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WINNIPEG: PLUG IN ICA

MARK KARASICK
 26 November – 8 January
www.plugin.org

Mark Karasick's recent exhibition at Plug In ICA in Winnipeg was a homecoming for the London-based artist. It was his first exhibition in the city where he was born and raised, and to mark the occasion he chose a selection of his elegantly ravaged encaustic paintings and drawings. Karasick straddles two very different worlds in this work, keeping one foot in the venerable tradition of painting with wax and pigment and another in the culture of digital image processing. The images that emerge from this hybrid sensibility compel your interest, whether he's painting the face of a model whose mouth assumes

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Mark Karasick, *Squared Off*, 2003. Courtesy: the artist

the form of pronounced vowels, or the partially occluded face of a young woman giving a blowjob on a Japanese porn channel. Called *Squared Off* (2003), the three numbered paintings are a modern day wax museum of coy sexual practice; the pixelation from the tv image-grab takes on a palette of blue, turquoise, brown and tan and makes the contact of moist lip and engorged flesh less a reality of controlled pigment than a ligament of the viewer's imagination. The technologically-enforced modesty is supported by the fact that the woman appears to be wearing mousketeer ears and her eyes are closed.

But there is plenty to see. The half-dozen vowel paintings are like large '50s billboards, the kind that advertised Coca Cola or Colgate

toothpaste to a public aware that father knew best and mother was the source of the family's cheery life. From a distance these paintings are charming and simple; the closer you get the more implicated the paintings become. This complication arises out of the promiscuity of encaustic, that most changeling of mediums, and from the skilful manner with which Karasick employs it. Close in, the woman's cheeks become large, bruised areas which take on the sickly lavenders and greens of defeathered chicken flesh. The surfaces of the paintings shift as well; what we initially read as solidly vibrant skin suddenly registers visceral depths. You have the same feeling when you're nose-to-nose with these encaustic paintings that you get in looking at sky

reflected in a pool of water on the street. It displays a disconcerting infinity of space.

Karasick distresses the surfaces of these works – drawings and paintings alike – as a way of insisting that his subjects are time and memory, and not the processes and vents that cause his physiognomies to assume Brobdingnagian proportions. He is not Jenny Saville, and nor does he aspire to be Lucian Freud. He is more interested in the making than the made, which explains the half-dozen square (microcrystalline wax, collage and pigment on canvas) works that are the most recent in the exhibition. Titled after two-month long intervals – *January, February* (2004) – they are comprised of thick, black pigment that coagulates and pools. ●●

● as if it were tar or scar tissue. Around the edges sections of a blue video screen peek through, and insinuate the suggestion of activity going on without us, or at least without our knowledgeable gaze. These paintings are a seductive tease into the world

where Karasick desires us to be: caught looking for something so elusive we'll never fully see it, but so pleasing that we'll never stop ourselves from continuing to look.