



FEBRUARY FIVE DOLLARS
Review

Michael Krueger and Don Ed Hardy at Dennis Morgan

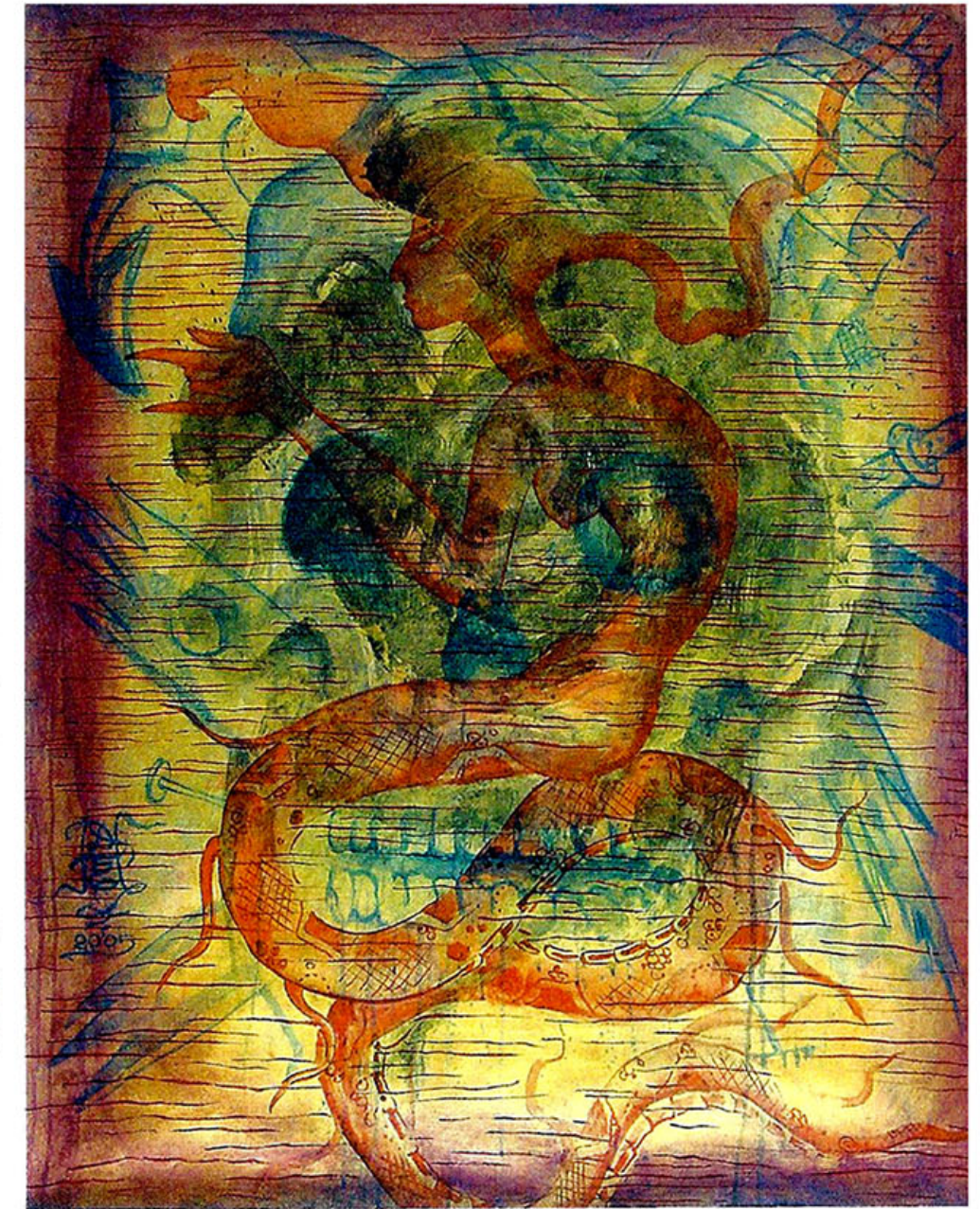
Jessica Owings

Recent Paintings, Drawings, and Prints: Michael Krueger and Don Ed Hardy
Dennis Morgan Gallery
Kansas City, Missouri
November 4 – December 24, 2005

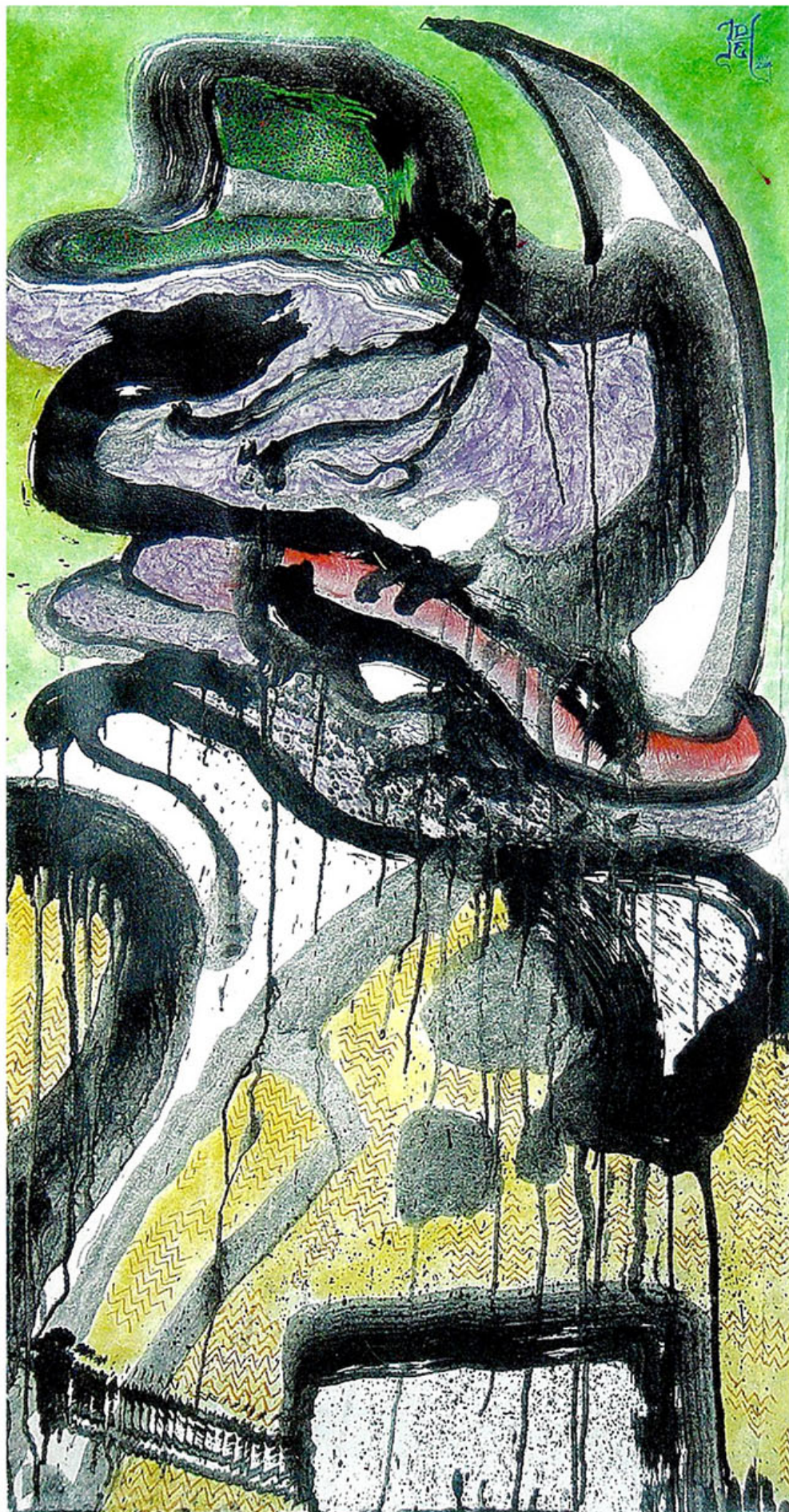
The Dennis Morgan Gallery presented a curious exhibition for determined art seekers willing to forego the beaten path of Kansas City's Crossroads Arts District. The Tracy Arts Park is somewhat secluded from the Crossroads, but a quick detour across the train tracks rewards the adventurous. *Recent Paintings, Drawings, and Prints: Michael Krueger and Don Ed Hardy* conflates past and present, framing unequivocal moments for viewers' delight and intrigue. The sensibility of the artists to compress stories, influences, and cultures is similar, yet each body of work resonated a distinct timbre between the gallery's walls.

For Krueger, the act of drawing is an eloquent venture. He employs his technique as a language, incorporating historical figures and events with contemporary notions in a dozen drawings and three prints. The simultaneous narratives of his landscapes and portraits foster connections between multiple points in time. *Haskell Indian Nations* (2004) is a landscape of discarded objects, buildings, and people. The collection of images reiterates the disparity between the past and present of a place close to Krueger's home in Lawrence, Kansas. In others, the source is less overt. *Black Spray* (2005) is a stark depiction of a man plucked from antiquity, spraying a can of black paint out into the ether of the blank page. The past in this poignant drawing is cleverly interrupted by the present. Three other drawings share this format of a solitary figure drawn in red or blue interacting with an object of a different color, thus drawing attention to the object. Subtly, he presents the narrative as a half-finished thought, leaving the responsibility of the conclusion to its viewer.

Each image contains numerous unique details and oddities, and the implied narrative often seems familiar. Waves of nostalgia creep into the crème-colored pages that seem yellowed with time. The drawings yearn for an earnest gaze, and as an encounter lingers more details appear. In *William Reads to a Passing Babe* (2005), an eagle looks on as William aims a gun with one hand, his eyes fixed upon a book in his other, a small lamb lays dead at his feet. The sadness inherent in such an image slowly drains to melancholy as the littered landscape demands attention. A disposed pizza box and cat food can strewn amongst the barren field displace the figures depicted as the focus. What appears historical, intermingles



Opposite page: Michael Krueger, *Fountain Pop*, 2005, colored pencil drawing, 15x12". This page, from left: Don Ed Hardy, *Bandito*, 2004, acrylic on archival synthetic paper (Tyvek), 48x25"; Don Ed Hardy, *Atlantis*, 2005, acrylic on archival synthetic paper (Tyvek), 51x41".



with disposable objects of contemporary culture. The figures, situated amongst everyday ephemera, are not too distant from modern life. Likewise, *Site of Contestation* (2004) is a collection of signs rooted in American history, recent and past. Staked about in Krueger's littered, flat Midwestern landscape, the demands and slogans jockey for attention where east meets west in the crossroads of a nation.

Similarly, Don Ed Hardy's paintings encapsulate an aspect of time. Whereas Krueger's technique involves wry juxtaposition between past and present, Hardy furiously layers patterns and painterly marks thus capturing his sequential process. Throughout the 12 pieces presented in the gallery, a determination and raw truth emanate from the powerful lines and potent colors. Six similarly sized paintings from 2004 to 2005 evoke an abstract expressionist sensibility. Thick black strokes wind across the page, segmenting regions of color. Although *Rhino* (2004) and *Bandido* (2004) roughly resemble each respective title, the method of creation is more pertinent. It is a balance of skill and subconscious. Each painting is therefore a relic, speaking openly and unambiguously of its creation, and to that point, its creator.

The pieces comprising Hardy's body of work are a bit larger and more dimensionally complex than Krueger's. The atmosphere Hardy creates is also more dramatic and in some cases violent. In *Atlantis* (2005), a warm, golden field dominates the atmosphere. As the layers reveal them, however, a skull, nail, and serpentine woman emerge and evoke a sinister theme. These larger paintings involve more delicate lines, and the layers of color and pattern build to a dramatic intensity. Once placed upon the surface of a page, his marks either contribute to these intricate atmospheres or carry the weight of subject. In *Diver* (2005), a thick, dark blue cloud broils up from an abyss of atmospheric marks across the surface, and an Asian tiger looms atop in a delicate white line as the iconic subject. The image seems to build itself, Hardy's brush strokes piling into the space he creates. The result echoes the nature of his skill as tattoo artist. Rather than erasure, he manipulates the history of marks as he composes.

Considering the effect of the two artist's livelihoods upon their styles reveals another dimension to the context of their work. Don Ed Hardy's success for the past 30 years as a tattooist garners respect and notoriety among his peers, tattoo collectors, and general public. The impact of his primary occupation upon his painting is apparent as his marks build into layers, and the scale and contrast of imagery commands attention. Michael Krueger spins a witty yarn, perhaps akin to a college professor. As faculty at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, KS, Krueger instructs printmaking, drawing, and digital media bridging popular culture and traditional practice. Furthermore, each landscape speaks of the Great Plains, and some drawings distinctly hark back to Lawrence, Kansas. The art of Don Ed Hardy and Michael Krueger implores more than just a gaze. Each piece deserves thoughtful attention and appreciation for its articulate sincerity and poignant complexity.

