

Art in Review

Dawn Mellor

A Curse on Your Walls

Team

83 Grand Street, between Wooster and Greene Streets, SoHo
Through Aug. 8

Dawn Mellor, a British painter born in 1970, is known for obstreperously satiric portraits of celebrities. This show, her third solo in New York, presents an impressive but problematic set of large canvases representing scenes from an apocalyptic, punk version of "The Wizard of Oz" and 71 portraits from her continuing series "Vile Affections."

Painted in a brusquely illustrational manner and measuring 8 by 10 feet or more, the Oz paintings stomp all over the innocent hopefulness of the film's heroine. In "Dead Dorothy" her bloody, eviscerated corpse lies on a concrete slab in a bombed-out basement. "Death Army Dorothy" shows her leading a platoon of golden, bikini-clad, skull-headed warriors on a rubble-strewn street in a chaotic city. The paintings are rousing ambitious, but their relatively conventional representational style lessens their incendiary impact.

The Oz paintings could use more of the formal unpredictability of Ms. Mellor's portraits, which cover the four walls of Team's smaller rear gallery. They depict an expansive cast of characters, including Virginia Woolf, Pope John Paul II, Paris Hilton and Condoleezza Rice. With a generously loaded brush, Ms. Mellor subjects them to all kinds of comic, bizarre and horrific transformations and surrealistic insults. A crazed-looking Hillary Rodham Clinton is in water rising above her waist; black birds pluck out Alfred Hitchcock's eyes; Nicole Kidman has a beard.

As Ms. Mellor skewers the cult of fame and the conformist order of popular culture in general, she is also having infectious fun with painting.

KEN JOHNSON