

splash erased. Fear and anxiety lurk, potent though transformed and refined by Cocteau's pure line. Dismay over aging, trepidation about death, fear of diffusion, of a loss of jurisdiction; and startlingly, tellingly, a dread for the decay of beauty and of the line's perfection and wholeness. ■

"Jean Cocteau. Enfant Terrible" showed at The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts from May 4 to August 29, 2004. It was conceived and realized by Centre Pompidou in Paris.

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VISUAL ART

Tony Scherman

Gary Pearson

In the catalogue for his exhibition "Tony Scherman: pensées impensables (unthinkable thoughts)," the artist states, "Everything between the paintings—the drawings—is everything in my life—the questions I have: what is real and what is not, what is tangible and what is not. A study in empiricism." The exhibition, guest-curated for the Kelowna Art Gallery by Ihor Holubizky, is the first public gallery exhibition to focus on Tony Scherman's drawings, and to examine the relationship between his drawings and paintings.

Scherman's quotation emphasizes an ontological focus in his practice—on the questions he asks, on a life, and an art practice

In Every Dream Home...



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guided by experience and experimentation. It's rare for an artist to be this forthright about the close proximity of his art and life; for this alone Scherman stands apart. Also, his preference for



top: Tony Scherman, *Anthony Hopkins as Hitler on his 50th Birthday*, 2001-2003, encaustic on canvas, 213 x 213 cm. Photographs: John Howarth Photography. Collection: Owen Shine. Photographs courtesy the artist.

below: Tony Scherman, *Eva and Adolf*, 1998-2003, oil on blue Fabriano Ingres paper, 56 x 71 cm. Collection: Louise Morwich & Lynn Miller.

encaustic (wax and pigment) painting is, while not off the radar screen, not so very common in contemporary mainstream painting. The 40 drawings in the show are bracketed by two large paintings, one called *Napoleon in drag and the powder that he used*, 1998-2003, and the other *Anthony Hopkins as Hitler on his 50th*

birthday, 2001-2003. The drawings are, by definition, wide-ranging in subject, including images such as: Adolf Hitler having sex, flowers, concentration camps, desserts, Gillian Anderson dead, dogs, eagles, Marilyn Monroe having sex, body parts and Toronto as an atomic bomb explosion.

Thoughts—unthinkable or not—and images, and the queries they raise, are the basis of Scherman's creative process. At one level his work embodies a kind of Warholian indifference toward images; like Warhol he doesn't privilege one over the other. Similarly, he understands the degree to which society is saturated by them—and the consequent indifference—and the increasing uncertainty towards the articulation of our relationship to images and, by extension, to the real. This problem is intensified when drawings and photos are combined. *For Martin Heidegger*, 1998-2003, for example, is composed of a hand-drawn still-life arrangement over a digital photo-print, depicting American troops looking at a pile of bodies at a Nazi concentration camp. Scherman has said that "[these] images are set together to be understood apart ... you can only articulate them independently, and on their terms." In saying this, he underwrites the important point that he's not collapsing the images into a common category and eroding paradigmatic distinctions such as good and evil, living and dead, but the linguistic pun is too obvious to ignore.

Unthinkable thoughts? "Everything between the paintings—the drawings—is everything (in my life)." The area in-between—that is, the production, mediation and signification of thoughts, images and artworks—is what might be said to fuel Scherman's metaphor machine. The area in-between is also where his audience is obliged to operate, to read between the lines, not only of the main text (the drawings, pinned salon-style on the gallery walls) but also between the aesthetic seductiveness of his technique and the often disturbing meanings these aestheticized artworks contain. A paradox, and an effective one, since this open, transitional and frequently conflicting area of reason and experience could be the closest, figuratively speaking, to the real, the real understood metaphorically. If his work is difficult to articulate and meanings seem unstable, we might want to remember that he describes this area in-between as a study in empiricism; an area guided by observation and experience without the aid of science or theory. A paradoxical argument, considering the philosophical temperament of Tony Scherman. ■

"*Tony Scherman: pensées impensables (unthinkable thoughts)*" was at the Kelowna Art Gallery in British Columbia from September 18 to November 14, 2004. The exhibition will tour through 2005.

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