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Paul Waldman

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Paul Waldman at Lennon, Weinberg

A voluptuous tribe of ambiguously gendered putti sport and posture at their leisure along the margins of Paul Waldman's recent diptychs of faux-marble tile. Among these 4-by-6-foot canvases, Waldman placed three related sculptures on simple pedestals designed to conceal the equipment necessary to produce mechanical signatures specific to each: expulsions of air, fire and water in forms expressive of the artist's fantasy. *Pussy Pupil* (2001), a prancing, rosy-cheeked and blue-browed boy in delicately painted ceramic with downy wings soft as marabou, breathes flights of bubbles into the quiet air. The second, *Degas' Flame* (2002), a perverse bronze sibling to Degas's *Little Dancer* adorned with outstretched white-feathered wings, repeatedly expels a tongue of fire from within a bifur-

cated pudendum. In the third, *Old Faithful* (2002), the ceramic figure of a nude, pubescent girl reclines on a flowered pillow, eyes wide and rolled back in ecstasy or astonishment, a dreaming Wendy among the spawn of Pan, as bursts of steam spout like geysers from her wounded breasts.

Waldman makes much of his meticulously prepared trompe l'oeil grids, where putti frolic on decorative programs of carefully rendered marble tiles. The imaginative scenes suggest antique narratives drawn from Indian paintings and Western frescos; liturgical and mythological moments are acted out by his cast of cherubic characters. Adorned with pearls, distracted or in reverie, a plump child with pointed ears and a pale blue face graces one panel of *Diane's Puppies* (2001) as though unaware of her companion at play in the other panel of the diptych. A blue-winged putto, garlanded with pink and white flowers, gazes forward into the viewer's space. Two shaggy children like woodland mutants, one adorned with spiral horns, the other with a leonine tail, their arms raised above their heads in supplication or defense, reach the opposite

margins of *Dangerous Bookends* (2001).

Waldman declines to alter the rigorous formal circumstances of his mythic kindergarten. The panels of his diptychs never meet. Their edges appear rough-hewn, as though chiseled from some larger architectural context. The children are relegated to the edges of the panels. But all hell breaks loose as a legion of tiny, sculpted-ceramic cherubs scale the faux-marble surface of *Everest* (2001), climbing the length of a spiraling ladder that rises along the diptych's seam. The many-hued Lilliputian figures are smaller than the painted figures they most resemble. They storm the unyielding flatness of Waldman's marbled plane, engaging the historic struggle to make the artist's labor come to be what it can only represent. —Edward Leffingwell



Paul Waldman: *Degas' Flame*, 2002, bronze, feathers, flame machine, 27 inches tall; at Lennon, Weinberg.