

JP Munro in Chinatown

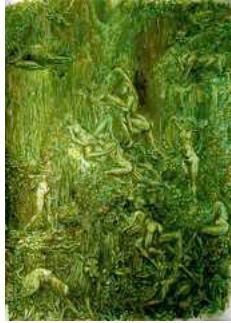
by Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer

JP Munro presented by China Art Objects

Cottage Home

410 Cottage Home Street, Chinatown, Los Angeles, CA 90012

October 17, 2009 - November 14, 2009



JP Munro's most recent exhibition of new paintings and drawings are even more libidinous than usual. His characteristic naïve-neoclassical world of imagery remains the familiar location for these new quasi-mythological scenes. While Munro clearly draws from an extensive and ranging selection of compositional and stylistic art historical references, his pictures have the overwhelming effect of lurid friezes, playing off classical Roman tropes while distorting bodies into more uncomfortable and more disturbed modern proportions. Naked male bodies clash in battle, men and women hump amidst ruins and jungle-like overgrowth, and female nudes writhe in male orgiastic fantasies. Perhaps something between Gustave Moreau and Les Nabis, his palette invests heavily in luminous oranges, ochres, yellow-greens, and warm browns. Paint is generally applied thinly and dryly in layered daubs. There is a deliberate poverty of traditional technique.

One striking tableau cast atypically in a cool, dark green pall may look like a pornographic still from Lars Von Trier's new hellish, x-rated horror film, *Anti-Christ*, but Munro captions his sexual maelstrom *The Golden Age* implying another primal and almost free-love, back-to-the-earth subtext: copulating figures nestle between the snaking roots of a tremendous tree and explore a range of oral sex possibilities, men walk around with terrific erections and women splay their thighs.

In fact, in all of Munro's paintings (with the notable exception of one large, beautiful figure-less streetscape of his Silver Lake neighborhood), the proliferation of bodies are de facto pornographic and hyper-masculinized, not merely by the actions they may or may not be pictured doing, but by the stiffness in which they are consistently rendered. Munro's bodies are rigid, hard robotic things with dislocated shoulders and Manneristically torqued torsos. Their very posture and muscular tautness communicates the embodiment of adolescent sexual drive that runs through the more, or less, explicit imagery. Less massive or sculptural than flatly linear, they are the refined and elaborate development of stoner daydream doodlings drawn on the covers of folders and notebooks. His figures are often as orange as carrots and their angular anatomies are stylized, awkward, nearly sickly affairs that spring from his imagination rather than observation. Expression is not human or facial, but melodramatic and theatrical, gestural and choreographed in flailing limbs. Romanticism is caricatured as pastiche, and Symbolism is simulated for its mystery of coded narratives and its insinuation of allegorical possibility. These are dense private fantasies. And, even though Munro musters a titillating sense of forbidden intrigue and mock-heroic antiquity through his flea-market approximations of classical genre painting, it is the bizarre stiffness of his bodies that ultimately sums up his peculiar and exciting vision. For Munro, bodies appear poignantly as piercing tragic-heroic emblems of potency and calcified disfiguration, often insect-like and contorted. Perhaps their stiff severity metaphorizes Munro's unwavering and rigorous commitment to his stridently idiosyncratic, even absurdly anachronistic world of imagery.

-Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer

Image courtesy the artist and China Art Objects.

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