

ART REVIEW

Bad Girls

ARTIST DAWN MELLOR SKEWERS FEMALE CELEBRITIES

By Rafael Risemberg

WHAT A MONTH THIS HAS been in the art world for showcasing the most outrageously invigorating gay female talent. Just a week after the opening of Nicole Eisenman's jaw-dropping dystopian fantasy exhibit (see my review in last week's Blade) comes Dawn Mellor's brutally funny show of paintings, "We Hope You Choke," at Team Gallery in Chelsea. Both of these artists share a jarringly twisted, borderline-scary sensibility.

Mellor is the latest member in the invasion of what are known as YBAs (Young British Artists), among them Damian Hirst and Sarah Lucas, whose no-holds-barred approaches result in artwork that is often at the edge of acceptable taste. In Mellor's current exhibit, as in her shows of the past decade, most of her targets are American female celebrities. Needless to say, she does not treat them kindly.

In perhaps the quintessen-

tial piece in the show, titled "Shitty Spanky Banner," a bevy of beauties stand or kneel in front of a huge American flag. A black-clad Madonna sucks off the dildo-wearing Christina Aguilera. Nearby, Wynona Ryder humps Jackie O. on a large pile of excrement, both women wearing prosthetic legs. Across from them, Beyonce spansks the naked behind of a woman wearing a white Klan hood, who turns out to be the artist (the clue: paintbrushes protruding from her ass). The artist-figure wanly waves a small British flag, which is of course dwarfed by the U.S. one.

These vain, often vulgar glory-seekers are our exports to the world at large, the artist seems to be saying; they are the public face of American womanhood. It is at first a ludicrous notion, and then a disturbing one as it begins to make sense.

In another large painting, "Fuck the Mothers, Kill the Others," a resplendent Judy

Garland-as-Dorothy is seen fending off the hostile advances of dozens of riot police with shields. They all wear a "Z" patch on their sleeves, and behind their helmets their eyes are laden with heavy mascara. All of them are clones of Liza Minnelli, Garland's daughter. (Yes, in their famous rivalry, it takes a couple of hundred Lizas to match one Judy.)

Lest we think that Mellor's focus is just the entertainment world, she depicts arguably the two most powerful women in this country—Hillary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice—as "The Librarians." Clinton, her figure svelte and wearing a pink bikini bottom, stands seductively on a bookcase ladder. Rice sits smiling at a desk, poring over a book. Their political ideologies may be very different, but they were presumably reared from the same American founts of knowledge.

In the most disconcerting piece in the show, "The Supremes and Four White



DAWN MELLOR, "Fuck The Mothers, Kill The Others," 2006, oil on canvas, 90 x 102 inches.

Cunts," the Motown group stands on a rooftop, proudly clutching the severed heads of TV stars Sarah Jessica Parker, Kim Cattrall and Jennifer Aniston. These sisters of soul, even with their superlative talent, had a much harder time making it to the top than their white contemporaries. The fourth "cunt" is a scalped

white vagina draped over one singer's crotch. This commentary on American race relations uses imagery so savage that it made even me recoil, and I've seen some pretty strong stuff.

Some people will rail against Dawn Mellor's artwork, that its purpose is merely to shock. I, for one, welcome a few jolts, a bit of brain-scrambling, if it

gets me to question anew the world's cultural premises.

"We Hope You Choke," 10am-6pm, Tue-Sat, at Team Gallery, 527 W 26th St, teamgallery.com, 212-334-9255. Rafael Risemberg, Ph.D will include it in his gallery tour Sat, June 17, through New York Gallery Tours, mygallerytours.com, 212-946-1548.