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David Daigle - *An Unexpected and Pleasurable Chaos*

The Death of Beauty

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by Jody Zellen



Holes: drilled, punched or otherwise created are core to David Daigle's process. His multi-layered works combine myriad printed materials — books, posters, magazines, and even colorful wrapping paper. He then drills into these thick and uneven surfaces to remove both large and small areas of content. The result is a melange of holes in varying sizes and depths: an ungainly and entangled collage that in actuality is an unexpected and pleasurable chaos of disparate visual elements. The pieces draw viewers in and invite them to reverse engineer their complex construction.

These intriguing works bring to mind a series of photographs by Anthony Hernandez from his *Screened Pictures* series (2017). In these images, Hernandez photographed Los Angeles streets through the metal screens of bus shelters to produce fragmented and distorted imagery that foregrounded the dot pattern of the mesh. Another related artist is Elliott Hundley who fills his dense compositions with thousands of tiny cut-outs — geometric shapes, buildings, figures and snippets of text from a range of printed ephemera. Hundley pins these fragments to the surface of his canvases so they stick out at different heights, adding a third-dimension to his paintings. Likewise, Daigle's two-dimensional works become sculptural.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is the monumental work *The Death of Venus* (all works 2026). To create this large-scale collage (it spans 96 inches horizontally), Daigle carefully cut apart and re-assembled a mural reproduction of Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (mid 1480s). He then layered parts of the original on top of magazine cut-outs and colorfully patterned birthday gift wrapping paper. In Botticelli's painting, a nude Venus stands in a giant scallop shell at the edge of a shore. On one side of her is the wind god Zephyrus, who carries a young woman in his arms. Both have wings and are blowing air toward Venus, pushing her closer to the shore. On her other side is another female figure who holds out a pink, flowered cloak, presumably to cover her naked body. In Daigle's rendition, the air emanating from Zephyrus is transformed into a sequence of holes, each filled with different colors and imagery. The image of Venus has been obliterated and replaced by an explosion of dots. Deeply embedded into these recessed holes that now make up the center of the composition are clippings from a wide range of printed ephemera that includes smiling celebrities and cartoony

illustrations. Scattered within this turbulence are text fragments culled from art criticism, as well as solid shapes of bright color. Each perforation is a wound, as well as a lens as Daigle excavates and punctures from above and below while allowing what surrounds the holes to remain. It becomes an intricate scaffold that holds the work together.

Across the wall from *The Death of Venus* is the large-scale framed collage, *Gaza City*. Rather than use art history as a point of departure, here Daigle focuses on war and its aftermath. Daigle enlarges an easily sourced, stock photograph of Gaza City from circa 2020, attacking its surface by drilling various sized holes into the urban landscape. All that remains from the original photograph are several clusters of buildings standing against a mustard-colored sky. The thick surface Daigle has sculpted extends off the wall about five inches. He layers what once surrounded the circular cores into an uneven surface through which he reveals fragments of Arabic text, too scattershot to cohere through the drilled holes. The surface undulates like a shock wave, metaphorically referencing the destruction and violence within the city.

In some ways Daigle's smaller pieces are more direct and though just as complex, they more clearly reveal his process and his interest in mass media and the advertising that supports it. To create *I just want It To Feel Like a Fleetwood Mac Song*, Daigle punched holes into Fleetwood Mac sheet music. He drilled through the booklet of white pages with black type and musical notations to create a collage of overlapping circles where elements from pages below rise to the surface. In *Sinead O'Connor (Herb Ritts Photo)*, Daigle follows a similar approach. He begins with a 'quintessential' image of the singer taken by noted photographer Herb Ritts from an issue of *Vogue Magazine*. O'Connor is pictured with her shaved head in profile filling the frame. The thick issue of *Vogue* provides Daigle with numerous layers of varying content and colors that are revealed through holes that obliterate every part of her face except an ear.

Sometimes Daigle drills in even rows or follows the contours of a given image; other times he creates chaos by obliterating the structure integrity of the original. Although his removals reveal new content, it is amusing to imagine the collection of circles amassed as a byproduct of Daigle's process and what they might collectively become. Returning to the title of the exhibition — *The Death of Beauty*, a variation on *The Death of Venus* — and contemplating the idea of the death of beauty metaphorically, it seems as though Daigle is talking about transformation and transference — how beauty is subjective and can take on different forms. That Daigle's re-creations are confrontations and assaults on found imagery in various forms cannot be denied. Yet, through this purposeful and calculated destruction a new disturbed beauty can emerge.

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