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San Antonio Report: The Post Apocalyptic Tattoo: A Ten-Year Survey

W. Michael Johnson



D. Dominick Lombardi. Courtesy of the artist.

The Post Apocalyptic Tattoo: A Ten Year Survey is a history of post-modern angst directed from the point of view of a tattoo artist. One of the intriguing things about this show is that the artist D. Dominick Lombardi claims to be a “vehicle for the Tattoo Artist” who “sends” the images. Lombardi in fact denies being a tattoo artist. This brings up several interesting questions concerning identity in the would-be post apocalyptic world.

The central question is, how does one maintain identity in the face of such a trauma as the end of the world? No one can provide a

definitive answer, of course, as the world has not ended (yet). Lombardi, however, undergoes an ironic subversion of his identity in order to provide an answer: as a receptacle of the tattoo artist, his own aesthetics seem to be secondary. The identity question is further muddled by the fact that a tattoo artist's aesthetic considerations are by and large dictated by the whims of his customers. The format of the exhibit itself is similar to the interior of a tattoo parlor; littered with individual images posted in a fashion as if to encourage the choosing of one.

But to display this project as a tattoo parlor would be an oversimplification and would only serve to obscure the chronological and processional nature of the Post Apocalyptic Tattoo.

The process begins with simple drawings in a sketchbook, as stated on the wall of what would be something of a timeline. From here, many peculiar characters begin to emerge along with drawings of writhing, tumor-shaped drawings. As if to highlight the process further, a number of the early drawings are sketched on rough-looking newsprint. One of the most poignant characters to arise from this process is the Blue Boy at Ground Zero. In the Blue Boy lies a conflicting symbolism, that is, the Little Boy Blue fairy tale juxtaposed with the tragedy of 9/11 and the powdered-white color of survivors covered in the dust of the fallen Towers.

The identity-effacing process takes a fascinating turn when the tattoo artist begins to paint over existing paintings. Most of the paintings seem to have begun as student work, but these are painted over with the stark black designs of the tattoo artist.

This is a manifestation of the new, post apocalyptic world overtaking the old, peaceful world as represented with a traditional art (easel painting). These "graffoos," as Lombardi calls them, are displayed intermittently with the more parlor-like images. This small but astute exhibit ends in a way that suggests a continuing process, with India

ink drawings juxtaposed not with vandalized paintings, but with three-dimensional forms that suggest that the post apocalyptic characters are still emerging.