

RACHEL MASON by Eve Wood

Circus Gallery, Los Angeles CA January 12 · February 16, 2008

Rachel Mason's latest show, "The Candidate," comes at an auspicious time. Drawing on recent activity connected with the upcoming presidential elections, Mason stirs up a veritable tempest of drawings and sculptures showing all the political figures vying for candidacy. Traveling on the actual campaign trails of political icons like Hilary Clinton and John Edwards, Mason composed many hundreds of drawings, perfectly capturing the strained, often hysterical pace of the world of politics. These drawings are hardly simple caricatures, however, offering evidence of a far more insidious and socially destructive process.

Tackling political subjects in art making has always been a risky business, and there are moments when Mason teeters on the edge of standup comedy, bathing her rhetoric in self-indulgent muckraking. But rather than aggrandize or denigrate these figures as politicians, Mason addresses the political machinery as a separate entity, showing it to be an all-encompassing, terrifying, if sometimes necessary process.

Mason breaks up "The Candidate" work into a number of distinct categories, including "Hopefuls," "Monsters," "Ghosts," "Also-Rans," and "Never-Rans." There are candidates who constantly equivocate, leaning whichever way the wind blows. Hilary Clinton is thus both "Hopeful" and a "Monster," a woman on the rise who alternates in public opinion between a common harridan and potentially the most auspicious leader this country has ever produced. Mason's charcoal drawing of Clinton, *The Orator* (all work

2008), shows a diminutive woman with exaggerated yet striking features, gesturing maniacally as she speaks into that ever-present political appendage, the campaign microphone.

Other drawings—such as *Sickle* (from the "Monsters" series), showing John McCain's face grotesquely twisted into the sword of death—conjure the seemingly inhuman behavior of all presidential frontrunners. Also included in the show are several mock podiums with Hydrocal casts of the artist's hands mimicking a particular gesture she noted during the campaign tours, such as *My Turn*. Taken out of context these hand movements have an otherworldly, dramaturgical quality. Are these politicians attempting to raise the dead or is it simply meant to emphasize a point? The fact that it is both never entirely escapes attention.

"The Candidate" points an inquiring finger at the media circus surrounding public life. Like something straight out of Greek mythology, everyone in this vale of shadows and fatal turnabouts is a scapegoat for every imaginable social deprivation, and so offers slim pickings for any reasoned choice. Perhaps it all boils down to the most basic kind of physical attraction, where, rather like the fate of Orpheus himself, the contender is at once disappointed lover, transgressive medium, and high priest of mystery. Mason understands all this and plays it to the hilt. Perhaps we Americans should dispense with the ceremony completely and just vote for the one we most want to screw?



ANNIKA VON HAUSSWOLFF by Jacquelyn Davis

Magasin 3, Stockholm SWEDEN February 9 · June 8, 2008

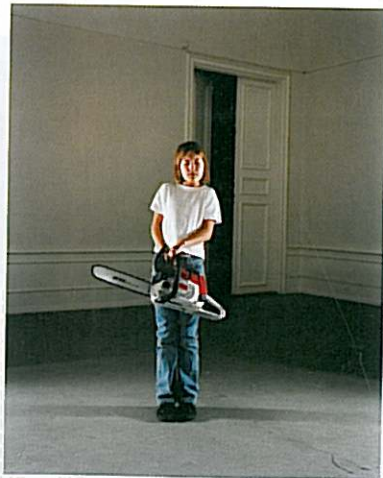
A lot of contemporary photography dealing with the body, especially by younger women, is not predominantly escapist or even theory-driven, but somewhat existential, treating the viewer to divergent experiences of the human condition. As Magasin 3's "Ich bin die Ecke aller Räume" (I am the corner of all rooms), a show of Annika von Hausswolff works from their permanent collection, demonstrates, this body of work exists somewhere between a simple tally of perceptions and wild dream states, between the real and the imaginary, while the overall effect is one of media photojournalism with a coquettish undercurrent of youth and borderline cultures. A man caught in a blur of self-gratification (*Alone in the Brown Room*, 1999); a woman floating in a murky pool of swamp reeds, her wet behind facing the camera, face submerged (*Back to Nature*, 1993); a young lady in her underwear poking through a seat-less chair, cradling it (*Live From the Ocean*, 2005); a squinty-eyed *Girl with Chainsaw* (2002); a pale shirt coupled with a fluffed-up bra flung over the back of a lonely chair (from the *Untitled (Shirts)* series, 2002): von Hausswolff's C-prints always hold their own, offer many com-

mon threads, and keep the interpretation focused on surrounding circumstances.

In a very adroit and rather matter-of-fact fashion, von Hausswolff fearlessly tackles issues of gender and group alienation, as well as the conventions of sexual allure and humankind's apparently bottomless appetite for self-flagellation. One might sometimes query certain Nordic indulgences in shame and humiliation, but they are never not to the point. After all, this all seems part of the intended effect. Some photographs have obviously been placed with great care in the main downstairs level, but elsewhere

they stand propped up against walls or are deliberately left in their wrapping. Why this should be so already constitutes a mystery. Is it a reminder of the hierarchical curatorial process, or of the built-in obsolescence of artworks themselves? It is certainly challenging to be shown just how fragile the bottom line of art can be.

In an art world of pretend revolt and winking abandon, von Hausswolff's atmospheric re-stagings of these "soft" alternatives refreshingly undermine well-behaved patterns of critique. There are no promises given, nothing vouched for, other than a sense of innate bewilderment over the fact that revelation doesn't always lead to wisdom or bliss, that the ideal of collectivity can often be a distraction from entrenched individualism. There is a twinge of narcissism unbound in these edgy photographs, similar to the way most teenagers stage their rebellion against the imperative of their own bodies.



(TOP TO BOTTOM) RACHEL MASON, *THE ORATOR*, 2008, CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 26 X 20 IN. COURTESY CIRCUS GALLERY, LOS ANGELES. ANNIKA VON HAUSSWOLFF, *GIRL WITH CHAINSAW*, 2002, PHOTOGRAPH, 152 X 120 CM. COLLECTION MAGASIN 3 STOCKHOLM KONSTHALL.