



Art Attack: *Ignorant Transparencies* at Gavin Brown Enterprise

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BY JOHN HUTT

Bjarne Melgaard's grand mischief on display

Photography by Tatiana Kiseleva

The huge Pink Panther statue stands sentry at Bjarne Melgaard's latest exhibition/installation at **Gavin Brown's enterprise** in New York City. Covered in bandages and glops of sloppy paint, this Pink Panther resembles a crazed being recovering after a bacchanalia. This exhibition (through Oct. 26), however, isn't as easily penetrated as the Norwegian artist Melegaard wants you to think.

The statue, astride its rug, looks terrifying and proud—with crazed eyes and a crack pipe, wreathed in freshly applied bandages. He wears a skewed top hat (reminiscent of

Voodoo's Baron Samedi) and he seems to be saying: "Screw you, Inspector Clouseau. And the Police. And screw you, too."

Ignorant Transparencies refers not only to the sculptures of found objects in the exhibition, but also the conclusions that we draw from those objects. Melegaard knows that by placing an Andy Warhol doll next to a bloody coat in a room with a dope pipe, it will cause an instant reaction—and an instant conclusion. The conclusion that Pop art, like the teenage substance abuse and squatting years, is dead, and yet he presents us with a huge Pink Panther (considered his alter ego), whose very existence in the space is proving Pop has an audience.

The room beyond the statue is filled with the lingering smells of incense, and the scene resembles a squalid squat or commune: The viewer sees disregarded art history books strewn amongst colored pencils, straws, and another glass meth pipe. Dr Bronner's hair shampoo bottles litter the couch, evidence of hippies gone awry. Having stayed in squats/communes/punk houses for longer than I'd care to admit, the scene painted here hits entirely too close to someone else's home (where I'm staying illegally).

Only after the drug abuse is firmly implanted in the viewer's mind, can we circle the room, the chaos not giving our minds a moment to think. A tree planted with such care by well-intentioned hippies is now the butcherbird's nest of bloodied clothes and irrelevant art figures. Three more Pink Panther sculptures, like proud Hindu Gods, each clutching a tome or a talisman, one seated on pink rocks, another on Pepto Bismol, the other on a pile of gay rags.

The last room comes as a welcome relief, air conditioning frees us of the incense, and now liberated from the commune, the viewer emerges and finds large, full-panel works in which the panther is slowly taken apart, cubed, smeared, talked about, rebuilt as an ironic parody of itself, and made into a cartoon.





Finally, with the three sculptures in the center of the room, the "true" panther is revealed: first as a cub, playful, hairless and young; then as a sexual predator, scary but erotic; and finally as a full adult animal resplendent in his glory and free from those formative phases from which too few move. If one were to view the exhibit backwards, entirely the opposite effect could be achieved: A panther is born, goes through the crazy commune phase, and then becomes the fully formed statue of grand mischief we see in the first room. A dialectical narrative, and Melgaard's ultimate thesis and joke for himself.



To show three models—one young, one older, then one slightly older—over panthers of corresponding years, the viewer is bound to assume that the openly gay artist is saying: "These are my sexual tastes, these pieces on the walls are part of an experience that has a easy beginning, middle, and end." Knowing Melgaard's other work, we have to be cynical.

Melgaard's love of process, and love for confounding, is on display everywhere. Simple assumptions are thrown in your face: A discarded Pre-Raphaelite book doesn't mean its influence on the artist is any more or less significant than a throw-away book on sex.

The title *Ignorant Transparencies* is a "fuck you" to anyone who would attempt to criticize the show, as the entire thing is designed to be transparent and easily read, even by those "ignorant." It also follows that the only ones who will speak on the show are the ignorant who have missed the point. Thanks, Mr. Melegaard, I think I got the point.

"Ignorant Transparencies" is on view through Oct. 26 at **Gavin Brown enterprise**

