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Fred Tomaselli: The Times, Orange County Museum of Art

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Fred Tomaselli, Apr. 28, 2010, (2010)

The daily newspaper is not quite a thing of the past. For some, it still arrives in printed form each morning at the front door. But the combination of “breaking news” stories and the Internet often makes this printed document obsolete: the web brings current news to personal devices the moment it happens. Holding on to this content that is fleeting interests the myriad artists who appropriate the news for their work.

Fred Tomaselli has remarked, “I am a news junkie... I love watching the history of the world unfold on a daily basis. Increasingly, I see myself as a kind of conductor overseeing a choir of voices singing through artifacts. I repurpose these cultural bits, which have been authored by others, into new artifacts.” News and newspapers have provided form, content and context for numerous artists beginning with Braque’s cubist collages. Among the many artists who have used the news or newspapers as a point of departure are Kim Rugg, Sarah Charlesworth, Nancy Chunn and On Kawara whose well known date paintings (on view at the Guggenheim through May 3, 2015) have a newspaper referent. Seeing On Kawara’s paintings in relation to a newspapers front page opens a flood gate of associations and memories.

Tomaselli has saved and scanned every front page of *The New York Times* dating back to 2005, amassing a huge archive of source material. To create “The Times,” he prints a digital facsimile of a selected page and proceeds to draw, paint and collage over the central image, often altering it beyond recognition. The series started with an image from March 16, 2005, of Bernie Ebbers holding hands with his wife leaving the Federal District court of New York after having been found guilty of fraud. For Tomaselli, the image reminded him of Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Unable to get this photograph out of his mind, he began drawing on the original, eventually covering the image with floral forms in vibrant colors. He first thought he’d mask the figure, turning him into a bigger and more horrific creature, but later focused on the “luminosity of human connection” instead.

Affected by the reportage on the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, (August 31, 2005), Tomaselli picked up the project again five months later. Over an image of the submerged city of New Orleans, he traced the path of the flood by painting rings of brightly colored lines. His mark-making on the newspaper images are spontaneous, stream of consciousness responses to both the form and the content of the image. The alterations range from hard-edged abstraction that cover the entire photograph to delicate filigree that trace over elements in the picture, or carefully constructed collages of related materials like eyes cut from other newspaper reproductions.

What remains, what is covered and the surrounding headlines, article fragments and captions ground the image to a specific date and time. That context is obviously important to Tomaselli as collectively these more than 100 images present a continuum of time. Embarking upon this series, Tomaselli embraced the idea of play acknowledging the works are responses to the visual and textual stimuli of the newspaper page. He did not know this endeavor would develop into a significant body of work, one that resonates on multiple levels.



Fred Tomaselli, July 5, 2012, (2012)

“The Times” series has conceptual and visual parallels to Tomaselli’s painting practice and are similarly infused with humor, cunning, irony and wit. In works like *April 28, 2011* (2011) and *July 15, 2009* (2012) the decorative elements float atop an image of destruction. The *July 15, 2009* top story and accompanying image depicts a marine running to safety as a bomb explodes. Tomaselli’s addition of a burst of hundreds of colorful concentric circles emanate from the cloud of smoke, a hallucinatory interpretation of the devastation. Red-and-black swirls cover a billowing tornado in Tomaselli’s alteration of the April 19, 2011 front page. The pieces are commentaries on the fact that “what passes for the news doesn’t necessarily reflect what’s going on in the world so much as it spotlights what is noticed.” Tomaselli asks his viewers to notice the new and to take into consideration the date, time and context for his creative and visually stunning interventions.

<http://artillerymag.com/fred-tomaselli-times>