



MICHAEL LAZARUS *Used To*, 1999,
oil, enamel, collage on panel, 67 x 67 in. Courtesy Marc Foxx, Los Angeles.

Michael Lazarus

MARC FOXX, LOS ANGELES
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Michael Lazarus's paintings had everything to with my finally picking up a copy of Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, and I'm still hooked on this part: "[My] image of man was the determinate negation of Nietzsche's superman: man intelligent enough and healthy enough to dispense with all heroes and heroic virtues, man without the impulse to live dangerously, to meet the challenge; man with the good conscience

to make life an end-in-itself, to live in joy a life without fear." Marcuse's mid-twentieth-century understanding of the psychological as political—i.e., "formerly autonomous and identifiable psychical processes are being absorbed by the function of the individual in the state"—sends a chill down my spine in 1999, as do the 14 paintings (all 1999) in Lazarus's show, this in the manner of the sublime. It's all too obvious that at the turn of our late-capitalist, postindustrial, downloadable techno-century, the very particular smiley face in/of these unnerving pictures drove me to this state; no coincidence that Lazarus's simplest and scariest painting is called *With Conviction*.

Here is a 2-D image of the quintessential and ambivalent 1-D Man (the Marcuse I did read in graduate school, by the way). On the one hand, it's a zombie jack-o'-lantern death mask, full of cookie-cutter holes, decapitated and always frozen, even if sometimes rolling around; on the other, it's a dependable, approachable, laughing presence alive amongst such things as geometric (game-board?) structures, swirling gestural brushstrokes, bright happy colors, the occasional collaged zones of magazine life (bodies, nature, bedding, etc.), and the overall sense of calm that can be transmitted by certain Tantric-inspired symbols. Lazarus gives this face what it needs to become one of the more blank—to wit, resonant—found in painting today, specifically the painting being done by an emerging generation that actually has the nerve to figure out its own relationships to such things as materiality and presence, not to mention progress.

Lazarus's ability to keep the associative and conceptual options of his work open while surfing multiple models of painting and their production values is not to be ignored. The fact that a painting like *Used To* is as much Mondrian or Hilma af Klint as it is Mike Kelley is not a symptom of the simplistic problem of the anxiety of influence, but rather a necessary condition of the meaningful and continual production of energy. Ten years ago, I suggested that the works of one of my most favorite painters, Marilyn Lerner, were "psychological batteries, storage containers for a world-view." Like Lerner, Lazarus makes paintings that are rechargeable, in other words, neither wasteful nor destructive. His work is a viable example of how the "electrical" stability of painting guarantees its own agility by draining away the parasitic power of so-called universal tendencies.

Terry R. Myers