

## ERNEST TROVA: Insinuations

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### Stripped Bare

There is nothing new in the technique of collage, and Ernest Trova is too good of an artist to make art as if there could be. Trova doesn't attempt to find new meaning in the ages-old act of combining found imagery, but rather embraces it for the simple instrument it is, and uses pages from magazines and other extant images to apply a grotesque visual language to the same invented narrative he has continually investigated over the past 60 years. Trova's new *Insinuations* bring a fleshy new focus to the themes of mortality, beauty, and comedy he has always dealt with in his art.

It has been noted many times that Trova places Ub Iwerks and the other artists in Walt Disney's early studio high on his list of artistic touchstones, and similarly to Disney, Trova's art is more about the invention of "characters" than about the requirements of a particular medium or set of formal concerns. The most notable of these characters is certainly Trova's *Falling Man*, which first appeared in his paintings and sculptures of the 1960's, but there is also his *Roman Boy* of 1947, the many nameless cartoon characters that populate his drawings made under the pseudonym "Junior Person" throughout the 1950's, his *Poets* and *Troubadours* of the 1970's and 80's, and the sleepy-eyed muscle-men that occupy his small paintings of the last five years. And now added to the long list are the world of disjointed characters

Trova has made here; a world where men's noses are literally cut off to spite their faces, a world where lamb chops enjoy their afternoons on sunny park benches, and where women's blouses are only as ruffled as the sliced ham from which the artist has constructed them.

It seems strange at first that an artist with Trova's vast experience and technical capabilities would choose to express himself through one of Modernism's earliest & most blunt tools, until we grant that it may partially be the art-historical primitivism that he's interested in. All art history aside, Trova's motivation, he is quick to insist, is purely in "looking". And as for what we are actually looking at it's interesting to note that the artist doesn't present us with collages at all, but rather digital prints, scaled up and ironically returned to flawlessly smooth printed matter.

Trova's new imagery is at once grave and playful, violently drawing the viewer's attention to both the beauty and fragility of our corporeal existence. If Trova's *Falling Man* was the epitome of the pragmatic and persistent individual in a rapidly approaching future, these new characters are monstrous amalgams of an imperfect present, the slick celebrity and disposable fame contained in the source images stripped bare and revealed as little more than meat going about its daily business.

-Matthew Strauss

Matthew Strauss is an artist and founder of White Flag Projects.  
This essay is a series of introductions to the gallery's exhibitions written by fellow gallery artists and friends.