

Joseph Stashkevetch

BALDWIN

Aspen

Judging from this exhibition of exquisite drawings of sites in the rundown border town of Matamoros, Mexico, the American artist must like making viewers squirm.

Using conte crayon to examine with microscopic precision the castaway everyday objects encountered in Matamoros, Stashkevetch achieves a level of detail and a sense of shadowy depth more akin to photography than drawing. The vivid depictions often leave one wondering whether to move closer to get a better look or take a step back to avoid grasping the full reality of the often-unsettling subjects.

Matamoros has struggled to cope with a skyrocketing population and a crumbling infrastructure since 1994, when the NAFTA trade agreement first enabled foreign companies to build assembly plants there. Stashkevetch's sketches (all 2002) highlight the derelict neighborhoods and industrial wastelands that emerged in the wake of the massive influx of industry

and job seekers. Local dumps appear packed to the brim, and billowing smokestacks dominate the landscape. Every oilcan leaks in Stashkevetch's Matamoros. The skies are always gray.

Small objects en masse suit Stashkevetch's purposes well. In *White Teeth (Boneyard #2)*, a mound of bovine skulls is depicted at such close range that it pulls the viewer right into the pile. Every groove of every decayed molar is visible, every calcified crack clearly defined. *Oil and Steel (Auto Parts #4)* is even more intense in its study of minutiae. Stashkevetch didn't miss a thread on the tiny screws that flounder at the bottom of the greasy pile of hundreds of gaskets and gears.

What's mystifying about Stashkevetch's treatment of these ordinary, abandoned items is his ability to make the grotesque beautiful. But his emotional detachment from his subjects allows the viewer to remain uninvolved, and the calming luminosity of his renderings somehow makes it all palatable. —Adam Preskill



Joseph Stashkevetch, *Oil and Steel (Auto Parts #4)*, 2002, conte crayon and watercolor wash on paper, 40" x 40". Baldwin.