



# The Drawers - Headbones Gallery

*Contemporary Drawing, Sculpture and Works on Paper*

Headbones Anthology  
2008

Commentaries by Julie Oakes

RICH FOG



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Toronto, 2008

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## **Headbones Gallery, The Drawers - 2008**

Contemporary Drawing, Sculpture and Works on Paper

After three years of exhibiting up to ten artists each show with a selection of ten works per artist, the number of works within the Drawers has grown to include many facets of drawing and works on paper. Being guided by a mandate to feature the 'touch' of an artist's hand, Headbones Gallery has been inclusive but perspicacious towards talent, innovation and insight.

The commentaries act as a bridge between the viewer and the artwork. In Sarah Thornton's book, *Seven Days in The Art World*, Roberta Smith, art critic for the New York Times, has said that she hopes her ideas will be "useful and accurate enough to get used. Art accumulates meaning through an extended collaborative act. You put into words something that everyone has seen. That click from language back into the memory bank of experience is exquisite. It is like having your vision sparked." This articulates the relationship between the work and the commentaries, the substance of the anthologies. The work reviewed has been varied and the commentaries delve into the multiple meanings of drawings and works on paper.

Headbones Gallery has advanced programming to broaden possibilities for the artist's featured. Through our inclusion in The Toronto International Art Fair 2007 and 2008, ArtNow, Miami, 2008 and The Drawers Travelling Tour, across Canada to BC, 2006-2008, we have widened our viewing public to good advantage and reviews.

Headbones Gallery has also been looking at art works internationally in order to gauge and compare works of art, fresh from the practice of both established and emerging artists, to a wider picture. Experience has increased our visual tolerance, vocabulary and scope as well as emboldened our exhibition schedule.

*Neopriest* (an acronym for New Pop Realist Intellectually Engaged in Story Telling) was born in 2008. Since the identification of the aesthetic was Richard Fogarty's genius, it is best described in his own words. "With careful consideration to all the great works featured at Headbones over the past several years, a visual thread was discovered that is based on narrative with a Pop realist slant. I've been emphatically drawn to these artists and their intellectually engaging works."

Julie Oakes  
Headbones Gallery, December, 2008



## **Work'n It, January 10 - February 14, 2008**

The energy needed to promote the work is equal to the energy needed to produce the work. Not only with the consistent driving of their practice and openness to opportunity, but also promotion can be integral to the work itself. With strength of image, format or a sheer graphic blast of power, the artists in *Working It* have noticeably been investing their talents in positions destined for high returns. The imagery and execution broadcasts a combination that clearly equals excellence.

### **Congratulations** to Srdjan Segan, recipient of the **2007 Headbones Award**

This year's unique cast bronze award was produced by last years recipient, Julie Oakes and is sponsored by Artcast Inc.

\*Fifty of the seventy-six featured artists in 2007 received votes by their peers. Each artist was asked to select three of their favorite artists featured in the 2007 Headbones Gallery exhibition schedule.



## Oswaldo Ramirez Castillo

### Work'n It

Working with images that unflinchingly examine the grotesque and painful alongside of the fantastical, Castillo moves forward with a steady and adept talent. The macabre content of his drawings on Mylar depict vague and extraordinary memories of his native country El Salvador where political unrest was a part of the daily diet of his childhood. Lately, the malignant imagery has been couched in a rainbow palette. The overall effect is one of wonder that the face of extremity can be so gloriously rendered as to become almost comprehensible.

Transformation myths help to explain the unexplainable and often irreconcilable opposites of good and evil. They allow ugliness to change into beauty, beast into man, darkness into light and inspire the hope of devastated peoples who feel they have been abandoned by their god.

Oswaldo Ramirez Castillo reinvents the Aztec character as a means of dealing with the violent imagery, born of memory and experience, that have made up his artistic output. From the dense black and white pain of *Shipwreck in Jucuapa*, 2005, to the harmful in influence and effect of his imagined interior of *Quetzecoatl* in 2007, there has also been an artistic transformation. From grey scale or muted analogous color schemes to a full and lurid palette, his work has gone through a transformation that reaches further into the convolutions of his fertile mind.

Quetzalcoatl is an Aztec sky and creator god. The name is a combination of *quetzal*, a brightly colored Mesoamerican bird, and *coatl*, meaning serpent. He is the God of the wind and the air, part bird and part snake. One of the pantheon of deities that reigned over the consciousness of South America before the advent of the Spanish, he was a personified translation of the mysteries of survival made into a visual form. However, other than the flying horse, clarion crying rooster and gaseous atmosphere enveloping the serpent, there is not a lot of flight in Castillo's rendition of the mythical creature. If the snake was the creator (phallic, truthful metaphor) - then the beginning was slithering into being rather than rising upon a spirit wave. There is violent indigestion in this hell-like process of birth and the element is fiery rather than light and airy. If these are Quetzalcoatl's children in gestation, then all hell is about to break loose.



Quetzacoatl's Children (detail), mixed media drawing, 144x42 inches, 2007

The violent memories of a people are often passed on in story telling with the intimate disclosure from father to son or mother to daughter speaking of the trials and tribulations of their generation. The figures, fantastic and unreal to our Western culture where there has not been a war fought upon this native land, have a resonance for Castillo that was born of experience. This is the telling seed of the conceptual beginnings of Castillo's work. It has been processed through his life and passed on from his parents who heard from *their* parents similar tales of transformation and change. This is the valuable insight that he is able to share and the result, foreign and horrific with exploding bodies, dog-men, soldiers, spikes and torture; is a cause for wonder. Only Castillo knows where, in *Quetzacoatl's Children*, the ropes towards the sky are anchored. That he delivers this epic version of the Aztec god with the deft and clairvoyant mastery of an angel, renders the statement even more poignant.

## David Pirrie

### Work'n It

David Pirrie's carefully rendered remains of vehicular accidents, in pencil on vellum and over laid with a grid, resonate with psychological and cultural implications. The motor vehicle is an icon that signifies positive as well as negative traits. The automobile is a symbol of wealth, status, style and even sexiness. Right down to the utilitarian vehicles for transportation - the eighteen-wheeler for example has become a pop trope, inspiring songs, literature, art and even *looking* like art with graphic, chrome and illuminated accessorizing. The motor vehicle is a necessity, a habit of convenience and a privilege.

The extension of the image of the automobile into wreckage - the dead body of all that the automotive industry has come to stand for - has a metonymic meaning. David Pirrie's drawings reduce the bulky, twisted steel and rubber carcass to a comprehensible size. It is comparable to a small crucifix, a reminder of mortality and hence a prompt from which to formulate living.

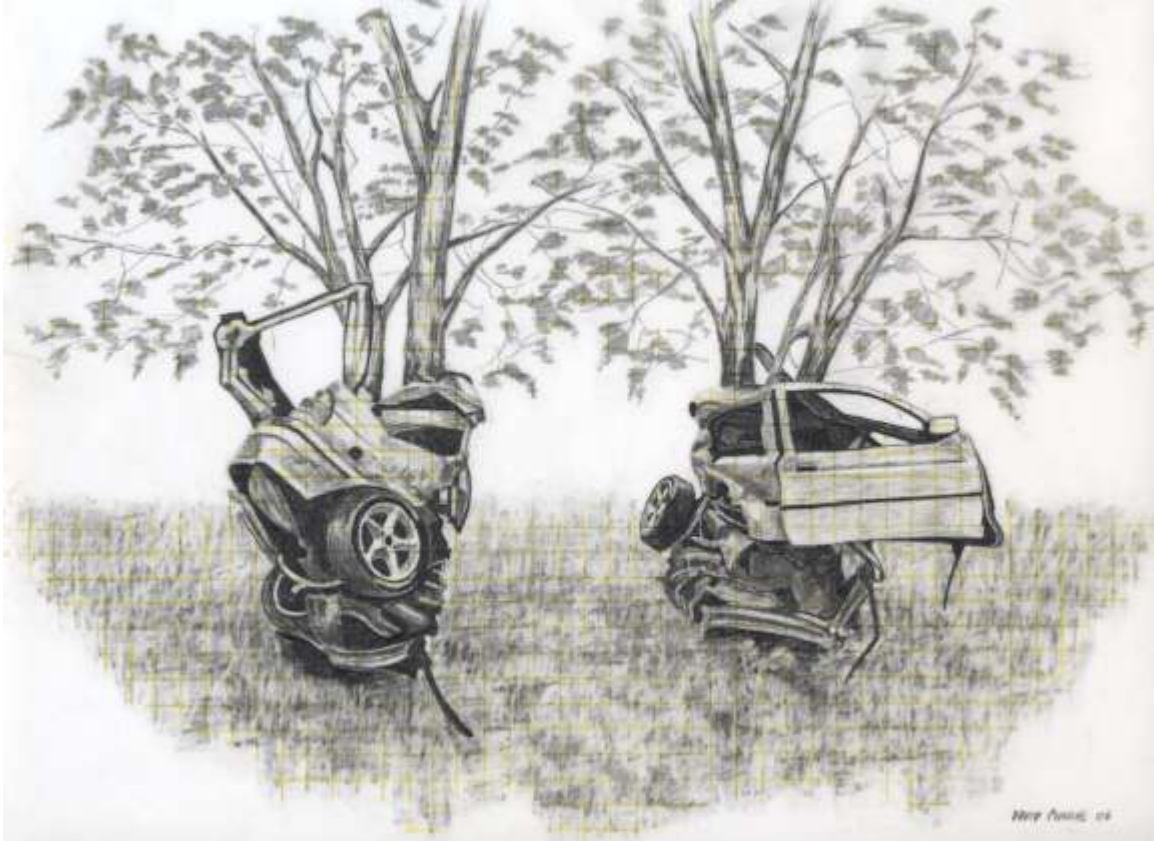
Picture the artist, David Pirrie, looking at a photograph of a wrecked vehicle, carefully drawing it in miniature, paying it attention, with a modeling that caresses the images. Miniatures were used in Persia to present private delicate subjects, in East India to depict intimate erotic realms, when traveling before photography loved ones could be viewed in miniatures in locket and now the most individual of human emotions assumes a tiny format - grief from the accidental loss or physical injury caused by an automotive accident. Man has become so mighty and clever with his technical acumen, flying over distances at speeds far beyond his actual physical capabilities. Carried by his inventiveness on wings of fire, man flits as fast as a hummingbird but not without fallout. To consider the impact of a vehicle colliding with a tree, for instance, leaves many repercussive meanings and metaphors in its speedy wake. There could be moral inferences, especially in the light of declining oil supplies and the wars raged to secure sources of the black gold. There could be a subtle accusation that we are killing the planet with the misuse of fossil fuels. As America becomes fatter, so does the ability to conduct one's life (between malls and a global economy) without being ferried from the Need to the Fulfillment seem an impossibility. We are reliant on the automobile with a sickly dependency. A smashed vehicle is a loaded image, perhaps easiest to contemplate when it is rendered so tiny that the person who would have been driving it

could fit into a palm like a Blackberry.

The wreckage when assigned a grid, allows an objective framework for the spectacle. The picture is quite neat and tidy, 'nicely' drawn, almost overly polite in addressing a subject that screams with emotional vim. Is Pirrie hoping to organize the clang of horrific associations by dividing the universally feared, yet preventatively imagined, scene into squares? As calculating as a military strategy where lives are disguised by names other than their own (the 52 Regiment, the 6<sup>th</sup> Platoon), Pirrie's beautifully penciled crashed cars, trucks and even (shudder) school buses permits the contemplation of irreversible tragic moments in a cultural context akin to the consideration given to Yoric's skull by Hamlet.

This sense of life's transience is especially poignant in the crumpled bus. It is empty and has been abandoned, useless in its vehicular capacity, as it transformed from a transportation for people to a smashed death trap. The viewer is, after all, still amongst the living, examining the tiny depiction of the remains of an accident that happened outside of his immediate ken. It has no identity other than a culturally pervasive, violent possibility of how death can occur. The drawings are remarkable examples of the ability to resurrect, from an image associated with death, a conceptual awe at man's trajectory from his discovery of the wheel to this contemporary, conceptual translation of where it has led him. This work speaks of the pity of progress, the fragility of human accomplishments and yet the sophistication of the overview of Pirrie's analysis grants a divine perspective on our condition.

Yet, as in a Godard or John Waters film, the car crashes keep coming, flowing off the end of the Pirrie pencil like the plastic flowers sprouting from telephone poles and road barriers. The drawings commemorate death or at the very least injury. A vehicle crashed, after-all, was once a vehicle driven, for the Pirrie crash is not a simple slide into a ditch but a violent collision. When the collision is with nature and the cars are slung from trees like limp flung socks or forming a pliable bend like a soggy vegetable, the message is even more disturbing.



Spring, graphite on Mylar, 9x12 inches, 2006

## Tyler Bright Hilton

### Work'n It

Between a traditional series of etchings that illustrate a story - Chagall's Aesop's Fables or Goya's The Disasters of War for example - and the peculiar, privately coded, personal narratives that artists feel compelled to have brought forward; falls the shadow. It is within this shadowy realm that Tyler Hilton fabricates his tale of dubious reference and peppery wit. The characters move from page to page enacting their destinies, fraught with the muddle of emotions, sexual innuendo and perplexity that riddles the young. Overlaid on a clean technological background, the characters magically transport from situation to dilemma. The main character, a lanky, randy young woman with a mixed ethnicity, sports a photogenic hairstyle reminiscent of cinematic fame or Japanese animation. Neither youth nor age oriented, his contemporary myth updates yore as within the twenty visual frames, he forms a tale of his own telling; one that relates to earlier told stories (most notably Alice in Wonderland) but rests in an orientation brought into line with the twenty first century. Hilton's 'Alice' is whimsical yet hardy. She is feminine yet more adolescent than womanly. She enters 'wonderland' through a clothes dryer in search of a sock and once there explores her sexuality with the appetite of a depraved libertine.

The skill evident in the etchings is part and parcel of the surrender to the journey that we are willing to take alongside of the heroine and the unique and often bizarre perspectives as the corner is rounded from page to page is well worth the attention spent. Each piece is compositionally able to stand unattended by the precedent and aftermath of the scene depicted. The lines are expressive. The darks are deliciously rich. Falling within the dramatic layout of film noire or gothic illustrations, this ambitious project measures up to the daunting task of holding interest over time.

In the past, Hilton has exhibited a fascination with morbid and theatrical subject matter with his drawings of cats that are far from fluffy pussies. He continues to wrench emotive content as he brings the subject closer to relativity (nearly-believable characters, all close to Brighton in age and style). The work is not an easy read, for the enigmatic aura overshadows logic both sequential and referential, but like a flight above the clouds the air is rarefied and the realm visited well worth the ticket. Bright Hilton is at the beginning of what promises to be an interesting trip - a career to be followed with interest.



Chapter 14: *In which Caitlynnne has a most unpleasant time, and ruins dinner for everybody.*  
(Copper Plate, hardground, etching, burin, aquatint, drypoint.) 15 x 22 inches, 2007

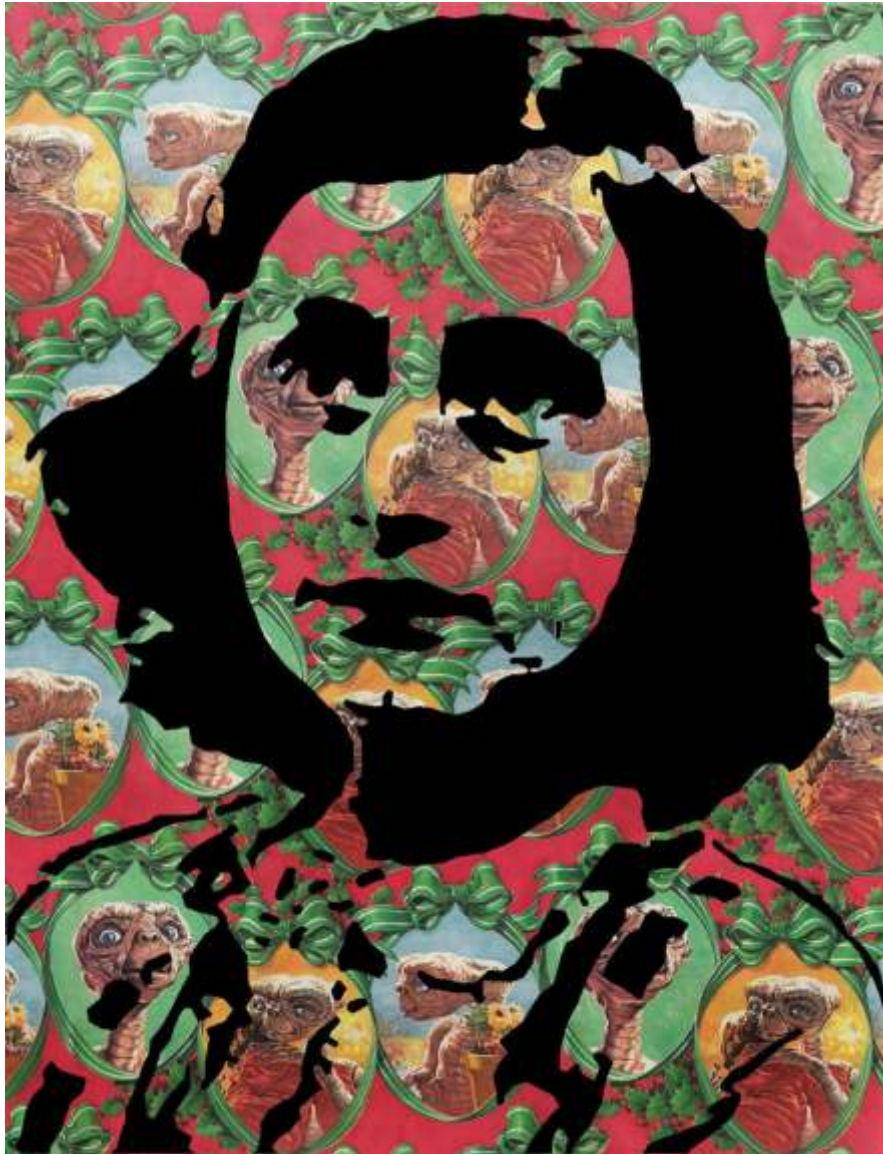
## Joyce Lau

### Work'n It

The image almost blurs into pattern as the cut-out breaks up the ground and mollifies the message. Like a succinct one-liner, a headline or satirical quip, the message is seated within the context of repetition and yet it triggers a responsive recognition and an ensuing abrasion. Frida, for instance, consists of a cut-out of the well known face with her heavy meeting eyebrows and the flora of Mexico surrounding her. The fabric out of which the cut has been made is wrapping paper for a baby present, replete with rattles and pastels. Frida Kahlo was doomed to childlessness as the result of a near fatal accident, horrible in aspect as she was pinioned to a metal fence post when thrown from a bus. The artist not only then faced a life of physical suffering but also had to deal with the emotional hardship of not being able to bare a child. The Joyce Lau version is as straight to the point as a blade cutting paper.

The use of black outline is either achieved by slicing into the ground and revealing a black back drop or by overlaying the filaments of a line silhouette of the subject against the pattern chosen for the contextual ground. In Toxic Boy a street punk male in cut off pants and holding a can of paint slouches before an overall repetition of grey cupids and is Lau's interpretation of a character from Tim Burton's book "The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories". The difference between the historical angelical babies and the boy is reinforced by the rubbery, spidery line made in depicting the figure.

Lau relates to history through eyes made aware of race, religion and cultural diversity. Napalm shows the photograph of victims fleeing from napalm in South Viet Nam. She juxtaposes the photographic image with a pattern taken from Katsushika Hokusai's famous wood block. The eighteenth century Japanese artist was himself a rebel - a cocky and quarrelsome Bohemian. That his work should have been translated into a banal and kitsch wrapping for presents furthers the irony as Joyce Lau's choice of materials are pertinent to her understanding of tragic events in Eastern history. Lau, of Chinese descent, lends new connections to the relationships between tradition and the stimulus of progressive modernity. The dark lines of the stencilled image, much like the work of Kara Walker, illustrates that it is too easy to superficially cast the subject. Through her research into the many possibilities of associations, Lau brings forth a new version of political positioning.



Anne, cut-out on vintage wrapping paper, 22 x 30 inches, 2006

## **Bruce Montcombroux**

### Work'n It

This is a boy's world, derived from Meccano sets, Tinkertoys, model airplanes and forts built from dilapidated snow fences. The constructions, depicted and actual (Montcombroux also builds dioramas), have a higgledy-piggledy engineering that retain a touch of the hand in the modeled areas or the recorded pressure as the line veers from thin to thick, drifting through the space of the page. The coloring holds a hint of the illustrational, as does the delineation as if we are reviewing a manual replete with directions and visual instructions. But it is impossible to get away from the mad cap aura of the constructions, the sense that an insane inventor has decided to build his way out of the necessity of employing proper methods, heeding codes and stress levels, to reign free in a kingdom of his own making. There seems to be more of a miniature tool kit than a box of pencils and brushes behind the work. That the elaborate towers, flying machines and hybrid automobiles could not possibly work might be a double freedom on his inventive agenda. The gap that exists between expectation and accomplishment is banished, the stress of struggling to keep up dissipates and creativity rules.

In a society that, despite the onslaught of manufactured goods, is still intrigued and admires workmanship and detail, the amount of time these drawings require for completion, the amount of *work* evident in the pieces causes admiration. It speaks from the outset of man's labour and the meeting of his efforts with the dreams of completion that fueled them. Not to mention talent, another immeasurable aspect of the making of an artwork - Montcombroux evidently has a natural draftsman's hand. This form of homespun knowledge is metaphorically inserted into his drawings with his use of wood, a natural building material on the airplanes, for instance, an airplane usually built of materials that reflects the epitome of scientific structural strength and durability.

In a world overrun with acumen, where the opportunity to excel is often dictated by years of training, especially in engineering professions, ideas may be aborted by the fear of their birth being a sheer impossibility. Montcombroux has adopted an open control policy by denying the concept of a failed lifeline. He proliferates the dubious, weird and wacky offspring of his genius. He expands through a new and unfettered production of parts, mechanical cells, or buds. He is determined to increase in number, to multiply in his rickety bed of sticks, and with his inverted diagrams giving private instruction, he climbs a ladder rung by rung - as he erects it. Adding to and taking away from the strictures of industrial materials usage, Bruce Montcombroux creates the ultimate widget, only to supercede his final step with the onset of his next new idea.



Construction III, ink, gouache & acrylic on paper, 44x30 inches, 2006

## Scott Waters

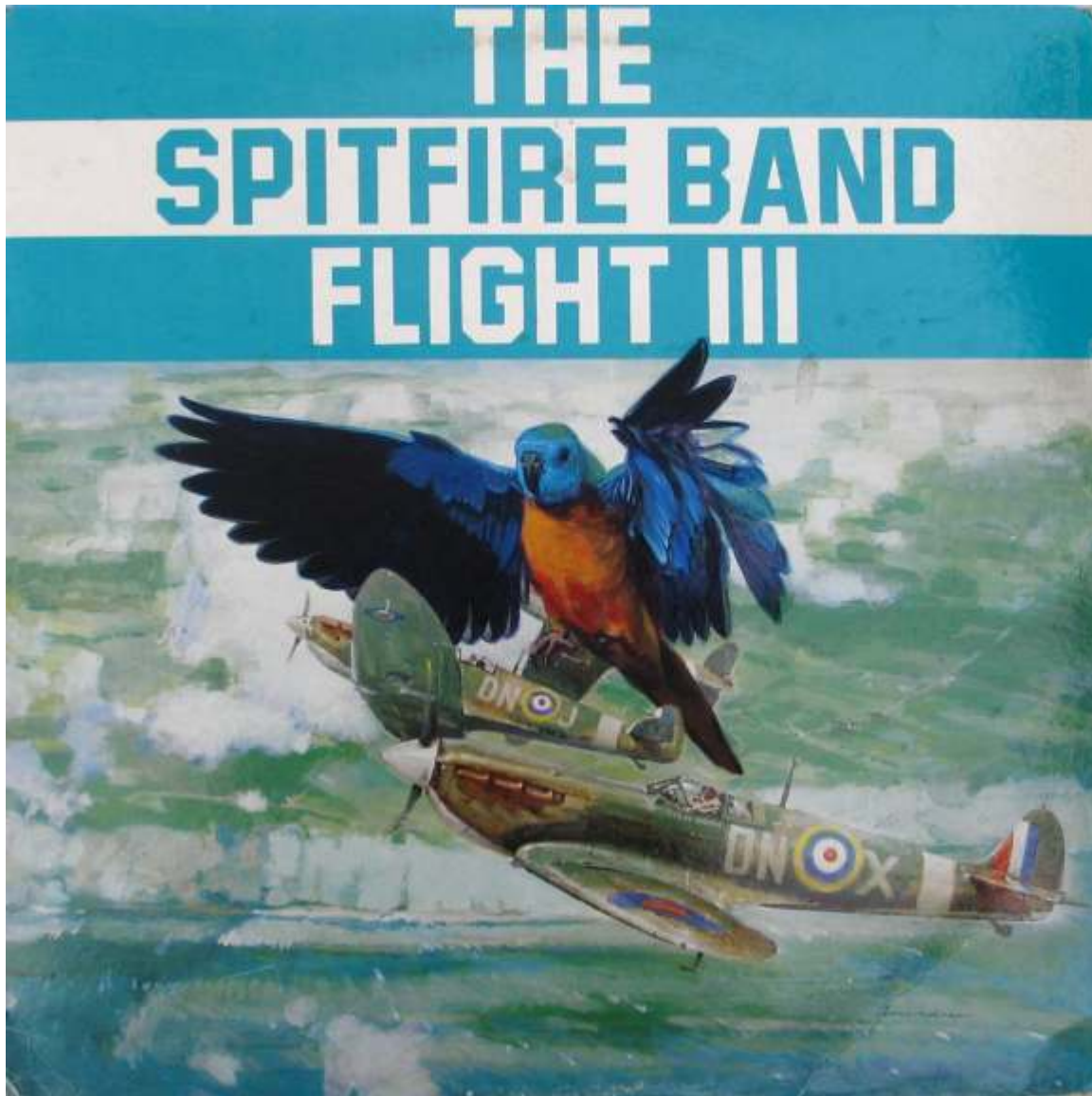
### Work'n It

As the world fills up with visual material, nostalgia is often a safer haven than the harsh stringency of approaching a clean ground. It could be argued that there is no such thing as a 'fresh canvas' in the confusion of visual bombardment, both historical and contemporary.

There was very little garbage during the Second World War, everything from vegetable scraps to rubber tires was recycled. Today, it is an ecological choice to build upon the existing rather than add to the over-thinged and populated earth. It is an intrinsic part of working on recycled surfaces. On record album covers dating back to the forties, fifties and sixties, Scott Waters superimposes imagery of the times. But whose times? What times? A raging fire eclipses the prim concentration of folk singers, dressed and poised for a promotional shot on a record album cover. The original intent of setting up the image - in this case, the folk group presenting a visual to contextualise the music that will be heard on the album - is interrupted by an act in what has become the future tense of the original visual. There is an immediate sense of gapping, of being at odds with the visuals and the reception of the material is perceived as a jolt into the present tense. The hand of the artist becomes overbearingly apparent despite the fool-the-eye facility of Water's adeptness with paint. A bemused and comic jibe at the self serious concentration of the group of singers meters the shock of the blazing turmoil that has landed in their midst. Always, there is an unaware victim of a joke. The fishermen on the postcards are dwarfed by giant birds, illustrative and unaware of their context. The crux of the schism lies in who is the knowledgeable one, the new addition or the original setup and yet the only 'all-seeing-one' is the artist, Scott Waters.

Often using military imagery, the civilian world is thrown off kilter by the intrusive visual but there is no apparent change in the context other than the necessary obliteration of information from the visual addition blocking out a portion of his chosen backdrop.

Like a private joke that has been passed on to an audience through a discrete aside, the structure of nostalgia is skewed by the addition of new information. The joke on the past is at no-ones' expense however and only serves to illuminate the present by layering an unconsidered option on the present - an option that takes into account the inescapable impact of the visual material that has already filtered through and escaped the garbage bin. That a vintage record, postcard or romance novel can play, communicate and entrance with new vitality shows the power to convince that can be awakened by the hand of a practiced magician.



The Battle of Britain II, acrylic on LP cover on panel, 12 x 12 inches, 2007

## **Z'otz\* Collective**

### Work'n It

It is almost antithetical to creation that a communal practice should invent rather than a single, egocentric notion. Within industry, science, education, even government – the power of constructive group decisions have furthered invention and yet the visual arts have traditionally been a one man show. The exception would be the workshops that surrounded the old masters and yet Z'otz\* is far from a hierarchical creative endeavour and closer to an exercise in equality. Perhaps the consuming growth in population has furthered a trend towards artistic collaborations or the famously socialistic Canadian politics have rubbed off on the arts community. Whatever the cause, the results have pushed the envelopes of individual expression wide open with the addition of both techniques and subject. Not only the merging of drawing styles but the personal preferences towards images are passed back and forth between the members of the Z'otz\* and much like the passing of a baby around the members of a tribe, the progeny flourishes and grows beyond a more singular parenting.

Z'otz\* goes for an immediate read and then a more subtle afterglow. The graphic potency, especially in the standing figures, is almost poster-like and inspires visions of both enlargements or reductions. The drawings in this series would make stunning, cinematic billboards or sharp postage stamps. The articulation of the line is acute and the balance between detailing and structural forms apt to the scale.

Their work is curious, so much so that the oddness of the name tends to be overlooked in the perusal of eclectic visuals. This energetic collective of drawers consisting of Erik Jerezano, Nahúm Flores and Ilyana Martínez, meet Sundays to pass the paper and reshape their individual visual destinies to a more communal and social end. To visit the studio while they are working is much like visiting a den of puppies, cavorting and wagging their tales at their mischievous interchanges. The wit and ingenuity of the collaborative output is uppermost – and wasn't the abandonment of the ego in favour of the enhanced formula of additive perspectives the object of the exercise? Objective attained!



The Idol's Disguise, mixed media on paper, 11 x 15 in, 2007

## Introduction

### WWW.WOMEN

Women can look at each other and see a reflection that adds up to a powerful, capitalised rendition of their gender for we have come into our own without having to resort to competitive wars over territory. Women have generally acknowledged the maxim that “two heads are better than one”.

The story of the final paring down of a candidate for a University teaching position illustrates the premise. Three women selected as finalists found themselves being asked to win the coveted position by stating reasons why the other women were not suitable for the job. They each began their defence by stating that they could see no reasons why the other women should not be chosen in their place. They had decided that they wouldn't gain ground by trampling their competitors. They elected to share the job and - to the great credit of this important institution - they had their desire for co-existence met!

WWW.Women is built on such a premise. Women, long used to task sharing in order to overcome the rigours of childbirth, child rearing, gathering of food, maintaining shelter and the many chores that, born of necessity are best done by grouping together, bring their strength, brightness, intellectualism, capability, technical expertise and creativity to their art work. Women have maintained a dignity of gender in a profession traditionally the domain of men. The work in this exhibition exemplifies the fact that women have staked a self conscious claim within this nourishing field of dreams and in doing so, broken ground that grew a different female form of artistic avatar. Often political in approach, women have used their bodies, their intuition, their ability to nurture and multi-task and their grand operatic voices to shatter many a glass tower. In this Valentine month, WWW.WOMEN follows on the day of paper hearts and cliché promises in a spectacular show of solid womanhood with the female flag flying at full mast.

During the opening, Headbones Gallery is hosting a baby shower for a new member to our feminine cast. Ivy Lumina Kurylowicz, born February 3, 2008 to Nancy and Martin Kurylowicz, will be welcomed into the circle of women, her mother's pregnancy celebrated and the male participation in it all, acknowledged and thanked. With an advocacy for inclusiveness, WWW.Women commends the honourable and accomplished advantages of us all, regardless of gender.

## **WWW.WOMEN**, February 16 - March 20, 2008

In this exhibition, women have staked a self conscious claim within a nourishing field of dreams (art) and in doing so, broken ground that grew a different female form of artistic avatar. Often political in approach, women have used their bodies, their intuition, their ability to nurture and multi-task and their grand operatic voices to shatter many a glass tower. This Valentine month, WWW.WOMEN follows on the day of paper hearts and cliché promises with a spectacular show of solid womanhood.

Women have a large range, of colors, textures, dispositions, levels, overlaps and tendencies. They talk with the moon and receive messages from the other side while taking care of the necessities, feeding the bellies and mopping the floors. They possess a dignified patience that oversees differences and difficulties and yet are susceptible to bouts of self immersion.



## Aleks Bartosik

WWW.WOMEN

These are provoking drawings, rebellious stances that push the unconventional. They are pugilistic with the boxing gloves loaded - clenched fists ready to punch. They're masochistic and appeal to the sadistic side of the psyche, that unacknowledged cry to be beaten and receive the full brunt of nastiness and humiliation. Aleks Bartosik reconciles the opposites of human grossness and glamour with the dramatic brashness of size and theatrical composition. Primarily focusing on the female figure, she creates situations that suggest a tangential perversity. None the less, there is a sexy allure and it is in this respect that the unconventional comes into play. They appeal to the fascination of a big naughtiness like a Roman overindulgence that is so over-the top that it is destined to implode but tastes delicious until that final cut is made.

Alice went down the rabbit hole and in wonderland she met up with grotesques, exaggerations of the world as she had left it. There was always a resemblance to the 'real' world but the skewing raised questions, entrapments, predicaments and drugged perceptions that begged to be acknowledged. Alice, a pretty little blonde girl, confronted the unusual - fascinated with the revelations. Aleks Bartosik is taking a similar trip and exploring temptation. She indulges her curiosity and hence furthers the voyeuristic interests of the viewers. The presentation of her compromised females - fat and clumsy or tastily dainty, pinioned and stuck, gloved for battle but hung, or small before a beastly headless adversary - allow the contemplation of gothic possibilities without a self righteous prod. There is no moral. There is no need to rescue. There is only the shock, the recoil, and then the step forward for a closer inspection.

A gutsy hip chick who steps outside of constraints, Aleks Bartosik uses the full force of her appearance as the autobiographically based subject of her bold yet intimate narratives. Using a storyline of self exposure, Bartosik allows her bad girl inclinations free reign. With a repertoire ranging from expressionist drawings to performances, Bartosik has distinguished her persona as a force to be reckoned with, peaked at and exclaimed upon.



Hairy Girl, 2001-conte, charcoal and oil stick on paper-100 x 60 inches

## **Louise Bourgeois**

WWW.WOMEN

She is The Role Model of tenacity, endurance, and generosity of self and spirit. First trained as a mathematician, she switched and attended the École Du Louvre and The École Des Beaux Arts in Paris where she also worked as an assistant to Fernand Leger. She married an American and moved to New York City where she studied with the Art Students League of New York. Although she had been a vigorous practitioner of her art forms through out her life, it wasn't until she was in her sixties, (which was in the seventies) and after the deaths of her husband and father, that she achieved recognition. In 1993, she represented America at the Venice Biennale.

Today, in the same house that she lived in with her husband, with a fading elegance topped by high shuttered windows that look onto a tangled garden that feels more like Europe than America; Louise continues to be a vital part of the growth of art. She hosts her Sunday salons where a small group of artists have one chance to visit the great artist and present what it is that they do. She doesn't appreciate return visits for she understands that her granting audience is an afternoon that many have veered towards and will continue to do so. It is indeed a privilege to be present as she teeters into the salon with the help of her walker. She nods and approves or with a slight wave of her hand signals for the next presenter. The company is international, men and women. Although on the treasured occasion of my visit, it was primarily women.

This occasion is second only to the primary one - that of being in the presence of her work and this will endure long after her small time upon this earth. She has brought to light themes that have been at the heart of women's issues including incest, betrayal and childbirth. The etchings that follow relate to her adulterous father who had an affair with her governess, one that her mother refused to acknowledge. Best known for her cells and more recently her spiders, the great sculpture that rests outside of The National Gallery of Canada is titled Maman. The great role of matriarch is assigned to Louise Bourgeois.



Birth, 1994-Drypoint on paper-Image 9 x 7 inches

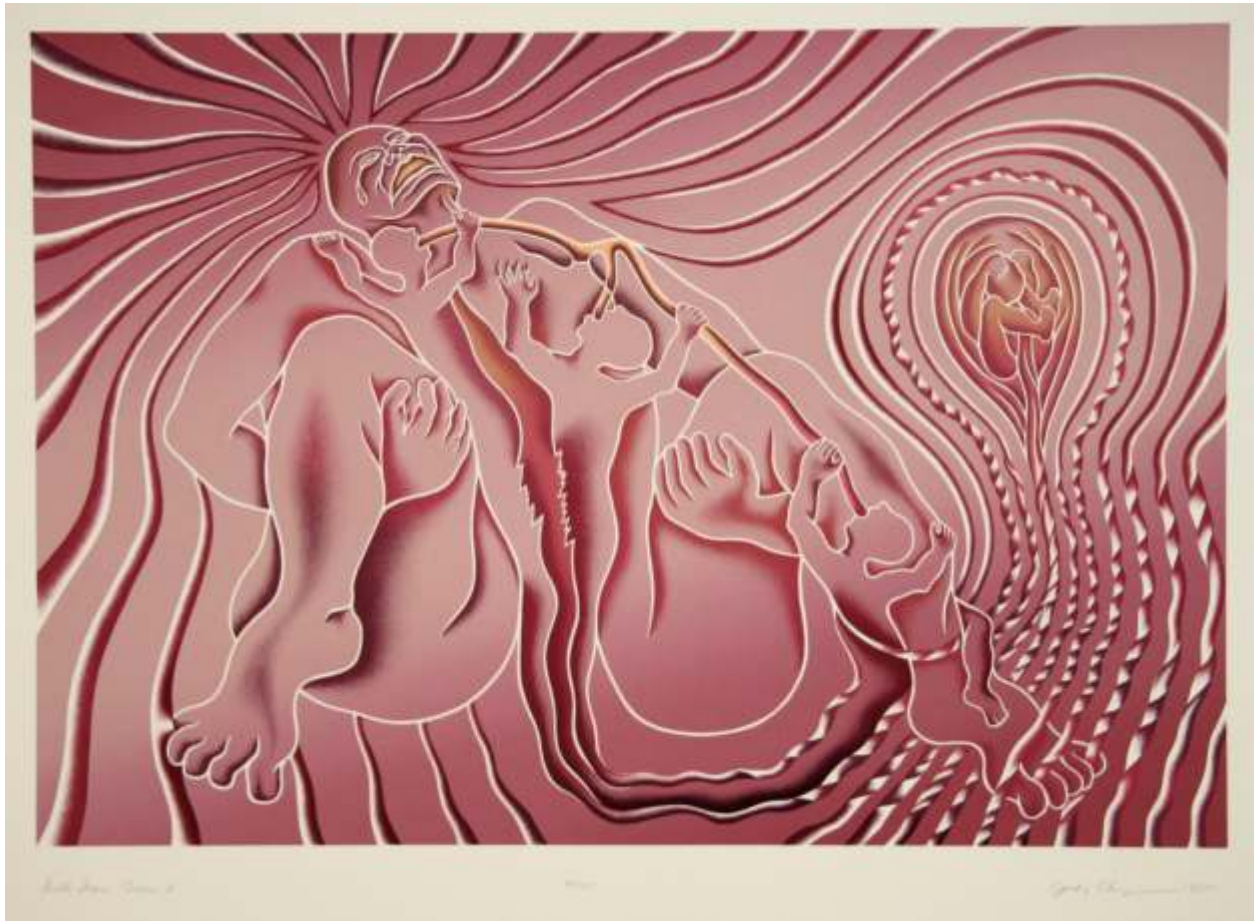
## Judy Chicago

### WWW.WOMEN

Although Georgia O'keefe had painted flowers that were suggestive of vaginal imagery, it wasn't until Judy Chicago and *The Dinner Party* that female sexuality found due attention in the echelon of acceptable subjects for the attention of the visual arts. Adopting art forms taken from the womanly crafts (china, painting, needlework and ceramics), she rallied the support of helpers and made a project that was beyond the accustomed scope of female, certainly, and even most male precedents. It was a starting point, the avant garde step that set women into great strides and Judy Chicago, as well, not only kept pace with her first glorious stepping-out but superseded herself with other work such as the Birth Project and the Holocaust Project. The resounding confirmation that she is indeed *The Avatar* is in the work.

It is fitting that the suite of prints from the Birth Project should be part of *WWW.Women* and that her definitive imagery and energy should stand beside many successful women artists whose work has been influenced by Judy Chicago in one way or another. Printed in 1985, when the technical rigor of serigraphy meant that the stencils were applied by hand, rather than photographically adhered to the silk as they are often made today, the prints are adept and flawless in execution. The shading, done with a stippled touch creates voluminous folds and curves much like a heavy set airbrush. The soft modelling is sensuous. The paper itself has been lifted from inclemency to become a lively presence, radiating self assurance and confident femininity. Chicago has reclaimed the subtle, reaffirmed the curve, opened the center and bloomed. To see the work that was made twenty years earlier, as vibrant and seductive as ever, from the hand of an artist who has been held as an iconographic figure in the art world, still as beautiful as ever, inspiring the desire to possess - is a heartening affirmation that the place women have managed to secure in the arts is not only blossoming but managing to maintain a full bloom.

Judy Chicago, to many women artists, has been the grand dame of contemporary art because she organised art projects such as *The Dinner Party* and the Birth Project that went way beyond the size limitations and ambitions of women artists previous to her. She has inspired artists and artisans to feed their expertise into her visionary overview while granting an enabling legacy to the following generations of women artists.



Birth Tear/Tear, 1985-Serigraph, Edition of 75; 34/75-24 x 35 inches

## **Donna Cleary**

WWW.WOMEN

At one time, children meant the continuance of the tribe. Birth was a natural process but so also was death and the survival rate was not as secure as in the western world in modern times. Fertility figures were common artefacts, a necessary prayer or good luck omen towards the continuance of life. In some cultures, these artefacts were worshiped, even elevated to a God or Goddess like status. When male, the figurines or statues would often sport erect phalluses. When female, it was not the genitalia that was glorified, as much as the state of gestation. Pregnant women with milk filled breasts symbolized bounty, prosperity and good fortune.

Modern western culture is proportionately bereft of fertility figures. In fact, with the population still growing, it could be accused of holding a somewhat jaded view of childbirth. The pressures of modern living have necessitated double income families and the 'job' of rearing the child can be farmed out to care facilities. Family time has, sadly, been shortened and the term 'family values' has an undertone of suspect political positioning that is quite often adverse to the natural concept of family. Who then, is culturally elevating the pregnant women? As ever - artists. Both male or female, once hit with the indelibly magical circumstance, they celebrate their engagement in the process with as much fascination as if they were the first ones to ever produce a baby. The birth of a child is indeed marvelous and the anticipation of the marvel is held within the physical aspect of the pregnant body. Pregnant women still garner the emotional response of compassion, their swelling bellies being patted, rubbed and listened to.

Always a clear symbol of the bounteous and beautiful, the pregnant body, nude, is glorified in Donna Cleary's drawings and mono-prints. To omit, in an exhibition that celebrates women, imagery pertaining to the solely exclusive female state of pregnancy, would be close to a slight to the gender. Women, capable of being 'with child', are hence the ones who know best how to visually speak of the experience. Donna Cleary represents the natural phenomena well.



Monoprint #17, 2007-10.5 x 8 inches

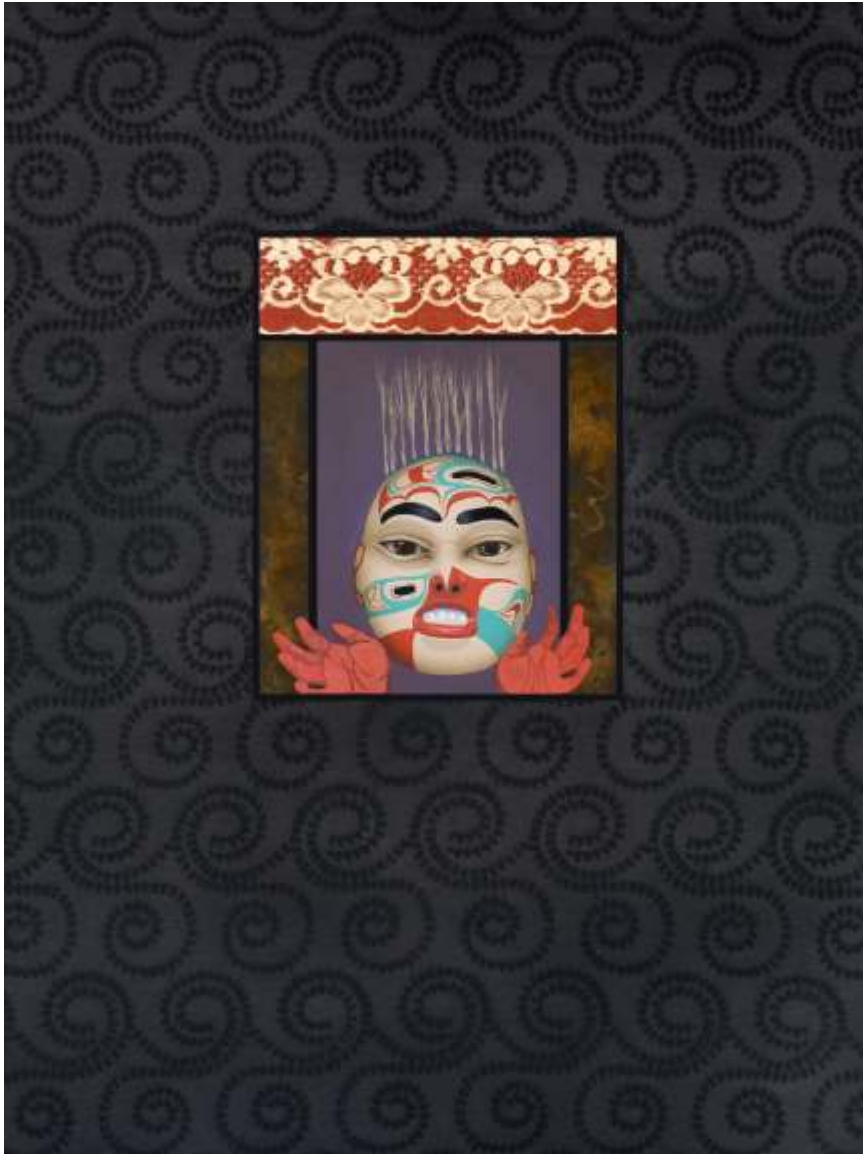
## **Diane Feught**

WWW.WOMEN

A Queen is a figure head, one who rules. She can be a consort to a King or she can reign alone. She is an example to her subjects and upholds the laws or regulations prescribed by the members of her kingdom. She is the shining light that illuminates darkness, dispels chaos and inspires right living. Queens are fairytale, mythological, fantastic figures and yet there are also 'real' Queens. A Queen is the highest ranking female within a kingdom. She is a woman of great power and effectiveness. She is also a solitary being for there can only be one Queen although there can be many realms.

That Diane Feught should create a series of paintings on paper addressing the theme of women by creating images of Queens, and accomplish such a regal display of beauty and strength, is a royal curtsy before the gender. She recognises the potential of her feminine perspective and uses that potential personally to summon up her slate of women. Women have a large range, of colors, textures, dispositions, levels, overlaps and tendencies. They talk with the moon and receive messages from the other side while still taking care of the necessities. They possess a dignified patience that oversees differences and difficulties and yet are susceptible to bouts of self immersion. Against a hand painted, deep brocade background, Diane Feught's luminous beings become votive icons, offered in devotion to womanhood and continuing with a life of their own to inspire and serve as an example of the force of females.

Women have been said to love beautiful things as well as embodying beauty themselves. Feught has the intuition to call to mind and hence to bring to her creativity, a range of women. She has painted traditional goddesses such as Q'an Yin (the Chinese female principal), Mara (the evil one who tried to tempt the Buddha and whom Feught depicts in the same frame as a snarling bear with a fire raging above her head) or Mamakala (the avenging Hindu deity). She also presents women who appear to belong to today such as the ones depicted in the realms denoted 'shelter', 'jewel' or 'ghost'. The pearl in 'jewel' is suggestive of a woman's sex, her precious treasure, hidden in the deep dark cave of her physicality and rendered to nestle in amorphous golden folds like the crown jewel of a private realm. Even the comic character Wonder Woman is extended to 'wonderful' by Feught's titling and has been given noble status through the elegant depiction.



Q'an Yin, 2007-gouache, acrylic, rust and metal foil on paper-20 x 17 inches

Diane Feught, like a Queen, has granted titles to each of her women, allotting them kingdoms and an aristocratic dignity. With a style of depiction that leaves the old masters behind, she makes paintings on paper of women who become accentuated through her skill and elevated taste. She has made art work fit for a palace, as rich as any of the phenomenal works of the Renaissance that were made for the grand castles, ecclesiastic collections and public interiors of yore. There is, in fact, a large degree of 'yore' - and suggested lore - in Feught's recent series of Queens. These regal women awaken yearnings. This is the effect of being in the presence of Queens.

## Heide Hatry

WWW.WOMEN

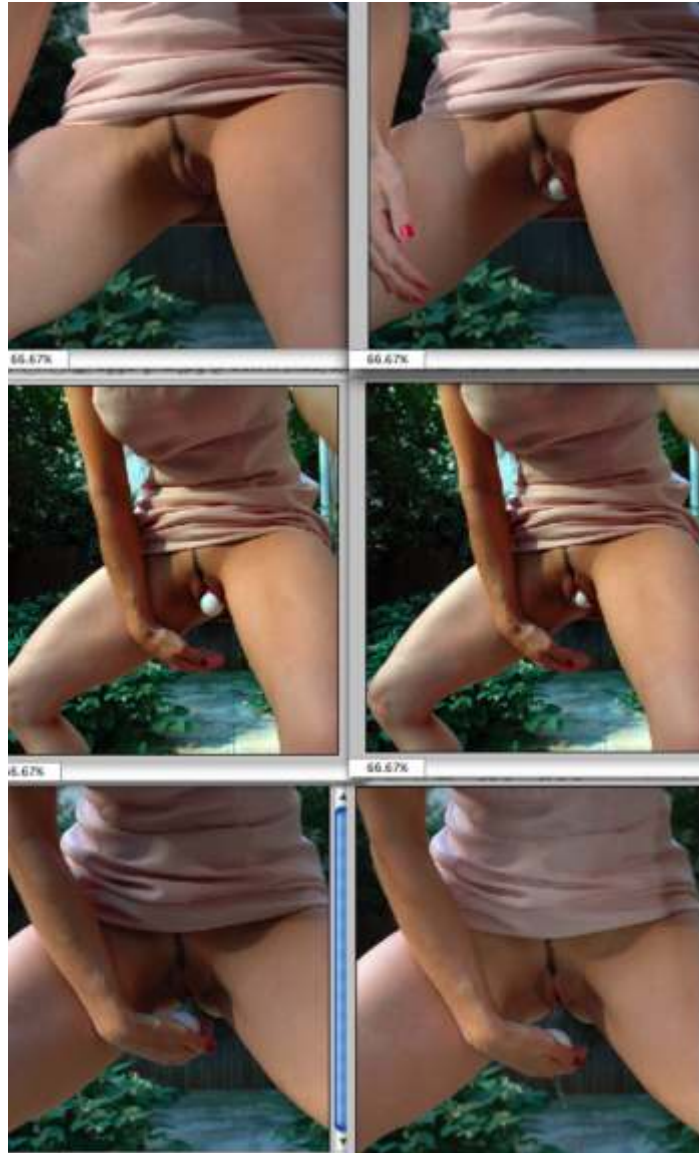
The British show *Sensation* contained art works that were sensational. The word 'sensation' is described as "a mental process that is due to immediate bodily stimulations as distinguished from perception". 'Sensational' is described as often pertaining to the lurid - quick, intense and, sometimes, superficial. When the perception stimulates the sensation and in doing so triggers a mental response, it awakens cognisant connections that further that immediate reaction. Heide Hatry's work with blood, for instance, can be associated with the luridus realms of death and provoke a reaction akin to having witnessed a murder. A shiver runs up the spine, a step is taken away from the spectacle and an expression of awe emitted. It is because there has been 'blood let'. For example, Hatry, dressed in a chic, short white wedding gown, skinned a pig in one of her performances. She ended up covered in blood, the beautiful white garment gradually stained a deeper red over the course of the performance. Awful! - 'awe full', and yet blood is also a traditional element of matrimony. The hymen is broken, the sheets hung out for inspection and until the egg is fertilised, the woman bleeds each month.

Hatry has captured herself on video as she 'lays' an egg. In one instance, she is nude, covered with dirt and the scene is set in nature. This is the 'wild' woman who perceives the event is nearing and quite naturally from her vagina, the lips swelling as they release her bounty - an egg is laid. In the second video we see a smart, seemingly sophisticated woman (the artist) in business attire - although the skirt is very short and the legs very long and bare - carrying a shiny silver laptop. She, too, 'lays' an egg and then ends the dynamic performance dramatically. Much like a movie review, it is better not to tell the ending for it is worth not knowing the ending in order to catch the sensation from the initial viewing of the piece. Once again awe! Hatry has created an art work that causes a reaction in the senses. It is not solely a sexual reaction, although this is not to be ignored for it is titillating to watch a woman push an egg out. It is more than a pornographic response, however. It provokes a sense of wonder at the connection having been made between the idea and the physical enactment of it. It is a mental placement of oneself in relation to the artist - "she did that! Could I?"

Is there that great a difference between standing in front of any phenomenal art piece?

An early Bellini, Botticelli's Venus, Picasso's Guernica, Gericault's Raft of the Medusa, a large Jackson Pollock drip painting, Judy Chicago's Dinner Party, all of the phenomenal art works that cause the "wow!" reaction. Are they not all based on a sensation?

Heide Hatry is one of those women who run with the wolves. She expostulates against the prim and brandies a new essentialism, a credo that acknowledges the primal, that celebrates basic instincts and expands the notion of femininity. She does this with her body, and with fit, sexy assurance turns heads at the outset, using her female allure to gain attention. Then she grants a peak at something beyond the pale of the more discretionary set. With video, photography and sculpture coalescing her conceptually avant-garde subject matter, she offers a fresh take on the 'gentler sex'.



Egg Birthing #1,2,3,4,5,6-Photos, color, 24 x 20 inches

## Angela Grossmann

WWW.WOMEN

Current reality is a series of overlays on the past and the separation between the tenses is dependant on the conceptualisation of them. It is this overview of time and imagined space, alongside the rational capacity to anticipate that places us in the liminal position - on the threshold of knowledge, away from the beasts. Angela Grossmann depicts this wavering of tenses with her paintings on photographic images taken from the turn of the century. That she overlays the remnants of the past with images that can transmit a sensational message straight to the libido grants a dynamic to the work that is evermore poignant than the always present realisation that without effort, time is passing. Part of the appeal to the senses is derived from the handling of the paint. It signals the presence of a free hand, a self referential, libidinous messiness, a relish in the sensuality of paint.

Beauty is fleeting and the depiction of the world of beauty is an attempt to unfasten beauty from the embrace in the passage of time. This has been the subject of convoluted philosophical treatises that turn back into themselves in the ambitious task of pinning down what might be described as an allure comparable to an aura - outside of the subject, emanating from the matter and overriding the temporal. It is this elusive aura that is depicted in Grossmann's work and she does so by using the medium with metaphorical advantage. A drip, for instance, as it wanders leaves a trace in time, so does a spatter. The gestural application of paint speaks of a presence before solidification of the art work - that which becomes the arrested object. When energy is fastened to the object by way of the art making, there is room for desire to enter, an element of beauty.

Grossmann, herself, could be described as an Alpha Girl (the title of a series by the artist made in 2004) for as one of the Young Romantic Painters, she entered the art scene as the girl amongst titans and had no trouble keeping up with the boys. With a dextrous hand and facile bravado she created a 'look' that made her dripping young women into 'it girls' - saucy, cheeky and self assured even in the midst of tears or a nervous breakdown. Her figures embody the range of human emotions, pathetic to pithy, that embody everything that the title Young Romantic Painters could have hoped to invoke. Lounging superbly in attitudes gothic, gauntly adolescent, and egotistically whimsical; Grossmann's figures capture all of the highs and lows of yearning for impossible beauty.



Miniature 27, 2007-oil on photo, 3 x 2 inches

## **Guerrilla Girls**

WWW.WOMEN

Another myth from the outset, their identities unknown but their fame magnificent, the Guerrilla Girls have been the stand in for the missing political pontiffs who should have been advocating for female equality in the art scene. The sighting of these hairy gorillas have been a lucky omen for women and a cause for stress for those male dominated venues where an issue became the focus of their ire. Through performance, publications and profiling women, they have raised the bar allowing women artists their time in the spotlight. But the work is not yet done and how they will address www.women is yet to be seen- only anticipated.



**Do women have to be naked to  
get into the Met. Museum?**

**Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern  
Art Sections are women, but 85%  
of the nudes are female.**

**GUERRILLA GIRLS** 132 La Guardia Pl. #237, NY 10012  
CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

## **Donna Kriekle**

WWW.WOMEN

“One in nine women!” Whenever the statistics are high, the shivers set in. The fight against breast cancer has been engaged with a vehemence and strength equal to the laborious act of giving birth. Kriekle's video, originally commissioned for "Survivors, In Search of a Voice: The Art of Courage", is titled *If I Were to Need a Mastectomy...* It is a poignant piece and, for some, may be difficult to watch but due to Kriekle's compassionate nature and video acumen, it is a heartening experience as it encourages hope while demystifying a delicate subject.

Kriekle explains in the catalogue that accompanied the original exhibition. "On the issue of breast cancer, it is a table of contents. As we gather around this cancerous table of chance, each of us becomes a player, either as spectator or as a participant. What are the odds?"

With the cult of the breast growing in numbers and size as implants have become a more common cosmetic choice, the shape of a woman and the glory of her breasts are as ever, a cause for wonder. The loss of a breast due to cancer is as traumatic for the self esteem as it can be for the physical well being of the woman. Breast cancer research has made the diagnostic process and the subsequent examinations, biopsies and surgery less intrusive and painful but the subject itself, particular to women, continues to stymie the afflicted and provoke concern. It is more than a worthy subject for cultural research and subsequent interpretation. Kriekle's take on the matter touches the heart.



If I were to Need a Mastectomy, 1994-Video, approx. 5 minutes

## Julie Oakes

WWW.WOMEN

Existentialism teaches that experience is always modified in the telling; consequently, we are surrounded by fiction. Australian Aborigines value "the dreaming" over a fixed sense of reality and enjoy a multi-layered perception in which identity and objecthood are flexible.

Julie Oakes's exhibition "Conscientious Perversity" is a rich autobiographical narrative that is laden with metaphor. This is the last element in Oakes's "Human Sacrifice" trilogy (comprising "The Quercia Stories," "The Revolving Door" and "Conscientious Perversity"), which draws on libertine adventures and different ways of exploring sexuality as a woman. The main characters are the siblings Juliette and Justine Quercia, alter egos of the author borrowed from the Marquis de Sade. Juliette serves as a foil for the more libidinous Justine.

Although the works have titles corresponding to chapters in a book by Oakes, they are not strictly illustrative. Indeed, the writing often seems painterly, with expressive metaphors piled up like vehicles in a traffic jam. The artwork is metaphysical and packed with humorous undercurrents that are manifested through cartoonish simplification. Thus the hapless donkey held upside down for a sex act in the colourful story of an incident in a Mexican bar makes numerous appearances. The repeated appearance of the artist's trademark orange bob hairstyle (even worn by the donkey in Ludicrous Strangeness) alerts us to the fact that these are self-portraits.

There is a beguiling menace in these works, like a female spider about to devour her mate in the act of making love. A delicate, feminine sensuality is embedded in the web of imagery with the inclusion of lingerie or exposed limbs. Clairvoyant third eyes peer through various orifices and negative spaces, observing the voyeur. Hilarious silhouettes burst into life and dash across the works' surfaces, frantically trying to lose clothing. Carcasses of dead animals become energized again.

The fervid atmosphere is passed on to the viewer, giving one the sensation of entering a whirling mass of imagery. It is an illusion, however; the works are disciplined, with certain forms echoing throughout. Oakes uses dissonance: virulent crimson tones abut oranges and maroons with an occasional startling blue. The inversions of scale conjure a scene reminiscent of Dante's Inferno.

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At The Stake, charcoal and ink on paper, 60" X 44", 2006

## **Allyson Mitchell**

WWW.WOMEN

Little girls are surrounded by the pink fuzziness of stuffed animals. Bedded down with them, they ritualistically line their cute furry bodies up in an order that works before closing their eyes, now safe to sleep. Carrying them around like little babies, dressing them up, combing their hair and grooming their inanimate bodies, they can become closer than real friends, a quietly sympathetic and non-judgemental ear for secrets yearnings. Many women, grown and way past puberty, still decorate their beds, armchairs and dressers with dolls and cuddly animal surrogates that range from pussy cats, through the more seemingly masculine teddies and puppies to the grand queen of the beasts - plush, and often royally expensive, lions and tigers. They are the first fetish objects of childhood. They signify a more innocent hierarchy of attachment than the adult has to contend with as life becomes complex and rife with the pressures of social awareness and emotional attachments.

The magic of the myth of the Sasquatch is partially embodied in the unattainable. 'Sasquatch' even roams outside of the net of spell check. Never verified as a 'real' animal, rumoured to be shy yet big (and usually homely), they trudge the woods, staying clear of the misguided attention of humans. They are hairy mammals, elusive and unable to be captured, even on film although there are many claims to their virtual existence. Allyson Mitchell has placed her own version of their physicality on the bulky beast giving them a face, a sense of warmth and endearment. In claiming the responsibility of having captured the sasquatch, she has also proclaimed discovery. The sasquatch is female! Much like the Amazons, her sasquatch has no need for men. They have figured out the secret of self-love and in doing so have established a strong self esteem. No need for the interaction with the more polluted tribes of human descent, they roam the same planet, free of technological constraints, not experiencing the discontents of modernity but instead enjoying the enlightened moments of females interacting with females. The smaller pieces are sasquatch familiars who live near and around the large giantesses. When they are in the same space together it is unclear who is protecting whom - the giant "hideous" monsters or the tiny feminized pink and more domesticated familiars. This is the narrative that speaks from the fuzz clad bodies of Mitchell's sculptures. She has managed to provoke a welling up of compassion for her sculptures. Mitchell has reclaimed cute, sweet, soft, and even pink all in a sweeping gesture of acceptance.



Helena, 2005/06-Mixed media sculpture-Length 34.5" x Width 11" x Height 10.5"

Her statement is a lesbian propagation of the sensibility of identification of women towards women. She proclaims the light side of the mysterious animal nature of the female. Mitchell's work takes the proactive stance of gay rights into an arena where the distancing of myths is brought closer in order to comprehend the drama unfolding between the sexes, as well as between the animal and the human. And through the use of synthetic plush and fake furs, she is also bridging the narrowing gap between art and popular culture.

## **Carolee Schneemann**

WWW.WOMEN

The words 'risky' and 'brave' are often associated with Carolee Schneemann's work. These adjectives poke into the core of the apple, that forbidden fruit that Eve first offered to Adam, the apple that had the slight perfume of fear to its ester, the sense of a higher authority lurking in the wings, spying on the sex. After all, there were repercussions to the bite; God asked Adam and Eve to leave paradise, an embarrassing scene where shameful, original sin had been committed (with Eve probably weeping and Adam kicking himself for having fallen for her seductive ways). Eve was cast as the temptress for although women might have been socialised to behave otherwise, they're not all sugar and spice. Women can be wild, have a propensity to become hysterical, and possess an intuitive psychic response to unseen forces.

Schneemann began as a painter - always drawing - and yet also underpinning her work with the written word. She emerges just as happenings were coming into being, using her body to draw in as well as mitigate what might have been an even more shocking spectacle had she not been so beautiful. In a time when feminist mores were turning to 'sensible' shoes and unshaven legs, she was riding on Robert Rauschenberg's neck, buff naked, glorious and glamorous.

The history of art has sustained few women artists but those who did surface to float in view alongside the more demonstrative males were exceptional and also in their own way, wild. Artemesia Gentileschi, for instance, took the case of her sexual abuse at the hands of her painting teacher who was also her father's assistant, a man his age - to court. Her subjects were a herald of female emancipation, such as Judith chopping off the head of Holofernes - a brave symbolic act. There were the colorful, exceptional women who lived with the men of the West Bank in Paris and were a vital part of the milieu; Sonia Delauney who married Robert Delauney and Suzanne Valadon, Maurice Utrillo's mother who in 1894 was the first woman painter admitted to the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. A perfectionist, Valadon worked on some of her oil paintings for up to thirteen years, before showing them. There were women working as artists, once the research was done to find them, and Judy Chicago's Dinner Party with her memorial plates to female artists brought a lot of those names to the fore.

Carolee Schneemann speaks of the unspeakable side of women, the un-demure. Interior Scroll performed in 1975 related a conversation between herself and “a happy man, a structuralist filmmaker”. The text was a documentation of irreconcilable inequality between the sexes. She read the narrative from a folded paper that she had inserted into her vagina, drawing it out, inch by inch, her body in an unflattering half crouched position. In the text, she brings to his attention the work that she, herself, had done as a filmmaker. He counters her offering of her credentials by referring to her as a charming woman, “We think of you as a dancer,” is his assessment of her filmmaking efforts. Schneemann's take on the story was brilliant. She drew forth, from her mysterious complex womanhood, the story of an unflinching refusal to see the woman as artist. “He said that we could be friends equally but that we are not artists equally”, she read. Then she read her reply, “We cannot be friends equally and we cannot be artists equally”. The final words that she read (his) “We think of you as a dancer”, spoken as she drew forth the last of the long interior scroll; made it's point.

Meat Joy, with the near naked men and women activating contact improvisations using sausages, paint, fish and raw chickens brings out this same irresistible inclination to tell an intuitive truth. Foucault relates to the idea of daemon; that part of mankind that reveals the chaos within and it is by knowing this daemon that we are able to shed the borrowed manners that come with our social conditioning and truly get to know what we consist of. This is a dangerous idea for it involves an awareness of the boundaries of acceptability and that becomes a personal delineation that might not fall within the realms deemed 'normal'. It is the principal of the avant garde, an advanced group that goes to the outfields of the discipline. Schneemann's work hovers around the outfield, lingers on the borders. It is truly unorthodox and experimental.

Schneemann approached the borders between the human and the animal. She accepted the ardent kisses of her cat over the course of eight years. She filmed the daily kisses of this persistent event producing a time factored photographic grid in which the agency of the pet cat becomes an erotic delirium.

In Terminal Velocity (2001), she structured enlarged photographic sequences of people falling from the twin towers, plunging to their death. Pushing the boundaries, once again, but this time sexuality is not the issue. But the question “What is decent?” is still there. Schneemann has put herself out there. She has not done anything vicariously. She has been there herself, making the plunge with the air singing around her and a “break on through to the other side” awaiting. She has been a brave artist.



Water Light / Water Needle, 1966-2003-Photo, 40 x 60 inches

## Faith Ringgold

WWW.WOMEN

Women of color have had to address an expanded platform in terms of their gender because of the long history of abuse, discrimination and superficial categorizations of their race. There could also be a valid argument that where white women have had to challenge the hierarchical inconsistencies between male and female in order to gain a secure footing in Fine Arts, women of color have had the added challenge of overcoming stereotypical translations of gender that have been perpetuated concerning their particular racial backdrop. All women who have managed to stand at the forefront of the art world are to be applauded but the women of colour who have managed to do the same, deserve a standing ovation. Not only have they had to overcome gender and race prejudice but they have also been operative in bringing people of colour into view. Fine Arts has always been an opportunity to pay tribute to ideas and record history, which can be easily discerned through a quick scan of western art and civilization. But the story of people of color has not been put forward with the same insistency. Faith Ringgold is visually speaking of her people and is filling the spaces denied her people in the books of yore with new and vibrant pages.

With a philanthropic and compassionate personal history of charitable and social actions, she has gained the admiration and respect of those who came in contact with either her or her proxy - her art. She has used both the written word as well as the visual realms to put forward the particular advantages of her African Americanism. Ringgold's sure hand provides a quick graphic read, similar to the clear pop imagery of Warhol, yet it is seated in a different premise. Rather than accelerating a case for the celebration of culture as we live it in the world of popular commodities, Ringgold tells of the cultural specificity of people of color.

The dreadlocks on the woman in "Mama Can Sing" spring from her head like a fountain of glory. She is as black and glamorous as the nightlife of Harlem. Ringgold, herself holds the stature of a queen and, dressed in African styling with her own magnificent head of dreadlocks, she poses a commanding figure. Her regal dignity carries through with soulful energy into her art work. She has become a respected master (gender non-specific), not only as a female artist but also ringing loud and clear with her clarion cry for black women.



Jazz Stories, Mama Can Sing, 2001- Acrylic on paper, 19.5 x 13.5 inches

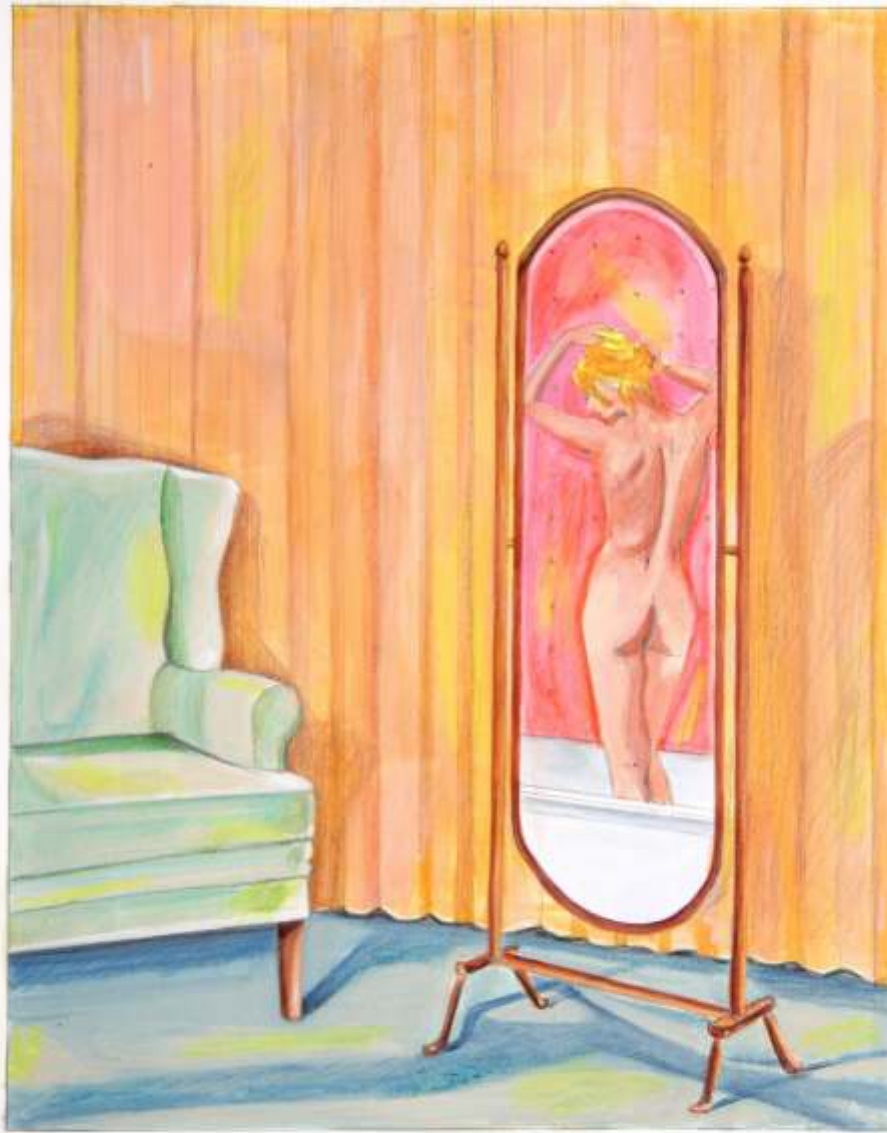
## **Robin Tewes**

WWW.WOMEN

Robin Tewes has been on a dogged pursuit of understanding with a Zen persistence that interprets her research with the simplicity of a Koan. As in a Koan, the original question posed has an element of the nonsensical and yet the answer is an illumination. What makes up the domestic environment? Since the rooms that Robin Tewes draws represent an interior where the majority of North American women spend their days - the furniture is mid-range, even the size seems 'normal' - and noticing that she has drawn and painted these typical spaces for years - what has her search revealed? The pieces speak the answers in the aberrations from normality that occur within the picture frame, like a message read between the lines or a subliminal voice-over.

To have recorded these spaces connotes that she has observed and documented them. Has she invented rooms, or are they rooms remembered where the details are specifically tied to impressions that were large enough to leave a mark on her consciousness? The insignificant details would have faded away so that the import of the room leapt forward and assumed the attention. To read the messages scribed on the walls (or in an instance on a table top) requires an attention to detail. Often the words have been written and then erased as if the significance of the message is not worthy of being viewed or, if it is a visual, the relationship to the environment is tangential as in the ink blot images. A timorous stance has been taken to the intrusive presence. It is revealing and necessary to spend the time reading, for this is not a loudly proclaimed declaration of being. The walls are whispering. What do they whisper? They say that they have forgotten something, they ask why he is always late, they list the groceries and they talk about art. At the same time as the Cy Twombly-like scribble registers, the words themselves communicate the artist's thoughts about her discipline.

Within quiet domestic environments, aesthetically arranged, chosen with a particular eye for order and cleanliness, in the intact, pristine expressions of place - Robin Tewes is firm and exact in her presentation of her world. She turns the potential to be picayune, the nonsensical aspect of her Koan, into a dignified illumination. It is the skew in the picture that heightens the revelation - the scribbled insistent messages, often confused and muddled like the niggles of things lost or a reminder to focus - on art, on love, on anything outside of the perfect pristine, seemingly normal, room.



"I'm a Good Listener"

NOVEMBER 11 |

Philip James 02

I'm a Good Listener, 2002-Gouache on paper-29 x 23 inches

## Betty Tompkins

WWW.WOMEN

Big, strong, aggressive imagery, indecorous subject matter, explicit content - all words that describe a phallic centric orientation. Tompkins redresses a subject, one that had been a specifically male point of view and does justice with a female perspective on the same issues.

Standing up to the possibility of being deemed an 'unwomanly woman', she takes the initiative and directs her gaze and hence her attention upon the act of copulation. Referring to French philosophical writings on the gaze, this is a male attribute. When the object is seen or captured by the gaze, the consummation of the male gaze upon the object takes place.

She chooses a technique that distances herself from a tactile involvement in the rendering. Take the drawings, or paintings, where the mark has been made by stamping a word or a number of words, over and over again so that they form a crosshatching on the pristine white paper and model the subject matter. The word itself - speaking out - is seated firmly within the male realm as it is a didactic, outgoing expression of self, as opposed to the female 'listening' position. On a closer inspection of Tompkin's renditions of this very private, intimate act, the words used to render the figure become clear. It is, in this instance 'cunt' and 'cow' repeatedly stamped so that the words form the pubis and vaginal lips.

Betty Tompkins could be called a feminist philosopher for she has taken on an issue that is not traditionally familiar to women - the close scrutiny and subsequent depiction (blown hugely out of scale) of the sex act. It is an unflinching call to attention. Gustave Courbet's painting *The Origin of the World* made a frank statement that the human species all passed through the woman's sex on their way in to this world. Tompkins traces the origins of the world back further to the pro-creational duality. It is not the woman's genitals alone that are the source of birth. The genital union between the male and the female is the source. Perhaps Courbet was saying that the sight of the female, as the object captured by his gaze, is the provocation for the eventual act of sex that will let loose the sperm and fertilise the egg? Tompkins is explicit. Human life is the result of a grand and momentous moment. And humans also have the extra bonus of experiencing pleasure with no other end in mind than the 'boink' (another Tompkins stamp).

There has been a massive politicisation of the ways we have become accustomed, and allowed to view sex, especially for women who have been historically 'protected' from seeing the sex act. After all, biologically, it is difficult for a woman to see herself having sex without the help of a mirror. Men can have sex and watch.

It took a feisty woman to monumentalise the genitals, using the popular vernacular ('cunt', 'cock', 'fuck') in the titles in place of the clinically correct terminology, and to come up with a handsome product in doing so.



Cunt Grid #6, stamp on paper-14 x 11 inches

## Monika Weiss

WWW.WOMEN

Although there is an invitation to look at the curled body, the identity is not revealed. The presence of humanity is denied, manipulated away from the one who is watching by the artist who had originally extended the invitation to look by placing the image on the paper, within the framework of an exhibition space and the overall context of creating art. This seduction to participate, having been denied the consummation of fully knowing and hence understanding, is much like the dichotomy of the human condition, whereby life is granted with awareness in varying strengths, but the reason for the gift is unexplained. It is the blind spot of Derrida, that understanding in the mind of the existence, but not being able to keep the knowledge and the experience in the field of immediate vision.

Like a wintry day when freezing temperatures lead the inclination to burrow into the warm envelope of hearth and home, the figure wraps upon itself. As in the womb or sleeping in cosy seclusion, the figure turned in upon itself, signals privacy and introversion. Yet the display of the body is extroverted. Weiss has used her corporeality as the basis for her mark making, drawing around her crouched position, tracing the outline of her body. She is realising her shape as she draws, but she cannot see it until she moves and looks back upon the paper. It is this distance from her habitation of the flesh that creates the necessary objectivity towards her being. It is a philosophical perspective, a logical rationality placed upon the immediacy of being present. As if she has managed to step away from her shadow or to rise above her frame in an out-of-body-experience, the artist has been able to 'be' in two places at once - both within her body and viewing it. By inserting the performative, a more modern practice, into the traditional borders of drawing, the representation of the self encompasses the time dimensions - the present, the future life of the piece and the past as she steps away from the active practice where body and mark making have coupled. Rigorously intellectual, the work of Monika Weiss recreates the illusion of omnipotent dimensional manipulations of both time and space as it moves from point to line to the illusion of a third dimensional reality.

Women who use their own bodies as the image within their art expose themselves in a public way while leaving themselves as they inhabit their body. They become open to critical attention and comment. Weiss is not a blatant exhibitionist. She strikes a balance between presence and absence, revelation and concealment, body and mind (as the element exposed), art practice and bodily practice. With one foot in the traditional - she is an accomplished and expressive drawer - she also straddles the river of ideas and stretches the limits of the discipline by drawing with her entire body.



Ular 2, 2007-Graphite, pencil, charcoal, archival glue and found images-39 x 36 inches



## **Revivified, April 3 - April 29, 2008**

It has been a long winter, cold and denying the relief of an irreversible melt. When the smells from the street become pungent and the snow banks piled by ploughs turn grimy from pollution, spring harkens.

Headbones Gallery is hosting spring in the heart of the east end. With floral sprigs, the wonder of the constellations, verdurous sweeping vistas, and the miniscule details of foliage, the rites of spring adorn the walls in paper works, a magnificent painting by Lorne Wagman and creep across the floor in an installation of moss and flying paper by Christian Bernard Singer.



## **Patricia Tobacco Forrester**

Revivified

Watercolour as it allows the cooperation between the white paper and the paint to freshen up the colors can be related to white light as it is passed through a prism and splinters into the full spectrum. In the work of Patricia Tobacco Forrester, the rainbow that infuses nature under the illumination of natural light couples with her adept handling of the medium and brings alive the intricate miracle of plants - designed in aspect, free flowing in arrangement and nourishing the senses with buds, blooms and synergetic renewal.



*First Campaños*, watercolor, 19 x12 inches, 2006

## Wendy Mark

### Ethnic Convergence

Daguerreotypes, invented in 1839, produced images of landscapes that were born in a misty gothic atmosphere and never left the Goethian impulse to wander the deserted hills and pathways. The silver plates treated with iodine were exposed to a mercury vapour and the image appeared. Wendy Mark's mono-prints have risen from the exposure of a plate that has been sensitised by Mark's mystical vision, pressed into a snowy white surface softened to a responsive dampness and then left as an impression on paper. The resulting image sets up a longing for completion and for a spiritual satisfaction that seems just a hint away from a resolution.

Her clouds are other-worldly, made for pondering like the fleeting fluffy airborne droplets that they are - shape shifting to reveal messages from on high. They are clouds above landscapes that bring to mind words that still hold the trace of Old English; 'steppes' or vast grassland, where a brooklet is a 'burn' and a thicket of bushes is a 'copse'. Her work evokes the ghosts of personages of yore and leads the mind to thoughts of the sublime. They soothe with a melancholy list towards homelands missed or subliminal memories from biblical times.

Pantheism, where God is manifest in the physical world, found a reason for the mystery of existence within nature. It is more difficult to associate the materialism born in the industrial age with a greater spirit. But the landscape, with ragged, rough, blousy beauty inspires the mind to wander and turn to thoughts of a philosophical bent. Wendy Mark is a part of the tradition, first appearing in the Italian renaissance when the reason to paint the landscape was in sync with the interest in the generative aspects of nature. From the disadvantage of the modern cement dilemma as we live in concrete cities where the relief of the 'park' is a necessary contrivance to fit our needs for green space - the restful and nourishing qualities of an intimate landscape are even more poignant.

Wendy Marks work, best appreciated as close as a kiss, is like devotion. It is a caress on the cheek from a breath of spring air, soft, welcome and gentle, yet absolutely necessary for survival. Part and partial to the poignancy of her pieces is the contemporary awareness that the earth is in jeopardy and that our ecosystem has, of late, been too often slighted. Mark's work is not didactic. It is suggestive. It is not the whimper as the world ends, but the persuasive seduction of the most basic temptress - mother earth, as she beckons us along her pathways.



The Weather Held Dry, monochromatic print, 4.5 x 5.5 inches, 2000

## **Christian Bernard Singer**

Revivified

Man has exerted his dominion over the earth, carving out roads, digging, shaping, and reinventing paradise in his own image. Too often the interception is abrasive and the earth suffers from the manipulations. Not so with Christian Bernard Singer's thoughtful relationship with nature. As he creates his installations in the natural settings of forest and meadow, under his hand the perfection of nature is further realised as the spotlight of his sensitivity plays up the contours and colors as if he is dressing mother earth in raiments fair in order to show off her graceful figure to full advantage.

A little patch of earth at its best - lush, green, soft, light, pliable, transportable, easily sustainable, beautiful - moss. Floating paper pieces hover like angels or spirits that have gotten away from sweet bodies. Mysteriously suspended like dry leaves momentarily arrested in dreamy falls, they appear to be in the process of a return to mother earth in order to continue to exist in the preordained harmony that is endemic to nature. They are still, hanging in the silence between being and becoming. They are talking in whispers, communicating messages so gentle yet they are heard visually, seen audibly, tasted through the fingers, and smelled through the eyes. The world of Christian Bernard Singer is overwhelmingly poetic. It provokes swoons.

The crisp definition of architectonic space is broken by a visual mirage, a displacement of the unfamiliar upon the objective reality of walls, floors, ceilings and segues between them - the stairs, passageways, corners and portals. The gallery is changed from the expected into the inspired. It is a form of culture shock, an objectification of sensibilities so that the subjective overtakes reasoning and the sensation becomes the prime means of understanding. Singer's installations are like other countries, foreign lands. Things are not as they have been. There are unaccustomed translations of ordinary juxtapositions. It is a 'trippy' feeling much akin to travelling. The installation brings about heightened awareness of place. It is delightful, not jarring, a pleasant surprise akin to eco-tourism.

In Thailand, the Bahamas, Hawaii, and other such exotic places, the outside flows into the inside. A shower can be taken surrounded by flowers, for instance, or food and drink eaten beside mossy embankments. The transition between the dwelling and the environment, the interior and the exterior is easily made. The weather is warm. There is no need to box in. Christian Bernard Singer helps us out in our Northern clime and forces the issue by bringing the mossy side into the gallery. After a long winter, the relief of the intrusion is as rich as verdi-gris on copper and as refreshing as a walk up a magic viridian staircase in a midsummer night's dream.



Cosmogony, living mosses, earth, hand-cast abaca paper; dimensions: various, 2003

## Betty Tompkins

### Revivified

Did the frolic come first or the spring in which to frolic? In Tompkins' impressionist paintings on photographic images, women from the 30's and 40's saucily act out in a frothy, leafy, grassy, effulgent playground, like nymphs in a naturalist boudoir.

In contrasting colors, where the red next to green or fuchsia beside puce is as vibrant as a gift wrapped with the freshness of nature; Betty Tompkins' pin-ups from the past cavort in the outdoors. Like a flurry of covert caresses between viridian landscapes and scantily clad figures, tantalizing fleshy hues are discretely muted by the photographic gradations from white to black as they lay in the arms of pastel bushiness. That the underwear is dated, and the poses comparatively innocent, almost 'delicate'; creates an allure that is missing from the inundation of graphic pornographic imagery that the twenty-first century is a party to. This subtle historical distancing of skin upon skin is further separated from immediate grasp by the cushioning grass, flowers or reflective water that frames in a context that lends a new narrative to the pose. The partially clothed, semi-nude and naked are flimsily focused and mesmerized in self absorption, either in mutual frolic or nymphatically alone.

There's a surrealistic movie-scene reminiscent of Bonny and Clyde in the aspect of a vintage car supporting the roadside assignations of a kissing couple, exposed to a kneeling brazen goddess perched slightly atop of the grass. The fully clothed figure in gloves (an aunt, a mother?) about to burst in on the fondling of the two women carries a story line past the immediate sensual encounter and into the past or future tense. The lounging young man on the tiger throne who contemplates the buttocks of the unknown bather is relaxed in his perusal of the possibilities before him. Throughout the series, there is an innocent yet ominous aura, like the pleasant anticipation of a treat yet to be delivered. Seduction is in play. The end is assured and the pace slows down to a natural rhythm.

Part of the sensual enjoyment is in the appraisal of Tompkins' facile rendering of the environment. Similar to the effect of the impressionist's paintings, her light strokes indicate a soft rustling movement like air as it flows through grasses and leaves, rippling the water and sending the sweet smells of spring forth to the awakening nostrils of reclining lovers. These are lush, satisfying paintings that quench unrealized thirsts and drench the senses in loveliness. The tableaux of flirtatious foreplay are reminiscent of Greek Goddesses cavorting before the Gods came to couple with them or Monet's garden when pretty cheekiness was left alone to explore delightful delectatto.



Peep Show, oil crayon on 1/2 tone, 8.5x14 inches, 1998

## **John Torreano**

Revivified

As the weather softens and the night sky in all of its glory is once again pondered without sufferance from the tempests, the contemplation of the outer spaces places man in his infinitesimal place in the supreme order of cosmic events. Torreano's water colors of super novas, constellations and galactic phenomena link outwards but originate from the mind. With fictitious astronomy that read as exciting as abstract expressionism, many of these works are studies for immense paintings.

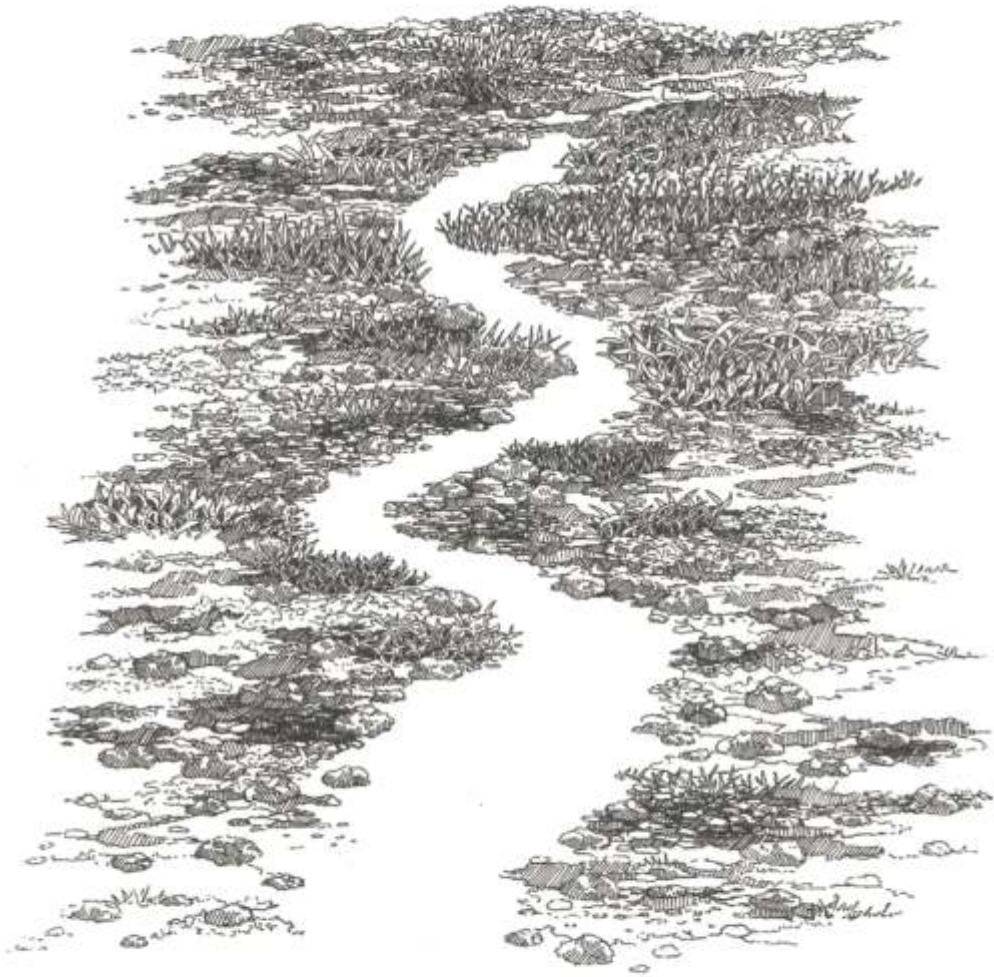


Exploding Galaxy, watercolour, ink, charcoal on paper, 8.5x11 inches, 2007

## **Kathleen Vance**

Revivified

Nature is an overwhelming myriad of details with millions of small parts that add up to an incomprehensible whole if the scope and magnificence is really considered. Kathleen Vance's pen and ink drawings painstakingly regard the abundance. They are the evidence of time taken to stop and look. They are the sublime realisations of attention spent, of research duly executed and of care given through a dextrous facility in order to communicate her observations.



Running Stream, ink on paper , 11x14 inches, 2007

## Lorne Wagman

Revivified

Lorne Wagman hooks into the Group of Seven with a psychedelic twist of heightened awareness. Their weightier hand and sense of the rugged outdoors is softened by his painterly veneer of specific enrapture. As he focuses on the delicate splendour of repetition, the moment is brought alive and transferred onto the canvas or paper with a slip-sliding ease that in turn permits an observance of equal ease. The experience is akin to a naturalist's innocence, a lack of self consciousness that allows for an authentic and hence believable commune with nature. A Wagman painting allows a respite for the world weary, a rest from the stress of social obligations and financial worry. The work is not 'work' to look at, but leisure time at its best. Although the evidence of 'work' is extreme the time needed to record each leaf, twig, bark encrusted stump or lichenous, mossy bank is palpable - the result is loose and free like a glide down a slope where the drifts buoy to achieve an absolute letting go of the tension that is endemic in modern living.

Lorne Wagman's studio is in an outbuilding of a field stone house in the woods, where flocks of sparrows have been seen flying from the windows, where the inside and the outside live in harmonious simpatico and where Wagman paints and draws every day with the rhythm of one who has mastered the hours and converted the quotidian into a comfortable way of being between man and nature. "The humble shall inherit the earth." There are many biblical notions in this work for who but one who is sufficiently humble to listen and look would be granted the particular powers of observation to discern between blades or leaves or branches? With the rigor of a monk-like discipline and unwavering focus, Wagman conducts his practice in sync with his lifestyle and does indeed inherit great riches - the talent to communicate the concerns of the creator through his art.

The work is informed - not a primitive take on the immediate but rich in art historical references that range from the immersion of Courbet to the overall flat patterning of Chinese landscape painting. The work is disciplined and rigorous yet sensuous and flowing. The colors are lush or hushed or vibrant and moving. The principle impression is one of awe created by the recognition that Wagman is a master painter. He has the ability to use paint so that it remains paint and yet suggests otherwise, as in the painting *The Rites of Spring*. There is a flattened picture plain as if the perspective has been presented as a cross section



Rock with Lichens, watercolour on paper, 18" x 24", 2004

and in doing so has become heightened in vivacity. The lushness of paint and the practice of moving it around on a canvas is present yet so are the plants and the leaves and the stump towering like a magic castle.

Lorne double-lines the minuscule and hence it assumes a greater significance. A plant is outlined rather than rendered with a singular line. There is the memory of a hymn - "God sees the little sparrows fall" - in the renderings for there is equanimity in place. Whether it is a weed, rock or cloying lichen, each is treated like an individual. These are crowds of portraits with the identity of each element as important as the mass. Each patch is different from the next attesting to the attention paid in the divine creation.

It requires the dedication of close encounters to understand and record the squiggles and squirms of the bush. With the sensitive lines of a competent draftsman, Lorne Wagman passes over to those not calm enough to spend the time observing the comings and goings of nature or to those not brave enough to endure the outdoor distractions of weather - a complex eco system where weeds have a spot as relevant as death and trees become symbols for the sublime.

## **Warnings - Scott P. Ellis, May 1 - May 31, 2007**

The jarring imagery in Scott P. Ellis' constructed photographs and collages have the power to provoke memories relating to atrocities from current and historical events. From the point of view of artist as interpreter, these works make associations to corporate, religious and political corruption. Ellis delivers a strong visual punch in this exhibition of photos created during the radical Montreal punk scene of the 90's along with current intricate collages born of mass media hyperbole.

Collage artist Scott P. Ellis was born in Colborne, Ontario, 1970. Scott started visually exploring the underground and punk rock scenes using photography in Montreal in the early nineties. The staged photographic work presented a visually challenging message directed at the perverted abuse of power in religious and corporate environments.



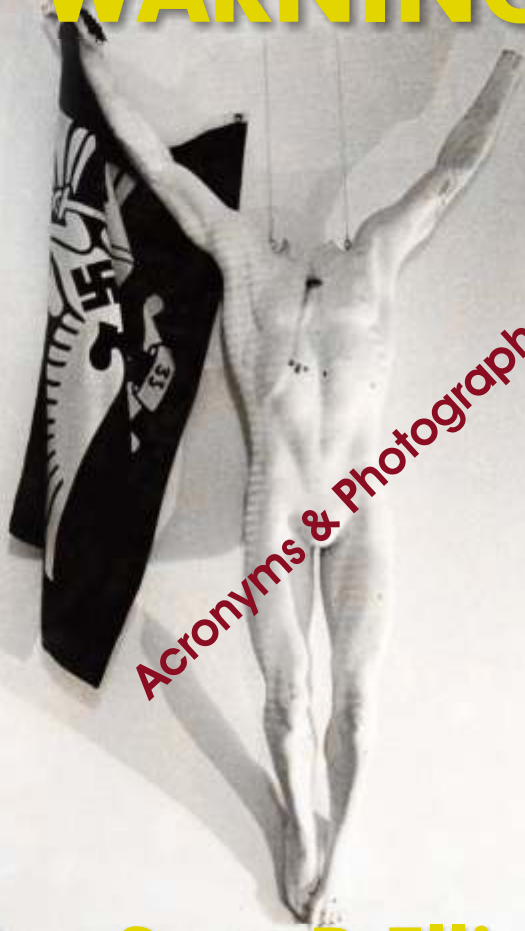
## **Scott P. Ellis**

### Power & Corruption Unhinged

Anacreon was a Greek writer of love poems and drinking songs. The loosening of the tongue that occurs within the inebriated state is much like the conversion from dictionary definition to the creation of an acronym. The 'word' already exists with a secure wholesomeness and status within the English language and yet from the letters that spell the word, an implied definition can be found. The potential to slant the new definition to one's own point of view, much like the innuendos of drinking songs, grants to the chosen vocabulary a character in line with the author of the acronym. When the author is Scott Ellis, with a head full of verbiage built from a conflagration of media and sociological research - the resulting acronyms harken to a broad spectrum of issues. The 'Ellis syndrome' is at play in this word game. With a biting wit and a searing cultural commentary, the new combinations of words cut to the quick.

Much like Ellis' no-holds-barred wrestling with words, the photographs from the "Corruption & Power" series also strike a bacchanalian chord. With the unrestricted freedom of Roman decadence, messy unruliness couples with eroticism. Subject matter ranging from religion through politics to the ever ominous police state sheds propriety and dances upon the tables with garters unhinged and blouses off.

# WARNINGS



*Acronyms & Photographs*

**Scott P. Ellis**



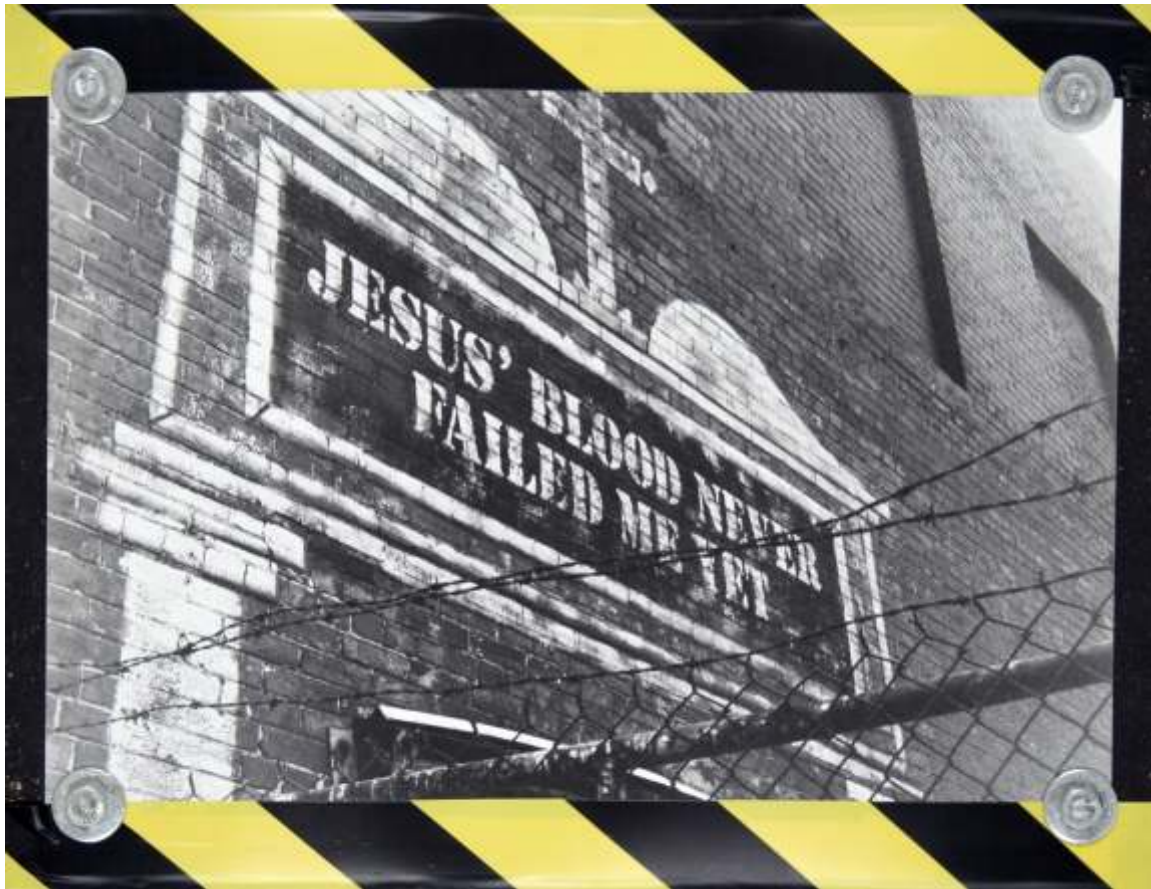
# Convenience Of Power



Barbarians With Ties On - photograph & mixed media, 16x20 inches, 1996



**G**enius  
**O**rderly  
**D**irection



Self Titled - photograph & mixed media, 16x20 inches, 1994



**Justifiable  
Apprehension  
In  
Law**



Groping For Desire III - photograph & mixed media, 16x20 inches, 1996



# Yearning Exploiting Society



Keeping The Spirit Alive - photograph & mixed media, 16x20 inches, 1994





How To Build An Empire, collage on panel, 36x48 inches, 2007



## **Robert Farmer - 10 Cent Hot Dogs, June 5 - June 28, 2008**

Toronto visual artist, Robert Farmer, steps up his work and delivers an exiting body of new paintings at Headbones Gallery commencing Thursday, June 5, 2008. Aptly titled, **10 Cent Hot Dogs** fits Farmer's surreal carnival-esque pop style paintings with a turn of the century faux finished feel. With his cotton candy palette and pop social messages, humour and spectacle prevail. Bring a roll of dimes and join Robert Farmer and Headbones Gallery for 'real' 10 Cent Hot Dogs in the alley during the opening reception. The generous sponsor for the hot dogs wishes to remain anonymous.



## **Robert Farmer**

### 10 Cent Hot Dogs

Robert Farmer is a modern day surrealist with a pop bent. As inundated as we are with visual imagery, and especially in the age of aggressive advertising, it is not surprising that the information that we believe we are receiving when we 'see' is not the true long and short of it. There were rumours (justified) circulating that planted a creeping suspicion in the mind of the viewing public that they were being subliminally affected by messages imbedded in the apparent, messages that floated behind the screen or beneath the surface. It is with surreptitious objective that Farmer lays down his ideas, seduces and snatches our trust. On the surface, it all looks so nice and sweet. The colors are happy with shades of innocence in the pastels and tones of childhood in the cartoon-like manifestations. The paintings seem fit for a small child's bed time in a pleasing nighty-night room with a candy-coloured story book. The paintings draw us in, just like advertisements for junk food. There is a concealment of pertinent facts that in reality nullifies the promise that the visual seemingly was granting. Numerous examples come to mind.

The overall patterns of bunnies for instance, appear to be an utterly benign image. No one will back away from their innocent allure on first confronting the work. The background has bled through and the bedroom has been overrun with copulating bunnies. The wet dreams of the innocent have become part of the wallpaper - almost unnoticeable. The overall design made by the shadowed pink and blue clad carousers forms an abstract lacy web over the surface of the aged paper and lulls the awareness of the permutations into a comforted sense of quiet decency. A closer look steps up the energy as the bunny bodies, in their imaginative positions, exhibit human tendencies - for the animal world doesn't employ the props and playthings that these bunnies do. The bunnies at one time were merely witnesses to the madcap world of Robert Farmer. Their references more naïve, they had sat at tea parties in the company of baby faced guests, marvelled at the hot dog served for the last supper or been present, and perhaps in collusion, when the teddy bear humped the pussy cat. More than one bunny has lost its head over the strange state of affairs, but never before have they appeared with such fornicating force - crowds of bunnies getting it on with an overall frantic feeling of "What are those bunnies up to?!"

There is a formlessness to their bodies that belies the sexuality being enacted. Like androgynous figurines, they appear to be made of a malleable substance similar to bubble

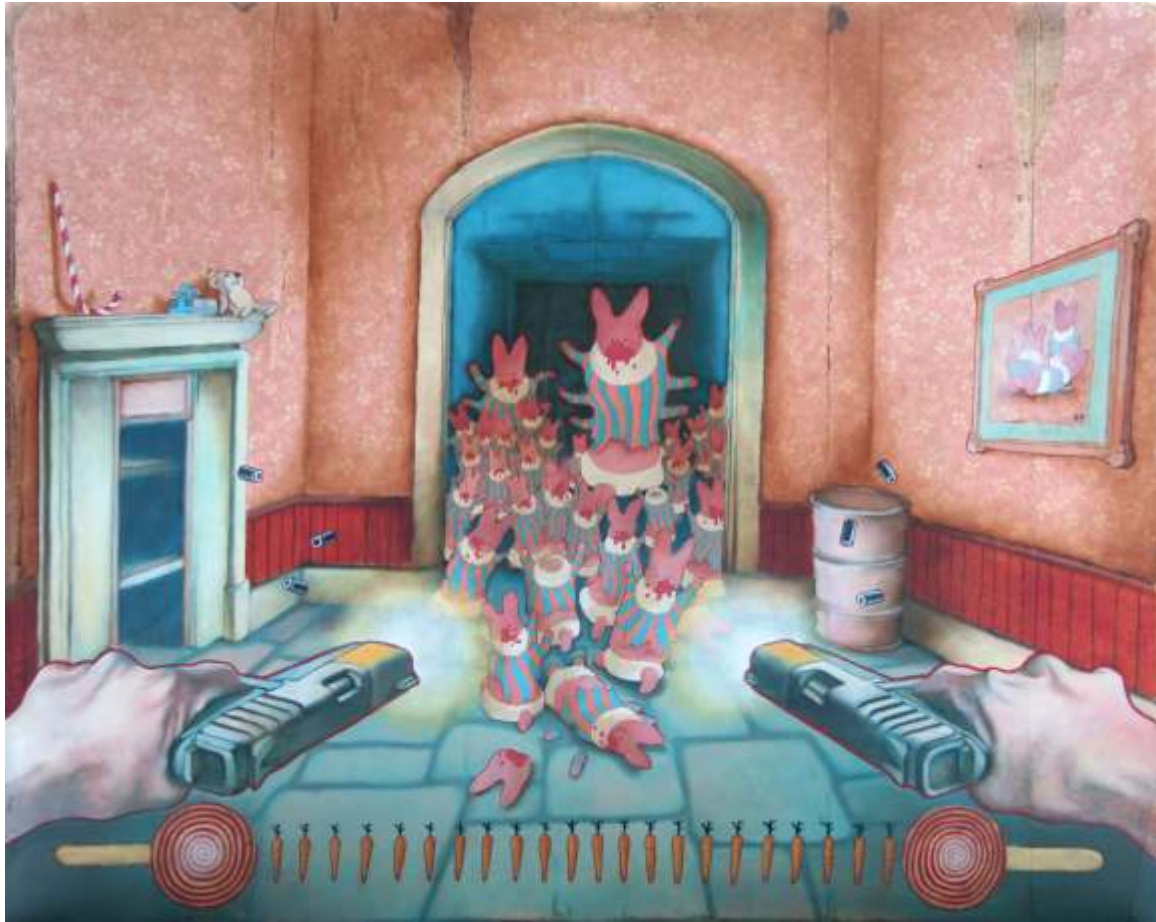


the shapes of things to come IV, oil on wallpaper on panel, 30x22 inches, 2008

gum. Their shapeless clothes recall gum wrappers and the overall color scheme of pink (for a girl) and blue (for a boy) reiterate the hermaphroditic allusion. Robert throws in accents of other characters such as a snowman in a cowboy hat, a gay reference to the archetype of a queer cowboy hooker. Since he has carrots serving as dildos, the erect nose of the blue snowman, launched into an upturned bunny body, furthers the reckless atmosphere of wild orgiastic abandon. Cavorting with the glee of propagating and adding twists of bondage to the naughtiness, Robert Farmer's bouncing characters play out their sexual fantasies against a backdrop of delicate wallpaper and within their lacy layout they appear as harmless, delightful and seductive as safe sex.

The paintings using hot dogs also use subreption as a ploy. The hot dog is depicted with a nostalgic flare. It is the good ol' hot dog, the ten-cent hot dog before food additives and carcinogenic fillers. It is the hot dog sold on the corner by a paternal vendor with a push cart, wearing an old straw hat and standing under a candy striped awning. It is a visual vocabulary invested with belief, old fashioned and not yet jaded by modern times. The same can be said for the ice cream cones. Farmer's ice cream looks as if it was made in a wooden ice cream maker, with cream, sugar, strawberries and ice ground down from that rare commodity on a hot day before refrigeration, when the ice truck delivered to the neighbourhood and an ice pick was better known as a utilitarian tool than a murder weapon. Robert Farmer's ice cream is pre-petroleum products, before the occult manipulations of recipe makers vying for a grosser profit transformed a special reward for good behaviour into a habit. Farmer tells the tale. He tattles, in fact, on the bad guys. He points out the obvious that has been obfuscated beyond recognition. He shows us that children are fat and ill tempered, that the Last Supper has become a giant hot dog, and that bunnies are fluffy sex maniacs.

The redeeming factor in all of this clothed exposure, this posturing of promises, is that the art piece, the work itself is actually 'quite nice'. Although we are an overweight, unhealthy society, it's not all that bad if we can gently prod ourselves on to a better position. There is still time to relegate the hot dog to the ten cent past. Above all, Farmer cautions against depression at the state of affairs. His tongue in cheek lyricism is palatable and we can take our medicine as he's mixed it - within an emulsion of sugar and spice and all things nice.



zombunnyocalypse, oil on wallpaper on panel, 24x30 inches, 2008



git 1 in ya, oil on paper on panel, 24x48 inches, 2008



crackerjacker, oil on paper on panel, 48x48 inches, 2006



Frankenstein, oil on paper on panel , 20x20 inches, 2008



Corndog, oil on paper on panel, 20x20 inches, 2008



Vienna sausage monster, oil on paper on panel, 20x20 inches, 2008

**Traveling Drawers - Ashpa Naira, BC, July 19 - August 7, 2008**

Ashpa Naira Gallery will be hosting works on paper from Headbones' Drawers along with new sculptures by Stephan Bircher.





**Headbones Gallery Summer Guest Curator: Ninette Gyorody**

Studio  
Nine  
Gallery

**Process: Mixed Media**

Exhibition of recent works by  
five emerging Toronto artists  
Curator - Ninette Gyorody

**July 4 - August 3, 2008**

Catherine Vamvakas Lay  
Sonja Hidas  
Erin Vincent  
Kim Dayman  
Hali St. Louis

## **Process: Mixed Media**

Catherine Vamvakas Lay, Sonja Hidas, Erin Vincent, Kim Dayman, Hali St. Louis

The meaning of the word *process* insinuates a continuous action or a series of changes that take place in a definite manner. The five artists represented in this exhibition have gone through an organic process to achieve results that intrigue and continue to serve as inspiration in further developing their process.

Catherine Vamvakas Lay, originally a glass blower, was drawn to the softness and malleability unique to fibres and textiles. She is intrigued by transformation and the effects of that transformation on a static material into something delicate and exquisite.

Sonja Hidas has a unique vision for beautifying what we would undoubtedly consider ugly. She works at reinterpreting form to suspend the viewer in a moment of reflection.

Erin Vincent revivifies the past through her very personal, enshrined homages. The past provides both inspiration for her recollections and her creations through found objects arranged into unique assemblages.

Kim Dayman explores the beauty of material design and reinterprets traditions. By looking at her matrilineal heirlooms, she seeks to recreate a touching tribute to femininity and femaleness.

Hali St. Louis' colour palette and painterly application of watercolours and dyes evoke a sense of depth that relates to the infinite texture of a piece of silk. Working her surfaces in several layers, she creates a sense of depth in her work to evoke such sentiments as hope, despair, and celebration.

The concept of process is innately understood as these artists continue to evolve, develop, reinterpret, and reinvent. As the viewer, we are the receptacle for their evolving creations.

Ninette Gyorody  
*Curator*

Catherine Vamvakas Lay  
Sonja Hidas  
Erin Vincent  
Kim Dayman  
Hali St. Louis

## **Catherine Vamvakas Lay**

Born in Crete, Greece, Catherine Vamvakas Lay is a Canadian citizen who lives and works in Toronto, Canada. She initially obtained a degree in Administrative Studies from York University and worked in the manufacturing industry at the capacity of an administrative assistant. At a later date she returned to York University for a degree in the Fine Arts Program (Honour's degree). She specialized in sculpture, was a Member of the Dean's Honour Roll and was a Magna Cum Laude graduate.

From the early times as a student to this date, Catherine's main focus has been the translation and definition of varied forms of transformation. To pursue these concepts further, she decided that glass would be the ideal material to study. As a result, shortly after graduating from York University, she enrolled in Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning where she obtained a Diploma in Glass. Her additional training involves numerous courses and workshops held in Canada and the United States.

Since her student days, Catherine has exhibited extensively and received several honours and awards. The most significant award was the receipt of a full time residency at Harbourfront centre, glass studio, for three years. She is also a recipient of grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. Currently, she is a past resident at the Living Arts Centre in Mississauga. In other related activities she has served as a jury member for the selection committee of Glendon Art Gallery, as a curator for an exhibition on Printed Works at York University, and as a glass blowing and sand casting instructor at Harbourfront centre and the Living Arts Centre in Mississauga.

In her work, Catherine strives to connect the individual with the elemental forces of our material and spiritual world. Her work is inspired by our transforming nature and symbols.

Catherine has exhibited in Canada, including Glendon Gallery, Toronto, The Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, Waterloo (twice), Bata Shoe Museum, Toronto, The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, Bowmanville, Toronto Pearson International Airport, and several times at Harbourfront centre, Toronto. She has also exhibited in the United States (New York, Kentucky, Illinois, and Florida), The Netherlands (Amsterdam) and Korea (Cheongju -- receiving honourable mention in its international competition). Her work is in collections.



**The Right Thing To Do**

22.5 cm x 22.5 cm x 5 cm

kiln cast crystal, enamel paint, hand embroidered cloth

## **Sonja Hidas**

My work is a study of being in silence and space, a meditation where identity dissolves and the barriers that separate humankind disappear. On my canvases the objective image is released and reconnected with nature. The viewer is led beyond the limitations of cultural differences and the vast distances that divide societies.

The aim is to connect the audience to life by lifting the viewer, suspending them in moment of reflection. My goal is to heighten awareness, leading the viewer to see their own connection or disconnection to the passage of time. The intent is to express a quiet moment of reflection regardless of the differences in race, religion, sex, abilities, to connect to the present moment.



**MMM Blue**  
20x30 inches  
Photograph

## **Erin Vincent**

Erin Vincent is a Toronto based-artist whose work embodies shrine like imagery with the intent to give homage to the past and present. By reusing discarded family mementos & photographs and incorporating them into secular shrines, forgotten memories are reborn with new interpretation. Vincent is a graduate of the Fine Arts program at the University of Waterloo and received her degree in education from the University of Western Ontario. She spent over four year's abroad working, traveling and focusing on her art. Vincent exhibits her work locally.



**On Mass**  
5.5 x 9.5 x 7.5 inches  
mixed media, 2008

## **Kim Dayman**

Through the use of my own handmade papers, textiles and various print and mixed media I strive to bring attention to the traditional notion of “women's work “. In my re-appropriation of archetypically traditional forms of craft, I tie these processes into contemporary artistic concepts based on female and identity. Recently the subjects within my work have focused more strongly on female rites of passage and tying in the connections to customs, heirlooms and family. I can identify with the re-appropriation of the heirlooms and customs that come hand in hand with weddings and the great importance of your matrilineal heritage during important right of passage in every female's life. Even with the independence of women today there will always be a tie to the legacy of their family and in my work I hope to bring that to the consciousness of the viewer.



**Sew Retro - (detail)**  
8 x 10 inches  
mixed textile assemblage, 2008

## **Hali St. Louis**

An artist with a divergent touch, Hali St. Louis has always found the natural world to be her most powerful creative influence, particularly the gentle grace of plants and flowers. Hali uses this inspiration of nature and colour to create visions of human emotion in distinctive and stunning ways.

Hali uses the deliberate application of colour and shape to communicate to others. Working the surface in several layers, she creates a sense of depth in her work to evoke such sentiments as hope, despair, and celebration. At the same time, her art allows viewers to interpret each vision in their own way. Hali endeavours to create artwork that is cohesive but unique, with each piece telling a different story. It is her belief that she can best achieve this by using the fluidity and grace of less predictable media, such as watercolour, fabric dyes and metallic ink.

Although initially interested in pursuing a career in architecture and interior design, she discovered her passion for hands-on design and decided to complete her undergraduate studies at the Ontario College of Art and Design, where she majored in textile arts. Furthering her desire to focus on colour and shape, she has fearlessly experimented with various techniques to express different moods and experiences, merging her skills in textile art and traditional painting.



**Untitled**  
24 x 36 inches  
watercolour, gouache, metallic ink, 2007



# Studio Nine Gallery

## **Embodiment:**

Exhibition of works by five Toronto artists  
Curator - Ninette Gyorody

**August 5 - August 31, 2008**

Paula Vandermey  
Brian Donnelly  
Boo  
Irina Dascalu  
Tara Gilchrist

## Embody

Paula Vandermey, Brian Donnelly, Boo, Irina Dascalu, Tara Gilchrist

To embody: to become, to behold, to be seen. Our corporeality defines our physical existence in this world and five contemporary artists visualize this concept. How do we see ourselves and how does this reflect in what we create? The works in this exhibition are figurative in nature, but are far removed from any traditionalist style.

Paula Vandermey's hot cast glass sculptures exemplify her fascination with people and how their souls are rooted in their physicality. Paula's use of textures and form capture a strength and energy that are even more spectacular when considering the delicate nature of her medium.

Brian Donnelly envisions the human form in a surrealist fashion. Brian's humour is evident in his juxtaposition of figures, whether human or animalistic.

Boo's maximal paintings filled with infinite detail and embellishments reflect upon the "girl" fascinated by "boys" and their spaces. Her expressionistic style highlights her interest in bath houses and gay dungeons.

Irina Dascalu, academically trained, reinterprets the traditional portrait through her use of bold colour and painterly application. Finding beauty in soulless mannequins, her artist's touch has breathed life, weight, and emotion into the figure.

Tara Gilchrist invites us to be voyeurs by peering into the holes of her blown glass pinhole cameras. Feeling a bit naughty, we catch beauties in their private spaces as they act upon their preparations unawares.

Simply put, the body fascinates. We are driven by the need to know how these tangible, imagined bodies feel. Through humour and earnest investigation, these artists have captured the essence of the soul and how those souls are embodied.

Ninette Gyorody  
*Curator*

Paula Vandermey  
Brian Donnelly  
Boo  
Irina Dascalu  
Tara Gilchrist

## **Paula Vandermey**

I find the creative complexity that exists in the relationship between the human form and the natural world to be a constant source of wonder and inspiration for me.

The body is both an intricate form and an alluring enigma. I find my own transformation and creative journey is taking me into unknown parallels. As I continue to develop my own self-awareness through personal reflection on the known past and unknown future, I aspire to capture this process in my work.

I work with hot cast glass and a variety of other materials. By using variations in texture, I am able to convey the contrasts between strength and fragility, form and frame. I strive to capture the freedom, energy, and complexity inherent in the human form and its relationship to the world in which we live.



**Matilda's Embers**  
sand cast and hot sculpted glass

## **Brian Donnelly**

I try to maintain a sense of honesty as well as a sense of humor within my work. These aspects joint with an interest in the analysis of art and art culture have been the primary ingredients through the majority of my work since my interest in representational painting grew to become my main focus. These elements allow me to invite my viewer to look outside the two-dimensional plane, and consider the context of the work, as well as the process involved in the completion of work. In doing so I blur the line between painting the verb and painting the noun.

With these mechanisms in place I aim to create an open dialogue between the work and the audience, as well as to better explore my medium and its impact.



**Scatter**  
48 x 72 inches  
oil on canvas, 2006

## Boo

The best way to describe my work would be "maximal painting". I spend many months on each large scale mural using a crazy amount of detail. I like flashy items like rhinestones, glitter, bingo chips, you name it, rubber balls cut in half, screen printed patches, pieces of my old acrylic palettes.

I'm a girl but my paintings fantasize of secret "boys only" zones, like gay dungeons and bath houses. Most of my new paintings depict males: skaters, punks, and other fun boys in urban settings.

Some of my painting obsessions also stem from a love of old time Victorian garb, street art and graffiti stuffs, decaying architecture, Austrian expressionist art, Euro trash travels, Roman fountains, techno and rock music.

Basically, I paint and live by the idea of "horror vacui". I feel life is already sterile enough; therefore art should be hyper- exciting and the opposite of minimal. I try to use every color imaginable.

Above all I aim to combat minimal boredom with maximum "horndom".



**Punker Subway Night**  
60 x 72 inches  
mixed media on canvas, 2007

## **Irina Dascalu**

My paintings are about connections, echoes and transformations: old to new, image to image, image to symbol. I use people I know well, with lives that marked mine or people of whom I know nothing.

I enjoy the flexibility of a rediscovered expression. Nine of my portraits speak about the Canadian Photographer Arnaud Maggs as an artist and fellow traveler. The series is, in fact, a thematic replica of his massive montages of photographic portraits.

I feel that, although the portrait as a genre is anchored in the past, it echoes in the present differently and ever so human. Faces of people known or not known to us, barge into our subconscious and desire to speak.

Finally, it is the loneliness of the fabricated world. Aloof silhouettes of mannequins dressed for product advertising, are the counter-points of human presence. They contrast and coexist.

The mannequins are the modern caryatids out of Ancient Greek temples, holding the walls of the shopping malls. They represent subliminally refined temptations, our longing for human perfection, under the deafening noise of the trademark; material consumption in the name of beauty..



**Arnaud Maggs**  
20 x 20 inches  
oil on canvas, 2005

## **Tara Gilchrist**

After completing her photography diploma in her native Montreal, Tara Gilchrist took time to travel and live on the west coast of Canada. It was when she returned east with the intention to study furniture design that she accidentally discovered and fell in love with making glass.

It was when Tara was awarded a summer residency at the Harbourfront Centre in 2005, and had the opportunity to work alongside professional glass artists, that she truly decided that this was the profession for her.

After graduating from Sheridan College Institute of Design and Technology in 2006, Tara spent a year working as a teacher's assistant in the glass studio, trying to help 1st year glass students learn technique as well as design and intent.

Tara has spent the past several years developing a body of work that incorporates her photography, as well as her design skills. Using the new technique of photosensitive glass, used only by a handful of people in the world and other techniques such as murrine, graals, enamels and silk-screens, she attempts to bring a unique twist to simple forms.



**Perspective Series**

Dimensions (including base) L30cm W15cm H52.5cm  
enameled, engraved blown glass



## **Fresh Pop NYC, September 11 - October 25, 2008**

**Billy Copley** has been working with popular imagery from the west coast to New York City, where he was a friend of Andy Warhol. His snappy cartoon-ish style is a fresh take on pop.

**Jesse McCloskey** is the young renegade. He freely emotes, applying a pop consciousness to a New England narrative. The result - fresh pop.

**Ed Giordano**, with humanitarian angst shows the plight of the common man in his most disadvantaged insecurity. With a sculptural technique that relates to the work of George Segal (he had studied with him), he presents the popular dilemma with the freshness of a well placed slap.



## **Billy Copley**

Fresh Pop NYC

In the early days of Pop art, evidence of the artists hand gradually disappeared from art in favour of techniques of mechanical reproduction. This reinforced the concept of the multiple. Individuality was replaced by mass production.

Fifty years later, artists once again crave the authentic self. A one of a kind approach, recognizing the individual. The unique is once again desirable. The more subjective arrangement of images and surface treatment is the fresh take of Billy Copley's recent works.

Working with pre-painted papers, Copley seldom leaves a flat uninterrupted color field. He uses a rich range of colors that are created with patterns, washes and gradations, transmutations layered and collaged so that each area is unique. This also makes for illusions of depth which in turn allows the push and pull of the picture to be activated.

Within each piece there is a maximum of means and a maximizing of the opportunity to present a surface. Rather than trying to convince us that there is a distance from the imagery, Copley acknowledges his engagement in the process and thus encourages the subsequent engagement by the viewer.

Copley melds the abstract and subjective with the discipline of an obsessive, precise aesthetic. With freedom to borrow from kitsch and sentimental rag barrels, he snips, pastes, prints, rubs and paints his way into a new corner, a place of no return for there are so many layers of visuals that the process of looking back to the beginning is indeterminate.

Relishing the creative process, there is a lip-smacking tastiness in the riot of elements, recognized and strange, within each work. Elements balance precariously in a circus ring like juggling balls. While these appear to be happy works, there is also something disquieting about them. They scream for attention much like a child at play. These works however, are mature no matter how loud they scream. Through the Power of visual presence, Copley extracts a varied beauty from the wacky objects and patterns he juxtaposes using styles from hard edge to mottled surfaces, visual treatments that carry braggadocio as if they were developed to wow the viewer.

With a painterly, psychedelic perspective, the foreground competes with the background and the relationship between the visual spaces becomes queered and all the elements fold into each other.



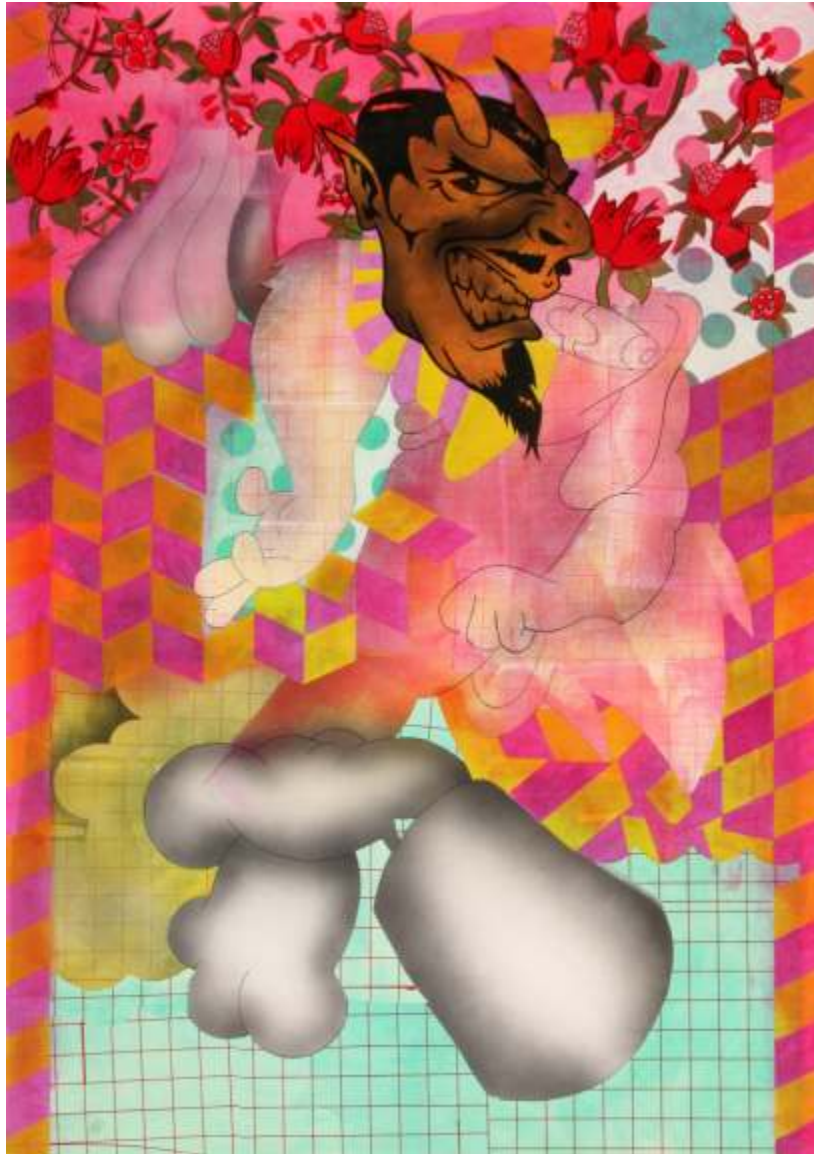
Drink Problem - 2004, Acrylic and rice paper collage on paper, 40 1/2 x 36 inches

Billy Copley seems to be pushing all of the buttons at once and taking us on a ride that brings forth a thrilling if somewhat queasy jubilation. The imagery propels the precepts of earlier pop art into fast-forward (or perhaps fast-reverse) and this results in giddy interesting work which like the wackiness of Saturday morning cartoons is full of adventurous changes.

So with Copley, his use of the familiar - be it pin-up girl, rose, polka dot or grid becomes new again and creates a sensational pop! For those who get their kicks out of art, it's a rush. Copley gives a lot of energy to the work.



Daffy Duck Target Bag - 2004, Acrylic and rice paper collage on paper, 24 x 20 inches



Untitled Devil - 2006, Acrylic and rice paper collage on paper 40 x 29 inches



Dux - 2006, Acrylic and rice paper collage on paper, 41 x 28 inches



Crucifix - 2007, Acrylic and rice paper collage on canvas 62 x 52 inches

## Jesse McCloskey

Fresh Pop NYC

There is a depth to the narrative behind Jesse McCloskey's shocking expletive where the dog/devil and girl/witch act out. The works of Warhol, Lichtenstein, Rauschenberg and Johns used references that came from childhood and adolescence - guns, toys, cartoons, maps, targets, cars, posters, advertisements, televisions and more. Their youth had come from the upswing of consumerism and their interest had been informed by the milieu of a prosperous America. Jesse McCloskey grew up in New England, home of the witch trials, Plymouth Rock and the Mayflower, Pocahontas and then the normal - bad boys, naughty girls and dogs. Mix these essential components in with a Fine Arts education replete with references from art history and there is a clue to McCloskey's secret ingredients.

There is an acknowledgment of suffering, wrong-doing, struggle and righteousness in the squiring of tales such as the one of a little girl of four years was tied, hands to feet, during the Inquisition - that in reality was based on property rights - in order to extract information on the devil. Quite the story to tell. Or Pocahontas spraying graffiti as the puritans wiped out her people. The struggle is not so easy to categorise as being 'renegade' or 'reactionary' once the impetus behind this work is explored. Abhorrent situations can be spellbinding so when he studies historical reference books for content of a nasty nature, gobbles it up and spews it out with a frenetic energy, the witchcraft has begun.

There are stories that are common to cultures and ages that serve as templates for the common narrative of the time: the creation myths, the passion plays, the Greek tragedies, theatre del arte, classical allegories and biblical morality tales. The action within them serves to illustrate the temper of the time. Jesse McCloskey appears to have developed a current common narrative within the consistent imagery of the dog/devil and the girl/witch that he has used in paintings and drawings over a number of years. Are the dog and the girl with their hedonistic foreplay and wild abandon an apt metaphor for a debauched culture or is his work a release for both himself as the perpetrator of the imaginings and for the voyeuristic perspective?

What might have seemed to be solely a flight of fancy into naughty-making, has now gained the credence of a commitment and the story has even progressed to encompass raunchier sexual exploits with more brutal retaliation against the harassment metered out by



The Strangler – 2004, Oil on canvas, 21 x 27 inches

the 'other', be it dog or girl. This work is not as simplistic as the pitching of good against evil, despite the angelic face of the girl or the gradual leaning of the physiognomy of the dog to goat-ishness for the girl gets down and dirty as well. Neither is hanging on to appearances and in fact the girl has been showing her witch-y side, throwing back the liquor with apparent relish and riding the strangled canine hard.

This is permissive abandon, bestiality and bad messy fun. There seems to be no moral amidst the searing colors and libidinous sweeps of paint. From the contemporary awareness of a world with a political climate of masked purposes, incomprehensible corporate power-mongering and materialistic prompts, it's a relief to spend some quality time following the scatological incorrectness of McCloskey's girl and dog.

He is uncovering malaise, recognizing it and placing it in the face of a complacent society with as much aplomb as he can muster with his expressionistic handling of the picture surface. None of the cucumber cool of the early pop guys; he pushes and pulls the surface with vehemence and extracts the energy needed for his un-didactic wake-up call.

Jesse McCloskey is the Red Bull of pop.



Pussy Devil – 2007, Vinyl paint and paper collage on paper, 22 x 30 inches



Devil Girl – 2007, Vinyl paint and paper collage on paper, 50 x 38 inches



Elixir – 2007, Vinyl paint and paper collage on canvas, 48 x 60 inches



Dora Good – 2007, Vinyl paint and paper collage on canvas, 50 x 60 inches

## **Ed Giordano Jr.**

Fresh Pop NYC

The acknowledgement of superficiality that the pop pioneers purported was punctuated by the poignancy of works by George Segal and Edward Kienholz. Both eschewed the religiosity towards materials that had come before them by using ordinary plaster as the end result rather than a step in the process of sculpting. They took found objects and set the context. They addressed topics that were psychological and they looked at contemporary consumerist orientation as the root of dysfunction. 'Loneliness' was not just a word in a pop song but the dripping faucet that was draining the resources from a morally depleted society.

Giordano had studied with Segal and the influence is felt. But he has distilled the final product, bringing the angst to its most intoxicating level and the plaster personifications cloy with a chalky under taste like the suspicious milky drink in Rosemary's baby served as an annunciation with a slightly demonic gene.

Ed Giordano's prognosis is bleak. His typical man seems unable to move off of his solitary and compromised perch. He is imprisoned in words, covered by statistics, pinioned by the message of modernity rather than set free by the fictionalization of his possibilities. There is no room to soar upwards and pursue the divine quest of finding himself. The 'overman' is someone else. This sad and stymied 'ordinary guy' is not going anywhere. This is the pith of the sorry matter and with true psychological zeitgeist the pieces transcend intrinsic commonality through the monumental truth of angst. By confronting the locked position of this vision of man, the opposite is invoked - freedom and all of it's liberating facets.

The diminutive size and rough rendering points a way around the grand philosophical mysteries without having to be overwhelmed by the impossibility of understanding. The more likely fault - missing the mark - looses the stigmata of ignorance. The potential for expressing the human condition has been realised in these unassuming figures. They pose no threat upon our need to stay at least somewhat comfortable within our sentience. In fact, they grant a reverse dignity to our common plight by vesting humility with a presence, a powerful sculptural identity.

Ed Giordano's sculpture opens a door to compassion. It is void of arrogance and admits no challenge. It exists with a stubborn right to be blindly depressed. We feel sorry that



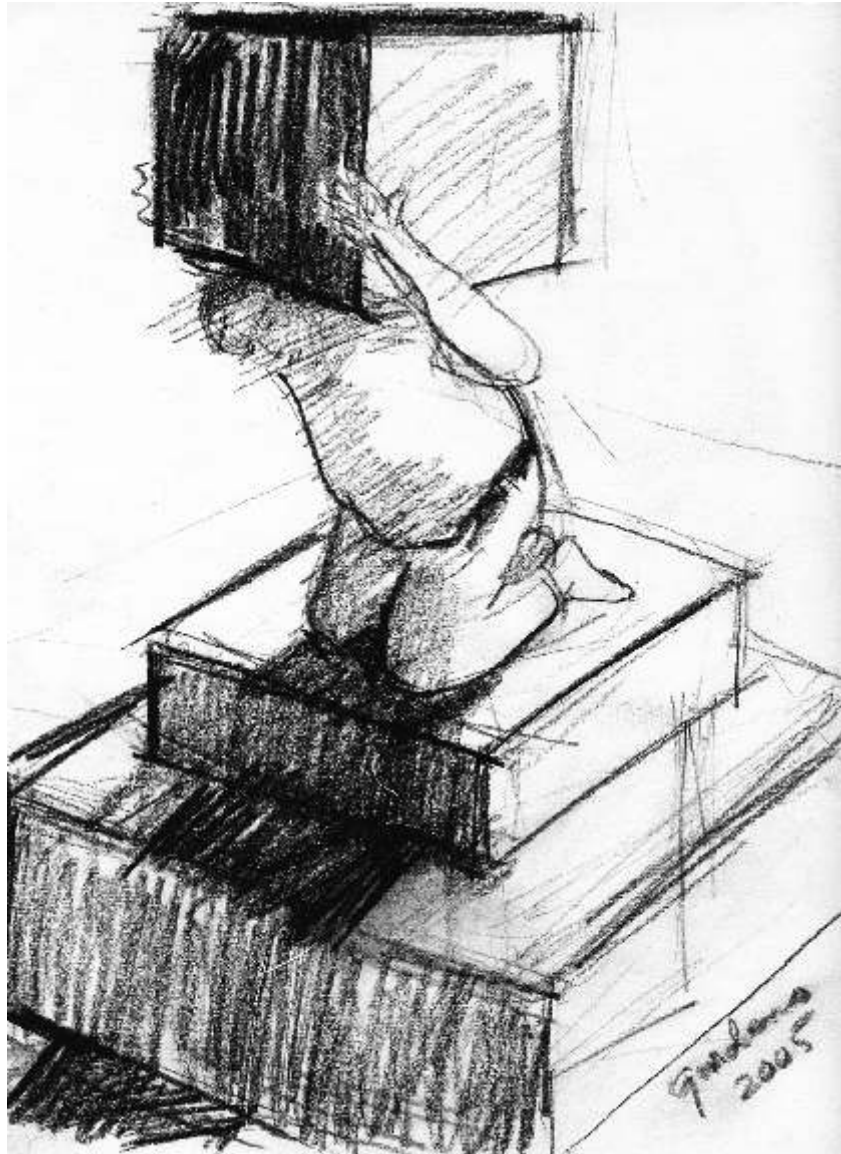
Untitled (Bound) - 2008, Plaster, wood, paint, 22 x 12 x 7 inches

it had gone this far, that the straight jacket has fused like a second skin, that we have not taken better care and been more attentive to this diminishing stature. It is his unflinching persistence that modernity is serving up less than it is capable of, that under-achievement is expected, that the weight of life is not equal to the potential for ascension that is first and foremost on his agenda. He is undauntingly pessimistic.

This is Ed's Fresh Pop - he insists the ingredients are toxic. His is not a bubbly intake but a draught with a bitter aftertaste.



Untitled (Box Front) - 2008, Plaster, wood, paint, 12.5 x 5.5 x 6 inches



Untitled - 11"x8", graphite on paper, 2005



Ecce Homo - Figure 40x20x20" All 12'x4'x2', plaster & wood, 1999



## Headbones Introduces NEOPRIEST at TIAF, October 3-6, 2008

Headbones Gallery is bringing forward an identified aesthetic titled Neopriest and in doing so expanding the concept from works on paper to include other media.

New **Pop Realists** Intellectually **Engaged** in **Story Telling**





## **Ashley Johnson - Primal, November 1 - November 29, 2008**

Ashley Johnson's first solo exhibition in Canada at Headbones Gallery will leave indelible impressions on the psyche of viewers. These powerful paintings have the ability to bridge synapses in the deep recesses of the brain and permeate the core. Johnson has successfully captured the essence of human/animal instincts addressing topics of evolution, reproduction, life, death, sexuality, dreams, customs and rituals.

Johnson has created work that harkens to a spiritual root of first importance, fundamental to the psyche. Humans shape-shift into animals, interact with the beastly and attach to areas of the subconscious. This delving into the basic impulses, much like Freudian psychology, allows for a confrontation with the nether regions where, by visually speaking the unspeakable, knowledge is gained.

The exhibition will consist of approximately sixteen works that span from 2001-2008. A catalogue will be available including pertinent writings by Ashley Johnson.



## Ashley Johnson

### Zoomorphic Gestalt

Modernity is overlaid with processes disguising our reliance upon the natural world. The mysterious roots of animism, 'otherly' and unusual to contemporary western understanding, had logic behind it at one time. In order to survive, symbiotic relationships with the animals had to be fulfilled - practically and symbolically. The masks of the native west coast aboriginals for instance, often frightening, were used as a visual channel to understanding the spirit of the animal.

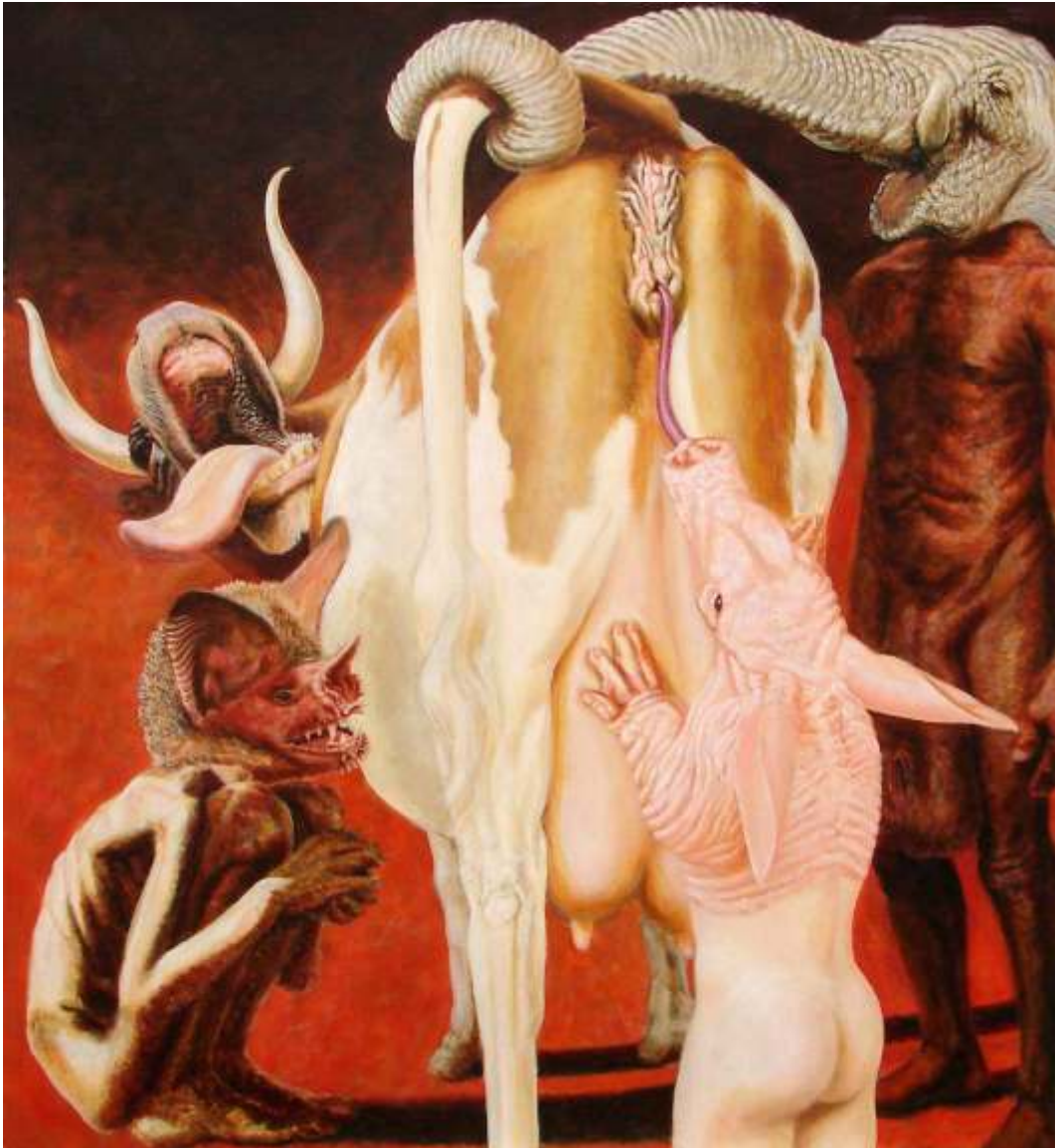
When an artist knows a truth and has a means to picture it, the result is often incredible; it seems so extraordinary as not to be possible. Historically, that incredulous understanding has been couched in allegory.

Connections between animal and human domains have long been used in art and religion as a way of understanding human existence. Sacred ceremonies used masks with costumes of hides and feathers, centaurs, Pan, Medusa, the Holy Spirit as a dove, Luke as a lion, winged angels, horned devils, Ganesha, the elephant headed deity, Hanuman with his monkey parts, Shiva as a snake, the Egyptian Nekhbet as vulture, Horus as hawk or Wadjet as cobra, Fenrisulfr as a wolf with Norse mythology, the Sphinx from Socrates, harpies, - the list of zoomorphic instances is a long one, historically.

Modern science has also drawn parallels to the animal world as in the study of psychological correlations between the human and animal states or the imaging of animal systems (pigs, rats, hamsters, dogs) for the study of the internal workings of the body in medicine.

Language utilises zoomorphism both directly (an ill kempt woman as a dog, an informer as a rat or a mole, a pretty girl as a chick, a sly person as a fox, or in contemporary clichés such as police as pig, hipster as cat, or female genitalia as pussy) and metaphorically (cute as a bug's ear).

Literature abounds with animals that communicate with humans or deities who use animal forms to further their ends, with Greek mythology being especially fecund. Leda, raped by Zeus begat Helen of Troy and then Zeus as a bull coupled with Europa, from which the word Europe originated. Demeter transformed herself into a mare to escape Poseidon but Poseidon counter-transformed himself into a stallion to pursue her, and succeeded in the rape. The white rabbit led a psychedelic chase, frogs became princes, Marvel Comics



Latch - 2008, Acrylic on paper, 40 x 37 inches

created Beastboy and Wolfsbane, and Harry Potter converses with owls. Even modern manufacturing has assimilated animals naming such products as Mustang, Pinto, and Greyhound after the beasts or the new BMW, simply called Shapeshifter.

We are accustomed to the transfiguration of human to animal (therianthropy) and yet Ashley Johnson's work contains a shock. A gestalt. A jolt. In a culture grown used to visual trauma through the wide range of imagery made available through the internet, global media and cinematic expertise, the power of a painting on paper can still hit a nerve and shock with the impact of visual depictions foreign to our knowledge. This jarring of sensibility, when executed in a manner that is readable, is a positive step towards wisdom. That the response felt might be one of repulsion rather than attraction, is not a negative reaction. It is simply, an intelligent awakening.

The reception for work from the Primal series might be compared to an imagined reaction to Hieronymus Bosch's work at the time that it was first presented. Johnson and Bosch each present a visualisation of the makings, members and happenings of an underworld. It is a nether land of phantasms that impacts the human psyche for it is recognised. It is virtually recognisable for Johnson uses a high realism with an admirable and adept painting style to further his revelations just as did Bosch. Bosch, however was using literal descriptions from the bible from which he patterned his creatures. It was a common narrative of the time.

Today the story is more complex. To bring about such a gestalt within our mechanised, technological, environment by using animals - and rather exotic and strange animals to which we may not have even been actually exposed - demonstrates that there is a reflection of self in the imagery. This gestalt is pertinent to our contemporary existence.

It is impossible to deconstruct the work into parts that add up to the whole impact of a Johnson painting because it is a realised gestalt, something that has not happened before and for which there is no preparation other than the personal potential to assimilate the work. Africa, to one who is not African, may be incomprehensible and the depiction of beasts interacting with humans strike chords that provoke a kind of fear, a horror. The unknown that is lurking beyond the periphery of knowledge is the cause of psychosis and Freud worked with this notion of recognizing and naming the areas of the consciousness



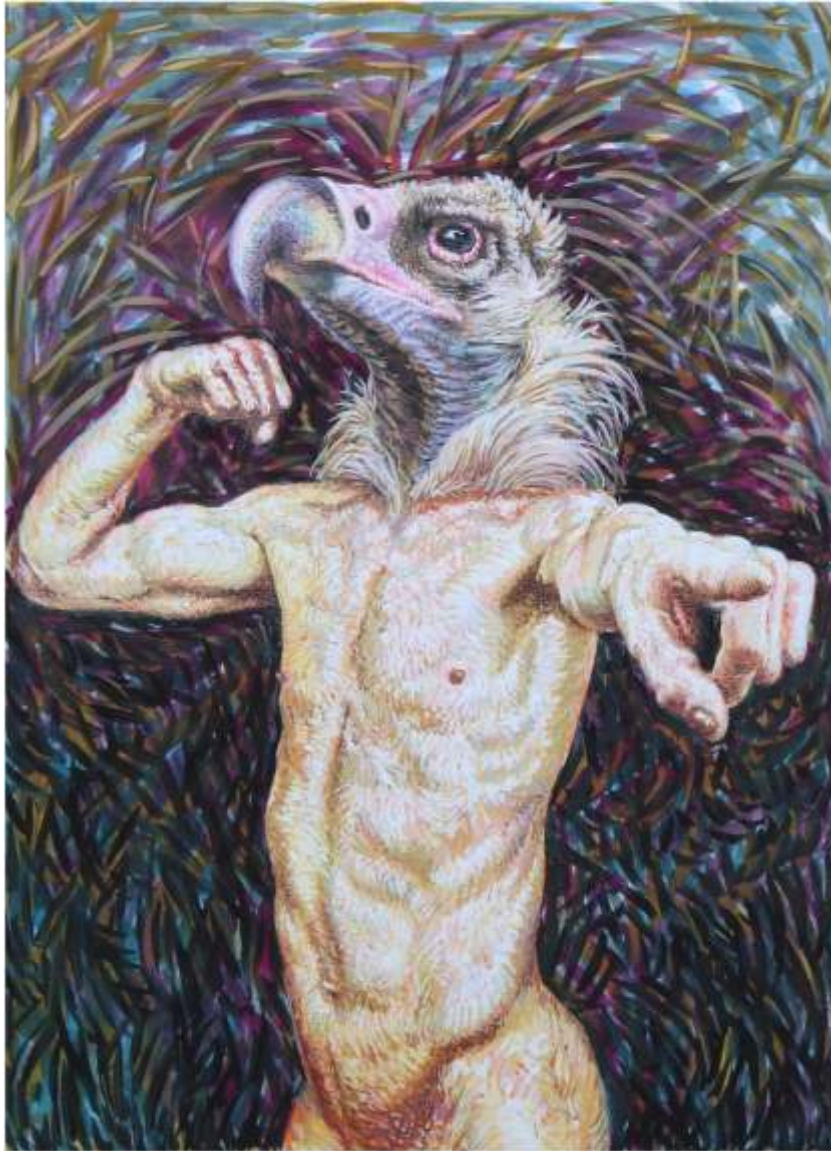
Vultureman I: Explorer - 2008, gouache on paper, 12.75 x 17.5 inches

that we have been socialized to ignore. With recognition, fear is allayed as the 'mysterious other' becomes an identifiable quotient. Once identified, it can be dealt with.

To use hyenas, nocturnal carnivores that feed primarily upon carrion, as the image of the predator upon a female human infant in order to describe the abhorrent practice of the rape of infants to cure AIDS, absolutely and effectively depicts the desperation of the disease. This confused and inadequate prescription of the shamans is counteracted by telling of the practice in order to stop it. Johnson is to be commended for his bravery.

Are these monsters that the artist is showing us? Is it monstrous to inflict such visions upon a world already saturated in disturbing ideas and images? Johnson takes absolute pains to describe his concepts through these visuals and engage. The ravenous, guttural, un-socialized instincts of raw incredulity are placed within a reasonable over-the-couch size painting for contemplation. The work is beautifully put together. The colors are lush and often harmonious. Each painting is industriously rendered, planned and composed. And in order to further the disambiguation, Johnson has written a piece inspired by his own life experience that is placed in juxtaposition to each visual (rather than as an explanation).

Johnson has placed conceptually difficult material in a form that is as accessible as he is able to make it. The gestalt arrives through a manipulation of elements that appeal to the higher aspects of the consciousness through a fine aesthetic. The subject matter becomes realisable, not so foreign, a bed for a seed of enlightenment on the nature of man.



Vultureman II: Imperialist - 2008, gouache on paper, 18 x 13 inches

# Rethink

by Ashley Johnson

Over the centuries Western society has postulated a relationship between humanity and animals that sees humans as superior. The original perceptions derive from religious dogma but Charles Darwin's 19th century Theory of Evolution has added the linear idea of natural selection. Environmental circumstances were supposed to have favored certain genetic predispositions through chance, thus eclipsing life forms less suited. It translated to the survival of the fittest paradigm, which was obviously humanity according to the common sense. The misleading image of hunched apes gradually transforming into the upright human has long graced our classroom psyche.

This painting uses August Rodin's famous statue, *The Thinker*, liberated from its pedestal and combined with a hamadryas baboon head reminiscent of those ubiquitous Albert Einstein photographs. The Chimpanzee in the background 'apes' the Thinker's pose. Bonobos are complex animals that use sex as currency for social interactions. The female sex organ is external and very prominent. Their society is matriarchal, benign and very tolerant of diversity.

Neo Darwinists state that humanity shares a common ancestor with bonobos and chimps. The implication is that genetic mutations took the lines in different directions, but the fossil evidence has not been very conclusive. There are examples like *Australopithecus*, which are closer to chimps, and ancient humans like Neanderthal but nothing in between. It is tempting to make the evidence suit the hypothesis.

The question arises whether our current theory of evolution is entirely correct and also, if it were not, would we accommodate an alternative theory? John A. Davison, a professor of Biology at Vermont University wrote a manifesto called *An Evolutionary Manifesto: A New Hypothesis for Organic Change*, which essentially calls into question the Neo Darwinist version of events. <http://www.uvm.edu/~jdavison/davison-manifesto.html>.

Davison defers to theorists like Richard B. Goldschmidt and William Bateson whose ideas were current when Darwin's theory first became prominent but were ignored. In essence, Davison's focus is on the chromosomes, not the genes, and he suggests that evolution took place at the first meiotic division through irreversible breaks in the chromosomes, centromeres and centrioles. He concludes that the second meiotic division or sex developed as a conservative measure to limit evolution. He predicts that no further evolution will take place.

It is interesting how ideas take root and how difficult it is to dislodge them. Richard Dawkins, the arch Neo Darwinist, is currently promoting his book, *'The God Delusion'*. It will be amusing if he turns out to be equally deluded. It is clear though that we need to rethink our relationship with animals. Current social biology studies are revealing that many of our cultural and altruistic attributes are present in other ape societies too. It is important for our own survival to recognize that humanity is not the pinnacle of evolutionary success.



Rethink - 2008, Acrylic on paper, 40 x 37 inches

## **Grade Rape**

by Ashley Johnson

This painting refers to events in my life. The Galapagos tortoise represents age and the raccoon, badger and Tasmanian devil stand for small scavengers.

My friend had been having premonitions for days that something was wrong with her 92 year-old mother-in-law. She visited her house and found that she had been held hostage and raped by street children for two days while they ransacked the house. There was blood everywhere.

She was an Italian lady who had had land confiscated by Mussolini. She and her husband moved to Africa, where they had a rubber plantation in Togoland before eventually settling in South Africa. While alive, he was a cabinetmaker and because of a general distrust of banks, built secret drawers and safes throughout his furniture and house.

We took her to a nearby hospital and left her there while my friend tried to think of a long-term solution. On returning a few days later, in order to move her to the Mary Mount hospice, we found the nurses had refused to wash her. She spoke no English and was traumatized so perhaps she wouldn't cooperate with them. In any event, we moved her to the hospice, which coincidentally, was the place where I was born. After a few weeks she died.

The police had not made any progress in finding these perpetrators so the local Italian mafia decided to help. One of them had some dogs that were trained to maul a person's stomach the moment the interrogator put a baseball cap on the victim. They found someone to do this to, and I believe, a person completely unconnected to the crime or perpetrators. I don't think anyone was ever apprehended for either crime.

The street children in South Africa live in doorways or wherever they can. They beg for money at traffic intersections while sniffing glue to obviate hunger. Generally they are orphaned or have run away from home. Tribal custom always required veneration for age so they are a measure of cultural disintegration as new ordering structures form. There are few social mechanisms to rehabilitate and reintegrate them into society.

It is also worth noting that the concept of the child we uphold has only been in existence since the 19th century after the efforts of the British philanthropists and reformers. Africa, while cherishing children, has a different view, and is quite comfortable with the concept of child soldiers and exploitation of labour. Slavery developed in Africa as a strategy for survival. As crops failed and drought took over, so people would indenture their family members to other tribes not in dire straits.



Grade Rape - 2008, Acrylic on paper, 40 x 37 inches

## **Necromance**

by Ashley Johnson

Necromancy is the practice of laying hands on the dead in order to communicate. Necrophilia is having sex with the dead. There are several famous cases in Western culture, like Jeffrey Dahmer and many grotesque urban legends about morgue events. Apparently it was a common practice for priests in some pagan cultures like the Moche of South America, to have sex with the sacrificial victim after death in an effort to communicate with the spirit world. Necromancy has a long tradition in Western cultures like the Greeks and Romans and many rituals were developed to facilitate the exchange.

While sourcing imagery for my dead deer, I came across an interesting story. Bryan James Hathaway was arrested for having sex with a dead deer that had been killed by a car. The Wisconsin State was seeking to have him incarcerated for two years for a crime against sexual morality. Quite apart from his strange perversity, it says a lot about our Western society that the concept of having 'sex' with a dead animal is so taboo. There is an anomaly in deciding when an animal ceases to be an animal and becomes a carcass.

We have a vision of life and death that, for many Western religions, devalues animals. Humans move through death to the hereafter, not animals. Life is separated from death and for many adherents of a scientific worldview death is merely decomposition. Despite these dogmatic insinuations, Spiritualism remains a widespread belief. By contrast, the Tibetan Book of the Dead outlines procedures for passing over and communicating with the dead.

Environmental interdependence has become a pervasive ideal and it seems important to revisit these taboos. Religious culture has formalized a system of morality that is out of step with the natural world. Animal identity needs to be fused with human to expand our restrictive notion of individuality. We have to look at our own animal nature squarely in the eye.



Necromance - 2008, Acrylic on paper, 40 x 37 inches





Featuring collages by Scott P. Ellis and works from Neopriest





## **Human Sacrifice - Julie Oakes, December 13 - 23, 2008**

View a selection of drawings from three exhibitions with novellas; Quercia Stories, The Revolving Door and Conscientious Perversity, documenting the libertine adventures of Justine Quercia as told by her sister Juliette.

We invite you to join us in **A Traditional Wiggly** for the opening reception **December 13, from 7-10 PM.**

**Neema Bickersteth**, the celebrated opera diva, will perform at 8:30.

Guests are encouraged to wear a wig, hairpiece, toupee or merkin. **Garage One Media** will be present and providing guests with complimentary professional digital portraits in their **Wigs.**



## **Julie Oakes: Justine and Juliette**

Foreward by Robert C. Morgan

I first met Julie Oakes in Venice, a perfect location for realist painting given the works of such luminaries as Titian, Tintoretto, Giorgione, and Bellini. I was impressed by the work she was doing, although we rarely had much opportunity to discuss it. She impressed me as a loner who was intensely involved in absorbing the art and culture of the Venetians. She would go out on her own in the morning to the Academia or to La Scoula de San Rocco and return late in the afternoon where I would occasionally see her, portfolio under arm, crossing diagonally across Campo San Barnaba. She maintained friendly relations with various American colleagues, but otherwise kept mostly to herself.

One afternoon, months later, at a reception in New York, I discovered that Ms. Oakes was a Canadian, then living and working in Manhattan. Over the years, I would occasionally see her - dressed to the teeth - at various art openings and cocktail parties in West Chelsea, but otherwise I had not a clue as to what she was doing. Then one day in the summer of 2005, I received a package from Julie Oakes, which included catalogs of her paintings and two books of her writings. I glanced through the images and starting reading one of the books, entitled *The Revolving Door*. I was immediately taken into a world that was outside my view of the New York art scene. The author was involved in the world of sex on a level that intrigued me. Her semi-fictitious adventures were recorded in artful prose under the pseudonym of the libidinous Justine who presumed to be the sister of the more reserved sister, Juliette. Those familiar with the writings of the legendary eighteenth century French writer and aristocrat, Marquis de Sade, will immediately recognize these two names as being personages in two of his most famous books from that pre-Revolutionary time period.

In her first two narratives, entitled *Quercia Stories* and *The Revolving Door*, Ms. Oakes narrates the sexual exploits of her heroine Justine in the first person. There are brief moments when Justine may suddenly embrace the identity of her sister/persona Juliette in order to avoid an uncomfortable situation. But, for the most part, the narrative is given solely to Justine as she recounts her story of repeated sexual encounters with men who are travelers and often married. Throughout these encounters, she gives herself openly in a manner that is unabashedly available. Justine is an elegant woman, not a slut. She wears delicate lingerie, drinks fine wine, is clearly intelligent, and attends sophisticated cultural events.



Big Bob - charcoal, ink & graphite on paper, 60x44 inches, 2006

In a note to Julie, I confessed my interest in her work and my dismay that I had never really pursued her talent. A few months passed whereupon I received a telecommunication from her inquiring as to whether or not I would be interested in writing a preface to the third volume of her trilogy whereupon I might include comments as to the nature of her practice as a visual artist. I responded in a reticent, though delighted mood, suggesting that I could do this, and that I had met the illustrious Anais Nin on two occasions and had worked professionally with the art historian Catherine Millet - two women who are known not only for their intellectual prowess but also for their extraordinary contributions to feminine erotic literature. I saw Julie's work in a similar way, and therefore unabashedly took on the task.

A point worth mentioning that explains my reticence; I am not an ethnographer - an occupation that Ms. Oakes fictionally personifies - but an art historian and critic. Therefore, I am outside the social sciences in terms of a discipline. I have not been trained to maintain the kind of objectivity that ethnographers employ in their work. I know virtually nothing about the underground sex world in New York and therefore do not have the qualified research or the personal experience by which to know or to judge the accuracy of the author's accounts. In reading Julie's trilogy (the over-all title is *Human Sacrifice*) I may empathize with Justine's frustrations, her joys, and travails, but on an "academic" level, I am clearly outside the scene. My connection with the author is from the aesthetic perspective of art criticism, not from the objective point of view of ethnography. I have seen and heard Julie Oakes speak at The New School University in New York and was highly impressed by her ability to hold her ground at the podium. During the question and answer session, Oakes never wavered from the point and employed anecdotes only when the intention was clear. Julie was absolutely marvelous in this regard.

In this third volume of the trilogy, entitled *Conscientious Perversity*, the situation changes somewhat from the two previous accounts. Justine's sister, Juliette, takes a more predominant role in the narrative. Male subjects from the previous two books, such as Tiziano and the fictitious editor, weave into the story along with several new characters, both male and female, including Paolo and Peter, Giovanni and Kiki, Robin and Joelle. There is more attention given to bisexuality, thus adding a new dimension to unraveling the mystery - or mystique - that seems, in part, to pervade the motivation behind Justine's adventures. The



Glassy Eyes - charcoal, ink & graphite on paper, 60x44 inches, 2006

sex clubs, frequently encountered in *The Revolving Door*, a topic given that forms the mise-en-scene for much of the narrative is dropped and thus, the public envelope is abandoned that informs many of the sexual advances and encounters in the early books. Conscientious Perversity describes the social repercussions and associations that branch off from Justine's personal encounters.

In Chapter One, there is a line worthy of quotation: "When you turn sexuality into art - you have to lie to protect identities. You mythologize your characters and since you also have a role, you invent yourself as a character. If this is about art then there must be a philosophy that is evident." And here is another: "If our friendship could be more of a conversation, then I would be conscientious of my perversity for now I am only conscientious in my perversity and it is that which causes the guilt."

What strikes me about these lines is their astute commentary, their unabashed straightforward pronouncement - that sexuality cannot be divorced from either identity or relationships. The fact is that as human beings we are inextricably intertwined, whether we recognize it or not. Sex is constructed within our identities and within our relationships as well. It plays an intrinsic part in both of these, even as it is removed. More than intrinsic, it is essential to our manner of being. In Chapter Twenty-two, the narrator states: "At the far end of the path of conscientious perversity there is a thin boundary. The limits of love and knowledge butt up against this boundary. They are in the neighboring realm. There is a danger that influences from the perverse can sneak through the thin boundary and pollute love and knowledge and also the opposite is possible, that love and knowledge can taint the perversity."

It is this thin line that Juliette, the writer, rides on behalf of her sister - her alter ego and persona - Justine. Who will survive amid the tension of this delicate chaos? This is the conundrum that Julie leaves for the reader to decipher.

As for my critical take on the visuals that accompany *Human Sacrifice*, it would take an essay of considerable length to deal specifically with her concerns. Still there are some general observations I would like to evoke. Upon first glance, the paintings and drawings reproduced in the book function more at an oblique angle in relation to the writing rather than as illustrations that visualize the narrative. They are, in fact, more psychological, even



When The Dust Settled - charcoal, ink & graphite on paper, 60x44 inches, 2006

prescient than they are prescribed in terms of how they attract or distract us from the text. Therefore, I would be hard pressed to categorize Ms. Oakes as an illustrator. Rather the paintings function as a parallel discourse to the narrative and therefore we can assume that they are intended to hold equal weight in terms of our response.

I am convinced of the author's debt to painting as, for example, when I encounter the series of works from Book Three. Having seen the Oledon Redon exhibition of prints at The Museum of Modern Art in New York last December, I indirectly discovered a clue to Julie's work. Illustrations serve a purpose in relation to the narrative, and indeed Julie's paintings do this. One may refer to them as the conceptual infrastructure or the underbelly of the narrative. Whatever one chooses to call them, they are capable of shifting their context just as the phantasmagorical images of Redon could move from the page of the book to the walls of a museum. The context is an open one, not rigidly defined. Julie's paintings are both symbolic and expressionistic to be sure. I am less convinced of their surreality. Rather I see them as a kind of psychically charged potion, a drug in visual terms that opens the door of perception to sexuality as belonging to the larger realm of consciousness.

This is essentially what Redon did, what the poet William Blake did, and what Julie Oakes is searching for throughout the parallel visual/verbal journey that belongs so emphatically to her Trilogy on sexuality. The paintings impress me as being conscientious as well as perverse. Either way, they represent important aspects of our internal reality - a reality that the writer Anais Nin argued was the necessary passage toward the future of the novel (1969). I sense that Julie Oakes is not far off from this position except for the fact that all the paintings are hers. Whereas Anais Nin secretly collaborated with her husband (Hugh Guiler) who provided etchings for the pages of her early novels, Oakes takes both sides of her brain (visual and verbal) and juxtaposes them as a new cohesion.

I say cohesion - not coherence - because I do not see her paintings in formal terms. In contrast, they are symbolic and expressionist. They transmit a disturbing juxtaposition not only between human beings but also between humans and animals. In this sense, Julie's paintings may open the civilized mind to rethink the latency of shamanism in our current era of decadence. It is an interesting speculation and an attribute that places Julie Oakes squarely within the present, which means she may actually be ahead of her time.



Ludicrous Strangeness - charcoal, ink & graphite on paper, 60x44 inches, 2006



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