

## New Exhibition at the Crocker Art Museum Surveys the Art of Gottfried Helnwein

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Gottfried Helnwein, *The Murmur of the Innocents 3*, 2009. Mixed media (oil and acrylic) on canvas, 86 3/8 x 129 1/4 in. Private collection.

**SACRAMENTO, CA.-** [The Crocker Art Museum](#) presents a survey of the work of artist Gottfried Helnwein in the new exhibition “Gottfried Helnwein: Inferno of the Innocents,” on view from January 29 through April 24, 2011. Organized by the Crocker, the exhibition features more than 40 major paintings and photographs. Highlights include his iconic portraits of performer Marilyn Manson, works from his major recurring theme, “The Child,” and his most recent series, “Disasters of War.” “Inferno of the Innocents” is the first museum exhibition to examine Helnwein—who has been based in Los Angeles part-time for nearly 10 years—as a California artist.

Since he began his career in Vienna in the late 1960s, Helnwein has been known for his radical use of the portrait and self-portrait. His photography, paintings, and monumental installations address themes of inhumanity, violence, and the importance of personal expression with stark and probing psychological intensity. Helnwein’s focus on the innocence of childhood idyll and the betrayal of that innocence is exemplified in provocatively themed paintings whose forceful imagery is rooted in the artist’s upbringing in post-World War II Austria. His was a somber childhood overshadowed by a repressed national memory, in which hope was gleaned from American culture, as represented by Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.

Lial A. Jones, Mort and Marcy Friedman Director of the Museum, states “This exhibition will upset some, but it will also challenge and inspire others. Artists respond to the world around them. Sometimes that response is beautiful, sometimes difficult. I believe that museums have a

responsibility to exhibit works that are important and relevant. This show, like others in our past and future, does this.”

As part of an emerging Austrian generation vigorously questioning the nation’s role in WWII, Helnwein developed a heightened sense of the need for truth and tolerance. In school, he discovered a persuasive form of argument in visual art. According to the artist, “you can change something with aesthetics, you can get things moving in a very subtle way, you can get even the powerful and strong to slide and totter, anything actually if you know the weak points and tap at them ever so gently by aesthetic means.”

“The contradictions between the human potential for beauty, enlightenment, tremendous accomplishment, and sordid ugliness has been the ongoing topic of Helnwein’s art,” said Diana L. Daniels, associate curator at the Crocker Art Museum. “His is a voice of tolerance, empathy, and personal freedom, and his paintings make concrete for us the role that values, ethics, and faith in humanity play in fostering human happiness.”

“Gottfried Helnwein: Inferno of the Innocents” draws particular attention to the influence of Los Angeles—Helnwein’s current home—on the artist’s practice. Helnwein’s artistic voice is distinguished by the purposeful channeling of the power of cinema, as he brings the narrative style and grand scale of the silver screen to his art. Helnwein’s connection to California is also evident in works such as the panoramic mixed-media painting “American Landscape I (Death Valley),” which will be on view as part of the exhibition.