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## "Martin Mull: Recent Work" Exhibition Brochure

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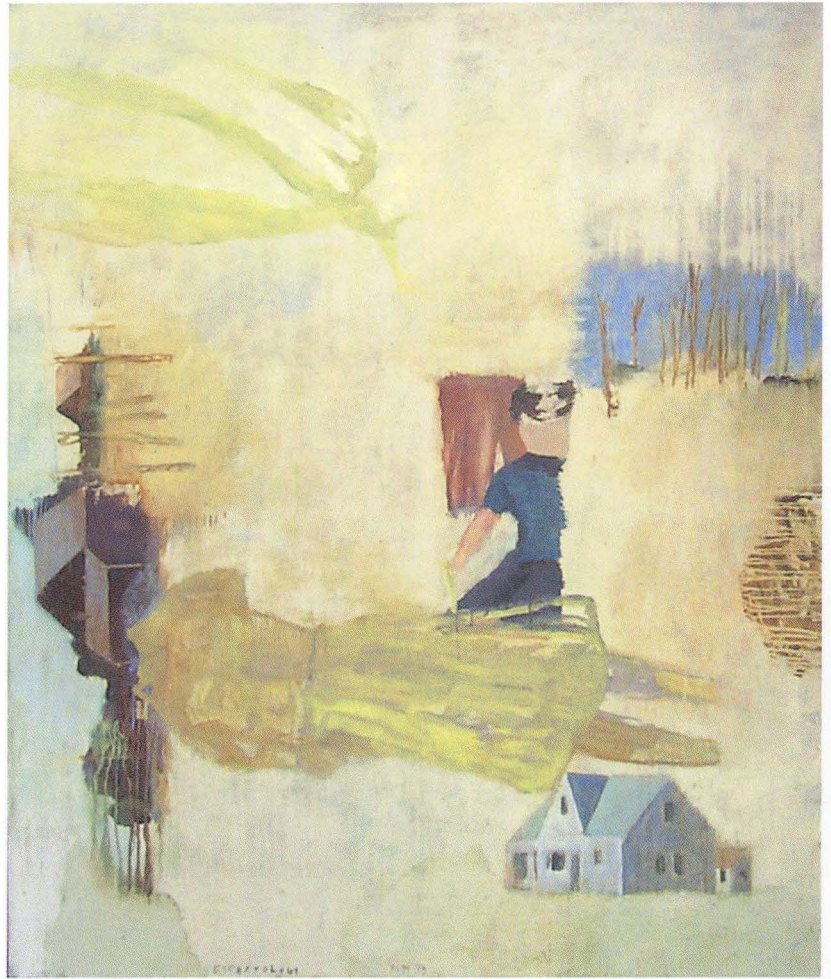
**Martin Mull: Recent Work**

November 2 - December 5, 2001  
Rhodes College, Clough-Hanson Gallery

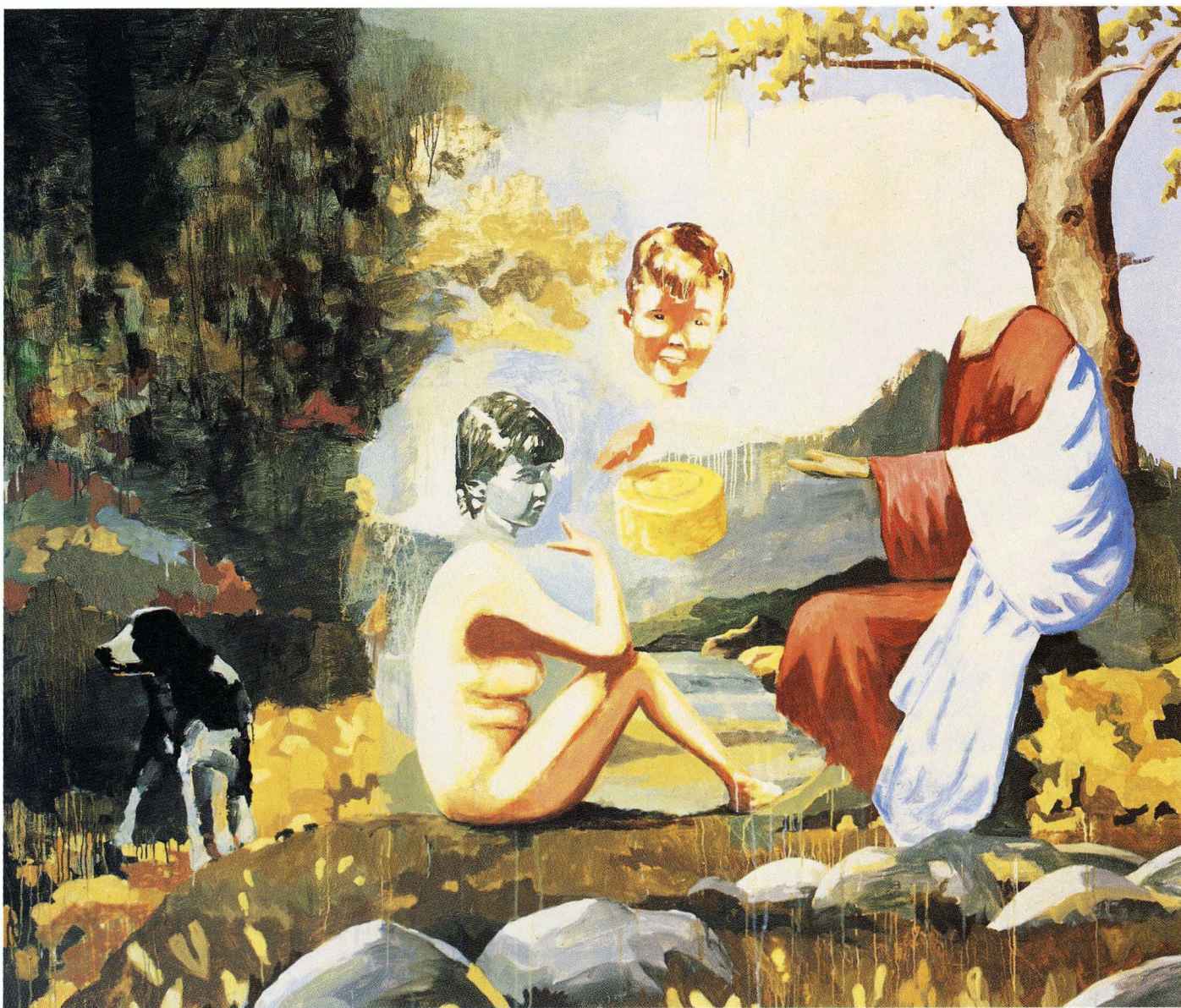


I HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT OF MARTIN MULL as a storyteller in painter's clothes. Mull is a painter who uses his work to begin a story, positioning the images like players in an event. All the while, he is trying to figure out how the story is to take shape: what the parts will look like, how large they will be in the story, and the props that will help them on their way. The narrator's voice, shaped by the act of painting, allows him to develop the characters and determine how crude or defined they need to be in order to lay the foundation for his tale. Responding to the painting, he begins to uncover their positions on the stage. The paintings' meanings slowly reveal themselves to their audience as the parts are gently tugged from the storyteller's mind to the surface of the painting. He is bringing these different parts to light, coaxing the images from their fog.

Mull's work combines simple, archetypal forms with cultural icons: a head in three-quarter view, a house-like construction paired with a child's toy train, or Jesus' robes holding a loaf of bread and a fish. Personal yet



*Eschatology*, 2001, oil on linen, 72" x 60"



*Le Dejeuner sur L'Herbe*, 2001, oil on linen, 66" x 79"

enigmatic, the paintings are rich with a childlike whimsy that is informed by a wry, mature wit. The work from the early to mid nineties is imbued with a sense of surprise and freshness, bearing witness to the moment of discovery. Raw and awkward, the naive hand of the artist fills the paintings with wonder as the stories meander, finding their place in the world as they are realized.

The expanses of empty space in Mull's work from the early nineties have recently given way to surfaces filled with an ever-shifting landscape. The players, while stylistically more flushed out, still offer a rich variety of interpretations. The images are still filled with painterly delight as well as dramatic shifts in scale and differing degrees of realization. The exhibition shows how his work is slowly changing with the increased use of universal images in the narrative.

While the players in Mull's work since the late nineties are more recognizable, their relationships are no more tangible. Bodies are still strangely incomplete, there are still floating heads, and there are juxtapositions of images drawn from dissimilar sources.

In Mull's cover of Manet's *Le Dejeuner sur l'Herbe* he alters the landscape just as he changes the characters. He mixes images from Manet's classic painting with cultural and

religious icons of nineteen-fifties white America. Remnants of Manet's green, leafy garden dissolve into a rocky hilltop clearing while the disembodied boy's head floats above an enormous round of yellow cheese (or is it a cake?). The head of Manet's central nude is erased and in its place rests the black and white rendering of a young girl's head. On stage left, a headless, robed Jesus figure extends his hand, while at stage right a Labrador Retriever looks out of the frame, waiting for his sunny day playmates. Manet's nude at the luncheon is made even more absurd in its new context.

By using more recognizable parts, Mull's newer work seems more open to the viewer. The work appears less introspective or personal; rather, it is aimed more towards the images and cultural mythology that shaped his generation. The artist uses these iconographic images from postwar America to show distortions in our culture's perceptions and understanding of itself. Mull's paintings point to how damaging these Milquetoast, sunny images that only appeared in magazines and on television really were on his generation and those to follow.

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