

ARTPULSE

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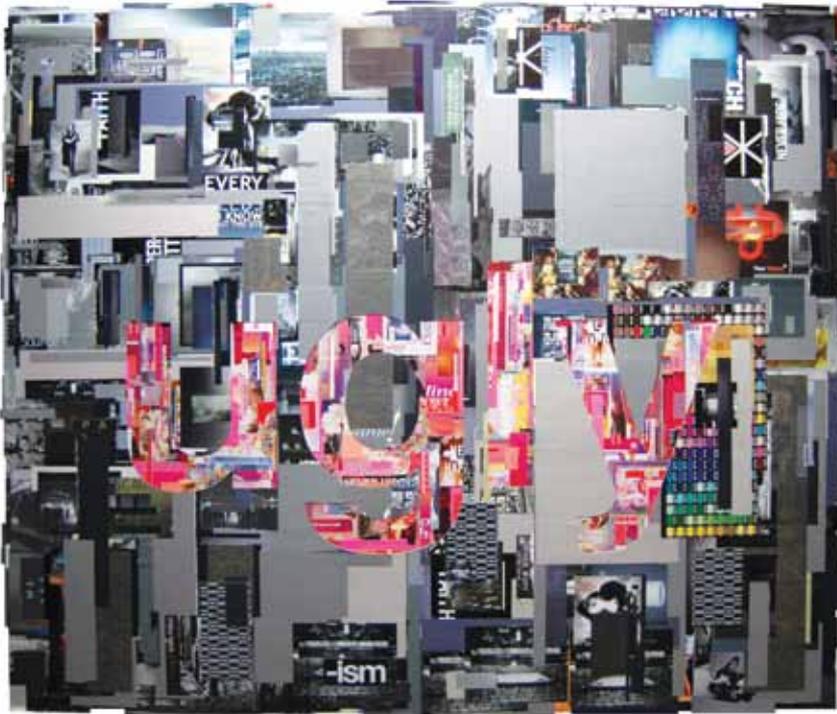
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TM GRATKOWSKI: NOTHING SHOCKING

Walter Maciel Gallery - Los Angeles

By Jill Thayer



Tm Gratkowski, *Ugly*, 2014, collaged paper on paper, 90" x 106." ©2014 Tm Gratkowski. Courtesy Walter Maciel Gallery.

In our quest to assimilate mass communication in a 24/7 news stream, Tm Gratkowski serves as a cultural observer and social navigator to channel and question the current. His paper collages and concrete sculptures reveal a subtext of social commentary amidst the white noise of society.

"Nothing Shocking" at Walter Maciel Gallery presents two and three-dimensional works in Gratkowski's first solo exhibition. The pieces are mischievous explorations into semiotics that offer immediate and buried meanings from an encounter with image, pattern, and text. Gratkowski compiles these elements through meticulous layers of paper collage in a confluence of linguistic reference and cultural vernacular. High gloss, matt, and textured papers from magazines, posters, other print material, and cast concrete are all collateral in his juxtapositions that push the viewer to consider what Gratkowski refers to as "getting to specifics of words rather than the generics of words."

The front gallery displays *Good*, *Bad*, and *Ugly*, three large works that challenge the notion of what we perceive through context and association. The artist sees these words as subjective, almost meaningless in today's culture even as the Sergio Leone film title remains in our vernacular. Gratkowski acknowledges the movie reference but notes that the genesis of the idea is more about the *words*. His subtext is intentional. He states, "Some of those words would question or enhance the title, which was based on a specific subject or idea. The subject or idea is the actual word so I am kind of flipping that process and the imagery around... What's ugly to you is not ugly to me and in vice versa." The words used are those people share an understanding of—how they have been used throughout time and how they are used today. "They don't mean anything to anyone anymore." He adds, "The epistemology of the language goes away, because you can't go back and find its origins. But it's so far removed that now, what does that mean? You have to go to the urban dictionary to understand the current reference."

Identifiable in syntax over time, the meaning of the words becomes inconsequential. "Bad," is cut out and centered on superimposed images of warm and cool greys. "TIME," "NEXT," "COL-

LISION," "SALUTES," "CLASSIC," "SOLUTIONS," "BIG OIL," "INTERCOURSES," "LOOKING UP," "DANGER," and "MESSAGE MEDIA" are words positioned haphazardly that provoke the viewer to define a possible relationship in the juxtapositions. The middle panel, "BAD," creates yet another layer of inquiry composed with yellow, green, and blue print media. Is "Bad" good or "Good" bad? It's all in the viewer's discretion and a matter of context. Gratkowski wants to push people in the understanding of communication and intent. Are these colloquialisms or formal references in the English language?

The exhibition includes a series of large vertical panels that explore the power of image over words. A smaller series displays silhouettes of human interactions and behaviors atop graphic layers of media text with comparisons drawn in the visual sequence of the subjects depicted. In contrast, small sculptural works of paper and pigment concrete from his *Paper Crete* series occupy the space as the textural dialogue continues. Crumpled paper from his print material is sandwiched between blocks of concrete inviting inquiry, as one might ask... Are we trapped under the weight of a media-saturated culture? Are words used today archaic tomorrow? Is our language compromised by a hierarchical society?

The constant change of information and trends in graphics, colors, and stories reflect the nature of the material that the artist sees as evolving. Gratkowski deconstructs our lexicon in a cut and paste landscape of meaning and message while his process-driven works contextualize image and text for the viewer to decipher. In "Nothing Shocking," Gratkowski finds nothing unusual about our quotidian misinterpretations or assumptions in a discourse of selective meaning. He does however find that anomaly and disseminates it through a language of visual perception offering engaging narratives in contemporary culture. ■

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