

Victoria Miro Gallery

Press Release

Inka Essenhigh

15 March – 28 April 2000

Private View, Tuesday 14 March from 6pm to 8pm

The Victoria Miro Gallery is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in Europe of New York based painter Inka Essenhigh.

In Essenhigh's most recent large-scale canvases, action figures are cast alongside the demimonde in roles where time-honoured human concerns such as patriotism, religion, competitiveness and heroism are played out in futuristic, Madmax-like landscapes. Her paintings present a new, but not necessarily better world than our own; one whose rather outlandish laws of physics are defined by the emotional content of the narratives taking shape. Essenhigh creates an enigmatic world in which polymerous beings with decapitated heads or other bodily parts, wield high tech weapons and voyage in and out of a cyberpunk underworld. Her canvases are filled with constant motion and action, in which the superhuman characters take on alternative feats of heroism and destruction. However, it is these very same characters whose actions appear suspended in between two worlds - in which mediaeval figures meet cyborgs within a sublime purgatory where anything is possible.

Essenhigh's paintings are reflective of her ability to unite several divergent influences from Antiquity to the present day, including the iconography of Italian Renaissance painting, the aesthetic sensibilities of Japanese Ukiyo-e prints and the contemporary mythologies of Matthew Barney. There are no individuals in her works, just prototypes, as if these beings could be reduced to merely haircuts and uniforms that act out their inevitable roles: messiahs are worshipped, cheerleaders are enthusiastic, villains are defeated. The array of sentiment portrayed is meant to be real; the violence and tenderness meant to be felt. □□□μ

The fabricated-plastic look of the surfaces created by the enamel paint gives Essenhigh's paintings their ultimate content. Glossy, impastoed monochromatic colours such as eggplant, mud yellow, aquamarine, and blood red, aptly reflect a 21st century tendency toward manufactured cyber colours. It is as if through modern science she is attempting to genetically engineer a parallel world.

Inka Essenhigh has exhibited at the Stefan Stux Gallery and Deitch Projects in New York. As well as participating in Pop Surrealism at the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Connecticut, she recently enjoyed a one person exhibition at the Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York and is currently showing work in Greater New York at PS1. She will have her first one person show with the Mary Boone Gallery later this Spring.

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