

## A cool jolt from a familiar image

It's hard to imagine an image of Cary Grant causing much of a stir in this day and age. After so many stills from so many movies

and a cottage industry of publicity photos and paparazzi shots, you'd think there'd be nothing left to show of the star. But Kurt Kauper's three full-length portraits at Acme Gallery prove otherwise.

It's startling to step through the door and see a larger-than-life-size rendition of the debonair legend striding toward you, buck naked; a welcoming smile on his face and his hand extended as if to shake yours.

Turn right, and there he is again, wearing only a wristwatch, his right hand resting on a jauntily pitched hip and his left elbow leaning on the mantel of a fireplace in which a big log burns brightly, its flames rising to the middle of his muscular thighs.

Spin around and see Grant perched on a divan in a beach house. Sitting cross-legged, with all his fingertips touching one another, he would look like a trim and tanned version of the Buddha if his smile were more beatific and less strained.

Kauper's extraordinarily detailed paintings invert common dreams, in which you find yourself going through the day without your clothing. So convincing is his painterly illusionism that you feel like the only person at a nudist colony — out of place, prudish and nosy. Only worse, because you're intruding into a classy actor's private world.

After the initial jolt of the paintings wears off, their weirdness intensifies. The fun of seeing every inch of Grant's taut physique, on both sides of his goofy tan lines, gives way to a psychological kick that includes but is not limited to sexual attraction.

There's not a lot of eroticism simmering in Kauper's uncanny images. Their style is cool and precise. The atmosphere has more in common with a doctor's appointment than a hot date. And ordinary voyeurism doesn't take you very far into these deliciously twisted pictures, which require a viewer's active participation but never let you think that you're in control.

The slippery nature of masculine identity is one of Kauper's favorite themes, particularly the ways power and authority manifest themselves in human bodies and shape our perceptions of one another.

In a side gallery, two portraits of hockey players, dressed in their team uniforms, zero in on other aspects of role-playing and performance.

Based on 1970s collector's cards, Kauper's athletes embody the awkwardness of adolescents, of unformed young men who are trying on attitudes and stances as if they were protective uniforms.

At once corny and compelling, Kauper's two new bodies of work push viewers just beyond the comfort zone, where deeply ambivalent emotions charge every gesture and detail with mystery and significance.

Acme Gallery, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., L.A., (323) 857-5942, through July 3. Closed Sundays and Mondays.