



PERROS FRAGMENTADOS

JUAN PERDIGUERO

Residency: July 10 - August 26, 2006
Exhibition: September 8 - October 14



THE PURE BEASTS

"When I think about the sound that resonates within the space of these drawings I can hear the sharp, dry, short and deaf barking of these strange canine representations. They entertain a surreal existential contradiction that I feel is so much part of the Spanish way of understanding life and art." – Juan Perdiguero

"By no other species except man will the animal's look be recognized as familiar. Other animals are held by the look. Man becomes aware of himself returning the look." – John Berger

Juan Perdiguero talks about his visits to the Prado as a child, and his first meeting with Goya's *Saturn Devouring One of His Children*, one of Francisco de Goya y Lucientes' (1746-1828) infamous "black paintings." He describes this meeting as a confrontation – both uplifting and intimidating – that has, no doubt, resurfaced in the simultaneous sensuality and brutality of the greyhounds.

I wonder if on the same, or subsequent visits, he hadn't seen Goya's *A Dog* (1820-23), a much bleaker and in many ways, more frightening "black" picture. Unlike the manifest violence of *Saturn*, *A Dog* resonates, cuts, closer to the bone. The bottom of the canvas, a deep, dirt brown mire, swells up, appearing to engulf the solitary head of a black hound who is sinking up to

his neck. His oval eyes are turned upward, sad but resigned, gazing into a ghostly void that is neither landscape nor air. Rather, *A Dog* is surrounded by what seems a poisonous, musty death-haze, a picture that Robert Rosenblum writes, "must have meant a comparable extinction of any semblance of human reason and control." It was the end of an era in Spain, but the beginning of an age for all of Europe that Goya's bleak painting portends: one of alienation, darkness and existential chaos.

Perros Fragmentados is an after-effect of post-modernism: protean man, plugged into a hermetic iVoid and insisting on tailored, personal

experience. The greyhounds leap and lunge and pant and *appear* to be in conversation – their bodies positioned to relate, to narrate, but the voice is hoarse and the story truncated – each hound estranged from the other, enacting a solitary drama.

On the cusp of the millennium, they emerge, severed in half, from whiteness, not blackness or haze. Their foreshortened bodies composed in such a way that they develop before our eyes, animated even in their stillness.

Rendered with etching ink on photographic paper, the dogs have a luminosity that is unsettling. They are paper thin but soulful, sharing their long faces with the portraits of El Greco. Unlike Goya's dog, the greyhounds are not being engulfed and

they are not desperate. These dogs have vitality, a boldness that speaks of life and grit, and they are surrounded: each by each other, the expressive sensuality of their anatomy the picture of pure beautiful, torturous longing.

This is an opposite depiction to Goya's, but perhaps equally bleak. True, Perdiguero's hounds are alienated, but they are not the last wretched creature on earth. Rather the greyhounds, sleek and self-possessed, have regained control, however heedless of their self-imposed isolation. Wrapped in a cold solitude, their sharp, dry, short barking echoes, their plain dog-stare rattles.

Shannon Stratton
Director of Programming

Detail of *Perro Sombra*, 2006, 50 x 84 in

