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News to use: Artist uses newsprint as canvas

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A lot of the tension in Gabriel Vormstein's art arises from a preference for painting his meticulously executed subject matter, calling on both the figurative and the abstract, on newsprint—a throwaway medium.

"When I first saw Gabriel's work, I couldn't understand why he was making such beautiful paintings on such a crude surface," Matthew Drutt, the former director of Artpace, said recently.

For the past decade, Vormstein, a young Berlin-based artist, has painted his poetic imagery—black-and-white geometric forms, clouds of color, floral and nature motifs, female silhouettes that recall Gustav Klimt—on the broad-sides of a daily newspaper. For the record, he prefers to work on the financial pages of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

"I just like the organics of the material, that it has a limited lifespan," he explains. "And it is a material that has its own history, like making a canvas out of real-life situations."

For "The Teeth of the Wind and the Sea," an installation at Artpace through May 1 in the upstairs Hudson (Show)Room, Drutt—curating his final show before leaving the organization Jan. 25—challenged the artist to "blow the boundaries



Berlin artist Gabriel Vormstein paints plants and fruits in this detail from "The Teeth of the Wind and the Sea," his installation which has taken over Artpace.

apart."

"I thought, 'What if he took over a space instead of working in the prescribed space?'" Drutt said.

Vormstein, who has cited the Arte Povera, a movement with roots in Italy in the 1960s that prefers "poor" materials and a limited aesthetic, as well as the surrealists and romantics such as Egon Schiele as influences, responded by basically going wild. He has wallpapered the gallery space with painted newspaper—the Zeitung, but also Italian and Indian publications.

Entering the space is a bit dis-



Figures rise in this detail from Vormstein's Artpace exhibit, which offers a contrasting look at man and nature.

orienting because one doesn't quite know where to look first. After a few moments of struggling to take it all in—a great orange stain spreads over one section, graffitied blue ghostlike figures (which the artist said are inspired by the work of the dadaist French painter Francis Picabia) rise up opposite—a viewer begins to notice small details: birds and butterflies, symbols like hearts. And Vormstein can draw and paint plants and fruits with the precision of a seasoned naturalist. The room takes on a faintly melancholy vibe, and we lose ourselves in the artistic atmosphere.

The title of the exhibition, which also includes a side gallery

of strange and wonderful totemic plaster and tree branch wall sculptures, comes from an epic song by the experimental British band 93 Current. It's a piece of repetitive apocalyptic folk (sample lyrics: "this is the atomic pain of the world/the molecular tears/the final crystalline structure of misery") that Vormstein says he "quite" admires.

"I wanted to fill the whole room with one large painting contrasting nature and man," he says, "like an art book where different stories are told throughout, but you come away with one story at the end."

Of course, that story's telling is steered by the viewer.