

Iverson, Tim. "Brian Bress," *UBER Art*, May, 2007.

Brian Bress

by Tim Iverson

Having spent my formative years listening to impossibly fast drum patterns and praying for the day robots would finally come and incinerate my small San Diego suburb, I find that I have an immediate affinity for the work of Brian Bress. His installations, photographs and performances trigger a cascading array of caustic references and emotions, in turn nostalgic and angst-ridden, awkward and humorous. Bress's studio experiments and mannerist appropriations are especially effective at framing these conflicting evocations in space, conjuring Berlin Dada photomontage, interpolated with the epileptic graphic sensibility of Paper Rad and Forcefield. His rigorously formal abstractions are suffused with textural and semiotic references that, although ostensibly arranged as a unified statement, manage to evoke a profound ambivalence. I find this particularly evident in works such as *Untitled* or *Gold Life*, which seem to present still life as a formal strategy but deflect the anticipated social commentary or symbolism in favor of a laboriously ornamental, uneasy mania, executed with a kind of studied don't-give-a-fuck-style glitch eclecticism that appears to be willfully oblique.

My first complete thought after recovering from his Naumanesque video, *Under Cover*, was that Bress is ever so cautiously seeking the sublime. Perhaps he only half-heartedly believes that it exists in the first place. The paradox of detecting both self-conscious nihilism and psychedelic optimism in the same body of work seems to be nothing especially new. In fact this appears to be indicative of where we are - and have been for quite while - palpably convinced of the apocalypse but easily distracted because it hasn't quite arrived (yet). Bress' work seems to signal an ever more nuanced and aestheticized manifestation of this collective existential terror.

