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Ink Blot Revelations

Phillips de Pury in New York brings together a group of works by artists inspired by the famous Rorschach inkblot test, revealing the psychological in the abstract. **By Eva-Luise Schwarz**

We've all played that game: what animal is that cloud shape, what face is in this ink blot? But Hermann Rorschach took it far more seriously. In the early 1920s, the Swiss psychiatrist realised that his patients, who were diagnosed as schizophrenic, responded quite differently to a certain game with inkblots than 'normal' individuals. He began crafting 40 inkblots which would eventually be culled into a group of 10 cards, five in colour and five in black and white, which were then shown to patients and non-patients. With each card, subjects were asked the same question: 'What might this be?' It was from this experiment that Rorschach wrote his book *Psychodiagnostik*. He unveiled his projective personality assessment, known as the 'Inkblot Test', in 1921.

Based on this theme, auction house Phillips de Pury & Company curated a selling exhibition in New York, on view June 22-August 31. The artworks are divided into two groups within the exhibition. The first group shows artists who have employed, literally, the visuals of Rorschach, which is symmetrical, bilateral and abstract. This concept is traced over

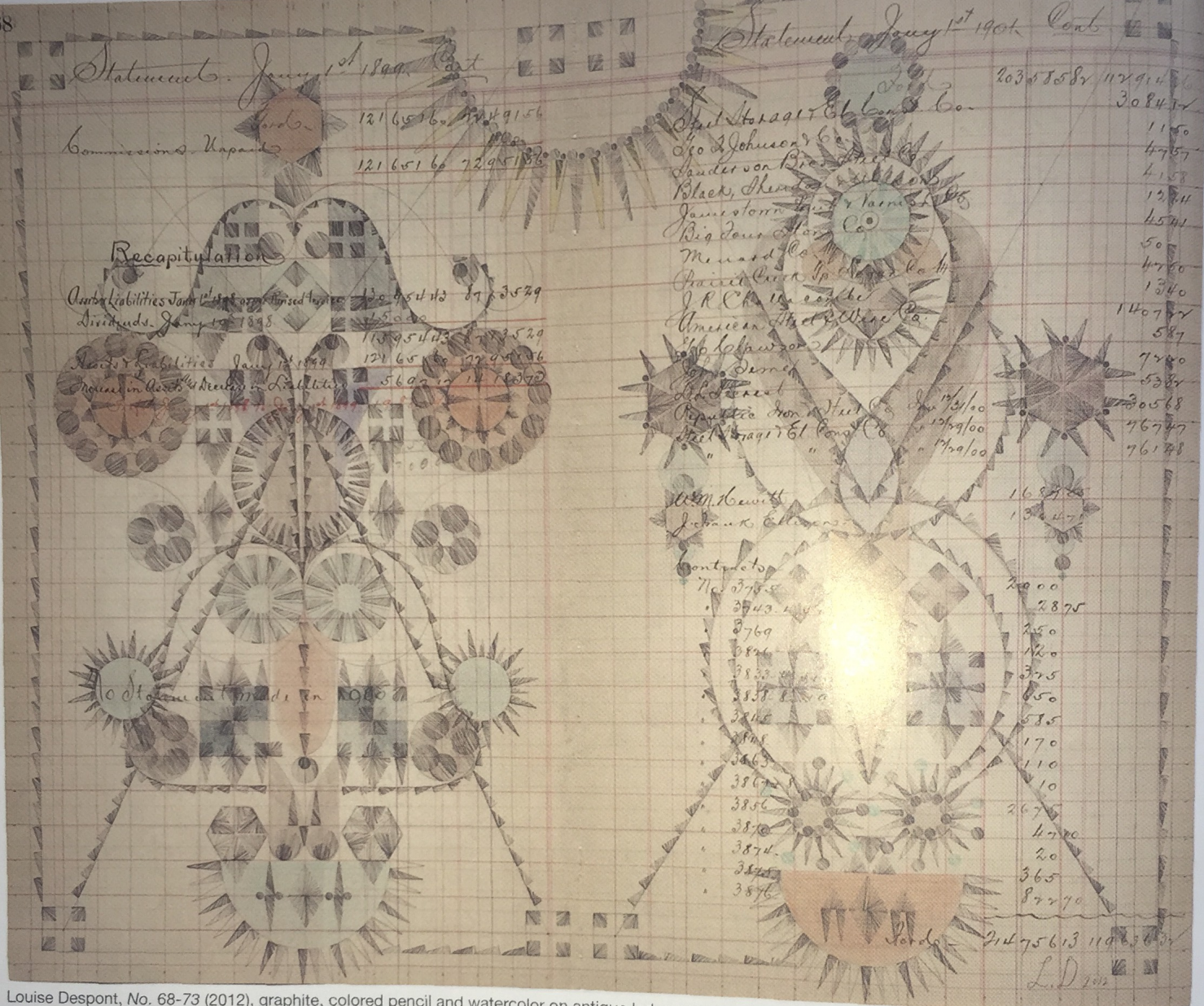
the course of 10 artists, spanning about 50 years. This part of the exhibition features American artists such as Joseph Cornell, Bruce Connor and Andy Warhol, all the way up to emerging contemporary artists. The other part of the show seems like a curated Rorschach test in itself. The works in this area don't have the bilateral inkblot theme, but they do have an embedded narrative related to psychology. While they seem extensively abstract, either in image



Above: Sara Greenberger Rafferty, *Candy* (2010), C-print

Opposite: Joseph Cornell, *The Ghost of Franz Lizst* (1968), collage





Louise Despont, No. 68-73 (2012), graphite, colored pencil and watercolor on antique ledger pages

or in the material selected, the viewer is still able to project their own narrative onto it. Alex Glauber, curator, says: 'In our second group of works the images have what I would call a polluted abstraction, in that there is something else beyond what is seemingly abstraction. The traditional Rorschach experiment consisted of 10 cards, so in this room we have about 10 works by themselves with black walls, so they actually take the effect of being a single Rorschach card, in a way.'

The idea of curating an exhibition around Rorschach's inkblot test arose because that theme is so pervasive within popular culture. Glauber explains: 'The test isn't nearly as effective as it used to be because it has found its way into everything from movies and comic books to design, as well as the applied arts. The people who don't know the name will certainly recognise the inkblot.' For Glauber and Sarah Mudge, Head of Day Sales, this provided the opportunity to bring together an interesting group of works that really relate to one another

on a conceptual ground.

For many of the artists featured in the exhibition, Glauber explains, the inkblot is not only a means by which the subconscious can be accessed, but it is also a symbol of the subconscious itself. 'It's almost as though the artist is drawing attention to that ambition. I think what allowed us to be comfortable in selecting a lot of artists for that interior room, those that don't seem to have any shared pursuit with the actual Rorschach inkblot, is that a lot of these works see the viewer position themselves in one of many different ways within the work. It's through that abstraction and the opportunity for personal interpretation that a work becomes successful.'

The exhibition runs until August 31 and is located at 450 Park Avenue, NY, an intimate space right in the heart of New York. As a selling exhibition, most of the works are available to purchase.