

# Plug In to the world of Mark Karasick

## Locally-grown artist fuses romance with po-mo weirdness

Dylan Ferguson, Staff

Mark Karasick's chief inspirations seem to be Rembrandt and Panasonic.

A locally born artist who made a name for himself in Europe, Karasick's first major show in Winnipeg recently opened at the Plug In ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts) gallery on McDermot. Karasick took a poor-quality video of a boy making various facial expressions, then culled a number of stills out of the tape and made wax paintings of them.

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking this sounds like post-modernist bullshit. Which it would be, if Karasick did not apply an unusually classical approach to his subject. The paintings of the boy are done with romantic strokes, giving him a look that bears a flattering resemblance to a cherub. A cherub, that is, whose face is wracked with distorted, exaggerated emotion, rather than an oblique gaze.

This kind of emotion seems to be a theme in Karasick's work. Included in the exhibition is the actual videotape of the boy, simply a short black-and-white clip of him moulding his young face into a number of stressed emotions. The exaggeration and undiluted purity of the young subject combine to create a curiously strong impact on the viewer. When the video depicted the boy frowning harshly, the girl in the room with me left, saying, "This is too intense." And it is strangely intense — though it is nothing but a black-and-white clip, virtually unaltered — simply



michael.

because we see these emotions in a detached way in which we never really see them in ordinary life.

This kind of emotional analysis seems to be the purpose of the series of large, flesh-toned wax paintings that line the walls of the exhibit, that each depict a different

emotion and are accompanied by a subtly playing audio recording of children laughing. The wax used in the paintings gives them a blurred, smudged effect that make them best viewed from a distance but also seem to transmit the idea of poor film stock. This is accentuated

by paint randomly flecked on each canvas made to look like splotchy, dirty film.

There is probably some commentary on the media intended here, perhaps on the way it represents mankind, though I did not really get that from it. Another se-

quence of three smaller paintings, called Squared off — that break from the theme to show a girl with mouse ears, whose face is being reduced to square pixels — seems to more clearly underscore a kind of "media destroying mankind" message.

All of the paintings are interesting, but only one is great. This is another wax work titled "michael" that also represents the boy and is the same size as the other paintings in the sequence but different in its depiction. His face is detailed with more sublime subtlety than any other work, with a very intriguing expression (just slightly reminiscent of the *Deliverance* kid), but the main difference is that his visage is mounted on a black background with green lines seeping through the picture, creating a weird modern techno-age twist that infects the classical drawing. It's like a romantic portrait that has been *Matrix*-ified. This one painting stood up to the only test I know for determining a great work of art — I could not stop looking at it.

Though it lacks some variety, and you could get bored with the repetitious flesh-toned paintings, the enthralling, understated emotion of it all, the classical influences in the midst of what appears to be media-saturated post-modern art, and the undeniable appeal of the "michael" portrait make Karasick's a fascinating show. It just might give you a taste of what Rembrandt would have done if he had had a camcorder.

Mark Karasick's show runs until Jan. 8 at the Plug In ICA in the Exchange District at 286 McDermot Ave.