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ART IN REVIEW

Brian Adam Douglas: 'How to Disappear Completely'



"A Sort of Homecoming" (2011), by Brian Adam Douglas, cut paper on birch panel.
ANDREW EDLIN GALLERY, NEW YORK

By KEN JOHNSON
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Brian Adam Douglas makes dreamlike paintings by means of an improbable, laborious technique. He glues zillions of tiny bits of painted paper to wooden panels to create extraordinarily complex, finely grained mosaics. From a distance, the four most ambitious works in this show give the impression of a kind of illustrative magic realism. Measuring from six to nearly seven feet across, they picture moments of contradictory delirium.

A man up to his knees in the waters of a flooded neighborhood catches in his arms an image of himself seated and oriented sideways, while a marching band emerges in single file from the watery background. A woman in an icy cave suckles a penguin as an anthropomorphic walrus looms protectively over her. In a ruined house, a woman cleans one wall using her long red hair as a mop. These mysterious visions call to mind the social realist-style surrealism of the painter Neo Rauch.

A reasonable viewer might wonder, why make paintings the way Mr. Douglas does when there are much easier ways to do it? The answer is in the experience of looking at them. Initially you scan the overall image which seems at first to be rendered by countless, crisp brush strokes. Then you move in close for an absorbing examination of the sensuous material fabric. Your attention widens again to take in the bizarre image. The shift from the micro to the macro, from empirical perception to vivid yet immaterial fantasy, causes a euphoric sensation. In this there's a lesson about the flux of consciousness.