



McMurtrey Gallery *Howard Sherman: In my mind, you're inflatable*

For his second solo exhibition at McMurtrey Gallery, Howard Sherman returns with large, aggressive paintings that take his previous work a step further along the path of success. Not so much gone as hidden in a cacophony of paint are Sherman's iconic cartoon figures, a departure from his last exhibition in which his quite capable drawing abilities were highly evident. *In my mind, you're inflatable* is much more about his ability to lay down layer upon layer of paint with the precision of a shotgun blast and still have it all come together in a cohesive fashion.

This progression toward a fuller abstraction somewhat dislodges Sherman from his apparent fondness for Carroll Dunham and 1980s graffiti art. The small Dunham fetish is evidenced in the displaced cartoonish sexual motifs seen throughout the exhibition: gaping mouths, tongues, vibrators, mons pubis and other, more obvious hunks of meat. While these shapes permeate his work, they are not present for merely salacious means.

Sherman has a socially minded attraction to ubiquitous bits of contemporary visual culture and art that doesn't just depict pears in a bowl. Sex, gold cards and gold teeth, graffiti chic and the need to "improve sex appeal" are all signifiers of a culture wanting to kick everything up a notch and wanting so much more of more to indicate its liveliness. He then mixes all of this in a successful explosion of paint and mark making. This can most honestly be seen in such works as *Gold Rolex for a Strong Pimp Hand*, *Gold Cards Buy Gold Crowns* and *Titanium Dildo*, wherein these things have become theoretical standards for society.

A slight throwback to his earlier work is found in *Donkey Punching Bastards*, a large blast of whirling dervish energy. Perhaps recalling his comic strip days, *Donkey* features all the disembodied parts seen in the best of cartoon fights including floating boxing gloves, detached heads and great clouds of color determining a great deal of action, but still less violent than any UFC bout.

The one thing that momentarily upsets complete success for Sherman's show is the titling of his work. Apparently taken aback at the easy success of his first two solo exhibitions, he wanted his work to be less immediately accessible. So, in addition hiding the more easily decodable iconography under layers of paint, he apparently amped up the titles of his paintings in an effort to force the viewer into more of a quandary over their content and subject matter. This raises the question, then, of which is more important – the image or the title? The obvious answer is, of course, the image. *Titanium Dildo* is simply an inept title for what is the best painting in the exhibition, although it clearly has nothing on *Invisible Nipple Clamp* and *Paralytic Hooker* (the weakest of the show). This sophomoric titling, reminiscent of "Beavis and Butthead"-type ramblings, distracts from rather than adding to serious discourse about the work. The painting – the idea – is already there; it already does this with no need for such frivolity.

Sherman, a graduate of the University of Texas and University of North Texas, is already achieving what many artists wait years for: sold-out exhibitions to good collections, good media coverage, important artist residencies, and, this fall, a solo museum show. Once he figures out the dilemma of titles, his visually dynamic work will pass its only hurdle. These paintings are not the grist for quiet meditation. They are loud and sometimes a bit outré, but they will keep you coming back, laying new surprises in your lap each time – a mark of good work no matter what you call it.

-R. Eric Davis

Through February 16th, 3508 Lake Street,
713.523.8238, mcmurtreygallery.com