

ART

Review

Steven Evans

Rupert Goldsworthy Gallery, through
Jun 20 (see Chelsea).

Steven Evans may be living in the '90s, but the past is ever present in his work. Lately, he's been focusing his attention on the Victorians, who, like us, lived through the close of a century. The Victorians have long been the subject of historical disagreement: Were they as sexually repressed as is popularly held or just as horny as the rest of us? For Evans, their ghosts haunt not only our construction of sexuality but the very language we use to express mourning.

Evans has painted the gallery a deep orange and solemnly marked one wall with three dense, black-on-black paintings of flowers. Although this combination of orange and black evokes Halloween (that self-consciously silly festival for chasing death away) the images are actually drawn from a Victorian catalog that specified the flowers appropriate for mourning the deaths of different loved ones (uncles, daughters, etc.). As a counterpoint, Evans includes a bearded mask in a vitrine facing the wall; its stern countenance suggests that there is no acceptable masculine model for grieving. Nearby, an empty sculpture pedestal stands shrouded in black—enigmatic and quietly riveting. On it, Evans has painted a nearly invisible lyric that enjoins the reader in archaic English not to sing on Sundays.

Along with the likes of Nayland Blake, Donald Moffet, John Lindell and Robert Gober, Evans first attracted notice in the early '90s—a time when gay mania swept the art world. The moment was right for identity politics: AIDS had made it a necessity. Yet fashions in art are usually short-lived, and as the political climate around sexuality and AIDS changed, so too did each of these artists. This show clearly demonstrates that Evans's work has been similarly reworked to be newly appropriate today—while still maintaining a link to the themes it began with a decade ago. —Bill Arning

