



Black Power/ Black September, 1968 Mexico City Olympics, 2006

# ARTFORUM

Los Angeles Critics' Picks

Daniel Joseph Martinez

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History hardens. Daniel Joseph Martinez's show at the new LAXART space is above all about this calcification: Events stiffening into images and things. Bleak scenes from the 1972 Munich and 1968 Mexico City Olympics, emptied of figures, are flattened into photostats. The floor of the main gallery is congealed into lumpen asphalt and a border of squishy, lugubrious lard. Huge texts on the façade and walls of the gallery and a nearby billboard pose poetic and propagandistic fragments—cliché being thought crystallized into convention. Martinez has explored truisms before, in works like his buttons proclaiming "I can't imagine ever wanting to be white" at the 1993 Whitney Biennial. That stridency is thankfully muted now. In the video *Hollow Men*, 2006, awkwardly costumed hands turn a flipbook back and forth in both directions, constantly reversing the narrative order of the pictures (which show police in riot gear) and stripping them of affect. In the Olympics images, Martinez crops the infamous surveillance photograph of a Black September terrorist to leave only a detail of rectilinear concrete surfaces; the podium at which American athletes raised the black power salute four years earlier is pared into a similar set of vacant geometric blocks. In some ways the show recalls a Beuysian handling of history—bombastic and narcissistic. But Martinez's work still holds out the possibility of understanding the process of historical cliché, the slow formation of torpor—a heat death that, as the artist's billboard proclaims, "radiates disaster triumphant."

Author: Michelle Kuo

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