

The New York Times

Art in Review

Hugh Steers

*Richard Anderson Gallery
475 Broome Street
SoHo
Through Dec. 3*

Hugh Steers' earlier paintings had two very different types of images: male couples tenderly helping each other dress or bathe, and a single male figure, wearing women's clothes and examining his body for signs of illness, shut alone in a room as if terrified of discovery.

The artist's recent work brings these images together. The paintings are all linked by the presence of a slim young man who, in one memorable image, poses with the hauteur of a Van Dyck aristocrat, hand on hip against a cascade of drapery. The difference is that he has an IV attached to his arm and he is attired in a mini-skirt version of a hospital robe and a pair of formidable white spike heels.

Mr. Steers depicts his protagonist — the isolated figure of his earlier work — in active and passive roles, but now seldom alone. In one painting he makes an aggressive sexual conquest; in another he lies helpless in his hospital room while a second man comes to his aid. Most moving, though, are the paintings that push beyond the specifics of eroticism and illness. When the white-clad figure literally flies over a sleeping man in a room at twilight, he becomes a kind of angelic, guardian presence, neither fearful nor angry, giver as well as receiver. Even with occasional infelicities of execution, these strong images constitute a moving and logical point of arrival for Mr. Steers' work thus far.

HOLLAND COTTER