

ARTFORUM

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LARS VON TRIER
LUCIE STAHL
TERRY ADKINS AND
GEORGE LEWIS
IN CONVERSATION

Dotty Attie P.P.O.W

Dotty Attie first began to exhibit in the early 1970s, a period often remembered as hostile to painting as a medium of significant art. Indeed, although she began her career as a painter, from 1970 onward Attie worked not in painting but in drawing, and when she started to paint again, around 1985, she leaned on the strategies of Minimal and Conceptual art, the schools that had displaced painting in the art world's attention. Attie worked and continues to work serially, mostly on canvases of the same size, a small six inches square, and she shows her groups of pictures in grids or rows. In doing so, she undercuts the individuality of any one painting, any sense of its expressive uniqueness or its responsiveness to its maker's mood. Rather, each painting is phrased as a semantic unit, like the words of a sentence or the pages of

a book, dependent on its context, its place in a sequence, to be understood. Attie was not the only artist emerging in the '70s to work on recuperating painting this way; I think of Jennifer Bartlett, for example, or of the gridded images of Pat Steir. What is special to Attie is her appropriated visual world, borrowed equally from old Hollywood B movies, photography both sensational and stock, and familiar staples of art history such as Courbet and Caravaggio, all of which she combines with a delicate hand and a dry wit.

This exhibition was titled "The Lone Ranger" and contained several sets of mostly grisaille paintings addressing that iconic guy, hung in long rows of from sixteen to twenty-five canvases each, along with a smaller panel of text at the beginning and end of each row. The most straightforward sequence, *The Lone Ranger*, 2012–13, is mainly made up of images of the cowboy himself in various stances, seen both with and without horse, or gun, or Tonto, even once or twice without white hat, but always with mask. The text seems purely factual: THE LONE RANGER, BORN IN THE EARLY DAYS OF RADIO / BECAME A BELOVED FIXTURE OVER THE NATIONAL AIRWAVES. A few images, though, are ringers—the Lone Ranger incongruously wearing a double-breasted suit, for example, and posing with someone I'm pretty sure is J. Edgar Hoover. (Attie will occasionally include recognizable people in her large cast of characters, though she won't tell you who they are.) Here, the frame briefly opens out from the Lone Ranger himself, or rather from the poses of derring-do and friendly authority that construct his persona, to his social context and the way that persona has been used there. This view broadens further in other works in the show and at the same time becomes more incongruous, even surreal, in fact even grotesque. In *Enthusiastic Fans*, 2011, for example, we see others besides the Lone Ranger wearing his familiar black mask, or masks somewhat like it, as if inspired by him: an infant holding a pistol to his mouth as if sucking on a lollipop, say, or women in bodices, in bondage gear, or near naked but for the mask and a top hat. THE LONE RANGER'S ENTHUSIASTIC FANS, reads the text, CAME FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE. Indeed.

Other works address the Lone Ranger more tangentially, with groups of images of outlandishly masked men, for instance, or of dire situations—attacks from bears, falls from blimps—linked to him only by the text (THE LONE RANGER WAS ALWAYS TO BE FOUND / WHEREVER ASSISTANCE WAS NEEDED). And a group of "Worst Case Scenarios," all from 2013 and often very funny, don't seem directly tied to him at all but take the idea of the dire situation to awful conclusions, even while setting fashion and hairstyle faux pas on the same crisis level as mutilations and car crashes. Throughout, as always in Attie's work, there is a three-way tension between the repetitive orderliness of her sequential rows of units, the absurdity and often explicit violence of the scenes they show, and the care with which they are made. Like kittens, beautifully crafted small objects have a tendency to be irresistible, and Attie's canvases seduce even as they point to strange and powerful social and psychic realities.

—David Frankel

Dotty Attie,
Enthusiastic Fans
2011, twenty-five
panels in oil on
linen, each 6 x 6

