

ROBT. WILLIAMS

OCTOBER 31, 2009 - JANUARY 24, 2010

CONCEPTUAL REALISM



FREE



Wrangling The Firmament, 2008, Oil on canvas, 36 x 48 inches

For Immediate Release: TONY SHAFRAZI GALLERY is pleased to announce the upcoming exhibition **Robert Williams: Conceptual Realism, In the Service of the Hypothetical** Featuring new paintings, drawings, and for the first time, sculptures. Opening Saturday, October 31, 2009, on view through January 23, 2010, with a fully illustrated book to coincide with the exhibition by FANTAGRAPHICS.

Introducing Robert Williams

BARRET S. BINGHAM

SINCE THE LATE 20th AND 21st CENTURY, diverse forms of commonplace and popular art appear to be coalescing into a formidable faction of new varieties of painted realism. The growth of this phenomenon owes its genesis to a number of factors. The new schools of imagery are a “product of art” that don’t fit comfortably into the accepted definition of “fine art.” They embrace some of the figurative styles, manners, and graphic images that formal art academia tend to reject: underground comic books, science fiction and horror films, trashy or populist movie posters, trading cards, tattoo iconography, girlie magazines, surfer art, hot rod illustration, and outlaw culture in general.

This alternative art movement found its most original voice in one of America’s most opprobrious and maligned underground artists, the painter, Robert Williams, whose art takes us into the world of subjective theory—a mock realm of violated graphic physics. This is his theoretical search to pinpoint the exact location where the sky meets the ground, with the golden socket wrench used only by quantum mechanics. His art is the first step on that hypothetical journey,

and is not a hapless sojourn through metaphysical superstition or false mystery, but simply the next adventure into abstract thought.

Edited with cooperation and encouragement from Robert Williams

Conceptual Realism

DAVID DALTON

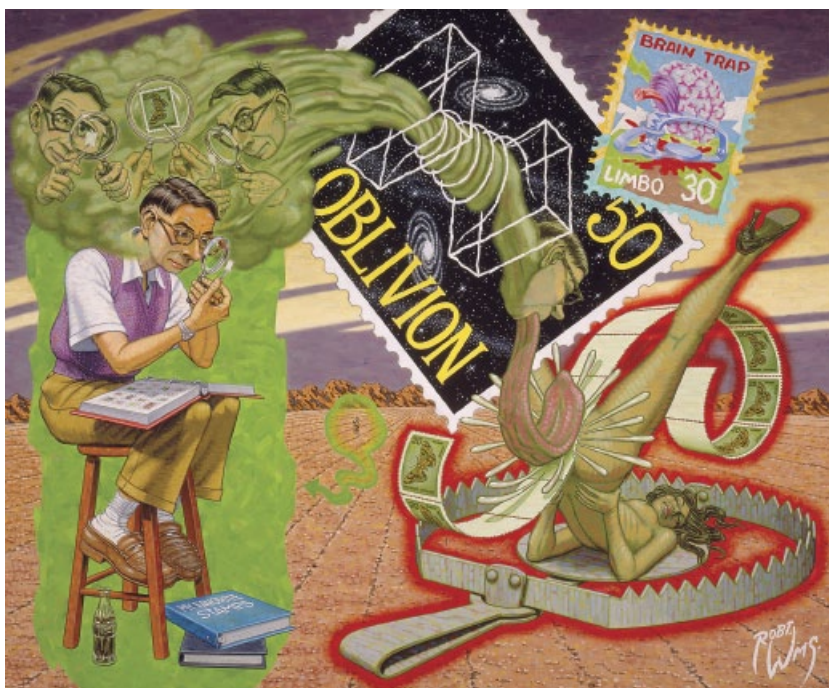
WHO THE HELL gets to call it reality, anyway? Robert Williams, the kinky king of West Coast outlaw culture, that’s who. Why? Because this is his show, a rabid art dog’s x-ray of angsty, eye-popping hyperreality. Putrid, crusading, loutish, leering, and profound, Williams is a generator of pure cerebral monsters summoned out of drooling lust, apocalyptic kitsch, alien hatchlings, and gross gonzo tableaux.

A master draftsman, inventor, and depicter of the seething teen brain, Robert Williams’ art is an uncanny graphic analogy for heavy metal’s raunch and grind—nasty, perverse,

loud, lewd, and out of control—which is why Guns N’ Roses used his painting and title “Appetite For Destruction,” 1979 on the cover of their album eight years later, where a hideous chrome-toothed orange space monster zaps a robot about to rape a blonde female street peddler.... Wait a minute, I can’t describe this ! You just gotta see it. Not surprisingly, art academia was aghast at this aesthetic whiplash. It was as if the Hells Angels had vroomed into the hallowed white space of the gallery on their Harleys threatening to gang-bang the Mona Lisa.



Appetite for Destruction, 1979,
Oil on canvas, 15 x 28 inches



AN ASPIRING ART STUDENT in the mid-1960s, Robert Williams had his first epiphany when he became art director for the infamous custom car builder, Ed “Big Daddy” Roth. Infested with Roth’s high-octane machines leching after lubricious babes, he next effortlessly merged with the rebellious, anti-war cabal of the early underground comix scene in San Francisco, joining forces with

Robert Crumb, Gilbert Shelton, S. Clay Wilson, Spain Rodriguez, Victor Moscoso and Rick Griffin to form Zap Comix. R. Crumb eventually got assimilated—you can find his cartoons in the New Yorker, for chrissakes, but to this day Robert Williams remains the outsider’s outsider. He’s still beyond the pale—and proud of it. Which is why the hip cognoscenti treasure his gnarly creations—among them Nicholas Cage, Leonardo Di Caprio, Ed Ruscha, Matt Stone, Debbie Harry

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Artie Shaw, Yoko Ono and Pink. They know sublime trash when they see it.

Who put “lowbrow” into the fine arts lexicon? He did, with his brain-jangling 1979 book, *The Lowbrow Art of Robert Williams*—a mayhem-splattered, babe-sprinkled road map that kick-started West Coast outlaw culture and instantly spawned a mangy horde of graphically demented, motorpsycho slaving, midway-trolling meta-artists. Now you know who to thank for that garish psychedelic split-screen porn palette and tasteless Frostee Freeze imagery that pops its ugly zit-plastered head up everywhere you don’t wanna look.

And as if that weren’t enough, in 1994 he founded the infamous art chronicle JUXTAPOZ, which now has a circulation greater than any other art magazine—100,000 and climbing.

Take that, snooty Artforumniks!

As addicted as he is to dumpster diving in cultural trash bins, Robert Williams doesn’t just ingeniously re-animate pop-cult debris, there’s also quantum physics in there—trust me—as well as Freudian fetishism, Escher-Riemann special conundrums plus a kind of irreverent rape of European art—the lurid Id let loose in the museum, grabbing snatches of Picasso, Dalí, Gaudi, de Chirico, and Bosch like a hyena snapping up bones. With his gratuitous morphing of high and low, the distance between fine art and Kustom Kar culture collapses in the atomizing vision of Robert Williams.

Beware, desultory gallery visitor, because his art isn’t just gaudy, grizzly, psychotic, and image-guzzling; it’s also highly infectious. Once seen, it goes directly into your bloodstream—and there’s no known antidote to this stuff, aesthetic or otherwise. It seers your eyeballs, makes your knees freeze, your liver quiver, and turns your synapses into a freeway off-ramp. Any questions?



Hollywood After Midnight, 2007, Oil on canvas, 50 x 66 inches



DAVID DALTON, a founding editor of *Rolling Stone* and a writer on pop culture, is the author of *James Dean: The Mutant King*; *Piece of My Heart: Janis Joplin*; the award-winning *Faithfull!* (with Marianne Faithfull). He has written extensively on art, including *A Year in the Life of Andy Warhol*

(with photographs by David McCabe); the very recently published biography *Pop: The Genius of Andy Warhol*, and the soon to be released *Painting Below Zero: Notes on a Life in Art*, the memoir of James Rosenquist. He lives in upstate New York with his wife, the painter Coco Pekelis.

ROBERT WILLIAMS

CONCEPTUAL REALISM

IN THE SERVICE OF THE HYPOTHETICAL

Robert Williams, "Diamond in a Goat's Ass (A Lyrically Poetic Euphemism for Pretension)," 2009 (detail of sculpture in progress)
Photo: Matt Heyerly

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