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David X. Levine and Ross Simonini *Eat and Die*, curated by Molly Rand
In the Project Gallery from May 18 to June 16, 2013

By Ross Simonini

After Molly asked me to show some drawings in a two-person show with David, I took a trip over to his studio. He works in a clean, compact, windowless box of a room in TriBeCa, where he's been for a little over a decade, and his artwork is, in some ways, a reflection of this environment. It's tight, economical, without clutter, and it's created mostly with a single medium: colored pencil, which he applies for up to ten hours a day, until he's built up a vibrating texture of color. David showed me hundreds of drawings at his studio and the work is all like this - bold, and fastidious with a singularity of vision.

I've always dreamt of having this kind of monastic, consistent focus, but I am, it looks like, a different kind of artist. I work across mediums and tend to find inspiration in distraction, which might be a signifier of my younger, internet-sodden generation. (David and I are about 20 years apart in age.) I'll spend my day sliding between writing, painting, drawing, and making music, and I like it when the artwork looks like the product of this kind of activity, like it's an object that comes out of a multifarious life. This is part of the reason why I end up using food in my work, because it's a pigment I already have around and inside of me.

All of these interests are, in some abstracted way, in the process of my drawings, but David arranges his cultural addiction on the surface of his work. He'll use iconic images of Amy Winehouse and Brian Wilson in a collage, maybe as a sort of dedication, it's not clear. This show includes a work with an obituary of the rock writer, Paul Williams, and David mixes it among clippings of Artforum and the New York Times, which he's made unrecognizable by his careful selection of solid-color chunks. For him, all of these elements are connected, and the act of choosing them, and placing them, is a path toward transforming them into precious, radiant objects.

Choice is something I'm usually trying to avoid. I don't particularly enjoy decision-making, so I find any kind of stimulus around me to make the decisions for me. Because of this, the drawings end up as documentations of searching, failing, accidents. I also try to draw non-visual, physical feelings, such as a nagging pain in my knee or the naturally erratic movements of a bus ride, or proprioception, which is the sensation of what it feels like to be inside your own body - a tricky kind of perception I learned about through Alexander Technique. Rather than try to ignore or overcome or work through these feelings I try to point the art right at the sensations and squeeze them for images.



Ross Simonini, *Health Care Drawing No. 2*, 2013. Various food, spices, and graphite on paper. 54 x 36 inches.



David X. Levine, *John Williams Stoner*, 2013. Colored pencil, collage and gouache on paper. 23 x 19 inches

It's not always easy to find images, and as an artist, it's important to meet other artists and look at your own work through their eyes. It lets that image-making part of your mind forget all its nervous habits. I experienced that with David, when I went to his studio and forgot about my own work for a second when I saw, in his drawings, a single, almost imperceptible imperfection, the way one of his lines appeared initially straight, but was revealed, over a nice long look, to have the wavering, breathing quality of being cut by hand.

David X. Levine was born in 1962 in Boston, MA, and lives in New York City. Levine is a self-taught artist. He has had 10 solos exhibitions in the past 10 years all over the U.S., from NYC to Las Vegas. He is currently preparing for a retrospective show at Boston University in 2014.

Ross Simonini was born in 1982 and is an artist, writer, and musician living in Brooklyn. He is a founder of the music and art project, NewVillager, and has shown his work and performed at Jack Hanley Gallery, Fredericks & Freiser, Human Resources Los Angeles and New York, Brooklyn Museum, Andy Warhol museum and elsewhere. He is the interviews editor of *The Believer* magazine, the executive producer of KCRW's *The Organist*, and the creator of *Blood Pillow*, an audio project at Clocktower Gallery. He regularly contributes to the *New York Times*, *Frieze*, *Interview*, *Art in America*, and a book of his interviews with artists will be released by Picturebox books in 2014.