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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

DARKNESS RISING

by Andrea K. Scott

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Troy Brauntuch is part of the Pictures Generation, the media-soaked crew who hit New York in the seventies and were sanctioned, this spring, with a show at the Met. Like most Pictures art, Brauntuch's paintings—figurative wonders so dark that their subjects almost vanish in the gloaming—rely on borrowed imagery (“appropriation,” in the art-world argot). In a striking pair of shows at the Friedrich Petzel galleries, in Chelsea, Brauntuch raises the stakes of this postmodern game, while generously tipping his hand. More than thirty years' worth of penumbral paintings share the walls with their sources: newspaper clippings, snapshots, magazine pages, scribbled notes and sketches, all matted and framed. The mood is both capital-“R” Romantic and coolly detached—Warhol's “Death and Disaster” series as a figment of Caspar David Friedrich's imagination. Calamity and banality blur. An empty shopping bag emanates menace; a corpse becomes Sleeping Beauty; the Branch Davidian compound is bathed in moonlight. A strange magic occurs in the process, as the artist promotes his archive from apprentice to sorcerer. ♦



ART: TROY BRAUNTUCH, “BOY'S HEAD” (DETAIL), 1979

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