



ARTWORKER OF THE WEEK #36

Donald Moffett @ Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, UK

New York-based, **American artist** Donald Moffett transgresses the limitation of a singular artistic category, **reconciling** abstraction and complex contemporary history. For his new series entitled "D.C." he presents intricate, densely painted canvases that function as screens for haunting video projections. Moffett adeptly balances the divergent aesthetic strategies of video and painting with compelling results. In this anxious U.S. **election year**, his "light loops" underscore how the more things change...

Donald Moffett's exhibition at Stephen Friedman Gallery **runs** through the 17/07.

This interview took place via email.

Jill Martinez Krygowski: Your **past work with** the AIDS activist collective **Act Up** and its offshoot **Gran Fury** has operated as a chain pin pointing towards social change. In your **current show**, the abstract monochromatic paintings that function as screens for the images -- light loops -- of Washington D.C., are far more subtle meditations on the same topic. Although working in a radically different way, would you still consider yourself a "political artist"?

Donald Moffett: Having survived the brutal backlash of fundamentalist critics of the '90s, I know that labels like "**political artist**" and "**gay artist**" are booby-trapped and suck. Who wants to suck?

JMK: There is an underlying sense of romanticism in the metallic luster of these silver paintings. As they also function as screens for the light loops, they are clearly reminiscent of the "silverscreen" of Hollywood motion pictures. You often use gold and silver paint. Why these glamorous colours, especially when D.C. is a rather stuffy town?

DM: I see these paints (not to mention the organism of D.C.) as tinselly, plated, garish, spangly.

JMK: There is a fascinating dichotomy that happens with the D.C. projections -- the contrast of what appear to be benign tourist attractions such as the [National Christmas Tree](#) and an elephant in the [National Zoo](#), and historically loaded imagery of uneasy power such as the [Watergate Building](#) and the [Brutalist architecture of the FBI Building](#). Can you comment on the narratives surrounding these images?

DM: There is nothing benign about the centre of American power (although the family entertainment packaging for tourists might leave that impression). We are long past that possibility. All the paintings are historically loaded.

JMK: The densely "woven", intricate patterning of these monochromatic paintings function nicely as a layered metaphor for the precarious realm of [D.C. politics](#) -- a complex, impenetrable arena plagued by incertitude, allegation, investigation and obscurity.

DM: I can imagine your somewhat bleak description of D.C. politics as dead centre to an interwoven field of darkness and brightness that extends vertically and horizontally for miles.

JMK: Can you tell us about the titles [Aluminium/White House Unmoored](#) and [Aluminium/National Christmas Tree and Power Problem \(b/w\)](#). These titles are obviously witty yet disturbing.

DM: They are descriptive titles only.

JMK: The videos at once seem detached and surveillance-like. How were they taken?

DM: With a [Sony mini-DV camcorder](#). Mostly on clear days. Four of the seven on a tripod. Thinking about insolence, complacency, painting problems and a [Bozo as Commander-in-Chief](#).

JMK: The image of the [Watergate Hotel](#) has a real nostalgic quality, yet in our collective consciousness remains an icon of big government at its worst. In an odd way, it's this nostalgia that imbues the image with a sentimental quality that outweighs the [sinister history](#), as we know the [legacy](#) of the [Nixon presidency](#), in the end, justice prevailed. If you were to imagine the unfolding of a modern day Watergate perhaps with a similar positive outcome, what might you envision? Is it possible to someday wax poetic about the [Bush presidency](#)?

DM: Sidestepping your concerns about nostalgia and sentimentality, let's go to the heart of the matter. Justice, as you link it with the past tense, might appear simple or easy. It rarely is. Justice linked with the present tense or future tense is not assured. Poetry -- of the fiercest kind -- won't wait for "someday." There will be a document of the day.

Jill Martinez Krygowski is an independent curator living and working in Los Angeles. She has organised exhibitions at [LACMA](#), the [Korean Cultural Center](#), and [ART2102](#) and published in LACMA's magazine. Recently she has edited an issue of the online artzine, [periscopes.org](#).

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