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REVIEW

Teenage Tempest

By N. F. Karlins

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Kim McCarty, Mar. 11-Apr. 9, 2005, at Briggs Robinson Gallery, 527 West 29th Street, New York, N.Y. 10001



Watercolor is a sensuous medium, perfect for Kim McCarty's portraits of adolescents. Here, we're given a provocative view of the tempest that takes place in the teenage body and mind en route to sexual maturity.

McCarty pictures her boys and girls individually and in the nude, from torso to head, against a pale background. The sitters all meet the viewer's gaze. The pictures are composed of mostly light, high-toned colors, applied with a mixture of delicacy and deliberation that brings into focus the fleeting and often conflicted emotions that their subjects express.

In her artist's statement, McCarty mentions her desire to capture "longing and loss." In the most complex of her works, she manages to halt time and find moments when both a fearful child and swaggering teen appear together, raging in the same person at once, as in her *Untitled (yellow/green girl, slouched)*.

McCarty's eroticism is not the Egon Schiele in-your-face kind. Her poses are simpler, less distorted and more direct. The viewer certainly can perceive a sexual charge from some pieces, but her subjects more often exude a preening, I'm-just-trying-this-on feel about them. A few seem more knowing, like her *Untitled (orange/yellow girl, tilted head)*.

Moods range from the worried or quizzical, as in her *Untitled (boy, faded gray)*, to the confident, as in *Untitled (red boy)*. The pieces are not as heavy in color or as involved with social issues as Marlene Dumas' watercolors. The focus is on the individual. But there is plenty going on. Each of the heads seems to teem with ideas and feelings, almost too many to be accommodated by its too-small bodily frame.

I bumped into the artist, almost literally, at the gallery. McCarty works wet-on-wet and very quickly, and she talked about the sometimes hundreds of pieces of paper that remain on the floor of her studio in her attempt to produce a single work.

McCarty has been showing similar works, measuring 30 x 22 or 40 x 26 inches, for the past couple of years in her native California and at the Aldrich Museum. At Briggs Robinson, she is showing several new pieces sized 60 x 44 inches, a real achievement in scaling up her watercolors, as these are so large that they have to be painted on the floor.

McCarty's sure touch revels in the beauty and vulnerability of growing up, and is well worth catching before the show closes.

N. F. KARLINS is a New York critic and art historian.