

cherry hood

REBIRTH OF THE REAL

THE WORK OF CHERRY HOOD REFLECTS A REALISM BOTH SINCERE AND CONTEMPORARY, WRITES **BRUCE JAMES**.

In the last decade of the 20th century, much to the surprise of the art world, the genre of “uncanny realism” advanced as a major movement – or at least as a significant, identifiable tendency. Painters and sculptors alike exchanged post-modernist irony for a new sincerity in relation to matters of method, representation, intention and the many psychological and formal possibilities of anatomical naturalism.

Practitioners of the three-dimensional gave themselves with especial speediness to this trend. In Australia, for example, **Kristian Burford**, **Charles Robb** and **Ah Xian** began to investigate the expressive range of the human body, encouraged to a greater or lesser degree by the international success of Australian-born sculptor, **Ron Mueck** – as well as by Mueck’s high-visibility co-travellers such as **Charles Ray**, **Marc Quinn**, **Stefan Balkenhol** and **Maurizio Cattelan**.

Working with a variety of visual conventions, including prop-making, religious – and particularly Catholic – iconography, medical illustration and the combined legacies of Western and Asian figuration, these pioneers of the uncanny paved the way over a few short years at the millennium’s end for a rebirth of interest in, and acceptance of, the depiction of the real.

In painting the process was a tad more protracted, with artists as divergent in pictorial approach as **Lucian Freud** and **Chuck Close** forging respective lifetime dedications to the cause, surviving style shifts and social changes with the passive-aggressive aplomb of zealots.

Sydney-based painter and sculptor, **Cherry Hood**, also enlists in the roster of those who have worked for decades towards rebirthing the real in art. As early as the 1970s, Hood was studying renaissance sculpture and painting in Italy, a country, among other European sites, she continues to visit. Her enthusiasm for Italian art embraces the output of a range of

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Cherry Hood, *Interface* (exhibition), 2002, watercolour with oil glaze on canvas. 1.8x2.4m each. Exhibition view, Mori Gallery. IMAGE COURTESY: THE ARTIST. PHOTO: SUE BLACKBURN.



Cherry Hood, *Untitled #4*, from the series *Sibling*, 2002, watercolour and oil glaze on canvas, 60x60 cm. IMAGE COURTESY: THE ARTIST. PHOTO: SUE BLACKBURN.

masters. Such variously gifted individuals as the **Della Robbias**, **Donatello**, **Verrocchio** and **Pontormo** all appear to have left their mark in her memory, and her work.

This is not to say she is a lazily incorporative artist. On the contrary, Hood’s internalisation of “old-masterly” prototypes has been won by dint of consistent effort and a tireless conviction, that the art historical past holds as many truths for engaged living artists as the mass cultural present. Therefore, it’s entirely natural that she knows as much about cinquecento terracotta procedures,

say, or fresco, as she does about the intricacies of Photoshop – and that both inform her current creative practice. Hood’s *Interface* exhibition of paintings at Mori Gallery in January, 2002, proved that she had mastered her sources magnificently, and produced a completely persuasive, mid-career body of work that made the market – and no few critics and curators – suddenly sit up and take notice.

Hood placed seven monumental canvases on one wall, each depicting the bust of an adolescent boy. Whether these individually named subjects were actual portraits taken from life or fantasy composites was difficult to tell – deliberately so. They stared across the room at 13 smaller painted juvenile “sitters” in similar head-and-shoulders format and oil-glazed watercolour technique. Their gazes traversed the territory between cultic ritual and erotic address, with a hint of the happy snap for good measure.

Hood is now not so much an artist to carefully watch, as one to collect. ■

Cherry Hood is represented by Mori Gallery, Sydney.