

ARTE FUSE

Brian Calvin paints emptiness at Anton Kern Gallery

by DANIEL GAUSS on 09/23/2014

Sometimes Brian Calvin paints a slightly open mouth against a plain background. Sometimes he presents an image of this type of mouth cropped beneath a nose and sometimes we see an entire face with this slightly open mouth. He also presents some images of nearly entire human figures which seem to be in a type of cognitive holding pattern. His focus, in fact, seems to be on a particular subjective state of 'emptiness' which can best be perceived, apparently, by focusing on a subject's mouth.

When we look at the pieces that just reveal the mouth, we get a sense of the type of benign aphasia the artist seems to be shooting for (aphasia is a medical condition in which a person has trouble processing language). We become aware of a state of mind where nothing is being processed – perhaps nothing is going on outside the person and nothing is going on inside at the same time. Or it could be that something is happening outside but we are witnessing that period of time when the person is in a state of cognitive emptiness or transition, that period when the person is just taking things in and waiting for some inner realization or response to kick in.

The artist seems to focus on that mysterious moment where we surrender to the nothingness and rely on something to just pop into our heads. This, of course, begs the question: Where do these responses come from, can we control or alter them, or are we, basically, helpless in regard to our processing and responses to outer-world stimulation?



Actually, the images cropped below the nose seem to provide a more intense awareness of this emptiness. When we see an entire face in the show, we see that this emptiness can exist simultaneously with different emotional states.



With larger eyes, slightly more open mouth and raised eyebrows indicating fear, we still see the moment of emptiness. Or we see sadness or concern or just a blank unemotional stare and... emptiness.

What I found to be really fascinating about the show is how we are challenged to investigate the process of how we perceive the emotional states of others merely by looking at the other's facial features, and how we are immediately engaged by the facial expressions we see. The engagement often involves attempts to replicate the same inner experience being displayed. All of this seems to be an automatic process.

So please drop by Anton Kern and be engaged by this amazing nothingness and feel your own nothingness and come away with a greater awareness of how you have been engaging the world of other's emotions and responses.