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CLINT ROENISCH GALLERY

Massimo Guerrera, DARBORAL

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We, in our infinite cleverness, like to think of drawing as the underground indie-music of the art world; a few practitioners here and there, making weird, oddball-looking art, appreciated by small groups of loyal devotees. The above-ground legitimacy (so to speak) of drawing is growing, however, along with its fan base. Thanks to the explosion of the art (and consequently, careers) of people like Marcel Dzama and the Royal Art Lodge (ah, we remember the glory days of Marcel, playing small venues like the sidebar illustrations in Saturday Night Magazine) and Massimo Guerrera, drawing is enjoying something of a cross-over appeal (at least we think that's the indie marketing term for such things). Massimo Guerrera (who is, at present, the Flaming Lips of the art world, and slowly becoming its REM) is a particular example of this kind of burgeoning popularity, with frequent shows in all sorts of places. Like the Clint Roenisch Gallery, for instance.

DARBORAL (so the show is titled, in all its uppercase glory) is not merely a show of drawings. The floor of the Roenisch gallery is covered in a collage of carpets, on top of which bizarre sculptures, folios of drawings and plates of snacks (olives, nuts, dried fruit) are strewn about. A few 2-D wall pieces are there to stand guard over everything. This particular show is, according to the artist's statement, merely the latest pit stop in the thus-far 5 year unfolding of the DARBORAL project, which, according to said statement, has something to do with social interaction and the construction of identity.

Whatever theoretical justifications may be brought to bear on the show, the fact remains that it is a staggeringly, strangely beautiful collection of objects. Everything generally has the same aesthetic, which partakes of a surrealist approach to biology. The sculptures, plaster casts, are mostly outlandish versions of heads; strange, hydrocephalically swollen things with grotesque protrusions from various and sundry orifices. The other sculptures are almost entirely unrecognizable, save for some vague associations with biological anatomy; some of them look like negative casts of chamber pots, some look like rather extravagant butt-plugs. The stars of the show, for our money, are the two dimensional works - the stand-alone drawings and the folios of drawings. They all partake of Mr. Guerrera's now-recognizable stable of marks - the stipple dots, the short needle-y dashes, the sinuous exploratory contour lines. They are scenes, tableaux, absurdist in their distortions and conflations of the human figure. Most of the drawings consist of couplings or groupings: mother and child, lovers, masses of people. And there is an animalistic eroticism that pervades the drawings, that is equal parts Freud, de Sade and Kinsey.

That DARBORAL has to do with the ins and outs of societal living is not all that hard to glean, and the theme is a well-established one. What

makes this exploration so fascinating is how Mr. Guerrero's form bears out his theme. His drawing vocabulary has always reminded us of textbooks and manuals. One comes across the stippled shading, the precisely descriptive uniform line in anatomy and biology textbooks, and their like. Yet, Mr. Guerrero takes this banally familiar form, and turns it on its head by representing these surreal circus freak-show distortions: lovers fused at the hip, caught in an eternal rutting penetration; a child's head anatomically indistinguishable from the breast on which it feeds; people conjoined with furniture, with machinery, with each other. DARBORAL, therefore, does indeed speak of social interaction; it ends up looking like some nightmarish anthropology textbook in which humans are the subjects, as if, somehow, some alien species handed us a guidebook to our own collective unconscious, and this was the result. In a peculiar, precise drawing language, he has shown us not only the ins and outs of social interaction, but our disturbed and disturbing fantasies that are implicit therein. Mr. Guerrero, has put on (to complete our smarmy little metaphor), with indie means, a show of arena-sized breadth and scope.