

# Daniel Bilodeau

## Consumed

June 8<sup>th</sup> – July 6<sup>th</sup>

Island Weiss Gallery is pleased to present *Daniel Bilodeau: Consumed*, an exhibition on view from June 8 through July 6, 2016 of paintings and works in mixed media in which the artist combines hyperrealism with elements of non-objectivity and painterly execution. The title *Consumed* functions in a dual manner, as Bilodeau explores the implications of consumer culture and is himself consumed in the processing of our role within it—through his life and art making practice. For Bilodeau, painting is wedded to this exploration, diving into contemporary visual culture, social responsibility and art historical riffs.

“The tangle of plastic bags, bottles and sauce containers, callous remnants of a lunch order, and all to be nurdles in the ocean somewhere,” as Bilodeau says, are rendered in *Consumed*. The painting depicts a fellow artist amid such items, with a sensuousness worthy of John Singer Sargent. Bilodeau mixed oil with encaustic to create surface luminosity, while rendering the plastic containers—with bits of food stuck to them—with trompe l’oeil precision.

Bilodeau's love for Dutch Golden Age painting and his concerns about consumer ethics merged perfectly as he came to discover the history behind the European works and its clear correlate on a globalized scale today. Learning more and painting his own flower pieces that recall those of artists such as Rachel Ruysch and Ambrosius Bosschaert, he found eerie parallels between their time and ours, such as the exploitation resulting from global trade. Bilodeau begins his floral still lifes with drawings, which he turns into real arrangements assisted by a florist. With the pressure of time imposed by his fleeting subject, he rearranges flowers, lighting, and props to get as much as he can from his motifs. He varies his process for each work, using collage, photoshop for planning, and abstraction to achieve his final results. In *Where Credit is Due*, Bilodeau paid careful attention to the textures in a lush bouquet. The shimmering light in the darkened space gives the flowers a romantic aspect, heightened by the symbolic presence of an opened pomegranate. However, the vanitas elements are not insects or fallen blossoms but credit cards, an iphone, and a handbag. For Bilodeau, the objects speak of the phenomena of “planned obsolescence and perceived obsolescence, in which the ‘expiration’ of the software or hardware, or the end of a trend, are already built in.” Abstract translucent shapes wound into the flowers are part of the composition and bring a contemporary narrative to the Dutch influence.

A bouquet in the Dutch tradition is also present in *Fast Fashion*, the most specific and allegorical work in the show. The theme of exploitation is raised in the way that the flowers are fed by a stream of water coming down from a poked hole in a bag, in which a gourami fish's life is in immediate peril. References to the flag of Bangladesh, H & M, Louis Vuitton and Walmart (their logos intertwined), and unmarked boxes that imply display and packaging raise the specter of ethics and environmental abuses. At the same time, a zigzag line that organizes the composition, and the use of exciting pastel colors like those used in emergent 3d advertising today, give this work aesthetic appeal beyond its subject matter. In itself, it mimics how we might be attracted to fashion items even while we are aware of the appalling conditions in which they were created.

Combining abstraction and realism, *Tweet* is freer than *Fast Fashion*. On a collage-like arrangement in which dark, weird flowers are suffused, a brightly colored group of finches tweet together. Bilodeau sees their lightness, representing an achievable freedom from the heaviness around them, as symbolic.

In other works, Bilodeau reveals beauty in the unexpected. In *Delancey (Might be)* he used collage to recreate the wall of a temporary construction site where ads had been posted, torn off, painted over, and damaged by weather. The subway entrance in the left side of the work locates it in the artist's neighborhood on the Lower East Side. "Might be," the wording in one of the torn signs, gives this painting poetic nuance. In *Bow*, a part of bouquet, which has been blown up, is detailed yet abstract in its arrangement. The red leafage calls up the vanitas tradition. Yet, the leaves, which seem both to bow and to be in a bow, give this image a certain sweetness, making it as much about life's brevity as about being alive.

Finally Bilodeau's work is about balance, about living with what we know that might weigh on us while reaching for life's delights and some measure of lightness.

Born in Montréal, Canada, Bilodeau received his BFA from the Ringling College of Art and Design and his MFA from the New York Academy of Art. He also studied at Studio Art Centers International, Florence, Italy. The recipient of several honors, including the George Sugarman Foundation Grant and the Leslie T. and Frances U Posey Foundation Scholarship, Bilodeau has exhibited in galleries and museums throughout the country and abroad. The Terra Foundation of American Art recently awarded Bilodeau a summer residency in Giverny, France. His work is also to be found in *The Figure: Painting, Drawing and Sculpture*, a survey of the use of the figure in contemporary art, published by Rizzoli Press.

Lisa N. Peters

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