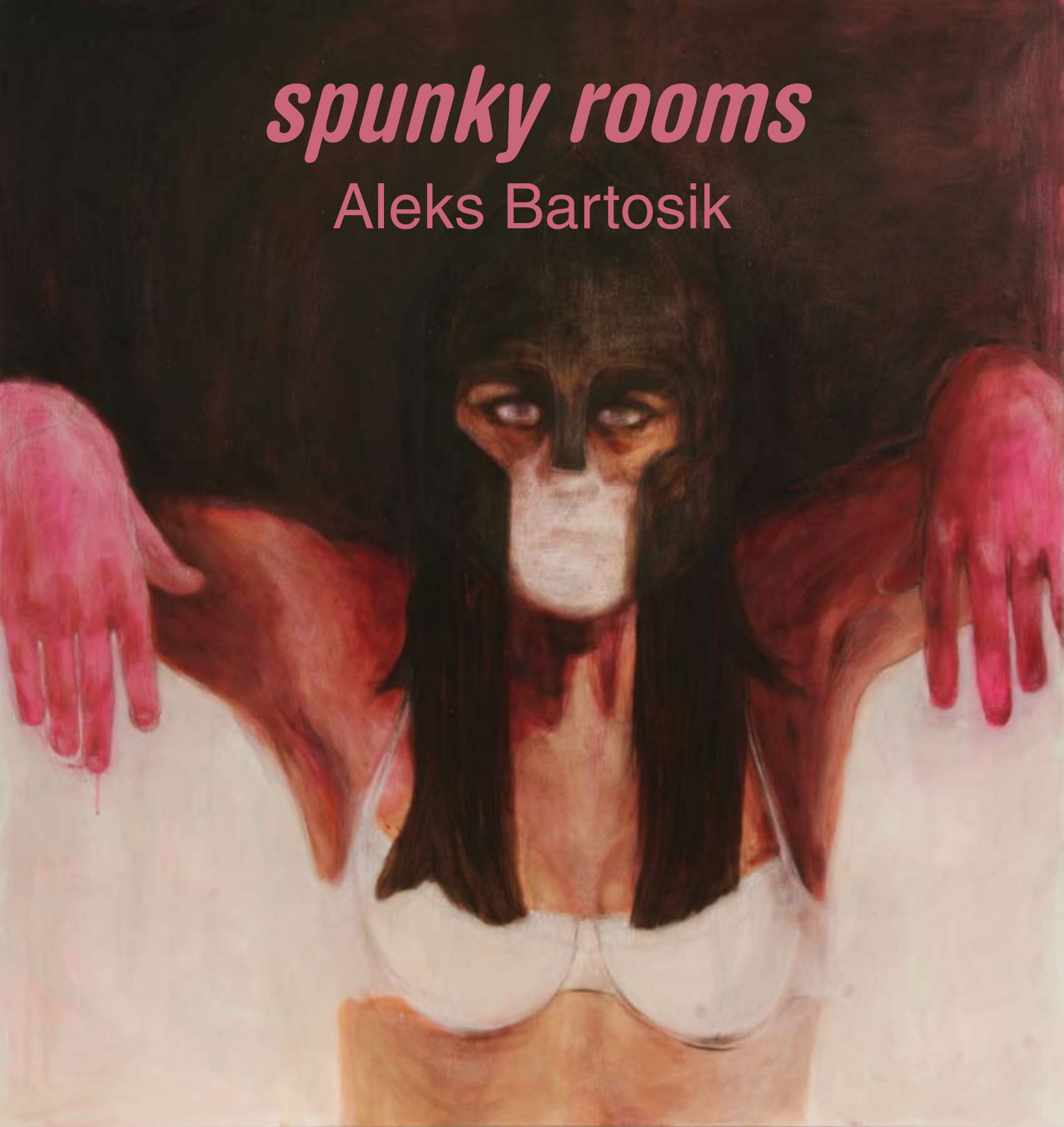


spunky rooms

Aleks Bartosik



Headbones Gallery - The Drawers

Contemporary Drawings and Works on Paper

spunky rooms

Aleks Bartosik & Robin Tewes

November 13 - December 7, 2009

RICH FOG



Micro Publishing

Artist Catalog: Spunky Rooms - Aleks Bartosik & Robin Tewes
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This catalog was created for the two person exhibition of Spunky Rooms at Headbones Gallery, The Drawers
November 13th - December 7th, 2009

Catalogue Essay - Dark Karma: Uncensored Thoughts on the Art of Aleks Bartosik
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Catalogue Essay - Peeping Tomasina: Ruminating on the Concealment of Robin Tewes
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Rich Fog Micro Publishing, printed in Toronto, 2009

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Aleks Bartosik Cover Image: Ice Maiden, Venus #8
Robin Tewes Cover Image: Pink on Pink

ISBN: 978-1-926605-20-3

spunky rooms

Aleks Bartosik

Essay by James D. Campbell



**Dark Karma:
Uncensored Thoughts On The Art of Aleks
Bartosik**

Picture this: Outsider artist Henry Darger prone on the gurney -- stripped, prepped and in constraints, waiting for a sex change op with no anaesthetic in sight, surrounded by his endearing Vivian girl heroines who are all holding steel tongs, trephines and Liston knives hidden behind their backs. This image comes effortlessly to mind when reflecting upon the work of Aleks Bartosik, for she does imaginative violence to Darger's demented, misogynistic *phantasia* as a gifted feminist artist unafraid of exploring her own dark side. She reclaims something of his territory as being ineluctably her own.

She shaves his work of what has been called its obsessively phallogocentric taxonomy and turns it on its head. No erect penises grafted onto young girls here. You might say she harrows up his soul from the nether regions where it has languished these last many years, draws and quarters it -- and makes it unapologetically her own, Kali-like. I do not mean to suggest that there is anything like stylistic affiliation at work here aside from a similarly put-upon, at-high-risk repertoire of painting subjects, but only that Bartosik shares with Darger in a welter of fever-dream-like imagery what has been called a "near hallucinatory intensity". (1)

In any case, her visionary work has an inflammatory aura, an unsettling, potentially *wound-like* resonance. The mercury here often rises to near-boiling point. Once she gets the hooks in, you're *hers*. She particularizes with weird acumen those extreme fugue states of identity and desire that vex us in the life-world and puts paint to them -- and with beguiling virtuosity for an artist with only a bare decade of work behind her. In fact, all her work to date has been rife with telling psychological as well as off-demonic, almost inassimilable sociological tropes. Like those of fellow painters Eliza Griffiths (mutable gender/identities) and Marion Wagschal (potent duende generators), her figures are triumphant painting events as well as psychic integers of chiasm and dark karma. Bartosik now joins their ranks as a feminist figurative painter exploring issues of gender and identity and psychological adversity in topical, intrepid and unforeseen ways.

Here is a visual artist capable of inordinately deft mark-making routines -- and a breathtaking delicacy in her rendering of the figure even when associated imagery is at its most dramatically wayward and extreme. However fraught with figures *in extremis* her work is, she knows what she is



about. And it shows. She renders flesh jackets as angst-ridden playgrounds, and auratic red water-color wash less as pancake makeup than spilled amniotic fluid or lifeblood -- and she does so with a casual authority few others have or can.

She works her drawn figures into a state of uncanny, even *vibratory* self-presence, grafting animal parts onto human parts and vice versa with radiant vestigial crossovers until just the right threshold of psychic density has been reached. One might sug-

ice maiden (venus no.8 - mariko) - 2009
acrylic, conte, pencil +oil on canvas, 50 x 48"



knight and her horse - 2009
acrylic, pencil and gesso on paper, 98 x 60"

gest that she is a creature of perfect control – or one all too willing to put herself in harm's way with no safety net in sight for the sake of her art. Hers' is a no-holds-barred exploration of a twilight psychological space as harrowing as it is authentic.

The truth is that Bartosik the artist and presumably the person is entirely *unafraid*. She recognizes fear as being the true *mindfucker* and resists it at every turn. Her works are at once subversive and provocative, celebrating rupture over continuity and continuity over rupture, as a means of ownership, avowal and perhaps overcoming. Her female figures are rendered with rare skill in open arenas of suffering and transformation – and with a consummately theatrical, take-no-prisoners bravado. But their rendering also possesses an aching, even heartbreaking, subtlety that betrays the sheer sophistication of this artist's understanding of human psychology and the need for excess as a way of working-through the perils of the present tense.

Her corpus represents her own unique take on Eden's nightside and its in!. While she detonates conventional narrative structure with all the delirium of a single heartfelt image wrested from the mind's eye and sent full-tilt over the edge of every orthodoxy and every expectation, we still infer from her painting content that it is always told in the first person -- I mean, that Aleks Bartosik herself is the subject, the sole *agent provocateur* of her own wildly adumbrated reality, her Artaud-like cruelty theatre of the Real. With a repertoire that ranges freely from wall-drawings and performances to costume and painting, Bartosik demonstrates that her own personae are strongly inscribed across all these surfaces and spaces with what is frequently a karmic, unstoppable and almost demented Kali-like fury.

But it should be emphasized that her embodied *Me* always rests on the solid fundament of an em-



pathic *We*. No mute solipsist, she, Bartosik never turns away from or denies the world, but embraces it – and its extremities -- at all costs and whatever the consequences. Her work investigates both self and other and their several interactive morphologies at the closest of quarters.

If her pictorial accomplishments apropos this human equation are profoundly multiple, well, it is probably because her painting world intermixes vulnerability and a lucid childlike innocence with disruptions characterized by an extreme violence and portents of a polymorphous perversity. There is also a salutary ambiguity always already at work there, even in the face of such disruptive web-like tremors, a smudging of possible selves across the full gamut of the human. But governing all that is what one concludes is a hard-won self-awareness, a well-nigh omniscient clarity that reads as virtually absolute. In other words, hers is a clarity that triumphs over everything else.

Aleks Bartosik was asked not that long ago

what inspired her and she responded with an understatement and honesty that still rings true:

“People. I’m inspired by the particularities, delicacies, sensitivities, beauties and obsessions held within relationships between lovers, siblings/twins, friends, strangers, or themselves. I like to observe the visible (and accessible) interactions between people and the situations they are placed in and re-create my own scenarios and my own environments and narrations.” (2)

She is a gifted critic and surveyor of the Social, or say, better, a wily ethnographer of the inner and outer worlds of her female protagonists and their tangled skein of relationships in the lived world. Aleks *agonistes*. She is untangling a noose to catch her viewers’ heads in, as she lures them into her own oneiric and ontologically fraught domain wherein they may experience pleasure, as she says, or experience a whole world of hurt hereto-

(detail) **two girls and two horses** - 2007
acrylic + pencil on drafting papers on panel, 15.75 x 21.25”

fore only hinted at in the annals of their own lives or richly embedded there. She has said:

“I want the viewers to have experienced some sort of a visual pleasure. Entered some sort of an imaginary land or situation. I am not particularly sure what I would like them to say, but I know what I would like them to experience. Perhaps they may say something like: “That was strange.” in a delightful sense or a frightened sense. The Horse Heads (a work in progress) are rooted in a larger and deeper narrative, but I purposefully want them to appear playful and child-like.” (3)

That was strange. Yes, and surreal, too. But also emotionally true. Pleasurable? Often. Seductive? Yes. Painful, maybe, if truth be told. I have termed the characterizing ethos of her work “dark karma”. But this is limiting, even misleading, especially where it dovetails with Buddhist teaching, because it only tells one side of the story, offers only half the truth, if you will. The whole truth is this: if there is dark karma in her work, there are also textures of light karma strewn out across its full array that invigorate and might well redeem the present tense of painting.

Perhaps Bartosik is reminding us – reminding *herself* as well, of course -- that this fragile life we live, is, well, *fragile*, and overwhelmingly a consequence and not a mere souvenir or portent of how we have lived. A life lived in and through angst and psychic suffering (i.e. dark karma) is a consequence of having lived controlled by desire-nature. If a life lived meretriciously (i.e. light karma) is a result of having lived in control of desire-nature, well, Bartosik demonstrates that too, and in the very execution of these works, with their fearless mien, and transparent process-esthetic, and, above all, her will to move forwards restlessly from one

medium to the next, all the while embroidering her signature cosmogony with myriad scars and cries of ecstatic joy and agony across the face of the life-world.

Arguably, her whole body of work, in its very ethic of execution and resolute “isness” in the world, can be fruitfully understood in terms of the concept of dark-and-bright action as the presence of wholesome and unwholesome features in the self-same action in Buddhist thought. (4) One might suggest that she is a savant of the lower worlds and perhaps intends that her work itself is an adamant bridge towards overcoming desire-nature, making dark karma light, and triumphing over the specters of adversity by walking on air, seraph or sylph-like.

If you have the strength, if you possess the emotional wherewithal, the psychological stamina, and above all, if you are not afraid of the dark, Aleks Bartosik will take you by the hand and lead you over the threshold into the night-side of Eden



dear water lady, my gold fish how deep you are in the sea, please stay with me
(detail)



untitled (venus no.9 - jen) - 2009
acrylic, conte and pencil on canvas, 50 x 48"

where she will proceed to take you places you've never been, show you things that you have never seen, and perhaps see the life run out of you. (5) Her invitation to the dark side of dreamland, writ in letters awash in blood, bruises and a tremulous beauty, is one hard to resist. Yes, this work stakes that kind of claim, possesses both a fiercely visceral *and* fiendishly auratic life, is not easily dismissed, and seldom forgotten.

In effect, Aleks Bartosik's art seesaws in arresting and exhilarating fashion between the purely abject and the authentically human; between a psychological hard place and a perilous beauty, as it were. Perilous because it trembles ghost-like on the threshold of disappearance as quickly as it is glimpsed, and morphs from dream into nightmare and back again in a bare nanosecond.

Not since Betty Goodwin left us (she died last autumn at the age of 85) has a Canadian artist measured and plumbed so fearlessly and with such remarkable acuity and devil-may-care abandon the hungry tides and restless shadows of the human heart.

James D. Campbell

Notes: Dark Karma

1. See John M. MacGregor *Henry Darger In The Realms of The Unreal* (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2002).
2. Aleks Bartosik, cited in post submitted by Jen 11/28/2007 on *She Does the City.com*, online text.
3. Ibid.
4. See "Dark and Bright Karma: a New Reading" by Dr. Abraham Vélez de Cea of the Georgetown University Theology Department at <http://www.buddhistethics.org/karma12/velez01.pdf>. As the author notes, this concept "has an enormous potential to explain the ethical behavior of many Buddhists. In this sense, the concept of dark-and- bright action bridges the gap between theory and practice in Buddhist ethics, that is, between the elitist and idealistic view of Buddhist ethics characteristic of Abhidharma literature, and the more common ethical practice of ordinary Buddhists."
5. As the malevolent spirit and splendidly righteous anti-heroine -- played by the inimitable Alice Krige -- said with relish in the film version of Peter Straub's *Ghost Story*.



this venus stole an artichoke heart - 2007
acrylic, conte and pencil on canvas, 48 x 48"

and she was his venus in furs - 2007
acrylic, conte and pencil on canvas, 48 x 48"



she was a beautiful apple - 2007
acrylic, conte and pencil on canvas, 48 x 48"



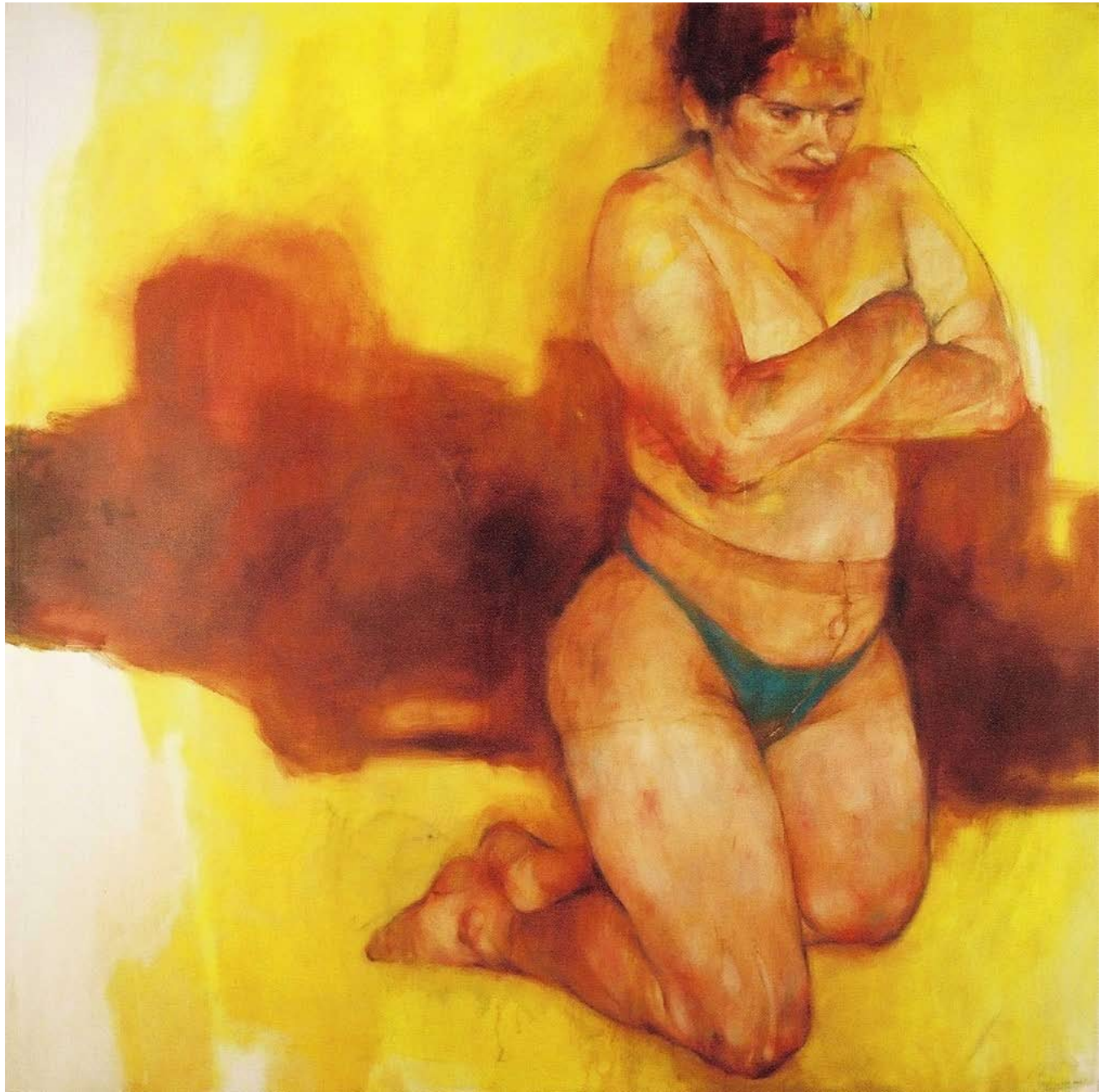
she was not his venus in furs - 2007
acrylic, conte and pencil on canvas, 48 x 48"



untitled - 2009
acrylic, conte and pencil on canvas, 48 x 48"



female column - 2003
oil on canvas, 62 x 61"



dear yellow cow, sleep beside me in a world of beautiful apples just like her - 2003
acrylic, oil and pencil on canvas, 71 x 71"





self control - 2003
charcoal, conte, pencil, acrylic, oilstick on paper, 83 x 112"



learning to conform - 2003
conte, pencil, oilstick on paper, 89 x 60"



dirty hands (boxing gloves) - 2003
oilstick, pencil, acrylic on paper, 44 x 30"



perturbed is heaving - 2004
charcoal, oil stick & pencil on paper, 60 x 95"



face #1 - 2004/05
charcoal, conte, acrylic + oil stick & pencil on paper, 30 x 16"



face #8 - 2004/05
charcoal, conte, acrylic + oil stick & pencil on paper, 30 x 16"



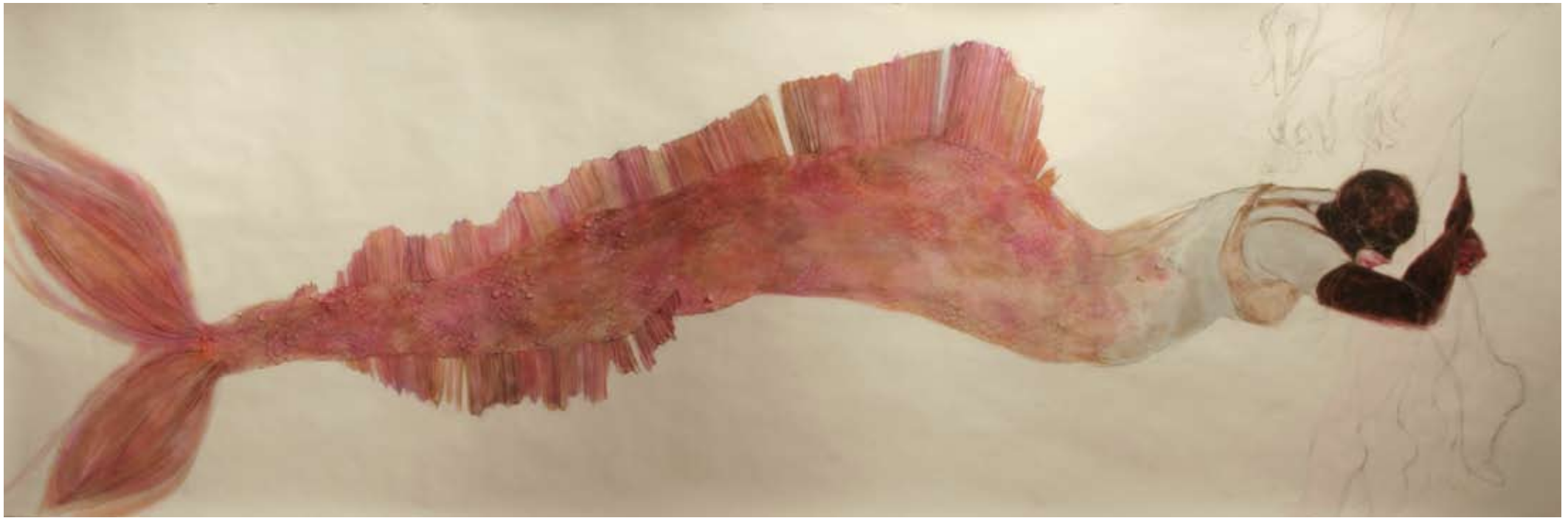
untitled (with wig) - 2005
oil and conte on canvas, two panels, 94.5 x 47"



horse loves you when you ride with her - 2008
acrylic, oil stick + pencil on paper, 58 x 115"



water lady, my gold fish how deep you are in the sea - 2008
pencil, acrylic and conte on paper, 57 x 159"



dear water lady, my gold fish how deep you are in the sea, please stay with me - 2009
pencil, acrylic and conte on paper, 59 x 176"



two girls and two horses - 2007
acrylic + pencil on drafting papers on panel, 15.75 x 21.25"



in feed - 2007
acrylic + pencil on drafting papers on panel, 15.75 x 21.25"





and so, the prince did finally sweep her off her feet. - 2007
acrylic + pencil on drafting papers on panel, 15.75 x 21.25"





now she thought she understood love. - 2009
acrylic + pencil on drafting papers on panel, 15.75 x 21.25"





i want to tell you everything. - 2009
acrylic + pencil on drafting papers on panel, 15.75 x 21.25"



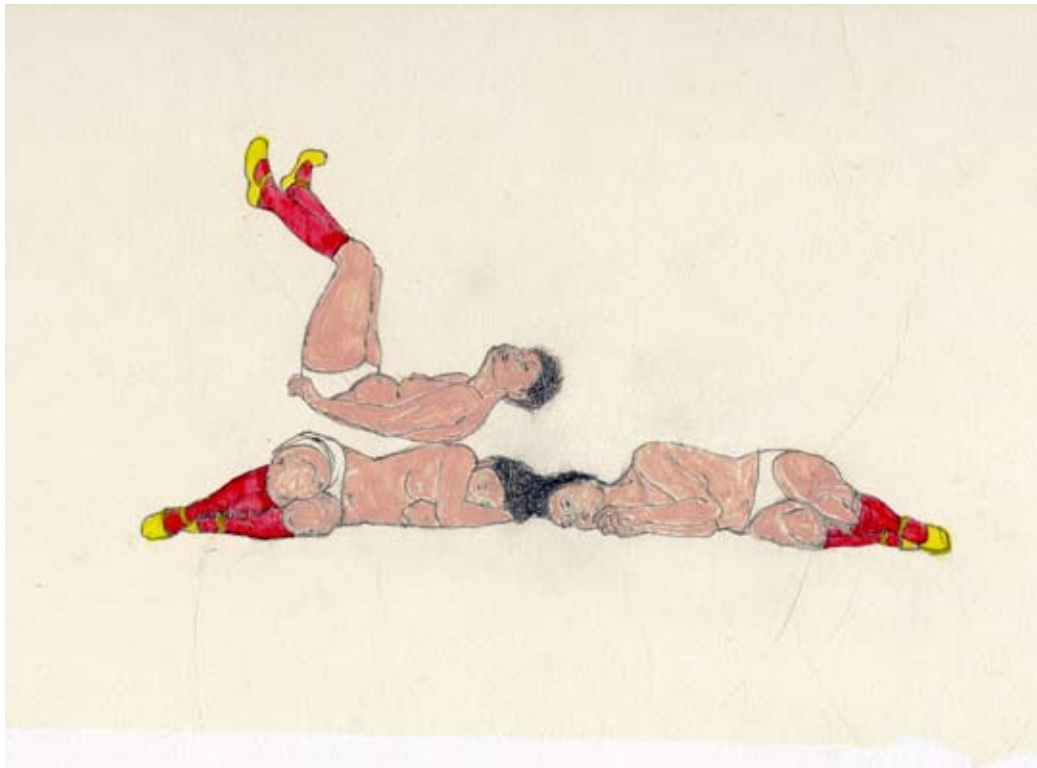


the horse loves you when you run with her. - 2009
acrylic + pencil on drafting papers on panel, 15.75 x 21.25"





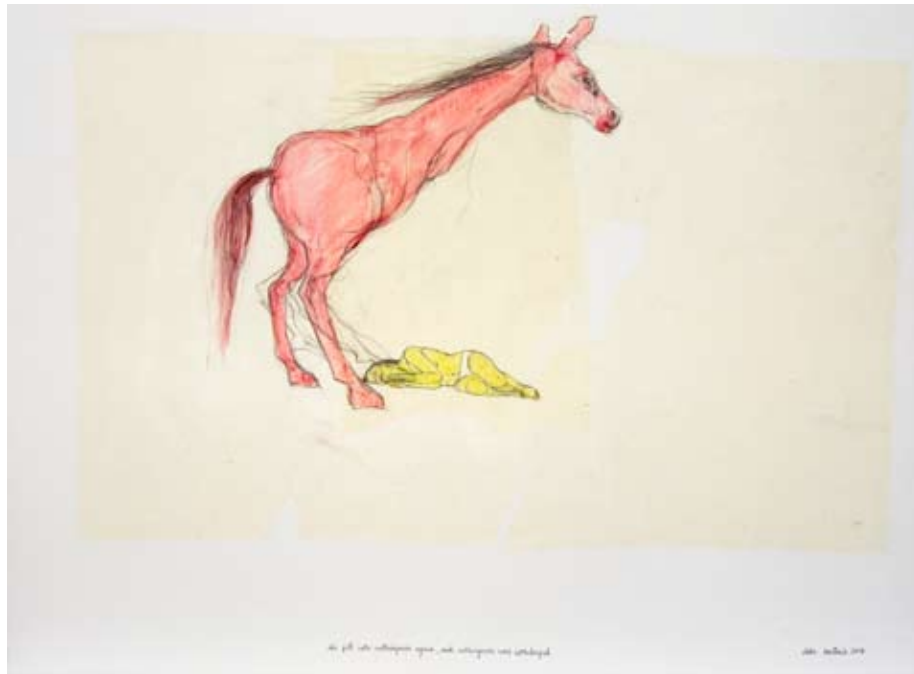
three girls with red socks sleeping with dreams - 2006
acrylic + pencil on drafting papers on panel, 15.75 x 21.25"





rape of Io. - 2007
acrylic + pencil on drafting papers on panel, 15.75 x 21.25"





she fell into nothingness and nothingness was wonderful. - 2007
acrylic + pencil on drafting papers on panel, 15.75 x 21.25"



aleks bartosik

academic history

2002-2005 concordia university: MFA (montréal, QC, canada)
1997-2001 queen's university: BFA with honours (kingston, ON, canada)

grants and awards

2009 1st prize, chocolate competition: toronto artist project, toronto, ON, canada
2008 featured toronto artist of the month (october): toronto visual artists web-site
canada council for the arts: travel grant. canada
2nd place in show, juried show. LAC gallery. mississauga, ON, canada
partial fellowship for vermont studio center artists' residency. johnson, VT, usa
2007 jurors' choice award, drawing show . glenhyrst art gallery of brant, brantford, ON, canada
drawing conclusions '07 drawing award: artSEEN journal, florence, italy
the ontario arts council, visual art grant. ON, canada
the elizabeth greenshields foundation grant. montréal, QC, canada
2006 canada council travel grant. canada
full fellowship for vermont studio center artists' residency. johnson, VT, usa
2004 the elizabeth greenshields foundation grant. montréal, QC, canada
the imperial tobacco visual arts grant. montréal, QC, canada
the william blair bruce european fine art travel scholarship. sweden & canada
2003 mississauga arts council grant: visual arts for emerging artist. mississauga, ON, canada
2001 the andre bieler prize: queen's university. kingston, ON, canada
2000 the margaret craig scholarship in fine art: queen's university. kingston, ON, canada

art groups/councils

toronto visual artists member: the collective (2007 – present)
mississauga arts council member (2007 – present)

solo & two person exhibitions

2009 **spunky rooms** (with robin tewes), headbones gallery. toronto, ON, canada (catalogue)
2007 **borrowing artichoke-hearts**, usine c. montréal, QC, canada
wallpapers, awol gallery. toronto, ON, canada
2005 **faces**, galerie luz. montréal, QC, canada
marsupial traces, galerie art mûr. montréal, QC, canada
2004 **latex flags**, site-specific installation on bald head island. NC, usa
animals and things, gallery weiß. nürnberg, germany
2003 **drawings**, bourget gallery. montréal, QC, canada
drawings, springbankarts centre. mississauga, ON, canada
sibyllae, gallery 401. toronto, ON, canada



Hysterics (installation drawing) - 2008

group exhibitions

- 2009 **square foot**, awol. gallery. toronto, ON, canada
we made a deal with the devil, “methinks” art tour
toronto (project 165), montreal (centre chat bleu), Brooklyn (BWAC exhibition space in red hook)
TIAF, with headbones gallery, toronto, ON, canada
neopriest, definitely superior art gallery, thunder bay, ON, canada
2nd annual governors island art fair, with galleryELL, governors island, NY, usa
grassroots arts festival, art gallery of mississauga. mississauga, ON, canada.
the artist project : toronto, the liberty grand. toronto, ON, canada
neopriest, headbones gallery. toronto, ON, canada
julie oakes: pass the buddha, canadian museum of northern history. kirkland lake, ON, canada.
- 2008 **breaking new ground**, glenhyrst art gallery of brant. brantford, ON, canada
movement 08, production house. etobicoke, ON, canada
TIAF (with headbones gallery, TO), toronto, ON, canada
month of photography (with facciponte and murrell), art gallery of peel, brampton, ON, canada
nomadismo cultural, zarinha centro de cultura. JP, brazil
living arts centre juried art show, LAC gallery. mississauga, ON, canada
the artist project : toronto, the liberty grand. toronto, ON, canada
drawing 2008, john b. aird gallery. toronto, ON, canada
www.women, headbones gallery (with schneeman & chicago, etc). toronto, ON, canada
generations 6, A.I.R gallery. new york, new york, USA
- 2007 **veni, vidi, over**, lennox contemporary. toronto, ON, canada
the mirrors, contemporary art crossing, kyoto int. community house. kyoto, japan
drawing 2007, glenhyrst art gallery of brant. brantford, ON, canada
TIAF, (with headbones gallery, TO), toronto, ON, canada
nuit blanche (horse heads event), headbones gallery. toronto, ON, canada
the best of film fort, art gallery of mississauga. mississauga, ON, canada
square foot, awol. gallery. toronto, ON, canada
TOAE, nathan phillips square. toronto, ON, canada
the drawing show, arthouse. calgary, AB, canada
small works, C1 space. toronto, ON, canada
NAC. núcleo de arte contemporânea, universidade federal da paraíba. PB, brazil
- 2006 **wallpapers**, vermont studio center, open studios. johnson, VT, usa
dancing to the invisible piper canadian contemporary figurative art, art gallery mississauga, ON
beauty & obsession, headbones gallery, the drawers. toronto, ON, canada
square foot, a.w.o.l. gallery. toronto, ON, canada
in your face, art gallery of ontario. toronto, ON, canada
n.b.i. international, bottega art gallery. wilmington, NC, usa
persephone’s palace, hang man gallery. toronto, ON, canada
- 2005 **the fifth international biennial of contemporary art**, fortezza da basso. florence, italy
square foot, project spaceman williamsburg. brooklyn, NY, usa
abstraction (with roberts & schenker), acme art gallery. wilmington, NC, usa
no boundaries, university of north carolina. wilmington, NC, usa
no boundaries, fayetteville museum of art. fayetteville, NC, usa
ylwa’s dream (with daphne gerou), gallery 401. toronto, ON, canada



Venus Installation - 2007

- 2004 **no boundaries international art colony**, acme art gallery. wilmington, NC, usa
salon rouge, vav gallery. montréal, QC, canada
look ma, no hands (a performance symposium), vav gallery. montréal, QC, canada
- 2003 **eye and hand juried drawing exhibition**, etobicoke civic centre art gallery. etobicoke, ON
international künstlerkolonie, schloss almshof. nürnberg, germany
salon dollop, rad'a gallery. montréal, QC, canada
- 2002 **form**, circa gallery. toronto, ON, canada
body as (ready to be re-) made, propeller centre for the visual arts. toronto, ON, canada
29th annual juried show, art gallery of peel. brampton, ON, canada
rash, agnes etherington art centre. kingston, ON, canada
ambrosia (with hall-patch & munro), union gallery. kingston, ON, canada
shaken, not stirred, union gallery. kingston, ON, canada
TOAE, nathan phillips square. toronto, ON, canada
- 1998 **scumbling**, union gallery. kingston, ON, canada

residencies

- 2009 vermont studio center. johnson, VT, usa
2006 vermont studio center. johnson, VT, usa
2005 acme art studios: one invited international artist in residence. wilmington, NC, usa
2004 no boundaries international art colony. bald head island, NC, usa
2003 international künstlerkolonie in schloss almshof. nürnberg, germany

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Aleks Bartosik in performance *Nuit Blanche*, Headbones Gallery - 2007

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arthouse. the drawing show (april 20 – may 4). kitchener: pandora press, 2007.
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headbones gallery. aleks bartosik: beauty & obsession 2006. toronto: rich fog micro publishing, 2006.
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nürnberg: kulturlanden schloss almshof, g. pistner, 2005.

collections

acme art studios residency program, NC, usa
arthouse, calgary, AB, canada
jetz kunst web-site: contemporary art collection: germany: www.jetzkunst.de
national museum der stadt nürnberg, germany
no boundaries international art colony, NC, usa
schloss almshof, nürnberg, germany
private collections

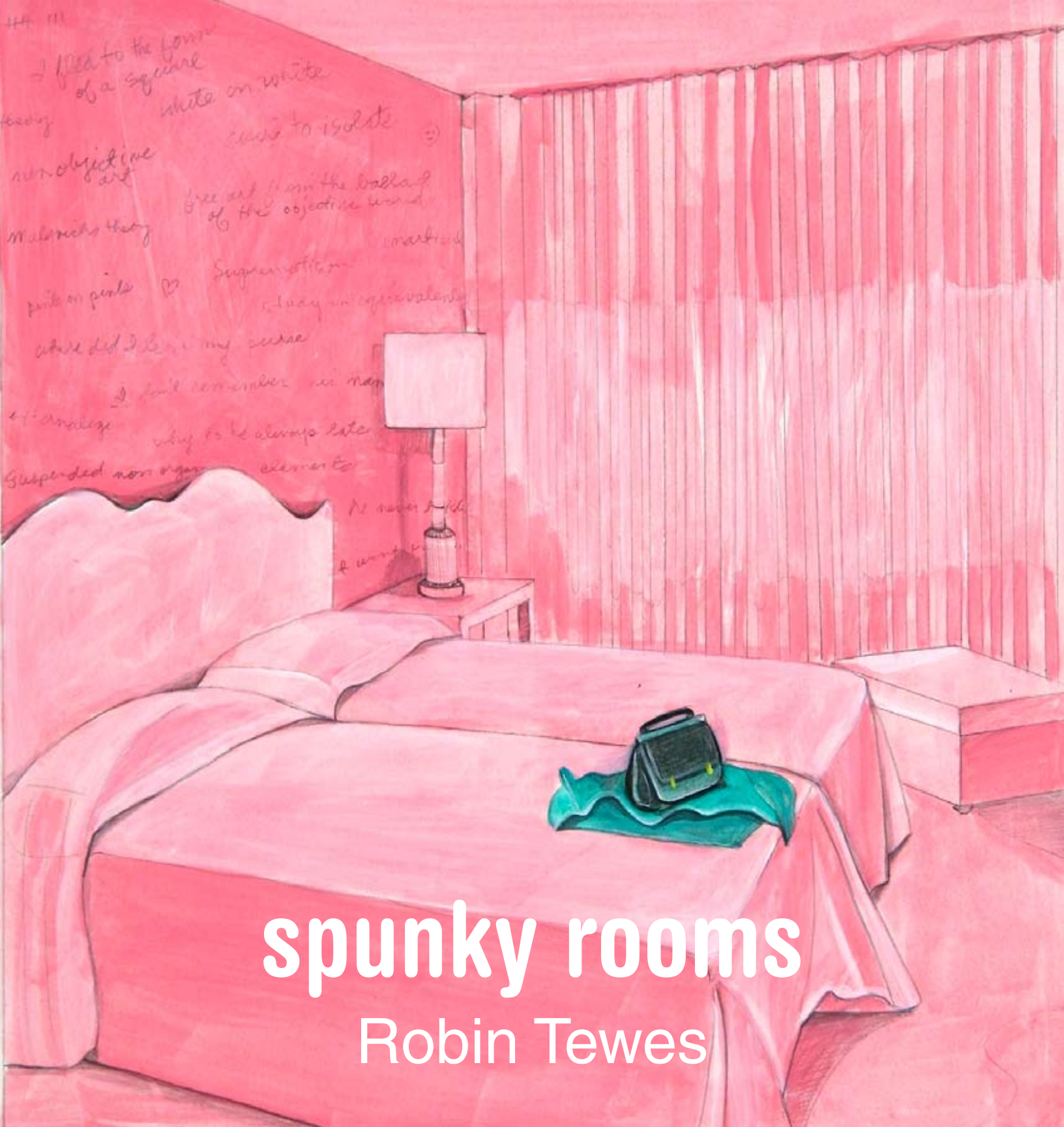
Spunky Rooms: Aleks Bartosik & Robin Tewes

On Friday November 13th, 2009, Headbones Gallery opened an exhibition of works by two women artists; Robin Tewes, a mature New York artist who deals in images derived from domestic environments and Aleks Bartosik, who's autobiographically based, narrative drawings were introduced at the opening reception with a drawing performance.

Spunky women - Tewes' quiet resignation breaking out with military fierceness and Bartosik's seemingly virginal demeanour kicking her heels with spirited naughtiness, ready to be frisked. Unseemly women, their work is not in keeping with standard norms of taste and form. Each is rebellious. Neither is ladylike.

Tewes brews on her boundaries, hysteria lying just below the surface of her placid rooms – a figment of her imagination or the visual documentation of her particular prison? Are the walls, corners, furniture, a private picture of a woman's castle or an artist's confinement? Tewes acknowledges the solitary confinement of easel painting in a living room while the child plays on the rug. Tewes is painting camouflage. There is a perverse insinuation lurking in the ordered sameness – a quiet 'fuck you' whispered with a sly smile of victory. Leo Tolstoy wrote War and Peace, first published in 1869 because men went to war - a grand theme. Virginia Woolf in 1929 delivered a series of essays to two women's colleges at Cambridge University titled A Room of One's Own wherein she questioned whether women could write a great work for they were denied the same opportunities as men to experience the world - women stayed at home. Tewes works from home and is effective.

Bartosik is the younger generation. Messing about. Her women do all the unseemly acts that lie beneath the surface of Tewes' brew. Rubrical acts with reddish smears as lipstick blotches. Bartosik's bad little girl is not about to give in to a ladylike resignation. She too is caught in the examination of women's world, the psychological range openly acknowledged - narcissist to nymphomaniac. She dons her war paint, saddles her horse, kisses her girlfriends and shows what she has been told to keep private.



spunky rooms

Robin Tewes