

Time Out New York

April 11-18 2002

Daniel Hesidence

Feature Inc., through Apr 20
(see Chelsea).

In Feature's tiny mezzanine space, Daniel Hesidence has packed in an array of small works from *The Whole*, an ambitious, ongoing project in which his paintings depict a transformation of our world into an alternate universe where all orifices seem vaginal, and figures often seem beyond any clear definition of gender.

The change is effected through violence: In order to create his otherworldly visions, Hesidence apparently must first attack the world as it actually exists. A number of portraits from early in the project, for example, involve a certain lashing out against fashionable-looking young women and men. Some figures' faces appear to be melting away, with runs of paint resembling scar tissue; elsewhere, the images possess the sort of lurid allure associated with the French Revolution as severed heads grimace as if still alive. In a few paintings that hang near the gallery ceiling, Hesidence has

gouged at the canvases, slashing away the eyes of one figure, the mouth of another. Such depictions are distressing, yet the violence is, it turns out, directed at mainstream culture's constructions of



Daniel Hesidence, *V redd-00 (#12)*, 2000.

beauty and sexuality, rather than at the people themselves.

That becomes clear in *The Whole's* more recent work, in which skin begins to resemble entire landscapes (most of the portraits date from around 1998). A series of blissful, runny rainbows on a blue background, for example, span from one vulvalike creation to another. Some areas of canvas are affixed with paper collages that present sexually ambiguous bodies, conjuring a sort of organic abstraction.

Hesidence's voyage through violence and innovative notions of beauty takes the fantasies and personal fictions of such painters as John Currin and Karen Kilimnik down a much darker road. (In fact, they have some of the psychosexual figuration and intensity of Antonin Artaud's famous drawings.) His project is all the more compelling because it will never be finished: The paintings will continue to create new relationships to each other as more are added, meaning that *The Whole* can never be seen or understood in its entirety.—Robert Mahoney