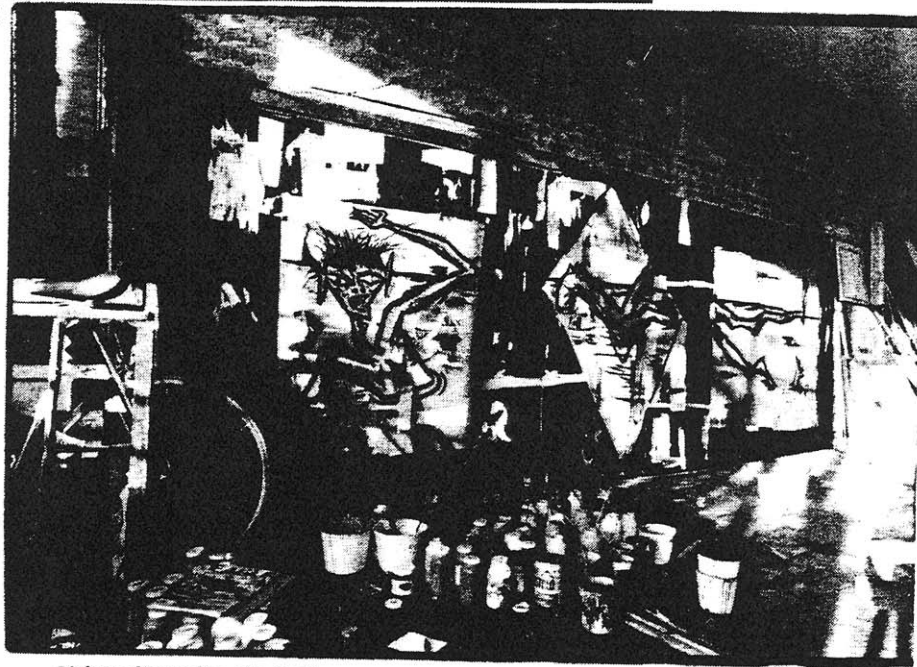


PROL GETS HUMAN

BY AMY SLAYTON



MARRON S.

Rick Prol's studio: *The Pool*

RICK PROL B-SIDE GALLERY

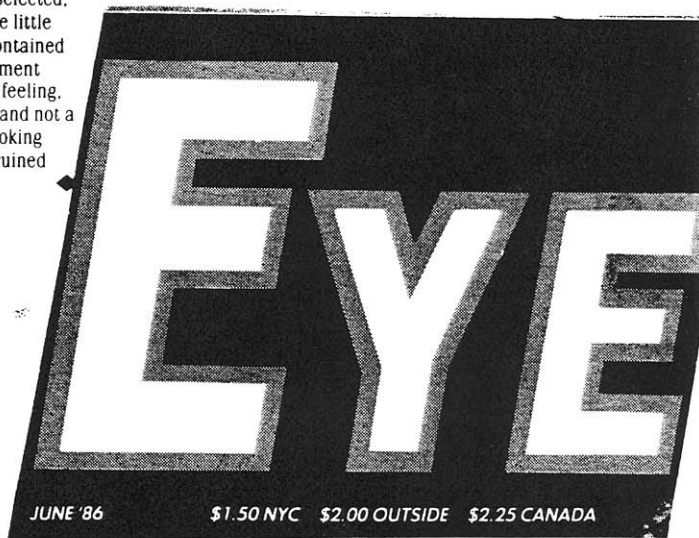
WITHOUT DOUBTING RICK Prol's skill and self-awareness as a painter, I have wondered why we should look at more than one of his paintings. They've been so highly stylized that they all achieve the same effect—provoking a sort of short-lived, low-level revulsion and defensiveness. The net result was like walking down a city street trying to shut out the bag people after you've tripped over them. But his new show goes beyond eliciting self-protective callousness. With these paintings Prol makes a quantum leap.

His subject matter hasn't changed: contorted figures still stare numbly out of desolate urban settings, with railroad tracks and the Brooklyn Bridge crumbling in the nuclear sunset. But Prol has now pushed his technique to a point where, in the best traditions of expressionist art, the paint bears the message, and the message sinks in. He maintains the layered self-parody through allegorical references to everything from the Three Graces to the most hackneyed subjects of American illustrational painting,

but avoids the visual flatness and snide resolution that used to make his parody—and any other content—difficult to absorb.

His works draw us in partly through a controlled, responsive line that Prol can accumulate into volumes or shadows, or use to pick out detail. *Self-Portrait at 29* displays this line in delineating a twisted, desiccated dog (with extra, human head)—its flesh and bones richly, if hideously modelled—that weaves toward us in a scene strewn with garbage. Prol also animates *Accident at Sea*, a scene of a whale attacking a ship, with sharp, abrupt strokes, striking against bright background colors. And it is not just the drawn line that Prol understands: *The Pool* features a huge figure sprawling across three large canvases done in wide brushstrokes, showing that Prol knows brush-size matters. This is a tenet of good painting that is lost (or never learned) in much hasty neo-expressionist output.

Prol surrounds most of his scenes with a wide black border, visually connected to the interior dramas with bits of collaged paper (from his own or found images) that match his paint in color saturation and in lumpy surface. Along with the detailed drawing recently lavished on his characters, it is this border that finally lets us commune with Prol's sad, damaged world instead of turning away. More than the crummy scrap-wood frames or old buckets that Prol attaches to his paintings, the border acknowledges the scenes as partial, selected, personal views. The little grain of humility contained in that acknowledgment shows me Prol is a feeling, responsive person and not a cold doom-sayer looking down on a distant ruined race.



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