

Thanks to Chris Burden (and in part André Breton), the act of an artist firing a gun to produce an artwork may forever be regarded as performance art. But during his notorious 1971 performance *Shoot* – in which Burden was shot at by a rifle-wielding friend standing only four-and-a-half metres in front of him – the artist considered the instant that the copper jacket .22 long rifle bullet entered his upper left arm to be sculpture. In other words, the fleeting event of Burden's technically self-inflicted flesh wound had as much meaning and permanence as even the most plastic of arts. Burden's extremist notion of sculpture (which is perhaps as radical as Breton's desire to fire a gun into a crowded street) is one of the countless quotations (nearly 60 are named in his press release alone) that Julian Hoerber wilfully ingests into his own artwork, an appropriative practice that is at its most raucous in this recent exhibition at Blum & Poe.

Hoerber's new group of ten untitled sculptures (all 2008) are a formal take on the concept of performance as sculpture, or sculpture that performs in place of a body. Each object is a life-size bronze-cast head, modelled after the artist or a single female sitter, which rests on a mirrored pedestal. Prior to their bronzing, Hoerber took the death-mask-like heads to the desert, where he shot them with one of the following guns: a 9mm pistol, a Ruger .762 x 39 rifle, a .22 calibre rifle or a sawed-off pistol-grip shotgun loaded with 20 gauge birdshot and slugs. Certain heads were further deformed with knives and bludgeons, resulting in scarcely recognisable faces peppered with bullet holes and gaping cranial fissures. As self-portraits, the objects seem self-destructive, an artist's attempt to erase his own hand. As straight portraiture, they act like forensic evidence: sculpture that reveals the traces of an aggressive act; art as decomposed material.

In a separate but related series of drawings, Hoerber takes aim at the canon through 15 Op art-inspired pictures that incorporate unmistakable art-historical references; as if lined up for target practice, these black-and-white compositions of concentric circles are each punctuated by the signature marks of artists including Bridget Riley, Barbara Kruger, Roy Lichtenstein and what might as well be Clyfford Still. Other drawings are illusionistically adorned with seemingly 'found' scraps, like a childlike doodle of a bride and groom or an illustrated nipple that appears to be torn out of a magazine and taped to the drawing's surface. Just as Hoerber's untitled heads simultaneously invoke Bruce Nauman, classical sculpture, *Scarface* (1983) and *Leatherface*, these drawings immodestly quote both fine art and culture's more mundane images to create an experience of repetition, familiarity and subtle provocation. But whereas his sculptures ultimately read as sublime and visceral, Hoerber's images are restrained, subtly provocative. This careful balance makes for a body of work that straddles the line between exploitation and assassination, obsession and annihilation.

Catherine Taft

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**Julian Hoerber**  
*All That Is Solid Melts into Air*

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Blum & Poe, Los Angeles  
6 September – 18 October



*Untitled*, 2008  
(installation view),  
polished bronze with  
stainless steel posts,  
MDF, wood, acrylic  
mirror and spray  
enamel, 20 x 18 x 33  
cm, pedestal 107 x 34  
x 34 cm. Photo: Joshua  
White. Courtesy the  
artist and Blum & Poe,  
Los Angeles