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## Joe Biel – Lexicon

by David Yu

### Lexicon

NETTIE HORN

25b Vyner Street, London E2 9DG, United Kingdom

November 20, 2009 - January 17, 2010



It's reassuring to know that humour is still alive and well in contemporary art. Joe Biel's current solo show at Nettie Horn is refreshing and considered; the work is riddled with a subtle deadpan dry humour that carries throughout the entire show. The casual awkwardness of the subject matter feeds into this overall atmosphere where a blending between natural and constructed vies for the viewer's attention. The work is so simple yet so complex; When you look at the show in its entirety, just from face value alone, you realize that the paintings consists only of monkey's juxtaposed beside and interacting with man made objects. Then ... you come across the monkey that is frustrated by reading a map or the one that looks guiltily oblivious to a broken telescope and catch yourself in the narrative. It's almost as if Biel looked through a National Geographic and picked out monkeys that would function within an everyday human context. A monkey that was originally picking nits from his arm is also examining a pocket watch.

The brilliant thing about this body of work is how viewers will instinctively read these paintings as the monkeys being

anthropomorphic. Biel has done a great job in pairing inanimate objects with an emotively activated subject. Viewers will automatically grant the monkeys "human" understanding through our intrinsic human need to find higher intelligence. Monkeys being our loose relative in the evolutionary line make for the ideal choice to pull on the strings of human imagination.

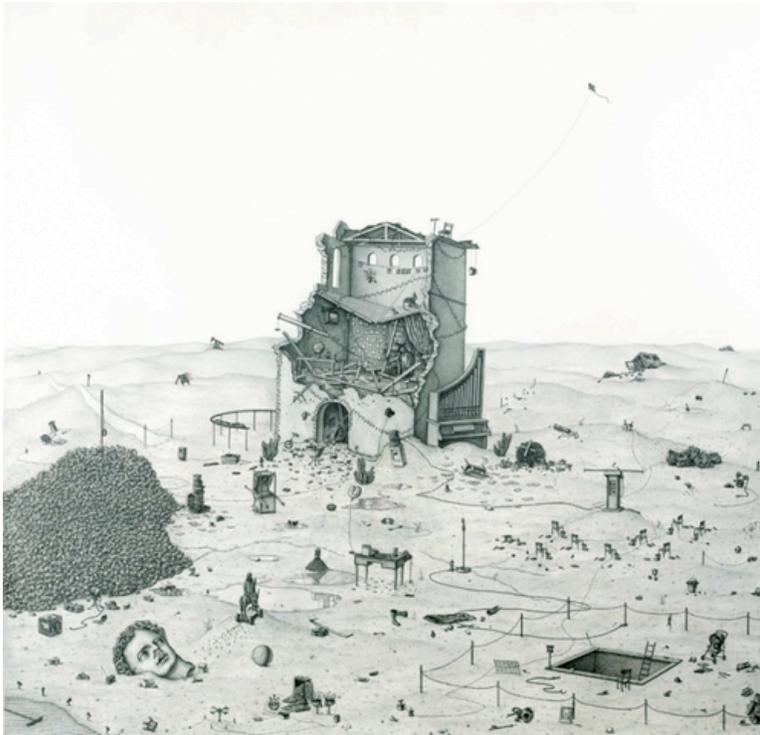
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Like the paintings, Biel's large-scale drawing utilizes symbolically loaded objects driving through a mysterious narrative. In the style of Goya and Ingres the tricks of visual storytelling are employed. Subtle connections between objects through the tying of string also help guide the eye and reify a narrative of activity and abandonment. Images are conjured up of the eternal suffering of Dante's *Inferno* or a mad creative genius building and ruining his environment while taking in this destitute landscape. *Lexicon* is a stimulating journey exploring signification and how we connect and locate this information.

-- David Yu

All Images Courtesy Nettie Horn

Images from top to bottom:(*Monkey (Map)*, 2009, Watercolour and latex on panel, 12 x 9 in; *Compound*, 2007, Watercolor, Colored Pencil and Graphite on Paper, 80 x 82 in.)

Posted by [David Yu](#) on 12/06 | tags: [drawing](#) [painting](#)

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