

robert YODER

AIR SUPPLY

September 27 - November 10, 2007
Opening reception September: 27, 1007, 6-8PM
Artist's talk: Noon, September 29, 2007



ROBERT YODER

EDUCATION

- 1987 Master of Fine Arts, University of Washington, Seattle, WA
1984 Bachelor of Fine Arts, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA

SELECTED SOLO AND GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 Air Supply, Howard House Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA
8th Northwest Biennial, Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA
Elegantly Frugal, Deceptively Simple, The Schneider Museum of Art,
Ashland, OR
2006 Sluice Gate, Frye Art Museum, Seattle, WA
In the Eyes of the Beholder, Elaine L. Jacob Gallery, Wayne State, MI
2005 A Machine For Living, Froelick Gallery, Portland, OR
Terra Non Firma, Howard House, Seattle, WA
Infrastructure, Studio Voltaire, London, England
2004 Reason, Howard House, Seattle, WA
Lewis and Clark Territory, Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA
2002 Landmark, Charles Cowles Gallery, NY, NY

PUBLIC AND CORPORATE COLLECTIONS

- The City of Seattle Public Art Collection, Seattle, Washington
Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, Washington
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas
Portland Art Museum Permanent Collection, Portland, Oregon
Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington
Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, Washington

AWARDS

- 2006 Juror Award, 2006 Center on Contemporary Art Annual, Seattle, WA
2005 University of Washington School of Art Alumni Award
Artist Trust Grant for Artist Project Award, Washington State Arts
Commission
2002 Seattle Collects Purchase Award, Seattle Arts Commission, Seattle, WA
2001 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant



Robert Yoder
Popular Front
vinyl, collage on paper
2007
44" x 30"

We are living in a world of visual overload, and there are times when the constant barrage of commercial imagery can feel more than a little claustrophobic. Robert Yoder takes some of the sources of that overload, materials used in advertising and public imagery (vinyls, reflective tape, glossy magazines), and mixes them up with the hand-drawn mark. The use of newspapers and magazines is suggestive of the low brow; but also of the fleeting, the temporal, and the discarded. The ephemeral nature of his materials is reinforced by the way the imagery is cut up and put back together. We are allowed but a fleeting glimpse of something undefinable, and Yoder leaves it up to us to put the fragments of discarded matter back together. By allowing popular culture to infiltrate the almost minimalist aesthetic, Yoder creates a tension that pushes and pulls the work in a number of different directions. Nature exists precariously close to architecture, industry is butting up against craft, creating a world in which navigation is difficult but where image-induced claustrophobia gives way to reveling in a peaceful yet dynamic visual space.

I am not interested in how man devours the natural world and replaces it with industry. I am interested in how the two coexist, how one may dominate the other for a while only to give up that control later.

Robert Yoder

Yoder explores and celebrates this tension and balance by creating a world in which explosions, implosions, movement, and rest all coexist. This fight for control results in an equilibrium where small shifts happen but the status quo somehow remains. In a similar vein, Yoder's work is a balancing act between abstraction and representation. When looking closely at the building blocks making up the abstract compositions, we discover bits of recognizable imagery: an eyelash, glittering diamonds, pieces of fragmented text. Similarly, the architectural and natural references will take on an abstract quality when looked at with a different set of expectations; forcing us to continuously re-evaluate our pre-conceived notions of both space and time.

Yoder's work functions like a temporal version of Cubism; instead of looking at a still life from several angles we look at a space, often interior and exterior simultaneously, and during several time spans. The event that just passed coexists with the event just about to happen, memories coexist with the present, time is both stopped and sped up. Yoder's images are impossible to imagine in a world without photography--it presupposes an intimate knowledge of this kind of imagery, while simultaneously bringing the photographic aesthetic back to a hand-crafted medium. If Warhol wanted his work to approach that of the machine, Yoder is a draughtsman through and through, craft is of utmost importance to him, but his work has the clarity and precision of the industrial. There is a "how did he do that" amazement when looking at Yoder's collages, and the awareness that every piece has been painstakingly cut out and arranged on the page by the artist's hand adds force and subtlety to the work.

In his latest body of work Yoder shaves off that which is unnecessary, he peels off layers of imagery and embraces the negative space, opening up and letting the work breathe like never before. The title of this show, *Air Supply*, incorporates references to both popular culture and nature. It refers to life-giving oxygen as well as the most sugar-sweet of pop groups (if synaesthesia exists, *Air Supply* would undoubtedly be bubble-gum pink!). Yoder manages to push the white page from being a passive background towards becoming an active compositional element. The white empty space has as much weight and importance as the bright and colorful elements of the work. It is as though Yoder is pushing the whiteness outward, seeing how much he can take away, how far the ground can go. The glitz and glamour and seductiveness of color are held in check by the vastness of the white space surrounding it.

This white space, the air, also plays into Yoder's continued interest in explosions and dispersion of matter. In a piece like *Coronation*, we witness a tremendous expulsion of energy, a force field of matter being pushed out towards the edges of the paper like some pink primordial big bang. It reminds me of flesh, but the hard edges of the fragments make it seem like an industrial or architectural flesh. It takes a moment to realize that the energy lies not in these fragments, but in the white space between and beyond them. Just as energy itself shows its power in the effect it has on things around it, so the background holds the work together (literally and figuratively), while simultaneously violently pushing it apart.

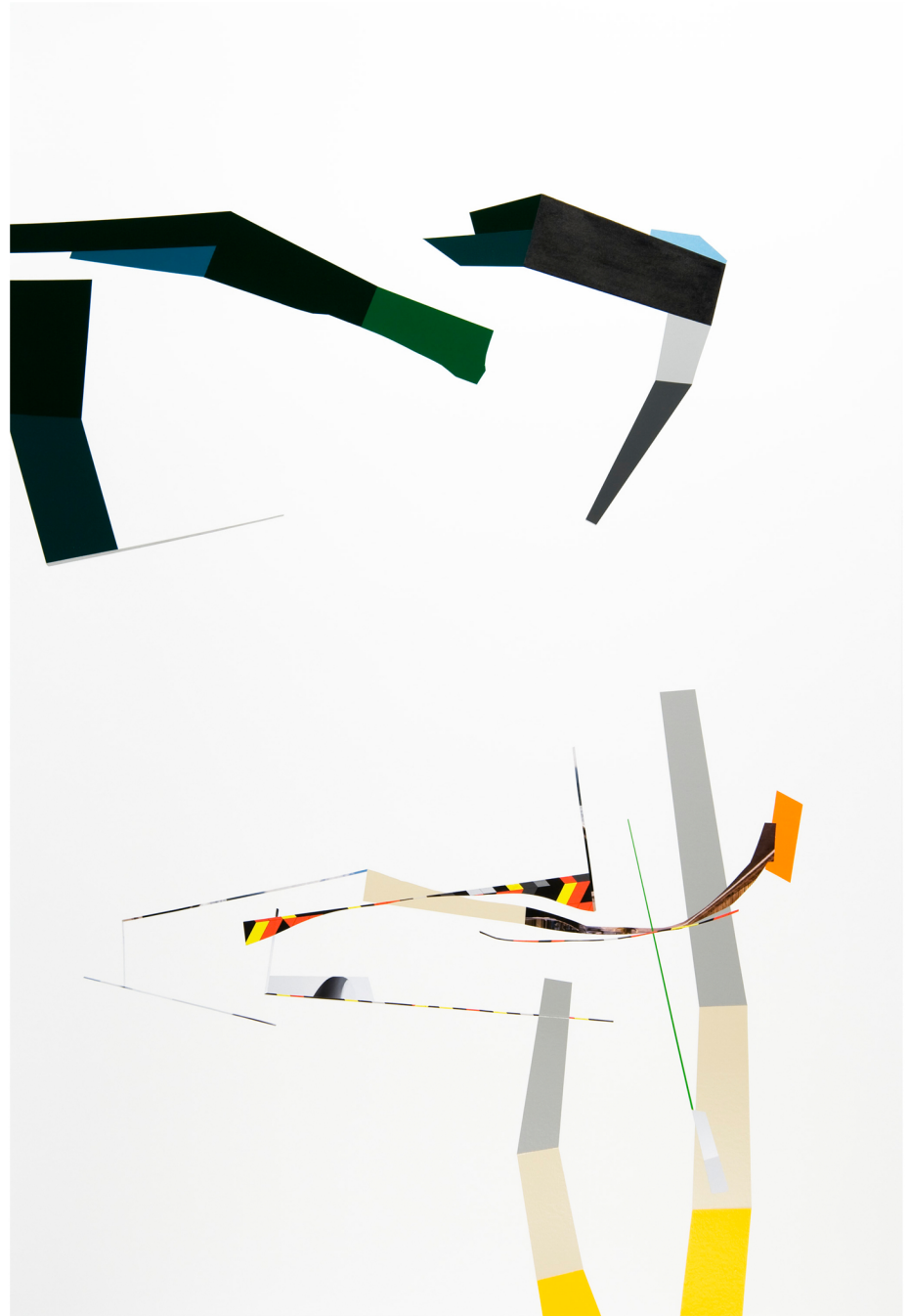
In *Village Doubt*, thin lines slice through the space, creating a broken visual line of grey and black. It is suggestive of speed and electrical currents, but also functions as a stylized version of the hand-drawn line; the way the hand of the artist controls the intensity of the color by applying more or less pressure to his pen or brush. The immaculately thin yellow stickers in the middle of the composition interrupt and contradict the space--grounding the image on its two-dimensional support, but also adding tremendous movement. The architectural shape at the bottom edge of the page makes the work read a bit like a photograph--it is surprising, the way a camera sometimes captures something which we didn't notice while looking through a view-finder. The pattern covers the façade of the building like a giant mural. On a rational level this space makes no sense of course, but on an emotional level it is strangely appealing and believable.

Collage, and the related photo-montage, have been favorite mediums for politically engaged artists on both sides of the ideological spectrum. Yoder's use of collage seems to side-step the political to focus on something quite different. Not that political references are altogether absent. His *Popular Front* is named after the Spanish left-wing coalition of the 1930s--the nemesis of Franco's fascists, and the heroes of the world's left-leaning intelligentsia at the time. The main impetus for the title, however, was the red and yellow shape at the top

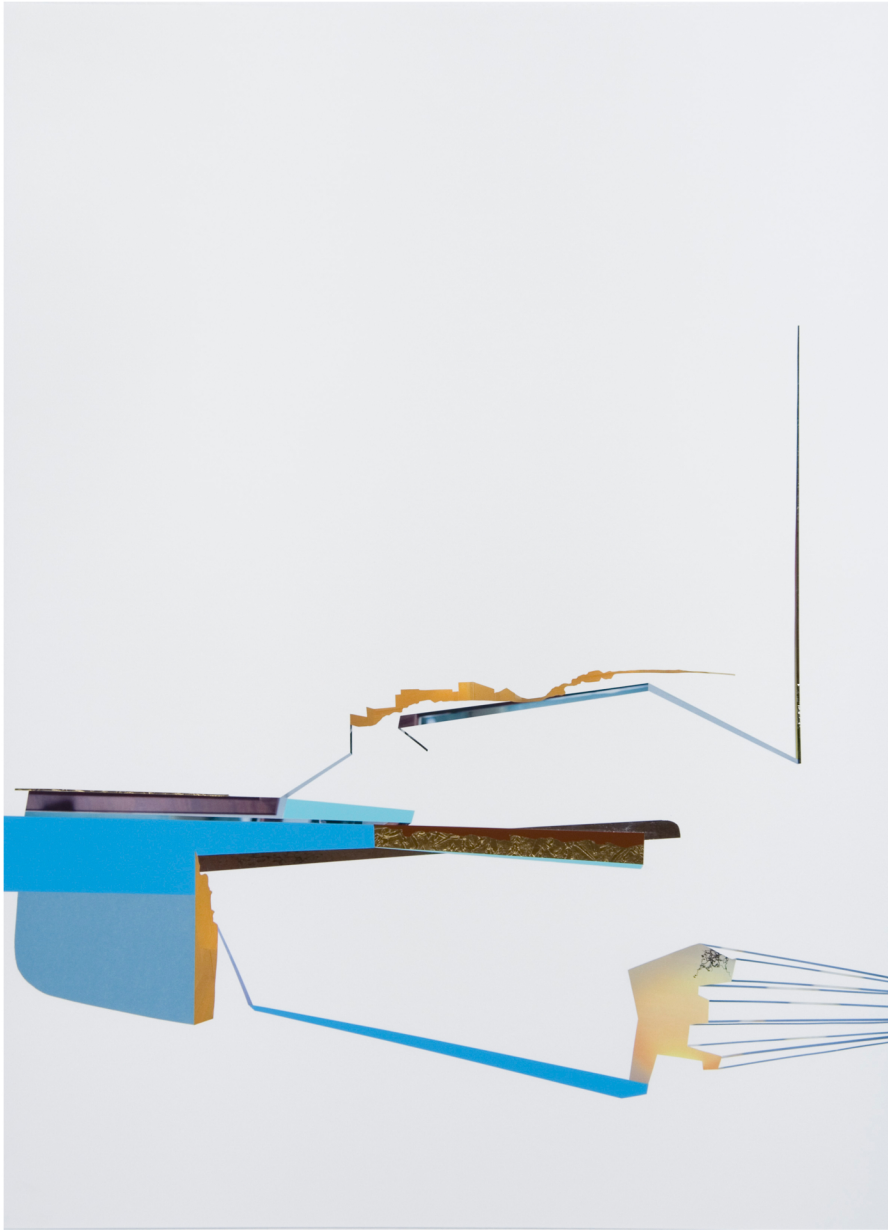
right which looks decidedly like the Spanish flag, and according to Yoder, the shape came before the title. To me, it is a crucial clue to understanding Yoder's way of working. When political, popular culture, and social references are brought into his work, they are always subordinate to Yoder's primary concern--that of making images that work on an aesthetic formal level. When language is present it is illegible and only used as visual building blocks; we are not meant to read the text, only to see it as yet another formal element. Advertising and the market are forever present in the work of art--stickers from the Chicago Art Fair make a cameo appearance, advertising elements are manipulated and rearranged. Instead of folding under the pressure of the art market and the commercialization of culture, Yoder takes control and incorporates the commercial and industrial into his work, showing that the Artist ultimately has the upper hand.

There is, in Yoder's work, a belief, and an indulgence in the visual which is becoming a rarity in contemporary art. We are so used to the concept taking center stage, that it almost strikes us as strange to have an aesthetic concern at the forefront. In Yoder's work one gets the sense that the visual, or the aesthetic, is the concept. It is by creating worlds in which balance and equilibrium, shapes and color, movement and quietude are intertwined, and where the work instills a sense of visual engagement, that Yoder's project is realized.

Sara Callahan



Robert Yoder
The Covered Bridge
vinyl, collage, ink on paper
2007
44" x 30"



Robert Yoder
Standard
vinyl, collage on paper
2007
30" x 22"



Robert Yoder
Locks
vinyl, collage on paper
2007
30" x 22"

BILLY HOWARD INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT YODER

Billy Howard: You've been showing with Howard House since 1998; which means that we have been working together for close to a decade. I am curious about where your work started and how you got to where you are now.

Robert Yoder: The original work, the road sign pieces, were all about landscape. I was examining multiple views of the landscape; some looking at it from overhead, and some from more straight-on view points. The early work was all about distorting those different views and merging them into the same picture plane.

BH: A sort of Analytical Cubism.

RY: Yes, a lot of that stuff was very Cubist, with some references to the work of MC Escher. As I kept working, I became more interested in the architecture that was in that landscape than in the landscape itself. Having said that, if you're doing work about architecture landscape has to be involved somehow, it is inevitable. The more I got involved in architecture the kind of multiple views that I had employed in the earlier work started to distort itself into more fractional view points. In the current work the architecture is starting to disintegrate, not violently, but actively.

BH: I always felt that your use of the found road signs was a very unique approach to painting. By the same token the use of Legos, functioned within a very formal approach to image making because of the grid that was involved. And now, you are, in a sense, working with image material rather than physical material.

RY: It has always been about using something that is preexisting, but with the road signs the colors available to me were orange, black, yellow, or white--it was very restricted. My new work is still working within restrictions, but there is a bigger group of colors to choose from. Of course, too much choice can also be problematic in a different way.

BH: In your latest work I see a lot of references to geometries, to illusion of space; but at the same time there is a sort of disconnect, this idea of the explosion. Explosions in my mind always have a moment of singularity where something is transforming into being something else. There are points at which parts are scattered everywhere. Could you talk about how your work deals with this concept of time?

RY: Yes. The explosion is interesting both when it is very compacted and when it is more expanded. I'm working at both ends of this. Some pieces are very dense, because I am capturing the exact moment of the explosion, and others are out on the fringes where there is more open space. I think of explosions as three-dimensional things that just keep getting bigger until there is nothing left. When it gets really big, there is a lot of space surrounding the debris and torn-apart material,

but this is still an active space. This is a very interesting area for me to explore.

BH: What is interesting to me is that as you look at the work, each piece becomes a different point in time, and one starts to think about the concept of time compositionally as well as conceptually. The road-sign pieces were all very dense and you were using things that were dispersed and bringing those materials back together. In the newer work, you're taking something that is very condensed and making it more expansive. As you approach the blank paper, do you think about these moments in time?

RY: I do think about that eventually, however, I start by moving things around, trying to create an image that has some kind of interest to me. And then something just clicks and it starts a narrative with me, which gives me something to hold onto. If such-and-such was exploding, then this would be how it would do it, etc. And then I take it from there.

BH: I wonder if you could talk a bit about your process. I know that you sift through magazines to find large swatches of color; do you know exactly what you need for a particular composition or is it more random?

RY: I usually know that I need something in a certain color range. For example, I might need to fade from white to that color or from black to that color, and then it becomes an active search. The road signs functioned a bit differently in that they



Robert Yoder
Village Doubt
vinyl, collage on paper
2007
22" x 30"

had patina, which gave those parts a bit of heaviness and importance. Now I am no longer able to rely on that, which is both a challenge and an opportunity. This is what sparked my interest in opening up the white area within the image. I want the white to be an important three-dimensional element within the picture plane, not just a background.

BH: Talk a bit about the title of the show, *Air Supply*. This obviously references the 70's pop group famous for their sugar- sweet love songs, but also to the notion of air supply being necessary for all life.

RY: Yes, and the latter is the more important idea! It relates to the way the newer work incorporates so much white space. I am also thinking about how the show will be installed at the gallery, and I want there to be a great deal of space between the work. So, I guess the term refers to the space within the work, the work within the gallery, as well as the way that people interrupt that space when walking into the gallery--all those things are important.

BH: Lazlo Moholy-Nagy wrote a very interesting essay about time and how time moves quicker over the course of history, and how perception happens dimensionally. For the Egyptians, time was a singular point, and their art was subsequently very flat. With Greek art, relief sculpture created an illusion of two-dimensional space, and the use of horse and chariot allowed them to move faster across distances. Now we move very quickly through the world and that obviously influences the way imagery works; like billboards or road signs which are legible at very high speeds. Moholy-Nagy created an experiment where he spins around various artworks at increasing speed. Things that were created centuries ago couldn't be read at all at high speed, the content of these paintings were only visible when being still, or moving very slowly. Modern artwork however, required a great deal of speed to make them illegible.

RY: That is very interesting! I do think of time a great deal in relationship to my work, but I think that each of my pieces is paced slightly differently. Some you can look at and immediately know what is going on. Some need plenty of time--one needs to slow down to really see them. I also incorporate hand-drawn elements in the work, and those marks obviously work at a different speed than the collaged elements. I find that I am incorporating hand-drawn elements more into the faster frenetic compositions. One can look at my work from afar and from up close and one will see very different things. But, I am also interested in the middle space between the two. The viewer must let the work come to them as they approach. From far away you get the graphic bang, and as you approach you get the more subtle elements of what is going on.

BH: Could you talk a bit about your choice of colors?

RY: I always feel that I work better when I set up restraints, then I can hone in and pay attention to what I want to deal with. I use a very limited color palate within each image. I am pretty much working within a slice of the color wheel



Robert Yoder
Coronation
vinyl, collage ink on paper
2007
48" x 48"

for each piece, and I like working with colors that sit somewhat uncomfortably close to one another, and to make those work together. Pink and orange has always been a favorite combination of mine.

BH: Let's talk a bit about your repeated use of pink. Pink relates to the inner parts of the human body, everyone has a memory trace of the color pink.

RY: One thing I like about pink is that it's essentially red with white in it, and as such I think that it can hold its own as a powerful color. Over time it has been associated with a kind of preciousness, but it doesn't really have to be like that. It's been interesting working with many different kinds of pinks, some can be very bubble-gummy and some very fleshy. Other times it just reminds me of ugly waiting-room furniture. I find it's just as active and strong as different shades of red.



Robert Yoder
Post Hole
vinyl, collage on paper
2007
10" x 14"



Robert Yoder
The Outer Bank
vinyl collage on paper
2007
20" x 20"



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