

Melvin Way: Gaga City

June 7, 2015—July 19, 2015

Opening reception: Sunday, June 7, 2015, 6–8 PM



Melvin Way
Gaga City, 2002
Ballpoint pen on paper with Scotch tape
3.125 x 4.25 in. (7.9 x 10.8 cm)

Melvin Way invented the Dell computer, founded collegiate and educational institutions all over the Northeastern United States, and wrote songs that were recorded and popularized by the Supremes. He had a ticket on the last Amtrak train that crashed near Philadelphia, but missed it, intentionally, because “something just wasn’t right.” Way’s enormously important intellectual and cultural accomplishments might explain the 6.2 million dollars he made last year. But what would you expect from a man who graduated high school fourteen times (ten times in South Carolina and four times in New York City) and who also happens to be “post-mortal?”

Some of Melvin’s stories don’t quite add up, and private details about a patient’s life can’t be legally disclosed. So, we rely on the artist’s shifting explanations of the past, separating reality from fiction to the best of our ability. Despite some conflicting stories and timeline gaps, it is clear that Way has lived and traveled between South Carolina and New York since he was a child. In the early 1970s, he attended a technical college and played in a music group, composing funk ballads and playing gigs in the city. He also experimented with drugs, and has spent periods of time in and out of various city shelters and programs.

In 1989, Way met Andrew Castrucci, an artist and educator, on Ward’s Island at a workshop run by Hospital Audiences Incorporated (HAI). The program included approximately one hundred men, but Castrucci took special interest in Way’s work. The two formed a friendship and creative relationship that continues today.

Way’s process is private and portable. He carries his drawings with him for days, weeks, or years, working on them when time or inspiration allows. He draws on found pieces of paper with ballpoint pen, often wrapping his work in Scotch tape—probably to preserve them as they are transferred among books, magazines, pockets, bags, and drawers. Way’s drawings look like copied textbook chemical formulas, but do not ultimately describe any particular substance known to man.

Way’s improvisational and scientific meanderings offer the possibility of a parallel universe—call it Gaga City—where the basic rules that govern our world are displaced, erased, re-drawn, re-configured, and covered in tape. Those new truths are stashed deep in the artist’s pockets or hidden away somewhere for safekeeping. Way’s drawings are frequently referred to as “cryptograms,” but by definition, cryptograms can be solved, whereas Way’s drawings have no beginning, end, or decodable message. Instead, they speak to the infinite possibilities of both imagination and science, visually describing other realities and ways of seeing.

—Phillip March Jones, Director

95 rivington street
new york, ny 10002
+ 1 917 525 5939
contactnyc@christianberst.com

www.christianberst.com

3-5, passage des gravilliers
75003 paris
+33 (0) 1 53 33 01 70
contact@christianberst.com

Art brut is an expression of individual mythology, conducted outside the realms of mainstream culture by people who exist in society’s constructed alterity, and returns us to the metaphysics of art where the creative impulse attempts to elucidate the mystery of being in the world.



Melvin Way
Molten Lava, 2011
Ballpoint pen on paper
3 x 3.25 in. (7.6 x 8.3 cm)



Andrew Castrucci
Lightbulb Number 3 (detail), 2014
Oil on metal
42 x 29.5 in. (106.7 x 74.9 cm)

Andrew Castrucci: Seeing in the Dark

June 7, 2015—July 19, 2015

Opening reception: Sunday, June 7, 2015, 6–8 PM

Andrew Castrucci is drawn to darkness, both the fabulous, formless kind Yeats described and the metaphorical variety that Martin Luther King spent his life trying to eliminate. His paintings and drawings are filled with black oceans and moons, but also with ominous buildings, cloudy landscapes, and the proverbial darkness embodied by drugs and pills. Diagrams map out systems of power and succinctly illustrate the structures of oppression and devastation wrought upon both people and land by industry, government, and greed. Occasionally, a light bulb appears, alone in a dark room, not overwhelmed but perhaps outmatched. Then again, only when it is dark enough can you see the stars.

Growing up in New Jersey, Castrucci spent his childhood hopping trains and tagging buildings, but also fishing and hiking. Since 1983, he has lived on the Lower East Side, in a building he originally occupied with a group of artists. Over the years, he has worked as an artist, managed galleries (most notably A + P and Bullet Space), and administered art programs for homeless men through Hospital Audiences Incorporated. As a result, he has become both a teacher and a student of the streets, but also at the School of Visual Arts.

Castrucci keeps track of the moon, in calendars for hunting and fishing, but also in paint and pencil, revisiting the circular form in drawings and paintings of various scale and material. That circular form also appears as the nexus of his diagrams, from which words, symbols, and puzzles emanate. A fishhook, another prominent symbol in Castrucci's work, often appears at the center of these diagrams, floating around, waiting to grab hold of something, bringing it into the light.

Seeing in the Dark espouses a certain variety of optimism, one that is clear, focused, and informed. Optimists are generally criticized for being naïve, but these works, intellectually and formally prone to darkness, crave light while acknowledging its absence in the world.

95 rivington street
new york, ny 10002
+ 1 917 525 5939
contactnyc@christianberst.com

www.christianberst.com

3-5, passage des gravilliers
75003 paris
+33 (0) 1 53 33 01 70
contact@christianberst.com

Workshop at Christian Berst is devoted to the exhibition of contemporary artists engaged with the works or ideas present in the gallery's program, recent discoveries or immersive installations.