

# ARTFORUM

## John Boskovich Rosamund Felsen Gallery

by David Rimanelli  
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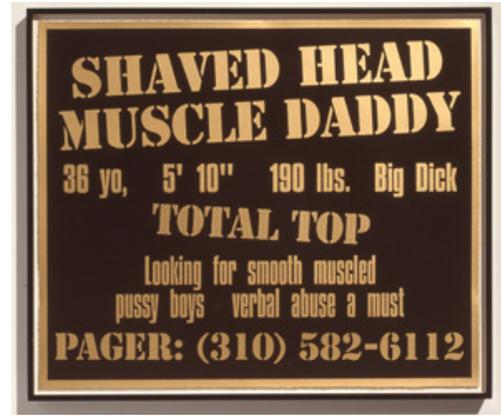
The lack of an interior life is less often the root of suffering than one might imagine. Usually, it's an excess of interiority, an obscene plenitude of psychic involution, that sends sensitive souls spiraling downward into the vortex of depression, madness, and rage. You think too much; you dwell morbidly on yourself. Get out of the house, they (your friends, your business associates, your psychiatrist) say; rejoin the world. Maybe you should join a support group.

You think about: friends who have died gruesome deaths; your own death; your loneliness and your fear of other people; sex as momentary relief and long-term sorrow; drugs as pleasant enablers of oblivion; indifference, the loveliest mental disposition. But you think, you know, really think, about other things, too: about Buddha, who said desire is the origin of suffering. You wonder, would Buddha be pro or con re: hallucinogens? Does psilocybin play Virgil to your Dante, guiding you through the underworld not to the Gates of Hell but to Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception*? You're reading Burroughs, Ginsberg, Kerouac—the Beat Generation. Such a boy thing, but hey, they all turned out to be faggots, right?

The meandering preamble I've concocted above is sort of like a journey without maps through the territory of John Boskovich's expansive and difficult installation. Indulging in "creative writing," it dispenses with most of the protocols of expository or analytic art criticism. The worst offense is that while writing about Boskovich's art I'm not sure that what I'm really writing about isn't in fact myself. An unwholesome, clammy intimacy pervades these sentences that refuse to do their job as explicators, analysts, judges. I guess I just think it's all great.

It's...Polaroids, all of which were taken within the precincts of Boskovich's L.A. condo, often images photographed from the TV set. *Valley of the Dolls at 3:01 A.M.* (all works 1993) is representative: 15 Polaroids showing the faces of the movie's female characters in excruciating close-up. *Valley of the Dolls*—a camp monolith, a staple of Gay Humor 101, just like *Mommy Dearest*—dissolves in the weird light of distorted reproduction, cracking the surface of predigested banality and cosmetic irony. A murky affect seeps through the crack. In a tour de force, Boskovich succeeds in restoring real pain, however grotesque (is pain ever not grotesque?) to these hollowed-out images of passably amusing cinematic hysteria. This odd gesture of recuperation recurs throughout Boskovich's show, as the sickest of ironies bares its caved-in chest to reveal a flaming Sacred Heart.

Embers smolder in *The Honey Machine: It Works Without Thinking*, an installation in which Boskovich has assembled 250 Honey Bears and miniature Buddhas and encased them in three



John Boskovich, *Daddy*, 1993, silkscreen on paper, 29 1/2 x 35 1/4

Plexi vitrines. In the role of artist-as-researcher (cf. Hans Haacke), Boskovich counted for six months the number of ads placed by "models" (read: hustlers) in *Frontiers*, a California gay magazine. The number was always close to, and sometimes exactly, 250. The comforting little surrogates for the 250 advertised pleasure-workers all face a framed text of an ad Boskovich took out in *Frontiers* bearing this inviting text: "SHAVED HEAD MUSCLE DADDY 36 yo, 5'10" 190 lbs. Big Dick TOTAL TOP Looking for smooth muscled pussy boys—verbal abuse a must PAGER: (310) 582-6112." The pager was hooked up to a sound system installed in the gallery and the voices of respondents would often interrupt a prerecorded tape featuring, among other things, Patti Smith performing "Piss Factory," Allen Ginsberg reading his depressing poem, "Aunt Rose," and T. S. Eliot intoning passages from "Four Quartets." The emblems of comfort and compassion are a captive audience for voices of bald, aggressive, pathetic sexual need. As if that weren't bad enough, they're subjected to a nonstop poetry reading of manic-depressive classics. Boskovich's implied subject—an overeducated shut-in hooked on anonymous amours—remains in dire need of an obliging bodhisattva's tender interventions.