

of art, gifted curators can teach us how to see and so interpret. And then, so this wonderfully suggestive exhibition shows, context is everything.

DAVID CARRIER

LOS ANGELES

## JAIME SCHOLNICK

JOHN WAYNE DRAWINGS

ANGLES GALLERY

20 MARCH - 24 JUNE

'It's not the size of the legend, it's the legend of the size.' Gallery director Nowell Karten might have been having fun when he said that in conversation about Los Angeles artist Jaime Scholnick's new work, but he has a point. More than one, actually. Scholnick's previous work has, at times, involved sculpture, installation and video, but her return to figurative drawing is marked not only by articulate draughtsmanship, wry cultural insight and a dose of sheer moxie; it also has a sense of humour.

In a way, it seems inevitable that an artist as concerned as Scholnick has long been with exaggerated representations of gender and sexuality in popular culture would eventually confront the *ne plus ultra* of American masculinity, John Wayne. And hard on the heels of his legend comes the rumour of his improbably small sex organ. This suite of works on paper places realist pencil drawings of the Duke, mostly naked, in proximity to other icons of maleness from different idioms to witty effect; but the large scale of the drawings, their serious execution and the delicately variegated colour washes that unify the environments signal to the viewer that these pictures carry sociological import as well.

*The Massage* (2005) finds Wayne seated on a bed in a nondescript room whose stark lighting is magnified by the brightness of the yellow colour field, in which the drawing resides like amber. The late rapper Old Dirty Bastard is seated next to him, getting a back rub from a scantily dressed suicide blonde. ODB is wearing white underclothing and lots of flashy jewellery, while Wayne is nude save for white neck scarf and cowboy hat. These bits of clothing are the only opaque passages in the composition and they form a sort of cascading abstraction encoded within the scene. But the toothy, senile grin on Wayne's face, the malevolence with which ODB regards him and the canary-yellow claustrophobia of the wash collude to both heighten the scene's tension and mock its tough posturing. This piece also represents a powerful realignment of masculine archetypes – as the black man is understood to have seized, and finally come to embody, the American



JAIME SCHOLNICK  
THE MESSAGE 2005  
GRAPHITE, GESSO AND INK ON PAPER, 119 X 152 CM  
COURTESY ANGLES GALLERY, SANTA MONICA

machismo dream in all its facets from virility to wealth and power.

This juxtaposition manifests itself in more nebulous, conceptual form in *Huh? What?* (2005) whose emerald wash is the most textural colour field in the series, and whose inky blacks and snowy whites are the most dramatic opacities. Wayne is portrayed in a flirty, coquettish stance, draped in an unbuttoned white woman's blouse and carrying a black man-purse, wearing a hat with a black band and black espadrilles. He is lighting a cigarette and the feminine tilt of his head and the hip-swaying jauntiness of his posture look for all the world like a prostitute's. ODB is in the lower left; he is not part of the same picture plane and is smaller in scale, but his shirtless torso, bagged-out boxers, and taut, awkward posture bespeak youth and strength. What is most poignant is how the work's integrity mandates that it begin to pick apart the construction of this new masculine paradigm even as it celebrates its ascension; and it takes it like a man.

SHANA NYS DAMBROT

LOS ANGELES

## ROE ETHRIDGE

APPLE AND CIGARETTES

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

25 MAY - 7 JULY

Roe Ethridge has made it clear that he is very aware of just how critical a place the in-between can be. Even when he has used the medians of highways as his subject matter, as in the series *Neutral Territory* (1999), the conceptual and pictorial terrain of his photographs is anything but middle-of-the-road. His work has been unsurpassed amongst his peers in its ability to lay claim to (or, better yet, play with) the loaded

territories that crop up between film and literature, as well as those between commercial and art photography.

In his best work, the picture itself comes across as if it were self-aware of the seductive, even dangerous, promise of its contextually-driven situation: for example, in this tight-as-ever exhibition (his first in Los Angeles, where several of the photographs were shot), even the plant-form protagonists of *Sage and Daisies* (2005) seem to have been infused with a kind of sharp self-consciousness by the blinding white light that turns them – the sage in particular – into eye-piercing switchblades.



Quickly separating himself from the substantial prior achievement of Richard Prince and Christopher Williams, Ethridge's fully established point of view is as deceptively casual as the former, and as deceptively sharp as the latter. Rather than getting in the deception by using it in the work (as Gursky and others have done), Ethridge allows it in any (even when absent) to be a means to another end, resistant to definition, always open to pleasure.

Other successful aspects of Ethridge's prior solo exhibition developed here. First, there are crucial ways in which every one of the 18 photographs on show differs from the others, almost as if they were a character in an intricate realist novel. For example, *Los Angeles* (2006) seems to establish a specific (Silver Lake) setting for the rest of the show in a rather blank manner, actually sets itself apart to initiate another intriguing story, once you realize that the two distinctive palm trees in the shot are stubbornly blocking the Hollywood sign and the Observatory. The definitive location of the show is further undermined by the presence of two photographs of mini-mall settings – almost perversely, in this case – not in LA: *Liberty Square, Liberty Square* and *Cove Corners, Wellfleet MA* (2005).

ROE ETHRIDGE  
OLD PHONE AND NEON RAINBOW 2005  
CHROMOGENIC PRINT, 102 X 82 CM  
COURTESY GAGOSIAN GALLERY, CALIFORNIA