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RICHARD BUTLER: hypochondriacatthegramercyparkhotel

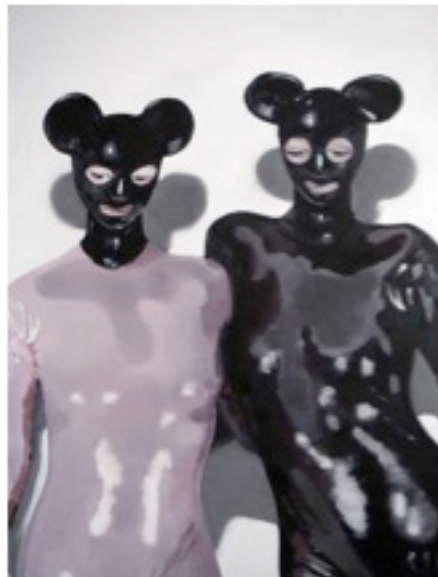
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Feb 18 – March 26th, 2011.

Artist's reception: Friday, Feb 18th 6-8pm.

*"There's an army on the dance floor
It's a fashion with a gun, my love
In a room without a door
A kiss is not enough..."*
(*"Love My Way"*, The Psychedelic Furs)

It has become increasingly difficult to find a painter who combines classic beauty and contemporary concerns with ease. Richard Butler is one such artist. His explorations of beauty and religion are cloaked in disguises – by turns fetishistic, with undertones of sadomasochism, bondage and glimpses of acid-induced horror – at other times, for example in his Geisha series, surreal, peaceful and mannerist. But at the end of the day his paintings are, well - beautiful. Richard Butler is somewhat of an anomaly in the art world. Born in Hampton Court England, he studied art and design as an undergrad, but went on to pursue a music career as founder and singer/songwriter of the hugely successful English band "The Psychedelic Furs" in the eighties and nineties. Butler resumed a painting career some fifteen years ago, residing now in Beacon New York.



His disarmingly simple portraits contain layers of mystery and meaning which unfold long after the first encounter. What sets Butler apart from many of his peers is how ultimately how personal his work is. "I always thought it odd that people would hang a portrait of someone they didn't know in their living room", Butler muses. In most of these works his daughter is the model and inspiration – her preteen, cherubic face peers out from behind a rubber Mouseketeer costume, or is swathed in bubblewrap, in some cases; in others it is veiled by the subtle patterns of a confessional cubical. Always present are the distinct details revealing someone the artist knows very well; like Freud or Neel, Butler obviously spends a great deal of time with his subject. A black eye in one, a bloody lip in another, conjure up connotations of domestic violence perhaps. Or is it just ordinary child's play? Clearly his work allows multiple interpretations – and this is what keeps his portraits at once porous and opaque.



Other subjects in Butler's oeuvre include Geishas, in various states of distortion; family members; skull necklaces and Catholic confessionals. His treatment of enclosed space, and manipulation of proportion and human features recalls another well-known British artist, Francis Bacon. Like Bacon, Butler's palette is also pared down to an elegant minimalism. Predominantly black and white, his paintings are hued with touches of lavender, dashes of pink, hints of ochre and vanilla. The stark textures of rubber and skin are juxtaposed with billowing kimonos, atmospheric gesture and fluid sensuality. The Age of Innocence is breathtakingly captured, teetering on the verge of adulthood and awakening. That poignant moment is at the core of Butler's vision.

*"Love my way,
it's a new road
I follow where my mind goes,
So swallow all your tears my love
And put on your new face..."*

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