



Terry Braunstein, *Garbage-can Man*, 2009, mixed-media installation, 13' x 22' x 10'.
Courtesy the artist.

Terry Braunstein: Station Identification

El Camino College Art Gallery, Torrance

Terry Braunstein: Time Bound

Craig Krull Gallery, Santa Monica

Braunstein's exhibitions — the Craig Krull show featuring companion micro-vignettes to the full-scale realizations at El Camino College — offered plum front row tickets to her visual recitation of a life journey. In her mixed-media works, collages, and assemblages, Braunstein's observations of life's passages unfold like mini-mythologies. Her astute reflections are rendered with a reassuring compassion and charming humor. Her fanciful, semi-surrealistic vignettes and miniature and life-size tableaux stir up the unconscious and hold our hand as we join her traipsing through the beautiful morass that is the human condition.

The piece *Station Identification* set the stage for the El Camino survey. A grid of photo-collages plays out in three acts, "Loss of Innocence," "Encountering Mortality," and "The Return." These episodes are Braunstein's leitmotives, and in theme and variation the work reflects on disillusionment with Edenistic notions and the push-pull realities of our myriad roles and relationships. Braunstein may create elegant objects of contemplation from which we can draw our own conclusions, but the work contains an unspoken warning: proceed with caution when myth becomes authority; "truth" will be lost in translation.

In her earlier collages, photomontages, and gorgeous reconfigurations of books that question the sacred nature of dogma, Braunstein cuts in and through images and objects, tearing them apart and gracefully reassembling them on a smaller scale. The more recent, full-size 3-D pieces almost envelop the viewer into the depicted scenarios. All her work depends upon a captivating process of observation. There is no separation between subject and object, viewer and viewed. In many cases her figures have their backs to us and we feel as if we have sidled up beside them to experience the parable at hand. Sometimes the figures are diminutive, bit characters in a larger drama; at other times they perform grandly.

— Ashley McLean Emenegger

Nick Lawrence: Notes From the Underground

Angstrom Gallery, Los Angeles

The title given this prolific presentation of East Coast painter Nick Lawrence's work, mostly from 1997 and the last three years, a blistering hundred-page rant by a disgruntled, alienated narrator, references Fyodor Dostoyevsky's 1864 *Notes from Underground*, regarded as the first existentialist novel. Dostoyevsky's protagonist begins, "I am a sick man . . . I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man. I know nothing at all about my disease . . ."

In Lawrence's case, the disease is being an artist. The symptoms reveal an aggressive case: twenty-five years of daily mark-making, gesturing, and messing with media. There is a history here of mutations, invisible problem-solving, and grumpy investigations, catalogued for all to see. There is no antidote and no exit; the habit of making art sets in and takes over.

Lawrence's more recent canvases display less aesthetic cohesion than the more designed, more thickly painted 1997 works. His art practice is taking him further and further from the light of day. Meandering ink trails are filled in with thin, quick, deliberate gestures. No more avocado-green suggestions of landscape. The trajectory of Lawrence's notes is increasingly dark and tedious. Muted oranges filled with Xerox-orb cutouts in black lines *do* feel like notes. They are interesting in the way a sketch is interesting: how do ideas begin, and how many times must an artist work them out before a clarity in purpose is found? In the disease of painting, it takes a lifetime. I wanted to see all the later works on paper, holding true to a history of note-taking, memoir-making, staining paper and moving off a history of the painted canvas.

Compelled to look at Dostoyevsky's text, I read, "My harassed face struck me as revolting in the extreme, pale, angry, abject, with disheveled hair. 'No matter, I am glad of it,' I thought; 'I am glad that I shall seem repulsive . . .'" Similarly, Lawrence's world catches us in a loop of purposeful daily disenchantment.

— Ceres Madoo



Nick Lawrence, *Baboon*, 2009, oil mixed media on canvas, 36" x 36".
Courtesy the artist and Angstrom Gallery. Photo Kevin Thomas.