



Bad Girl. Feminist. Lesbian. Nicole Eisenman doesn't like to be labeled and you can't blame her. It's a lazy way to describe the diverse range of styles, themes and mediums she has worked through over the past twenty years. An ideal way to contemplate her art would be to view her traveling retrospective, which was presented at two European venues in 2007, The Kunsthalle Zurich in Switzerland and Le Plateau in Paris. Unfortunately, I'll have to settle for the catalog, but I did catch an earlier incarnation at Cornell University's Johnson Art Museum. Eisenman's work stands out since it is in your face and well rendered, without being overly resolved. You have to admire anyone who presents scenes of raw, crude, sexual exploits, alongside complex allegorical tableaus featuring art historical references. Her work has never seemed a front, but an honest transmittal of whatever type of narrative she happens to be most interested in at a given time. When I arrived at her airy studio in the Gowanus section of Brooklyn I felt at home.

I discovered we shared an admiration for punk rock and hardcore music, as well as underground comic books. The artist who drew the comic book *Sacred and Profane*? Justin Green. *Murphy's Law*? A legendary band. The feminist show at the Brooklyn Museum? Not so good. We were on common ground. The white elephant in the room was the feminist question. I found an old quote from her on the web and she admitted she had probably said some things she wished she hadn't, or didn't want brought up again. But she wasn't shy about stating her distaste for post-feminist theory in relation to

art: "It was invented by writers to classify art, it's totally irrelevant and you have to ignore it. Categorizing art doesn't work."

Eisenman's 2006 show at Leo Koenig gallery in New York was less focused on gender issues and more about painting. Maybe that's because she is channeling that aspect of her life through *Ridykeulous*, a collaborative effort with artist A.L.

Steiner that can best be described as an all-out assault, take no prisoners 'zine that skewers conventional lesbian and feminist art.

The art in Eisenman's studio comes at you from many angles. On one long wall, a diptych

pretending to be a gallery.

Nicole's newest paintings—which she didn't want me to photograph in case some crafty art student tried to copy their unique physicality before she gets a chance to exhibit them—are massive rectangular mounds of expanding foam painted with gobs of oil paint. Unlike anything I've seen of hers before, these Dubuffet-meets-Dr. Seuss creations are further proof of her fearless attitude to unusual materials, and will debut at Susanne Vielmetter gallery in Los Angeles this fall.

When questioned about the various styles she had employed over the years Eisenman explains, "Different images ask to be painted in different ways." She cherishes the flexibility of oil paint, but jokingly doesn't rule out attention deficit disorder when analyzing her decision to utilize a mix and match approach to working. Art history, — which she says is impossible not to reference — anatomy books, photography and drawing from her head (as well as from life), are some of the tools she uses to compose a painting. What happens when you arrive is more important to her than how you get there. She admits she doesn't pull from art history as much as she used to, since she has a bigger frame of reference now. Before I leave she humbly admits, "Art history is a giant ball of mud and I'm a beetle trying to push it forward a little bit." ■



was at its beginning stages. The underpainting on the left canvas was half way done, washes of burnt umber, the right a graphite line drawing. A selection of finished canvases were hanging on walls about the room, one featuring a yellow-skinned woman pulling a lusciously painted mound of color. In one corner a sturdy wood table was piled with roughly hewn sculptures in various states of completion. I was viewing a real workshop, not a studio



Below: Eisenman in her studio
Above: studio detail