

### In the midst of life ...

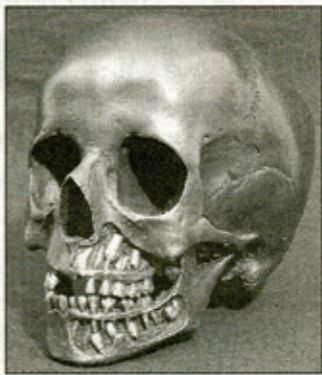
Damien Hirst at Wexler Gallery? It's true. The original YBA (Young British Artist) of pickled shark and sheep fame has two sculptures — a cast-silver skull and a cast-silver heart — in the gallery's "(In) Between: Contemporary Interpretations of Vanitas" exhibition, organized by its associate director, Sienna Freeman.

*The Fate of Man* (2005) is a beautiful, weirdly serene piece, cast from a young girl's skull. *The Sacred Heart* (2005), pierced with pins and razor blades (and all of it cast in silver) is almost as compelling, except that the heart, which must have come from a very large animal, does not immediately read as one.

Of the other six artists in this show, Adelaide Paul, who covers her porcelain casts of real dogs with colored leather that she stitches to mark each section of the animal's body, comes closest in spirit to Hirst. *Green Dog* (2008), one of four such pieces, is easily the most startling piece in this show, mainly because of its lifelike, bright green eyes. I don't get the point of Paul's work — apparently to call attention to our schizoid relationships with animals — but I couldn't take my eyes off it, either.

There are two painters whose work fits Freeman's theme perfectly, but who I would never have expected to see here. One is Randall Sellers, who has shown extensively in Philadelphia and elsewhere; the other is Anne Siems, German-born and based in Seattle. Sellers is represented by three tiny, oval-shaped paintings of landscapes set in the center of three 8-by-10-inch canvases, all of which bring to mind memento mori, cameos, and American folk paintings. Siems also paints images inside cameo shapes, such as a face of an 18th-century man or woman, or an eye, or lips, but sets them within a painting of a surreal scene from the past. Imagine a marriage between Jane Austen and Magritte.

The show is rounded out by the efforts of Joe Boruchow, Tim Tate and Dirk Staschke, all of whose work was new to me. Boruchow, a Philadelphia artist, contributed four meticulous paper cutouts of ominous interior scenes mounted on white satin; Tate, a Washington glass sculptor, has three reliquaries of hand-cast and blown glass mounted with tiny monitors showing original videos; and the Vancouver ceramic sculptor Staschke is represented by three ceramic figurative pieces that look like cut stone and could pass for religious ornamental sculpture from an obscure ancient Egyptian cult.



**"The Fate of Man" (2005)**, by Damien Hirst, is silver cast from a girl's skull.