

Anton Henning

28 April-25 June

Haunch of Venison, London

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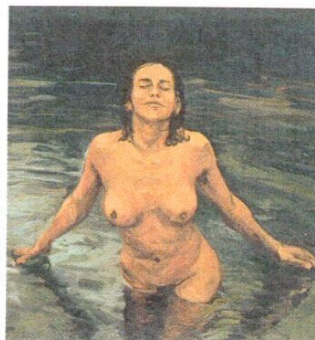
www.haunchofvenison.com)

Review by Pablo Lafuente

For a gallery that works with Jorge Pardo, Tobias Rehberger and Diana Thater, organising an exhibition of work by Anton Henning could be considered either perfectly sensible or slightly bizarre. These four artists (two American, two German, all born in the 1960s) share a concern with space, environment and presentation – highly appropriate for a venue with such strong architectural features.

But while the work of Pardo, Rehberger and Thater attempts to encourage, through eminently contemporary aesthetic strategies, a certain empathy with the viewer, that of Henning – with its mix of styles, heavy colours and tacky figurative motifs – appears purposefully dated and wilfully tasteless in comparison. Canvases like *Pin-up No. 96 (Ariadne)* (2005), depicting a naked woman with chocolate-brown skin and cucumber slices covering her eyes, or *Sandpiper with beard* (2005), a self-portrait of the artist standing naked on the beach, are unquestionably vulgar. They are the kind of images you would find in the photo album of a middle-aged German male, one who likes going to nudist beaches and looking at attractive younger women.

Pin-ups and beaches are accompanied by sentimental figurative scenes, such as a bird on a branch (*Abendlied 21.30 Uhr*, 2005) or a child and a woman playfully wrestling with a cow (*Spiel No. 2*, 2001), and by geometric and psychedelic abstract constructions (*Interieur No. 292*, 2005), all rendered



in visible brushstrokes and a palette of browns and greens.

If that were all, 'Sandpipers, Lizards & History' would be a good painting show, but one that probably wouldn't stay in anyone's mind for too long. The interesting (and perhaps irritating) thing about it is the fact that Henning has combined his paintings not just with films, on the ground floor, but, on the other two floors, with Modernist furniture and lamps of his own design, displaying it in rooms in which the walls have been painted with geometric patterns in pastel colours and the floor (in the top gallery) covered with a yellow-ochre carpet.

As with Pardo's and Thater's shows at Haunch of Venison, here the aesthetic experience is not structured around the direct contemplation of an object, but through environmental effects and partial or lateral perception. Unlike these artists, Henning gives the paintings a certain pre-eminence; but once experienced in the environment he has created, they are impossible to dissociate (perceptually or conceptually) from the narrative in which they are immersed. This narrative, which appropriates different, even opposed styles (combining impressionist, constructivist, decorative and expressionist elements without providing any hierarchy) appears to be sincere, but also, if it's possible, both sentimental and ironic at the same time.

Above: Anton Henning, *Pin-up No.94 (Venus von Binenwalde)*, 2005, oil on canvas, 157.5 x 189.5cm, detail