

Face it



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著者:Gottfried Helnwein

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10. April 2006 New Statesman, UK Julia Pascal NAZI DREAMING "Face it" Helnwein exhibition at Lentos Museum of Modern Art Linz - Gottfried Helnwein's latest exhibition,

"Face It", is the artist's first show in his native Austria since 1985. A retrospective of 40 works from the 1970s to the present, it is more shocking than the Royal Academy's infamous "Sensation" of 1997. Helnwein aims to disturb not with, say, an elephant-dung Madonna, as Chris Ofili did then, but with a far more controversial Virgin. Of all his paintings, the most disturbing is Epiphany (1996), for which he dips into our collective memory of Christianity's most famous birth. This Austrian Catholic Nativity scene has no magi bearing gifts. Madonna and child are encircled by five respectful Waffen SS officers palpably in awe of the idealised, kitsch-blond Virgin. The Christ toddler, who stands on Mary's lap, stares defiantly out of the canvas. Helnwein's baby Jesus is Adolf Hitler.

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