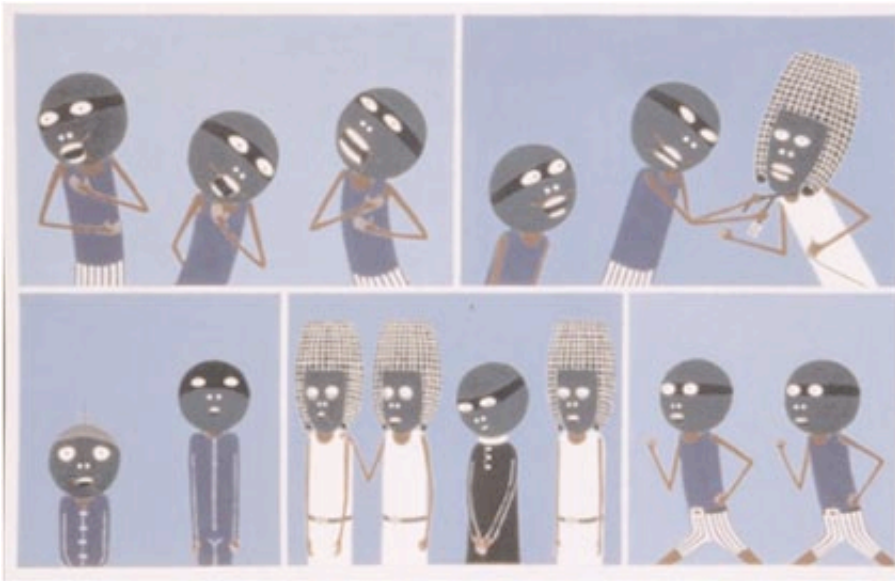


ZACH FEUER GALLERY (LFL)

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Laylah Ali, *Untitled (Greenheads)*, 1998, gouache on paper, 12" x 14 1/2", collection Bernice and Harold Bailey, CT

True Stories

The drawings and paintings featured in this exhibition highlight some of the options available to artists who are presently using the language of figuration. The works on display demonstrate that artists who are prepared to look beyond their chosen media and disciplines are revitalizing figurative drawing and painting. Although a number of the works shown here are informed by the look of video games, computer images, photography and film, all are ultimately handmade.

A wonderful aspect of art is that, after thousands

of years of figurative painting, idiosyncratic styles and images still abound. This exhibition does not aim for homogeneity. Instead, it suggests the current landscape of figurative drawing and painting. The exhibition includes male and female artists of differing ages as well as various ethnicities and nationalities. This exhibition offers a range of perspectives instead of a singular view. There is no dominant style in our increasingly globalized culture.

The artists included in *True Stories* have something to communicate to us that goes beyond a certain feeling



or sensation. That is why they have chosen figuration over abstraction. This is not to say these artists are necessarily forthcoming, for the beauty of a work of art is precisely that its meaning is never direct or singular. Instead, a work of art inherently inspires renewed interpretation. These interpretations will vary in proportion to the viewer's personal interests and experiences. This essay will examine some of the facts and fictions that the works created by these seven artists bring to mind.

Salomon Huerta paints portraits that force us to rethink what constitutes portraiture. A portrait is an evocation of a likeness. In Huerta's portraits, however, the facial features that render an appearance most clearly identifiable are hidden from view. This artist depicts either the heads or the entire bodies of his models as he perceives them from the back. The figures, all pulled off the street, are depicted in singular isolation at the center of the composition in front of a brightly colored monochrome background. Thus, they become vulnerable while retaining their anonymity. At times, they seem interchangeable. By losing their identity, they become objectified – almost abstractions. Who are these people, and what are they thinking?

The fully clothed, standing figures fill almost the entire height and more than two-thirds of the width of the large vertical canvases. In contrast, the paintings of heads and necks perceived in greater close-up occupy almost perfectly square compositions. Each painting is symmetrical. Because each model is either clean-shaven or sporting a crew cut, the "head-shots" do not always enable us to determine whether we are looking at a man or a woman. Race, however, remains distinguishable. As an artist born in Tijuana and living in Los Angeles, Huerta cannot forget the issue of race. The artist's singular focus upon models with very little or no hair also raises questions regarding fetishism and sexual preference. Huerta aims for smooth, elementary, Brancusian forms and the slick, immaculate surfaces for which L.A. painting is renowned.

Muntean/Rosenblum, the Vienna-based artist duo, draw and paint images of young men and women. Ours is a youth-oriented culture, and these artists



Christopher Leitch, *O Noble One, chance diaries, November 2001 - March 2002: dreaming about Mom, 2001-02*, (detail, 1 of 56 pieces), randomly selected media and paper, 18" x 24", courtesy of the artist, Kansas City, MO

featured in advertisements. In large, powerful acrylic-on-canvas compositions reminiscent of the great paintings of old, it becomes obvious that these artists' characters enact nothing whatsoever. The models' perceived or actual insignificance is underscored by the format of the images – a rectangle with rounded corners framed by white borders – reminiscent of old photographs or of televised fodder. It is also conveyed by inscriptions appearing in block letters underneath the images, proclaiming nonsense of the order of: "Mystery is the promise of unknown things which you must be wise enough to explore not too deeply, for fear you will dead-end in nothing but facts," with entirely convincing occasional lapses in spelling, grammar and punctuation.

The more intimate pencil drawings of single individuals seen in close-up likewise combine text and image. These works are more sexually charged. Here, we confront the actors – who assume provocative poses as we see them from somewhat risqué vantage points – one on one. The youths respond to us with word and glance: "It is such a privilege to know how being selfless feels." The paintings and drawings are executed in a straightforward, matter-of-fact style that is perfectly suited to their subject.

The French, Brooklyn-based artist Jules de Balincourt is extremely fond of narrative. His paintings, executed with oil, spray paint and pen on board, appear as climactic moments that are excised from a larger narrative context that is unknown to the viewer. Whether de Balincourt imagines his own stories or bases his episodes upon ready-made sources is unclear. This could perhaps be ascertained, but that would take away from the mystery of his paintings. For example, in the dark movie theater represented in one picture, where the viewers all turn light and dark blue in the glow of the movie screen, do we really want to know what is going to happen next? All hell could break loose – though maybe not. There is obvious tension as we look down upon dozens of figures, sitting in a precipitously receding space, who stare back at us.

There is something almost frightening about the

examine what it means today to be young and somewhat innocent. The message they convey is disconcerting. These youths are aimless creatures with seemingly few interests and ambitions. They look hopelessly bored and assume the poses, gestures and mannerisms of their counterparts



Muntean/Rosenblum, *Untitled (There is no transcendental point from which we may observe the past; it is always constructed in the present and changed along with its movements.)*, 2001, acrylic on canvas, 79" x 98", courtesy Daniel Hug Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

a car winds its way around a cliff as a dam breaks in the valley below and water rushes forward, flooding an industrial site. In the latter, a helicopter hovers over the side of a mountain, casting its spotlight upon a compound as figures clad from head to toe in

red suits grab farm animals. What is going on here? De Balincourt paints in a naïf style, using highly saturated colors, flat textures, stiff lines, no modeling, and reveling in spatial recession as if he had just stumbled upon it. All of these elements give his



there is something about engineering about the empty supermarket with the lone cashier in another picture. This interior is seen from a three-quarter angle from above, with its check-out counters and shelves arranged according to the unyielding laws of one point perspective. In *Leisure Land* and *Free for All*, great drama is not merely hinted at. In the former,



Jules de Balincourt, *Temporary Drop Out*, 2003, oil, spray paint and pen on board, 40" x 48",
courtesy LFL Gallery, NY, collection Johnson County Community College

Thorson, Alice, "True Stories", *The Kansas City Star*, February 15, 2004