



APF Lab on Wooster Street, August 2010



Sean Mellyn's *Eyecharts*, 2009-10, and "Monetteantoinettes," 2008-09, in "Paper Monet" at APF Lab



Sean Mellyn's Cabinet: "Paper Monet," 2008-09, left, at APF Lab



Sean Mellyn's Cabinet: "Paper Monet" (detail), 2008-09, at APF Lab



Sean Mellyn's Cabinet: "Paper Monet" (detail), 2008-09, at APF Lab



One of Sean Mellyn's *Eyecharts*, 2009-10, at APF Lab

EYEFUL by Walter Robinson

The New York artist Sean Mellyn went to Giverny to look at the flowers and came back with a paranoid fantasy. Or so it might seem from his installation at the APF Lab space, the modest white cube on Wooster Street in SoHo, across the street from the late lamented Deitch Projects, in a storefront provided free by the SoHo Mews development.

Mellyn gazed out at Monet's water lily gardens, and saw, in a now-familiar horror movie trope, a sea of eyes staring back at him from the lily pads. Thus, the walls of the APF space are filled with "eye charts," that is, with prints of numbered reproductions of eyes, more than 60 sheets in all, in varying sizes and treatments. The installation can be a little unnerving.

This mock-nightmare is inspired not only by the thought that Monet had cataracts, and that Impressionism is all about vision, but also by Mellyn's observation that Giverny has become one vast Monet gift shop, emblematic of the very contemporary horror of high art transformed into commercial kitsch.

A second major component of the APF show is a tripartite cabinet, installed against the back wall, stretching floor to ceiling and filled with Mellyn's custom-made Monetabilia, a sort of suite of fine china. Decorated in indigo blue, the ware is decidedly cut-rate, made of paper -- notably picnic plates bearing the ersatz-fancy Chinex brand name. The cabinet includes a complete table setting, from teacups and saucers to candlesticks and a soup tureen. The more complicated items were fabricated by the artist, rather than being purchased at Pathmark.

This elegant concoction celebrates all things Monet through the artful application, via photo transfer, of selected images: Monet's lovely wife posing in the garden, a photograph of the bald and bearded aging artist, a few haystacks, a bit of borrowed Japonisme, and water lilies floating in reed-lined ponds, each pad holding an eye. That stares out at you.

The artist begins by looking for something "funny," as Mellyn told *Bomb* magazine in an interview on its [blog](#). Mellyn's work has displayed a particularly twisted sense of humor, as in his 1998 painting *Nose Jobs* (cited by *Bomb*), which portrays two little girls like in a 1950s shampoo ad, but with matching rhinoplasty bandages. The noses are done in low relief, as if an adjustment to the formalist picture plane.

But wit hides many an awkward truth. As Donald Kuspit recently pointed out in [these pages](#), the Impressionist was in search of an authentic utopia, and who can gainsay that, even today?

The prints start at \$1,500 (and a good number have been sold), and the cabinet is \$70,000.

Sean Mellyn, "Paper Monet," June 23-Aug. 12, 2010, at APF Lab, 15 Wooster Street, New York, N.Y. 10013

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