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Untitled, 2003, by Todd Schroeder, oil on canvas, 96" x 36"

Painting 2003 @ Heights Arts

By Douglas Max Utter

Most intimately among the visual arts, painting explores the mysteries of passage between the second dimension and the third. How substance becomes symbol, how mind merges with image are the questions that subject matter and technique must ultimately address. How is it that we reconstruct a world behind our eyes, how do we pass between the different recognitions of reality and dream, what is the nature of the spirit that comes to visit our works, which seems to *mean*?

The four painters brought to Heights Arts Gallery this summer by William Busta experiment with various kinds of perceptual vibrato, shaking loose clues to other, imperceptible or forgotten dimensions. There is room for the eye to wander, moon-like over the gray-blue shadows and creamy white brushstrokes of Christine Kuper's large canvas *Shadow Fall*. Appearing abstract at first, the painting in fact depicts her father's shadow, merging with the shadow of an aluminum walker. In a statement Kuper writes that her father recently lost a leg to diabetes; Kuper videotaped the subsequent recovery process. Layers of reference in the work include the staccato brushwork that imitates video interference and a penumbra of purplish shades surrounding her father's head like a bruised aura. A life has been turned upside down, in reality and in Kuper's melancholy rendition.

Todd Schroeder's more purely abstract *untitled (orange, for me)* unfolds horizontally, skipping down the length of a three-by-eight-foot canvas. Based on actual orange peelings, Schroeder essays a very classic translation of three dimensions into the lingo of Flatland, like a Mercator map of the world. Schroeder's randomly cut shards are literally peels, also, accomplished by picking off sections of the thin skin of his painted surface to reveal underlying tones. Michelle Droll takes a different tack, building object-like three-dimensional forms from dried flakes and clumps of oil paint. Droll, a recent Cleveland Institute of Art graduate, often collects used paint from other artists' palettes. The idea that no material or activity is fresh or original in any pure sense, but achieves immediacy through contextual shift, can be read either as Dadaist or simply true in a fundamental, physical sense.

Daniel Dove's extraordinary landscapes evoke a sense of *deja vu* — there is always a shimmer, a shimmy, or an uncanny repetition; Dove's meticulously painted views tend suddenly to veer toward epiphany. In his oil on canvas *Complex Duplex Complex*, the outlines of a glassed-in suburban house echo the ghostly dimensions of other, similar houses. Beyond the reflections in the glass doors, a wicker deer trembles, dead center. At once armature, representation, thing-in-itself, and symbol, the deer is the painting and the hunt for the painting, and, perhaps, the inevitably provisional, incomplete nature of any painting. Beauty and meaning reside somewhere between or beyond the object and its shadow.