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Cocktail Hour: Anthony Iacono at P.P.O.W.

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by Dennis Kardon

Anthony Iacono: *Crudités at Sunset* at P.P.O.W. Gallery

July 9 to August 7, 2015
535 West 22nd Street, 3rd Floor (between 10th and 11th avenues)
New York City, 212 647 1044

A perverse combination of BDSM homoerotic fantasies, '50s French poster graphics and modest quotidian moments marks Anthony Iacono's debut exhibition. Together with two short, less than compelling Bruce Nauman-like videos, eighteen impeccably crafted collages of painted paper, mostly 24 by 19 inches done this year, were executed with a suave brio that belies their kinky preoccupations. I'm not sure whether Iacono's delight in color, form, and composition camouflage his darker fetishist fascinations, or the other way around, but his jitterbug between form and content has a charming syncopated beat.



Anthony Iacono, *Shrimp Cocktail*, 2015. Acrylic, cut paper and linen tape, 24 x 19 inches. Courtesy of P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York

Though factually collages, by appearing like paintings, these works queer picture making, undermining and subverting expectations of how a conventional genre painting should behave. There are constant double-entendres humming through the work, from the obvious (*Fruit*) to the sly (*Cantaloupe*, *Peach and Rug Burn*). In this latter work the peaked slices of cantaloupe in a white bowl, rhyme with a negative space between a forearm and tricep. The peach-colored elbow bruise of a cropped figure resting his arms on a table echoes the blushing piece of fruit at his side, and implies a rough sexual encounter on the burn-inflicting, absent rug of the title. Even this show's name, *Crudités at Sunset*, implies not only the early evening, pre-dinner nosh at a cocktail party, but in a larger sense, minor off-color behaviors in the twilight of the painting enterprise.

Fragments of bodies in these works mostly function, along with plants and fruit, as still life forms. A young male body, often in chaste white underpants and gym socks, becomes the center of erotic fascination, as in *Hanging Plant* where a potted begonia is suspended by a hook from the nipple of a bent over torso in white briefs that frames the scene. But in *Shrimp Cocktail*, where seven tiger-striped crustaceans dangle from a

martini glass and, with a lemon, balance precariously on parallel, naked butt-cheeks, it is only our presupposition that the supine figure facing away from us is male.



Anthony Iacono, *Peach and Rug Burn*, 2015. Acrylic, cut paper and linen tape, 23 x 19 inches. Courtesy of P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York

On the other hand the pink-tipped large aubergine breasts that rest on a table like sharp knees and support a water-filled vial of daisies in the décolletage in *Vase*, are undeniably female. There is so much that is provocatively improper about this painting (including the rhyming yellow-nippled lemon shape protruding from the right), that the implied racial incorrectness involved in using dark-skinned tits as a carafe holder in some kind of disturbing bondage play shall almost go unremarked.

Screen-based reproductions of his work fail to convey the nuances of Iacono's process. Each colored area seems to have been separately cut from painted paper and then pieced together like a jigsaw puzzle. The surfaces therefore have a subtle relief, which produces sharply defined edges, and avoids the painterly conundrum of deciding how to handle the interaction where two colored shapes meet. This could result in a conventional modernist flatness, but the shapes, shaded and highlighted with such a light touch of the airbrush, or cut perspectively, tend to carve out a shallow space and create a point of view that implies psychological content. There are of course echoes of Matisse cut-outs in this, and it is also similar to the way David Salle's recent large

paintings were collaged together from painted pieces of canvas. Iacono's work is much more pristine than Salle, but it made me curious how these might look if they were much larger, attached to canvas, and not under glass.

This exhibition makes a good case for Iacono's place in the burgeoning group of painters investigating the abstract pictorial properties of representation. Of course these paintings have roots in the work of several older artists. The stylized hair and drawing in a particular piece, *Bag*, depicting a wide hipped, jaundiced female back and arm, brought Alexi Worth to mind. Nevertheless Iacono's sarcastic wit and stylish execution evidence a unique sensibility. This is an impressive first show.



Installation view, Anthony Iacono: *Crudités at Sunset* at P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York, 2015



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