

# Petzel

Hannah Mandel, "Troy Brauntuch's Dark Matter," *Interview*, May 10, 2013.

## Interview

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ART

### *TROY BRAUNTUCH'S DARK MATTER*

By HANNAH MANDEL  
Photography JEFF HENRIKSON

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When *Interview* sat down with artist Troy Brauntuch in 1983, he described, concretely, the thinking that has come to be a defining characteristic of his oeuvre. "It's the dilemma of consciousness trying to decide what to make us see," Brauntuch said. Thirty years later, the artist, a seminal member of the now historic "Pictures Generation," a group of artists that emerged in the 1980s and includes Cindy Sherman, Robert Longo, and Sherrie Levine, continues to produce his haunting, phantasmagoric, immediately recognizable drawings. Large and dark, the subjects of the photorealistic images, which are produced by meticulous draftsmanship on dark cloth, are often not discernable until the eye adjusts to the canvas. Though they appear void-like in their blackness, the images are actually made using a plethora of color, layering and dispersing until the drawings take on a photographic hue, be it a sepia or a graytone. Brauntuch's latest show, opening

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Friday at Petzel Gallery, features some images appropriated from media and newspapers, and some taken directly by the artist. Ghostly tableaux of charred, discarded cameras mingle with larger, multi panel works—a state trooper exiting his cruiser, a man's partially obscured visage, the late racehorse Barbaro. The effect is beautifully haunting; at once dulcet and jarring. We previewed the show with Brauntuch. He discussed image sourcing in the Internet era, teaching, and how his studio schedule has evolved with time.

HANNAH MANDEL: The show looks wonderful—congratulations. So, you don't live in New York, but how often do you come up here to visit?

TROY BRAUNTUCH: Usually around once a month. Less, recently. I had an apartment for a while, so I was here a lot. But the last couple of years, it's been once a month.

MANDEL: So, this is all new work, for the show?

BRAUNTUCH: Yes.

MANDEL: How long have you been working towards this?

BRAUNTUCH: The last year, this last year meaning 12 months.

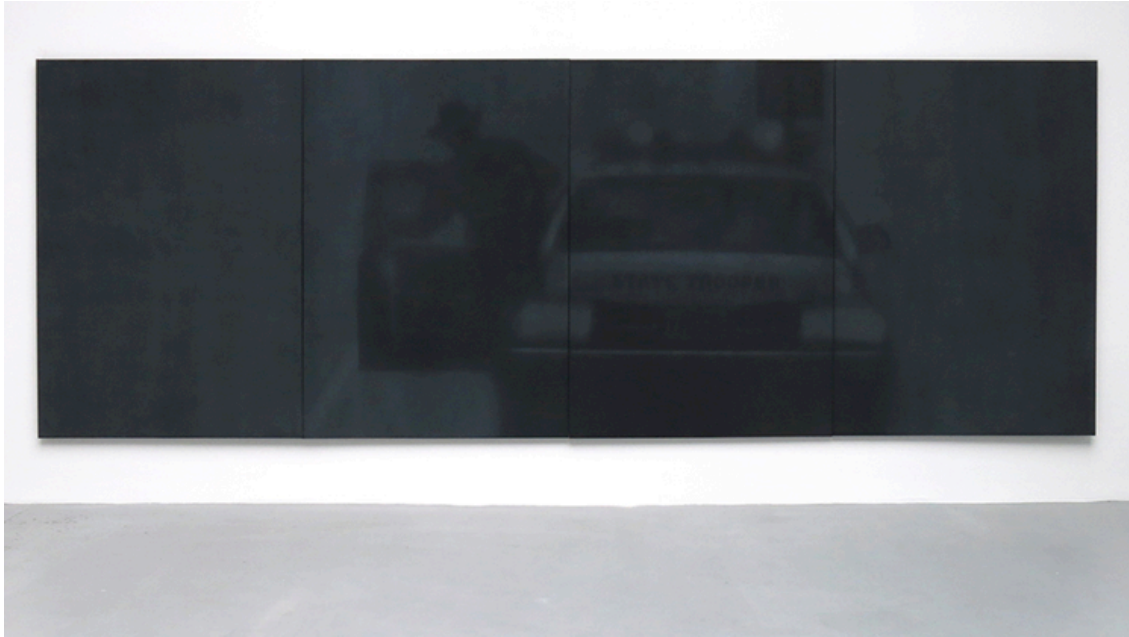
MANDEL: I'm really interested in *State Trooper, 2013* and how it's split up into multiple panels. Have you worked much with pieces with multiple canvases?

BRAUNTUCH: I actually have, yeah. Also, based on logistics, and scale and fragility, often they're panels. So, in terms of transport and production of the works, there's no way that could be a continuous surface with the materials I work with. It also breaks down the image in a way I sort of like—as parts that make the whole. But, with this one I think it's really beautiful. But a lot of my work has been triptychs, diptychs, multiple panels.

MANDEL: In reading about your work, people are always talking about this idea of the Pictures Generation, and what it is. So, I was interested if you could tell me, in your own words, how you define what the Pictures Generation is.

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BRAUNTUCH: I don't define it anymore. Actually, I try to avoid those words. I think if you read my press release, the reason I did a more narrative story, not being about the object, and not being about pictures, was that I was more interested to really talk about what the work and the images were about, as opposed to the history of the Pictures Generation. I mean, it keeps changing—who that generation is. My histories with certain people—that keeps changing. Not my history, but what that history really was. It's forever changing and growing. Maybe that's why I stay away from it now.

MANDEL: I think your work seems so heavily focused on time—the time it takes to produce a photographic image, versus the time it takes you to do your rendering of a photographic image. There must be something really cathartic about that process, about subverting time.

BRAUNTUCH: You mean, the physical time of making? Or the time that it operates in?

MANDEL: Both.

BRAUNTUCH: Yeah, the actual production is not so interesting. *[laughs]* Getting to the final result is sort of like the movie, the end. Seeing it, in terms of that sense of time, and how it operates in time—I love. But the actual production is sort of tedious and painful.

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MANDEL: Do you watch many films?

BRAUNTUCH: I love films, yeah. I think actually, going back to the Pictures Generation, it was so much film-based, coming up out of the early '70s, '60s—cinema was just really amazing. So I think myself and others were sort of quite entrenched in film and image. Certainly more than art.

MANDEL: Interesting.

BRAUNTUCH: Because art at that moment wasn't anything like that in that sense. It was post-Pop, and minimalism and conceptual art. Anything but an image. Anything but a picture of something, or something real.

MANDEL: I feel like there's been this vein in contemporary art recently, about taking appropriated imagery and dotting on it—doing things with appropriated imagery that's very related to the Internet. What role does the Internet play in your own practice? Does it play a role at all? Because you've been making work using appropriated imagery since before the Internet.

BRAUNTUCH: You know, we never use the Internet. [*laughs*] It's funny—if they're not photographs I've taken, and some are and some aren't, I never think about locating them on the Internet. Newspapers, magazines... I mean, you could type in, for instance, "dead people," on the Internet, and you'd get a zillion dead people. And I've never done that. There's sort of a reservoir of stuff out there that I never use. Usually I sort of live with these images for a while, so there's usually a distance between thinking about using something, and using something. Especially if I've done something about an event. I've used stuff that's say, 70 years down the road from it. Rather than in the moment.

MANDEL: I know that you're a professor as well. How has that changed your practice? How you work?

BRAUNTUCH: It's just been a nice life. I like teaching, and I think it's sort of a grounding thing, talking to people. It gets you out of your studio—it got me out of New York. And I sort of came to it late; it wasn't something I ever planned on doing. So it's been sort of a new adventure, in my 40s. And I like it. It's cool. Austin, where I teach, is really nice.

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MANDEL: What is your studio practice like? When do you work in the day? Do you work alone?

BRAUNTUCH: I used to work only at night, and now I don't like working at night as much. So I try to do it during the day—from morning to afternoon. A basic work day. 9 to 5. But it used to be 4 to 4, or something like that. In my younger days.

MANDEL: Do you think that affects the way the work comes out? If you're working at night, versus working during the day?

BRAUNTUCH: No, I have no windows.

MANDEL: I was looking over an interview you had done for *Interview* in 1983, when you said you hated going to your own openings. Is that still the case?

BRAUNTUCH: It is. Yes, it's awful. I mean it's nice to be *around* it—sit in the back room, have a drink—people come up to you. Because the great thing about being an artist is that it stands in for you. So why do you really have to be standing around. It's kind of awkward. It's like watching a movie, and the filmmaker is standing next to the movie while you're watching it. It's kind of like, why is Coppola standing next to his film? I don't understand. I think it's kind of weird.

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MANDEL: You had mentioned that a lot of these images are ones that you had taken yourself.

BRAUNTUCH: Yes, and some of them are pulled from newspapers, or the world—this one is actually a drawing setup from my studio class [*Untitled, 2013*], which is kind of simple. This is one of the things I put in front of them to draw. But I've worked with this kind of imagery in ways that are not necessarily studios. I've worked with statues, and I've worked with structures, and figurative elements like this. What I pull out of this room every day, and make them draw. It could be seen many different ways, but it's important to me that that's what it is; it's from the studio. The cameras [*Untitled, 2013*] were from a friend of mine, a colleague's cameras, whose home was burnt down. He's actually a professional photographer. And he lost everything—his home, his cameras. And he let me borrow these ashen cameras to take photographs of for the show. To use for my work. So it's really important that they're real. And again, there's sort of the glitch that gives it the space that it actually is my imagery. In other words, that they sort of are moving through the space, looking at something. And then this one was Barbaro, [*Untitled, 2013*] the horse that was put to sleep. The racehorse. He's in a stall, where he's being worked on, and eventually he dies. So, they come from different places. In terms of whether they're my photographs, or "taken from the world" photographs—in the end, they end up here.

MANDEL: So, as an artist who works, or has been written about working, with media culture, I was curious—do you see your work as a strict critique of media culture? Or is it more of an investigation? Or somewhere in between?

BRAUNTUCH: It isn't something I really think about. It seems to need a personal history, investigation, because everything seems sort of arbitrary. There's such an abundance of imagery in media. It sort of finds that seam, that moment that's really not identifiable as being a critique of that. I think I'm more interested in how I choose an image, what that image is, what that narrative is, how it reads when someone looks at something, thinks about something. So at the moment, I guess I wouldn't think about that. I think because it's already in the work. It's sort of like, whether there's a camera, or a racing horse, or a criminal, or a state trooper—in the end, they're not replaceable. I couldn't take something out of this and put something else in that would make sense. So, it's sort of how you make meaning with it, in the end.

<http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/troy-brauntuchs-dark-matter>