Drawing no. 330, 1994
In the summer of 1989 Drew Beattie and Daniel Davidson decided to try making a painting together. Impressed with the results, they continued working in tandem in what Davidson has described as a “private laboratory.” Within six months they had accumulated a body of work that seemed to both of them to be far more interesting than the work either was doing alone, and so officially began what has become an extraordinarily fruitful artistic collaboration.

Beattie & Davidson have been very prolific—as is evident in this exhibition of approximately one hundred small-scale “mail art” works. Not only the quantity but the astonishing variety of styles, images, and techniques testify to the uncommon fertility of their imaginations.

It seems more accurate to describe Beattie & Davidson as having a single “imagination”: in their work it is impossible to tell which person is responsible for which mark or image. The recurrence of certain images and an oddly consistent tone unify what might otherwise be a chaotic jumble. Nevertheless, their strange combinations of figures and abstraction cannot be analyzed through conventional psychology. They are expressive of a kind of hybrid state that constantly fractures, yet uncannily coheres. Instead of turning inward to plumb the depths of the individual artist’s soul—the very epitome of artistic practice since the Romantic era of the nineteenth century—Beattie & Davidson launch their investigations outward, in search of conventional drawings. It became a way of extending that out over time and space. There were so many of them, traveling in time and moving out into the world and coming back. Sometimes they seem, by the time they get back to me or to Dan, like demented homing pigeons that fly out there into the world and come back to us somehow changed.”

Despite the occasional darkness and dementia of their imagery, there is an implicit trust in Beattie & Davidson’s collaborative work that borders on innocence. Their method has the playful aspect of a children’s game—combining, say, a three-legged race, Pin the Tail on the Donkey, and Musical Chairs—in which the artists set off blindly together in search of an image that either of them is allowed to pluck from the flux of their ongoing process and declare “finished.” In the mail art works, they have expanded even further the parameters of this game, letting these small pieces loose into the world for a brief time to be transformed, or even destroyed, before returning to be re-worked or judged completed works of art.

Drew Beattie was born in 1952 in Atlanta, Georgia, and Daniel Davidson was born in 1965 in San Francisco. They currently live and work in New York City. This fall they will begin a year-long residency in Italy as recipients of the prestigious 1994 American Academy in Rome Fellowship in the Visual Arts.

Lawrence Rinder

Works in MATRIX:
All works executed between 1990 and 1994; media include ink, wax, gouache, white-out, acrylic paint, watercolor, tape, modeling paste, coffee, charcoal, marker, spray paint, pencil, liquid plastic, shoe polish, aluminum foil, thread, paper, plexiglass, foam core, cardboard, photographic reproduction, and vinyl record; dimensions vary. All works are lent by the artists, courtesy Stephen Wirtz Gallery, San Francisco.
Selected one-person exhibitions:


Selected group exhibitions:


Selected bibliography about the artist:


Edelman, Robert G. “Report from Washington, DC, The Figure Returns,” Art in America (Mar. '94).

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