

Hot, Wet Art

Vox Populi's exhibit of male erotica oozes with visual metaphors.

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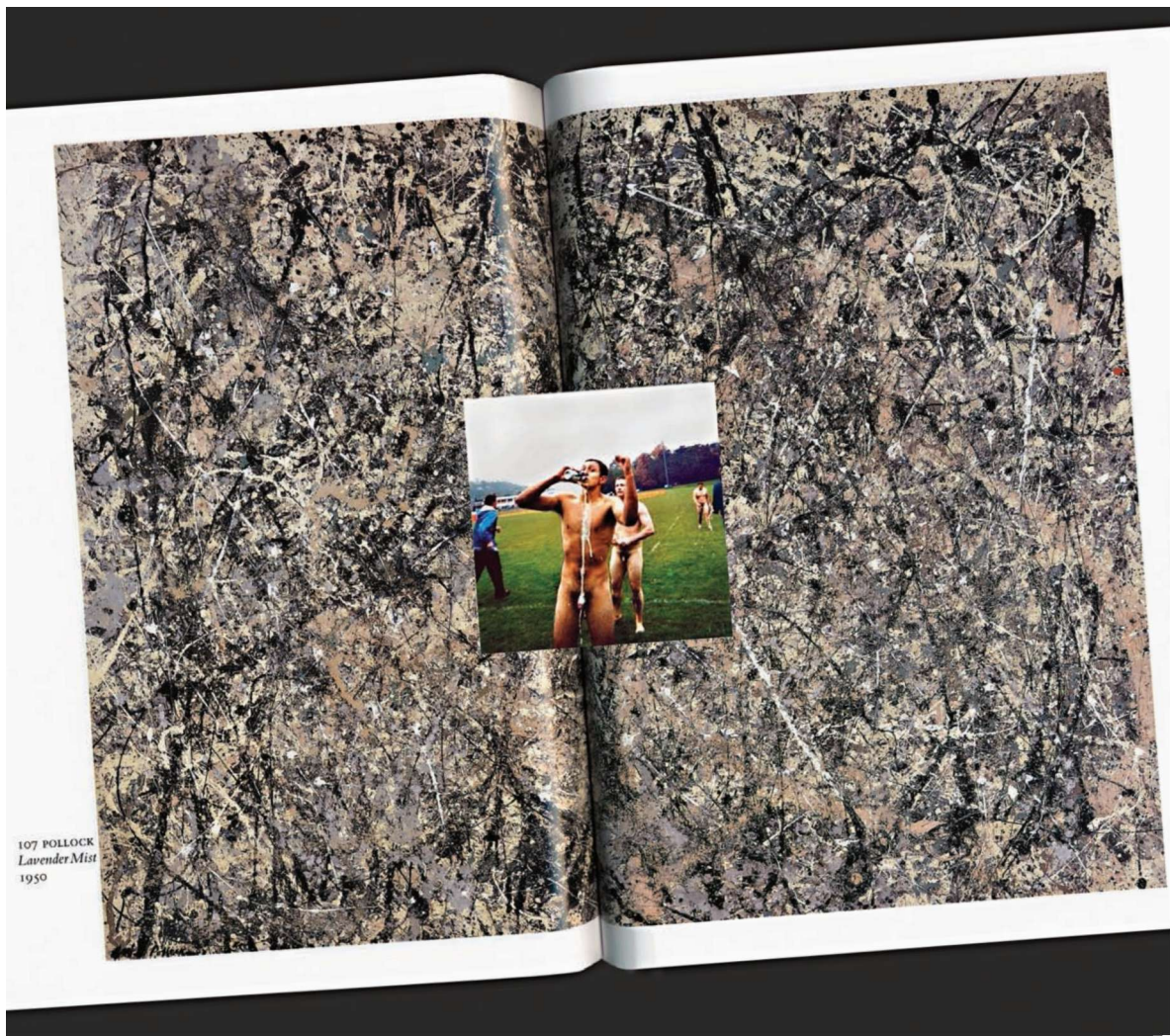
Painting *Bitten by a Man* is a two-person exhibition resolved to spread the cheeks of painting and take a dip. "I've been interested in ways that people can fuck with painting—literally," explained Andrew Suggs, executive director of Vox Populi Gallery and curator of the current show, which pairs Brian Kokoska's homoerotic paintings of leatherheads with mixed-media artist Jonathan VanDyke's desire to squeeze the history of modern painting for its, shall we say, creative juices.

If *Painting Bitten by a Man* is a show about dealing with the legacy of Modernism as queer painters, then it breaks down roughly as follows: Kokoska paints, and VanDyke takes a bite. In many ways, Kokoska uses traditional media (oil on canvas) to treat traditional subjects (eroticism and desire). But while the type of desire Kokoska depicts may have long scintillated beneath the hard-nosed varnish of many an Abstract Expressionist painting, his pictures bring queerness to the forefront. He paints closely cropped vignettes of men giving and taking pleasure from one another. Rainbow tongues explore gaping mouths, tentacular fingers penetrate red ears, and a leather boy cuddles his daddy in a moment of unexpected tenderness.

On a conceptual level, much of VanDyke's work is more fastidiously historical than Kokoska's. He pecks away at painting, but he doesn't always draw blood. VanDyke's photographs, in which pages from art history textbooks have been overlaid with contemporary snapshots of guys fooling around, are often so thoroughly legible that the pairings fall flat. Example: Pollock's *Lavender Mist* (1950) is paired with a naked frat boy pouring beer down his chest. Here, VanDyke compares the dripping paint in Pollock to the beer dripping off the bro's genitals; it's been said before—and better—by Warhol.

While these drips may run dry, those in VanDyke's sculptures and performance are thickly, deliciously and perversely wet. In a series of wall-mounted sculptures, colored paint drips seductively from holes and tubes onto the floor. It's all sexual seepage—a pitiful and more powerful response to Pollock than a can of beer.

Cordoned Area (2011-2012), a three-hour performance for two dancers who are also lovers, set the tone for the rest of the exhibition at the opening reception. Starting out with clean costumes in a ring formed by a swathe of fabric on the floor,



Sexual seepage: Mixed-media artist Jonathan VanDyke's photographs depict snapshots of guys fooling around over pages from art-history textbooks.

dancers David Rafael Botana and Bradley Teal Ellis duked out a powerfully improvised match. Throughout the performance, they added paint to their bodies, the cumulative traces of which remain visible on the walls, pillars and floor of the gallery. Unfortunately, if you missed the opening night performance, you're left trying to recreate its dynamism from the stain left in its wake.

Similarly, unless you visit the exhibition on Saturdays, you won't see VanDyke's dripping sculptures in action (they couldn't afford paint for the other days). In both cases, the residue of dried

paint is much less interesting than the gunky, messy rumble responsible for its secretion. Although Suggs should be commended for coaxing painting off the wall, the result that visitors will see on most days of the week is more timid than the raunchy possibilities promised by the press release: to queer paint's "historical resonance and contemporary application."

Nevertheless, there are moments of provocation that spark regardless of performative and kinetic constraints. A filmic, Dutch-angle shot of hands pleasuring a dripping asshole in Kokoska's *Finger Linger* (2011) stands as one. Another is

VanDyke's *Everyone I Ever Loved* (2008), a video installed behind a wall and accessible only through a peephole. The hour-long loop shows a stationary man staring at a painting with his back to the viewer. In the absence of any other action, the mind begins to wander; rather than tackling a conceptual course through the video, the accumulated kinkiness of the rest of the show lures you down a less traveled and more titillating path: There's a hole in the wall. What will you do with it? ■

Through July 1, Vox Populi Gallery, 319 N. 11th St, voxpopuligallery.org