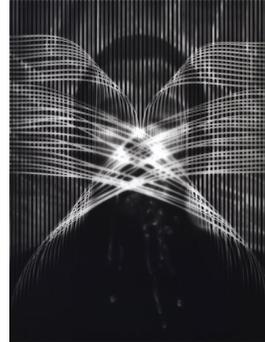




Sophia Dixon



Benjamin Kress



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In the Viewing Room: "The Figure in the Carpet", curated by Colleen Asper

2 December 2008 - 10 January 2009

Reception: Thursday December 11th, 6 -8 pm

"The Figure in the Carpet" is a Henry James short story, a title borrowed for this exhibition of works on paper by Sophia Dixon, Benjamin Kress, and Ted Mineo. Henry James's story is narrated by a critic, a device that tempts the reader to look to the narrative for insights into James's own thoughts on the relationship between art and meaning. It begins with the narrator's high hopes for a piece of criticism he has written of the latest novel by the fashionable author Hugh Vereker. When circumstances align to introduce our critic and his author, the narrator's pride over his insightful review is crushed by Vereker's unexpected dismissal. This bit of criticism, like all the others contends Vereker, has entirely missed the point. Taking pity on our dejected critic, Vereker later reveals to him something he claims to have told no others, that his work has a secret subject, something for the critic to find that is "like a complex figure in a Persian carpet".

The narrator becomes obsessed with uncovering the true meaning of the novelist's work and this search soon rules his life and doubly ensnares the lives of those around him, becoming the cause of marriage and death alike, but as is the case with many of James's tales, revelation never comes. The reader is provoked to look for the hidden figure in James's own writing while simultaneously made into the hapless critic for doing so. This parable of problematic interpretation serves as a metaphor for the artists in the show, whose seductive and enigmatic works invite decoding only to elude fixed meaning.

Sophia Dixon's drawings straddle traditional genres. "Tree House" is a landscape whose composition becomes anthropomorphic, making it double as a portrait. When seen as an image of the phases of the moon moving through the sky "Four Months" invokes a landscape as well, but when viewed as a calendar, it shifts to still life. Her evocation of witchcraft and astrology is at odds with a resolutely earthbound use of the basic medium of graphite on paper. **Benjamin Kress's** photographic contact prints are made using hand-drawn negatives; not simply a reproduction nor a handmade work, they too slide away from single categorization. The drawings are based on found images of men that are rendered, cut, sliced, folded, and finally inverted in the final print. These processes alter his source imagery in a manner that is violent, delicate, and erotic. The source imagery in **Ted Mineo's** invented still lives is pulled from the swamp of vernacular storytelling. His drawings of objects such as a mask, a spooky tree, or a mechanical pod invoke the familiar language of fantasy illustration, but are each

depicted with a hermetic logic and calculating precision that renders their common narrative associations suspect.

All three artists work with images that in other contexts need no interpretation; meaning is transparent and easily grasped. Their reconfiguration of these images acts to complicate meaning while the intricacy with which they construct their work invites scrutiny. This intricacy is exacting, making their process not unlike that of a weaver. Whether one should attempt to find a figure in the carpet, however, is up to the viewer.