

David Kennedy Cutler

DEREK ELLER GALLERY

Over the past few years, David Kennedy Cutler has drawn notice for installations and performances centering on bizarre interactions among multiple selves—his own ineluctable one and those of a cluster of life-size Kennedy Cutler clones, doppelgängers fashioned from ink-jet prints of images gleaned with a handheld scanner. While some of these



David Kennedy Cutler, *Double Exposure*, 2019, ink-jet transfer, Permalac, and acrylic on canvas, 45 x 32 x 4 1/2".

(1991) and *The Shining* (1980), in particular—these activities also functioned as gonzo allegories of internet-age image dispersion and social-media irreality.

Thematic parameters thus established, Kennedy Cutler absented himself from this, his fourth show with Derek Eller, shifting the attention away from the creator and onto the act of creation. A comparatively sedate affair, this outing comprised eight discrete, medium to large layered-relief paintings dotting the walls of the main space. I say *layered* relief because each work bore two planes and three surfaces. The outer layer—the traditional painterly support—carried the most weight, sporting in each instance a central image of an ordinary garment of some kind. This surface was backed by another, bearing depictions of organic matter and body parts whose forms were carefully excised, but for a small section at the bottom, and folded outward such that they protruded and became part of the overall composition. The resultant holes provided views through to another layer stretched across the back of the frame. The imagery on the bottom surface echoed that of the top, though it was slightly misaligned, creating a jarring, stuttering effect. The nifty trick juiced the interplay of elements and called attention to the pictures' construction. Three of the paintings (all works 2019), evenly interspersed among the others, prominently featured an image transfer of a rumpled black T-shirt rocking a cartoony white spine and rib cage (the comedic horror vibe prevailed), cut through and backflipped to reveal, respectively, potatoes, banana peels, and hands holding red Anjou pears resembling vital organs. This last combo was suggestive of an artwork tearing at its own entrails. And finally, all of this was bound to the canvas by poured, spattered, or troweled-on additions of color-coordinated acrylic that unified the layered compositions while dropping anchor in painting's deep art-historical waters.

Kennedy Cutler's work is self-scrutinizing yet expressive; it is reflexive and process-oriented, but not above the poet-aesthetic divination of existential staples such as food and clothing. The artist's concern with process is especially evident in *Utility Scheme*, which features an image of an apron—its yoke and ties venturing out of frame—smeared with paint, actual and reproduced. An ink-jet-transfer hand wielding

stand-ins remained flat like cardboard cutouts, others were grafted onto flexible mannequins, ready for uncanny action. In the weirdest of these productions, the artist—sheathed in the artificial skin of his digitized, casually attired self and sharing space with a small army of abeyant look-alikes—occupied the Halsey McKay Gallery in East Hampton, New York, for a period of ten weeks (less a few necessary real-world reentries). While there ensconced, the artist performed a deranged narrative involving, among many other things (ten weeks is a long time), the construction of a large, lumber-frame-and-drywall white cube that he then smashed to bits with wooden mallets, eventually inserting several of his duplicates, cocooned in see-through boxes, into some of the gaping apertures he'd created. Comically summoning cinematic memories from classic horror films—*The Silence of the Lambs*

a splayed pair of scissors folds out and down from the lower half of the apron, fingers and implement all hanging below the picture's bottom edge. Depicting the means of its execution, this piece recalls Robert Morris's process-art icon *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, 1961. But while Kennedy Cutler's work is similarly self-revealing, the end result is so much more alluring than Morris's empty box. These works are raw, loose, and dynamic, not to mention funny, and the Bruce Nauman-esque focus on the studio and what is immediately at hand delivers a cogent meditation on the act of painting in a digital age. However, contra Nauman, whose studio performances became "more of an activity and less of a product," Kennedy Cutler's efforts this time have yielded less of an activity and more of a product, and I, for one, am buying.

—Jeff Gibson