

# Art in America

March 2001

## REVIEW OF EXHIBITIONS

### NEW YORK

#### Kim Dingle at Sperone Westwater

"Never in School," Kim Dingle's latest plunge into irascible little girlhood, is a series of small oil-on-vellum paintings in which elementary schoolers clad in pinafores and Mary Janes once again seem to have gone slightly over the edge. They roughhouse, pummel each other, vomit, moon the viewer, misspell dirty words on the blackboard, tussle with seething animals, clamber up fences and overturn chairs.

The works, executed in blurry beiges, sepias and browns on translucent vellum, nod in the direction of the old masters. Warm hues, combined with schoolroom settings and old-fashioned dress, give the sense of children's book illustrations à la Norman Rockwell. However, this warm and cuddly look belies the paintings' actual content, which features not only mayhem but even a twinge of pedophilia-luscious, juicy little thighs peeking out beneath bulging underpants. In one schoolyard scene, a little girl lifts her skirt while another, holding a toddler by the hand, seems to point out her friend's private parts. In another, a girl appears to wrestle with a rabid, rottweilerlike dog with an erection. However, the specifics are less than clear; Dingle's deft, swift strokes create a smeary sense of motion, in a technique that also brings to mind children's fingerpainting.

Often tagged as the quintessential "bad girl" artist, Dingle has spent the last 10 years exploring the relatively uncharted territory of the juvenile female id. An able craftsperson, she seems each time to want to deploy a slightly different approach. At her last Sperone

Westwater outing two years ago, she created papier-mache dolls that literally burst through Sheetrock walls in female rage; these were accompanied by paintings restaging historical scenes such as Iwo Jima, but populated with little female hell-raisers.

In this comparatively modest gathering displayed at the gallery's 121 Greene Street annex, the starring characters were Fatty, a tousled redhead, and Fudge, an African-American—two Shirley Temple look-alikes who have appeared elsewhere in the Dingle opus. Once again, they flail away, accompanied by madcap play-

mates, as well as some dogs and a bunch of very scary roosters. This West Coast-based artist's tomboy-tot aggression can be written off as feminist venting or as a deliberate attempt to shock. Yet the hair-pulling fistfights and the many episodes taking place outside adult supervision, while exaggerated satires, also have the specificity of lived memories. Beyond all that, the unprocessed rage captured in these works points to something larger—to society's own destructive, erotic energies that are always simmering just below the surface.

—Carey Love/ace

Kim Dingle: *Never in School (Blackboard S.H.E.T.)*, 2000, oil on vellum, 24 by 19 inches; at Sperone Westwater.

