

GLADSTONE GALLERY

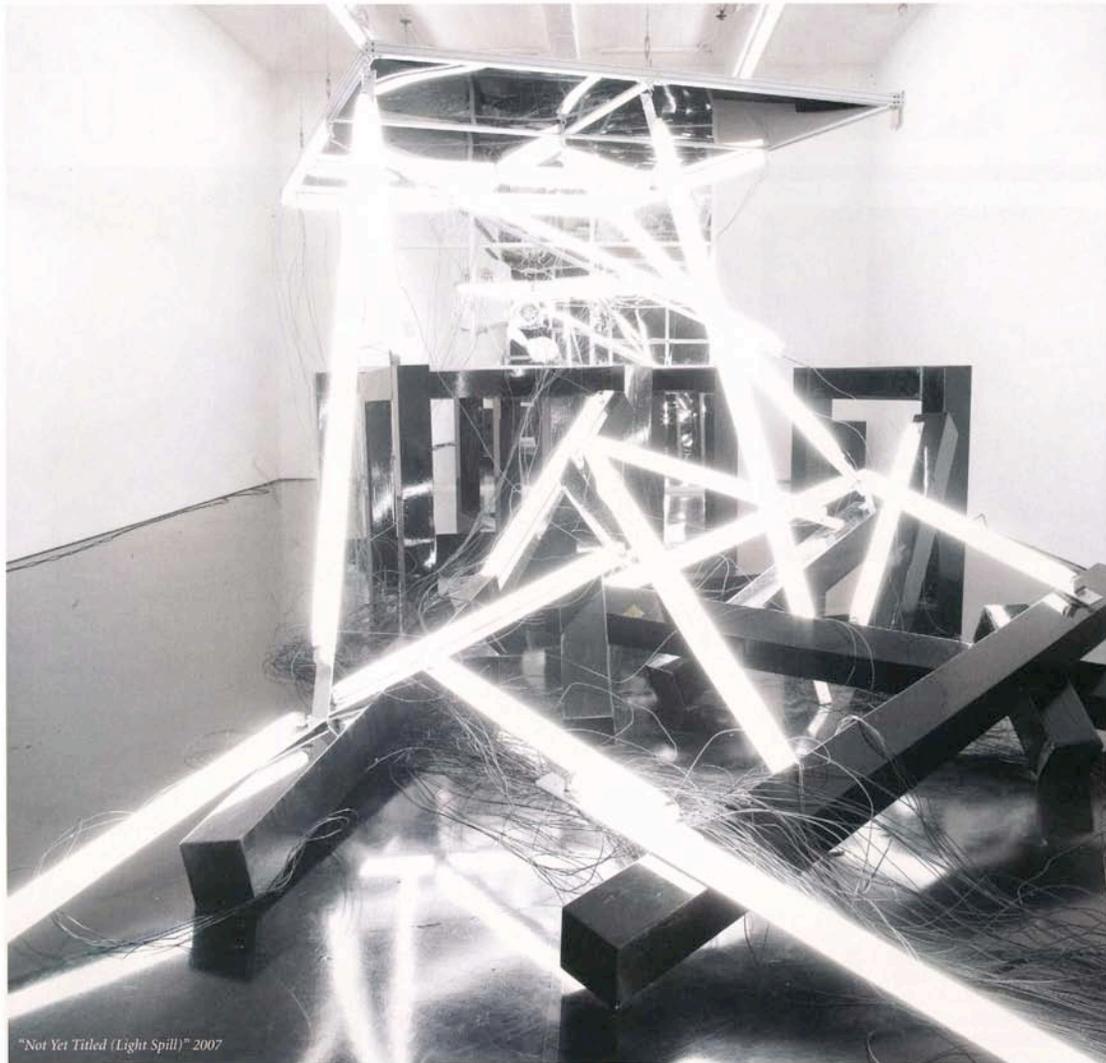
Greene, Tamsen, "Heavy Metal: Artist Banks Violette Combines Music and Madness for a Cracked-Out Good Time," zink, November 2007

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HEAVY METAL

ARTIST BANKS VIOLETTE COMBINES MUSIC AND MADNESS FOR A CRACKED-OUT GOOD TIME.



"Not Yet Titled (Light Spill)" 2007

"Not Yet Titled (Light Spill)" 2007 (at Gladstone Gallery) photograph by DAVID REGEN, courtesy of the artist, Gladstone Gallery and Team Gallery; "Not Yet Titled (fluorescent Jagermeister)" 2007, "Kill Yourself" 2006 (at Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich), "Untitled (White Cast Salt Space)" 2006 (at Maureen Paley, London), and "Voidhanger (Twin Channel), ... All Tomorrows Graves" 2006 (at Art Unlimited, Art137/Basel), all courtesy of Team Gallery.

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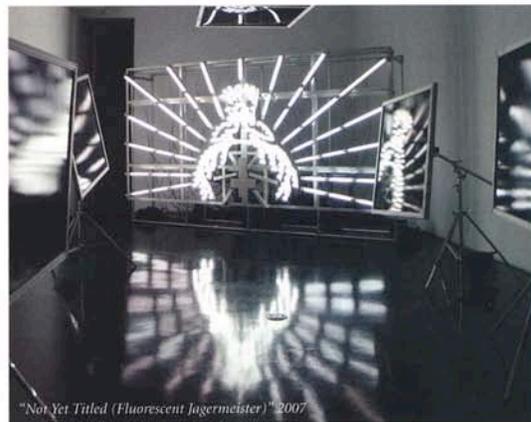
"Voidhanger (Twin Channel) ... All Tomorrows Graves" 2006



"Kill Yourself" 2006



"Untitled (White Cast Salt Space)" 2006



"Not Yet Titled (Fluorescent Jägermeister)" 2007

With a moniker that sounds like a good band name, avant-garde artist Banks Violette seemed destined to collaborate with musicians. He's already worked with cult drone band Sunn O))) and the black metal Norwegian group Thorns (whose leader, Snorre Ruch, gained notoriety when he was convicted of being an accessory to murder). Part of two distinct subcultures — thrash metal and the art world — Violette staunchly associates himself with the former. He once said, "I got involved in art because I thought that was the place where there were a lot of cultures, a lot of differences and weirdos. And there aren't."

When Sunn O))) performed as a part of Violette's exhibition at the Maureen Paley Gallery in London, Violette denied public access to the show's opening, so fans stood outside while the walls shook. This was not only an integral factor of the ensuing show that addressed issues of denial and withholding, but also a protective gesture. Violette didn't want to expose death rock to a potentially exploitative audience. So even when you're not allowed to hear it for yourself, thrash metal is at the heart of the artist's work.

But for all his affiliations with metal bands and his bad-boy persona (including extensive tattoos and a former meth habit), Violette is also a graduate of the School of Visual Arts and has a coveted MFA from Columbia. He's well-spoken and well-versed in art history, philosophy and theory, and he's shown at the Whitney twice. He can apply Hegel's dialectics to Satanism, and his work has a strong basis in the art of Robert Rauschenberg, Barry Le Va and minimalist forms. The duality between his thrash metal devotion and classical art background allows his work, which often focuses on adolescent subject matter, to also be formally intelligent, self-contained

and relevant with the potential to grow in depth.

In the past, Violette has used narratives to structure his art. His breakthrough exhibition at Team Gallery in 2002 explored the 1995 California murder of a female student by three classmates who wanted to gain fame for their slasher band, Hatred. For eight months, they ritualistically abused the body until one of them caved and confessed to the police. Fascinated with teenage angst gone too far, Violette explored the margins and strange hiccups of a culture so caught up with stardom that it explodes with violence.

Now, five years later and with a new body of work, his exhibition creates its own story instead of illustrating another. We all know it's bad luck to break mirrors, and perhaps that superstition impacted the late opening of Violette's dual solo shows last summer at Barbara Gladstone and Team galleries in New York, where cracked mirrors abounded. But it was worth the wait. Again, Violette worked with Stephen O'Malley of Sunn O))), but this time the role of the music was more subdued, suggesting the quiet aftermath of explosive sound. Alongside the black floors, glowing fluorescent lights and seeping liquid nitrogen, the soundtrack transformed the gallery into a forest of crumbling metal. Blown-apart speakers and cracked mirrors were presented as the surviving relics of a destructive storm that passed through the space, ripping through everything and leaving the mangled residue to remake itself. Most poignant was the artist's frequent use of salt as a medium, casting objects in the white crystals as if they, like Lot's wife in the Bible, were being punished for looking back at something forever destroyed.

Next up for Violette is his first Austrian solo exhibition at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac this November, a showing that's sure to be music to our eyes and ears. **TAMSEN GREENE**