

DAVID DATUNA

Emblem and Image



October 4 - November 3, 2012

BIRNAM WOOD/GALLERIES

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David Datuna: Emblem and Image

As Jasper Johns famously said, the American flag is something “the mind already knows.” Yet its interpretations are limitless. David Datuna’s interpretations conjure an echo of meaning for all of us. In *Emblem and Image*, he invites us to re-imagine all the visual cues that this most familiar emblem holds for us. The twelve works here are a journey of discovery, a path toward exploration of the American spirit.

In these works, the Stars and Stripes are distilled to a dialogue on culture and identity. Cascading lenses magnify and illuminate elements of American culture and history through a glass veil of graceful forms. Like Johns and other Pop and Conceptual artists before him, Datuna re-imagines our most potent national symbols as art and artifact. His work is a melting pot made visual. In scanning the overall image, the viewer is enticed to focus on contrasting elements as each lens creates a screenshot of individual words or images within the whole.

Datuna skillfully plays out the constructive element of lenses and glasses. At first glance, they are a graceful surface layer, both sculptural and conceptual. Layered over the top of each work, they simultaneously glisten and beckon. Their reflective character might form a boundary, but it is the artist’s device to invite inspection. The lenses are the intersection of our relationship with these works. Their prismatic effects render a manual for observation, the artist nudging us to one viewpoint, then another. Each different magnification allows a different point of view toward the same image or subject. In Datuna’s world, the lenses symbolically represent personalities, illusions, perception, fragmentation and finally, unity.

Originally from the Republic of Georgia, now a permanent resident of the United States, David Datuna offers us a distinct viewpoint on national identity: a view from within and without. It is the perspective of a visitor or keen-eyed guest in a long tradition of discerning foreign observers of America that goes back to de Tocqueville.

Rather than hewing to literal translation of shape and color, some of Datuna’s flags appear as minimalist renderings in shades of white or black, or in the case of *Broken Banner*, as a virtual pool on the ground. *Double Black* has a compact force driven by its dark framework. The whimsical *Due Date* is as rhythmic as a Frank Gehry building. It doesn’t so much wave as distend. Its unexpected contours are the artist’s query about the country’s unpredictable future and potential re-birth.

Still, at their core, the flags all share the loaded emotional language of the Emblem they represent.

In a gesture to the political moment, *Ballot Paper*, the exhibition’s portrait of President Obama, traces the arc of African-American political and social experience over 150 years. The portrait, done in collaboration with artist Alex G. Cao, is comprised of tiny images of Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks.

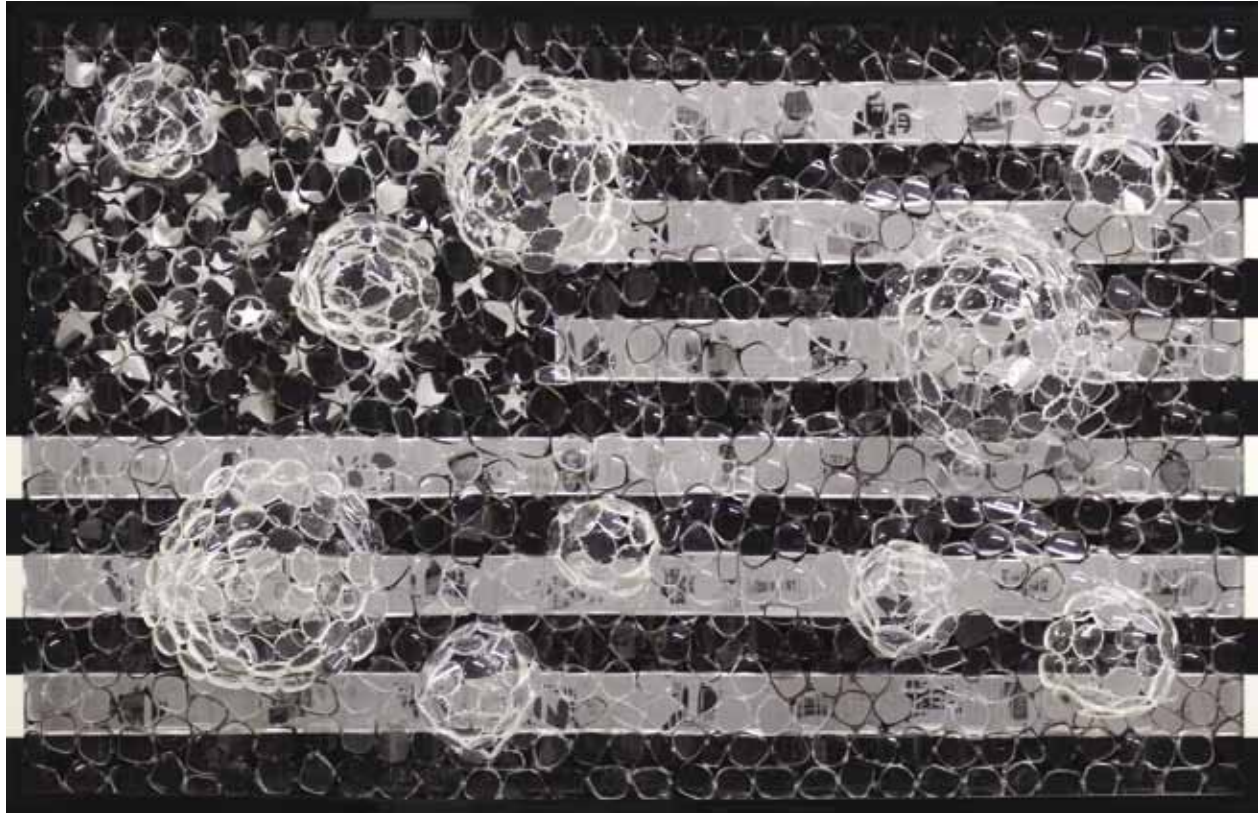
There is also whimsy in some of these forms. Datuna invests *Moving Image* with a playfulness that lightens its mood and softens its edges. *Marilyn* sparkles with the glamour of its subject. *Cool Britannia* is a modern take on the Union Jack as edgy pop icon.

I find myself asking about intention, but in this case the artist’s intention is only a vague guide, somewhat like a faded road map. Datuna remains an observer, and his thematic elements are fragments of shared experience; what he has done is frame the viewer’s experience, at once clarifying and obscuring what we see beyond the image. Or maybe we see only the flag, only the portrait. David Datuna isn’t making statements or forcing us to decisions about ourselves, or the works.

Either way, each piece in *Emblem and Image* is an eloquent visual complement to the times; each work an epigram that keeps us focused on our own identity: seeing and believing, doubting and wondering.

David Datuna now lives and maintains a studio in Brooklyn. His work has been exhibited extensively, including shows in Europe, Russia, China and the United States. This is the sixth solo exhibition of his work and his second solo show in New York.

– Patrick Dawson



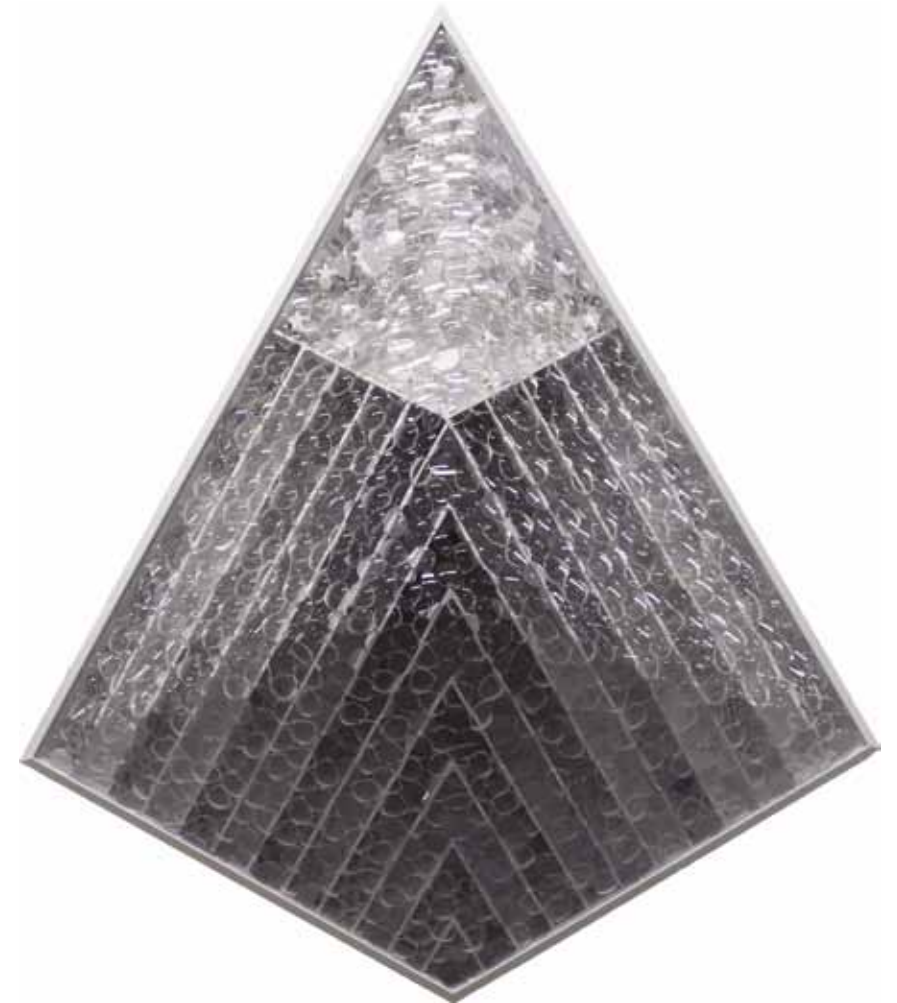
Black Bubble. Mixed media construction with collage. 45 x 70 inches.



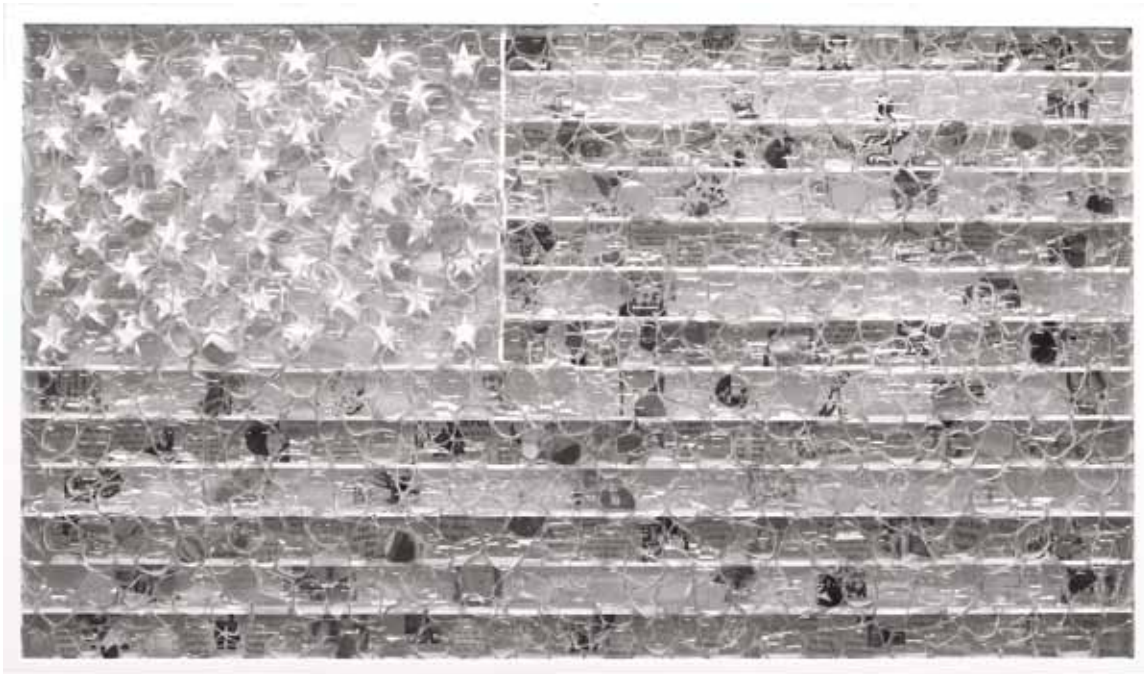
Due Date. Mixed media construction with collage. 45 x 75 x 14 inches.



Cool Britannia. Mixed media construction with collage. 45 x 90 inches.



Stealth. Mixed media construction with collage. 82 x 66 x 17 inches.



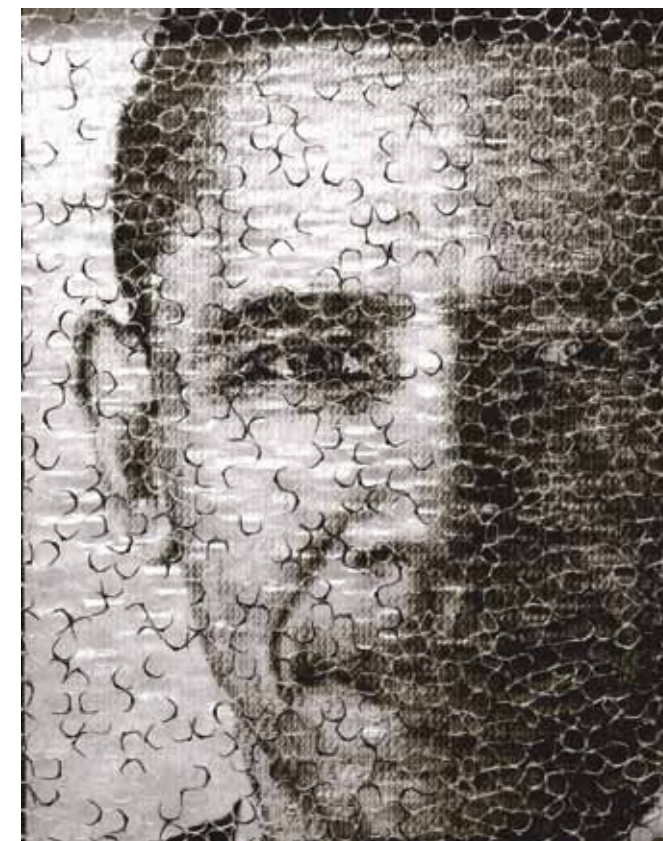
White Banner. Mixed media construction with collage. 55 x 91 inches.



Moving Image. Mixed media construction with collage. 32 x 55 inches.



True Colors. Mixed media construction with collage. 32 x 54 inches.



Mr. President: Legacy. Mixed media construction with collage. 77 x 60 inches.
Created in collaboration with Alex G. Cao.



Broken Banner. Mixed media construction with collage.

David Datuna and Birnam Wood Galleries would like to extend special thanks to Alex G. Cao, Mike Huter, Lyle Gray Dawson and Elizabeth Orlov for their contribution to the show. We would also like to thank Kerrin Griffith for her help with this catalogue.

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