

**HASWELLEDIGER
& CO. GALLERY**

PIA DEHNE

BED BAD BEYOND 15 Sept. - 22.Oct. 2005

It is interesting to note that few, if any, of the original Orientalist artists actually visited the regions suggested in their works. By the time that North Africa and the Middle East were readily accessible to the average European, an eroticized picture had already emerged of a dangerous, if effeminate, people necessitating Europe's continued colonial penetration. One cannot help but think that works like Ingres' *The Turkish Bath*, with its implications of white slavery, did for French imperialist morale what today is accomplished through the heavy-handed 'bad guy'/'good guy' type rationale currently dominating our televisions, theaters and even art galleries.

For her second New York solo exhibition, Pia Dehne presents *Bed Bad Beyond*, a suite of large scale oil paintings that use *The Turkish Bath* as their point of departure. In reconstructing Ingres' Euro-guilt masterpiece (only to gradually deconstruct and then ultimately abandon it), the German-born Dehne connects the sexual and creative acts to exoticism and colonial conquest. As in past projects Dehne assembled a group of friends, this time in Berlin, to photographically recreate this iconic image and thereafter created paintings based on her appropriation. By taking Ingres' imagined harem-scenario and actualizing it, Dehne works as a kind of anti-historian who willfully un-writes a piece of Orientalist fiction and with it the slanders of bias and might. What is left is not a blank canvas but rather a system of works that draw direct lines between Body and Global politics.

The painting themselves, with their multiple glazes and soft layers of color, look as if they have been muted (or partially cleansed) in some giant bath. On top of these vaguely psychedelic backgrounds are placed nude women in various states of rest, play and even battle. In *Fight Painting* (2005), two big-busted women, more Russ Meyers' than Ingres', get down and dirty in the wrestling ring. Neither objets d'luxe nor pro-colonial metaphors, these vixens kick and scratch their way right out of Ingres' tranquil, harem as colony allegory. In the end what is left are the images that lay beyond the bad bath, beyond guilt, beyond cleansing and towards the artist's own post-colonial colony: a universe comprised of her own fetishes, demons, politics and finally, sense of place therein.