



Joe Andoe, *Untitled*, 2003, oil on canvas, 40 x 20".



Erick Swenson, *Untitled (detail)*, 2004, polyurethane resin, acrylic paint, MDF, and polystyrene, 23' x 14' 5" x 1' 11 1/2".

is—to use art to help us think not only formally but ethically, then it is crucial to seek the most instructive, revealing, and provocative balance between the universal and the specific. But appropriating museological methods of display to expose assumptions about taxonomy and historiography is not exactly fresh rhetoric. It's not interesting to say merely, "This is a surrogate museum." Surrogacy in the service of what? Whose taxonomic desire or historical revisionism are we looking at? It's not helpful to answer, "Everybody's." We are dealing, nonaesthetically, with looted antiquities, fundamentalist interpretations of ancient texts, and the misreading of human bodies as subhuman hordes. Joining a thousand tiny hands to make a garland of indeterminate meaning risks cliché in a time where platitudinous obfuscation is everywhere, and legible, hard facts seem like relics.

—Frances Richard

JOE ANDOE FEIGEN CONTEMPORARY

"All of us had police records, some more than me. But still, before I was sixteen, I got busted for acid and was put in jail over night on two hits of it. Then I got arrested for driving under-age and had to work at the zoo. At sixteen I got a car that I totaled and went on to total three more and was charged with DWI, DUI, and reckless driving and busted for drugs three more times before I was done being a teenager."

New York painter Joe Andoe's confessional short story "Out on the Perimeter" (2004), reproduced as an introductory wall text, set the stage for a collection of

suitably rough-hewn canvases dominated by scenes of the artist's teenage bad-boy antics in late-'60s and early-'70s Tulsa. Interspersing images of stripped-down cars bombing down rural highways at night with sultry portraits of girls in various states of undress and intoxication, Andoe conjured a darkside Americana familiar from the work of Larry Clark and Harmony Korine (specifically Clark's "Tulsa" photographs, 1963–71, and the duo's collaboration on *Kids* [1995]), David Lynch's postmodern road movies *Wild at Heart* (1990) and *Lost Highway* (1997), and the sex 'n' death novels of Dennis Cooper.

Andoe's vision is cinematic in its wide-angled viewpoint but has none of the smooth texture of celluloid. Rendered in muted dark or sepia-toned oils, the application of which veers unpredictably from smeared impasto to dry scrub (images are often made by wiping paint off the surface of the canvas rather than layering it on), these pictures suggest photographs bleached by the desert sun or found lying half-buried by the side of the road. The fuzzy grays of his image of a speeding white car and the violent reds of his depiction of a siren in jean shorts leaning back on a bed point to a use of color that is at once rigidly disciplined and richly evocative, worn down to the bare essentials. A three-dimensional equivalent might be Richard Prince's "Hood Paintings," 2003–2004, in which the titular car parts are given a painterly "weather-beaten" patina. Andoe's compositions too are stark and focused, his backgrounds largely restricted to foreboding skies streaked with high clouds, his figures stylized and silent.

Invariably, the people Andoe paints—drawn from personal and cultural mem-

ory—exude a noirish cool. In one large portrait, a woman's face appears, like the image in a locket, framed in an oval cloud of paint and surrounded by a dreamy pastel blue haze. Another depicts a waiflike creature, hair cascading over her bare breasts, clutching a brew with both hands. The landscapes inhabited by these characters are distinctively Oklahoman—expansive, and troubled by history only as it is made manifest in gradual economic decline—yet their openness is consistently upset by an echoing melancholia and the possibility of imminent disaster. Andoe's study of an unnamed lake feels more like a crime scene than a pastoral idyll; the foliage might hide some terrible evidence, and that water looks as hard and dry as gunmetal. A painting of an empty road vanishing into the distance under a darkening sky is similarly ominous, a route straight through to the middle of nowhere.

"This was just the way things were," claims Andoe in defense of his checkered past. "I didn't know any different. I knew it was bad and it drove my folks crazy. Then I discovered painting."

—Michael Wilson

ERICK SWENSON JAMES COHAN GALLERY

At least since his 1998 show at Dallas's Angstrom Gallery, Erick Swenson has pursued a level of presentation and craftsmanship so exacting that it might attract phone calls equally from museum curators and from Hollywood special-effects technicians. Titled "Obviously a Movie," the Angstrom show consisted of sculpted creatures, including a creepy half-horse,

half-sheep called *Edgar*, 1997, that stood upright and two green-faced ape-men set in action poses among snow-covered rocks, all dusted with artificial snow. Making no secret of their artifice and sources, Swenson's hybrid forms appear almost capable of movement yet are wholly unnatural and inhabit uniquely improbable environments. Like the aliens in the *Star Wars* movies, Swenson's figures are initially modeled in clay, then cast in polyurethane resin and painted. But Swenson's wondrous tableaux serve no script except his own, a set of concerns that is itself a hybrid encompassing awarenesses of the nineteenth-century Romantic sensibility and the inhabitants of the ice planet Hoth.

As this, his first New York solo show, and the concurrent display of his work at the 2004 Whitney Biennial indicated, Swenson's sensibility has shifted from the cinematic to the theatrical and the mythic, with two discrete but ambitiously scaled works that are at once pristine and baroque. *Untitled*, 2001, exhibited at the Whitney, is like a still from a Surrealist film. A milky white fawn is shown standing on a Persian carpet with its legs splayed, casting a dark, oddly shaped shadow. The animal stoops to rub its antlers against the carpet and sloughs off a covering of downy velvet, leaving peelings and eroding the rug. It is a peculiar convergence of man-made and natural elements all rendered in patently artificial ways (both deer and carpet were casts, the latter imprinted with a digitized image of its source).

At James Cohan Gallery, another, larger young stag, its antlers fully bared and covered in simulated ice, was positioned again in isolation and under similarly mysterious circumstances. Inspired by museological dioramas, Swenson has taken the notion of freezing a moment in time to its ultimate conclusion. A low platform twenty-three feet in length replicated an icy landscape. Toward the middle and closer to one end, a cobble street (cast with astonishing verisimilitude) is visible beneath the surface. In the midst of this, the buck has succumbed to the pull of nature's forces. Collapsed to the ground and partially covered with snow, his body contorts as if rigor mortis had already set in. But his eyes remain open, and we wonder if he is still suffering a gradual death. Pretty and horrible, the piece recalls David Altmejd's crystal-covered werewolf corpses (another Biennial inclusion) but is in some ways an alternative to the gothic vocabulary to which they refer. Swenson has also managed to invert the equally slick and well-crafted pure black