

APOCALYPTIC HARVEST
PESTILENT FUNERAL FOGS
WHISPERS OF SUFFERING
ANCESTRAL NECROSODOMY
FECULENT BLACK EARTH
RELENTLESS SLAUGHTER
ENIGMATICAL HUMAN HATRED
SPHERE OF ROTTING
FLUORESCENT BLEEDING CHAOS
FOUL WINDS OF PUTREFACTION
ETERNAL DISMEMBERMENT
CADAVERIC MASTURBATION
CENTURIES IN DECOMPOSITION
DESTROY SACRED WORDS

The Renaissance Society

at The University of Chicago
5811 South Ellis Avenue
4th floor
Chicago, IL 60637

Museum Hours
Tuesday - Friday: 10 am - 5 pm
Saturday, Sunday: 12 - 5 pm
Closed Mondays
<http://www.renaissancesociety.org>

All the Pretty Corpses

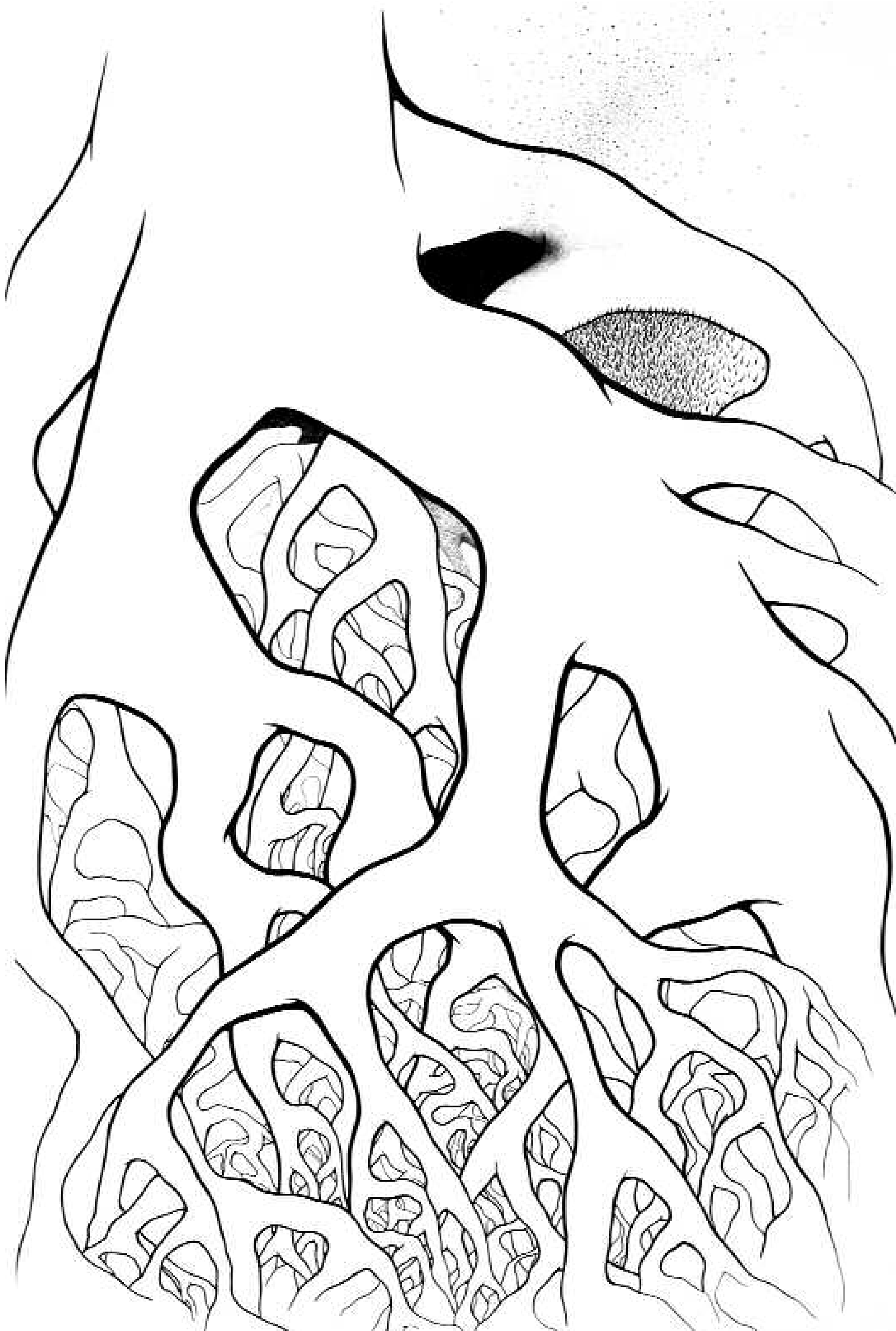
Jeremy Blake
Ellen Cantor
John Espinosa
Jay Heikes
Kacy Maddux
Sterling Ruby
Steven Shearer
Tony Tasset

November 13 – December 24, 2005

Opening Reception: Sunday, November 13, 4:00-7:00pm
Featuring a talk with the artists from 5:00-6:00pm

**The Renaissance Society
at The University of Chicago**
5811 South Ellis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60637
Phone: (773) 702-8670

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[this side]
Kacy Maddux
Untitled (trees), 2005
ink on paper

[that side]
Steven Shearer
Untitled Poem, 2005

Goth is Dead! Long Live Goth!

By the end of the 1990s, the post-punk phenomenon known as Goth was no longer a specific subculture but an aesthetic sensibility permeating a vast and more general weave of subcultures that in turn informed popular culture. Goth's signs are ubiquitous, from a "Nosferatuchic" in fashion and Tim Burton films, to the gleaming cyber-dungeons and candy-coated gore of video games such as *Quake*; from the pain and ecstasy-based performances of Ron Athey, to the many variants of heavy metal music (Death Metal, Black Metal, Doom Metal, Sludge Metal, Stoner Metal). More than a subculture, Goth has become a discourse, one simply referred to as the dark side.

The emergence of what *Artforum* dubbed the "New Gothic" within the contemporary visual arts is not surprising. The "New Gothic," however, is hardly new given Goth's steadfast persistence in the realm of popular culture. Goth's appearance within the visual arts is in fact belated relative to its having taken the form of parody (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) and farce (Marilyn Manson), with the four "A's" of adolescence—angst, alienation, anger, and anxiety—being duly exploited for fun and profit. But Goth's matriculation into popular culture is also an acknowledgement that the darker inclinations of youth culture have been made permanent. Yet, credit for creating a youth culture fused to and suffused with counter and subcultures ranging from light to dark, belongs to a previous generation. In questioning authority, a burgeoning 1960s youth culture was more than eager to adopt alternative belief systems, which included an open flirtation with the occult.

Although Goth is squarely identified as belonging to youth culture, many artists whose work might fall under that rubric are hardly laying claim to Goth in a generational sense. If these artists are susceptible to nostalgia then it is for a youth culture they inherited as much as invented. In this respect, the dark streak being signified by these artists is one running from the Manson Family murders to the shootings at Columbine High School, and with neither Beatles songs nor the video game *Doom* as legible forecasters of violence, it is the unfathomable events themselves that haunt. Goth is an intergenerational accumulation of signifiers forever in search of a signified capable of bearing its weighty cross of meaning, one derived through recourse to the polar extremes of sex and death. Prevalent enough within the visual arts to dissolve any notion of it as a discreet category defined by style or subject matter, Goth has effervesced into a more general sense of foreboding that is the tenor of the times.

All the Pretty Corpses is a group exhibition whose work explores a range of subjective sensibilities that has emerged over the past few years. The works reflect on mysticism, anger, mourning, horror, aggression, angst, apocalypse, and the post-human. In concert, they suggest that the dark side may well be upon us, and that ours is an era of Good versus Evil. The works

feature Goth Metal poems (Steven Shearer); a candlelight vigil (Tony Tasset); a psychedelic meditation on the haunting legacy of frontier violence (Jeremy Blake); a body-based cosmogony of tooth, bone, muscle, and hair (Kacy Maddux); a stain of psychological magnitude (Jay Heikes); a dual homage to the films *Invocation of My Demon Brother* and *Carrie* that is also a paean to Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction (Ellen Cantor); a rant calling for a new era reigned by the "Amorphous Law" (Sterling Ruby); and a scene of instinctive aggression ritually played out in the animal kingdom (John Espinosa). Indeed, from the shores of these troubled waters, the call for "a thousand points of light" feels like a million years ago.

But are these times darker than any other? Before September 11, 2001, this question, formulated by an older generation unable to take Goth seriously and put to a legion of seemingly disgruntled youth, would have been purely rhetorical. That is hardly the case now, making the generation gap irrelevant. Generations spanning the 1960s to the present would no doubt acknowledge the symbolic value of the dark side, which is indispensable to an imagination seeking to challenge and/or transgress the existing social order. Indulging the dark side, however, is not about "imagining resistance." If anything, it represents the imagination's failure at envisioning, not to mention adopting, a constructive mode of resistance. Like expressionist impulses, gothic tendencies are symptomatic of regression, which may be warranted given the feelings of being utterly infantilized by the quality and patronizing tone of current socio-political discourse. In the words of Steven Shearer, whose untitled poem is printed on the other side of this poster, "Sometimes art has to go there." "There" being a place far from art as positivist social critique, let alone art as responsible for the uplift of humanity.

Despite its explicit anti-authoritarian sentiments, Goth is more legible as a cultural phenomenon than a political phenomenon. As for the question as to whether these times are darker than any other, theories of civilization's decline are as old as those of progress. According to Freud, civilizations in all their spectacular achievements and unspeakable cruelties are a reflection of human nature in full. This is obviously no consolation for those believing humanity's moral and spiritual progress is linked to its material progress. The dark side is ever present. Guilt, depression, aggression, and unhappiness are ensconced in the development of civilization, ours included. In anthropological terms, the dark side is not dark at all. It is part of what we are, sublimated into the rites and rituals we call culture. As for art, what would Dante or Milton's imaginations have been without Hell, and what would Hell be without their imaginations? In this respect, Satan will always give the kids something to sing about.

Related Events

Opening reception
Sunday, November 13, 4-7:00pm

Talk with the artists
Sunday, November 13, 5-6:00pm

Concert
The Maverick Ensemble
Sunday, November 27, 2:00pm
FREE

As the name suggests, this ensemble continues to break new ground, focusing on small chamber works and solo pieces. Billed under the title, *World, conceive a man*, this concert will premiere a major work commissioned from the ensemble's leader, William Jason Raynovich. This concert has been generously sponsored by Maria Kulczycky. It will take place in the gallery.

Lecture
Eileen Luhr
Sunday, December 11, 2005, 2:00 pm
FREE

Rebels with a Cross: Christian Metal and Punk Subcultures
Luhr specializes in contemporary Christian youth culture. Her 2004 PhD. dissertation, *Witnessing Suburbia: Christian Conservatives, Family Values, and the Politics of Youth*, examined the ways in which conservative religious beliefs helped reshape the political and cultural landscape of the late Twentieth Century. She was a 2005-2006 Kevin Starr Postdoctoral Fellow in California Studies at the University of California Humanities Research Institute where she continued to research her interests in the history of religion, youth culture, and the rise of sunbelt conservatism. This talk will be preceded by a 45 minute sampling of Christian punk and heavy metal. The talk will take place in Cobb Hall room 402 (down the hall from the gallery).

This exhibition has been made possible with generous support from Alphawood Foundation; the CityArts Program of The Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, a municipal agency; Christie's; The Danielson Foundation; the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; LaSalle Bank; The LLLWW Foundation; The MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; The Peter Norton Family Foundation; the Provost's Discretionary Fund at The University of Chicago; The Pritzker Foundation; The Siragusa Foundation; and our membership.