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UNGALLERY

Making the unsaid less so



NAKETTE SULLANO

UP THE WALL: Artist John Evans in front of his work — including doodles — at GhettoGloss.

By DEAN KUIPERS
Special to The Times

JOHN Evans' painting is a shock, a dark, funny shock — not because a lot of his work is frank, profane and even highly sexual but because Evans is so childlike in his ability to reveal an interior world that is as poignant as it is unexplored. Walking into the 37-year-old's second career solo show, "Push," at GhettoGloss gallery in Silver Lake is like walking straight into the unfiltered subconscious of one who finds the world as funny as it is brutal and unfair.

Actor Benicio Del Toro, a friend and collaborator who worked with Evans on two paintings in this show and who writes a foreword in the artist's first book, says that Evans' work "devours the eye like a famous monster." In one of the show's best works, a woman stands, head bowed, in purple lingerie and bound in bondage gear. In the opposite corner of the canvas, a

dark-haired man in shorts relaxes in a lawn chair and holds up a beer under the painted tag line "Cheers." It's unclear what the relationship is between the two, or which of the figures Evans identifies with — either of them could be the powerful or the pathetic one, or both.

In "Yellow Boy," a young clothed boy formed in choppy strokes turns away from the viewer toward an immense, 8-foot-wide expanse of textured yellow. Like "Cheers," this work expresses intense isolation and openness to all that goes unsaid in society, the suppressed content of first thoughts.

Other works are just offbeat and funny, like a rough portrait of "Star Trek" character Mr. Spock with the words: "Did you ever notice: there's a little bit of a 'Drag Queen' in Mr. Spock?"

"You're provoked in some way to basically break down who you are in under two minutes while looking at this show or this book," says Flora, the one-named woman who runs Ghetto-

John Evans' 'Push'

Where: GhettoGloss Gallery,
2380 Glendale Blvd., ground floor,
Silver Lake

Ends: March 21

Info: (323) 912-0008

gloss. She is also the publisher of Evans' book, which is available at the Museum of Contemporary Art and UCLA Hammer Museum bookstores.

"People have radical reactions to this work," she adds. "Everyone projects onto it. The brutal honesty provokes so much brutal honesty. I appreciate that more than anything."

As much work goes on between the paintings as in them. The prolific self-taught artist — Evans started in 1991 and now paints as many as 500 works a year in an apartment in Brentwood — has scrawled all over the gallery's walls, drawing frames around some paintings and even entire new works.

"The History of the World" appears in one corner, with doodles representing the stages of human existence: 1. big bung theory, 1.5 adam / eve, 2. the great flood, 3. christ crucified (deposed rex), 4. procreation of our species, 5. holy wars, 6. sucked into a black hole, and 7. no afterlife.

"I've always wanted content and imagery to be there," says Evans. Unable to afford live models but wanting to paint figures, he used the images he found in porn magazines. Because he still works from found images, adding his own titles and imagined bits of conversation, the resulting work has a public subtext, as if he's examining the interior life of Los Angeles.

In its first year, GhettoGloss has made its mark by specializing in shows like this, which challenge notions of high art by exploring transgressive content. In a big space close to the Red Lion tavern on Glendale Boulevard, GhettoGloss has hosted a show by Dogtown Skateboards designer Wes Humpston, for which the gallery built a half-pipe skate ramp and had 1,000 people at the opening; a show of pipes and bongs by comedian Tommy Chong; and paintings by CalArts student Samuel Casebolt.

For Evans, who for years has supported his painting (and, one might argue, formulated much of his dark worldview) as a bartender, putting his "obsessive-compulsive" works in a gallery sheds new light on their content.

"I try to be as instinctual as I can about this process," he says. "I don't censor myself. When you can take something that a lot of people might consider crude or primitive and then put it in a sophisticated setting, you're making a statement right there."



LETA BISCO Los Angeles Times

"Evans' work 'devours the eye like a famous monster.'"

BENICIO DEL TORO

Actor and friend of the artist