



D. Dominick Lombardi, *Shrunken Head #9*, 2001, reverse painted acrylic on Plexiglas and on board, 24 x 20"

## Post-Apocalyptic Tattoo: D. Dominick Lombardi's Dark Vision

**Burt Chernow Galleries, Housatonic Museum of Art,  
Bridgeport CT**

**by John Mendelsohn**

D. Dominick Lombardi paints a damaged world. The fact that this world is a fictive invention makes it nonetheless ruined. Mutant beings, melted, twisted and hydrocephalic, populate this domain. Dominated by flat, slightly retro colors, painted in reverse behind lightly sanded plexiglass, Lombardi's world is a place where identity is everything: who you are is

defined by your personal damage and the role it creates for you in a network of relationships.

If this sounds like our world, it is because Lombardi's art is a grotesque vision of not only the post-apocalyptic, but a satire and an embrace of impairment and survival. In style, his creatures are genetic cousins to comic book characters, with black outlines,

uninflected hues and a part in larger narrative. Replete with monarchs, aggressors and victims, a band of heroes, and the unseen creator of a fallen world, Lombardi echos the myth-making impulse that has been a perennial in comic books and video games.

In this eleven year survey of *The Post-Apocalyptic Tattoo*, we get a sense of Lombardi's playful and harrowing feelings for his world and its inhabitants. In paintings, drawings, and free-standing sculptures and reliefs, he continues to explore a place that exists as an imaginal construct, and an ever-expandable portmanteau for the artist's obsessions.

One of these obsessions is graphic: the unending pleasure in creating images that boldly exist in time and space, and assert the artist's own presence as ringmaster of the abject and the comic. Lombardi's line is clear but bulging, organic but stylized, perfect for short-hand representation of guts and brains. The tattoo is another graphic touchstone, echoing the traditional art of many cultures, that translates a wall of small faces into an array of abstract signs that hang in space like the *Cheshire Cat* in *Alice in Wonderland*. In a series of *Graphoos*, tattoo-like patterns spread like a psychedelic virus over older and newer



D. Dominick Lombardi, *Head #485*, 2003, India ink on paper, 14 x 14"



D. Dominick Lombardi, *Tumor Heaven*, 2001, reverse painted acrylic on Plexiglas, 10 x 8"

paintings by Lombardi, which range from abstract images to landscapes.

A second obsession throughout this large exhibition is the desire to create avatars, characters who live out a role, fulfilling the maxim "damage is destiny", and yet often have an independent, spirited presence. There is *Pre-Raphaelite Preemie*, mostly head, unable to move, a witness and a seer, "finding heaven in hell." There are *The Elite Eight*, a circle of misfits, the super anti-heroes, including *Exotic Dancer with Tumor*, dragging her blackened foot in the moonlight, *Tumor Heaven*, the exotic, nearly featureless "gateway to colorful bliss", and *Death of a Clown*, the deceptive flower power trickster. And there are the lovers, the melting *Blue Boy* with his spilling innards and *Twister*, a sexy snail of a girl.

Other notables include *Johnny-Two Heads*, "a misogynistic gossip hound" whose skill is to create shrunken heads, both as trophies and remembrances of individuals. The paintings of these heads are among Lombardi's strongest work here, almost abstract, coloristically complex and resonating with the work of biomorphic surrealists like Miró.

There are a raft of other characters both named, like *Super Man/Boy Surfer*, an elusive traveling legend, and anonymous, like the barely human

*Fragments*, "victims of aggressions."

The descriptions of these avatars come from the comic book-style catalogue that Lombardi produced with writer Carol Kino, which is an essential guide to the entire project.

Lombardi often realizes his creations in a number of different mediums. In the exhibition is a small selection of deft tonal charcoal drawings of a number of characters, including *Kitten*, a lovable but dangerous feline, and the creepy, impulsive *Hercules* and his trusted advisor *Digitus*.

The wall sculptures, created in mixed media, are made to resemble plaster. In high relief, some of these pieces are dimensional versions of

recognizable characters, reminiscent of those found on the facades of retail outlets of the corporate titans of animation. Others of this group have a provocative weirdness to them, as do a series of ball-like heads, art deco-ish abstractions with a hint of Mayan art. Each is an inner child, bad boys all, and all up for some nasty fun.

The single free-standing sculpture, *The Beachcomber*, is a kind of monument as ruin, the great man made of sand, intact on one side, the armature of recycled detritus revealed on the other. As is the case throughout the show, the best of the sculptures have a real psychic charge that allows the characters to escape the strictures of their assigned identities.



D. Dominick Lombardi, *Shrunken Head #11*, 2001, reverse painted acrylic on Plexiglas and on board, 24 x 20"