

or bottom to the new format. And without a top or bottom to a picture, there is no longer any (albeit illusory) sense of gravitational pull towards the picture's base. Which means, essentially, that whatever you place on a tondo's surface breaks out of the old spatial verities and floats free.

While this might prove a problem for many artists (the tondo form is, after all, not very frequently used), Pete Dako revels in it. For Dako, the tondo provides a hyper-energized space in which his musterings of cartoon characters, slippery graphic runes and equivocal shapes can shriek and tumble and chase each other's tails without spatial restraint. Even in his crowded, graphically intense comic books and chapbooks of cartoon drawings (like his delightful *Pete* from March 2000), the pages pulse and jostle with so many drawings that his little inky beings are squeezed and pummeled into an omni-directional clamour for space that cries out for the release the tondo can provide.

It was Dako's initial choice of the circular saw-blade as a support for his paintings/drawings that was so fortuitous. Dako's cartoons, the characters through which he lives (plump, rubbery Snoopys, for example, little antennae-headed space beings, fluid cats, big-eyed, bug-eyed birds, owls, cute if demented wolves, a whole whirling menagerie of creatures never dreamed of by Noah), float everywhere in the matrix-wide consciousness provided by the artist's graphic largesse, in the pauseless inventiveness flowing from the end of his fecund pen. They need breathing space. And they get it when Dako empties them out onto a tondo.

But the saw-blade's teeth? Isn't the savage toothedness of the saw-blade antithetical to the innocent spirit with which Pete Dako's are so plentifully imbued? Yes, it is. That's part of the satisfying complexity of these recent works. For here, in these joyous roundels, the benignity of heart which sees the wisdom of battering swords into ploughshares, has here contrived the poignancy whereby the force of these innocent cartoon-drawings has in itself been sufficient to negate, nullify, or at least marginalize (literally), the danger lurking in those potentially ripping, tearing teeth now fringing the circumference of each saw-blade picture. For me, the saw-blade works represent the triumph of vitality (the cartoon



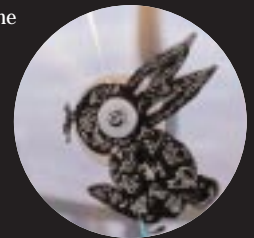
content) over an ever-present threat (those metal teeth). There is a sense in which Dako's cartoon figures simply live with the far-flung threat of the encompassing teeth the way all of us resolutely live with everything from bacteria in the water to the tattered ozone layer.

With the CD pictures, the situation is different.

Here, the viewer becomes involved with, entangled in, the works' imagery. While the CD paintings maintain the free-floating rapture of roundness, they recede from the brut presence of steel teeth, trading it for a stake in the archetypally powerful human experience of mirroring—of reflectability and reflection. With the CD paintings, a radical graphic intervention on the artist's part into the sanctity of that inviolate artifact the digitally-coded/loaded computer disc or music disc, Dako has freed his characters onto a plane which is a delicately teeming field of information—over which they run gloriously rampant.

What a lovely, childlike disdain there is here for the authority of any externally programmed desire! Just as Dako's saw-blade denizens ignore the serrated edges of their saw-blade world, so do his CD creatures make their mirrored grounds their own, gleefully trampling info beneath their cartoon feet—and inviting you to do the same. The CD paintings are as truly subversive as they are delightful.

Because the second we peer into their mirrored surfaces, we too have joined, however briefly, in Dako's bacchanal. And we, too, have been returned, for a moment or two, to ourselves.



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