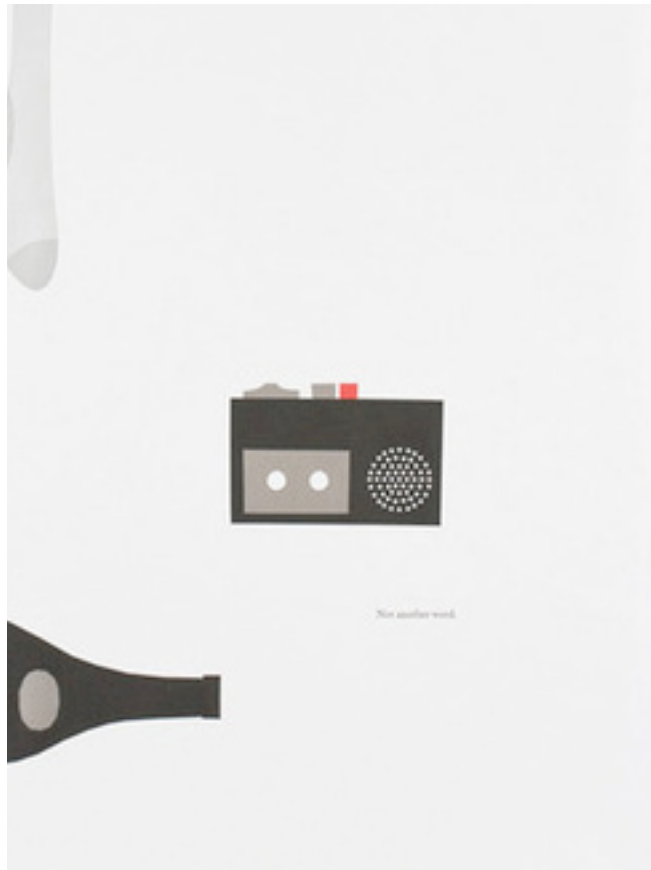


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ARTslant



## Adult Books: Meet Matthew Brannon by Alix Vollum

It's like looking into your parents' liquor cabinet, all mysterious bottles, unknown quantities and unbounded possibilities. Happy new year? I'll still drink it. Post-party, what good fortune: to find a single cigarette, golden filtered, stashed on a ledge. Adult books, interiors, pleasures.

Displaced from their habitual twilights, Matthew Brannon relocates the murky signifiers of cosmopolitan debauchery to the spare matte tableau of letterpressed sheets and precise sculptures. Everything is taken in isolation, bristling against pithy literary barbs. Certainly excised from elsewhere, a more cluttered context, and here sharpened with edges fine and violent.

The constituents of this strange semiotics are rinsed in icy disinfectant hues: glacial blues, membrane pinks, medical teals, white. Saturated and lustreless layers render the form of a glass bottle opaque and wipe clean the text of books on the shelf. A spray of knives and razors in dusty grays, a swell of pastel wine glasses, winter-hued pill bottles and rounds of birth con-

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trol. Empty or full, whatever, I don't care.

The prints and paintings particularly hold a spare graphic quality that resonates with advertise-



**Matthew Brannon**, *Nevertheless*, 2009, Wood, steel, aluminum, string, glass, sintra, balsa foam, acrylic paint, enamel paint, canvas, soap, mouse trap, sound cancelling device, water from a melted ice sculpture, 147 x 219.5 x 157.8" / 374 x 558 x 401 cm; Courtesy the artist, Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York, and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles.

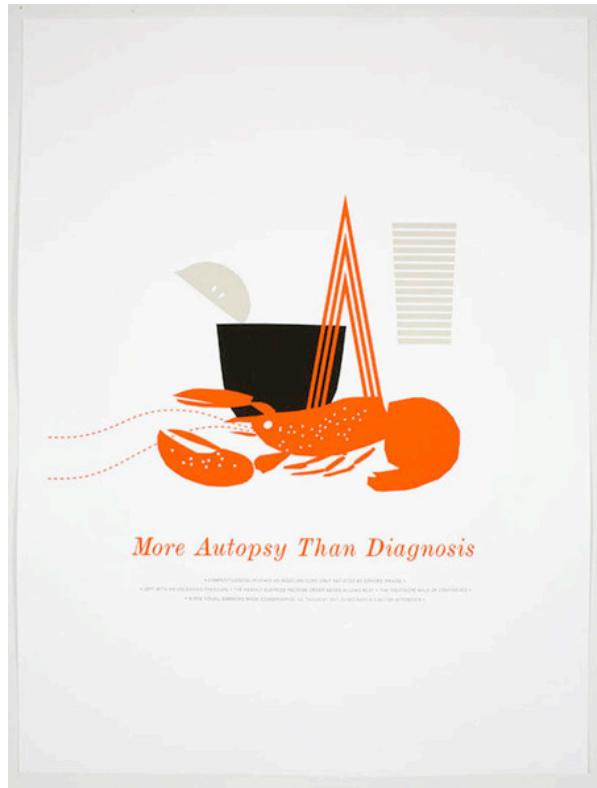
ments, cinematic title sequences, party invitations, clip art. Brannon, however, allows these images, as excerpts from more sober arenas, to fester in an uneasiness born of their pairing with discomforting text. Terse but equivocating. Brannon lays out these fragments of adult life, openly and plainly, and in this selfsame gesture removes all that is penetrable, effacing the facile points of entry: drained of liquid, washed of clarifying language.

In this way, Brannon's move out of the half-light is not an elevation but rather a lateral slide: the union of image and text is now primed for a wedge. Cleaned up to be sullied again, but freshly. Slit it open. The slimy insistences of the text ("sick whore," it coos, beneath some frail floral tendrils) reintroduce something sinister, a little virulence, into these chilly graphic operations. It's alive now, but squirming.

Brannon often arrives at this queasy coupling of word and picture by way of grammatical ambiguity—and I admit that I, too, am curious about teasing out the possibilities of unpunctuation, as in *Ladies Choice*, 2007. The text confirms IT LOOKS RIGHT • BUT IT ISN'T. Doesn't everything.

Brannon's sculptural works produce interiors and signs much the same way as in his prints: as

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**Matthew Brannon**, *More Autopsy Than Diagnosis*, 2006, Letterpress on paper, 24 x 18 inches/ 61 x 45.7cm; Courtesy the artist, Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York, and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles.

excerpts, flattened. As if just peeled from the page or canvas, these forms appear uncomfortable in their new dimension, their novel contours tense and stiff. *No Way Out*, 2011, troubles the literalness of signs in its reproduction of an exit sign in wood and foam, green acrylic mimicking the glow of an interior light. Exit, I am told—and the plain questions: from where, and where to?

Nevertheless, *2009*, appears as a theatrical set scrubbed of its players, pickled in Brannon's favored palette of blues, greens, white. It's as nefarious, perhaps adulterous, as you are, its limits your own: something like the feeling of waking up in a hotel room. Reoccurring, too, are those hidden smokes, in their silkscreen and sculpted foam manifestations, materializing along the top edges of the canvas. Mundanely illicit party favors. Can I trouble you for a cigarette. Thanks.

—Alix Vollum

(Image on top: Matthew Brannon, *Regrets Only*, 2008, Letterpress on paper, 24 x 18" / 61 x 45.7cm; Courtesy the artist, Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York, and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles)