



EYE CANDY



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Scott Waters

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BY DAVID BALZER March 19, 2008 16:03

SCOTT WATERS' "TIME HEALS ALL WOUNDS (NEGOTIATING A LIE, PT 2)" RUNS TO MAR 31. WED-SAT NOON-6PM; SUN NOON-5PM. CRAIG SCOTT GALLERY, 95 BERKELEY. 416-356-4276. WWW.CRAIGSCOTTGALLERY.COM.

Painter Scott Waters was in the Canadian Army from 1989 to 1992. Most writing about him begins this way, not just because it's a presumed rarity for a figurative painter with his kind of sensitivity to be an ex-soldier, but because Waters is increasingly and deliberately incorporating that experience into his work. His new series, currently on display at Craig Scott Gallery, is based on photographs he took during his military stint, and its intentions are clear. The tone is more nostalgic than critical; if the homosociality of the scenes Waters paints comes across as disturbing, it's a by-product of a more intimate pursuit. The paintings are about the nihilistic abandonment of youth. They could be depicting friends or acquaintances in any context, really; Waters has said that the time he spent in the army was largely about wasting time, and the goofing of his figures – the devilish looks in their faces as they are startled by Waters' camera – demonstrates that. What better subject for a beautiful painting than a moment at which the painter felt as if life were standing still?

Yet nostalgia can bleed into regret, and Waters' self-portraits tell a slightly different story. Underpainting, at play in all his work, has the effect of both erasing and highlighting the figure. (Waters is obviously interested in the concept of camouflage, in how backgrounds can become foregrounds.) That to Which I Committed Myself Wholeheartedly shows Waters in a t-shirt that matches part of the wall behind him: he's sucking his thumb, with a beer and a seemingly beheaded teddy bear in tow. The considerably darker 15 Years Younger, 25lbs Heavier shows him in orange coveralls, the colour of which consumes almost everything except his gear. Even his lips are orange – as if the blank, withering pout weren't indicative enough.

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