

GAY LETTER

MIKE KUCHAR – DRAWINGS BY MIKE!

The avant-garde filmmaker premieres his private drawings
by Chris Stewart

Mike Kuchar is well known for his films. John Waters cites him as his hero, which is a pretty big compliment. But he's always been an illustrator; the work has just been more anonymous. Kuchar has always been successful in obscurity's sense. He worked as a magazine retoucher in the 1960s and, after moving to California, became a go-to name in the then underground comic scene. While he and his brother George Kuchar are widely known film directors, Mike has always been drawing and painting, gathering attention of a much smaller audience.

Opening just last week, Anton Kern Gallery has curated an exhibition of some of Mike's private collection on view through September. The drawings on exhibit have never been published or shown publicly before, so on the eve of his opening, Mike answered some questions I had about the works going into the premiere.

Do you believe your drawings share similar qualities to your cinema? Yes, because they come from my mind, which is creating moods and images, action and form. They are products of the same mind, and they're libido driven.

The illustrations in the show have a perfectionist's quality. What stylistic choices are you most attuned to when drawing? To design images and forms that excite the eye, done with competent skill and grace, so it can be appreciated on many levels... Not just sexual.

Gay artists tend to focalize phalluses for homosexual reasons, but do you believe besides masculinity and genuine homo-attraction there is another comment for work that details throbbing phalluses? Naturally the focus is between the legs, and that area becomes prominent. In drawings, you can exaggerate those areas. If you want natural proportions, take a photo.

Who is someone you would love to draw? No one. They are icons in my mind, characters of my imagination. If I want to render a real person, I would photograph them or put them in a movie.

The men in your drawings are reinterpreted as Biblical figures and are in fantasy settings as well. What role does dreaming play in your life? The drawings are creations of the imagination. They're colorful characters symbolic of sin and virtue in our culture. I play with those images, since they're in our psyche and our society. Temptation is alluring, so the images of Satan are oversexed, which is what sex is all about. Angels are good and beautiful, they're characters to play with and put on the stage of the canvas.

What were your favorite male nude magazines, or what are your favorite male form references? I don't look at photo magazines, I look at sexual illustrations, I prefer homoerotic drawings. They used to be on the newsstands. Physique Pectoral was one monthly magazine, I enjoyed the illustrations by Harry Bush.

Your characters are primarily uncut — are there aesthetic benefits to illustrating uncut rather than cut? It's natural, the way nature made it.

Can you remember the first body you knew you had to draw? I knew the first body I wanted to touch, not draw.

