

TEARING US APART

CHRISTIAN FAUR'S "SEG MENTATION" SPREADS OUT AT GALLERY V

BY MELISSA STARKER

A BODY OF WORK, IN PIECES: "SELF-STATES"

With their numerous layers of color, texture and imagery, Christian Faur's canvases have always drawn in the viewer. But in his current solo show at Gallery V, the artist introduces a series of work that literally reaches for you. Groups of white wax fingers separated from hands extend outward in various stages of the curling, come-hither motion, or caress a face emerging from a two-dimensional surface.

Seg mentation presents in segments both the human body and the artist's body of work. One part is made up of Faur's haunting oils; the other displays his recent experiments with casting encaustic wax.

"With the solo show in Columbus, I wanted first off not to be tied into having one type of work," Faur explained. "The encaustics are so different from the oils, it wouldn't have been a good idea to have all of one or another."

Throughout the show, you'll spot a hand, a cheek, occasionally even a full head and torso, but no complete human forms. Faur isolates the parts to illustrate a greater isolation, a feeling that's become more tangible for him since he and his family moved from Southern California to the rural, red-state territory of Granville five years ago. "Conceptually it was about being alone, inherently alone, these figures that are disenfranchised," he said.

Faur physically breaks up body parts in his encaustics, cleaving a face in two for the small diptych *Tearing the Fabric*, which somehow seems frozen on the verge of disintegrating. In the oils, he often brings a pair of figures together, but visually he cuts them off at the knees, or the chest, or both in the striking, panoramic *Departure*. Two works feature a young, solitary figure surrounded by one thing that connects everyone yet is untouchable:

power lines. As Faur put it, "She's surrounded by this communication, this world being piped through these lines, and she's outside of that."

He brought encaustics into his mix of media (oils, glazes, screen printing) about two years ago. "What I liked at first was its textural elements, like human skin, that luster," Faur said. "Trying to get it to do exactly what I wanted—it's absolutely uncontrollable, not fun at all, which I guess is what makes it so interesting."

From earlier, flatter works, the 3-D sculptural element evolved. "It was a straightforward evolution because the problem for me with working in encaustic is the layers are about 50 percent opaque," the artist explained. "After about two or three layers it would obliterate what was underneath. I would scrape back the wax to make it as thin as possible, so I was working on a sculptural process even if it was flat. I wanted to incorporate more of that."

Years before, he'd done a plaster cast of his wife Gabrielle's face, and according to Faur, she still feels the sting of ripped-out hair and eyebrows. "The process was excruciating," he recalled. He started researching less painful casting methods, then two visiting artists at Denison University, where Faur is a digital media technologist, told him about Moulage, a medium that picks up exceptional detail without tearing anything away in the process.

His family offered their hands and fingers for casting, and these forms rise up unadorned from flat, clean wax surfaces, as in the previously mentioned come-hither work *Attractions*, or fields marked by a jumble of black vinyl letters and numbers. Other works incorporate numbers solely, binary code and the transcendental number e (a relative of π used to calculate growth), always in an

ordered pattern. These join the underlying textural presence of DNA code and prime knots that have long been a part of Faur's canvases.

As a student of physics and philosophy, Faur feels that words are generally an inadequate form of expression. His artist's statement mentions Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, which relates in his work to the notion that you can't fully explore concepts like truth and love with words because "truth" and "love" are themselves words.

"I think you can be very exact in the mathematical language, and you can also be very metaphoric," Faur said. "It relates to poetry. Poetry goes off on a tangent, and uses words with powerful meaning, like love and death. They're essentially meaningless but assigned power."

"I'll use the mathematical representation of eternity, or death or life, just like you would use words in poetry," he continued. "It's so much better than stamping the word 'mortality' on a painting. It has so much more meaning, more variety."

Faur expresses the countless choices faced, made and left unmade in binary code. "They represent a puzzle nexus of decisions, yes or no, affecting your life, piling up all around," he said.

In his oil works, binary numbers appear slyly as a tie pattern, or loom before a young man with his back to the viewer in the khaki-tinged *E5*. Often they evoke a feeling of separation, which lends a decidedly chilling effect to scenes that are usually warm and mundane, such as a couple leaving the bed they've shared, or a mother and child in the show's title piece.

"It very much caught the essence of this mother in transit, on the go, and this baby as its own person, but also as baggage," Faur said. "There's a separation between mother and child where you would



normally associate strong bonds. Maybe people don't talk about it, but mothers with a fast-moving career will reject their baby. It's something they have to move around, something that's holding them back."

In addition to the prime theme of isolation, a strong political current runs through several of the pieces. The *Letter of the Law* series suggests that judicial power comes down to whoever carries the biggest stick, while *E5* illustrates the fear Faur, a U.S. Army veteran, has for his son, who'll be out of high school next year. "I don't feel comfortable at all with these decisions being forced upon these kids," he said.

He doesn't feel comfortable with overt political statements, given the community he lives in and the general cultural climate, but Faur can't help commenting on the state of the country's leadership. Essentially, it offends his sense of logic. **Ⓢ**

"CHRISTIAN J. FAUR: SEG MENTATION" is on view at Gallery V through February 26. Dial 228-8955 or click to galleryv.com for info.