

Elizabeth Dee

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Helen Sadler

Elizabeth Dee is pleased to announce exhibitions of new work by Virgil Marti and Helen Sadler in the gallery at 545 West 20th Street. A reception for the artists will be held on Saturday, February 25th, from six to eight pm.

Virgil Marti covers the walls and ceiling of the Main Gallery with plaster sculptures of large flowers and other motifs. Half-chrome mirrored bulbs set in the reliefs reposition the decorative as functional, at the same time they cast a light back onto the sculptures that reveals them to be composed entirely of human bones. Skulls, scapulae, clavicles, coccyxes, patellae, femurs, tibiae, and other bones cast in plaster make up the flora, fauna, and snowflakes of the design. The initial impression of an all-over room treatment yields to the slightly macabre knowledge that the decorations comprise intricate patterns formed of the repeated parts of reconfigured skeletons, punctuated by the artist's signature translucent flowers in brightly colored resin.

Green Winter marks a progression from Marti's prior essays in cast resin antler chandeliers and white plastic tortoise shells with lighted, flowering cacti. As in his previous rooms, the artist draws inspiration for this installation from disparate sources in art and cultural history. Seventeenth and eighteenth-century plasterwork represents the obvious origin of the wall and ceiling reliefs, but it is conflated with the coeval, yet seemingly incongruous, decorative scheme of the bone chapels of Europe, such as that of the Capuchins in Rome, in which all manner of architectural embellishment was made from the skeletons of dead monks. To complicate matters further, the artist derives the motif of towering vegetation from the drawings of Henry Darger, whose collage aesthetic produced scenes of small girls dwarfed by huge garden flowers. The human bones might suggest affinities with the gothic or a heavy metal taste for allusions to death, but the outlandish scale of the oversized blossoms, the evocations of the rococo in the confectionary white-on-white, and the drollery of the ornamental conceit, point to a more subtle and complex intention.

The work's title, *Green Winter*, contracts a saying of the artist's grandmother, which foretold illness from too warm a winter. In the current climate, both meteorological and geopolitical, the old-wife's adage suggests a more dire prediction. Marti allows the faint echoes of a future forewarned to color his illuminated environment and create a walk-in *memento mori*, in which the faux gaiety of the imagery cannot quite offset the fact that we are all destined for the bone heap.

Green Winter is Virgil Marti's second exhibition at Elizabeth Dee. His seminal *Grow Room* was featured in the 2004 Whitney Biennial and is a promised gift to that institution. The artist has been the subject of exhibitions at the Santa Monica Museum of Art; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; Participant, Inc.; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; and Thread Waxing Space. He lives and works in Philadelphia.

In Gallery 2, **Helen Sadler** presents a suite of new paintings, executed in her customary egg tempera on wood. Using the medium of an early Renaissance master, she makes small panels that depict moments of intense experience. Appropriating images from film and video, the artist captures people, young women in particular, at instants of ecstatic abandon, profound grief, or emotional crisis. She chooses figures from events in recent history or from the era of her childhood, the 1960s and '70s. The subjects of her recent works range from close-ups of fans at rock concerts-Woodstock in 1969 and Wattstax in 1972-to news footage of the arrests of the young female accomplices of Charles Manson, to mourners at the funeral of Pope John Paul II. Painting with a delicate looseness and transparent washes of color, as if egg tempera were watercolor, Sadler catalogues nuances of the ineffable, played across the faces of her subjects. Despite their diminutive scale, her panels compel our attention with their concentrated passion

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This is Sadler's first one-person exhibition at Elizabeth Dee. She was included in *The Sublime Is (Still) Now* at the gallery in 2004, and in *Ciao! Manhattan: Recent Painting from New York* at Perugi Artecontemporanea in Padua that same year, and in *Girls on Film* at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia in 2003. Solo shows of her work have been held at Team in New York and at Biagiotti in Florence, Italy. The artist lives and works in New York.