

Joshua **Murphy**



Text by JESS BARNETT

The Hanging



UB41. 2011
JOSHUA MURPHY

AT FIRST GLANCE, it might be easy to dismiss the work of digital artist Joshua Murphy as shock art, something designed to grab a casual viewer's attention and reel her in from there. After all, pieces such as *The Smoker* and *Against the Wall* include images of blood (in the former) and ghostly nudity (in the latter). And the color palette Murphy uses often seems straight from a horror movie set: blood red, black, gray, and white.

Perhaps the shock value of Murphy's pieces stems from his former career in advertising, one which he now calls "unfortunate," and during which he tried "to drink away the disgust I felt at night, just so I could get up and do it all over again." After all, it's an advertiser's job to capture attention – yet it's keeping it that's the real talent.

Murphy's images are jarring but also haunting, seeming to float like afterimages behind the eyelids. In *The Hanging*, a woman

with closed eyes floats against a contextless background. There is a noose around her neck, but a calm half-smile on her face.

Against the Wall features a woman with her back turned, presumably pressed against a crumbling wall. The woman is ephemeral, half in this reality and half in another, possibly one hidden behind the wall. The juxtaposition of sexuality and dissolution appears regularly in Murphy's work. As the artist explains, he enjoys "exploring those dark places and ideas we don't talk about at cocktail parties."

While his work occasionally veers dangerously close to obviousness or moral instruction, as in *The Smoker* (which could stand on its own as a PSA), it also explores less-defined themes, as seen in his *Illustration Series*, of which *Octothring* is a part. Ultimately, it's Murphy's talent, equally on display in these less graphic images, that capture the viewer's attention – and keeps it.

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The Smoker. 2011
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Against the Wall. 2011
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