

Inter – Office

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Like most of Jeff Feld’s work, this group of drawings possesses the strange and compelling virtue of calling into question its own status as art. One could even say this work is in the understated throes of an “existential crisis”—but in the most un-anguished and endearing way. These are drawings, so to speak, caught in the ambivalent act of being drawings. They have an almost unseemly, indeed interloping snapshot quality, as if the antic “figure” that occupies most of their grounds impetuously lurched into the frame at the last moment and somehow immediately regretted doing so. Then, to add taxonomical insult to existential injury, these drawings are decidedly undecided about whether they are figurative or abstract (is that their problem or our problem? Is it even a problem? If so, at least in this case, it is a delightful one).

But before all that, it seems necessary to back up here a bit and ask if on a formal level they are even drawings. Employing elements of collage and painting, they consist of cut-up inter-office envelopes, enamel paint and ink on a kind of cardboard, and as such, hardly conform to the traditional definition of a drawing, i.e., ink or pencil on paper. And yet they are not without a certain graphic quality, produced largely by the figurative presence of the inter-office envelope, its four holes that stand in for eyes, among other haphazard traces. Ink, as already noted, is also part of their make up. And importantly, that the artist refers to these as ‘drawings’ markedly informs their crisis-oriented status.

Formally, Feld’s palette is primarily limited to a kind of shoeshine brown, ink black, Whiteout white, and envelope orange. It seems no mere coincidence that all of these colors can be found in an office building. If it weren’t for the layers and semi-effaced or painted-over traces of other drawings within the drawings, suggestive of a studio practice, these works could potentially be elaborate office doodles—representative of hours of reckless and idle neglect (how many messages in those interoffice envelopes gone astray?). Almost outsiderish and slightly maniacal, there is something refreshingly spontaneous and artless about these drawings. This artlessness makes for a healthy, tension-producing contrast with their artfulness. For while these drawings could have been made by a Bartleby the Scrivener gone “creative,” they also evince a humble awareness of such monolithic historical precedents as Abstract Expressionism, and its main figurative apostate, Philip Guston, whose later paintings these impish little figures forcibly bring to mind. What is more, vis-à-vis Ab Ex proper (Feld’s two-tone grounds are evocative of Rothko, while the use of a leitmotif may also bring to mind Motherwell), these small, messy drawings become anti-monumental and coyly self-effacing. Full of thought, wit, and humor, their crisis is a human, as in humane crisis, in so far as they speak of the conflation of art and life, the uncertainty which often dogs the latter, and an imperfect beauty, which is not afraid to expose, indeed even depends on the exposure of its own seams.

—Chris Sharp