

Tema Celeste **September 1999**

Stefano Arienti **Studio Guenzani, Milan**

By Elena Di Raddo

Translation by Amanda Coulson

Fleshy, naked men, drawn on paper with fine strokes of color, seem to observe the viewer placidly from the walls of the gallery. Presented alone or in pairs, they are captured in both moments of idleness and activity - reading a book, going for a bike ride, or a walk - and moments of tranquility on the banks of a river, or in a Jacuzzi. The nudity and their poses, both relaxed and demonstrative, create a contrast with their appearance as serious middle-aged men. The figures in this exhibition, selected from thousands of photographs posted on personal gay and nudist Internet sites, are similar in the confidential and affectionate poses with which the protagonists present their own bodies, openly for public consumption on the Net. Stefano Arienti, a fanatical image collector, effects a subtle and ironic reading of the stereotypes proposed indiscriminately by the mass media. In these amateur photographs, after which the drawings are made, bodies are displayed with all their defects and so appear in direct contrast to the common fashion shots of male models on the covers of glamour magazines. Having appropriated the online photographs and rendered them visible in a different context, the artist is hoping to rescue these images and identities from the stereotypes into which they are destined to fall. However, in displaying the sexual identity of the characters ironically, this approach ends up by becoming a sort of stereotype itself: many of the images do not hide the homosexuality of the person portrayed, in their tendency to exhibit their very carnality and to remark upon their sexual identity. Arienti reinterprets these digital images with a light touch, absolutely noninvasively, with subtle strokes of pastel colored paint on tracing paper. The shapes of the bodies seem thus to emerge from a space that is simultaneously real yet indistinct, maybe the same concrete yet impalpable space as that of the Net, which is itself similar to the indiscriminate label of the stereotype.