

Britt, Douglas, "Robyn O'Neil on Duchamp, goodbyes and her new 'slow read'", HOUSTON CHRONICLE, 14 May 2009.



Robyn O'Neil on Duchamp, goodbyes and her new 'slow read' - May 14, 2009

As promised, here are a couple of outtakes from my recent Q&A with 2009 Hunting Art Prize winner Robyn O'Neil. This time, no Qs, just the A.

I really did need that (\$50,000 award), too. It's been such an uncomfortable time in so many ways. And I actually kind of thought of Marcel Duchamp's Box in a Valise. Do you know that piece of Duchamp's? I can't remember the whole story, but he basically gave mini-versions of his best work and put them all in a suitcase, this beautiful little box full of tiny versions of what he considered to be the most important pieces. And I sort of thought of that when I made (the winning drawing). I had this need as an artist, aside from the prize, to do it, so that it was coming to an end almost as a -- it was really, it was a (way) to fully say goodbye to everything I was doing for awhile. Also, it seemed like a great way to just scrunch it all into a 32-by-40 piece of paper and see how I could manage it without it seeming way too chaotic.

Regarding the new direction her work has taken:

I think the biggest change is that the work isn't so based on a limiting narrative. I mean, the narrative that I've been working with for so long was kind of the easiest thing for people to catch onto with my work, and anytime something becomes a little too easy to get, I get a little -- I don't know, a little uncomfortable with it. So the big change and shift is that the work is just more poetic and not so driven to a narrative. There will be -- I kind of think of each piece as an individual song or poem that might or might not have anything to do with the one it's sitting next to. So it's much more trusting of formal qualities of drawing and imagery -- and without that need of the stamp of some bigger story to it. And they're much quieter. Men aren't -- they aren't looking like they did in all these drawings. You will see images of the human form, but not in a way you ever did. You'll see heads sort of floating. There's also much more white space. Things aren't as dense. So it's almost as if the world sort of opened up at this time and (is) ready for a new -- you know, if you were to -- I don't want to tie it to my old narrative, but if that world's gone and those humans are all gone and the world's a blank slate now, that kind of makes sense with the way the work works. It's just much quieter, and there isn't much happening, basically, and it's much more mysterious. I don't think people will be able to catch on exactly what's happening as quickly, so -- and I think I love a slow read, and these new drawings are definitely exactly that. It's something that takes time to really understand, I think.



Robyn O'Neil, *These final hours embrace at last; this is our ending, this is our past*, graphite on paper;
courtesy of the artist