



Stuart Diamond
Memory and Puzzles
(2016)
40" x 60"
oil on canvas

BANNISTER GALLERY



RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

Stuart Diamond: "Trunks and Tales"
June 1-30

Artist Reception: Thursday, June 1 | 5-8 p.m.

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*You gentlemen who think you have a mission
To purge us of the seven deadly sins
Should first sort out the basic food position
Then start your preaching, that's where it begins ...*

*Mankind can keep alive thanks to its brilliance
In keeping its humanity repressed
And for once you must try not to shriek the facts
Mankind is kept alive by bestial acts*

–Bertolt Brecht, “What Keeps Mankind Alive?”¹

The recent paintings of Stuart Diamond combine seemingly disparate phenomena in strangely architectonic settings that appear to simultaneously assemble and disassemble themselves. Seductive arrangements of raw and prepared foods, for example, make intermittent appearances in these amorphous and fluid figurative compositions. Evoking a broad history of visually-charged representations of edible things—from the still-life paintings of Spanish Baroque masters, such as Juan Sánchez Cotán and Francisco de Zurbarán, to the so-called “food porn” found in the richly saturated photographs in current magazines such as *Bon Appetit* and *Food and Wine*—they cut a displaced figure amidst skewed interior and exterior settings and disturbing fragmentations of animals, such as elephant trunks and the snouts and muzzles of oxen. The manner in which these assembled arrangements of food “pop” from within an amorphously undefined spatial composition and uniformly muted color scheme lends them a distinction and significance redolent of the role that sustenance plays in Bertolt Brecht’s lyrics that open this text. This dynamic is further emphasized by the stark contrast between the delectable assortments and the animal body parts, entrails and other viscera that conjure an abattoir more than Alinea.² The particular works characterized by this strategy of juxtaposition draw Brecht and Weill’s politically urgent lament of 1928 into a critical dialogue with the present day in their meditation on the increasingly unsettling disparity between food as a lovingly depicted and fetishized luxury item and the pervasive everyday evidence of a perpetual global hunger crisis.

¹ From Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht’s “Die Dreigroschenoper” (“The Threepenny Opera”), 1928.

² Alinea is a restaurant in Chicago that opened in Chicago in 2005 and is internationally recognized for its role in developing radically new approaches to gastronomy.

Other recurring motifs in Diamond’s recent paintings are fighter planes seen partially in profile that appear to be heading downwards into a crash landing. They function, perhaps, in an obverse manner to the sinister bull-figures in Pablo Picasso’s legendary painting *Guernica* (1937), in their literal signification of airborne terror. The elephant trunks and oxen snouts thus replace the human figures below in Picasso’s work, elements whose physical evocations of trauma suggest mental, spiritual, social, and economic wounds. Suffusing all of the depicted elements is a quality of color that creates a pictorial flattening of sorts, regardless of the restless spatial shifts and progressions that dominate the paintings. This formal approach moderates one’s experience of intensely represented subjects and compositions that, rendered in brighter or more lurid tones, would risk overwhelming and repelling the eye rather than more subtly persuading it. In another sense this chromatic quality accentuates such “cinematic” aspects of the works as their theatrical staging and architectural compressions and expansions, functioning like a film director or cinematographer’s decision to use a particularly restrained lighting, palette or saturation of the image to temper the telling of an otherwise difficult or disturbing story. Stuart Diamond’s recent paintings, however, depart from conventional narrative cinema with their jarring juxtapositions and disparities, serving to develop more ambiguous and oblique meditations on the inequities and conflicts that (hu)mankind struggles through to keep itself alive in our contemporary moment.

– Dominic Molon is the Richard Brown Baker Curator of Contemporary Art at the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

BANNISTER GALLERY

Bannister Gallery was dedicated in November 1978 in honor of Edward Mitchell Bannister, a noted 19th-century African American artist. Bannister lived in Providence and was a founding member of the Providence Art Club.

Bannister Gallery is located in Roberts Hall and is accessible to persons with disabilities. Hours during exhibitions are Tuesday through Friday, noon–8 p.m., or by appointment. Free guided tours are available by appointment to groups of 10 or more. Contact Gallery Director James (Ari) Montford at (401) 456-9765 or email jmontford@ric.edu.

Programming is presented through the cooperation of the Rhode Island College Department of Art Gallery Committee; RIC Art Club; RIC Artist Co-Op; RIC Performing and Fine Arts Commission; RIC Committee for Lectures and Films; Dean, RIC Faculty of Arts and Sciences; E. M. Bannister Society; and the Rhode Island College Foundation. Bannister Gallery is a member of Providence Gallery Night: www.gallerynight.info.

For information about exhibition-related programs, visit: www.ric.edu/bannister.