Vol. 4 No. 4 April/May 2002 New York

GALLERY&STUDIO

The World of the Working Artist

ART for the BOOK

APRIL 2002

DALI

***Moise et le Monotheisme**, Freud 1974 Silver Plated Sculpture*

FINI

***La Fanfarlo**, Beaudelaire 1969 Watercolor Study*

CFM Gallery

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VICENTE SAAVEDRA

"Birth of a Mandolin" Oil on Linen 22" x 14"

Selected Oil Paintings

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Reception: Tuesday, May 21, 5-7pm

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Ed Brodkin

Recent Works

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April 23 - May 11, 200
Reception Thurs. Apr. 25, 5 to 8pm & Sat., April 27, 3 to 6 pm

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Cordula Ehms and Ray Wilkins

"Faces of Life - Frozen in Emotion"

Cordula Ehms, "Tulip Fields Forever" acrylics, dungrass, palmseeds on canvas 100Cm x 120cm

Ray Wilkins "Courage" acrylics, pigments, sand on canvas 90cm x 100cm

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World Fine Art Gallery 511 West 25th St., 8th Fl NY, NY 10001
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Marjeta Lederman

New Works

Kimono #28 oil on canvas 36" x 60" Photo: Howard Goodman

"From Oriental Inspiration" April 23-May 11, 2002

Reception: Thursday, April 25, 5:00-8:30pm

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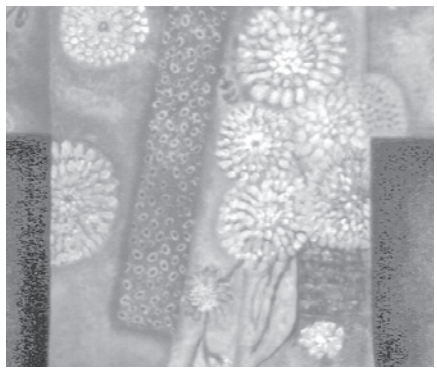

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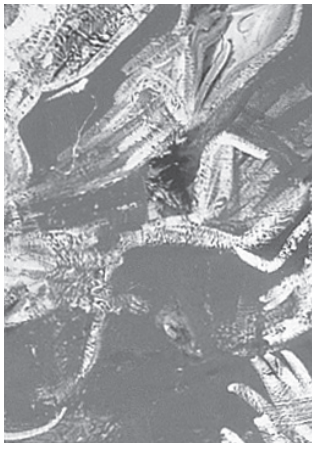

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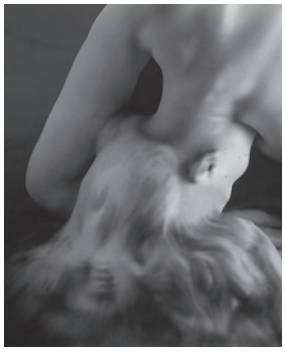

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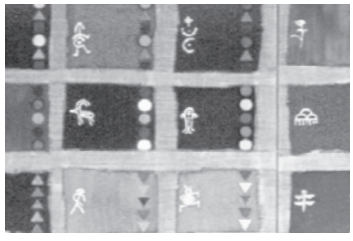

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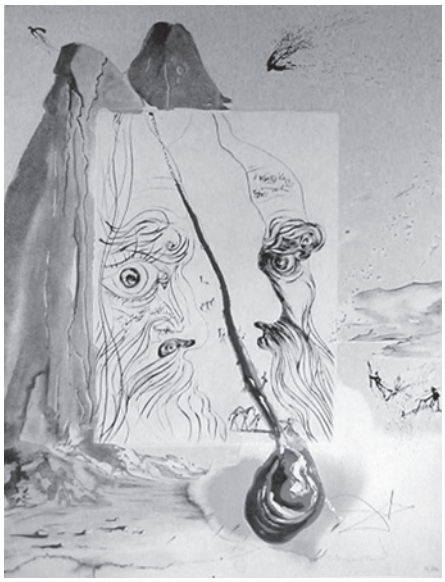
Fini, Dali, and the Art of the Book at CFM Gallery

"The dream, then, has been a paradise of books—a select few—in which the beams supporting the volumes should truly be sunbeams," Andre Breton stated in 1937, in regard to his exalted vision for livres de peintre, or artist's books. "A special condition attaching to these books is that they should all be worth reading, that they and they alone should form the phosphorescent substance of what we are expecting to know and love, of what



Salvador Dali: lithograph/etching on lambskin for "Moise et le Monotheism" by Sigmund Freud

enables us to look forward, not backward, and act accordingly."

This passionate effusion, issued a full decade and a half after Breton's futile vow —made on behalf of himself, Paul Eluard, and Robert Desnos—to cease all literary activity, expresses the almost metaphysical powers with which the surrealists invested the book. Yet, for all the intriguing experiments with collage, nonreferentiality, and textual fragmentation that resulted from the collaborations between surrealist poets and painters endeavoring together to subvert the traditional relationship of writer and illustrator, of image to text, the livre de peintre achieved its fullest, most fantastic flowering only at the hands of surrealism's two renegade classicists and transcendent draftspersons: Leonor Fini and Salvador Dali.

For if Breton chose to join forces with Matta, Magritte with Mesen, Man Ray with Paul Eluard, and so on, Fini and Dali were far more discriminating in choosing their collaborators, forsaking the chummy, aesthetically incestuous creative liaisons of their contemporaries for a wide ranging variety of classic texts that would enable them to indulge their predilection for exquisite eroticism, mythologized history, subjective spirituality, and arcane fabulation.

Thus, "Art for the Book," featuring work by Leonor Fini and Salvador Dali, at CFM Gallery," 112 Greene Street, which opens April 5th, offers a unique view of the surrealist book, one that differs markedly and elegantly from the notion of the livre de peintre as a repository for undecipherable texts, slapdash avant garde posturing, eccentric typography, and chaotic design.

Curated by Neil Zukerman, the owner and director of CFM Gallery and a leading contemporary champion of surrealism and symbolism, the exhibition is also remarkable for the unprecedented glimpses that it gives of the creative process of both artists. For it includes not only actual volumes that can normally only be seen in the rare-book rooms of exclusive libraries or the homes of a few private collectors, and lithographs and etchings from them, but in some cases, preliminary studies that demonstrate how certain illustrations evolved from initial conception to published work. Indeed, in some instances, the various stages—study, copper plate, and finished illustration—are exhibited side by side or even framed together as a single entity.

Of the actual books included in the exhibition, one of the heftiest and most altogether magnificent volumes is the deluxe edition, illustrated by Salvador Dali, of Sigmund Freud's "Moise et le Monotheisme (Moses and Monotheism)," printed in 1974. With its silver plated, sculpted cover depicting the full length figure of Moses, his head encircled by the halo of a monolithic eye dripping tears that flow in rhythm with the waves of his beard, the sheer size of the book suggests the imposing dimensions of the stone tablets on which The Ten Commandments were supposedly handed down from Mount Sinai. Shown along with the book are ten untitled illustrations that Dali created for it. Printed on lambskin, an unusual material that lends them an extraordinary sensuality, in a combination of lithography and etching, their fiery colors and densely layered figures and forms evoke an inferno of subconscious imagery that only Dali's complex visual vocabulary could have done full justice. Freud's seminal writings on the riches and demons of the psyche and its dreams provided fodder for all of the surrealists, but particularly for Dali, who pays him the ultimate tribute here, interpreting his ideas with that combination of intricate refinement and impulsive splashiness, of intellect and madness, that makes this majestic volume a blissful textual/visual marriage.

Similarly, anyone who ever read "Histoire D'O" by Pauline Reage—which was to become one of the seminal libertine texts of the hippy era when it was published in English translation as "The Story of O"—will agree that Leonor Fini and this S&M classic were made for each other. No one but Fini, with her own unabashedly varied and adventurous sexual history to—quite literally—draw upon, could have illuminated this tale of a young woman's increasingly ecstatic discovery of the joys of fleshly submission more feelingly. Fini's evocative pictures of the willowy protagonist's encounters with a succession of prodigiously endowed ravishers are executed with a linear and tonal fluidity that makes her lithographs all but indistinguishable from watercolors. In fact, Neil Zukerman, who reintroduced Fini in the United States tells one that he had to take action at one point to stop one major international auction house from representing them as such. And one can easily see why, comparing the similarities between a watercolor study and final illustration for this edition, published by Cercle de Livre Precieux, Paris, in 1962.

Because of the juxtapositioning of works in various stages throughout the exhibition, other instructive comparisons can be made between Fini's oil portrait of Maria Von Karnstein and the silkscreen that was made from it and reproduced in "Carmilla" published by Sherian Fanou, as well as in her studies and finished illustrations for such lavish volumes as "Livre d'Images" by Juan-Bautista Piniero and "Monsieur Venus," by Roman de Racnhilde.

As for Dali, who can deny that he undertook his most exalted collaboration when his patron Giuseppe Alberetto, a religious Catholic who hoped to save his soul, convinced him to illustrate "The Dali Bible," his lavish and unorthodox interpretation of the holy book published by Lancell. Yet, Cervantes and Dante also inspired some of Dali's most fantastic graphic excursions, as seen in his editions of "Don Quichotte (Don Quixote)" and the "Divine Comedy," published in the 1960s by Joseph Foret and Les Heures Claires, respectively.

The great variety of books, original drawings, studies, watercolors, and prints on view here and the coherent manner in which they are presented make for a scholarly, as well as a sensual and aesthetic, experience. And while both Fini and Dali are well represented in "Desire Unbound," the big surrealist survey currently drawing crowds to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, this more intimate show at CFM Gallery does far greater justice to the contribution each made to the art of the book.

—Ed McCormack

Amy Banker: Postmodern Heir to the New York School

While it took several leisurely centuries for figurative painting to evolve from the ancient world, through the Renaissance, beyond Impressionism, to the present—when a good many artists still struggle with the challenge of representing the visible aspects of experience fruitfully—it would seem that the cycles of abstract art have been on fast-forward since the start of last century.

Propelled by critical pressures that have little to do with the timeless space in which painting should properly germinate at its own pace, there can be no doubt that this too-rapid acceleration in the name of novelty has cheated us of much that abstract art has yet to offer, aborting its progress and its promise at crucial points, simply because subsequent generations of artists felt unnaturally coerced to react against what proceeded them as a matter of course, rather than being allowed to build upon and add to its legacy.

This is particularly true of Abstract Expressionism, simply because it loomed so large for so long in the critical mythology as the movement that put American painting on the map and established New York City as its epicenter. In fact, neither Pop nor Minimalism nor any of the mini-movements that followed in their wake have had the initial impact or measured up to the accomplishments of painters such as de Kooning, Pollock, Kline, and Gorky; nor have they produced work anvwhere near as authentically revolutionary.

"Poppy Fields"

Established artists like Brice Marden, Frank Stella, and Lawrence Poons, who launched their careers with austere geometric styles, only to circle back in recent years to explore more gestural modes of expression, appear to have come to this realization belatedly. Even more exciting, however, is to discover an emerging artist such as Amy Banker, whose vigorous and lyrical abstract canvases can be seen in two consecutive solo shows at Ezair Gallery, 905 Madison Avenue, the first from April 1 to 30; the second from May 1 to 31.

Both exhibitions are entitled "The Wheels & Deals of Motion," which seems as apt a title as any, given the whirling compositional rhythms that animate Banker's canvases, with their tactile scraped and distressed surfaces, their vibrant chromatic contrasts, and their thinly scumbled passages giving way to gorgeous, juicy impastos. At the same time, there is a lot more than mere painterly pyrotechnics to be found in the work of this artist who Knox Martin, one of her mentors at The Art Student league, has predicted will be a "leading force in the 21st century art world," adding that Banker has already "earned admiration and respect as a distinguished American artist."

Amy Banker herself will tell you that the legacy of Abstract Expressionism was not something she set out to claim but simply "absorbed by osmosis" as a native New Yorker. In any case, she has not only assimilated the lessons of the New York School but has built upon them in a manner that makes her a refreshing anomaly in the contemporary arena for the authenticity that she brings to the gesture as an autonomous force, uncorrupted by the coy strategizing and hipper-than-thou irony that far too many of her peers employ as self-protective distancing devices.

Indeed, Amy Banker wields her brush as though no one ever told her that honest passion has now become The Last Taboo, or that slick conceptual schtick and stylistic posturing has replaced commitment to the lyrical impulse in much recent art. And her stubborn commitment to following the dictates of her own sensibility lends her canvases an authenticity that is undeniable and inspiring to those of us who still hold high hopes for the future of genuine painterly endeavor.

On encountering an oil such as "Bicycle and Umbrella" at Ezair Gallery, one is immediately struck by its compositional thrust, its coloristic impact, and its rugged physical presence, recalling the almost visceral jolt one felt, facing for the first time a de Kooning, a Pollock, or a Gorky. For without being in the least bit imitative of those earlier artists, Banker reinstates the notion of the painting as both object and event by virtue of her muscular paint handling and her rhapsodic orchestration of a palette that ranges from rosy to vibrant red hues, to deep nocturnal blues, to verdant greens, to strident yellows and frosty whites that slice decisively into her forms or play along their edges like liquid light.

As consummate a draftsperson as she is a colorist, Banker's paintings are beautifully "drawn," her brush strokes sliding sinuously on the natural viscosity of oil pigment itself, swirling serpentinely to articulate a shape, or veering off to culminate in splashy configurations that obfuscate meaning, even as they allude to any number of possible subjects or objects: the outline of a bicycle wheel and the hint of a figure here; the calligraphic suggestion of furious patterns of fertile organic growth in another major painting called "Poppy Fields," or the sense of a weathered, slab-like portal dappled by metaphysical auras in the scroll-shaped composition "Lower East Side Synagogue Door."

It is possible to Rorschach all manner of subjects into the evocative shapes enlivening the compositions of Amy Banker, who readily admits that all of her life experiences, from to simplest to the most profound—as well as sundry other influences, ranging from psychology (in which she holds a degree) to fairy tales—are fodder for her paintings. Far more germane to the importance of her work however, is how successfully Banker builds on the accomplishments of her aesthetic forbearers, adding a vital new voice to the gestural tradition and extending its possibilities into the post-modern era and beyond.

—Ed McCormack

At Juno Gallery: Olga Sheirr's Radiant French Idyll

By any standards that one cares to name, Olga Sheirr has an impressive pedigree and an exemplary resume. As a young artist her mentor was Aristodimos Kaldis, the flamboyant Greek-born artist who cut a bold swath through the New York art world for decades and is still remembered by the cognoscenti as a "painter's painter." From Kaldis, Sheirr apparently learned something about that wizardly sleight of brush that makes a composition morph back and forth between landscape to abstraction; yet from early on in her career, she has developed independently, her style an inseparable facet of her character.

Since the early 1960s, Sheirr has exhibited extensively, everywhere from New York, to Paris, to Beijing, and her work has continued to evolve in its own unique way with little regard for trends and fashions, as seen in her new solo exhibition "French Scenes," at Gallery Juno, 568 Broadway, from May 17 through June 22.

One of the constants in the art of Olga Sheirr has always been her ability to evoke a very specific sense of place, even while creating paintings that shine as much for their formal attributes as for their atmospheric qualities. In her most recent group of watercolors, she focuses on "the rich countryside of the Dordogne region with its lambent rivers, stately manors and 13th century towns restored by Andre Malraux; the Vendee region with its castles and moats; Paris and her soaring churches, waterways, and street scenes; and Provence with its villages snuggled into the mountainside."

Sheirr employs watercolor in a richly saturated manner that lends it the weighty presence of more opaque mediums such as oils or acrylics. Yet she retains the luminous freshness peculiar to aquarelle, thus achieving a balance between the material and the ethereal that sets her work apart.

This special synthesis of the physical and the poetic is especially effective in the Parisian scene entitled "Ile de la Cité," where the white cloud formations in the vibrant blue sky that dominates much of the composition were achieved by a combination of leaving patches of the paper bare, as in traditional watercolor technique, and the addition of white pigment, as in gouache painting. That lusciously oxygenated sky, the sparkling blue waters of the Seine, and the confectionery pink pavement running along the riverbank and leading the viewers' eye right into the center of the composition, demonstrate how skillfully Sheirr orchestrates chromatic contrasts and harmonies to lend her compositions a transcendent abstract power. At the same time, Sheirr's attention to scenic particulars, such as the foliage and houses clustered along the riverbank, makes the painting as atmospherically evocative as any of Utrillo's picturesque postcard views.

Olga Sheirr, "Ile de la cite" at Gallery Juno, 568 Broadway, Suite 604B from May 17 - June 22 212 431-1515

In terms of their sheer, exhilarating, sweep, among the most exciting achievements of the present show are three variations on the theme "Domme, Dordogne River," particularly one in an extremely horizontal format. With the deep blue river snaking between an intricate patchwork of furrowed fields and meadows laid down in vibrant areas of green, pink, orange, and ocher, punctuated by foliage, confetti-colored flowers, and little white farm houses with brilliant red roofs, this panoramic tour de force appears to operate in time, as well as in space. For, much in the manner of a Chinese handscroll, to enter into this painting is to embark on a journey and be carried over great distances. However, while most classical Chinese scrolls are monochromatic, Sheirr's accomplishment here is all the more remarkable for her ability to harness such chromatic complexity to create such rollercoastering, yet coherent and serene, compositional rhythms.

Literally breathtaking as Sheirr's "Domme, Dordogne River" paintings are, however, they are just three pleasures among many in this show. "Vendee Montaigue la Caillauderie," for example, depicts a stately pale pink chateau bracketed between a shimmering blue sky and a brilliant green lawn. The picture projects an opulence and a genteel ease, lit by a sense of underlying drama, that makes one think of one of Merchant and Ivory's film epics. In terms of pregnant tensions brewing beneath a placid surface, its only painterly equivalents are certain canvases by Malcolm Morley.

Then there is "Gordes," a tiny gem of a painting, depicting small houses nestled into the side of a mountain. Something of an homage to her mentor Kaldis' paintings of hilly Greek villages, yet limned in her own inimitable manner, this humble little picture encapsulates in its fresh and unaffected directness all the hard-won mastery that makes the art of Olga Sheirr something to be treasured.

—Ed McCormack

Vicente Saavedra: A Painter Continues a Great Tradition

While there are those who feel that progress in art is contingent solely on the constant production of new styles, movements, and novelties, there are others who believe just as fervently that one can advance the cause of beauty by adhering to the eternal verities; by studying and emulating the techniques and values of the Old Masters and employing them to capture timeless subjects.

Since one of the greatest attributes of all true art is that it recognizes no absolutes beyond the ability of the individual artist to express his or her vision convincingly, both views are valid. In the novelty-hungry climate of the current art scene, however, the traditional artist has a harder row to hoe, so to speak, not only in having to impress us without gimmickry or sensationalism, but in having to measure up to the standards set by the masters of the past.

Happily, Vicente Saavedra, a Venezuelan artist based in New York who looks to the Old Masters of the 16th and 19th centuries for inspiration, demonstrates the enduring appeal of straightforward realism, reflecting wonderment at the beauty of ordinary things, in his exhibition "Selected Oil Paintings," at Gelabert Studios Gallery, 255 West 86th Street, at Broadway, from May 21 through June 1. (There will be a reception for the artist on Tuesday, May 21, from 5 to 7 PM.)

Saavedra, who holds a Masters of Arts Degree from New York University and also studied at the Sorbonne, employs his considerable training to create paintings that ultimately transcend academicism by virtue of his ability to imbue even the most traditional subjects with freshness and immediacy. His still life paintings are especially notable for his handling of the play of light and shadow on a variety of surfaces, as well as for the the artist's ability to create a compelling composition with the simplest of objects.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable pieces in the present show in this regard is the oil on linen entitled "Birth of a Mandolin." Like most of Saavedra's paintings, it is of relatively modest size, an easel painting, and its composition is one of his simplest: a centrally placed stringed instrument poised against a gray backdrop on a dark tabletop, with a tasseled length of rope wound around it and a crumpled white cloth object partially covering its rounded bottom.

"Painter at Easel"

Given the title of the picture, it is possible to see the rope encircling the mandolin as an umbilical cord. That the crumpled cloth appears to be a carrying bag from which the instrument has been removed can also suggest a symbolic birth. However, while Saavedra's paintings are evocative enough to invite a wide range of interpretations, and such second-guessing is certainly enjoyable, one can also derive sufficient pleasure from regarding them for their aesthetic qualities alone.

Especially engaging here is the play of light on the smoothly polished wooden surface of the mandolin, as well as the subtle folds and other details in the gray backdrop, which contrast markedly with the deeper folds and shadows of the fabric in the foreground.

By comparison to "Birth of a Mandolin," the somewhat larger oil on linen entitled "Meat Grinder" is a considerably more complex composition. Along with the old fashioned manual meat grinder of the title, which is clamped to the edge of a butcher's block near a bowl of meat, it also includes a small vase of dried flowers and a straw-covered chianti bottle on an adjoining table. Again, it is possible to read various meanings into the different objects, as one does in one of Chardin's still lifes, seeing the visceral red meat as a mortal reminder, the wine as either a sacramental or a bacchanalian symbol, and so on. With such a reading, one could indeed see the contents of the adjoining tables as symbolizing poles of life and death.

Yet, as with a Chardin, it is less speculative and ultimately more satisfying to simply appreciate the way Saavedra ennobles simple things. Far better, too, to admire the balances that he achieves between the contrasting shapes and their shadows; the spatial tensions and textures, as well as the subdued, subtly modulated tonalities with which he unifies the various elements and brings the entire picture alive in a manner that quite literally contradicts the French term for still life, nature morte.

As a figure painter, as well, Saavedra gives his subjects great vitality, as seen in two oils entitled "Standing Nude" and "Sarah." The former canvas depicts a classically plump model with her face turned away from the viewer, her hair in a demure bun, the sensual contours of her pendulous breasts and torso defined with exquisitely limned areas of light and shadow. In the latter painting, a red-haired model leans back in a chair, one leg curving under her, the other extended, her rosy coloring rendered with warm exactitude. Both paintings make palpable the ample proportions of their subjects in a manner that celebrates the female form eternal, as opposed to the more minimal attributes promoted by the fleeting forces of fashion.

Also included in the exhibition are two self portraits. In one, the artist wears a brilliant red smock and turns to regard himself in a mirror. His hand, holding a brush, is extended in the air, capturing a split-second gesture poised between thought and action in the very process of creating the very painting we are looking at. The other self portrait shows the shirtless artist wearing a visor, head down, absorbed in the act of mixing paint on an old fashioned hand-held palette. The perfect little still life of brushes and paint tubes on the nearby work table furthers the impression of a careful craftsman paying tribute to the long, great tradition to which Saavedra belongs.

—Martin Parsons

For Marjeta Lederman, the Kimono is Still a Richly Allusive Theme

When an artist discovers a theme that suits her purposes as well as the Japanese kimono serves Marjeta Lederman, she is wise to continue to explore it as long as it proves inspirational. On the evidence of Lederman's newest solo exhibition at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from April 23 through May 11, the painter still finds the kimono a rich creative resource, employing its outline as a formal armature to support powerful abstract compositions and its ornate designs as an imaginative springboard for imagery that transcends decoration to verge on the metaphysical.

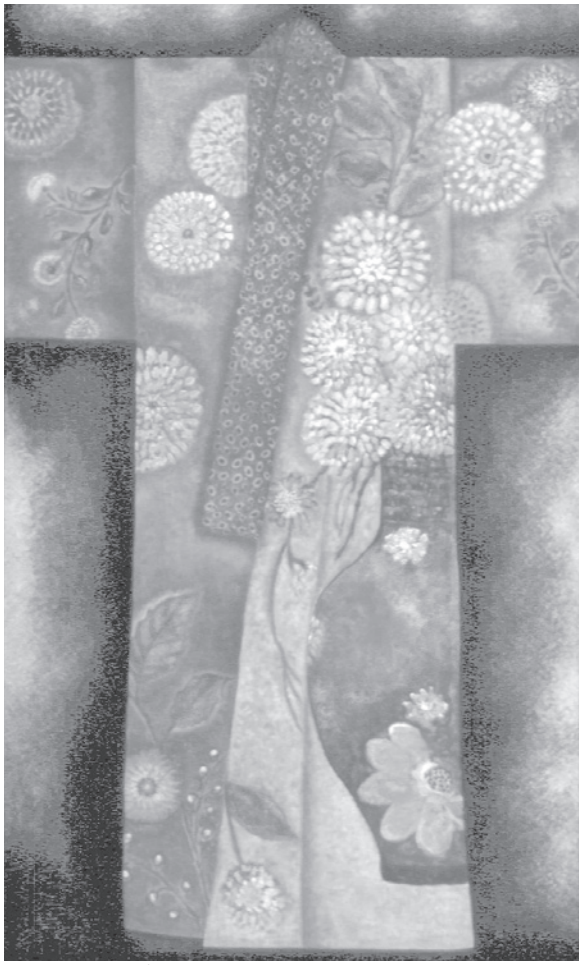
Indeed, suggesting the title if not the plot of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's Broadway hit "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," Lederman's kimonos serve as windows to a radiant inner world in which luminous colors and intricate patterns come alive and take on aspects of the fantastic.

Lederman, who was born in Slovenia and dreamed of being a painter since childhood, is essentially self taught. However, she is an exceptionately diligent autodidact. Along with developing her own improvisitory techniques, such as employing toothpicks and sharpened chopsticks to incise her paint surfaces with intricate textures that enrich their tactility, she has spent interminable hours in museums, both in her native country and in the U.S., studying the old and modern masters, letting their lessons inform her work and imbue it with art historical resonance.

To this day, Lederman tells one, she will go right up to a painting by Gustav Klimt or some other artist she admires in a gallery or museum and scrutinize the pigment at close range to divine the particular alchemy by which he or she arrived at this or that precise effect. Such curiosity concerning technical matters has paid off handsomely in her own paintings, which are possessed of a degree of sophistication and refinement that must surely be the envy of many more formally trained artists.

At their sumptuous best, the light-struck surfaces of Lederman's oils on canvas can remind one of Monet's way of making variegated strokes of color coalesce into a shimmering chromatic whole, or the manner in which Vuillard employed muted, subtly modulated hues and delicate textures to evoke the patterns of the fabrics and wallpaper designs in his domestic interiors. Like Vuillard, who was highly influenced by the Japanese art that he first encountered at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in the late 1890s, Lederman makes no secret of her Eastern influence, as the title of the present show, "From an Oriental Inspiration," makes unabashedly clear.

Thus, along with her oils on canvas, the exhibition includes a group of drawings in Chinese ink on rice paper, some with touches of watercolor, in which she consciously adopts tools and techniques traditional to Asian art, yet adopts them to her own purposes. These works are floral still lifes in which she demonstrates a quite remarkable linear facility for a Western painter (or to be more accurate, an American painter of Eastern European origin, particularly in her ability to toss out a sinuous line like a lasso and capture the vitality of a living flower or leaf through its carefully controlled variations of thick and thin, as well as through her skill manipulation of the density and tonality of the ink itself. In this regard, Lederman's synthesis of Eastern technique and Western sensitivity equals that of Morris Graves, another artist who, in his floral paintings and drawings, assimilated aspects of an Asian sensibility without sacrificing his personal identity.



"Kimono #26"

It is in her oils on canvas, however, that Marjeta Lederman braids the best qualities of two distinctly different aesthetic strains most strikingly, as seen in the canvas called Kimono #27," which for all its Eastern floral decorativeness also suggests the cruciforms so ubiquitous in Christian iconography and Western art. Whether or not Lederman has consciously considered crucifixions as a subtext of her kimono series, the structural similarity is undeniable, given the flat frontal positioning of the garments, which almost invariably have their sleeves spread out on either side. This allusion, conscious or not, to one of the most powerful and emotionally laden symbols in Western art makes Lederman's kimonos infinitely more evocative than, say, Jim Dine's early Pop bathrobe paintings, the well known contemporary works to which they might most readily be compared.

At the same time, however, the sensual floral flowering within the kimonos so obviously contradicts their austere cruciform structures as to create dramatic contrasts and visual tensions that enrich these paintings dramatically. And it is the sensual allure of Eastern beauty that ultimately wins out and makes Lederman's paintings succeed so splendidly. For even in a painting such as "Kimono #26," where the cruciform is most pronounced we are thoroughly seduced by luminous hues—ochers, reds, blues, and greens—that appear lit from within. And we are equally won over by the imagery that enlivens the garment: a veritable constellation of vibrant floral forms flowing all around a large Oriental vase—an ornate receptacle within the imagistic receptacle of the kimono itself!

And in Kimono #28," the one composition in which the sleeves of the garment point downward and the cruciform allusion falls away altogether, the inner space opens like a portal on a realm dominated by a large white orchid and brilliant green leaves and fronds, set against a richly variegated, burnished reddish ground enlivened by some of Lederman's most subtly ravishing painterly activity to date.

Marjeta Lederman stated recently that she intended to continue with the series until she had created at least one hundred kimono paintings. Judging from this second solo exhibition centering on the series, the subject seems inexhaustible.

—Ed McCormack

Ikarashi: Materiality as Metaphor

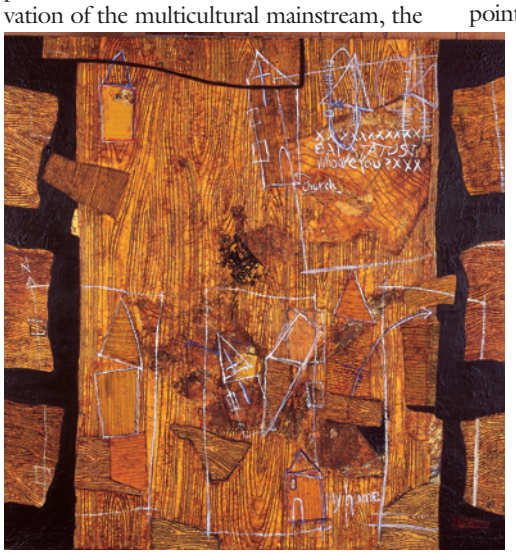
To embody meaning in the surface of a painting, as well as in its forms and colors, is to employ the medium to its fullest potential. This truth is made clear by the Japanese painter Toshio Ikarashi, whose solo exhibition of recent work can be seen at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, from May 9 through 22.

Ikarashi, who has won numerous awards and exhibited widely in galleries and museums in his native Japan, can be most immediately compared to the Spanish artist Antoni Tapies for the rugged tactility of his work, manifesting that "noumenal" spirit, to use the older painter's term, that exists in materials themselves.

Ikarashi's pigment-encrusted surfaces suggest molten energies trapped within substance. The roughly weathered skin of the thick pigment exudes a sense of fossilized vitality, as though it boiled and bubbled ferociously into being before being frozen in stasis, with all the evidence of that furious activity left visible on its face. The burnished golden browns that the artist favors are decidedly autumnal, suggesting the season for the poetic Japanese custom of moon-viewing. These natural allusions are furthered by recurring references to "woods" in the titles of Ikarashi's recent paintings, as well as the scored linear spirals, like the wood-grain patterns on the stumps of trees, that enliven so many of his compositions. These intricate mazes seem as integral to Ikarashi's work as Hundertwasser entrail-like ribbons of color. Ikarashi's vision, however, is considerably more subdued, his colors, while vibrant, of a somber cast that brings to mind the novelist Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's great essay on aesthetics "In Praise of Shadows," which celebrates all that is subtle and subdued in traditional Japanese culture. For although Ikarashi is a decidedly contemporary, internationally-attuned painter who partakes of all the freedom and formal innovation of the multicultural mainstream, the sensibility that he contributes to the whole retains those special qualities of reticence and mystery that Tanizaki argued should be preserved, even as East and West move closer, saying, "I would push back into the shadows the things that come forward too clearly."

At the same time, the sheer physicality of Ikarashi's work asserts itself powerfully in a large painting such as "Affair in the Woods," where the aggressive scale of the canvas and the boldness of the composition create considerable impact. Here, the composition is dominated by two roughly circular forms, their centers aswirl with the aforementioned linear spirals, that converge amid several smaller white shapes, which float suggestively over and around them. Some of these smaller shapes are rectangular and inscribed with symbols, suggesting arcane scripts. Others are sinuous, elongated with appendages that look like stylized fingers or the prongs of a fork.

These fork-like shapes are considerably larger and more prominent in another painting, entitled "Birth in the Woods," where they appear superimposed over several interlocking forms in subdued red, purple, blue, ocher, and brown hues. There is a suggestion here of natural forces and energies of nature that can be likened to the early "new naturist" paintings of Gregory Amenoff, for Ikarashi's expressive shapes are as elusive as they are allusive, which is to say that they suggest a great deal without being specifically descriptive. In another large canvas entitled "Village in the Woods," however, Ikarashi introduces clearly identifiable imagery in the forms of rudimentary houses crudely sketched in the manner of a child's drawing or the frenzied graphic graffiti of Jean-Michel Basquiat. These simple dwellings are drawn in white strokes, as though with chalk on a board, over larger painted rectangular forms. One house is inscribed with a cross and has an arrow pointing to it with the word "church" scrawled nearby. Other words and phrases such as "who are you?" and "my name" are also scrawled here and there on the composition, their hasty impulsiveness contrasting starkly with the elegance of Ikarashi's painted forms, finely scored with those linear wood-grain patterns that figure so prominently in his formal lexicon.



Toshio Ikarashi

Toshio Ikarashi is a painter whose work achieves tension and power by virtue of its exquisite balance of simple and complex elements, which combine to create their own unique form of beauty. That the material qualities in his work are fully as prominent as their formal and symbolic elements, and indeed often overshadow them, lends his paintings a remarkable physical integrity.

—Peter Wiley

The Magical Moonlit Narratives of Ruth Poniarski at Jadite Galleries

"Bather's Invention"

The painter Ruth Poniarski inhabits her own private Arcadia. It is a place where figures from art history mingle freely, as in a dream, with unlikely human or animal companions in serene nocturnal landscapes. Although her compositions are rife with incongruities, the anxiety that one associates with surrealism is strikingly absent from Poniarski's paintings.

Thus, the title "Kingdom of Peace" seems especially apt for Poniarski's solo exhibition at Jadite Galleries, 413 West 50th Street, from April 4 through 25. (The reception is April 4, from 6 to 8 PM.)

Humor is another element that lends levity to Poniarski's acrylics on canvas, as seen in "Birth of Venus," where Botticelli's Venus appears beached, stepping onto her pink seashell as though it were a surfboard. She holds a towel to her midriff, but such modesty is barely necessary, since she is semi-transparent anyway, with a nice view of the foamy surf showing through the outline of her torso. Apparently unfazed by any of this, a single white duck waddles along the shoreline.

In another painting by Poniarski entitled "Milking of Spring," Rembrandt's slightly more dowdy wader holds her baggy white nightgown above her flabby knees under a full moon. A bucket appears in a bunkhouse window, feeding the stream at her feet, while a lone horse poses prettily in profile in the background. Poniarski possesses a unique ability to orchestrate such incongruities convincingly, creating a composition with a logic all its own.

The theme of "The Bather," so ubiquitous in art history, is reprised once again in Poniarski's painting of that title, where

"Horse of a Different Color"

a woman reclines in an outdoor tub amid tall trees, her long wavy hair trailing down onto the forest floor. Nearby two lions recline in a docile manner that recalls both Henri Rousseau's sleeping gypsy and the peaceable kingdom of Edward Hicks. Although Poniarski is a more sophisticated painter than either of those great primitives, she shares their uninhibited way with imagery, which enables her to create compositions that are genuinely dreamlike, rather than pseudo surreal.

In a related canvas called "Bather's Invention," the same bathtub, green in color, is seen in an open field under one of those full moons that Poniarski paints so evocatively. While a woman in a robe dips one foot into the water, another woman similarly garbed perches on the edge of the tub, gazing skyward. Behind them, in the middle distance, a single lion is seen in repose, resembling the serene stone sentries outside the 42nd street branch of The New York Public Library.

Leonine figures appear once again in the title painting of the exhibition, "Kingdom of Peace." Here, three docile beasts guard the sleep of a slender young woman in leopard-spotted pajamas, as a fat full moon peeks through deep blue tree-limbs. Once again, it is Poniarski's ability to combine the fantastic with the mundane that lends her scenes their rarefied flavor. She is a painter acutely attuned to numinous subjects, yet she grounds them with visual wit—those jazzy patterned pajamas being the piece de resistance here—that makes even the most outlandish situations seem somehow cozily familiar.

Even while being charmed by her often deceptively innocent imagery, however, one should not be distracted from what a truly exquisite and consummately sophisticated painter Ruth Poniarski is. For her ability to capture the subtlest nuances of her subjects and cloak them in mysterious moonlit auras makes her visual narratives not only magically atmospheric but aesthically successful.

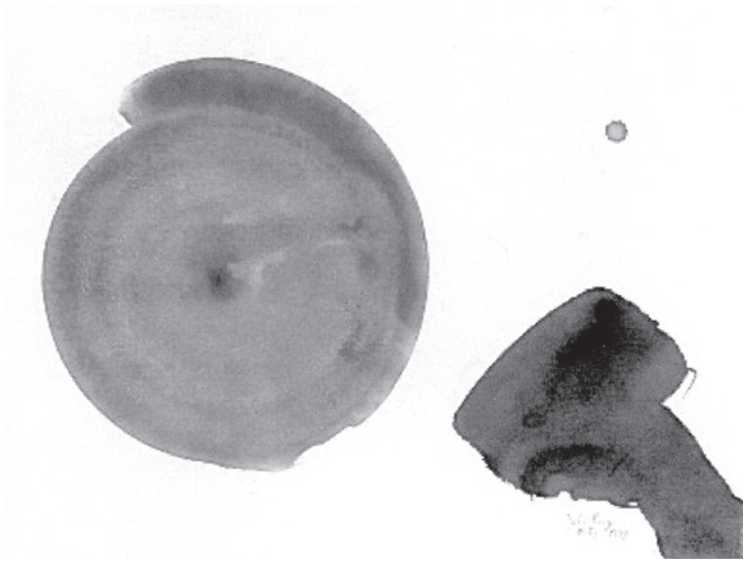
—Peter Wiley

Yali Peng's Paintings Liberate Calligraphy from Language

What Asians call "ink painting" would be considered drawing in the West. But in order to agree that the term is accurate in context it is necessary to understand the weight with which Asian cultures invest The Gesture.

Calligraphy, which the Chinese consider superior to painting for its ability to embody beauty in brevity, presents an even more daunting puzzle for the Western mind, since penmanship, even at its most accomplished, is not regarded here with anything near the respect accorded brushwork in the East. And the written character itself, being undecipherable to us, seems as formidable a barrier as an iron gate between two cultures.

Yali Pang, who recently had a solo exhibition at Artsforum Gallery, 24 West 57th Street, solves the problem brilliantly by liberating calligraphy from language, the gesture from the ideogram, even while retaining its innate brevity and grace. In doing so, she also bridges the gap between calligraphy and ink painting, making the dance of the brush more appealingly accessible than ever before to the Western eye.



"I Love The Blue Moon"

For while it is true that we have learned to appreciate some aspects of calligraphy as translated through Abstract Expressionism—especially in the work of painters such as Franz Kline, who were clearly influenced by it—Peng's work presents the brush stroke as an autonomous entity.

More concerned with flow than with "push and pull" (Hans Hofmann's term for the angst-ridden Western approach to gesture that he and his peers cultivated), Peng sets her swift, sinuous strokes afloat in space in a manner more akin to calligraphy than to painting. That she paints on canvas, however, rather than on rice paper, and with acrylic ink instead of Chinese ink or its Japanese equivalent, Sumi ink, tips one off that Peng fully intends for her work to be regarded as painting rather than as writing—even writing of the freeform, nonreferential style that has evolved among some modern calligraphers, particularly in Japan.

We readily embrace this designation, because Peng's isolated, yet sensually weighty, shapes do indeed succeed as painted forms, especially since the artist employs colored inks on grounds tinted with other, paler hues, rather than working in black and white in the monochromatic manner of traditional ink artists. The particular colors that Peng chooses for her compositions, however spare, also add to our perception of them as paintings, rather than calligraphic works or drawings, since they invariably add a painterly dimension to her expressive forms.

For "Loving Sensual Touch," for example, Peng chose a deep red hue with the visceral suggestiveness of dried blood. With this color, centered on a pale green ground, she creates a form that, for all its bold, nonspecific abstraction, evokes two figures silhouetted in ardent, even strenuous, erotic embrace. Though seemingly set down with a single decisive stroke, this shape suggests the volumic mass of merged human bodies, its almost sculptural effect further enhanced by its placement against the plain, pale ground. (None of which is to suggest that it is necessary to "Rorschach" figurative meanings into Peng's compositions, since they can be appreciated just as well for their abstract virtues alone.)

In other paintings as well, particularly the poetically titled "I Love the Blue Moon" and "The First of a Million Kisses," Yali Peng combines Zen-like simplicity with coloristic expressiveness to give even her sparest, most elemental gestures the full weight and depth of serious painterly enterprise.

—Maurice Taplinger

78"Bather's Invention"

Ed Brodkin Sensualizes Semiotics

The term "scholars' painting," originated in China in the Sung dynasty to describe a category of learned artists whose work differed from that of artisans and academicians in that, according to historian and author James Cahill, its "quality of expression was principally determined by the personal qualities of the men who created it."

The same could be said of the contemporary American painter Ed Brodkin, whose work is invariably a product of his wide-ranging intellectual curiosity, rather than of those practical career choices that make some artists today artisans and academicians in the guise of avant gardists.

Communication, a subject dear to Brodkin's heart but broad enough to grant him a good deal of imagistic latitude, is the overall theme of his solo show of recent works at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from April 23 through May 11. (There will be receptions for the artist on Thursday, April 25 from 5 to 8 PM. and on Saturday, April 27, from 3 to 6 PM.)

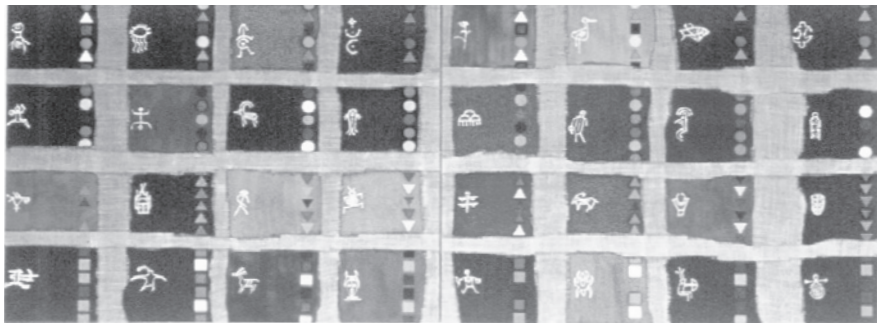
Characteristically, Brodkin employs a broad variety of signs and symbols to explore "the power and meanings of visual imagery" as it has evolved in pictographs and other written signs over many centuries, from the "primitive"—a word that the artist takes care to qualify with quotation marks, given his respect for the innate ingenuity of indigenous people—to the most recent high tech permutations of binary sequences in cyberspace.

What is being celebrated here is, in the artist's own distinctive locutions and syntax, the "unique and wondrous facility among the planet's fauna" to create written systems for "sending and receiving information, recording all sorts of transactions, recording and preserving scientific discoveries, reaching for higher understandings, correcting by-passed ideas—as well as—telling and perpetuating untruths, preserving foolish myths, brainwashing, building and preserving power for the greedily ambitious..."

As the latter phrases of that statement make clear, Brodkin acknowledges the negative as well as the positive potential of the signs we devise to communicate redeeming ideas and destructive doctrines alike. Such dualities and paradoxes seem central to Brodkin's inquiring vision, to the investigative and exploratory nature of his art.

The mixed media painting that Brodkin calls "Ancestral Whispers," for example, takes in a broad spectrum of humanity with a procession of starkly simplified figures and sheilds inspired by Paleolithic art employed to represent, in the words of the artist, "warriors, farmers, weavers, builders, hunters, women, men, the wise and the foolish." These pictographic personages, poised on that precipice where images morph into language, span a grid of panels painted with vigorous strokes of pigment that surge in different directions, imbuing the composition with great energy and immediacy.

In the tondo "Auguries," the very title tips one off to Brodkin's belief that signs are pregnant with portents and omens that delve deep into the human psyche, raising questions to which there can be no easy answers. Here, five circular forms containing different ancient symbols for the sun appear to orbit like planets within the larger circle of the composition, against a ground enlivened by horizontal bands of color overlaid with broken, wavering strokes of black latex floated over wet polyurethane. Around the outer edge of the large circle, in contrast to the ancient sun-symbols within the smaller circles, a steady sequence of zeros and ones—the binary system that is the basis of digital computing—introduces an element of modernity that the artist invites us to ponder as an augury of either "advancement or oblivion."



"Voices"

Here, as in all of Brodkin's work, the constantly questioning, probing, philosophical content is couched in the context of a personal painterly vocabulary that could only have been achieved by a painstaking process of trial and error, through a great deal of experimentation with a wide variety of unlikely materials. In general, if not in every instance, Brodkin tends to favor the use of latex, enamel, polyurethane, and other ostensibly industrial paints and solvents over traditional artist's materials such as oils, and even over slightly more modern ones like acrylics.

Over the years, these materials have become so innate to his working process that they meld with his subject matter in a peculiar manner, forging an amalgam of physicality and idea that enhances both the sensual qualities and the meanings of his compositions. Through such means he materializes his visual metaphors, giving them a weight and physical presence that is finally inseparable from their content. By these methods, too, Brodkin realizes forms of beauty whose qualities are quite unprecedented, having been achieved through a kind of aesthetic alchemy that can only come about when common materials are transmuted through an uncommon creative sensibility.

Familiar letter forms, for example, become objects of pure delectation in a mixed media painting called "Footnotes," where they take on the sinuous grace and beauty of tropical flora. Juxtaposed with overlapping discs filled with newspaper clippings—fragmented media narratives—the shapely letters constitute a colorful, albeit incomplete, calligraphic Roman alphabet: "abcdefgtuvwxyz."

Simply by leaving out several middle letters, Brodkin calls our attention to beginnings and ends, seeming to suggest that the mystery in any sequence of events or story exists, not in its genesis or its denouement, but in the middle, where the significant action that precipitates change occurs.

The title of another work, "Prologue. Epilogue," again signifies a fascination on Brodkin's part with beginnings and endings. Here, several small rectangular panels—each containing a single, elegant letter set against a dark, earthy ground, its edges illuminated by color chips, as if licked by flames—are arranged in a large, wing-like configuration. The suggestion is of language taking flight, as when words gain the glorious velocity that results in poetry. The notion of letters borne aloft by wings also recalled a rather miraculous event this writer once witnessed outside New York University, where a sudden, strong gust of wind made paperback books on a street vendor's table start flapping their pages and take off like a flock of pigeons!

And, indeed, that memory seems an apt simile for the way Ed Brodkin elevates the ordinary, making lowly materials do the work of high art; transforming familiar images by placing them in new contexts, and providing unexpected revelations for the viewer.

—Ed McCormack

Patti Mollica Shares her Shimmering Urban Visions

New York City has inspired so many artists for so many decades—from poets and novelists, to painters and sculptors, to photographers and filmmakers—that one would almost think its possibilities had long ago been exhausted. Then along comes an artist such as Patti Mollica, whose exhibition "Urban Impressions" can be seem at the Manhattan Athletic Club, 277 Park Avenue, April 2 through May 31.

"Sobo Fire Escapes"

Mollica, who has a BFA from SUNY Oswego and whose work is in numerous private and corporate collections, has stated, "I view the world as a mosaic of shapes and color. Even what appears to be a most 'mundane' sight can be extraordinarily interesting from a design/composition standpoint. My focus is not on the subject matter per se, it's on the inherent design qualities within that subject."

The city provides Mollica with a seemingly limitless number of opportunities for exploring her clearly formulated aesthetic goals. Her paintings are notable, above all, for their strong compositions, bravura brushwork, and striking color harmonies.

In her painting "Guggenheim Museum at Dusk," for one splendid example, the eccentrically flowing facade of Frank Lloyd Wright's familiar building on the left side of the composition creates a thrusting shape that pulls the eye into the picture. This is counterbalanced by a lamppost and street signs set against a vigorously worked white sky on the opposite side of the composition. Bracketed between the museum's facade and the green trees outside Central Park, directly across the street, two figures strolling along in the middle distance, illuminated by a shaft of light on the sidewalk, become the focal point of the picture and unify by their presence all the other elements.

By contrast, the painting entitled "Soho Fire Escapes" is a study in the patterns created by light and shadow on the facades of the cast iron buildings peculiar to that area of the city. Tall loft windows catch dark shadows like yawning gaping mouths, while fire escapes thrust forward into the sunlight, suggesting glistening teeth. In the foreground on the left side of the composition, an ornate old fashioned lamp post provides a curving contrast to the rectangular structuring of the architectural elements. While the building facade is depicted at an angle that suggests perspective, this is contradicted by the way in which Mollica flattens the forms on the picture plane through her use of light and dark patterns, creating spatial tensions between the abstract and the representational qualities of the painting. The artist exploits such contrasts skillfully to lend her paintings a good deal of vitality that is further enhanced by her bold, energetic brush work.

In other paintings, Mollica explores a variety of subtle effects: "Midtown Mayhem" gains its dynamic momentum by her juxtapositioning of the simplified shapes of yellow cabs, converging in broad strokes, with garish smears of neon that create a dynamic sense of gritty nocturnal drama. Conversely, In "Con Ed on Park Avenue," Mollica's use of boldly brushed areas of green gives the urban scene a delightfully incongruous pastoral feeling, akin to one of Richard Diebenkorn's semi-abstract California landscapes. Here, too, the peppermint-striped Con Ed smokestack jutting up out of the street and the anti-naturalistic palette—particularly the chromatic deliciousness of the pink, pale blue, and strident yellow office buildings in the middle distance—create a visual excitement that harks back to Fauvism.

It is one of Patti Mollica's great strengths as a painter that she can indulge such coloristic playfulness even while capturing an authentic sense of the city's character and atmosphere. Indeed, the poetic license that she takes with color, as well as form, only serves to make her sense of the city feel more real. For Mollica is one of those rare painters whose personal vision, rather than distorting reality, seems to amplify it, making us see even the most familiar places and things with greater clarity. —Judith Levy

At Agora Gallery, Mirroring the Diverse Face of Latin American Art

One of the more comprehensive group surveys of the season, the "Latin American Art Exhibition," seen recently at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, was far too inclusive to be done full justice here. One can, however, give a glancing sense of its diversity with the brief descriptions that follow. It is hoped that they will at least provide some insight into the high level of imagination and craft that Latin American artists bring to the table to enrich the feast of multiculturalism that makes contemporary painting unique.

The paintings of the Argentinean painter Patricio Bonta combine elements of neo-expressionism with intriguing imagery, as seen in a strong monochromatic image of a couple embracing in a window that puts the viewer in the role of voyeur. Sabrina Villasenor's severely cropped paintings of nude figures make one think of the Mexican muralists. However, Villasenor pushes her nudes much closer to abstraction and her concerns appear more painterly than political. Another Mexican painter, Elsa Zarduz shows the influence of Orozco, particularly, in her bold yet focused compositions, in which the nude figure also comes into play prominently.

Argentinean Alejandra Tolosa employs forms influenced by Pre-Columbian art, albeit within an abstract context. One of Tolosa's best paintings depicts a grid of mask-like faces in subdued earthy hues. By contrast, Dania Sierra employs brilliant colors to create compositions with their roots in spirituality. Sierra's canvases often feature birds and other creatures in fanciful, expressively distorted compositions .

Simone DeSousa, born in Brazil, employs rich color and impastos like a postmodern abstract expressionist. DeSousa's succulent paint quality lends tactile presence to her bold forms. Born in Mexico City, Karen Deicas tends to favor simple rectangular forms, which she paints wet-into-wet to achieve a subtle coloristic shimmer. Deicas' work is simultaneously strong and subtle.

Jorge Humberto Goncalves-Romero, born in Venezuela, combines the figure and abstraction in a unique manner. Goncalves-Romero worked out certain ideas regarding light and shadow on a computer before incorporating them into his complex, kinetically evocative acrylics on canvas. Leonardo Faillace, educated in Buenos Aires, is a neo-surrealist whose meticulous mixed media paintings evoke a rarefied private world. Figures, faces, and fanciful settings merge in Faillace's poetic scenes. Colombian painter Jaime Izquierdo employs a restrained form of expressionism to give his unusual figurative compositions and still life paintings an underlying energy. Izquierdo's paintings have a quiet power that belies their serene surface organization.

The figure is fragmented in various ways to create both a sense of abstraction and a psychological tension in the paintings of Silvia Pace, who is of European background, but grew up in Latin America, influenced by its cultural rhythms. In Pace's compositions the human face is merged from several different angles to create composite portraits with an unusual presence.

Born in Ecuador, Francesca Rota-Loiseau is fascinated with eyes. Painted smoothly and directly in a manner that owes something to outsider art, albeit informed by a sophisticated sensibility, Rota-Loiseau's people confront the view face-to-face with their frank gaze, their moist eyes seeming to mirror their individual souls with a peculiar expressiveness.

The subconscious mind is the source for the powerful, darkly brooding abstractions of Fernando Moreno. Moreno is a truly postmodern abstract painter in that his compositions are fraught with a wide variety of meanings which are cloaked in mystery yet lend his forms a pregnant power and presence.

While one cannot claim to get a complete overview of Latin American art from the work of only thirteen painters, the curatorial care and inclusiveness with which this group was assembled comes impressively close nonetheless. Even more significant is the fact that every painter in the show seemed to bring to it something special that gave one a cumulatively impressive sense of the general quality and diversity of Latin American art as a whole.

—Maureen Flynn

Leon Yost's Breakthrough Epiphanies in Northern Italy

Up until quite recently, Leon Yost, a documentary photographer by profession, a photographic artist by inclination, was best known for the images of sacred rock art sites in the Southwest and elsewhere that have preoccupied him for a good many years. A veteran of some twenty-six solo exhibitions, including shows at the Arizona University Art Museum and the San Diego Museum of Man, Yost has long been a unique presence in contemporary art for his successful marriage of aesthetics and archaeology.

In his most recent exhibition of large color photo-assemblages at Noho Gallery in Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, this past February, Yost took northern Italy, from Rome to Venice, as his subject and found in the grandeur of its cathedrals and colonnades inspiration for a significant new departure that broadened his oeuvre considerably.

Some who have followed Yost's career over the years may have been surprised by the contrast between his opulent Italian subject matter and the austere desert settings of his earlier pictures. Even more relevant, however, is the formal inventiveness of his new photo-assemblages, which make clear that Leon Yost should be regarded first and foremost as an artist who employs the camera as a tool, rather than merely another artful photographer.

Indeed, Yost's use of the photographic medium in these most recent works can be likened more accurately to the work of such painters as Robert Rauschenberg and David Hockney than to that of most other photographers. Nor is this meant to imply any value judgment regarding the relative merits of the two mediums. It is simply that, while the skills specific to a professional photographer are everywhere evident in his recent work, Yost has entered a fertile new phase of his creative journey, in which the purely visual and aesthetic elements have taken precedence over documentary concerns. At the same time, the fastidious professional habits of a documentary photographer compelled Yost to present texts next to his photo-assemblages on the gallery wall, providing helpful historical information, to illuminate the images and add to one's enjoyment of the exhibition overall.

What really makes these new works important, however, is the manner in which Yost transcends the confines of traditional photographic presentation, employing collage techniques and fragmentation to create imagistic juxtapositions which achieve cinematic sweep and an almost visionary intensity. Most of Yost's compositions are in vertical formats, the images stacked one above the other. Vertiginous views of cathedral ceilings converge unexpectedly with close ups of intricately patterned floor tiles, aerial panoramas of rooftops or towers, fragments of statuary, gondolas on Venice canals, details of frescoes and mosaics, and other diverse elements.

Yost works with fast film and available light, hand printing from 35 millimeter negatives, limiting each edition to twenty proofs plus an artist's proof. Since the proofs are made one at a time, each varies slightly from the others in the edition, making every photo-assemblage unique. The almost painterly coloristic subtlety that Yost achieves by such methods, as well as by his careful placement of the individual prints within each composition, is especially striking in "Burano in Perspective," its subject a small island-village just north of Venice that the accompanying text informs us is "famous for lace-making."

Here, the slightly sun-bleached pink, red, and blue buildings bordering the canals provide a pastel palette which Yost exploits masterfully to create piquant chromatic accents. These close-valued yet vibrant hues, bracketed between areas of luminous sky and shimmering water, advance to the picture-plane, contradicting veering perspectives in vertically stacked views of canals, creating spatial tensions that further enliven the composition. Yost's skillful placement of these elements imbues "Burano in Perspective" with an abstract power to match its picturesque qualities.

Equally dynamic in another manner are "Pantheon Reassembled"—in which the vast rotunda and the floor below, replete with tiny tourists, are reconstructed from several separate proofs and juxtaposed with an exterior view of the magnificent temple—and "Three Apses." In the latter work, the interiors of the Basilica of San Miniato, the five-domed Basilica of San Marco, and Rome's San Clemente are combined in a richly detailed vertical composition flooded with unearthly amber light.

Yost's sumptuous synthesis of the three cavernous churches creates a transcendent space, a soaring spiritual milieu of symphonic proportions and Escher-like complexity.

Other pieces, such as "Basilica of Santi Quatro" and "Baptistery, Florence," set mosaics and architectural elements afloat against areas of blue sky, creating compositions that combine the earthly with the ethereal. In the former photo-assemblage, the exterior of the church is seen from below and inverted; in the latter, the ornate octagonal ceiling is splayed out like a mandala.

Yost's juxtapositioning of different photographic images serves to suggest the actual scale of existing places much more accurately than could be accomplished with any single view. Yet, in other photo-assemblages, he juxtaposes images to create contrastingly intimate effects. In "A Taste of Venice," for example, close-ups of tomatoes, peppers, and uncooked pasta are contrasted with more panoramic views of gondolas, canals, and outdoor cafe umbrellas; while "Fifteen Virgins" zeros in on the vernacular charms of the homemade shrines to the Virgin Mary that one encounters everywhere in Italy, their simplicity a humble contrast to the more official religious displays.

"Tuscan Totem"

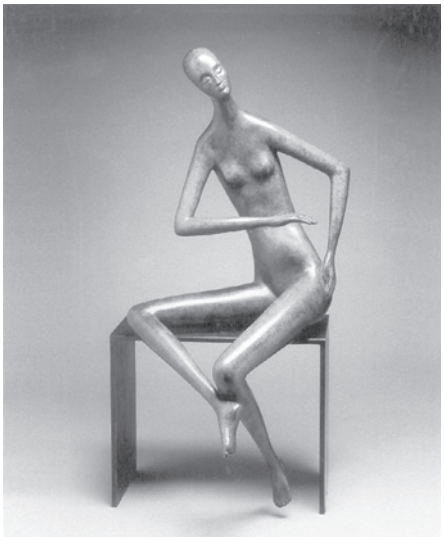
Visiting Italy obviously had a salutary effect on the creative energies of Leon Yost, giving him a new slant on the spiritual archaeology that has long been a subtext of his work. Each of his recent photo-assemblages, comprised of up to six 11" by 14" photographs, embodies a rich array of images, encompassing both the secular and religious aspects of a country literally saturated with art history. Respectful but not overly reverent, Yost turned this treasure trove of inspiration to his own ends, creating works that span the centuries by virtue of their intellectual depth, technical wizardry, and dazzling immediacy.

—Ed McCormack

Exploring the Significance of Images at Noho Gallery

The title "what's in an image" invites intriguing speculation in an exhibition by the New York Society of Women artists, at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from April 2 through 20. (Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, from 11 AM to 6 PM, with a reception for the artists on April 4, from 5 to 7 PM.)

Some works in the show demonstrate that the definition of an image has been broadened considerably in the postmodern era. And this seems all for the good, given the evocative qualities in the work of essentially nonobjective artists like Rachelle Weisberger, Gloria Scher, Harriet Regina Marion, and Benice Horowitz.



Isabel Shaw

Rachelle Weisberger's paintings combine sharply defined elements of geometric abstraction with softly diffused color fields to achieve a pleasing synthesis of the precise and the poetic. Gloria Scher's compositions vary from chromatic explorations involving horizontal bands of color to works in which vibrant hard-edge shapes, set against subtly modulated washes, suggest hermetic personal symbols. Harriet Regina Marion works in mixed media, employing ink jet printing on unprimed canvas to which she adds hopscotch numerals scrawled in oil pastel, shaggy fringes, glitter, dirt, and a variety of found objects to create tactile surfaces that are at once sensuous and allusive. Benice Horowitz codifies nature within gridded compositions, her colorful and vigorous gestural calligraphy evoking aspects of landscape in its lyrical dance, even while retaining a striking abstract autonomy.

Sheila Kriemelman

Other artists are even more overt in their merging of image and abstraction: Sheila Kriemelman employs cityscape as a launching pad for form and color in a canvas where architectural elements and other simplified images and symbols morph into abstract shapes and vibrant color areas are further enlivened by splashy painterly pyrotechnics. While the collages of Wendy Brest are ostensibly abstract in their overall thrust, on closer inspection images from Eastern prints and fragments of text emerge to lend her intricate and variegated compositions a semiotic richness that is intriguingly literary.

Janet Indick

Sculptors also tread a fine line between the actual and the implied: Janet Indick's "High Tea" combines a witty neo-dadaist visual pun with a totemic structure, balancing an old fashioned tea pot and ornate table cloth atop a long pole encircled by lace garters and colorful stripes. Barbara Arum creates a more figurative totem in an elegantly carved wood sculpture in which the piece de resistance is a stately, simplified female nude balancing two abstract shapes on her head, as well as a graceful exotic bird. The versatile artist Anica Shpilberg, also an accomplished painter, is represented here by a stone sculpture with powerful forms and a ruggedly scored surface which suggests any number of organic life-forms without spelling them out.

Benice Horowitz

Isabel Shaw's gracefully elongated female nude in bronze with a luminous blue patina perches on a welded steel bench, her expression serene, her gestures articulated with mime-like delicacy, the merging of traditional and modernist mediums enhancing the artist's elegant and harmonious marriage of unabashed figuration and sleek semi-abstract form. Another bronze nude by Mireille Lemarchand is contrastingly voluptuous and craggy of surface, as she balances on her back like a cat, embracing her raised knees with one arm, cradling her head with the other, appearing to herself to sleep in a near-fetal reverie of languorous self-containment.

Other distinctly different approaches are seen in the work of two more sculptors: Shelley Parriott's tactile layerings of mesh and wire take the grid beloved of painters into three dimensional space with intriguingly results. Anne Bedrick employs rough surfaces and expressive distortions to give her humanistic figures emotional thrust.

Time honored subjects such as landscape and still life are revitalized in the work of other artists, such as Ann Pellaton, Olga Sheirr, and Catchi. Pellaton evokes the earthy essence of Italy's landscape in dark, deep hues and strong semi-abstract forms. Sheirr, whose solo exhibition is covered at length elsewhere in this issue, conjures up Parisian scenes in watercolor, albeit with an atmospheric poetry akin to Utrillo's oils. Catchi's oil of a large vase of flowers and fruits spread out on a picnic blanket is exuberant composition of boldly brushed pastel hues. Then there is Elisa Pritzker, whose glazed multimedia piece memorializing the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center has a ghostly presence, with the two majestic structures glowing fluorescently against a dark sky.

Also including works by Olga Poloukhine, Joyce Pommer, Anne Stanner, Gerda Roze, Liz Arum, Francis Avery, and Maureen Renahan-Krinsley that were not available for preview, "what's in an Image" is a laudably ambitious exhibition. Indeed, its inclusiveness endeavors to explore the complicated relationship of image to idea and raises questions well worth considering.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Joan Schreder Evokes the Metaphysical Majesty of Antarctica

The somewhat archaic yet uniquely evocative phrase "a terrible beauty" comes most immediately to mind on encountering the photographs in the "Antarctica Series"of Joan Schreder, whose recent exhibition at Artsforum Gallery Gallery, 24 West 57th Street, was a landmark in a long and productive career.

In order to fully understand her approach to photography, it is important to understand that Schreder was a painter before turning to photography. In the 1930s, as a youngster participating in the progressive education system instituted by John Dewey, she studied painting with the then unknown Jackson Pollock. In the forties, after graduating from Vassar College with a drama degree, she continued her art education at the Art Students League under the watchful eye of the esteemed painter and teacher Morris Kantor, while and studying printmaking at The New School with the equally respected William Hayter.

Schreder continues to paint to this day, and in previous shows, has exhibited her fanciful watercolors along with her photographs. In her most recent solo show at Artsforum, however, her "Antarctica Series" alone took center stage, and this seemed a wise curatorial decision, given the solitary majesty of these magnificent photographs. Indeed, so powerful are these pictures that their auras fill the gallery, engulfing the viewer in hushed silences such as one normally encounters only in places of worship. Indeed, one cannot help but feel something akin to reverence when confronted by images of such solitary majesty as we see in Schreder's digital C-prints of glaciers, icebergs, and ice floes bracketed in utter desolation between immense expanses of sky and sea. So terrible is their beauty, in fact, that one is reminded of the following lines from Elizabeth Bishop's "The Imaginary Iceberg": "Icebergs behoove the soul /(Both being self made from elements/ lease visible)/To see them so: fleshed, fair, erected/indivisible, " as well as her observation in the same poem that an iceberg "cuts its facets from within./Like jewelry from a grace/It saves itself perpetually and adorns/ Only itself."

"Antarctica Series #6"

Such metaphors do not seem overblown for the profound and soul-wrenching sense of isolation that Schreder captures in these pictures, as well as the introspection that they provoke. In "Antarctica Series #1," for example, a large cloud hovers above an iceberg, dwarfing even this monolithic giant by its immensity, the disparity in scale between the two elements suggesting the finite nature of all earthly things. Here, too, the dramatic effect is enhanced by the shadow that the cloud casts on the water, dimming its natural sparkle, deepening the gloom that permeates the scene, suggesting the proverbial "dark night of the soul" in broad daylight.

By contrast "Antarctica Series #2" is a panoramic view of ice-floes stretching serenely toward the endless horizon where ocean meets sky, with icebergs looming in the distance, while "Antarctica Series #4" focuses on an iceberg filling the center of the composition in the middle distance, its shape, size, and monolithic placidness recalling Melville's description of Captain Ahab's crew spotting a gigantic sperm whale "lazily undulating in the trough of the sea," and tranquilly resembling "a portly burgher smoking his pipe of a warm afternoon."

Equally evocative in another manner is "Antarctica Series #10," a more severely cropped image dominated by a large, craggy land mass, its surface entirely covered by snow, except for two dark areas that resemble eye-sockets, making it look like a huge skull rising from the frigid water—a macabre vision worthy of the great fantastic draftsman Alfred Kubin.

Of course, one could comment, as one critic did, on the ecological implications of Joan Schreder's Antarctic views, as "elegiac mementos of a fragile and small part of the earth that is at risk of disappearing in the not very distant future." And while the present writer might quibble with the very use of the word "small," since one of the most striking qualities of Schreder's compositions is the almost metaphysical sense of immensity that they project, one would not be in error to dwell in such matters. Much more germane, however, to the power and importance of these pictures as works of art and universal symbols is what they whisper to the attentive viewer of our common mortal fate.

—Jorge Santiago

New York Notebook

Surrealism's Guilty Pleasures at the Met

Surrealism is the movement that critics love to hate. Perhaps part of the reason is that it can be awfully entertaining, which is something that most professional aesthetes don't seem to think serious art is supposed to be. After all, if something is entertaining it stands to reason that it doesn't require a great deal of explication, and that kind of leaves the critic out in the cold, doesn't it?

This may explain, at least in part, the generally chilly reception given the excellent and highly enjoyable exhibition "surrealism: Desire Unbound," which originated last year at the Tate Modern, in London, and is now at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue, through May 12.

A sumptuous clothbound catalog of the exhibition, edited by Jennifer Mundy, Senior Curator at the Tate, is available from Princeton University Press (9 3/4 x 10 7/8; 352pp. 300 color illus.; $65.00.)

Besides paintings and sculpture by all of the leading lights of the movement, the show features a veritable treasure trove of photographs, documents, manuscripts, and ephemera, as well as the magnificently illustrated books that were an important part of a movement in which the visual and the literary were so naturally wed. Yet some critics, when faced with a plethora of self-explanatory pleasures, can do naught but quibble.

The usually levelheaded Michael Kimmelman of The New York Times surprised us most by opening his review with a rambling and barely relevant third-hand account of a performance by the Canadian artist Jean Benoit, which was presented at an international Surrealist exhibition organized by Andre Breton and Marcel Duchamp in 1959, and merely documented in passing in the present show.

Quaint as it sounds now, when Benoit was stripped naked by his wife before an audience and pretended to brand the word "Sade" on his chest, it couldn't have been much sillier than Karen Finley's more contemporary antics with peanut butter or yams. And it would have at least been more avant garde in 1959 than today. So we can only suppose that Kimmelman kicked off his piece with this irrelevancy because he needed a good stomping platform for trashing the rest of the show, most of which is infinitely more interesting than Benoit's stunt, illuminating as it does the erotic milieu in which surrealism thrived, and casting much light on how it continues to reverberate in contemporary culture.

From his podium at The New Yorker, Peter Schjeldahl gave a more balanced account than Kimmelman of the show's scope, the origins of the movement, and Breton's role as its reigning Pope. Yet his only epiphany came in the last paragraph of the review, standing in front of Jackson Pollock's "Pasiphae," a painting already familiar to him from the Met's permanent collection that wasn't even in the show when it originated at the Tate.

"When I encountered this large, pre-drip painting in the last gallery, I felt I was experiencing it with the astonishment of its first viewer," Schjeldahl enthuses embarrassingly, his rhapsodic reaction to a picture that is only marginally surreal and hardly among Pollock's most significant works betraying a built-in antipathy to the movement that borders on a disqualifying critical bias.

Both Kimmelman and Schjeldahl make much of the misogyny of male surrealists—old news by now—without making nearly enough of the fact that some of the women were more than a match for the men, both as artists and in terms of their serial sexual conquests. And in regard to exploring issues of gender identity that have only come to the forefront in recent years, artists like Dorothea Tanning, Remedios Varo, Leonora Carrington, and Leonor Fini were often way ahead of their male peers. Still, both critics insist on stereotyping the women of surrealism as muses, mistresses, and party dolls. (Our man at The New Yorker even goes so far as to make a witless analogy to Hugh Hefner's harem of Playboy bunnies!)

Man Ray, "Kiki de Montparnasse as Odalisque c.1925

Kimmelman gives the obligatory nod to famous victim Frida Kahlo, and that's about it. Schjeldahl tips his hat to Meret Oppenheim's fur-lined teacup, and has the good manners not to ignore the long neglected and now overexposed Louise Bourgeois. Neither critic, however, mentions Tanning, Varo, Carrington, or Fini, all three of whom have major paintings in the exhibition.

The latter is an especially grievous omission, since Fini (paired with Salvador Dali in CFM Gallery's "Art for the Book," reviewed elsewhere in this issue) was not only one of the strongest painters in a movement often dismissed as mainly "literary," as "The Ends of the Earth," a 1949 oil in the exhibition makes clear; she was also exemplary for her liberated bohemian life-style.

Considering how revered Freud was by many surrealists, Varo also makes an iconoclastic statement with her oil " Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst." The canvas depicts a mysterious, veiled woman gripping a disembodied male head by the beard, as she prepares to drop it down a well, which the artist opined was "the proper thing to do when leaving the psychoanalyst."

Desire is not only unbound but celebrated in all its kinky permutations in this lavish survey. Among the most poignant pieces are those of Joseph Cornell, the American recluse whose nerdy demeanor and suburban life-style in a row house in Queens that he shared with his mother and disabled brother did not afford him the erotic opportunities enjoyed by his counterparts in Paris. Like Emily Dickinson's poems, Cornell's box assemblages, often built around images of screen goddesses such as Greta Garbo and Hedy Lamarr for whom he lusted from afar, demonstrate that desire unrequited can often be more exquisitely ardent than desire unbound.

Quite opposite in their explicitness, the drawings and drypoints of Hans Bellmer explore aspects of polymorphous perversity through a startling array of anatomical anomalies suggesting all manner of erotic permutations. Also on view are a number of Bellmer's stark photographs of disturbingly distorted dolls, which show up Cindy Sherman's slavishly imitative efforts in a similar direction as the garish pornshop sextoy throwaways that they are.

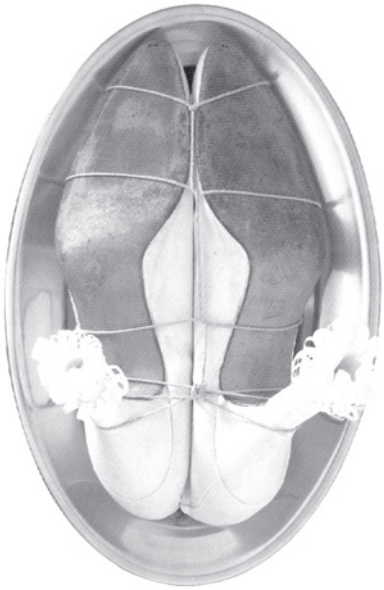
By the same token, the gelatin silver prints of Pierre Molinier, a real meshugah who shaved his own body, donned sheer black stockings and photographed himself as a woman (often in stylized lesbian embrace with other artfully disguised and montaged self-portraits) obviously influenced the rarely exhibited leather-fetish photo collages with which Robert Mapplethorpe launched his career. (Indeed, we were present when the then unknown Mapplethorpe's collages were unveiled in a small private exhibition in the Hotel Chelsea suite of Stanley Amos, an early '70s scenemaker and Warhol associate, and thought immediately of Molinier).

As one would have every right to expect in any major survey of the movement, "Surrealism: Desire Unbound" also has lots of great stuff by Salvador Dali, Max Ernst, Man Ray, Giorgio de Chirico, Yves Tanguy, Jean Miro, Rene Magritte, Alberto Giacometti, Marcel Duchamp, Andre Masson, and just about everyone else ever associated with the movement.

So don't be put off by those who would display their erudition at the expense of your fun. Guilty pleasure that it may be, this is one of the most entertaining exhibitions you are likely to see this season.

Leonor Fini

Joseph Cornell



Meret Oppenheim

Critiquing the Critics Redux:
The Co-op Controversy

Lawrence ("Larry") Rinder, the Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz Curator of Contemporary Art at the Whitney Museum of American Art, was one of the six curators of the 2000 Whitney Biennial and also curated the museum's Bitstreams exhibition in 2001. This year should be an even busier one for this distinguished art world personality: Besides being the chief curator of 2002 Whitney Biennial, which opened March 7 and continues through May 26, Rinder will also be the juror for Pleiades Gallery's 20th Annual Juried Exhibition, which opens on June 26 and will run through July 13 in the gallery's new location at 530 West 25th Street.

Rinder's involvement with the latter exhibition leads us to reflect on one of the more puzzling questions in today's art scene: If a curator of his stature thinks highly enough of a venue such as Pleiades to put the full weight of his considerable reputation behind it, why do so many members of the critical establishment—particularly those who write for The New York Times—consistently ignore exhibitions in artist-run galleries such as Pleiades?

This issue was raised but hardly resolved awhile back, when we participated in an Artists Talk on Art panel discussion entitled "What Makes a Co-op Gallery Successful." While many opinions on sundry matters were kicked around by the two gallery directors, two artists, and one writer on the panel, the one thing they all agreed upon was that cooperative galleries rarely, if ever, get reviewed by what is commonly referred to as "major media."

Since the panel discussion was recorded on a videotape that is still available from ATOA, no one has to take our word for some of the dispiriting allegations that were made by panelists and audience members about the New York Times in particular.

Painter Cecily Firestein, who has been a member of the Phoenix Gallery, the oldest New York co-op, since 1959, claimed that while the Times reviewed shows there regularly during the 1960s, in the past four decades they did so only twice to her knowledge.

"One of the artists that got reviewed happened to be the wife of the Times' business manager," Firestein added with a rueful grin.

Even more damning, and also recorded on the video, were comments by Barbara Kulicke, who stood up in the audience during the question and answer period following the panel discussion and identified herself as an artist and a member of the Prince Street Gallery, another well known co-op.

"Recently I called an old friend of mine, an art critic from the Times," Kulicke said, "because I wanted to hear from her why co-op galleries are not getting reviewed. And her answer was that there there's 'a wall,' ...join a commercial gallery or you're not going to get through.' And when I told her that this just isn't right she said, 'Well...what's 'right,' you know? Good luck!"

In fairness, one member of the Pleiades Gallery, veteran social realist painter Erika Weihs, did manage to get through the wall recently and get reviewed in the New York Times. In fact, the Times' review appeared shortly after a review of Weihs' exhibition was published in Gallery&Studio, and seemed to borrow liberally from ours. Not that we minded: We're always pleased when we can point the Times in the right direction, as we also did in the case of Corky Lee's photographic show at The Museum of Chinese in the Americas, in Chinatown, which the Times covered in a review remarkably close in tone and content to one that appeared first in these pages. Once again, no problem! In fact, they are more than welcome to take a hint from our review, elsewhere in this issue, of Ed Brodkin, another outstanding artist who exhibits at Pleiades Gallery and is long overdue to be discovered by "the newspaper of record."

At the same time, it isn't easy to have faith in a publication that purports to cover all the news that's fit to print, yet pointedly ignores significant cultural signals such as the recent rescue of WBAI radio, New York's only really noncommercial station (NYPR has too much corporate funding to qualify) by its listener sponsors.

WBAI, an award-winning Pacifica Foundation outlet long known for its uncompromising political and arts coverage, was seized last year in an illegal coup by a group of greedy media pirates, backed by certain of its board members, who apparently hoped to convert it to a commercial station. But a coalition of faithful listeners protested daily outside the station's Wall Street headquarters, filed lawsuits, and after a bitter, year-long struggle, were able to regain control of WBAI. In the upshot, canceled programming was restored and fired broadcasters were rehired.

This was a major victory for free speech, demonstrating how democracy can still work when a determined group of citizens decides to fight the system, and it should have been covered as important news story. Instead, it was afforded only nominal coverage by the Times, which spun it in two brief "human interest" items as a minor dispute between aging sixties activists and seemingly more reasonable members of the Pacifica National Board.

However, even this woefully neglected story was afforded more space than the Times has chosen to allot in recent years to the many gifted and significant artists who exhibit their work in co-op galleries. And we really have to wonder why, considering that even Barron's magazine, a bastion of business rather than hipness, was right on the money when it ran an article two years ago headlined: "Art Democracy: Artist-run co-ops are good for everyone but the snooty establishment."

Quoting critic Lawrence Alloway, the piece made the very important point that "artist-run exhibiting societies such as the French Salon or the British Royal Academy, open to members," have a long and honorable history, having "preceded the emergence of commercial galleries in the 1870s." The writer, Peter C. Du Bois, went on to record how the 10th Street Galleries of the 1950s made history by "focusing on American art, particularly abstracts, that weren't widely shown in commercial galleries."

Barron's being the sort of magazine that it is, the bottom line was: "The good news here for potential art buyers who are willing to make up their own minds about what they like, who buy with their eyes, not their ears, is the fact that quality art is available in co-ops at very fair prices."

More recently, artist-run galleries have been garnering support from other quarters as well. For example, Linda Handler, director of the Phoenix Gallery, which has remained in Soho while other co-ops have joined the exodus to Chelsea, informs us that the venerable venue was recently awarded a 2001-2002 Fund for Creative Communities Grant in the amount of $ 4000 by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council.

Handler, who has worked diligently on behalf of the gallery for several years, is delighted that the grant will enable the Phoenix to mount a major

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survey, to be titled "Leaps and Bounce," featuring emerging Asian American women artists. In a letter to the gallery, the LMCC hailed the upcoming show as an important contribution to "the richness of Manhattan's cultural landscape" that will "help strengthen local communities and contribute to the uniqueness of New York."

And, as we noted earlier, the fact that Lawrence Rinder, a curator praised by Maxwell L. Anderson, the director of the Whitney Museum, for his "talent, wisdom and energy," will be jurying Pleiades Gallery's Juried Exhibition this year also indicates that artist-run galleries are beginning to get at least some of the respect that they deserve. Now all that remains is for the Great Gray Times and others to finally catch up.

Theresa Bernstein in her New York studio in 1988

Theresa Bernstein (1890–2002)

We were saddened to hear from her art dealer Joan Whalen, of Joan Whalen Fine Art, 24 West 57th Street, about the recent death of the painter Theresa Bernstein at age 111. No, that is not a typo: Born in Philadelphia in 1890, Bernstein graduated from the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (now Moore College of Art) in 1911, and the following year moved with her family to New York City, where she studied at the Art Students League with William Merritt Chase. In 1919, she married the artist William Meyerowitz, with whom she lived in New York City and Gloucester, Massachusetts, until his death in 1981; and in the 1920s, she helped John Sloan to form the Society of Independent Artists.

As one of the youngest and one of the very few women among the group of urban realist painters later to be known as the Ashcan School, Bernstein attracted early attention with her vital, vigorously brushed cityscapes and genre scenes.

Bernstein's career took off in 1919, that tumultuous year in American life chronicled in John Dos Passos' famous novel, with a successful solo show at the Milch Gallery and a rave review in International Studio. Numerous other critically acclaimed solo and group exhibitions followed over the ensuing decades in prestigious venues, ranging from the the Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, Ohio, to The Jewish Museum and in New York City.

In 1991, the artist was honored with an exhibition entitled "Echoes of New York: The Paintings of Theresa Bernstein" at The Museum of the City of New York, and in 1998, 1999, and 2000, Joan Whalen Fine Art mounted three major retrospectives of her work over the past seventy years.

Over the years, Bernstein's subjects evolved with the times, from poignant scenes of soldiers saying their goodbyes to loved ones in 1914; to a Fourth of July celebration during World War II; to hippies and break dancers in more recent years.

She captured the spirit of each decade with characteristic sympathy and verve. Her early oils, such as "Dance Hall" (1911) and "Carnegie Hall" (1914) combine genre subjects with vibrant contrasts of light and dark reminiscent of the visionary loner Albert Pinkham Ryder. In paintings of the 1920s, such as "Saturday Night, Gloucester," and "Boys on the Deck," we begin to see elements of cubistic structuring, albeit combined with a coloristic freedom more akin to the Fauves, and muscular brushwork reminiscent of the Expressionists. By the 1940s, when she painted pictures on musical themes ranging from opera to jazz, such as "Don Carlos" and "Charlie Parker," she had already achieved the fluid synthesis of bold form, strong color, and slashing strokes characteristic of the mature style that culminates in such urban subjects of the mid seventies as "Bank Line."

While unbeholden to any particular branch of modernism, Bernstein synthesized elements of several different movements to forge her own unique style. In this sense, she was more adventurously attuned to the innovations of Modernism and evolved in a more complex manner than many of the better-known male painters of the Ashcan School who were among her early peers.

Yet, Theresa Bernstein never abandoned the essential humanism at the core of her vision. And while we can only wonder if her deep and abiding love for humanity contributed to her remarkable longevity, we can be fairly certain that it will help to make her work endure.

Stamos at Meisel and Other Surprises

Louis K. Meisel Gallery, at 141 Prince Street, is one of the true landmarks of Soho, featuring as its owner puts it, with characteristically unaffected bluntness, "fine art which is fun to look at and live with, which does not require lengthy explanations to understand and enjoy."

Meisel, who represents the well known realist painter turned sculptor Audrey Flack and the late, great pin-up artist Gil Elvgren, among other artists with solid reputations and outstanding technical skills (a criteria for being on the gallery roster), earned his place in contemporary art history when he coined the term "Photorealism."

Given his reputation for normally eschewing abstraction (except, occasionally, Abstract Illusionism, which requires trompe l'oeil) Meisel surprised us recently when he mounted "Theodoros Stamos (1922-1997)—Celebrating Six Decades of Painting."

This was a major posthumous retrospective of a painter who first came to widespread attention when he was included, along with Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and others, in a famous photo published in LIFE magazine in 1951. The picture was entitled "The Irascibles," because the artists in the glowering

Theodoros Stamos, "Adam," Louis K. Meisel Gallery

group portrait had recently protested against the Metropolitan Museum of Art for not showing American abstract painting of the type they were busy pioneering.

Although at age twenty-eight, Stamos was the youngest member of the group and looked it, even with the big black mustache he already sported, he is seated right up front, sharing pride of place with Rothko and Barnett Newman, an indication of the esteem in which he was held by his older colleagues. And their faith in the Greek-American prodigy was justified. Moving over the next several years from surrealist influenced biomorphic abstractions to a more open, gestural lyricism, Stamos was to become an important member of the New York School, with work in the collection of the Modern, the Whitney—and even that damnable Metropolitan!

Louis K. Meisel, who has always been something of an "irascible" in his own right, showing the kind of art he believes in and never giving a damn what was considered fashionable at any given moment, surprised but did not disappoint us with this beautiful and important retrospective exhibition.

* * *

Vincent Arcilesi's "Drawings: Portraits and Nudes," at 2/20 Gallery, 220 West 16th Street, gave a more intimate view of a leading realist painter best known for his mural scale, multi-figure oils on canvas. Arcilesi's exquisitely refined drawings in conte and pastel demonstrated the incisive draftsmanship that is the armature for all of his work.

Arcilesi, who lives and works in a loft near Ground Zero, also demonstrated considerable ability as writer in a moving first person account of 9/11, published in a recent issue of "Artists Proof," the newsletter of New York Artists Equity Association, in which his friend and fellow painter Jack Beal is quoted as saying, "We have to keep making art so that Osama bin Laden doesn't win."

* * *

Jan Wunderman, a veteran artist who has been exhibiting since the 1940s, showed recent paintings at Denise Bibro Fine Art, 529 West 20th Street. Wunderman's show was aptly entitled "Choice & Chance," since her large, lyrical abstractions in oils on canvas explore the challenge of "organizing disorganization" with flowing forms that vigorously overlap and interact to create compositions chock full of rhythm and

Vincent Arcilesi, 2/20 Gallery

Jan Wunderman, Denise Bibro Fine Art

Eve Ingalls, Soho 20

Monica Bernier, Prince Street Gallery

movement. An element of chance obviously enters into Wunderman's spontaneous working process. Nonetheless, it is the conscious choices that she makes on the spur of the moment in the act of painting that make her sinuously surging compositions work so splendidly.

* * *

At Soho 20 Chelsea, in its new location at 511 West 25th Street, Eve Ingalls' solo show "Unsheltered" featured a downright intimidating installation of her large sculptures in pigment and metal. Entering a room filled with Ingalls' towering totom-like configurations of weird white and gray biomorphic forms stacked almost to the ceiling, the viewer feels as though he or she has stepped right into one of Yves Tanguy's eerie surreal boneyards, where gargantuan object-creatures lurk and loom, spreading a sense of ineffable foreboding.

Eve Ingalls possesses a highly original sculptural sensibility, at once sensual and unnerving enough to make us wonder what she will come up with next.

* * *

Barbara Bachner is one of our most versatile and unpredictable artists, moving easily between visual and conceptual modes of expression, as in her recent mixed media installation "Camouflage, at Gallery@49, 322 West 49th Street. As the title indicates, the theme was concealment, subterfuge and hidden agendas, which Bachner explored through her use of a kind of camouflage material manufactured in East Germany during the Cold War, her own old, worn shoes, footprint reliefs on the gallery walls, and other odd elements which she layers or combines artfully. How people dealt with the doomsday atmosphere of Cold War paranoia and how it is mirrored in our present post 9/11 anxiety goes hand-in-hand with gender issues expressed wryly through domed shoe sculptures, pink army boots, and other ominous/funny fetish objects and material metaphors.

Barbara Bachner is an aesthetic provocateur who is not afraid to push your buttons—or even subvert your sense of humor—as long as she can make you think.

* * *

If you happened to pick up this issue close to our distribution date, April 2, we should alert you that the paintings and collages of Monica Bernier can still be seen at Prince Street Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, through April 6. Bernier's oils on canvas, particularly, combine elements of the surreal with an impressive painterly prowess. In a small but strong painting entitled "Group," for example, we see several intriguing forms lined up within a landscape. They have a monumental presence akin to the sculptures of Henry Moore, and indeed they are suggestive of human figures. Yet their baroque shapes bear little relationship to human anatomy. The fact that the landscape is painted more or less naturalistically, with cottony clouds drifting by in a brilliant blue sky and areas of verdant green alternating with patches of brown earth, creates a stark contrast, giving these vaguely figurative forms the startling appearance of extraterrestrial hitch-hikers glimpsed by the roadside. Monica Bernier, however, locks figure and ground into harmony by virtue of her technique of virtually carving every element of the composition out of thick, tactile strokes of oil pigment.

For its vigorous physical quality, Bernier's style has qualities in common with the late, New Image paintings of Philip Guston, while the surreal quality of her imagery also makes one think of Matta. Bernier, however, has her own offbeat vision, which makes this show well worth seeing.

* * *

Five Distinct Visions in Soho

Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, is known for presenting a varied roster of local and international artists. In recent months, this well known Soho venue mounted several successive shows that presented a number of striking, yet complementary, stylistic contrasts.

Lee, Wal-Chong

The Korean born painter Lee, Wal-Chong has evolved a personal visual language for celebrating the magic of daily life. Often Lee's small paintings are arranged in grids in the manner of filmic story boards. In them, the joys and tragedies of life are depicted in a narrative manner in line and color. Images pour forth in profusion: a plane crashing into the Twin Towers, couples making love, ships at sea, flowers, animals—literally everything under the sun, from the most tragic scenes to the most mundane, drawn with simplicity and grace, the line inscribed into pigment, as though etched with a sharp instrument. These simple narratives capture the flow of dailiness in all of our lives with a directness at once primitive and consummately sophisticated.

"In our daily life we confront with numerous personal ordeals because of the complex underlying emotions of life," Lee has stated. "We are tormented by conflicting feelings of good and evil, love and hate, pleasure and pain, anger and despair, and obsession and indifference. Then we have golden mean, a path which lies beyond the bipolar emotions and leads to peace and equilibrium of mind. I try to express these things in my paintings."

Along with narrative grids exploring subjects from the tragic to the erotic, Lee creates larger, quilt-like works in sewn fabric in which the fullness of life is expressed in more abstract terms, with brilliant rectangles of color or severely simplified animal and floral forms. Like Lucas Samaras, Lee, Wal-Chong is a unique artist who moves easily between very different mediums and modes of expression to capture the flow and movement of life and bring it into harmony with a unique sensibility and aesthetic identity. His work must be taken as a whole to get the full effect of his fertile creative imagination.

Gloria Ruiz Duzoglou

Gloria Ruiz Duzoglou, a painter born in Malaga, Spain, has lived in a variety of cultures and assimilated aspects of each into her work without sacrificing her own distinct cultural identity. In her most recent oils on canvas, Duzoglou explores the city, a subject that she imbues with great poetry in her palette of subdued blues and earth colors, enhanced by mysterious shadows and frosty white highlights. In one of her most poetic paintings, a flock of pigeons ascends against a backdrop of lower Manhattan buildings. In light of recent events one cannot help viewing their flight as Phoenix-like, a symbol of a great city's ability to rise above devastation, a theme that Duzoglou makes poignant with her bold composition, vigorous brushwork, and dynamic way with tones in the darker range.

In another strong painting, the Twin Towers are seen intact and bathed in beams of light as sailboats glide by, a moving memorial that, like all of G. Ruiz Duzoglou's work, conveys emotional impact while retaining formal power.

Ken Green

Ken Green is an artist from Minneapolis with a vibrant way with color and a dramatic way with figurative form. Green's figures are enveloped in an array of rainbow hues that lend them mystical auras in the series of large canvases that he calls "Ascension of the Fallen Heroes." In one such painting, several translucent figures, suggesting phantoms, rise above the prone figures of men in brilliantly colored garb lying prone in a field of rubble, reaching toward a shining orb at the top of the composition. Although the rainbow-clad victims are not wearing recognizable uniforms, they are obviously symbolic of the firefighters, police officers, and other rescuers who perished in the World Trade Center tragedy.

In other paintings as well, Green employs color intrepidly, with an unrestrained boldness, to convey the spiritual intensity that propels heroic human endeavor. Indeed, his figures, with their athletic physiques and colorful costumes, have the symbolic directness of comic book super heroes, although their expressively exaggerated gestures recall Michelangelo-esque grandeur and other classical strivings. There is also the hint of a Futurist influence in the swirling vortexes of color that the figures inhabit. However, the manner in which Ken Green assimilates these aspects of art history into his own style is original and refreshingly direct.

Helena M. Stockar

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 are a subject that will not be going away for quite some time. It seems only natural that contemporary artists will attempt to deal with the most traumatic event in recent American history. It is doubtful, however, that many will be as successful in capturing the spirit of heroism that 9/11 brought out in the best and bravest of our citizens as Helena M. Stockar.

Stockar is one of our most skillful proponents of what R.B. Kitaj calls "drawing-painting," in that much of her technique is linear. She draws with color in her oils on canvas, giving her work strong graphic thrust. In "Ground Zero," the large canvas that was the centerpiece of her exhibition, flowing rhythmical strokes suggest smoke billowing over clustered groups of rescuers searching through the rubble of the fallen Twin Towers.

While "Ground Zero" is a major statement that sweeps the viewer up in its whirlwind composition, smaller canvases such as "Firefighters" have a more intimate power akin to the American expressionism of Robert DeNiro senior. Stockar's energetic brush work, however, imbues her canvases with an emotional power all their own.

Stefan Kleinschuster

Stefan Kleinschuster paints very large figurative oils that appear to explore the complexity of the relationships between men and women, from tenderness to cruelty. Because of the dark, somewhat kinky, sexual suggestiveness of his work he is bound to be compared to Eric Fischl. However, although they do share certain similarities in terms of the drama they convey in their work, Kleinschuster is a much stronger painter. Indeed, his monumental nude and partially clothed figures are a lot closer in style to those of Lucian Freud; for like the older painter, Kleinschuster makes oil paint a sensual surrogate for flesh, employing juicy impastos to build up succulent, richly shadowed surfaces that fairly glow with light and life.

In the huge canvas, "Compendium Vitae," when the larger-than-life figure of a man raises his meaty arm above the prone form of a woman as though to strike her, the serene little smile on the woman's face suggests that this is an erotic game rather than an act of violence. In "Compendium Vitae III," the man who embraces a woman from behind has a shadowy, ghostly quality that contrasts sharply with her vibrant presence, suggesting that she is the anchor of their relationship. This impression is enhanced by the fact that while the woman is partially clothed in a bulky sweater, the man who clings to her appears infantile in his nakedness.

Kleinschuster's compositions possess an extraordinary momentum that springs from his ability to convey a host of psychological subtleties and emotional nuances in powerful painterly terms.

—Wilson Wong

Penumbra at Pace: Aspects of Reality and Dream

A good case can be made that it is counterproductive for artists' groups to segregate themselves according to either a figurative or abstract bias, since it can be interpreted as a reactionary stance that places the artists involved outside the mainstream—particularly in a period like the present one, when a healthy pluralism holds sway anyway. That said, "Penumbra at Pace University," an exhibition by The Penumbra Society for Representational Art at The Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts, 1 Pace Plaza, from April 1 through 28, is a show that anyone interested in art reflecting both reality and dreams should not miss.

The title of the group refers to "the partly shaded outer region of the shadow cast by an opaque object, especially that of the shadow cast by the earth or moon over an area experiencing a partial eclipse," and the intriguing sense of mystery that definition suggests is evident everywhere in this large and varied exhibition.

Ailene Fields, for example, is a well known sculptor and teacher whose figures invariably have a surreal quality. In both "Greenman II, Summer" a mythological head, and "Seeing is Believing," a graceful nude , glass eyes are combined with more traditional sculptural materials to create effects at once beautiful and unnerving.

In his oil "Mephisto's Waltz," David Derr depicts a brilliant red devil choreographing the terpsichore of an anthropomorphic crocodile and a blue horse in a smoky nocturnal landscape set in what appears to be some nether region of New Hades. Derr's meticulous style and expressive figural distortions lend the scene a slightly "bent" Boschian beauty.

Gina Novendstern's "Tribunal" is a frieze of headless nude figures in bonded bronze. The dark patina and emaciated quality of the figures evokes a death camp or other hellish situation, and also suggests that Novendstern is a humanist in the tradition of Leonard Baskin.

In a collage called "All the World's a Stage," Ann Lasusa combines figures from old line engravings and other arcane sources to create a surreal realm of gnomish personages and shifting perspectives. Lasusa has an impressive ability to make diverse elements merge in a coherent and evocative composition.

Sarah Katz, on the other hand, employs scattered elements effectively in her sculptural installation, juxtaposing a full figure with anatomical details that suggest fragments from antiquity. Katz's piece is called "The Dream Tune," and the poetic effect that she achieves with its dispersed elements lives up to the title.

Another gifted sculptor, Sally Weiss, also employed materials imaginatively in her piece, "The Juggler." Like Marisol, Weiss combines two dimensional drawing with their dimensional objects to create dynamic, visually witty contrasts.

Penny Dell employs interior spaces in her compositions to create her own intriguing contrasts. Dell's monoprints of empty rooms explore the tensions between representation and abstraction, perspective and the picture plane.

Then there is Barbara Lubliner, whose boxed sculpture "Hugs and Kisses" merges the real and the abstract in another manner. In Lubliner's piece, a woman's arms, appearing to embrace her own pregnant belly, create a strong formal statement.

The bas relief comes into its own in this exhibition in the work of three artists with distinctly different approaches:

Gloria Spevacek, an artist known for her sculptures of animals who also happens to be president of the Penumbra group, is represented here by one of her most fanciful pieces. Entitled "Marine Equis," Spevacek's relief depicts two romping sea horses in a beautifully balanced composition.

Yanka Cantor's relief is entitled "Silence," and features a crouching female nude. Cantor's graceful anatomical abbreviations lend her pieces a poetic brevity akin to that of Giacomo Manzu.

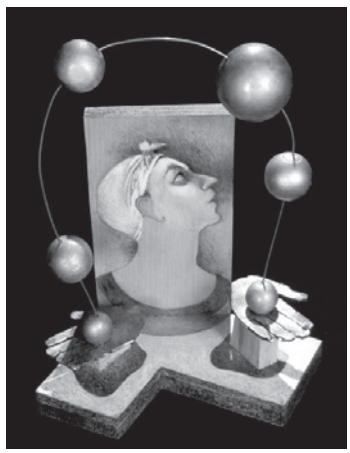
Then there is Martin Glick, whose "St. Serapion," simply by being enclosed within an ornate gold frame, combines elements of the bas relief and painting. Glick's piece is also notable for the artist's skillful handling of folds and draperies in the martyred monk's cowl.

By contrast, the sculptor Cari Clare projects a sinuous sexiness in the slenderly elongated figure she calls "Getting There." Like African tribal sculpture, albeit informed by a thoroughly contemporary sensibility, Clare's sculpture succeeds by virtue of its sleek formal brevity.

Although painters are a decided minority in this group, two final ones acquit themselves admirably: Girair Poladian is an expressionist whose nudes and portraits combine vibrant color areas with unique linear grace. Poladian's "Nude" turns the voluptuous female figure into a sensual arabesque, while "Boris" captures the character of a bearded man with calligraphic swiftness.

Ludlow Smethurst orchestrates a complex array of objects and patterns in realist still life compositions with remarkable resonance. Especially evocative is "New Shoes II," in which Smethurst combines elements that seem to tell a story with the succinctness of a poem by Emily Dickinson. —Dorothy K. Riordan

David Derr



Sally Weiss

Ludlow Smethurst

Ailene Fields

Sasha Linda Wasko's Spiritual Painterly Path

Not too long ago, especially in what are considered to be serious art circles, the mere mention of anything "spiritual" was scorned by formalists who had lost sight of the fact that abstract painting had its origins in the search for meanings beyond the physical world. In the late 1800s, abstract pioneers such as Kandinsky, Kupka, Malevich, and Mondrian had, to varying degrees, explored then-popular spiritual belief systems such as Theosophy and Rosicrucianism and sought to evolve a visual language for conveying aspects of the unseen world that they perceived to be the underpinnings of our daily reality.

It was an opposite quest than the forsaking of meaning that the formalists would insist upon in later decades, and a similar concern with spiritual content in abstract painting is being revived in the work of artists such as Sasha Linda Wasko, whose solo show was recently seen at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, in Soho.

"Peace, I feel, starts at developing my own internal potential to the fullest," Wasko has stated in relation to the personal philosophy that informs her work. "Each and every one of us as one person has the potential to affect others and perhaps many others. Our lives are filled with positive and negative thoughts. We are surrounded by choices on how to reach our quest through use of soft or hard powers. The challenge is to orchestrate this noise and center it on truth; this is my mission."

Although thoroughly contemporary in their immediacy, Wasko's oils clearly belong to the tradition of Malevich and Kandinsky. At the same time, Wasko has also taken certain cues from Abstract Expressionism. Her best paintings allude to landscape and even, at times, to architectural structures within a landscape, without making such references specific.

There is also a sense in Wasko's compositions of the elements—of wind and light and movement, expressed with a combination of geometric and organic forms, enlivened by vigorous gestural elements . Wasko's way with luminous color, which she employs to create impressive chromatic clarity, and sharply articulated form, adds to the overall dynamism that activates her compositions. Her pictures appear to depict an internal world rather than the external landscape that the eye sees; and yet the rhythmical thrust of her compositions is such that it convincingly evokes a sense of a natural energy and light.

"Power of Dialogue"

The spiritual force underlying the paintings of Sasha Linda Wasko is undeniable and inseparable from their success, for the numinous quality in her work lends it a depth that skirts decoration and goes far beyond the superficial attributes on which some abstract painters rely for their effects. At the same time, even while striving to apprehend the unseen, Wasko produces paintings that possess an exhilarating formal power and lyrical sweep.

—Robert Vigo

Masques and Fetishes: The Art of Stephen J. Ballance

Like the late Robert Mapplethorpe, the Michigan-based photographic artist Stephen J. Ballance finds a similar sensuality in floral subjects and the unclothed human figure. And while Ballance has exhibited compositions centered on flowers alone, as seen in a print from his "La Nature Morte" series exhibited a few years ago at the Dennos Museum Center, some of his most compelling images are those in which floral forms and female nudes are featured in the same picture. In other recent pictures, too, Ballance adds masks, angel wings, and other props to lend his pictures of nudes mythological and symbolic qualities that the artist has stated "reference concepts such as healing and redemption."

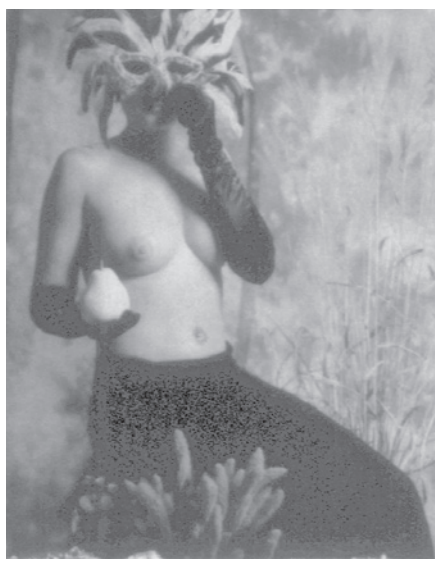
In his recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, Ballance exhibited a powerful series of his Polaroid transfer prints. These works are created through a painstaking process in which an image photographed on Polaroid film is cut apart before it can fully develop and the portion containing the dyes is pressed onto dampened watercolor paper. The image is then reworked on a computer, which enables Ballance to achieve sumptuous painterly effects, before printing the final image out as a Giclee print.

The resulting pictures have the coloristic subtlety of watercolors combined with the imagistic specificity of photography, as seen in one composition where long-stemmed pink tulips appear to sprout from the torso of a nude woman whose body has seemingly metamorphosed into a shapely vase. In another picture a woman wearing a lacy bustier and cradling three large flowers in one arm wears a black head-scarf and a metallic bird-mask with a long pointed beach.

While the previous picture was both sexy and lyrical, this more darkly psychological image verges on the grotesque, simultaneously suggesting one of Goya's Spanish Court portraits and Joel-Peter Witken's altered photographs depicting various freakish personages.

Somewhere between the two, in terms of being both fanciful and sensual, is an image of a bare-breasted woman holding an elaborately feathered mask to her face with one hand and a large pear in the other. She is wearing black elbow gloves and standing near what appears to be an especially phallic plant, its many fronds jutting up from the bottom of the picture like a bouquet of erect penises.

The same feathered mask and black elbow gloves are featured in yet another picture in Ballance's "Masque" series, here on a gracefully posed nude model with a boldly patterned cloth draped over one leg. This composition also features a bunch of flowers with long, sinuous petals that rhyme visually with the feathers decorating the model's mask.



Polaroid Transfer by Stephen Ballance

Here, as in all of the pictures in Ballance's "Masque" series, the odd props that he chooses to juxtapose with the nude women projects an erotic fetishism that is fully equal to that in the surrealist photographs of Man Ray. Indeed, it is in this exalted company, as well as that of the aforementioned Mapplethorpe, that the photographs of Stephen J. Ballance belong.

—Lawrence Downes

WSAC Group Show: A Study in Complementary Contrasts

"The Harmony of Contrast" is a title that could seem oxymoronic if not for how effectively the recent exhibition, curated by artist Joyce Lynn for the West Side Arts Coalition, proved its point. For the show, at Broadway Mall Community Center on the center island at 96th Street and Broadway, was remarkable for its diverse range of subjects and materials, yet the contrasts that it presented were ultimately complementary.

Figurative painter Ernesto Camacho, Jr. was represented by a large acrylic on canvas of a subway scene in which a beautiful, elegantly dressed young woman, seated between two unsavory-looking male passengers, balances a large pumpkin in her lap. Although wings are nowhere in evidence, one suspects she may be an angel, since a subtle aura emanates from the figure that bathes the dreary subway car in her radiance.

James Glass is an artist whose innovative use of mixed media lends his work a tactile appeal to match is imagistic power. Here, Glass was represented by a group of strong compositions on the theme of 9/11: A rugged cross with police and firefighter's hats affixed rising out of textural rubble; a toy plane crashing into a map of Pennsylvania with real pine branches collaged onto it; a weeping face of Lady Liberty, and other jarring subjects.

Janusz Jaworski is an intimist whose tiny, poetic abstractions in watercolor explore inner worlds. Jaworski possesses the singular ability to create a compelling mindscape and evoke a mood with a few simple kite-like shapes set against pristine white grounds or other faint forms afloat on luminous veils of color.

Joyce Lynn, the show's curator, takes a direct approach to landscape in works in acrylic and oil pastel that depict light-filled rustic scenes with breathtaking boldness and vigor. Especially appealing here was Lynn's painting of a road winding through a brilliant red shed, set against a vibrant blaze of autumnal trees.

Peter Campione is an artist with a whimsical view of the animal kingdom. Chimps, horses, bears, penguins, hummingbirds and other creatures cavort happily among fanciful flowers in Campione's bright, upbeat acrylic paintings, for which one is tempted to coin the term Zoological Surrealism.

In the oil paintings of Byung Sook Jung classically endowed female nudes bathed in golden light are seen in dreamy interiors where gilded picture frames and other objects gleam out of darkness. Jung's atmospheric paintings have the feeling of remembered dreams or situations one step removed from reality.

Frequent WSAC exhibitor Carole Whitton was also well represented in this show by two large, characteristically bold watercolors. Especially exciting was Whitton's painting of two women bathers watching a large wave roll in, the figures reflected in the blue and green water, the composition captured with snapshot immediacy.

By contrast, Arlene Sheer paints intimate, delicately tinted watercolors that look like scenes from Tolkien's "Middle Earth," even when she is depicting an actual landscape in Spain. Mountains, castles, caves, and other elements take on a fanciful fairy tale quality when transmuted by Sheer's whimsical sensibility.

Eleanor Gilpatrick has her own uniquely romantic vision, which comes across most mysteriously in a small oil wash painting on paper. Called "The Viewfinder," Gilpatrick's composition places the tiny figure of a woman in an old fashioned dress in a landscape, apparently gazing off through the gadget named in the title.

Wendy White, on the other hand, paints monumental figures with a down to earth presence, as seen in her large acrylic on canvas of two women. Gazing out at the viewer as though he or she were an intruder, clutching towels to their breasts, the two figures, painted by White in hasty, scumbled strokes are nearly as forbidding as Leon Golub's mercenaries.

The polymorphous ink and watercolor drawings of Camilla Wier recognize no boundaries between the inner and outer world. Beautiful female faces sprout wings or morph into floral forms and other fanciful things in Wier's delicately drawn visions, which recall the fluid intricacy of psychedelic art, as well as such symbolists as Odilon Redon.

Floral forms also figure prominently in the acrylic paintings of Astrith Deyrup. However, Deyrup employs them for their abstract qualities, creating bold, luminously colored compositions in which the sensual contours of large blooms fill the canvas, suggesting spiritual energies as much as organic matter.

Then there is Linda Lessner, who moves easily between atmospheric landscapes and seascapes in oil and pastel to mixed media works with conceptual elements. Particularly interesting among the latter is an undersea scene incorporating bits of glass, weeds, dried flowers and a cryptic note, saying, "Stop the medicine. Have I cried for you?"

Curator Joyce Lynn succeeded splendidly in making this varied yet coherent group show live up to its oxymoronic title.

—Marie R. Pagano

The Transcendent Blue Wet-Dreams of Hideo Mori

By far the most significant accomplishment of the postmodern era has been its critique of the Eurocentric assumptions that have defined the canon of modernism for more than a hundred years. Japan, where there has been a vital and varied avant garde from the postwar era to the present, has been one of the major beneficiaries of this newly enlightened attitude. Since the mid-1980s, numerous surveys of contemporary Japanese art have been mounted by important museums and galleries in the United States and Europe. This has had a beneficial effect for Japanese artists in their homeland as well. As their stock has risen in the international art world, artists once ignored by a conservative cultural establishment have been embraced as national treasures.

Few, however, are as deserving of that designation as Hideo Mori, one of Japan's most distinguished and revered painters, who has exhibited in the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, the Tokyo National Museum of Modern art, and numerous other prestigious cultural institutions the world over.

Curated by James Cavello, Mori's recent exhibition, "Blue Infinity," at Westwood Gallery, 578 Broadway, came as a revelation to many who mentally equate contemporary Japanese art with its more publicized permutations, such as the neo-Pop neophytes of the "Super Flat" school, who paint banal images of bug-eyed cartoon characters in unmodulated primary hues.

In contrast to those flash-in-the-pan hip hop artists geared to Japan's imitative youth culture, Mori, who was born in Mie Prefecture in 1935, is a mature painter whose meticulously refined large realist canvases evoke figures in misty blue dreamscapes suggesting a mysterious and complex inner world. The rarefied atmospheres and incongruous figurative juxtapositions in Mori's paintings make it possible to liken him most immediately to such surrealist masters as Rene Magritte and Paul Delvaux. Like the former artist, Mori creates brilliant visual metaphors and like the latter, he bathes the nude female figure in nocturnal auras that evoke the sensation of vividly erotic wet-dreams. However, Mori generally works on a larger, more contemporary scale than either of those two Belgian easel painters. The engulfing dimensions of his canvases, combined with their severely limited palette of mostly blue monochromes, and the luminous refinement of his paint surfaces, achieved with an airbrush, lends his compositions an impressive visual power and physical presence.

Mori's use of an airbrush, a tool formerly associated with slick illustration that he has been largely responsible for elevating in a fine art context makes his paintings akin in technique to Salvador Dali's description of his own pictures as "hand-painted dream photographs." In fact, Mori has said of his process, "I start copying as if I am taking a photograph." But as James Cavello astutely observed in his curator's statement for the exhibition catalog, "Whether realist or not, painters cannot move forward unless seeing through their own eyes." And what Hideo Mori sees is invariably filtered through his highly selective vision and transmogrified by his singular sensibility until it conforms to what the artist, referring to himself in the Dali-esque third person (a sure sign of a man with a healthy creative ego), terms "the invisible worlds of Mori."

"The engulfing dimensions of his canvases, combined with their severely limited palette of mostly blue monochromes, and the luminous refinement of his paint surfaces, achieved with an airbrush, lends his compositions an impressive visual power and physical presence."

That last phrase is especially significant because for all his kinships to the surrealists, Hideo Moei does not avail himself of the familiar, timeworn props of surrealism; nor does he traffic in imagistic incongruity for its own sake to make metaphysical gag cartoons in the manner of Magritte. Rather, he depicts an inner world with its own inimitable logic. It is a realm suffused by blue, the hue that, as Donald Kuspit pointed out in an essay on Mori, Kandinsky called "the typically heavenly color."

One might also add that blue is a color often associated with eroticism, as in the phrase "blue movie," and that this tantalizing tension between the spiritual and the sexual is also an essential element of Hideo Mori's artistic vision. Surely it is apparent in a painting such as "After Goya," in which we see a perfectly copied version of the Spanish master's " Maja Desnuda" reclining in her familiar pose on her ornate divan and glancing at another female nude. In contrast to Maja's classically full figure, the second nude is a markedly more contemporary type of beauty, possessed of that aerobicized slenderness peculiar to women today, as she raises her arms as though to unclasp a necklace, showing her firm young buttocks to the viewer. While the spiritual—or at very least the metaphysical—is hinted at in the bit of blue curtain mysteriously emerging from the blue sky behind the figures, there is something decidedly more down-to-earth in the knowing gaze that the reclining Maja casts over the nudity of her nubile companion...But, then again, who can say with any degree of certainty that desire itself is not a facet of our spiritual striving?

Although some of the figures in Mori's paintings appear to be living beings, while others are obviously statues from antiquity, all of them are equally drained of fleshly color. Yet, rather than robbing the figures of life, the pervasive whiteness creates a sense of ambiguity that has a converse effect, making the statues, too, come alive as though by some supernatural, Pygmalian-like wizardry. And although many of Mori's models are Caucasian rather than Asian, the exaggerated, marble-whiteness of their complexions also suggests the almost ghostly pallor that geishas and Japanese noblewomen would heavily powder themselves to attain, just as the luminous blue hues in Mori's paintings have been likened to the precise clear blue in Oriental ceramics and tiles.

Surely this bloodless pallor with which Mori imbues his figures, coupled with the unearthly blues that complement it so exquisitely, reaches a sort of apex in the canvas entitled "A Woman by Lakeside." In this major canvas, an almost phosphorescently glowing white nude appears to have emerged like some shapely sea mammal or beached mermaid from a body of blue water. She looms monolithically, glistening, all but dwarfing the lake, the desolate surrounding landscape, and a sky pregnant with white clouds and gray mists that hover like shrouds. Her damp white hair hangs limply as seaweed, as she curls up in a near-fetal manner, probing with the fingers of one hand a dark, womb-like opening in the moist earth along the shoreline. One could read all manner of symbolism into such an image; yet, since we are more concerned here with aesthetics than Freudian analysis, why belabor a beautiful dream with tedious interpretations?

In other paintings, such as "Homage to Man Ray" and "Facing the City," female nudes appear in other surreal situations. In the former canvas, a slender young woman reclining in a nocturnal landscape gazes up, as though roused from her

Hideo Mori "A Woman by Lakeside," acrylic on canvas, at Westwood Gallery, 578 Broadway.

dreams by a vision of feminine lips hovering in the sky above the tree line like a flying saucer; in the latter, two apparently real nude women stand among ceramic sculptures of Chinese soldiers from antiquity, gazing at a distant, smoke-shrouded vista of the New York city skyline. Noticeably absent are the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center.

Although couched in his characteristically dream-like manner, "Facing the City" is this Japanese painter's tribute to a city that he is said to deeply love. Indeed, in the wake of the September 11 tragedy, Mori also created an affecting lithograph entitled "Peace Protector," in which a classical head hovers like a cloud above the same skyline, here with the Twin Towers affectingly restored. Out of the edition of 200 prints, fifty were designated to be donated as gifts and the remaining prints were to be sold, with the entire proceeds to be donated to the "I Love New York Art Benefit." The artist and Westwood Gallery also earmarked proceeds from the sales of selected paintings in the exhibition to be donated to the same charitable organization.

This generous gesture of support for our grievously wounded city says something about the character of Hideo Mori, who is known for his sensitive, highly emotional personality. Margarite Almeida, an attractive and articulate woman who is James Cavello's partner in life, as well as in Westwood Gallery, tells an anecdote that gives one a hint of Mori's attachment and loyalty to his friends. Recently, when the couple went on a vacation to Lake Tahoe and James was injured in a skiing accident, Mori, who was in Japan at the time, was so distraught at the news that he fell into despair and went on a drinking binge. Although Mori speaks no English and Cavello speaks no Japanese, the two men had formed such a deep and mutually affectionate bond that the artist refused to sober up until he had been assured that the dealer's injury was not life-threatening or permanent.

That life and art are interminably intermingled in Mori's concerns is reflected in those paintings in which Chinese, Greek, or Roman statues substitute for the human figure, as seen in "Uneasy Retrospection," which features three partially eroded female torsos set like classical columns against a vibrant blue sky, and "Rush Hours," in which sculpted heads from ancient times to the modern, emerge from a crowd of commuters. Here, the fact that the human faces are blurred, while the stone heads are rendered with photorealist clarity, seems to suggest that only art can bring the world into proper focus and provide a promise of immortality.

In "L'Angelus in Blue Sky After Monet," a painting that rivals Mark Tansey's postmodern narratives for its subtle visual wit, Mori makes another intriguing, albeit characteristically oblique, comment on the relationship between art and life. Here, the famous painting by Millet of two peasants, a man and a woman praying in a field, is suspended mysteriously against one Mori's transcendent blue skies, enlivened by wispy white clouds. In front of the large canvas in its ornate frame stand a casually dressed contemporary couple. Although the two trendies sport well-fitting jeans and appear to be solid from the waist down, their upper bodies and heads dissolve in white light, as they assume postures similar to those of the figures in the painting.

Whether Hideo Mori is suggesting that the modern couple is more enlightened, or simply more ethereal, than the earthy peasants in Millet's painting, is just one among many intriguing issues raised by this eternally engaging contemporary master.

—Ed McCormack

Dieter Obrecht: A German Artist's Universal Concerns

The German-born artist Dieter Obrecht, who has been exhibiting extensively throughout Europe and elsewhere since the early 1970s, has a varied history. Like his great predecessor Joseph Beuys, Obrecht, who emigrated to Greece in 1992, then moved to London in 1998, has extended his creative activities well beyond the gallery wall. Most recently, he has been involving himself with the mass media in various ways, embarking on specialized teaching projects, and even dabbling in spiritual diplomacy by "meeting with the Dailai Llama to present him with a painting about the political/human rights situation in Tibet."

For the past two years, Obrecht has also worked as an art director and designer for a Japanese jazz-rock band in Osaka, as well as creating digital images for record companies, and providing Internet based free education as resource for beginners in art history—all in keeping, apparently, with his broad based philosophy and vision of the artist as an all-around shaman/communicato/scholar in the Beuysian tradition.

This deliberate, theoretical approach figures into Obrecht's activities as a painter, as well. His work has been divided into three distinct phrases. From 1973 to 1980, he explored what he calls "Neo-Surrealism," creating metaphysical compositions of "fictional realities" exploring the concept of time. From the early to late nineties, he concerned himself with digital computer art, employing technology to explore the connections between so-called "virtual reality" and personal reality. And from 1999 to the present, Obrecht has been exploring Abstract Expressionism, albeit from a postmodern perspective, which he explains involves "studying the works of leading abstract painters with a strong emphasis on those of the German artist Gerhard Richter" and "researching the relationship and connections between abstract and figurative painting in an effort to arrive at a marriage of the two."

For his most recent exhibition, "re(e)volution," at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, in Soho, Obrecht did an abrupt shift prompted by the events of September 11.

"I changed my planned theme for the exhibition and the paintings," the artist wrote in a statement accompanying the show. "The paintings now on display for me represent a visual transformation of inner conflict where ethical values and everyday reality are colliding. My paintings are a 2-dimensional place for an open dialog about self-destruction, a downward trip on which mankind probably is. They echo a story, the story of my soul-pain, a sadness to be witnessed of what people are able to do and are doing to each other. This artistic expression is applied with an intention to provide enough space to develop (and encourage) the viewer's own interpretation and fantasy into my work. Therefore, in an effort not to dilute a fragile moment of sensibility, I do not provide any obvious titles."

The untitled paintings in Dieter Obrecht's show, are at once lyrical and powerful, conveying a hint of emotional complexity—if not to the degree that the artist may intend, judging from the ponderousness of his statement. For, in truth, one would not really be able to determine the impetus for the paintings strictly on the visual evidence at hand. However, Obrecht's statement does shed light on the underlying forces that inform his overall compositions of vertical textured strokes on vibrant color fields, which stand quite handsomely on their own as hermetic expressions of private angst translated into striking visual terms. In the final analysis, while Dieter Obrecht is an articulate artist with a strong conceptual commitment and his theories are certainly relevant, the bottom line is that his paintings, at once gestural and meditative, speak eloquently for themselves.

–Bela Miklos

Kim, Myung-Sik: A Painter's Haunting Sense of Place

The longing for the place of one's origins is one of the most basic and bittersweet of all human emotions. Kim, Myung-Sik, a painter and college art professor from Korea, grew up in a small town called Kodegi, which completely vanished over the years due to creeping modernization. This "ghost town" of memory was the subject of some of the most affecting paintings in Kim's recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, in Soho.

Kim, Myung-Sik is a lyrical expressionist whose vibrant palette and fluid gestural style effectively evoke a variety of moods. His acrylic paintings on Oriental paper have a joyous sense of freedom that is almost childlike, yet they are informed by a sophisticated and mature sensibility, in subjects ranging from Central Park, in New York City, with tall buildings rising above brilliant multicolored trees to the landscape and small dwellings of Kodegi.

In his memory-paintings of Kodegi, Kim combines cultural nostalgia and a deeply felt sense of place with a strong sense of abstract design and a bold use of color. In one painting in the series a pagoda-like house appears in swift red outline in a large, rectangular area of brilliant yellow brushed onto the paper in broad strokes. It is juxtaposed with a bright explosion of floral shapes in red, green, and yellow hues that

"Hometown, Kodegi Hill"

suggest a bouquet. The mood evoked is at once gay and funereal. The flowers, after all, are simply flowers, and unaware that they are participating in an elegy. So the overall feeling of the compositional is finally more celebratory than elegiac . There is the sense of a cherished childhood memory, an effect enhanced by Kim's fresh approach to form and color. In this regard, Kim can be compared to such contemporary American expressionists as George McNeil and Jay Milder, who adopt the directness of children's paintings to invest their pictures with an adult depth of feeling.

In another painting in the series simply entitled "Hometown, Kodegi Hill," in contrast to the sunnier hues in the previous composition, Kim employs a somewhat more somber palette. Vigorously brushed strokes of gray, blue, and black are massed at the center of the composition to convey the sense of a landscape viewed through darker mists of memory, with the surrounding areas of the white paper left bare. Although this compositional spareness is a feature of much Asian art, here it serves to suggest a sense of isolation, of how a melancholy nostalgia often seems to exist in a kind of void, apart from all that makes up the present and the daily events of one's life.

The visual information in another painting in the series is considerably more specific, even while the composition is abstractly schematized, with the outlines of small dwellings and foliage scrawled loosely over roughly rectangular areas of subdued color. In yet other compositions, however, Kim treats similar landscape subjects in a more buoyant manner, blocking in the various elements in bright primary hues accented by a lively linear calligraphy of strokes and dashes.

In the latter paintings Kim, Myung-Sik, who has exhibited widely in his native Korea and whose work is in numerous public and private collections, seems to suggest how even the most haunting memories are invariably acompanied by an irrepressible sense of joy.

—Marie R. Pagano

Celebrating African-American Art

This year, artist Dee Winfield curated the West Arts Coalition's annual Black History Month exhibition at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street. Entitled "L.I.F.E. (Looking into the Fine Arts Experience)," the show rallied together a diverse group of artists to herald, in the curator's words, "the Black experience in figure and form."

Winfield herself did so with a large canvas in oil and graphite called "Reading 'Closed Doors.' " It depicted a stately, shapely woman seated in a chair reading a book in the nude. The unfettered reader was rendered in charcoal on bare canvas, while the cityscape in the window was painted in full color. One might be tempted to view the monochromatic figure on the colorful background in terms of Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man," as a symbolic reflection of the Black experience in White America. Or else one could simply appreciate the picture for its visual contrasts. In either case, Winfield is an accomplished painter whose work invariably raises intriguing questions.

Elton Tucker, on the other hand, spells out his intentions with upbeat texts such as "Have Faith" and "You Inspire Me" stenciled onto portraits of proud, attractive African Americans set against energetic, graffiti-like surfaces. Tucker's work, at once funky and elegant, combines positive propaganda with a lively approach to form and color.

Frequent WSAC exhibitor Mikki Powell revealed characteristic deadpan wit in her winking self portrait on a box of "Quaker Hominy Grits," as well as in another acrylic on canvas of a man in an argyle sweater and wide-brimmed fedora cooling it with a bottle of Heinekin on an inner city stoop.

Bernice Simms put formal brevity to different purposes in "Green Dress," a gracefully composed oil of an arabesque-like figure limned in a bold neo-fauvist manner akin to Milton Avery. Vibrant color areas were also featured in another painting by Simms of two women having lunch in an ornate setting around a vase of flowers.

Carol Maria Weaver showed two large mixed media paintings on wood in which joyful dancing figures were interpreted in a strong semi-abstract style. Weaver's paintings were semi-abstract, yet expressed a strong sense of character with their flowing contours and the figures' expressive features and buoyant gestures.

Another ubiquitous exhibitor, Jack Dittrick, contributed a dynamic relief painting entitled "Venus Williams," capturing the incomparable grace of the great athlete loping across a green tennis field on which she cast her long, lovely shadow.

The large, emblematic acrylic paintings of Stuart McClean, whose work can also be seen at the Simmons Gallery, a new venue in Harlem, adopt certain characteristics of African sculpture in contemporary terms. McClean's colorfully clad, silhouetted figures have a frieze-like flatness, vibrant colors, and kinetic sense of movement.

Stuart McClean, "Chit Chat"

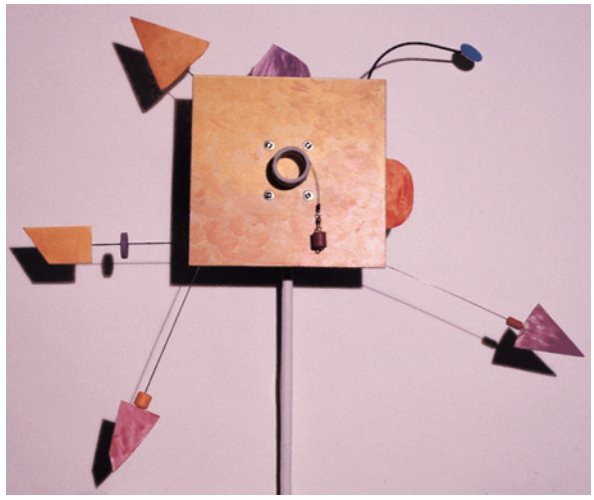
By contrast, a serene stillness distinguished an oil by Trevlin Jeffrey, in which a monumental female figure with an Afro wreathing her head like a halo raises her arms to drink heartily from a gold vessel that the title tells us is the "Cup of Life."

Danii Oliver is an artist who can make the folds in clothing and other inanimate details as expressive as facial expressions. Oliver's "My Sista" showed the fond relationship of two young women in miniskirts posed in front of a skillfully articulated stone wall, while another oil captured the despair of a young man unlucky in love, his woeful presence looming before a screen door.

Amid the more socially engaged works in this show, Ashley Peek's paintings were anomalously fanciful. "Mushroom Faeries" and "Mischief" both featured delicate winged nudes cavorting in whimsical natural settings, demonstrating not only Peek's unique vision, but the rich diversity of styles and subjects in African American art.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Arensberg's Soulful Contraptions Mirror Our Human Klutziness



"Away to the Circus" 22" x 27" mixed media

Humor is one of the most misunderstood components of art, for all too often critics and others fail to realize how serious it can be at its core. Leda Arensberg makes this point as effectively as any artist in recent memory with a work called "After 9/11," which can be seen in her solo show "Art in Motion," at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25 Street, from April 2 through 20. (There will be a reception for the artist on Saturday, April 6, from 3 to 6 PM.)

Like most of the pieces in Arensberg's show, "After 9/11" is a kinetic sculpture, created with wood, wire, beads, and sundry other odd materials mounted on a small motor on the wall. From the edges of a central rectangular form, several lengths of wire protrude in different directions like spindly limbs. Affixed to these are whimsically shaped forms and beads that slide up and down the wires when the motor is turned on and the piece is set in motion. The whole thing starts to shake and quake and the sliding beads make clicking and clacking noises as the contraption gains momentum and its various components start to revolve. Like most of Arensberg's recent kinetic sculptures, with the exception of one or two small ones in shades of industrial gray, "After 9/11" is quite colorful. But the fact that the predominant colors here are red, while, and blue, coupled with the pregnant title, lends this particular piece a peculiar poignancy.

For all its cacophonous kineticism, the piece has an elegiac quality. It seems not so much an antic Yankee Doodle Dandy satire of jingoism as a sympathetic statement about what a sadly ineffectual, if understandable, response patriotic flag waving is to the anger and grief that we all feel in the wake of a tragic event that has changed our lives irrevocably. There are even small mirrors affixed to the sculpture, seemingly inviting introspection. Into a subject as serious as Hell, Arensberg's piece introduces a note of gentle humor to salve our sense of national impotency.

In other works dealing with subjects of a less grave nature, Arensberg is freer to indulge in flights of fancy that combine a whimsy reminiscent of Paul Klee, Joan Miro, and Alexander Calder with elements akin to Jean Tinguely's Dada-influenced kinetic "metamecanique" assemblages.

Pieces such as "Away to the Circus," and "Seven Sisters," for example, are a sheer delight, with bright colors and shapes suggesting deconstructing playing cards. Hearts, spades, arrow heads, circles and other intriguing symbols jut out from the tips of bouncing wires, on which beads slide and click back and forth, or boing this way and that on wobbling springs. The overall effect is of barely controlled chaos.

That the low-tech motors Arensberg employs are not always consistent, tending to quicken or slow unpredictably, may vex the artist but only adds to the fun for the viewer, giving the pieces a touching sense of fallibility that oddly humanizes them. This is humorous and refreshing in an age of sometimes intimidating computer science and technological wizardry. The Humpty Dumpty precariousness of these quaintly mechanized, strangely beautiful objects, seems to speak reassuringly to our common human klutziness, as if to say, "Don't worry—nobody's perfect!"

This general sense of optimism pervades Arensberg's oeuvre. It was present in her pristine early boxed constructions, some of which included springs and shapes similar to those in her present works, as well as in the delicately delineated ink drawings of trees that she showed in the same venue in the 1994. Although the wires sticking out from Arensberg's new moving sculptures could suggest abstract versions of the delicate limbs in some of her arboreal drawings, while the colorful forms on the tips of them could suggest stylized leaves, they could just as easily be seen as the limbs of stylized human or animal figures.

Yet, perhaps it is better to view these zanily evocative configurations as discrete life forms unto themselves, possessing their own peculiar vitality and an inimitable soulfulness that makes us recognize them, for all their strangeness, as fellow creatures—and smile!

And like such worthy predecessors as the aforementioned Calder, Klee, and Miro, Leda Arensberg appears to recognize that a smile can be an appropriate response to serious art. Indeed, because a smile, like a sneeze or sob, is involuntary, it just may be the most sincere response of all.

—Ed McCormack

Ina Wishner's Watercolors Limn the Luminous Landscape

A recent review of the work of J.M.W. Turner pointed out, correctly, that the great English painter's landscapes were nineteenth century forerunners of Color Field painting. Other relationships to abstract painting, albeit of more structural varieties, can also be seen in the work of John Sell Cotman, another British painter of roughly the same period, known primarily for his work in watercolor and sepia wash.

It is to the latter painter that one can compare the contemporary artist Ina Wishner, whose exhibition of landscapes in watercolor and pastel, "At Home and Abroad," was featured recently at The Pen and Brush, Inc., 16 East 10th Street.

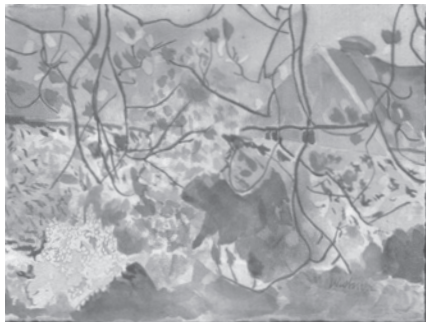
Although she is a contemporary American artist based in Port Chester, New York, Ina Wisher has mastered what has come to be known as classic English watercolor technique. Like Cotman, Wishner often employs washes of translucent color to render the landscape with a bold simplicity that verges on abstraction, yet retains the natural character of her subjects.

Wishner's direct, unaffected style is a refreshing contrast to much of the stylistic strategizing that one sees today. While taking her inspiration directly from nature, rather than from a selfconscious desire to cultivate postmodern sophistication, she reveals her innate savvy, nonetheless, in the splendid organization of her pictures.

In the aquarelle entitled "Sun Striking the Cliff," for example, the landscape is evoked in loose washes of color that are casual yet controlled. Layers of clouds, mountains, and fields are laid down in flowing horizontal bands that function brilliantly in both pictorial terms and as abstract design. Through her lyrical tonal modulations, Wishner fills the entire composition with a sense of light and air.

The title of another work, "Sussex Downs Near Rodmell," tips one off that Wishner is familiar with the English countryside, whether or not she is consciously influenced by the British watercolor tradition. Here, however, the boldness of her paint handling—particularly the way she captures the lay of the land in what appear to be single strokes of a broad brush, as well as the five bold dashes of yellow in the foreground that function more as abstract flourishes than descriptive elements—can also be likened to modern American watercolor masters such as John Marin and Charles Burchfield.

Indeed, in the process of evolving her own distinctive style, Wishner appears to have assimilated techniques from a wide variety of sources, including classical Chinese ink painting. This seems especially apparent



"Pink Magnolia, Sissinghurst"

in "Pink Magnolia—Sissinghurst," for while the subject is ostensibly British, the slender branches bearing brilliant red buds that dominate the foreground are rendered with a bold linear grace that is decidedly Asian.

As a pastelist, Ina Wishner also reveals impressive facility, as seen in "Spectacular Sky—Sussex," where white clouds and yellow streaks of light are captured in staccato diagonal strokes, set against a vibrant blue sky.

It is in her watercolors, however, that this gifted artist reveals most dynamically her ability to assimilate elements from several different traditions and employ them, in her own unique manner, to conduct a lively dialogue with nature. —Maureen Flynn

Galleries 2002: an overview

The historical influence and current role of New York City's galleries and museums are indisputable. Without them the city would not have achieved its status as a global leader intellectually, creatively and commercially. This city attracts, influences, exhibits and sells artwork by artists from all continents in staggering numbers, thereby enhancing its multi-cultural vitality. Imagine, there are over 1,000 galleries and alternative exhibition spaces in New York City –including the five boroughs. How they all survive is a mystery and watching their ebb and flow is an adventure.

Not long ago, SoHo dominated the downtown art scene, with 300 or more galleries. Then, escalating real estate costs forced their exodus to Chelsea. SoHo's gallery population has been cut in half, while we can now easily count more than 250 galleries in Chelsea –and growing. We cannot remember such excitement since the East Village buzz in the 80's and that was a flicker compared to the expansive growth of Chelsea. What brings such attention to this area is the brisk accumulation of blue chip as well as brand new. For example, pioneer Paula Cooper, one of the first dealers to appear in SoHo in the 60's, was also among the Chelsea trailblazers, along with Matthew Marks. Tatistcheff, Sherry French, Robert Miller and Fischbach, a few well-known galleries that once called 57 St. their home, are now Chelsea habitats. Several cooperative galleries, including NoHo, Bowery, Blue Mountain, Prince Street and Pleiades made their moves to West 25 St. in Chelsea which now places them on a level playing field with the privately owned commercial galleries. There are a few galleries that have set up satellite galleries in Chelsea, while keeping their uptown headquarters, including Mary Boone, Marlborough, and Gagosian.

What's New:

In the last few years, despite a sluggish economy, many gallery owners decided to make their mark in New York City. Among them are Lyonsweir, at 526 West 26 St., where contemporary Realism in all media is shown. It is one of the several newer galleries where representational art reigns supreme. New also is Fresh Art, a non-profit organization located at 135 West 4th Street, that represents and promotes NYC artists with special needs –bravo. Eye Beam, a gallery that shows digital art, at 540 West 21 St., joins the host of new and established galleries that are showing computer inspired works. In Harlem, Sugar Hill Art Center, located at Broadway and 151 Street, opened its doors to show art with an African-American presence.

Major changes:

What is one borough's loss is another's gain. Manhattan's Upper Eastside lost The Sculpture Center, a non-profit gallery and school, established in 1971. It is now located at 44-19 Purves St., LIC. And, we all know that MoMA, now associated with PS1, will close its doors for renovations at 11 West 53 St. from May 2002 until 2005 with temporary 160,000 sq. ft. facilities at 45-20 33 St., LIC. We cannot deny that this move by a major museum will inject Queens with new vitality. Like Williamsburg in Brooklyn, LIC is bursting with exciting artists' studio buildings and alternative spaces. Manhattan, still a dominant force, is not the only place of action.

Who Closed:

Sadly, we have recently bid farewell to Schmidt Bingham, Linda Kirkland, Knickerbocker, Thread Waxing Space, Dru Arstark, Asyl, and many others. But, as we know so well in the art world, they may one day reappear in a new form. And, in the meanwhile, many more galleries will take their place. But, we wonder, as space becomes sparse, have we seen the last of the new frontiers?

—Renée Phillips

Renée Phillips is author of New York Contemporary Art Galleries: The Complete Annual Guide. Excerpts from the book may be read at www.ManhattanArts.com

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"Abstraction" and Anderson at Allan Stone

Following closely on its recent group show, "The Figure," Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th Street, has mounted an equally important and comprehensive survey entitled "Abstraction," on view through April 25. In either area, few venues have the inventory or resources to draw upon that Allan Stone has, but the gallery is especially well-known for showing the giants of Abstract Expressionism, all of whom are present and accounted for here.

As soon as you walk in, one of the first things you see is a large collage by Robert Motherwell, with splashy areas of pale blue oil color combined with exquisitely torn and pasted paper. For some of us with peculiar taste, Motherwell's intimate collages surpass his large canvases. This untitled piece is a splendid example, circa. 1964, of his casual command and elegantly juxtaposed odds and ends.

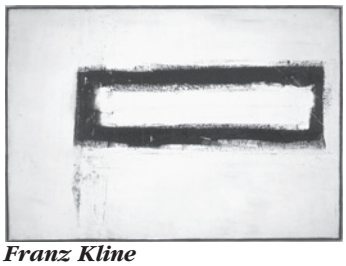
Right across the room is "Herald," a big knockout of a canvas by Franz Kline of a rough, elongated rectangle boldly brushed onto a juicy white ground. Although Kline has drastically reduced his composition, it is possible to discern "ghosts" of more characteristically converging calligraphic strokes showing through the white. But even without the pentimento, this major canvas, dated 1953-54, has its own peculiarly frozen "push and pull."

Talk about gestures, Edvins Strautmanis' monstrously huge, profoundly splashy painting "One Time Only" is well named. Reportedly, Strautmanis sometimes painted with a broom, and this time it looks like he dipped one into a big bucket of gooey red paint, took one insouciant, go-for-broke swipe at the canvas and hit the jackpot!

Of course no gesture fest like this one would be complete without de Kooning and Pollock. The former is represented by a gorgeous oil on paper in mostly yellow hues from 1942, before his cubist structuring really "liquefied," to borrow Allan Stone's own apt word; the latter contributes a small untitled oil on board from the late 1940s that appears more marbleized than dripped.

Arshile Gorky also puts in a a strong appearance with "Enigma," a very early (1928-29), beautifully somber oil. The subdued hues and tightly locked-in composition show the influence of Braque, but the sensual, biomorphically flowing forms are already pure Gorky.

Nor can one ignore a vigorously linear watercolor by Hans Hoffman; a luminous



Franz Kline

little gem of Synchromist composition, circa. 1916-17, by Stanton MacDonald-Wright; a characteristically tactile 1950 canvas by Richard Pousette-Dart; and an energetic 1959 oil on canvas incorporating shapes staked out with masking tape by Robert S. Neuman.

There are also myriad pleasures to be found by less famous but nonetheless worthy artists in this stunning show, among them: a characteristically jazzy composition of intricately layered hard-edge shapes by Richard Hickam; an sumptuous little grid of edible pastel impastos by Sue Miller; an austere black and blue geometric composition by Kazuko Inoue; a splashy gestural oil by Alfred Leslie from 1960, before he converted to realism; a subtle, quilt like collage by Philip Sultz; muscular painterly excursions by both Dominick Turturro and Robert Baribeau; a chromatically gorgeous painting of sinuously swelling vertical rainbow hues by Jay Rosenblum; and a wickedly whiplashing calligraphic abstraction by Nguyen Ducmanh called "Kung-Fu-You."

* * *

John Anderson

Just before the "Abstraction" exhibition, Allan Stone Gallery featured a solo show of new sculptures by John Anderson, who was born in Seattle and has shown with the gallery since 1962. A recipient of a Guggenheim Foundation Grant and New Jersey Council of the Arts award whose work is in numerous museum collections, including those of the Whitney and the Modern, Anderson is still perhaps best known for his early carved sculptures of tool-like objects.

His more recent pieces, however, are massive assemblages of stripped and sectioned pieces of timber, often with the stumps of smaller branches protruding in thorn-like configurations from their outer surfaces, pierced through their centers and linked like beads on giant necklaces to lengths of strong industrial cable.

Either suspended from the ceiling in densely layered bundles or incorporated, along with larger limbs and sheets of polished steel, into large floor pieces, they form rugged monolithic structures that appear at once playful and brutal.

Like gigantic tinkertoys that might at any moment spring noisily to life in some monstrous, mutant "Dance of the Wooden Soldiers," John Anderson's new sculptures command space with their awesome, almost intimidating overall presence, even as they seduce us up close with the elegance of their beautifully carved, chiseled, and in some cases painted, surfaces. —Ed McCormack

Susan Sills' Witty Coutout Installations Humanize Art History

Although freestanding two dimensional sculpture did not attract major critical attention as a discrete phenomenon until 1996, when the Whitney Museum mounted a major exhibition called "Contemporary Cutouts," it had its origins in the 1960s, when artists such as Red Grooms and Alex Katz, among others, sought to escape the limitations of the traditional pictorial space and bridge the gap between painting and sculpture. Few artists, however, have pursued this intriguing hybrid form as doggedly nor refined it as wittily as Susan Sills, whose solo exhibition "Ladies of Leisure: Life-size Cutouts from the Old Masters" is at Viridian Artists, Inc., 530 West 25th Street, from April 23 through May 11. (There will be a reception April 27, from 4-6 PM. and a gallery talk by the artist on May 4, from 3 to 5 PM.)

Sills takes the art of appropriation to new heights by unfettering familiar figures from art history from the confinement of the frame and thrusting them into real space, to confront the contemporary viewer in new and surprising ways that invariably provide not only smiles but also fresh insights about how women have been viewed by male artists of various periods.

Seemingly one of the few contemporary artists to realize that unabashed humor can be more viewer-friendly and enjoyable than irony, Sills is not above punning to up the ante of fun in titles such as "Utamaro, Utamaro, I'll See Utamaro." In the piece so named, as well as in others, Sills combines figures cut from birchwood and painted in oils with found props from the real world, such as the cardboard box from a Happy Meal and other MacDonald's detritus scattered on a tatami mat in front of two 18th century geishas. Why, in the multi-culti, pluralistic realm of postmodern art, should two working girls have to settle for only sushi? And by the same token, why shouldn't an artist known primarily for cutouts sprawl out into the larger space of installation art? Indeed, cutouts and installation—at least in Sills' case—go together like a Big Mac and fries.

One of the things that makes Sills' pieces succeed is her ability to mimic the styles of various artists and periods so convincingly that we recognize her art historical sources as instantly as the faces of old friends. From the bright, flat color areas of Ukiyo-e in the previous work, she moves effortlessly to the staccato strokes and subtly modulated hues of Impressionism in "Degas Vu." Here, three separate cutouts of a nude bather, combined with such props as a real towel, soap, and sponge, form a cinematically flowing sequence. Since we know Degas worked from photographs, Sills takes it one step further to imagine how he might have handled a video camera!

Then there is "Voulez vous un chapeau, M. Gauguin?" or, "Would you like to buy a hat, Mr. Gauguin?" in which two of the painter's dusky beauties crouch in the manner of flea market vendors behind stacks of actual straw fedoras. In this tableau, with characteristic wit, Sills gives us an inkling of how Gauguin might have felt when he arrived in Tahiti, expecting an unspoiled paradise, only to realize that it was already a French tourist resort.

Such thoughtful conjecture sets Susan Sills apart from those artists who have employed the cutout merely for its visual novelty, lending her work a conceptual aspect that adds to its complexity, as well as to the viewers' enjoyment. Thus, in yet another life-size cutout installation entitled "What Sybil Saw," we see the girlish model for one of the main figures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel swooning furtively over Michelangelo's sketches for "David" as she takes a break in the master's studio.

By her ability to imagine such behind-the-scenes details of art history as how Michelangelo might have selected his models from among the naive and impressionable teenagers of Florence, who must surely have daydreamed of things more mundane than their own unimaginable immortality, Susan Sills brings exalted subjects down to earth. In doing so, she makes us vividly aware of the simple human, and sometimes even humorous, origins of great art.

—Ed McCormack

Susan Sills with some of the life-size cutouts in her solo show, "Ladies at Leisure" at Viridian Artists Inc., 530 W. 25th Street from April 23 - May 11. 212 414-4040 www.viridianartists.com

what's in an image

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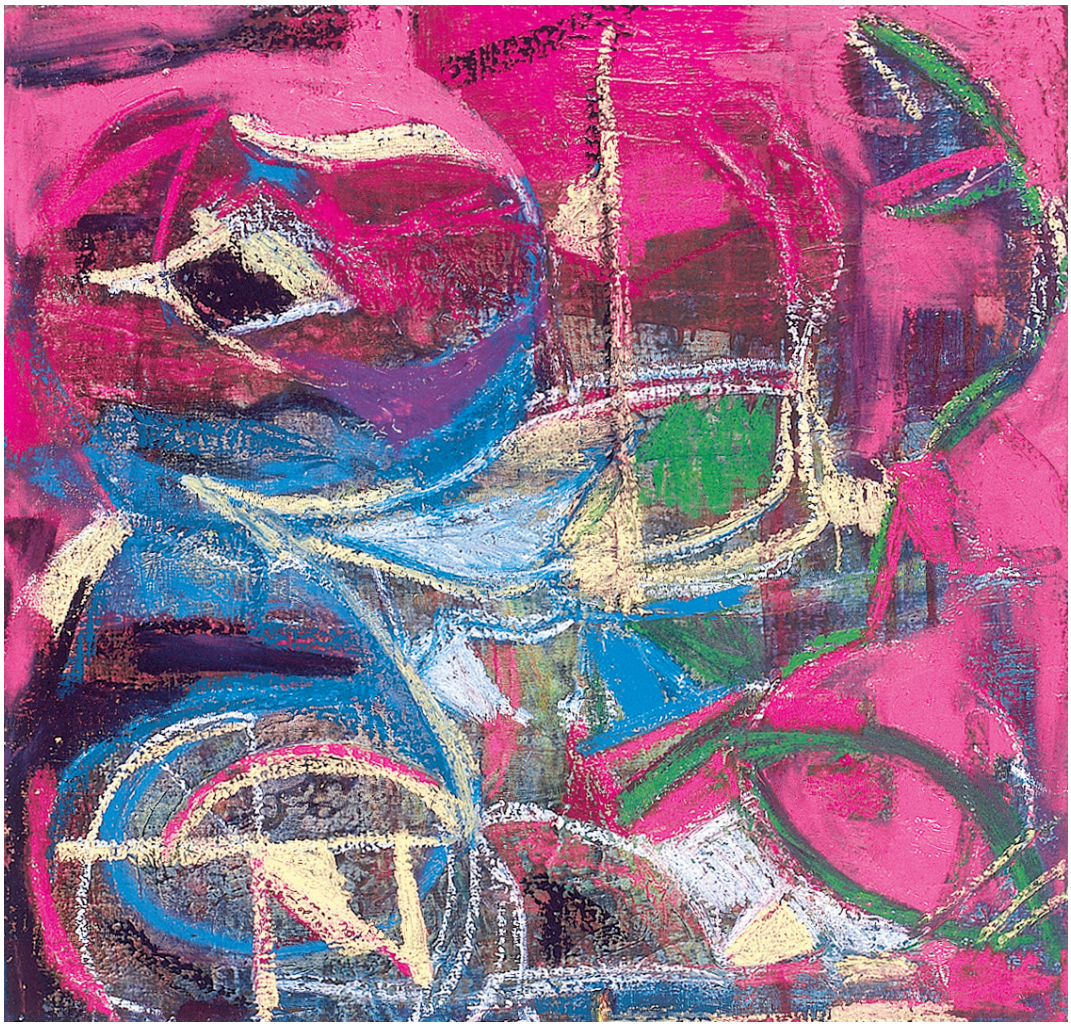

"Bicycle and Umbrella" oil/canvas 40" x 40"

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