



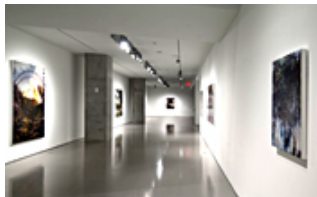
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Jimmy Baker, "Remote Viewing," 2011, installation view, Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati



Jimmy Baker, *Double Tillman*, 2011, Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati

JIMMY BAKER'S DOUBLE TILLMAN

by Pedro Vélez

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If you do a Google search for the Mike O'Callaghan-Pat Tillman Memorial Bridge you will find multiple links to "Hoover Dam Bridge is America's Newest Wonder," a mushy piece of propaganda from the *Arizona Republic* newspaper.

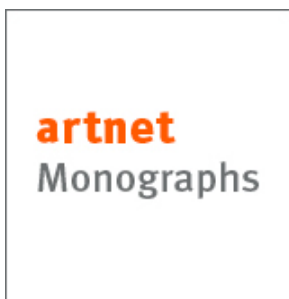
"It stands like a sentinel, watching in the wind over one of America's most treasured landmarks, the Hoover Dam," reads the story, which fails to mention that the massive arched bypass crossing the Colorado River between Arizona and Nevada is a monument to war, erected in a region embattled by xenophobic fervor.

Just look at the names gracing its existence: O'Callaghan was a former governor of the gambling state, decorated Korean War veteran and Harry Reid's mentor, and Arizona native Pat Tillman we all know as the Hulk-like football player who enlisted in the Army after 9/11 in an effort to fight the "good fight" in Afghanistan.

Sadly, the honorable serviceman was killed by friendly fire, and became victim of a shameful fabrication, spearheaded by General Stanley McChrystal and the Bush Administration, designed to position Tillman's apparent sacrifice as recruitment bait. Even though the plan failed, people were quick to forgive and history received into its arms another faux tale of heroism. Remember "Little Girl Rambo" Jessica Lynch?

The Cincinnati-based painter Jimmy Baker (b. 1980) didn't forget. Instead, he confected an ode to deception titled *Double Tillman* (2011), an ominous, ultra-glossy and sort of magical painting of a barren valley in burnt colors as seen from a rocky mountaintop. Some elements in the large vertical painting look pixilated, the same way images break down on YouTube, and far away in the distance is the round corona of an orange-yellow sun flickering bright.

The painting is the high point of "Jimmy Baker: Remote Viewing" at the Contemporary Art Center





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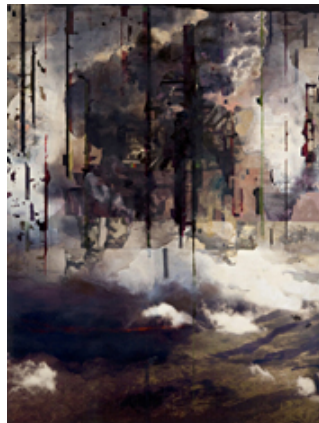
Jimmy Baker, *Double Tillman*
(detail), 2011, Contemporary Art
Center, Cincinnati



Artist Jimmy Baker posing with
his painting, *Double Tillman*,
2011, at Contemporary Art
Center, Cincinnati



Jimmy Baker, *Hamd Bags*, 2011,
Contemporary Art Center,
Cincinnati



Jimmy Baker, *Storm Troupe*,
2011, Contemporary Art Center,
Cincinnati

in Cincinnati, the artist's first solo museum show. Baker, who exhibits in New York with Foxy Production and in Los Angeles with Roberts & Tilton, is known for works that mix traditional painting with digital printing.

Spreading across the surface of *Double Tillman* is the faint image of a gigantic ghostly eye, apparently constituted of a smoky glare, or magnetic field, as if refracted from within the sun. Closer inspection reveals that the upper part of the faux eye is a double photorealistic rendering of the arched bridge. In addition, piled up on each side of the painting, in sharp contrast to its super flat surface, are delicious-looking pasty accumulations of oil paint in dark greens, ochres and browns.

Certain elements from nature in the painting are reminiscent of Max Ernst's surreal forests and solar disks. Baker also establishes an immediate historical connection to North American landscape painting, especially the Hudson River School and its romantic notions of the wilderness.

Whether Baker's painting has religious connotations, or is the last vision of a dying Tillman, is up to the viewer to decide, but what I feel makes it so special is the way that the artist concocts a drowsy metaphor dealing with mistrust in government. In multilayered images he merges traditional oil painting, large-scale commercial digital printing and UV inks, the type used commercial in outdoor banners.

With this technique Baker ventures in territory once ruled by Antoni Muntadas in the '90s in his series "On Translation," where he would display portable photographic banners in public spaces as a way to prompt people to question corporate mainstream media. In recent years, Fabian Marcaccio has also painted on monumental banners, though his works tend to negate metaphorical readings while focusing on the ultra-cool.

But unlike Muntadas and Marcaccio, Baker makes his complicated way of painting seem effortless and even natural to the naked eye.

In general, "Remote Viewing" kept me befuddled, thanks in part to the disorienting imagery of inverted skies, clouds mingling with artillery explosions in vast landscapes, faceless soldiers marching upside down, hacked bodies, and pixilated surfaces juxtaposed with photorealistic details of futuristic machinery.

One painting that has it all is *Divination* (2011). It shows two figures wearing outdated virtual reality gadgets, comfortably levitating like Virmanas -- mythological Hindu flying machines -- over a dark hollow stage, as if they are flying remote-controlled drones over Baghdad or Colombia.

Another good one is *Hamd Bags* (2011), a small violent depiction of airhead Pop star Jessica Simpson's upper half blasting -- in the manner of Michelangelo Antonioni's explosion sequence in *Zabriskie Point* -- into a raw barrage of fluids and meaty gruesomeness.



Jimmy Baker, *Divination*, 2011,
Contemporary Art Center,
Cincinnati



Jimmy Baker, *Ghillie RP*, 2011,
Contemporary Art Center,
Cincinnati

Not to take away from the rest of the show, but it would be fair to say Jimmy Baker's "Remote Viewing" is the story of one great subversive painting that contains hardcore political commentary without sacrificing beauty or craft. It's always uplifting, as it is depressing, to find an artist who can wake us from our collective daydreaming and remind us how hypocritical we can be.

Jimmy Baker, "Remote Viewing," Feb. 26-Apr. 10, 2011, at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, 44 East 6th Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202.

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