

EDWARD LIGHTNER

May 27 - June 24, 2006 at [L2kontemporary](#), Downtown

by Margarita Nieto

In the catalogue essay for "Pay Your Respects to the Vultures," Edward Lightner's exhibition of twelve star-shaped paintings, poet and catalogue essayist Lisa Radon tells us that the show's title is the "first half of a line from a Coil song ("Amethyst Deceivers".) The line continues: "Pay your respects to the vultures, for they are your future." The tone of doom is quite direct with the essayist, but left unsaid by the artist. Yet what Lightner has effectively accomplished in this show is a revelation of that future.



"Dakota Redwing," 2005, acrylic/paper/lettering on foam board and wood, 24 1/2 x 26 x 4 1/2".

These star-shaped paintings, these "super stars," are charged with the significations that Lightner draws from two sources: porn stars and nuclear explosions. The titles themselves sound like porn screen names--"Romeo Castle," "Matt Sizemore," "Cameron Fox," "Jeff Stryker," "Ken Ryker," "Nick Savage," and "Dakota Redwing," who with "Priscilla Plumbbob," is the other female. In Lightner's vision, these deadly stars form a constellation fraught with the impending disasters of our time.



"Jeff Stryker," 2005, acrylic/paper/lettering on foam board and wood, 39 x 41 x 5 1/2".

Inspired by Michael Light's 2003 book, "100 Suns," featuring images of one hundred photographs of nuclear explosions drawn from the Los Alamos Archives, these works embody the dazzling beauty of those "100 Suns." The phrase is a reference that Manhattan Project head J. Robert Oppenheimer quoted from the ancient Vedic text, the "*Bhagavad Gita*," to describe the first nuclear explosions in New Mexico: "If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst forth. . . That would be like the splendor of the Mighty one. . . I am become death, the destroyer of the worlds." Words and images of a glorious horror, which Light is quoted as saying were ". . . so loaded (that) in a sense, they're pornographic," an on-the-mark statement, since the explosions themselves bore names that turn out to sound like porn star names: "Dakota Redwing" was in fact the name of one such nuclear explosion.



"Matt Sizemore," 2005, acrylic/paper/lettering on foam board and wood, 24 1/2 x 26 x 4 1/2".

These references to the "sexy" power of military

force and the brilliant apocalyptic vision engendered by these explosions serve as the groundwork that Lightner explores. Cropping and enlarging the source image and removing color graduations, he draws a super glossy sheen as Radon states, from the punk zine culture and the color separations of Warhol's silkscreens. And on the edges of each star he inscribes a biblical quotation taken from "The Book of Revelations (The Apocalypse According to St. John)." So, the golden yellow and white-bright "Priscilla Plumbbob" carries this warning: "Men will desire to die, and death will flee from them." "Ken Ryker," reddish, pink and gold, with a surface of curvilinear forms and lines, reminds us: "The fifth angel sounded: to him was given the key to the bottomless pit." "Jeff Stryker," whose dark blue and pale blue surface is covered with delicate curvilinear lines, bears this double-edged warning: "Take it and eat it up; and it shall make your belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey." We are invited to ponder whether those are phallic images or simply abstract curvilinear forms on the surface of these paintings.



"Priscilla Plumbbob," 2005, acrylic/paper/lettering on foam board and wood, 24 1/2 x 26 x 4 1/2".

This visual and verbal interplay, drawing from and conflating the venerated and ancient Order of Things (Vedic and Christian texts) and the hip world (Coil), dominate our society, the artist seems to say, and serve as the constant in Lightner's work. No simple irony here. Rather a deep-seated awareness of the dangerous games we face: nuclear weapons run amok (Iran, North Korea, India and our alliance with her), epidemics (AIDS and its rampant uncontrolled course of destruction, of which Lightner, who is HIV positive, is only too aware), global warming, genocide, and unbridled powers waging senseless wars. Like his constellation of portentous stars with their contradictory messages of decadent beauty and annihilation: you are drawn to look, but it's a weight to bear. Lightner's is an apocalyptic vision of falling stars which reminds us that we are indeed "paying our respect to the vultures which are our future."

