

# In Plato's cave, 2003

Sex comes to the fore in work by Karyn Kirke and Michelle Barczykowski

by Shawn Hill

**'Resolutions,'** work by Ian Hart at the Somerville Cable Access Television (S.C.A.T.) in Union Square, through January 21.

**'YBA: 8 MFA Thesis Exhibitions,'** at Tufts University Gallery, in the Aidekman Arts Center, through February 2.

S.C.A.T. is initiating an ongoing artist series on its office walls, starting this year with the paintings of Ian Hart. Most of the paintings here are still lifes, but the largest is figurative: "The Ultimate Player." This image of an athletic, shirtless man celebrates Ultimate Frisbee. The player, in harsh direct light, stands like a Greek

statue. His arm is up and bent back behind his head. His articulate fingers hold the Frisbee like a modernized discus. He's leaning on one hip in classical contraposto. His shiny nylon shorts hang off his hips in folds of drapery.

Other images, of female nudes and plants, are serviceable, especially one of pomegranates that benefits from Hart's instinct towards contrasting jewel tones.

Hart's response to 9-11 is unique and powerful. In a series of four paintings, he repaints the same modest pumpkin and records its slow decay. Starting out bright orange and firm, he contrasts it with a dark blue ground. But as it begins to blemish and go brown, the background too fades, getting duller and grayer. Finally, the pumpkin is a gray, ashen husk, sinking into the environment and out of existence.

Over at Tufts, a group of Museum School students make a solid debut on the local scene. These young artists are quite sophisticated, seamlessly mixing painting and photography with newer media. Many incorporate DVD and video technology into their work, and most have an awareness of installation.

Karyn Kirke is, in a way, one of the most traditional. She's making figurative paintings and portraits. But her subject matter is provocative. She revives the story of Little Red Riding Hood by making all the subtext overt. The boundaries between girl-grandma-wolf-wanderer-thief collapse completely. The wolf is as often a stuffed doll as he is a devourer, and grandma might just be wearing a mask, too.

Kirke repeatedly contrasts red with shining white. Her paintings mix the modern-day with the dream-like, as when a young woman in jeans passes a paper wolf to a red-hooded child, looking like Wonder Woman and serving as an initiatory guide.

## At the core

Grrrl power is at the core of this work, made explicit as we follow one trail into a walled enclosure. The wooden floor of the gallery has given over to white linoleum, and artifacts from the paintings (a loaf of bread, an ax, a picnic basket) are strewn along the path. Inside, a wall of portraits of girls and young women, each in matching white hooded sweatshirts, is a celebration of real girls dealing with puberty. They seem to have formed a gang.

Michelle Barczykowski's "Projected Desire" is provocative as well, frankly confronting issues of sexuality and commerce. Three screens project footage from hidden cameras, in drab black and white. One feels like a security guard watching endless bland footage, until the shock of seeing one's self enter the screen, seen from several angles.

While still fascinated by the appearance of the self, one takes note of the images that cycle across the screens. There's footage of a gym, focusing on moving hands and feet rhythmically exercising the fat away. There's also tape of women shopping for clothes and wedding dresses, moving obsessively through racks and dressing rooms. Occasionally, in the middle panel, we see a peep show, but



Ian Hart, 'Wedding Present'

from an unusual vantage point.

Rather than seeing the women on display as the shades slide up and down (for a price), we're watching the customers, seeing what the sex worker sees. It's possible in this work to watch yourself watching someone jacking off to a woman we can't see.

Barczykowski is exploring multiple aspects of scopophilia here, of our love for seeing and being seen. Do we know how watched we are, while shopping and working out to look better? The horny men

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by Michelle Barczykowski

# *Ian Hart, Etc.*

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paying to watch nude women are only an extremely overt example of the transactions that fascinate Barczykowski. ▼

*For Ian Hart's 'The Ultimate Player,' visit  
>[http://www.ihart.net/art/ultimate\\_player](http://www.ihart.net/art/ultimate_player.jpg)  
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