

Vittorio Brodmann
PRESS



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By Karen Archey

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BRODMANN'S NEW YORK debut renders bulbous, slapdash forms reminiscent of the golden age of cartoons (think early *Merrie Melodies* or even *The Ren & Stimpy Show*) with virtuosic-if-haphazard painterly brushwork, the resulting works appearing akin to an exquisite corpse from Hades. Both the impressionistic doodle and a more classic illustration style appear throughout the show.

Puberty, Intelligent Design, and Managing Your Bank Account, 2013, pairs what seems to be a miffed, tentacle-laden cloud with an anxious pink-and-blue mouse, complete with a drop shadow. The comic umbra departs from the expected content of traditional painting and instead moves toward the easily identifiable, slapstick cheap tricks of cartooning: A puff of smoke tells us that a Roadrunner has recently zipped away; pearls of sweat jumping from the brow of a mouse communicate its rampant anxiety. The drop shadow signifies action—perhaps a falling anvil or a fast-moving coyote. *The Head Is Quite Light, the Bottom Weighs Heavily*, 2013, expertly plays with positive and negative space in a series of semitranslucent, variably crackly washes as calligraphic eyes melt into noses and breasts, and male members into feet. (Droopy phalluses and buoyant breasts make frequent appearances throughout the show.)

In an exhibition of somewhat diminutively sized paintings, the exceptionally large *Scrambled Eggs*, 2013, stands out formally as well as physically. We see a distended, angry suit-clad man punching the air with scrota for fists against the background of a concerned face that could double as a moon. Three additional forlorn figures—a gray drunk clown, a perturbed smoking dog, and a gender-defying Hassidic Jew—line the corners of the canvas. It remains unclear what the confluence of these various figures means, and the work's title aids little in its interpretation (as is the case in the remainder of the show). A generous critic could deduce that the combined dour dispositions of these figures speak to a communal emotional plague. Since all the heterogeneous characters in Brodmann's mise-en-scène seem to be deprived downers, perhaps it's a Platonic reminder to "be kind, for everyone is fighting a harder battle," though the artist offers a frustrating dearth of clues.

While Brodmann's practice consistently employs comic-style graphic rendering, one would be remiss to connect his work with comics-meet-painting precedents such as Richard Prince or Roy Lichtenstein, the work of the latter two diverging by their engagement with appropriation and parody. Rather, Brodmann's phantasmagoric compositions are knowingly, presciently goofy and endearing, and critical only when taken as a total practice: Like many of his young peers who employ illustration-based imagery—such as Sanya Kantarovsky, Jana Euler, and Oliver Osborne—Brodmann's paintings signify a return to personal, vulnerable, and meaningfully handcrafted content after so-called corporate aesthetics have run amok in Europe. If post-Internet art, or work that speaks through corporate rhetoric to articulate a collective alienation, is a prevalent mode of address in contemporary art, Brodmann responds to this by personalizing the hellholes we all exist in. —Karen Archey



Vittorio Brodmann
Moods,
2013. Oil on
canvas,
11 x 11¼ in.