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TRIBECA AND UNION SQUARE

Brian Buczak

Through Feb. 17. Ortuzar Projects, 9 White Street, Manhattan; 212-257-0033, ortuzarprojects.com.

Gordon Robichaux, 41 Union Square West, Manhattan; 646-678-5532, gordonrobichaux.com.



Brian Buczak's "Broken Glass (Science Project Series)," 1986–1987, at Ortuzar Projects. via the Geoffrey Hendricks and Brian Buczak Estate

[Brian Buczak](#) moved to New York from Detroit in 1976. He had already been corresponding with Ray Johnson, the celebrated mail artist, and once in the city he found his way to a number of other artists, most notably [Geoffrey Hendricks](#), of Fluxus, who became his partner for the rest of his life. (Alice Neel [painted them together](#).) Before dying of AIDS in 1987, just shy of his 33rd birthday, Buczak also made a tremendous number of paintings. This two-site exhibition, "Man Looks at the World," is his first solo show in more than 30 years.

Buczak worked in several longstanding, sometimes obsessive series. At Ortuzar Projects, for example, is one small painting of lush, melting American flags that he repeated dozens of times. To judge from the whole double exhibition, though, he was at his best constructing eerie diptychs and triptychs of found imagery. Two boiled eggs in water glasses sit above a boy stretching a rubber band across his lips; a hammer smashing a glass bottle looms over another boy breaking the surface of a swimming pool.



Installation view of "Brian Buczak: Man Looks at the World," at Gordon Robichaux.
Greg Carideo/Gordon Robichaux, New York

The links may be conceptual, as in the buoyancy of eggs and rubber band, or visual, as when glass shards echo the short blue and white brushstrokes of the pool. Sometimes, particularly when the source material is pornographic, the connections are more occult. But what makes them all so interesting is the saturated, laborious, against-the-grain way Buczak painted — as well as his choice to paint in the first place, rather than assemble his heavily image-driven work with Xerox copies or photographs. You can feel him searching for something — meaning, clarity, peace, liberation — that never quite arrives.