

ERIC WESLEY *Daily Progress Status Reports*

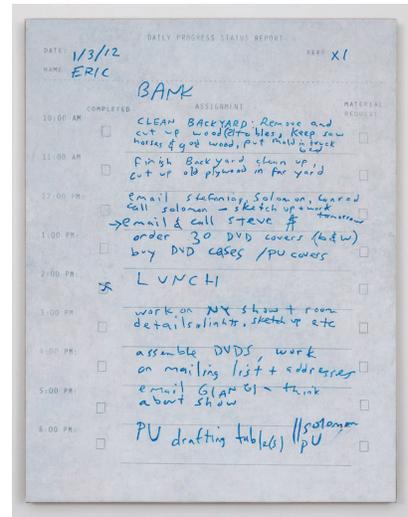
by Lucy Li

BORTOLAMI GALLERY | SEPTEMBER 4 – OCTOBER 4, 2014

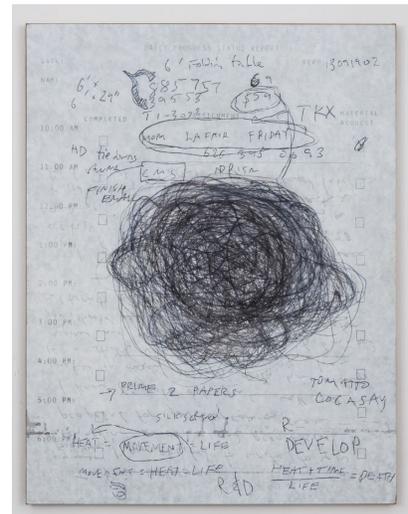
It is common for workers to embellish their to-do lists out of boredom, but creating tromp-l'oeil, four feet tall, meticulously polished replicas of sheets of doodles takes a more worrying level of ennui. Eric Wesley's new work is comprised of a suite of aluminum surfaces slapped against raw stretched linen, each presenting a reincarnated page of a routine "Daily Progress Status Report" (DPS), a standard form used to track one's activity and goals throughout the work day. Each page requires a date, reference number, and a list of assignments with a column of accompanying boxes to check off once complete. For the most part, these paintings shrug and say, "I didn't do sh*t today."

Wesley's exhibition at Bortolami buzzes with inactivity. To create these works, the artist completes a DPS before placing it over a light table, and subsequently recreates it with insouciant frankness using a variety of painting techniques on aluminum. Some paintings are green because in California (where Wesley is based) boxes of recycled paper always come with a few green pieces—a pastel, practical shade to conceal impurities. The resulting aluminum sheets are impressively paper-like, almost as if they are flat sculptures buoyed by the linen blocks underneath to become paintings.

While they are rooted in the aftermath of lethargy, all 20 works on view boast purposeful and engaging compositions, and emulate the relaxed focus of a cellphone vibrating from some unimportant call. On good days the progress report lists a solid set of activities—"clean backyard," "assemble DVDs," "work on mailing list"—some even have a box checked off ("lunch"). Most pages, however, look as if they were directly dipped into Wesley's day and rubbed against every surface and movement to collect oil paint stains, dirt smudges, juice spills, musings like "experiment with gravity," fruit stickers, and origami ridges as testimony for activity.



Eric Wesley, "DPS #20 (Power Blob)," 2014. Acrylic on aluminum on linen, 48 × 37 in. Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami Gallery. Photo: Josh White.



Eric Wesley, "DPS #6 (Bank, Lunch, Pu)," 2014. Acrylic on aluminum on linen, 48 × 37". Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami Gallery. Photo: Josh White.

On particularly low-wattage days when nothing gets done, he paints the blank side of the report and describes the texture of the cheap, thin recycled paper's pulp with an Impressionistic airiness, like in "DPS #3 (Ether)" (2014). One mesmerizing page called "DPS #12 (Who's Afraid of Bleach)" (2014) shows a green sheet suffering a serene chemical burn which blossoms into a beautifully feathered white half. Another moment, "DPS #26" (2014), is simply a blank-side-up piece of paper resting in a slight arch after spending a day folded down the center, slightly worse for wear.

These cheeky works pose penetrating questions about the politics of artistic productivity. Cascading uniformly down the gallery's walls, these precisely marked progress report templates almost look like chemistry beakers ready to evaluate the volume of their contents, or prison mug shots with rulers that indicate height. These progress reports would be fantastically effective if only artistic production was a Newtonian-mechanical undertaking with sensible units of measurements. In "DPS #20 (Power Blob)" (2014), after a field of various applications of numbers—"TI 3072," "6' Folding Table," "626 345 0693"—Wesley attempts an equation of life: "heat = movement = life", and offers an enticing corollary: "(Heat + time)/life = death." The sheer absurdity of the heftiest existential concepts pursued inside a fraction is just dizzying, and the day's progress curls up into a giant abyssal hairball in the middle of the page.

Although Wesley repeatedly vandalizes the Daily Progress Status Report template like a frustrated weight watcher smashing up an honest scale, the rubric's necessity is emphasized and magnified in these impeccably crafted, durable metal paintings, and momentarily rebuts the artist's apparent apathy and irreverence. One scrawl of a ship is captioned with a clever pun that might be right on the money: "study for enterprise with no sells sails." With annual art fairs, monthly exhibitions, established magazine deadlines, and art market theories to furnish, the demand for aesthetic output is intensifying and becoming more and more scheduled, more reliably a function of time. The structural incompatibility between Wesley's impromptu scribbles and the DPS's strict grids and industrial connotations signals a larger issue of supply refusing to meet demand and the rejection of a theorized economic context. This show discusses these issues in a manner that is perhaps a bit too literal and simplified, but the creative artist's increasingly salient identity as a traditional wage-earning laborer in a market system is worth sleeping on.