



***Die Umwelt* @ Honfleur Gallery**



"Politics and sex." That is how Arie Mandelbaum, speaking in English as best he could, simply explained his work during the opening of his first U.S. show, at Honfleur Gallery. And while Mandelbaum's work exhibited in *Die Umwelt* can easily be divided into these two self-identified categories, they contain much more than these simple explanations and speak to his experiences.

A critically acclaimed artist in Europe, Mandelbaum's career is dotted with numerous accolades. His work is a part of several collections throughout Eastern Europe, and it is easy to see why.

Mandelbaum employs masterful mark making. His figures are drawn with a light, but knowing hand. Just enough charcoal touches the paper to define a mark and just enough lines are drawn for a figure to be recognizable. Emphasizing orifices, different parts of the body are more fully rendered than others. His lines are fluid and confident.

He makes his own tempera paint, and his work contains a sheen due to the eggs. His palette is also simple and does not stray from black, white, red and sometimes blue. Drawings are made from pencil and charcoal and he smudges the charcoal to dampen the image, softening it and then layering it with tempura washes.



His style is minimalist. Utilizing negative space, his imagery is centered on the canvas and framed by huge expanses of white background. His canvases are overwhelmingly large and juxtapose often uncomfortable images. One would think that such large canvases makes for confrontation but the technique used gives reverence to the subject matter.

In *#18, Untitled*, the largest of his works, a central nude figure lies on the ground. Her head is pointed towards the viewer and arms are outstretched, resembling the cross or crucifix. Red washes converge on the figure's lower abdomen and spill from her hands. The crucifix is reflected in a pipe that mirrors the stance of the figure and T's off in the top center of the composition. Its tubing extends to the ends of the canvas. In the left hand corner there is a toilet.

Mandelbaum spoke of his experience watching performance artist Marina Abramovic perform, and was inspired to create this piece. He watched her cut and inflict pain on herself. "It is too difficult to explain," he said, not identifying whether it was due to the language barrier or the experience of the intense performance by Abramovic.

The "sex" part of the exhibit is subtly portrayed in a series of nudes, which Mandelbaum expressed great sentiment for because his girlfriend posed for them. It is also found more overtly in *Couple with Lion I* and *Couple with Lion II*. In these paintings a large floating lion's head oversees a couple engaging in sex acts. Layered washes emphasize the activity. Mandelbaum explained that the lion imagery is from his childhood, but has been newly incorporated into his work.



In a more political piece, titled *Mensch*, portrays familiar imagery from Abu Ghraib. A faint outline of a dog resides in the left corner, while male figures are lined up across the composition and red washes drip in the center. *Mensch* is written in big, capital letters on the top, inquiring; is this honorable behavior?

Die Umwelt is on display at Honfleur Gallery through January 12, 2008. The gallery located at 1241 Good Hope Rd SE and is open Tuesday through Friday, 12 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturdays 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.