



Ted Hiebert is a Canadian visual artist who works predominantly in photo-based media. His work has been shown in solo exhibitions across Canada and in group exhibitions internationally. His most recent body of images, "Self Portrait Chimeras" have been shown at Harcourt House Gallery (Edmonton), La Galerie Sans Nom (Moncton) and Modern Fuel Gallery (Kingston) with various other venues upcoming.

His published writings include "Hallucinations of Invisibility: From Silence to Delirium" (CTheory 26.1) and "Becoming Carnival: Performing a Postmodern Identity" (Performance Research 8.3, forthcoming). Ted is the editorial assistant for CTheory journal, a PhD student in the Humanities Doctoral Program at Concordia University and currently lives in Victoria, BC.

# chimeras ted hiebert

at the  
Nanaimo Art Gallery  
February 13 to March 13, 2004

Opening: Friday February 13th  
7:00 to 9:00 PM  
Artist's Talk: Thursday February 19th  
12:15 PM

Ted Hiebert's show  
is partially funded by:



Desktop Design: Powell Hargrave

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NANAIMO ART GALLERY



Unlikely Totem

On meeting a casual looking young man such as Ted Hiebert, you would not suspect the depth of thought or intensity of exploration that is seen in his photo-based works in the exhibition “chimeras.” Yet duality is a trademark of this emerging Canadian artist who is currently writing and exhibiting his work at two or three venues across the country each year. The elaborate visual images that you see in this exhibition are rooted in enquiries into *identity, self, and being*. Self-portraits are a common form of expression for visual artists, but when Ted Hiebert approaches the subject he exposes all without reserve as he searches for references to his own existence.

His portrait works are images captured while he is covered in glow-in-the-dark paint as a super-speed film records, in a single frame, his body movement over a period of time.

Hiebert is intrigued with a

technique that allows him to capture an image with “self-generating light,” as the glow-in-the-dark paint provides the light source. In the past, he has created images using Kirlian photography that also works on the principle of self-generated or “incidence” light. He is drawn to this process that doesn’t use reflected light as he tries to remove the sense of *reflection* from his portraits. Some of the works are directly captured without manipulation while others are digitally manipulated animal-composites.

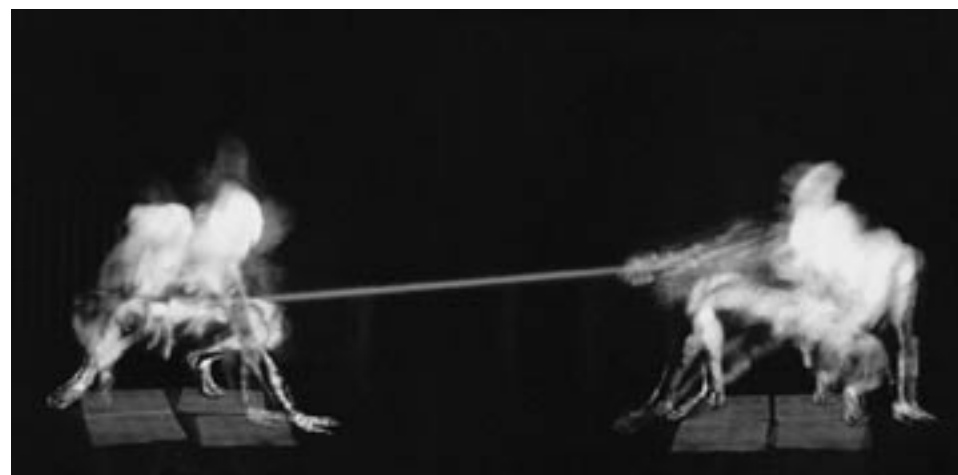
We can enjoy these works intuitively and respond to the impact of the life-size fanciful creations. We can also appreciate them for their refined sense of aesthetic, the formal elements of image making, or the sophisticated techniques relating to the photographic and digital processes; but the works come much more from intellectual exploration. Hiebert engages in dialogue with his own art making that is influenced by a philosophy and psychology rooted in metaphysical enquiry. He uses a dialectic approach to understanding, but meaning is elusive and each question is usually answered with a paradox. In the dialectic of Ted Hiebert: what is, isn’t; and a condition of being, is not being. This is not a flippant way of

exploring our world and our existence, but a deeply analytical one. When he writes, opposites are considered and questions are reflected. He speaks of “the self as xenophobic, afraid of being what it is not, and of not being what it is.” In Hiebert’s writing such as “Hallucinations of Invisibility,” he reveals the complexity of how he looks at *himself* (<http://www.ctheory.net/printer.asp?id=367>).

Hiebert is willing to examine his own being: narcissism, egocentricity, and vanity are all relevant considerations when looking at the relationship between these images and their creator. Intense self-examination may be narcissistic, and Hiebert does not shy away but gives us titles of works such as “Cloning Narcissus”. He prefers not to label his works that may result in restricted interpretation. Some of the works come under the heading “Altered Egos,” referencing, but not answering the search for personal identity. Vanity refers to the unsubstantial, while substantial refers to what actually exists and is not illusionary. The vanity of Hiebert is in the search for the real, not illusion. He also explores whether the self can exist in a non-mediated form, as contemplation and exploration are for him, “pure mediation.”

His *own* body is paramount to this exploration. In these works we are presented with the naked figure, not the more demure nude of the Western art tradition. We have to acknowledge the relevance of his *physical* being to his work, as it is the source of the imagery he presents to us; however, he resists the notion of himself and his body being separate. The extent to which Hiebert sees himself as a corporal entity goes beyond the mere fact that the images all result from the use of his own body as we see in the works that have been morphed into animal forms. The crouching body posture in many of the works is more akin to animals other than humans, or animalism, as Hiebert is willing to look objectively and honestly at himself as a living being.

His process is solitary, and the images are created with no assistant. The camera records his image as it sees him, inverted, reflected, and captured in the negative. He emphasizes and plays with these levels of reality by work-



Tug of War

ing with a mirror to further the dualities rather than presenting certainties, increasing the paradoxes of reality and imagery. His presence before the camera takes several minutes to record, even with its super-speed film, and the resulting movement seems somewhat like a performance, a ritual or even a rite of passage. A shamanistic quality can be seen in many of the works, but Hiebert resists labels, and is not comfortable with a lexicon that includes performance, ritual, or shamanism.

Although he has worked with the Kirlian camera and searches for answers to his own being, he resists terms such as *aura* and is cautious about references to the *spirit* or the *soul*. The somewhat nebulous quality of the images that we see is in keeping with his reluctance for a definitive answer to his existence. His *sole* searching is not easily placated with the comfort of the *soul*: he looks deeper.

The work “Tug of War” is especially revealing of the dialogue the artist has with himself. The dramatic poses are connected with a line more like a ray of light or energy source than one showing the tension or struggle of a typical tug-of-war. Perhaps he exists more comfortably with himself after all.

There is also an element of playful exploration in this exhibition. The artist presents us with absurd creations of the imagination through processes of inversion, reflection, and metamorphoses. The element of trickery or illusion is not incidental, and the deception of what is, and what we see, is at the core of his explorations. For all the seriousness with which he approaches his subject and technique, fun and folly are not foreign to Ted Hiebert as he tantalizes us with the enigmatic works in “chimeras.”



Camel 1

Robin Field  
Curator  
Nanaimo Art Gallery