

ART

review

Raw, Edgy Artwork of John Evans and Benecio del Toro on display at Ghetto Gloss

by Geri Mars

Speaking of his daring artist friend, Oscar-winning actor Benecio Del Toro wrote, "John Evans devours his work and his work devours the eye like a famous monster."

Beni isn't joking.

Imagine looking out the window on what seems like a calm, sunny day only to find Godzilla staring right back at you, and you've just felt the impact of the art of John Evans. Descriptions like "bold," "raunchy," "raw," "in your face," "shocking," "graphic" and "disturbing" come to mind but fall short intrinsically and dimensionally.

Beneath the powerful initial impressions of Evans' provocative imagery lie a subtle and meaningful familiarity that conjures every human condition from anguish to religious zealotry. Evans' work doesn't just devour the eye, it waits in ambush and waylays the being.

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His is art that demands to be dealt with.

Push, the appropriately titled show and sale of fifty original paintings and drawings by the controversial Evans, including two works created in collaboration with Del Toro, is on display at the Ghetto Gloss Gallery through Sunday. It is the artist's fourth exhibit.

"I'm inspired by the biggies - sex, death, life, love. I like to state what I feel isn't being said; and, at times, the only way to get someone to stop from the daily daze is to jolt them," Evans explained. "I like to pin prick the world.

"Sometimes, when I come up with an idea, I think, 'Oh, shit, I can't do that! I can't put that on paper!' Then, I know that I've got to do it. I've got to zero in on those touchy subjects and try not to censor anything," Evans added.

Featuring titles like "Cherrybomb," "Size 7," "Cuffs," "Worship Me," "Psyko Junior," "Jacking Off" and "Group Therapy," Evans produces hundreds of paintings each year and has since the early 1990s. So "uncensored" are some of his more explicit works that they hang in the offices of famous cable, internet and radio sex therapist Dr. Susan Block who displays them to inspire her clients.

"When I was younger, I painted more for boldness and for shock value; but now, it's just the way I speak, the way my mind works," Evans said. "I never create my art with the intention to sell. My goal is to challenge people, to make them think and feel, and to tell my own story. "If I end up 80 years old with 10,000 paintings unsold, I will still consider my art successful for having been seen."

Born in Seattle and raised in San Jose, Evans, now 37, moved to Los Angeles at age 18 to attend UCLA. A self-taught artist with no formal training, he prides himself in his unusual combinations of artistic media - crayon, pastel, pencil, charcoal, oil crayon, oil stick, acrylic, house paint, oil paint, chalk, collage - at times applying them simultaneously on the same piece.

"I like to make a point of doing crayon on canvas or even pencil on canvas because, to me, it's still painting - it's a crayon painting," Evans explained. "Putting it on canvas makes it more like a serious piece of art, even though I use a child's medium that isn't always taken seriously."

In addition, the unconventional use of mixed media lends itself to conveying the



No Shoulder to Cry On, pastel on canvas by John Evans. Photo by Geri Mars.

humor and sarcasm of his lighter works, some of which include cartoon-like faces and figures resembling such well-known and beloved characters as The Chicken Hawk, Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd.

Evans' influences include a number of artists, contemporary photographers and art styles. Among them are Frank Auerbach, Francis Bacon, David Salle, R. Crumb, Jean Michel Basquiat, Expressionism, Fetishism and Outside Art, the edgy works of the unrefined, uneducated and institutionalized.

Del Toro costarred in *Basquiat*, the 1996 film about the homeless youth turned painter and Warhol protégé. The actor studied art as a boy and in high school.

Despite Evans' impressive list of finished works, he regards himself as "merely a man who happens to paint." When not creating in his studio, Evans manages and tends bar at a fashionable restaurant in Santa Monica, a career that he's held for more than a decade.

Push, the work of John Evans, remains on display through Sunday. The Ghetto Gloss Gallery is located in Los Angeles at 2380 Glendale Boulevard near the intersection of Silverlake Boulevard. Gallery hours are from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, with extended evening and weekend hours by appointment. Admission is free.

My Missing Dissertation, an exclusive Ghetto Gloss book of selected works by John Evans with foreword by Benicio Del Toro, is available for \$30 plus shipping from the gallery. For more information, call (323) 912-0008 or visit www.ghettogloss.com. ER