

GLADSTONE GALLERY

ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

RICHARD TUTTLE
GAYLEN GERBER
DIGITAL CAPITALISM
CAMERON JAMIE



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Minor Threat

BRANDEN W. JOSEPH ON THE ART OF CAMERON JAMIE



Top left: Cameron Jamie, *Botanical Wounds*, 2011, ink on paper, 12 1/2 x 9 1/2".

Bottom left: Cameron Jamie, *Smelting Figure*, 2013, ink and mixed media on paper, 51 1/4 x 35".

EVEN WITHIN an already markedly diverse oeuvre, Cameron Jamie's recent work is initially difficult to place. Despite certain iconographic continuities—found most notably in Jamie's primary leitmotif, the mask—his newly atmospheric pen-and-wash drawings, brightly colored ceramics, and intimate Xerox artists' books appear to depart starkly from the documentary impulse behind his much-celebrated films. Highlights of his singular filmography include *BB*, 1998–2000, which captures the dangerous antics and assumed personae of suburban backyard wrestlers; *Kranky Klaus*, 2002–2003, which follows the elaborately costumed Christmastime devils of the Austrian Krampus festival; and *Massage the History*, 2007–2009, which portrays the idiosyncratic and highly sexualized form of living-room-furniture dancing developed by a group of young Alabama men (and which is, according to Harmony Korine, "the single greatest dance film ever made").¹ Based largely on his cinematic output, which Jamie has by no means abandoned, his critical reception has thus far overwhelmingly focused on his role as an amateur anthropologist or ethnographer. That the newer work has yet to receive substantial discussion, despite featuring prominently in recent exhibitions, undoubtedly results in large part from its ostensible digression from this paradigm, making a consideration of how it relates to and expands on that paradigm particularly timely.

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Two views of Cameron Jamie's *Untitled*, 2013, glazed stoneware, 56 x 11 x 11".

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If Jamie is a “backyard anthropologist,” his backyard in some sense remains the San Fernando Valley, where he grew up—which he calls “horrible,” “a very small and dead world.”

If Jamie is a “backyard anthropologist,” his backyard in some sense remains the San Fernando Valley, where he grew up.² Jamie minces no words about his hometown of Northridge, California, which he calls “horrible,” “a very small and dead world,” and akin to “a maximum-security prison,” where a landscape of ubiquitous shopping malls felt like “the end of humanity.”³ Although undoubtedly rooted in biography, Jamie’s outlook should not be reduced to individual angst or even trauma (as some commentators have been led to do), but rather understood as a more general reflection of the socioeconomic conditions of life within increasingly all-encompassing spectacle. In 1988, Guy Debord biting characterized the combination of oppressively enforced conformity (the prison) with the near ubiquity of the commodity form (the mall) as the true connotation of Marshall McLuhan’s blithely optimistic term *global village*. “Villages,” Debord wrote, “unlike towns, have always been ruled by conformism, isolation, petty surveillance, boredom and repetitive malicious gossip about the same families. Which is a precise enough description of the global spectacle’s present vulgarity.”⁴ The situation is, of course, hardly mitigated by the rampant pseudodifferentiation of both products and identities available at the mall. “It is a matter of running hard to keep up with the inflation of devalued signs of life,” wrote Debord, before inadvertently prophesying America’s suburban meth epidemic: “Drugs help one to come to terms with this state of affairs, while madness allows one to escape from it.”⁵

Jamie has spoken similarly of the kinds of derangement endemic to life in the Valley and places like it. “I know how weird it was to grow up in the suburbs and I completely understood the anger and rage behind the Columbine school massacre,” he observed in 2001, shortly after moving from Southern California to Paris, where he maintains an apartment while also working in Berlin and Cologne. “The most intense anger always comes from the provinces or suburbs, because those kinds of places have no real history, because they’re like these dead zones and the kids react against this empty feeling of desperation that they feel inside.”⁶ This sense of entropic suburban deadness became the subject of Jamie’s *Goat*, 2000,

in which he revisited his hometown dressed as Dracula in the company of various witnesses, one of whom duly noted, “Every house in the street of his old neighborhood looked the same.”⁷ Mike Kelley aptly characterized the project as “a kind of reverse haunting, haunting that which haunts him.”⁸

Two months before the Columbine High School shootings, French theoretical collective Tiqqun addressed the homicidal anger of parricide Alain Oreiller and teen gunmen Mitchell Johnson and Kip Kinkel. “The contradiction between the powerlessness, isolation, apathy, and insensitivity” of such individuals, they presciently but provocatively declared, “on the one hand, and on the other their abrupt need for sovereignty cannot but lead to more of these absurd, murderous, but necessary and true, gestures.”⁹ Extending Debord’s analyses of spectacle’s alienation and disciplinarity, Tiqqun alleged that such actions tragically conveyed the mute negativity of a life no longer recognizable to itself in any of the subjective guises proffered by consumer culture. Instances of those bouts of madness mentioned by Debord above, such actions reveal their opposition to the spectacle, according to Tiqqun, in the perpetrators’ refusal to voice a meaningful motive, their hostility to allowing the act to be represented in the spectacle’s terms, “because [the assailant] senses that, in the end, the worst atrocity he can make this society undergo is to leave the crime unexplained.”¹⁰ Although neither revolutionary nor even exemplary (for their savagery only betrays the mistaken assumption that the spectacle can be overcome by solitary deeds), such nihilistic gestures, note Tiqqun, recall André Breton’s scandalous definition of “the simplest Surrealist act,” which “consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd.”¹¹

If I invoke Tiqqun’s discussion of school shootings here, it is not for the purpose of comparison, but rather contrast. For despite Jamie’s professed comprehension of the affect behind such actions (which, needless to say, his statement does not endorse), nothing could be more antithetical to his art and its relationship to the most repressive aspects of spectacle than the rank refusal that Tiqqun find common to both inexplicable outbursts of teenage violence



Three stills from Cameron Jamie’s *Massage the History*, 2007–2009, digital video transferred to 35 mm, color, sound, 10 minutes.

Cameron Jamie, *Kranky Klaus*, 2002–2003, video, color, sound, 25 minutes.



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Six stills from Cameron Jamie's *BB*, 1998–2000. Super 8 transferred to 35 mm. black-and-white, sound, 18 minutes 20 seconds.



and the most extreme forms of avant-garde negation. On the contrary, Jamie's work seems to revolve, on the one hand, around that very sense of subjective deadness imposed by what Tiqqun call the "authoritarian commodity" (and its prefabricated forms of identity) and, on the other, around those marginalized cultural products that manage, seemingly by the sheer force of personal investment, to alter mainstream commercial forms and formats, transforming them to the same extent that (and as a partial reflection of the degree to which) their producer's desires have been constrained and distorted by them.¹²

Hence the signal importance for Jamie of Afrofuturist jazz musician Sun Ra, scandalously scatological comic rapper Blowfly, and absurdly "primitive" voodoo rock and roller Screamin' Jay Hawkins. All three of these African American artists created not just their own personae but entire alternative cosmologies (literally, in Sun Ra's case), pitted against both the strictures of their respective artistic genres and the repressive social and political forces of their time, most notably American racism. (The first Hawkins album Jamie encountered, *What That Is!* [1969], was "dedicated to President Nixon, whose efforts to recapture the era of the early 50s do not pass unnoticed.") Importantly, such alternative or "minor" (in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of the term) cultural practices do not negate or evade, but rather

remain invested in the dominant formats and languages of industrial commercial culture, yet they nonetheless detourn those formats and languages sufficiently enough to render them at odds with hegemonic modes of audience reception and address. By opening spaces of alterity within spectacular culture, such practices invite recognition of, and the possibility of (dis)identification with, a willfully idiosyncratic "otherness."¹³

WHILE STILL A NORTHRIDGE TEENAGER. Jamie came across a quintessential example of such alternative culture, Gary Panter's photocopied underground comic *The Asshole* (1979), a publication that, Jamie recalls, "absolutely changed my life."¹⁴ Perhaps not insignificantly, Panter's title character embarks on a rage-filled killing spree, only stopped once a judge, who "can find no-one to speak in [his] defense," has him executed (or not; the ending is ambiguous).¹⁵ Not only does *The Asshole* identify with antisocial violence and transform it into art—as signaled by a Picasso reference on the back cover—it also turns that violence onto the art itself, via an intentionally crude and regressive drawing style and the low, low-cost quality of its cheaply photocopied format. "I became obsessed," explains Jamie. "It was like the worst, most crude thing, but it spoke to me in massive, massive volumes. It actually said to me, 'You can make something really crude and really distorted, and it

has a place in the world.' And that, to me, was very, very revolutionary."¹⁶

Emboldened by Panter's example and looking to other precedents as diverse as the gang-related art of *Teen Angels* magazine and, later, Antonin Artaud's post-Rodez-asylum sketches, Jamie cultivated a deliberately raw, regressive, and willfully adolescent style in his drawings, augmenting their implicit violence by partly defacing one image with another. Rosalind E. Krauss has characterized William Kentridge's recursive process of drawing and erasure, the traces of which concatenate over time, as producing a complex sense of drawing as a medium, even as that medium is updated and transformed through interactions with cinema.¹⁷ Jamie's own recursive drawing style accomplishes something just as complex, yet almost entirely opposite in effect (even as his practice of affixing larger drawings to wooden panels, propped against the wall like John McCracken sculptures, also transforms the medium of drawing). Rather than build on one another, each of Jamie's successive images seems to disfigure or even cancel the one before it, like a large X used to invalidate an engraving plate.¹⁸ Even with the superimposition of numerous images and a taut, wiry energy of execution, Jamie's earlier drawings often appear depthless, almost diagrammatic, and—given the profusion of skulls, intestines, disembodied eyes, and headless torsos—distinctly uncanny, dead and alive at the same time. (Jamie's

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Page from Cameron Jamie's *Peking Skinny*, 2013, Xeroxes, stapled, 7 1/4 x 5 1/4 x 3/4".



Cameron Jamie, *Untitled (Rugburn)*, 1996, pen and colored pencil on typing paper, 11 x 8 1/4".

The forces of contemporary cultural repression and its censoring and distorting effects seem to be precisely what Jamie's automatic drawings express.

drawings are thus also cinematic, although surely more related to slasher films than to Kentridge's BBC-style docudramas.)

Jamie's recent pen-and-wash drawings derive their newfound, nearly etheric spatiality in part from the use of various background washes, including ink, gouache, and even coffee. At the same time, the brittle, almost incised scoring typical of his draftsmanship of the early 2000s has given way to an increasingly fluid line that occasionally tips over into actual drips and splashes, as in a particularly intense untitled example from 2013 that resembles H. R. Giger and Jackson Pollock in equal measure. (Interestingly, both that piece and *Smelting Figure* of the same year recall Pollock's late, anomalous painting *The Deep*, 1953.) The destructive potency of Jamie's earlier drawings has not disappeared but seems to have been partly transferred onto the materials, which Jamie pushes toward shadowy effects by repeatedly effacing or, better, demolishing his figures, even going so far as to scrape away at the surfaces with a disposable razor. "In the last, I would say, five or six years, since I've been using different types of ink," says Jamie, "it's always about this process of building something, building something, building something, and finishing it, and then completely breaking it down and starting over again."¹⁹

Although Jamie has long insisted that his "drawings have always been rendered automatically," his

reliance on procedures of layering and erasure marks his distance from the automatist legacy of Surrealism, a movement toward which he expresses a certain aversion, although that has not stopped critics from interpreting his latest work through this lens.²⁰ For the historical avant-garde, the purpose of automatism (continued into the neo-avant-garde via the example of Pollock) was to liberate the unconscious. As such, revision, effacement, and occlusion, practices that make up so much of Jamie's graphic repertoire, would be anathema, since such tactics emulate the censoring effect of the superego, the very agent of the social repression that automatic drawing sought to evade and eventually overthrow. By contrast, the forces of contemporary cultural repression and its censoring and distorting effects seem to be precisely what Jamie's automatic drawings express and explore by the processes of layering and occlusion. Despite the presence of the artist's hand, then, Jamie's is a type of anti-expressionism, or expressionism of a decidedly uncanny sort. "Some artists create worlds that they want to exist," he has explained. "Inside my world everything seems to be dead and brought back to life in a zombie-like state."²¹

Reflecting back on his own childhood doodling, dissident Surrealist philosopher Georges Bataille felt he had "rediscovered the natural conditions of graphic art."²² "This development is easy to follow," he explained. "From a few bizarre lines, chance

unleashes a visual resemblance that can be fixed through repetition. This stage represents the second degree of *alteration*; in other words, the destroyed object (the paper or the wall) is altered to such a point that it is transformed into a new object—a horse, a head, a man. Finally, through repetition, this new object is itself altered through a series of deformations. Art, since undeniably there is art, proceeds in this way by successive destructions."²³ Bataille's process of "successive destructions," as should already be evident, can be productively compared to Jamie's approach to drawing. Yet the importance of Bataille's insight was not primarily formal (or even antiformal), but social and political. For, as he makes clear, the initial act of deformation does not take place under just any circumstances, but only when the nascent artist is confronted with a repressive authority, however abstract. "This was not just anytime or on just any piece of paper," Bataille writes of his juvenile scribbling. "Sometimes I was supposed to have written an assignment in my copybook; sometimes I was supposed to have written the professor's dictation in a notebook."²⁴ Bataille goes on to discuss Abyssinian children who, at great risk to themselves (for they are invariably beaten if caught), compulsively deface their churches with graffiti. Thus, in all instances graphic defilement acts as insubordination (against God, priest, teacher, and so on). "Insofar as it liberates *libidinal* instincts," insists Bataille, "these instincts are sadistic."²⁵

Bataille's invocation of power points back to the oppressive socioeconomic conditions potentially motivating aspects of Jamie's work, namely, the ubiquitous imposition of spectacle over life in the San Fernando Valley. According to Tiqqun, the interrelated forces of spectacle and biopower have by now so infiltrated the vast majority of each person's innermost subjectivity that individuals live as though in exile from themselves.²⁶ It is therefore not surprising to find that the dissociated (spectacular) self can become the target of sadistic impulses, as when Jamie

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Top: Cameron Jamie, *El Hombre (detail)*, 2005, ink on paper mounted on wood panel, 67 x 24".

Bottom: Cameron Jamie, *Inscape*, 2011, ink on paper, 13 x 10".

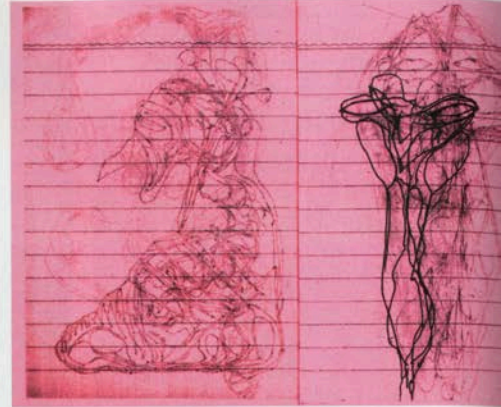
Top: Cameron Jamie, *Cranium Mask*, 2011, ink and coffee on paper, 13 x 10".

Bottom: Cameron Jamie, *Shaking Traces (detail)*, 2009, ink on paper mounted on wood panel, 86 1/2 x 38".

Top: Cameron Jamie, *Tonal Collision*, 2011, ink on paper, 13 x 10".

Bottom: Cameron Jamie, *Angle of Reflection*, 2011, ink on paper, 13 x 10".

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From left: Cover from Cameron Jamie's *KOPBF: Book XI*, 2013, Xeroxes, stapled, 8 1/4 x 5 3/4 x 1/4". Cover from Cameron Jamie's *Un singe à gauche*, 2013, Xeroxes, stapled, 11 1/4 x 8 x 1/4". Spread from Cameron Jamie's *Clutch Fang Bush Toe*, 2011, Xeroxes, stapled, 5 1/2 x 8 1/4 x 1/4". Opposite page: Spread from Cameron Jamie's *Outward/Inward*, 2012, Xeroxes, stapled, 5 1/2 x 8 x 1/4".

defaces depictions of the Mexican wrestling mask he had fabricated from a crude sketch of his own face: "In many of the drawings my wrestling character appears as a stand-in for myself and it's often like I'm wrestling with myself, to try to tame something inside that comes out."²⁷ In the more recent drawings, masks alternate with a recurrent profile of a bird's head (often skeletal) that also seems, in some manner, to be a self-projection and bears the marks of disfiguration in turn. "The drawings somehow stabilize me mentally," Jamie confesses. "I get very tense and I have horrible nightmares if I can't draw."²⁸

BY SUBMITTING some of his most intimate and improvisatory sketchbook drawings to reproduction at local copy shops (otherwise dedicated to products such as take-out menus), Jamie's Xerox books hint at further historical constraints on the automatist legacy. Filled with iterations of masks and birds' heads and often highlighting the photocopy's particular grain, Jamie's books approach layering and defacement from a different direction than do his autonomous drawings.²⁹ In examples such as *KOPBF: Book VI*, 2008; *KOPBF: Book VIII*, 2010; and *KOPBF: Book XI*, 2013, Jamie uses transparent or translucent pages to concatenate layers of imagery, sometimes approximating the effect of atmospheric depths characteristic of his recent drawings. In *Clutch Fang Bush Toe*, *Orphan's Prayer*, both 2011, and others, he xeroxes pages from his sketchbooks, precisely calculating exposures, toner levels,

and other copy-machine settings to induce varying degrees of image bleed. Thus, in addition to the primary image on a reproduced sketchbook page, one can often see the fainter but still perceptible image from the verso of that page, as well as other, even more ghostly images that show through the not fully opaque pages of the actual Xerox book. The semblance of multiple layers of simultaneously visible imagery can be as vertiginous to examine as it is to describe, as when one turns a page, expecting to see the picture that is apparently bleeding through from the other side, only to find that it was only the photocopied page that bore the traces of that image, and the actual leaf one is turning presents an altogether different figure on the back, complete with its own strata of shadowy image bleedthrough.

In addition to such visual subterfuges, Jamie sometimes engages in actual procedures of layering, as when he overprints pages, often in reverse orientation, by feeding them through the copier a second—and even a third and fourth—time (a process that can gum up the machine with toner and has led to his banishment from at least one Parisian copy shop). Here, particularly in the case of pages that feature lists of apparently disconnected words—instances of dead, reified, but nonetheless evocative language—Jamie demonstrates the process of layering as obfuscation, as the terms become difficult, if not impossible, to decipher (see, for instance, *KOPBF: Book X*, 2012). In still other examples, as in *Un singe à gauche*, 2013, and *Tierlexika*, 2014, Jamie tears

drawings apart (another clearly destructive act) and recopies the pieces in different configurations. Throughout all of the books, the processes of layering that in the drawings tend to read as cancellation, defacement, or destruction are analyzed—not in the sense of being explained, but in the proper definition of analysis as the opposite of synthesis: separation into constituent parts.

Jamie bridle somewhat at using the term *fanzone* for his Xerox publications, pointing to other precedents such as underground comics (again, *The Asshole* is exemplary), Jack Chick's demented religious chapbooks, and Tijuana Bibles, the clandestine, scandalously sexual detournements of comic-strip characters popular in the 1930s. Nevertheless, the quality and profusion of Jamie's photocopy books (there are more than two dozen at present) surely rank him as one of the art world's "zine masters," alongside Korine, Mark Gonzales, Raymond Pettibon, and others.³⁰ Indeed, Jamie has collaborated on publications with both Gonzales and Pettibon. As in the work of his peers, Jamie's engagement with the photocopy connotes the collapse of the supposedly least constrained modes of visual libidinal expression (the intimate sketch or automatic drawing) into the forms of technical reproducibility explored by Conceptualism (as in Mel Bochner's *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art*, 1966), while at the same time pointing to the continuation of libidinal expression, however socially distorted or

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Jamie pushes the overtly decorative and often overly decorous surfaces of conventionally “beautiful” ceramics toward something like horror.

constrained, within the “lower” and more marginalized genres of industrialized popular culture to which the zine and related formats allude.³¹

By frequently foregrounding gridded sketchbook paper, Jamie’s books further intertwine the avant-garde legacy of automatism with its opposite: the abstract, modular grid exemplified by the drawings of Jasper Johns or Agnes Martin. The dichotomy between these two poles of avant-garde production famously motivated Walter Benjamin to chastise the Surrealists for overemphasizing erotic desublimation, asking, “How are we to imagine an existence oriented solely toward the boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, in rooms designed by Le Corbusier and Oud?”³² An impulse to acknowledge the “dictatorial” (Benjamin’s term) side of modernity has always coursed through Jamie’s work. This is evident, for example, in his subtle but insistent acknowledgment of the forces of

nationalism and politics that permeate the rituals documented in his films—as when French right-wing politician Jean-Marie Le Pen shows up amid the Joan of Arc celebrations in *JO*, 2004, or when, in *Kranky Klaus*, a Confederate flag appears in a rural village in Austria, a country not known for racial tolerance. Elsewhere, the dictatorial and the desublimated establish an equipoise. In the books *Outward/Inward* and *Inward/Outward Blues*, both 2012, Jamie’s drawings appear as though sandwiched between gridded sketchbook paper and ink blots made by pressing facing pages together. In their resemblance to a Rorschach test, the amorphous but largely symmetrical ink stains partially block out Jamie’s drawings (another instance of destructive occlusion) and invite the viewer’s subjective projections, which not only intertwine with Jamie’s imagery but become integrated into the same matrix of modular form and mechanical reproduction.³³

Although Bataille specifically exempted sculpture from his discussion of “successive destructions,” Jamie approaches his ceramics in precisely this manner. Secluded in an underground, bunker-like studio, he spends hours building up and then breaking down clay forms: “I would build and build and build and build, and then at a certain point, just out of pure anger, I would just destroy it and start all over again. Just destroy the clay, bring it back down to the basis: [then] build, build, build. This happens all the time with me.”³⁴ This private, almost ritualistic process, which can take months to complete, is then repeated,

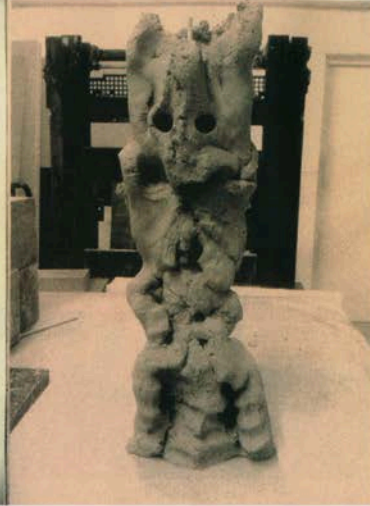
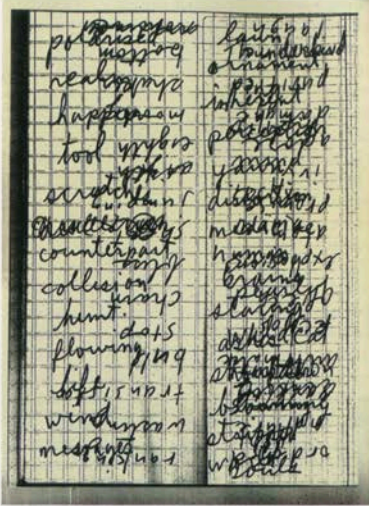
to some extent, in the glazing that, against standard practice and conventional wisdom, Jamie insists on firing multiple times.³⁵ The result, as each glaze partially eats into and dissolves those beneath it, is a remarkably dense concentration of colors that appear from close up to swirl with near-hallucinogenic intensity, like animated Florentine paper or psychedelic, candy-colored smoke.

Jamie describes his process as entirely improvised and inductive, but the ceramic figures frequently resolve into either of two motifs that have dominated his recent books and drawings: the mask or the bird’s head. (The figures are only half of Jamie’s current ceramic practice, which also includes the more abstract but equally inductively composed “Compression Fracture Paintings,” 2012–.) Bataille regarded both the mask and the animal head as harbingers of chaos, death, and destruction. Importantly, however, they do not represent such phenomena, but rather invoke them by working against representation. The mask’s unsettling effects, according to Bataille, derive primarily from its obstruction of the human face, its blocking of the recognition of the other that habitually reassures the viewer of a normative social state, “the maintenance of stability and order.”³⁶ By rupturing such face-to-face communication, the mask throws that stability into crisis, imbuing the other with the obscure and terrifying potential of unrestrained violence.³⁷ Jamie often installs his ceramic figures so that (like certain animals he observed at the zoo) they turn their backs to the entrance, doubly occluding a face already hidden by a mask or a beastly head. In so doing, the sculptures seem to literalize Bataille’s observations, for in the absence of any recognizable countenance, the nearly inchoate polychrome mounds lose all figural qualities and initially confront viewers with nothing but “chaos” and “decomposition.”³⁸

In their almost shapeless, even excremental profiles, Jamie’s ceramics conjure the operations of formlessness, as theorized by Bataille and imported into art history by Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois. Indeed, affinities between Jamie’s work and the qualities of baseness and horizontality associated with formlessness are the very subject of his Xerox book *Bunka*, 2012, which juxtaposes images of unfinished ceramic sculptures, overprinted word lists, and iPhone snapshots of stains left by urine and other fluids on Parisian sidewalks.³⁹ Yet in reproducing sculptures only in unglazed states, *Bunka* omits an important component of the discourse on formlessness: the transgressive (over)embrace of polychromatic, decorative surfaces that Bois likens to the “poisonousness” of the unmediated and untransposed kitsch found in the work of Jean Fautrier and Lucio Fontana.⁴⁰ If the theory of high-modernist sculpture was predicated

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Left: Spread from Cameron Jamie's *Bunka*, 2012, Xeroxes, stapled, 7 1/4 x 11 x 1/4".

Right: Cameron Jamie, *Compression Fracture Painting XXI*, 2014, glazed stoneware, 39 x 18 1/4 x 5 1/2".



on the suppression of polychromy, Jamie embraces that very quality to such a degree as to push the overtly decorative and often overly decorous surfaces of conventionally "beautiful" ceramics toward something like horror, as when the partially dissolving glazes come to resemble flayed or melting multi-colored flesh (appearing, at other times, as matte and chalky as bone). In this, Jamie courts those qualities of "contrary prettiness" and "decadent aestheticism" that Kelley so brilliantly analyzed in Paul Thek's engagements with "stomach-churning, sweet hippie and middle-American kitsch." "It is pretty decay," writes Kelley about the pink coloring of Thek's *The Tomb—Death of a Hippie*, 1967, "and prettiness is a weapon for Thek."⁴¹

Yet if Jamie deploys such weaponry, he aims it not just at high modernism but at kitsch as well. As argued by Clement Greenberg, kitsch depends on an immediate recognition that triggers an unequivocal affective response.⁴² Kitsch, in other words, sparks something more akin to a conditioned reflex than to aesthetic or intellectual judgment. It is here, it seems to me, that the sculptural analogue of the processes of agonistic layering so crucial to Jamie's drawings becomes important. For just as the sculptures' polychromatic glazes work to undermine any remnants of gestalt form (often aided by light scintillating off their highly reflective surfaces), the near formlessness of the figures and the profound difficulty of reconciling

one viewpoint with another function to undermine and destabilize the automatic reception on which kitsch depends. In other words, in Jamie's sculptures, the strategies of base materiality and surface chromaticism work to mutually "destroy" each other in perpetual alternation. Mainstream, conformist, middle-of-the-road culture at its most oppressive, kitsch is but one more guise of the authoritarian commodity. As such, its polychromed surfaces are precisely the vestments that one's individual desire—already deformed by a world filled with kitsch—must parasitically inhabit and deform, in turn, if the sadistic process of successive artistic destruction is to be effective as insubordination.⁴³

By elaborating his own rituals of production (and destruction) into nearly obsessively recurring motifs, Jamie's recent drawings, books, and sculptures effectively document his own idiosyncratic cosmology, one where individual desire (however deadened or detoured by an overwhelming commercial culture) finds a place—an "insular world," to cite his description of the Alabama living room of *Massage the History*, "which ha[s] a lot to do with the outside world, but at the same time [is] completely cut off from the real world."⁴⁴ "We are all the creators of our own little planets," he has stated elsewhere. "These are my planets, this is my world, and I'm following a path through realms of the unknown."⁴⁵

Such a degree of personal investment and self-

implication has largely absolved Jamie from the dual traps of objectification and idealization that plague other "artists as ethnographers," whether their sights are set on long-established anthropological phenomena or, as is increasingly the case, on various forms of entertainment or subcultural production.⁴⁶ Perhaps it is via this aspect of subjective implication, too, that Jamie remains truest to the examples set by Sun Ra, Blowfly, Hawkins, and Panter, who commandeered and managed to reinvest and detourn available forms of industrial mass culture. If the amount of time, energy, and effort Jamie expends on his Xerox books can be read as emblematic, it is perhaps because their comparatively inexpensive, technically reproduced, and commercial format most closely approximates those eccentric LPs and comics that first pointed him toward cultural realms outside Northridge. As the contemporary art world becomes ever more indistinguishable from mainstream industrial mass culture (albeit at the loftiest economic echelons), Jamie's relatively modest photocopy books betray the highest ambitions of all of his art: that it might allow for investment in and detournement of authoritarian commodity forms and formats. For in this way, his artworks open onto intimate yet cosmic pathways by which to encounter individual alterity and difference. □

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For notes, see page 304.

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From left: Cameron Jamie, *Untitled (detail)*, 2013, glazed stoneware, 61 1/2 x 12 1/4 x 12 1/4".
Cameron Jamie, *Untitled (detail)*, 2013, glazed stoneware, 63 1/2 x 10 1/2 x 10 1/4".