

A fresh whiff of perpetual possibility

GALLERY GOING
GARY MICHAEL DAULT

Give me but one firm spot on which to stand," wrote Archimedes, thinking about the efficacy of the lever, "and I will move the Earth." For Toronto artist, writer and curator John Marriott, whose spatial ambitions are perhaps not quite as lofty as the ancient Greek scientist's, that firm spot on which to stand has been the sidewalk in front of the Cameron House, a genially grungy pub on Queen Street West in Toronto which has been a home away from home to the city's artists for the past 30 years.

It is not Marriott's intention actually to move the Cameron House. What he is suggesting is simply shifting it a bit. To that end, the artist has painted a vast mural along the side of the building, a mural that is simultaneously a statement of his idea (A Proposal: Tilt This Building 5 Degrees to the Right) and an abstracted, diagrammatic hint of the way it would look (A 5 Degree Rehearsal for Upward Mobility).

The brilliance of this cunning, mordant muralizing lies somewhere between the essential goofiness of the idea ("we flip buildings all the time," notes Marriott, no doubt thinking of real estate) and the elegant economy of the thing: which is to say that with the aid of the artist's graphic guidance, it suddenly seems perfectly possible to lever up the pub on one end, as if you were jacking up a car to change a tire. What would this do? Well, it would give the place a lot of quick new energy for one thing: all diagonals are dynamic, after all, while the usual horizontal nature of the built environment is dependable but uninspiring.

Marriott's mural, which is fast becoming a tourist attraction, draws wittily on a number of established periods and procedures in art: the painted proposal itself (incarnated in innocent blue letters which tip the way the building would tip) has the feel of many of the visionary proposals and the grandiose or absurdly unrealizable schemes of conceptual art practice of the 1970s. The hot reds and yellows of the mural's background and of the buoyant, vector-like arrows pressing upwards — the

paint was purchased at the hardware store around the corner — smack of Pop Art and, therefore, smugly reference the colours of commerce (Marriott says he wanted to employ the sort of colour you could "almost taste." Aestheticism, he maintains, is overrated). And the straining ascension of the painted arrows themselves seems drawn as much from the world of cartoons as from any sober architectural plan. All in all, Marriott has given the Cameron House new life — for while it still sits stolidly on Queen Street, it now gives off a new fragrance of perpetual possibility. Which is a big payoff for a fugitive idea and a few litres of exterior latex.

At 408 Queen St. West in Toronto.

A.R. Lukacs at Lehmann Leskiew + Schedler

The art of the notorious Attila Richard Lukacs, whose artistic career moves along what his Toronto gallery carefully terms "a hard-to-grasp terrain between social criticism and erotica, idolization and fiction," is the subject of two exhibitions, one following immediately after the other, called Worx (Part I and II). Lukacs, fixed for years at the epicentre of the gleefully overheated homoerotic underground of Berlin, now divides his time between Vancouver and, of all places, Hawaii. His work has in no way cooled down, however, by his having removed himself to the laid-back west coast or to the prettily lai'd pacific paradise. *Au contraire, mes frères.*

Worx Part I has just opened. It features hitherto unexhibited paintings by Lukacs from 1989-2000. Worx Part II, which will open July 9, will be made up of large-format, double-sided works on paper — all of them derived from the stunningly virtuoso silk-screen *Boy With Green Arm* (1999), a work which, while begun as a print, is so lavishly overpainted by the artist that each example of the image is essentially an original Lukacs painting.

Worx Part I is essentially a tiny compact retrospective. And all the Lukacs preoccupations are here — chained monkeys (*Piss and the remarkable Golden Alex*), more or less naked skinheads in fierce and possibly lethal laced-up boots (*36 Boys*), neo-fascist bric-a-brac, theatrical sado-masochism, and a generalized screw-you attitudiniz-

ing that would be irritatingly adolescent if Lukacs didn't paint so damned beautifully. Notable among his most recent pictures is his altogether extraordinary, candy-hued *Myths About My Garden* from his *Varieties of Love* series. Here, in a garden the likes of which you have never seen before, a so-called "dominatrix tree" — the serpent-like branches of which are whips — stands like a sort of anti-Edenic tree of life at the centre of the painting. Naked male figures, intensely coloured in blues, burnt oranges, lime greens, lie littered about the tree, some with bugs crawling upon them (another familiar Lukacs motif), as if they were pieces of rotting fruit in a 17th-century Dutch still life. Not everyone's dish of tea? Maybe not, but man can the guy paint.

Prices on request. Until Aug. 10, 626 Richmond St. West, Toronto; 416-922-1914.