

March 2 – June 4, 2006

Barnaby Hosking
MATRIX 155



Romanticism Revisited

IN A SOCIETY saturated by media bombardment, war coverage, terror alerts, and turbo-capitalism, many contemporary artists have responded with equally jarring images that mimic the chaotic and fragmentary state of culture and politics. However, around the globe a new artistic trend is emerging which seeks respite from this brash quotidian existence and recalls the spirit of the Romantic era.ⁱ

BARNABY HOSKING is one of a growing number of young artists whose work presents a new romantic stance.

A recent graduate of London's Royal College of Art, Hosking is well schooled in the history of Romanticism as it encompassed painting, literature, and philosophy.

Over the past five years, he has created an impressive body of work that revisits many of the central themes in Romantic thought, including notions of escape, isolation, desire, beauty and the Sublime. Perhaps the strongest parallel between Hosking's work and Romanticism involves the idea of artistic creation.



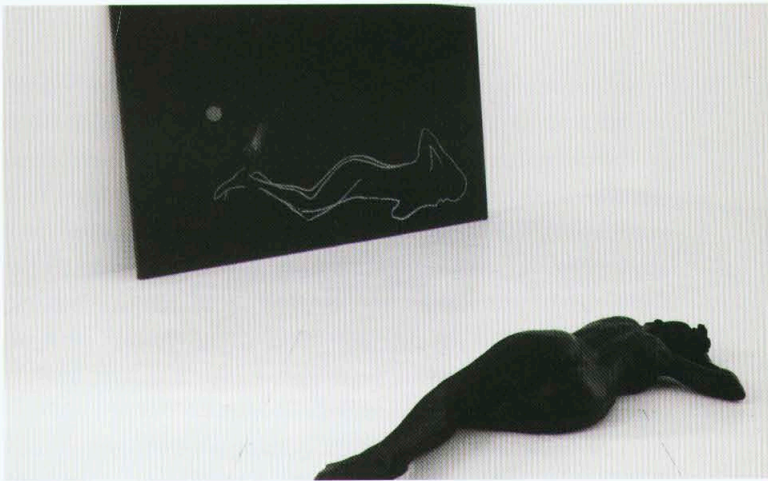
Top: Video still, *Night Painting*, 2004 • Bottom: Video still, *Snow Painting Once Removed*, 2005

Fundamental to the Romantic Movement was the belief that art reflects the personal expression of an autonomous individual. The artist was envisioned as an inspired genius whose imagination, directly expressed, formed the bedrock of all creativity. Hosking reanimates this Romantic model by presenting us with the image of an artist at work in each of his video projections. (Often, Hosking himself plays the role of "artist" shown in the process of painting or sculpting.) Consider, for example, *Night Painting* (2004), in which Hosking is shown painting a landscape alone at night. Filmed in the heart of England's Lake District, an area that many consider the birthplace of British romanticism, *Night Painting* depicts the artist in a state of tranquil inspiration. As in nineteenth century painting, Hosking's emphasis on the solitary individual goes hand-in-hand with an intense focus on the landscape. This image of man set against the vastness of nature is a hallmark of Romantic painting.

For MATRIX 155 Hosking continues his exploration of the relationship between artist and nature with *Snow Painting Once Removed* (2005). Created off the coast of Norway on the island of Nordkapp, the northernmost point in Europe, this major new video installation documents the process of painting a snow-covered landscape *en plein air*. The film follows Hosking, easel and canvas in tow, as he treks across the snowy Arctic terrain in search of the perfect vista. The sense of vast openness and isolation is almost too much to bear. But this is the point. *Snow Painting* epitomizes the inner and outer struggle of the artist to capture the essence of a scene and translate it onto canvas. Here, as in paintings by Caspar David Friedrich, the feeling of yearning and loneliness gives way to a transcendent, or Sublime, experience on the part of the viewer.ⁱⁱ It is worth noting here the strong affinity between Hosking's epic sojourn and the Romantic fascination with remote Polar regions. The lure of these remote unknown areas inspired Romantic artists and authors alike to capture the perilous beauty and overwhelming grandeur of the Arctic.ⁱⁱⁱ

Snow Painting Once Removed, however, is not only a meditation on the activity of the artist, but also on the artwork itself. In this installation, two additional elements hang opposite the video projection: a white monochrome painting and a black mirror. The painting, which consists of heavily applied white paint on a black canvas, is a larger version of the series of white paintings Hosking executed in Norway. By displaying this completed object alongside the video of its creation, Hosking allows the painting to assume a life of its own, separate, yet intimately connected to the persona of the artist. The result is an elegant tension between the process and the finished piece. The layers of white paint echo the snow covered landscape, while the black canvas beneath suggests the ground below. Both layers, the pure black and pure white, recall the romantic fascination with notions of the Sublime void, an endless abyss that elicits fear and yearning. Similarly, the black mirror in *Snow Painting* is used by Hosking as a reference to the snowy landscape. Positioned across from the video, the mirror literally reflects the projected image while simultaneously mirroring the viewer and gallery space. Ironically, while the white painting and black mirror each recall notions of the Romantic Sublime, they also reference twentieth century Minimalist painting (in particular the monochromes of Robert Ryman and Ralph Humphrey), a movement which sought to discredit the Romantic myth of the artist and empty painting of all subjective content.

In *Reclining Figure* (2005), Hosking departs from his preoccupation with painting, exploring instead the venerable practice of modeling and casting a sculpture. *Reclining Figure* takes its inspiration from two of Hosking's previous projects, *Surface* (2003) and *Untitled* (2004), both of which depict the process of sculpting a figure from life, and the complex relationship between an artist and his model. In each video, Hosking is shown methodically measuring the limbs and face of a Japanese model with calipers. This process, charged with erotic tension, becomes a metaphor not only for the artist's "obsession"



Installation view, *Reclining Figure*, 2005

with his model, but also for the creative act itself—capturing and translating beauty into sculpted form. In *Reclining Figure*, Hosking creates a similar dynamic, however, the live model is no longer present. Instead, the artist's infatuation with his model leads him to sculpt a clay surrogate that is later cast in bronze. Shot in near darkness and projected onto a black velvet screen, the video shows Hosking bringing the figure "to life" from a simple chalk outline. Displayed together, the video and final bronze sculpture constitute one of Hosking's most compelling projects to date—a quiet meditation on the intimacy between artist and object that arises from all creative acts.

Although *Reclining Figure* does not overtly reference the Romantic tradition, Hosking's fascination with dark and mysterious landscapes remains a powerful subtext in this work. Loosely based on the Greek myth of Orpheus, the video transports us into a dreamlike world.^{iv} Here, we see Hosking (like Orpheus) in a dark and unknown place, trying to "revive" a loved one. As the sculpture takes shape, its curving form begins to resemble a gently sloping landscape, which Hosking showers with water. This evocative gesture not only establishes a thematic link to the story of Orpheus, but also alludes to the mythic creation of man from clay.



Installation view (detail), *Reclining Figure*, 2005

The third and final work featured in MATRIX 155 is *Black Caddy* (2004). In this small video installation, Hosking documents the meticulous fabrication of a black lacquer tea caddy. Once complete, the caddy is transported to Kyoto, where it is used in a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. As in previous works, the tea caddy is displayed alongside the video of its creation. Here again the process of making an object takes on a kind of ceremonial, almost religious significance. Like the tea ceremony itself, the creation of the caddy becomes a ritual of patience and repetition. This unexpected meditation on Japanese culture becomes a means of escape from the pace of contemporary life. And just as the Romantic artists sought refuge in the mountains of England's Lake District and the exotic markets of the Orient, so too are we transported to an exotic and foreign continent.

Joanna Marsh

Associate Curator of Contemporary Art



Top: Installation view, *Black Caddy*, 2004

Bottom: Video still, *Black Caddy*, 2004

FOOTNOTES

ⁱ Although somewhat difficult to define chronologically, the Romantic era generally signifies a period from c.1770 to 1860.

ⁱⁱ The concept of the Sublime was introduced by philosopher Edmund Burke in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756). In this treatise, Burke identified the Sublime with depictions of vastness, infinity, vacuity and darkness, and stated that only such images could incite a truly powerful emotional response.

ⁱⁱⁱ Caspar David Friedrich's famous *Monk by the Sea* (1808–1810) alludes to the haunting vastness of the far North, as do many paintings by American artist, Frederic Church.

^{iv} The myth of Orpheus recounts his descent into the underworld to bring back his wife Eurydice.

Barnaby Hosking

Born in 1976, Norwich, Norfolk (UK). Lives and works in London, UK

Education

2001–2003

MA sculpture, Royal College of Art, London, UK

1998–2001

BA Fine Art, City and Guilds of London Art School, London, UK

Solo Exhibitions

2005

Max Wigram Gallery, London, UK

2004

Night Painting, MWprojects, London, UK

Selected Group Exhibitions

2006

Solitude, Upstairs Gallery, Berlin, Germany

2005

Threshold, Max Wigram Gallery, London, UK

Chambres à part, Hotel Sezz, Paris, France

2004

Northern Light, The Rubell Family Collection, Miami

Expander, Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK (cat.)

Selected Sculpture, MWprojects, London, UK

New Blood, The Saatchi Gallery, County Hall, London, UK

2003

A Tiny New Nation, Bowie Art, London, UK

Cold Stew, VTO Gallery, London, UK

Works in the exhibition

Black Caddy, 2004

Black-and-white digital video projection on black velvet screen, and black lacquer tea caddy. Courtesy of the artist and Max Wigram Gallery, London

Reclining Figure, 2005

Black-and-white digital video projection on black velvet screen, and cold cast bronze sculpture. Courtesy of the artist and Max Wigram Gallery, London

Snow Painting Once Removed, 2005

Black-and-white digital video projection, black mirror, and acrylic on canvas painting. Courtesy of the artist and Max Wigram Gallery, London

Images courtesy of the artist and Max Wigram Gallery, London

Selected Bibliography

2006

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2005

O'Reilly, Sally. "Barnaby Hosking," *Time Out London*, November 9-16, p. 43

Meek, James. "The Collectors," *The Guardian* (G2 supplement),

Friday, October 21, pp. 6-10.

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2004

Aaltonen, Gaynor. "A View from Here," *National Trust Magazine*, September, p. 50

Morton, Tom. "Crude oil, Arse gratia artis: sex dominates modern art," *Arena Magazine*, (Luxury Sex supplement), p. 18

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Kent, Sarah. "Night Painting," *Time Out London*, February 11-18, p. 52

2003

"Straight-up." *I.D. Magazine*, Issue No. 234, July, p. 87

MATRIX Talk

Thursday, March 2, 2006, 6:00 p.m.

Barnaby Hosking will give an informal talk about his work in the MATRIX gallery.

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