

**ARTnews**

“Reviews: Justine Kurland”

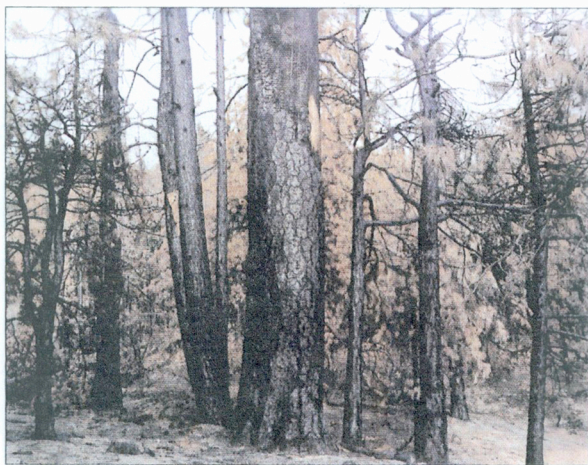
By Hilarie M. Sheets

November 2004; p.152

## Justine Kurland

Gorney Bravin + Lee

In her show “Songs of Experience,” Justine Kurland offered a world of enchantment—outside the bounds of time and convention. The setting was a forest, pic-



Justine Kurland, *The Burned Down Forest, Charred Skin*, 2004, C-print, 40" x 50" (unframed). Gorney Bravin + Lee.

tured in dramatic large-scale Cibachrome prints, her first landscapes without people.

These were syncopated with smaller black-and-white images introducing a cast of characters— young knights in full regalia, maidens brimming with anticipation, a pied piper, and even Jesus. The pictures, most interesting when seen as a group, were charged with playfulness, innocence, and sexuality, further

exploring the ideas conveyed in Kurland’s earlier series of teenage girls and utopian communities.

The best stand-alone images, though, were of a fire-ravaged forest in which the denuded tree trunks have an unreal-looking black sheen. In *The Burned Down Forest, Charred Skin* (2000), Kurland seems to pull the massive vertical trunks, glinting like mica, to the foreground of the picture, establishing the sense of a stage set. There is an air of anticipation in the hyperfocused image, as if giggling elves might suddenly emerge from hiding.

Kurland is on more familiar ground with people pictures. Two shots here faced off against each other: a pubescent boy outfitted as a Renaissance fencer ready to draw his sword, and a naked girl, arms at her sides, with an alert yet ambiguous expression on her face. Is she fearful or offering herself? Is he savior or aggressor? There was humor in these new works, from the overly chivalrous posturing of several knights in armor to the rock-star-hot Jesus standing in a shallow creek with two awestruck teenage girls gently lifting their white petticoats above the water.

In one image reminiscent of Kurland’s earlier commune pictures, seven naked, pregnant women are gathered lakeside around a campfire. Something’s clearly in the water. —Hilarie M. Sheets