

Jay Battle: Grade Painting

I. I. (June 04, 2015)



Jay Battle's new exhibition *Grade Pending* at Ierimonti Gallery, New York City, is a suite of select giant restaurant stationery paintings produced 2013- 2014, to be shown with his new *Sanitary Grade* paintings.

Sanitary Inspection Grades, in the form of laser printouts, are displayed by law at restaurant entrances in New York City. [Battle](#) [2] displays his own hand painted versions next to his selected work in a meta-discursive way.

The artist's sardonic idea is that the viewer of his restaurant pictures can rate them just as the sanitary authorities rate the restaurants themselves, and just as their customers rate, or like, the food.



The deeper current running here is that Battle take issue with the new social-media implications of the word like. These days, artists – in common with everyone else – have to attend to feeds, tweets, tumbls, texts, and likes galore, just to keep up. We live in the era of the quick check-and-move-on, the yes, the like. A false sense of immediacy.

How art stands up over time has nothing to do with like. Like is lazy popular taste. If artists measure their art by like, all their changing moods, loves, skills, obsessions and smells are rendered trivial. By contrast, the slick, quick visual information we receive today has become a fearsome homogenized vehicle used by corporations and social media to control and rate us, while curating our images.

The contemplative warmth and generosity of art has been thrown out the window, leaving us all starving for a recent friend request.

Battle is very clear about this:

“Human beings grow, change and die, but great art remains exactly what it is. I have visited [Matisse's Piano Lesson](#) [3] in the MOMA at many different periods in my life; I have come to see its fixed and constant beauty as a yardstick for my own evolution as a man and an artist. Every time I return to it, this painting offers me the same lesson; but I am different every time I return, and because I am different, the same lesson teaches me something new. Whether or not I like the picture is completely irrelevant.

I have always known that for my own creative system to thrive, I need to keep questioning the structures I set up. But with Grade Pending I have begun to question my motives: why have I spent the last eight years blowing up copies of restaurant stationery and painting on them? These new Sanitary Grade paintings are the consequence of my introspection. I find I want to create because I think it's interesting, but once my work goes into the world, I can't manage it anymore, it's beyond my control. But losing that control can give me a distance that allows me to see a way forward and this is what is happening now.

Somebody said the reason socialism never took off in America is that even the poorest Americans see themselves as inconvenienced millionaires. The same goes, worldwide, for struggling artists like [Van Gogh](#) [4], who was so hungry he ate his own paints. But instead of saying artists are poor, or they're broke, or they're inconvenienced millionaires, we say they're starving.

So what does this mean, literally? It means lunch. If you've made it then you can go to the [Colombe d'Or](#) [5], where Picasso used to trade drawings for meals. Kippenberger had a lifelong free lunch at the Paris Bar in Berlin, where he had all his paintings hanging. An artist has made it when he can eat wherever he wants. I question the motives for my restaurant paintings and for the moment I find that success is associated in my heart with eating well, and I guess I like that. The Grade, however, is Pending”.

Battle's work has been exhibited at galleries and museums around the world, including [The National Academy Museum](#) [6], Nyehaus Gramercy Park and Chelsea, Andrew Roth, Metro Pictures, Casey Kaplan, Paul Kasmin, Feigen Contemporary, the [Chelsea Museum](#) [7], Exit Art, The Dorsky Gallery, and [The Whitney Museum](#) [8], all in New York City, The Glass House Museum at Mana, New Jersey, Blum & Poe, CA, The Ausstellungshalle Zeitgenössische Kunst in Münster, The Abteiberg Museum Mönchengladbach, Germany, The Museum of Liverpool, and at The World Museum both in Liverpool. Battle's first solo institutional show, with accompanying catalogue, took place in 2012 at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Santiago de Chile, titled Free Lunch.



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