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## TROY BRAUNTUCH

12/3/09  
 FRIEDRICH PETZEL  
 by ara h. merjian



**NEW YORK** Comprising photographs, drawings and works on canvas of all sizes along with framed newspaper clippings, handwritten notes and rubber stamps, this exhibition ranged in scale from the minuscule to the grand, the singular to the serial. The expansive body of work in the gallery's central room, a patchwork retrospective of a career launched with the landmark "Pictures" exhibition of 1977, offered a spectacle at once more and less than the sum of its parts. More, in the sense that it was the images' (and notes') commingling on the walls, in a parley by turns subdued and raucous, that took each individual work out of itself. And less to the extent that their interrelations remained ambiguous and disjointed.

Aside from the confluence of their titles, what does a color photograph of a young Mickey Rourke bathed in sunlight (*Mickey*, 1985) have to do with an ink drawing of what looks like a cat's silhouetted head (*Mickey*, 2000)? How to square a drawing of a hand ripped from a magazine page (*Hand*, 1987) with framed newsprint images of cars on a highway? Does a handwritten paragraph on the fate of a bear from the Sarajevo Zoo shed any light on its neighboring pictures—or on Brauntuch's practice at large? Despite their discrete, framed individuality, these pieces together formed a conceptual collage of sorts, one that raised more questions than it answered.

Of course, conceptual problems haunt many of Brauntuch's images in their own right. His best known works, which he began making in the 1970s and continues to produce, are drawn in black crayon on deep-colored cloth grounds, and set photo-based imagery into a murky fog from which objects emerge only slowly and incompletely. The significance of the objects represented is often as obscure as their contours. That is true, for example, in this exhibition's trio of Conté-on-cotton drawings, *Bag with Garbage (1, 2 and 3)*, 2009. The subject's apparent banality and the almost cinematic seriality of its only slightly varied repetition create an uneasy effect, as if we were staring at a wrapped, ticking bomb. Perhaps the mesmerizing blue balustrade of *Balcony* (1984, ink and pastel on linen) conceals some even less congenial narrative. *Foot* (2009, Conté on cotton) certainly seems to, with its fragment of what seems a foreshortened corpse.

Both visually and emotionally, Brauntuch's Conté images evoke some of Gerhard Richter's photo-based paintings, particularly his Baader-Meinhof cycle. But while Richter's sources are readily recognizable, Brauntuch draws on obscure details, and thus his work seems less generous, more recondite. With its ample selection of source imagery and sketches, this exhibition might have helped elucidate Brauntuch's overall undertaking. But instead it seemed conceived to keep the befuddling mist in place.

*Photo: Troy Brauntuch: Bag with Garbage 1, 2009, Conté on cotton, 40 by 50 inches; at Friedrich Petzel.*



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Photograph by Guy Tillim, Archival pigment ink on cotton rag paper, 2007. Currently on view at Harvard's Peabody Museum. Courtesy of the artist.

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