

I've been living with a beer belly for about six years now, both literally and in the form of a small painting entitled Beer Belly (2001) by artist Brian Belott. I have grown to despise my own, but everyday I fall more madly in love with Brian's. It has become, for me, my own tiny Brice Marden—I could fit in my pocket, but I prefer to keep it hovering above my head as I write.

Let me first describe: the piece is a goofy color field chart (approximately 8X13") constructed of acrylic paint applied to some sort of office supply Styrofoam (I think) glued on canvas. Dark brown sloppy crooked grids descend in rows from top to bottom. The colors evolve downward from dark chocolate to tan to gray and finally, to two shades of pink. Belott has birthed a work of art that is both conceptual and cute; quite an accomplishment from someone who was booted out of Cooper Union (as his CV matter-of-factly indicates). At first glance, the cubes look like sugar. However, they maintain a creamy smoothness and on further inspection, are clearly made of something else. The fact that these pieces are glued to a canvas is both functionally hysterical and almost irrelevant. Despite himself, Brian has made a painting. No matter how far away he drifted, no matter how much he wanted to create an object, there's just no getting around it: Beer Belly is a painting. It's acrylic on canvas—with the Styrofoam functioning, in the end, merely as a beautifully goofy buffer between paint and canvas.

In addition to his little painting experiments, which expanded to include rows of marshmallows "dipped" in color fields of acrylic (also conceptually radiant), and larger scale paintings on glass, Belott focused his seemingly endless energies on collage books and a sort of personal excavation—obsessively sifting through and collecting anonymous family photos, which had fallen sadly from both their original albums and/or their homes. One need not mention the hundreds of family pictures reproduced on dusty flyers spread throughout New York City in the days immediately following September 11, 2001; it is simply implied (if not clearly remembered very well). Recovering abandoned keepsakes must get sad, after a bit, but Belott took that sadness and transformed it into art.

Now Brian Belott has finally published a comprehensive documentation of his early work. *Wipe That Clock Off Your Face* is perhaps the first truly extraordinary American art book of the 21st Century. Published by Picture Box Inc. ([www.pictureboxinc.com](http://www.pictureboxinc.com)), distributed by DAP, available at Printed Matter ([www.printedmatter.org](http://www.printedmatter.org)) and fully realized with support from CANADA gallery and the indefatigable Annie Pearlman, *Wipe That Clock Off Your Face* is a compelling children's book for adults—with an accompanying home movie slide show DVD for souls of all ages. The book also includes an insightful introduction by artist Donald Baechler and a compelling biographical essay by Phil Grauer and Sarah Braman of CANADA Gallery—not to mention a dizzying diatribe by the artist himself.

Brian Belott's ongoing collage book project is in itself an astounding undertaking. As Mr. Baechler explains in his introduction: "[W]orking on top of existing children's books, Belott obliterates any sign of original text and pictures...[The artist] appropriates not [a] central image but the stuff around those images and behind...and beneath: blue and starry night skies, bright orange Formica counter-tops; cartoon blades of grass and random, oversize punctuation marks become a primary vocabulary for his picture-making." A given page of a Belott book can often be a picture without an object; or more appropriately, the absence of identifiable objects is many times the ultimate subject of his pages. There are times, however, when a page or two from one of Belott's books can evoke the entire scope of Western civilization. Just six pages into *Wipe That Clock*, a gray space is playfully occupied by a ladder to a door in heaven. With a subtle and tender application, Belott easily evokes William Blake's 1793 iconic etching "I Want! I Want!" with its ladder to the moon, while simultaneously maintaining a laid back easy listening 1970's album cover cool. Playful, chill and biblical, all at the same time; wow.

And when you're finished with the actual pages of Brian's new book, pop in the DVD, lay back with your closest loved one and enjoy the family picture slide show from the heart of a silly time warp. A lonely organ takes you back to those lazy days of summer spent in a baseball stadium with a cold beer & a hot dog. While melancholy is its overall mood, *Wipe That Look's* slide-show DVD has great moments of humor too, which is at the core of everything Brian Belott does as an artist and great soul here on planet Earth and specifically the New York City metropolitan area. A good kid from Jersey, Brian has given us all a gift. To paraphrase poet Allen Ginsberg: open Brian's book as you would a box of crazy toys.