

Tabloid Histories



BRUCE THURMAN

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New Works, Notebooks and Sketchbooks

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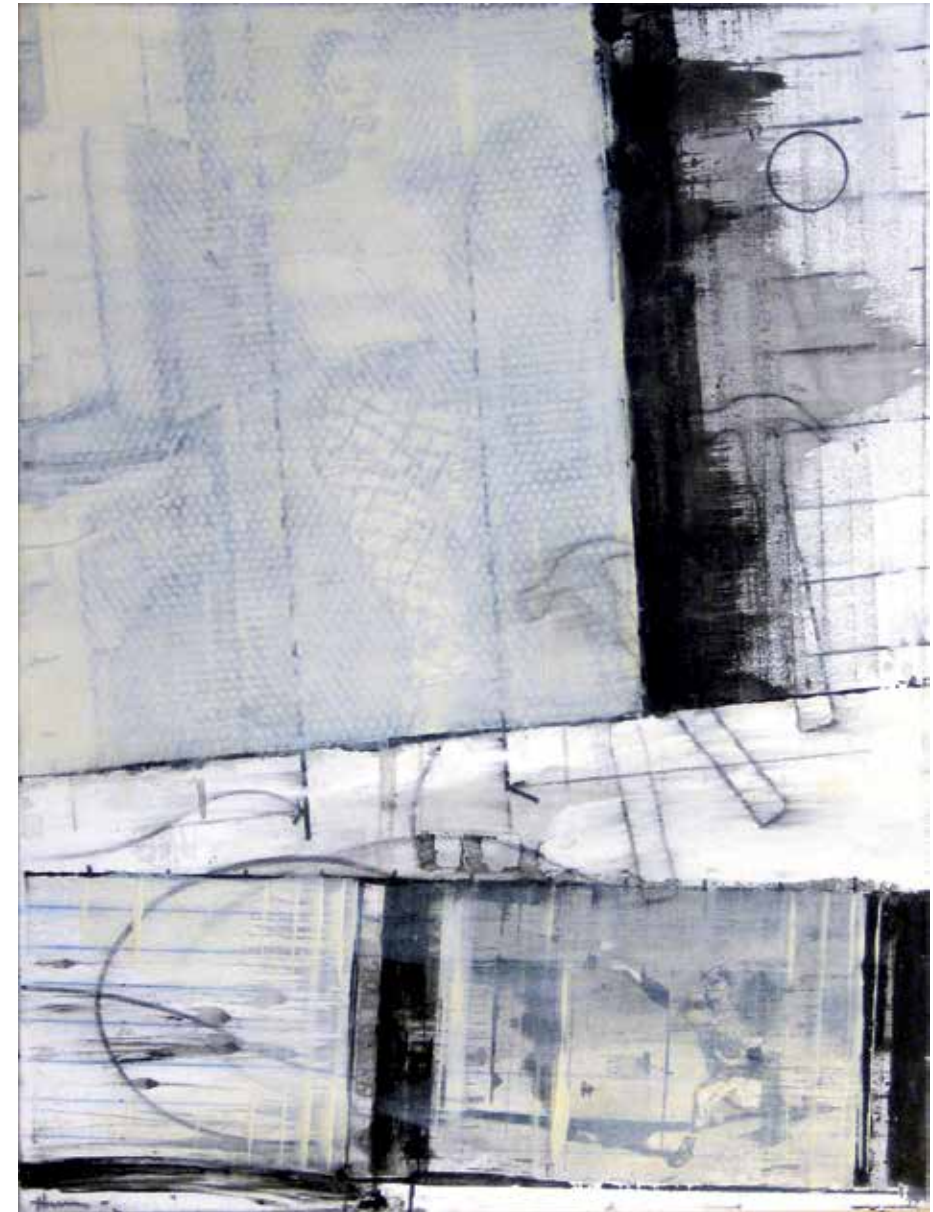
Whether he paints the amber reflections on a forgotten tumbler, the fuzzy sketch of a usual suspect, or the heavily made-up face of an aging stripper, Bruce Thurman takes his viewer away from the cliché into a disturbing intimacy. He paints a world undone, almost consumed, that never ceases to echo through our lives and bite into our hearts.

— Antoine Audouard

Between 2006 and 2010 Bruce Thurman made a collection of small painted panels he calls Notebooks – over 250 works resembling artist sketchpads, referential in nature and constructivist in process. Thurman looked on them as modern day miniature diptychs that provided him with a format for a wide variety of subjects and techniques. In the Notebooks, diptychs – traditionally large-scaled and religious in nature – became at once intimate, secular and dualistic. Thurman refers to them his “left and right brain scans.”

The Notebooks are crafted as dossiers, complete with binder rings and movable pages: each open notebook reveals two “pages” containing the images that define the artist’s personal narrative. Thurman took his inspiration for the Notebooks, and the larger Sketchbooks that followed, from photo magazines, pulp fiction covers, scrapbooks and diaries, complete with their jumble of chaotic texts, scribbled notes and advertisements.

In 2010 Bruce Thurman began a series of assemblages called Page Works, larger in scale and recalling the mock-ups and storyboards used by art directors for graphic design layouts. The “page” studies ultimately served as true sketchbooks: studies for the larger works on canvas that were to follow.



Perfect Game 2012, oil on canvas, 36"x 48"

These larger works acknowledge a debt – with a touch of humor – to the silk-screen aesthetic of Pop Art. Thurman's canvases, however, are entirely manually produced and employ no photo, ink jet, transfer or collage techniques of any kind. With their densely marked and multi-layered surfaces (mixed media/acrylic and oil, ink and charcoal) they can be seen as an imitation or parody of the design process itself. These works attempt to be both constructed and deconstructed at the same time, leaving traces of their evolution, and allowing the viewer to witness the process of their creation.

Common throughout the work are the recurring themes that reflect Thurman's interests and obsessions: distant memories find echoes in the grainy renditions and Polaroid-like patina of some of the paintings, calling to mind the monotone fuzz on the small-screen TV sets of the 1950s. The effect is a kind of palimpsest surface, a sanding down through the strata, creating a narrative out of our private and collective cultural memory. Patterns and events emerge on the canvas that almost seem like shadows, all jumbled together and out of order, remembrances of things past and yet not passed.



Saw 2009, mixed media on wood, 10½" x 19¾"



Active Duty 2010, mixed media on wood, 31"x 38"

Notebooks

The standardized format of the Notebooks offers me a neutral surface on which I stage my little dramas, project memories and vent anxieties. I try not to overwork them, allowing them to remain both studies and works in progress, virtual sketchpads for my personal narrative. — BT



Mirage 2009, mixed media on wood, 10½" x 19¾"



Rocketeer 2009, mixed media on wood, 10½" x 19¾"



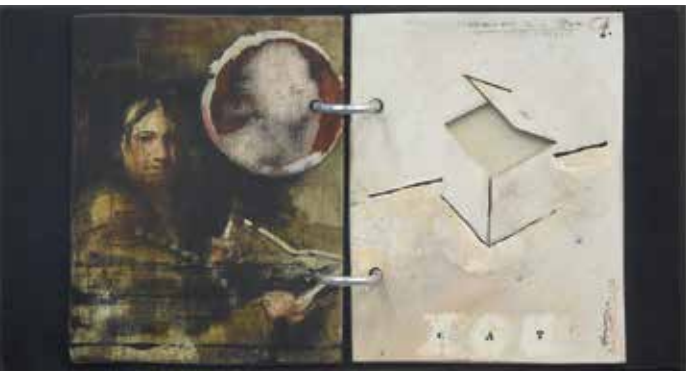
Crux 2009, mixed media on wood, 10½" x 19¾"



Table 2009, mixed media on wood, 10½" x 19¾"



Knife 2009, mixed media on wood, 10½" x 19¾"



Aert's Cat-Box 2009, mixed media on wood, 10½" x 19¾"



Chair 2008, mixed media on wood, 10½" x 19¾"

Sketchbooks

Much of my work today might be called “imaginary illustration” in the sense that it depicts actual events that seem to have influenced the making of history in their time, but now are mere forgotten footnotes. The speed at which headlines are replaced always astounds me....

— BT



Event Horizon 2010, mixed media on wood, 14½" x 26"



Main Event 2010, mixed media on wood, 14½" x 26"



Matinee 2010, mixed media on wood, 14 ½" x 26"



Bowling For Dollars 2010, mixed media on wood, 14½" x 26"



Scoop 2010, mixed media on wood, 14½" x 26"



Pop Art 2009, mixed media on wood, 14½" x 26"



High Life 2010, mixed media on wood, 14½" x 26"

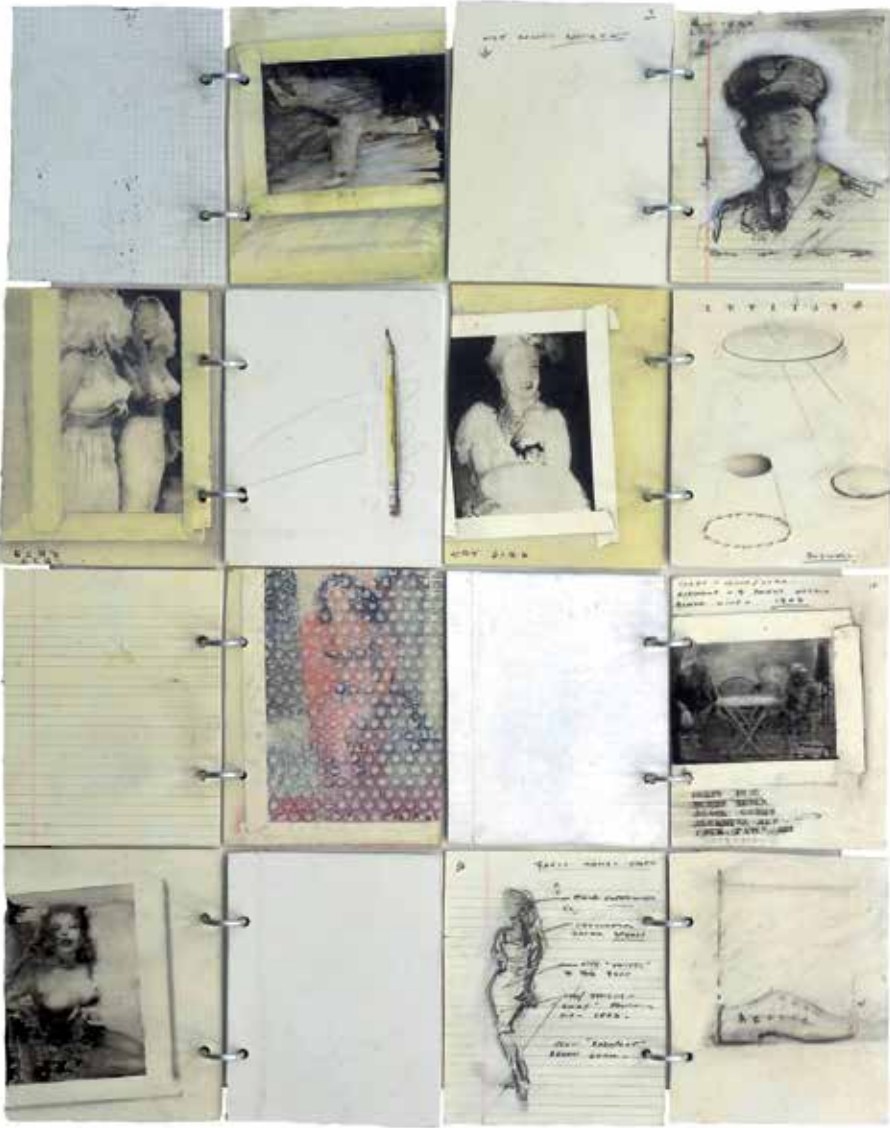
Large Works

I believe that the artist’s job is to find a compelling and effective graphic form with which to incarnate his ideas and obsessions. The new work is the result of this inquiry. The paintings describe people and events that were, in their day, the porters of popular culture and consciousness, and embodied the things that at one point in time seemed so very important to a young man and to his entire country.

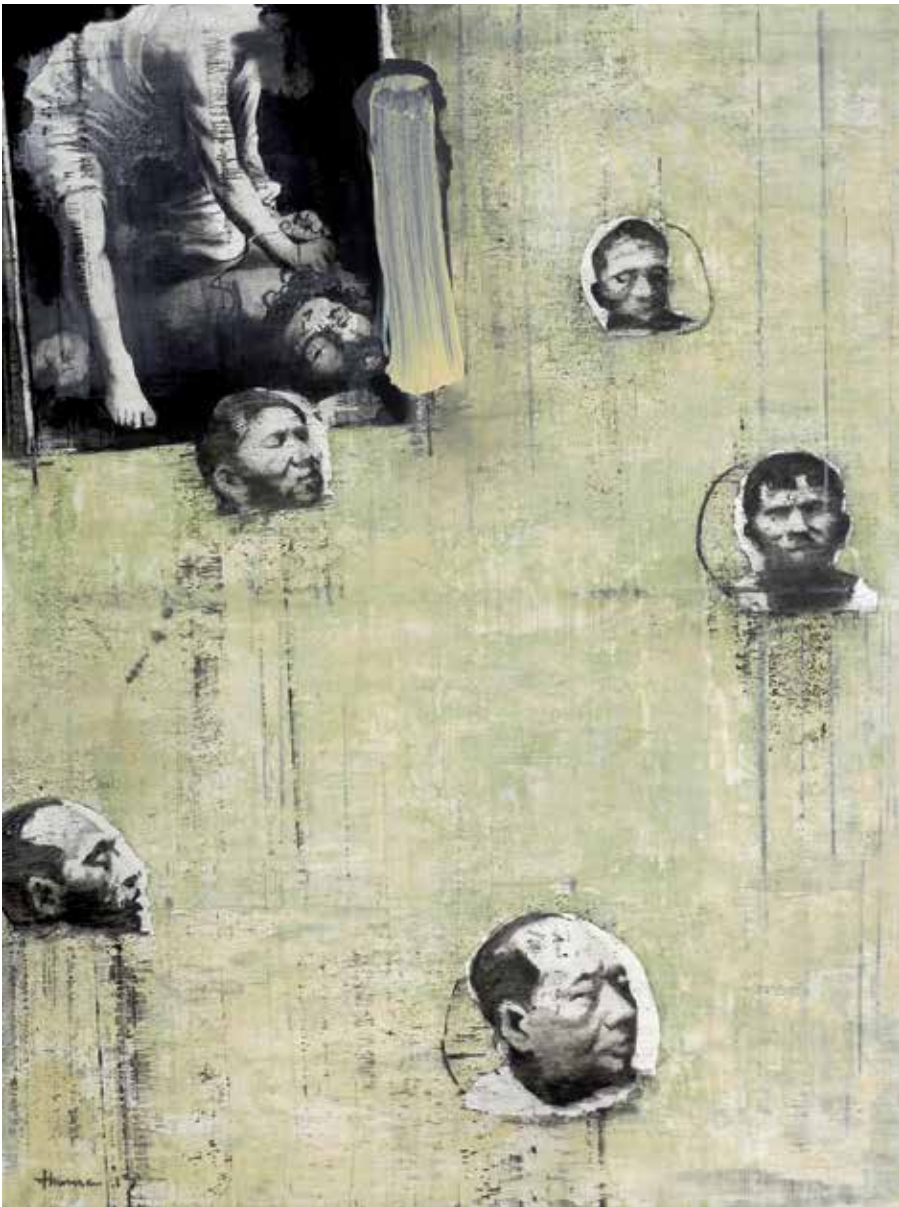
— BT



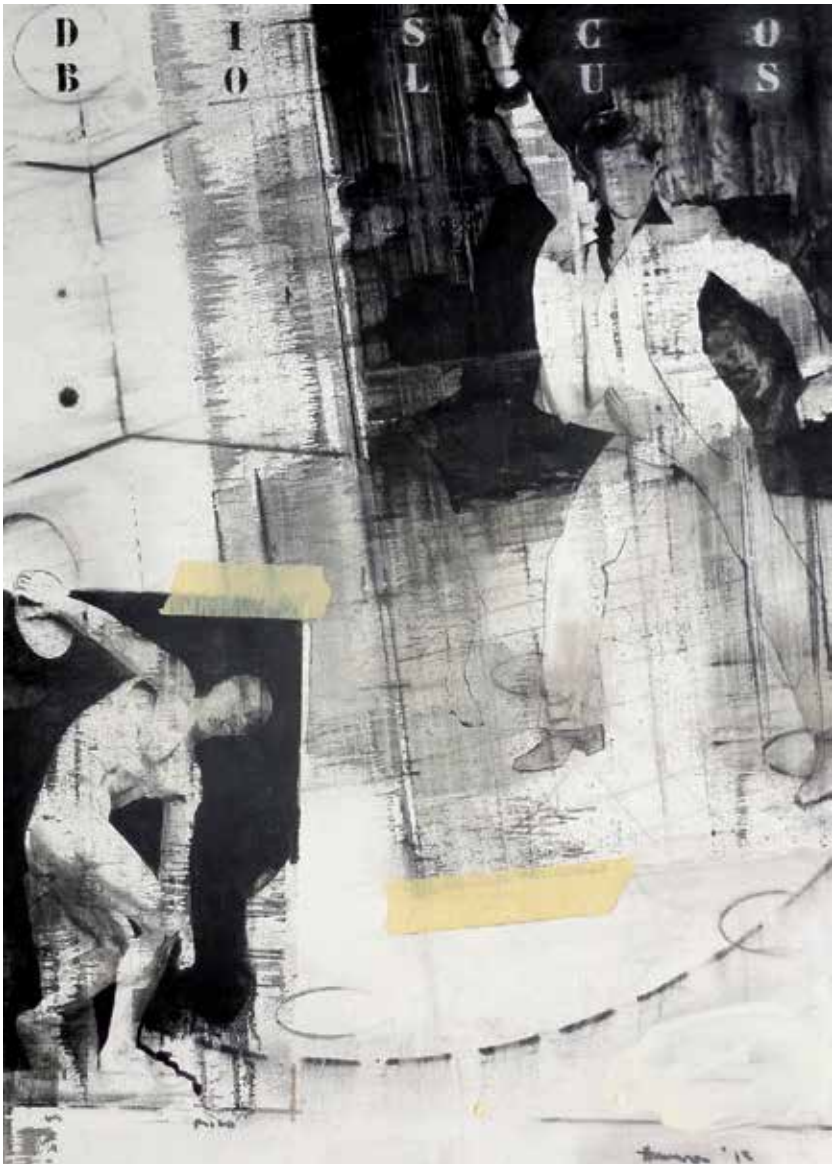
Blaze Starr 2010, mixed media on wood, 14½" x 26"



Blaze 2010, mixed media on wood, 31" x 38"



Heads of State 2013, oil on canvas, 36" x 48"



Disco Bolus 2013, oil on canvas, 30" x 42"



Hollywood Bowl 2011, oil on canvas, 36" x 48"



Kites 'n' Tops 2010, mixed media on wood, 14½" x 26"



Market Fluctuations 2010, mixed media on wood, 14½" x 26"



Uncle Jack (diptych) 2014, oil on canvas, 38" x 56"

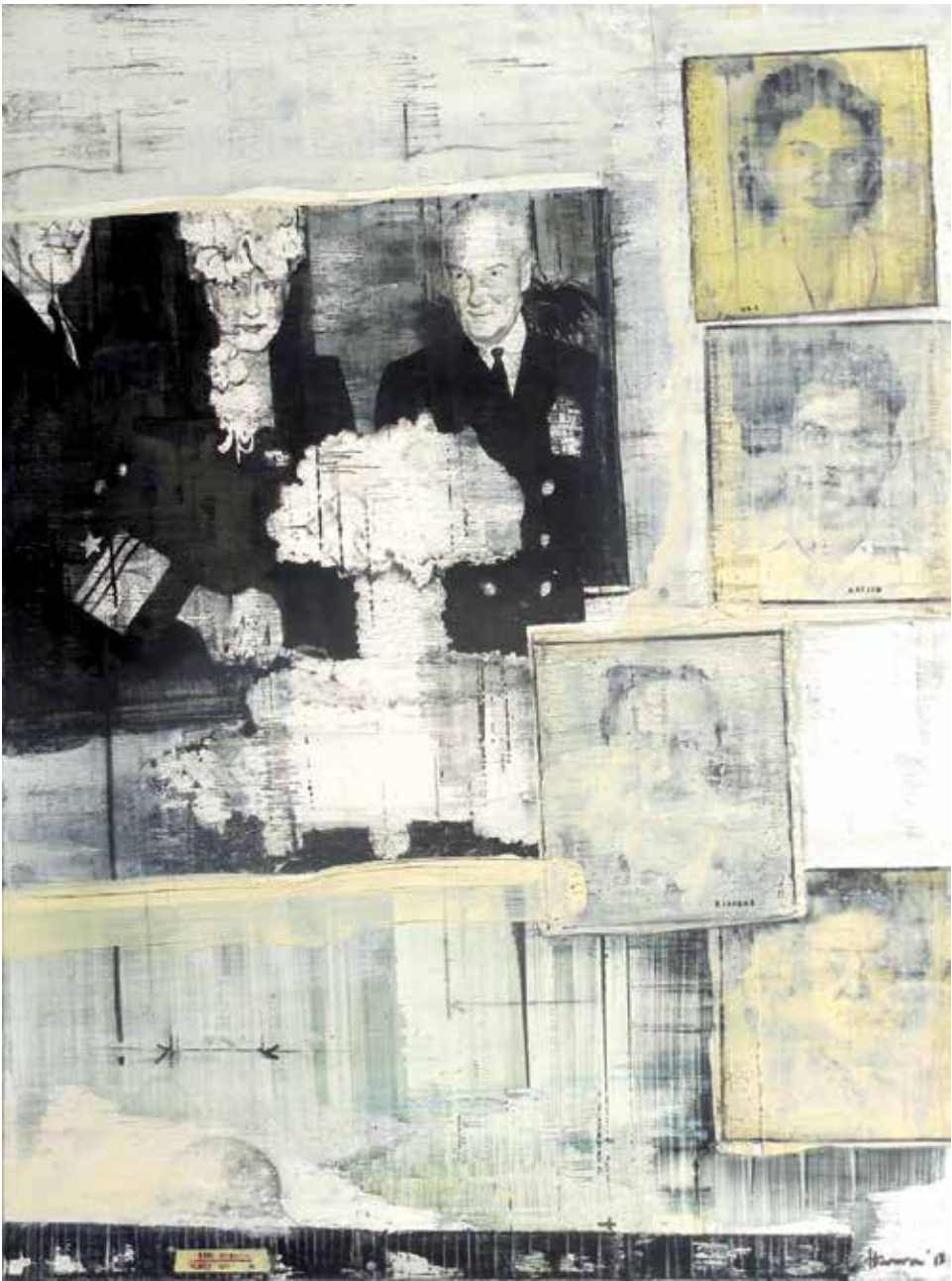




Red Scare 2014, mixed media on wood, 14½" x 19¾"



Talk to the Hand 2009, mixed media on wood, 14½" x 26"



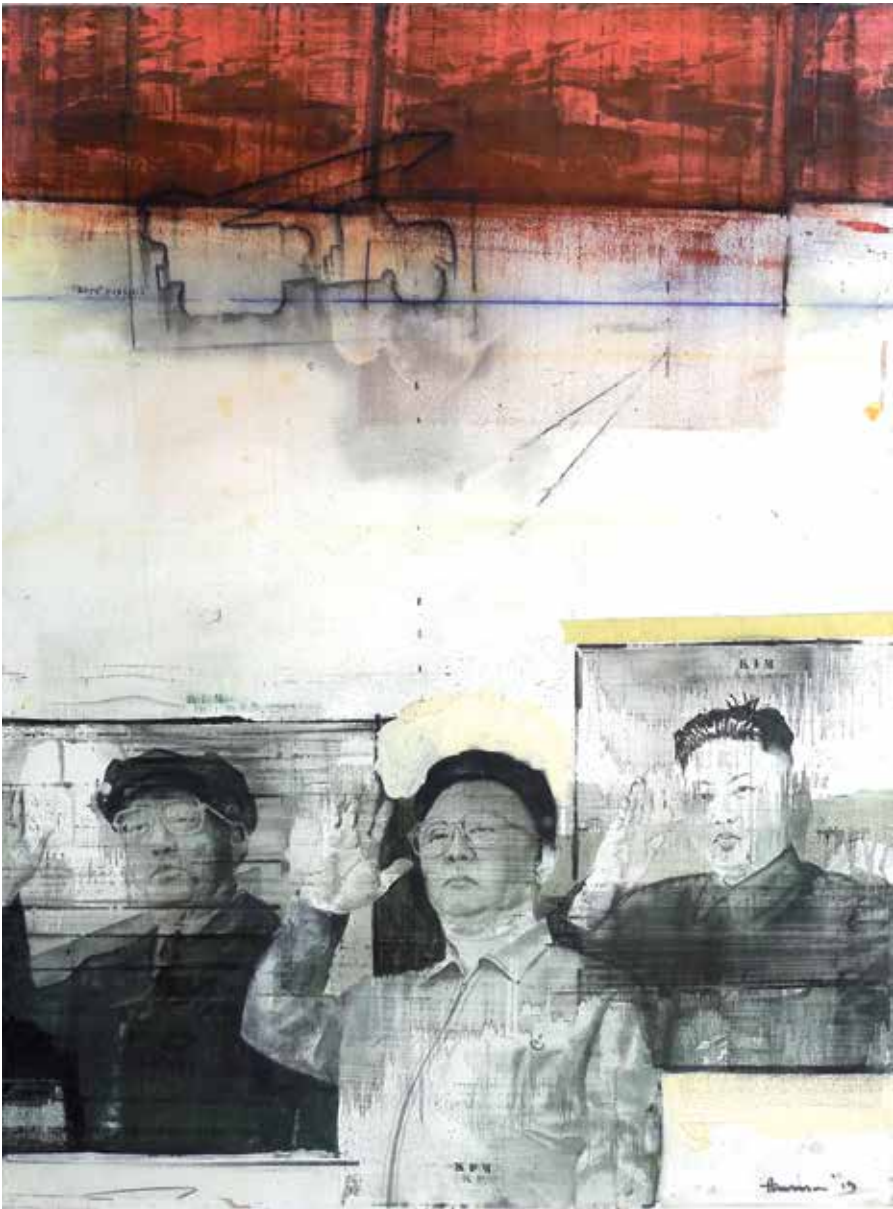
Angel Food 2013, oil on canvas, 45" x 55"



Cholon 2013, oil on canvas, 41" x 49"



News of the World 2013, oil on canvas, 41" x 51"



Three Kims 2013, oil on canvas, 40" x 54"



Rear Projection 2010, mixed media on wood, 14½" x 26"



Tikal 2014, mixed media on wood, 14½" x 26"



Killers (d'après Caravaggio) 2013, oil on canvas, 42" x 50"



Ranch Hand 2013, oil on canvas, 40" x 54"



Under the Wuhan Bridge 2013, oil on canvas, 38" x 53"



Billie Sol 2013, oil on canvas, 41" x 53"

Interview with Antoine Audouard

Paris, September 21, 2013

Antoine Audouard: *Bruce, we're not often asked about the process of art and I'd like to open with a few questions about that. Imagine me as a guy you have a beer with now and then, down at the corner bar. How do you describe your process?*

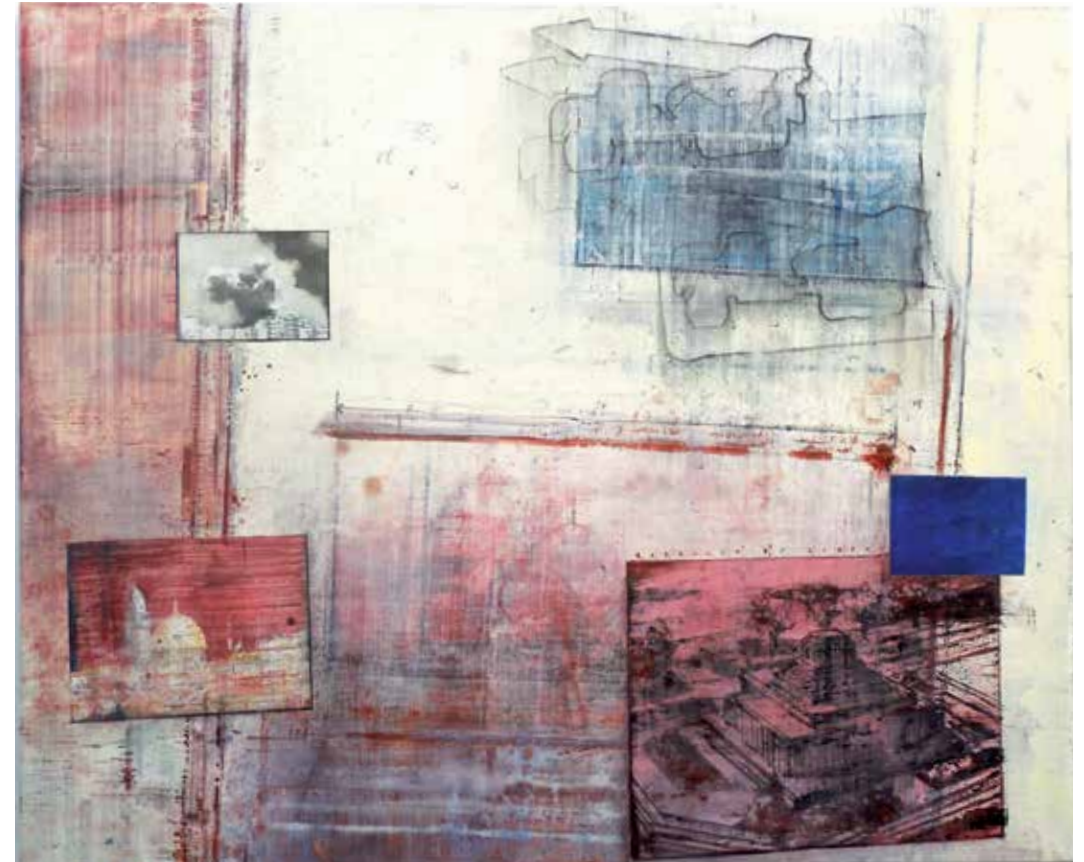
Bruce Thurman: Art needs to be meaningful, but I think it best if one's reaction to it is first emotional and intuitive, and only much later – if at all – thoughtful and rational. Art must enter on an unconscious level. Unlike science, which demands logic, Art asks only to be loved or hated, before being understood. Art has become entertainment and therefore needs to provoke. The curator's nightmare is indifference.

Audouard: *Okay, let me put this in a different way. How do you make a painting?*

Thurman: I start with a subject and its accompanying story. The painting is a narrative of this story. By the way, I read an interesting definition of "narrative" the other day, a very ancient one too, by Polybius. He says narrative is "history with the truth removed." What an amazing way to put it! The point I take is that the narrative form is above all personal and therefore fictional. Another way to answer your question would be to say that I start with a fairly precise idea and develop it in an analytical way. But once the painting starts – logic ceases – and only intuition and the subconscious can lead. You're re-learning to crawl every time. You almost mustn't think. It is a great thrill to succeed with a work and not know how you did it.

Audouard: *You use icons a lot. What do they mean to you? Aren't they rather facile?*

Thurman: The most obvious stereotypes are usually the best as they carry the narrative forward in the most direct way. These serve to generalize the narrative, liberating it. The grosser the icon the more weight – the greater message – it can carry. Yes, icons are superficial and banal, but also economical: they cut to the chase. They are really just shortcuts; they stand in for a more complicated world picture and allow the message through.



Redsquare(s) 2014, oil on canvas, 45" x 55"



Studio 2011, New York

Audouard: *Pick one of your paintings and tell me how it began. From what I observe about your work, it seems to me very unlikely that you start with a concept. It seems to me more like you connect one mental picture with another, and that through those interconnections the painting itself emerges. Am I far off the mark here?*

Thurman: I often work that way. One day I realized that my daughter's Barbie dolls had suddenly become orphans, as would my son's action figurines later, abandoned as their childhood drew to a close. I rescued them and used them as elements in many paintings, those sentinels of childhood lost. I had no difficulty in relating to their sudden and unavoidable fate. So the story, in this case, found me instead of the other way around. The painting was the subsequent telling of that story, of that situation.

Audouard: *In his letters, Mozart mentions that sometimes as he is writing his music, he has a physical sensation of what the whole work will sound like when it's completed. Does that sound familiar?*

Thurman: Sometimes, but there's a danger here. I find that often we start with an idea, a coloration, a tone poem, and it happens that we destroy some very interesting works in their larval stage by adhering too closely to this preconception, instead of allowing the unfolding work to follow its own path into maturity.

Audouard: *Even when it is in opposition, all art is a dialogue between artists and their predecessors. You seem to have deep connections with works by other painters, photographs of historical events and people, even literary works. Is there some sort of pecking order there at work, or is it more instinctive?*

Thurman: I constantly struggle to identify the source of my memories: how much did I really see firsthand, how much was read by me or to me, or overheard, and how much was repeated to me much later by adults, and especially, how much might be due to hindsight. How have my memories become distorted, or worse, "doctored" in my mind?

Painting is a way of remembering, of defining – to disengage from what I was "taught" and try to "see" as if for the first time. For me, the past is like some guy in an overcoat following me down the street at a safe, or not so safe, distance. Our individual, our collective, memories are broken and fragmented, with gaping holes separating little island-memories, like galaxies drifting in the void. I use paint to try to fill in some of

the gaps between these fragments. The actor Peter Ustinov once defined acting as “the imitation of the imaginary.” I like that a lot, and I think it sounds a lot like painting too. Creating a fiction in support of a precise truth.

Audouard: *You are by training an architect, which has its own set of rules. How would you describe the differences and the connections between this world and the world of painting? Is there any downside to working as an artist with this duality?*

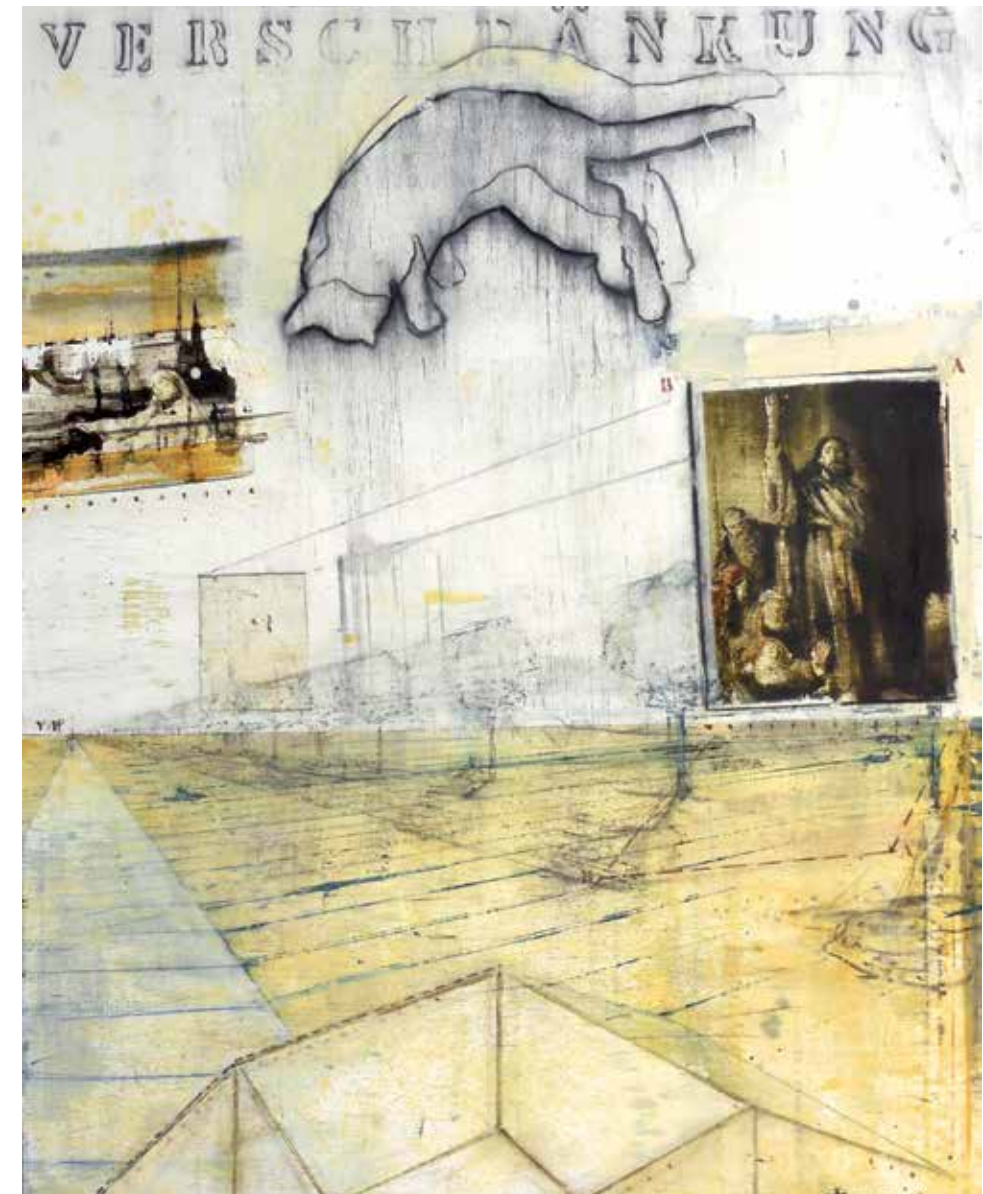
Thurman: Since antiquity, Architecture and the Fine Arts have been joined at the hip. Back then, the same people did both, but no longer. The real question, I think, is the general benefit of duality itself. It is a wonderful asset to be more than just one thing, to embrace your inner conflict and avoid the rigidity of seamlessness. It helps to be a bit on edge with oneself, a bit unsure. This comes with a price, this duality. I lived for twenty-seven years as an “other” in France, and though it may look very romantic from the outside, it also leaves a mark on you – you’re always a step behind in the conversation, and when you do manage to catch up, you don’t quite get the joke. You have to pay your dues, do it right, avoid the other expats and the Harry’s Bars and find your own way.

Audouard: *There is this moment in Clouzot’s 1956 documentary Le mystère Picasso when Picasso puts down his brushes and says, “I’m done.” Clouzot asks, “How do you know?” And Picasso says, “I just know. It’s finished” How do you know when it’s finished?*

Thurman: I sympathize with his statement. Picasso might seem dismissive at first but he’s being sincere. Each of us would have his own way of voicing this truth. Sometimes it feels like the painting itself decides when it’s done. Maybe it’s like cooking – there comes a time when the stew is done and you can only ruin it by continuing. Sensing when that moment is near is the trick, because like with linguini, if it tastes done, it’s overdone. Writers also speak of their characters “taking over” the action and dictating the course of events, as if the author were just a bystander to his own creation. If you know how to listen, a painting will tell you when it is ready.

Audouard: *How do you feel about the Abstract Art / Figurative Art question? Is there even such a thing today, as “schools” of Art?*

Thurman: All art needs to successfully combine and unify the elements that it is composed of and in a coherent way. Within its own self-defined parameters it must solve the structural problem by creating an object that is perceived as meaningful. This applies equally to non-figurative art. I’d like to add that I would love to see art in museums be



Schrödinger's Cat 2013, oil on canvas, 42" x 53"



Studio 2014, New York

arranged with no distinction made to its school or provenance, just its subject matter, for instance. We might then enjoy judging each work on its own aesthetic merits rather than within its historical and cultural context. I don't see the downside.

Audouard: *For me one of the exciting things about your work is how it holds tension: not so far under the surface there is dirt in these pretty pictures and their juxtaposition of images.*

Thurman: Early on as a kid I was confronted with this two-tiered American dream. I can remember the drive down West Madison Avenue, through Chicago's skidrow, the derelicts and street people, and all this on our way to see the Black Hawks play in front of a sell-out Stadium crowd of fans in furs, suits, ties and hats. Later we kids would go back to see just what was in those decrepit movie palaces and their broken-bulbed marquees – the dying embers of burlesque, with the stand-up comic and three-piece band, a Russ Meyer film and the exotic dancers that would wrap it all up. In the audience were the standard cat-calling greasers, sailors, out-of-town conventioners, and suburban kids like ourselves. The sublime and the less sublime. We knew there was something wrong, but we just couldn't quite put our finger on it.

As I grow older, these distilled moments and images seem to come upon me like waves lapping at the shore, rearranging and reordering themselves in my moods and memory. I guess that's what I paint, or try to. It's really that simple.

Bruce Thurman was born in Chicago in 1948. He studied Architecture at the University of Illinois and at L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He worked as an architect in Chicago, southern France and New York until 1981, when he moved to Paris to devote himself full time to painting. Since 2008 he divides his time between his studios in Paris and New York.

Antoine Audouard is an acclaimed novelist, editor, scenarist, teacher and publisher. His best-selling novel Farewell, My Only was translated into 14 languages and was short-listed for the Prix Goncourt. His most recent novel is La Geste des Jartés published by Gallimard.

Solo Exhibitions

2014	Pismo Aspen
2014	Galerie Colette Clavreul Paris
2013	Galerie 218 Paris
	Le Clos de Lutaine Blois
	Galerie Modus Paris
2012	Expo Chateau Vignieu Lyon
	The Affordable Art Fair NYC
	Living with Art Gallery NYC
2011	O.K. Harris NYC
2009	SOFA New York, Galerie Modus NYC
	The Affordable Art Fair NYC
	Living with Art Gallery NYC
	Galerie Modus Paris
2008	SOFA Chicago, Galerie Modus Paris
	SOFA New York, Galerie Modus Paris
2007	Galerie Rollebeek Brussels
	Etienne & van den Doel Oisterwijk
	Espace Pernelles Paris
	Hotel D'Aultane Valreas
	Galerie La Passerelle IUUFM, Lyon
	Exposition Ohe En Laak
2006	Exposition Retrospective Atelier Paris
	Lyon & Lyon Fine Art New Orleans
	Van Brunt Gallery Beacon
2005	Living with Art Gallery NYC
	Van Brunt Gallery Beacon
	Michel Gamard Lyon
2004	Rob van den Doel Gallery The Hague
	Manoir du Mad Galerie Metz
2003	Michel Gamard Lyon
1999	Galerie AKKA Paris
1997	Gallery Lydon Chicago

Collaboration with Peter Bremers

Exhibitions with glass artist Peter Bremers include:

2006	Etienne Gallery Oisterwijk
2004	Rob van den Doel Gallery The Hague
2003	Minke Lipsch Hulsberg Gallery Holland
2002	Articoll Gallery Hoogezand
2001	Eclat du Verre Gallery Paris
2001	Castle of Horn Gallery Holland
1995	Bert Quadvlieg Maastricht Holland

Group Exhibitions

2013	Pismo Aspen
2008	Galerie Carbonek Cannes
2005	Etienne & van den Doel Oisterwijk
2004	Gruen Gallery Chicago
2002	Articoll Gallery Hoogezand
2001	Eclat du Verre Gallery Paris
	Castle of Horn Gallery Holland
	Minke Lipsch Hulsberg Gallery Holland
1998	Rob van den Doel Gallery The Hague
1997	Jean-Pierre Prébet Gallery Roanne
1996	Rob van den Doel Gallery The Hague
1995	Bert Quadvlieg Maastricht
1993	Michel Gamard Lyon
1989	"Art à l'Abattoir" Roermond
1988	Nicole Schuermans Gallery Brussels
1986	Kikkerburg Gallery Roermond

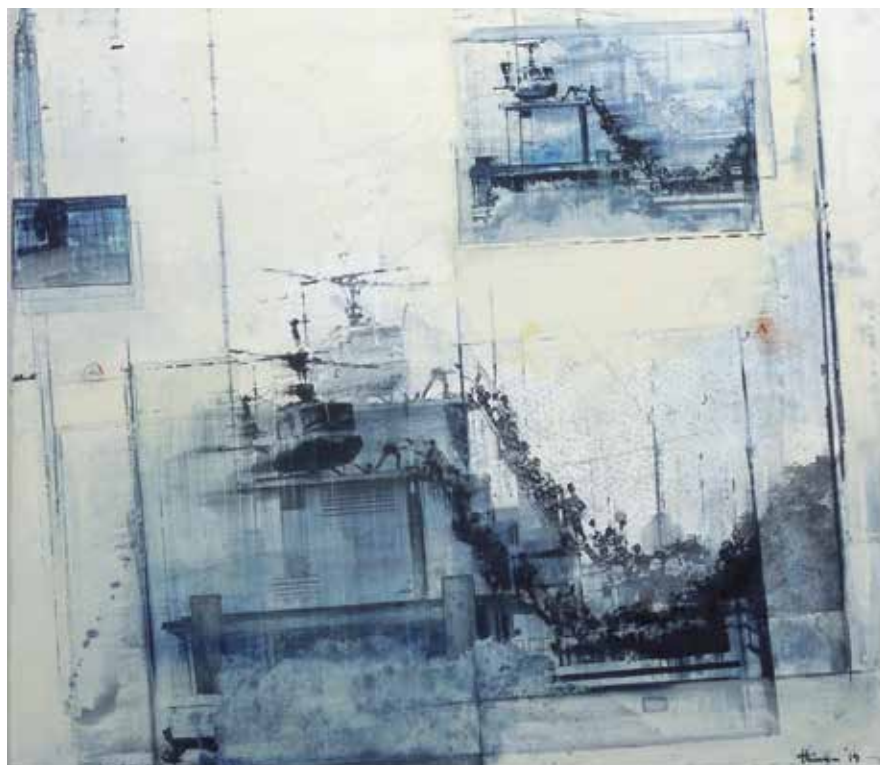
Film Posters

1999	Inséparables by Michel Couvelard
1995	The Pillow Book by Peter Greenaway
1993	Moi Ivan, Toi Abraham by Yolande Zauberman
1993	Couples et Amants by John Lvoff
1992	Quartier Mozart by Jean-Pierre Bekolo
1992	Retour à Howard's End by James Ivory
1991	Jusqu'au Bout du Monde by Wim Wenders
1990	Tilai by Idrissa Ouedraogo
1990	La Captive du Désert by Raymond Depardon
1989	Le Cuisinier, le Voleur, sa Femme et son Amant by Peter Greenaway
1988	La Bohème by Luigi Commencini

Selected Commissions and Installations

2010	Mural – F. J. Sciamè Construction Inc NYC
2001	Mural – Lerus Center Tournai
2001	Mural – Toys "Я" Us Wayne, NJ
1997	Mural – Steelcase Strafor Lyon
1995–02	Frescoes – FairPlay Amusement Centers Holland
1994	Mural – Clinique Jeanne d'Arc Lyon
1992	Mural – Ariane Films Paris
1990	Mural – The Seamens Church Institute NYC

A more detailed list and further information available at www.brucethurman.com



Companionway 2013, oil on canvas, 36" x 48"

Special thanks to Ida, William, Antoine and Mary, who were instrumental in the creation of this catalogue, and to Frank Sciamé, whose friendship cannot be measured in words.

Cover art- detail from **El Balcon** 2013, oil on canvas, 41" x 49"



The 17th Parallel 2013, oil on canvas, 49" x 52"

Art is really just the physical manifestation of an idea, of a subject, of a desire. This holds no matter how abstract the concept or minimalist the expression. It comes down to this: how do I make an image, what's the chosen technique? It's all about the 'how.' — **BT**