

Beautifuldecay.com : 'Studio Visit : Adam Helms', August 30th, 2010

Studio Visit: Adam Helms

August 30, 2010 by **Bill**



Adam Helms is known for drawing radicals and constructing ominous wooden watch towers. His current project is a series of 48 charcoal portraits in response to Gerhard Richter's "48 Portraits." Richter's work used encyclopedia photos to catalog the iconic males of Western

culture. Helms is also cataloging icons, but shifts focus to the dangerous fringes where civil wars and insurrections take place. Ranging over the entire political spectrum, from anti-establishment and anti-government groups to official government troops, Helms' portraits are intentionally politically ambiguous, stating "The politics are less interesting to me than this idea of a repeated identity."



I asked if all the portraits were of resistance fighters, Adam responded, "Not all of them, there's a couple of images that are not, there's one of a Mexican Federal police officer, and another of a Brazilian military police

officer. It's not about right or left politics, it's about this idea of masking and militarized resistance against some other force. The majority of them are taking up arms against civil society, or fighting for a particular religious or cultural identity versus someone else, but it all comes down to masking, utilizing violence, and then appearing in this ominous way. Appearing shadow-like, or as these posturing, confrontational looking guys, either for propagandist purposes, or just to show themselves that way to the world."



"Because the politics of a lot of these guys are all differing, it's not really about that. This identity repeats throughout these 48 portraits. "

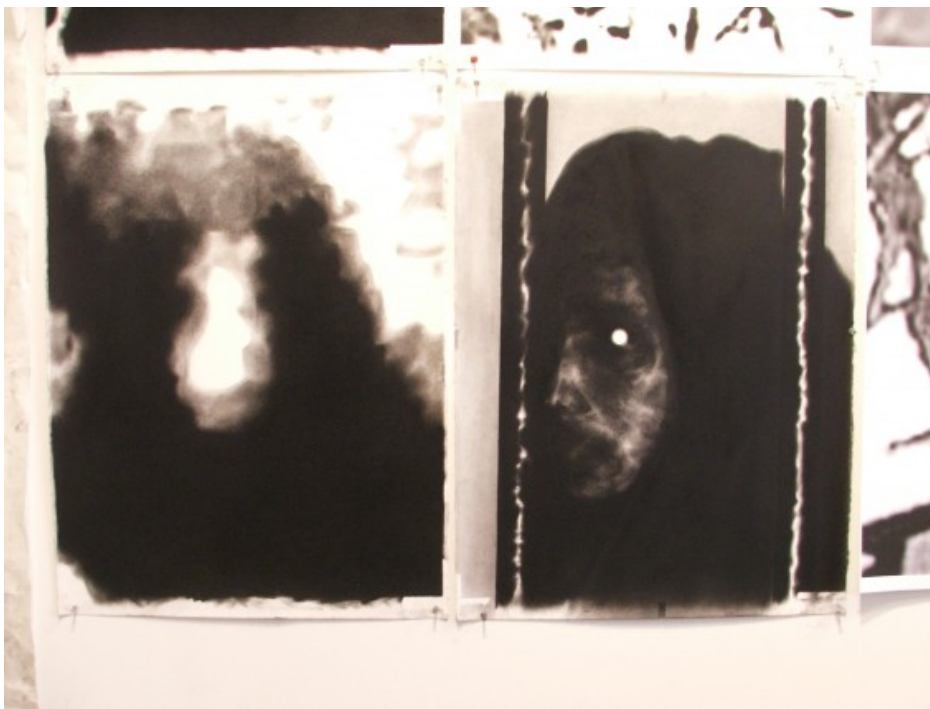


“I think there’s something relatively ambiguous in it, and that’s kind of interesting to me, trying to get a perspective of ambiguity. Both in how the drawings become distorted when they’re blown up this way, and in how there’s no clear politics in it. There’s not a very clear identity amongst all of them, and that lack of an exact definition lets the viewer try to answer those questions for themselves. Because that’s how these sorts of things are found in the world, they’re just sort of images, and then you have to research where they are coming from. (In reference to Richter’s 48 portraits) It’s not as clear cut as a portrait of Oscar Wilde or a portrait of Albert Einstein, as in Richter’s piece. It’s obvious who those guys are. And I think these things are linked, both the iconic and hidden visages of a society, all those things are linked. History, a sort of European colonial history is linked to a degree with the history of these different movements, where these guys go off into these sort of rural environments in the hills, outside of the civil society they are trying to change and fight. This system or culture they find themselves in, and are dominated by – they oppose it, you know. In this way, these representations (within the 2 bodies of work) have a cause and effect relationship.”



The space was set up with a table with a large cutting mat on it, and a desk against the back wall. In this photo Adam is at the desk. He draws standing, with the work tacked to the wall.







Here are a couple of early works. I thought both of these were really well done, and I especially like the way the balaclava makes the pipe smoking gunman merge with the background.

