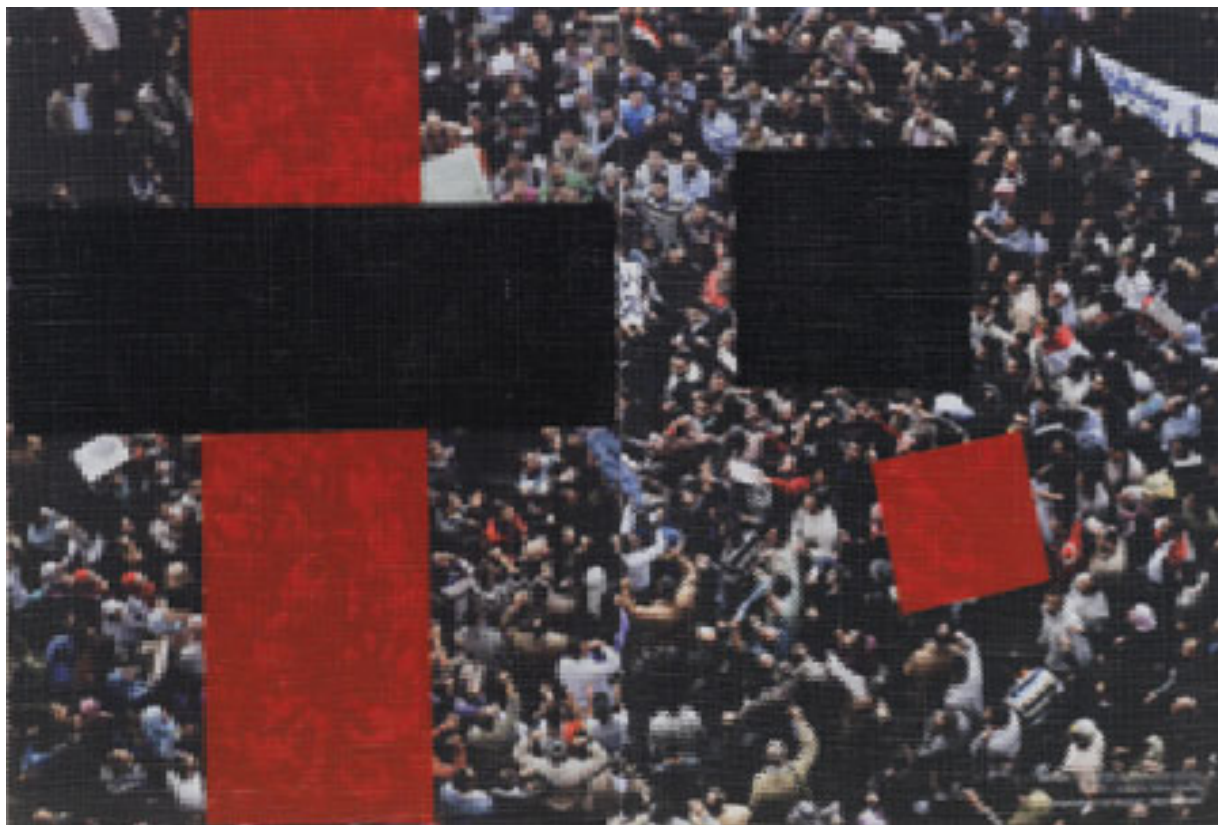


John Sparagana: "Going Down for the Third Time" at Bryan Miller Gallery

by rachel hooper

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GD #2: Cairo, Tahrir Square Protest, Kazimir Malevich 'Black and Red Squares' (1915), Kazimir Malevich 'Suprematist Painting' (1927)

2011

John Sparagana

Sliced and mixed archival inkjet prints, oil pastel on paper

62 1/4" x 92 3/4"

Photo: courtesy of the artist and Bryan Miller Gallery

There is a beautiful sort of transcendence that arises from John Sparagana's complex collages. His meticulous technique of systematically slicing and reassembling photographs from magazines results in fascinating visual fields that are engaging on numerous levels. Although there is usually enough information to get a sense of his source images, the details are hard to pin down as they are blurred and abstracted by Sparagana's cuts. Confronted with the give and take between the subjective and concrete aspects of the work, an artistic experience emerges that hovers between the layers of mediation inherent in the collaged photograph. A surprising and subtle hint of a shared abstract thought comes into being through time, space, and interpretation, the distance of which is emphasized by Sparagana's process.

This sense of communication through and across media and subjectivities is mirrored by the subject of crowds of people that dominates this exhibition. Although sometimes faces and bodies can be made out, the individuals pictured lose their distinctiveness. They become almost like pixels, small segments coming together to form a larger idea. Half of the works in the exhibition are of Tahrir Square. At a larger scale than most of Sparagana's previous works, these collages of the Arab Spring are totally engrossing, pulling you into the action and energy of the crowd. A standout is *Untitled (Tahrir Square Crowd)* (2011) in which Sparagana's cuts on a figure crowd surfing in the center of the image dissolves his outline into the swirling mass of people holding him up. A few of the artworks in the exhibition in the GD series have an added layer of well-known compositions by modern masters, such as Kazimir Malevich or Ellsworth Kelly, painted or drawn on their surface, and the pages from which they are made sometimes contain bold printed headlines of "revolution." The text and colored marks carry a lot of weight in the composition and are a leap from Sparagana's earlier, more nebulous collages. It is a curious move that takes his work in a new direction, from a fairly self-contained experience into a web of references to the history of abstract painting and textual allusions.