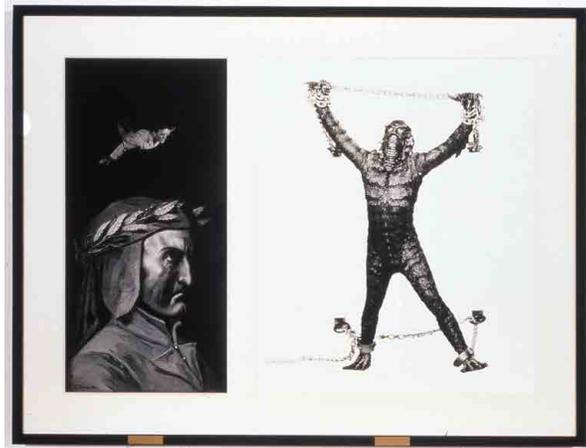


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Alienation lurks in humanity's black lagoon

by Christopher Knight
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Surrogate self-portraits by John Boskovich serve as “a metaphor for social ill-ease.”

John Boskovich's solo debut at the Rosamund Felsen Gallery consists mostly of self-portraits, but they're less about likeness and description than about a certain psychological dysfunction.

Indeed, in these engagingly evocative mixed-media works, one among the several surrogates for the artist is a B-movie star: the Creature from the Black Lagoon. Oddly, this out-of-time-and-space beastie is contextualized by the artist to become a poignant metaphor for social ill-ease and discomfiture. Surely everyone, sooner or later, has felt like that horrific critter lost in the dark pool of contemporary life. Clearly, Boskovich's chosen characters aren't just meant as surrogates for a personal self-portrait.

How can they be when the portrait can take the form of an impersonal telephone number? “Artist's Current Listing” is a phone-number superimposed over a painting of a tiny ship carefully navigating an iceberg-infested sea. Elsewhere, the artist turns up in photographs as a man dressed in a rabbit costume or in pajamas flying through space—choices in which eros, Freud, sexual stereotyping and desire get mixed up together in a stew of touching buffoonery.

Like John Baldessari or Alexis Smith, Boskovich mixes-and-matches found images to construct his art. All of them are reproductions—photographs, 19th-century lithographs, copies of engravings and such—or else they're paintings salvaged from junk shops rather than newly made by the artist. Either way, these are highly romantic images that nonetheless seek to devalue the idea of the work of art as embodiment of the unitary and expressive self.

Instead, Boskovich's self-portraits seem designed to insist upon the commonness of estrangement. In the end, we all turn out to be creatures in a black lagoon.