

ARTFORUM

Damian Moppett

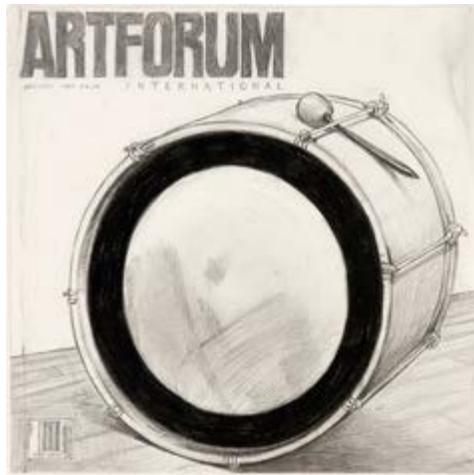
RENNIE COLLECTION

51 East Pender Street

November 26-April 21

Call it a hometown coup for Damian Moppett. In the fall of 2009, Bob Rennie, a Vancouver-based collector, real estate marketer, and chair of the North American acquisitions committee for the Tate, opened the eponymous Rennie Collection in Vancouver's Chinatown to display his private collection, one of the largest in North America. This fall, of the forty artists Rennie collects in depth, Moppett became the first Canadian artist to have an exhibition in the gallery.

Moppett's representational drawings and paintings are deceptive because the subject of his work is not what is depicted. Viewed all together, these images suggest a meaning that develops through the juxtaposition of the various people and places. In one room, for example, the walls are cluttered with small-scale paintings and drawings, salon style. Their subjects differ: portraits of artists, such as *Calder with Maquette of Public Sculpture* (all works cited 2005), or *Hollis Frampton in His Wittgenstein T-Shirt*; scenes of bands performing; vignettes of the Gulf Islands; studies of sculptures in an artist's studio, like *Studio in Basement*. What seems to develop, at first, is a portrait of the artist, a mixture of influences and autobiography, all removed from context. However, if this is self-hagiography, there is a certain humor to it. In the middle of the same room in the Rennie Collection appears one of Moppett's "Stabiles," reworkings of Alexander Calder and Anthony Caro sculptures that serve as platforms on which Moppett displays his intentionally bad pottery. Further, one notices that some of paintings depict the objects in the gallery. As such, Moppett's work often refers to its own making, but the absurdity of presenting high modernist sculpture next to amateur craft also suggests parody, or at least humor. Whether the work mythologizes or criticizes the autonomous artist is left ambiguous; it's never funny enough to be just a joke.



Damian Moppett, *Artforum with Mike Kelley's 'Foul Perfection: Thoughts on Caricature'*, 2003, graphite on paper, 10 x 10".

- Aaron Peck

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