

# Rewind: André Ethier

by Lise Hosein

CANADIAN  
a | r | t

Luft Gallery, Toronto

In his painting exhibition "Hunting Party" at Luft Gallery, André Ethier creates a swirling, psychedelic, Munchian landscape populated with bizarre characters who act out a savage, vacant masculinity. Insanely laughable and strangely horrifying, these characters run rampant in an uncontrollable landscape, spearing lions and each other, decapitating dissenters and revelling in a cult of manhood that blends the image of the caveman with that of a 1970s British glam rocker.

There's some similarity between the rocker figure and the caveman, as if long-haired men who listen to Judas Priest have retained some vital connection to the primal source of masculinity. In "Hunting Party," Ethier blends the hunting rituals described in cave paintings and the unkempt, ragged look of the caveman of popular culture with the wild, vacant stare of a British rocker who has been living in the woods for 25,000 years.

The painting for which the series is named describes three of these caveman-rocker hybrids. Resplendent in Spinal Tap—like ruffled shirts, jackets and the tightest of pants, they carry spears as they walk away from the bloody remains of a hunt. A cohort lies dead on the ground. The leader of the pack approaches a lion, apparently wounded, in the foreground. The peculiar scene takes place in a garish pink landscape dotted by docile, candied-looking blue flowers, an active volcano and a flock of birds. Ethier's treatment of man and the landscape is agitated and churning, composed of thick, impassioned brush strokes reminiscent of the work of Munch or Emil Nolde. The faces of the feral men read as savage, delirious masks.

What is wildly humorous and terrifying about these paintings is the image of masculinity they convey: something wild, unfettered and often murderous. Ethier's description of virility ranges from a naked man revelling in a landscape in which he exists in an almost Christ-like, transcendent state—at one with his surroundings—to a severed head, long-haired and bearded, held triumphantly in the air by the disembodied, studded-leather-cuff-clad arm of his murderer. The paintings describe a cult of masculinity, an adult *Lord of the Flies* narrative in which blood lust takes over and caveman-rockers render themselves extinct with hunting spears.

In "Hunting Party," it is clear that man is inextricably related to his landscape. Both the figures and the natural setting are composed of the same vocabulary of almost nauseating pinks, yellows and greens. Each painting looks rapidly executed, while remaining deliberate, decadent and thick, giving off a rich, sugary sheen. The colour palette runs against the conventions of masculinity, but somehow adds to the agitated, homicidal, weirdly playful atmosphere of this wholly male-populated world. This series offers a compelling and magnetic mythology of man and the hunt.

Spring 2004