

Take off that stupid mark!



No, It's my face!



**Getting on mother's nerves
psychological drama and contemporary drawing**

October - December 2006

Nayland Blake. Jesse Bercowetz & Matt Bua. Adam Dant
Gary Coyle. Marcel Dzama. Simon English. Neil Farber
Atsushi Kaga. Petri Ala-Maunus. Jason McLean
Noel McKenna. Jennifer Mills. Joyce Pensato
Raymond Pettibon. The Royal Art Lodge. Bennie Reilly
Rembrandt van Rijn. David Sherry. David Shrigley
Daniel Silver. Bob and Roberta Smith. Filippo la Vaccara

Bad behaviour: What's gotten into mom?

Charles Manson, blood sucking, nose picking, original sin, Ronald Reagan, shooting up, cross dressing, falling from grace, potty talk, outrage, delinquency, leaving stains and getting on mother's nerves. "Stop that right now!" an exasperated mommy exclaims to her little darlings. Repetition, the same infantile behaviour, over and over and over, high pitched screeches followed by hysterical outbursts. I suppose it is enough to drive anyone over the edge.

The rapture of narratives that is *Getting on mother's nerves* (the exhibition at mother's tankstation) criss-cross the boundaries of social discourse, from religion to sports, politics to playtime. It is impossible to contain such a proliferation, to sum it up as one type of expression. Even the formally unifying premise of the show – that we are looking at drawings – is debateable. The works are all 'drawn', so what? Drawing is multifarious. It is both conventional and highly unconventional. Its many utterances have made their way through the ages. To presume that drawing is the common factor here is to miss out on what actually ties the works together. Drawing, all drawing perhaps, is a discourse, full of metaphors and similes that spill over into language, although not wholly, because images have a literacy of their own. But to be preoccupied with the artifice of medium, to fixate on line, texture, or 'mark making' is to mismanage, in a sense, to misread every work in the exhibition. Underlying the surface of the sublime are deeper pleasures.

At the turn of the century (the 20th), irony as a form of political commentary had taken over America and, according to the Institute of Official Cheer, the rise of the country's morale and morality coincided with a rise in ironic undertones. The Institute's founder, Lucius Richard Peter Stochwacker wrote "I realized there was a great market for some sort of tonic that would help people see things clearly, and make them feel better, and this tonic would sell even better if it was composed mostly of cocaine." The thing about irony is this: it is embroiled in the literal, which is why it can't be explained without losing its precision. For the same reason, propaganda is characteristically *un-ironic*, as President Bush continues to demonstrate through stultifying phrases like, "I am concerned about the recent violence in Iraq." In these as in other troubled times, irony and its close cousin satire propose an oppositional space, a collective stance against the debasement of authority and the absurdity of the status quo. United in opposition the opening works of *Getting on mother's nerves* conspire the turn of events played out through the joint works in the exhibition. Displayed within the gallery's small vestibule is a glass case containing a selection of Raymond Pettibon's early zines. Above the case, perched in white light is an impression of a 1638 etching by Rembrandt. Eve, standing in between the Serpent and Adam deftly holds an apple in her hands. We are in the moment just before man's greatest downfall. Suspended between innocence and guilt. Two bodies, identifiable because of the story they inhabit. Yet, in this version Adam bears an odd resemblance to another mythical character: the Satyr. He leers. Availing of a well-worn tale, Rembrandt graphically offers us a new story, a way out of original sin to something that precedes sin. Desire. It is as though Rembrandt reasons that Adam must have

wanted that apple. I mean really *wanted it*.

The strange ability for brutal mockery to resonate through the desperately sincere is how I think about Raymond Pettibon's work. With Pettibon, I am startled to discover that sardonic humour is to shame as my own glib indulgences are to an uncontrollable state of dependence. Like an addict's drug-seeking behaviour, my addiction is non-linear, impulsive, chaotic. Pop psychology and self-help programmes would have us convinced that we can know our addictions, can predict behaviour, anticipate patterns of thought and action, but the real professionals know that addiction is illogical and therefore unpredictable. Every addiction starts with some sort of gratification. And gratification is both physiological and psychological.

What of this banding of historically divergent characters, one is slumming and the other is exalted. Yet, who is who? If we really question the terms of transgression, we realise it is an illusion that hinges on other people's fascinations. We sublimate pain and fixate on form. The madman, the pervert, the criminal, the naïf, the idiot. Self taught yet rarely self determined. The outsider. Categories in art say everything you need to know about class-based principles that reduce misery into aesthetics. Collecting is the *power-that-be's* power to absorb that which it most profoundly oppresses. With both Pettibon and Rembrandt, the struggle between reason and imagination that is the essence of Romanticism implodes. The stories they each retell expose the moralising politics that are bound up with religious fervour – a parody of human reason. Extreme anxiety defaults to extreme hostility.

The psychological extent and depth of emotions that accompany deviation – guilt, absorption, self-hatred, surrender, redemption, liberation – might shock some. The rest of us feel reassured. So without thinking about individual narratives and how they ensue, we can imagine in mother's tankstation an endless injection, ruthless highs and brutal lows, the dead pan and the dead earnest. The exhibition is hung salon style, no – it's more like a page from a Pettibon zine. Each work is a panel, the wall is the gutter. The unobtainable and unrepresentable lies in the speech bubble. Set up like a stream of analogies we can see parts to a whole. Conspiracy theory is to Jesse Bercowetz and Matt Bua as Wordsworth is to Simon English. OCD is to Neil Farber as bulimia is to Nayland Blake. Joyce Pensato's gargantuan distortion is to Mickey Mouse as Gary Coyle's mannered reenactment is to CSI Miami. As the fantasies build up, at times literally as with Noel McKenna and Adam Dant they breakdown, led by itinerant non sequiturs. Snot Boy, boy with a dead bird, bird in a mask and cape, caped vampires, many bad bunnies, cartoon heroes, sports legends, heroine. Associations lead to blind alleys, vastness is a route to excess. Sneering at all that is immortalized and completed, narratives break out like a teenager's skin as the life affirming celebration of never, ever doing what we are told.

One question remains: What's gotten into mom?

Sarah Pierce



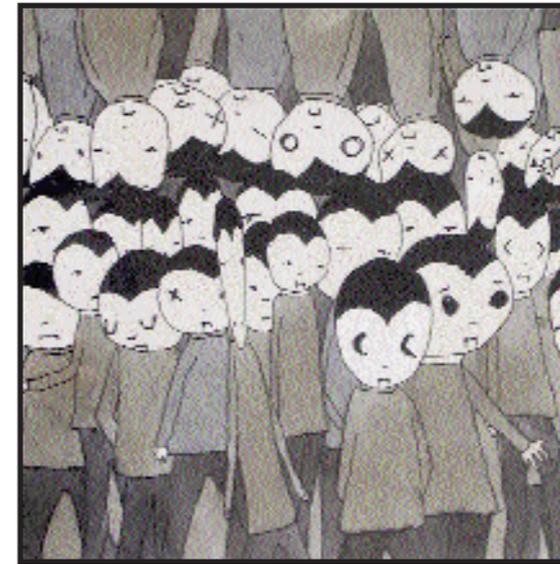
Installation view: **Getting on mother's nerves - psychological drama and contemporary drawing**



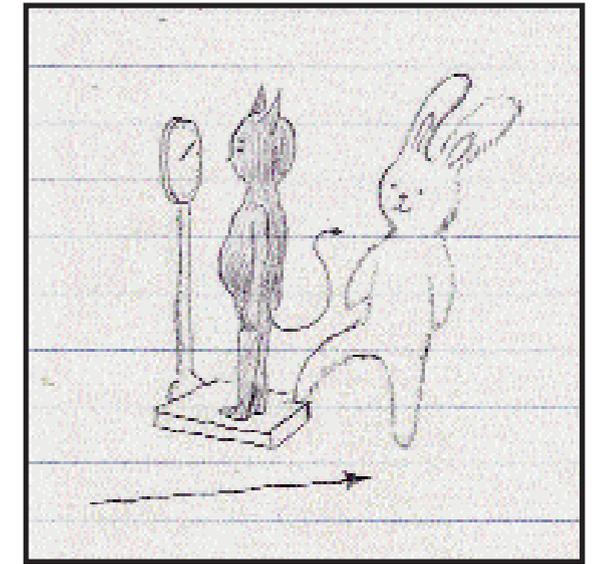
Nayland Blake



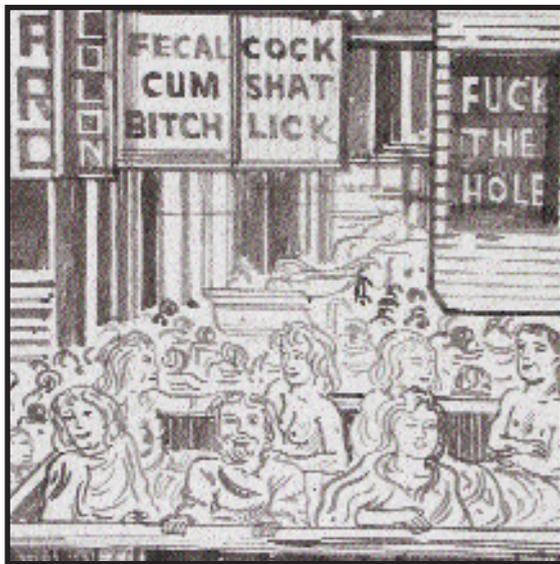
Jesse Bercowetz & Matt Bua



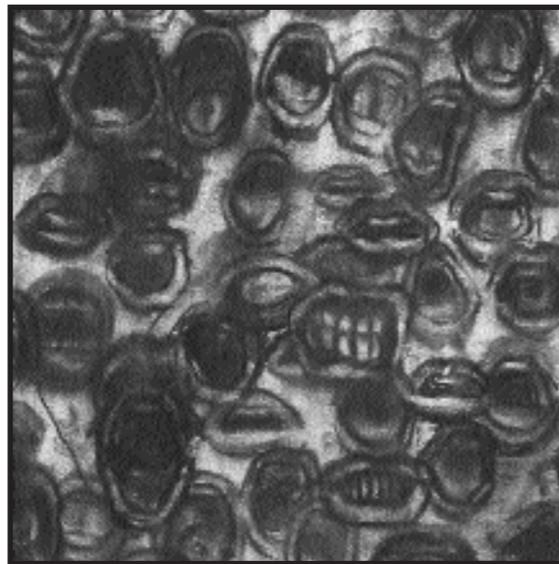
Neil Farber



Atsushi Kaga



Adam Dant



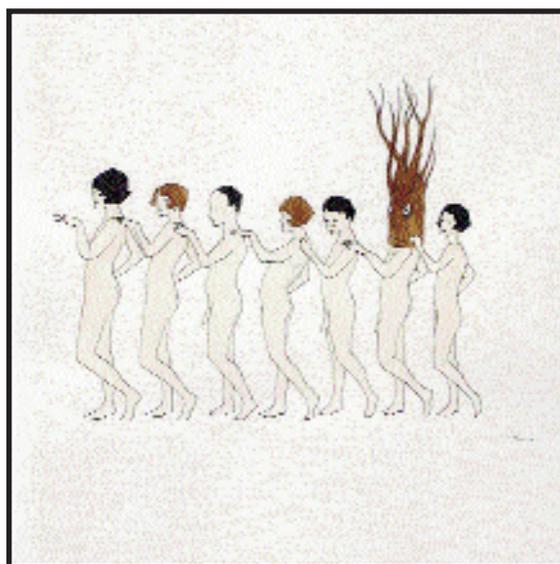
Gary Coyle



Petri Ala-Manus



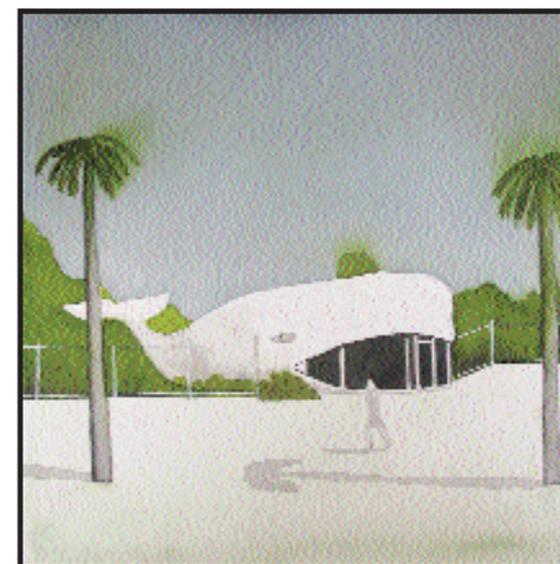
Jason McLean



Marcel Dzama



Simon English



Noel McKenna



Jennifer Mills



Joyce Pensato



Raymond Pettibon



David Shrigley



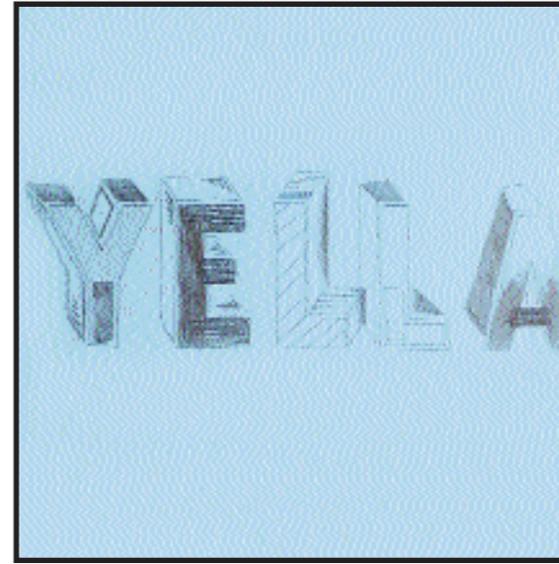
Daniel Silver



The Royal Art Lodge



Bennie Reilly



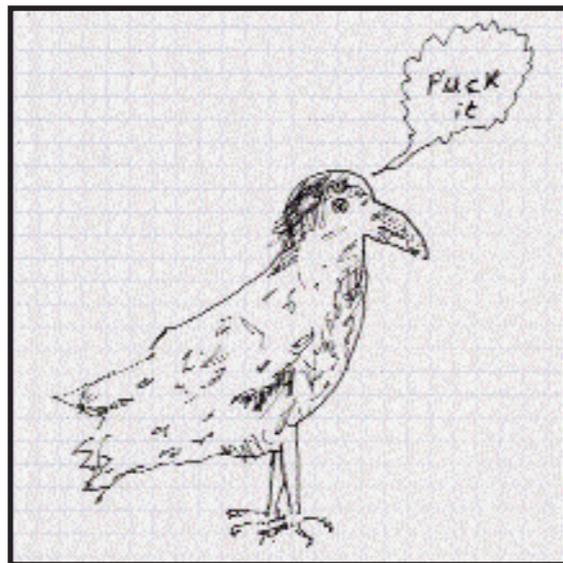
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