

David Carrier, "An Artist's Monument to the Monotony of Images," *Hyperallergic*, April 13, 2022

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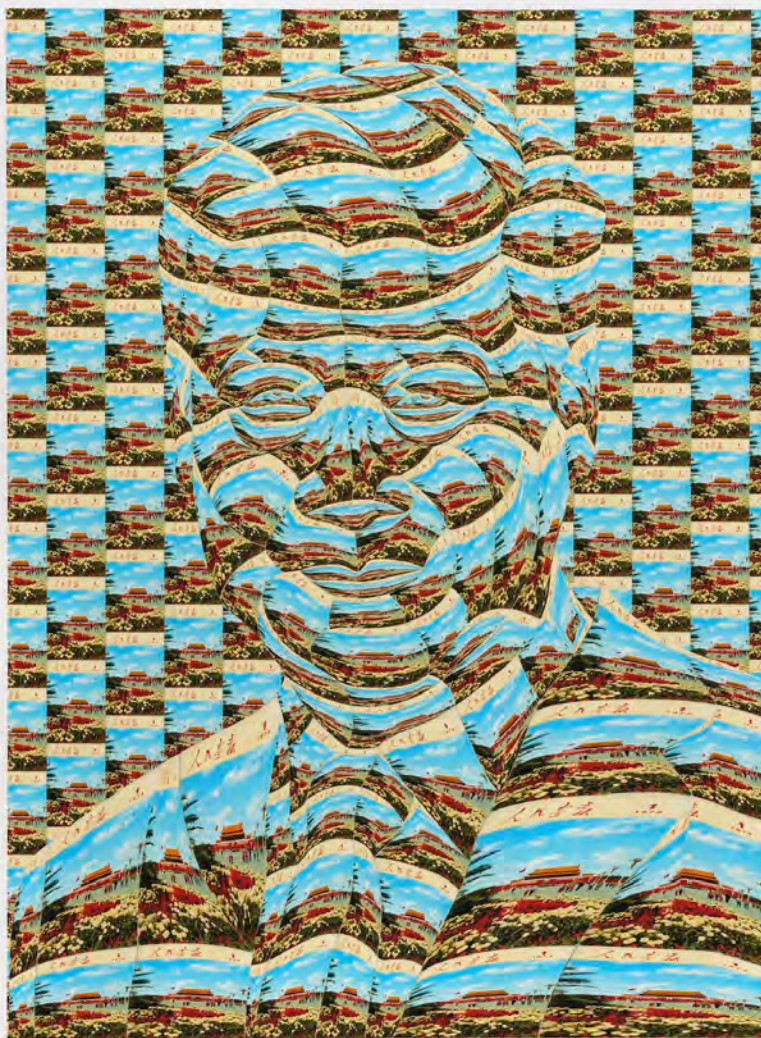
Art Reviews

An Artist's Monument to the Monotony of Images

Bayle creates an art gallery version of computer reproductions of unreality. His art inhabits a world composed of repeated ready-made images.



by David Carrier
April 13, 2022



Thomas Bayle, "Tian'anmen 1973" (2021), fine art pigment print on paper, mounted on gallery cardboard, 37 x 49 1/4 inches (© Thomas Bayle, VG-BildKunst, Bonn. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery)

Very often political art is defined by its subjects. The beleaguered people painted by Sue Coe and the victims of war depicted by Käthe Kollwitz reveal these artists' progressive worldviews. But artists can also reveal their politics through their chosen style of representation. The pointillism of Paul Signac and some of Georges Seurat's other followers is one such possibility. Instead of blending their colors, these artists call for the spectator to synthesize autonomous dots of paint, thus creating a more vivid image than can be found in traditional painting. For these artists that procedure had obvious political implications in that it takes account of each dot.

Thomas Bayrle's *Monotony in a Hurry* is a neo-pointillist display, made of what the artist calls "superforms," which take the traditional pointillist procedure one step further. Three images, each five meters tall, are shown in Gladstone's main, extremely spacious ground-level gallery. Initially it feels as if one of the gigantic public screens in Times Square has been placed inside a Chelsea gallery. After you pass the front desk and enter the main room, stand back to look at the wall on your left and in the center "Xi Jinping" (2021), a portrait of the Chinese premier, will come into focus. Walk closer to that wall and you'll see that this portrait is cunningly constructed from a vast assortment of small rectangular images of Chinese workers, using prints on recycled fabric mounted in a massive metal frame attached to the wall. That the image of China's ruler is literally made up of pictures of Chinese workers is an ambitious political statement that deserves unpacking. The ruler is constructed of his population; alternatively, the populace is subsumed in the depiction of the premier. On the right-hand wall, "Pope" (2021) is composed of digital prints of the Papal shoes on tiny wood panels. Facing it on the left wall is "Smartphone Kim," (2021), a portrait of Kim Kardashian constructed of digital prints on aluminum. You'd have to have grand real estate indeed to collect even one of these works. Bayrle needs plenty of space, a luxury in our crowded art world.



Thomas Bayrle, "Pope V" (2021), fine art pigment print on paper, mounted on gallery cardboard, 38 1/2 x 39 3/8 inches (© Thomas Bayrle, VG-BildKunst, Bonn. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery)

A Neo-Impressionist painting is best seen from a distance for the depicted scene to come into focus, but the right position to take before Bayrle's pictures is not clear. What experience of "Xi Jinping" is more real: seeing the enormous image of the premier from a distance or the mass of workers up close? When we look very closely at pictures on our computers, the images dissolve into a field of pixels. For this reason, these three large works are fundamentally ambiguous. Xi Jinping, the Pope, and Kim Kardashian are celebrities, whose images appear very familiar. And yet they are unknowable to most of us because they are present to us only as reproduced in such images. They are, as the Gladstone website states, "all image." When we get close to these images of them, these works dissolve into Bayrle's pixels. His art thus captures their strange, disembodied presence as media superstars.

How, then, should we interpret these images? Bayrle's process must be very labor intensive. How much work is needed to plot and construct these three images, which then have to be assembled in the extravagantly high space at Gladstone? Bayrle has deconstructed pointillism, for in place of the Neo-Impressionists' very vivid visual world he creates an art gallery version of computer reproductions of unreality. His art inhabits a world composed of repeated ready-made images.



Installation view of *Thomas Bayrle: Monotony in a Hurry*, Gladstone Gallery, New York, 2022 (© Thomas Bayrle, VG-BildKunst, Bonn. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery)

In a suggestive speculative description of our period, as seen from the viewpoint of a utopian future, the leftist art critic Ben Davis speaks of “the disastrous levels of waste and toxic pollution left by the late-stage capitalist system that led to ecosystem breakdown.” Is this not exactly what we see in *Monotony in a Hurry*? Bayrle's comically uneconomical way of making images creates a highly distinctive aesthetic effect, bringing into the art world a visual experience normally associated with lavish public advertising art. Politicians, religious leaders, and Hollywood celebrities all are equivalent for him. And he shows how the image-

how I see his works.

But in a marvelous video accessible on the Gladstone website, Bayrle offers a completely different analysis. And so he should have the last word here. Monotony, he says, is the most beautiful thing that he knows. Judging from that video, he looks to be totally happy, which is reason to believe that he knows what he is doing.



Thomas Bayrle, “Kim Kardashian (II)” (2021), acrylic and fine art pigment print on canvas, 55 x 59 inches (© Thomas Bayrle, VG-BildKunst, Bonn. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery)