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Review

Time Out New York / Issue 662 : Jun 4–10, 2008

Critic's Rating

Chloe Piene

Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert, Inc., through Jun 14

Featured in the 2004 Whitney Biennial, Chloe Piene's contour drawings of women reimagined their subjects as hybrid creatures, part skeleton, part siren. These works knitted together the outlines of overlying flesh and underlying bone, blurring sex and death, ecstasy and dissolution. They had clear affinities to late-19th-century Expressionist and Symbolist art, but their literalist conjoining of Eros and Thanatos diminished the power of both. Isolated on expanses of blank paper, Piene's self-contained and self-absorbed figures had neither the tortured individuality of Egon Schiele's nudes nor the persuasive humanity of James Ensor's elegantly attired skeletons. Technically and formally stunning, her drawings were both operatic and somehow inert.

Piene's latest efforts are more complex and engaging. The renderings are smaller and looser, with figures jumbled together and obscured by calligraphic markings and frenzied cross-outs. Skeletons appear alongside bodies, but in less-mannered juxtapositions. Accompanying these works are sculptures created with clay and casts of human skulls.

The skulls, coated with gray-brown plasticine, have been embedded in slabs of the same material, and set on translucent white wax pedestals. Half buried in the stuff, they bear a resemblance to Medardo Rosso's wax busts, but also call to mind more disturbing images of mud-clotted remains exhumed from mass graves. Just as her new drawings have begun to suggest a physical and narrative context for her figures, Piene's sculptures seem connected to a world more real than phantasmagoric—in all, encouraging signs.

— Anne Doran



Untitled (Head 01)
 Photograph: Santi Caleca, Private Collection, Courtesy Acquavella Galleries, New York

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