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Post Internet

Notes on the Internet and Art
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Poster Company is the duo of Travess Smalley and Max Pitegoff.

They operate a photostream on Flickr displaying over 200 abstract digital paintings and they've showed this work in a group show at Foxy Gallery as posters tacked to the wall.

They have created an important strategy for making paintings in the world after the Internet.

Digital imaging converges as much previous visual media as it can handle—painting, photo, film, video, animation, print-making, newspaper, etc.—and creates automatic simulations of gestures that "read" as these media. For instance, the "film grain" look or "sun flare" effect or the "spray paint" tool.

These digital effects, though, take on their own visual look that is distinct from what they imitate.

It also has created a suite of effects that are often derived from these analogical functions, but have gained their own uniquely digital feeling, such as the ubiquity of the "rounded corners" look familiar to users of Macs or Web 2.0 applications, or the jagged, hard-edged look that comes from a rough usage of the "lasso" tool, or the uncannily smooth, but hollow renderings accomplished in the Maya 3D imaging software.

Poster Company's posters throw all of these digital affects and effects—both in reference to functions analogical and digital—into a stew of action painting, untutored Photoshop fiddling, glitch-y Quicktime files, 8-bit vampire castles, Matisse, Leger, Lichtenstein, soft film footage of lunar landings, Terminator 2-esque liquid-metal, Kandinsky, late 60's psychedelia, "cheesy" public-access video effects, etc.

Each of the posters contrasts effects with each other, which allows the viewer of the work to see each of the effects as an effect. Typically, an effect or a digital aesthetic is viewed in the context of giving some other message. It is meant to disappear. Here, though, the effects are divorced from any context and allowed to be viewed as chunks of visual language bouncing off of other chunks of visual language. This is not to say that the posters are a mess. On the contrary, the artists are able to create powerful, often eye-popping composi-

tions from these materials in the same way that an artist like Rauschenberg used the trash on the street near his studio to create his combines of the 1950s.

In their gallery showing, the artists focused on quantity as much as quality.

The first thing one notices upon walking into the room in which their work was exhibited is that there are a lot of posters—too many, a surfeit.

However, it comes very close to working because they play this overwhelming output against the formal skill and care going into each individual image and the whole thing holds together.

One oscillates between the feeling of being overwhelmed—both inside and outside of the posters—and the focus on a particular image or gesture, which resonates and harmonizes the work.

I say "comes very close to working," though, because there is something going on in their process which does not come across in the gallery show:

Performance.

If there is, in the end, a power to what Poster Company is doing, it resides in the project's continuous devotion to daily production.

The question "what is a digital painting?" is here better phrased as "what is digital painting?"

The significance of their work lies not in the individual compositions, nor in the volume of output (although these elements are undeniably crucial for the full execution of the work to occur), but rather in the performance of the work.

I'm not sure how one would convey this in the gallery without being gimmicky, but it, nonetheless, seems to be a dimension of this work (and work like it by artists such as Harm van den Dorpel and Charles Broskoski) that needs to be explored.