



# Scotic Joey Fauerso & Michael Velliquette Matter

It has a hole in it. Not only where I concentrate.

The river still ribboning, twisting up, into its rearrangements, chill enlightenments, tight-knotted quickenings and loosenings—whispered messages dissolving the messengers—Jorie Graham, "The Surface"

### How Joey Fauerso & Michael Velliquette Matter

### **ONE:** Cosmology

Not a diagram, but a cosmology. When looking at the work of Joey Fauerso and Michael Velliquette, one might start there; one might start with the idea that the exhibition, and the pieces within it, may not form one picture, nor record one experience, but may more loosely relate. The work may be, collectively, more evocative than illustrational. Like, then, the cosmos, where stars flare across great distances, I want to begin with the formal observation that these works, at times, seem polar to one another, existing at the furthest reaches of a sensibility. Thus, they may relate without seamlessly integrating.

Moreover, this heterogeneity need not only apply to these works as a collection but may mirror the kind of process that both Fauerso and Velliquette engage in as artists. Their pieces, as pieces, shatter and fragment; they at once possess a certain gestalt and then disintegrate under our regard. Both use the formal detail and the errant fragment to work against unbreakable form. In this way, the collaborative exhibition space and the pieces within it stand as sites of disorientation. I also contend that this disorientation counts as pleasurable.

The idea of the fragment may seem a curious one considering Fauerso's compositions feature figures isolated against nearly blank "backgrounds." Yet this compositional spareness works only to amplify the sense

cover: Joey Fauerso, *Field Study (6),* 2009 watercolor on paper, 49" x 48"

LEFT: Joey Fauerso, *Feel What it Feels Like (2),* 2010 watercolor on paper, 50" x 41"



that all is not stable within the borders of her work. For instance, in Force Field a planar, nearly cubist, male body pulls a monolithic blackness over its head, or seems to emerge from it. The featurelessness of the black, and feathery edges of the mark, remind the viewer that this force field is pigment itself: the black wedge stands as obdurate representation. The gently rendered body meets an occluding mark that covers and overpowers it. Think, then, about the levels of surprise in this piece. The scale of the brush stroke and the scale of the body meet and recontextualize one another. Featurelessness meets the figure. The white of the background becomes, when juxtaposed to the black columnar form, a constitutive part of the piece. Thus, this graphic, spare composition—this image that seems apparent all at once-fractures and grows complex as we observe it.

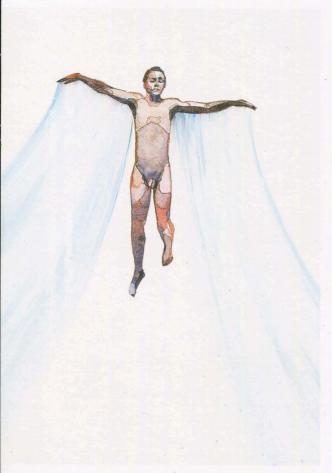
In contrast, Velliquette's pieces arrive as already kaleidoscopic. Made up of bits of painstakingly cut card stock paper, the pieces act, at once, as scrapbooks of abstract parts and vibrant, post-colonial totems. *Seeker*, a paper covered sculpture, nearly vibrates, optically, with

its riot of colors; the stylized "head" seems secondary to the clangorous, sensual display of effects as the paper is shredded, shined, linked, fanned, pleated, dimensionalized, and otherwise worked. Indeed, the choice of solid-colored paper produces a peculiar sensation. Because there is no brush stroke, no mark of the hand, these individual color blocks seem especially two dimensional, or abstract; the color is literally in the weave of the paper. However, when juxtaposed and bent into a sculpture of a head, the flat fact of the color competes with the illusionistic composition of the entire piece. The formal enigma of the piece—divided between the whole and its fractious parts—mimics the expression within the piece: the face displays, by turns, aggression, enthusiasm, madness, and blunt comic timing.

Through very different formal strictures, then, Fauerso and Velliquette give us strategies for viewing and for reviewing. The disparate scale of the parts, the haptic quality of material, and the subject matter that resists easy allegory, all guarantee that these surfaces hold secrets—to be perceived in time. Then the pleasure lies not in resolution of the compositions, but in the unfolding,

RIGHT: Michael Velliquette, *Honored Soul*, 2010 cut card stock, bristol board, and glue, 35" x 22" x 6"





Joey Fauerso, *The Falls*, 2009 watercolor on paper, 21" x 13.5"



Joey Fauerso, *The Springs*, 2009 watercolor on paper, 21" x 13.5"

the deepening sense of competing forces, different hierarchical arrangements, separate viewing methods, that coexist within the fragile borders of the work of art.

### TWO: Exotic Matter

Unfolding, deepening, fracturing. "Exotic Matter," the title of the show, refers to that matter that, according to particle physicists, resists gravity and aids in the construction of wormholes. And as much as this speculative side of particle physics stands as a very loose metaphor within this show, it also reminds us that even in the "hard sciences" the elasticity of matter has become of central concern. As examples, one might cite theories of negative mass, the sucking void of the event horizon, or the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle wherein the identification of one kind of atomic property necessarily precludes the identification of another. So as not to bastardize these elegant and complex theories too dramatically, I will simply state that there is something about this scientific theorization of material uncertainty, how matter becomes transformed or undone, that seems to speak to one subject of Fauerso and Velliquette's work, and also explains, uniquely, what it means to put work by two "different" artists into the same gallery. The game herein becomes one of affinity and repellence.

As for subject matter, what strikes me as common, and as commonly fascinating, about both of these artists is their palpable sense of the vulnerable figure constructed through vulnerable material. I'm thinking of how Fauerso portrays a body out of watercolor, and, further, reduces the head to a gestural sweep. That the same paint could obliterate and realize a person highlights the delicacy not only of this painterly material, but of human material as well. The human and human subject stand at the edge of evaporation. And while it seems to arrive as visual exclamation points, Velliquette's work has always displayed its vulnerability wholeheartedly; the paper, unframed, with its floral and fringed surfaces, can literally come undone, bent, or ripped if care is not taken. Then, in both artists' work the custodial role of the spectator, and the human under threat and subject to surreal disarrangement, strikes me as nearly heartbreaking.

On the other hand, it could all be a joke. Fake totems done in a self-consciously kindergarten style. Little human subjects whose masculinity gets subsumed and marginalized by the female artist. The undecidability of form here occupies the central success of this work; its claims are under revision. Like, then, matter that can be

conceived of as negative or positive, stable or breakable, of our world and yet exotic, we have artwork that outperforms any one interpretation.

### THREE: Art History

If the term "contemporary art" refers not only to art produced in a certain time, but to art engaged with a certain set of ideas, then one of those ideas, it seems, has to do with the de-sanctification of form. Specifically, in the art that directly precedes the contemporary (termed Modern), the form and composition of a piece are thought to be whole and wholly integrated. Think, for instance, of the unbreakable, sealed surface of a painting by Piet Mondrian, or of an elegant and impermeable sculpture such as Constantin Brancusi's Bird in Space. Even such fractured Modern surfaces as Cubist collage suggest that within the perimeters of the work, an object, or even an experience, might be recoverable or wholly known. I am suggesting that a great deal of contemporary art does not offer such solace. Further, the dazzling work of Joey Fauerso and Michael Velliquette might give us an idea of what is offered in its stead. Surely, however, what it does not offer is wholeness.

I have attempted to talk about what these pieces, formally, share and what they do not. Moreover, there is a sense that within the gallery and within the pieces, each may seduce, simultaneously, in different ways. Still, what strikes me as most interesting is how these artists have, by showing together, invoked a term that is central to contemporary art: dialogue. No longer do we look at an object of art as a vessel of vision that is separate from us, and not because art cannot be perspicacious. Instead, vision, or more broadly art itself, is produced in a zone that includes not just one subjectivity, but intersubjectivity—a dialogue between these artists and the readers of this catalogue. These pieces grow and change with regard, with the artist's care, and with our investigation. In this way, we can think of these objects as not just the record of these two artists' hard labor, but as working in the present in dazzling, contradictory ways. To quote the infamous French poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire, in this show we witness nothing less than "the luminous explosion of the figure into space." And that should count as exotic matter, indeed.

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Michael Velliquette, Seeker, 2010, cut card stock, bristol board, and glue, 24" x 28" x 7"

## Exotic Matter: Joey Fauerso & Michael Velliquette

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# David Shelton Gallery

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