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JULIAN MEAGHER

OVER THE PAST few years I have become more interested in painting surfaces and objects that are ordained in some way, be it a tattoo within skin or surface imagery that gives an object a unique history. I like building up layers of paint, scrubbing them back and then re-applying more to show this history on the original subject. I was taught to paint skin using quite a traditional process and still use this technique in my work.

I like to think of my works as a kind of painterly version of the 'cabinet of curiosities', where simple observation can give rise to fascination. My paintings of delicate tattoo designs are presented on viscerally painted body parts that are dismembered from their hosts. I suppose my medical background makes it easier for me to see bodies more as specimens. In my work the identity of the owner of the tattoo is often physically absent, allowing the full comprehension of the design on a symbolic level to remain just out of reach.

These two small-scale works are new studies for my upcoming show at Chalk Horse gallery, Sydney, in September 2010. My friend Teik had his tattoo completed by his favourite artist after several trips to Nagoya. I like how delicate yet strangely masculine and other-worldly it is on him. In this work I have painted his torso as if it were a Ming vase, altering the colours a little to make them more ultramarine blue.

The other painting is of a Ming vase I saw on a recent trip to Shanghai. The link is obvious—they are both delicate designs that contain a personal narrative and individual history. In some



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ways my painting becomes an extension of this, I'm happy for the design's original history to remain ambiguous. These works become successful for me when the glazing begins to create a depth of surface—be it skin, porcelain, or fabric—in the layers of which some quite ornate line work and imagery is recorded.

More and more I've become interested in other forms of surface imagery and have been focussing on other subject matter based around masculinity—from scenes that may be a real or interpreted rite of passage, to objects themselves, such as an army helmet drawn on by its wearer or a to simple six-pack of beer. Some of these works will be shown in the Melbourne Art Fair. I enjoy working with text on surfaces as well, especially knuckle tattoos. These tattoos while assuming an ultra-tough form of expression for the wearer are actually often quite cheeky and humorous given the constraints of using three to four letter words. I have just finished a large scale grid work of these knuckle tattoos which will be shown with Future Perfect at the Shanghai Art Fair in September this year. ■

Born 1978 in Sydney, Julian Meagher has trained as both a doctor of medicine and artist and now paints full-time. He is represented by Chalk Horse, Sydney, Edwina Corlette Gallery, Brisbane, and Lindberg Contemporary, Melbourne.

EXHIBITION
3 Sept - 9 Sept 2010
Chalk Horse, 94 Cooper Street, Surry Hills, Sydney
www.chalkhorse.com.au

01 Teik as Ming Vase, 2010, oil on linen, 60 x 60cm

02 Ming Vase, 2010, oil on linen, 60 x 60cm

Courtesy the artist