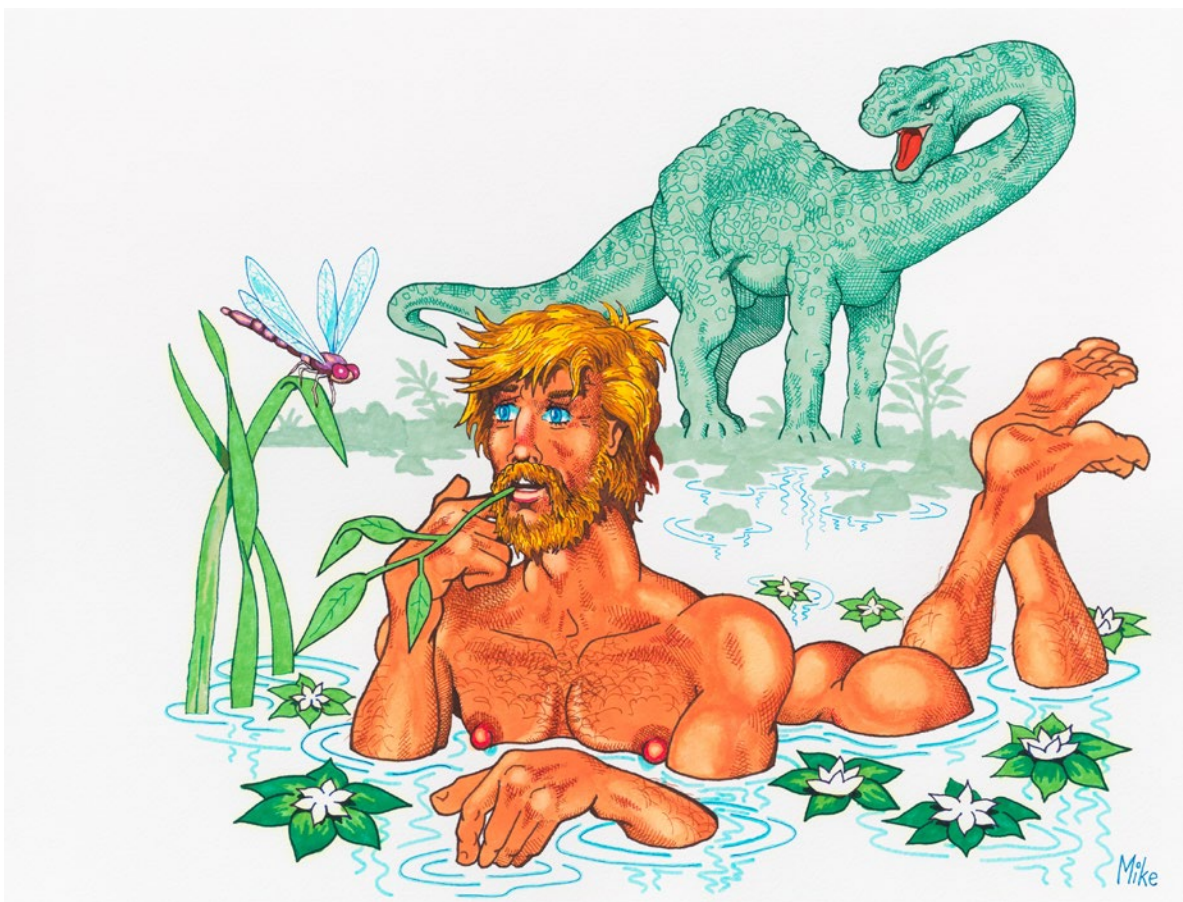


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ART & DESIGN

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

By ROBERTA SMITH, JASON FARAGO and WILL HEINRICH SEPT. 20, 2017



Mike Kuchar's "Blue Eyes," 1980-2000s. Anton Kern Gallery

Mike Kuchar

Through Oct. 7. Anton Kern, 16 East 55th Street, Manhattan; 212-367-9663, antonkerngallery.com.

Mike Kuchar's over-the-top [felt-tip-and-ink drawings of gay male fantasy](#) are weirdly innocent. The underground filmmaker (and twin brother of the other filmmaking Kuchar, George) started dreaming up his bronze-skinned, blue-eyed, naked Vikings and gladiators in the 1960s as commissioned illustrations for privately printed comic books.

In the exhibition "Drawings by Mike!," they still have the bright colors, lush details and graphic anatomical exaggerations of a vintage Mad Magazine cover. They also have Mad's vaudeville-style over-determination, the conviction that any joke worth telling is worth telling again: Candles drip, bottles of Champagne and rum spurt, and the naïve farmhand in "Adam's Eden" has "GOOD BOY" and "BAD BOY" tattooed on his shoulders to underscore the miniature devil and angel sparring to advise him.

But in contrast to those spurting bottles, the key to the drawings' dreamy innocence is that the serpent in this garden hasn't yet brought down la petite mort on anyone's head. In fact, Mr. Kuchar's achievement is to have combined such vividly realized details — the farmhand's pout, the turn of a berserker's hip, a reticulated green brontosaurus — into scenes that seem oversaturated with sexual suggestion but are actually completely unspecific. In "Play Stations," two naked men stand in front of a basement wall covered with crudely lettered graffiti expressing crudely transactional desires and demands, and they look utterly befuddled, as if they have no idea what to do with each other.

WILL HEINRICH