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Brad Downey's Dual Exhibitions in Reggio Emilia Explore Hidden Art and Living Materials

Posted on May 18, 2026 by Sebastian Vane

Reggio Emilia is set to host a significant artistic event with the opening of two distinct yet interconnected solo exhibitions by the renowned artist Brad Downey. Presented as part of the 21st edition of the Festival di Fotografia Europea, these exhibitions invite viewers to delve into complex themes ranging from the unseen layers of street art to the profound materiality of nature itself. Both shows offer a compelling dialogue on authorship, appropriation, and the artist's responsibility in contemporary society.

What Lies Beneath: Unearthing Hidden Histories

Opening on April 30, 2026, at Lo Studio Design, the exhibition **What Lies Beneath** presents a fascinating exploration into the concepts of authorship, property, and the very nature of an image. Accompanied by a critical text from Emanuela Mazzonis di Pralafra, this project originated from a remarkable archaeological gesture by Downey.

In 2011, when invited to exhibit at Kunstraum Kreuzberg Bethanien in Berlin – the same venue where Banksy had created a series of murals in 2003 – Downey undertook a unique intervention. He meticulously excavated the walls, bringing to light Banksy's original artworks that had been concealed beneath layers of plaster. This literal and symbolic act of unearthing evolved further in subsequent years. Portions of these unearthed surfaces were isolated, and through the application of hyperspectral photography, the hidden images were rendered visible once more, transformed into autonomous artworks.

The two works featured in *What Lies Beneath* encapsulate this intricate process, where physical recovery intertwines with critical reflection. Downey appropriates images originally conceived within the ephemeral and public context of street art, reactivating them within a new exhibition framework. By employing appropriation strategies reminiscent of Banksy's own methods, Downey redirects the discourse to a broader examination of image control and circulation. The exhibition's title itself, *What Lies Beneath*, probes what is hidden beneath the surface – a question applicable to both the physical artwork and the intricate systems of the art world. Downey's work challenges mechanisms governing visibility and opacity, authenticity and reproduction, particularly in an era grappling with how digital technologies and artificial intelligence reshape our understanding of authorship.

Dead God, Thank You: A Material Reimagining

Concurrently, at SPAZIOC21 within Palazzo Bрами, Downey presents his second solo exhibition, **Dead God, Thank You**. Also part of the Festival di Fotografia Europea and running until June 20, this parallel reflection shifts focus from the image to the profound relationship between matter and responsibility.

This compelling series is born from six distinct trees – pine, cypress, wild cherry, ash, oak, and laurel.

Downey subjects these trees to a radical transformation: they are photographed, felled, and reduced to wood pulp, which is then meticulously crafted into the very paper for his artworks. On this unique paper, he paints with pigments derived from the macerated bark of the same trees. The resulting works are images that are intrinsically linked to their material origin, representing a life cycle that has been interrupted and then recomposed in a new, artistic form.

The Multidisciplinary Vision of Brad Downey

Born in Louisville in 1980, Brad Downey currently lives and works in Berlin. His diverse educational background, encompassing documentary film at the Pratt Institute in New York and painting at the Slade School of Art in London, underpins a truly multidisciplinary practice. Downey fluidly navigates installation, video, performance, and urban intervention.

Since the beginning of his career, his work has consistently engaged with the social and political structures embedded within public space. Often through subtle yet impactful actions, he reveals latent tensions within urban environments. Downey has exhibited regularly across Europe and internationally since 2003, with his work gracing institutions such as the Kunstraum Kreuzberg Bethanien, the MU Hybrid Art House in Eindhoven, and the Kunstverein Arnsberg. He also participated in the Tbilisi Architecture Biennale in 2020. His comprehensive monograph, *Slapstick Formalism – Process, Project, Object*, published by Hatje Cantz in 2020, offers an insightful retrospective of two decades of his prolific activity.

These two exhibitions by Brad Downey in Reggio Emilia continue his journey, fostering a rich dialogue where images and materials, appropriation and transformation, converge to offer a deeper contemplation on the essence of an artwork and the artist's vital role in the contemporary world.