

Kutlug Ataman
Women Who Wear Wigs
 1999
 video still



kidneys have failed, she is on dialysis, and is forced to live off of prostitution, but her life seems held together by a passionate devotion to maintaining her immaculate maquillage. *Never My Soul* reflects those gender theorists who argue that traits once thought psychologically, or even biologically, determined are in fact performative. As Judith Butler has written: 'Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylised repetition of acts.'

In *Women Who Wear Wigs*, 1999, four Turkish women talk at length about why a hairpiece has become an integral part of their lives. One is accused of being a political terrorist and has been living in disguise for 30 years. Another is a glamorous journalist who has lost her hair from chemotherapy for breast cancer. A third is an observant Muslim who has substituted a wig for the headscarf she is forbidden to wear as a student in a secular university. The last is a transsexual prostitute whose head is periodically shaved, out of spite, by the police. Rather than being a question of vanity, the wig serves as a metaphor for how women deal with oppression, repression and fear. All four subjects are dealing head-on with imposed conditions and moulding their appearance in ways that are simultaneously assertive and protective.

The characters that Ataman selects live on the fringes of what would usually be called mainstream society, but the more we listen to them, the more we become aware that their stories are allegories for the possibility of reinvention. Significantly, language is the key. As Ataman has explained: 'Identity is a dress that other people put on you and make you wear – but then talking is a form of rebellion because you can work against these perceptions.' The protagonists speak, not just to reveal their side of the story, but also to order and clarify their own thoughts and feelings. Ataman's videos show individuals who transform themselves through the act of narration and demonstrate this very process before our eyes. ■

Pryle Behrman is a writer and critic.

■ Dirty Pictures

The Approach London January 29 to March 23

The title of this painting show, 'Dirty Pictures', I'd assumed to be a kind of conceptual word play about the nature of painting – that all paintings are actually just canvases dirtied and smeared with pigment, like so many used drop cloths. I figured this was yet another one of those cleverly

APPARITION the Action of Appearing

8 March - 27 April 2003

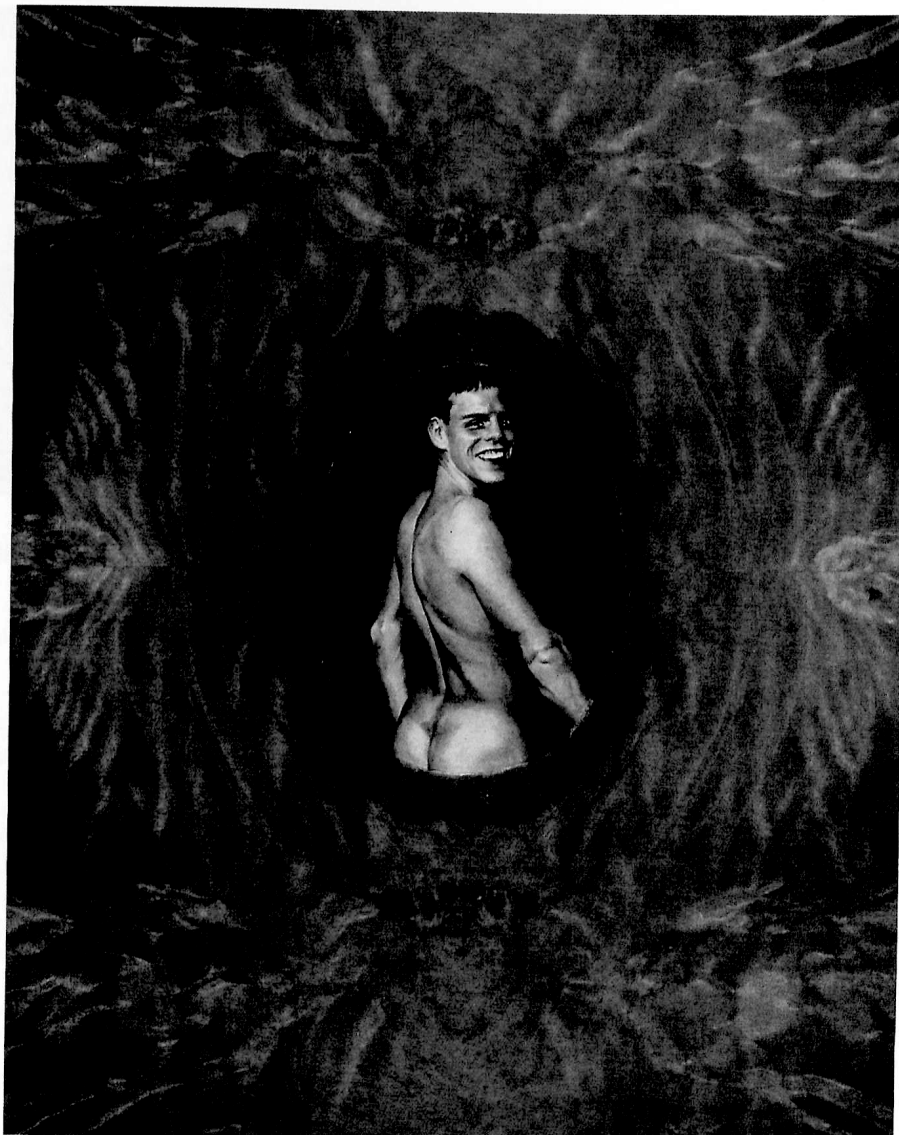
Cai Guo-Qiang, Charles Crumb, Marlene Dumas, Susan Hiller,
 William Kentridge, Paul McCarthy, Elizabeth Manchester,
 Daniela Steinfeld, Jon Thompson • exhibition organised by Arnolfini, Bristol



KETTLE'S YARD

Kettle's Yard, Castle St., Cambridge CB3 0AQ
 gallery open: Tues-Sun & Bank Holiday Mondays,
 (closed Good Friday) 11.30-17.00 • admission free
 t 01223 352124 • www.kettlesyard.co.uk

Daniel Sinsel
Untitled 2003



titled painting exhibitions which recently have explored the conundrum of painting, among them, 'Trouble Spot Painting', 1999; 'Examining Pictures' 1999; 'Painting at the Edge of the World' 2001; 'Dear Painter, Paint me ... '2002; 'Painting on the Move' 2002, ad infinitum.

When I asked gallerist and exhibition organiser Jake Miller if this paint=dirt idea was in fact what he'd had in mind for the title, he responded with a look of baffled but good-natured amusement. What on earth was I talking about? No; he literally meant dirty pictures, you know, like naughty, possibly sexy pictures. What a relief! A pun-free title! And that explained the adolescent content in much of the work, the fairly high vulva count, and the walls painted a seductive shade of Agent Provocateur pale pink. There were a few lovers and nudes too, but it wasn't that smutty, really. Figuration definitely prevailed, but fantasy imagery and landscape were also in great number. Standouts among these included a very beautiful, claustrophobic urban landscape with a 70s hyperreal record-cover feel, by Nigel Cooke, *Pyroclastic Fever*, 2003, and a mysterious, blurred sort of father/daughter beach image by newcomer Manfredi Beninati, *Despina*, 2002. Mostly 'Dirty Pictures' was an unpretentious collection of 85 smallish new paintings, a chance to see recent 'classics' like Michael Raedecker alongside a few new painters, some more or less unknown in Britain, like Spaniard Nono Bandera (who paints and writes on found canvases) and Russians Dubossatsky & Vinogradov (who

make pastel-coloured digs at American pop culture, from Mickey Mouse to Barbie). Other good 'dirty pictures' included a killer dolphin from Paul Noble, *D...d...d... dolphin*, 1994; a great big psychedelic collage by Gary Webb & Mark Titchner, *Who Did What Bits*, 2000; colourful dioramas like updated Cornell boxes by Dan Coombs, *Dream 1*, and *Lounge*, both 2000, and a tattooed, lute-playing angel by Uwe Henneken. Though not quite as dirty and exciting as a peep show, 'Dirty Pictures' was, above all, thankfully, blissfully uninterested in offering yet another rebuttal in the Great Painting Debate. For this reason 'Dirty Pictures' genuinely suggested, in its own modest way, that painting might really be doing OK. All those institutionalised ra-ra-for-painting exhibitions, desperate to prove how vibrant painting still is, always seemed to confirm just how precarious painting's health really must be, effectively banging another nail in the coffin. If it's doing so damn well, then why the need to prove it time and time again?

Instead in 'Dirty Pictures' you just had the reassuring sense that interesting young artists in London, Berlin and elsewhere are still enjoying long afternoons in the company of easels and turpentine without hating themselves in the morning. Happily, they no longer seem so damn selfconscious that they can barely pick up a paintbrush without having first to apologise or explain their work to death. Although the 19th century-like salon-style hang, with pictures clustered artfully on the walls, has

Central Saint Martins College of
 Art & Design Library
 100-109 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0DU



Installation view of
'Exploring Landscape'

become a bit of a cliché by now, it functioned well here perhaps because so many of the painters are working in the spirit of a pre-Modern age. Many are essentially making 21st-century Pictures of Modern Life, from Kaye Donachie's images of the Manson family, *Never learn not to love*, and *Give up your world, come on an' be with me (I'm your kind, I'm your kind)*, both 2003, to Daniel Sinsel's untitled beefcake pin-up. Other highlights included Phillip Allen who is in a league of his own among this bunch, making most of the other artists on view look especially youthful. I most admire paintings in which you can sense the artist's real control over every last bit of the canvas, and yet also feel as if the picture had emerged effortlessly, almost on its own, as though it had somehow always existed. Allen's work consistently gives that kind of resolved, mature impression. A single canvas by Swedish painter Mamma Andersson, *First Encounter*, 2002, with its liquid, Gauguin-like figure groups also seemed noticeably more accomplished than the majority here. And if you're pining for 80s style neo-expressionism, look no further; good examples of that sort of thing included young, Finnish artist Mari Sunna's large, flat female figure, *Beauty is Only the First Touch of Terror*, 2003, Leigh Curtis's cartoonish *Dead Soldier* or *Man with Broken Bottle*, both 2002, and muddy, painterly works by Rezi van Lankveld, such as *Woman*, 2001.

Miller's strategy, whereby he chose the group of artists to be included without first selecting the actual works to be shown, contributed to the relaxed yet well-informed mood of the show. 'Dirty Pictures' connected to the kind of fresh, artist-led group exhibitions with which the Approach had begun in the mid 90s, yet it didn't suffer any sense of nostalgia. Above all, as always, group shows are only as good as the works therein, no matter how dazzling or weak the concept behind them. 'Dirty Pictures' boasts mostly good work, probably the reason why one is inclined to trust its motives, and enjoy. ■

Gilda Williams is a writer and commissioning editor for contemporary art at Phaidon Press.

■ Exploring Landscape: Eight Views from Britain

Andrea Rosen Gallery New York
January 24 to February 22

Curated by Andrea Rosen's new director, Susanna Greeves, a veteran of the Anthony d'Offay Gallery which suddenly and unexpectedly dissolved in 2001, 'Exploring Landscape: Eight Views from Britain' is a blandly titled, indifferently installed and somewhat arbitrarily selected sampler of current painting from London. It should come as no surprise that much of it is also associated with the interests of Greeves' former boss. But, while partial and flawed, it is at least a useful primer for a New York audience curious about the state of things in Britain post-yBa (New Neurotic Realism, if it ever really existed, never made it across the Atlantic). That none of the participants has yet been the subject of a solo show in this city is a sobering realisation after the hype surrounding their recent appearances in competitions such as Beck's Futures and the John Moores. In dark economic times and amid rumours of war, it takes even more than before to make an impact here.

Dan Perfect broke London in d'Offay's final group show, the Martin Maloney-curated 'Death to the Fascist Insect that Preys on the Life of the People', staged at what is now Haunch of Venison. Perfect has the sure hand and sharply tuned compositional sensibility of a commercial illustrator, but his "After the battle there will be a cut-scene and you'll receive the Hero License" and *Get all the treasures here which include: Puppies 73-75, Watergleam, Tornado-G and Cottage*, both of 2002, are as insubstantial as the cartoons and computer games to which they owe their lurid hues and verbose titles. Vaguely anthropomorphic forms battle it out with pumped-up doodles (think Jonathan Lasker meets Fiona Rae) against gaseous rainbows of colour. Unarguably stylish, they're fun for a little while, sophisticated wallpaper thereafter.

INTERLUDES

Anne Bjerger Hansen

8 March – 26 April 2003

Angel Row Gallery Central Library Building 3 Angel Row Nottingham NG1 6HP T 0115 915 2869
Mon - Sat 10.00 - 5.00 Weds 10.00 - 7.00 Admission Free

Touring to Focal Point Gallery 24 May - 5 July, ArtSway 9 August - 7 September



a film and video umbrella touring exhibition
T 020 7407 7755 W www.fvumbrella.com

