



9/10/11

Hugh Mendes

anniversary / memorial exhibition

Curated by Angelica Sule &
Richard Gallagher

Open Sept 9 - Oct 1
Mon- Sat 10am - 6pm

Private View Thurs 8 Sept 6-9pm
Special Opening on Sunday 11 Sept

Kenny Schachter/Rove Gallery

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Gore, Bush, Bin Laden. Oil on Canvas 2001

8.46 EDT/13.46 GMT, Sept 11th 2001

'Only love and then oblivion. Love was all they had to set against their murderers.'

Ian McEwan

'The work of Hugh Mendes freezes the fleeting moments of Fleet Street by preserving the ephemeral nature of newspapers, and the historical content they inevitably contain, embalming them in paint and canvas forever. Rather than perusing headlines like junk food, we are left with a lasting taste of the social and political to ponder at will and at length.'

Kenny Schachter

Throughout human history there have been certain moments and events that have affected global consciousness in such a profound way that the world stands still. On September 11th 2001, we experienced one such moment as the twin towers came crashing down in New York. Now, on the 10th anniversary, Hugh Mendes looks back over his personal record of the 9/11 attacks and the aftermath presented through painting, drawing and original newspaper clippings. Mendes has been painting images of newspaper clippings for the last ten years. They came to prominence in his work following 9/11, which was the day of his MA graduation. That day he showed a painting of Osama bin Laden pointing a gun at a triumphant George Bush. It had been painted about a month previously in response to Bush's contested election victory. As the external examiners were marking the show, Mendes absentmindedly turned on the TV at home. The first thing he saw was the second plane flying into the twin towers and he started videotaping immediately. It was not until the next day that he realised the Arab with gun clipping that he had found blowing down Brick Lane, was of Osama bin Laden. It seemed a shockingly prophetic painting. He then collected all the papers for the next week, and made a new series of

paintings sourced from the coverage of the 9/11 attacks. It catapulted him into working exclusively with newspaper clippings as source material. He has explored the repercussions of the so called 'War on Terror' and the subsequent devastation of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

With the rather timely killing of Osama bin Laden, this memorial exhibition represents a selective history of the last decade and how it has been described to us through the

9/11 Ten Years On: An Admission

By Kenny Schachter

I was sleeping recovering from something or other, probably self-induced, when the phone rang and my wife informed me a plane had flown into the World Trade Center. Knowing

the events of the day, but there was something, somehow unthinkable and grandiose at the same time when two of the world's tallest towers were nearly simultaneously razed flat. Terrorism as spectacle. How can you read fiction when no imagination can conjure such a massacre? The immediate fear of gas mains bursting resulted in our being evacuated - the smells alone that ensued for months were a putrid reminder of all that was incinerated human, man-made and other. I visited the devastation and the area was white-dusted with an eerie dry snow, piled high. There was a single, smallish, lattice-like skeletal presence of structural remains. It was otherworldly. 10 years on, 9/11 colors all we see and think and the towers remain in their absence, like missing teeth from the New York skyline.

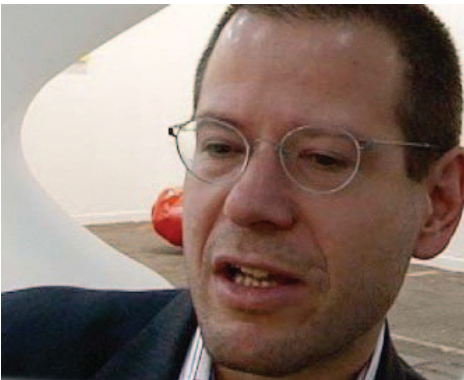


Anniversary. Oil on Linen 2009

media. Transcribing newspaper articles, the paintings filter the information we receive on a daily basis to give us only hints at what is happening. While having a focus on the fall out of the 9/11 attacks, we also catch a glimpse of what else is considered newsworthy. Exercising his own journalistic integrity, Mendes presents his potted history of the last decade, showing the devastating alongside the more trivial. A painting of Farrah Fawcett's obituary sits alongside a clip referencing the 9/11 trials. Nothing is too extreme or too banal. We are given facts but out of context. It is Mendes' own personal newspaper.

her propensity to hyperbolize, I dismissed it as at best a random small aircraft incident, but turned on the TV nonetheless. First one, then two planes were depicted crashing into the buildings, the smoldering towers became a shocking, gaping hole in our collective consciousness (literally and figuratively). I stood on the corner of my West Village residence a mile away from the wreckage and watched in disbelief. At the expense of being horribly desensitized, I was sorry I walked back in when the actual buildings went down. I admit to the morbid human frailty of the impulse to rubberneck. Yes, the deaths must have been agonizing beyond imagination; the suicidal jumpers went missing from the local media.

The devastation will never be lost on us. I wouldn't dream of belittling



Kenny Schachter

Saatchi Online Critic's Choice

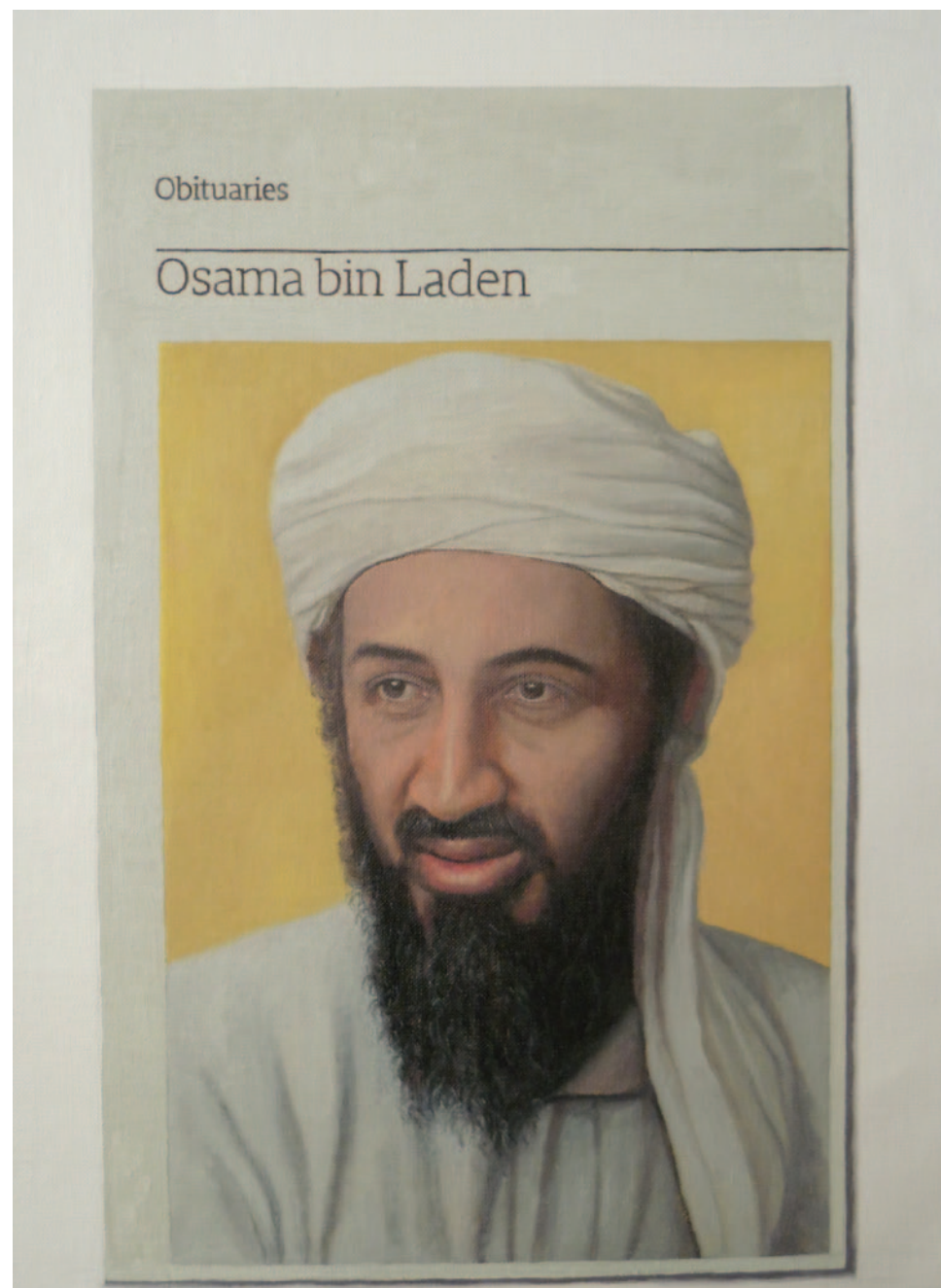
By Ben Street

It's quite an achievement to make photorealist painting interesting nowadays. What it seemed to present from its inception – an occasionally diverting strategy of tension-building between the instantaneity of a photograph and the time-intensive labour of an oil painting – quickly looked like a weak gag, hemmed in by self-imposed limits. Flip through a book of twentieth-century art and you find yourself easily bored by an approach with a diversity of practitioners – Close, Estes, Bechtle – but a paucity of scope, like watching a roomful of people do the moon-

hand and superhuman patience, as though that were enough. There's something of the virtuosic excesses of late-seventies prog rock about the worst photorealism, something emptily show-offy and self-aggrandising. Hugh Mendes' work takes on this troubled legacy, and by nudging it into new territory offers it some sort of guarded redemption.

Mendes' paintings reproduce, in 1:1 scale, fragments from British newspapers. The paintings divide, roughly, into two categories: obituaries and world news. Some approximate a torn-out jaggedness; others seem snipped with relative care. The collection of newspaper clippings – the retention of something knowingly ephemeral – implies a discriminating eye. Mendes' focus on the photographic image over the text suggests a fascination with the role of imagery in print media, and its ability to evoke the end of life. A snapshot used to epitomise the subject of the obituary – Anna Nicole Smith beaming with a clutched puppy, Richard Pryor grinning into a mike – is isolated, stilled, its pretensions to last-word-on-the-subject status thereby opened up and questioned. Text appears – the page header, a headline or caption – but is, for the most part, elided: Mendes generates a mystery and ambiguity not otherwise present (actively avoided, in fact) in his source material. Boris Yeltsin, pouting in a cocked hat, is rendered first comic, then oddly distant, as though receding before your eyes. Mendes makes you look, and the act of looking becomes, as it always does, transformative.

Painting stops time. Not merely in their trompe-l'oeil credentials do Mendes' paintings draw from the 17th century tradition of the memento mori and its fascination with the reproduced surfaces of skulls, spilled fruit and resplendent fabric. By ossifying the temporal in spare, brushy paint, Mendes calls up painting's perennial trump card: its ability to freeze the act of seeing, giving us the luxury of suspended animation. Applying age-old painterly strategies to the frenetic pace of contemporary mass-media, Mendes locates a hidden melancholy in a society awash with imagery, and by doing so provides photorealism with the get-out clause it's always needed.



Obituary: Osama bin Laden. Oil on Linen 2011

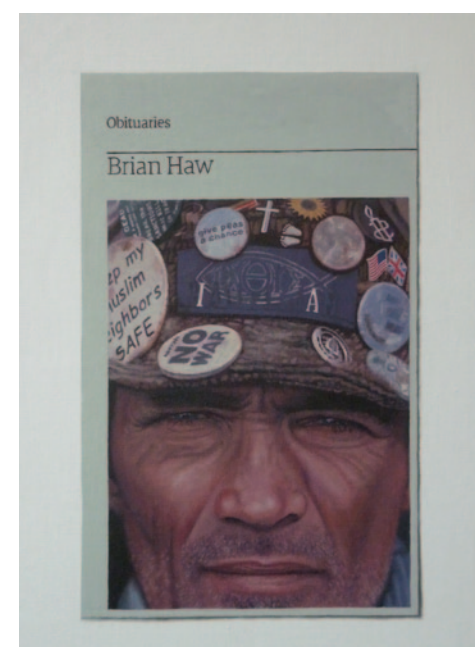
An Existential Itch

By Xavier Ellis

Hugh Mendes' paintings draw on a combination of the historical notion of the still life and a psycho-geographic embracing of the random and accidental, set within a prescribed framework of world events. By obsessively collecting newspapers, the artist employs daily events by juxtaposing found images and headlines from clippings. Focusing broadly on four categories – the war on terror; the march of science; the artworld; and in particular obituaries – Mendes' increasingly hyper-real renditions become haunting epigraphs for our society.

In its totality Mendes' oeuvre reminds us of our macabre preponderance for death, terror and the state of mankind by relentlessly presenting us with modern day 'memento mori'. The transience of ubiquitous headlines and the magnitude of

historical events that generate them combine with an uncanny personal history laden with experiences that feed back into the work where war and loss are never far away, thus creating permanence from the ephemeral and personal from the universal.



Obituary: Brian Haw. Oil on Linen 2011



Death of Bin Laden. Oil on Linen 2011

walk. Contemporary photorealist paintings are too often presented as achievements in themselves: you're being asked to applaud a steady



Iraq Conflict. Oil on Linen. 2003



Jasper Joffe & Hugh Mendes July 2011

Joffe asks Mendes Questions

Jasper Joffe: Why did you start painting obituaries, isn't it a bit ghoulish and depressing?

Hugh Mendes: When my father died I went back to art school, to do an MA. The obituaries came about two years later. I had been painting newspaper based images since I graduated in 2001 (on 9/11). A drawing of Princess Margaret may have been the first. It was an iconic image, a photo by her husband, Lord Snowdon. I think it's the iconic images that attract me. The other thing was that I started noticing strange quirky images, almost irreverent, being used by The Independent. I contacted the editor at the time, James Fergusson. He was rather flattered that I was using his images. The Independent obituary team subsequently came to my studio and bought a couple of paintings, one to give to James as a retirement present... They are celebrations, as well as memorials. One day in the newspaper is not enough. They are still lifes, vanitas, memento mori.

JJ: I am intrigued by your early work, you were a bit of an expressionist and you ended up painting meticulous images of newsprint, what happened?

HM: It was during my MA. I was painting Still Life images. This was a direct response to my father's death... (I had originally been trained in life painting at Chelsea, by the likes of Euan Uglow). So I went from life painting to death painting...I was never really expressionist.

One day Paul Hedge from Hales Gallery came into my college studio and asked me about all the newspaper

clippings on the wall, also if I had ever painted them, which I had not. It was a challenge. I thought it would be too difficult. But when I had a go, it was not so hard. The first piece was an item about the anniversary of John Lennon's death. I juxtaposed the clipping with a green apple, on a shelf, as a still life. That's how it started... then the newspapers just took over. It became an obsession. It's an affliction a lot of artists suffer from!

JJ: What kind of reaction would you like to your 9/11 tenth anniversary show?

HM: I would like people to take time with the work. There will be a lot of it... I would like people to spend time looking, reading, thinking, contemplating. Reflecting on some of the events and issues from the last 10 years. Sometimes you walk into a show of paintings and five minutes later you walk out again.... I hope this show will demand a little more time at least. I would like a lot of people to see it. I hope it will be well publicised, and perhaps covered in the press. I have a bit of a relationship with the press, not just as source material. I have been lucky in that when my work has been written about in the past it has been done well, with some interesting viewpoints and insights.... It all helps and adds to the work.

I would also like to sell the work! Preferably with a lot of it staying together... being well placed as they say.

JJ: What do you think about when you are writing the list of 3000 victims?

HM: Sometimes I think about what I am thinking about. The basic idea of the piece was to pay homage. That it would be an appropriate memorial piece. As I write out each name I think that's another person, who died that day, so unexpectedly, so shockingly. They had a family; a mother, father, wife, husband, children, etc. I also think about what actually happened to them? Which ones were the jumpers? Apparently about 200 people jumped from the towers. Which ones were blown to pieces immediately on impact? They are all listed alphabetically. I also think quite a lot had unusual names... That's another random person. I look out for names that are familiar, similar to people I know. It's a meditative piece. It's an extended meditation on those people.

JJ: We teach together, does teaching influence your work?

HM: I enjoy teaching, including with you! I like the place we teach, City & Guilds Art School. Teaching means I am continuously thinking about art,

about painting, talking about it. It is an important part of my practice. Sometimes I get good ideas from students, or from my interaction with them. I enjoy, at least occasionally, a sense of generosity. Like I do have something to give. I have been painting for a long time, decades! I am continuously thinking, reflecting, so teaching provides a fantastic channel. Studio practice is a solitary affair, so it's a good balance to that. One or two days a week is about the right balance. Right now we have a long summer break, which is great so I can really concentrate on the show. A week after the show closes,

demand a lot of time. They are exquisitely beautiful. I sometimes refer to my work in the context of Dutch still life and trompe l'oeil...

Andy Warhol... who was media based, and hugely influential. I once exhibited a painting in New York next to a Warhol. They were both images of electric chairs. The work was bought by the gallerist, to go with his Warhol!

That's another thing I have been thinking about... New York 10 years later. I have spent quite a bit of time there, went to 'Ground Zero'. It's vast, a huge space. You look down into it. I am very happy to be showing with Kenny Schachter. He is



3000 Names (detail). Pencil on Paper 2011

it's back to school! I also enjoy the interaction with my colleagues, the other staff. I think we have a good team and a lot of the others are my good friends, artists I also respect.

JJ: Which artists have influenced your work?

HM: Lots and lots, such a huge and glorious history, that I feel honoured and grateful to be on the end of... but to pick out two:

Initially Vermeer and the Dutch genre painters of the 17th Century. He was like a photographer. He was beautiful, precise. His paintings

from New York and was there on 9/11. It's also interesting that he wanted to do the show. A few other people were interested, but backed off. That was all before Osama bin Laden was killed. I think that has changed things. Made it more 'acceptable'. It's like a book end!

