

Alexander and Bonin

EXHIBITION: *Other Aristocrats*
John Ahearn, Philip Akkerman, Matthew Benedict,
Marlene McCarty, Barry McGee, Rigoberto Torres

DATES: April 10-May 15, 2004

LOCATION: 132 Tenth Avenue between 18th and 19th

HOURS: Tuesday – Saturday 10am to 6pm

Alexander and Bonin is pleased to present *Other Aristocrats*, a group exhibition of work by John Ahearn, Philip Akkerman, Matthew Benedict, Marlene McCarty, Barry McGee and Rigoberto Torres. The title of the exhibition was inspired by a Diane Arbus quotation. Speaking about the subjects of her photographs, Arbus said that while most people go through life fearing a traumatic experience, her subjects—strange and unconventional people—“were born with their trauma. They’ve already passed their test in life. They’re aristocrats.” *Other Aristocrats* brings together the work of six artists whose diverse and often unconventional subjects extend the tradition of portraiture into new areas. The respect and evident fascination with which these subjects are portrayed places them on a plane more traditionally accorded to royal, biblical, mythological or public figures.

Beginning in 1979, John Ahearn lived and worked in the South Bronx of New York, where he created the majority of his castings in collaboration with artist Rigoberto Torres. Their practice involved working with a community whose representation in fine art and museum culture was limited. In particular, their permanent outdoor murals heroicized “ordinary” people in their own neighborhoods and were instrumental in turning the art world’s attention to diverse cultures. Ahearn, currently working in a storefront on East 100th Street and Torres, now residing in Florida, continue to collaborate on public projects. Each will exhibit individual works from the past several years.

Like Ahearn and Torres, Barry McGee’s work is inspired by the immediate milieu of his native city, San Francisco. *Other Aristocrats* will include a large work comprised of more than 100 flasks, each painted with a portrait. McGee, also known by the tag name *Twist*, received a BFA from San Francisco Art Institute in 1991. His drawings, paintings and mixed-media installations have been shown in numerous museum exhibitions, including solo shows at the Hammer Museum, LA and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. His work was most recently seen in New York in *Drawing Now: Eight Propositions* at MoMA QNS in 2002.

Marlene McCarty’s graphite and ballpoint pen drawings of seemingly innocent but not-your-typical adolescent girls illustrate another level of the complexities of portraiture. McCarty’s recent work specifically deals with adolescent girls who have committed horrific crimes, like Marlene Olive, who in 1975, with her boyfriend’s help, murdered her parents in their Marin County home. These large scale virtuoso drawings present adolescent girls as cool, removed, and perhaps numb to their circumstances. The grandiosity and perfection of their portrayal is shattered by a journalistic summary of the events that have occurred (the texts are exhibited alongside the drawings). Marlene McCarty has exhibited her work in New York since 1990 and is a member of Gran Fury and a co-founder of Bureau. She was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2002 and recently exhibited in the 2003 Istanbul Biennale.

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Phillip Akkerman has been exclusively committed to creating self-portraits since 1981. These works are executed in oil on small scale canvases that depict his head and face, approximately life-sized, in a variety of clothing, attitudes and emotions set against grounds patterned or plain. These portraits strive to go beneath the surface and reveal what is essential or universally human. Devotion to a single subject implicitly elevates the importance of that subject, urging the viewer to determine what is at the root of this inquiry. Akkerman lives and works in Amsterdam and has had solo museum exhibitions at Gemeentemuseum, The Hague (1999) and Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (1992).

Matthew Benedict's aristocrats are drawn from his readings in literature and history as well as his fascination with subcultures. His portraits are sometimes constructed or 'written' by collecting the 'possessions' of real or fictional characters. *Artifacts of Officer Fellows* is a still life painting of the officer's gun belt, handcuffs and jewelry. At other times, Benedict poses a contemporary in the guise of a Saint, mythological character or archetype. The tension between the physical characteristics of contemporary models (often friends) and the historical or literary period the characters come from is often palpable. Benedict's most recent solo exhibitions have been at Mai 36 Galerie, Zürich and Alexander and Bonin, New York. Two of his paintings will be included in the upcoming Brooklyn Museum exhibition, *Open House: Working in Brooklyn* (April 16 - August 31, 2004).