



Eric Kaiser at Pi Gallery

Andrea S. Norris

We Know But ...
Pi Gallery
419 East 18th Street
Kansas City, Missouri
August 4-26, 2006

We Know But Don't Want to Believe What We Know is the title of one of the paintings and of the series of new paintings by French artist Eric Kaiser on view at the Pi Gallery from August 4 through August 26. Born in France in 1958, Kaiser has painted since childhood, as well as working in ballet, theater, radio, and marketing. His grandfather and uncle were active in the arts as well. He had his first gallery show in 1999, and its success prompted him to take classes in drawing and painting at the Ecole nationale supérieure de Beaux Arts de Paris from 2001 to 2004 (according to his web site).

Kaiser displays his new politically based paintings in a benefit exhibition for Doctors Without Borders, an organization to which I donate and which I respect. One of the paintings in the show is even being sold to benefit Doctors Without Borders. I am very interested in politically inspired art, which very often offers me more genuine expression, commitment, and thoughtfulness than much other contemporary art. This particular exhibition is somewhat more subtle in content and less exciting in painting style than engages my senses. Nevertheless, it's a very worthy cause, and I learned something from the painting I thought the most visually interesting in the show. The works are relatively small, fairly loosely painted, often with drips à la Hung Liu and some with hidden faces either painted into the corners or background or modeled in relief in the paint surface.

I found the works in this show considerably more assured in their handling and less self-conscious in design than the nude figures in complicated poses

Kaiser showed at Pi in 2005. The themes of the 13 paintings are political, but their subjects are not instantly evident. Several obviously refer to the London subway bombings of 2005, with figures in gas masks and empty floating inner tubes meant to invoke the unoccupied swimming pools of that summer.

A painting called *Public Transport* was the most successful of the group. It depicts a group of African men crowded together. We see primarily heads and bright colored bits of shirt. The complete title *Public Transport at Fuerteventura* helps us to understand that their location is one of the Canary Islands, whose close proximity to Africa makes it a popular place for illegal immigrants to try to enter the European Union. While we are quite familiar with the border towns and various means aliens use to enter the United States, this one is less obvious to me, indicating indeed that Kaiser's French perspective can show us additional aspects of political issues. The heads are rather loosely painted but still clearly heads, all looking in the same direction as if waiting for the bus or the boat and suggesting the sunny, sweaty heat of the place both through the watery handling of acrylic and the actual drips of paint.

One of several paintings dominated by heads cut off at the nose depicts a young man in front of a stark landscape dominated by a tower. The title, *What Next From Belarus*, identifies the tower as part of the remains of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor, intending to call to mind issues of nuclear power and its impact, as well perhaps, to the complexities and problems resulting from the breakup of the Soviet Union.

We Don't Want to Believe, the auction painting, depicts three fat white people in the background sitting on the beach while a black person crawls across the sand in the foreground in front of them. Whether it's about African slavery, immigration and diversity issues, global warming, or AIDS in Africa I could not understand, but that fact indicates that there's a lot we wish we didn't have to understand.



Facing page, Eric Kaiser, *RubberPool*
— *Summer Bath in London 05*, Acrylic
on canvas, 60cmx90cm.



This page, from top, Eric Kaiser, *Her*
— *Rwanda or Kurdistan*, Acrylic on
canvas, 60cmx90cm.

Eric Kaiser, *We Don't Want to Believe*
..., Acrylic on canvas, 50cmx40cm.