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REVIEW: Dave Muller, “Death Disco,” The Approach



Courtesy The Approach

Dave Muller, "Death Disco," The Approach, London, January 16 - February 10th, 2012, installation view
by Coline Milliard

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There's a dark twist to **Dave Muller's** show at [The Approach](#). The LA-based, one-time DJ continues to give free reign to his musical obsession — which in the past has spawned such monumental projects as a mural-sized reproduction of [Reebee Garofalo's rock'n roll history chart](#) — but it's here pervaded by a somewhat solemn, meditative mood. The suicide of Muller's friend **Mike Kelley**, with whom he played in the band **Destroy All Monsters**, is likely to have something to do with this change of tone. Muller painted Kelley's drum kit twice ("Empty Drum Set #1 and #2," 2012), an homage saturated with sounds too soon silenced.

In "Death Disco," the acrylics on paper "Empty Drum Kit #3 (K. M.)," "Empty Drum Kit #4 (K. C.)," and "Empty Drum Kit #5 (J. B.);" (2012) picture instruments belonging to musicians either deceased, or once part of a now-disbanded group: **The Who's Keith Moon**, **Karen Carpenter**, and **Led Zeppelin's John Bonham**. As often in Muller's work, the series pushes and pulls between the personal and the collective,

tapping into a set of references specific to the artist but shared by many of those who grew up in the West at the end of the 20th century. It functions as a series of portraits *in absentia*, a fan-like celebration of a time gone by, and the role it played in shaping who we are.

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Muller's delicate brushstrokes and watered-down colours have the ethereality of memories, fleeting like mirages on the surface of large sheets of paper. Nodding to staples of American radio, the double diptych "This American's Top Forty (2012) represents two stacks of CDs, mostly by musicians who died in 2012: **Billy Strange**, **Andy Williams** and **Whitney Houston**. An era is measured in well-listened albums, a tally of dead musical talents.

Until recently, Muller spent \$3,000 a month on music: LPs and CDs progressively digitized to create a behemoth archive he has described as a "self-portrait." "Where I'm At Is.. (#5, blue)" (2006) — composed of a computer and speakers broadcasting non-stop to three radio sets disseminated in the gallery — is a snapshot of Muller's collection in October 2006: 95,000 tracks, about half of his current holdings. "If you are living with this piece and it's in your house, you're leaving inside Dave Muller's head," the artist has said of a previous version. One can only wonder about the rationale steering Muller's accumulation. It stands as a warped reflection of a contemporary, pathological consumption, the irrepressible urge to define oneself by what one owns — and what, ultimately, will be left behind.

"Dave Muller, Death Disco," Until February 10th, 2013, [The Approach](#), London

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