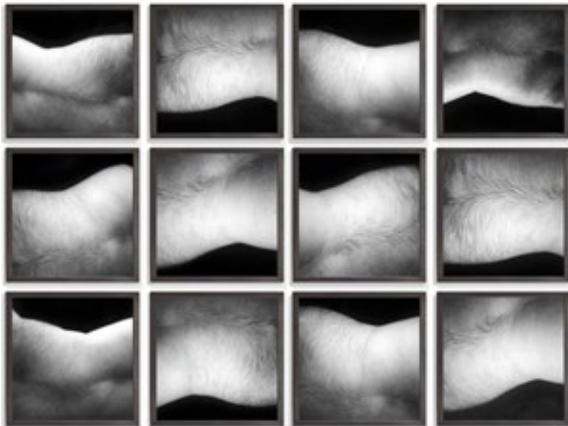


Refracted Intimacies

by Shawn Hill

Chris Komater's abstractions derive from photos of body parts

Chris Komater: *Harem*, at Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston, through February 24



Gay male culture possesses a resilient tension concerning what constitutes male beauty. Are we going for smooth, sculpted muscles this month, or grizzled and hirsute flesh? Are we more concerned with how we look, or with the appearance of those we desire? Chris Komater, in his first solo show in the area, resolutely avoids the cliché of the sculpturally perfected (and thus, somehow, god-like and removed from the world of the familiar) male form. Instead, his portraits of the furry, fuzzy, details of masculine attributes create a startling intimacy.

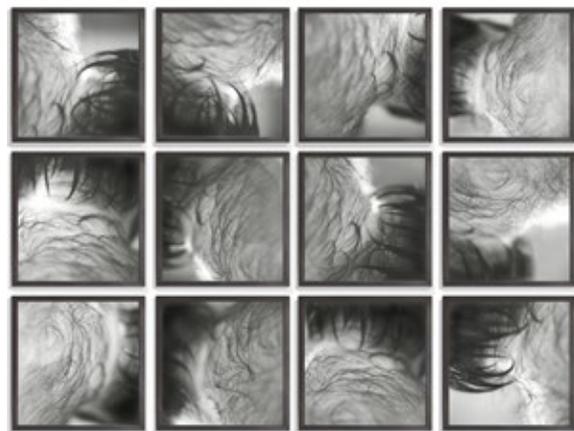
One feels specificity, not generality, in Komater's images. He seems to be looking, in detail and in extreme close-up, at bodies he's familiar with. These images (though they avoid faces) are like the bodies of lovers we know very well. There's a level of trust on display that one doesn't find looking at more traditional nudes.

Komater couples a compelling formalism with his focus on hairy flesh. Repetition (each larger piece is made up of several smaller frames) sets up rhythms, as the photographer finds interesting patches of hair to use as components in abstract systems. *Nape* is about the juncture of hairline

with neck and shoulders, from the back of a head. But the body we see only a portion of is wet, silky and soaked as if we're in the bathroom, sharing a shower. The subject's dark hair makes spiky thick teeth, in contrast to the different sparser hair growing on his back.

Odalisque takes the familiar motif from art history, substituting a decidedly male back for the nude females we've grown accustomed to over the centuries. Komater's furry form possesses the same sinuous s-curve of spine; but as we only see the torso, at first it's hard to say whether we're enjoying a dorsal or ventral view. This particular back, from shoulders to first curve of buttocks, undulates across the wall like a wave of skin.

Beanstalk, one of the few color works in the show, is the only vertical one. The grid is elongated here, as our eye scans slowly down a body from pectorals to knees. The stomach sags, the patterns of hair across the legs diverge; we see a hint of the penis. Once could think of the similar self-portraits of perennial Boston exhibitionist, John Coplans. But whereas Coplans seems to be documenting his own physical decline, Komater is celebrating physical realities he seems to find comforting.



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