

BIENVENU STEINBERG & J

Sean Micka

Book Out Of Print But Six Pictures

NADA House 2023, Governors Island, Nolan House 18

September 1 - October 2, 2023



Bienvenu Steinberg & J is pleased to present *Book Out of Stock But Six Pictures*, a project by Sean Micka for the fifth edition of NADA House, on Governors Island. The collaborative exhibition brings together 26 art galleries and art spaces to present 26 artists, with participants engaging the unique character of the 19th century former military residence and exhibition work in a diverse range of mediums.

Book Out of Stock But Six Pictures is a painting project about the American Mildred Fish Harnack (1902-1943), whose life and death intersect with the traumatic events of WWII: the atrocities of the Third Reich in Nazi Germany, and the anti-communist ideology of McCarthyism in America. Mildred Harnack experienced two deaths:

her physical death by guillotine, beheaded by the Nazis for her involvement in the international resistance against Nazi Germany (Röte Kapelle, Red Orchestra) and her symbolic death, mnemonic annihilation by the United States government. Perceived as a possible enemy of the state due to her commitment to communism, Harnack was the target of the US government's project to suppress (and repress) all known intelligence about her involvement in the resistance, and their espionage activities with both the US and the Soviet government agencies (see Appendix).

In her own act of self-preservation, Mildred also lived a life of secrecy and self-erasure. Furthermore, her siblings, out of a similar fear of their own life and liberty, burned many letters and pictures she had sent home. If it were not for the love of her mother, her memory would have all but disappeared: many years later, discovered in an attic in Maryland, was a box found hidden by her mother Georgina Fish, containing a collection of photos, letters, ephemera and a lock of Mildred's hair. What emerged was a remarkable 20th century story of a key individual in the Nazi resistance.

"As a way to work through artistic inheritance, there is a debt to address: Gerhard Richter's painting has served as an influential basis in my practice. However one must destroy in order to create.

For this project, I've used Richter's grisaille photo-painting technique, a monochromatic form of oil painting rooted in classical painting where all brush-work is blended-away, and all painterly gestures are erased. The human touch is evacuated. The result is a blurry picture that resembles an out-of-focus photograph.

After mastering this skill, I then return to the waiting, by painting over it again, effacing the image in order to create something different. Through sanding, scratching, smearing, and/or swiping, I return to the canvas with in-painting (wet-on-wet) and/or over-painting (wet-on-dry)." - Sean Micka

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