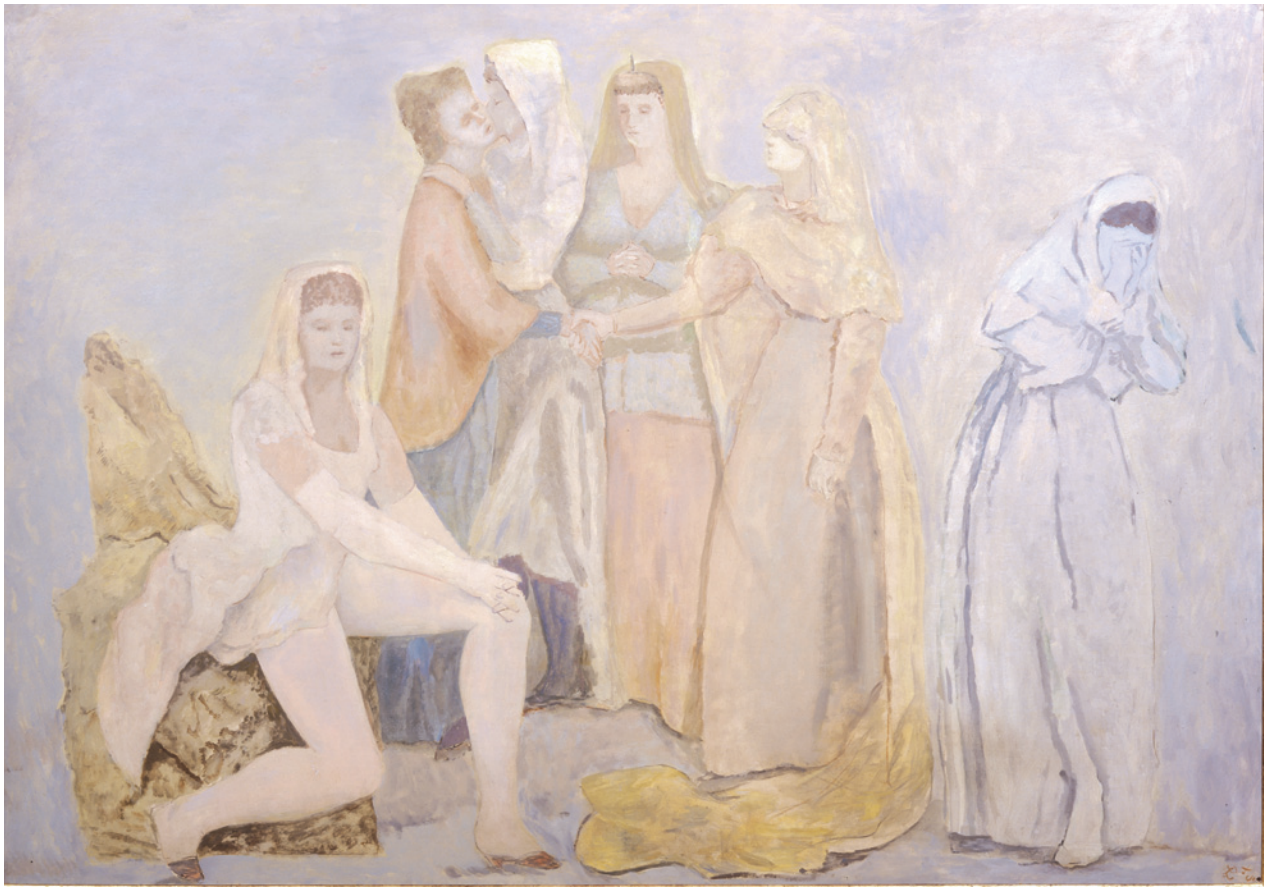
VOL. 4 NO. 1 SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2001 New York

GALLERY&STUDIO

The World of the Working Artist

Leonor Fini
Early Works



Leonor Fini "Les tragediennes" 1930-31 Oil on Board 45" x 64"

Salvador Dali
Originals and Graphics from The Dali Bible

September 7 thru October 7, 2001

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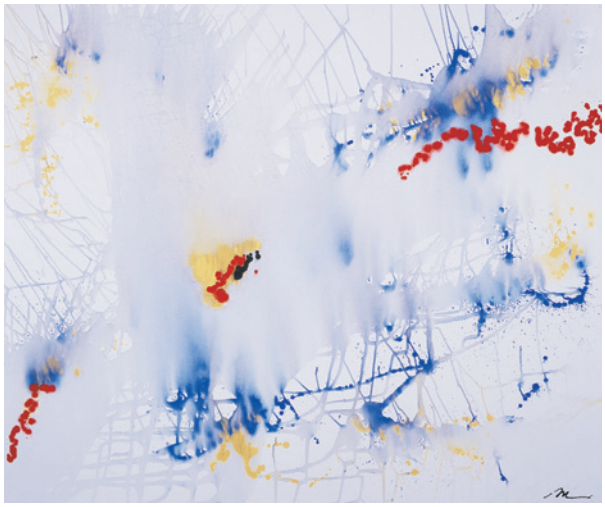

Untitled 2001, acrylic on canvas, 60" x 72"

Missy Lipsett

September 4-22, 2001 *recent paintings*

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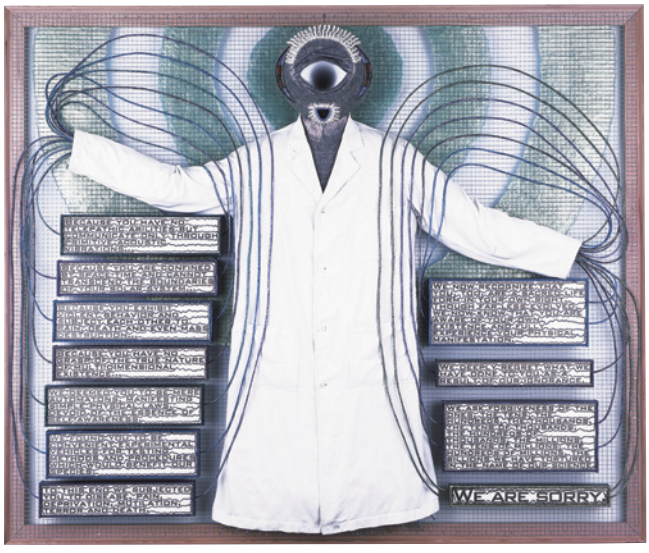

"We Are Sorry" (Didactic Series) 2001, Acrylic, Photographs, Mixed Media on Wire Mesh, 60" x 72" x 7"

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Loose Canon

We hope you're as pleased with our new look as we are.

As we begin our fourth year of publication, we feel it's time for an upgrade.

Better quality paper means that we can now reproduce works of art in full color throughout the magazine, as well as on our outside cover pages.

Our more compact format makes it easier to display G&S in galleries where counter space is limited, as well as in more hotels, museums, book stores, art supply stores, and other places frequented by those interested in keeping up with the art world.

This is all part of our ongoing effort to make G&S the best publication that it can be, and to continually expand our readership. We feel that we have something special to offer, and we want as many people as possible to know about it.

Initially, we were encouraged in the daunting task of starting a new art publication by noticing that so much of the art writing that we saw elsewhere was frankly terrible: jargon-filled, pretentious, and needlessly obscure.

Since art is one of the most exciting of human activities, it struck us as inexplicable that so much art criticism was so boring. Once, critics who were also poets and artists—people like Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, James Schuyler, Elaine de Kooning, and Fairfield Porter—wrote about art with clarity, wit, and enthusiasm.

So, we knew from the beginning that there was a precedent for the kind of writing that we wanted to present in G&S. We knew that art writing, in order to be intelligent, did not have to be dull. We've made it our business to put this belief into practice, and the response from so many of our readers has been gratifying (especially when they give us that extra vote of confidence by including completed subscription forms in their letters).

We're also determined never to succumb to the tendency of many other publications to cover only artists who are already well known or who fit into some currently trendy category. This strikes us as criminally narrow, not to mention shortsighted. Never before in the history of art has there been such exciting diversity, such delicious uncertainty... such a "loose canon," so to speak.

All of which confirms our conviction that there is a real need for a magazine such as G&S, presenting a more balanced view of visual culture; covering established artists, as well as artists who stand a good chance of being well known in the future.

In fact, for many artists who had not yet received the attention they deserved (at least, before we wrote about them and other publications, including The New York Times, followed our lead) we have often been the only forum in town.

We are proud of this fact, and we take the responsibility that goes with it very seriously.

Jeannie McCormack
Editor and Publisher

G&S Highlights

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EDITOR AND PUBLISHER **Jeannie McCormack**
MANAGING EDITOR **Ed McCormack**
SPECIAL EDITORIAL ADVISOR **Margot Palmer-Poroner**
DESIGN AND PRODUCTION **Karen Mullen**
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR **Juliet M. Ross**

Fini and Dali: Sacred and Profane Monsters Wedded in Spirit

In Neil Zukerman's definitive book on Leonor Fini, "La Vie Ideale," there is an extraordinary photograph from the 1950s of Fini and Salvador Dali posing with Yul Brynner at some elegant event in Paris. As dynamic a presence as Brynner is, with his gleaming bald pate and the regal manner that made him so perfectly cast as The King in "The King and I," the actor is so upstaged by the two Surrealist luminaries that he all but vanishes in the aura of their combined charisma.

With her Medusa mane of scalloped black ringlets, her feline features, her dangling earrings and black evening dress with flowing white collar and cuffs, Fini resembles a beautiful vampire costumed in parody of a fallen nun. Sporting a double breasted black velvet cloak, clutching in one talon his cane and what appears to be either a lily or a pair of white gloves, Dali looks, as usual, like The Phantom of the Opera. Seeing them together, we can only gawk at Fini and Dali—and muse upon what a perfect marriage of monsters they make!

Of course, Fini and Dali were never lovers; nor could they have been. Even if Dali had not been in thrall to his domineering Muse, Gala, and even if Fini gave up all her male and female lovers, these two willful geniuses would only have eaten each other alive with their enormous, carnivorous egos...

No, for all the aesthetic sympathies that make them the yin and yang of Surrealism, no mating of these two icons could have gone much beyond the cool social necessity of friendly rivals agreeing to a "photo op."

Still, Neil Zukerman has accomplished the next best thing: In his joint exhibition of early works by Leonor Fini and originals and graphics from "The Dali Bible," at CFM Gallery, 112 Greene Street, from September 7 through October 7, he gives us an aesthetic marriage of unsurpassed compatibility and beauty.

Inarguably, the centerpiece and jewel of the exhibition is a large, previously unseen oil on board by Fini, circa. 1930-31, entitled "Les tragediennes." This multi-figure composition, all of 45 inches high by 64 inches wide, is painted in a style somewhat reminiscent of Picasso's "Blue" and "Rose" periods. Fini employs a similarly subdued palette of pale, subtly harmonized hues in this composition, which compares most favorably to Picasso's 1905 masterpiece "Family of Saltimbanques."

However, although both paintings depict traveling troupes of performers, and both are comprised of six figures, Fini's independent spirit is already very much in evidence. While Picasso shows us a traditional family of acrobats, encompassing both sexes, including adults and children, Fini's neoclassical figure grouping is made up solely of women. And for all the formal austerity of its composition— its cool color harmonies and the reposeful quality of most of the fully clothed figures—sapphic undertones already make themselves felt in the fervent embrace of two of the women, hinting at something decidedly more erotic than the stagy consoling gesture one might glean from the title.

In contrast to the more domestic languor of Picasso's family, its members lingering listlessly in a barren landscape as though awaiting transport to their next performance and contemplating nothing more urgent than the meal they will consume after it, Fini's painting hints at complex relationships and emotional entanglements. These radiate out from the two embracing women, one of whom reaches out to another nearby figure as she accepts a kiss from her partner.

Set slightly apart from the group, yet another woman covers her face with both hands in a dramatic gesture of sorrow. While none of the modestly clothed women comports herself as lasciviously as other nude or seminude figures will in some of Fini's later paintings (when the classical cloak of ambiguity will no longer be necessary), the erotic glow of Fini's best work already burns through the theatrical trappings of this magnificent early painting.

Other eye-opening formative works by Fini make this show indispensible: "Zorniga" and "Eola," two major oils from the late fifties, each depicting a single female figure in the throes of some seemingly demonic metamorphosis; a large color lithograph of a ravishing face with lowered eyes; and an exquisite little wash drawing of a wan harlequin, among several other transcendent images in various mediums.

It is "Les tragediennes," however, that should make most abundantly clear that Leonor Fini, even before she emerged as one of our premier Surrealists, was well on her way to becoming one of the major artists of her century.

Salvador Dali's credentials in this regard are long established. Say what one will about the antics that have at times upstaged his greatness, he remains one of the master draftsman of this or any other century. And nowhere is this more evident than in the drawings and lithographs for "The Dali Bible."

Executed at the behest of the devout Catholic collector Giuseppe Albaretto, who reportedly hoped to save the artist's soul by commisioning him to illuminate the Holy Book, this audaciously named project demonstrates Dali's ability to combine the sacred with the profane as no other artist can.

Surely no other interpretor of a Biblical

Salvador Dali, "Asperges me Hyssopo et Mundabor," 1964 Mixed Media

subject would have dared to juxtapose two nude figures as explicit as those in the mixed media work entitled, "Asperges me Hyssopo et Mundabor," one a rear view of a sexually ambiguous being, the other a cherub with hands clasped in prayer and pubic hair visible above dangling genitals. Neither the halo over the taller figure's head nor the levitating cross to which this dubiously saintly being points a languid finger does much to diminish the picture's blatant sensuality!

Even when Dali treats Biblical subjects in a more traditional manner, he is never so reverent as to stifle the imaginative and technical freedom that makes his work extraordinary. In "And after the morsel Satan entered into him," he juxtaposes the looming foreground figure—boldly brushed, bloated and of excremental hue—against a rendering of The Last Supper in delicate red tones. Dali's version of "The Annunciation" sets the the Angel and the dove afloat above the figure of Mary, whose face is delineated in exquisite, expressive detail, while the other elements of the composition are evoked in sketchy lines and luminous colored washes. Then there is "Jeremiah's Prophecy Against King Joachim," where Dali shows his singular ability to bring a figurative image to the brink of abstraction, clearly articulating the silhouette of the prophet shaking his fist with righteous indignation in a gestural flourish that appears as though accomplished with one swift, bold stroke.

Never have the talents of these two great artists been paired so auspiciously as in this remarkable exhibition, which firmly establishes Leonor Fini and Salvador Dali as the uncontested First Couple of Surrealism.

—Lawrence Downes

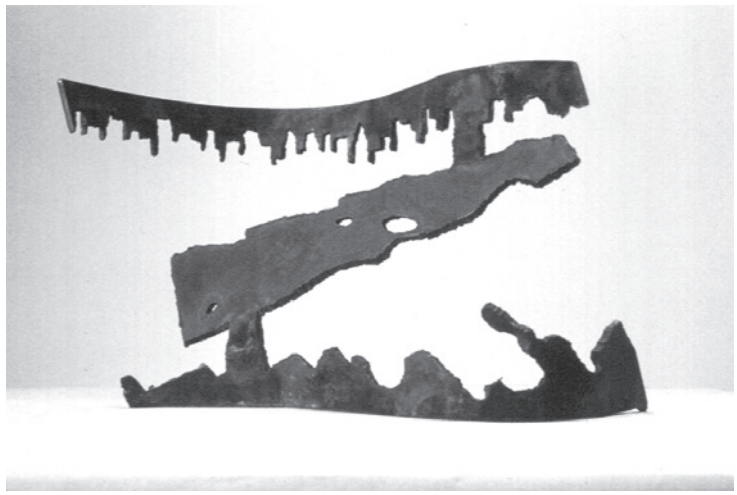
Dan Bergman's Half-Hidden Heavy Metal Metaphors

Dan Bergman is by no means your latest disposable art world wunderkind. He did not become a full-time sculptor until the age of fifty, and although he has been exhibiting regularly in group shows and winning prizes in juried shows since 1989, he took his own sweet time about having a solo exhibition. Thus Bergman brings a welcome depth of vision, as well as a healthy dose of mature wit and wisdom, to his first one-man show of steel sculpture, at Phoenix Gallery, 568 Broadway, from October 3 through 26. (The reception is Thursday, October 4, from 6 to 8 PM.)

It is unusual indeed to hear a sculptor—much less one whose work is largely abstract—refer to one of his pieces as a "picture." But that is what Bergman, a pleasantly unpretentious chap with a neatly trimmed white beard, did when we previewed the exhibition at his studio in Union City, New Jersey.

In his artist's statement, Bergman explains that he uses "shape, movement and color to evoke memories of real or imaginary places that have powerful associations for me—hidden crannies where as a child I could imagine being invisible; high places that were frightening but exhilarating; spaces full of strange objects that bewilder but intrigue me."

Some of Bergman's sculptures are also inspired by literary references, as seen in "The Old Man," its title drawn from a phrase that William Faulkner used in one of his stories to describe the sea. In this powerful steel sculpture, the cut-out figure of a rudimentary man in a horizontal position is suspended vertically between a shape with serrated edges that could suggest the snaggle-toothed grin of a shark and another form with slightly gentler contours that could resemble rolling waves. Such interpretations are subjective, however, since the overall thrust of the piece is abstract. Indeed, this is part of what makes Bergman's sculptures so engaging. Initially, they grab one with with their wonderfully articulated abstract shapes, which command space with a seemingly effortless, almost serpentine, grace. Then they slowly reveal their more pictorial elements, which are never so specific as not to leave plenty of room for the viewers' own imaginative collaboration.



"The Old Man," 2000

Along with the simplified cut-out of the reclining man, which can be seen in other sculptures as well, Bergman has other recurring images, such as rectangular forms containing negative spaces cut out of found, often rusted, I-beams. These suggest those "hidden crannies" and other safe places of childhood fantasy and memory that he referred to in his artist's statement. In the steel sculpture entitled "Children's Park," sinuous shapes suggesting dancing figures are seen atop a one such I-beam derived rectangle out of which Bergman has cut a kind of wiggly tunnel that looks like it would be fun to explore. However, in "Phototrope" and "Lord Nightingale," the elongated rectangular space becomes a kind of cage, its austere geometry enclosing more organically flowing forms suggesting entrapped human figures.

Even more enigmatic is "Horn of Plenty," a smaller steel piece with squared-off contours suggesting the bare outline of a briefcase (complete with a carrying handle at the top), containing more convoluted linear shapes that extend beyond its boundaries like ominous trails of smoke.

Of course, this, too, is a highly subjective take on an essentially abstract piece. But Dan Bergman obviously encourages this sort of participation on the part of the viewer, and that, along with the casual grace and beauty of their forms, makes his sculptures all the more fascinating.

—Ed McCormack

Myron R. Heise, "Carla White with Band," oil. See "Street Painters" in New York Notebook (centerfold).

The Baroque Contemporary "Maximalism" of Miriam Wills

Hoboken, a seven minute ride from Greenwich Village on the PATH train, has long been a haven for artists of all kinds. A booming rock music scene in the local bars and galloping gentrification have turned the mile-square Jersey burg where Frank Sinatra was born into something of theme park for yuppies in recent years. Many artists, however, are still hanging in there, as evidenced by the Hoboken Artists Studio Tour, which takes place on Sunday, October 14, from 12 to 6 PM.

Miriam Wills, whose studio address is 89 Park Avenue, is well worth the trip. Wills, a frequent exhibitor in New York City galleries, is one of the few contemporary artists whose style can be termed baroque—at least with a lowercase "b." Whether working abstractly or figuratively—and Wills moves easily between the two modes—Miriam Wills is a Maximalist, filling every inch of her canvases with energy, color, and movement. At times, her compositions are so compressed that her canvases appear on the verge of exploding and sending the stretcher bars flying in four directions!

Wills' mixed media painting on canvas, "Mardi Gras," for example, is filled with swirling semi-circular abstract shapes that create a veritable vortex at the center of the composition. Areas of vibrant red, yellow, and blue hues, reinforced by linear elements that glow like dancing neon, radiate outward from this central force field to strain against the edges of the composition, creating powerful pictorial tensions.

In "The Kiss," a work in acrylic and collage on canvas, we see how Wills may have influenced younger, more highly hyped neophytes like Mary Boone's newest protege Inka Essenhigh, who employ anatomically suggestive yet non-specific shapes to create compositions that hover ambiguously between the abstract and the figurative.

Although Wills' forms here do not so much hint at human anatomy, their contours are sensually rounded and the visceral reds that she employs in concert with slightly softer ochre and blue hues generate a good deal of heat. Here, too, Wills' color areas are relatively hard-edged, yet more in the intricate and eventful manner of sixties psychedelic art than of austere geometric painting.

The same qualities that animate Wills' abstract paintings are present in her more representational work, as seen in her "Carousel" series. In these mixed media paintings beautiful white merry-go-round horses take on the almost demonic quality of mythic, smoke-snorting steeds. Their manes swirl like the curls of satyrs as they whirl amid the kaleidoscopic colors of the carousel, its poles, wheels, gears, and decorative patterns energizing every area of the composition, creating a dynamism akin to that of the Futurists, albeit with a somewhat more surreal spin, as well as an emotional component reminiscent of the Expressionists. These are dream-like evocations of a childhood experience filtered through a highly sophisticated aesthetic sensibility, conversant with several diverse art historical precedents and possessing a singular ability to make them coverage in a coherent contemporary manner.

Miriam Wills, "Carousel Horse #3," in the Hoboken Artists' Studio Tour, 89 Park Ave. Hoboken, New Jersey on October 14, and also by appointment (201 659-3437).

Miriam Wills apparently imposes no arbitrary limits on the range of expression that she allows herself, moving between the figurative and the abstract as the moment demands or simply merging the two in a personal synthesis that belongs to her alone. She is a consummately adventurous artist for whom discovery invariably takes precedence over a humdrum consistency, and the viewer is the ultimate beneficiary.

—Andre Bove

Nature and Aesthetics in the Art of Momoji Matsumoto

The Japanese naturalist and painter Momoji Matsumoto takes photographs and makes sketches as part of his preparatory process, and these preliminary works are complete and interesting expressions in themselves. The full effect of Matsumoto's sympathy for his animal subjects and his ability to evoke minute nuances of their natural environment, however, can only be fully appreciated in his paintings.

In "Cottontail and Crocus," one of the paintings in Matsumoto's recent solo show at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, early spring light encircles the entire form of a small rabbit like an aura or a halo, as it crouches alertly among delicate purple flowers. Although this painting is an oil, the artist also employs tempera, acrylic, or gouache, as the subject demands, in order to achieve the degree of detail that he needs to depict not only the many subtle qualities of light but also the different textures found in nature. Here, the tactile contrasts between the hairs in the animal's coat, the grass in which it crouches, and the bark of

Painting by Momoji Matsumoto

a nearby tree-trunk are each distinctly delineated.

While Matsumoto's use of microscopic, finely woven brushstrokes to build textural verisimilitude, as well as to activate and unify the entire surface of his compositions, is fully equal to Andrew Wyeth's technique, the Western master to whom the most obvious comparisons must be made is John James Audubon. Yet, while Matsumoto is every bit as scientifically accurate in capturing the specific characteristics of the much wider range of animal species he depicts, he takes greater pains to evoke their natural habitat, placing all manner of wild creatures in landscapes limned with an unabashed Romanticism akin to that of the Hudson River School.

The plight of an endangered species is depicted especially affectingly in "Piping Plover," set on Jones Beach (where their eggs are often thoughtlessly trampled under the feet of human bathers), as well as in "Iriomote Wildcat," a feline uniquely drawn to water and indigenous to the area between Okinawa and Taiwan.

In "Arctic Fox," the sleek canine inhabits a rarefied realm of snow and cool blue shadows; in "Big Horn," the two magnificent beasts balance gingerly on a steep cliff against a magnificent mountainous vista in Colorado; in "Japanese Beetle," the tiny insect's world is evoked just as vividly, as it traverses an intricately veined leaf.

If Momoji Matsumoto captures these and other wild creatures with an innate empathy that makes us identify with their plight, it is because his painterly abilities are fully equal to his knowledge of their habits and surroundings.

Willis, Rosas, and Anderson Shine in Soho Solo Shows

Three talented artists who use subject matter as a point of departure, either to evoke a sense of other periods and places in a contemporary context or as a vehicle for formal exploration, were featured recently at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, in Soho.

While attending the Academy of Art in San Francisco, Judy Willis fell under the influence of the Impressionists and later she became interested in the work of John Singer Sargent. Since, she has put these influences to good use, developing her own distinctive style in paintings of comely young women with the rosy-cheeked wholesomeness of some of Renoir's models, albeit combined with darker accents reminiscent of Singer's society portraits. While paying tribute to her mentors, Willis' paintings evoke a personal world of dreamy romantic reveries where a couple who resemble Bonnie and Clyde pose proudly before a 1930s sedan, or groups of young women in elaborate hats are seen in nostalgic landscapes.

That Judy Willis can also depict considerably more elaborate scenes is made clear in her painting "Song at Tiffany's," where a folk singer entertains a leisurely crowd in a country town with a decidedly Woodstockian charm.

Judy Willis is a neoclassical realist in the best postmodern sense, drawing upon the art of the past to forge a highly expressive and poetic personal style.

Melcina Rosas is another artist who employs aspects of antiquity to create contemporary art of a high order, in her installation of uniformly intimate oils, all of the same subject. Rosas began the series that she showed with the acquisition of a Florentine head, created by an Italian sculptor. She was so struck by the androgynous beauty of its features that she was inspired to paint "portraits" of this head again and again. Her purpose, however, was not to paint the same facial expression over and over, and she succeeded in not doing so by virtue of her ability to make each image unique through the subtlest variations of form and color. Surprisingly, in the latter regard, Rosas cites Andy Warhol's portraits of Marilyn Monroe as inspiration. Rosa's oils, however, are considerably more subdued coloristically than Warhol's silkscreens, with their garish dayglo hues. Indeed, she is an exquisite colorist who favors soft blue and brown hues that, combined with her refined paint handling, lend her compositions a cumulative formal strength that unites them as a singular aesthetic enterprise.

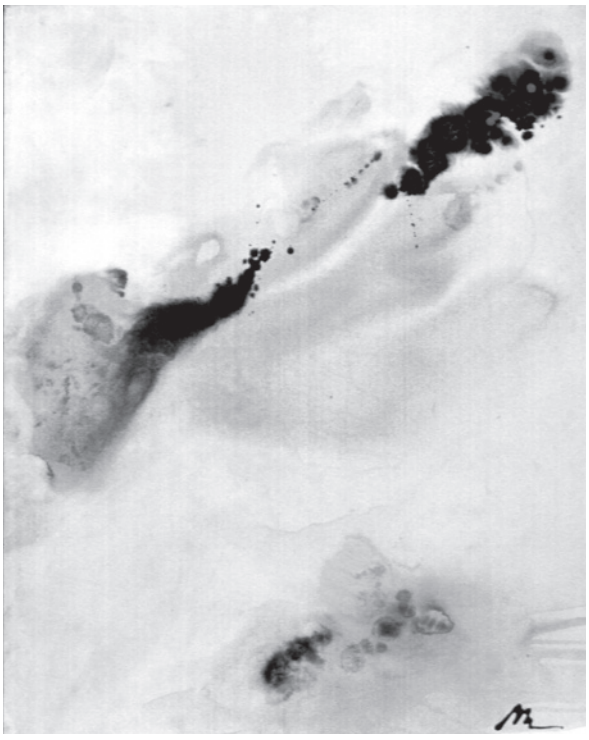
The Mississippi-born artist Desaix Anderson has an interesting dual background in both architecture and diplomacy, having served in the latter regard in Vietnam, China, Japan, and elsewhere. His architectural experience has obviously influenced the structure of his semi abstract compositions, while his diplomatic assignments have given him an appreciation for Asian art that influenses the images that he chooses.

Anderson employs mountains, moons, and other natural subjects as recurring motifs in his paintings, along with simplified structures based on tall buildings. Grids of gold leaf are combined with vibrant lacquer-like reds in compositions that are at once minimalistic and evocative. Indeed, Desaix Anderson's paintings, for all their Asian opulence, are even more akin to those of the well known "New Image" painter Robert Moskowitz in their combination of formal brevity and poetic resonance, as seen in the large acrylic with gold leaf entitled "Look Ye Mighty on My Works and Despair," with its dominant gold structure juxtaposed with a black orb, afloat against a deep ochre ground.

Although he also cites the Japanese artist Toko Shinoda as another influence, in his impressive exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, Desaix Anderson proved himself to be a unique painter with his own distinctive style.

—Stuart Leslie Myers

Form, Faith, and Romanticism in the Art of Missy Lipsett



Untitled, 2001

Missy Lipsett's first New York solo show was so impressive that one feared she might find herself a tough act to follow. The good news, however, is that Lipsett's second solo exhibition, at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from September 4 through 22, is even more impressive.

Previewing Lipsett's new paintings in her studio, one was reminded of the following lines from Howard Nemerov's poem Runes: "This is about the stillness in living things / In running water, also in the sleep / Of winter seeds, where time to come has tensed / Itself, enciphering a script so fine / Only the hourglass can magnify it, only / The years unfold its sentence from the root." For it is this vital stillness that Lipsett lassos and ensnares in skeins of pigment cast onto expansive areas of color that have now grown even more amorphously luminous than those in the earlier paintings.

Lipsett's considerable accomplishment in her first show was finding a way to "freeze" the gesture, thus effecting a detente between the "action painting" of Jackson Pollock (the predecessor to whom she could appear most beholden to the uneducated eye) and the formal impassivity of his less hyperactive colleagues such as Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman. The differences between the New York School painters who championed action painting and those who favored formal stasis was a bone of contention picked over ad absurdom by tastemakers like Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg. It provoked serious critical divisions and perhaps even a few of the fist-fights that often settled aesthetic issues in the alcohol-fueled, macho art scene of the abstract expressionists.

That Missy Lipsett, a theretofore unknown female painter who had never exhibited anywhere at all before her first New York solo show a year ago (although it was obvious she had been working and planning her attack in private for some time) found a way—at least within the perimeters of her own canvases—to quietly resolve these long simmering issues in the less explosive climate of the postmodern era, made her debut deliciously audacious. How dare this relative neophyte—and a woman to boot!—presume to settle accounts with the long-gone bully boys of the New York School...and to do so with such savvy, such undeniable painterly authority!

Now, having made her point about the fictive illusion of implied movement in stationary art objects, Lipsett has moved on. She has done away to a large degree with the swirling skeins, the drips and splashes, and other "gestural" elements that made comparisons to Pollock so inevitable. Perhaps the most audacious aspect of her most recent paintings is her absolute faith in painting as a pure and meaningful enterprise in a period when much critical ballast has been mustered to deny its relevance and elevate conceptual modes above it.

Of course, Lipsett is not altogether alone in this faith—countless others share it, judging from the huge number of artists who continue to paint, and to paint well, despite the critical naysayers who would reduce all art to empty theorizing (and elevate criticism above art itself in the process). Nonetheless, Lipsett belongs to that relatively small company of contemporary artists who still put their faith in the power of paint alone—as opposed to pictures, images, or symbols created with paint—to convey the meaning of the actual as material reality, rather than a signification of something or other. In fact, few painters today adhere so fervently to Clement Greenberg's anti-representational credo; few hold so steadfast as does Lipsett to the belief that a painting should be an autonomous aesthetic object whose ultimate value is to be found in its own innate physical qualities, rather than in its ability to evoke, through allusion or illusion, the qualities of something else.

And that this is still a valid approach is made manifest in the dynamic presence and immediate power of Lipsett's new paintings, which have a visual impact one has come less and less to expect in recent years. Her bold yet lyrical large canvases hark back to that pre-ironic period in American painting when heroic scale was synonymous with high aesthetic ambition, rather than merely an attention-grabbing device. The large size of Lipsett's canvases is integral to their sweep and grandeur, to their generous spirit, to a formal rigor married to romanticism that one is at pains to encounter in much recent art.

Missy Lipsett's new paintings engulf the viewer in subtle chromatic auras, created with sumptuous saturations of color that pool and converge in cloud-like configurations or culminate in fluid rivulets of diluted pigment that are as likely to run upward as down, given the artist's habit of working from all sides of the canvas and sometimes reversing the flow of the composition by tilting it in the working process. Lipsett's approach is so intuitive, spontaneous, and exuberant that the adjective exhilarating cannot be overused in relation to her paintings, which restore our belief in the lyrical impulse as an impetus for pure painterly endeavor.

On the superficial evidence of the new openness in her compositions, with surface generally upstaging form or gesture as the compelling element, one could suppose that Missy Lipsett has shifted her allegiances from abstract expressionism to color field painting. But that would be too pat a conclusion, for Lipsett's majestic new canvases evade easy description, with their ethereal compositions and colors more like liquid light than any familiar spectrum of hues in the palette of Pollock or even of Jules Olitski. Indeed, her sources are too personal and diverse to be traced to her American predecessors alone, encompassing Eastern influences as well (albeit without indulging in the kind of chinoiserie or japonaiserie that one encounters in the work of some western artists influenced by Zen).

Missy Lipsett has come a long way in a very short time, establishing herself as a formidable presence in the intriguingly diverse yet still ill-defined area of postmodern abstract painting. Her second exhibition at Pleiades Gallery makes clear that she will continue to evolve and be a force in its development. ——Ed McCormack

The Chromatic Rebirth of Rosalyn A. Engelman

"And beauty came like the setting sun," Acrylic on Canvas To View Rosalyn Engelman's work in her studio in DUMBO by appointment, call 718.643.6696.

One of the true highlights of the past few months was the showcase exhibition of new paintings by Rosalyn A. Engelman at the Sidney Mishkin Gallery Baruch College, 135 East 22nd Street. What made this solo show immediately remarkable was the brilliant coloristic flowering of an artist who in two previous exhibitions at Adelphi University Center Gallery, in Garden City, New York, and the National Arts Club, in Manhattan, showed black-on-black paintings.

At the time of those earlier exhibitions, which both took place in 1999, Engelman employed black in the manner of the ancient Chinese as surrogate for all other colors. And indeed she managed to wrest an amazing range of nuances and subtle chromatic suggestiveness from the all encompassing blackness. Deeply disturbed by the worldwide political turmoil and carnage that filters into our daily lives via news media, Engelman sought a way to reflect human suffering in an abstract context, without indulging in graphic histrionics of the "social realist" sort. She succeeded splendidly in somberly compelling canvases lit from within by a deep, redemptive beauty, suggesting a flicker of hope in the midst of darkness.

In the series of paintings that Engelman showed at Baruch College, that hope has apparently blossomed beyond all expectation, judging from the sonorous coloristic richness that reaches its apex in the large canvas named for a quote from Siegfried Sassoon, "And beauty came like the setting sun". In this composition, as in other recent paintings, vibrant red, yellow and orange hues are employed in concert with deeper blues and other darker colors, layered with the feathery cursive strokes that lend Engelman's canvases much of their energy and depth.

Engelman's gestural calligraphy is at its most vigorous in paintings such as "Capriccio VIII," an acrylic on Arches paper where swift white strokes are layered liberally over dense concentrations of blue, red, pink, and gold hues to create a shimmering rhythmic density that fairly hums with energy. In this painting, as well as others in a similar vein, Engelman combines a linear fluidity akin to Mark Tobey's "white writing" with a succulent tactility and a painterly intensity that can only be compared to Jackson Pollock. Engelman, however, combines the intimate poetry of the former artist with the powerful presence of the latter and enhances them with a distinctive personal ecriture that belongs to her alone.

Unexpected as Rosalyn A. Engelman's chromatic rebirth may seem, it is part and parcel of the aesthetic evolution of an artist who has continually striven to expand the limits of what is possible in postmodern abstraction.

Currently featured in a major exhibition at Nico Gallery in Seattle, and preparing for a one woman retrospective at the Quick Art Center for the Arts of Fairfield University, in Connecticut, scheduled for 2003, Engelman is clearly a painter at the height of her powers.

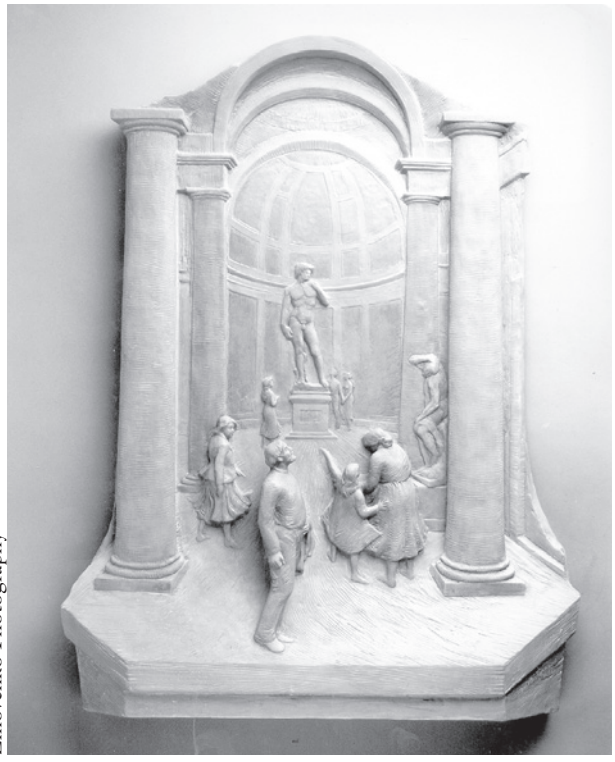
—J. Sanders Eaton

Neoclassical Immediacy in the Sculpture of Helene Johnson

Gestalt criticism holds that we do not project aesthetic and emotional qualities into a work of art but find them there waiting for us. However arguable this view may be, Helene Johnson, a sculptor from Connecticut who recently had a solo exhibition at the Pen and Brush, Inc., 16 East Tenth Street, makes a good case for it by making her terra cotta, clay, and bronze tableaux literal slices of life so complete as to constitute self-contained miniature worlds.

One of the mere handful of contemporary artists capable of rendering genre subjects convincingly, Johnson is refreshingly unbeholden to the precepts of postmodernism. Yet her sculptures are fully as contemporary as the more cartoony tableaux of Tom Otterness or Red Grooms. Although Johnson professes great admiration for the latter artist, her genre subjects, while every bit as detailed (albeit on a much more intimate tabletop scale), are imbued with a far greater formal unity. In addition, Johnson's ability to depict a scene in great detail without being in the least bit fussy in technique, as well as her unerring sense of what to include and what to leave to the viewer's imagination, makes her sculptures not only evocative of very particular places and settings but more aesthetically pleasing than those of other artists working in a similar vein.

Like fragments from antiquity, many of Johnson's profusely detailed scenes from daily life, showing several figures in restaurants, galleries, museums, or in exterior settings such as city streets or on the steps of grand municipal structures, are contained within irregular formats that have the appearance of having been broken off abruptly. The asymmetrical formats of her



Zinovenko Photography

"La Accademia," Manzini

sculptures add to the sense of boundlessness that belies their relatively modest size and also imbues them with an organic dynamism that creates a perfect context for her animated figures.

For above all, Helene Johnson's scenes seem to teem with a sense of life, their many small figures captured in movement, their casual gestures made immutable in clay or bronze, as they stroll amid classical columns and statues in "La Accademia" or imbibe in a cozy rustic tavern in "Tap Room, Griswold Inn." In the former work, the piece de resistance is the witty contrast between the nude "sculptures" frozen in stillness on their pedestals and the implied movement of the "people" in contemporary dress; in the latter, even though they comport themselves with more middleclass decorum, the drinkers at the tables and the bar call to mind Breugel's reveling peasants.

Johnson's conjoining of contemporary immediacy and art historical references, which she accomplishes as successfully in sculpture as Reginald Marsh did in painting, can also be seen in the clay original "The Stone Carvers," an affecting tribute to the tradition of the master craftsmen, as well as in the bronze "La Femme en Bleu I," where a famous masterpiece by Corot is lovingly rendered in relief behind the more three dimensional figures seated on a bench in a museum.

In other works, such as "The Secret Garden" and "In My Dream," the private fantasy worlds of children are captured with the characteristic poetry and finesse that makes Helene Johnson one of our most gifted and compelling neoclassical sculptors.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Body & Soul: An Ambitious Survey by the West Side Arts Coalition

Reena Kondo, "Dissolution"

Billed as "an art exhibit exploring people's connections with each other, their inner selves, nature and the cosmic energy field," the group show "Body & Soul," curated for the West Side Arts Coalition by Reena Kondo, took place recently at Broadway Mall Community Center, at 96th Street and Broadway.

While the show's theme might have seemed a bit dispersed, the "cosmic energy" part was seen to by the curator herself: Reena Kondo showed dynamic collages in a tondo format featuring photographic images of whirling dervishes, wavering patterns and a fragmented nude inhabiting a realm of planetary orbs. The round shape of Kondo's collages enhanced their sense of eternal, infinite spaces.

Contrastingly down to earth, the pastels and charcoal drawings of Carolyn Marx

Beth Kurtz,"The Light of the Moon"

Fletcher feature autumnal fields filled with pumpkins and other landscape subjects depicted in rich strokes of color as densely knit as those in the abstract paintings of Milton Resnick. Fletcher, however, employs her impressive technique to evoke both the surfaces and underlying rhythms of nature.

Jack Dittrick, best known for his painted foam core constructions, surprised us in this exhibition with a small, intense abstract oil in a manner somewhat akin to the pioneering American modernist Arthur Dove. At the same time, its bold composition was consistent with Dittrick's assemblages, one of which was also on view.

Beth Kurtz never fails to surprise one with her diverse range of imagery, although her paintings are invariably recognizable for their meticulous neosurrrealist style. Here, Kurtz showed two characteristically enigmatic still life compositions (one featuring a classical head, the other of two helmets) that confirmed her growing reputation as one of our most intriguing image inventors since Magritte.

James Glass, on the other hand, seems more related to that postmodern school of the 1980s known as "New Image" painting, judging from his large, frenzied canvas of a cat riding a bicycle. The point, of course, was not the weird subject matter, but Glass' vigorous and authoritative paint handling.

A more calligraphic approach is employed by Margarett Jhun to convey the movements of dancing figures in mixed media paintings such as "Cha-Cha." Jhun treads her own fine line between figuration and abstraction in compositions that are notable for their energy and immediacy.

Another kind of immediacy was apparent in the intimate, ink and watercolor drawings of Ruth Friedman, who captures the distinguishing characteristics of her figurative subjects with economy and grace.

Paul Gazda: The Grid as Armature for Material Metaphor

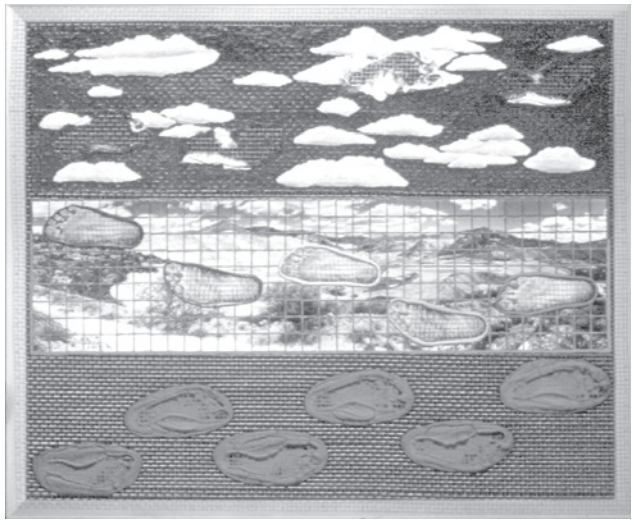
While the drawn or painted grid has long been a device that modern artists employ to locate forms on the picture plane, the widely exhibited artist Paul Gazda takes the grid into a more physical dimension, using wire mesh in place of canvas as a surface to hold an intriguing variety of materials and objects.

In his solo exhibition of mixed media works, "Triple Vision," at Phoenix Gallery, 568 Broadway, from October 3 through 27, Gazda shows three related series under the categories of "Archetypal," "Didactic," and "Household Icons." The first series focuses on singular and distinctive visual statements; the second addresses social and ethical issues; the third offers a refreshing view of common objects one often takes for granted.

All three series are enlivened by Gazda's highly original way with nontraditional materials such as sand, appliance or computer parts, and deconstructed blue jeans, as well as his equally inventive way with more familiar mediums like acrylic paint and photography. Gazda also combines the freedom and directness that we most often encounter only in so-called "outsider" artists with a sophisticated conceptual sensibility. This results in a plethora of unexpected juxtapositions that lend his compositions unusual vitality.

Not the least of these are the textural/textual contrasts that Gazda achieves through his use of assemblage materials and fractured fragments of language, as seen to especially lively advantage in the large mixed media work on wire mesh entitled "We Are Sorry." The dominant feature of this work is a large Cyclops-like central figure sporting an actual lab coat. From the outstretched sleeves of this forbidding figure, presumably a one-eyed extraterrestrial scientist, sprout long lengths of wire connected to continuous blocks of text that comprise a rambling mea culpa that appears to refer to torturous experiments performed on earthlings: "WE FOUND YOU TO BE CONVENIENT EXPERIMENTAL VEHICLES FOR TESTING METHODS AND PROCEDURES WHICH WOULD BENEFIT OUR SPECIES...TO THIS END WE SUBJECTED YOU TO DISEASE, PAIN, DEPRIVATION, MUTILATION, TERROR AND DEATH...WE ARE SORRY..."

This eerie litany (excerpted here—it's actually much longer and more detailed), combined with the equally disconcerting image of the frightening yet abjectly apologetic figure, results in a singularly powerful piece. It could also serve as a metaphoric indictment of human scientists who experiment frivolously on lower species or governments that employ their technological prowess to dominate less advanced cultures, from the perspective of an artist decrying the increasing soullessness of modern society.



"Evolution"

"Tower of Babel," another large mixed media work on wire mesh, protests another atrocity: the crass materialism that permeates our entire culture and the art world in particular. Here, tottering structures containing photographic images of glass fronted skyscrapers soar heavenward in a bloody red rain, scrawled with the crass graffiti of unabashed consumerism: "BUY MY STUFF."

The theme of rampant materialism is explored even further in another major work entitled "The American Ten Commandments," its composition centering on two tablet-like forms inscribed with such phrases as "THOU SHALT NOT SPEAK THE TRUTH" and "THOU SHALT NOT RESPECT ANY LIFE BUT THINE OWN."

Gazda makes such images succeed by virtue of the aesthetic qualities that elevate even his most didactic statements. In the aforementioned "Tower of Babel," for example, the intricately worked surface, with its elegant linear elements, has qualities in common with the paintings of that other provocative eccentric Fritz Hundertwasser.

Indeed, like that of Hundertwasser, the work of Paul Gazda eludes easy categories, perhaps because it has developed along unique lines, out of necessity, as it were.

Born in Detroit Michigan, Gazda earned his MA from the University of Toronto, and later relocated to Sedona, Arizona, where he still lives and works. He began his career as a photographic artist, but after five years, in a sudden epiphany of creative clarity experienced while gazing at a scrap pile of torn photographs in a corner of his studio, he was inspired to expand his range of expression into collage and assemblage.

The wisdom of that decision is borne out in the power of works such as "Evolution," where a photographic image of a stretch of desert is combined with thickly painted clouds and human footprints (juxtaposed with photographed clouds and feet) and "Dam," in which landscape photography and painted passages create equally evocative combinations of great imagistic precision and tactile succulence.

In these and a number of other works, Paul Gazda employs a unique personal iconography to create images that often combine aesthetic quality and righteous anger. Gazda's passionate mixed media paintings provide a most welcome antidote to flaccid postmodern irony.

—Lawrence Downes

Taking the "Art Express" to Cork Gallery in Lincoln Center

One of the more focused group shows to take place in recent months was "Art Express," featuring members of the Metropolitan Artists organization, at Cork Gallery, in Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center.

As the show's title suggests, this was a streamlined survey of several widely exhibited New York artists. Rhoda Greif's paintings, for instance, exemplify no-nonsense directness in her handling of landscapes and urban scenes. Greif's oil of an idealized New York City skyline was especially appealing.

Marlene Zimmerman has her own refreshing sense of whimsy, which enlivened her oil of a goddess-like face amid a sprinkling of stars, among other fanciful subjects. Zimmerman is an eccentric talent whose pictures have a fanciful New Age quality somewhere between Henri Matisse and Peter Max.

Daniel Daeshik Choi is another artist whose progress bears watching. Choi's paintings in this show were his best to date, with mountains, moons, waves, and other natural elements stylized in a manner simultaneously suggesting the influence of Paul Klee and Korean folk art.

A new discovery, for this writer at least, were the sculptures of Judith Janus. In "Hollow Man," a strong mixed media work featuring a figure with straw sprouting from its head caught in the grip of a viselike wooden structure, Janus gives material form to a theme by T.S. Eliot.

Miriam Wills is a painter of cosmic abstractions. Wills sets a variety of clustered orbs and other shapely forms adrift in mostly blue expanses. Her intense colors and swirling compositions create an evocative sense of infinity and eternal flux that activates the imagination. However, Wills is essentially an abstract painter and her mixed media works finally succeed on their more formal virtues.

Kim Na, on the other hand, combines a wide variety of calligraphic gestures and exquisite chromatic harmonies to create canvases that are primarily about the act of painting as a discrete activity and language. Na's oil on canvas "Symphony in Pink" featured irregular rectangles of soft pastel hues frozen in stasis amid more active drips and splashes.

Another exciting discovery were the mixed media sculptures of Tadashi Mitsui, whose "Dream of Carrot Cake" had an originality that seemed peculiarly Japanese for its combination of funk and elegance. From unlikely materials, Mitsui makes witty material metaphors that provoke smiles, as well as a serious aesthetic response.

Miriam Hirschhorn 's clear, lively forms hint at cartoon origins, yet her paintings are more abstract than Pop. Still, boldly simplified eyeglasses, stars, cigars and other recognizable objects can be discerned among her less recognizable shapes, making Hirschhorn one of those rare painters, like Guston in his late phase, who can have it both ways.

Also included in "Art Express" were the sculptures of Debora Villalon-Gonzales, whose anatomical fragments, such as the plaster piece simply entitled "Knee" have a peculiarly haunting presence; Julia A. Rogge's poetic, exquisitely painted Central Park scenes; Myrna Harrison-Changar's mysterious color photographs of subtly shifting reflective grids; Noel Schneider's witty, animated sculptures of symphony conductors and jitterbug dancers, as well as paintings by Meyer Tannenbaum, whose recent solo show was reviewed in a previous issue, and Carmiah Frank, who is reviewed at length elsewhere in this issue.

—Wilson Wong

Craft and Art: Conjoining Forms of Excellence at Pen and Brush

Inherent in the hyphenated named of the Artist-Craftsmen of New York, Inc., a non-profit group formed in 1958, is the point that art and craft are inseparable and should both meet the same high standards. Surely this came across clearly in the organization's most recent exhibition, juried by the well known ceramic sculptor Hilda Steckel, at the Pen and Brush, 16 East 10th Street.

Liz Cenedella, a leading fiber artist and the current President of the Pen and Brush, won an Outstanding Merit award in the textiles category with a dynamic wall hanging in which elegant, wavering, abstract shapes suggested the movement of ocean waves. Dermot Naughton was another prize-winner for a clay and wood sculpture with a delightfully odd and funky quality called " Reliquary for Absolute Space."

Jeanelle Myers also challenged the boundaries between craft and art with her elaborately crafted dolls, layered with lace and brocade, encrusted with baubles and beads, projecting a bizarre, fetishistic presence. By contrast, the jewelry of Ronnee Lee Medow has an opposite appeal, with sterling silver, gold, diamonds, yellow and blue sapphires and other such materials employed to create delicate and fanciful necklaces, bracelets, and pins, such as one prize-winning piece with a fish motif.

One of the pleasures in a show such as this one is the sheer variety of methods and materials on view, which persistently posed the question of whether there should really be any difference between how we look at craft and so-called "fine art" objects. Certainly the level of invention here was equal to any other exhibition in recent memory, and indeed the inclusion of photography, sculpture, and collage along with more traditional craft mediums such as jewelry, pottery, and textiles bespeaks an enlightened refusal on the part of the Artist-Craftsmen of New York to make arbitrary distinctions between one form of excellence and the other.

This catholic curatorial attitude made it possible to draw comparisons between the expressively distorted terra cotta figures of the sculptor Claire Clark; the photographs of Sandra Sgarro, in which female nudes are posed and cropped to create essentially abstract compositions; and the sensual ceramic bowls and vases of Cecily Fortescue, with their gracefully furled forms simultaneously suggesting floral shapes and aspects of the human body.

Other kindred qualities could be found in a variety of unexpected places. For example, Shirley Venit Anger's relief-like wall pieces (in which batik, silk screen, and a rich variety of fabrics are employed to create intricate figurative narratives), and the earthy clay sculptures of Bobbi Rayfield—particularly one in which a figure resembling a Native American maternal spirit swarms with many smaller figures.

Then there were Shula Mustacchi, who exhibited both wall hangings and photo callages, and Barbara DeBaylo, whose use of digital imagery, handmade paper, silk, roses, feathers, shells, rhinestones and sundry other materials made her assemblages intriguingly impossible to classify.

Like several others in this splendid exhibition, too numerous to do justice here, these artist-craftspeople challenged our preconceptions while providing great pleasure.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Bachelier: Art's Enchanting Scheherazade

Had he known her, the great French Symbolist painter Odilon Redon, who took pleasure in fashioning beings that, in his own words, were "impossible according to the laws of possibility," could only have been delighted with his worthy countrywoman, the contemporary artist Anne Bachelier, whose star has been rising steadily in recent years.

Even while exemplifying Flaubert's sound advice that the artist should "live like a bourgeois" by eschewing bohemian excess for a serene family life in the foothills of the Alps, Bachelier inhabits an "impossible" private world. Populated by fairy tale ingenues, chimeras, unicorns, and myriad other fanciful beings, this rarefied realm and its denizens is once again the subject of Bachelier's latest solo show of drawings and paintings at CFM Gallery, 112 Greene Street from, October 12 through November 4. The show coincides with the release of "Anne Bachelier, The Book," a lavishly illustrated 266 page monograph published under the gallery's imprint.

Faced with the art of Anne Bachelier, the writer's prose invariably threatens to turn purple; indeed, poetry would seem more appropriate to convey the exhilaration of encountering so unfettered an imagination in a time when the power of subjective fantasy has been so sadly undervalued. But the task, one quickly realizes, is one of translation, rather than of poeticizing, since poetry is abundant in the paintings themselves.

Still, how can one translate dreams into words? How does one even begin to describe a painting such as "Le regard de la conteuse?" In this relatively small, exquisitely beautiful oil on canvas, painted succulently in predominantly brownish tones reminiscent of the Old Masters, we see one of Bachelier's characteristically willowy young women perched demurely on a kind of parapet in space. Enigmatically, she is blindfolded and is joined by three of those bizarre little creatures that inhabit Bachelier's world. One is a miniature humanoid skeleton with feathery wings, which it raises above its naked skull in the manner of a preening bird. The other is an actual bird, preening in a similar manner. The third is a hybrid being, part woman and part bird, reclining on a lower perch of the parapet like Sleeping Beauty or a corpse.

Roughly translated, the painting's English title is "Days of the Storyteller." Yet, as is often the case with Bachelier's paintings, which defy too-literal interpretation, it is not entirely clear which of these figures is the storyteller. From its agitated "Chicken Little" gestures, one might suppose the winged skeleton to be the narrator and take this to indicate that Death is sounding a warning...Or could it be that the young woman wearing the blindfold is actually telling the tale, to which at least two of her companions are avid listeners?

This second interpretation gains credibility when one considers that the young heroines of Bachelier's paintings often seem to serve as surrogates for the artist herself. And this begins to seem even more likely when one remembers that Bachelier takes no credit for creating her private world; that she claims it has existed intact in her imagination since early childhood, and is simply channeled —blindly!—through her brush...

"Nous serons ensemble, toujours?" ("We will be together, always?")

Like Scheherazade, Anne Bachelier never seems to exhaust her store of stories. Indeed, each of her pictures seems the painterly equivalent of a film still for a larger narrative that is unfolding endlessly in her fertile imagination. How else to account for the genesis of a painting such as "La chimera amoureuse," —or "The Amorous Chimera?" In this large oil on canvas, one of Bachelier's wan male protagonists appears to have his hands full with a fiery red female creature that wraps itself around him like a humanoid serpent— hot to trot! The poor fellow seems overwhelmed by this demonically sexy being, its long, tapered tail entwining his legs, its curvy torso impinging on his frail chest, its flaming head and wings thrown back like a buxom, tight-gowned torch singer in the throes of some kind of uncontrollable, all-consuming Charo-like "coo-chi coo-chi" passion ! He is clearly a man more alarmed than charmed by having his wildest erotic fantasy come true.

Much more coolly composed and seemingly adequate to cope with her companion is the petite slip of a girl in a silky pink chemise who strides along, in another large canvas, beside a towering black creature with a noble equine head and a long, phallic horn. The stallion-like unicorn stands upright in the manner of a man, as the couple goes on its merry way against a vibrant green background that suggests a Sunday stroll in a lushly verdant, even Edenic, garden. Here, while one could certainly read romantic reverberations of "Beauty and the Beast" (a story Bachelier has illustrated, definitively) into these two figures, the virile unicorn seems more like a protector than a lover to the nubile young woman, suggesting that the artist has always felt safe in her secret garden.

Another unicorn image can be seen in a large round canvas, as yet untitled when the paintings for the show were previewed at the gallery by this writer. In this boldly composed tondo, a creamy-shouldered blond beauty in a low-cut, blood-red gown with long, matching gloves is seen in profile, placing a large white unicorn mask over her head, as though in preparation for a costumed ball. Here, for all of Bachelier's far too humble protests that she is merely performing a kind of "reportage" when she paints pictures culled from her inner world, there is a veiled implication of the conscious artifice informing her art.

Indeed, like the young woman hiding her beauty behind the equally beautiful head of the white unicorn, perhaps Anne Bachelier finds in her secret garden of innocent daydreams a place to seek refuge from the demands that her brilliance imposes, even while simultaneously revealing the consummate creative sophistication that makes her paintings so paradoxical, so endlessly enchanting. —Ed McCormack

"Inside/Outside Art" at The Broome Street Gallery

Eleven artists who demonstrated a variety of surprisingly congenial stylistic contrasts were seen in the recent group show "Inside/Outside Art," presented in conjunction with Metropolitan Artists, at The Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street, in Soho.

Michele Bonelli grows ever more compositionally eccentric as time goes on. Her recent paintings are as jazzily hardedged as ever. However, they are more spatially open, with sinuous linear elements and geometric forms in bright comicstrip colors converging on pristine white grounds like shards of Art Deco deconstructed by a diabolically inventive postmodern sensibility.

E. Janya Barlow is another abstract painter with an antic approach to form and surface. Barlow likes to paint on the backs of joined canvases, layering all manner of intricate, colorful geometric forms, confetti-like dots, and symbols right over the stretchers to create shaped compositions with a festive, Aztec two-step quirkiness.

Joyce B. Flora also works with odd modular units in her mixed media wall sculptures. Although Flora calls her intriguing pieces, made with elongated bundled and tied forms the "Cathedral Series," they actually suggest the fetish objects of some imaginary tribe.

Estelle Pascoe, who has her own way with unusual materials, is represented here with two ruggedly elegant large collage paintings featuring bold, interlocking forms. Although Pascoe is best known for more sculpturally aggressive assemblages of funky materials, these pieces have a stately simplicity akin to that of Conrad Marca-Relli.

Meyer Tannenbaum, one of the most frequently exhibited and reviewed painters in the city, is represented here by older works from his "Gesture Collage," "Gesture Flow," and "Gesture Geometric" periods, as well as one new acrylic from his "Direct Impact" series. The latter painting and others like it mark a significant breakthrough for this constantly evolving proponent of earnest, energetic abstract painting.

Another frequent exhibitor, Kim Na, has a palette as deliciously varied as a Ben & Jerry's ice cream flavor chart . Here, she was represented by paintings with titles such as "Tribute to Pink" and "Red Dream" that conveyed the essences of those hues in delectable, creamily pigmented compositions.

Another transcendent colorist of Korean origin, Eun Hee Park, showed three vibrant paintings in which rectangular fields of a single color were bordered by other hues that set off subtle chromatic fireworks. Eun Hee Park's compositions are so austere and skillfully controlled as to amplify each tiny painterly incident, making an errant dash of violet or blue a major event.

The mixed media collages of Ellen Faith Daniels are contrastingly monochromatic. Daniels creates energetic compositions in which gestural elements in ink intereact with photos and text from Asian newspapers with lively immediacy.

Although they are outnumbered, the figurative artists in this show acquit themselves every bit as impressively as the abstract ones. Maria E. Leather's mixed media paintings employ imagery as darkly disconcerting as that of the well known social realist Sue Coe. Leather, however, layers plexiglass and other physically imposing materials to lend her bold anatomical anomalies a dynamic, almost brutal presence.

The landscapes of Elizabeth Moore, on the other hand, are exquisitely painted and enlivened by a luminous lyricism. Moore's oils on canvas capture the moods of nature and make them immutable in pigment, as seen in one picture where gathering storm clouds cast a subtly ominous pall over verdant fields.

Then there is Carmiah Frank, who also works abstractly (as seen in her solo show, reviewed elsewhere in this issue) but was represented here by figurative bronzes, including one, "Woman Standing on a Cube," that effectively combined both modes.

—Maureen Flynn

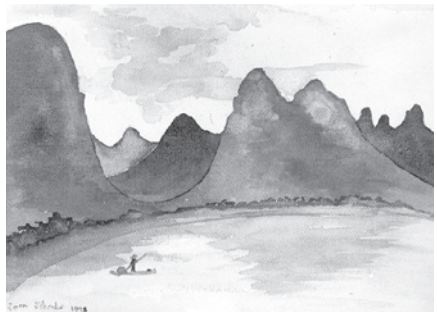
Joan Schreder's Artful Pas De Deux

Although Joan Schreder is a doubly gifted artist, proficient in both photography and painting, her approach in each medium is so conspicuously unassuming as to almost deflect our attention from the true depth and breadth of her gifts.Yet the deceptive simplicity that distinguishes Schreder's photographs, watercolors, and oils is so inseparable from their special charms that one can only assume it to be a sly conceptual strategy on the part of this consummately sophisticated artist. Indeed, her sophistication is such that she can assume the pose of a globe-trotting flaneur, a casual, almost disinterested observer of the world's many splendors, quite distant from the gladitorial arena of contemporary aesthetics. Yet, while she presents herself with undue modesty as a "travel artist," and while much of her inspiration does indeed spring from her sojourns to faraway places, close study of her work proves Schreder's sensibility to be firmly entrenched in the considerably more selfconscious spirit of postmodern pluralism.

In Schreder's recent solo exhibition at Artsforum Gallery, 24 West 57th Street, all of her mediums were well represented. Thus it was possible to discern the distinct differences between each of her modes of expression, as well as the complex subtleties underlying the studiedly disingenuous surface which serves to unify her vision as a whole.

In Schreder's contrasting approaches to photography and watercolor, the pas de deux of sophistication and innocence plays itself out most dramatically. As a photographer, she strikes a fine balance between the documentary and the picturesque in "Lone Windmill, England." In formal terms, as well as informationally, this is a stunning image, with the large structure cast in shadow and looming monolithically over verdant hills and fields, reminding us that such lovely anomalies still exist in isolated locales in the modern world. At the same time, the way Schreder frames the scene, from a distance that allows for a vast expanse of blue sky, with feathery clouds floating by, lends it such a fanciful atmosphere that one almost expects Don Quixote and Sancho Panza to come galloping over the countryside. Similarly atmospheric qualities enliven all of Schreder's sharply focused color photographs, from an Irish lake turning into a bog at ebb tide; to a narrow, shadowy Parisian street where silhouetted pedestrians navigate among reflective rain puddles; to an ancient stone portal in Burma, its black opening gaping in sunlight like the womb of all creation.

Joan Schreder's watercolors enable her to give even freer vent to the more whimsical aspects of her vision by virtue of their faux naif style.



"Sunset by the River"

Especially delightful was a Santa Fe scene with lizards scurrying around on a patio, while buzzards soar ominously overhead. Two other small gems were "Sunset by the River" and "On the Yangtse," both memories of China. Schreder, however, turns the Chinese landscape into a fanciful realm as evocative as that in J.R. Tolkien's own watercolor renderings of Middle Earth (which have never been surpassed by any of the more "professional" artists who would later illustrate his fantasy epic).

Also including somewhat more abstract oils, such as "Blue Landscape," which reveal a formal savvy she sometimes subordinates to her more visionary tendencies, Joan Schreder's exhibition at Artsforum was bountiful and exuberant. —Peter Wiley

Kelynn Z. Alder's Dazzling Documentary Realism

For certain artists there has never been much need to construct artificial barriers between fine art and illustration. At the same time, it could be argued that the more "reportorial" graphic works of Toulouse Lautrec and Honore Daumier —particularly the Moulin Rouge posters of the former and the social caricatures of the latter—possess a vigor and expressiveness that is sometimes lacking in their paintings. Perhaps even these masters, so unfettered with a sketchpad in the cafes and courtrooms of their time, approached the easel with slightly too much reverence, stifled by preconceptions concerning the sanctity of so-called High Art.

Fortunately the more permissive climate of the postmodern era does not place such burdens on an artist such as Kelynn Z. Alder, who blithely refers to herself as "a visual essayist with a wanderlust" and whose solo exhibition of monotypes and paintings, "People & Places," can be seen at Viridian @ Chelsea's new location, 530 West 25th Street, 4th floor, from October 16 through November 3. (The opening reception is Saturday, October 20, from 5 to 7 PM, and a "coffee and conversation with the artist" event will also be held at the gallery the following Saturday, October 27, from 2 to 4 PM.)

Alder, an instructor at the School of Visual Arts and a frequent guest lecturer and workshop instructor at other institutions, has had considerable success as an illustrator and portrait artist for The New Yorker, The New York Times Book Review, and numerous other publications. A writer as well as an artist, her expeditionary work, combining sketching in the field and painting in the studio, has taken her to Peru, Australia, New Guinea, and Mexico, to document lives of indigenous people, as well as to explore her own Mexican heritage. In 1999, as "Artist in Residence" for the Smithtown Arts Council, in Smithtown, New York, she chronicled her extended family in an exhibition entitled "Portraits of Family Life." Alder's present solo show extends her subject matter further afield in genre scenes set in Coney Island and Mexican marketplaces, as well as in landscapes of locations in Long Island and Italy. The tawdry attractions and varied citizens of the Coney Island Boardwalk provide her with particularly lively fodder for capturing character amid a visual cacophony of colorful signs, rickety facades, and gaudy novelty items.

While Alder's skills as a portrait artist are equal to those of Don Bachardy and Billy Sullivan, her sympathies here lie not with the famous authors, artists, and fashionistas favored by both of those older artists. Rather, she savors the unique qualities in "ordinary" people working or relaxing in a a decidedly unfashionable amusement area in an animated gestural manner that is simultaneously swift and detailed.

Alder has a dazzling ability to combine snapshot immediacy of movement, attitude, and gesture with those more classical virtues that render a passing moment immutable. This is especially impressive in her monotype "Head Shots," where a small boy stands with affecting awkwardness before a boardwalk shooting gallery, holding one of the stuffed toys that it apparently awards as trophies. An antic array of other stuffed animals clutters a high shelf behind the counter, where the pony-tailed attendant casts a sidelong glance at the viewer as he paces restlessly as a caged tiger against a backdrop of bold red and yellow stripes and images of clown-faces.

"Head Shots"

Altogether, it is an unusually busy composition, but Alder controls it skillfully, using the bold striped designs behind the counter, as well as on the facade before which the boy stands (where they thrust downward, as in one of the abstract artist Kenneth Noland's chevron paintings), to unify the various areas of the picture. She is able to balance harsh, potentially clashing colors and a variety of disparate elements, marshaling them to create dynamic tensions that activate the entire surface. Thus, she makes a composition cohere that could collapse into chaos at the hands of a lesser artist. Indeed, she seems to thrive on setting difficult compositional problems for herself and drawing pictorial power from the aesthetic solutions that she employs to solve them.

Her work is made even more impressive by her apparent refusal, as a "visual essayist," to falsify or "fictionalize" the information in her pictures, in order to facilitate a smoother composition. Instead, she employs selective emphasis and succulent brush work to create a compelling composition from the material at hand. Witness her monotype "Coney Island Boardwalk," where her loose, painterly handling of the planks of the boardwalk serves to anchor the main figure and the green refuse pail to the picture plane, while the intricate patterns on the man's sport shirt create a lively counterpart to the profusion of colorful signs and flags on the facade of the arcade behind him.

In "Gloria in Coney Island," Alder depicts a plus-size African American woman wearing a bright red t-shirt, purple pedal pushers, and winning grin. In "Joe with Jump Rope," she shows us the macho pride of a shirtless middle aged man sporting droopy shorts and the attitude of someone who still glories in his physicality and flaunts his physique, even as time takes its toll. In both pictures, what comes across strongly is the artist's genuine affection and appreciation for the individual character of her subjects.

Other portraits, such as "Marshal Arisman," in which the well known artist/illustrator's head takes on the nobility of a Roman emperor, and "Mame Vendor," where a woman in a Mexican market has her own stoic dignity, are equally affecting for what Alder tells us about the character and humanity of these people.

Kelynn Z. Alder brings such subjects to life by virtue of her insightful draftspersonship and considerable painterly prowess. That she does not eschew particulars or feel compelled to distort or generalize her figures in order to achieve the expressive power that distinguishes all of her work makes her monotypes and paintings all the more remarkable.

—Ed McCormack

New York Notebook

Painting by Philip Sherrod

The Street is Their Beat

Although we have seen other exhibitions by "The Street Painters" over the years their most recent, in the gallery at The Art Students League, 215 West 57th Street, showed this loose-knit group of painters at their raucous best.

Formed in 1977, the "Street Painters" have been praised by elder colleagues no less distinguished than Alice Neel, who cited their "passion and immediacy" and Raphael Soyer, who enthused about their pictures "fairly bursting with vitality and energy." Unquestionably the best known painter among them is Philip Lawrence Sherrod, a popular League instructor. Making our rounds over the years, we have seen burly, bearded Sherrod attacking his portable easel amid the charging traffic, lurid billboards, and horny marquees of Times Square to capture the frenetic visual cacophony and crazy simultaneity of midtown in strokes of glistening oil pigment thick as cake frosting—New Hades in all its flaming glory!

If Alec Guinness had not been available, Sherrod could have played the lead in the film version of "The Horse's Mouth," based on Joyce Cary's novel about an eccentric bohemian artist. In fact, Sherrod's paintings have a bit in common with those of John Bratby, the leader of London's "Kitchen Sink School," who actually painted the huge canvases attributed to Gully Jimson, Guinness' character in that film. To be fair, though, Sherrod's paintings are more in a class with Soutine.

Myron R. Heise has his own grasp of Gotham's nocturnal mystery in his darkly pristine paintings of smoky, funky cellar jazz clubs right out of a novel by Jack Kerouac; atmospheric little streets illuminated by glowing storefronts; subways or porno theaters populated by lonely zombies; or visions of bridges, boats, and twinkling skylines that flirt with black velvet kitsch—yet rise above it to become compelling statements by sheer virtue of Heise's passion for the city in all its aspects, from the seamy to the scenic.

Like Sherrod, Simon Goan is drawn to aspects of Times Square that have escaped the grasp of Disney in powerful portraits of the area's denizens, the dealers and smalltime players who hang at Mickey D's, Burger King, and other fast food havens, waiting perhaps for some hip hop Godot.

Other "Street Painters," such as Tad Day and Ronald DeNota catch the spirit of the city from slightly more mellow angles—a church steeple soaring high above the humped backs of parked cars, a sunny day in a funky park—contrasting transcendent and mundane elements to powerful effect. Strictly speaking, not all of the "Street Painters" specialize in streets. The name seems to bespeak an attitude rather than a required subject. Peter Schwarzburg paints landscapes that appear lit by neon rather than sunlight. Jessie Benton-Evans, the sole woman in the group, captures the visionary aspects of nature. Strong portraits by both Richard Castellana and Ivan Nunes' bring their sitters alive through vibrant color and vigorous paint handling. Kenneth McIndoe, who also teaches at The League, painted streets in the past, but has turned recently to Amazonian female nudes.

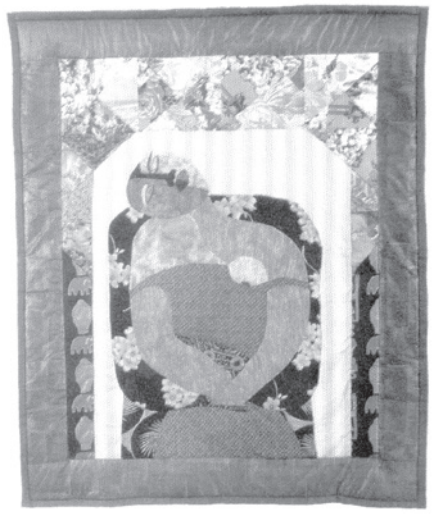
Also including strong work by Andy Pizzo, Richard Rash, and Philip Southern, this group exhibition (sadly ignored by most of the art press, with its head up its anus looking for the latest avant garde wrinkle) seemed especially appropriate at The League, where members of the Ashcan School such as Robert Henri and John Sloan once taught. Among their students were Reginald Marsh, Isabel Bishop, and Raphael Soyer, who could have been called "Street Painters" in their day.

Now that both Phil Sherrod and Ken McIndoe teach at The League, it appears that the loaded brush of lively, humanistic urban genre painting is being passed like a baton to a new generation.

Staten Island on The Brink

Being just a short, free ferry ride from Wall Street and now boasting a brand minor league baseball stadium, Staten Island seems destined for dubious development—especially in light of a green-eyed front page feature on the borough in the Times' Real Estate section last month. Although we're told a fair number of artists live on the Island, a recent Saturday afternoon visit revealed no threat to Williamsburg or Dumbo, in terms of boasting any visible art scene. Nonetheless, we did discover one tiny storefront venue, at 58 Victory Boulevard, called Gallery of Precious Things, with its own unique appeal.

That part of Victory Boulevard, a crooked stretch of funky, ramshackle structures within spitting distance of the ferry terminal, is still a real neighborhood. People still hang out on the streets, some of them looking like they don't have a great deal to do or anything much to do it with. There's a beauty parlor, a bakery, and a Jamaican fast food place, among other small shops offering an odd variety of merchandise, and you get the impression you could buy various things on the street as well. Among the most legal of these were some bags of rice and noodles of unknown origin that a bedraggled-looking couple tried to sell to us outside the Everything Goes Resale Shop. A few doors down, some people were having a sidewalk barbecue outside the storefront campaign offices of City Council candidate Debi Rose, as we crossed the street to check out Gallery of Precious Things.



Quilt art by Arzu Titus

Arzu Titus, the owner of the gallery, is a friendly woman who informed us that she was born in Honduras into the Garifuna, the only tribe outside of Africa with its own language. An internationally known fabric artist, she creates large quilts that combine opulent surfaces akin to those of Faith Ringold with imagery reminiscent of Romare Bearden. She has received commissions from the Smithsonian Institute, among others, and exhibited in numerous galleries and museums.

"The prevalent theme of my quilts is women discovering the dignity of their lives," she says. "In many ways my quilts reflect my own spiritual path and evolution as a woman."

Titus also called our attention to intriguing work by Montana, an artist of mixed Apache Indian and African American heritage who creates dream catchers and Native American masks, as well as oil paintings; and Florence Berry, who is best known for her watercolors, collages, and spirit dolls.

As we spoke with her and browsed around her tiny but visually rich premises, various neighborhood people stopped in, one a local writer who grew up on Staten Island and complained about the recent influx of "yuppies with attitude from the city" who are buying up property and "cut you off with this snobbish look if you simply try to be friendly and say hello to them."

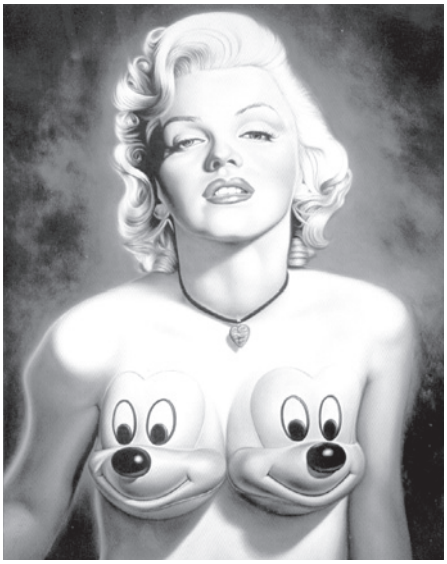
From the sound of things, big changes are in store for Victory Boulevard. So, If you're interested in discovering a grass roots venue where no unnecessary distinctions are drawn between art objects and power objects—where the magical properties of all art, secular or sacred, are apparently still taken for granted—we highly recommend that you visit Gallery of Precious Things before the Island is overrun with speculators and loses some of its more authentic charms.

Putting Some English on Pop

Ron English, who shows at Opera Gallery, 115 Spring Street, may be The Last Pop Artist.

However, his approach is significantly different than that of the late Andy Warhol, who appears as a skeleton on the cover of "Popaganda: The Art & Subversion of Ron English," recently published by Shortwave books. While Andy was the guru of passivity, accepting the mass media at face value and feeding off its amoral banality, English loves nothing better than biting the hand that feeds him, much the manner of some of the famous rock musicians who are among his most avid collectors. For example, Joe Camel is ancient history, thanks to English's scathing "pirated" billboards calling attention to how that popular cartoon character was used to market cigarettes to kids. So much for cynical claims that art can't affect social change: English proved that one man with a brush can nip a multimillion dollar advertising campaign in the butt, so to speak.

But English is a lot more than merely a Pop iconoclast, as he is often billed, judging from his recent exhibition at Opera Gallery, which combined a good deal of painterly prowess with visual wit. Two reprises by English of Pop icons also painted by Warhol were especially rich in



Painting by Ron English

allusions: Marilyn Monroe with two Mickey Mouse faces protruding from her breasts and Jacqueline Kennedy in black mourning veil, superimposed over Picasso's "Weeping Woman."

In Memoriam:
Konrad Bercovici Abbott (1945–2001)

That Westbeth remains one of the few artist's housing complexes worthy of being called a community was proven once again when one of its residents died unexpectedly. Other residents rallied with the deceased artist's family in the eleventh hour to mount the memorial exhibition of paintings by Konrad Bercovici Abbott, seen recently at Westbeth Gallery, 155 Bank Street.

A third generation painter in a family of well known artists and writers that included his grandfather, noted author Konrad Bercovici, Abbott showed alongside his mother, painter Mirel Bercovici, and his grandmother, sculptor Naomi LeBrescu, in the Westbeth Generations Show this past April. Selected for the United Nations Human Rights Commission on Peace Exhibition, in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1988, Abbott, who resembles Arshille Gorky in the photograph in the exhibition brochure, was a painter's painter. Unlike a lot of others, he did

Painting by Konrad Bercovici Abbott

not need huge scale to make an impact. One highlight among many in the memorial exhibition was the relatively small oil called "The Aggressor," depicting an expressively distorted female nude with a predatory expression, leaning forward in a chair as if about to spring. At once witty and visually dynamic, it has qualities akin to both de Kooning's "Woman" and the sophisticated primitivism of Jan Muller. Yet it is wholly original, stamped by Abbott's distinctive style. Then there is "Pianoman," where the boldly outlined musician , emerging from a roughly rectangular form, demonstrates Abbott's ability to combine dynamic figurative elements with abstraction.

Although he was nowhere near as well known as he should have been during his lifetime, Konrad Bercovici Abbott was an immensely gifted painter and the art world is sadly diminished by his loss.

Jose F. Rios' Barrio Dreams

A harrowing story with a happier ending is that of Jose F. Rios, a self-taught artist born in Puerto Rico and raised in New York City, who recently had an impressive first solo show of paintings at Gelabert Studios, 255 West 86th Street. Like Claude Brown, the author of "Manchild in the Promised Land," Rios is a ghetto kid who overcame the odds— but not without difficulty: Although he loved to draw and his talent was obvious from childhood, he was an alcohol abuser and a heroin addict by age eleven.

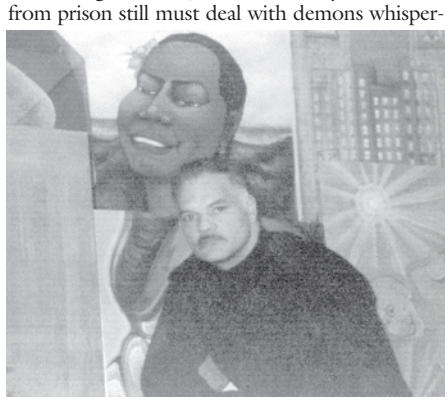
To escape a turbulent family life, he left home at sixteen and ended up living on the streets for ten years. Still doing drugs, sleeping in a cardboard box in the Village, he used his creative talents to survive as best he could, scavenging for junk to create funky assemblages that he sold on the streets. But he supplemented his income by selling another kind of "junk"—drugs—and was finally busted for dealing.

Prisons don't have a great record for rehabilitating people, but Rios, once again, was the gifted exception: he rehabilitated himself. No longer scuffling to survive on the streets—one of the toughest full-time jobs in the world!—lots of time on his hands, he began to draw again. Soon he was talking commissions from other prisoners to draw portraits of their families and actually making a living, of sorts, from his art. If he could do this well in jail, he reasoned, then there might still be hope for him in on the outside.

So far, so good. Since his release from prison, Rios has been clean and sober. He supplements the income from the sale of his paintings by working as a carpenter, and he has reunited with a formerly estranged daughter who now acts as his agent.

All of this would be simply another "human interest" story, the stuff of tabloid journalism rather than art criticism, if not for the fact that his first solo show at Gelabert Studios revealed Jose F. Rios to be an exceptionally gifted genre painter whose pictures pulse with the same infectious salsa beat as the verses of the Puerto Rican poet Emilio Cruz and the plays of the late Miguel "Mikey" Pinero, author of "Short Eyes."

Part of the power in his work comes from the fact that Rios paints what he knows by heart: In "Hope," a single dandelion growing through a crack in the sidewalk is taken as a positive omen by a homeless man living in a cardboard box; in "Subsiding Demons," a man recently released from prison still must deal with demons whisper-

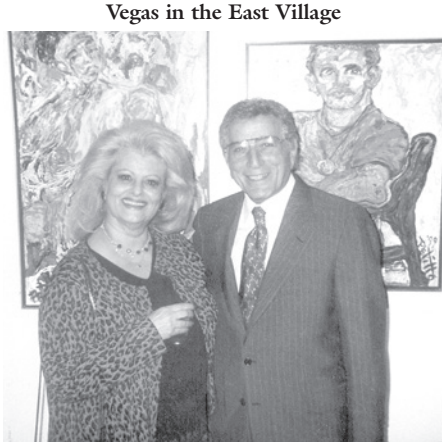


Jose F. Rios with his paintings

ing in his ears; "Windows" offers rich glimpses into the varied lives of tenement buildings, its bricks and other details evoked with an atmospheric exactitude reminiscent of the late Martin Wong.

Jose F. Rios paints the life of the inner city—its rotten-tooth tenements, prison-like housing projects, flypaper bodegas, crumbling schools, treacherous playgrounds, and too-often-thwarted aspirations with an authenticity and passion that should not be ignored. Rios is The Real Deal.

Vegas in the East Village



Painters Barbara Petitto and Anthony Benedetto (who also sings under the name "Tony Bennett") take a photo-op at Petitto's recent exhibition at Nexus Gallery, 345 East 12th Street...What else is there to say?

Deep Mortal Beauty in the "Edible" Pastels of Terry Kalayjian

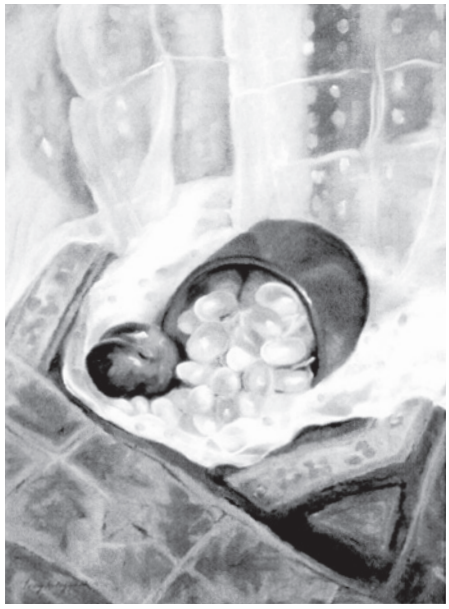
The French term for still life, *nature morte*, seems especially applicable to the pastel paintings of Terry Kalayjian, precisely because the fruits she depicts are so so ripe with vibrant life that we know they will soon be on the verge of decay. This dramatic dichotomy is the first thing that strikes one on encountering the works in Kalayjian's solo exhibition at the James Beard Foundation Greenhouse Gallery, 167 West 12th Street. (The show runs from August 30 through October 31, with a reception on Sunday, September 9, from 2 to 5 PM.)

Terry Kalayjian's pastels are portraits of fruit in the same way that the late "magic realist" Ivan Albright's oils are portraits of people: They are so particular and vital in the moment that she paints them; yet they will inevitably face the same fate as the figure in "The Picture of Dorian Gray," painted by Albright for the film version of Oscar Wilde's famous story of the same name.

Only, while Albright depicted the tale's protagonist as a decrepit old man, Terry Kalayjian captures her fruits in the full bloom of their ripeness, before decay sets in. This lends even greater poignancy to her pictures, which enable us to simultaneously graze on beauty and anticipate its imminent demise. It is this ability to invest inanimate objects with philosophical and emotional resonance that makes Kalayjian's paintings so much more affecting than those ordinary still life set-ups in which even fruits, vegetables, or flowers seem as inert as bottles or vases, since they merely exist to provide the artist an opportunity to create a formal effect. In Kalayjian's pictures no single plum, pear, or grape is a generic object; each is an individual entity, imbued with its own vital energy; each is caressed in soft strokes of pastel, revealing the artist's obvious reverence for every living thing.

In looking at the pictures of Terry Kalayjian, it is relevant in this regard to know that, along with being an artist, she is a body and energy therapist who also works with dolphins to, as she puts it, "support the healing process for people." When she speaks of her work she uses phrases such as "pure life force energy" and "chi," and she asserts with utter conviction that "Facilitating the healing process is the same as facilitating the creative process, there is no difference."

From her obviously evolved spiritual perspective, as well as on the evidence of her work, one can safely assume that Kalayjian is as confident as any of us can be that, while matter decays, energy does not die; it is merely transformed. This is



"Composition from the East"

the good news conveyed in her paintings, to balance the sense of mortality that she touches upon so much more gently, more subtly—yet just as insistently—as her great predecessor Chardin, whose gaping, eviscerated fishes and bloody blades serve as jarring mortal reminders.

How the sense of this transformation, while hardly a tangible quality, comes across in Kalayjian's pastels, coexisting harmoniously with her more palpable subject matter, can be seen especially well in the still life called "Composition from the East." In this exquisitely simple composition, a bunch of glistening green grapes spill out of a small purple jar onto a gossamer white curtain, beside a single red plum. The curtain continues upward and out of the composition, as though billowing down from a window above the surface that supports the vessel and the fruits. This surface could be a tabletop, yet might actually be a floor, since it is covered by a thick, darkly patterned fabric more suggestive of a rug than a tablecloth.

Similarly ambiguous is the upper part of the composition, where yellow spots, set against something deep blue, seem to glow through the gossamer white fabric. These could initially resemble stars in a view of the night sky seen through a nearby window, until one realizes that their patterns are far too regular. Thus, they must be yellow designs on a deep blue fabric behind the semi-translucent white curtain. Through such layers of ambiguity, Terry Kalayjian subverts mere verisimilitude, to convey a sense of the mystery behind physical objects, suggesting deeper, more enduring mysteries beyond temporal things in the material realm.

In another pastel, entitled "Inspiration," pears, squash, and other fruits and vegetables, predominantly in vibrant red and yellow hues—along with a single white flower—are arranged on a blue patterned plate, set against a blue-purple ground, resulting in a composition of an almost Persian richness. The lush colors, combined with the intricate designs on the round plate create the effect of a natural mandala composed of actual objects, hinting in yet another way at the larger order behind the seemingly random processes of life and death.

In "Firenze," we see patterns of flowing, fiery leaves, vines, and purple grapes on a large pitcher with sensually swelling contours that fill a good portion of the composition. These are juxtaposed with an actual pear rendered with the same degree of verisimilitude as the decorative elements on the pitcher, so that both appear to share the same space, the same solidity. Here, again, magically, Terry Kalayjian introduces a sly note of ambiguity that causes the viewer to question what is real and what is illusory.

What makes this and all of Kalayjian's pictures succeed so well is that she employs pastel with consummate skill, as a full-fledged painting medium, rather than a drawing tool, to create compositions in which richly nuanced surfaces and subtleties of light are conveyed as convincingly as in any oil or acrylic painting. Thus she is able to evoke a world entire, in which to locate her still life subjects and with which to seduce the viewer into complicity with the more metaphysical aspects of her pictures, which she makes every bit as convincing, finally, as their more physical properties.

It is interesting to note that Terry Kalayjian created the pastel paintings in this exhibition exclusively for the James Beard Foundation, the mission of which is to promote the culinary arts. Naturally, the edible subjects of her paintings makes them an auspicious choice for the foundation's Greenhouse Gallery. Being an exceptionally gifted and imaginative artist, however, Terry Kalayjian gave them a good deal more than they bargained for.

—Ed McCormack

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Variousness and Poetry in WIA's Lincoln Center Exhibition

Women in the Arts Foundation, Inc. (WIA), whose recent group show was seen at Cork Gallery, Avery Fisher Hall, in Lincoln Center, is an organization with a distinguished membership that includes many familiar New York artists.

Among them is Olga Sheirr, whose luminous watercolor landscape, "Giverny Tree" showed her at her casual best. With a brilliant red road running alongside a vibrant blue body of water, Sheirr's sparkling aquarelle turns a landscape into a symbolic rainbow.

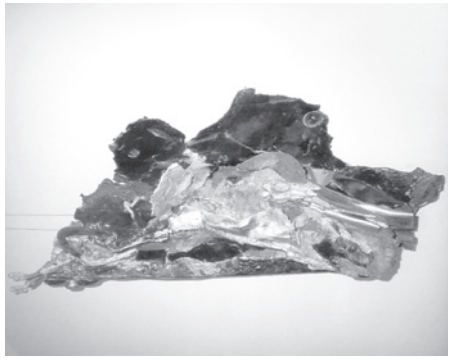
Another frequent exhibitor, Miriam Wills (reviewed at length elsewhere in this issue), showed powerful collage paintings animated by vibrant colors and dynamic figurative and absstract compositions.

Roberta Crown captured another kind of dynamism in her abstract acrylic on canvas "Turkish Delight," with its cursive ecriture and luminous hues. As its title suggests, Crown's composition has a decidedly exotic quality, its gracefully floating forms at once allusive and elusive, hinting at poetic meanings just beyond the viewers' grasp.

Nydia Preede is an artist who conveys her own kind of poetry in her mixed media paintings, albeit of a more concrete kind. In Preede's "Roots of Regeneration," images of children, birds, flowers and butterflies are combined with cryptic printed phrases to create a compelling personal semiotics.

Estelle Pascoe's metaphors, on the other hand, are material ones, complete with witty physical puns. They result from Pascoe's ability to layer various shards and shapes in her commanding wall reliefs with intriguing titles such as "Might as Well Be Spring," which actually has two tiny springs affixed to it like piquant exclamation points!

Olga Sheirr, "Giverny Tree "



Estelle Pacsoe, "Might As Well Be Spring"

The sculptor Estelle Levy has her own way with rugged materials, as seen in "Tower of Babel," a piece in found metals. With its convoluted coil, propeller, and other cunningly combined forms stripped of all utilitarian function and assembled with surprising elegance, Levy's piece had the gadgety visual wit of a Rube Goldberg invention.

Like the late Loren McIver, Marianne McNamara is a painter with a particular gift for finding a peculiar lyricism in obscure corners of the city. In her delicately limned acrylic painting, "Amsterdam Avenue," McNamara evoked a tender mood with a fragmented, windblown sign saying "Heros" and the corner of a fire-escape enshrouded in luminous mists.

Then there was Jutta Filippelli, another frequent exhibitor, here represented by a simple still life in her characteristically straightforward realist manner. Filipelli's small oil of a china vase filled with colorful flowers on a yellow kitchen chair was an unpretentiously affecting ode to commonplace objects and everyday life.

Another painter well known for still life is Rebecca Cooperman, represented here by an oil entitled "Spreading." As in all of Cooperman's recent paintings, this composition of graceful green leaves set against rectangular yellow and ochre forms verged on abstraction.

Also including a strongly stylized painting of a woman's head by Marlene Zimmerman; a small, exquisite painting of a ballerina by Marjeta Lederman; a vigorous gestural abstraction by Barbara Schaefer; Beatrice Rubel's graceful composition of flowing, rhythmic ribbon-like forms in colored pencil; a characteristically painterly abstraction by Emily Rich; and works of equally high quality by Eran Far, Theresa Bates, Deborah Beck, Pamela Hawkins, Susan Asarian, Joanne Turney, Marilyn Coen, Sari Menna, Erin Butler and Maria Formoso, this was by far one of the WIA's best and most varied exhibitions to date.

—Marie R. Pagano

Campisi's Celebratory Art

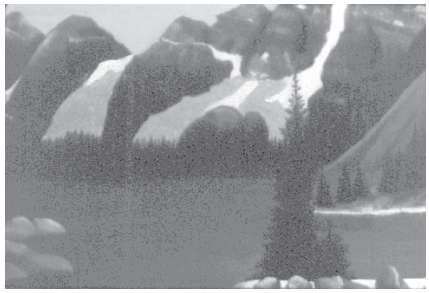
The Brooklyn-based painter and printmaker Naomi M. Campisi has long been known for her ability to invest still life and landscape subjects with a peculiar resonance. Campisi's recent exhibition of paintings and etchings, at Dag Hammarskjold Towers, 47th Street and 2nd Avenue, was one of her most accomplished to date, for it emphasized the qualities that make her work uniquely appealing.

Like the poetry of the late Denise Levertov, Campisi's paintings and prints often take inspiration from the ordinary trappings of domestic life. Through their celebration of commonplace food items, albeit with an Italian accent, such still life paintings as "Making Caponata" and "Abundancia" suggest that a grocery list can be every bit as profound an affirmation of life as a poem. The former painting— in which an eggplant, bottles of olive oil and Harvey's Bristol Cream sherry, a bulb of garlic, an onion, green peppers, and other items are arranged on a tabletop—constitutes a literal recipe. Presumably, one could cook this popular Italian eggplant dish by taking careful note of these ingredients. And Campisi makes them so palpable, so palatable, that one is sorely tempted to try!

"Abundancia," on the other hand, is a more traditional cornucopia that includes two plates of assorted fruits, a smaller plate of eggs, a bottle of wine, a blue vase, and a loaf of Italian bread. Painted with characteristically uninflected restraint, these elements offer an elegant argument that, as F. Scott Fitzgerald once put it, living well is the best revenge.

That Naomi M. Campisi's handling of landscape is equally appetizing can be seen in another oil entitled "Emerald Lake, Canadian Rockies." This is an exhilarating picture, in which snow-flecked mountains hover above pine trees and a brilliantly reflective body of water. Here, Campisi's sense of clear winter light is as precise as that in the best Alaskan scenes of Rockwell Kent, whose fame as an illustrator unfortunately overshadowed his considerable gifts as a landscape painter.

In another fine oil, "Dr. Zim's Lilies," Campisi paints a subject so often associated with Monet in a manner so distinctly her own that she avoids such comparisons with admirable finesse. Her own distinct style comes across as well in her watercolors, such as "Rock Gorge, NH" and "Jordan Pond, Maine," where rugged landscape subjects are captured in a manner at once fresh and particular. This is not easy in a medium as



"Emerald Lake, Canadian Rockies"

unforgiving as aquarelle, but Campisi's combination of gracefully articulated draftsmanship and clear washes of color are more than equal to the task.

Especially impressive in the latter painting is her handling of the delicate cloud formations in the luminous blue sky. Here, too, she employs the light colored rock formations in the foreground in much the same way that she uses the areas of snow on the mountains in the aforementioned "Emerald Lake, Canadian Rockies," to create compelling abstract pattern.

Such touches appear to be second nature to Naomi M. Campisi, whose etchings—particularly an exquisite print of autumn leaves entitled "Summer's End"—are as richly nuanced as her oils and watercolors.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Vigor and Wit in the Paintings of Mary Fader

"The Gospel Singers"

I consider myself a Staten Island painter," says Mary Fader. "A town set against a panoramic harbor is a perfect setting to create and be inspired constantly by nature and urban life."

Although Fader was born and still lives on Staten Island, her subject matter is by no means limited to that borough, scenic as it may be. Manhattan provides inspiration for several oils in Fader's solo exhibition at the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building, 26 Federal Plaza, through September 28.

In "The Theater District," for one lively example, clustered buildings awnings and marquees overlook matinee crowds wending their way between cabs and buses. While Fader captures the particular flavor of that part of town, her approach is by no means fussily realistic. The human figures are rough silhouettes and the towering buildings are blocked in bold outlines and pigment the color and texture of pastel cake frostings. The whole scene shimmers with a confectionery pink, blue, green, and yellow hues that look good enough to eat.

A similar energy and gestural vivacity animates "Fifth Avenue Library," where the familiar facade is brushed in broadly, bracketed between green foliage, and further enlivened by flocks of swooping pigeons that Fader evokes with two or three strokes.

Her ability to conjure up a complex cityscape through the most elemental means is akin to that of Abraham Wolkowitz or Beauford Delaney.

Other city subjects include "Central Park South," where crowds of pedestrians and tall apartment buildings across from the park appear to dissolve in sweltering late afternoon sunlight, under a hot pink-violet sky. Through her vigorous neo-expressionist paint handling, Fader makes the entire surface of her compositions appear to shimmer and shake with light, rhythm and movement.

As a Staten Islander, presumably used to traveling via the ferry, Fader has also been inspired to paint harbor scenes such as "Ship with Tugs." In this oil, the boats are painted in bold outline, in strokes as liquid as those that capture the movement of the murky harbor waters. The crafts converge and huddle in near-abstract masses in hues as boldly evocative as those of Georges Rouault.

The human figure is another favorite theme for Fader, as seen in several excellent paintings centering on the domestic activities of women. "Little Women" is especially notable in this regard, with its witty treatment of three women doting over vases of flowers. "Holiday Music," another oil of a woman in an elaborate dress seated at an uptight piano, has an almost Victorian charm—as though one of Whistler's society ladies had somehow wandered into the world of Emile Nolde! Another oil, "The Piano Player," brings a similar subject several steps closer to total abstraction with the simplified figure almost vanishing into the painter's thickly pigmented gestural pyrotechnics.

Even more bold, in terms of form and color, are portraits such as "Sunday Morning" and "Proud Athlete." The former painting depicts a woman wearing a huge hat that looks like it was inspired by the chapeau of Napoleon Bonaparte; the latter is a broadly grinning face that fills the entire canvas with the thrill of victory.

Mary Fader, who has exhibited widely in her native borough and elsewhere, combines painterly zeal with a warm, humane wit, making this a doubly engaging exhibition. —Maureen Flynn

Noho Gallery Brings a Proud Tradition to Chelsea

It should always be remembered that Abstract Expressionism, the most significant American art movement of the twentieth century, sprang not from the commercial venues uptown but from the artists cooperatives on Tenth Street. This is especially important to keep in mind when one visits an exhibition such as "Noho Gallery...New Digs," which celebrates that venerable co-op's move from Soho to its new venue at 530 West 25th Street (4th floor), in Chelsea.

Featuring small works in various mediums by some 26 artist members, the show, which runs from September 25 through October 13, with a reception on Saturday, September 29, from 3 to 6 PM, demonstrates by its overall high quality the diverse aesthetic riches that this highly respected artist-run venture, founded in 1975, brings to New York City's hottest new gallery area.

Sharon Florin shows a realist oil "White Restaurant," which captures the layered quality of urban life, with figures and buildings reflected in the plate glass windows of an elegant dining place, the scene made palpable by the artist's unerring way with light. Siena Porta is a realist of a more metaphysical bent, as seen in "Just Sitting," an assemblage in clay, stone, and plastic that depicts a man meditating in a desert landscape. Equally ethereal in a different manner is Dianne Martin's poetic mixed media drawing of a single feather floating within a precise rectangle set against a delicately modulated grey ground.

A monochromatic palette is also used effectively in Amarillis Kroon's acrylic painting "Black and White Trees," where the sense of a dense forest penetrated by shafts of sunlight is evoked in a near abstract painterly composition enlivened by touches of gold leaf. Hester Welish's "Shoreline" is a beachscape notable for its freewheeling composition and vigorous paint handling. In a color lithograph entitled "Dusk," Akiko Naomura employs an intricate network of tree limbs set against New York tenement buildings to create graceful compositional rhythms.

Two artists in the forefront of the movement to elevate quilt-making and other textile techniques in a fine art context are featured with strong works: In two pieces from her "Impromptu" series, Marilyn Henrion, an award winning international artist, employs hand quilted silk to explore the relationship of abstract art to music through vibrant geometric compositions with a jazzy impact akin to Stuart Davis. Erma Martin Yost, who draws upon her Mennonite heritage to create vital contemporary statements, shows a stitched construction entitled "Mapleleaf/Dragonfly Dance," combining poetic natural elements with formal grace and austerity.

The Brazilian artist Edgar Barbosa is a consummate colorist, as he demonstrates once again in a vibrant oil on canvas composed with rectangular forms and rainbow stripes. Sinuous, sharply defined black and white shapes confound figure-to-ground relationships to create dynamic contrasts in Zarvin Swerbilov's hard-edged painting "Wave." By contrast, David Deutsch employs patches of color and a fluid line to create figurative compositions with offhand abstract attributes akin to those of Larry Rivers. Stephanie Rauschenbusch makes her own peace with the tensions between abstract form and representation in her luminous watercolor of rock formations in Cornwell. Leon Yost, best known for his photographic exploration of spiritual sites, also makes a characteristically strong aesthetic statement with an image of a specific place, in a hand-tinted Cibachrome of an ancient Egyptian obelisk re-erected in Romeb Bernini in the 17th Century.

Rebbeca Cooperman is represented by "Green Fantasy II," one of her most abstract and successful oils based on plant forms. Daniele Marin employs a grid of nine squares to contain a variety of intriguing pictographic images in her mixed media piece, "Nuits Blanches. " Jacques Simons demonstrates a funky elegance in his energetic, brilliantly colored abstract collage of fractured gestural forms. Sheila Hecht reveals her own gestural power in "Gorilla Warfare," an acrylic on canvas with a frenzied painterly energy that reflects its amusingly punning title.

Other exhibitors whose works were not available for preview include Diana Freedman-Shea, Lynne Friedman, Mark Jacobson, Bruce Laird, Hyeon-Seok Lee, Pat Feeney Murrell, Frances Jacobson, Jessica Fromm, and Judy Zeichner.

The addition of artist-led venues to Chelsea, especially ones as respected as Noho Gallery, is a healthy sign that the area is developing into an inclusive and varied gallery district concerned with more than chic commercialism. No one has higher standards than artists themselves. Nor do any galleries bring more vitality and legitimacy to keep an art area from turning into Boutique Row than those galleries over which artists preside.

—Andrew Margolis

Marilyn Henrion,"Impromptu #2"

Sharon Florin, "The White Restaurant"

Stephanie Rauschenbusch, "The Chûn Quoit, Morvah, Cornwall"

Leon Yost, "Obelisk of Santa Maria"

"Tropicos": Five Venezuelan Painters in New York

Although contemporary art in Venezuela has kept a relatively low profile in the international art world, and most particularly in the New York art world, up to now, a recent exhibition of Venezuelan artists in Soho indicates that there is a good deal of first rate work being produced in that country. The exhibition, at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, featured the work of five painters, each of whom showed a level of development that would indicate a major talent in any national context. Indeed, as their exhibition credits made clear, each of these painters has important credits in his native country, and in some cases in other countries, including the United States, as well. Even more important, however, each of these artists has evolved a very definite style, the stamp of a fully matured aesthetic sensibility.

Enrique Finol is an expressionist whose gestural abstractions present an ambiguous sense of an askew landscape that can be favorably compared to the upside-down figures of the well known German painter Georg Baselitz. Finol, however, has his own distinct approach, with vigorous, slashing strokes of fiery colors filling large canvases with a sense of untrammeled natural energy. Finol's work can also be compared to that of Susan Rothenberg for the way in which the submerged image asserts itself through the highly-charged painterly pyrotechnics. Enrique Finol, though, employs a much more vibrant palette of hues, often in the red and yellow range, to create a chromatic frisson that is altogether his own.

Luis Rocca Brito also employs a loaded brush in a lively expressionist manner to create compositions in which the central motif is a single tree emerging from a highly activated, tactile paint surface where vibrant areas of color vie with more monochromatic passages for supremacy. It has been accurately observed that Rocca Brito is a neoclassicist in the sense that his compositions are distinguished by a formal austerity that plays off against his gestural paint handling to create dynamic spatial tensions. Thus his paintings are endowed with a sense of contained energy that considerably enhances their innate vitality.

Although also driven by an exuberant painterly impulse, the canvases of Justo Osuna are primarily concerned with lush effusions of color that approximate, but do not imitate, elements of landscape and nature, even though the artist acknowledges his natural inspiration with titles in which the word "Floral" is often prominent. All the same, it is the energy and essence of nature that Osuna strives to capture, a sense of the process of natural growth rather than its outward appearance. His paintings are essentially abstract, their components colors and forms rather than actual objects or specific landscapes. They shimmer with a sense of movement, of flux and action that speaks of nature in a general sense, as the substance of all creation, for which Justo Osuna makes the substance of pigment itself a sensual surrogate.

Jose Martinez, on the other hand, is concerned with essences of quite another kind. Martinez fills his canvases with small pictographic figures that appear to allude to mankind's origins and to the soil and culture of his native land. These are figures that could as easily grace the wall of an ancient cave as the canvas of a contemporary painter. They appear to hint at that exact moment when primitive pictograms metamorphosed into the letters of a written alphabet, and yet they also seem immutable, eternal, at home in any age, including our own, by virtue of Martinez's ability to integrate them—or one might more accurately say to *embed* them—into the surface of his canvases and make them function as elements of decidedly abstract compositions.

Then there is Giovanni Escala, who brings his own private mythology to bear in canvases with bold signs and symbols that echo the ancient past. Brilliant colors and expansive forms are set afloat to do battle on the picture plane in Escala's large canvases, conjuring visions of ancient cultures—their signs and symbols, their beliefs and primitive tools. Nothing is spelled out, nothing is specific, yet all of these diverse things resonate in the colors and shapes that Escala summons up in his compositions. Here, evoked by a swift, calligraphic gesture of the brush we see something resembling a written symbol; there, we discern the outline of a simple boat; another shape suggests a tree glimpsed in passing; in this earthy area we seem to perceive a body of land afloat on an ocean, while the circular shapes that grace many of Escala's paintings invariably suggest either suns or moons. Yet each of these elements is so integral to the painterly vocabulary of Giovanni Escala that we cannot finally name it; each is a unique manifestation of the artist's personal vision and must finally be regarded as a discrete creation.

All five of these gifted artists bring something distinctively his own into contemporary painting, so each must be taken for his own merits in an art world where national boundaries are rapidly vanishing, or at very least becoming irrelevant. At the same time, it is important to recognize that every artist, no matter how modern or postmodern, retains traces of his or her heritage that must be acknowledged in assessing the contribution that he or she makes to mainstream world culture. Thus, it is important to recognize and celebrate the unique characteristics of Venezuelan history and culture that contributed to making this exhibition memorable and valuable.

* * *

Also on view at Montserrat Gallery during the same period as the Venezuelan exhibition were two solo shows by the Mexican sculptor Maria Lagunes and the Norwegian painter Astri Eidgeth Rygh.

Along with her bronze sculptures, Maria Lagunes also showed a large group of watercolors and drawings that related to her three dimensional work and were every bit as compelling in their own way. Indeed, Lagunes is an excellent draftsperson whose drawings and watercolors stand on their own as finished works of art, rather than preliminary studies, even while their relationship to her sculptures is certainly clear.

As for the sculptures, most of them are roughly figurative forms that command space with impressive substance and grace. Indeed, in the bronze entitled "Paraja II," the space between the two slender figures that stand next to each other on the same pedestal is so beautifully articulated as to constitute as much a part of the overall statement as the figures themselves.

Maria Lagunes' bronzes compare favorably to those of such predecessors as Henry Moore and Alberto Giacometti for her ability to capture a monumental sense of the human presence through strong formal generalization.

Astri Eidgeth Rygh employs a unique technique in which the artist's own photographs of micro-structures form a black and white basis for acrylic paintings that take the profound theme of time itself as a starting point for their genesis. They depict "objects placed on walls at different periods in history, to worship, decorate, inform or communicate." In each of Rygh's paintings, images and symbols inhabit compositions that often have the weathered appearance of ancient parchment scrolls or tablets. Calendars with dates crossed out are a recurring motif, along with vertical lines intersected by diagonal marks. By these devices, Astri Eidgeth Rygh gives the sense of a prisoner biding time in a cell, suggesting both the fleeting nature of time, as we measure it by the days of our lives, and its larger, more eternal truths.

—Sheldon Oster

Hierholzer's Industrial Dreamscapes

While it has long been fashionable for artists to rail against technology, decrying its dehumanizing effect and other supposed evils, Joan Hierholzer is as captivated by its romance today as the Futurists were in the relative infancy of the machine in the early nineteenth century. Furthermore, viewer be warned: Hierholzer's enchantment with technology is quite contagious in her exhibition of acrylic paintings, "Age of Marvels," at The National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South, from September 16 through 29 (reception Wednesday, September 19th, from 6 to 8 PM).

The show, which includes Hierholzer's large, panoramic mural, "The Refinery," recently acquired by the Zimmerli Art Museum for the permanent NAWA collection, develops the artist's themes of industry, science, fusion, space, and landscape. These themes are skillfully interwoven in her dreamlike compositions, where turbines, pyramids, space capsules, homes, and other elements are seen in atmospheric imaginary landscapes with a decidedly unearthly quality.

Those who have traveled by train or automobile through the industrial areas of New Jersey and other parts of the United States, perhaps holding their noses to shut out the noxious odors and gazing ruefully at some of the sights to be glimpsed there, may be amazed at the poetry and the beauty that Hierholzer manages to perceive in such places. Like William Carlos Williams' epic poem "Patterson," the acrylic paintings of Joan Hierholzer prove that beauty, as the old saw states, truly is in the eye of the beholder.

By her ability to ennoble sites that others might consider eye-sores, making us see them anew, Hierholzer accomplishes one of the most difficult tasks of art: that metamorphosis by which the commonplace, even the ugly, takes on a visionary gleam, an unanticipated glamour. Part of her success in this is due to her technical proficiency in evoking atmospheres that provoke an epiphany in the viewer. She employs acrylic paint almost in the manner of watercolor, in luminous semi-transparent washes that overlay her forms like diaphanous colored veils, suggesting ethereal shifts of light, imbuing her industrial landscapes with a sense of time, as well as space.

In this regard, the allusive, even haunting, atmospheric magic that Hierholzer creates can only be compared to that in the paintings of the late great Chinese American watercolorist Dong Kingman. Just as Kingman could capture the hidden poetry of a berubbled street at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge, so can Hierholzer unveil the underlying lyricism of utilitarian man-made structures imposed on a once-virgin landscape. Hierholzer alone seems capable of convincing us that this can constitute a compatible marriage of visually harmonious entities, rather than an unconscionable act of corporate rape!

In the acrylic on canvas entitled

Joan Hierholzer, "Bloomation"

"Bloomation," for example, the piece de resistance is a fanciful white bird perched contentedly in a scrubby tree amid a variety of structures that loom like ominously spidery poles and towers straight out of some science fiction setting. An even more desolate vista is transformed in "Wireless Spires," where the mundane structures of the title become a distant fairy tale city. Equally fanciful are "Power Cones," a dynamic juxtaposition of modern towers and ancient pyramids and "World Tree," where not even the presence of three structures that look like industrial dumpsters ruin a rapturously pastoral landscape.

Indeed, Joan Hierholzer demonstrates an imaginative freedom, along with a considerable gift for for form and color, that makes her work not only magically allusive but also formidable in formal terms.

—Lawrence Downes

Kumi Ito Evokes Childhood Magic

Kumi Ito, gouache on paper

Growing up in a small village in Japan, where traditional games, crafts, and festivals still flourished, made a lasting impression on Kumi Ito, whose solo show was recently seen at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, in Soho.

Think first of Hokusai's swarming market scenes; then add to their antic intricacy the vibrant color and meticulous execution of Indian miniatures; now mix in an element of the hermetic obsessiveness that we see in the paintings of the American "outsider" artist Henry Darger (albeit with all the dark perversity replaced by sunlit innocence) —and perhaps you will have some idea of the antic energy that animates Ito's paintings in gouache and acrylic.

"My idea," Ito says, "is to create a world in which my viewers are released from their tightly constrained feelings, a place in which we can play together."

Indeed, the most active elements of her compositions are swarms of children, often in the company of beautiful young women in colorful traditional costumes that have not changed significantly since Hishikawa Moronobu painted his similarly populous panoramas during the Edo period.

Like Moronobu, Ito began her creative career as a fabric designer, and it is in his great tradition that this gifted contemporary artist continues. At the same time, Ito updates the tradition with her singularly innocent sensibility: Rather than painting racy scenes of swaggering samurai and fashionable young ladies flirting, dancing, and roistering gaily in town squares, Ito lends equal energy and animation to the more innocent carousings of children. Her plump, round-faced kids clamor aboard festive parade floats or carts filled with colorful flowers. They soar through the air on fish-shaped kites, cavort in swarms under a brightly blooming cherryblossom tree, or splash each other good-naturedly with buckets of water. Occasionally, they even engage in more elegant and stately activities, staging tea ceremonies or placing dolls on altars on the traditional holiday known as "Girl's Day."

More often, though, Ito's colorful paintings and considerably more elaborative decorative screens rival the peasant festivals of Brueghel for their boisterous charms.

Yet, there is also an element of pure fairy tale fantasy to her pictures, as seen in one lovely composition of kids in pure white kimonos playing pattycake within the petals of gigantic flowers or another beautiful image of graceful young women floating freely in space, scattering delicate pink petals from baskets, while grinning children employ wisps of white pollen as parachutes.

Painted in meticulous, hard-edged detail in vibrant primary hues, often unfolding against luminous gold or ochre grounds, Kumi Ito's pictures are radiant visions that, for all their celebration of Japanese culture, evoke an idyllic fantasy realm that is finally universal.

Hilda Green Demsky "New Naturist"

"Rock City"

Hilda Green Demsky, a much exhibited painter whose awards include a Fulbright Fellowship and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, takes inspiration directly from nature, and particularly from certain areas of the western and northern United States. Yet, her forceful oils are also related to the visionary abstractions of Gregory Amenoff and Bill Jensen. In part, this has to do with the subjects that Demsky gravitates toward: craggy canyons, exploding geysers, bubbling mudpots, ancient volcanos, and other aspects of nature that tend to bring out the visionary tendencies in even an avowed realist.

Indeed, the deliberately phenomenological bent of Demsky's work is expressed in the title of her new solo exhibition "Existence Sprang Forth," which can be seen at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from September 25th through October 13th. The opening reception is Saturday, September 29 from 3 to 5 PM. And Demsky may cast some light on the issues raised above in the "Artist's Dialogue" that will take place at the gallery on Thursday, October 4, from 5 to 7 PM.

The paintings, however, speak eloquently for themselves, as seen in the large oil on canvas,"Rock City," where Demsky displays her ability to depict the movement of a waterfall, capturing the thrust of the torrents convincingly, even while locking all the elements in place in a composition as air-tight as a Cezanne. While inspired by the landscape Demsky never allows its energy to sweep her off course. Her apparent mission is to capture the underlying forces of nature and contain them in a composition that translates those innately chaotic forces into a coherent visual statement. She succeeds admirably in "Rock City," where the various elements of the composition—the rectangular shape of the sheer wall of water, the more rounded contours of the surrounding foliage and rocks, and the less regular shapes of the gushing white foam—are at once schematized and vital.

Rock formations provide Demsky with some of her best opportunities to schematize nature in near-cubistic terms in paintings such as "The River of Life" and "Colorful Canyon." In the former composition, the winding movement of the water over boulders and between larger rocks conveys the symbolic meaning of the title with a strong visual metaphor put forth with haiku-like succinctness; in the latter, the majestic sweep of the craggy peaks, limned in muscular strokes, creates a compressed composition bursting with quiet internal energy.

The rugged beauty of Demsky's landscapes can be favorably compared to earlier American artists such as Marsden Hartley, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Arthur Dove, who extracted vital essences from nature and reorganized them in compositions that often hovered between the real and the abstract. Since Demsky is a postmodern painter, however, it seems more accurate to classify her as a New Naturist, for to paint landscapes today is a much more radical enterprise than it was in the early nineteenth century. And Hilda Green Demsky does so with a skill, passion, and conviction that makes her work a natural wonder in its own right.

—Feliks Karoly

Sung Mo Cho: A Korean Artist's Highway Songs

"Along the Road II," Acrylic on Canvas Sung Mo Cho's solo show is on view at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th St., from Sept 4 thru 22.

Although the Beat writer Jack Kerouac and the Pop painter Allen D'Archangelo have both celebrated the mythic American highway in their respective mediums, some of the most vivid evocations of the road have been created by foreign-born artists gazing upon that unique and gaudy wonder with fresh eyes. Witness, for two excellent examples, the neon-splashed highway passages in the Russian emigre novelist Vladimir Nobokov's "Lolita," and transplanted British painter David Hockney's many long and winding California vistas.

No artist in recent memory, however, has captured the metaphysical aspects of the view from behind the wheel from quite as unique a perspective as the Korean born painter Sung Mo Cho, whose solo exhibition can be seen at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25 Street, from September 4 to 22.

For one thing, Cho introduces the delicate poetry of the Asian landscape tradition into the equation, letting Eastern aesthetics collide head-on with raw Western banality. Yet his view, while intriguingly skewed, is anything but vulgar.

Working in acrylics or mixed media on canvas, Cho creates compositions in which the road and its natural surroundings take on an unearthly beauty. One of his most impressive paintings in this regard is the acrylic on canvas entitled "Along the Road—Nature," where Cho's take on nature is decidedly surreal. The right side of the composition, meticulous in technique as all of Cho's paintings are, depicts a seemingly infinite highway weaving between tall rows of trees. But the most amazing element is the sky, where a weird canopy of clouds with inner shadows shaped like myriad craggy peaks in a Chinese landscape scroll looms mysteriously, forming a phenomenal portal of cumuli through which we see a more or less normal stretch of stratosphere. Stylized Asian mountain peaks also appear in a small area on the upper left side of the painting, while a larger area below contains a sideways image of slender winter trees. In a manner that could be termed cinematic, the three sections of the composition, separated by swooping grey borders with a white line down the middle that suggest an aerial view of a highway, appear to transcend time and space. Remarkably, these metaphysical juxtapositions all occur on a canvas not much larger than an Indian miniature, the intimate scale adding to the somewhat disconcerting beauty of the picture.

The use of a symbolic highway as a border to separate disparate images is employed just as effectively in a larger acrylic on canvas called "Along the Road II." Here, these borders flow between glimpses of graceful, golden autumnal trees; a full moon set like a jewel in a brilliant red sky, and misty blue skyscrapers that loom like some distant Oz.

Of all the paintings in Sung Mo Cho's "Along the Road" series perhaps the most suggestive and in many ways most intriguing is the square shaped acrylic on canvas entitled "Along the Road—S," in which the image of a sexy young nude striking a seductive pin-up pose and two mysteriously masked faces appear in the upper right hand corner. Here, too, the symbolic highway borders wind sinuously around a variety of other images, including those Asian-style mountain peaks; petroglyphic symbols of birds, deer, and fish; a gnarled Bonsai-like tree in a verdant field under gathering clouds, and the yellow peering eyes of two blue cats. The cumulative effect of these images (the juxtaposition of the nude woman and masked faces recalling aspects of Stanley Kubrick's final film "Eyes Wide Shut") is to hint at the adventures and casual trysts that can occur far from home—or at very least, the opportunities for fantasy that being removed from one's normal life by travel can afford.

In these and other paintings, Sung Mo Cho gives us the odd juxtapositions of nature and man-made elements that make modern life so innately surreal. With brilliant colors and images that become visual metaphors for the restless modern spirit, he chronicles the journey of a Korean immigrant in America from the first tremors of culture schock along the lonesome highway to the mirror at the end of the road.

—Ed McCormack

Spain, The United States, and Korea: Three Cultures, Three Painters

Aurora Shakespeare, Norma B. Heisler, and Ke-Won Lee, come from different parts of the world and have diverse aesthetic approaches. Yet, their three recent solo shows at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, made for complementary contrasts.

Aurora Shakespeare was born in Manila, Philippines, of Chinese parents, but lives and works in Majorca Spain. Over the course of her career she has evolved from an abstract minimalist style to figurative imagery.

Shakespeare's acrylic on canvas, "Two Women," is an especially bold composition in a perfectly square format. One woman sleeps, while the other is awake, watching her. A scarlet sheet flows over their nude bodies against a brilliant orange background. They share a bed but could also appear to be floating freely in space, their sensually rounded forms limned in warm tan and ochre hues.

In "The Pool," another powerful painting by Shakespeare, a sinuous nude reclines like a living arabesque on a dark red blanket beside a swimming pool filled with luminous blue water, the juxtaposition of the organic and geometric shapes bolstering the composition with an underlying abstract power. This was Aurora Shakespeare's first New York exhibition and it was an auspicious debut indeed.

Norma B. Heisler is an American artist who began her career in 1958 and has been exhibiting at Montserrat Gallery since 1997. A noted psychotherapist as well as an artist, Heisler's recent paintings are essentially abstract. At the same time, they suggest radiant visions of light streaming through clouds and other transcendent natural imagery. Titles such as "Blizzard," "Storm Clouds," "Mediation," and "Warming Spirits" simultaneously suggest outer perceptions of nature and inner states of mind.

It is the forces of nature, its underlying essences and energies, rather than the objective appearances of clouds or ocean waves, that Norma B. Heisler evokes with such stunning power. That her paintings are as intriguing in formal terms as they are emotionally evocative makes them doubly compelling.

The Korean artist Ke-Won Lee necessitates the coining of a new term: conceptual abstractionist. He is an artist with an abiding faith in the avant garde impulse in an era when "postmodern" is often used as an excuse to cease experimenting.

At Montserrat, Ke-Won Lee used geometric forms, modular sequences, and monochromatic colors to express what he refers to as the "intrinsic common features in all human beings"—even while it is the differences between individuals and cultures that are more commonly stressed.

Toward this end, this adamantly avant garde and much respected innovator showed a grouping of small, monochromatic paintings in plain wood frames. Their impassive surfaces were devoid of incident, yet their precise arrangement on the wall created austere yet complex spatial tensions. Also outstanding were gridded compositions centering on the interplay of rectangular shapes and primary colors, as well as another intriguing minimalist painting suspended from the gallery's ceiling.

All revealed the uncompromising aesthetic that has made Ke-Won Lee one of Korea's most celebrated artists over the past decade, culminating in a prestigious exhibition at The National Museum of Contemporary Art, in Seoul.

—Maureen Flynn

Varied Pleasures: From the Everyday to the Metaphysical

A welcome relief from self-conscious self referential art was seen in the recent exhibition of septuagenarian Swiss artist Germain Chassot, at Montserrat Gallery , 584 Broadway.

Chassot's sophisticated primitive canvases celebrate the simple things in life with an affection that is contagious. At the same time his detailed scenes of peasant farmers, card games in cozy family parlors and other folksy subjects have real aesthetic merit. Combining the rustic charm that we see in the masters of Yugoslavian folk painters like Milo Kovacic with the innate formal qualities more common to French naifs such as Rousseau and Bambois, the paintings of Germain Chassot possess the unique healing power of an uncorrupted pictorial imagination.

Among several other refreshing international talents recently encountered in the same Soho venue was the ninety year old French painter Jean-Claude Chertier, who specializes in picturesque marine scenes that hark back to a long-gone era of galleons and conquistadors. Blustery gales, billowing sails, and rough seas lend Chertier's pictures a charm comparable to reading a romantic seafaring novel. Chertier paints clipper ships and similar subjects with a conviction that transports the viewer, making us relive the vicarious adventures of childhood, even as we savor his pictures for their more painterly pleasures.

Equally commendable, in a time when too many galleries place a premium on youth, was Montserrat's decision to show another brilliant French painter of advanced years: the abstract artist Emile Mariotti. In his "Catharsis" series, Mariotti compels one's attention with swirling forms and fiery hues that project a remarkable sense of energy. These canvases truly are cathartic, with their rhythmic, vortex-like compositions of fractured planes and shard-like forms that suggest exploded cubism. The paintings of Emile Mariotti share qualities in common with the work of both Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner, yet the work of this mature master also has an easel-scale intimacy and a European finesse that sets it apart, in a class by itself.

Speaking of intimacy, few artists bring to the small picture as much compressed power as Rob Duvall, an American artist whose paintings are not much bigger than postcards, yet convey the vast grandeur of waterfalls, mountains and other landscape subjects. At first glance one could mistake Duvall's pictures for color photographs, so accurate is their depiction of light, especially in one little gem of a sunset spilling its orange magnificence over a body of water. On closer inspection, however, one can enjoy the vigorous yet controlled brush work that lends Rob Duvall's paintings their subtle power.

Cristina Hoyos, an artist from Colombia, is a postmodern surrealist who explores the theme of the "witness" through the ubiquitous image of a mysterious eye in the sky that appears in many of her paintings and collages. Hoyos' compositions are visionary journeys, depicting fragmented figures in metaphysical spaces in luminous colors that enhance their rarefied, dreamlike imagery. The addition of organic materials, such as leaves, in some of her smaller mixed media works adds to the poetry that makes Cristina Hoyos an appealing and compelling painter of personal dreamscapes.

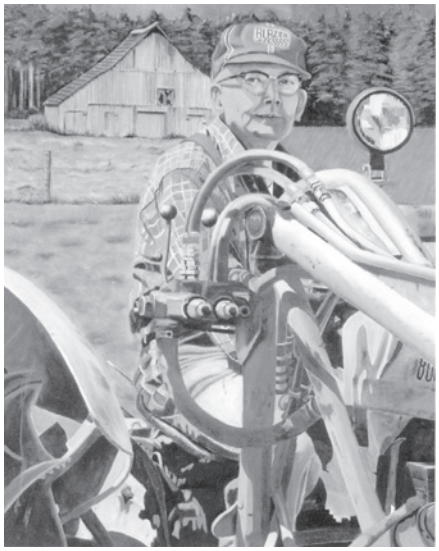
The Texas-born artist Robert Holsch also made an impressive showing at Montserrat Gallery with abstract carved wood sculptures distinguished by a remarkable formal unity. Holsch has a real way with sensual organic forms, which he enhances texturally with a tactile carving technique, using his chisel like a painter employs brush strokes, to energize the surfaces of his pieces, which often combine continuously flowing, sensual forms with sharper, more abrupt shapes.

—Andrew Loomis

Hartsock, Dupoux, and Sant'Anna: Reality's Many Faces

Three woman artists with diverse ethnic backgrounds and distinctly different approaches to representation were featured in the recent exhibition "Faces of Reality," at Agora Gallery, 560 Broadway. The most realistic approach could be seen in the oils of Carol Hartsock, an artist of mixed European and Native American ancestry, presently living and working in Seattle, who refers to herself as a "hostage to faces." Hartsock started painting portraits in Hong Kong, where she lived from 1984 until 1991. She has also traveled extensively throughout Asia, where she has encountered many faces that have inspired some of her best work, such as the smiling young woman in vibrantly patterned garb in "Thai Girl," and the handsome grandma, framed by a bamboo window and holding a small child, in "Nipa Hut."

Hartsock has also created insightful portraits from subjects closer to home, as seen in "Pride of America," an oil on canvas depicting a senior farmer at work. Wearing a bright blue baseball cap and plaid shirt with red suspenders, he perches on the seat of what one assumes is a tractor, from the machine parts visible in the severely cropped composition, with which he almost appears to merge. With a weathered shed and a row of tall trees behind him, he also appears to merge just as thoroughly with the land that he works daily. Gazing frankly at the viewer from his elevated position, he is a figure as quintessential as the couple in "American Gothic."



Carol Hartsock, "Pride of America"

Although the best known art from her country is folkloric, the Haitian painter Marithou Dupoux creates sophisticated semi-abstract figurative compositions that nevertheless retain elements of her heritage. In "Once Upon a Time, Freedom," for example, a little girl clutching a doll is set against various signs, symbols, and simplified human and animal figures painted in a style that combines African influences with the colors and bold forms of the Fauves.

In another acrylic on canvas called "Selfconversation," small silhouetted blue and red figures swirl around the larger figure of a woman, encircling her head like a halo and surrounding her from all sides. The picture comments on how we become prisoners of our memories. In these, and other colorful and boldly composed canvases, Marithou Dupoux creates warmly humanistic and enduring statements intended to counteract the grim, often violent, political realities that plague her country.

Carla Sant'Anna, an artist from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, living and working in Los Angeles since 1998, paints luminous, often pensive, images of women in a style that incorporates elements of Art Deco. In a manner akin to that of Tamara Lempicka, but in colors considerably more intense, Sant'Anna employs smoothly painted areas of shading to highlight the sensual contours of her beautiful female figures. Their melancholy poses enhance their sultry appeal, as they daydream like the young woman in the brilliant red robe gazing longingly from her window in "Watching the World Go By," one of Sant'Anna's most beautiful and affecting oils on canvas.

Like the other two women artists with whom she was paired in this impressive showcase exhibition at Agora Gallery, Carla Sant'Anna is a painter with a distinctive style and world view. Indeed, all three artists demonstrate that reality has as many faces as there are artists to celebrate them.

—Joyce Morrow Levy

A Gemlike Survey of Thiebaud's Kandy-Kolored Mastery

"Reservoir" 1999 Oil on board 9 1/4" x 17 1/4"

While it can be a daunting task for a show in a private gallery to compete with a retrospective in a major museum, the strength of the recent show of paintings by Wayne Thiebaud at Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th Street, was its intimacy. Although the exhibition at The Whitney (which can still be seen through September 23) offers a comprehensive overview of this important American realist's career, the show at Allan Stone was curated with a jeweler's eye for the subtle pleasures that make Thiebaud's work so special.

Among its delightful surprises was "Butcher," a 1998 oil on board in which the tiny figure of the title is seen at a deli counter where glass enclosed display cases offer several signature Thiebaud food paintings in miniature. Equally unusual were "Receptionist" and "Sales Girl," two other small oils from the same year, in which Thiebaud's handling of a single female figure in an interior illuminates his kinship with that other great American realist, Edward Hopper—particularly the latter's austere office scenes. Yet, Thiebaud demonstrates the zesty brushwork and electric color that makes his work temperamentally antithetical to Hopper's.

More typical of Thiebaud's recent preoccupations are the sweeping Western landscapes in which lollipop trees, furrowed fields, and serpentine lakes and rivers are captured in kandy-kolored hues from hovering angles that lend them an unearthly quality. One of the most spectacular of these is the panoramic oil "River Boats," with its strident yellow and peach-colored land masses set off by the piquant accent of a single sailboat afloat on a lime-green body of water.

A smaller landscape from 1999, "Reservoir," in a somewhat more romantic vein akin to that of Bill Pellicone, a lesser known painter who has also shown at Allan Stone, demonstrates Thiebaud's willingness, unusual in an artist of his stature, to take whatever risks are necessary to keep his vision fresh. He obviously likes to surprise himself and is secure enough in his overall vision to let each picture go exactly where it wants to go.

Thus, it was possible for Thiebaud to rework an older painting such as "Two Players (1978-2001)" without forcing it to conform to his most recent mode. In fact, the broadly generalized forms and frenetic brushwork in this fairly large oil on canvas of two scrimmaging athletes hark back to Thiebaud's origins in the Bay Area Figurative School of the 1950s.

Perhaps this painting was included to make the point that Wayne Thiebaud was wrongly inducted into the Pop movement to begin with—that his work was always all about painting for its own sake, rather than about pies or other novel subject matter. In fact, there were no confectionery paintings on view at Allan Stone, and even "Hat Stand (1999)," the most ostensibly Pop painting in the exhibition, resembled nothing so much as a fanciful tree blooming with Thiebaud's own peculiar produce. —J. Sanders Eaton

Judith Peck's Amazons Confront the Towers of Midtown

Unless it is intended to make a provocative political or moral statement, most reasonable people would probably agree that sculpture installed in public spaces has a responsibility to edify rather than to oppress those citizens who come in casual contact with it in the course of going about their everyday activities in the city. All too often, however, the opposite is true: The anti-humanistic scale and aggressiveness of much public sculpture is such that at worst it provokes either hostility or outrage and at best it is met with indifference.

Happily, this is not the case with the four large steel sculptures by Judith Peck installed in Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, at 47th Street and Second Avenue through February 12, 2002. Indeed, like the late great former Secretary General of the United Nations for whom the plaza is named, Judith Peck's sculptures are exemplary for their diplomacy; not only do they occupy space agreeably but they make great strides toward ending the long Cold War between the general public and High Art.

To a good extent, this is because Peck, a widely exhibited artist with work in the collections of several major museums, as well as a Professor of Art at Ramapo University, in New Jersey, creates sculptures that ingratiate rather than alienate viewers of diverse aesthetic persuasions by virtue of her ability to combine monumental form with upbeat themes. Not that Peck cannot be satirical or provocative when she so chooses, as anyone will recall who saw her show last year at Fordham University, Lincoln Center. That show, in an academic setting, included elements or eroticism as well as affecting social statements in pieces with titles such as "Appalachia" and "Refugees."

In her present installation at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, however, Peck presents four monumental sculptures of zaftig female figures whose cheery presence can be favorably compared to the "Nana" figures of Nikki St. Phalle. Indeed, like that distinguished French artist's sizable painted papier mache Amazons, Peck's more formally formidable and enduring welded steel sculptures make a feminist statement, however lighthearted. For they are powerful images of women with their curvaceous contours asserting a healthy classical alternative to the anorexic contemporary ideal put forth by fashion designers and fashion victims.

Judith Peck's Big Beautiful Women appear to luxuriate in their full-bodied femininity and could conceivably empower working women to take proper nourishment without guilt when they spend their lunch hour in the plaza, an oasis in midtown with comfortable benches and pleasantly babbling fountains, which complement the aesthetic experience that the sculptures afford.

Judith Peck's "Seated Woman Red" Welded steel 5' x 4' x 8'
www.judithpeck.com, 201-529-5105, jpeck@ramapo.edu

Each of the much-larger-than-life figures has its own unique appeal: "Seated Woman Red," so named because it is painted a brilliant fire engine red, is especially exemplary in terms of demonstrating Peck's genius for formal abbreviations of human anatomy. Through a kind of formal alchemy, Peck can make a flat sheet of metal suggest a crossed leg, complete with knee, calf and foot, by virtue of its precise placement in the context of the rest of the figure.

"Falling Woman," on the other hand, is notable for the sense of gesture, movement, and buoyancy that Peck achieves in a medium that is, by its very nature, heavy and inert. Indeed, the layered sheet-metal shapes in this piece have a rhythmic flow akin to the calligraphic strokes of a Franz Kline or—perhaps even more appropriately—one of Willem de Kooning's famous femmes.

Then there is "Reclining Woman— Black, Red & Yellow," in which Peck combines aspects of sculpture and drawing with the two dimensional cut-out figure of a majestic, serenely reposeful female nude, her salient features delineated in a spare, sinuous line.

Like Judith Peck's other sculptures, "Reclining Woman—Black," asserts a dynamic and uplifting human presence, poised against midtown's soaring glass towers.

—Ed McCormack

Rehfeld, Rosic, and Vargas: From Lyricism to Funk

Steven H. Rehfeld, who earned his B.A. in studio art from the University of California, in Santa Barbara, is the quintessential California artist, continuing the tradition of Richard Diebenkorn, Frank Lobdell and others as a viable aesthetic enterprise for the postmodern era. Like the Bay Area painters of the 1950s, Rehfeld seems to draw inspiration from the existential zeitgeist of the Abstract Expressionists, yet like them too, he does not totally reject the figure.

In fact, one of the most powerful paintings as well as the largest canvas in Rehfeld's recent solo show at Montserrat, 584 Broadway, was "Roman Year 3001," a magnificent oil of three nude figures in a landscape. Posed frontally as though in a neoclassical frieze, two of the figures are female and one is male. One of the female nudes is conspicuously missing an arm, giving her the appearance of a statue from antiquity—an effect enhanced by the grey cast of all three figures. At the same time, the casual, animated gestures of the figures, as well as their expressive eyes, complete with pupils, gives the scene a more metaphysical quality, as though they are "living statues" or mythical beings who are sentient in some supernatural sense.

The other paintings in Rehfield's show, however, were abstract works in mixed media on canvas in which subtle colors, predominantly in the pink and blue range, were combined with geometric forms and vigorous paint handling to create dynamic compositions anchored by strong spatial tensions.

Another excellent recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery featured the work of Paco Rosic, an artist born in Bosnia, who studied in Germany, where he became involved in the hip hop scene, joining a break dancing group called The Unique Wizards, which toured all throughout Europe. As we all know, the hip hop scene and breakdancing have intimate connections to graffiti art, and like Keith Haring and Kenny Scharf, when he took up painting Rosic was able to bring that same youthful energy into a fine art context. However, Rosic has done so differently than his East Village predecessors, creating radiant color field paintings in which the vitality of his hip hop background is expressed more subtly in his use of color as the main element in his light-filled canvases, which adopt the spray paint aesthetic of graffiti to create lyrical shadows and chromatic effects.

Although one might make more obvious comparisons to the color fields of Jules Olitski and the ethereal shadow-elements in the paintings of Ed Ruscha, Paco Rosic actually cites Claude Monet as an influence and it shows in the subtle refinement of this gifted young painter's work.

By contrast, Joe P. Vargas, another young artist who had an impressive solo show at Montserrat Gallery in recent months, is a funkmeister in the tradition of Chicago's "Hairy Who" school. Vargas activates his paintings with a wild visual wit that makes them full of delightful surprises. Floating smiles, carrots, goldfish, and ladybugs are combined with strong abstract color areas in Vargas' paintings, which have a freedom comparable to Miro and Calder, two other artists who created serious works without giving the impression of taking themselves too seriously.

It takes a lot of skill and self confidence to paint as Joe P. Vargas does, combining imagistic free association with solid aesthetic qualities and making it all look rather offhand. —Timothy Morrison

Carmiah Frank Adds to a Great Tradition

Starting with the work done by Julio Gonzalez in the late 1920s, welded steel was as important to the development of modern sculpture as cubist collage was to the evolution of modern painting. Although she also works in a range of materials that includes plaster, clay, terra cotta, bronze, aluminum, iron, concrete, wood, most recently the Jerusalem-born sculptor and collage artist Carmiah Frank has been making her own contribution to the medium. The impressive results were seen in Frank's recent solo show "Reconstructed Steel," at New Century Artists, in its former address ar 168 Mercer Street.

Fascinated by what she calls "the elusive, uncaught moment of realization of interpretation and creation...that vast area that is forever changing between the eye and the mind," Frank, who also works figuratively, creates sculptures that adhere to the true meaning of abstraction as a representation of essences. Her pieces combine formal integrity with a sense of nonspecific allusiveness.

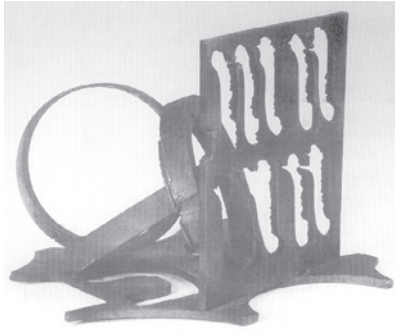
In "Wingless," for example, there is the sense of an elemental human figure in the evocative vertical form, its rounded top suggesting a simplified head. Here, too, the rusted surface of the steel enhances the primitive thrust of the piece, which possesses a primal power akin to Precolumbian art.

A more complex arrangement of interlocking circular and rectangular shapes distinguishes another piece entitled "Rusty Geometrics." This work combines the "drawing in space" that David Smith adopted from Julio Gonzalez with Frank's own idiosyncratic combination of geometric forms. These forms are simplified and further emboldened in the welded steel sculpture "(In)stability," where shapes that suggest a Russian Constructivist painting are developed in three dimensions. The mat black surface of the piece enhances its formal dynamic.

Then there is "Landscape," where the basic vocabulary of circles and squares, on which Frank seems capable of working a seemingly endless number of variations, is employed in a more horizontal format to suggest a fanciful abstract terrain. This is one of those unique abstract tableaux like Giacometti's early surrealist piece "The Palace at 4 a.m.," in which nonobjective forms are so freighted with allusiveness as to take on unexpected meanings. Frank succeeds admirably in creating a landscape like none that exists anywhere on earth, yet so evocative that, inexplicably, we feel we have visited such a place.

Frank's sculptures, in this exhibition at least, were relatively small, generally on the scale of maquettes. Yet each is a fully realized statement with a presence much larger than its actual size. This is especially true of the two pieces entitled "Crisis" and "Greenhouse," both of which have the monumental feeling of massive public commissions.

The former piece is aptly named, with its



steel sculpture

sense of exquisitely precarious balances, its flat, square outer forms poised around swirling circular shapes. The latter sculpture is a more grounded configuration of circular forms supported solidly on a flat base and painted with a green hue that enhances its organic quality.

Indeed, this organic quality is present to some degree in all of Frank's recent steel sculptures, counterbalancing their geometric forms in a unique manner. She invariably adds rough elements, such as the jagged edges on the flowing perforations with which she breaks up some of her flat square shapes, offsetting their austerity with a tactile touch that hints at the warmth of the human hand.

At once complex and possessed of a profound simplicity, the steel sculptures of Carmiah Frank add a significant personal voice to the tradition with which all of modern sculpture began. —Byron Coleman

Drama and Confrontation in the Photo-Paintings of Karl O. Orud

The merger of painting and photography is a particularly postmodern phenomenon. Although Warhol, Rauschenberg, and others employed photographic imagery in the Pop era, it was the Austrian artist Arnulf Rainer who merged the two mediums most fully in his self-portrait photographs altered with paint. It is this tradition that the Norwegian artist Karl O. Orud expands upon with considerable panache in his solo exhibition of works from his "Sport Series," at Agora Gallery, 560 Broadway.

Orud has racked up impressive credits in his native country as both a painter and a photographer, participating in some of Norway's most important exhibitions, as well as publishing several books of photography, painting, and poetry. The degrees to which either photography or painting take center stage in his compositions varies greatly from work to work. In "Aqueducts and Polaroids," for example, the painterly impulse dominates, with trompe l'oeil images of fruit and small, scattered photographic elements placed like piquant accents in a vigorously brushed green field to which a swift linear outline of a vase of flowers has also been added. Here, as well as in related paintings, such as "Drommebildet" and "Days of Disasters," an eclectic array of collaged objects, newspaper clippings, and other elements are combined with various mixed media mark-making techniques, including broadly brushed strokes, scrawls, and drips. These large canvases incorporate a lively visual stew of gesture and imagery in a manner akin to the early work of Rauschenberg, as well as the funky postmodern graffiti-based expressionism of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Most recently, however, in his "Sport Series," Orud has begun to use large, dramatically posed photographs of full-length figures as the central motif of his paintings. These images of attractive young people are repeated in a serial manner reminiscent of Andy Warhol in some works, while in others, images of different male and female models are juxtaposed. Unlike Warhol, however, Orud also affixes various collage elements and adds stenciled phrases to the lively semiotic mix.

Clad in the basic black garb of contemporary chic, the models that Orud photographs strike poses that suggest stills from underground films or avant garde fashion ads. In one of the more intricate canvases, a young blond woman stands with hands on hips, wearing a black dress, staring out defiantly at the viewer; a young man regards us more pensively with hand on chin; yet another male, cloaked in a long black overcoat, glares fiercely, while a third fellow appears to skip gingerly across the green-streaked ground. By contrast, a somewhat starker composition is created with three connected images of the same young man, wearing a black cap and a cloak that comes up over his chin, striking a mock-heroic pose against a salmon-colored ground.

"Sports Series, picture no. 15"

Intense and confrontational, the "Sport Series" introduces an exciting element of performance art to painting, indicating that Karl O. Orud is an innovative artist whose progress bears serious watching.

—Dorothy K. Riordan

The Uses of History, the Mystery of Invention in Four Soho Solos

Without a firm grounding in art history, every artist would be a primitive, an outsider faced with the task of having to invent the art of painting from scratch. How contemporary artists learn from the past and assimilate those lessons into their own personal styles was made clear recently in the work of four painters seen in concurrent solo shows at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

Katia Buteau Zucker revealed herself to be an artist with a freewheeling approach to the figure and color. While her way of merging the forms of a voluptuous female figure and a bass fiddle owes something to Picasso, her vibrant color and paint handling are much more in the spirit of Matisse. Buteau Zucker has also assimilated elements of the Japanese print into her considerable painterly vocabulary as seen in "Passion," in which a pair of lovers were entwined as one. Here, as in other paintings, Buteau also showed qualities akin to Egon Schiele. Like that artist, she combines solid aesthetic virtues with a sense of ornamentation that sometimes verges on the baroque. She employs these lessons from the masters effectively to create paintings that bear the stamp of her own distinctive sensibility, applying pigment in a vigorous painterly manner with stylized figures , patterns, and other decorative elements creating a pleasing yet strong artistic statement.

In the best tradition of artists who create their own rarefied worlds, Katia Buteau Zucker's women could perhaps most accurately be described as "paint nymphs," inhabiting an eternal realm of feminine languor, grace, and beauty.

Italian artist Fabiana Yvonne Lugli Martinez is a painter who seems vitally in touch with the basic forces of nature as a direct inspiration, yet at the same time nature is transformed in her work in a manner akin to certain paintings by Paul Klee.

In Lugli Martinez's painting "Estate Tropicale," for one example, the almost fluorescent colors and organic plant forms project a sense of intense sunlight, reflecting the natural world in a composition that is essentially abstract. This imaginative approach enables her to create undersea scenes, as well as works influenced by landscape, lending to each the unique qualities of her inner world.

Daniel P. McKinley paints figures in landscapes and interiors in a bold semi-realistic manner, but it is the metaphysical aspects of his work, obviously gleaned from surrealism, that make him a vital postmodern presence. In one of McKinley's best paintings, the figure of a man inhabits a desert-like, moon-lit space where a rectangular area replicates his own image. Within that image is yet another mirror-image of the same scene, and one can only assume that the replication continues ad infinitum. Like Magritte, Dali, and other masters of surrealism, McKinley makes the painting work by virtue of his ability to create a self-contained private world with its own natural laws.

The small, intense, exquisitely condensed abstract paintings of Pilar Marquez can be compared to the work of Georgia O'Keefe for their sense of organic mystery, as well as their impressive formal integrity. Marquez is something of an anomaly among contemporary artists, a painter of intimate formal compositions in which simple forms, often circular swirls, and luminous colors create a poetic sense of harnessed natural forces. In a time when so much new art is sensational but superficial, the work of an introspective, consummately serious painter such as Pilar Marquez is to be treasured.

—Maurice Taplinger

The Rhapsodic Urban Epiphanies of Charles E. Murphy

"Empire State at Dusk", Oil on Linen 36" x 58"

The art critic John Russell referred to New York City as "one of the supreme subjects of our century," and certainly this is borne out by the sheer number of painters, poets, novelists, photographers, and filmmakers who have striven over the years to evoke its energy and mystery. With predecessors like Walt Whitman, Henry James, and Edward Hopper, the contemporary painter Charles E. Murphy is in good company. And Murphy does it proud, capturing the light, weather, and local color of the city with the skill and sensitivity of a latter day John Constable, in his latest solo show of "New York Impressions," at Rochester Big & Tall, 67 Wall Street, from September 29 through November 3. (There will be a reception for the artist on Thursday, October 11, from 5 to 7 PM.)

That an upscale men's clothing store can also serve as a serious art venue is itself indicative of what makes the cultural capital of the world so unique. No one appreciates this specialness more than Charles E. Murphy, whose newest Manhattan epiphanies are some of his most magical to date.

Like that quintessential New York auteur, Woody Allen, Charles E. Murphy is an artist whose love of the city permeates his every picture. Just as gracefully as Woody's camera waltzes through the city's streets, wondering anew at familiar landmarks, Murphy's brush caresses them, making their moods, moments, and myriad fleeting qualities even more immutable in the time honored medium of oil on linen.

One of the particular pleasures in Murphy's art is his ability to breathe new life into subjects that many others have attempted before him, sidestepping cliches and transcending banality by virtue of his superior painterly gifts. Of special interest in this regard is the oil on linen entitled "Empire State at Dusk," where the grandaddy of modern skyscrapers is seen silhouetted against a vast expanse of early evening stratocumuli, giving way further down to luminous streaks of orange. Beyond the Empire State Building's majestic spire, its needle piercing the uppermost clouds, a particularly strident streak of yellow light ignites the tops of more distant towers, making them appear as though touched by a torch trailed along the skyline.

Equally rhapsodic is "Night Lights," another nocturnal scene so picturesque it might scare off a less intrepid painter. Murphy, however, turns this vibrant vision of rain-slick, light-reflecting gutters and glowing office towers into something as fluid, fresh, and finally funky as a Charlie Parker saxophone solo. Underlying the painting's poetically allusive qualities and unashamed beauty are the abstract virtues that make all of Murphy's paintings succeed as strong, thoroughly contemporary formal statements.

Indeed, whether seen in an exhilarating snow scene such as "Flatiron in Winter," or in the meditation on stark contrasts of light and shadow on nondescript buildings that is "Old Fulton Street," or in the moody confrontation of pregnant clouds and stagnant water called "East River Morning," it is this combination of poetry and formal power that makes Charles E. Murphy one of our most consistently rewarding urban realists.

—Andrew Loomis

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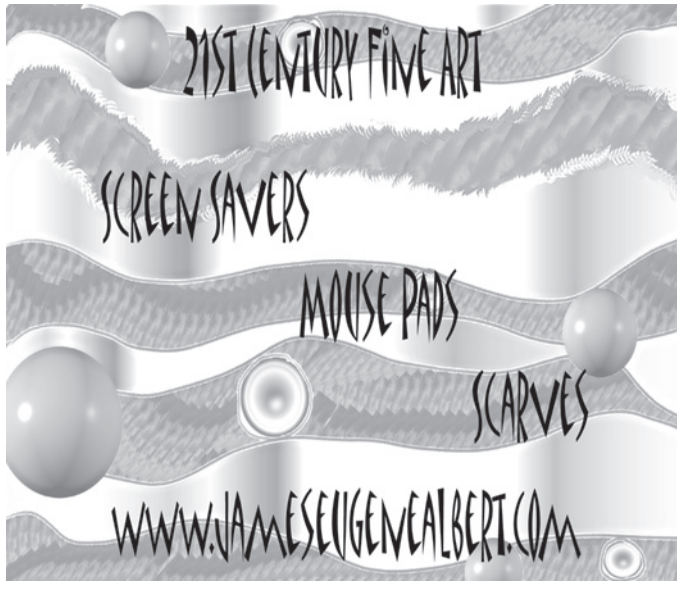

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