

GERING & LÓPEZ GALLERY

ART VOICES

Often finding himself listening to one Joy Division song on repeat for weeks at a time, Michael Bevilacqua took one year to finish the massive 30-foot-long canvas *An Ideal For Living*, 2012, letting the music be more than just background entertainment. Immersing himself in the legendary Manchester-based band's whole output, including rare recordings, Bevilacqua may have found the perfect soundtrack for his work and his life. Starting with a stripped-down, punk attitude, as heard in their *An Ideal For Living* EP, the post-punk pioneers quickly morphed into a moody, shifting, cerebral band that was hard to pin down. Composed of three panels, Bevilacqua's tribute to Joy Division, including an image lifted from the first EP of a Hitler Youth drummer boy, uses a wide variety of painterly techniques that parallel the band's diverse sound. Using acrylic, spray paint, and graffiti paint markers, hard-edged sections overlap stains, drips, patterns, textures, and words that function as signifiers for the band's recordings.

If painting *An Ideal For Living* was a form of catharsis, it may have also further loosened Bevilacqua's approach to tackling a canvas both formally and conceptually. His early work was known for its precise delineation of knowingly-filtered pop culture collaged together in bright or fashion-forward hues. Starting with his 2012 solo exhibition, *Ceremony*, at Kravets Wehby Gallery in New York, Bevilacqua began incorporating chrome spray paint to create a new series he titles *The New Disorder* — alluding to the first track on Joy Division's first full-length album *Unknown Pleasures*, as well as *New Order*, the band formed after the singer of Joy Division, Ian Curtis, committed suicide. Minimal and full of symbolic meaning, the works in the series feature text and patterns, as well as scratches and gouges in the surface to suggest a world in a downward spiral or an artist coping with reality by leaving an indelible impression in the form of a contemporary cave painting.

One such work, *Trinity*, 2012, at Gering & López Gallery hangs on a wall next to yet far enough away from *An Ideal For Living* to make a significant impact of its own. A large square work, it features the letters 7 and 15 in a gothic font, referring to the artist's birth date, on top of a silver ground. Also present is a thin black line that runs the length of the canvas, under which is an inverted cross, alluding to Bevilacqua's Catholic upbringing and his being named after St. Michael, who in the New Testament was said to battle Satan's minions, using a sword to thwart evil. The silhouette of a bird is seen on the lower right side of the canvas under a large brown splotch — perhaps dried blood? By limiting his palette to mostly silver, black, and white, Bevilacqua achieves a certain simple beauty and purity, while at the same time calling attention to a grimy industrial landscape not unlike the working-class city of 1970s Manchester that Joy Division called home. In this case Bevilacqua manages to connect his personal life with those of his musical heroes more indirectly, yet the results are nonetheless striking.



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