

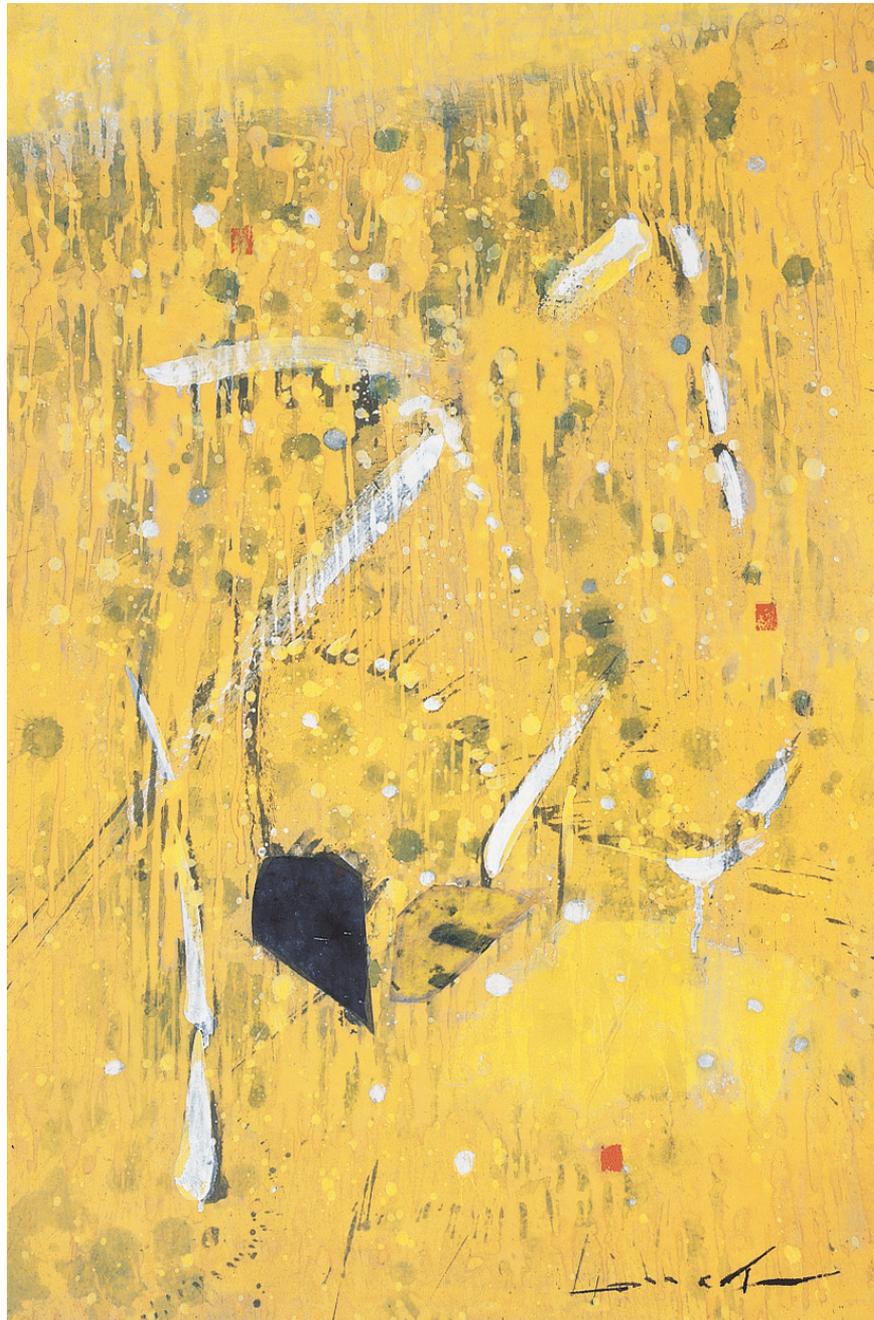
VOL. 4 No. 2

DECEMBER 2001/JANUARY 2002

New York

GALLERY & STUDIO

MICHIO NAMATAME



"LIGHT 6"

Cast Iron Gallery 159 MERCER ST. FROM DECEMBER 5 - 22, 2001

"Dealer's Choice" Acrylic on Canvas 40" x 30"



Sheila Hecht
Recent Paintings

November 27 - December 15, 2001
Reception: Saturday December 1, 4-6 PM

Noho Gallery

530 West 25th, Street, 4th floor New York, NY 10001
(212) 367-7063 Tues - Sat 11am - 6pm

"In The Beginning," 2001 10" x 14" Acrylic on museum board mounted on birch wood. 1 of 7 in grid formation



The One wanted to give to us. He revealed his will in six days. At first it was only dark and "His spirit hovered above the water." He said, "Let there be light" and there was light. He called the light-day and the dark-night.

Betty-Ann Hogan
"In The Beginning"

Jan. 8 - 27, 2002 • Reception: Sun. Jan. 13, 3 - 6 PM



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José Gomez

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oil on canvas,
59" x 59"



Patricia Orbegoso

"Dressed in Clarity,"
oil on canvas, 20" x 25"



From their recent exhibition at
Gelabert Studios

255 West 86th St, NYC 10024, Tel 212 874-7188

Artists contacts:

pjorbegoso@hotmail.com josegomez@hotmail.com
www.geocities.com/pjorbegoso
www.geocities.com/josegomez



"Femininity & Strength" Mixed Media 9" x 24"

DANIÈLE M. MARIN
Au Féminin/As a Woman: a possible pattern
Mixed media show
January 8 - 27, 2002

Noho Gallery

530 West 25th Street 4th Floor (between 10th & 11th Aves), NYC 10001
212 367 7063 • Tuesday - Saturday 11 - 6 pm

G&S Highlights

On the Cover:



Michio Namatame

December 5 - 22, 2001

CAST IRON GALLERY

159 Mercer Street, Ste 4 E

New York, N.Y. 10012

212-274-8624 Fax 212-925-0342

Open Tues - Sat 12 - 6pm

GALLERY&STUDIO

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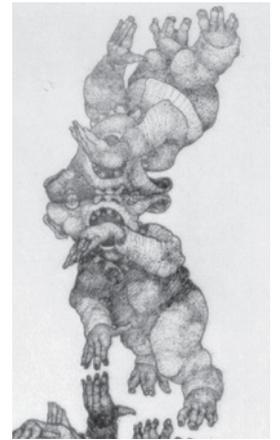
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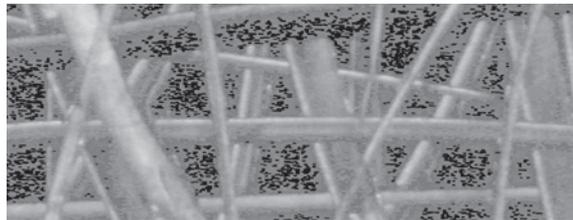
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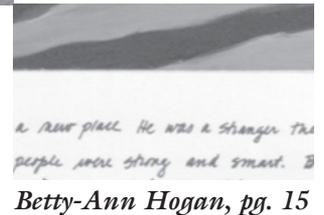
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Nature and Spirit in the Paintings of Michio Namatame

Several years ago, this writer had the pleasure of spending an afternoon chatting with Willem de Kooning in his studio in East Hampton. Although the great Abstract Expressionist was already elderly and quite frail, he was still lucid. He was painting every day with the help of an ingenious mechanical easel that made it possible to manipulate his large canvases without undue strain, and he was still capable of discussing the activity to which he had devoted most of his life with intelligence and wit.

One of the more provocative opinions de Kooning expressed that afternoon was that almost all abstract painting springs from landscape. Out of courtesy and respect for the master, one refrained from contradicting him. Yet, while it is true that many abstract painters employ landscape as a compositional armature, it can be argued, conversely, that abstract painting actually evolved from the efforts of Kandinsky, Malevich and others of their time to explore spiritual ideas inspired by Rosicrucianism and similar esoteric thought systems in a manner unbounded by and ungrounded in traditional representation. Indeed, one might say that those pioneer abstractionists endeavored to liberate painting from its earthbound concerns, of which landscape was the most literal manifestation.

This controversy—if it can be called one for the sake of making several points here—is resolved handily, at least for one artist, in the work of Michio Namatame, a contemporary Japanese painter who isolates and codifies aspects of nature in abstract compositions notable for their lyrical beauty and spiritual resonance.

Not content to merely hold the mirror of illusion up to the face of nature, Namatame endeavors to penetrate the surface of the landscape, to delve beyond its superficial appearances and find a new visual language with which to symbolize both its most enduring and its most ephemeral qualities.

Thus, the paintings in Michio Namatame's solo show at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, from December 5 through 22, are grouped under four themes and general titles: "Earth," "Water," "Light," and "Air." And the colors that he employs in each group of paintings correspond in the most logical sense to their subjects: brown for earth, blue for water, and yellow for light, and a combination of yellow and red for air. Yet, with these rudimentary means, Namatame creates an infinite degree of subtleties that transcend traditional methods of representing natural subjects, to arrive at a poetic



Michio Namatame, "Air 5"

synthesis of the seen and the felt, of the physical and the metaphysical. Working with oils and acrylics, on linen and rice paper glued onto boards, Namatame creates airy, amorphous compositions in which variegated color fields are enlivened by buoyant floating forms, splashes, drips, and calligraphic gestures.

As Yoshiharu Sasaki, Chief Manager of the Iwaki City Art Museum, pointed out in a previous essay on the artist's work, Namatame "comes from a line of artistic ancestors that date back to the Edo period." Whether this is meant literally or figuratively, perhaps it accounts for the elegance of Namatame's compositions—those aspects of his paintings that call to mind the phrase "a floating world," as well as the gracefully swerving linear elements that lend his work a sense of movement, particularly in the "Water" series.

At the same time, Namatame partakes fully of Western modes of expression as well, not only in his choice of medium, but in his use of elements adopted from both Abstract Expressionism and Color Field painting. Among the Abstract Expressionists, Namatame's work seems most akin to that of John Schuyler, who exiled himself from the New York art world at the height of the movement's fame to paint on a remote island in Scotland, where the light inspired him to do his best work.

Presumably, Namatame did not have to take similarly extreme measures (which benefited Schuyler's paintings but cost him critical attention at a crucial moment in art history) to achieve the luminosity that we see in his "Light" series. In these paintings, the ground is especially variegated, with drips and rivulets of diluted yellow pigment streaming down in translucent layers. Here and there, spare white calligraphic strokes enliven this vibrant yellow field, to which

small squares of red are also added at strategic points in the composition. In the context of Namatame's compositions, given the artist's harmonious balance of immediacy and timelessness, these piquant red accents suggest not only sun spots but the seals—or "chops"—that not only identify the artist but become integral elements in traditional Chinese and Japanese ink paintings. Much more Western in feeling, however, are the few isolated collage elements, irregular shapes cut from rough bits of partially painted linen, that add further tactile interest to

the "Light" paintings, creating rugged contrasts to their more ethereal aspects.

In Namatame's "Air" series, more densely pigmented areas of yellow surround central areas of red overlaid with splashes and calligraphic black strokes, their concentrated power calling to mind the "tachism" of European modernists like Wols and Soulages. Namatame, however, employs color more freely and the red heart-shaped collage elements that he affixes to some of these compositions lend them a more evocative, pictorial quality as well.

In his "Water" and "Earth" paintings, Namatame employs different strategies to create paintings with their own unique characteristics. In terms of the former, one can not help but bring up the precedent of Hokusai's masterpiece, "The Wave," which has surely influenced generations of Japanese artists. Rather than imitating Hokusai's approach to a watery subject, however, Namatame acquits himself admirably, employing drips, splashes, and calligraphic strokes in his own inimitable manner to suggest, not a single, monolithic wave, but a wide variety of ripples, eddies and rhythms in the entire, oceanic vocabulary of water.

By contrast, Namatame's "Earth" paintings project a powerful sense of depth and stasis, with their earthy hues and a variety of shapes suggesting a submerged constellation of stones. Like all of this widely exhibited and thoughtful artist's paintings, they suggest an abiding love for nature and sensitivity to its myriad moods and meanings.

Indeed, Michio Namatame is an abstract artist in the most accurate sense of the term, since his paintings extract essences from particular aspects of nature to create images that resonate with a profound universality.

—Ed McCormack

Marilyn Mazin Miller and the Art of Uplift

“Despite the incredible harshness and difficulties of the human experience,” the sculptor Marilyn Mazin Miller has stated, “I am drawn to the joyous side of life; to everyday and yet common experiences of people.”

For this reason, Miller has titled her exhibition of recent sculptures, at Viridian Artists @ Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, “A Celebration of Life,” and will donate partial proceeds from the show to Equality Now, a non-profit organization that works for the protection and promotion of the human rights of women around the world.

Miller has cited Peter Paul Rubens, Gaston Lachaise, and Eli Nadelman as inspirations for the full-blown forms of her figures in bronze, cast stone, and terracotta. And while she certainly follows in the tradition of these earlier artists in how her monumental, mainly female, figures command space with the sensually curvaceous forms, her pieces also possess qualities of lighthearted humor that put her in a league with more contemporary colleagues such as Niki de Saint-Phalle and Tom Otterness.

Indeed, it is this sense of levity, of good-humored grace and upbeat affirmation, combined with the formidable formal qualities of her pieces, that makes Miller a supremely positive presence in contemporary art.

The life-affirming qualities in Miller’s work are especially evident in the gestures of her severely simplified and often featureless figures. Close as they come to abstraction, with their severely generalized take on human anatomy, Miller’s fluid organic forms manage, nonetheless, to convey an eloquent sense of the specific gesture. Her unique ability to convey very specific emotions through formal brevity can be seen in pieces such as “Reaching” and “Exhilaration,” which happen to be among her most ostensibly abstract bronzes.

In the former, a sense of yearning is conveyed in the arms of the figure, which come together as a single thrusting shape; in the latter, the joy suggested in the title is made explicit in the way the figure’s upraised arms flow back over its head, morphing into a flaring shape that suggests the wings of a preening bird or a jubilant angel.

In another powerful piece entitled “Flying High,” featuring a somewhat less generalized dancing couple, the woman’s feet lifted into the air as her partner leans backward, we see literally realized in bronze Miller’s stated goal of reflecting “the beauty and harmony in the physical world as well as the deeper, tender, spiritual connections people make in coming together through this dance of life that we all share.”

In contrast to Miller’s use of smoothly generalized forms in the aforementioned featureless figures, to convey nuances



Marilyn Mazin Miller’s “Exhilaration,” 2001, bronze, 23 3/4" x 17" x 17". Miller’s works can be viewed by appointment. 914-739-9271 email: marilynml@aol.com website: www.marilynmmiller.com

through strictly formal means, here such details as the folds in the female dancer’s dress and the expression of serene confidence that her male partner’s features assume as he whirls her off the floor lend the sculpture a more specific emotional dimension.

Similarly, deeply incised lines that add to both the expressiveness of the face and the figure as a whole are an important element in “Dancin’,” a cast stone sculpture of a middle aged gent in a suit and tie engrossed in what appears to be a lively businessman’s bounce. Linear elements also play an even more prominent role in the cast stone sculpture “Patchamama,” where they swirl like the strokes in van Gogh’s “The Starry Night,” emphasizing the ample contours of a female figure, suggesting the

archetype of an Earth Mother.

Then there are two terra cotta figures called “Lady” and “Gentleman,” in which Miller makes a witty synthesis of her two main modes of expression, adding small, telling details to otherwise generalized figures. Although both figures are as smoothly featureless and asexually pear-shaped as cartoonist Al Capp’s famous “Shmoos,” the “Lady” wears a necklace and has two jutting breasts, while the “Gentleman’s” prominent necktie appears to be a surrogate phallus.

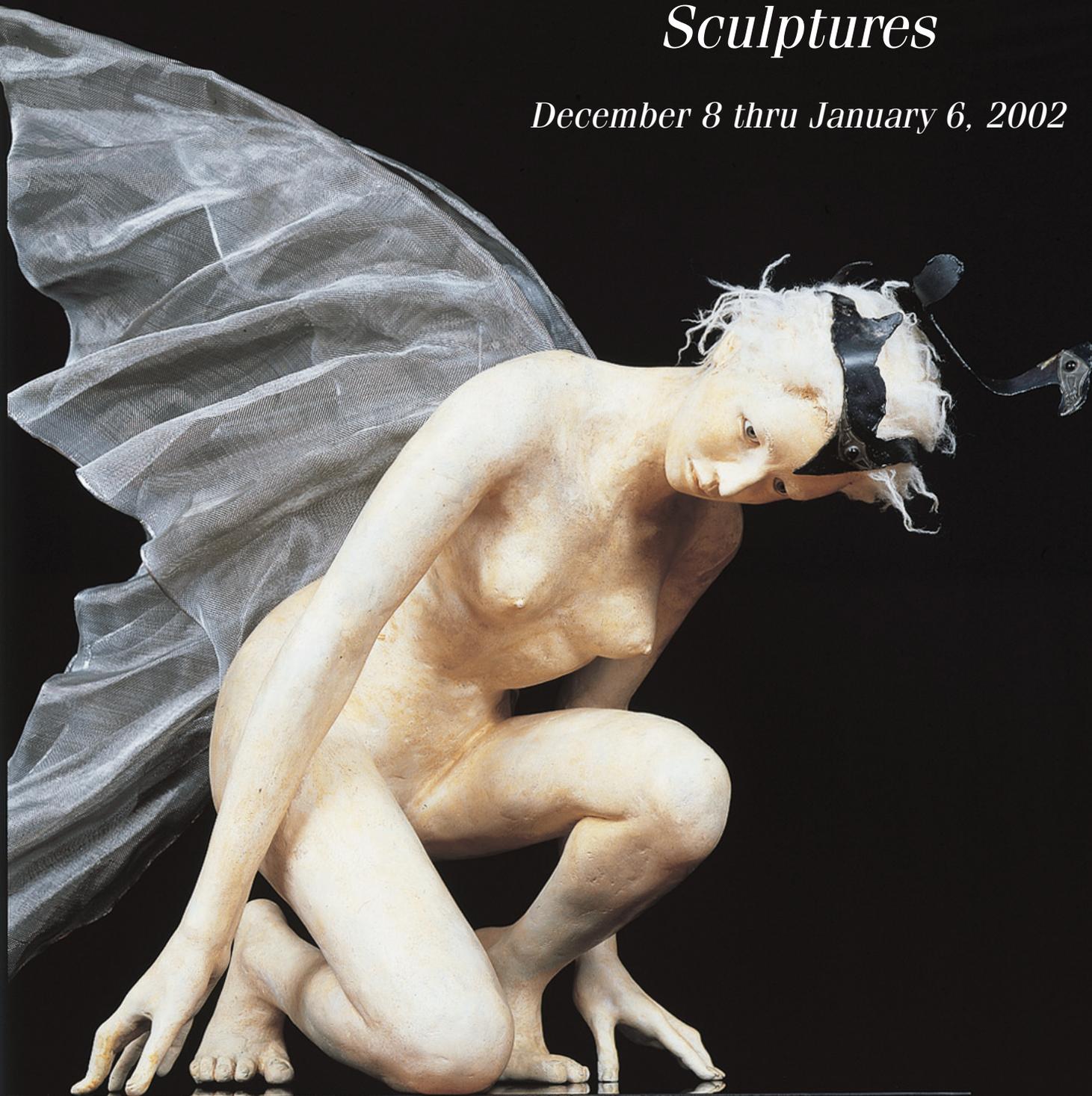
In these, as in all of her sculptures, Marilyn Mazin Miller employs the human figure as a powerful and uplifting symbol to celebrate what she calls “the deep and resonant joy of being centered in the body.”

—Ed McCormack

Cazuko Toda

Sculptures

December 8 thru January 6, 2002



CFM Gallery

112 Greene Street

SoHo, New York City 10012

(212) 966-3864 Fax (212) 226-1041

cfmg@mindspring.com

Navigating the Pluralistic Pleasures of "Talent 2001"

Part of the fun of the annual Talent shows at Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th street, is never knowing what to expect. The recent "Talent 2001" was more honed, focused, and less eclectic than some of its predecessors. Fewer artists made for a less carnivalesque atmosphere; yet the exhibition was not without its delightful oddities.

Bill Will's sculpture "S100" was a cube made entirely of pennies, while his "Ten Loaves" was a similar structure created with Wonder Bread. Both works put a witty spin on Marshal McLuhan's assertion that "the message is the medium."

Daryl Abraham is another one of those eccentric talents who find a home at Allan Stone, where weirdness is welcome when it is supported by genuine vision. Abraham's "Old Farm," a mixed media box construction of a rural scene in a box filled with real earth, transcended quaintness by virtue of its quirky originality.

Another artist who takes a mundane rural subject as a starting point is John Goodman, who showed a series of oils on canvas, each depicting a single rooster. In each painting, the common fowl became an ironic foil for Goodman's bravura brushwork, striking a fine balance between the comic and the heroic.



John Goodman, "Rooster"

Animals of various species made for a veritable bestiary within the exhibition: Carolyn Evans applied her own visual wit to an unusual subject in her oil on canvas, "Swim Meet," employing a large and little fish pass-

ing in the deep as an opportunity for showing off her painterly pyrotechnics. In "Poodle" and "Golden Retriever," Emily Epstein Vines captured the individual characteristics of her canine subjects in a meticulous watercolor technique. By contrast, John Balsey's "Dog," an aluminum sculpture of a mechanical pooch, was both amusing and aesthetically pleasing, with its sleek surface and ingenious use of mechanical elements.

Adam McPherson employed found scrap metal parts in his majestic large sculpture "African Woman." McPherson's lifesize piece captured the statuesque grace of the slender woman balancing a basket on her head, evoking a palpable presence in a semi-abstract style.

As always at Allan Stone, the painterly impulse was also well represented by various artists working in styles ranging from realism to abstraction: Robert Valdes, always an impressive painter, offered an exquisite small gouache on panel entitled "Odd Ball." A simple yet mysterious composition focusing on a ball decorated with stars set against a dark ground, it exemplified the combination of subtly surreal suggestiveness and sensitive paint handling that makes Valdes' work doubly pleasurable.

Latter day literati painter/poet Nguyen Ducmanh, fresh from a successful solo show in Italy, demonstrated his incomparable gestural flair in two characteristically calligraphic abstractions. In "The Phoenix" and "Letter 'D', no. 5," Ducmanh's bold strokes, enlivened by variegated primary hues, resulted in compositions marked by a unique velocity and panache.

Bo Joseph showed a work in ink, tempera, and oil pastel on paper entitled "Inferno: Passages" that was notable for its own kind of calligraphic intensity. With a serpentine black line employed gracefully to create a mazelike composition as convoluted as a



Bo Joseph, "Inferno: Passages"

subway map, Joseph convincingly evoked an abstract sense of Dante's lower depths.

Judy Molyneux's oils are built up in textures that approach bas relief. Her intense colors add further impact to canvases such as "Girl Running on the Beach" and "Red Cliffs and Surfers, their subjects harking back to the California Figurative School. John Turturro's ruggedly muddy abstractions, on the other hand, are more rooted in the New York school, with their bold forms and their scumbled, scratched, and scored surfaces stirring up an almost violent sense of immediacy.

Other surprises in "Talent 2001" included: Stewart Paley's large collage painting, gridded like a comicstrip bursting with antic images; a huge mixed media sculpture of a candy sampler by Peter Anton; some wonderfully warped ceramic vessels by Michael Denslow; Gina Minichino's exquisitely limned little landscapes and figure paintings; Jeff Britton's gritty realist oils of traintracks, tornados, telephone poles and other forlornly poetic subjects; Alex Itin's funky art brut heads, one with a gaping cut-out mouth revealing the gallery wall; an oddly baroque abstract canvas by Mourtala Diop; and Page Laughlin's painterly takes on elegant room interiors. —Ed McCormack



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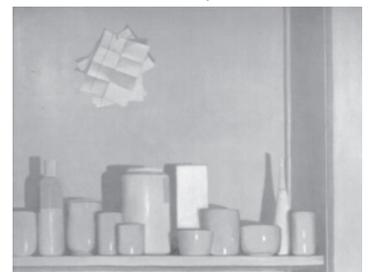
First Non-Members Show at the Pen and Brush

It is always newsworthy when an arts organization that has been in existence for more than a hundred years mounts a new type of exhibition. This is especially true of the Pen and Brush, Inc., one of our most illustrious not-for-profit organizations for women in the arts, founded in 1892, which recently presented its first regional juried exhibition for non-members in the gallery of its elegant town house at 16 East Tenth Street in Greenwich Village.

The show was open to women artists residing in New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey, and despite the slow-ups and general uncertainty in the art world in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks, the number of applicants far exceeded the organization's expectations, according to Exhibition Chairperson May Trien.

The event, which included a watercolor demonstration by well known artist and illustrator Jada Rowland, attracted artists working in a wide variety of styles, from realism to abstraction, including some—such as Nydia Preede, Maida Rosenheck, and Eleanor Gilpatrick—whose names should be familiar to many New York gallery goers.

Lili Maglione won the Best in Show award for her acrylic painting, "Bottles and Cases I," a realist still life notable for its subtly harmonized monochromatic palette and exquisitely austere composition. Depicting various sized vessels clustered on a table top and dominated by cool gray hues, Maglione's painting combines qualities akin to



*Lili Maglione,
"Bottles and Cases I"*

Morandi with a luminosity reminiscent of the Dutch masters.

First Prize for Mixed Media, a popular category in most exhibitions in recent years, went to Laurette Rindlaub for a work called "Winging it," in which collaged images of airplanes and flying insects and floating cumulus forms were deftly juxtaposed to create a sense of buoyant balances between reality and fantasy.

Elizabeth Delson took First Prize for Graphics with "Sandpipers at Low Tide," a breezy and graceful color etching that evoked a sense of the harmonious integration of small birds with the natural world, reminding one of what we humans can learn from such humble creatures.

First Prize for Water Media went to Ruth Friedman for "Dew Drop Inn," an atmospheric aquarelle of a red brick building in Greenwich Village with a quaint cafe on its ground floor, painted with a fresh boldness reminiscent of Winslow Homer's handling of that difficult medium.

Just as exemplary for its technical finesse was "The Hidden Pear," which won First Prize for Pastel for Claudia Seymour, with its skillful handling of light and shadow in a still life composition comprised of a China vase, fruits, and other objects.

Among the other prize-winning works were "Columbus Circle," a lively, detailed etching of a cityscape by Karen Whitman; "Then and Now," a composition of classical figures within an Elysian landscape by Catherine Nicodemo, in which the artist's smooth handling of pastel looked deceptively like watercolor; and "Queens Midtown Tunnel," an uncharacteristically abstract work in pen and ink on board by Sue Kutosh, a Manhattan artist best known for her intriguing self-portraits.

Judging from these and other first-rate works too numerous to mention here, this first non-members exhibition at the Pen and Brush attracted an unusual number of gifted women artists eager to exhibit under the auspices of an organization whose distinguished former members have included first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, poet Marianne Moore, and Nobel Prize winning novelist Pearl S. Buck.

—Jeannie McCormack

DECEMBER 2001/JANUARY 2002

Cazuko Toda's Heady Brew of Beauty, Innocence, and Mortality

Normally when one thinks of fairies, one imagines ethereal beings with decidedly unearthly auras. The Japanese artist Cazuko Toda, however, imparts to the fairies and other fabulous entities that she sculpts so exquisitely contradictorily down-to-earth qualities of sensuality which set them apart from other depictions of their numinous species.

Perhaps it is a question of intimacy with and belief in her subjects, for the artist is apparently not being in the least disingenuous when she asserts, "Since I was a child, I have been encountering fairy spirits in many places and times. My imagination takes me into deep and dark meadows where fairy spirits are born."

Indeed, so palpably does Cazuko Toda evoke these spectral beings—often adding real hair and bits of fabric to her stone clay figures to enhance their naturalism—that one would fully expect to find the soil of those deep, dark meadows and forests in which they congregate caked between their toes.

It is this ability to imbue her sculptures of fairies, sprites, nymphs, and angels with human attributes that distinguishes Toda's first New York solo exhibition, at CFM Gallery, 112 Greene Street, from December 8 through January 6.

In fact, many of Toda's figures are downright sexy, as seen in "Muse of Destiny," an especially engaging figure of a nude nymphet that would surely cause Humbert Humbert's horny old heart to palpitate. Her mane of wild, wheat colored crinkles teased out like some club kid's Halloween parody of Medusa, she languishes dreamily in a rugged rustic sling-chair, leaning over to clutch the knee and fiddle with the toes of one shapely limb. Her slumped posture suggests that of an insolent adolescent, as does her compact figure and the pout of her full-lipped mouth. While her face is fetching, with its long slanted eyes curving around her brow in a feline fashion, she is not conventionally beautiful. Rather, her beauty has a quirky, almost punky, individuality that makes it all the more disarming. Indeed, as the artist seems to hint, advertently or not, in the title of the piece, something about this comely jail-bait muse suggests that she could very well decide some hapless soul's destiny—and in a manner he might not be able to anticipate until it was too late!

A larger stone clay figure, "Dappi," strikes a more classically fairylike kneeling pose (not unlike that of the White Rock fairy, in fact) and has large, gossamer wings fanning out behind her. Although she is naked, except for an ornate tiara, she is considerably less seductive than the pre-

vious figure. Her pale nudity is more pristine, her appeal spiritually rather than erotically suggestive, even while her body is beautifully formed. Of course, anomalous as they are to human anatomy, her wings contribute greatly to Dappi's otherworldly quality, thwarting erotic fantasy on the part of all but the most perversely imagi-



Cazuko Toda, "Muse of Destiny"

native viewer.

At the same time, Toda endows the figure, characteristically, with facial features that suggest all the complexity of an individual human personality. Thus, Dappi comes alive for us in a manner that makes her all the more magical.

Conversely, Cazuko Toda is capable of investing a less winsome figure with a more worldly form of magic, as seen in "Old Soldier." This is a sculpture of an elderly card player in traditional Japanese dress, not of the courtly type, but more in the manner of a rough hewn peasant in one of Hokusai's raucous market scenes. His simple costume and wispy white hair are lovingly fashioned by the artist from fabrics and natural materials in a manner that has a long history in Japanese sculpture, dating back to thirteenth century, when artists of the Kamakura period inserted bits of quartz crystal in the carved eye-sockets of their figures to make them more lifelike.

Toda goes even further, tailoring each stitch and whisker of her "Old Soldier" to

imbue him with an almost eerie verisimilitude, as he sits at a weathered woodblock table contemplating his cards with the "poker face" common to gamblers of all nationalities and centuries. Toda's penetrating revelation of character through careful observation recalls the Kamakura sculptors' almost fetishistic attention to detail, albeit further emboldened here by a contemporary sensibility, unfettered by traditional methods or techniques. Still, the folkloric aspects of this particular figure cast light on some of the specifically Japanese characteristics that inform and contribute to the uniqueness of Cazuko Toda's art.

More typical of this artist's vision, however, are willowy female nudes or partial nudes, such as "Spirit of the Dayfly" and "Look at Me," which, through their intriguing combination of lifelike and sylphlike qualities, suggest some slightly macabre symbiotic relationship between beauty and mortality. Related to these are other sculptures, such as "Tangled in Forest" and "Angel's Breath I and II," in which gracefully fragmented feminine figures merge with earthy organic elements to capture, as the artist herself puts it, "the moment of birth of fairies from piles of decayed trees."

Other superb figurative sculptures, such as the poetically erotic "Moon on the Horizon," the whimsical "Mermaid Revival," and the poignant "Grounded Angel" series, reveal the artist's special gift for making us empathize in a way that one would never have imagined possible with the most fantastic beings.

If you were to ask Toda to explain the motivation for her work, she would tell you it is "to reflect our state of innocence." Obviously, she employs that often misused term not to imply some judgmental notion, such as the opposite of sin, but, rather, in its truest sense: to signify the simplicity and guilelessness that enables us to believe in fairies and other magical creatures; to embrace and treasure them in a world that tends to overvalue the rational, much to the detriment of all that is imaginative and playful.

That her figures can be simultaneously spectral and sensual makes her work all the more fascinating. Even more profound and valuable, though, is how convincingly the art of Cazuko Toda finally demonstrates that beauty and innocence are indeed synonymous and must not be held hostage by the hypocritical tethers of a false morality.

—Ed McCormack
GALLERY@STUDIO 9

Josep M. Gort and Bobbie Koh: Vastly Different Visions United by Equal Depth and Commitment

Josep M. Gort

Toward the end of his life, Groucho Marx once declared that he would gladly trade all of his wealth for one more erection. In his recent solo show at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, the Catalan artist Josep M. Gort (who sports a mustache and actually resembles Groucho a little) captures the spirit of the great American comedy icon, in a painting that depicts him leaning on the shapely rump of a crouching blonde, wearing nothing but a cowgirl hat, who looks like she stepped right out of a Playboy centerfold. Various other figures are in the composition (one suspended in the air upside-down), as well as stacks of books and other props, but it is Groucho with his nude blonde and his erect cigar that compels our attention and makes this a memorable painting.

Like the American artist George Deem, Gort is given to appropriation. But Gort is also something of a surrealist who will not hesitate to place a Magritte man holding an umbrella and a bowler floating over his head with a Botticelli Venus holding an empty picture frame in front of her face. All of art history is fair game to Gort, and he is technically accomplished enough to carry it off, painting in the manner of any master or period that he chooses and melding several of them together in the same canvas seamlessly by virtue of his remarkable ability to synthesize styles. He can paint like Rubens or Dali or Botticelli and make it look reasonably similar to their style—and yet it always also looks like Gort. How he does it is as much of a puzzle as his mix and match imagery, and therein lies the mystery and the pleasure of his work.

Who really knows what he is getting at, for example, when he creates a complex figurative composition in which the central figure is a longhaired, bearded man in an elegantly tailored suit who looks simultaneously like one of Durer's youthful self-portraits and Jesus Christ. Wearing one shoe and one slipper, he is seated in a period chair with his hands primly folded as the Mona Lisa stands behind him with her hands on his shoulders. Next to them is a little girl in the white dress out of Velasquez' "The Maids of Honor," and next to her is a white terrier like the one in "Tin Tin," and under its feet is a book

about the famous European comic strip of that name. And, oh yes, standing nearby is Michelangelo's "David," but he is not naked. Rather, he is duded up in a pale purple sport jacket and dark slacks and brandishing a cool-looking cane.

Weird as all this sounds, Gort makes it all work beautifully by virtue of his painterly virtuosity and innate ability to knit disparate elements into a coherent composition. Indeed, his technical skill can be quite astounding, as seen in another, especially intricate composition entitled "The Man Who Lost His Head for the Dance I," in which several figures, including a ballerina, and the headless man of the title are seen in a room limned as luminously as one of Vermeer's interiors, where an upside-down chair is suspended from the ceiling and a potted plant floats several inches above the floor.

Flawless in technique, the paintings of Josep M. Gort are dreamlike visions of a complex inner world, where figures from art history mingle with figments of the artist's imagination to raise questions about the meaning of reality, the nature of beauty, and the mysteries that lie hidden in the human heart.

Bobbie Koh

"I believe that human beings possess two different natures," states Bobbie Koh, who has exhibited regularly at Montserrat Gallery over the past decade, attracting a large, loyal following among collectors, critics, and others who follow the New York art scene. "One is where we try to create artificial impressions on others; the other is spiritual, where we have purer qualities which are untainted, simple and primitive. My goal is to bring out the purer side, free of superficiality."

Koh, who holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Southern Illinois University has evolved a unique technique, employing textural fabrics, dyes, textile pigments and acrylics to create paintings in which underlying patterns and texture suggest the spiritual energy and depth underlying natural phenomena.

In an early series, entitled "Ladies," Koh explored the human figure and human nature, while in her more recent "Eternal"

series landscape is the conduit for exploring states of tranquility.

In Koh's painting, "Eternal/Borrogo Springs I," a densely packed field of pink flowers interspersed with green leaves creates a vibrant chromatic aura that is enhanced by the underlying fabric patterns, which lend the image a unique depth and resonance. Here, Koh's work wavers between neoimpressionism and overall abstraction. The entire canvas shimmers with a teeming sense of natural growth, energy, and light. One thinks of certain Color Field paintings by Jules Olitski, as well as the densely pigmented, neopointillistic early abstractions of Milton Resnick. Unlike both Olitski and Resnick, however, Koh's work possesses poetic qualities that spring from the natural subject matter, adding yet another dimension to the visual experience. Indeed, the painting projects a sense of spiritual radiance that reveals Koh's genuine reverence for nature, which permeates all of her recent work.

Another powerful painting "Eternal/Taos I," is especially interesting for the manner in which the boldly embossed patterns of the fabric that it is painted on insinuate themselves through the pigmented surface, which depicts a dense growth of green grass, weeds, and foliage. The underlying patterns play against the painted image in an intriguing manner, creating a sense of afterimages such as one sees when sun spots temporarily affect one's vision. They also create a sense of intense, radiating heat that adds an extra-visual dimension to the painting, as though one is experiencing the image, rather than merely viewing it.

Bobbie Koh's newest paintings are among her most accomplished, for they show her taking her unique technique even further than before, making the tactile elements of her work an integral part of her overall vision and employing them to express subtle sensations unavailable to most other artists. It is this, as well as her considerable skills as a colorist that distinguish Koh as a painter with a complex aesthetic agenda and the technical resources to implement it. However, it is finally her imaginative approach to subject matter and her commitment to truth that make her work important and valuable.

—Maurice Taplinger

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Sandy Levine's Earthy Monuments to the World's Women

"You can't get the news from poems," William Carlos Williams once wrote, "yet every day men die miserably for want of what is found there."

These words come to mind in regard to the affecting sculpture exhibition by Sandy Levine, at the National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South, only from January 3rd through 11th, 2002—it's brief tenure making it even more of a priority to commend to your attention.

The exhibition is entitled "Women of the World," and Levine's original intention was to travel around the world in order to depict women of different ethnic groups. She soon realized, however, that some of the most powerful and telling images of women the world over were found in our daily newspapers. Indeed, since news photos often captured images of suffering, they perhaps encapsulated the plight of women most accurately and dramatically. And while the artist's inspiration was initially more humanistic than political, she realized that the political implications in such images were as inescapable as the headlines that so recently changed all of our lives.

This comes across most chillingly in the sculpture she calls "God is Great," for those are the words that Middle Eastern terrorists exclaim when they blow themselves up, taking numbers of innocent victims with them. Often, the least acknowledged innocent victims of such unconscionable acts of terror are the female relatives left behind to mourn the loved ones who have caused so much suffering and revulsion.

The ironically titled "God is Great" sprang from a news photograph that Sandy Levine saw of two Palestinian women. One was seated, weeping inconsolably for her brother, who had destroyed himself and several others in one such act of terror. The other woman was standing, reaching out to embrace and comfort her. Working in clay, the medium that she prefers for its earthiness and expressive malleability, Levine has transformed this image from the daily press into a universal monument to human suffering that transcends its topical origins. Struck by such details as the manner in which the women's shawls fall, the artist has emphasized them to imbue

the sculpture with an emotional resonance that can only be compared to a contemporary Pieta.

Levine's ability to make transient images from the media immutable in clay through her gift for the formal synthesis of specifics into universals can also be seen in "Three Refugees," an equally affecting image of a mother clutching her two sons to her bosom. Although the figure grouping was inspired by a photograph of a family of refugees from Lebanon, and the Israelis have since withdrawn from that country, altering the situation of such



"The Refugees"

families considerably, the sculpture loses none of its immediacy. Characteristically, Levine has stripped the image down to its essentials, abstracting its essence to make an enduringly humanistic statement. She has done so by the manner in which she exaggerates the mother's protective bulk, making her a literal Earth Mother wrought in clay, as she envelopes her two offspring in maternal embrace; enlarging her head to emphasize her noble profile as she gazes warily over her shoulder. Like all of Sandy Levine's sculptures, the piece possesses a monumentality that belies its relatively modest scale.

A resident of New York City for forty years, Sandy Levine studied at the Educational Alliance, the Sculpture

Center, and the National Academy of Art. She also traveled to Pietrasante Italy to learn the distinctive Lucchesi terracotta technique from Paul Lucchesi, whom she credits with teaching her to free the figure from the armature, so that it could be fired in a kiln, and also "how to heighten the surface luminosity, to give the figure a sense of flesh touching flesh." She also credits another great teacher, Leonid Lehrman, from Russia, with teaching her classical anatomy drawing skills, as well as how to passionately approach her artwork with such compelling energy that "to sculpt is to live."

Now the director and instructor of her own school of sculpture, Feat of Clay, at 167 Madison Avenue, Sandy Levine applies the lessons learned from her esteemed teachers in her own inimitable manner in sculptures such as "The Hostages of Chesnia," in which the figures of women and children, released after being detained for several days, are expressively elongated, as though seen from a distance through a telescope, and "The Worrier," a starkly simplified female figure inspired by a woman the artist saw in a news photograph accompanying a story about the rape of five women in Bosnia.

In a recent videotape documentary about her work, Levine begins to talk about this piece, then clearly overcome, states that hearing about such events "makes me speechless, so I make sculpture..."

Although her voice trails off, leaving the thought unfinished, it is clear that only through sculpture can she articulate the emotions provoked by the plight of modern women.

"Unfortunately, this series of 'Women of the World' is about suffering," Sandy Levine says, adding that it is her hope for the future that she will some day be able to create a similar series about women of the world "building, voting, loving in an environment that is friendly to them."

This hope is expressed powerfully in the sculpture "Women's Conference," consisting of four female nudes seated in what the artist calls "a circle of healing and common cause." Each gracefully elongated figure is formed in a different color clay to symbolize their different ethnicities, yet all are finally formed of the same common earth. Contrastingly serene by comparison to some of her other pieces, and perhaps not quite as dramatic, it is nonetheless one of Sandy Levine's most beautiful and affecting sculptures.

—Ed McCormack

The Metaphysical Humanism of Charles S. Klabunde

Art that transcends the gamesmanship of the art historical view to address the larger and more terrible history of mankind achieves its immediacy and relevance by mirroring current events, even as it aspires to an enduring universality. Certainly this is true in the case of Charles S. Klabunde, a fiercely independent spirit whose work suddenly seems more urgent than ever in the light of the horrendous terror attacks of September 11.

Klabunde, a widely exhibited artist whose etchings are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art, and numerous other prestigious public and private collections the world over, belongs to that small, often maligned fraternity of humanist artists who, in the words of the critic and poet Selden Rodman, “feel drawn to values outside themselves strongly enough to examine them in their work.”

Rodman himself was broadly maligned by the avant garde establishment in 1960, when he published his controversial book, “The Insiders,” an impassioned argument for art that calls attention to “the unspeakable degradation of the individual” and “rejects the purists’ authoritarian reliance upon the direction and umpiring of an aesthetic elite...”

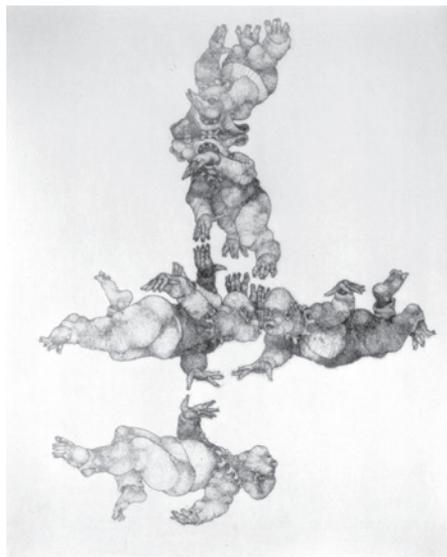
These were fighting words in a period when the art world, particularly in New York, was still drunk on the triumph of Abstract Expressionism and eager to embrace every mini-movement that followed feebly in its wake. Just a decade later, however, the taboo in the art world against impassioned subject matter had relaxed sufficiently for Charles S. Klabunde to be awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship for a series of etchings and engravings addressing what he calls “the dark world of the existential nihilism of the twentieth century.”

Klabunde began “Cycles of Sangsaric Phenomena (The Tibetan Book of the Dead),” in his Greenwich Village studio in 1967. From this series of prints, inspired by Carl Jung’s interpretation of Tibetan Book of the Dead, which puts into context the theory that all human thought, including the world’s great religions, are mere illusions, Klabunde moved on to a suite on “The Seven Deadly Sins.” Although the concept is of Medieval origin, Klabunde’s etchings are based on twentieth century Jewish theologian Martin Buber’s thesis that “the inherent reality of evil lies at the threshold of our consciousness and that this is the origin of the human dilemma.”

Sixteen years later, in collaboration with the New Overlook press, Klabunde created etchings for a deluxe edition of Samuel Beckett’s “The Lost Ones”—harrowingly beautiful images of human isolation in a desolate landscape of lovelessness—that the

great Irish author and playwright himself praised as “terrifying.”

The final leg of what Klabunde refers to as his “solo journey into the darkest recesses of the human soul” is the series entitled “Studies of the Revolutionary Mind,” which can be viewed by appointment at Beyond the Looking Glass Gallery, 33 Bridge Street, P.O. Box 69, Frenchtown, N.J. 08825 (telephone: 201-996-6464 or 212-777-9162). Inspired by the writings of Albert Camus, this Blakean enterprise, presented in an elegant European box book format bound in burgundy colored Italian linen and Moroccan leather, and includes the artist’s own text, focusing on “the incomprehensible horror of genocide in the twentieth century.”



“The Mirrored Images”

An eloquent writer as well as a superb draftsman, Klabunde begins the introduction to his text with the observation, “The faces of mass murderers show no trace of the madness that lies within.” And this statement proves chillingly accurate when one recalls the photographs of the terrorists who destroyed the Twin Towers and killed so many innocent citizens that appeared in the mass media shortly after September 11th. With their innocuous expressions and casual Western style sports clothes, their faces did not differ markedly from those of their victims, in the poignant posters that papered the walls and lamp posts of the grieving, wounded city in the wake of that unthinkable tragedy.

It is the inner demons of such terrorists, however, rather than their deceptive social masks, that Charles S. Klabunde shows us so vividly in his powerful etchings, which may someday take their place beside Goya’s greatest works in the same medium, such as “Los Caprichos” and “The Disasters of War,” as enduring documents of mankind’s

folly and savagery.

As a contemporary artist, however, Klabunde has been liberated by his awareness of abstract aesthetics from the specific, satirical details to which even the most imaginative artists of Goya’s time were, by and large, beholden. Thus his figures, like the “Nazi Drawings” of Maurice Lasansky, achieve a monstrosity that is considerably more symbolic and visionary than those of his illustrious predecessors. With the bulbous features and gaping mouths of gargoyles, Klabunde’s embodiments of evil float weightlessly in empty white space.

Resembling weird hybrids of cherubs and dybbuks, they twist in mid-air like wisps of smoke from the ovens of Auschwitz or the ruins of ground Zero, contorting their lumpy limbs and converging as though seeking some unspeakable form of sexual congress by which to impregnate the world with further evil. Indeed, the etching entitled “The Communal Rage” depicts several grotesque figures entwined in an almost orgiastic manner. According to the artist’s text their congress “blends the evil which fortifies the great lies that justify our hate and cruelty for others.”

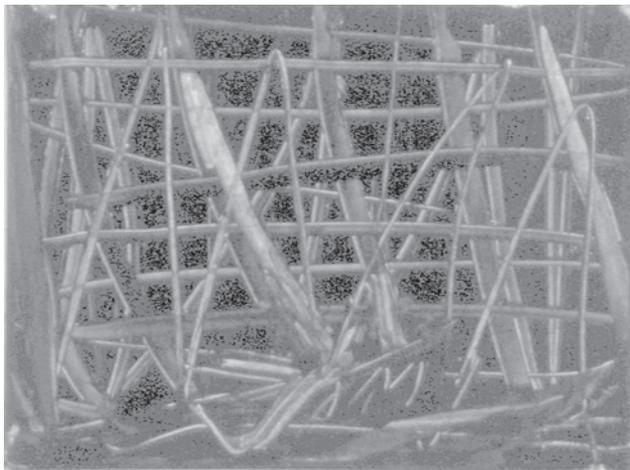
If “The Communal Rage” suggests intercourse, another etching entitled “Ideology of Madness” suggests a demonic birth, with gnomish creatures tumbling from a gaping, womb-like opening in the underbelly of a protoplasmic mass of writhing limbs and grimacing faces. Here, the accompanying text describes the “transformation of all truths into the great lie, the true fanatical ideology of madness” which begets “the need to annihilate all opposition to the great cause.”

Although Klabunde’s finely-stippled figures resemble those in the early figurative etchings of Paul Klee, the manner in which they flare out against the white space of the paper is more akin to the compositional freedom of more contemporary metaphysical humanists as Rico Lebrun and Jacob Landau. Like the latter artist, particularly, Klabunde’s refusal to anchor his figures lends them a supernatural quality that makes their demonic aspects all the more harrowing.

Perhaps the level of passion and outrage in the etchings of Charles S. Klabunde can finally be compared to the work of the French writer, actor, and draftsman Antonin Artaud. Unlike Artaud, however, Klabunde is not a madman, nor is he a misanthrope. Rather, he is an immensely gifted and deeply concerned citizen struggling to make sense of the world’s random evil and pointless violence. Indeed, it is the sense of a supremely civilized intellect driven to the edge of reason by that which defies reason that imbues his work with its undeniable power.

—Ed McCormack

Sheila Hecht: Architect of the New Abstraction



"Magic"

To this writer's mind, one of the most important large surveys of contemporary painting in recent years was "Repicturing Abstraction," at the Virginia Museum of the Arts in 1995. The premise of the show was to explore postmodern abstract painting's development from subconscious impulse to conscious strategy in the late twentieth century, and it succeeded admirably, by presenting work by twenty-three artists who exemplify the recently broadened relationship between abstraction and representation, among them Gregory Amenoff, Terry Winters, Pat Steir, and Jonathan Lasker.

In regard to the show, Arthur Danto made one of his more perceptive observations, stating, "It is no longer necessary to declare our independence from the literal and the literary by setting up representation as abstraction's definitive opposite. Abstract painting has much in common with abstract thinking, and abstract thinking is a function of daily life, part of how we understand and interact with the world."

An artist, at this point less known than those who participated in the 1995 exhibition but just as attuned to the aesthetic it put forth, is Sheila Hecht, whose first solo exhibition of recent paintings is on view at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, through December 15.

Although it is the nonobjective qualities of her paintings that strike one most immediately, Hecht embraces the abstract/representational dichotomy wholeheartedly, saying, "When figures, landscapes and objects appear in the abstraction, I integrate them into the totality." What makes her work especially exciting, however, is how thoroughly Hecht not only integrates such references but submerges them in the sensual surfaces of her vibrantly colorful compositions—until it is finally the spirit of the figure or the landscape or the object that

energizes her canvases, rather than its literal image.

Indeed, it is these submerged energies that contribute to the "dynamic equilibrium between tumult and composure" that Hecht says she aims for in her paintings. She achieves what she refers to as "the resolution of visual enigmas" through highly activated gestural surfaces, worked and reworked with brush or palette knife. Favoring medium size canvases that reflect the scale of the human body, she com-

combines thick impastos with thinner passages of paint, layering the surface, then scraping pigment away to reveal areas of underlying color. Gestures, too, are altered in the act of painting to produce palimpsestic effects, elements of pentimento that penetrate the picture plane, introducing the contradictory sense of depth that often works in concert with the abstract/representational dichotomy to up the ante of ambiguity peculiar to recent nonobjective painting.

Hecht's very process exemplifies postmodern painterly practice, in that she combines spontaneous, intuitive improvisation with more deliberate reworking of forms and colors to achieve compositions with strong spatial tensions, resulting from the tug of gesture against stasis, often enhanced by especially definite figure-to-ground relationships, as seen in the acrylic on canvas entitled "Dealer's Choice." Here, Hecht's high-keyed colors (particularly the strident yellow ground) and thickly impastoed forms (their cake-frosting textures conspiring lusciously with the confectionery hues) can seem akin to those of Jonathan Lasker, one of the artists featured in the 1995 exhibition alluded to earlier. Hecht's painting, however, is possessed of far greater gestural authenticity. Unlike Lasker, who works out every aspect of his compositions before putting brush to canvas, Hecht is not self-consciously simulating the dialectic between impulse and image but embodying it in the act of painting in a much more authentic manner. Thus, "Dealer's Choice" demonstrates that repicturing abstraction need not mean rehashing the conventions of Abstract Expressionism, while adding a soupçon of irony. Rather, in this and other recent paintings Hecht demonstrates that the untrammelled energy of the pure painterly gesture can be reactivated in a new historical context in a manner that combines passion with hindsight.

Much to her credit, Hecht also demonstrates that style in painting is more a function of individual sensibility and character than of contrived similarities that carry over from picture to picture. Rather than relying on repetitive motifs to construct an aesthetic persona as recognizable as a commercial logo, she trusts to deeper resources to stamp her paintings with a coherence that overrides their compositional diversity. Thus, paintings as different in approach as "Making the Rounds," with its intricate linear web emerging from a deep red ground, and "Blue Fall," with its welter of bold, succulent strokes of blue, green, and orange converging dynamically, are united by the artist's singular painterly sensibility.

Indeed, one of Hecht's greatest strengths is her ability to constantly come up with new and surprising compositional strategies without sacrificing the consistency or the integrity of her overall vision. From coloristically complex canvases such as "Afternoons with Lulu" and "Going South"—in which several subtly harmonized combinations of luminous hues explode in lyrical strokes—to stark ideogramatic paintings like "The Chief" and "In The Mood," dominated by large central forms set boldly against contrasting grounds, Hecht retains her distinctive "touch." She has the unique ability to move effortlessly between expressive modes as the spirit moves her, coming off in one canvas as lushly, voluptuously lyrical as Joan Mitchell, and in another as bluntly brilliant as a technicolor Franz Kline. Of special interest, too, are mostly monochromatic canvases such as "Life Cycles #1" and "Life Cycles #2," where the subtle interaction of densely layered pink and blue strokes creates its own quiet intensity.

Hecht generates diverse visual excitement by virtue of a seemingly endless arsenal of painterly effects, ranging from voluptuous, tactile color areas, to juicy gestures, to staccato strokes, to sinuous calligraphic elements that create an eloquent personal ecriture, to splashes and drips that activate the entire surface of her canvases with immediate evidence of the artist's hand in the act of painting.

Although the noisy emergence of so-called Neo-Expressionism in the early 1980s marked the epochal transition from modernism to postmodernism, the increasingly less bombastic emphasis of the last two decades signals a healthy resurgence of timeless painterly values. Sheila Hecht appears to be acutely attuned to this shift and her work shows every promise of pushing it even further, toward a profoundly lyrical resolution.

— Ed McCormack

“Visual Voices”: A Diverse Survey of Korean Artists

While others have forsaken ethnic traditions in order to enter the mainstream, Korean artists have been particularly adept at retaining their national character, even while making fresh contemporary statements. Nowhere is this more clear than in “Visual Voices,” a large group show presented by Korean American Contemporary Arts, Ltd., at Cork Gallery, Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center Plaza (65th and Broadway), from November 30, through December 11.

In “Variation of Rainbow Bridge near the Cherry Hill at Central Park,” for example, Kyung-Ok Yoo employs acrylic with gold and silver leaf on paper to create a composition that combines lyrical qualities of traditional ink painting with a semi-abstract urban dynamism reminiscent of John Marin. Kyung Hee Park’s abstract acrylic on canvas, “A Fervent Hope,” crosses cultural boundaries in another manner, with sinuous organic shapes and softly harmonized hues creating the sense of a mysterious inner world.

With their roughly tubular shapes and earthy quality, the ceramic sculptures of Jennifer K. Suh suggest ancient scrolls. At the same time, Kuh seems attuned to a minimalist aesthetic that is contrastingly contemporary. Daniel Daeshik Choi, a frequently exhibited New York artist, transforms traditional motifs in his own inimitable manner. Here, Choi’s mixed media painting of stylized semi-abstract mountains and floating clouds strikes a fanciful

balance between the formal and the poetic. Sung Ja Han has developed a unique technique, employing ink on canvas to create intricate abstract compositions notable for their sense of movement. At once restrained and energetic, Han’s compositions are possessed of an impressive

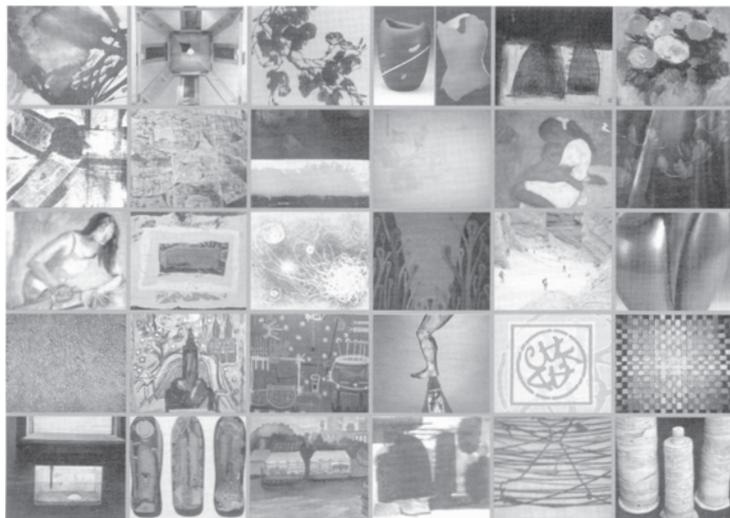
originality of vision. Sung Hee Lee also employs linear elements, albeit in a totally different manner. In Lee’s paintings bold abstract forms emerge from richly layered calligraphic elements. Tae Heung Lee is a sculptor with a quirky, somewhat funky, individuality that can only be compared to Western artists like William T. Wiley. Here, Tae Heung Lee shows a mixed media piece in which a fairly realistic representation of a human leg is balanced precariously on a pyramidal form. Another outstanding colorist, Yeon Ah Jung employs luminous shapes that hover like gossamer veils in abstract paint-

ings distinguished by a combination of delicate translucence and chromatic richness. Jin Young Kim employs color with admirable restraint, combining pale blues and autumnal hues with an overall linear motif suggesting stylized leaves. One of the true discoveries of this show is an artist named Wool Ga Choi whose neon-gaudy oils on canvas inhabit a zany place between abstraction and cartoons. Like Carroll Durham’s blob-like creatures, Wool Ga Choi’s scribbly personages suggest a world gone ga-ga. One of Choi’s most delightfully weird paintings appears to depict two wildly distorted devils having a barbecue in Hell!

Although realists were in the minority in this exhibition, Chong Sung Lee contributed a sensitive genre painting in the manner of Moses Soyer of a young woman bent over an ironing board; Young Choon Kwon showed an affecting image of a young woman in a white dress embracing an infant that was notable for its strong draftspersonship and bold composition; and Ming Jung Kim was represented by a charming faux naïf watercolor that transformed the boathouse in Central Park into an exotic fairy tale vision.

These and other artists too numerous to do justice to in a review of this length demonstrate the diversity of contemporary Korean art, as well as its ability to retain its own unique character.

—Andrew Loomis



Works from the group exhibition, “Visual Voices”

VISIONS

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 **West Side Arts Coalition**

Two works from the recent group show, **“Abstract 2001”** at Broadway Mall Community Center
(See pg. 26 for review.)



Janusz Jaworski



Leanne Martinson

Betty-Ann Hogan Unearths Biblical Metaphors in Nature

From the early Gothic era, when religious iconography served as Christian propaganda for a largely illiterate population still mired in the medieval world, through the Renaissance, when classical antiquity was ransacked to project a newly ennobled image of man, Biblical subjects provided the dominant themes in Western art. In modern times, however, more secular “spiritual” themes have largely usurped specifically religious ones, replacing the cultural and moral symbols of the Bible with more abstract approaches to the larger mysteries of life.

Thus, a contemporary artist intent on exploring Biblical themes is faced with an interesting challenge, which Betty-Ann Hogan has resolved in a unique manner.

In her solo exhibition “In the Beginning,” at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from January 8 through 27, Hogan employs the Biblical story of the origins of the world as the starting point for a powerful series of images and texts created with acrylic on museum board mounted on birch plywood.

“I have used nature for the human and Divine qualities we attribute to it,” Hogan says of the series, in which painted landscape images are combined with hand written selections from The Book of Genesis. “Trees often remind us of people. We refer to branches as limbs, the top as the crown, and we refer to the middle part of our bodies as the trunk. Sky and light are Divine. Roads and paths are the free will choices we make. The terrain is the ease or harshness with which life presents itself to us.”

Betty-Ann Hogan’s paintings are installed in series, some in rows, others in grids. Each, however, stands on its own merits as a discrete entity. One fine example can be seen in an individual panel from “In the Beginning,” 2001. Although it is only 10 by 14 inches, this image of sky and water, boldly painted in subtly harmonized blue and violet hues, has a spaciousness of scale that makes it appear much larger than its actual size. Hogan’s fluid brushstrokes and strong composition lend the painting an abstract force that energizes the image without sacrificing its natural verisimilitude. Sky and sea converge at the horizon-line, with clouds clustered like windblown ribbons that gradually lighten from deep blue to pale purple as they descend to meet the waves, marking the progression from night to dark.

The image harmonizes perfectly with the text, hand-written in a clear, unadorned script on a white surface appended to the bottom of the panel:

“The One wanted to give to us. He revealed his will in six days. At first it was only dark and ‘His spirit lowered above the water.’ He said, ‘Let there be light’ and there was light. He called the light-day and the dark-night.”

Even the artist’s small eccentricities of punctuation (followed faithfully here) imbue the image with a sense of immediacy, of the Word transcribed as if heard, rather than read, echoing in consciousness, embodied in the image, mirrored in the handiwork of the Creator. For, through the suppleness of her paint handling and the subtlety of her chromatic harmonies, Hogan invests the painting with an overall sense of unity that celebrates the sacred qualities of nature, as invested in the landscape by divine authority.

Another painting depicts trees in a forest. Sunlight streams through their lush leaves. Their dark trunks cast dense shadows. Strong tonal contrasts and the play of vertical and diagonal patterns create strong compositional tensions that complement the text: “The One came to a new place. He was a stranger. There He saw that the people were strong and smart. But in all their strength they couldn’t see Him.”

Here, as in another painting, based on the story of Jacob, where ascending stones in a landscape suggest a ladder, aspects of the composition mirror the biblical texts in a manner that makes for intriguing visual metaphors.

For a good part of her career as a painter, Betty-Ann Hogan, a pioneer of the Long Island City artists’ community and a veteran of numerous solo and group exhibitions from the late 1970s to the present, has sought to unearth the power of nature through her vigorous brush work and ability to convey specific qualities of light. Her succulent manner of applying paint in broad strokes that make the viscosity of pigment a surrogate for the ruggedness of the terrain or the movement of reflective, liquid surfaces is akin to that of Neil Welliver, another artist who has remained faithful to landscape painting for several decades and



The One came to a new place. He was a stranger there. He saw that the people were strong and smart. But in all their strength they couldn't see Him.

“Abram and Sarah”

transcended aesthetic fashions to forge a compelling personal style. But while her painterly signature is just as insistent and distinctive in its own way, Hogan would appear to be a more intuitive artist, with a more passionate investment in landscape as a visionary entity, as opposed to an occasion for formal, quasi-abstract manipulation. Which is to say, Hogan’s muscular strokes of pigment seem to summon up something beyond either the physical face of nature or its formal distillation; rather, her paintings unearth a sense of hidden natural forces that the accompanying biblical texts shed light on in her most recent paintings, bringing the underlying mysticism in her landscapes to the forefront.

Indeed, one of the most profound aspects of this exhibition is the symbolic truce it appears to affect between these sacred texts from The Book of Genesis and the pagan beliefs of ancient nature-worshipping religions, such as that of the Druids, who felt that the landscape held spiritual secrets, to which they erected outdoor shrines—most notably, Stonehenge. For this alone, Betty-Ann Hogan must be considered a provocative and highly original artist. However, her purely painterly qualities as well make this show well worth seeing.

—Ed McCormack

“Friends of Pleiades” Provides the Pleasure of Aesthetic Kinships



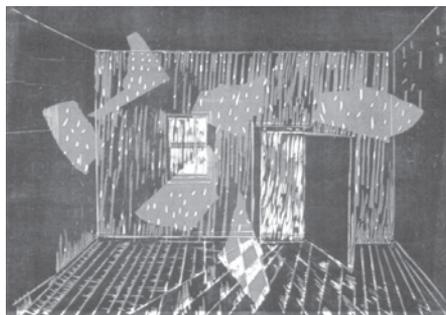
Rowell Bowles



Marlene Bremer



Debora Gilbert Ryan



Penny Dell

Because Pleiades Gallery is one of the more venerable and excellent artist-run venues it is always interesting to see who its members choose from among their peers to participate in a show such as the “7th Friends of Pleiades Invitational Show,” at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 27 to December 15 (reception Saturday, December 1, from 3 to 6 PM).

One of the things that immediately strikes one about this show is the diverse ways in which several of the artists employ imagery. Rowell Bowles, for example, treads a fine line between the abstract and the figurative with a vigorous painting of a strange, lozenge-like shape that suggests a spooky, stylized skull. Rhoda Blate Mogul makes a memorable formal statement and creates a poetic mood with her color photograph of a simple chair in a room interior. Then there is Marlene Bremer, whose atmospheric acrylic on canvas, “Shipwreck of Dreams,” affectingly depicts a group of foiled Chinese stowaways huddled on a beach, gazing out to sea. Elayne Flax makes another kind of figurative statement with her insightful pastel character study “Sally Bowles,” depicting a busty beauty posed bodaciously in lingerie with a smoking cigarette. By contrast Norma Behrmenczer’s “Kasia” is a swift vision of a faceless female nude, her sensual contours captured in charcoal and watercolor wash. In “China Moon,” a collage by France Garrido, figurative imagery is combined with abstract in an intricate, richly textured circular composition.

Tactile qualities are also pronounced among some of the more abstract works in the exhibition. Notable among them is “Doloroso,” an evocative mixed media assemblage on mesh by Renee Lerner, in which lengths of string, fabric, other materials are suspended loosely from a vertical support, creating the sense of a shredded scroll.

Thickly textured pigment provides another kind of tactile excitement in “Dead Nature with Fruits,” an oil on canvas by Norberto Olea in which circular forms in brighter colors activate an earthy ground, creating a sense of swarming organic activity. Subtle textural suggestions also enliven “Wind in the Willows,” a monoprint by Penny Dell, featuring a palette of various blue hues and rectangular shapes that create an intriguing sense of spatial depth.

Several other abstract artists prefer to emphasize the shallow space two dimensional picture plane as a staple of modernist aesthetics. An untitled oil on canvas

by Norma Nicolau does so with interlocking rectangles in subdued earth tones that create a serene sense of stasis. By contrast, Marcelo Kruschewsky Duarte disperses circular, rectangular, and linear elements over the picture plane to create a sense of formal dissonance in a mixed painting called “On the Road.”

Olivia Koopaethes employs sensual forms and luminous colors to lively rhythmic effect in her aptly named encaustic painting “Ribbon Dance.” Jim Ruban’s contrastingly austere aesthetic can be seen in a hard-edged composition combining a subdued gray grid and vibrantly colored stripes, its title suggesting the staccato flash of neon: “Red Green Purple Gray.” Debora Gilbert Ryan’s untitled encaustic painting provides another kind of pleasure with its cursive, monochromatic forms suggesting an arabesque or mandala suspended in a sensual waxen surface. Then there is Dail Fried, who combines deep, rich color harmonies and boldly simplified forms hovering between the organic and the geometric in a strong oil and mixed media painting entitled “Off the Edge.”

If this seventh invitational exhibition at Pleiades Gallery demonstrates anything at all it is that the community of artists offers a network of kinships that not only provides mutual inspiration for its participants but a host of pleasures for the viewer as well.

—Maureen Flynn

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Gomez and Orbegoso: A Marriage in Life and in Art

Although it is hardly unusual for two equally committed artists to be husband and wife, few such couples turn out to be as aesthetically compatible as Jose Gomez and Patricia Orbegoso, two painters from Peru who exhibited together recently at Gelabert Studios, 255 West 86th Street.

The paintings of these two artists made for a complementary exhibition, in equal parts due to the similarities of vision that they share and their very different approaches to subject matter and formal solutions. The most obvious kinship in their work is their mutual belief that form, in order to be significant, must be shaped by content. Both artists believe that art must communicate on a human and an emotional level, as well as on a purely aesthetic level, and is therein that the secret to their happy marriage of opposites lies.

Jose Gomez is by and large the more figurative of the two, as evidenced by a large and highly accurate double oil portrait, a triptych, in which he stands by naked and bearded as Adam, pensively regarding his pregnant wife, sprawled Eve-like in a bath tub. Entitled "Expecting Life," this powerful oil is a moving testament to a young couple's hopes and aspirations for the future.

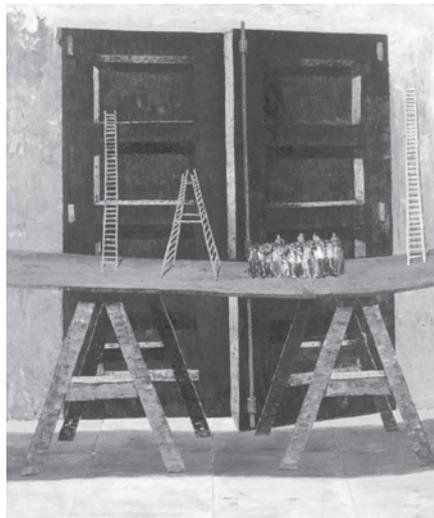
Gomez' other paintings, although equally figurative, are somewhat more surreal cityscapes that make social statements, ranging from the utopian to the tragic. To the latter category belongs the large oil entitled "People as Us," which also serves as the overall title for the exhibition. In this affecting painting, Gomez pays tribute to those who perished in the recent attack on the Twin Towers. Through his fluid painterly pyrotechnics, Gomez moves from tiny figures strolling peacefully through the lobby of the World Trade Center to the eerie rubble of the collapsed towers in a single, powerful composition.

In other large paintings, such as the canvases respectively titled "Rising" and "Free," Gomez creates allegories in which tiny figures enact mass rituals amid architectural elements that create visual metaphors for the external constraints of politics and society. In "Rising," a mysterious box is lifted aloft by a balloon as many tiny figures huddle and marvel amid rudimentary dwellings; in "Free," we appear to be viewing an uprising of toys in a setting where the ordinary accouterments of a domestic interior loom oppressively. Although paintings depict complex events in specific detail, Jose Gomez' use of thick, juicy oil impastos and bold brushwork imbues his canvases with an unfussy energy and tactile vitality.

Patricia Orbegoso favors still life and abstraction as symbolic elements in her

dynamic canvases, which vacillate easily between various degrees of representation and abstraction. Employing luminous glazes of color that contrast sharply with her husband's dark impastos, Orbegoso presents painted images of simplified dress forms, scissors, and fabrics as metaphors for the feminine condition.

In paintings such as the oil entitled "Them," eleven vigorously brushed



Jose Gomez, "After the Journal"

images of fragmented female figures, clothed and unclothed, appear in a sketchy grid. Here, Orbegoso's merging of abstract and representational elements united by a vital gestural shorthand has qualities akin to that of Larry Rivers. Orbegoso, however, provokes a deeper emotional response through her use of female anatomy and dresses as resonant signifiers of how women think of themselves and are seen by others in a world that tends to objectify them.

Simple still life objects serve as potent symbols in other paintings as well. In her small but powerful painting "Absences," Orbegoso makes a row of empty chairs speak volumes about those who have lost their lives to senseless violence in her homeland. In a more complex still life composition entitled "June 7th," she celebrates a significant holiday in Peru with a painting of a table containing a pair of scissors and other objects that hark back to her memory of teaching children to make a flag. And in yet another large, beautifully organized still life composition entitled "Dream," a children's exercise book on a table set before a window view of a night sky and stars creates a fanciful, metaphysical mood.

The contrasts between the approaches of Jose Gomez and Patricia Orbegoso are perhaps most obvious when one compares

his "Fisherman of Men" with her "Pages." While Gomez' picture is a surreal representation of a marketplace where small human figures are laid out on a block beside fish, in Orbegoso's oil, pages of writing and roughly sketched dress designs emerge from muted areas of earthy hues in a composition of near-cubistic abstract austerity. Both paintings, however, are equally evocative in terms of their emotional suggestiveness and their successful marriage of form and content.

While Gomez' approach is more figurative and topical, Orbegoso is no less concerned with content, although she tends to approach it more obliquely. Both painters studied at the National Fine Arts School in Lima, Peru, where traditional painterly skills would appear to be still held in higher regard than in most art American art schools, judging by the degree of technical finesse that each brings to bear in their different ways. Much to their credit, however, they do more than merely flaunt their abilities; rather, they apply them to hone their ideas and express their highly individual and original sensibilities in a thoroughly contemporary manner.

In 1999, both artists were chosen to



Patricia Orbegoso, "Pages"

represent Peru in the First International Painting Competition, sponsored by Winsor & Newton in London, and both have exhibited widely in other prestigious exhibitions at home and abroad. Their superb joint exhibition at Gelabert Studios did much to establish Jose Gomez and Patricia Orbegoso as formidable presences in the New York art scene as well.

—J. Sanders Eaton

New York Notebook

Celebrating a Vanished World of Penny Ante Entrepreneurs

Up until very recently, we persisted in denying comic strips their rightful status as art, despite all evidence to the contrary, and even though a good case can be made that comics, along with jazz, are one of precious few art forms to actually originate in America. In fact, since Richard Outcault's classic "The Yellow Kid" first appeared in the *New York World* in 1896, the "funny papers" have produced works of indisputable genius. Witness the semi-abstract visual shorthand and brilliant word-play of George Herriman's classic strip "Krazy Kat," and the surreal beauty and surpassing draftsmanship of Winsor McCay's "Little Nemo in Slumberland," among other masterpieces of the rotogravure.

Creators of contemporary "comix"—the term preferred by the medium's avant garde—have taken the possibilities even further, tackling ever more daring themes. Those of us who came of age in the 1960s can attest to the mastery of underground legend Robert Crumb, however skewed by a willfully perverse misogyny. And in his deeply moving Pulitzer Prize winning graphic novel *Maus*, inspired by his troubled relationship with a his father, a Holocaust survivor haunted by his memories, Art Spiegelman demonstrated that this much maligned popular form



could sustain the most serious of subjects.

Further evidence that comics are finally gaining the recognition that the best of them have long deserved is the exhibition Ben Katchor: *Picture Stories*, at The Jewish Museum, 1109 Fifth Avenue, through February 10, 2002.

Katchor, whose strips have

appeared since 1988 in *The New York Press*, *The Village Voice*, and the English edition of the Yiddish language newspaper, *The Forward*, added to the growing legitimacy of the genre when he was honored by MacArthur Foundation with its so-called "Genius Award" for the year 2000.

Born in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn in 1951, the

son of a small businessman, Ben Katchor has fond childhood memories of sitting with his father in the now-vanished cafeterias of midtown Manhattan, listening to the conversations of men who made their livings in the manufacture of marginal novelties and trinkets. The daily struggles and wry philosophizing of such penny ante entrepreneurs provide the main impetus for Katchor's best-known strip, *Julius Knipl*, *Real Estate Photographer*. Mr. Knipl, a middle aged mensch in a fedora and rumpled suit whose name, in Yiddish, means a small treasure or nest egg, is a low-rolling flaneur moving through a milieu populated by manufacturers of folding rain bonnets, Going Out of Business Sale specialists, and manure futures brokers. He strolls the streets of the small manufacturing district, stopping to admire some cockamamie gadget in a store window, kibitzing with another small-time operator on a street corner, musing on the meaning of things. Walking on Outlet Avenue, he passes the art deco edifice of the Fraycuff Building, and the shabby facades of the Mortal Coil Mattress store and the Coin Bath. Stopping for refreshment at a stand selling Herbert Water—presumably, one of those unique local concoctions like an Egg Cream—he inspects the headline of "a prenatually limp, gray tabloid" known as *The Evening Combinator*:



“BRASSIERE STRAP SLIPS.”

Drawn in a sketchy ink line enhanced by gray washes that lay upon his scenes like the time-mellowed grime of all urban memory, Mr. Knipf and his associates traverse streets whose assorted detritus is inventoried aloud by a worker for the Ullage Carting Company, as he loads his truck: “Cardboard cutouts in the shape of onion rolls; leather skullcaps in assorted flesh-tones; pencil sketches for a requiem; an olive jar carved from balsa wood; phosphorescent toothpicks; Styrofoam heads; duct-tape tiaras, Turkish towels and crepe paper...”

Through his lovingly detailed delineation of such trivia, as well as a plethora of expressively exaggerated architectural details and a cacophonous clutter of billboards and signs, Ben Katchor evokes an ineffable sense of nostalgia for a New York subculture where hawkers of cheap novelties, immigrant entrepreneurs, and a cast of other ethnically diverse characters with names like Elijah Salamis and Emile Delilah engage in activities as esoteric in their own way as the meta-physical goings-on in the short stories of Jorge Luis Borges. Titles such as *The Cardboard Valise*, *Chipped Cup Inspector*, and *The Toy Cigarette* suggest the peculiarly poetic setting in which Katchor’s picture stories unfold.

As if to justify with standard curatorial jargon the anomalous presence of a mere “cartoonist” in a fine arts museum, the press materials for the exhibition harp on “the conflicts between identity and assimilation, tradition and modernity” in Katchor’s work. The organization of the show, as well, strives for the familiar respectability of “Installation” by including displays of old-fashioned novelty items from the artist’s collection, illuminated reading boxes, and a videotaped interview with the artist on a continuous loop, along with the original drawings and strips.

While it is understandable that the museum should wish to offset the low-brow connotations that some still attach to comic strip art by creating a conceptual context for a show such as this, in the case of Ben Katchor there is no need for it. For his originality transcends genre altogether, creating from his fascination with fringe neighborhoods and marginal professions a human tapestry as profound and enduring as that of any artist working in a more traditional medium.



David Hockney Plays Sherlock Holmes with Art History

In *Secret Knowledge*:

Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters (Viking/Studio, 2001; \$60), a handsome coffee table volume that the UPS man brought us hot off the press just the other day, the well-known British artist and author David Hockney purports to blow the art historical whistle on the mechanical methods that he alleges were used by masters such as Van Eyck, Holbein, Leonardo, and Caravaggio to achieve some of their effects.

“The thesis I am putting forth here,” Hockney states in the book’s introduction, “is that from the early fifteenth century on many western artists used optics—by which I mean mirrors and lenses (or a combination of the two)—to create living projections. Some artists used these projected images directly to produce drawings and paintings, and before long this new way of depicting the world—this new way of seeing—had become widespread. Many historians have argued that certain painters used the camera obscura in their work—Canaletto and Vermeer, in particular are often cited—but, to my knowledge, no one has suggested that optics were used as widely or as early as I am arguing here.”

As in many private-eye stories, Hockney’s investigations began with a “hunch” he had, in 1991, while experimenting with a camera lucida, that Ingres may have used a similar gadget in the first decades of the nineteenth century to produce a series of exquisite miniature portraits that Hockney had seen at London’s National Gallery.

So intriguing was this possibility that Hockney stopped painting for

two years in order to devote himself to uncovering the “hidden secrets” of the Old Masters. Since taking such a sabbatical from one’s real vocation entails self-sacrifice on the part of any painter—not to mention considerable financial sacrifice in the case of so eminent and successful an artist—one can not doubt Hockney’s sincerity. He obviously wants to get to the bottom of something about which he has strong feelings. Yet, like many another author with an agenda, he appears to stretch some of his points with conjecture and finally offers no conclusive proof of his theories. Indeed, while calling into question the very mastery of the Old Masters he discusses by supposedly “duplicating” aspects of their draftsmanship with his own camera lucida, all he really proves is that his own abilities are hardly equal to theirs, since he must rely on gadgetry to produce effects that he fails to convince they did not arrive at naturally, lending his arguments a slight whiff of sour grapes.

In trying to make the case that Ingres must have used a camera lucida in one of his portraits, for example, Hockney writes, “The fabric draped over Madame Leblanc’s chair could not, I believe, have been done without some optical help. The pattern follows the folds flawlessly, which means it must have been plotted point by point. Optics provide the only practical means to be able to do that.” (Some artists, it might be argued, place pride in their craft above practical considerations—particularly in a time when accurate representation was more highly valued for its own sake than it is today.)

All throughout his profusely illustrated argument, Hockney points to what he perceives to be significant differences between effects achieved with “eyeballing” and those achieved by optical means. But all too often he presents contradictory arguments, alternately calling attention to either accurate draftsmanship or glaring flaws in the reproductions he presents, in order to make similar points. One negative example is when he examines a 1532 painting by Hans Holbein and points out that “the table begins to loom up; and at the bottom right, it looms away, as if its corner has been chopped off.” While the accurate way the patterns follow the folds in the previous example—Ingres’ portrait of Madame Leblanc—lead Hockney

to that Ingres employed optics, the obvious flaws in perspective in the Holbein painting prompt him to conclude that “these distortions suggest the use of a lens not geometry...”

In spite of there being much that one can quibble with, this is a fascinating book, since it alleges, in effect, that at least some of the Old Masters were guilty of “secrets” that would have been considered charlatany in the centuries before many artists routinely and openly employed photography and various other mechanical means as part of their creative process.

With this in mind, it seems no wonder that, as the press release from Viking’s publicity department states, “When news of [Hockney’s] investigations spread, his sensational discoveries became the subject of headlines, media attention and debate among prominent scientists, art historians, and museum directors world wide.”

Yet, while some of the the author’s arguments may seem weak, and even blasphemous in terms of tarnishing the reputations of certain masters for transcendent draftsmanship, no one can state with absolutely certainty that all of his claims are untrue. This makes it fun, as one reads the book, to mentally argue with his arguments, as one might disagree good-naturedly with a friend whose intelligence one respects and whose company one cherishes for the stimulating intellectual challenge it provides.

Hockney, after all, is an engaging writer and a passionate observer with a working artist’s appreciation for the finer points of painting, which he articulates authoritatively. His opinions, however controversial, are a pleasure to contend with, since he supports them with hundreds of beautiful color reproductions, as well as his own photographs and drawings illustrating how he thinks the artists he discusses would have used various optical devices in a similar manner.

And while one might not go so far as to agree with the publisher’s claim that *Secret Knowledge* “blows the lid off the art establishment,” it certainly raises some interesting questions. Especially in light of the breaking news!—as we go to press—that Thomas Eakins—America’s greatest draughtsman, no less!—used an opaque projector to trace photographs...

Neil Zukerman's Symbolist Exhibition: A Major Celebration of the Counter-Tradition

As combative as he is charming, Neil Zukerman, the owner and director of Soho's CFM Gallery, is a man who cherishes his adversaries almost as much as his friends. Which is to say, he always relishes a good fight, especially on behalf of figurative artists and art movements that he feels have been relegated to critical limbo by the avant garde establishment.

Zukerman made his initial art world reputation in the early 1990s by resuscitating the career of the great Surrealist Leonor Fini, then discovering and engineering the success of kindred contemporary artists like Anne Bachelier. In more recent years, he also became a major player in the market for Symbolist inspired prints, watercolors, and drawings, assembling a collection that demonstrates the extraordinary abilities of the loosely-knit

tion on the movement with a museum quality exhibition, at CFM Gallery, 112 Greene Street, through December 2, featuring first-rate works by Felicien Rops, Fernand Khnopff, Henry Fuseli, Edmund Dulac, Rudolf Jettmar, Franz von Stuck, Joseph Uhl, Paul Herrmann, and Franz von Bayros, among others.

The show is especially strong in the work of the Belgian Symbolist Felicien Rops, best known for his macabre mixture of morbidity and eroticism. Rops, who had a major influence on many later artists, particularly James Ensor, often depicted female nudes in high gloves and stockings cavorting with skeletons. Particularly exciting in this show is "Indolence." One of more than 400 works by Rops in CFM Gallery's collection, it depicts a young woman holding

fat serpent; Paul Herrmann's dark vision of Salome holding aloft the head of John the Baptist; an animated engraving by Rudolf Jettmar entitled "Eve Plucks the Apple from the Tree of Knowledge"; five photogravure illustrations delicately hand colored by Fernand Khnopff in the last year of his life; and a selection of engravings executed by Henry Fuseli for one of the major projects of his career: a lavish edition of Shakespeare published by John Boydell and issued with a separate set of prints that have been prized by discerning collectors for two centuries.

"This may be my most important show yet," Neil Zukerman confided, gazing around CFM Gallery proudly, as an appreciative opening night crowd thronged his Symbolist exhibition.

And, in terms of presenting a vital



Herrmann

group of nineteenth century artists who defied the dominance of Impressionism to revive a new romantic spirit.

The literary origins of Symbolism can be traced to Joris-Karl Huysmans' sensational 1884 novel "Against Nature," which was hailed by Arthur Symons as "the breviary of the Decadence." Two years later, Jean Moreas issued the Symbolist Manifesto, citing the French poets Charles Baudelaire, Stephane Mallarme, and Paul Verlaine as the precursors of the movement. For the Symbolist aesthetic, in both literature and painting, elevated the subjective imagination to achieve a fantastic and exotic synthesis of the psychosexual and the spiritual that retains its fascination to this day.

Neil Zukerman focuses renewed atten-



Khnopff

up her skirts to admire her naked body before an ornate full length mirror, behind which a rather neurotic-looking monkey crouches in apparent alarm. Rops' modeling of the nude figure's voluptuous torso is especially exquisite in this sensual drawing in watercolor, ink, and gouache.

Even more daring, considering its social context, is Franz von Bayros' image of a nude woman sprawled on an elegant divan with an equally naked Nubian maid kneeling between her legs, which ranks with the best sapphic scenes of Leonor Fini for its steamy sensuality.

Ah, but there is so much to raise one's eyebrows in this brilliant survey, including Franz von Stuck's seductive image of frank-gazed nude cozily entwined with a



von Stuck

counter-tradition to the modernist bias that began with Impressionism, he may very well be right.

—Ed McCormack

(Selected works from the Symbolist collection will still be available for private viewing at the gallery after the exhibition closes on December second.)

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Wit and Mystery in the Ceramic Sculptures of Tadashi Show Fujii

Perhaps because ceramics have played an important role in the culture and applied arts of Japan for so many centuries, Japanese artists have long led the way in making ceramic sculpture a staple of fine art as well. One of the first great innovators in this regard was Deguchi Onisaburo, the artist and mystic who, in the two years preceding his death in 1948, revolutionized Raku-type “tea ceramics,” creating brilliantly colored vessels unlike anything ever seen in that exquisitely austere tradition. Before and after his death, Deguchi’s “bowls of paradise,” as he called them, inspired younger, more self-consciously avant garde ceramic artists such as Yagi Kazuo, Suzuki Osamu and Yamada Hikaru, who aimed, as they stated in a 1947 manifesto, to “broaden our experience by departing from the limited viewpoints defended by ceramic artists of the past.”

It is doubtful, however, that even those forward-looking members of the Kyoto-based Young Ceramicists Group could have anticipated the work of the contemporary ceramic sculptor Tadashi Show Fujii, whose exhibition “1 Mile” is on view at Caelum Gallery, 508-526 West 26th Street, Suite 315, from December 11 through 22 (with a reception on Saturday, December 15, from 4 to 6 PM).

Tadashi Show Fujii, who has exhibited widely in France, Japan, and the United States, creates ceramic sculptures with wildly distorted figurative forms that can only be compared to the late, cartoon-influenced paintings of Philip Guston. His brightly colored personages can be as simplified as the Pillsbury Dough Boy or as complexly reconfigured as some of Picasso’s most deconstructive portraits.

Indeed, some of the latter’s paintings of Dora Maar may have served as inspiration for Tadashi Show Fujii’s ceramic sculpture “Barbara.” Here, a woman’s head and face are created with a range of layered rectangles and cylindrical shapes. These are stacked to create a creature with her own peculiar allure. Her hair is formed

from a flat form that sits atop her head like a warped roof on a ramshackle house. Immediately below it, a squareish form contains one big, round eye, and next to it another rectangle serves to support a single ruffled ear. (The other ear, turned sideways, occupies another rectangular area below her broadly smiling mouth, which graces a more circular shape and is glazed to suggest glistening red.) Despite the anomalous arrangement of her features, “Barbara,” who also seems to be a distant niece of de Kooning’s “Woman,” is a fetching femme fatale nonetheless. Indeed, her peculiar charms are inseparable from her anatomical oddities.



“Barbara”

Another ceramic sculpture by Tadashi Show Fujii, entitled “Sphinx,” reveals a visual wit akin to the great New Yorker cartoonist and fine artist Saul Steinberg. It depicts a hybrid creature with a head shaped like an elongated vase, topped by green topiary spikes that lend it a vaguely punk effect. Its face is both human and feline in the way that Steinberg’s cats boast features of both species. As befits the mythical creature of the title, its body is decidedly leonine, with two legs folded around its trunk in a posture like that of the two seated lions guarding the 42nd Street branch of The New York Public Library. While the terra cotta coloring of the piece also enhances its leonine qualities, it covers its mouth with a distinctly human hand, as if to stifle the impulse to

speak. Although the ancient Egyptians believed the Sphinx to be a symbol of power and vigilance, as well as a keeper of arcane secrets, this Sphinx is obviously given to garrulousness and must struggle to keep from spilling the beans, so to speak.

Much more difficult to interpret is the piece titled with the exclamation “Put the tongue out from the cosmos!” This ceramic sculpture depicts a creature that could resemble a hybrid of a human and a mushroom. From its mouth, studded with big white teeth, a long gray tongue protrudes like a drawbridge, hanging almost down to its stump-like feet. At once

comic and demonic, this figure has a quirky originality that can also be seen in the piece called “The Bag-Man: sleeping and awaken.” Although, in this country, a “bag-man” is someone who collects debts for the Mafia, here the phrase is meant more literally, since the piece depicts a human face emerging, mysteriously, from a brilliant blue bag.

One could be tempted to see Tadashi Show Fujii as a three-dimensional colleague of the “Super Flat” movement—those contemporary artists inspired by the cute Manga and animation characters that have permeated the popular culture of Japan in recent years. Yet, for all their lively humor and brilliant

colors, his sculptures can be likened more accurately to the terracotta and earthenware figures of ancient China, which often guarded tombs and were seen as emissaries to the afterlife.

So while they are thoroughly contemporary and informed by a formal sophistication akin to that of the American ceramic artist Robert Arneson, the sculptures of Tadashi Show Fujii possess qualities akin to ancient power objects. Indeed, it is this underlying sense of magic, along with their formidable formal attributes, that finally makes them so compelling.

—Lawrence Downes

New Caledonia Artist Caroline DeGroiselle and the Sensual Alchemy by Which the Landscape is Transformed

As art historian and critic Xavier Girard expressed so poetically in *Mediterranean: from Homer to Picasso*, a lavishly illustrated book released this year by Assoulane Publishing, of Paris and New York, there are places in this world that inspire artists like no others; places that the French refer to as “pays de cocagnes,” because the blue of the skies “is like a chunk of that woad paste that used to be called a ‘paddy,’ or, in French, *cocagne* — a large, unevenly round ball suggesting a soft blue sky, before the advent of that somber and ‘sublime indigo.’”

Reading Girard’s rhapsodic descriptions of “these hills, these colors, these perfumes and this particular coast, which some bucolic bureaucrat inane labeled ‘azure,’ as if it was not lapped by the sea,” one is reminded of Caroline DeGroiselle, a painter born in Paris in 1963, whose parents moved the family to New Caledonia, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, in 1970, where the budding artist found her formative enchantment in “the warmth of the island and the marvelous colors of the lagoon surrounding it,” which continue to inform her sun-splashed paintings to this day.

For any place in the world where an artist finds such inspiration is indeed a magical realm, and DeGroiselle’s landscapes achieve universality by virtue of her ability to render the most fleeting facets of nature immutable with her brush. For DeGroiselle, the color and light of New Caledonia is by now internalized to the extent that it permeates all of her pictures like the emulsion of imagination, imbuing her canvases with a rarefied atmosphere, a vibrancy and a warmth unlike anything else in contemporary painting. It is part of her personal myth, illuminating her nostalgic memories of her family, which included a mother of Italian descent from whom she inherited “a natural feeling for refinement, beauty, good cooking, self discipline,” and a father fondly recalled as “the tireless giant” who passed on to her an appreciation for “boundless energy, courage, generosity.”

A member of Les Salons des Artistes Francais, and le Salon des Independents, at the Grand Palace in Paris, DeGroiselle has won numerous awards, and exhibits regularly in Europe, as well as at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, in New York, where her most recent exhibition was her most impressive to date. Despite the hor-

rendous terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, which took place shortly before the exhibition, throwing the city into turmoil, and making the prospects for any enterprise less than auspicious, DeGroiselle refused to cancel it. To do so, she felt, would have been to dishonor the people of the city where her work has been so consistently well received in their hour of need.

The exhibition went forward and was a triumph, providing a bright spot of color and beauty in a grim and mournful moment in the city’s history, proving that art is always a welcome and positive force, even in the grimmest of times. One of the simplest and, in its own way, most impressive paintings in the show was the still life entitled “Mon Bouquet aux Citrons Jaunes.” This breezy and buoyant composition depicted a vase bursting with brilliant flowers, along with three lemons on a table top. The bold sensual treatment of this subject was wholly characteristic of DeGroiselle, with sunny hues flooding the composition in luminous translucent glazes augmented by graceful linear strokes to define the contours of the vase and the lemons, from which the light seemed to emanate as though from a trio of miniature suns. This was a consummately French painting, as much a confection as an observation from life, a concoction for aesthetic delectation, rather than a simple representation of any known reality, a theatrical presentation of time-honored painterly conventions made fresh and new by simple dint of the artist’s skill and will. Filled with joyous energy and empathy for the most humble and enduring of life’s treasures, the composition was further enhanced in a tactile sense by the addition of sand to the pigment and bits of mesh material added as a collage element, to suggest filmy curtains, as well as serving to convey DeGroiselle’s connection to the great tradition of French modernism.

This abiding connection to all that is enduring in modern painting was underlined even more emphatically perhaps in Caroline DeGroiselle’s vibrant tribute to Monet, “Giverny in Soft Adorn” — even the imprecise translation of the title into English adding to its poetic effect. Here, softly hanging leaves, a bridge, and the shimmer of reflective water were evoked by the artist in a manner that was wholly her own, demonstrating the fierce individuality which allows her to reinterpret the milieu of one of the greatest of all Impressionists

without succumbing to parody of imitation. The painting succeeds splendidly because DeGroiselle’s manner of attack is distinctly different from that of Monet, with loose, flowing strokes that deconstruct and reassemble the familiar scene, enabling us to see it anew.

Even more spectacular in this regard was the large triptych entitled “The Pond with Blessful Colours,” in which a rowboat and a small foot-bridge are focal points of the three panels, all of which are unified by the verdantly blooming tree limbs that frame the composition like theatrical curtains, as well as by the bright yellow flowers gaily clustered along the shore.

Other highlights of the show included the poetically titled canvas called “The Market that Smells Like Sunshine,” where brightly colored tents and human figures create a composition that captures the excitement of the every day world with winning verve, and the equally vivacious “Promenade Rose Tendre,” with its mountainous terrain where a tree covered with hot pink blossoms is juxtaposed with a luminous orange sky exemplify the kind of chromatic frisson at which DeGroiselle excels.

Another especially lively composition was the still life entitled “Melodie pour Piano et Fleurs,” a still life in which a piano, sheet music, and yet another vibrant vase of flowers appear to take flight, with the instrument’s black keys and the musical notes creating a kind of dazzling calligraphic effect. Here, again, DeGroiselle is at her most inventive in terms of making nature morte come alive in a manner that few other contemporary artists can match. Indeed, while DeGroiselle is one of our most exuberant landscape painters, it is in her still life compositions that we see her style pared down to its bare essentials. However, subject matter is hardly what the art of Caroline DeGroiselle is really about. For while she obviously takes pleasure in and inspiration from the wonders of the world, it is her dialogue with her materials in the act of painting that accounts for much of the excitement that her paintings generate.

For When DeGroiselle paints beams of sunlight streaming down on a lush, verdant landscape where foliage and flowers vie in clotted, colorful clusters, it is not only the illusion of nature, but the alchemy of pigment on canvas by which she achieves it that compels our admiration and gratitude.

—Bela Miklos

Marie-Louise McHugh's Transformation of Personal Experience

In painting, as in writing, there are stylists and then there are artists who subordinate style to content. An example of the latter would be Rene Magritte, who painted objects in an uninflectedly descriptive manner in order to make their incongruous juxtaposition all the more dramatic. Another artist who obviously prefers to let her subject matter speak for itself, rather than upstaging it with flashy special effects, is the contemporary painter Marie-Louise McHugh, whose solo show is on view at Phoenix Gallery, 568 Broadway, from November 28 to December 22.

Although McHugh's oils on canvas are not quite as deadpan as Magritte's—since she employs a form of restrained expressionism, in which carefully controlled yet visible brushstrokes lend her images emotional vitality—she takes care nonetheless to avoid unnecessary painterly flourishes. In this, her second exhibition in this venerable Soho venue, she shows paintings and works on paper inspired by the pear, the cone flower, and the female figure, as well as a series of

narrative paintings created over the past several years with a decidedly autobiographical thrust.

Some of McHugh's most powerful paintings are those dealing with the female nude, in which she subverts the art historical notion of the "male gaze" in order to explore such subjects as feminine body image in regard to both the aging process and the ideals and unrealistic expectations imposed on women by society and the mass media. (Interestingly enough, McHugh once experienced censorship when two women objected to her nudes in another gallery, an event that was to be expected in Manet's day, when "Olympia" set off a scandal in the Salon, but seems simply silly in our more prurient age!)

One of the most striking nude figures in the present exhibition is "Nude on Red Wall," in which the blond model is seen from behind, reclining with her hands back behind her head and her legs propped up on the red wall of the title. The woman's figure, ample of hip and fleshy of thigh, is considerably more mature and full in the classical manner than the present

anorexic ideal, propagated by fashion magazines featuring models barely out of adolescence. Although the position from which she is painted creates an almost abstract composition, McHugh nonetheless exploits certain details to admirably expressive effect. Particularly impressive in this regard are the artist's handling of the shadows on the red wall and her articulation of the model's bare feet, their toes appearing to wag in a girlishly blithe manner, suggesting that this woman is at ease with her nudity and thor-

Considerably more complex, as are most of McHugh's narrative pictures, is another major oil on canvas, entitled "Journey." In this painting, inspired by the artist's emigration from Europe to America, the dominant element is a large female figure with a lower body that morphs into an uprooted tree. This figure inhabits a surreal landscape in which mountains and clustered dwellings give way to a body of water and a distant island on which several rows of large pear resemble a crowd of huddled figures.

An evocative expression of an actual experience through symbolic means, "Journey" is part of a body of narrative work that also includes "The Dream," another large canvas that McHugh was working on on September 11th, when the terror attacks occurred in New York City and Washington D.C. While the painting was originally based on an earlier work, a rather lighthearted painting by William Merritt Chase which had caught McHugh's fancy, its subject and mood changed considerably in the wake of the attacks.

"The enormity of these events put into question the relevance of creating

and exploring what all of a sudden seemed to be rather mundane images," McHugh has explained. "I really had a difficult time getting over the horror of that day, and could not paint for awhile. Also, how could I even consider exhibiting paintings just a few blocks from 'Ground Zero,' a mass grave for some 5000 people and the place where so much got destroyed. The privilege of being able to find refuge in my studio and paint felt almost sacrilegious and it took me a few weeks to somehow recover and find new images to express what I wanted to say with that painting."

According to the artist, "The Dream" became considerably more grim in its post-terror version, and while it was not available when the work was previewed for this issue, one anticipates that it will be a powerful addition to the exhibition. Indeed, the entire show, comprised of work created over the past ten years, reveals Marie-Louise McHugh to be an artist with the ability to transform her personal experiences and perceptions of the world into unique visual statements that achieve an affecting universality.

—J. Sanders Eaton



"Journey"

oughly at peace with the unfashionable beauty of her body. The complementary factors of the bold composition, the warm flesh tones, and the vibrant red wall lends the painting a winning combination of formal strength and sensuality.

It is indicative of Marie-Louise McHugh's unique ability as a painter that she can impart almost as much sensuality and suggestiveness to an image of a pear or a flower as to a nude female body. Naturally, the manner in which the rounded contours of the fruits suggest and even mirrors aspects of human anatomy enhances their sensuality. This is made especially clear in McHugh's painting "Solace," where a shapely female nude is seen leaning against a pear the size of a large boulder, the dislocation of scale lending the picture an element of the surreal.

By contrast, "Coneflowers," an especially large oil on canvas in a triptych format presents three large flowers in a frontal manner that lends them the presence of a triple portrait. Indeed, the almost cinematic quality of this powerful large painting is akin to that in certain compositions by Francis Bacon.

Trees as Spiritual Symbols in the Art of Romeo Robert Tomei

Not only as a painter, but for films and theater as well, Romeo Robert Tomei has been creating art for almost half a century. His work is in various public and private collections around the world, and continues to gain momentum with each exhibition, as seen in his recent show at Agora Gallery, 560 Broadway.

Although he is also known for his vigorous calligraphic abstractions Tomei's most recent paintings are inspired by nature, particularly trees. Working with acrylics and mixed media, including plaster compounds, gesso, and casting resins to increase the tactility of his paintings, and sometimes gold leaf to add radiant highlights, he explores images of trees as symbols of spiritual yearning.

Of course, arboreal subjects make perfect metaphors for transcendence with their limbs striving skyward, and Tomei exploits them to the utmost in paintings such as "Grounding." In this vibrant acrylic on canvas, two trees stand side by side on a horizon where the night sky meets a flat verdant field. Behind one tree is a fat full moon. Behind the other is a brilliant red sun. The rising moon and the setting sun meet on the horizon-line. The former drips white. The latter bleeds red. The rivulets seep deep into the earth, run-



"Grounding"

ning down over the submerged roots of the trees. The liquidly leaking orbs, the x-rayed earth, and other anomalous elements in the painting lend the landscape a metaphysical dimension, as though the artist is in possession of some secret knowledge hidden beneath the surface of nature that he is sharing with the viewer.

In "Ecliptic," another large, atmospheric painting in acrylic and resin on canvas, the dominant element of the composition is a shimmering orb in the upper left area of the composition. It is black at its center, encircled by auras of white, pink, and red. Radiating out from this solar orb is a radiant red field that fills most of the canvas with a sense of blinding light and sweltering heat. Within this rosy radiance, faint

vertical tracteries suggest a grove of slender saplings consumed, as in a forest fire, by the shimmering rays of the sun. Here, again, the artist heightens the effect of nature to create a truth that transcends the factual; to capture the hidden essence of his subject, rather than the superficial appearance of the landscape.

One painting by Romeo Robert Tomei includes an image of a single tree, topped by luminous gold leaves, with rays of white light streaming from its uppermost branches like frothy torrents from a waterfall. In another, an acrylic on board, mysterious pink light glows forth from the depths of a forest, illuminating clusters of leaves whose red, yellow, and blue hues create dynamic chromatic variants of nature's actual palette.

Here, as in all of his best paintings, Tomei heightens elements of nature to capture, as he puts it, "not necessarily what is seen, but what I feel from our earth..."

Romeo Robert Tomei succeeds splendidly in his goal, finally enabling the viewer to feel the same spiritual vibration that he does when he focuses his unique gaze on trees and other facets of nature. And it is, indeed, an enriching aesthetic as well as spiritual experience. —Stuart Leslie Myers

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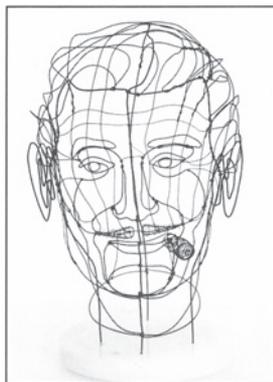
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Myriad Pleasures in the CLWAC's 105th Annual Open Exhibition

The recent 105th Annual Open Exhibition of the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club, named for an American scholar and philanthropist who was the only woman among the 106 founding members of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, made one reflect on the important role the organization has played in encouraging so many distinguished women artists.

This year's show, in the main gallery of the National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South named Francine "Franke"



Nancy Minor,
"Clark Gable"

DeBevoise, a celebrated portrait painter and the Club Historian, as its Honored Member. Although many tendencies and styles, from the representational to the abstract, were represented, the exhibition,

overall, demonstrated the membership's abiding faith in time-honored mediums, techniques, and timeless themes.

A humanistic subject was combined with a sensitively modulated handling of pastel in "Street of Broken Dreams," an affecting image of a man adrift on skid row by Fleur Byers. Gabriella Delloso, demonstrated strong draftspersonship, as well as an ability to capture character through nuances of expression and ges-

ture, in "El Conquistador," a full length portrait in charcoal and pastel. Equally impressive in another manner was "The Urry-Szymkowiak Girls," a charming and insightful oil of two children seated on steps, painted in a meticulous realist style by Jada Rowland. By contrast, Harriet Regina Marion employed mixed media and collage to a lively composition entitled "Ho-Sale Dogfood," animated by an antic array of human and animal figures.

In a small, strong oil called "Brother Bruce," Gaile Snow Gibbs depicted a bearded monk in a contemplative pose, with one hand to his cheek. Similarly posed, yet decidedly different in medium and mood, were Joan Rudman's exquisite charcoal drawing "Pensive Ann," and "The Lady," a serene neoclassical sculpture in Bond marble by Helene Massey-Hemmans.

Still life also took intriguing forms, ranging from Jinx Lindenauer's sensual sculpture "Bronze Pear," to Ginger Brown's "Babe, You're the Tops," a meticulously painted oil on linen of colorful vintage toys arranged on a dresser-top. Other innovative interpretations of inanimate objects were seen in Lynn Melanie Veitzer's trompe-l'oeil treatment oil, "Garden Forks," and Darlis Lamb's sprawling bronze sculpture "French Lesson 8 - Orange Epluchee avec Deux Prunes." Then there was "Antique Reflections," a painting by Sharon Florin that was notable for the artist's ability to create a coherent composition with intricately layered images limned with remarkable precision.

Urban and landscape subjects were also well represented. Katya Held's bravura brushwork and vibrant use of color to



Karen Whitman, *"Village Morning"*

capture light were especially impressive in her oil "Bryant Park, New York City." Stylized architecture and human figures were merged in Karen Whitman's "Village Morning," a linoleum block print depicting roof tops, back yards, and cobblestone streets in a charmingly atmospheric panorama. Another approach to printmaking was seen in Diane Miller's poetic intaglio monotype, "Chinese Landscape," while Nina Maguire capture a nocturnal fireworks display with Turner-esque panache in her acrylic painting, "The Millennium."

Myriad other works too numerous to describe at length here— among them, a witty wire sculpture of actor Clark Gable by Nancy Minor; Sandy Frank's whimsical wood and paper sculpture "Winged Fantasy," and Toni Ellis' portrait-like painting of an old leather satchel—made the 105th Annual Open Exhibition of the Catharine Wolfe Art Club a thoroughly enjoyable event.

—J. Sanders Eaton

West Side Arts Coalition
at Broadway Mall
96th & B'way
recently presented

"Still Life with a Difference"
curated by
K.A. Gibbons
(See pg. 32 for review.)

Mikki Powell

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Celebrating the Allusiveness of Postmodern Abstraction

“Abstract 2001,” seen recently at Broadway Mall Community Center, 96th Street and Broadway, was one of the West Side Arts Coalitions most focused theme surveys to date. On view were some forty paintings and drawings by ten artists that lived up to the show’s stated aim of presenting each participant’s “individual concept of what today’s abstraction is about in this new century.”

What made the show successful was that each artist obviously not only had a different idea about where abstraction is going, but also managed to make a convincing case for it.

In “Salute to C.B.,” Romanian-born painter Jacob Vargo took his fellow countryman Constantin Brancusi as a starting point for a composition whose cool blue hues suggested C.B.’s highly polished metal surface. Vargo’s painterly attack, however, was less austere, with juicy strokes and drips activating the surface.

Ersilia Z. Crawford showed seven works in collage and acrylic in which boldly patterned fabrics often became an integral part of the composition, rhyming visually with painted shapes in vibrant hues. Crawford’s work demonstrated that gestural energy, devoid of postmodern irony,

can still generate excitement.

Leanne Martinson’s paintings are all about sensual pleasure. All of her compositions feature freely brushed stripes of clear, brilliant color that radiate like vertical rainbows, looking good enough to eat.

Karl J. Volk’s work is marked by modesty and formal grace. Volk’s graphite drawing “Ben’s Trumpet Solo” suggested the musical theme of its title with its rhythmically rhyming network of lines, while his aquarelle, “Aquatic Theme,” had a luminous liquidity.

Miguel A’ngel Mora has a singular ability to make hard-edged geometric painting surprising and fresh. In his composition “JR #1,” Mora employed ordinary silver-gray duct tape, in concert with flatly painted areas of tan, to make an elegantly insouciant formal statement.

Peg McCreary’s gift for painterly calligraphy lends her compositions exquisite linear grace. Her serpentine black line, combined with her palette of subtle, softly diffused earth colors, invariably makes for a graceful and lively visual dance.

Say what you will about him: Meyer Tannenbaum continues to be one of our most unrelentingly adventurous experimenters. Here, he dazzled us with a suite

of canvases from his “Scraped Flow” series, a palimpsest’s delight, wherein horizontal streaks of color simultaneously obscure and unearth jewel-like passages of pentimento.

Janusz Jaworski proved the old adage that less can be more with a group of very small watercolors which were notable for their subtle modulations of close-valued washes and delicate traces of form. Jaworski’s little gems impressed one with their Turnesque sense of light and semi-submerged nuances.

“Opera,” a large oil by Young Me, was notable for the startling way the canvas hung loosely on the stretcher bars, which was too large for it and protruded several inches beyond the composition. This device, however, was an integral part of Me’s statement, adding to the theatrical impact of his bright, bold, abstract composition.

Then there was Eleanor Gilpatrick whose large, bold composition “Mixed Emotions,” featuring swirling forms with fiery highlights emerging from a deep nocturnal blue ground, was one of this gifted abstract painter’s most dynamic recent oils.

—Martin Parsons

Mary B. Connally: Limner of Souls

The ability to get a likeness and also suggest the spirit of an individual is a special talent that not all artists possess. Indeed, to be a good portrait painter is to be, to some degree, both an artist and a psychologist. Alice Neel, for example, was one such artist, although her portraits often reveal as much about herself as her sitters, and thus for all their brilliance are somewhat skewed. Mary B. Connally, in her upcoming show at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, is a portrait painter who has learned to subordinate her own personality in order to absorb that of her subject, even while retaining the stamp of her own unique sensibility and style. Connally has studied widely, at the Norfolk Art School of Yale university, and the Rhode Island School of Design, among other places, but it would appear that the teacher who made the greatest impression upon her was the late Raphael Soyer, with whom she studied extensively at the National Academy of Design in the late 1960s.

Like Soyer, Connally employs a muted palette and superb draftspersonship to capture the character and attitudes of her sitters in succulent strokes. There is something pleasingly old masterish about her technique, although she also has an informal way of posing her sitters and often

leaves portions of bare canvas showing in order to imbue her compositions with a sense of vitality that is thoroughly contemporary.

In one painting of a little girl with long black hair sitting primly in a hardbacked chair with her hands folded in her lap, for example, it is these unfinished portions of the canvas that lend the composition a sense of spontaneity that brings it to life. Unlike many other portrait painters, Connally seems to know exactly what to leave out in order to make the composition work as a painting as well as a portrait. This, in fact, is the difference between portraits that transcend their genre to become objects of art that are of interest to others besides the sitters’ family and friends. Like the aforementioned Raphael Soyer, David Hockney, and very few others, Mary B. Connally has the increasingly rare ability to bestow each of her portraits with the discrete pictorial interest and aesthetic qualities that one expects from the best figurative painting of any kind.

Indeed, this ability carries over to Connally’s paintings of the female nude, which never have that generic quality one sees in so many art school studies. When Connally paints a nude body, it invariably has the character of a portrait. The figure

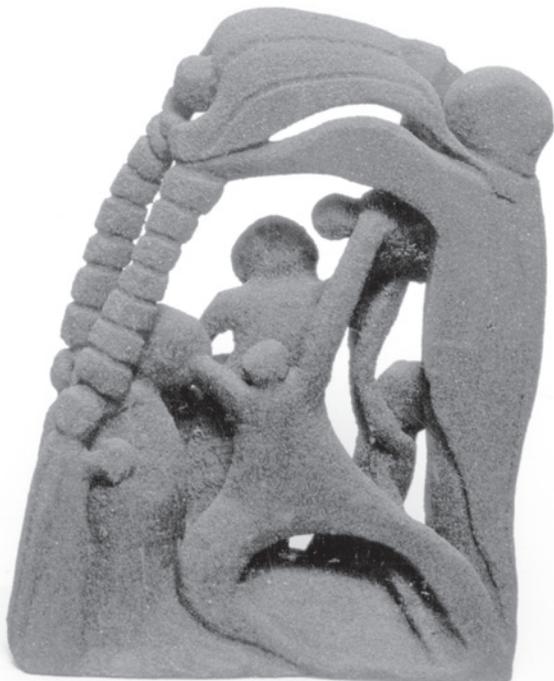
is not idealized or emphasized in any way that makes its nudity the whole point of the picture. In one splendid painting of a woman with a bun in her hair leaning against a large pillow that is suggested with a few faint, skillful strokes, her pensive expression holds our interest as compellingly as her unclothed body. And in another painting of a dark haired nude, the artist conveys a strong sense of her personality through her body language, even with her face turned away from the viewer.

Other excellent portrait subjects by Mary B. Connally include a middle aged Asian man whose animated smile lights up the entire canvas; a young woman with wavy raven hair framing her face, dreamy eyes, and the full lipped pout of an old fashioned film star; and a bearded man with the intense gaze of a poet.

Each painting captures the sense of a particular individual in a manner that makes one feel almost as though one knows him or her. This is something special and worth preserving in contemporary art as it was in the art of the past. Mary B. Connally is an artist whose work reminds us once again that the human image is still a worthy subject and for this we owe her a debt of gratitude.

—Marjorie Perkoff

Aegis Hands: “Tears of Time” Sculpted in Sand



Sand sculpture by Aegis Hands

Aegis Hands, a widely exhibited and highly respected artist from Iceland who exhibited recently at Agora Gallery, 560 Broadway, creates his remarkable sculptures from dry sand, without benefit of forms, molds, or special tools. Because of his unusual method, each piece is unique and cannot be duplicated by the artist. Hands favors this medium because, as he states, it has “the flexibility of wood, the softness of clay, the hardness of stone, and the fineness of glass.”

In his present series, entitled “Tears of Time,” Hands employs forms that have

been compared to the sculptures of Brancusi and the drawings of Matisse, the former for their dynamic abstract presence, the later for their fluid figuration. These two comparisons could seem contradictory, if not for the fact that Hands’ sculptures are both abstract and figurative in the most literal sense of those two terms. Which is to say, the bold organic forms of his pieces initially appear abstract, with the rounded contours and combination of positive and negative spaces. On closer inspection, however, starkly simplified human emerge from these seemingly abstract shapes. Often these figurative configurations are quite complex, involving several figures with the powerful primitive presence of Precolumbian carvings. Although Hands’ figures are featureless, their postures are expressively distorted and their gestures are animated in a manner that suggests all manner of arduous human endeavors.

In the sculpture called “Eggplay,” for example, two interlocking figures appear to be balancing a round form between their bellies. Although the image is hardly specif-

ic, it is remarkably evocative, suggesting a symbolic vision of sexual congress or arcane primitive fertility ritual.

In another powerful piece, entitled “The Colossus,” what appears at first glance to be an abstract form with several holes in it turns out to be a cluster of simplified figures climbing one upon the other. Yet other pieces, in which several figures appear to interact or embrace have monumental and emotive qualities akin to the family groupings of the great British sculptor Henry Moore. Indeed, Aegis Hands shares with Moore a dynamic way with integrated organic forms, as well as an ability to imbue simplified figures with a powerful emotional resonance. Like Moore, too, Hands’ treatment of the human figure anthropomorphizes elements of landscape, with hollows that suggest caves, and voluptuous contours that evoke hills creating a sense of surreal metamorphosis. The two artists also share a fondness for negative spaces contained with volumic masses that Hands takes even further in terms of interwoven figural complexity. Equally remarkable is Hands’ ability to achieve monumentality on a much more intimate scale than the earlier sculptor.

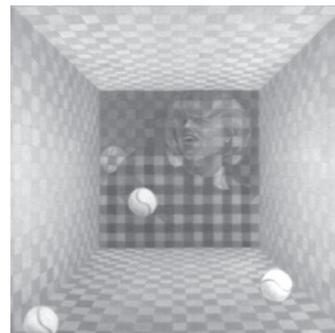
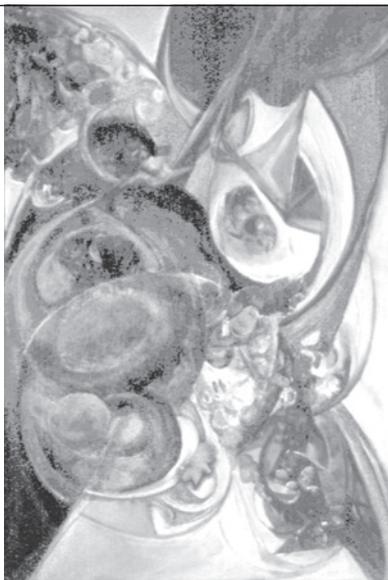
As another writer pointed out, the present popularity of musical performers such as Bjork and Sigur Ros has focused attention on the contribution of Iceland to contemporary popular culture. Aegis Hands shows every indication of making a comparable contribution to visual culture, given his highly original use of materials, as well as the universal qualities that, along with their abstract ones, make his sand sculptures vastly appealing. On the evidence of his recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, it seems safe to assume that wider recognition for this gifted sculptor is imminent.

—Marie R. Pagano

Painting by Miriam Wills

An exhibitor in the recent Hoboken Artists Studio Tour

To view the artist’s paintings by appointment call 201-659-3427



“Missing Opportunity”

Elvira Dimitrij

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The “Primal Universe” of Russian Painter Ekatherina Savtchenko



All too often in contemporary art, we tend to separate the conceptual from the expressive, as though they were polar opposites. This seems like folly when one considers the work of Ekatherina

Savtchenko, a young Russian-born artist based in Germany whose paintings are built on a complex philosophical armature, yet compel us initially by virtue of their dynamic physical properties.

A protege of Harry Stendhal, the flamboyant New York art dealer and Svengali known for guiding the careers of several rising European artists, Savtchenko resembles a more petite, more wholesome version of Nico, the late Warhol Superstar and chanteuse of the Velvet Underground. Unlike the tragic Nico, however, Savchenko harbors an impressive intellect beneath her blonde bangs. Despite a shy, unassuming demeanor that is most refreshing in an artist who has already had several impressive New York exhibitions, as well as a prestigious solo show at the Russian State Museum in St. Petersburg, she does not hesitate to speculate learnedly on the origins of the universe and other lofty subjects. Indeed, making mind-boggling imaginative leaps over the hurdles of her halting English, the diminutive painter—whose chic black garb makes her resemble a classic European existentialist in the Jean Seberg manner, rather than your standard Soho fashionista or latter-day Chelsea Girl—cites sources ranging from recent scientific hypothesis to ancient Hindu myths to explain the metaphysical inspiration behind her most recent solo show, “The Primal Universe.”

The exhibition took place from November 8 through December 1, at Westwood Gallery, 578 Broadway, the spacious and elegant venue whose savvy director James Cavallo recently mounted a much-publicized posthumous exhibition by Stuart Sutcliffe, the former “fifth Beatle” turned Abstract Expressionist painter who died of injuries sustained in a brawl that also involved John Lennon.

“Primal Universe” featured large acrylic paintings on canvas in which the universe was embodied and eroticized in the artist’s treatment of the human figure as anthropomorphic archetype. Savtchenko traces this notion back to the Hindu myths of cosmic titans who held the universe in their bodies, as well as to Scandinavian legends of a primal mover, Ymir the Glacial Giant, whose body transformed

into the entire cosmos.

Since some scientists speculate that our solar system is only one among millions of parallel universes, how are they all held together? Savtchenko asks hypothetically. Perhaps the universe is actually a living creature and our solar system is only a minuscule component of a single atom or cell. Perhaps the Big Bang was “the birthday of this megacosmal being,” of whose body we are but a minute part.

Farfetched as Savtchenko’s theories might strike some of us, she puts them across by sheer virtue of her painterly conviction in her large canvases, with their hieroglyphically simplified figures set against cosmic expanses of vibrant, tactile color.

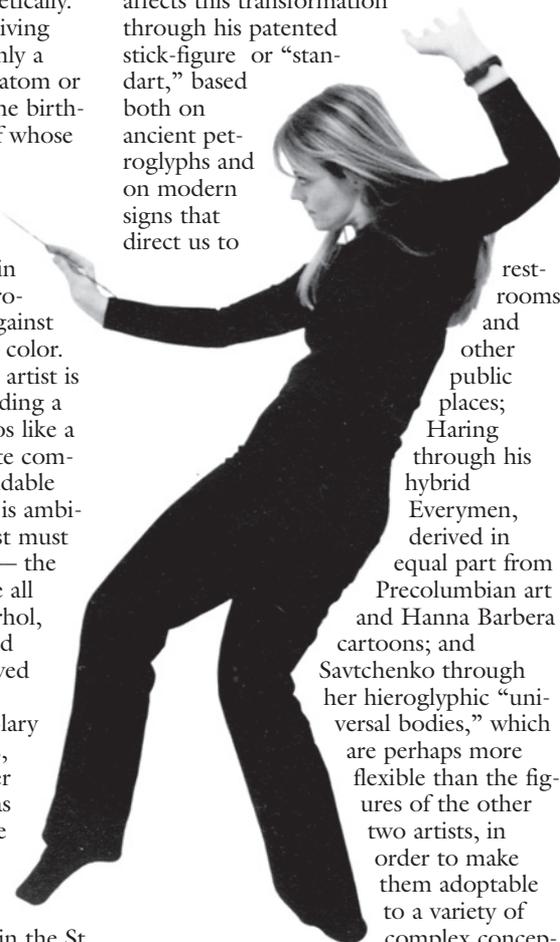
Indeed, part of her appeal as an artist is that she is absolutely fearless, wielding a brush loaded with molten impastos like a pint-sized Julian Schnabel to create compositions of epic ambition and laudable conceptual chutzpah. Savtchenko is ambitious in the way that a young artist must be to survive in today’s art world—the art world bequeathed to us by the all American work ethic of Andy Warhol, the first major artist to make naked ambition respectable in the hallowed precincts of High Art.

To comprehend what an exemplary child of her century Savtchenko is, consider that she started her career in computer science and worked as an engineer of information science before deciding that art was to be her true vocation and embarking upon it with characteristic intrepidity. She enrolled in the St. Petersburg Academy of the arts in 1990. She completed her education by moving to Dusseldorf in 1994, where she studied for four years at the Dusseldorf Academy of Arts as a master student of A.R. Penck, whose pictographic figurative mode she has expanded considerably in her own work.

In the space of a single decade, Savtchenko has become one of Dusseldorf’s leading artists, compiling a curriculum vitae that would be the envy of many artists with careers spanning half a century, with numerous solo shows in Germany, France, Italy, Russia, the Netherlands, and the United States. She has participated in just as many group exhibitions world wide (including Japan, Hungary, and Belgium), and was also featured in a landmark exhibition with her former teacher A.R. Penck and Keith Haring.

The latter exhibition seems especially significant, because like both Penck and

Haring, Savtchenko has evolved a highly personal visual vocabulary that draws from primitivistic sources, revitalizing them in a particularly postmodern manner. Penck affects this transformation through his patented stick-figure or “standard,” based both on ancient petroglyphs and on modern signs that direct us to



rest-rooms and other public places; Haring through his hybrid Everymen, derived in equal part from Precolumbian art and Hanna Barbera cartoons; and Savtchenko through her hieroglyphic “universal bodies,” which are perhaps more flexible than the figures of the other two artists, in order to make them adoptable to a variety of complex conceptual themes.

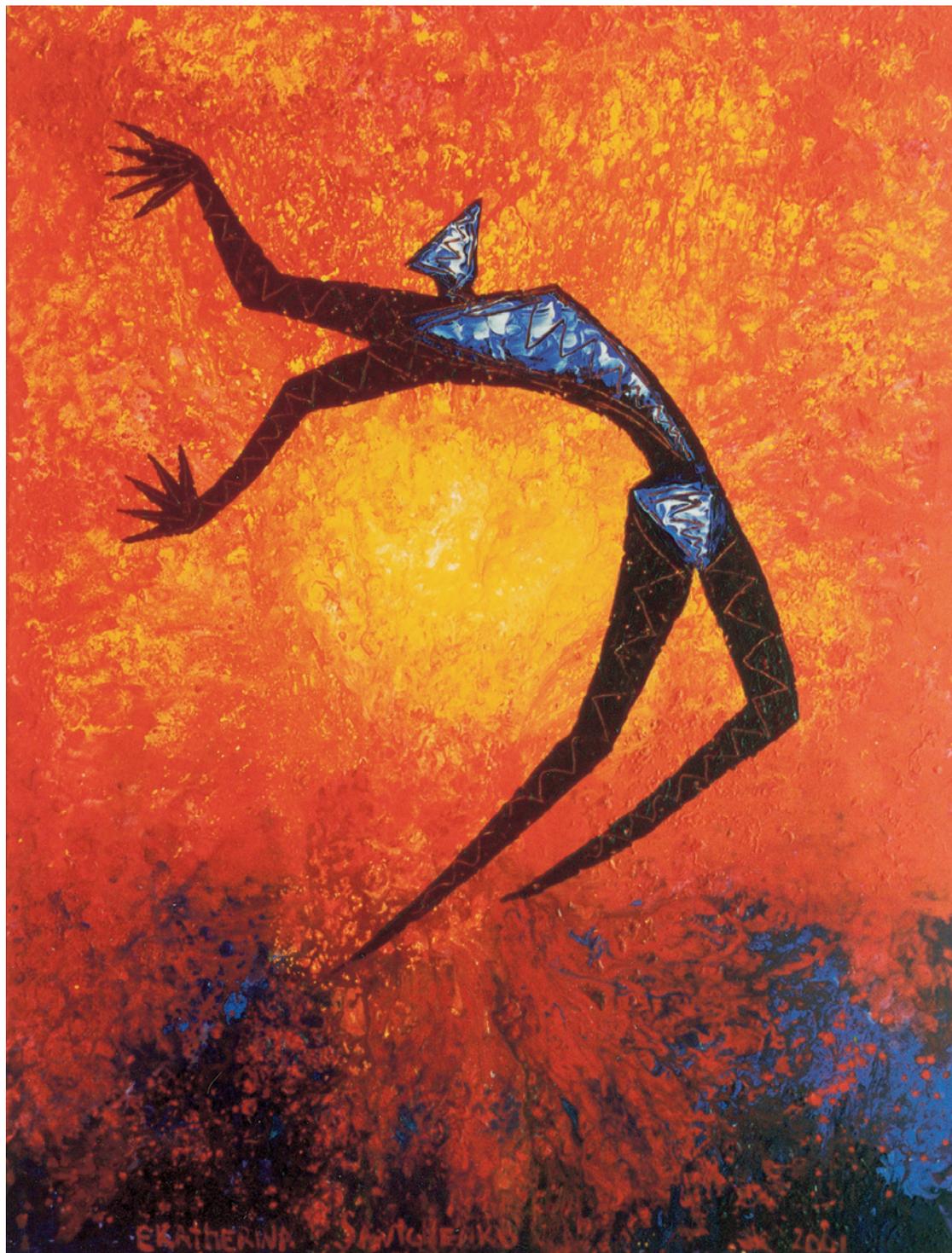
In “Human Fractals,” for example, Savtchenko’s exhibition in March of 2001 at Gallery Stendhal (it is indicative of her productivity that she has had two major New York solo shows in the same year), kaleidoscopic compositions of schematized figures, swirling within circular shapes, were employed to explore complex possible relationships between the elementary structures of the universe; the mathematical formulas behind the chaos theory; principles of religion; the structure of human brain cells; and the ethical consequences of genetic cloning, among other compelling issues.

By contrast, in another New York solo show, “Kama Sutra” (in the same venue a year earlier), Savtchenko explored the erotic origins of the cosmos according to East Indian mythology in compositions whose sexual explicitness was counterbalanced by the dynamic simplifications of her figures, their genitals and heads con-

cally schematized, their limbs and torsos scored with intricate designs suggesting tribal tattoos. With their characteristically fiery colors, their sumptuous textures serving as aesthetic surrogates for the sensuality of the flesh, and their boldly painted borders inscribed with the artist's own distinctive ecriture of indecipherable private texts, the large canvases in the "Kama Sutra" series were hailed by critic Donald Kuspit for their "invincible intensity."

Now freed from their former geometric constraints, the figures in Savtchenko's "Primal Universe" series are as unfettered as the angelic beings of William Blake, as they traverse luminous cosmic expanses built up with thickly encrusted pigmentations, ranging from molten red and yellow hues to deep, nocturnal blues. The latter are further enlivened by neopointillistic constellations of silvery-white strokes in the manner of Richard Pousette-Dart. These starry strokes, at once ethereal and physically palpable, pierce the picture plane, creating a sense of infinite space.

In the acrylic on canvas called "Universe Red," two boldly silhouetted figures dance joyfully against a veritable explosion of brilliant red and yellow hues that form a fiery mottled energy field with a luminous solar orb at its center. The two dark figures in "Dualism Yellow" appear to swim in a blinding sea of light, alternately fleeing and pursuing each other in endless circular motions that seem to express the eternal tensions of yin and yang, among other universal principles. Then there is "Battle of Giants," in which the two large yellow figures appear to dissolve in the succulently glistening visceral



"Creation Red"

red ground.

The more nocturnal canvases, such as "Creation Blue" and "Dualism Blue," set monolithic single figures or terpsichorean pairs of figures against mottled blue fields enlivened by variegated secondary hues. In the former canvas, the two figures float against subtly modulated areas of color that suggest watery depths, while in the latter painting a single figure appears to levitate above mysterious spire-like stalag-

mites or icicles.

By contrast, in two anomalously abstract compositions, "Lite Universe" and "Big Bang Blue," the figures are absent, leaving one to contemplate limitless cosmic expanses mirroring the imaginative magnitude that Ekatherina Savtchenko calls upon to create her conceptually complex and physically compelling canvases.

—Ed McCormack

Exploring the Great Outdoors at Broadway Mall

In the recent group show "On the Outside," curated by artist Jennifer Holst for the West Side Arts Coalition at Broadway Mall, Broadway and 96th Street, nature and the urban scene were interchangeable.

Mike Shiffirin confounded fellow photographers at the opening reception with poetic nature images that went further than many others do to closing the gap between photography and painting. Especially lovely in this regard were hand-colored semi-abstract works on photographic paper, achieved through a secret process Shiffirin refuses to reveal, such as "Enchanted Woodlands" and "Flowering Fields."

Arthur Bitterman also made an impression with spare, exquisitely delicate pencil drawings of urban imagery such lamp posts, a skyline, and a single tree partially erased by white smoke. Bitterman's refined drawings, which appear on the verge of evaporating, have the feeling of "after images" imprinted in one's memory, rather than reflections of social reality.

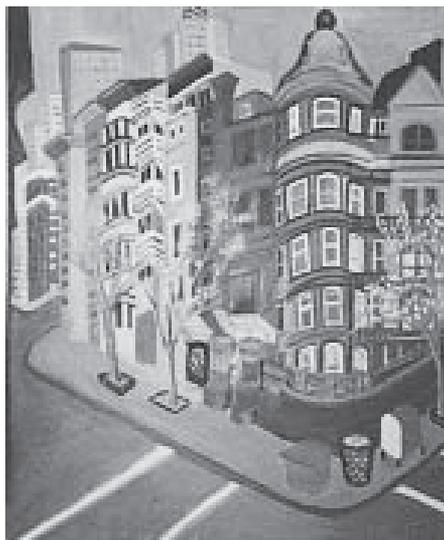
In Marianne McNamara's Central Park snow scene, slender, bare trees are set against virgin snow and misty gray distant buildings, the entire composition a fugue of subtle monotonies. By contrast, her paintings of the park in summer explode symphonically with verdant greens and other vibrant hues.

The oils of Robert Halasz depict landscapes with rugged, staccato strokes layered to create rhythmical compositions in which clouds and hills cluster expressively. Halasz's paint application activates his pictures, imbuing them with a sense of natural growth and energy.

Like Charles Burchfield and very few others, Carole Whitton lends the medium of watercolor a weight and depth that is normally reserved for oils. Here, Whitton's large, vibrant aquarelle of a bridge in Central Park with a shadowed footpath running under it, amid sun-dappled trees, made for an atmospheric tour de force.

By contrast, Reena Kondo employs watercolor in a loose, fluid manner more akin to that of Maurice Prendergast in her landscapes such as "Canyonlands." Kondo's transparent washes flow and pool, forming puddled patterns of luminous color that call to mind qualities of both the Impressionists and the Nabis.

Yet another handling of the same medium, closer in spirit to Winslow Homer, can be seen in the intimate watercolors of Jutta Filippelli. In Filippelli's rustic scenes,



K.A. Gibbons, "Street Scene"

autumnal trees, reflective lakes, and cottony clouds take on an idyllic, even enchanted, atmospheres owing to the artist's skilled use of mellow color harmonies.

Setta Solakian's paintings have a distinctly European feeling. Small scenic views of quaint streets in softly blended hues, they have an earnest charm comparable to Utrillo's Parisian pictures, yet they are possessed of a melancholy poetry that belongs to Solakian alone.

By contrast, Ruth Friedman's city scenes in aquarelle capture the frenetic movement of yellow cabs, trucks, and other vehicles familiar to New Yorkers. Friedman's careful attention to particulars, such as architectural details and advertising signs is beautifully counterbalanced by her breezy paint handling.

K.A. Gibbons evokes yet another urban mood in her view of picturesque Manhattan brownstones and apartment buildings, their gothic gables and spires set against a backdrop of brilliant yellow modern highrises. Gibbons' painting is at once boldly simplified and filled with a plethora of lively details.

Eleanor Gilpatrick, always an adventurous colorist, contributed a large cityscape called "My View." Presumably painted before the September 11 tragedy, it depicted the Twin Towers in strident pink and violet hues, looming dramatically against a tangerine and shocking pink sky. For all its Fauvist stridency, Gilpatrick's painting struck a somber, elegiac note.

An exquisite small watercolor, "Dreamscape," by Madi Lanier, was considerably more abstract than the other works in this show. With stylized figures, stars, birds, and other fanciful elements converging in a singularly imaginative metaphysical realm, Lanier introduced a welcome note of magic.

—Peter Wiley

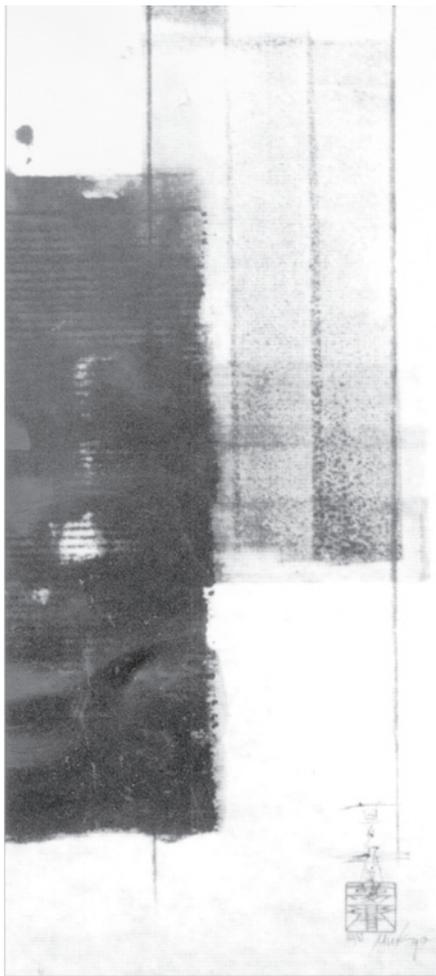
Mukyo Hiram's Universal Calligraphic Language

To the untrained western eye, the calligraphic ink paintings of the calligrapher, poet, and painter Mukyo Hiram can appear very traditional. In fact, Mukyo's work is so untraditional that he cannot exhibit it in Japan, where it is considered too radical by the conservative cultural establishment.

In New York City, however, where Hiram recently exhibited at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, this gifted Japanese artist's handsome scroll paintings are greeted with enthusiasm by those of us who are aware of how Eastern calligraphy has influenced American abstract painting, and vice versa.

In his most recent show, Hiram exhibited ink paintings on fabric, yet another departure from the traditional practice of painting on paper. The cloth surface, which is slightly less absorbent than rice or mulberry paper, gave a different quality to the brushstrokes, which Hiram exploited skillfully to create different effects. One of the most noticeable of these was a certain crispness to the linear elements in the paintings, sharp quality that added to the sense of grace and velocity that characterizes Hiram's best compositions. Different, as well, were the quality of gray tones that the artist employs along with his darker strokes and gestures to create subtle effects and to differentiate the weight and density of certain forms. The tonal contrasts in his most recent ink paintings were all the more striking as a result of his use of these unorthodox materials. At the same time, the most immediate satisfaction in Hiram's work comes from the force of the gesture itself, as well as the innovative matter in which the artists transforms familiar characters to create highly personal pictographic symbols. It would not be going too far to say that Hiram's improvisations can be compared to the way that jazz musicians take off from melodies, creating something new and challenging from a familiar tune.

Although there is surely an added dimension of appreciation to be had by those who can read Japanese characters, those of us who cannot have another kind of advantage: we are free to interpret Hiram's paintings pictorially in any way that we see fit and that has its own unique satisfactions. In looking at a painting such as "Wind, Kaze," for example, one can "Rorschach" all manner of images into the dynamic dark form that thrusts verti-



Mukyo Hirama, "Light"

cally into the composition from its right side, with two thinner linear elements springing vertically from it like the legs of an insect.

In "Sea Water, Shio," for another example, the main shape suggests a stylized human figure, although one who knew the character might see it quite differently. In either case, Mukyo Hirama's dynamic brushwork creates an image that transcends literal meaning, compelling our attention and admiration for its aesthetic beauty alone.

In every one of this artist's calligraphic paintings we encounter visual surprises that delight the eye and excite the imagination. Mukyo Hirama's paintings, because of their calligraphic origins, demonstrate perhaps better than most that art is truly a universal language.

—Andre Bove

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Michiko Hoshino's Tribute to Borges

In a memorable 1954 essay, Jorge Luis Borges referred to the baroque as "that style that deliberately exhausts (or tries to exhaust) its own resources...the final stage in all art."

It seems no wonder, then, that the master Japanese printmaker Michiko Hoshino is drawn to Borges' work, given her predilection for mingling illusionism with intellectualism, classical composition with avant garde exploration, and the formal with the literary, to affect a synthesis that is the visual counterpoint to the great Argentine writer's metafiction.

In her recent solo exhibition at Artsforum Gallery, 24 West 57th Street, Hoshino showed a series of lithographs unabashedly inspired by the stories of Borges and reflecting their richly layered nuances with a complex array of seamlessly integrated photo-derived images, details of scientific or arcane diagrams, clock faces with Roman numerals, and snippets of text so artfully fragmented as to give Sappho herself pause. All are set afloat in atmospherically evoked realms where light and shadow commingle rapturously.

In Hoshino's expansive, ethereal, silvery-toned monochromatic prints, their infinite range of grays conjuring an entire spectrum of virtual hues in the manner of classical ink painting, everything appears forever in flux. Objects have a tendency, as seen most advantageously in the print entitled "Book as Mirror," to morph or dissolve in the

developing fluids of imagination, becoming things other than themselves, rippling on richly variegated veils of windblown temporality that seem to shift and shimmer before one's eyes.

Few artists, in fact, can match Hoshino's ability to grasp the transitory by the tail and render it immutable—and yet not quite explicable!—mirroring in forms and tones the elusive nature of Borgesian poetics: "Blood of the garden, pomp of the walk, gem of spring, April's eye..."

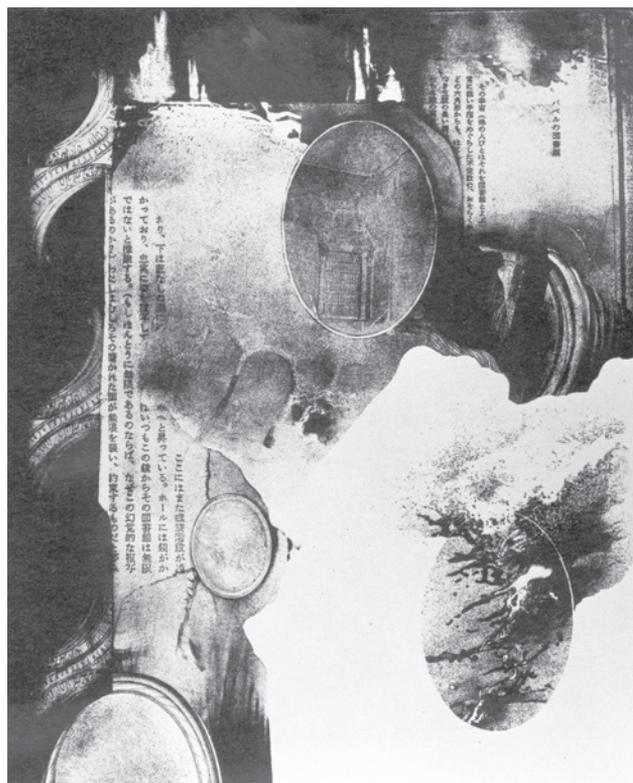
Hoshino's lithographs are formidable for their scale and technical accomplishment alone, yet even more valuable for the baroque excess of imagery unfolding within them, the dispersed, elliptical quality of which one might be tempted to compare to Rauschenberg, if not for something far less funky and more exquisite which can only be attributed to this artist's more subtle sensibility, as well as to the refinement native to her nationality.

In relation to a print such as "Babel the Library—Mirror," for example, one thinks not of Borges so much as of "In Praise of Shadows," the novelist Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's eloquent, somewhat elegiac essay on the Japanese sense of beauty. One does not make this association because Japanese characters (a rarity in Hoshino's work) appear in this large lithograph, but rather because the entire composition, far from emulating Rauschenberg's grab-bag eclecticism, bespeaks those spare, harmonious balances

that characterize Japanese aesthetics, even while the composition could be considered almost "busy" by a western minimalist's standards.

Here, as in other remarkable lithographs, such as "Mirror of Sand—Falling," with its geometric forms and granular intricacy, and "For Manuscript of Borges—El Aleph," with its contrasts of liquid movement and tiny, tight handwriting (presumably Borges'), the artist imposes order on potential chaos with a singular wizardry. Like the great writer with whom she finds a spiritual kinship that renders their cultural differences irrelevant, Michiko Hoshino is a modern artist whose roots are buried deep in tradition and whose vision traverses the stars.

—Andrew Margolis



Michiko Hoshino, "Babel the Library - Mirror"

Curator K.A. Gibbons Puts a Fanciful Spin on Still Life

“Quirky and whimsical” was the way curator and participating artist K.A. Gibbons billed the recent group show “Still Life with a Difference,” mounted under the auspices of the West Side Arts Coalition, adding that a bit of levity is much needed to cheer us all in these troubled times. Yet while the show, which took place on the mall at Broadway and 96th Street, did indeed have its fanciful elements, it was also serious enough to compel one’s attention.

The title of Brenda R. Epstein’s “Cat and Mouse” was the painting’s punch line as well, since it juxtaposed a porcelain feline, a ball of thread, and a computer mouse, its wire trailing out like a tail! Epstein’s strong composition and sure paint handling, however, made her painting far more than a witty visual pun.

Jutta Filippelli exhibited floral still lifes with pronounced formal patterns providing an abstract underpinning for her realism. Although Filippelli also showed oils, her watercolors, which were detailed without being in the least bit fussy, were especially fresh and appealing.

Beth Kurtz’ contribution to this show was somewhat atypical, in that her paintings of onions, lemons, tea pots, and sea shells were less psychologically loaded than her more characteristically surreal pictures. By virtue of her starkly simplified compositions, smoothly shadowed surfaces, and some

intangible alchemy known only to her, however, Kurtz managed to imbue even these relatively innocuous objects with a sense of underlying mystery.

Mikki Powell employed a palette of clear, flat colors with bold outlines to convert common kitchen utensils into strong semi-abstract shapes in the two impressive paintings that she showed here. Best known for her piquant portraits of beautiful African American women, Powell demonstrated that she can wring similar visual interest from simple still life themes.

James Glass employs thick textures and luminous colors to lend his quirkily original paintings of sensual “male” and “female” pears, cheery sunflowers, and other inanimate subjects palpable presence and visionary sheen. A poet as well as a painter, Glass puts the icing on the cake with titles such as “Beeper Kissing a Tulip.”

Marcia Ostwind introduces elements into her still life paintings that make them imaginative forays, aside from their noteworthy pictorial rhythms. In “Still Life in Mirror,” the black tape framing the composition completes the illusion; while in another painting the piece de resistance is the Lautrec poster behind the bowl of rose petals dominating the foreground.

A looking glass also figures prominently in K.A. Gibbons’ vibrantly colorful faux naïf composition, “Mirror, Mirror Everywhere.”

Here, as in all of Gibbons’ refreshingly upbeat still life paintings, boldly stylized shapes, purposeful dislocations of scale, and other sophisticated touches betray the sly wink in this gifted artist’s ostensibly innocent eye.

Aspects of Pop and Photo Realism merge in the watercolors of Karl J. Volk, with their meticulous technique and prominence of brand name products. One of Volk’s best pictures juxtaposed a Clorox bottle, three apples, and sharply focused snapshots in a tautly organized composition.

Elaine Mokhtefi also includes familiar product logos, such as “Plax” and “Cottonelle,” in her paintings, albeit in a more muted manner. Working in oil on canvas, Mokhtefi creates still lifes in which bottles and boxes of consumer goods and other objects are rendered with a degree of realism, yet skillfully controlled by close color harmonies to create an almost cubistic compositional unity.

Eleanor Gilpatrick achieves her own singular compositional power through a mode of color construction in which radiant red, green, violet, and blue hues are used to stunning effect. In Gilpatrick’s large oil on canvas “Hue Go Your Way,” various starkly simplified vessels are located in space by virtue of the artist’s dynamic chromatic emphasis.

—J. Sanders Eaton

The Romance of Intrepid Visionary Christina Teichert

The Danish artist Christina Teichert has had an interesting career trajectory. Starting at age 17, she worked for over a decade as a stuntwoman in films and theater. Later, she was a police officer for awhile, before resigning to paint full-time. Since, she has exhibited widely in galleries and art fairs in Denmark, Nice, Barcelona, Los Angeles, and New York. In 1999, she was nominated “Artist of the year” at the People’s Theatre, in Copenhagen.

In her recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, 560 Broadway, Teichert showed all of the bold intrepidity that one would expect from an artist with her active and adventurous background. Working in oil on wood, she creates large, witty figurative compositions which sometimes employ jigsaw puzzles as visual metaphors.

The painting she calls “Pleased,” for example, is irregularly shaped, like a single piece from a puzzle, and its main figure is a female nude amid an array of smaller images. The shape of the composition contributes to the sense of mystery, suggesting that one will not know the full story until the rest of the pieces are added to the puzzle. The fact that this picture is a discrete

entity, however, enables the viewer to use his or her imagination to complete the unfinished narrative, thus engaging one on an even deeper level.

Another painting that takes the form of a puzzle, albeit one that is more complete, with jigsaw divisions enlivening the rectangular format, is “Play.” The fact that it is also a floor piece pushes the boundaries between painting and sculpture in a playful manner that auspiciously reflects the spirit of the work’s title. However, it is the imagery in “Play” that makes the piece especially appealing, for it depicts a graceful interaction between two lovers. A shapely, pale nude woman gestures tenderly toward a companion in an ornate kimono, amid a plethora of white flowers and delicate, colorful leaves. The painting has the sumptuously decorative eroticism of Art Nouveau, drawing the viewer into the couples’ romantic idyll by virtue of the rhythmic flow of the composition, the languid grace of the figures, and the overall beauty of the setting.

In other paintings by Christina Teichert, a combination of semi-nudity and elaborately patterned fabrics creates the sense of a contemporary odalisque. The artist’s sophisti-



“Play”

cated primitive style enables her an enviable freedom to depict a detailed fantasy realm, where entwined lovers inhabit pastoral landscapes in which trees spread their sheltering limbs and sunflowers dance on long stems under stylized cotton-clouds.

One of the real strengths of Christina Teichert’s art is its refreshing directness. Her pictures have an innocence of eye that sets them apart, yet there is an innate sophistication to them as well. Teichert has obviously assimilated the lessons of art historical precedents ranging from Egon Schiele, to Persian miniatures, to German Expressionism, and turned them to her own purposes. Yet she remains unpredictable and highly original, an intrepid visionary whose work is a delight to encounter.

—Wilson Wong

Hard-Edge Painter Zarvin Swerbilov's Noble Aesthetic Mission

"The flight from taste" is a phrase that Clement Greenberg was fond of using in the 1960s, when Pop art was in its initial flower and banality became the order of the day. Today, of course, that phrase can almost seem quaint, given the all-out assault on taste that has occurred unrelentingly over the intervening decades. Yet Greenberg was not altogether wrong when he maintained that taste was necessary "to keep high art going." And elitist as it may sound, keeping high art going begins to seem like a laudable goal in an era when some misguided souls would deem it politically incorrect to make any distinction whatsoever between high and low culture.

Which brings us to Zarvin Swerbilov, an artist who clearly regards abstract painting as an exalted activity, wedded to a noble and ongoing modernist tradition and un beholden to the whims of popular culture or the winds of fashion. Although we don't normally think of precision and sensuality in the same breath, these are the two qualities that strike one most immediately in Swerbilov's solo exhibition at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from December 18, 2001, through January 5th, 2002.

Swerbilov has stated that he works "initially with gesture," and perhaps this is what imbues his paintings with a sense of energy and an urgency that is unusual in so-called hard-edge painting. His colors are bright and clear, filling sharply delineating forms with flowing, billowing contours that swell to fill his compositions with a sense of graceful organic movement. While comparisons can be made to Matisse's late cut paper works, particularly for the book "Jazz," in more contemporary terms Swerbilov's closest peers are painters such as Ellsworth Kelly and Jack Youngerman. Swerbilov, however, permits himself a wider range of expressive freedom than either of those predecessors, which gives his paintings greater allusiveness.

Although Swerbilov insists that titles such as "Scheherazade's Scimitar," "Night Along the Nile," and "Madame X Dances" are "accidental, incidental and whimsical," they contribute nonetheless to the sense of a mysterious poetic subtext underlying his abstract compositions. Surely the baroque sensuality of the shapes he sets in motion, both in his large acrylics on canvas and his smaller paintings on paper, suggest all manner of subject matter, from floral forms to aspects of landscape, to undulating figures.

Although none of these shapes is representational in any traditionally specific sense, the flowing blue horizontal forms in "Ocean Waves" conspire with the title to evoke a sense of moving water, just as the

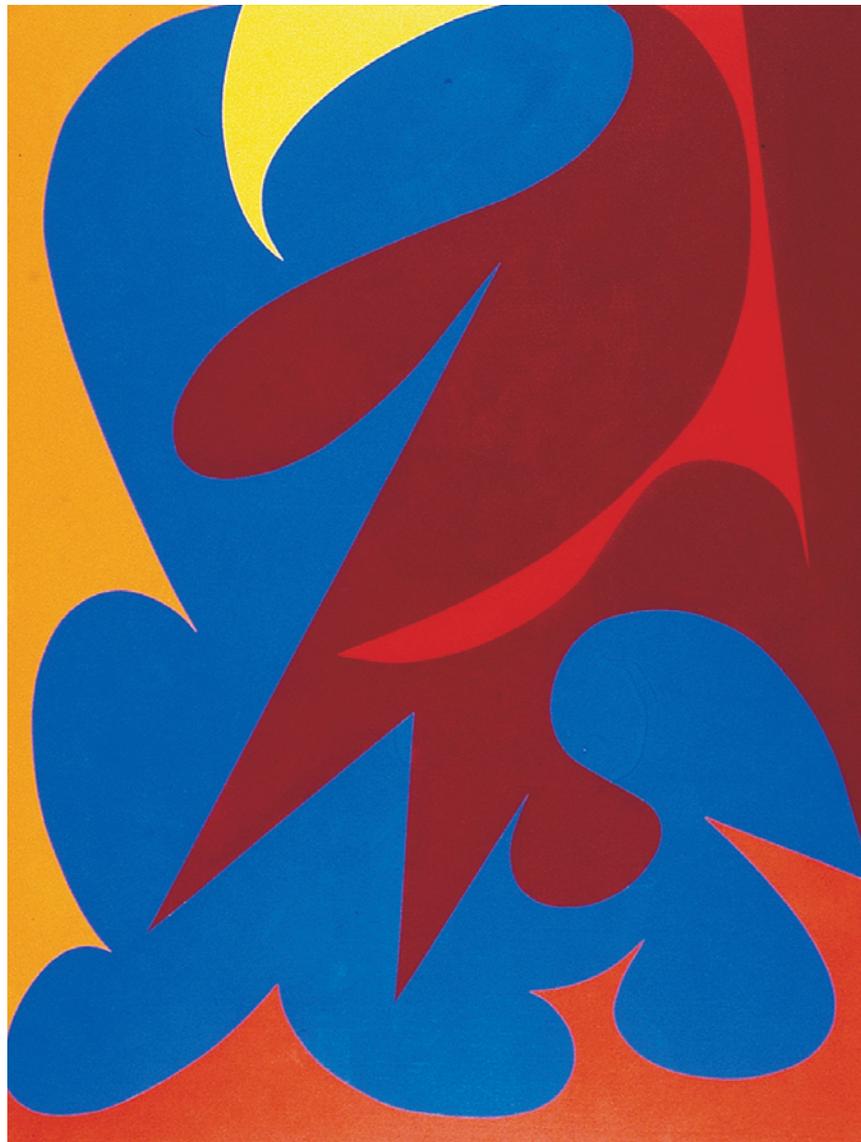


Photo by Karen Bell

Zarvin Swerbilov, "Happy Blue" Acrylic on Canvas, 51 1/4" x 38 1/4"

sinuous green shapes in "Summer Landscape" contribute to its bucolic suggestiveness. At the same time, Swerbilov eschews any illusion of depth, taking pains to preserve the integrity of the two-dimensional picture plane, even when combining shapes within shapes, or contrasting concave and convex shapes. He maintains this shallow space skillfully through his use of flatly painted areas of analogous hues, such as three gradations of cadmium red or the six different blues, ranging from light to dark, employed in "Happy Blues."

By contrast, "Happy Blue," another large acrylic painting on canvas, features a single shade of vibrant blue in congress with dark and brighter red hues buffeted by yellow and orange. Here, the colors create sensual shapes that overlap and interlock, their con-

tours varying from smoothly rounded to sharply serrated.

Zarvin Swerbilov extends the coloristic dynamism and formal design of the Russian Constructivists into the realm of the Abstract Expressionists by "freezing" the gesture, as it were, through a process of formal refinement. His paintings are unabashedly handsome in a manner that makes him something of an anomaly in a time when taste, in the way that Clement Greenberg employed the term, has largely fallen by the wayside—or at very least, been usurped by various anti-aesthetic stances.

Zwerbilov, however, paints as though the historical progress of high art had never been impeded and that makes his work both enormously appealing and vastly hopeful.

—Ed McCormack

Discovering Rafat Mey, a German Artist Whose Work Reconciles Distant Poles

Surrealism and abstraction do not always make compatible bedfellows. All too often the literary content in the former tends to work against the formal demands of the latter. Few artists seem capable of striking a proper balance between the two and creating compositions that are simultaneously dreamlike and visually coherent. One of the few exceptions among contemporary artists, however, is the German painter Rafat Mey, the subject of an intriguing recent solo show at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

Along with an unerring eye for what makes a picture succeed in strictly formal terms, Mey has a masterly way with imagistic metamorphosis, as seen in his painting "Embrace," where the piece de resistance is a woman's head that becomes a vase, with fronds spilling out of it that also serve as her hair. This could sound like an awkward image to carry off, and indeed it would be in the hands of an artist with a less defined graphic shorthand. Mey, however, makes such images succeed by virtue of his superb draftsman-ship and a style that reduces his subjects to their most vital components.

In this regard, his most immediate artistic ancestor is Victor Brauner, the Romanian painter who emigrated to France and became prominent in the Surrealist movement. Like Brauner Mey has evolved a style at once precise and flexible that enables him to explore a seemingly limitless range of figurative transformations, suggesting all manner of poetic and psychological meanings.

In Mey's "Birth of Venus," the lower portion of a shapely female nude emerges from a sea shell that fills the upper part of the composition like an Art deco arabesque. Like all of the paintings in the series shown at Montserrat Gallery, the image is painted in a linear manner on a black background, which lends the picture a dynamic glow akin to neon lights emerging from darkness. The shell is a luminous green hue and curves around a brilliant red orb at its top, while the feminine form emerging from its bottom is pure white. The picture presents a precise formal distillation of a subject that has

preoccupied certain painters throughout art history. Mey's version is so succinct that he almost appears to be having the last word.

A certain playfulness permeates all of Rafat Mey's paintings, as seen in "Nude Flying Over Clouds," where the female figure has an elastic quality not unlike a wavering, wind-blown flag as she sails through the sky, her hair flowing behind her, her breasts flopping down over the small cumulus formations that float below. One could read all manner of possible meanings into such an image, but for Mey it would seem sufficient simply to create it and leave the viewer to draw his or her own conclusions.

Other large paintings, such as "The Woman with Long Hair," delight us with their dazzling figurative distortions. Here, the woman's feature's play a game of peek-a-boo with the viewer, half-hidden among layered forms and intricate patterns that yield such details as small colorful birds nesting in her hair with prolonged study. Mey takes pleasure in the complexity of the world, which he exaggerates and distorts with a Picasso-esque fervor that appears to appropriate and parody styles from various periods of art history.

"The Woman with Several Faces," for example, is a complex image in which the figure's features emerge from overlapping heart-shaped forms that suggest anthropomorphic Valentine boxes. Her multiple heads, as well as her torso, are created with vibrantly colored lines and dense patterns layered in a rhythmic manner that imparts to the composition a writhing sense of energy. Mey could eliminate the subject matter altogether and still have an engrossing abstract composition. The imagistic element, however, is an important part of his art, adding to it a zany neo-surrealism akin to that of the American painters, based in Chicago, who call themselves "The Hairy Who School."

Like those artists, Mey often enhances his imagery with a Byzantine intricacy that one could almost compare to the obsessive doodles in the work of certain so-called "Outsider" artists, such as Martin Ramirez and Adolf Wolfi. For a

sophisticated artist to take inspiration from the unschooled is, of course, nothing new. Max Ernst, Paul Klee and other nineteenth century modernists learned a great deal from naive painters and Jean Dubuffet sang the praises of "art brut" as an antidote to the avant garde academy in his famous text "Asphyxiating Culture."

Rafat Mey, however, appears to apply the inspiration of outsider art more profitably than most, partaking of its freedom without succumbing to its tunnel-vision. Indeed, he seems to have the ability to generate interesting images at will, as easily as other artists breathe, freely associating to create highly original visual puns through the juxtapositioning of incongruous figures and objects. At the same time, his precise technique and austere line counterbalances his freewheeling imagination, subjecting his images to formal constraints that keep his compositions from spinning out of control through sheer exuberance.

Geometric forms and organic shapes are skillfully balanced in Mey's compositions in a manner that makes it possible for him to indulge his imagination to its fullest, yet create paintings that remain coherent in all their parts, reconciling the "literary" content of Surrealism with abstract design in a manner that unites two aesthetic ideologies that have, at times, been bitterly antagonistic. This is a daunting task, one that might easily signify schizophrenia—or at very least its aesthetic equivalent—in a lesser artist, but Mey pulls it off admirably by virtue of his unique sensibility, which appear perfectly poised between the decorative and the descriptive, the poetic and the pictorial.

Indeed, one would have to search far and wide to find a painter who provides so many diverse pleasures simultaneously as does Rafat Mey, an artist and a professor at Academia International who has exhibited extensively throughout Europe and whose work, on the evidence of his recent Soho exhibition, should soon be equally well known in the United States.

—Adele Palmier Levine

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Several Soho Exhibitions Reveal a Variety of Diverse Visions

Several who artists exhibited recently at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, showed an impressive range of styles. One was Alan R. Munro, a native New Yorker transplanted to Alaska, where he has been inspired by the local landscape and Inuit culture to create a strong synthesis of abstraction and figuration. Not since Rockwell Kent, has any artist captured the spirit of that vast and unforgiving terrain as magnificently as Munro. In paintings such as "Oystercatcher's Celebration, 2001," the sinuous linearity and boldly stylized patterns of ancient Inuit design merge with sophisticated formal aesthetics. Employing brilliant acrylic colors, Munro creates dynamic compositions in which elements of nature, such as birds and flowers emerge from flowing abstract forms.

Roni Nicholson imbues minimalism with unaccustomed poetry in works such as "Simple Scratch," where a few loose linear incisions on a black ground amount to a surprisingly eloquent composition. In another work, entitled, "Two Chairs and a Table," Nicholson evokes the objects of the title in actual scale with almost ethereal means. Another of Roni Nicholson's most intriguing pieces is "Silky Way," in which a geometric cosmos is conjured up with gossamer silk and thread.

May Kooreman, an artist from the Netherlands who has found new creative inspiration in London exhibited large paintings on fabrics such as burlap in which floral, animal, and human forms are boldly delineated. Educated as an architect influenced by Japanese art, Kooreman employs line, and areas of muted color, and an exquisite use of space to create paintings with a decorative sensuality reminiscent of Gustav Klimt.

Utah artist Ana Cristina Albu employs earthy colors and boldly drawn, neoprimitivistic figures to create paintings with a strong emotional content. One such painting presents three heads reminiscent of the one in Edvard Munch's "The Scream." Other paintings by Albu depict clowns and other poignant personages with a dark lyricism akin to that of George Rouault.

Born in a small village in Thailand, now living in California, Songkram Rodpai captures intimate aspects of the natural world in a meticulous photorealist style. Often, Rodpai takes a microscopic approach, as seen in "Spring Visitor," a poetic picture juxtaposing a butterfly and purple flowers beaded with drops of water. In other paintings, such as "The Beetle," and "Nice Moment," Soghkram Rodpai makes us see every day events in

the natural world— such as the slow journey of an insect, the play of shadows on white flowers, or the flight of a green parakeet—with fresh eyes and new significance.

Then there is Alicia Binda, who employs color photography to create intriguingly abstract compositions. Binda focuses on such subjects as water or light reflected glass to create compositions of flowing forms and swirling kaleidoscopic colors that demonstrate how a gifted artist with a highly original vision can employ the camera to make impressively personal statements.

Asselin Stevens is a young Canadian painter who works on a large scale with silicone and mixed media. Stevens sets an array of personal signs, symbols, diagrammatic forms, and gestural flourishes afloat on thickly textured grounds to create a stimulating dialogue between semiotics and tactility. His mostly monochromatic palette enhances the "objectness" of his paintings, which have a physical presence and sense of primal markmaking and elegant graffiti akin to that of Cy Twombly.

Marcos Mion, an Argentine artist who started his career in the U.S., paints severely simplified figures and forms with a lively, upbeat feeling. His brilliantly colored paintings have a whimsical quality akin to that of Paul Klee, but his work also has a conceptual aspect that is thoroughly contemporary, as seen in his series comprising one picture for every day of the year, each painted on newspaper.

Eduardo Rosales, who is well known in his native Venezuela, exhibited a series of works in which colorful birds are transformed by various degrees of abstraction. Brilliant blue hues represent skies in Rosales' compositions, while the feathers of the fabulous avians create vibrant patterns that lend his precise, visionary canvases a sense of life and flight. Permeated by a sense of light, the paintings of Eduardo Rosales are at once metaphysical and formally formidable.

The final artist, Carole Belle is an intrepid and original talent with an epic sensibility. Belle's "Three Pearls of Wisdom" is a symphonic mural-scale composition, spanning six panels of visionary imagery, in which the artist makes a powerful and poignant plea for peace and universal harmony. A genuine New Age painter with an abiding belief in the power of art to affect social and spiritual change, Carole Belle often employs the form of the mandala in a highly original manner to convey her vibrantly humanistic vision.

—Maureen Flynn

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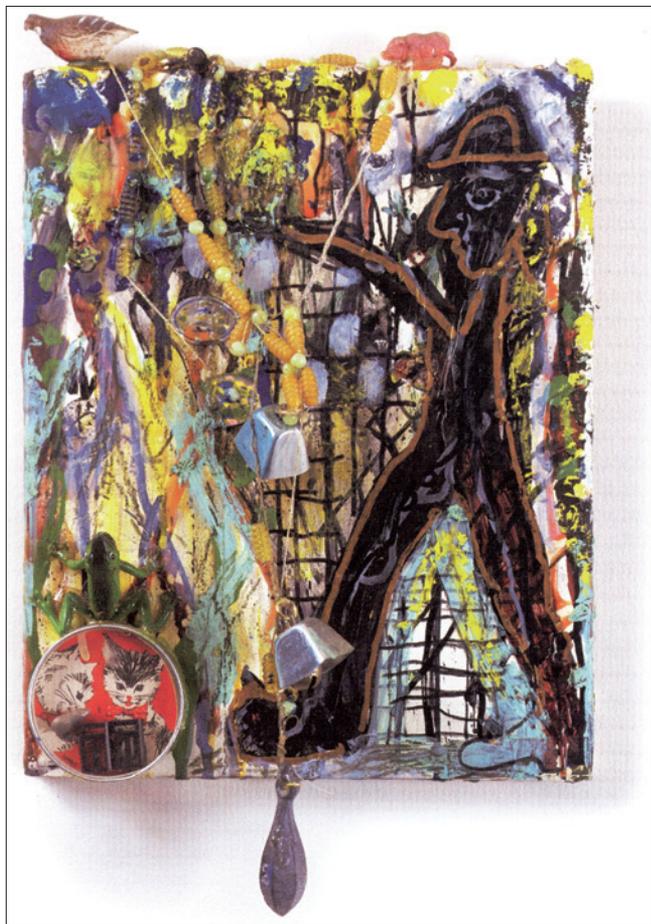
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Marty Greenbaum: Visionary Mojo Man in the Postmodern Age



Marty Greenbaum, "Minstrel Man," 13" x 8 1/4" x 2 1/2"

With the spirit of Abstract Expressionism still haunting the Tenth Street galleries and Pop, Op, and Minimalism all on the upswing, it was as easy as Paint-by-Numbers for a savvy young artist to jump on various bandwagons in downtown New York in the early 1960s. But even without being in the least bit crazy or naive, Marty Greenbaum was an "outsider" before there was a word for it. Which is to say: for all his streetsmart hipster's awareness of the scene's shifting permutations, Greenbaum was stubbornly committed from the gitgo to an intuitive, neoprimitivist aesthetic of his own devising.

At a time when most of his contemporaries were calculating how to harden their edges or revamp their styles with the window dressings of Camp, this primal mixed media whizkid from Coney Island labored like an entranced shaman, to conjure up zany beautiful art brut paintings and weird, wax-dripped voodoo altar assemblages that resembled nothing so much as the ritual artifacts of some lost psychedelic tribe!

If Greenbaum had any peers at all, they were a world away, on the West Coast, where funk/junk assemblageists like Bruce

Conner and Wallace Berman practiced the alienated aesthetic of the Beat Generation while luxuriating in a laid-back critical vacuum. Marty Greenbaum, however, possessed the singular ability to be brilliantly alienated in the middle of the Art Capital of the World. This probably explains his status as a cult figure, beloved by fellow artists and some of the more discerning collectors and museum curators, but not as well known as he deserves to be by everyone else.

If justice prevails, wider recognition should result from Greenbaum's recent show at Pacifico Gallery, 546 Hudson Street, where aspects of his early manner can be seen in "Diary and Pointer," a freestanding book work dated 1969-83/2000.

Calendar pages, recurring collage elements employed as markers of time, seem especially appropriate in this piece, given its long gestation period. Here, dates, days, doodles, personal symbols, and graffiti-like markings that predate Basquiat by decades emerge from thick, warped pages encrusted with paint, crayon, and wax. Shredded, distressed, flecked with strident yellows and visceral reds, the pages spill out like viscerated entrails. Resting atop the freestanding tome, the "pointer" of the title is a stout, serpentine crooked stick. Decorated with colorful stripes and incised with scratchy "X"s, it could resemble the witch doctor's staff that Screamin' Jay Hawkins brandished when he shrieked, "I'll Put a Spell on You!"

Diverse objects such as beads, bells, strings, toy cars, and small novelty figurines enhance the ruggedly tactile surfaces, and even parade across the tops of, other paintings. In "Mojo (eight)," 1997, its title apparently alluding to the mystical source of sexual prowess of which Delta blues singers bellow, a boldly brushed red figure in a Lester Johnson fedora leads a lively alpha-male boogie on a textured ground encrusted with a child's watercolor set and tumbling dice.

"Minstrel Man," another work from the same year that calls to mind the mature persona of Bob Dylan (although this is an admittedly subjective interpretation), is enlivened by an even denser concentration of objects, including a heavy lead sinker dangling genitally off the bottom of the composition like the force of gravity itself. Here, as in a series of mixed media works on paper from 2000 called "Pages," where drawn and collaged figurative images and abstract forms are grounded by intricate diagonal grids and vibrant color areas, Greenbaum's frenetic maximalism reflects the neon-lit fragmentation, sensory overload, and utter too-muchness of modern life.

In yet another series of mixed media works on paper created in 2001, compositions are sparer and figure-to-ground relationships are more clearly defined, with human silhouettes and black winter trees merging to create hybrid shapes as multi-limbed as centipedes. Especially dramatic among these are "Tree Dance #1"—where black roots mired in earth tones at the bottom of the composition soar upward to morph into exuberant human silhouettes set against a luminous blue sky—and "Tree Dance #2," a sinuously graceful black and white painting in enamel and acrylic that is notable for a formal austerity quite new to Greenbaum's work.

Also on view are a splendid series of recent mixed media works on paper in which drawn shadow-pedestrians and the artist's own snapshots of city streets are juxtaposed with characteristically edgy verve and visual wit.

Like everything else in this richly varied survey, these recent pictures reveal Marty Greenbaum to be a refreshingly idiosyncratic visionary whose considerable oeuvre, which marries the jarring immediacy of outsider art to a consummately sophisticated aesthetic sensibility, is long overdue for serious reassessment.

Ed McCormack

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Marty Greenbaum with the future editors of G&S in 1965.

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