In Steven Spielberg’s 1993 blockbuster film *Jurassic Park*, scientist and chaos theorist Ian Malcolm scolds the film’s goatherd John Hammond for re-creating dinosaurs that eventually run amok by saying that his scientists, “were so preoccupied with whether they could that they didn’t stop to think if they should.” One could make a similar claim for much of the technology we live with today, including the very CGI (Computer-Generated Imaging) responsible for the illusory dinosaurs that made the film such a resounding success. While CGI has, in many instances, it has eliminated a “human” quality that allows us to empathize or project ourselves into the unreal to look remarkably real, in many cases, it creates a sense of artificiality that can heighten a sense of authenticity that is often not necessarily mean one should.

To illustrate this point, consider a recent series of works by Alejandro Cardenas, a Spanish artist who has created a series of five works from 2006 that explore the relationship to film or other time-based activities as checking one’s email or lacing up a pair of sneakers. Cardenas uses the phrase “Study for a 16mm Film” in some of the titles of these works to suggest a possible dual role as preparatory drawings for scenes in a film. A more pictorial relationship to film or other time-based visual media is found in twoUntitled works from 2010, one showing a screen television or movie image of nude woman washing herself, and the other a film projector depicting a film of another nude woman in a prone position on the floor. As in the other etchings, their extreme visual economy gives them a documentary, factual presence that suggests a particular story or scene is left to the viewer to resolve the intent and meaning of the images for oneself.

Jennifer Borstein’s meticulously crafted yet loosely drawn small etched portraits feature subjects ranging from specific historical figures to acquaintances of the artist and more generally contemporary social “types.” Her use of the very traditional medium of copper-plate etching to represent situations and people more associated with the present day (or even recent history) not only breaks into this artistic approach but also lends a strange significance to such everyday activities as checking one’s email or lining up a pair of sneakers. Borstein uses the phrase “Study for a 16mm Film” in some of the titles of these works to suggest a possible dual role as preparatory drawings for scenes in a film. A more pictorial relationship to film or other time-based visual media is found in twoUntitled works from 2010, one showing a screen television or movie image of nude woman washing herself, and the other a film projector depicting a film of another nude woman in a prone position on the floor. As in the other etchings, their extreme visual economy gives them a documentary, factual presence that suggests a particular story or scene is left to the viewer to resolve the intent and meaning of the images for oneself.

Figure Studies: Recent Representational Works on Paper

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Alejandro Cardenas’s series of *Arctic Cross* (2008) develops a fictional narrative centered on a stranded arctic explorer who lives with his warden, encountering ghosts and beings from outer space. The elegant presentation of refined figures reminiscent of the subjects in works of the nineteenth century artists Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele against a stark, black background reflects the artist’s interest in the evocation of spirituality not only pictorially but also physically and emotionally. Cardenas’s investigation of how more abstract ideas such as ideology or belief are represented visually is intriguingly evoked in the work, *A Spaceship Landing*. Its presentation of a lone crucifix-shaped form immediately prompts associations with Christian religious iconography, yet the title’s suggestion that an alien spacecraft (or landing pad) could conceivably resemble a cross encourages us to consider how symbols and signs often possess multiple meanings. While the Arctic Cross works feature characters and situations from science fiction, they depart insistently from the style and sensibility that is typically used to depict these kinds of scenes and phenomena in popular culture.

While Cardenas’s work aesthetically redeems standard visual representations of extraterrestrial life and space travel, Jordje Ozbolt’s drawings conversely bring a subversive sense of humor to the subjects and styles in traditional art history. His drawings mirror his paintings’ introduction of disproportionate or totally inappropriate objects or characters into scenes resembling those in famous paintings from the past. For example, one drawing presents a nude female figure whose huge breasts are more appropriate to a pin-up magazine than a “serious” art work. Another work depicts a religious figure—a saint or even Jesus Christ himself—holding a cartoon-like bunny rather than a more expected religious icon such as a holy book or a crucifix. Ozbolt’s satirical take on established art history encourages us to question other traditions in society and culture.

The imaginative representation of fantastic landscapes in Tom Reed’s works on paper reflect such art historical inspirations as the visionary work of the twentieth-century outsider artists Joseph Yoakum and Henry Darger. Natural motifs such as acorns or flowers function as compositional devices to frame colorful scenes and subjects in the works resembling those in famous paintings from the past. For example, one drawing presents a nude female figure whose huge breasts are more appropriate to a pin-up magazine than a “serious” art work. Another work depicts a religious figure—a saint or even Jesus Christ himself—holding a cartoon-like bunny rather than a more expected religious icon such as a holy book or a crucifix. Ozbolt’s satirical take on established art history encourages us to question other traditions in society and culture.