

Rewriting History: How Artist Samuel Stabler Finds Meaning from the Old Masters

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When [Samuel Stabler](#) gave [The Ghent Altarpiece](#) a modern makeover, he chose to finish the work, part of his ongoing “Old Masters” series, with stripes of neon yellow over a minimal, gray palette. “I use neon because it’s contemporary,” he told [Interview Magazine](#). “It’s a pigment that was made in the 20th century.” Through this simple addition of color, in addition to his spare, unique aesthetic Stabler launches the Dutch masterpiece into the present. With an avid interest in the internet age and how historical works are digested by contemporary audiences, Stabler distills historic artworks to vital compositional lines, a grayscale palette, and stripes of the electric color, reinvigorating them was a sense of contemporaneity. At New York’s Garis & Hahn this fall, Stabler presents four new works created in this vein, in [“Untitled \(Politics\).”](#)

While he sources his material from the internet, Stabler is inspired by his passion for art history, and years worth of sketchbooks filled with countless copies of masterworks. In this new series, he homes in on American history, particularly American politics to consider storied moments like the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The works featured in the exhibition employ his characteristic palette, in addition to his affinity for stripes, featuring familiar figures like George Washington, among other forefathers, gathered in courtrooms, witnessing moments of history—compositions that are not among the most revered icons of art history. Overlaying bold stripes and unexpected color onto these works, he beckons a completely different reading from that of the original work, calling the viewer to recognize the original scene while encountering the present. The exhibition is Stabler’s meditation on the state of the world within the digital age, where today, one news item is quickly drowned out by the next big headline. By reviving the old and the familiar, Stabler has asked viewers to look beyond the internet browser and appreciate history anew, just as he has.

—Melissa Smith

[“Untitled \(Politics\)”](#) is on view at [Garis & Hahn Gallery](#), New York, Sept. 5th–Oct. 4th, 2014.

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