

**DOUGLAS MILLER**  
**on**  
**Joe Hadden's 665 and 13**



Among the works at Georgia State University's politically-themed February showcase in SOUP, Artist Joe Hadden's mixed media pieces initially stood out for their non-participation. Hadden, a third year senior at GSU, describes himself as an alchemist whose experiments with the materiality of paints, cleaners, toxics, etc, place equal emphasis on process and product. His maximalist commitment creates engrossing work that look synthetic, inorganic--and possibly unsafe--but certainly not political. Perhaps that is why it so strange that a profoundly politicizing experience is communicated through his works.

Both of Hadden's paintings were placed in SOUP's third room--the deep red of 13 situated on the south wall, looking past the faded green 665 in the room's eastern face. Both seemed out of place among the overtly political feminist works and realist works of his fellow presenters. But after staring at 665 and 13 for hours that evening, I recalled a piece of journalism Michael Idov of New York Magazine, which posited that a deep deep cynicism--rather than explicit violence--characterizes everyday life under authoritarian regimes. (in Russia, Idov observes, no one pulls to the side for an ambulance. They are widely believed to function like taxi services for the rich). Viewed a certain way, I believe Hadden's works unintentionally (but phenomenologically) to capture this authoritarian dynamic through their use of color, texture, and position.

Since November 2016, this reviewer has been plagued by feelings of terror--“the anticipation that *precedes* a horrifying experience”--and cynicism. Part of what makes terror unique is, like Hadden’s work, it doesn’t have an obvious focal point. And like an ulcer in your stomach--which Hadden’s gruesome reds and blues, coagulated on canvas suggest--terror corrodes your insides, destroying your protective linings and never letting you forget it is there. And while the nature of terror is to sprawl, you must purposely hide it behind a number of fronts (like a piece in the third room of an art show). Read this way (admittedly, idiosyncratically), Hadden’s 665 recalls the terror that so many of us are feeling.

For a while, the fact that Mr. Trump had been elected, the worry about what he might do, and that it could have been different, was frankly too hurtful for many of us to contemplate. Many friends who were already cynical only became more so. For them, the very palpable fear and tragedy of Nov 9th had a kind of weathering result once the shock had worn down, effectively suggested to me by the oxidized green of Hadden’s 665. And months later, the mention of politics has produced in many of them a kind of bland look many of their eyes, not unlike the stucco-esque texture of Hadden’s 665.

As I left that night, it came to me that both pieces look past each other, refusing to acknowledge the other’s presence. But if there’s any truth to my interpretation, they are siblings that won’t acknowledge a common parent. I’m certain that many will disagree with my view, but I hope they will allow themselves to wander with me about this fact: that the real alchemy of the night came in the form of a paradox, that I could have one of the most cathartic experiences and political experiences through work that is the most impenetrable, stoic, and technical.

Joe Hadden’s Portfolio  
[www.joehadden.com/](http://www.joehadden.com/)

Thank you Douglas.

Sincerely,

SOUP experimental