

HELEN SADLER by Cliff Eyland

Helen Sadler is a Canadian painter who lives in New York. Her small panel paintings of ecstatic girls at rock concerts are based on photographs the artist takes directly from a television screen as a rock concert video plays. Sadler's paintings are dense, opalescent television stills.

Television is made and presented fast, but these paintings are made slowly and meant to be viewed slowly.

The titles refer to the rock stars that the girls are swooning over: Elvis, Beatles, Ziggy (David Bowie). These paintings are not only documentation. As Janet Koplos stated in her Art in America review recently [No.6, June 1998, p.110]: "The paintings communicate such a sense of inwardness that one thinks of Bernini's St. Theresa in her religious/sexual ecstasy."

Sadler's subject is the adolescent female experience of the rock concert - a central ritual of our society of spectacle - and she takes her subject very seriously. As Flash Art's Martha Schwendener put it: "An extension of her earlier paintings, which zeroed in on women's faces during orgasm (culled from porn images), Sadler's new works concentrate on pubescent and pre-pubescent girls rather than women." [Flash Art, Vol. XXXI No. 200 May-June 1998, pp.99-100]

Sadler's focus on canonical rock stars of yesteryear such as Bowie and the Beatles lends this work a sense of lost youth and innocent infatuation, an ecstasy that can only be understood later in life. The fact that Sadler depicts people of her generation or older not as mature adults but as besotted girls is significant. As the adult contemplates the work, reflection on the formative influences of one's own youthful obsessions is inevitable. (Sadler's Beatles fans, for example, are now in their 40s - do they now see Sadler's works in terms of

their own teenage infatuations?)

Sadler learned her tempera on wood painting technique from the Canadian realist painter Tom Forrestall, whose own egg tempera works resemble Andrew Wyeth's dry brush paintings, except that he often paints on unusually-shaped supports. Forrestall did not teach at any of the art schools that Sadler attended, rather Sadler is an old art school friend of one of Forrestall's daughters, Renee. They met at Mount Allison and they both moved on to study at the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design in the 1980s. Mount Allison still has a reputation as a champion of traditional artistic techniques like egg tempera painting, even though nobody on faculty currently works in egg tempera.

Sadler was born and raised in Ottawa, but this is Sadler's first exhibition in Canada since graduating from art school in 1985 (after graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Art in Nova Scotia in 1985, Sadler went on to receive an MA in art history in 1990 from Carleton University in Ottawa.)