

Stephen Schofield and Charles Ray, Vanguard, 1985

Stephen Schofield and Charles Ray

Mercer Union

Toronto

David McFadden

Vanguard, Summer 1985

On the surface, the sculptural artifacts of Stephen Schofield (of Montreal) and Charles Ray (of California) do not seem to belong together naturally. Viewer impact-wise, however, they do for each artist in his own way presents a powerful blast of naked metaphysical strangeness, a blast rendered stronger because of the unlikely and seemingly irrational juxtaposition of their work. The curator responsible for this double billing must be in league with the programmer at the Bloor Cinema who comes up with such inspired matings as *Ascendancy/Vertigo*, *Splash/Love Streams*, *The Year of Living Dangerously/2010*. The double bill is more serious, though it was made in hell.

This kind of artistic strangeness — the shock of the unfamiliar, the affront of the unaccountable — is rare. It sometimes takes the form of a delicious personal insult, it can ruin your day.

Ray's approach to it is fairly simple. He mounts a flat green board on the wall. There's a hole in the board. He gets naked, lies on the board and puts his arm (which has been painted green from fingertip to armpit) through the hole and lets it hang there, his green nails brushing the grey floor. Or, more tellingly, there's another board, painted grey, and on it are a series of objects you might put up on such a shelf, and they're all painted grey too. On closer inspection, however, one of the objects is the artist's head, painted grey, just sitting there along with all the other objects, his unpainted body, pink and naked, standing there like something you're not supposed to notice, like an extra-dimensional vector we're trained to exclude from our sensoria. Or there's his famous metal chair and desk, very sparse, at which he sits, naked again and terribly vulnerable and allows his head to disappear inside a large metal disc that sits on the end of a bracket welded to the desk and hovers over the chair.

Schofield's approach to all this is less repetitive and more scattered. No performance is involved. His installation is called *Paradise Pools*. Try to imagine the work as being the sort of thing Schofield might put around his backyard pool if he had one. Actually, there is a painted wooden pool in the show, but it's small and not, one would expect, intended to be particularly interesting. More interesting are the series of fiery wheels, five of them, spread here and there around the little pool, along with a very impressive dancing woman, and a very disturbing piece depicting two naked men.

The wheels are about four feet in diameter and feature sculpted flames, about nine of them, bursting out from the edge, and a pair of crossed "tongues" which almost meet each other in the centre of each. The wheels are perhaps to a slight extent inspired by the Buddhist art of India and south east Asia and are painted in the somewhat faded but still bright hues of yellow, white and red reminiscent of that pan of the world's past—or another plane of existence

entirely. The dancing woman is naked and painted mud-red while a cascade of glass rods bursts out of her head and drops to the ground, enveloping her with mysterious majesty. Her hands are cupped and protect a tiny pair of grey sculpted women in a potentially erotic pose, the head of each between the feet of the other.

And then there are the two men. One, finely sculpted, almost ultra-realistic, kneels on the ground while the other, less realistic, lies across the first. The left arm of the first is plunged deeply through the anus of the second, while his right arm is shoved deeply down the second's throat, so deeply that the hands appear to be trying to meet somewhere deep inside. It's Michelangelo's *Pieta*, it's Dr. Frankenstein and his Monster, it's the artist and his public. Is the passive man dying, dead, coming to life? Is this an act of love, hate, magic? Or is it just the sort of thing that artists do? At any rate, it's not beautiful or delightful. But it's a beautifully executed work and if its intention is to counter the effect of the delightfully dancing woman and in its own right to confuse and disturb it's a huge success.