



**DONIGAN
CUMMING**

LA SOMME

LE SOMMEIL

LE CAUCHEMAR

Catherine Bédard, excerpt from “Masquerade”

La somme, le sommeil, le cauchemar

The allusions to the paintings by Bruegel and Ensor are quite specific yet they do not leap to the eye. They are nevertheless really there, whether or not the beholder is able to recognize them. Their role is not to bring art history to the surface of Cumming's art, nor to lend a depth (or substance) that would compensate for the sprawl of bodies and the clusters of images. To the contrary, the originality and visual power of this diptych stem from the fact that the allusion is totally instrumentalized here, as are the *images* of human models - and not the individuals themselves, with whom they should not be confused. By this I mean that the artist does not respect the conventions of the painting that inspired him, nor does he reinforce its prestige by confirming - even in parody - its status as model. He is not *updating* past artworks. He neither analyses nor interprets them. From them he takes something like a superficial form, which guides but does not constrain him, a mixture of overall impression (like a vague visual memory) and of striking images, to which he has tied a recollection of his own characters. This work is the product of amalgamations and deformations, of enlargements and transpositions, of associations of ideas and images that all evoke dream-work. Cumming frees the human figure from all attachments, from gravity even, and he thereby seems to be freeing himself, as well, from painting and photography. He has devised a place governed by disproportion, solitude, and exaggerated immobility. And in this compact, overly dense place, an entire series of hierarchical relations - between the whole and the parts, between the individual and the crowd, between quality and quantity, between colour and black-and-white, between real dogs and stuffed dogs, between figure and ground, between major and minor registers, between beauty and ugliness, between elegance and obscenity - are called into question, indeed frankly disordered.