

Bryce Kroll's Deconstructions of Fax Machines

Kroll has put a lot of labor into dismantling machinery that once took a lot of labor to create, in the ongoing effort to save ever more labor.



Louis Bury February 12, 2024



Bryce Kroll, ".77 Inches Per Minute (Panafax UF885)" (2023), oil and ink on canvas, 48 x 24 inches (all images courtesy the artist and Lubov, New York)

The works in Bryce Kroll's exhibition *[Hard Copy](#)* at Lubov are copies, of a sort. The paintings and sculptures are artistic "copies" of six fax machines that the artist purchased at auction from the New York City mayor's office for \$6.44. Yet the resultant artworks vary in surprising ways from the originals and from each other. The show's two painting series, for example, were made by wrapping the fax machines in clear PVC, then painting onto the plastic, and finally transferring the painted plastic to a canvas. One series preserves traces of the machinery's appearance, with each monochromatic painting recalling a schematic diagram and titled in the manner of fax machine ratings (as in ".76 Inches Per Minute (Panafax UF885)," 2023). The other series' imagery, in contrast, appears fleshy rather than machine-like, with each painting (all titled "Hard Times") depicting a cross-section of what resembles vacuum-sealed organ meat.

Similar transmogrifications occur in the sculptures. To fabricate them, Kroll built his own vacuum forming machine using how-to guides, then molded pieces of plastic to parts of the fax machines, and arranged the contoured pieces into alien assemblages. In “Trace Panafax UF885 derivative” (2022), for instance, curtains of translucent and neon-green plastic, shaped into a ghostlike figure, dangle from the ceiling by a hook. The purple, trilobite-fossil-esque forms that comprise “Precision Placement Panafax UF885 derivative” (2021–23), on the other hand, evoke a plodding, low-to-the-ground creature. All the sculptures suggest sci-fi beings or apparatuses yet Kroll is more invested in the fabrication process than in world-building elaborations.



Installation view of Bryce Kroll: *Hard Copy* at Lubov, New York (photo by Charles Benton) Credit: Charles Benton

In their procedural strangeness, the artworks testify to the distortions inherent to copying technologies, and to the often invisible human labor behind such technologies. Kroll’s metaphorical hard copies are not just oblique reproductions of their originals but are copies that were, quite literally, hard to make. It’s as if his labor-intensive artistic processes exist in inverse proportion to the obsolescing machines’ utility. This emphasis accounts for the grisliness of the *Hard Times* painting series, whose depictions of scarred, meat-like sections serve as uncanny reminders of the flesh-and-blood labor that human-built machines obscure.

It also accounts for *Hard Copy*’s beguiling sci-fi mood. In the same side room as the *Hard Times* painting series is “ELMO TT-12 Panafax UF885 Derivative” (2022), a group of document

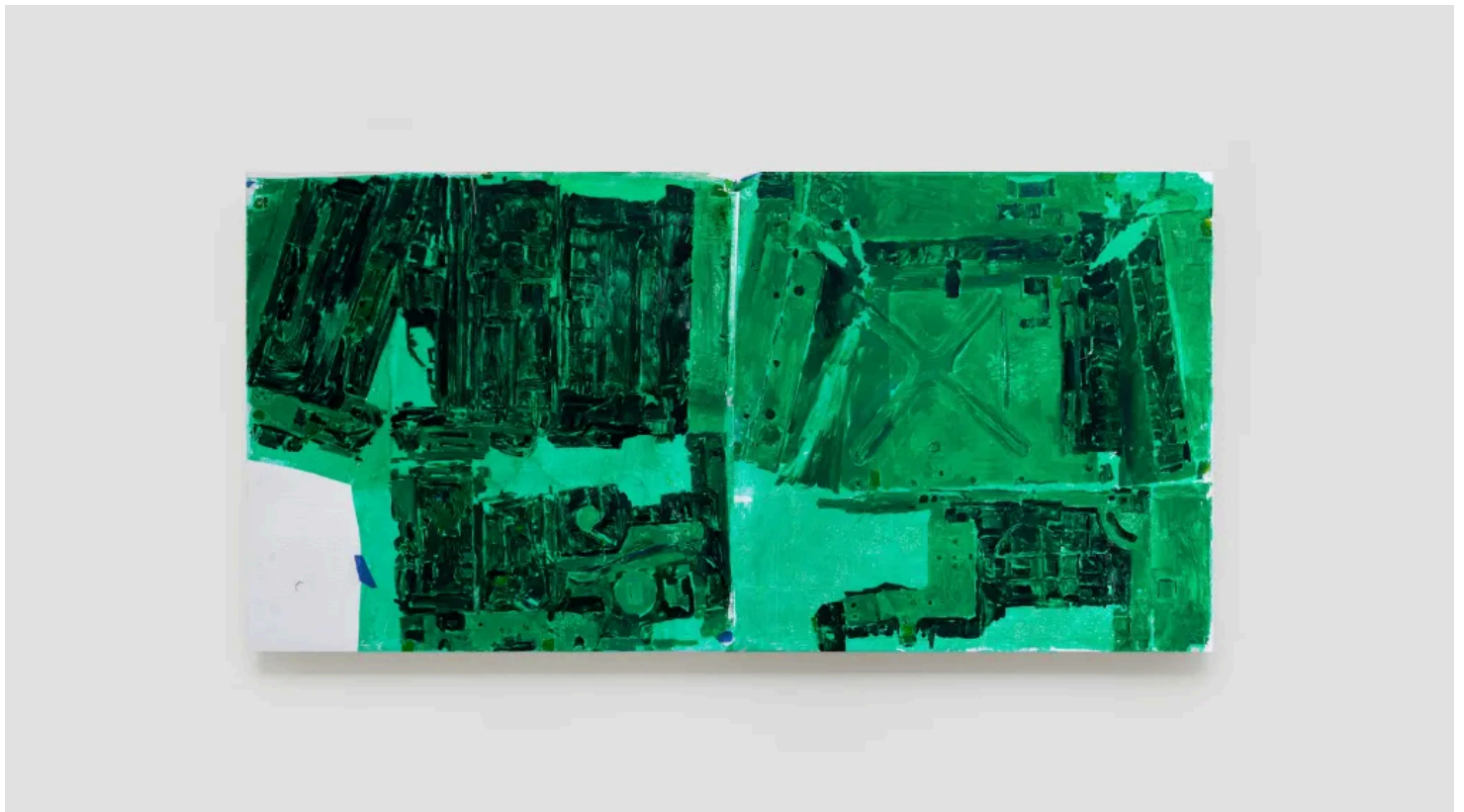
scanners, each of which is a dead ringer for a microscope, partially submerged in a rectangular suitcase filled with milky blue fluid, something like a kiddie pool. The installation looks like a lab experiment that has gone so far off script that it has abandoned any pretense to science and landed in the bizarro realm of art, basking in its inutility. As with *Hard Copy*'s other experiments, Kroll has put a lot of labor into dismantling machinery that, however outdated it might seem today, once took a lot of labor to create, in the ongoing effort to save ever more labor.



Installation view of *Bryce Kroll: Hard Copy* at Lubov, New York. Center: "ELMO TT-12 Panafax UF885 Derivative" (2022), oil on PVC, PET-G, aluminum, hardware, document scanners, 31 x 40 x 17 inches (photo by Charles Benton) Credit: Charles Benton



Bryce Kroll, "Curved Candelabra Panafax UF885 derivative" (2023), oil on PVC, PET-G, styrene, polyurethane foam, oil soluble colorants, aluminum, molded fiber packaging, vacuum pump gasket, organza, hardware, 20 x 59 x 17 inches



Bryce Kroll, ".72 Inches Per Minute (Panafax UF885)" (2023), oil and ink on canvas, 48 x 24 inches



Bryce Kroll, "Trace Panafax UF885 derivative" (2022), PET-G, polyester batting, nylon rope, polyester, PVC, oil soluble colorants, aluminum, polyurethane foam, shoelaces, butyl adhesive, 15 x 15 x 64 inches



Bryce Kroll, "Precision Placement Panafax UF885 derivative" (2021–23), oil on PVC, PET-G, styrene, oil soluble colorants, aluminum, molded fiber packaging, organza, hardware, 48 x 22 x 9 inches

Bryce Kroll: Hard Copy *continues at Lubov (5 East Broadway, #402, Chinatown, Manhattan) through March 3. The exhibition was organized by the gallery.*