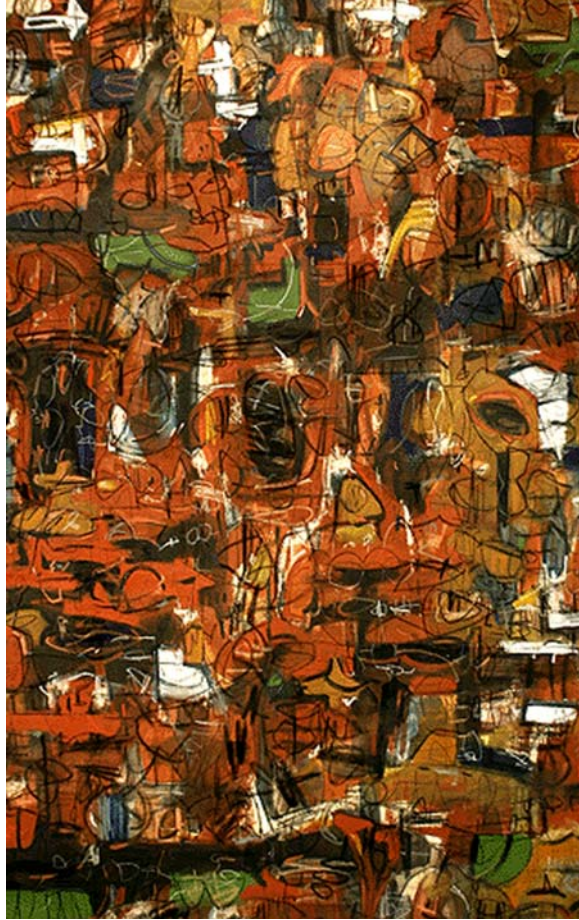


GRONK

A Tale of Two Rocks



He Came First, detail, mixed mediums, 2008

September 6 – October 11, 2008
Reception: Saturday, September 6, 7 – 10 pm

If a painter's job is to paint feelings then "A Tale of Two Rocks" is teeming with nuanced emotion. The suite's burnished palette has a rich, deep quality with shades upon tones within gradations and tracings. Adapting his title from Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, a novel about Paris and London during the French Revolution, Gronk's new paintings are formed out of his self-created idiom. One can view the alphabet of colors and shapes (on display along with cinematic-style storyboards for the suite) and see how Gronk deployed his urban hieroglyphics to create a pictorial discourse on our anxious moment in history. This is a show to be experienced—again and again.

Besides drawing on life during a violent transformation, Gronk reached back to the ancient mysteries of Easter Island and the silent stone statues that speak to our inner depths. In one of his artist's journals, he says that he was "dreaming of a distant past." Figures come at us as if they are rising up and off the painted surface. Some are black, some are rust. We also see an amber bird's eye spurting truth or mockery. This is a dream or a nightmare or something supernatural.

The dense, multi-layered imagery recalls a place where absurdity reigns and echoes *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where an exile inhabits a desert terrain of stone, rock, wind and dust. In one painting there is a ghostly visage whose eyes are looking somewhat astonished at the intensity of this subterranean metropolis. (Think George Grosz' *Grobstadt* in its urban chaos distilled to its quintessence.) Is this how we look when we recognize our futile destiny? Albert Camus wrote that the only time we conquer our absurd fate is when we acknowledge it and then it belongs to us. This is freedom.

Dickens began his novel with these famous words: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." Peering into Gronk's paintings we see intuition materialized at that strange point where beauty and horror intersect. The smudged black and rust shadows seem to call forth our two sides: the divine and the demonic. Gronk's paintings are about our eternal duality and the never-ending struggle for the supremacy of one over the other.

Max Benavidez

Max Benavidez is the author of *Gronk* (CSRC and University of Minnesota Press).