

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

83 VANDAM STREET NEW YORK, NY 10013

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NEW YORK HORTICULTURE
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JANUARY 28, 2004

The hot exhibitions this winter not only generate heat, they radiate an eerie, ghoulish, ectoplasmic glow. The ghostly aura is strongest at "Scream: 10 Artists x 10 Writers x 10 Scary Movies," currently haunting the Anton Kern Gallery on West 20th Street in Chelsea. Following the dark teachings of Slasher films, S&M, Goth and Death Metal, "Scream" peels away the horror genre's epidermal clichés, revealing metaphoric meat, muscle and brains.

In "Scream," curators Fernanda Arruda and Michael Clifton have assembled a searing and smart group show of artists who draw inspiration from horror films, including works by David Altmejd, Dora Longo Bahia, Sue de Beer, **Brock Enright**, Matt Greene, Cameron Jamie, Bjarne Melgaard, Amy Sarkisian, Banks Violette and Michael Wetzel.

The films, which are being screened at Gavin Brown's Passerby bar on 15th Street, range from Georges Franju's 1959 *Eyes Without a Face* (Wetzel) to the 1977 cult flick about a teen vampire, *Martin* (Violette). The writers, who include Meghan Dailey, Massimiliano Gioni, Jens Hoffmann and Ali Subotnick, contribute essays to an accompanying mock-catalogue.

One standout in this crew is **Brock Enright**, the artist who made global headlines in 2002 for his "kidnapping service" presented as an artwork. At Kern, Enright has placed a rickety television set on top of an incongruous installation that includes a heap of packing boxes, a basketball duct-taped to a football and a beat-up stuffed koala bear with its paw wedged into a plastic cup.

Supposedly playing on the TV is a live feed of one of his kidnapping victims, a blindfolded man pacing in a small basement room; the junk in the pile is booty stolen from the unfortunate subject. Enright's work is, of course, a particularly perverse comment on the capitalist marketplace, where any demand can be satisfied -- for a price.

Also notable are Michael Wetzel's small but ominous paintings, done in egg tempera and oil, that capture those classic horror scenes that come moments before the violence starts. *Endless Hallway* initially appears benign, with its pink-and-white floral wallpaper, plum carpeting and neat white doors with dainty handles. But Wetzel extends the passageway to impossible length, until it becomes insufferably claustrophobic and death-laden.

In Wetzel's *Sacrifice IV*, a pretty young blond in a black spaghetti-strap top looks upward, her mouth agape with fright. It is possibly moments before she is murdered as a ritual cult sacrifice, but the strangulating tight fit of the ladylike pearls she wears hint at a more everyday dread, like law school.

Across the street at Kim Foster Gallery are compellingly creepy organic sculptures by New Jersey artist Jim Toia. All around the gallery are Toia's "spore drop drawings," ghostly abstractions on black paper made by huge mushrooms that he encloses in airless boxes, convincing them to loose their white spores. They range in price from \$5,000 to \$9,000, and are popular with collectors.

In the middle of the gallery are several sculptures, including *Bees Echo the Moon* (\$8,000), a stack of rough, unvarnished wood boxes that were originally intended as beehives. Through holes

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punctured in the wood -- and adorned with grotty fungus growth -- can be seen a video of mushroom spores floating in glowing blue light, like the evils adrift in Pandora's Box.

Toia's *Shed (Universal Self-Portrait)* (\$9,000) is a similar blend of craftsmanship and decay. A group of fragile, incongruous artifacts mounted on the wall and displayed in vitrines, *Shed* includes a chalice overflowing with teabags coated in resin clumps, like putrid saliva, as if the tea were brewed in a decaying, gummy mouth. With his delicate and contemplative works, Toia could pass as the Blair Witch's more poetic sibling.

While Toia is into natural secretions, the pair of slimy octopuses that star in Amy Globus' video *Electric Sheep* at Gorney Bravin + Lee seems invitingly sleek. Part of "Future Noir," a group exhibition inspired by Syd Mead's set designs for *Blade Runner* and *Tron* (Mead's gouaches are also included in the show), the Globus video lovingly follows the invertebrates as they suction their way through an aquarium of glass tubing. The accompanying soundtrack is like an opiate dream of a David Lynch lounge act. As the singer hypnotically croons about her party dress, the squids soft pink bodies start to look prettier and prettier.

After the squids, the most appealing piece in "Future Noir" is Julian LaVerdiere's *Diogenes Returned*, a magnificent toy vehicle luxuriously crafted of gold, silver, bronze, granite, walnut, glass and micro-electronics that can be had for \$15,000 (an accompanying sepia-toned diazotype print is \$1,500). LaVerdiere's sculpture seems closer to H.G. Wells than *Blade Runner*; more in keeping with Philip K. Dick's paranoid dystopia is a rack of kitsch breast-shaped mugs and hair dresser's dummies assembled by Commodity Sculpture pioneer Haim Steinbach (\$45,000).

In one corner of the gallery, Jon Kessler pays homage to *Blade Runner's* version of a post-apocalyptic Tokyo with his work *Noriko* (\$15,000), a large image of a young Asian girl printed in blue, green and yellow on a sheet of scrim. As usual, Kessler's work has a low-tech kinetic component -- an exposed mechanism moves a yellow light bulb up and down like in a cheap light-box ad. The girl's sweet face is selling something, which will probably be a disappointing buy.

Across 26th Street in "Game Show" at James Cohen Gallery is still another electronic temptress - - Kristen Geisler's interactive video animation, *Dream of Beauty*. Claiming to know 500 words, the seductive if bald cyborg is actually a fairly dull conversationalist, who blinks blankly at most questions and whose lexicon doesn't seem to include the few words most people want to hear from a pretty mouth.

Nearby, Mike Kelley's *Arena #2 (Kangaroo)* offers headier stuff, via its staging of the eviction from Eden as enacted by a haggard group of pastel stuffed animals posed on a chewed-up children's blanket on the floor. Also recalling the classic horror movie motif of creepy if well-dressed kiddies is Yinka Shonibare's *Hopscotch* (2000), an ensemble of headless child-sized mannequins in little tailored suits, like those the devil child Damien wore in *The Omen*, except that Shonibare makes them of his signature brightly colored Kinte cloth. They're standing ominously on an enormous hopscotch board.

A theatrical terror is the prevailing note sounded by Dutch artist Amie Dicke in "Le Cabinet des Collages," the group show currently on view at D'Amelio Terras on West 22nd Street. Dicke cuts out images of slinky models from glossy fashion magazines, then darkens their outlines with heavy black ink and uses an Xacto knife to slice spidery designs through the image, cutting away the girls' identities and leaving nothing of a model, say, but her wild hair, almond eyes and a pouting upper lip. Dicke's works intertwine sex and death so enticingly that her drawings could count as the Cliff Notes to Georges Bataille.

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Dicke's neo-Gothic sensibility is shared by Christian Holstad, whose collages juxtapose images of gay lovers cut from porn mags, New England furniture from design catalogues, fresh berries from cooking journals and obituaries torn out of the newspaper. Mixing fruit and fruits, Holstad designs challenging memento mori, which, alongside Dicke's Gucci succubuses, remind us that sex is still not (nor has it ever been) safe.

Uptown at Mary Boone Gallery on Fifth Avenue, Toland Grinnell brings the horror home -- in a suitcase, literally. His latest group of objects, titled "Mazes, Traps and Runways," are all designed to be packed up in portable valises. The showpiece is undoubtedly his *Rodent Addiction System*, a kind of ultra-decadent multi-chambered home for hamster Puff Daddies that includes a mini-S&M harness and water bottles that dispense top-shelf liquor, among other luxuries. It's enough to make being reincarnated as a rodent seem like the ultimate reward.

Grinnell is clearly mocking our consumer society, though he tempers his appetite for creamy luxury with a touch of terror. In the small gallery is *28 Baby Girls*, a sculpture inspired by a news report of a case in China where newborn and infant girls were found drugged or dead in series of suitcases, waiting to be smuggled abroad. Grinnell hangs a silver plaque on the gallery wall paraphrasing the gruesome incident and nearby he displays a beat-up suitcase, itself a seedy artifact found in a vintage shop, which he outfitted with improved trimmings for humane-if-illegal infant transport, including an oxygen tank, pampers and a sterile baby bottle.

Back in Chelsea at the Rare Gallery, the painter Jim Wright is exhibiting large works with acrylic piled on so joyously that it resembles plastic cake batter. *Imagine Every Molecule in Your Body Exploding at the Speed of Light* pays homage to *Ghostbusters*, and features a team of gallant spook-fighters eviscerating a possessed corpse. This is Wright's first solo show at the gallery, and his pictures are priced in the \$1,600-\$7,500 range. Overall, the exorcism looks jolly but thankfully there is still "something strange in the neighborhood."

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