

New
American
Paintings

A System to Communicate: Carl Hammoud
at Lora Reynolds Gallery

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Carl Hammoud's message is an open book. This may be unhelpful on the surface, as that book is comprised of blank pages — just as a series of labeled jars (for volatile chemicals? Scented oils? Are they filled at all?) appear without elucidating text. Yet therein lies the message: an image's power to represent reservoirs of information while simultaneously being that reservoir of information. His debut U.S. solo exhibition, *A Zone of Reduced Complexity* at Lora Reynolds Gallery in Austin, bears much to consider. — Brian Fee, Austin contributor

Despite a dearth of data, Hammoud's compositions are fairly easy to "read". His oil paintings maintain a muted color palette, fluctuating between warm sepia and clinical gray, and bear a near photorealistic quality from a distance, despite their "missing" information. Closer looks reveal the artist's brushstrokes and a human imperfection to these otherwise uninhabited compositions. At the opening reception, Hammoud conferred to me that he only included figures in his graphite drawings, which he considered more formulated than his paintings. Though like in *Test pt 1* — where a gender nonspecific figure appears to read a blank book sideways — Hammoud doesn't feature faces. Such extraneous information would detract from the point of the work: the containers themselves. In the case of *Test pt 1*, one of those containers is the person's mind.

Hammoud derived the exhibition's title, *A Zone of Reduced Complexity*, from the writings of German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, specifically as a system for conveying information within a greater, chaotic world society. Hammoud's process of culling source imagery from the internet, editing them to a smaller pool of references, and finally working off several images at once to execute a single painting or drawing seems in keeping with Luhmann's systems theory. For his chosen imagery to "exist", they must retain their identities. Diorama is apparently based on crime-scene photos, but I see corporate boardrooms and university halls in those stacked chairs. However, this does not detract from the fact that they are chairs, containers for a seated body — no matter the situation nor location.

Despite their charming antiquity in our digital age, Hammoud's use of card catalogues are a particularly ingenious device for representing categorized and stored information. In prior exhibitions, like 2012's *Diplopia* at Gallery Baton, Seoul (a dual show with fellow Swede Jens Fänge), Hammoud presented them in uniform rows, with one drawer open to reveal blank cards. He has further distilled that imagery here, in a pair of cardboard sculptures entitled *Correct*. Produced primarily from the backs of the artist's sketchbooks, these empty drawers are reduced to perfect receptacles. What they lack in physical, readable information, like the other works in *A Zone of Reduced Complexity*, they communicate a suffusion of meaning.

Carl Hammoud was born in 1976 and lives and works in Stockholm. He has exhibited extensively in Scandinavia. Hammoud has had solo shows at the Gothenburg Museum of Art (Sweden), the Malmö Art Museum (Sweden), and the Kalmar Art Museum (Sweden). He has participated in group shows at institutions including Magasin 3 (Stockholm), the Turku Art Museum (Finland), and the Borås Museum of Modern Art (Sweden). His work is included in the collections of the Moderna Museet (Stockholm), Magasin 3, the Malmö Art Museum, the Gothenburg Museum of Art, the Museum Frieder Burda (Baden-Baden, Germany), and the British Museum (London). *A Zone of Reduced Complexity* continues through March 16.

Brian Fee is an art punk currently based in Austin, TX. His culture blog *Fee's List* covers his three loves (art, film, live music) occurring in his other three loves (the Lone Star State, the Big Apple, and Tokyo).