



Scott Turri: *Poppies + Heroines 54_2, 2007*, acrylic on canvas, 45 by 54 inches; at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts.

PITTSBURGH

Scott Turri at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts

The connection between visual and corporal pleasure is taken up by Scott Turri in his exhibition "Poppies + Heroines." This Pittsburgh-based painter once favored an intense color palette and expressionistic figures. The commitment to bright colors remains, but these recent acrylic paintings (all dated 2006-08) demonstrate a fresh approach and conceptual framework. Borrowing advertising's use of visual stimulation to sell sexual gratification, Turri's simplified, crisply flattened or outlined forms tap into painting's similarly seductive potential.

Abstract icons, created out of appropriated forms manipulated on the computer, are transferred onto 18-inch-square canvases or larger horizontal ones often measuring 45 by 75 inches. Poppies, birds, a seed husk or plant part, a swatch of plaid and occasional text are isolated in intense, synthetic hues on flat grounds that are sometimes divided by color to suggest a diptych or triptych. The lighthearted icons call to mind the work of Robert Rauschenberg or Robert Rauschenberg. However, depending on their arrangement, Turri's forms often seem anthropomorphic and imply a sexual content not overtly addressed in the work of those Pattern and Decoration artists.

This carnal reference is not discerned in the more abstract works until

the icon's use elsewhere gives the clue. In the small *Poppies + Heroines 18_3*, for example, a bright orange flower appears on a brown ground at the upper right corner above two dominant close-up views of an organic form in shades of pink. The pink form, seen again in the left frame of *Poppies + Heroines 75_4*, clearly represents female genitalia, poised for penetration by a phallic plant shape. Like Duchamp's bachelors in the lower register of

his *Large Glass*, forever unable to gain access to the bride above, Turri's anthropomorphic forms never consummate their attraction and exist, in their saccharine colors, in a state of visual arousal without cathartic release.

Suggestive text sometimes contributes to the mating dance with phrases such as "hero, in, side" in one or "up, shoot" in another. In the latter work, the addition of a circle of poppies at the center and the possibility of reversing the phrase to "shoot, up" makes plain the double symbolism of the flowers. They are the heroines in the paintings' titles as well as the narcotic derived from poppies.

If Turri's canvases allude to the temptations of the flesh that are exploited by advertising, they also recognize painting's much longer history of seduction. Rather than providing one more tired critique of ad culture through these abstractions, the artist acknowledges visual pleasure and his own desire to seduce.

—Kristina Olson

Miao Xiaochun: *H2O: A Study of Art History—The Washing of the Feet (Second View)*, 2007, digital C-print, 68 by 68½ inches; at Walsh.



CHICAGO

Miao Xiaochun at Walsh

With his third solo exhibition at Walsh Gallery since 2004, Beijing-based Miao Xiaochun has become a Chicago regular. Titled "H2O: A Study of Art History," this show consisted of 16 large digital prints and one computer animation. As in previous work, Miao uses the popular graphics application 3ds Max to re-create and animate canonical Renaissance paintings. In each, water either figures centrally as a motif, as in Giotto's *Washing of the Feet* at Padua, or it is made to figure through adaptation, as with Pollaiuolo's *Saint Sebastian* bleeding crystalline beads.

"H2O" is a symbolist project with romantic underpinnings. It emphasizes water as an animating, purifying and regenerative force within a symbiotic environmental order. The exhibition catalogue quotes Miao stating that "the water I drink today has flowed through millions of years, through countless . . . living beings . . ." But at the same time, the artist flirts with parody. He presents the still images in sets of two: one replicating the composition of the source imagery, the other presenting the scene from a bird's-eye perspective that opens up new spaces. Placed into those pockets are little signs of the carnivalesque: dogs and cats frolicking, washing, sniffing or peeing, as well as human merrymaking. Most of the figures are nude men, and all are portraits of the artist himself, smoothed and abstracted through computer generation. The effect is comic, and it results in a fundamental ambivalence. The allegorical messages of the source images are caricatured. But at no point is parody directed at Miao's own romantic environmental notions.

His romanticism does not acknowledge the fact that in modern China, water is associated with the power of the state, embodied in bridges and dams that stand as Olympian feats of engineering. Settlements are displaced, geography reshaped, and field and stream contaminated. Despite this looming environmental ruin in real life, Miao floats tropes of *aqua vita* on a par with the advertising imagery of Evian or Poland Spring. At best, "H2O" seems

beset with delusion. Or more likely, it is simply unconcerned with the history or the present-day charge of its core symbols.

Then, what about the pair of digital prints based on *The Deluge*? Miao rids it of Michelangelo's bright palette and gives it instead ash and coal hues except for the brassy glow that illuminates the floodwater's refugees in a stagy light of hope. The on-high companion image shows choppy gray storm waters extending up and over a low horizon that reads as the edge of a flat earth. Per-



Nathan Mabry: *Process Art (Dead Men Don't Make Sculpture)*, 2008, bronze, 87 by 58 by 41 inches; at Cherry and Martin.

haps the real meaning of this work lies not in its subject matter but in the astonishingly high resolution of the large-scale digital image, which indicates that Miao has at his disposal a flotilla of able designers and an enviable cache of computer technology. This technical finish is in strong contrast to the project's intellectual languor, marked by a leisurely plundering of art history. These are not uncommon features in contemporary Chinese art. The privileges of the market, hot for Chinese product, have alleviated the burden of critical discourse.

—Ryan Holmberg