

# Max Protetch

## Saul Chernick: *Borrowed From the Charnel House*



**June 10—July 30, 2010**

Max Protetch Gallery is pleased to announce *Borrowed From the Charnel House*, an exhibition of new work by Saul Chernick. The exhibition runs from June 10 through July 30, 2010. An opening reception will be held on Thursday, June 10 from 6:00 to 8:00pm.

Saul Chernick makes highly detailed ink drawings that combine masterful control of the individual mark with an incisive grasp of the history of image-making and various visual media. The exhibition brings together works that display Chernick's penchant for borrowing from the relics of art history to transform them into the constituent elements of his own visual language.

On view are some of Chernick's largest drawings to date, including a piece in extreme horizontal format, almost thirty five feet long and comprised of more than thirty drawings done en plein air at Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn. A meditation on mortality created from a position in the living world, it also proves to be a forum in

which Chernick displays his mastery of the use of line and shifts in perspective. The cemetery is seen not only as a landscape but as a museum of funerary sculpture.

In fact, the exhibition's title, *Borrowed from the Charnel House*, refers to the vaults where skeletons are stored, often after they have been dug up from crowded burial grounds; one of the most famous of these, and noted because it is still in use, can be found at St. Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, where the monks gather relics from the difficult, rocky soil for both practical and spiritual reasons.

Reflections on contemporary sexuality and technology are embedded into Chernick's intensely detailed riffs on anatomical drawings, heralds, and etchings. The most evident reference is perhaps to the prints, manuscripts, and illuminations of the Northern Renaissance. But like the monks of St. Catherine's relying upon their brothers' relics as reminders of their own mortality, Chernick tweaks specific images and compositional methods from the past to shed light upon current cultural conditions. In this sense, he works like a musician improvising on an existing theme or a writer adapting an older idea for a new context.

Another of the large-scale drawings on view, 'Ars Gratia Artis,' depicts a lion's head floating in a vast alpine landscape. Uncannily reminiscent of the roaring lion that serves as the logo for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, the piece seems to hint at both the history and future of cinema, drawing a connection to the logo's roots in centuries-old coats of arms. Almost eight feet wide, the piece seems to exist at a hybrid scale, between the intimacy of the drawing and the expansive presence of the movie screen. The emotional power of the drawing, however, lies not only in the scope of its cultural references, but in the mysterious way that the lion himself is rendered.

This sensitivity to individual moments, and the subtleties of human and animal forms, lends Chernick's work an immediacy that places it squarely in the present, and that engages the viewer outside of any specific art historical context. It is a question of both craft and poetry. On the surface it is clear that the artist's technique is indebted to the achievements of the Old Masters, but the critical and psychological revelations on view in his drawings are wholly his own, and shed light on the future of our physical condition—in the short term with respect to technology, and in the long with respect to death.

Saul Chernick was recently the subject of a solo exhibition at Franklin Art Works in Minneapolis. His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions across the United States, and reproduced in a variety of print and online publications. He lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.