

or else, more disturbingly, the suppressed desires behind all those blank faces.

The failings of these sweatsuited figures are animated by their opposite in a large, five-panel drawing of men doing nothing more startling than getting along with each other. In *As darkness falls on this heartless land, my brother holds tight my feeble hand*—the centerpiece of the exhibition, and, even amidst all the transfixing violence, its most compelling work—a large group of men hug each other, perhaps in a sensitive masculine ritual, or simply in relief over having survived the apocalypse that has overwhelmed the rest of the show. Other figures, scattered across the bare landscape, sow seeds, share jokes, run together with hands clasped, frolic with a dog, sit cross-legged together, and (it is not hard to imagine) hash out the problems of the world in what might be an allegory of good government in the New Age.

But in the end, the resemblance of this ideal society to a utopian retreat is more chilling than reassuring. It's a world of anodyne, nonspecific kindness—the sort that arises not from real feeling but out of something much more abstract and impersonal, even slightly sinister. As it turns out, we haven't exchanged *Inferno* for *Paradiso*, just a different sort of hell.

—Emily Hall

RIDGEFIELD, CT

“CONTEMPORARY EROTIC DRAWING”

ALDRICH CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM

Organized by independent curator Stuart Horodner, Houston's *DiverseWorks* director Sara Kellner, and Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum director Harry Philbrick, the elegant “Contemporary Erotic Drawing” never got hung up on what constitutes “erotic” or what constitutes a drawing. With sources ranging from comics (mainstream and underground) to the classical study, from high formal or “obsessive” abstraction to design and decoration, from the notebook doodle to midcentury abstract animation, most drawings in most media here treated sexuality as a source of delight, or, at least, an opportunity to treat self-hatred delightfully.

R. Crumb—whose influence was felt throughout the show—was himself represented by three works, including *Big Healthy Girl Enjoys Deep Penetration from the Rear*, 1998, an acknowledgment of the sheer energy involved in the sex act:



Mark Dean Veca, *Klusterfuck* (detail), 2002, ink on paper, 53 x 39 1/2".
From “Contemporary Erotic Drawing.”

A pants-free, socks-and-glasses-wearing male rides a superhero-like lady through the air as she moans AWRNH!! In *Bedroom Eyes*, 2002–2004, Scott Teplin's felt-tip pen notes-to-self at the head and foot of a fitted bedsheets—NOW THAT I'VE DECIDED TO MAKE THIS BED ART I MIGHT HAVE TO WIPE MY BOOGERS ON THE BEDSTAND—float amid a constellation of doodled boob-like eyeballs, eyeball-like boobs, and pairs of boys' underwear. Crumb's exaggerated precision is also echoed in Mark Dean Veca's *Klusterfuck*, 2002, in which a wallpaper pattern of protrusions and secretions surrounds an assortment of sexy scenarios including the Land O' Lakes girl revealing her breasts (actually her knees, cut from the carton and taped up underneath, a trick my sister showed me when I was eight).

Tom Knechtel's *The Werewolf Yantra*, 2002—in which a werewolf with a soft dog's face and a middle-aged man's body sleeps in an armchair dreaming of an eighteenth-century gown, of sucking someone off, of abduction, and of a convoluted brass instrument—brings to mind John Wesley's sleeping bears, curious camels, and other human-loving animals. It's a pity the para-Pop artist himself was not included—he may be just as important to just as many here as Crumb. His influence is patent in the work of Parisian duo Moriceau + Mrzyk, whose inky free associations include images of a woman reaching out to grasp not a penis but a snail's slimy head, and the Michelin man giving it to a lady whose rolls of fat suggest a family relationship.

A few examples of what one might call “suggestive abstraction” provided short breaks in the lusty narrative but no relief from the show's insistent Pop beat: Paul

Henry Ramirez's juicy blobs from the “Liquid Squeeze Series,” 1996–98, dripped cartoonish drops, while Ruth Waldman's untitled work from 2004—a latticework of tender, multicolored living parts (testicles?), some leather-clad and stretched taut by hooks—evoked Dr. Seuss as much as de Sade. All was not lighthearted here, of course; on the repressed and creepy end was Ruth Marten's graphite *The Virgin*, 2001, an Ernst-ish configuration of hair done up in braids, buns, sausage-curls, and ribbons. Simon English's *The 7.42 from Worthing*, 2004, a series of studies on paper of Bacon-like males and gloomy females, effected the show's lone moment of desperation. On the whole, this was a gratifying presentation for the Aldrich—and for New England, where a little titillation goes a long way.

—Larissa Harris

CLEVELAND

MICHAËL BORREMANS

CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

Near the end of his life, Baudelaire—bored and besieged by creditors—made a disastrous trip to Brussels. In 1865, he wrote to a friend: “This highly detestable Belgium has already done me a great service. It's taught me to do without everything. . . . I've become sensible because of the impossibility of finding satisfaction.” Similarly, Belgian artist Michaël Borremans's determinedly dour drawings show how much artists may achieve without finding, or offering, fulfillment or resolution.

Mounted on walls and tables in the Cleveland Museum of Art, the sixty-three