonné published in the 1960s, and hold the same, though highly scaled down, dimensions as an original work. To the left of each lithograph—the second part of the diptych—is a monochrome ink wash related to one of the 556 entries that, while denying us any of Manet’s actual pictorial content, replicates exactly its respective piece’s dimensions. The three diptychs displayed here related to entries 216, 217, and 218: Manet’s 1873–74 painting *Masked Ball at the Opera* and two related studies. And the

three diptychs, in turn, form the basis for another set of works located elsewhere in the gallery. Made simply by stretching cord around brass pins set into the wall, the pieces each comprise two rectangles whose dimensions are identical to their corresponding framed original.

Made with a strategy of erasure, these six works exhibit a close relationship to Belgian conceptualist Marcel Broodthaers’s *Un Coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* (A Cast of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance), 1969, a work for which he effaced the words in a book of Mallarmé’s poems, leaving only the typographic layout marked with solid black bands. Significantly, and unlike Broodthaers’s piece, Prina’s diptychs are not based on the originals, but on information taken from a catalogue raisonné considered by contemporary scholars to be out-of-date. An inspiration here, as suggested by the works’ titles, is the Surrealist game of *Exquisite Corpse*, where one artist would create a new work based on an incomplete view of another’s. Likewise, these diptychs rise from an obsolete rendering of Manet’s oeuvre.

Installed in clear sight was the poster *The Way He Always Wanted It, V* (Kunstthalle Baden-Baden 2008), 2009, where off-white capital letters, superimposed on a photograph depicting the remains of Prina’s work from another show, announce screening times and locations for the artist’s new film, *The Way He Always Wanted It II*, 2008. Although listed as the last of the eleven works on the checklist, the film was never on view at the gallery but was screened at the Harvard Film Archive on May 3. An homage to Bruce Goff (1904–1982), it is set in the unorthodox composer and architect’s podlike Ford House (1947) and lays a sound track, with lyrics sung by Prina, over views of the home’s first floor. The film’s focus on only a portion of the house is analogous to the blinds’ concealment of Barbara Krakow Gallery—which, in turn, afforded a fragmented view of works based on an incomplete record of Manet’s catalogue. With its layers of elision, the show gave an excellent perspective on Prina’s complex love affair with avant-garde art, its documentation, and its afterlife.

—Francine Koslow Miller

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