

Johnen Galerie

ART IN AMERICA

Martin Honert at Matthew Marks

Feb 2008

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Martin Honert's drawings and sculptures replicate in meticulous detail his own childhood sketches and give form to images from his earliest memories. Both two- and three-dimensional works faithfully reproduce each way, uncertain line of his source material. His interest, he has said, is in "a personal theme but a very dry presentation," creating tension between cute and clinical, affectionate and exacting.

Sketches, a suite of 28 laser prints on letter-sized sheets (all works 2006 or '07), extended along two walls in his latest exhibition. Several of them included, side by side, a reproduction of an early drawing and a recent re-drafting of it. The title identifies them as studies; those who saw Honert's 2004 show at Marks might have recognized a group of rubbery-limbed boys with a bicycle, a lumpy Santa Claus and armored knights with a cannon. Other drawings represent a pair of kneeling altar boys, a tent pitched in the forest and a starling perched on a branch.

Included were sketches for two new sculptures that were this show's main attraction, one of them a landscape diorama set into the gallery wall, the other a pair of giants seemingly caught in a pensive moment. Crafted from painted polyurethane and actual hair, these oversize men—each stands about 10 feet tall—wear jeans and hooded sweatshirts; one carries a backpack and the other a duffel bag. Satisfying details of their clothing, like dirty, worn knees and scuffed shoes, imply many miles traveled, and their sad eyes and

faraway gazes—one studies the floor, one looks into the distance—suggest that they're a long way from home. Based on the artist's memories of circuses in which human curiosities were on display, they are not only enormous but also have hammy hands and thick, broad features.

While *Giants* explores the massive, *River Landscape* delves into the miniature. At 3½ by 8 by 5 feet, it is a minutely detailed vista of a waterway winding through hills populated by hundreds of tiny trees, complete with dead branches and dry leaves. Flickering light projected onto a screen from above simulates rippling water. Every few minutes, a toy train, bright red and double-decked, rolls out of a tunnel at one end, vanishes into another mid-landscape, then reappears before chugging into the mouth of another tunnel.

Honert has fun with exaggerated perspective. At the diorama's front edge are individual blades of plastic grass and some spindly branches; a few inches beyond, full-grown trees stand just a foot high. And the train appears in two different versions, a larger one closer to the viewer and a smaller one farther away. (I only wish the gallery had let me figure this out, rather than explaining it in the press release.)

Many artists use industrial fabricators; gallery staff confirm that these works were created by the 54-year-old Honert himself, in his Düsseldorf studio. Not surprisingly, his output is limited, and it seems only right that works which so powerfully telescope from the present to a distant yet vividly remembered childhood should be few and far between.

—Brian Boucher



Martin Honert: *Giants*, 2007, mixed mediums, approx. 10½ feet tall; at Matthew Marks.