

No News Is Good News

By Jeffrey Edalatpour

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The work of Dashiell Manley takes on media



In the aftermath of the 2016 election, Dashiell Manley's work seems prescient.

The artist Dashiell Manley paints the front page of yesterday's newspaper as a blurry, baffling mess. In other words, he reveals a collection of faded headlines for what they are. In the exhibit *New to the Cantor: Dashiell Manley*, this "front page" series of watercolor pencils on canvas convey, at once, a literal and a figurative sense of a newspaper's psychic and physical decay. This institutional rot was made manifestly clear during this year's rancorous political season.

The headlines and social media outbursts (which regularly post as undisguised opinion mongering instead of verifiable fact) are now saturated with hyperbole and the deliberately misleading rhetoric of fake news, that even despite the election having ended, now shows no sign of stopping. Post-truth is, in fact, the word of the year that defined America's incurious acceptance of every malevolent utterance sent like furious spitballs from the bully pulpit.

On 8-foot-tall canvases, Manley, who has an MFA from UCLA and a BFA from the California Institute of the Arts, incorporates a day of those headlines into this series of paintings. *The New York Times, Thursday October 2 2014, national edition Southern California (front page) 2016* contains washes of plum, violet and black. The words themselves are randomly handwritten, horizontally and vertically, and mostly illegible, as intended. The overall effect evokes a Japanese watercolor made in the aftermath of a tsunami. The muted

palettes are the same. The tendency toward chaos and muddled abstraction is not.

Manley again attempts to distort the meaning of media in the second of three series in the show: *Various sources (quiet satires)*. On large white backgrounds, he reproduces cartoon images from newspapers on uneven pop-colored grids. He's adapted some of Basquiat's lines and squiggles but without his dynamism or intent. Unlike the text-based paintings, Manley doesn't make the cartoons his own. They sit statically on the canvas neither speaking to each other or the viewer. If they're simply jokes turned upside down, they remain woefully unexplained.

In a departure from the media focused work, the *Elegy for whatever* paintings are lovely experiments in impasto. (*a haystack lit from the back*) 2016 is not unlike a densely arranged collage. The association with the word haystack may be a stretch, but if you squint and turn your head at the right angle, the colors of sky and field merge and emerge from all those heavy stacks of oil. Manley has even made one in jet black (*untitled elegy*) 2016. The elegy series is the newest, so it could be an elegy for the news industrial complex. But it also reminded me of the darkest Rembrandt etchings across the hall. Someday Manley might reveal the story hiding underneath all that black.

New to the Cantor: Dashiell Manley

Thru Apr 24, Free

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