



HOWARD'S BEND
Clockwise from left:
Sherman's 'Tactile
Hallucination,' 'Flea
Market Mood Ring' and
'Revision as a Form
of Lying' on display at
McMurtrey this month

Out of Toon

In a splashy show at McMurtrey, a laid-back ex-cartoonist goofs on the gory and the grotesque

| By Christina Wiginton |

Houston-born artist Howard Sherman is walking around his studio showing off his latest abstracts, which feature painted depictions of hypodermic needles, guns and middle fingers. "I like to keep it light," he says without irony. It takes just a few minutes to understand where he's coming from. In the open, optimistic mind of an almost-unexpectedly amiable former college-newspaper cartoonist, even life's dark side can be fun.

Jack Johnson tunes humming, Sherman continues the tour of his paint-splattered east Downtown space, accessorized simply with a futon and a shelf holding empty liquor bottles and vinyl record covers, and then reminisces about formative days at UT. This was back when "Austin didn't have to try so hard to keep it weird," he advises. After undergrad, he says he hostel-hopped in Europe, "living off chocolate spread." Good times.

And for Sherman—a fun-loving bachelor who sleeps in his studio on a mattress hidden behind a hanging faded sheet—the good times are set to continue right up through his buzzy solo show at McMurtrey Gallery (3508 Lake St., 713.523.8238). The zany provocative *When Gorillas Shoot Pigs* goes up Oct. 24.

Sherman's offbeat artistic career hatched in college, where he drew social-commentary comics for *The Daily Texan*. That gig soon led him to scribbling

his tongue-in-cheek cartoons for 18 newspapers across the country. It all became a bit too hectic for the laid-back lad, now 38. "After a while I started getting tired of being on a daily deadline," he says.

So, in 2006, after getting his masters in painting and drawing, Sherman took aim at contemporary art. Shortly thereafter, he had an exhibition at a museum in Beaumont, and placed as a Hunting Art Prize finalist (a feat he's repeated twice more in recent years).

Sherman's abstracts pack layers of random doodles like stars and credit cards, bold colors and animated-type characters. The McMurtrey show's namesake piece features a furry-looking gorilla, whose face morphs into a gun. Sherman says he balances the heavier subjects with "funny colors"—bright pinks, blues and yellows.

And those flips of the bird and the needles? Just stuff, open to *your* interpretation. "It's funny the way people react to [needles]," Sherman says. "Someone said, 'We love your work but we have a newborn baby. I don't think we can put a painting up that has needles in it.' Diabetics use needles all the time!"

All needling aside, the chilled-out fellow says he hopes people can laugh at his art. He does. "It's important for me to hold on to my sense of humor in the work. If you lose your sense of humor, you're screwed." ■