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Local Gallery Features Breakthrough Artist

Colorful, cartoonish works depict painter's angst

By Kristiana Heap
Society Editor

Paintings with titles like "Not Enough Middle Fingers" and "Anatomy of a Pimp" may seem like a hard sale in an upscale Turtle Creek gallery, but Karen Fedri and Ashley Tatum Casson are doing their best.

The current show at the Gerald Peters Gallery on Fairmount Street is Commodification of Dissent, a vivid collection of unusually named, large-scale paintings by Houston artist Howard Sherman.

"He's not creating art for the pure aesthetic. He's not creating noise for the sake of noise," said Fedri, who co-directs the gallery with Casson. "There's an energy and vitality that people gravitate toward."

Dallas has seen its share of noise in the last few months, including the morbidly unforgettable Polly Morgan show at the Kristy Stubbs Gallery, which featured taxidermy rats and squirrels in champagne glasses. But Sherman's currents of angst over world events and credit card debt are much easier to swallow because they are paired with bright colors and cartoonish movement.

"I'm not going to cause immediate meditation," Sherman said. "You're definitely not going to forget this work, whether you love it or hate it."

Many of the collectors who visited the gallery to see his work have had positive reactions; seven of the 13 pieces in acrylic and marker were purchased within the first two weeks of the show.

"People will see a red [sold] dot, and they'll ask if they can buy the painting from the person who purchased it," Fedri said. "People have a reaction, like [they've] got to have it. That energy makes



Courtesy Photo
Gerald Peters Gallery directors **Karen Fedri** and **Ashley Tatum Casson** with artist **Howard Sherman** in front of 'Your Mouth is the Ultimate Landscape'

people cross the line of being complacent.”

It may be hard to imagine that an older collector would jump at the chance to own a piece titled “Goya Remix (With Underpants),” but it is a surprisingly sophisticated reference to Francisco de Goya’s “Saturn Devouring his Son,” a dark painting that depicts the Roman god eating his child. Sherman drew a stick-figure Saturn in white briefs. Before he began painting, he worked in comic strips.

“Underpants are funny, aren't they? It’s an awesome comic device,” Sherman said. “That Goya painting is so serious and intense. It needed comic relief.”

Another bit of comic relief is written on the side of a painting called “Chick,” where Sherman scrawled “Save the drama for yo’ mama” in black marker.

“It’s a little bit of a kick in the crotch, I guess,” he said. “I don’t want to get too precious with the work.”

The work itself is relatively precious, with most of the approximately 60-inch by 50-inch canvasses selling for \$5,000. Fedri expects the prices to increase soon, given the positive response from area collectors.

“We have very young collectors and very old, established collectors who gravitate to his work because they see different things,” Fedri said. Some see de Kooning, some Kandinsky, and others see Opus the Penguin from comic strips.

“What I’m trying to do is take all of that history and tweak it and bend it and mutate it and throw something out that’s very fresh and different,” Sherman said.

“And that might be why [people] are responding to it, they can see what’s come before me and where I’m going with it.”

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