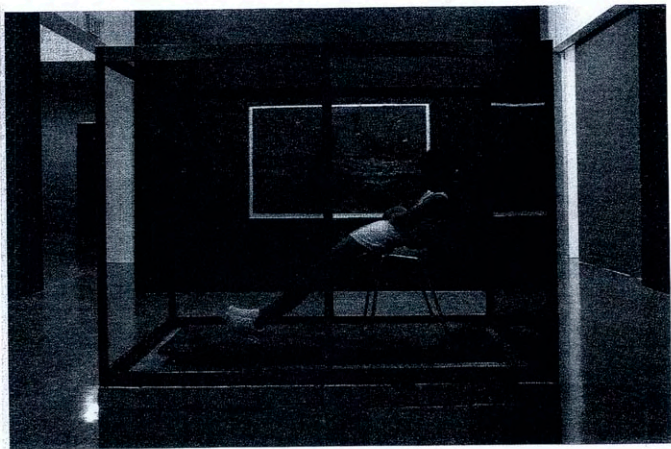


Falconer, Morgan, *Andro Wekua: Blue Mirror*, Art Review, Issue 22, May 2008

## ANDRO WEKUA: BLUE MIRROR

GLADSTONE GALLERY, NEW YORK  
1 MARCH - 29 MARCH

Peter Shaffer didn't really know whether to believe the violent tale of blinded horses that seeded his 1973 play *Equus*; he did, no doubt, believe in all the Ancient Greek finery that he dolled the story up with: notions of eternal recurrences, of gods and monsters rearing up in new guises, were compellingly current. More than 30 years on, it's hard to know how much to believe of Zürich-based artist Andro Wekua's similar work of re-enchancement. I can only say that, at Gladstone's show, it's hypnotically convincing: in one collage, a lobster-red nude reclines in a shady landscape below the silhouette of a face which hangs in the sky; elsewhere are two cubic vases that look like they might have been ripped from the earth: one is clean and white but warped, the other deluged with torrents of brown glaze; and in a tender minimonument, *Box* (all works 2008), the face of a thin figure emerges from the glossy white casements of a plinth which recedes at the rear to reveal the figure's fleshy back.

Of course, every historical moment has its favourite version of the past, and although Wekua's evocation of wrecked civilisation is at times very fresh and genuinely awful – quaking, shattering – the past he imagines isn't unfamiliar. It's one tinctured by the fall of Modernism and the Soviet Union, and it's one evoked here by voguish devices, like the darkly painted walls on which he has hung his pictures. Here early Modernism seems like yesterday: *Combing in My Face* comprises the framework of a cubist head that has been cancelled by a black cascade of hair. *Sunset by the Wall* also

seems like one from the crypt, though here Wekua fudges his references, and we are left wondering whether the scene of a black sun setting over crashing waves is surreal figuration of the Balthis school or perhaps a later, Warholian musing on the emotional deadness of images – the waves derive from a badly enlarged photograph, after all.

Indeed, Wekua sports a loud disregard for fine finish in all his collages, and most seem distressed in one way or other. It's in keeping with the mood of retrospection, and it can be darily suggestive, though more often it's irritating: firstly, because it doesn't always work, and the failures just look like freaks of the thrift store variety; secondly, because it's dishonest: Wekua is no naïf. Tellingly, however, he escapes all these difficulties in his magnificent film of haunting-by-history, *By the Window* (2008). In it, an androgynous lipsticked doll sits with his/her feet up on a table while coloured lights illuminate different sides of the room, and images of waves and shining hands and temples and glowing faces appear in the window at the rear. This is a vision of hell as history, experienced alone and in constant rerun. I can only hope I go to heaven. *Morgan Falconer*

*Blue Mirror*, 2008 (installation view). Photo: David Segal  
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