

Daniel Davidson

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Pierogi, through Mon 19
(see Brooklyn)



Art

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Daniel Davidson's work takes self-loathing to new aesthetic heights (or perhaps new depths). For 15 years, the Brooklyn artist has been using his own visage, albeit morphed, bloated and otherwise skankified, as a subject. True, he doesn't paint an attractive picture of himself, but it is one so well constructed—and entertaining—that it's hard to resist. There's a playful sensibility at work, particularly in terms of process. Ten black-and-white watercolors from the artist's "Mirror" series grace one wall, each with a matte, charcoal-like finish. There's a scary, fat-faced cop who wears both a beer-can helmet and a police cap emblazoned with the word "bud," and a stubble-covered street dude smoking five cigarettes at once. To achieve his effects, Davidson painted one side of each face, then folded the paper in half. Once unfolded, the image is perfectly symmetrical—and perfectly hideous. A couple of large collages are similarly ebullient, incorporating such diverse material as notes found on the street, texts describing the artist's dreams and cartoony vignettes. Alphabet of Hard Knocks is one of only two nonfigurative works in the show, yet it too is a portrait of Davidson's schlumpy alter ego, reading a is for angioplasty not covered by insurance. b is for blister i got at the dance. Is the leitmotif here the exorcism of inner demons? The nasty everyman that dwells inside us all? Ugly can be excellent when it's used in the service of art—think Ensor and Bosch. Davidson updates the tradition, enjoying the endless narrative possibilities of wallowing in the muck.—Sarah Schmerler