

For immediate release

Cheryl McGinnis Gallery

“Swimmers, Posers, Bathers”

Jessica Houston, Margaret Murphy and Tony Gonzalez

1287 Madison Avenue
Between 91st & 92nd, Suite #1
New York, NY 10128
T – 212-722-1144
F – 208-474-6209
CMGGallery@rcn.com
www.Artnet.com/cmng.html



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NEW YORK, (May 18, 2006), Cheryl McGinnis Gallery is delighted to exhibit “Swimmers, Posers, Bathers,” provocative images of female figures by Tony Gonzalez, Margaret Murphy and Jessica Houston. Connecting past with present, they each explore timeless and contemporary perceptions of gender and body image, while invoking Hellenistic and Baroque traditions of “catching the moment.” The subjects are in their purest and most attractive state when lost in their momentary activity. When all pretense and self-consciousness is abandoned, the beauty and purity of a fully realized moment is thoroughly relished by the subjects and the viewer alike.

Diving, suspended, or flowing through the luminous cool blues of pools and subtle ocean grays, Jessica Houston's swimmers breathe under water as if they were in the womb. Fundamental to life, H₂O and breath become Houston's metaphor for the continuity on earth. The amount of water on the planet never changes -- every day we drink and breath recycled moisture from distant glaciers and the ancient ponds and oceans from which our ancestors emerged. Houston's visual meditations on the force and rhythmic curves of water bubbling, swirling, eroding and pushing with breath give form to the invisible, as the water outside and inside the body mysteriously shifts between sensory and molecular. We are weightless in water -- free to lose our fears and become aware of our pulse, our gestures and shape, our lungs and our connection to each other. Working on paper and canvas, Houston uses oils to map breath and to create water rather than to resist it, with buoyant and turbulent figures that pull us into unknown depths.

Drawing us out of nature into an alternate reality, Margaret Murphy's female figurines tease and captivate, blurring the distinction between what is real and what is fake. Painted with their backs to us, they engage but do not look at us, causing our own emotions to fill in the unseen. Ballerinas, belles in

ball gowns and pin-up fantasies lost in their gestures and gazes examine how personal histories, memories and ideas of gender are collected and constructed. If painted by a man, these familiar, romantic and kitschy icons of femininity would evoke an entirely different intent. Instead, the viewer is drawn in by the subject's focus, momentary solitude and the childhood memories these dolls evoke. Isolated against flat walls and decorative wallpaper, these rigid 99-cent store life-size figures cast dark shadows. Richly painted with dense watercolor and acrylic on paper, the subject's twirl, pause, and beckon in heavily saturated fabricated colors. They are often combined with domestic ornamental designs or solid voids

Immersed in their solitude, women's natural gestures are captured by Tony Gonzalez's bathers. We are compelled to enter their spaces and intimate meditations as they pour over themselves, showering, shaving, brushing and polishing. Reminiscent of the 19th century genre, these women echo those poses with a new boldness and self-acceptance. By emphasizing design elements indigenous to New York City bathrooms, Gonzalez leads the viewer into a spiritual temple within the frenzied pace of contemporary living. Not since Degas and Cassatt have images of grooming oneself been so cathartic. Using a 100-year old hybrid process combining multiple layers of gum arabic with watercolors, his painterly prints add another edge to this paradox of time and place. His technique also speaks to the individuality and natural beauty of the women themselves. While many 19th century painters portrayed their subjects as generic figures, Gonzalez pays tribute to each model by including her name within the title. Gonzalez sees the models not as muses but as collaborators. Uninhibited, the women are aware of and accept our presence, becoming a mirror in which we reflect the levels of comfort within our own skin. Monumental in their simplicity, the images heighten everyday cleansing into a mythic rite.

Gonzalez's Jersey Shore series, in which the artist documents life on the Jersey Shore one summer in the late 90's, is a feast of catching pre-pubescent children in their most natural and joyful environment, the beach. They swim, play, socialize, and simply live unaware of themselves or the photographer. They live fully, as only a child can, without the burden of pre-occupation with their body images. They are not aware that by next summer their carefree lack of body consciousness will be gone. Gonzalez has captured them on the precipice of puberty, after which their bodies will forever change.

Opening Reception: Wednesday, June 7, 2006 6 to 8 PM

Summer Hours: Monday-Friday from 9:30am to 4:00pm

(Images left to right): Jessica Houston, Margaret Murphy, Tony Gonzalez