

Thomas Erben Gallery

Press Release



Father, Father, why Hate You Forsaken Me! and *Oh Mary, Full of Grace*
1990 acrylic on glass, 47 x 43in.

Blalla W. Hallmann *Die Heilige Familie, 1990*

March 2 - April 15, 2006

Reception: Thursday, March 2, 6 - 8:30

Thomas Erben is pleased to announce *Die Heilige Familie* (The Holy Family), selections from a body of large reverse paintings on windows by the German artist Blalla Hallmann (1941 - 1997). This is the artist's first exhibition in the US since his sojourn in San Francisco in the late '60s.

With highly polemic intent, Hallmann chooses to populate archetypal Christian imagery with Disney characters cheerily involved in scenes of blasphemous sexual acts, horrific cruelty, and mayhem. A "vulva Madonna" and Child is encircled by penis headed Magi; the Holy Trinity interpenetrates, and a naked Mickey is nailed at his arms, feet and genitalia to a cross under a Cardinal's watchful eyes with rows of soldiers in attendance. He "gets under our skin" by using visually emotional techniques such as seductive primaries, an endearing, seemingly naive style, and a mise-en-scene reminiscent of the Renaissance originals. >

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Hallmann's work has often been discussed in terms of his biography: Born 1941 in Quirl, Schlesien (formerly Germany), his family was ousted after World War II and moved through different refugee camps. His drawing abilities were recognized and fostered early on; at age 16 he studied for one year at the Art Academy in Düsseldorf and was later an honor student at the Academy in Nürnberg. Residing in Northern California from 1967-69, he had two solo exhibitions and participated in group shows within the circle of Bruce Connor, Peter Saul, and Robert Crumb. The experience of a breakdown and subsequent hospitalization as a result of a history of psychological imbalance, malnutrition, and a "bad trip" led to his extreme disdain of America. After returning to Germany, it was not until the late '70s that he regained full creativity. In the '80s he was celebrated as an important figure within the booming Cologne art scene and had exhibitions with such prestigious galleries as Rudolf Zwirner, Cologne, and Produzentengalerie, Hamburg.

Cloaked in a lusty, figurative style with an abundance of art historical and cultural references, it is Hallmann's ferocious emotiveness and abrasive zeal which pushes the work closer to an outsider's sensibility. His work invites discussion on the interdependence of destructive impulses and creativity, and to which degree the boundaries of taste and societal norms can be tested on artistic grounds. Finally and perhaps most pointedly, Hallmann's work explores how complex truths can be articulated through art.

Works by Blalla Hallmann will be also on view at our booth #72
-scopeNewYork March 10 - 13.

*For further information and visuals, please visit www.thomaserben.com
or contact the gallery at (212) 645-8701.
Gallery hours are Tuesday - Saturday, 10-6.*