SALON 94

Carter

11 Dec-6 Feb
Hotel, London
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Review by Cedar Lewisohn

Left: Carter, *Untitled*, 2005, blue and black acrylic ink, pencil and paper on paper, 103 x 87.5cm

Even before arriving at the show, I found myself asking some perplexing questions about this Carter character. Who exactly is he? Why the one-word name? Is it an alias, the artist's surname, or perhaps the title under which some new collaborative group operate?

The thing about the name Carter is that it comes with a truckload of baggage. A quick Google reveals a random ocean of subjects as diverse as the ex-US president Jimmy, a basketball player named Vince, a sometime acquaintance of Paris Hilton called Nick, a wonder woman named Lynda, and the 1971 classic London gangster movie, *Get Carter*.

When I did finally make it inside the exhibition, far from clearing up my perplexities, an entirely new set of uncertainties were revealed.

The East End debut of the artist, who is based in New York, consisted of seven medium-scale drawings (all untitled), a photograph of a mannequin's hand holding a paintbrush (*Polaroid*), and a small monitor showing the hand in action.

The drawings were made up of simple outlines of head shapes, with the various details that go towards constructing a face cut out and placed in (usually) the wrong place on the face, or simply elsewhere on the page.

Sometimes you see the head shape, with the eyes in the right place, but with the face filled in with a close-up of hair. Other drawings have the eyes and ears stuck to the paper, but no face outline to connect them. So not only do you never view the complete picture, you usually witness some kind of oblique juxtaposition.

The overall effect is repetitive and arbitrary, giving the impression of someone who's been smoking dope while messing about on Photoshop. The grubby smudges of blue ink and Carter's just-enough-talent-to-draw remind us all the time that the marks are definitely handmade, however.

This strengthens the interpretation that Carter is making a point about humans doing a machine's job.

The forms repeat over the page, and repeat again in each individual work, but because they are drawn in fine lines on white paper, the effect is both physically sparse and visually crowded at the same time.

This is not the only contradiction in the work. It can be considered incredibly slack and yet obsessive at the same time. The eyes poking through the backs of heads give the impression of someone inside themselves, looking out through a mask. But what are we to make of these shields or barriers our mystery man stands behind?

Then there are the images of trees to consider. Outlines of trees are drawn on to the page in the same linear style as the faces, and black-and-white photos of trees also show up as a collaged backdrop in one of the drawings.

Because of the casual nature of the work, it's difficult to know at what level to read this kind of visual symbol. It is almost as if the artist is willing us to dismiss him, which might sound crazy, but also works on some passive/aggressive level. It's a reverse psychology that actually encourages intrigue.

There is a rumour that Carter's work all relates to queer identity politics, so maybe the trees and anonymity of the face portraits all subtly refer to this. But that is, of course, like everything else we know about Carter, pure surmise.

Right: *Untitled*, blue and black acrylic ink, pencil and paper on tree collage, 2005, 104 x 85cm

Lewisohn, Cedar. "Carter." ArtReview (April, 2006): 124.