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“Brutal Beauty: Drawings by Hugo Crosthwaite” at the San Diego Museum of Art

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Hugo Crosthwaite's *La Cola de dos Ciudades*, (*A Tale of Two Cities*), (2010), and *Bartolomé*, (2004), are the dominant works of “Brutal Beauty,” his current show at SDMA. *La Cola de dos Ciudades*, inspired by Crosthwaite's birthplace Tijuana, highlights conflict between Tijuana and San Diego. Dickens' famous novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, Goya's *Duel with Cudgels* and Kahlo's *The Two Fridas* provided source material. The drawing features two anguished males depicted in a graphic/Pop Art style influenced by Crosthwaite's recent years in New York and DC comics. Crosthwaite is a superb draftsman, and the fact that he created this work in three weeks in front of an audience is a feat. However, his ‘deconstruction’ process—masking sections of the drawing and painting over them with

white paint creates a stark effect. Influenced by an experience where his mural was destroyed, Crosthwaite sees the blank squares as reflecting loss and providing space for viewers to visually complete the work. Unfortunately, the squares have the unintended effect of blocking the viewer's gaze.

In contrast, *Bartolomé*, featuring a classically drawn martyr, is powerfully consuming. It hits you on both a visceral and conceptual level. Evoking the collision of sensuality and violence found in a Caravaggio or Delacroix, *Bartolomé* features the saint flayed alive by a cheese knife. Initially, Crosthwaite found humor in the association between the saint and cheese guilds. However, once news of Abu Ghraib broke out during the creation of the piece, it took on a darker tone. Dense space, overlapping figures, and detailed Tijuana architecture encourage contemplation. Hooded figures portraying both the tortured and torturers conjure Abu Ghraib. Like Picasso's *Guernica*, it conveys the human potential for destruction and suffering.

Hugo Crosthwaite, *Untitled, New York #1-Victory Leading*, 2007, Graphite and charcoal on paper, 84" x 96"