

Oregon

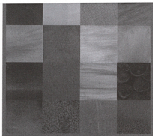
David Eckard and Leanne Hitchcock at Chambers Fine Art

Known primarily as a sculptor, David Eckard moved the implied theatricality of his tool-like objects into the applied arena of performance and spectacle.

Using his own body in place of the inferred body of the earlier works, Eckard has carved a space for himself in the Northwest's art scene. Beginning with his standout 2003 installation at The ArtGym at Marylhurst University, *Tournament/Amuse*, Eckard's work has become elaborately theatrical combining repeated gestures, durations and speeches—all revolving around his carefully crafted utilitarian sculptures. This summer's *Float* is a perfect example. Eckard created a huge water strider-like float and went down the Willamette River at dusk reciting Whitmanesque odes to the river. His drawings, however, often get overlooked. Where the performances and sculptures combine layered language and operatic sculptural gestures, the drawings are quiet oblique moves—fastidious and hermetic. They are usually shown alongside the sculptures and have received scant critical attention for being themselves.

Recently, Eckard presented a suite of new paintings and drawings, *Locus*, at Chambers Fine Art. His drawings finally received their own stage and, as a result, were less shy. The show included a suite of twelve small drawings called *Stanza* (*Carnat: Alignment*) inspired by the Carnac Stones in France. The small square images operate as a kind of alphabet. Each snapshot of an arrangement of stones suggests a runic character. Created with flat steel-gray and pink paint and scumbled charcoal, each image acts as both ligament or bone and stony outcropping. These pieces refer most strongly back to his earlier drawings of indeterminate muscles or seedpods. Works like *Proscenium* are straight-on painting. This diptych explores the language of high surrealism, alluding to Francis Bacon and René Magritte in equal measures.

The title *Proscenium* is a hint that Eckard has not completely abandoned theatricality in the two-dimensional work. In fact, performance is a subtext to all the works in the show. *Madflap Theatre* is a Rauschenberg-like combine.



pointed space is an actual curtain with a movable wooden bell shape on pegs. Like his earlier sculpture, interactivity is implied by the mechanics of the thing. The piece alludes to puppet theaters and medicine shows—portable hucksters and storytellers always on the move—not unlike Eckard's performances.

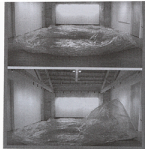
Does that mean that these paintings depend on prior knowledge of Eckard's work? No. These pieces open up their own dialogue with the notion of performance. The painting is not an artifact of the truth, but a ritual object—a diva engaged in a coy strip tease with the viewer. The painting says, "You and I both know that the entire act of entering a gallery and viewing a piece of art is artifice. But knowing that, let's continue anyway. Blasphemy aware." Eckard directly references the diva in *Bactine Diva*. A graphic lotus flower in the center of the panel is surrounded by what appears to



Top: Leanne Hitchcock, *Summer*, 2006, 16 1/2" x 12" archival inkjet prints; bottom: David Eckard, *Proscenium*, 2006, charcoal, latex paint on panel, 18" x 24", at Chambers Fine Art, Portland.

be a curtain, but which could also be a *butte* (a reference to the Carnac stones). In the lower left hand corner, a muscular nodule like a tumescent penis radiates light from its tip. A womanly form moves toward the light. At once it is the fat lady singing, and the annunciation. Despite all the sagging flesh-like forms, the radiating lines and attachments, there are moments in the pictures that suggest the stillness and monumentality of painters like Giotto—the same kind of stillness that di Chirico evoked in his images of ominous emptiness.

After seeing these pieces on their own, I hope Eckard will produce more of these self-contained paintings, which might deepen, engaging a dialogue not only with the more public realm of performance but with the longer and deeper



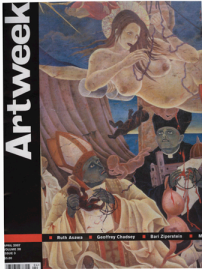
Alex Schweder, installation view of *A Sac of Rooms Three Times A Day*, at Suyama Space, Seattle.

Chambers. The gallery statement says that Hitchcock is "challenging the practice of photography via the history of painting." The four 4-by-4-foot grids of inkjet prints refer to the four seasons. Each grid is made up of sixteen 12-inch-square prints. The seasonal suite has a long tradition in art as a formal device and controlling metaphor. It is also a guide for catalog designers and retail displays. While some of the squares in the grid transcend the source photos (see becomes a formal study in white and grays) most remain themselves. *Autumn* is a beautifully shot grid with ambers, chestnut and yellows, but never actually looks more than a study. In the end, it looks like it would be perfectly at home as part of a design package.

—Daniel Duford

David Eckard: *Locus* and Leanne Hitchcock: *Cycle* closed in February at Chambers Fine Art, Portland.

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