
Art in Review

■ Leon Golub's dogs of war and pain ■ Matthew

Antezzo revisits a heroic era, the 60's and 70's

■ Uncovering a hidden reality in everyday objects.

Leon Golub

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

31 Mercer Street

SoHo

Through April 6

Inscribed in neon yellow near the center of one of Leon Golub's new paintings, the phrase "Cry Havoc" sends the viewer back to the scene in Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" where Marc Antony, standing over the dictator's corpse, vows bloody vengeance and civil strife: "Cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war." Indeed, Mr. Golub's oversize canvases are full of wolflike canines, rolling and snarling, nipping at the heels of corpses or grasping human skulls in their jaws.

For years now, Mr. Golub has

translated the most horrific headlines from the daily paper into searing images of man's inhumanity to man, and his new paintings seem at first glance like variations on this theme. But this time around there is something more personal and meditative about his imagery. In "Snake Eyes II," the figures of a seated skeleton and a dog biting a skull are accompanied by a quotation from Nietzsche: "I have given a name to my pain and call it 'Dog.'" The dogs of war can maraud within a soul instead of a battlefield.

This thematic shift is accompanied by a striking formal change in Mr. Golub's work. The dense color fields familiar from his work of the 1970's and 80's have given way to loosely brushed black rectangles, floating in the open space of the raw

linen, and punctuated with explosions of brighter color. The figures themselves remain much the same, drawn with crabbed precision and shaded with flickering color. The overall contrast between the near-photographic figures and the abstract, collage-like backgrounds is surprisingly reminiscent of the work of Robert Rauschenberg.

In the back room, the gallery is also showing eight of Mr. Golub's mythological paintings from the 1950's. Here, his contemporary sources — principally Francis Bacon and Jean Dubuffet — are more evident, but what's most surprising are the echoes of Gustav Klimt. Upon reflection, this affinity with the art of fin-de-siècle Vienna is evident even in Mr. Golub's more recent work, with its combination of morbid narrative and throbbing color.

PEPE KARMEL



A detail from Leon Golub's "Snake Eyes II" (1995).