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Starsky Brines: Bestiary

Félix Suazo · 2010

English translation for the artist's website. Original text in Spanish.

"You are no longer linen, humble plane, canvas."

Rafael Alberti

In its current iteration, the work of Starsky Brines (Caracas, 1977) paradoxically links different media, including photography, painting and drawing. Here, images are appropriated from printed publications and promotional material from the film industry, then worked over, digitized and copied. Following this initial metamorphosis, the selected motifs—generally faces and figures, although also interior scenes and panoramic views—may undergo further modifications, so that a process of technical reproduction leads to a unique work rather than multiple copies.

The matter becomes more complicated as soon as the viewer realizes that some of the "original" images depict film stars, even though their faces have been smudged or literally scribbled over. This is, of course, a practice akin to defacing street posters: adding moustaches to advertising models, lengthening electoral candidates' noses or erasing the smiles of corporate idols. These are deformed portraits with incongruous features—horns, snouts, wings—whose identity remains hidden or partially visible within a palimpsest of lines and stains.

These works imply a narrative, an effect produced by making use of the captions accompanying the appropriated images and reinforced by occasional annotations and written marks. Brines's characters thus appear to inhabit a separate universe, cut off from their immediate surroundings and immersed in events known only to them. Their stories unfold in a space-time limbo governed by extreme impulses that fluctuate between comedy and drama.

Despite a severely restricted palette, limited largely to black, white and a few other tones, the logic of the pictorial discourse retains its expressive force, subverting the mirror-like fidelity of photographic representation. There, in that play of crossings-out and absurd apparitions, instinct prevails over appearances. Consequently, the attributes and meanings of the underlying images are left at the mercy of brushstrokes and drawn marks, while the eye—that instrument of sensitive discrimination—revels in the surface's virtual thickness, attempting to decipher the meaning of forms.

Ultimately, staining or scratching other people's photographs has a double connotation. On the one hand, it can be understood as an exercise in the symbolic demolition of the signifier; on the other, as an extended manifestation of the form-making gesture. In both cases, however, the consequences fall upon the image, that generative stronghold where certainty and doubt coexist in prolonged tension. Faced with this dilemma, Brines's works lead to another question that is never resolved: humans or beasts?

Caracas, September 2010