



REVIEWS

Jeff Zilm: 7023629730

Marty Walker Gallery
2135 Farrington Street, Dallas

The somber grisaille abstraction of the five large paintings that are the center of *Jeff Zilm 7023629730* belie the combination of magic and humor that is the true crux of the show. Much different from these works of would-be gestural abstraction, *Untitled (Curse Go Back)* truly says it all. Greeting gallerygoers head on, it is an unprimed canvas with a well-organized collage of old images. Mr. Zilm and collaborator Sonja Lowrey configured giant, blocky letters from found photographs that read — that shout — “Curse Go Back.” Look carefully and you will see embedded almost dead center a tiny photograph of a very similar work made by Mr. Zilm while artist-in-residence at the Locker Plant in Marfa.

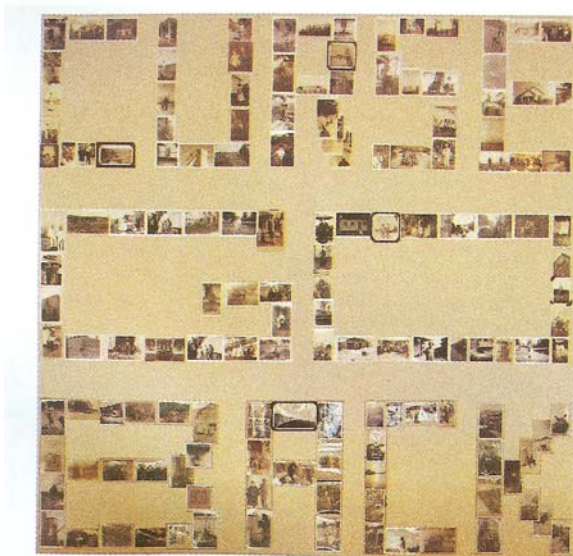
Keep in mind this subtle nesting of smaller within larger image. The riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma is the logic of the otherwise straightforward work at hand.

The gray-black surface of *Untitled (Nosferatu 8mm)* is scratched as though a bird with tiny sharp talons has haphazardly hopped across the surface. On the facing wall, *Untitled (The Pharmacist)* bears a surface of hazy, scrim-like color, shifting from tan-white to almost yellow. The faint distinction here in color palette between paintings — from gray to yellow — is the effect of different grains of celluloid. The titles of Mr. Zilm’s paintings are the only hint of the alchemy at work behind their making. Mr. Zilm grinds and dissolves the film of old movies, here the 1922 vampire flick *Nosferatu* and 1933 comedy with W.C. Fields *The Pharmacist*, into acrylic paint and then, after thinning it out, blows it on the surface of canvases with an airbrush or applies it with a thin palette knife. Mr. Zilm applies paint in a ghostly fashion, lightly sweeping paint across flat surfaces as if conjuring ghosts of cinema past.

Two small inkjet prints on canvas, *Untitled (Fatty Arbuckle, Detached/Loose)*, unleash the furies of the figural. We see Arbuckle in a face-off with himself, each canvas showing a silhouette of the silent film comedian known for going in drag as “Miss Fatty.”

Mr. Zilm’s work is conceptually layered. Paintings that prima facie seem simply to be a replay of yester-century’s ruminative abstraction are actually so many flat mausolea of film. The almost sentimental feel of Mr. Zilm’s homage to the well-nigh dead medium is quelled by the title of the exhibition — *7023629730* — yet another exercise in Matryoshka doll joke making. It is the phone number of Jerry Lewis Films in Las Vegas. He cuts his nostalgia with a fine grade of kitsch. **The show closes July 18.**

— Charissa Terranova



Jeff Zilm & Sonja Lowrey, *Untitled (Curse Go Back)*, vintage photographs, collage, 72" x 72", 2009