

## David Ratcliff at Team

David Ratcliff lives and works in his native Los Angeles, a place where churning out images is an industry unto itself. The entertainment business is increasingly focused upon the young, rich and beautiful, and Ratcliff evokes all of these, while revealing the tacky and creepy underside of the enterprise. He selected a seemingly innocent passage from Bret Easton Ellis's 1991 *American Psycho* as the lengthy title for his exhibition: "I find a Burberry scarf and matching coat with a whale embroidered on it (something a little kid might wear) and it's covered with what looks like dried chocolate syrup crisscrossed over the front." In that novel, which takes place in New York City during the go-go Reagan '80s, Ellis's protagonist describes both everyday events and gruesome acts in the most deadpan manner. Ratcliff brings the same nonchalance to his handling of undeniably loaded found images, using the cold, flattening stencil to achieve a mechanical impartiality.

In his paintings, Ratcliff delights in visual overload, which, surprisingly, he often manages to turn into a virtue. The artist gleans images of sexualized young girls, children, luxury goods, leather straps, flowers, toys, and architectural interiors and exteriors from magazines and the Web, processes them digitally, and then converts these images into hand-cut stencils which he arranges in dense clusters on canvases painted black. He selects one color per painting (pink, red, mauve, blue or beige) and sprays through the stencils. As the stencils do not closely adhere to the canvas, the silhouettes of the forms bleed ever so slightly. In the resulting paintings (all acrylic on canvas, 2004 or 2005), images emerge abruptly from deep shadow into the boldest highlight, evoking the reversed values of photographic negatives as well as several of Warhol's series in which black plays an important role.

*Charm Bracelets* (2004), with its Warholian red and black color scheme, is a winner. Particularly good are its density, its degree of visual ambiguity and its attempt to tear away from the all-ordering grid established by the repeated stencils. The image flips back and forth between flatness and the illusion of depth. The almost indecipherable forms, including young women and girls and bracelets cutting diagonally

across the canvas, bleed into one another. Black suggests evil, red evokes blood, and suddenly, this becomes a dripping slasher painting, which brings us back to *American Psycho*. Like Ellis, Ratcliff at his best is a deft chronicler of glut. —*Michaël Amy*

David Ratcliff: *Charm Bracelets*, 2004, acrylic on canvas, 72 by 66 inches; at Team.

