

# frieze

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## Daniel Sinsel

### Sadie Coles HQ

The boy with the burnished skin, closely cropped hair and seductive inky eyes in Daniel Sinsel's *Untitled (Boy with Pearls)* (2005) could have been a Pacific islander. Set against a burnt earth orange background, his portrait somehow spoke with the same tone of brooding exploitation, eroticism and exoticism as Paul Gauguin's paintings from his Tahitian sojourn cum sexual odyssey, but translated into an image of deliciously dubious, hypnotic and paradisiacal homoeroticism. The young man's serene, open-mouthed expression – as if he were a displaced choirboy mid-canticle – could have been a delighted gasp or a lazy offer of tropical fellatio. And we could have imagined that the pearl necklace was his skin-diver's booty or an indulgent gift from a provocatively resourceful admirer with a wicked appreciation of globular porn slang.

The function of the gift seemed embedded in Sinsel's 13 paintings and objects in this debut solo show, not least because arabesques of ribbon abounded in his images. Tumbling and tangling in pink through baked dough loops (*Untitled (Pretzel)*, 2004), garlanding the head of the naked young man with the flayed back like the green tendrils of a climbing plant (*Untitled (Torture)*, 2005), or claiming a painting entirely to itself (*Samba Klementine*, 2004), ribbon attends Sinsel's works with the suggestion that their narrative kernel is inseparable from the exquisite lustre of their presentation.

The saucer-sized painting *Untitled (Rosehips)* (2004) could almost be a miniature for a lover's locket. At the centre of the disc of linen is the disembodied head of another young man whose image was purloined, as was the case with the other portraits in the show, from a vintage gay porn magazine. Porn-derived artworks often seem like a woefully bankrupt applied content solution to a programmatic template – whether in Thomas Ruff's blurred photographs or Fiona Banner's handwritten skin-flick text works. But Sinsel is not looking to import any off-the-peg prurience into his art – although some of his earlier work not in this exhibition, such as *Untitled (Hovering Penises)* (2001), certainly bordered on

the bawdy. Instead he harvested the images of the young men in *Untitled (Rosehips)*, *Untitled (Boy with Pearls)* and other works for their electric gazes, atoning their awkward attempts at provocation with a coterie of connoisseurship alongside nuts and knives, horn, gems and rare woods. In the former cameo images two gorgeous rosehips and a virgin hazelnut mast were painted to appear like they were floating around the nameless man's pallid face, perhaps deployed in an act of sympathetic magic that might cast a hedgerow spell over the painting's owner.

The most successful of Sinsel's painted object works in this show shared with *Untitled (Rosehips)* and *Untitled (Boy with Pearls)* the arcane quality of esotericism combined with fecund perversion by deploying inanimate natural materials as if attempting to produce a three-dimensional visual potion or a fertility trophy. *Untitled (Edelweiss)* (2004) and *Untitled (Gentian)* (2005) – each work takes its title from a jewel-like alpine-needy flower – were both mounted at painting height on the walls of the gallery. *Untitled (Edelweiss)* comprised an eggshell painted baize-green and blotting-paper-pink as well as another plump hazelnut symbol. Sprouting from the top of the egg were two tiny coral-like, pristine white antlers crowned with points of diamond and yellow sapphires, while below a short cluster of salt-and-pepper horsehairs begged to be gently caressed or plaited. *Untitled (Gentian)* took form around a cube made of yew – Druids' wood of choice for their wands – painted with an octagonal design. From a recess on the top protruded a wedge of yellow-stained boxwood and a lump of the delicately pale green crystalline chrysoprase. *Untitled (Egg with Spiked Face)* (2004) was an immaculate curse. An egg hung from a gold chain attached to a carved and diamond embellished section of laburnum – a fittingly poisonous tree. Painted on the shell was the head of another porn protagonist, this time wrecked and bleeding from several skewers to his smirking face.

Unlike Dario Robleto, who also uses pointedly relic-like materials in his constructions, the cruel magic of Sinsel's work is less an effect of the sedimentation of history or of collective memory than a microclimate of an intrapersonal and aesthetic intimacy. His works are small but potent – handfuls that stimulate and are fuelled by distilled indulgence, both sexual and decorous.

**Max Andrews**