

ART IN REVIEW

'Dear Dead Person'

Momenta Art
72 Berry Street
Williamsburg
Through June 4

Horror movies, if they're any good, temper scariness with wit. So does this morbid little group show organized by the artist Banks Violette. The title is lifted from a short story by Benjamin Weissman in which the narrator addresses the deceased victim of a car crash. A cool, Warholish post-mortem view of disaster is Mr. Violette's theme.

It is spelled out most clearly in documentary photographs of collisions by Slater Bradley and Roe Ethridge; in one, an ambulance takes a hit. Elsewhere, bad things happen at home: in Sue de Beer's photograph of a gore-spattered bedroom (actually a stage set created for the camera); in a deceptively daffy Op-Art piece by David Mims about a skateboarder who found religion and did his girlfriend in, and in Jason Fox's small 1994 painting of what looks like a figure chopped up and neatly reassembled. (Recent work by Mr. Fox is in a solo show at Feature in Chelsea.)

Catastrophe moves into the symbolic realm in a beautiful, chartlike painting by Jesse Bransford, inspired by the Heaven's Gate suicides, and in Ivan Witenstein's politically charged monument to James Byrd Jr., the black man who was dragged to his death in Texas in 1998.

Mr. Witenstein's cast-resin sculpture, which mixes cartoon-style references to the American eagle, Jim Crow and a tattoo worn by one of Mr. Byrd's killers, suggests a Disneyesque Dance of Death, infantile and awful.

Even farther out are two entries by Marlene McCarty, life-size portraits in ballpoint pen and pencil of young women in sexy poses. In each case, the body is in some way deformed; accompanying texts describing the physical abuse that killed the women explain why. Ms. McCarty's work is like a nightmare version of reality TV, factual but beyond belief. She's the star of this strong gathering and practically any other she appears in, with work that commands a room and ticks away in the memory. (You can also catch her in a group show at Massimo Audiello in Chelsea.)

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