

Attila Richard Lukacs

Over-the-top artifice marks latest paintings by internationally acclaimed Vancouver-based artist.

by Lissa Robinson

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Attila Richard Lukacs, "Camp David" 2014, oil, enamel, bitumen, polyurethane, traffic paint, palladium, gold and paper collage on canvas, burlap and linen, 69" x 60" (courtesy of the artist)

Attila Richard Lukacs is a Calgary-born, internationally acclaimed painter who was part of a group of artists in the 1980s known as the Young Romantics. He became famous for his large-scale canvases of skinheads and for his adept use of Caravaggio's chiaroscuro techniques and the flattened gold-leaf planes of the Symbolist painters. Over the years, his work, also inspired by Indian miniature painting, has shifted between abstraction and figuration, sometimes integrating both – all of which is evident in his exhibition, *Your Name Here*, at the Herring Kiss

The exhibition presents two series of collage paintings that Lukacs worked on simultaneously in 2013 and 2014. They are bold, colourful and textured works that meticulously weave together personal iconography with socio-political references. Oil, enamel and bitumen drip down his canvases, creating rich surfaces interrupted by bold blocks of cadmium orange, ghostly figurative elements and poignant punctuations of text, burlap and other decorative elements.



Attila Richard Lukacs, "Fire Monkey" 2014, oil, enamel, antique silk, copper, silver and gold braiding on burlap, canvas and linen, 53" x 53" (courtesy of the artist)

Each series contains architectural devices or references. One conjures the experimental compositions of concrete poetry, while the other summons stages populated with spectral figures and conspiring shadows. Both share an over-the-top artifice and a playful seriousness that together provide a complex visual commentary.

In *Camp David*, part of the *Camp David* series, viewers are confronted by a repetitive arrangement of block letters, photocopied images of Michelangelo's *David* and architectural elements – a Roman column, flat silver planes and decorative motifs, all shrouded by a mottled sky. The work evokes thoughts of homoerotic beauty as it fights against darker forces. Meanwhile, in a more playful piece, *Fire Monkey*, a red-faced monkey teeters on the edge of a disrupted forest of yellow drips.

The show also includes 10 works from Lukacs' *Proscenium* series, ranging from a small box sculpture to traditional stretched canvases. A scroll-like work acts as both memorial and monument. It retells dreams and names men now gone, but not forgotten. A reverie of sorts, it hangs like a curtain, its ghostly murmurs echoing through the space.



Attila Richard Lukacs, "Whoops! Outside Your Head," 2000, Hermes box with underwear, wax and oil on stand, particle board, paint and metal, 22" x 19" x 13" (courtesy of the artist and Herringer Kiss Gallery)

A small sculpture, *Whoops! Outside Your Head*, succinctly captures the homoerotic while revealing Lukacs' affinity for both low and high culture. A pair of men's underwear is pulled taut around the corners of an orange box. A circular hole cut from the garment's crotch exposes a Hermes logo. It's both confrontational and amusing.

This framing is echoed in other works in the series through the use of theatrical devices like proscenium arches, faux-gilded frames, columns and curtains. One gets the feeling that Lukacs is lifting the edges of a sealed box, revealing its dark and glorious secrets.



Attila Richard Lukacs, "Fountain and Mirrors", 2013, oil, enamel, bitumen, polyurethane and vinyl on canvas, 49" x 70" (courtesy of the artist)

Drawn profiles and shadowy figures reminiscent of his skinhead figures haunt these stage-like spaces. For example, *Fountain and Mirrors* contains two architectural spaces. One is saturated with oranges and yellows while the other is almost devoid of colour. The figures, rendered in shades of white, grey and black, seem like props, while a golden fountain to the left bursts with energy and light.

Attila Richard Lukacs, "Painted Portrait in a Vortex," 2014, oil, enamel, traffic paint and gold on canvas and linen, 44" x 44"
(courtesy of the artist)

The series presents a confounding mix of flatness and depth combined with decorative elements, mostly in the form of intricate patterns or gold-leaf shapes that are used to frame the scene. In *Painted Portrait in a Vortex*, for instance, a faux-gilded frame with squiggles of gold and white paint surrounds a veiled vortex that peers out at viewers like a leering eye. While the blocks of orange used in most of these paintings are jarring, they are also vibrant colour fields that plunge one deeper. ■

Attila Richard Lukacs: Your Name Here is on view at the Herringer Kiss Gallery in Calgary

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