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Julian Hoerber: "Around the Galleries: A thoughtful look at casual violence"

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AROUND THE GALLERIES



JOSHUA WHITE *Blum & Poe*

JULIAN HOEBER: Bronze busts such as this untitled one from 2008 ponder fantasy violence in relation to the real thing.

A thoughtful look at casual violence

At a time when the sheer volume of violence in video games and movies has gone through the roof, yet images of suffering and death in war-torn Iraq and Afghanistan are few and far between, the room full of 10 bronze sculptures in Julian Hoerber's third solo show at Blum & Poe makes itself right at home. An even larger gallery,

packed with 15 big paintings on paper, raises similarly unpleasant questions about the morality of mindlessness.

These are old subjects, typically trotted out by second-rate artists who would rather be activists and are so convinced that the two jobs go together that they can't see the differences between them. In contrast, Hoerber's works probe the links between America's voracious taste for fantasy violence and its smug aversion to the real thing without serving up easy answers.

Never pretending to be above it all, or to know it all, Hoerber's incisive art puts the contradictions and hypocrisy front and center.

His super-realistic heads are no strangers to sensationalism.

Each began as a clay model of a man's head that Hoerber took out to the desert and, using large-caliber handguns and low-gauge shotguns, blasted vigorously — not quite to smithereens but with more energy and enthusiasm than would be necessary to kill a man.

Hoerber then used the malleable, flesh-like clay to make molds to cast the heads in bronze. The polished pieces are monstrous. Each life-size sculpture sits atop the black base of a mirrored, chest-high pedestal like a demonic meteorite from hell's far reaches, or a perfectly preserved consequence of actions that cannot be undone or forgotten but haunt the memory and lead to all sorts of post-trauma sicknesses.

Hoerber's roughly 4-foot-square works on paper are equally creepy, if a bit more abstract. Each features a battered Op-style spiral onto which he has grafted other styles of representation: *trompe l'oeil* illusionism, realistic portraiture, image-and-text Conceptualism, Dadaist collage, Color-Field painting, gestural Expressionism and Pop graphics. Like Hoerber's heads, his images are hard to look at and even more painful to contemplate.

Blum & Poe, 2754 S. La Cienega Blvd., L.A., (310) 836-2062, through Oct. 18. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.blumandpoe.com

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