



Flesh and formula

Christian Faur creates a body of work around a closed set of one

by Melissa Starker

Christian Faur's canvases have enough room for only one. For $\{1\}$: *The Closed Set of One*, his first show at the Ohio Art League and his premiere show in Ohio, Faur is filling the walls of the gallery with solitary figure studies. A quick first impression of the show's signature image, a portrait of a pretty little girl, may come off as a little cute for OAL. More than a second of staring at the work awakens a more ominous sense. She is not just solitary, she is alone. Nothing can penetrate the crowded, bumpy rows of binary prime numbers. They are miniature hills to climb before reaching the glossy figure at the center. Their impressions are spilling onto her ice-blue dress.

Faur, an artist who moved to the Columbus area from Southern California in August, is the girl's father on canvas and in real life. His daughter was the model for this particular work, *Deconstructing the Silence*. Faur's wife, a German professor at Denison University, also poses for him frequently. The artist gestured to the paintings around him and called them "family portraits" with a laugh.

There's nothing funny about these images, however. In the artist's own words, the pictures "feel very heavy and still and passive." Though he uses those close to him for individual reference, Faur is exploring deeper themes within the content of his final products.

Teaching himself to paint through reading and trial and error, Faur spent time in a German surrealist collective while serving in the military. Later, he studied physics and supported his family by teaching the subject, along with philosophy. "I think of them both the same way," Faur said.

The painter is fascinated with a variety of ideologies that would seem close to clashing, but instead just continue to spur questions and investigations. The existential writings of Kafka and Beckett are listed as influences with Wittgenstein, an inspiration in the creation of semantics. Faur's interest in surrealism coexists with a strong admiration for Lewis Carroll and his embrace of the concept of logic.

"My background train of thinking is very existential," Faur explained. "I work out a lot of my feelings on canvas." Given his schooling, it's not surprising that Faur should search for answers in math and science, the closest thing mankind will accept as universal absolute truth. Behind his paintings' subjects are numbers, symbols and shapes representing information in code, from Fibonacci numbers to DNA strands to a familiar passage from the Book of Matthew ("My God, why hast thou forsaken me?") in numerical form.


This focus bleeds into Faur's technique, which is exceptionally precise for a self-taught artist. He works his canvases heavily with a mixture of oils and glazes, hiding content within 10 to 15 layers of paint and finishing with a surface that's Old Master smooth, except for the 20th-century data. This information rises like Braille from the surface through a process in which Faur finds content online or in a computer spreadsheet program, silkscreens it onto the canvas and manipulates it to fit with the overall piece.

When Faur looks at his paintings, he sees not only what is visually apparent, but what he has concealed underneath. For the rest of us, this highlights another strange combination in the artist's work. Though his paintings are representational, they seem to invite with their images of life in flesh and life in formula an interpretive openness more in line with abstract art. There's no right answer, no absolute truth, but there's value in the hunt.

Faur offered one explanation for such an impression: He explores a variety of ideas and formulas in his work, but takes none of them as the end-all be-all. For him, science and math are made of theories no more provable than the idea that life is ultimately meaningless. The only thing any of us knows for certain is that we are born, we are alone within our own consciousness, and we will eventually die. We are each the closed set of one, bracketed by the womb and the grave.

One work in particular illustrates this idea. In *Garden of Ash and Symmetry*, the canvas is filled with the back-and-forth of life and death. An infant is cradled within black, lifeless branches. Bombs drop from planes above onto pictures of DNA strands. Square grids with stenciled numbers indicate cryptically that Jesus died for somebody's sins.

Faur's move to the area brings a combination of viewpoint and vision unlike any other artist' on the Columbus scene. With many local galleries booked up for at least the next year, the OAL show may offer the only chance to see his work for some time.

Christian Faur's *{1}*: *The Closed Set of One* opens on the night of Gallery Hop, Saturday, March 3, continuing through March 31. More info is available at 299-8225. 

Christian Faur's Deconstructing the Silence

