

# Art in America

MARCH 2004

## Michael Raedecker at Andrea Rosen

In Michael Raedecker's new paintings (all 2002-03), he continues to develop his signature process of combining washes, drips and daubs of paint with blobs of yarn and embroidery stitched into the canvas. In these works, the imagery is more disjointed and the atmosphere more surreal than in some of his earlier paintings that took suburban landscapes or interiors as their subject matter. Some canvases were based on art-historical subjects while others were landscapes with a dreamlike, imaginary, almost disjointed quality.

Seeming to reference a Chardin still life, it is happening again (51 by 39 inches) shows a deer carcass hung upside down by one hoof. Metallic thread and sections of "fur" made from woolly, golden yarn form the awkwardly dangling animal; inexplicably, one of its front hooves is shaped like a duck head with a bright yellow bill. The white backdrop resembles a fringed altar cloth, with small fir trees stitched in the bottom portion. This delicate embroidery contrasts with the aggressive handling of the paint. Thick and muddied in some sections, the white paint seems to have been dragged across the surface, perhaps even scraped off and then reapplied.

In dissociation (for the best future), 29½ by 43½ inches, Raedecker offers a twist on the vanitas still life by replacing the usual human skull with a football helmet, dramatically lit by two candles. Like a strand of pearls, tufts of knotted gray yarn encircle the setup, which also includes a pair of pliers, another duck head and what appears to be a pint of beer.

Of the landscapes, breakaway (78¾ by 130 inches) is one of the most intriguing. The entire canvas is a wash of peachy orange color with sewn passages in reds and rusts. The topography is suggested with thick, horizontal patches of paint. A Middle Eastern-style tent surrounded by three palm trees stands near a murky gray pond crafted from long strands of closely stitched thread. Three white armlike forms are trying to pull themselves out of the water and onto the sand. The entire unpopulated landscape has an eerie air about it as if seen through an infrared camera at night.

That's the way it is (72 by 108 inches) retains vestiges of Raedecker's earlier architectural subject matter. A ranch-style house rendered in grisaille appears to be aflame as it peeks through the foggy landscape. Two flower beds in the foreground are delineated with thickly stitched green and brown borders. An erect penis "grows" insouciantly beside a clump of foliage in one of the beds, while a unicorn sits in the other. This slightly surreal suburban scene also includes a birdbath in the middle of the canvas, where two enormous ravens splash about.

Raedecker cleverly incorporates the craft of embroidery into works that are aggressively painterly. In his hands, thread, string and wool are used as expressively as the boldly poured and scumbled paint.

-Melissa Kuntz

Michael Raedecker: breakaway, 2002-03, oil, acrylic and thread on canvas, 78 ¾ by 130 inches; at Andrea Rosen.

