



Lukacs, Attila Richard (b. 1962)

by Eugenio Filice

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The work of Canadian painter, sculptor, and installation artist Attila Richard Lukacs is frequently fetishistic and invariably provocative, especially in its depictions of skinheads.

Lukacs was born in 1962 in Edmonton, Alberta. He graduated with honors from the Emily Carr College of Art and Design in Vancouver in 1985.

Lukacs received recognition as a painter while still an art student. In October 1985, he was included in a group show entitled "Young Romantics" at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Among the works by Lukacs in this exhibit, the painting *Il y a quinze ans que je n'ai fait pas ça* (I Haven't Done That in Fifteen Years, 1985) unveiled themes, subjects (nude males, monkeys) and painterly styles (figurative representation) that have become principal characteristics of his later works.

With a strategic move to Berlin in 1986, Lukacs positioned himself within the social and cultural environment of the increasingly visible skinhead movement in Germany. A major show at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in the spring of 1988 not only revealed an increased mastery of his medium, but also featured the direct representation of skinheads with homoerotic subtexts.

Two defining pictures, *Where the Finest Young Men . . .* (1987) and *Authentic Décor* (1988), bring to the fore the odious subject of neo-Nazi skinheads, but they do so by eroticizing them.

Skinheads are also the topic of *Junge Spartaner fordern Knaben zum Kampf heraus* (The Young Spartans Challenge the Boys to Fight, 1988), which reveals the appropriation of compositional elements and subject matter from both Edgar Degas' *Young Spartans* (ca 1860) and Caravaggio's *The Calling of St. Matthew* (ca 1597-1598).

In 1990, Lukacs turned his attention to promotional material furnished by the United States military academies. He produced a series of paintings featuring youths performing various activities.

The inherent homoeroticism of such male-only training centers is defined in such works as *Gemini* (1990), which depicts two rugged teenagers with shorn heads struggling to climb posts. Of the same year are a series of images depicting skinheads, but whereas in earlier portrayals these hardened youths are represented as intimidating, now there is a perceptible shift in the style--illustrative, decorative, linear--and relational attitude: the skinheads begin to touch in overt homosexual activity.

This change in Lukacs' style and attitude culminates in "Varieties of Love," a 1992 exhibition held at his longstanding commercial venue, the Diane Farris Gallery in Vancouver. The rough, ruin-like environments of his earlier work give way to Eastern-art influenced decorative backgrounds; and while some figures retain the relics of Lukacs' signature paintings of skinheads, clearly the artist now seems anxious to distance himself from the negative associations with skinheads.

The style and subject matter of these paintings reappear in his work shown at the Phyllis Kind Gallery in New York in early 2000.

Monumental canvases were featured in "E-werk," a 1994 exhibition. In *This Town*, Lukacs depicts young workers with trademark shaved heads momentarily pausing from their backbreaking work. Although interpretable as a social commentary on the state of political affairs in post-unified Germany, the grimy, fleshy youths are presented in such a way that the gay male viewer may linger with an erotic gaze on their labor formed pectorals and sweat covered limbs.

After a ten-year absence from North America, in 1996 Lukacs moved to New York City, where he currently lives. His mid-career work continues to confront viewers with sexual interests and fetishes held by many a gay man (suits, black socks, youths).

In terms of art history, Lukacs appears at the height of a revival of figurative painting in Europe and North America. Critics have praised him and his work, though they generally straddle two positions. On the one hand, they are in awe of his talent and ability as a painter; on the other, they are often at pains to account for the eroticism inherent in the work and for a subject matter they often revile.

In an interview article published in *The Advocate*, Lukacs is quoted as saying, "I'm a homosexual, but I don't consider myself a homosexual artist." Regarding his subject matter, in the same interview, Lukacs states, "For me it's a fetish. Simply, there is a fetishization of the skinhead style. Sex power politics. My work is about the potentiality of the very specialized and stylized culture of skinheads."

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About the Author

Eugenio Filice is a doctoral student in art history at McGill University. He is currently preparing a dissertation on representation of gay men in contemporary Canadian art, and on the revival of figurative painting that occurred during late 1970s and 1980s.