

ARTFORUM

Mike Kuchar

FRANCOIS GHEBALY GALLERY
2245 E Washington Blvd.
January 17–February 14

Burnished bubble butts beam with unholy light. Cut and uncut, huge, veiny cocks blossom from every angle. Angels and gods, gladiators and cavemen, street hustlers and bodybuilders, S-M beltings and four-way pirate fuckfests are all drawn with the bright hues and hard lines of comic-book superheroes. The Los Angeles debut of underground-film hero Mike Kuchar (best known for collaborations with his brother, George) hangs and screens five decades of lusty illustration and delightfully schlocky film. Kuchar creams and colorizes a tradition set by Tom of Finland's pencil drawings of leathered men and lonely sailors with inflated musculature and fantastically large rods (currently the subject of an exquisite survey across town at David Kordansky Gallery). While such work has a cool, supple-wristed beauty, Kuchar's drawings and film both mock and celebrate the near-comic lust of the former generation. Many might worship the purity of high modernism, but we'd prefer to live in the hot mess of its aftermath.

In one room, Kuchar's first effort without the help of George, *Sins of the Fleshapoids*, 1965 (considered one of the great underground films by none other the pope of trash himself, John Waters), plays on the hour. In the next, amid a dozen leafy potted plants, is a plaster replica of Michelangelo's David, who looks askance at the framed illustrations on the walls around him. This high kitsch makes the gallery more "arty," a classic cover for the homoerotic illustrations and soft-core movies playing on either side (the other video, *Tickled Pink*, 2012, shows in just under nine minutes that Kuchar's cheap, campy charm remained tumescent with time). As with *Sins of the Fleshapoids*, the cut-rate set dressing only deepens my affections for the artist and his antics. With horny glee, Kuchar returns the original seasoning to the normally sexless accolade of "seminal."

— Andrew Berardini



Mike Kuchar, *Liquid Dreams*, c. 1980-1990, pencil, pen, felt pens, ink on paper 26 1/5 x 20 1/5".