

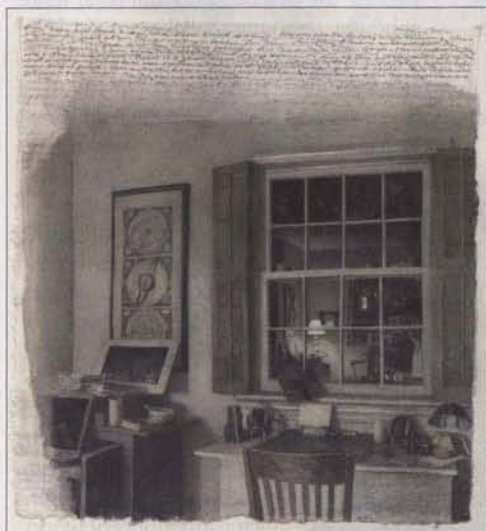
Ernest Beaux's 1921 innovation of combining floral scents with aldehydes to create the classic Chanel No. 5. But for many, the perfumes will conjure much more personal associations, ranging from experimentations with their mothers' Clinique Aromatics Elixir (1971) to bad boyfriends who doused themselves in L'Oréal's Drakkar Noir (1982). Such recollections go far toward affirming perfume's power as an art form, capable of eliciting and conveying deep-seated emotions. It might have been useful as well for the show to include examples of the advertising and marketing that enabled these delicate, ephemeral creations to blossom into a \$10 billion industry.

—Barbara Pollack

Charles Ritchie

BravinLee programs

Charles Ritchie has been painting and drawing the same subjects for decades: his studio, the view through the window, houses seen from the street at night. Rarely, he himself appears, as a shadowy silhouette seen from behind. The details of his domestic interiors—the furniture, the books and potted plants, the computer on the desk—are meticulously rendered, but Ritchie's rooms are anything but straightforward. They are ambiguous spaces—shadowy, smudged, streaked with reflections in windows and mirrors. In the so-called self-portraits, mirrors and reflections dematerialize the space:



Charles Ritchie, *Studio Corner*, 2010–12, watercolor, graphite, and pen and ink on dark-manner aquatint on heavyweight Rives BFK paper, 15" x 10 1/4". BravinLee programs.

you can't tell whether you're inside or outside, whether the walls are solid or the ceiling is the sky. Interior and exterior are merged.

The show also offered a selection of Ritchie's marvelous journals, little books that seem to have been preserved from an earlier century. Their pages are covered with pencil and watercolor sketches, sometimes accompanied by tiny, indecipherable writing.

The writing is like a secret code. In two drawings, pale lines of text crawl over the entire surface from edge to edge. The almost unreadable image of trees underneath is a flat, tapestry-like pattern, but the lines of text appear strangely three-dimensional. You know you won't be able to read them, but you keep trying.

Ritchie is a curator in the department of modern prints and drawings at the National Gallery of Art. In interviews, he has talked about Wallace Stevens, and he borrowed a phrase from Stevens for the title of an earlier exhibition: "Dust and Shade." Dust, Ritchie says, is the drawing medium, and looking at his powdery, smudgy grays and blacks, you see how apt the metaphor is. The images emerge from the dust of charcoal or graphite; they are illuminated by lamp- or streetlight and at the same time concealed by the shadows of Ritchie's world.

—Sylvia Hochfield

O Zhang

Vilcek Foundation

In Chinese artist O Zhang's recent photographs, collectively titled "I Am Your Mirror," the wind-whipped faces of blank billboards stationed across the varied terrain of the United States assert a weighty silence. Devoid of advertising, except for the occasional "For Rent" sign, the billboards' surfaces offer a chilling vision of failed entrepreneurship—that



O Zhang, *I Am Your Mirror, 1 (Brooklyn, New York)*, 2010, archival pigment-based ink on presentation paper, wood, and aluminum, 114" x 142" x 52". Vilcek Foundation.

hallmark of American individualism—and evoke a landscape of bankrupt dreams and economic ruin.

The show was a product of four road trips taken by the 38-year-old artist between 2010 and 2012, incorporating framed photographs, collaged gel transfers on board, and heaps of torn office-paper prints strewn about the gallery floor. Anchoring the installation was a freestanding billboard titled *I Am Your Mirror, 1 (Brooklyn, New York)*, 2010, positioned in the center of the room like a sentinel. Constructed by O Zhang from repurposed local wood, its scarified back—peeled, chipped, and sullied by graffiti—offers a striking contrast to the message scrawled across its scuffed, leathery facade: "It's Your Heart Rambo: Bless Yourself."

As promised by the title of the series, the photographed structures seem to reflect their environments, towering over desolate stretches of sun-cooked sand or tumbleweed. *I Am Your Mirror, 5 (Colton, California)*, 2012, pictures a lone platform shot against a rippling mountain range. As if spotlighted, the billboard's face, cracked and wrinkled as weathered skin, is bathed in the falling pink of dusk. Other photographs, such as *I Am Your Mirror, 8 (Alpine, Texas)*, 2012, are starkly metaphorical. Isolated in a field of dry grass, the structure's canvas has been torn away, revealing a bare wooden frame through which we glimpse infinite nothingness.

Historically, these commercial message boards have been defined by industry's incessant noise, obsessive self-promotion, and propaganda. Their reticence in O Zhang's photographs speaks, quietly, to a new reality.

—Emily Nathan