



REVIEWS

Scott Treleaven

JOHN CONNELLY PRESENTS

Scott Treleaven's first New York solo exhibition, "The Best Kind of Friends Are Like Iron Sharpening Iron," was a charged romantic vision of young bohemian gay male life. In the small mixed-media photomontage *Grotto*, 2005, for example, a half-nude man squats, blue jeans unbuttoned, in the center of a pentagram inscribed in a circle, gently holding the handle of a knife stuck in the ground. It's an allegory of the artist as lover and mystic, summoning from the sacred confines of his magical arena the elemental forces necessary to understand a precarious existence.

In *Desire Armed*, 2005, a nude model, this one also holding a knife, kneels among a pile of human bones. His expression is alert and his gaze averted in a pose that's revealing and vulnerable yet also wary.

In *Khepra*, 2005, a skinny shirtless punk sits enthroned among a brilliant burst of flowers, a halo of skulls and bugs encircling his head. *Dog Skulls*, 2006, is an installation of dog skulls (yes, the real thing) covered with images of small purple flowers that look to have been cut out from wallpaper. While the overall effect of these works is more cute than creepy, the combination of homoeroticism and morbid allusion evokes the shadow that AIDS has cast over gay life and art for nearly three decades. At the same time, Treleaven's images recall works by an earlier generation of gay artists, including Jean Genet and William S. Burroughs, reminding us that while the specter of disease is arguably receding from the lives of gay men (at least those who are comfortably off), they must still contend with the same kind of social contempt (albeit in often more covert form) that inspired an earlier generation to craft the persona of the homosexual as outlaw.

In the collage *Dais*, 2006, an orgy of writhing naked young men is overseen by Gustave Doré's pulchritudinous Lucifer. Treleaven's Satan is that of Milton via Byron, the noble, beautiful outcast who'd rather, in Milton's phrase, "reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n"—especially a consumerist heteronormative heaven that seems to neither understand nor want him. That Treleaven's iconography is oriented toward the pagan, polytheistic, and satanic is perhaps a commentary on the hostility with which monotheism regards same-sex eros. And while none of Treleaven's images spills over into anything truly evil, they do flirt with an unsettling phantasmagoria that implies a familiarity with, and an attempt to exorcise, the demons of addiction and abuse.

Scott Treleaven, *Grotto*, 2005, watercolor and collage on paper, 16 1/4 x 15".



In his film *Lustre*, 2006, young men wander the backstreets of suburban Zurich, stopping behind houses to "resurrect" other young men from inside garbage bags. The metaphor is obvious—in gay as in other marginalized cultures, it's still, to a certain extent, fellow "outsiders" who "rescue" one another from mainstream alienation. Treleaven's film, along with black-and-white photographic portraits like *Lukas*, 2005, and *Jamie*, 2006, recalls the intimate regard in which photographers like Nan Goldin hold their subjects (who, as one assumes Treleaven's to be, are usually friends). If there weren't something humanly flawed about his nevertheless attractive models one might fault Treleaven for playing into the tired body fascism of contemporary urban gay culture. In fact, with its punk 'zine aesthetic, Treleaven's work forms something of a graphic counterpoint to the hardbody vogue that, with the full force of the market behind it, can appear to be the be-all and end-all of gay. Treleaven, joining a lineage of obdurate misfits, stakes out far more primal, haunted territory.

—Tom Breidenbach