

RENA BRANSTEN GALLERY

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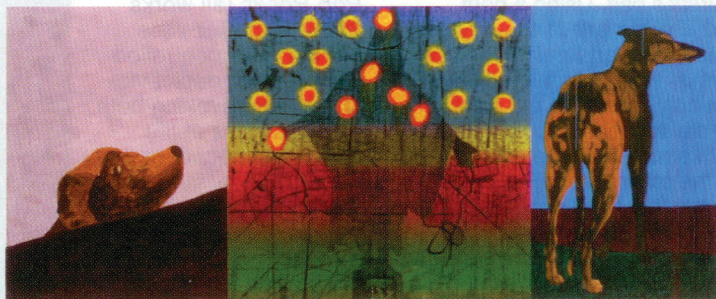
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Rupert Garcia at Rena Bransten



Rupert Garcia: *Dogs and Abu Ghraib*, 2005-06, inkjet pigment and acrylic on paper, 53 by 119¼ inches; at Rena Bransten.

The central panel in a triptych by Rupert Garcia titled *Dogs and Abu Ghraib* (2005-06) shows the now notorious, still shocking image of a cloaked, silhouetted figure from Abu Ghraib. His pose, with outstretched arms, evokes a crucifixion, but that sober association is undone by the inhabitants of the flanking panels, bearing apprehensive witness to the central figure: crisp and colorful dogs gleaned from well-known art-historical sources. One of these is the alert hound seen in Courbet's *The Meeting* (1854), while the other is Goya's scrap-hungry mutt peering from the post-Napoleonic gloom of *Dog* (ca. 1821). Unlike the actual dogs of Abu Ghraib, these have been turned into guardians of sorts; in this version of events, obedience to authority is called into question, as are the politics of secret coercion and official hypocrisy.

For over three decades, Garcia has been creating politically charged images of this type, all responding with intelligent indignation to the historical moments in which he conceives them. Throughout, he has pursued the genre of political art in a uniquely vital way. The current body of work, titled "Los Perros" (Dogs), contains a few new twists. One is Garcia's incorporation of digitally manipulated, photographically derived images, here printed onto paper or unstretched canvas and then hand-painted in brilliantly colored, translucent acrylics. In a work titled *Perrovenecia* (2005-06), there is the addition of a densely colored intaglio print in a Brice Marden-esque abstract pattern, juxtaposed with images of a 16th-century Venetian military encampment, echoing a different sort of conflict.

Not all of the recent works have a digital component; three smaller, single-panel paintings (*El Perro Normal*, *Perropugura* and *Perroposada*, all 2006) are gestural renditions of individual dogs set against backgrounds of almost flat color. Given, however, that at least one of the multiple panels in each of the four largest pieces in the show was digitally inflected, it seems clear that Garcia's layered procedure represents a likely future direction.

Whether or not Garcia's work commits to one side or another of the digital divide, it is evident that he is a master of deploying succinct and sophisticated formal strategies to advance subtle political critiques. Rather than cry expressionistic havoc to let loose the dogs of bombast, Garcia reminds us that the dogs most likely to have their day are those who are best of breed.

—Mark Van Proyen

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