

ARTnews

Patricia Cronin fordPROJECT

By *Elizabeth Kley* March 2013

Titled “Dante: The Way of All Flesh” and curated by Kara Finnerty, Patricia Cronin’s incendiary exhibition was dominated by a series of large oil paintings depicting individual nude figures. Although some were rendered with loving attention to muscular and skeletal details, these bodies were not exhibiting themselves for the viewer’s delectation. Instead, they were shown roasting in agony. Three of the fieriest paintings respectively featured two men and a woman crouching or sitting on rocks, bending their heads to hide their faces as if they were doubled over in pain.



In other works, grimacing figures tumbled headfirst against fields of red and black brushstrokes, suggesting a lower inferno where the rocks are more jagged and the atmosphere is dense with flowing blood. In an upstairs gallery, Dante’s floor of hell could be found in a monumental watercolor triptych featuring a sea of flowing grays and purples. A pair of skull-like heads emerges in the central panel’s lower half, one biting the other, echoing Dante’s description of Satan chewing on traitorous heads. Bulging eyes stare blankly, inured to a frigid punishment that has no end.

The smallest images, however, were the most arresting works in the show. *Untitled* (2012) is a 16-part grid of watercolors created by bleaching red and orange paper. Inspired by Dante’s lineup of named Renaissance malefactors, they are portraits of contemporary power mongers who’ve committed the sins that Cronin (and Dante) consider most heinous; fraud, treachery, and betrayal. Since bleach is clear, the works were invisible as Cronin was creating them. Features materialized like evil spirits once chemical reactions occurred, resulting in doughy and twisted faces that echo their subject’s inner distortions. Religious headdresses could be discerned on several heads, but actual identities were left to the viewer’s imagination.