



Faded Glory

ART DIALOGUE

Peter and Lucia Simek discuss Jeff Zilm's cinematic creations in [7023629730](#) at Marty Walker Gallery

By [Lucia and Peter Simek](#)



Untitled (Nosferatu) by Jeff Zilm

Jeff Zilm's show called [7023629730](#), which opened at [Marty Walker Gallery](#) on June 13, includes large white canvases airbrushed with an ashy, grey-toned hues. The paints used in the work were made from old film stock — prints of classic films were broken down through a process of emulsion to create a kind of dye. The material was then loaded into an airbrush gun and sprayed onto canvases primed with the same paint used for movie screens, an extreme white that mixes in miniscule fragments of glass to intensify the paint's reflectivity.

Peter Simek: It is probably an unfair criticism, but I am always a little put off by art that you need to know a lot of outside information about in order to understand what the artist is trying to say. I'm thinking here of someone like Anselm Kiefer whose work on its own terms is fascinating and plumb-able, but when you read Kiefer's statements he implies that he is working towards very specific philosophical ideas. Once I know this information I feel like it cheats the work out of its own play of revealing. From what I can gather, Jeff Zilm isn't trying to make the audience think of anything in particular, but you do need to know that these works are made from the acrylic emulsion of celluloid prints of the films that are referenced in the titles. Since I knew this coming into the gallery, I couldn't help but bring a lot of deliberate ideas to the work. Most shows you walk in without knowing anything and you are forced to approach the work on its own terms. With these I immediately started to look for the fingerprints of the cinematographer somewhere on the canvas.

Lucia Simek: Sure, knowing how or why something is made can deter you from really being able to look at it

purely. Keifer is a good example. But Keifer's work is nearly always looked at in a museum with a note on the wall briefing you on his concepts, choice of medium etc. Galleries don't do that – the art is just hung with its title and the rest is up to the viewer. Already, that's a pretty pure experience of a work of art.

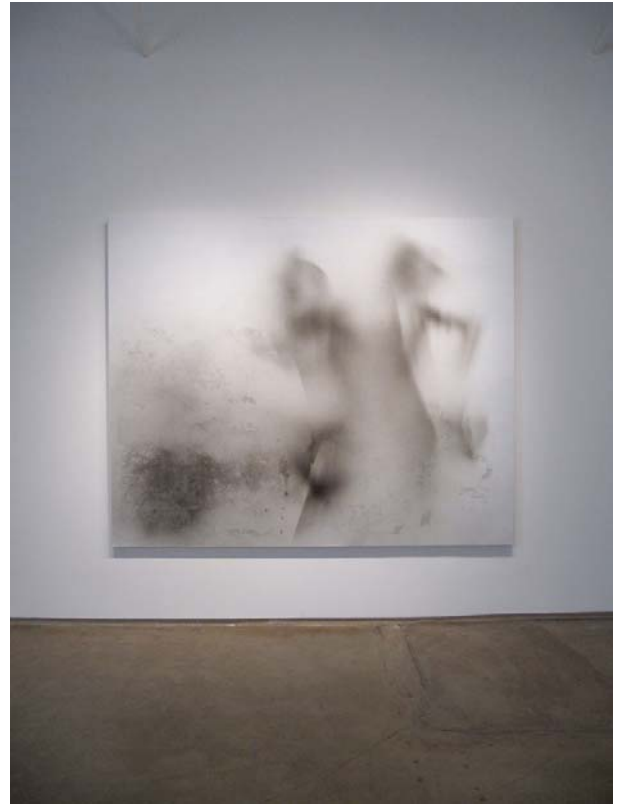
In regards to knowing that Jeff Zilm makes his paintings from emulsion from celluloid prints, I tend to think that whether or not you know how something was made, there is always a visceral reaction to it. We don't question the meaning of paint when it's used to make a painting, but we want to question the reason for Zilm using old film emulsion because we fancy that there is some poetic significance behind it. Maybe there is, maybe there isn't. What seems certain, though, is that reading the titles of these paintings points you in a certain thoughtful direction: A painting with a dark and folded ashy splotch atop a muted grey background called *Untitled (Nosferatu)* makes you begin to feel a kind of foreboding, creeping darkness. But Zilm, seems to call it (*Nosferatu*) only as an indicator of the source of the material. But that doesn't change the reaction of wanting to the work to reference it's original source: the celluloid film strip. Because of that, I find myself looking for narrative in these paintings, or if not narrative, than a feeling that's analogous to the movies he's using to make these works. Still, these things have their own kind of power regardless of knowing a lick about them. The smokiness of them defines a mood of mystery and quiet no matter what their called or made from.

P.S. It's that tendency to look for narrative that I'm talking about, and I'm not saying it is necessarily a bad thing here. In fact, I think it has an interesting effect. We knew about

the process entering the gallery, another viewer may not have known. Zilm must have known, then, there would be these two viewers, and in a sense, these two viewers then are looking at different works. There is a phenomenological statement here, intended or not, about modes of perception – about a single object taking on two separate identities as a result of a particular viewer. I think it is impossible to say that Zilm wanted something about the original films he used to come across in the work itself. He used *Nosferatu*, but I think any German expressionist film – or any film from the 1930s for that matter – when completely emulsified would create a similar tone. The role of the specific films mentioned in the titles, then, become a play on perception, a play on the idea of a viewer writing him or herself into a work by scripting narratives in a narrative-less plane.

Zilm's work, in its mysterious, enticing ambiguity, seems perfectly suited as the accomplice in this play between perceiver and perceived. You get lost in the little ridges of texture, the white paint behind the grey spills out like light, and the canvases almost seem to be projecting light out of their two-dimensional spaces. Appropriately, there is a lot of projection going on here.

LS: Exactly. The gallery becomes a kind of theater.



Untitled (The Bellboy) by Jeff Zilm