

ART PAPERS

Fall 2017

Stefan Tcherepnin: *Forgetting* Paul Anthony Smith: *Walls Without Borders*

Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta

Excerpt:

[...] Paul Anthony Smith's *Walls Without Borders* presented works that were high in labor and production value. Smith's idiosyncratic approach to art-making first involves producing or sourcing photographs from the places he has lived— sometimes these images are family snapshots, sometimes raucous disposable camera shots taken in his Brooklyn neighborhood during long, daily walks into Manhattan and back. Once scanned, reworked, and broken down into new collages via Photoshop, Smith then prints these new hybrid pictures, and meticulously etches their surfaces, transforming these deeply personal, almost scrapbook-like images with elaborate geometric patterns reminiscent of quilts or brick walls. This picotage technique creates a screen over his photographs, protecting or disguising the layers between the subject and viewer of the work, and allowing Smith to both share and withhold his personal experiences.

Exhibited behind glass in neat frames, these works nonetheless maintain the obsessive, even frenetic energy of their making, and perhaps of the scenes depicted therein. Bits of paper and shards of images dust the bottom of the inside of the frame like white flecks on the floor of a dormant snow globe. Architectural memory and urban development are leitmotifs throughout Smith's works as they record the rapid gentrification of the artist's home country (Jamaica) and home borough (Brooklyn) by tracing the ubiquitous, stark patterns of bricks and building walls, or the decorative ironwork typical of both locales. The building materials and architectural forms present in *Walls Without Borders* become signifiers of identity and memory in an exhibition whose very title alludes to the transcendence of these things—that is, to the ability of the essence of a person or place to move unrestricted by boundaries, simply through recollection. Through his picotage, Smith seems to propose that we perforate the walls that enclose our environments and movements, and ask architecture to perform with the flexibility of memory, to become fluid so as to better slip the restraints of the class difference and structural racism built into our cities' plans. Would such a liquid architecture cause landlords and developers to morph, or to disappear? I would hope so.

– Erin Jane Nelson



Above: Paul Anthony Smith, *Blurred Lines, (Beads3) Black/Olive Green*, 2017, Oil stick on canvas with acrylic beads, 96 x 66 x 8 inches [courtesy of the artist and Atlanta Contemporary]