Vol. 5 No. 1 September/October 2002 New York

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John Schueler, a major American painter associated with the New York School is the subject of two posthumous New York solo shows: "Cross Currents: the Sixties and the Eighties." at **Katherina Rich Perlow Gallery,** 41 East 57th Street, from October 2 through 31; and "Cross Currents: the Fifties and Seventies," at **ACA Galleries,** 529 West 20th Street, from October 19 through November 16. See ***New York Notebook*** (centerfold).

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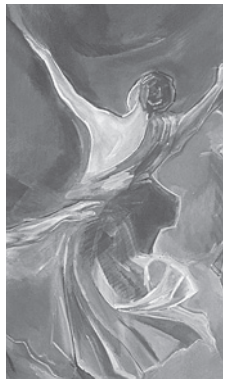

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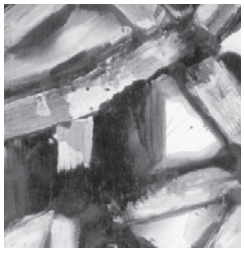

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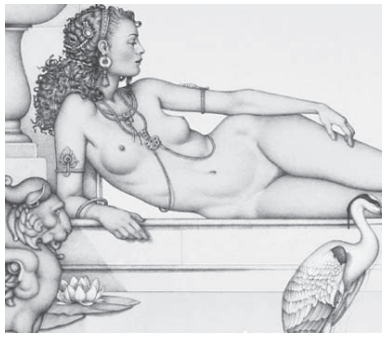

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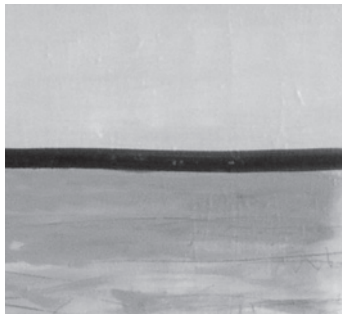

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GALLERY&STUDIO
An International Art Journal
PUBLISHED BY

217 East 85th Street, PMB 228, New York, NY 10028
(212) 861-6814 E-mail: galleryandstudio@mindspring.com

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Exploring the Hidden Psyche in the Art of Steve Cieslawski

For several years now, CFM Gallery has been affording visitors tantalizing glimpses into the private world of Steve Cieslawski. Here and there, in group shows, the gallery's owner and director, Neil Zukerman, has judiciously included oils by the Cieslawski in the company of much better-known artists such as Leonor Fini, Frederick Hart, and Anne Bachelier. Invariably, Cieslawski's smoothly painted, meticulously canvases were intriguing, often depicting archaically dressed female figures in enchanted landscapes, amid intricate mazes of hedgerows and trees whittled into fantastic topiary displays, as though by some Edward Scissorhands of a mad gardener. From the very first, these carefully selected works appeared as portents of something major to come, something being nurtured and hoarded under wraps, only to be fully revealed at some undetermined later date.

One memorable painting was called "Garden of Eros," although the male of the species had apparently been banished from it like a muddy-footed intruder from a newly waxed kitchen, leaving only three prim ladies in old-fashioned hoop-skirts, positioned like equidistant pyramids amid strange, towering fruits, giving the impression that Eden had been domesticated with a vengeance to equal that of "The Stepford Wives."

Another early canvas, considerably less serene, depicted cloaked and hooded women clinging to a huge primitive wheel, churning like a water-wheel through a dense layer of gilt-edged clouds. The anxious, histrionic gestures of the figures, as well as the overall turbulence of the composition, recalled Gericault's Romantic masterpiece "The Raft of the Medusa " and hinted at the dramatic evolution now unveiled in Cieslawski's first major solo show, at CFM Gallery, 112 Greene Street, from September 6 through 29.

A full decade has passed since Steve Cieslawski and Neil Zukerman had their initial meeting, and there is the sense in this show of an artist who, with the encouragement of a perceptive patron, has mastered his technique so that his figures now inhabit a fully realized realm, reminiscent of Alfred Kubin's novel "The Other Side," first published in Germany in 1908.

Although Kubin was one of the major graphic artists of the 20th century and this was his only literary work, the novel gives us vivid descriptions of a kingdom called "Pearl," otherwise known as the "Dream Realm," whose overcast skies and odd inhabitants, dressed variously in the styles of many periods, Steve Cieslawski appears to channel visually.

"Procession"

Indeed, we are willing to abandon disbelief outside the garden gate upon entering Cieslawski's rarefied realm because he has steadily evolved into a sublime painter with an ability to evoke atmospheric nuances with stunning verisimilitude.

With a fine-pointed brush dipped in liquid light, Cieslawski layers translucent glazes with the clarity of a Flemish master, as seen in the "Midwinter Navigators." In this 2002 canvas, three skaters— two men and one woman— whirl on their blades around an icy object shaped like a huge halved lemon and balanced miraculously on the surface of an endless ocean. Here, Cieslawski's crystalline rendering of the sky, with its back-lit knot of clouds, as well as the placid surface of the water, recalls the 19th century American transcendentalism of the Luminists.

In another canvas created this year, "The Moon Viewing Pavilion," a man and two women stand under a parasol between tall columns, gazing at a sky in which no less than three crescent moons mirror the curved sails of three small boats dreamily traversing the lake below. While the rigid postures and formal dress of the moon gazers could be likened to the quasi-Victorian graphic farce of Edward Gorey, the slightly comic situation is elevated aesthetically by virtue of Cieslawski's surpassing skills as a painter—particularly his melding of delicate pink, yellow, and blue hues to achieve a unique chromatic frisson.

Equally compelling in another way is "Procession," a larger composition in which six human figures and two canines traverse a mountainous landscape in single file under a dramatic canopy of clouds. Led by a pendant-dangling priestess in a long dress decorated with a pattern of stylized eyes, the medieval-looking group, one carrying an incense burner trailing a thick plume of pink smoke, others lugging a vessel from which a large likeness of a human face peers mysteriously through what appears to be a pool of yellow liquid.

Although this is obviously an arcane ritual—perhaps of purification, judging from the pendant wielded so purposefully by the priestess at the head of the procession and the incense trail left by one of her acolytes—it provokes a subliminal sense of recognition in the modern viewer.

All of Steve Cieslawski's recent paintings, in fact, appear to tap into what Carl Jung referred to as the "collective unconscious": the past experience of the human species persisting in the pool of mass memory as symbolized in archetypes that recur in dreams, myths, and fairy tales. Thus we encounter a host of bizarre, yet oddly familiar images: In "Infantas," two little girls in a forest, bearing armloads of sinuous twigs; a man in a monk's robe and cowl passing a fish through what appears to be a disc of water appearing like an apparition in mid-air, in "Myths and Examples"; a woman in a vaulted gothic chamber with miniature actors performing in an opening in the bodice of her dress in "Theater of Memory"; and two figures in Goya-esque gowns and veils watching as a third woman, reclining nude on an ornate golden sleigh, materializes amid radiant arctic auras on a frozen pond to herald the "Arrival of Spring."

These and other equally fabulous images suggest, in visual terms, what Alfred Kubin, likening his sole literary work to a series of turn of the century guide-books by the German publisher Karl Baedeker, once called "a sort of Baedeker for those lands which are half known to us."

That Steve Cieslawski can guide us through a tour of the hidden psyche so convincingly in our present, much more skeptical, century makes his accomplishment all the more remarkable.

—Ed McCormack

Dorothy A. Culpepper: The Landscape Within

The merging of inner and outer worlds is perhaps one of the most significant contributions of modern painting. This manifests itself in various ways, ranging from the dream imagery of the Surrealists to the subjective gestures of the Abstract Expressionists, to the numerous ways that postmodern painters have evolved to put personal content back into the mix, after decades of formal distancing and increasing depersonalization in the wake of Minimalism and other reductive tendencies.

"I feel my paintings are portraits of a landscape that is within, a visual monument of space and time," states Dorothy A. Culpepper, a painter born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and raised in Albuquerque, who has exhibited widely in New Mexico, including exhibitions in Paris and New York City.

In her recent solo exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, in Soho, Culpepper showed a series of paintings in which natural settings are transformed in various ways to create abstract paintings notable for their intricate compositions and vibrant colors. Her approach can sometimes resemble that of "stain" painters such as Helen Frankenthaler and Paul Jenkins, with areas of translucent color flowing freely to create amorphous forms. Unlike her illustrious predecessors, however, Culpepper's veil-like washes pool and congeal to create shapes that suggest actual aspects of nature, such as rocks or crashing surf, rather than to create strictly abstract compositions. At times, she adds nails, plastic objects, and other collage elements to her large acrylic paintings to enhance their tactile qualities.

The degree of representation varies widely from work to work, from her large works in acrylic to her more modest-sized watercolors. While most of Culpepper's compositions are created with a few large, flowing forms and a limited palette, others (particularly her watercolors) are quite intricate and employ a rich range of hues. While the former invite comparisons with the austere formalism of the aforementioned Frankenthaler and Louis, the latter are whimsical and evocative in a manner more akin to earlier modernist painters such as Kandinsky and Klee.

Perhaps it is a feature of the postmodern era that Culpepper's style can signify such diverse, even contradictory, sources; yet the success of her venture rests on her ability to achieve a solid synthesis of the abstract and the literal, the poetic and the particular, most often achieved in her large acrylics by allowing the paint to flow freely and form the direction of the composition in the process of painting.

"I think of my paintings as manifestations," Culpepper has stated, "because as I work with them the image manifests itself. I stop when I finally decide that if I do any more to it, it will ruin the painting."

Acrylic by Dorothy A. Culpepper at Montserrat Gallery

Although conventional realism never really enters the equation, there is a very definite sense of place in these paintings, albeit expressively distorted as if by a trick of memory or a sleight of aesthetic alchemy. Culpepper's watercolors are as impressive as her larger acrylics in this regard, with fluid forms and bright hues creating a festive feeling somewhere between a natural event and a Fourth of July celebration.

Often Culpepper seems intent on covering the entire surface of the composition with a veritable confetti of colorful specks and lively patterns that suggest kinetic showers of light, falling leaves, sunspots, sparkling lakes, swarms of bees, or any number of other possible subjects and symbols that the imagination can conjure up. The sheer profusion of forms, colors, and patterns that Culpepper sets into motion often creates an almost antic effect of nature run amok. Organic forms are layered and interact in various ways, creating a sense of energy and flux that animates every square inch of the composition. In her watercolors, the composition is generally made up of intricate color areas and interacting shapes; in some of her large acrylic paintings the formal thrust often manifests in powerful poured forms that loom monolithically, while in others the entire surface is layered with drips and splashes in a manner akin to Jackson Pollock as well as the densely topographical recent abstractions of Lawrence Poons.

In both mediums, Culpepper creates compositions that can only be described as "maximalist," given the sheer number of formal constituents that she juggles successfully. While these elements are especially animated and suggestive of natural objects and forces, they are rarely fettered by a sense of the specific to the degree that we must view them as actual details in a landscape.

The free interaction of form and color in Culpepper's work appears intuitive, free of intellectual structuring. By eschewing a more systematic approach in favor of improvisation inspired by what the artists herself refers to as "manifestations of the thoughts of an expressive scene, long forgotten but mysteriously remembered," Culpepper imbues her paintings with immediacy and vitality. Her forms flow and interlock in intricate configurations that convey flashes of movement, mood, and memory.

In one watercolor, various colored orbs are set afloat like planets, suns, or brilliant balloons and juxtaposed with stars, triangular forms, and patterns that appear to have been stenciled or stamped onto the surface of the paper to increase the sense of layered density that lends the picture a particularly festive quality.

Another buoyant aquarelle includes a chain of linked circles apparently created by applying the paint-covered bottom of a paint jar or other circular object to the paper. Here, too, freely dripped areas of paint are juxtaposed with repetitive regular patterns which suggest the patterns of growth in nature, the contrasts between the two conveying both the chaos and order of natural forms and processes.

Culpepper is constantly exploring new ways to create abstract compositions that evoke, without imitating, various aspects of landscape, and in this she is generally successful. Indeed, what her work demonstrates most dramatically is that such exploration can be its own reward, in terms of the sheer opulent beauty of the work, as well as what it bodes for the future of nature-based abstraction as a vital area of contemporary art.

—Jeffrey Grundberg

Poetry and Character in the Ink Paintings of Judith Funkhouser

So fraught with imminent peril, as W.C. Fields used to say, has our world become that one can easily empathize with the painter/poet/scholars of old China, who would take to the mountains and live as recluses to escape the governmental corruption, political intrigues, and numerous other dangers so prevalent in their time.

Indeed, it is these late eleventh century literati artists who rebelled in seclusion with their exuberant ink splashing against the craft-embalmed productions of the official Court painters, who inspire the contemporary American painter Judith Funkhouser, in her solo show of ink paintings, "Color Within," at Viridian Artists @ Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, from October 15 through November 2. (There will be a reception for the artist on Saturday, October 19, from 3 to 5 PM.)

This exhibition is the culmination of a long love affair with Asian art. In previous solo shows at Viridian, as well at the Chinese Culture Institute in Boston, Funkhouser exhibited large oils on canvas that combined elements of East and West, much as Brice Marden did in his "Cold Mountain Series."

Like Marden, Franz Kline, and other Western artists who have explored calligraphic modes in abstract oils, Funkhouser could rework and revise her earlier compositions on canvas by over-painting. Since switching to the less forgiving medium of Chinese ink on absorbent rice paper, however, she no longer has that option. As the well known Chinese painter C.C. Wang once put it, "Ink painting is all or nothing. Every single stroke, dot, or layered wash, once painted, cannot be erased or covered up as it is in oil painting."

Funkhouser began studying Chinese brush painting in 1997 and took to it so naturally that she was soon exhibiting traditional landscape paintings, along with non-representational paintings, in group exhibitions in China, as well the United States. While one might think that it would be a daunting prospect for an American artist to exhibit Chinese type painting in the country from whence it comes, Funkhouser has tapped into its vital spontaneity in a manner that few Western painters can equal. Most impressively, she has mastered the coordination of inner and outer resources that the painter and scholar Mai-mai Sze, in her classic text "The Way of Chinese painting," refers to as "heart and hand in accord."

Neither in her ink paintings of traditional landscape subjects nor in her abstract compositions in the same medium does Funkhouser indulge in the cheap-shot chinoiserie that we see in the work of lesser Western artists who take up Asian materials and manners. Rather, like those progressive Chinese artists who explore ink on paper as a vital contemporary medium, of whom she can properly be called a peer, Funkhouser exploits the unique qualities of ink as freely as one would those of oil, respectful of but unbound by its venerable tradition.

Judith Funkhouser, "Auspicious Color," at Viridian Gallery

In this sense, her paintings are the visual counterpart of Gary Snyder's epic poem, "Mountains and Rivers Without End," in which he takes inspiration from the plain-spoken lyricism of ancient Chinese poetry—indeed, the literary side of those self-same literati painter/poets—but imbues it with his own freshness of utterance and peculiar American vernacular.

Judith Funkhouser shows a similar subjective immediacy in a painting such as "Scholar's Dwelling." Although every good ink painting is as much about the artist as about its ostensible subject, her broad rectangular black strokes suggest rugged rustic structures albeit with a bold abstract thrust akin to Kline's monochromatic gestural abstractions. But unlike Kline's stark black and white oils, Funkhouser's painting, with its chromatically suggestive range of subtle gray ink tonalities, demonstrates the Chinese theory that black can "contain all basic colors."

In other pictures, such as "Scholar's Poem" and "Auspicious Color," Funkhouser combines splashy ink pyrotechnics and calligraphic vigor with sumptuous color in compositions where expanses of bare white paper are as pregnantly significant as silences between notes in the avant garde jazz of Ornette Coleman. One could also compare Funkhouser's refreshingly offbeat spatial sense and the impulsive quality of her calligraphic strokes to the elegant graffiti of Cy Twombly.

At the same time, even the most random-seeming elements in her paintings are perfectly placed. Even the red "chops" or seals which, in traditional Chinese painting, serve as signatures (with subsequent owners of the picture frequently adding their own) become piquant visual accents in Funkhouser's compositions. In the ink painting "Solitude," for example, no fewer than four seals of various shapes and sizes are strategically placed to anchor the exquisitely spare black and white composition.

The Chinese believe that an artist's character can be read in every stroke. By this measure, the new paintings of Judith Funkhouser possess an integrity and a purity of intent that is especially laudable in the context of today's art scene. For while very much of the moment, they pander to none of the currently "hot" tendencies; nor do they partake of the desperate posturing that dominates our present cultural politics. Rather, they transport the viewer in the same way that all good painting and poetry is supposed to, by speaking to us through the centuries of that which endures beyond the fleeting follies of any particular time or place.

—Ed McCormack

Steven Dono Rocks the Rudderless Ship of State

Something about the quixotic heroism of Steven Dono's sculptures has always called to mind the "inventions" of Rube Goldberg, an old fashioned newspaper cartoonist who became famous for his diagrams of ridiculously intricate machines designed to carry out simple tasks. However, in the single monumental sculpture that will comprise his exhibition "The Ruin of Belief," at Phoenix Gallery, 568 Broadway, from October 2 through 26, Dono goes even further: It is as if Rube Goldberg had turned to political cartooning and then used his drawing as a blueprint to construct a huge, complex contraption engineered to convey an elaborate intellectual conceit, complete with obscure literary allusions, filmic references, and witty material metaphors.

Dono is the artist-in-residence at The Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, which means that he has his studio in the cavernous crypt of the church. Like Noah, he labors down there with hammer, saw, and screwdriver, as though the Lord had said unto him, "Steven, be fruitful and build thou the biggest and most confounding of sculptures, so that all humankind may wonder once again at what a marvelous and exalted calling is Art, when it flies in the face of all practical commerce in order to realize a... Grand Vision!"

Let there be no doubt about it, Dono is a master of Conceit, as the term is defined by the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics: " an intricate or far-fetched metaphor, which functions through arousing feelings of surprise, shock, or amusement." For his exhibition last year in the same venue, he built two room-size mazes of bolted beams, one based on Poalo Uccello's masterpiece "The Battle of San Remo" (but subverting the message of that ode to military might by employing a puppet to symbolize the individual soldier who gets mangled in the war machine); the other an "Annunciation" for the modern age, with Mary represented by a bizarre fetish figure in black stockings and garter belt.

In the present exhibition, Dono has employed even more elaborate material means to construct a mega-metaphor for our national condition in the year 2002 and its implications for the future of the world. The title for the piece comes from Jean Cocteau's classic film "Orpheus," in which the mythological protagonist is being led into the Underworld, where he sees lost souls wandering about and is told, "They represent the Ruin of Belief. They don't know they are dead."

Dono applies the term to those citizens who are still in denial about the electoral piracy addressed in his latest sculptural extravaganza. The genesis for the piece, the artist confides, was the fleeting, fanciful notion of a ship on wheels on rails. But as with all of Dono's' fancies, layers of underlying meaning surfaced as the creative process got under way and he discovered what he really wanted to say.

The boat that he built, modeled on no known craft that ever sailed the seas, is a stout frigate with bows on both ends, so that its front and back are indistinguishable. But while it looks like it could sail in any direction, it can only traverse a twenty foot stretch of track mounted on a large wooden seesaw covered in imitation fox fur. When the viewer steps on the end of the seesaw, activating a rocking motion that approximates the movement of the sea, instead of coming toward him or her, the boat moves in the opposite direction, seeming to defy the laws of gravity. This is accomplished through a system of pulleys and counterweights on a second set of tracks hidden within the base of the piece, implying that the ship is being navigated by unseen forces.

Presumably it is these same unseen forces that have shanghaied the Statue of Liberty, seen here in miniature lashed to the ship's broken mast. Yes, the ship itself is disabled: It has not only been "demasted" (to use the old nautical term for when a ship's masts have been blown away by a navel enemy); it's silk sails are in tatters, it is rudderless, and there is a loose cannon on deck. All of which has dire implications, since this frigate is none other than the Ship of State, although the name painted on its side is "Polychrest," a reference to a craft of notoriously poor design featured in one of the nautical novels of Patrick O'Brien.

Steven Dono is an artist with firm moral, philosophical, and political beliefs, which he is willing to go to great lengths to communicate in a manner that skirts propaganda to achieve a kind of zany transcendence. His work successfully assimilates a broad range of seemingly contradictory influences, from the room-scaled tableaux of the West Coast funk assemblageist Edward Kienholz, to the Minimalism of Donald Judd (albeit sans Judd's formalist eschewal of all content and symbolism), to the espousal of ideas in the manner of the Conceptual art.

Unlike the Conceptualists, however, Dono does not dispense with the object in favor of the idea. Rather, it is Steven Dono's special gift to embody the idea in the object, creating material metaphors in real space. Partaking of the whole eclectic menu of postmodern choices to propel a singular aesthetic sensibility, his sculptures have the power to simultaneously amuse, appall, and educate the viewer.

And that they are so uncompromisingly imposing, even ungainly, as to seem virtually unmarketable makes them all the more invaluable.

—Ed McCormack

Michael Parkes: Luftmensch of Lofty Plateaus

Although he came of age in the 1960s and was reportedly an enthusiastic participant in the hippy scene, Michael Parkes can hardly be termed a "psychedelic" artist in the same sense of the term as Alex Grey or the late Mati Klarwein. For while Parkes' pictures have retained all the playful sensuality and hopeful sense of magic that flourished among the Flower Children, they also hark back to the bejeweled decadence of Gustav Klimt, as well as to the more innocent fantasies of Maxfield Parrish and Norman Rockwell. Indeed, it is precisely this synthesis of exotic eroticism and rosy-cheeked (in both the literal and colloquial sense!) innocence that makes the art of Michael Parkes so uniquely appealing.

This duality can been studied in its most unadorned form in Parkes' drawings, some especially fine examples of which are on view in Parkes' new solo show at CFM Gallery, 112 Greene Street, from October 4 through November 3, which marks his homecoming to the venue in which he had his most memorable earlier New York exhibitions.

Two small works in graphite on tinted paper show not only a refinement of technique akin to the Old Masters but also striking contrasts in subject matter. The first is an image of two nubile female nudes nestled like kittens on the type of marble recliner that one normally associates with Roman orgies; the second depicts a dwarfish male "artiste" in courtly attire seated on a large goose, sketching a model who is invisible but for one bare foot entering at the edge of the composition.

The pompous figure of a gnomish creative charlatan is also present in "The Sculptor," an original stone lithograph that CFM Gallery will have exclusively for a year before it is released to other galleries. Here, he strikes an appropriately dilettantish pose as he contemplates a lumpish sculpture-in-progress that hardly does justice to his model, who would appear angelic even without the white wings sprouting from her bare shoulder-blades. Nearby, a younger, handsomer male figure, sporting a cape and a floppy feathered beret and brandishing a mohl-stick in a manner that suggests that he, too, is an artist, gazes lovingly at the naked angel.

Although Parkes is best known for his beautiful females, this latter figure, comparable to the classically comely males of that other great contemporary draftsman Paul Cadmus, adds yet another dimension to this satirical allegory of Art and Desire.

Less complex but inimitably charming is another print depicting an amorous encounter between an earthling and a numinous being: In "Angel Affair," a young man in a business suit impetuously embraces one of Parkes' shapely winged nudes and finds himself soaring high above the city. Although this is an older piece, it is one of Parkes' most popular graphics and warrants inclusion in any major survey of his work.

"Oasis," 2001 Stone Lithograph

Since the popularity of Parkes' prints makes him more familiar to many as a graphic artist than as a painter, encountering his oils can be a revelation. Two especially exemplary canvases with titles and themes that have also provided inspiration for prints are "Oasis" and "Going Nowhere."

The title of the former picture is especially apt, since each of Parkes' images is an oasis of sorts, a refuge from daily reality. This particular one is a magnificent contemporary Odalisque, depicting a voluptuous nude reclining languorously beside a pool in which pink lilies float, guarded by a stone lion and a living water bird. In the latter an equally ravishing beauty slumbers amid stately columns as white geese fly by in dreamlike formation.

Both pictures, painted with the cool and luminous classical clarity that characterizes all of Parkes' work, are culminations of a familiar theme for this artist, with their museful meetings of leggy, ivory-skinned nudes—all with the regal profile and distinctive overbite that defines this artist's feminine ideal and is said to be inspired by the wife who also serves as his Muse—and an entire menagerie of wild creatures who turn tame, even docile, under the spell of these statuesque goddesses.

Birds, those symbols of the soul in the art of ancient Egypt, of frivolous young girls in the Decameron, and of the Four Elements in Greek mythology, are especially abundant in Parkes' paintings and prints, often in the form of graceful, long-necked white geese that hover over nudes reclining on marble parapets like Venus in her bower. Lions and leopards, too, are so enamored of these human beauties that they lie down with them as with the lambs of Biblical prophecy, docile in their sky-high hideaways.

If Leonor Fini is a dark angel of the night, and Anne Bachelier is the poet of twilight, Michael Parks is the bard of the clear blue stratospheres. For the most part, his human, animal, and mythological figures cavort in broad daylight, traversing cloudscapes with gravity-defying grace or lounging on narrow ledges against luminous expanses of heavenly space in the easeful postures of charmed beings to whom no earthly harm could ever possibly come.

In an earlier mention of "The Secret," the first graphic that Parkes did for his own publishing company, also included in this show, I wrote that certain of his figures "look like characters from fairy tales glimpsed voyeuristically in the private moments that the stories omit." And it occurs to me now that the respite from our increasingly harrowing daily reality that his pictures afford us must surely account, at least in part, for their widespread popularity. After all, what could be better than to recapture some of the innocent joys of childhood without having to deny the more sophisticated pleasures permitted to adults?

Michael Parkes, contemporary art's leading luftmensch, gives us the best of two worlds.

—Ed McCormack

Maryleen Schiltkamp and Art's Nobler Aspirations

All too often what is termed "Neo-Classicism" in contemporary art is a misnomer, a campy Pop parody of classical themes couched in postmodernist irony. At its core it is as selfconsciously cynical and opportunistically decadent as the "Neo-Expressionism" of the nineteen seventies, or the "Neo-Geo" of the eighties—enervated rehashings of once vital movements geared to a conceptual model and designed to promote art world careerism.

There are artists, however, who take past movements as a starting point for innovative contemporary styles, such as Maryleen Schiltkamp, a well-known painter from the Netherlands whose latest solo exhibition of oils on canvas, "Degrees of Freedom," was seen recently at Atelier International Art Group,
68 East 131st Street.

Schiltkamp is one contemporary artist who approaches time-honored themes with genuine commitment and unmatched passion. What sets her work apart from others who would endeavor to revive similar themes and motifs as a vital aesthetic endeavor is her ability to forge connections between the classical and the modern, the figurative and the abstract, and thus, as T.S. Eliot put it in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" to achieve "objectivity in the continuity of tradition in art."

Schiltkamp acknowledges having been influenced by the ideas of the astrophysicist Piet Hut, whose manuscript in progress, "Degrees of Freedom" (the title of which she has respectfully appropriated for this exhibition) she admires for dealing with "how many independent choices you can make in a given situation, before the situation is fully determined." She is also inspired by Eliot's statement that "The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past."

Certainly Schiltkamp is to be admired by her ability to put such ideas into practice in her work as well as for her intrepid willingness to depart from the legacy of stylistic simplification bequeathed to us by the Minimalists--the dictum that less is necessarily more and that all aesthetic innovation is predicated on formal "purity." If anything, Schiltkamp is a maximalist, determined to up the pictorial ante at every opportunity by introducing a wide variety of elements into the mix. Consequently, her paintings are "machines," in the very best sense of that now slightly archaic term: complex, often intricate constructions in which each part contributes to the overall dynamic of the composition and all of the elements of the picture are interdependent.

Surely this is not a complexity altogether foreign to modernism, as its foremost exponent, Cezanne, made clear through his subtle surface manipulations and shifting planes, which paved the way for Cubism. Indeed,

Maryleen Schiltkamp, "Degrees of Freedom" 90" x 70" Oil on canvas 2002, Atelier International Art Group, Inc., 68 East 131st St., Suite 100. Ph.212-431-0630. www.atlierart.com. www.MaryleenSchiltkamp.com to view works.

subject matter aside, Maryleen Schiltkamp seems every bit as beholden to Cezanne as to the masters of the Renaissance in her methods of constructing a picture. It is her particular contribution, however, to imbue the multi-figure composition with an abstract superstructure that becomes as overt an element of its appeal as the figures themselves. In this way she achieves compositions that project a unique sense of energy and movement.

In Schiltkamp's most recent solo show, these kinetic qualities were especially evident in paintings such as "Daybreak," a dynamic large oil on canvas depicting a full frontal stampede of mythic steeds in angular, shard-like areas of red, blue, and ocher hues shot through with areas of white. In this work, as well as in an exquisite study for it on tan paper, where the composition is pared down to its bare bones, the equine figures provide Schiltkamp with a vehicle for vigorous draftspersonship akin to that of the Futurists and the Vorticism of Wyndham Lewis.

By contrast the exhibition's centerpiece and namesake, "Degrees of Freedom," demonstrates that the fragmented nature of modern reality can be restored to classical wholism with a harmonious composition featuring several figures aswirl in a rhythmic ritual dance. Perhaps the title signifies the artist's ability to take liberties with the art of the past without abusing the privilege, for this majestic large canvas, with its sweeping compositional rhythms, is remarkable for its exquisitely balanced combination of joyous freedom and formal restraint. The painting can be seen as the visual counterpoint of a well-known definition of poetry: "emotion recollected in tranquility."

Indeed, only by applying this principle diligently would it have been possible for Schiltkamp to have accomplished a powerful group of paintings and drawings provoked by the 9/11 tragedy. These include monochromatic studies of ghostly pedestrians moving sonambulently through an urban nightmare of ash, twisted metal, and smoke in the shadow of the fallen towers. The figures huddle together or gesture stridently, the series culminating in a semi-abstract canvas entitled "NYC/Guernica which juxtaposes symbolic images appropriated from Picasso's masterpiece with more naturalistic visions of contemporary people moving amid boldly expansive areas of strident color that, by their sheer gestural force, evoke the spirit of Abstract Expressionism. The latter tribute to the major American art movement also known as The New York School adds a sense of heroism to a subject whose emotional content could degenerate into mawkish histrionics in the hands of a lesser painter.

Maryleen Schiltkamp, however, skirts such tastelessness to achieve a somber grandeur wholly appropriate to that dark day, thus demonstrating that History Painting, once considered the noblest form of art, may yet be a possible option for the contemporary artist whose skill and passion is equal to the task.

—Maurice Taplinger

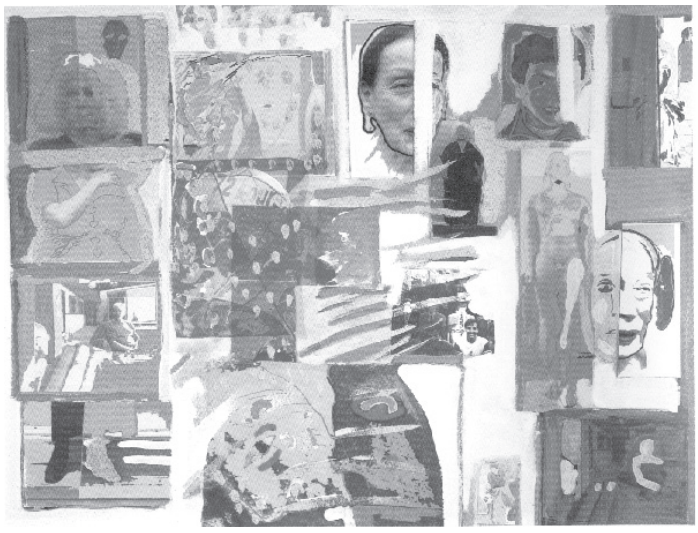
Layered Lives: Depth and Mystery in the Imagery of Saritha Margon

Given the crazy complexity and simultaneity of modern life, as exemplified by the overlapping of the real and the virtual, as well as by the unceasing sensory overload and imagistic bombardment perpetrated on us daily by the mass media, it has become increasingly untenable for artists to depict any scene with seamless consistency, as a discrete and self-contained entity.

Fragmentation and layering are a natural reaction to the chaos that surrounds us, if artists are to reflect our world with any degree of accuracy, but few manage to make such techniques as aesthetically appealing as does Saritha Margon, whose mixed media works were recently seen in a strong solo show at Artsforum Gallery, 24 West 57th Street.

The ubiquitousness in contemporary art of mixed media itself seems yet another reflection of the need to engage modern reality on its own eclectic terms, and Margon ups the ante of complexity by adding digital prints to her collated and painted pieces. The addition of these printed elements enables her to repeat certain images that she had made integral parts of her visual lexicon. In this manner, she updates the use of photo-derived images that were so important to artistic predecessors like Warily and Rauschenberg, both of whom were among the first to recognize how images from the mass media have come to saturate and influence our lives.

Margon, however, tends to treat images with a more post modern subjectivity, selected from apparently more personal sources. Rather than presenting us with icon of Pop culture like Elvis and Marilyn, she shows us images of anonymous people with the appearance of snapshots in a family album.



"Friends" 2002

In the large work entitled "Friends," which is characteristic enough to serve as a descriptive template here, several such images appear in the gridded format that Margon employs for most of her compositions, painted over and drawn upon in various ways. One image is of a matronly woman holding one hand over her heart as though reciting the pledge of allegiance. Although any interpretation of such an image is bound to be tainted by subjectivity, this image suggests (to this viewer, at least) the poignantly fervent patriotism of a recently naturalized citizen. Here, too, while the figure's face is partly obscured by painterly activity, Margon calls attention to her affecting gesture by emphasizing details with red lines scrawled, with a casual elegance reminiscent of Warily, over the bright blue bodice of her dress.

Another photographic image that has been significantly altered is that of a fatherly-looking middle-aged man seated in what appears to be a suburban living room. In one instance, the image appears intact, with strokes of green and blue surrounding it, while in another the figure has all but disappeared under abstract areas of blue and brown. All that remains of the figure is his head, shoulders, and one arm filled in with opaque white pigment, effectively transforming him into a simplified symbol. The specific individual is gone but something of his spirit remains, juxtaposed with equally snapshot-like images of faces in various stages of deconstruction created with strident strokes of color that activate the entire surface of the composition.

The painterly appeal of Saritha Margon's work, with its fluid abundance of mark marking that simultaneously reveals and obscures, is sufficiently appealing unto itself to recommend her work as a vital visual experience. It is the human subtext that emerges from her densely layered surfaces, however, that makes her paintings doubly significant and moving in elusive and mysterious ways. —Robert Vigo

Postmodern Pluralism Dominates Soho Solos

Several recent solo shows at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, explored the postmodern preoccupation with merging qualities of the abstract and the representational:

While most of us tend to think of the ultra orthodox Hasidic Jews as urban people encountered most often in Manhattan's diamond district and certain neighborhoods in Brooklyn, in recent decades many Hasidim have formed communities in such upstate townships as Munsey and Monroe, New York.

Gloria G. Bernstein exploits this incongruity in her paintings, capturing these scholarly and devout People of the Book looking somewhat out of place in natural settings.

In her painting "Man and Birch," for example, an elderly man in the black garb of his people appears startled, like the proverbial "deer in the headlights," as he peers between the branches of a birch tree in a forest.

Another painting by Bernstein, "Walk in Woods," depicts a Hasidic father and two young sons strolling in nature yet seeming quite apart from it. At the same time her skillful use of color harmonies unites the figures and their surroundings in a harmonious formal synthesis and her Modiglianilike figural elongations assist her in conveying the ascetic qualities of these pious Hasidic men, with their soulful faces, doleful eyes, and full beards seeming weighted with history.

* * *

"As we move deeper and deeper into an |age that worships super smooth computer realized images, it seems to me more and more that the strength of painting is in its awkwardness...dare I say it, even its clumsiness," declares Richard Sutta, although his own paintings could hardly be called awkward or clumsy.

In fact, Sutta is a painter who achieves a splendid balance between neoclassical subject matter and abstract composition in paintings such as "Warriors," where ancient soldiers clash with swords and shields, their figures forming angular formal arrangements, even as they battle so convincingly one can imagine the clanging sound of metal on metal.

By contrasting other paintings by Sutta such as "War All the Time," where a man blocks the charge of a huge winged horse with his sword, and "Eve," an ample female nude, one can see the impressive range in this artist's work. While the former painting is neoclassical in the best sense of the term, with its gracefully unified composition and idealized forms, the latter is violently deconstructed in a manner reminiscent of de Kooning, albeit informed by Sutta's own gestural touch.

Indeed, "touch" is a quality upon which this artist puts a high premium. Evidence of the human hand is everywhere to be seen in his work as an antidote to those "super smooth computer realized images" that he decries so eloquently in his artist statement and which he counters with considerable elan with the swordsmanly grace and power of his brush.

* * *

Ana Lía Werthein Rouseaux, a painter from Buenos Aires, is a figurativist with a decidedly literary bent. People such as Herman Hesse, Jean Paul Sartre and even Raymond Chandler turn up frequently in her bold crayon paintings on paper—and paintings they truly are, for she employs a medium more often used for drawing with such complexity and conviction that no other term will do.

Chandler sports a slouch hat, as befits a great American mystery writer, and Sartre has his own Bogart-like charm as he stands on a bridge puffing his omnipresent pipe and giving an interview. Then there is Brancusi, with a statuesque woman on his arm as he strides into an art reception.

Rouseaux, like Red Grooms, is an Expressionist with the desire to tell stories. And she does so with a conviction and a wit that rivals many of her literary subjects for its power to make us see nuances of character with particular clarity, even while Rouseaux retains that material immediacy which differentiates poetic painting from written poetry.

* * *

Monika J. Wally employs titles such as "Zero Gravity" to convey the cosmic consciousness that permeates her paintings of what appear to be planetary orbs suspended in space. Wally's work employs a metaphysical context to create a rationale for abstraction. Her circular forms are cast amid swirling areas of gold that create a sense of light. Thus she contrasts concrete and ethereal elements to effectively to bring about a synthesis of the abstract and the representational that is at once pleasing in formal terms and imaginatively evocative.

Wally's work is in the best postmodern tradition in that it takes a complex approach to subject matter, simultaneously subjugating it to a formal context and allowing it to animate her compositions in a manner that would be impossible without the associations with cosmic forces that we immediately make in our minds when we are confronted with one of her paintings. She is a painter with a peculiarly affecting vision that makes her work quite memorable.

* * *

Two other artists can be compared for their ability to move easily between representational and abstract modes of expression: Gary Hesketh states that "our world consists of two distinct realities: the visible and the invisible," and he separates the two in darkly evocative landscapes and equally strong abstract compositions in which subdued colors and linear forms convey a sense of the underlying patterns of nature. Hesketh brings the same quiet intensity to both modes, demonstrating that the stamp of a strong aesthetic sensibility can transcend subject or style.

Erika Kunzmann has her own distinctive way of dealing with the disparities of the seen and the unseen, in her luminous watercolors. In one body of work, Kunzmann captures floral still life subjects in breezy strokes of translucent color with fresh simplicity, while in another series of shimmering small abstractions, color fields akin to those of Mark Rothko, albeit on a more intimate scale, suggest a poignant sense of spiritual yearning.

—Dorothy K. Riordan

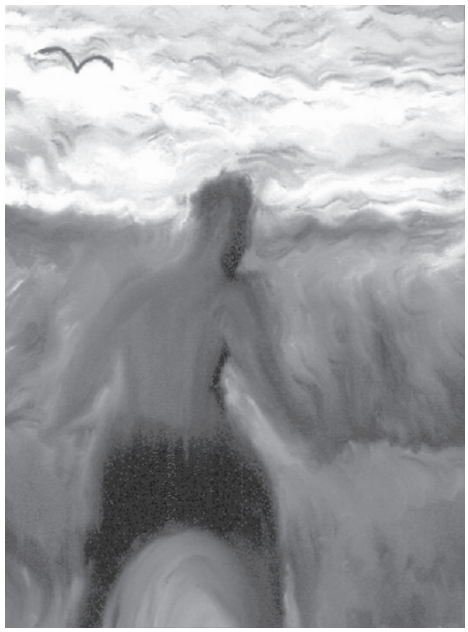
James Eugene Albert's Digital "Abstract Reality"

Because digital art is one of the few new frontiers in contemporary culture, in the work of many practitioners its dazzling technical qualities tend, all too often, to take precedence over its expressive capabilities. However, a refreshing exception to this flaunting of technology at the expense of more enduring aesthetic qualities can be seen in the work of James Eugene Albert, whose show of new digital paintings, "Abstract Reality," is featured at World Fine Art Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, from October 4 through 26. (There will be a reception on October 11 from 6 to 8 PM.)

San Francisco, where Albert lives and works, has a long tradition of producing painters such as Richard Diebenkorn and David Parks, among others, who originated ways of combining the qualities of abstraction and figuration in a manner distinctly different than that of their East Coast Peers. Albert appears to update that tradition digitally in his work "The Jogger," an image of a figure looming in a landscape. Like all of Albert's pictures, the piece was produced by using a low resolution digital camera as a sketching tool. Such cameras, according to the artist's statement, "only capture the essence of a particular scene, allowing artistic creativity to take over and mold something special from what may be considered 'digital garbage.' " Here, through his manipulation of the image to severely simplify and integrate the figure, sky, and landscape in rhythmic waves, Albert produces a sense of energy and painterly thrust akin to that of David Parks, particularly, and is in keeping with Albert's previously quoted assertion that "Even though a computer is involved, I still feel the need to 'paint.'"

Although "The Jogger" is overtly figurative many of Albert's other digital paintings, arrive at considerably more abstract compositions through his inventive transformation of anatomical details, flowers, landscapes, and other elements of the natural world. Even images of people having sex provide inspiration for certain works, although these are usually so submerged in swirling configurations of color and form as to skirt explicitness. By such means, Albert is able to play a game of hide-and-seek with the viewer, tantalizing him or her with hints and glimpses of images that alternately emerge and withdraw, like subliminal messages flashed briefly on a screen. Thus he engages one in a collaborative dialogue of shared perception and imaginative interpretation that lends his pictures a layered complexity, a subtle tension between abstract appeal and imagistic subtext.

The relatively modest scale of the twenty prints in the present show, which Albert refers to as "apartment size," enhances the intimacy of these works, drawn



"The Jogger"

from three recent series entitled "Abstract Reality," "Tripping through the Holy Land," and "Useless Abstractions." The apparent irony of the last title is perhaps explained by Albert's statement that the pieces represent "a new, but tangential, direction for my work that tries to take something real, or at least a digitalized image of something real, and turn it into an abstract fantasy."

In "Old San Juan," the skyline of Puerto Rico's capitol emerges from a composition in which floating orbs, swirling shadows, and luminous colors evoke a sense of cosmic phenomena. Here, too, the harmonious juxtaposition of specific imagery and abstract forms within a fanciful context suggests the mysterious forces that operate beneath the surface of everyday reality.

As in the previous picture Albert employs an image of the view from a cruise ship as the springboard for fantasy in "Charlotte Amalie," albeit in this case with a decidedly more pronounced dominance of abstract qualities, resulting in a bold composition in which looming monolithic shapes and intricate white linear hatchings create the impression of tactile incisions in a color woodcut. The latter elements appear to continue and extend the virtual tactility explored by Albert in his 1999 exhibition "Texturequest." The illusion of texture—specifically, thick painterly impastoes—is also simulated with remarkable finesse in "Pergonium Thing," where a boldly simplified, slightly eerie, face emerges from an intricate concentration of sharply delineated, densely layered shapes. When one realizes that these shapes are derived from floral images upon which Albert has worked his peculiar transformative magic, it is possible to compare "Pergonium Thing" to certain paintings by Giuseppe Arcimboldo, the Italian Mannerist and early precursor of Surrealism, who created grotesque human portraits from configurations of fruits, vegetables, and other still life elements.

In works, such as "Porsche's Eye," other familiar objects—here the headlight of a Porsche sports car—are subjected by Albert to funhouse mirror distortions that give way to sweeping imaginative vistas with a visionary, even psychedelic, impact. At the same time, "Porsche's Eye," with its vibrant colors, sinuous lines, and elemental spirals and other symbols has a quality akin to the most whimsical abstractions of Joan Miro.

It is this ability to forge connections to the art of the past while innovating in a new, technically challenging medium, that makes James Eugene Albert an engaging and rewarding artist. Indeed, Albert's art historical awareness, coupled with his innate originality, should make him a seminal influence in the effort to win digital art an integral and enduring place in the mainstream of world culture.

—Peter Wiley

The Essential Synthesis in the Art of Chinyee

To some of us who have long followed the career of the veteran painter Chinyee, who has resided permanently in the United States since leaving her native China to escape the Communist Revolution, her most recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, seemed a realization of much that has been brewing in her work for some time.

Chinyee has been steadily developing her art for five decades, having studied art at the College of Mount Saint Vincent, New York University, and the Art Students League, and combined this grounding in Western art with Asian brush techniques to achieve a highly effective personal synthesis. Her style has, from the beginning, sought to unite the twains of East and West by exploring the relationship between Chinese painting and Abstract Expressionism as it manifests in the primacy of the gesture.

Few artists have accomplished this as naturally as Chinyee, whose most recent large oils on canvas feature an even subtler use of line, space, and color than we have previously seen in her work. But while this might seem a dramatic turning point in the work of a less experienced painter, in the case of Chinyee it signifies a refinement and a coming to the forefront of qualities that have distinguished her paintings all along, albeit in a less assertive manner.

One of the more noticeable aspects of her new paintings, however, is their compositional austerity, in marked contrast to some earlier works in which the gestural elements were more dominant. This is not to say that the gesture has subsided or been eliminated, for that would be totally uncharacteristic of Chinyee. Rather, while her earlier paintings focused on the overall calligraphic force of the gesture, now the gesture has been subdued to achieve a new sense of serenity.

The most obvious evidence of this is that while one would have in the past noted her kinship with more muscularly gestural artists such as de Kooning, now Chinyee seems closer to Rothko compositionally. However, as William Zimmer, the New York Times art critic, noted in a recent essay on Chinyee, she has "put hard edges on what would be his soft cloud forms." Now Chinyee's linear thrust is horizontal, whether created with strokes of a broad brush to lay down a bold bar of color— as seen in one canvas where an area of soft rose madder divides a field of subtly modulated orange and peach hues— or as seen in another large painting in which the composition is similarly dissected by looser, dark strokes.

In the latter painting, too, more prominently than in some of her others, Chinyee

Painting by Chinyee

has added delicate gestural strokes (possibly with an oil stick, a new addition in her work), to the vibrant yellow field dominating the upper portion of the canvas. The linear elements, very unlike anything in Rothko's work, assert a very different intention, even while Chinyee adopts a similar formal armature for her composition.

For all that she has assimilated from Western art, these delicate, graceful strokes, floating faintly over her predominantly burnished yellow color fields, link the paintings of Chinyee's work to the long tradition of Asian art. Thus, they are indispensable, giving the work of this distinguished artist much of its essential character.

—Joyce Lynn Marcus

A Two-Gallery Survey of Korean American Art

Anyone familiar with the fine restaurants in the area of midtown Manhattan known as Korea Town can tell you that Korean food has its own unique flavors, distinctly different from other Asian cuisines. That Korean art also has characteristics unlike any other, can be seen in a large group exhibition, under the auspices of Korean American Contemporary Arts, Ltd, spanning two venues in the same bustling area: Gallery 32nd Street, 32 West 32nd Street (4th floor) and Liberty Bank, 11 West 32nd Street, through September 9, 2002.

Daniel DaeShik Choi exemplifies these unique qualities in his mixed media paintings of stylized landscapes where the central image is invariably a textured orb affixed in bas relief to the composition. Juxtaposed with craggy, semi-abstract mountains, Choi's sun/moon symbols project a strong spiritual aura.

Kyung Hee Park's acrylic paintings have their own quirky charm, their intricate compositions subjecting natural subjects to surreal permutations. Park's fertile imagination transforms a flower garden into an otherworldly realm.

Ju Won Park paints bold abstractions with a painterly panache reminiscent of Abstract Expressionism, combined with a muted, earthy quality that suggests the rustic atmosphere of a small Korean village. The combination of elements makes these paintings appear simultaneously folksy and sophisticated.

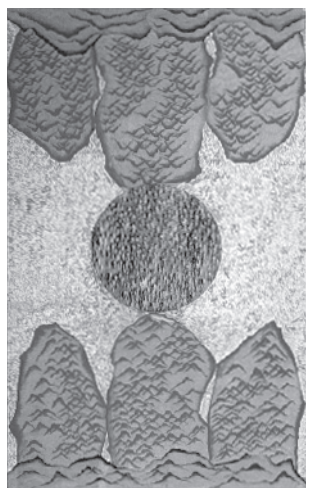
Working with dyed silk, Oh Kum Kwon creates subtle abstractions in which areas dark blue and crimson hues create subtle coloristic nuances. Kwon's compositions are possessed of a fragile sense of mystery that sets them apart as products of a rarefied sensibility.

Kyung Ok Yoo's intriguingly titled oil on canvas, "The Vase to Heaven," depicts an idealized view of the Queens Whitestone Bridge within the outline of a large vase encircled by floral forms. Although Yoo's elevation of a mundane subject is so subjective as to be inexplicable, the painting is poetic and oddly affecting.

Hyun Chough, on the other hand, submerges images from news photos in somber veils of color, juxtaposed with the stars and stripes, as well other elements such as small stones in a rectangular receptacle, in a powerful mixed media work entitled "Remembrance of Sept. 11th, II." While echoes of Rauschenberg resound, Chough's composition has its own funky power and is emotionally affecting.

Then there is Soo Kyung Kahng whose trio of small square mixed media abstractions combine a checkerboard grid with fine translucent elements interlaced to create delicate optical effects. Kahng's use of unusual materials adds to the purity of this artist's pristine aesthetic vision.

Young Choon Kwon shows floral still life paintings in acrylics on canvas that belong to a long tradition in Western art. Yet, Kwan invests these pictures with freshness and immediacy through the use of subdued yet vibrant hues, as well as authoritative brush work.



Daniel D. Choi, "Mountain 02"

Hyun Sook Park's ink painting "Morning Glory" partakes of the Asian tradition, yet retains its own particular freshness, as well as that linear grace through which ink painters convey a sense of one's own individual character, even while adher-

Hyun Chough, "Remembrance of Sept. 11th, II"

ing to the conventions of a traditional art form.

Elements of Eastern and Western techniques achieve a fine formal synthesis in an untitled mixed media painting by Young Son. While Young's energetic work, with its rhythmic horizontal strokes, has the gestural thrust of modern abstraction, it is also enlivened by a peculiarly Asian lyricism.

These and several other talented artists, too numerous to do justice in the space allotted here, demonstrated the vitality and stylistic diversity of contemporary Korean

Erika Weihs: A Gentle, Angry Painter

There are certain artists whose concerns are so timeless as to almost appear prophetic, as the cycles of history repeat themselves again and again. Fashions in the art world come and go, but the art of Erika Weihs remains rooted in the human experience, and thus it never appears out of touch with the times.

Like Ben Shahn and Leonard Baskin, Weihs is a populist who has illustrated more than fifty books as well as had numerous gallery exhibitions. Weihs makes the transition between making pictures for publication and fine art painting quite gracefully because she is essentially a story teller. Her figures, convincingly realistic but always somewhat simplified, become a kind of visual alphabet for conveying human emotions. Her work is never obscure, coy, cute, or tainted by the irony so prevalent in much contemporary art; Weihs does not deal in ambiguity. She trusts in the viewers' intelligence, in his or her ability to recognize between right and wrong, good and evil, and she is unequivocal in letting us know what side she is on.

"Peace and Wars Past and Present" is the title of Erika Weihs' new exhibition at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from October 15 through November 2. Like most of her shows in recent years, it is something of a mini-retrospective, comprised of both old and new paintings. This is a suitable approach for an artist whose work traces the continuum of contemporary life and politics, and it seems especially appropriate at the present time in our history, as the drums of war beat once again and we all begin to experience that familiar deja vu which, beyond the first flush of justifiable anger and misguided patriotism, can only bring sadness on reflection.

There is a powerful oil on canvas, for example, called "Shalom, Sala'am." It depicts two women, one presumably Israeli, the other obliviously an Arab, judging from her distinctive head-dress. They both wear expressions that simultaneously signify sorrow and determination. Their hands are clasped in solidarity and raised high above their heads.

The composition is powerful and emblematic in the way that makes Weihs' work much more than wishful thinking or "peacenik" propaganda. The formal flattening of the figures, their dark garments merged as one entity against the strident mustard yellow, blue, and green color areas in the background, lends the image a visual

"Business as Usual"

dynamism to match that of any hard-edged abstraction. Indeed, the combination of bold shapes and vibrant hues could give the effect of the design for a universal, humanistic flag. But it is the immediacy of the image and the prayerful feelings that it encompasses which make "Shalom, Sala'am" an effective and affecting work of art, above and beyond its considerable formal virtues. And the enduring relevance of the picture seems all the more remarkable when one learns that it was painted, not yesterday, but in 1981.

Another canvas, from 1990, also resonates with today's headlines in more ways than one, given the underlying, incestuous relationships between various corporate scandals and rumors of coming war. In "Business as Usual (Courtesy of the Oil Cartel)," we see an eerie figure in a gas-mask and fatigues crucified on a rough cross. In the background, a full moon hangs low in a murky, polluted-looking nocturnal sky above a highway crowded with a convoy of cars and trucks.

Among the most immediately gripping paintings in the exhibition are "9/11/01" and "Death Over New York." The former is an image of figures falling against billows of black smoke; although we are reminded of the most horrifying and haunting news images of the 9/11 tragedy, the way Weihs depicts these people, while not trivializing their demise, imparts to them the grace of angels. In "Death Over New York," a smaller oil on canvas in somber monochromes, a black bird flying over gray ruins becomes a powerful symbol. Other paintings bring back old ogres : The beefy, inelegant profile of Lyndon Johnson set against a wall scrawled with protest slogans; Henry Kissinger, cloaked in an American flag and walking on water. In political portraits such as these, Weihs can be every bit as unforgiving as Leon Golub in his paintings of mercenaries.

As the title of the show makes clear, however, Erika Weihs deals with peace as well as war, with beauty as well as horror. In "Come to Me," a woman reaches out to embrace a little girl against a clear blue sky and the picture speaks with simple eloquence of unconditional love; in "Seascape with Gulls," the white birds soar up majestically, an image that, in the context of Weihs' oeuvre, seems to symbolize a sense of hope and renewal. In another oil, dated 1967/8, a young woman strums a guitar and smiles blissfully as she sings. She has long black hair and wears a flowing garment. Tall weeds behind her blow in the wind, evoking Bob Dylan's famous song title of that time, and the sky is overcast and filled with clouds that remind us that the

"Untitled"

late sixties was a tumultuous time. Yet, the songful hippy Muse reminds us, too, that the peaceful protests of the young once prevailed to end an unpopular war.

To paraphrase a song by the folk singer Holly Near, which has become an anthem for progressive people everywhere, Erika Weihs is "a gentle, angry woman." And if there are those who insist that art cannot change anything for the better, their naysaying has never discouraged her from trying.

—J. Sanders Eaton

New York Notebook

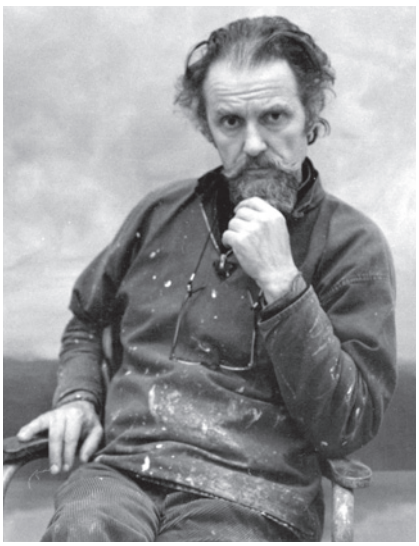


Photo courtesy of Merrell London

Jon Schueler

Jon Schueler's Transcendent Skies

Because Jon Schueler (1916-1992) was the last romantic, it was also his fate, at least until recently, to be the lost Abstract Expressionist. Born in Milwaukee, where his father was a tire distributor, Schueler got his a M.A. in English Literature from the University of Wisconsin and hoped to become a writer.

In the late forties, however, while living in Los Angeles with his first wife and trying to write a book about his experiences as a bomber pilot in the Army Air Corps, he took a course in portrait painting. Although he signed up for it almost as a lark, simply because his wife did, it set him on the course that he was to pursue passionately for the rest of his life. Soon he was studying full-time on the G.I. Bill at the California School of Fine Arts with Clyfford Still, Richard Diebenkorn, and Mark Rothko, who taught there for one semester.

Of his teachers, it was Still that Schueler respected most and who became something of a mentor to him, leading one to wonder if the older painter, a cantankerous loner who eschewed art world politics and cronyism to follow a solitary path, might have had some affect on Schueler's later isolation from the art world at a crucial moment in his career. Granted, Schueler was much more gregarious than his teacher. He followed the action to New York and quickly became a drinking buddy of Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock, Joan Mitchell, and everyone else who mattered—particularly among the Second Generation of the New York School, of which he was already a leading member on the strength of his successful solo shows at the Stable and Leo Castelli galleries.

Then, in the late fifties, Schueler experienced a lightning flash epiphany that could be said to have adversely affected his career almost as much as it benefited his work: He realized that nature was his most important inspiration and took off for the Western Highlands of Scotland, chasing the perfect light, seeking skies as turbulently magnificent as those he had soared through on bombing missions over France and Germany.

At a point in time when it was almost as essential for an ambitious painter to spend his evenings in the Cedar Tavern, the social hub of the New York art scene, as it was for him to spend his days in the studio, Schueler had exiled himself to Mallaig, a remote fishing village on the Sound of Sleat. In this isolated place, with its violent storms and strong winds that kept the clouds in constant flux, Schueler found the dramatic qualities of light that inspired his best paintings. Intermittently, he spent time in Europe and returned to the U.S. for his New York exhibitions and to take periodic teaching positions. But it was to Mallaig, where the stoic fishermen respected his odd mission as the villagers in Arles had tolerated Vincent van Gogh a century earlier, that he invariably returned for prolonged stays for the remainder of his life.

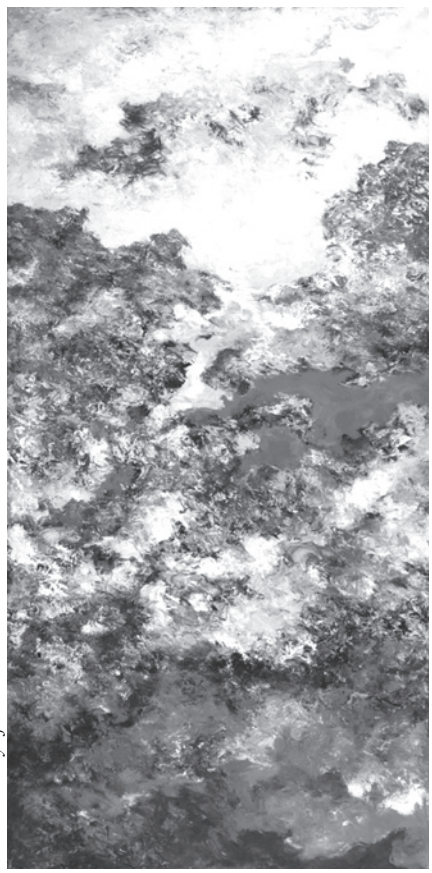


Photo courtesy of ACA Galleries

Painting by Jon Schueler

Over a period of thirty years, Schueler wrote as well as painted, and the 3700 handwritten pages that he produced, edited down to 359, were published as "The Sound of Sleat: A Painter's Life," in 1999. Illustrated with reproductions of his work, as well as several dramatic photographs of the handsome, bearded painter resembling Errol Flynn in some of his more swashbuckling roles, the book is an often rhapsodic account of Schueler's artistic struggles, stormy marriages and love affairs, and conflicts between the need for creative solitude and the desire for human intimacy.

While the memoir has helped to spark renewed interest in Schueler, it is the paintings that warrant our serious attention. Even more than the craggy compositions of his mentor Clyfford Still, which influenced him briefly early in his career, Schueler's ethereal later canvases bridge the gap between Abstract Expressionism and Color Field Painting. At the same time, their floating, cumulus forms and light-filled surfaces are as evocative of sky and sea as those of J.M.W. Turner, an artist Schueler admired greatly.

Schueler's unabashed acknowledgement of nature as inspiration flew in the face of the avant garde taboo against art being "about" anything, so prevalent among the New York School. ("You can't abstract from nothing," the jazz bassist and composer Charles Mingus once said, and Schueler—himself a part-time bass player with various jazz combos— would probably have agreed, although such an opinion could hardly have been fashionable among his painterly peers in the fifties and sixties.) Schueler's rugged individualism cost him dearly during his lifetime; despite numerous exhibitions in prestigious venues, his work never received the degree of attention that it so obviously deserves.

Now, however, that appears to be changing, with two major John Schueler solo shows coming up in New York: "Cross Currents: the Sixties and the Eighties." at Katherina Rich Perlow Gallery, 41 East 57th Street, from October 2 through 31; and "Cross Currents: the Fifties and Seventies," at ACA Galleries, 529 West 20th Street, from October 19 through November 16. Concurrently, there will also be a solo show at The Ingleby Gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland. All three exhibitions coincide with the publication by Merrell, London, of a 128 page monograph, "John Schueler: To the North," with over 100 color plates, excerpts from "The Sound of Sleat," and essays by Gerald Nordland and Richard Ingleby.

"I wanted to push through figuration into abstraction, and then through abstraction into non-objectivity, and to come out the other side," Jon Schueler once stated.

That Schueler anticipated the direction that abstract painting has taken in the postmodern era makes his work all the more ripe for rediscovery at the present moment in art history.

Mirel Bercovici: A Novel Life

Few living artists can boast an 80 year retrospective, but Mirel Bercovici, who started painting as a child prodigy and is still going strong at 84, covered that time span in her recent show at Westbeth Gallery, 155 Bank Street. Of the 150 works on view, one of our favorites was "Leonard Bernstein Conducting the Philharmonic."

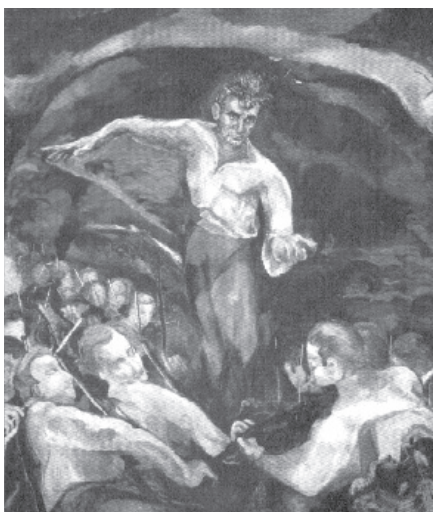
Painted in the late 1950s, the large oil depicts the composer as a Byronic figure in a flowing white shirt, looming over the violin section against a background of somber yet vibrant red, purple, and blue hues. In keeping with its theme, the composition itself has a symphonic

The young Mirel Bercovici with her father

sweep, with the figures of the composer and the musicians elongated in a manner reminiscent of El Greco. Although Bernstein's familiar face, with its intense dark eyes under bushy black brows, is immediately recognizable, his gesturing hands are hugely exaggerated, making for a highly effective synthesis of specific portraiture and vigorous Expressionism.

Although she has painted every sort of subject in the course of her long, productive career, Bercovici is an especially exceptional portrait artist with an ability to both capture a likeness and give us something even more essential of the sitters' character by virtue of her bold distortions and equally intrepid color sense. Rather than flattering her subjects Bercovici, like Alice Neel, does them the even greater honor of laying bare their slightly tarnished souls. Her "Retired Policeman" and "Newspaperwoman," particularly, are as roguishly deft as the terse prose portraits of the noir mystery novelist Raymond Chandler.

Indeed, Mirel Bercovici's own bio reads like a novel. The daughter of eminent bohemians—



Mirel Bercovici, "Leonard Bernstein Conducting the Philharmonic"

the noted author and historian Konrad Bercovici and the sculptor Naomi Le Brescu—she was was brought up among artists like Constantin Brancusi and Diego Rivera, entertainment figures such as Charlie Chaplin, Melvyn Douglass, and the Gershwins, as well literary giants like Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. To this day, she is often interviewed by biographers of her parents' celebrity friends.

As a child, Bercovici remembers taking long walks with Paul Robeson and trying to "explain to him equal rights for children"; listening to a drunken Isadora Duncan complain to her mother, "I'm old, fat, and can't dance anymore"; and being fussed over by Sigmund Freud, who warned her father against exposing her to the political turbulence of pre-war Europe, saying, "It's not a good idea for a young girl to see blood."

She was the youngest person ever admitted to the Academie Julian in Paris, went on to study at the National Academy of Design and the Art Students League, and later founded the New York Art Information Bureau under Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. She had numerous exhibitions in the U.S. and abroad, broadcast the first radio commentaries calling attention to the historical inequality of women in the arts.

At present, she is collaborating on a film project about her father's successful suit against Charlie Chaplin for allegedly stealing the script for "The Great Dictator" from him, which she claims to have typed as a young woman.

A poet as well as a painter, one of her recent poems, "Unfinished Time," lamenting the encroachments of age on still-youthful spirit, admonishes "Excuse me, Death, for you are wrong/I have yet another song," and concludes, "The Lord is not my shepherd,/Let him keep his god-damned sheep!"

Michael Ragusa
Firefighter, Engine 279
By Barbara Marcus

John Coughlin
Sgt., NYPD
By Michael Economos

Face of Courage: The 9/11 Portrait Project

Among the many exhibitions taking place around the county to commemorate the first anniversary of the September 11 tragedy, one of the most interesting that we've heard about is a show that recently opened at the Chesapeake Gallery at Hanford Community College, in Maryland, where it can be seen until October 17, before traveling to several other cities, including New York.

"The Face of Courage" portrait exhibition was initiated by Barbara Marcus, a painter and associate professor of fine art at the college, who says, "After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, many of us searched our hearts to find a way to help alleviate the unbearable grief and contribute to the healing process. My thoughts as an artist kept returning to a simple concept: to provide families of the missing uniformed rescue workers with portraits of their loved ones. I also envisioned the portraits traveling in a nationwide exhibition before being donated to the families who suffered so much. This intuitive reaction was the beginning of an incredible journey. I would like to thank the families –-the epitome of grace under pressure —who have contacted me and chosen to become involved with the project. Their letters and photographs are an honor to receive and have made me more devoted than ever to this project."

Soon after the attacks, Marcus discovered a web site posted by the widow of a New York firefighter and offered to paint her husband's portrait free of charge. Word soon spread among the families of other fallen firefighters and police officers and the photos and letters started pouring in—especially after the NYFD and NYPD added the portrait information to their newsletters. The first fellow artist that Marcus enlisted to help her with the project was her husband Michael Economos, a professor of painting and drawing at Maryland Institute College of Art, but the couple soon found themselves overwhelmed and reached out to other artists nationwide.

New York artist Frank Boros was one of them. "It was an honor to be part of this project," Boros says. "Although it is my gift to the family, it also helped me with my own healing about September 11."

The web site for the project, updated each time a new portrait is completed, is www.thefaceofcourage.com. Those who would like to make a tax-deductable contribution can make their checks payable to The Face of Courage Fund and mail them to the Harford Community College Foundation, Inc., 401 Thomas Run Road, Bel Air, MD 21015-1698. (For more information, call 410-836-4428.)

Rinder Redux

Larry Rinder, who curated the 2002 Whitney Biennial and also juried Pleiades Gallery's 20th Annual Juried Exhibition was reportedly so impressed by the sheer number and quality of submissions to the latter show that he later confided to gallery artist Ed Brodkin that in judging it again, he "might have chosen 40 different works."

This is a remarkably candid admission for a curator of his stature to make, especially since Brodkin tells us that Rinder "worked hard and conscientiously to carefully review the hundreds of submissions, often doubling back to check himself."

Refreshingly modest as Rinder's self-doubt struck us, however, we found most of his choices impeccable. Among many impressive works, we especially liked a trompe l'oeil floor sculpture by Christopher Kurtz aptly entitled "Hoodwinked," for what initially appeared to be an ornate Persian carpet with some lumpish (possibly feline) thing hidden under it, actually turned out to be fashioned from wood and paint; a whimsical oil on canvas of shocking pink pigs performing an aerial act and a mouse walking a tightrope in a circus tent by Gabriele Longobardi, a figurative painter with a winningly eccentric sensibility; "The Red Menace," an artfully "artless" ink drawing by Jay Van Houten, its maze-like arabesques combining qualities of elaborate graffiti "tags," tribal tattoos, and 1960s psychedelia; Anna Sea's imagistic melange of guns, explosions, rubber duckies and hand-scripted texts on terrorism painted in a style somewhere between Hieronymus Bosch and Oyvind Fahlstrom; and a spookily realistic sculpture of a sneering skin-head by Vassilios Lois that gained in weirdness for being slightly smaller than life-size.

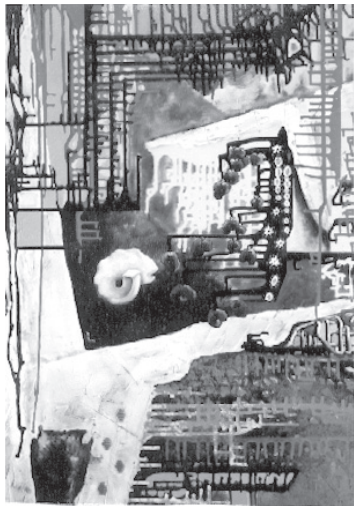
Jim Schulte's Synthesis of Image and Abstraction

Although Jim Schulte has lived and studied drawing and painting in New Mexico and Arizona (places that are known to put a regional stamp on many artists), he has not succumbed to the cliches of what we think of as Southwestern contemporary art, judging from his recent solo show at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway.

Rather, Schulte's vibrant and intricate paintings have more in common with those of the late David Wojnarowicz and the bizarre productions of Chicago's "Hairy Who" school than with the arid desert scenes and decorative Native American themes that we normally associate with that part of the country.

Like Wojnarowicz in particular, Schulte often divides his compositions into areas of disparate imagery that have the appearance of jaggedly deconstructed comic strips whose narrative has been jumbled beyond recognition. His images are painted in a meticulous style that merges realism with heightened color in a manner that owes something to popular art forms such as comic book illustration and urban graffiti. Schulte, however, appropriates aspects of such low-brow genres for their genuine vitality and considerable expressive possibilities, celebrating and elevating them, rather than employing them ironically in the manner of a Pop artist.

Thus, a painting such as "Night City," with its images of silhouetted skyscrapers, strident yellow lightning bolts, fragmented faces, stylized clouds, and various organic and geometric patterns, has a dazzling immediacy that transcends the somewhat snide condescension toward its popular sources that we see in the work of artists like Warhol and Lichtenstein.



"Deep Water"

Indeed, if one did not know better, one might think that Schulte had sharpened his visual skills in the vital aesthetic melting pot of New York's East Village in the 1980s, given the funky imagery and skillfully contained chaos of his Hellzappoppin compositions.

At the same time, Schulte has a cool, classical side that can also be compared to the jazzy, streetsmart formalism of Stuart Davis and the more emblematic abstract compositions of Marsden Hartley, such as "Portrait of a German Officer." Like both earlier artists Schulte combines abstract shapes such as rhythmic waves of color, triangles, and circles with bits of recognizable imagery to create compositions that initially compel our attention with movement and rhythm, yet reward closer inspection with a plethora of witty visual clues.

Although relatively modest in scale compared to some of Schulte's other compositions, the oil entitled "37" is especially compelling, both in terms of its strong design and its neosurreal imagery.The upper left side of this composition is dominated by an abstract painting within the painting, identifiable as such by the stapled edge of the canvas. Protruding through this canvas (or perhaps simply spilling out of it—given the characteristically metaphysical flowing. Add to the dense imagistic layering a slice of cherry pie, an odd human face, a large black bug, and chain of cherries linked like a diagram of atoms, among other curious odds and ends, and you have a composition of great complexity and suggestiveness.

With their intriguing imagistic layering bolstered by an impressive formal command, the paintings of Jim Schulte are at once eccentric and aesthetically pleasing. One could spend a great deal of time and have a lot of fun trying to decipher their hidden meanings; however, their visual qualities alone provide sufficient pleasure to compel our attention. —Feliks Karoly

Belfiore and Franchi: Beyond "Transavantgarde"

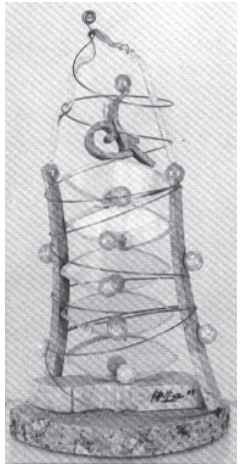
Since the last great U.S. publicity blitz concerning Italian contemporary art occurred with the emergence of Chia, Clemente, and Cucchi in the late seventies and early eighties, we still tend to stereotype Italian artists in terms of Neo-Expressionism or "Transavantgarde," the lofty term coined by the critic Achille Bonito Olivia to mean roughly the same thing.

For this reason, among others, it should be an enlightening experience for New Yorkers to encounter the two uniquely unclassifiable Italian artists featured in the exhibition "Looking Inwards," at Gallery @ 49, 322 West 49th Street, from September 10 through October 1.

Presented by Stefania Carrozzini of International Exhibition Service, in Milan Italy, the show brings together the sculptor Fiorenzo Belfiore and the painter Massimo Franchi, both of whom give a new face to Italian art—at least for those who may be unaware that it has evolved significantly over the past two and one half decades.

Fiorenzo Belfiore creates assemblages in glass that immediately transcend the self-limiting stigma of "craft," elevating this potentially decorative material far beyond one's stereotypical expectations in startling and amusing ways. Belfiore employs glass for its airy, ethereal qualities, to create pieces that are at once magical and refreshingly funky. Found objects such as marbles, jars, and test tubes appear to float freely in thin air and to cavort in antic configurations within their transparent glass "cages," as the curator Carrozzini has aptly called them, pointing out that, in Belfiore's work, the container "encloses in its turn other containers."

Thus, like the classic image of the cartoon character Little Lulu on the Kleenex box, holding yet another Kleenex box (and so on ad absurdum), these see-through containers within containers appear to parody a sense



Fiorenzo Belfiore

of infinity. Yet, Belfiore's use of found objects—given the nature of the objects he chooses—is more poetic than Pop. His pieces are spiritual descendants of both Alberto Giacometti's early surrealist tableaux such as "The Palace at 4 a.m" and Joseph Cornell's miniature metaphysical theaters, and Calder's gravity defying playfulness— albeit invariably realized in a manner and in materials unique to Fiorenzo Belfiore alone.

Like a godly tinkerer, Belfiore pieces together his glass components with stray bits of iron, wire, and other odds and ends that contribute to their improvisatory charm—making serpentinely graceful processions of marbles, for example, suggest molecular activity, the movement of cells, the stately dance of the cosmos.

That the materials Fiorenzo Belfiore employs to evoke such eternal phenomena are often frankly, undisguisedly mundane makes his assemblages all the more magical, lending them a sense of metamorphosis-in-action that simultaneously delights and takes us aback.

By contrast, the paintings of Massimo Franchi are steeped in the drama of darkness. In some, comely female nudes emerge from areas of shadow richly conjured in oil on canvas. Defined with semi-transparent areas of white against the dark, subtly mottled grounds, these nude figures appear at once palpable and ghostly, their transient presences bespeaking the embrace of beauty and mortality.

Here, too, paint itself becomes a surrogate for flesh, rather than merely its imitator, the surface alive with sensual scumbling, subtle modulations of tone and color, and exquisite variations of texture that approximate, at least in aesthetic terms, some of the tactile and visual sensations that accompany an erotic encounter.

This same voluptuousness of surface carries into other paintings by Franchi, in which images of large eyes dominate the composition, mirroring the gaze of the viewer, suggesting a mutual dialogue of seeing, reflecting the introspective title that announces the exhibition's theme, recalling the old saw about the eyes being the windows of the soul.

Massimo Franchi

In yet other paintings, fragmented images of nudes are enveloped in the embrace of large shirts presented frontally in a manner that has caused some viewers to draw comparisons to the American Pop artist Jim Dine's compositions dominated by bath robes. Since both artists are superb draftsmen who successfully combine aspects of realism and abstraction, such comparisons are not altogether inaccurate. In the paintings of Massimo Franchi, however, these inanimate articles of clothing take on a haunting human presence. They are not merely iconographic forms but powerful symbols that resonate with elusive and mysterious layers of meaning.

—Peter Wiley

McCarthy: Translating Nature into Painting

The Australian artist Paul McCarthy is well known for both his landscapes and still life paintings, which made for a lively combination in his recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, in Soho.

Ever since he began painting in 1980 and sold his first picture to a collector in Sydney two years later, McCarthy has pursued a direct path of working directly from nature or still life setups in the time honored manner. His work is refreshingly to the point, without the stylistic tics or affectations that we see in the work of many of his contemporaries with less confidence in their ability to convey their responses to the natural world.

McCarthy has no such insecurities, apparently, for he plunges into the landscape with exuberance, painting out of doors in the plein air manner, laying down paint in bravura strokes. And his still life subjects are no less energetic, as seen in the oil called "Gathering Angelina Burdett," where the tabletop still life set up is captured in a composition at once replete with lively detail although abstract in its overall power. Here the piece de resistance is the vase of bright blue irises at the center of the composition, juxtaposed with two chianti bottles, a china tea cup and a scattering of purple plums on a yellow striped tablecloth. Along with the round tabletop, a rectangular framed and matted painting on the wall, behind the tall-stemmed Irises add geometric contrasts to the more organic shapes of the flowers and fruits. Here, the incisive painterly draftsmanship with which the various

Painting by Paul McCarthy

objects are depicted, as well as the bright clear colors in the higher register are reminiscent of certain paintings by van Gogh, albeit with McCarthy's own unique touch. What unites the two artists, however, is that even a genteel domestic subject such as this is imbued with a dynamic energy by virtue of McCarthy's vigorous brush work and highly charged color sense.

If anything, these qualities are heightened in McCarthy's landscapes, where lush tropical colors and boldly delineated forms make one think of Gauguin sans the exotic trappings. Rather, McCarthy relies on the radiance of the landscape itself, its lush growth and chromatic richness to convey the drama of nature and transform it in pure pictorial terms. The key words in describing the paintings of Paul McCarthy, are mass, color, energy and light. The latter is a particularly important element in his compositions, which appear illuminated from within by the sheer chromatic power that he projects in his vigorously painted oils.

One of the most striking in this regard is a painting of purple and blue mountains set against a vibrant yellow sky toward which tall, slender palm trees also strive heavenward.

In other paintings, equally as compelling in their own way, he employs somewhat more subdued hues to capture densely wooded scenes where trees are bracketed between verdant patches of grass, earthy dirt roads, and clear blue skies. In these paintings where color is somewhat muted, McCarthy's brush work comes to the forefront, knitting the various elements in the composition into harmony in a manner that makes one think of Cezanne.

Like any good painter, however, McCarthy invariably follows his own path, building on the examples of the masters who inspire him to translate the vital energy of nature in personal painterly terms.

—Wilson Wong

Dawn Arena and the Mystery of the "Nephillim"

The term "Nephillim" derives from the Hebrew word Nafal, which means "to fall." In the Old Testament the Nephillim appear on earth when the sons of God cohabited with the daughters of earth and bear them offspring. In the Midrash the word denotes that these offspring "fell and caused the downfall of the world" (Genesis Rabbah 26: 7) and in more recent New Age terminology it has been applied to the notion that life on earth may have had extraterrestrial origins. Some of the more religious UFO enthusiasts like to point out that extraterrestrials, according to those who claim to have had encounters with them, are astonishingly angel-like in appearance, concluding from this that they could well be part of God's heavenly host. Conversely, popular Christian evangelist Bill Graham was moved at one point to preach, "The devil's angels are calling themselves visitors from outer space today... The appearance of UFOs in our skies means the devil is intensifying his satanic campaign against the good."

In her recent exhibition, "Dragorigin," at Gelabert

"Dragorigin"

Dawn Arena, 732-846-4641
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ARENART13@aol.com
www.DawnArena.com

Studios, 255 West 86th Street, the New Jersey artist Dawn Arena explored the notion of Nephillim in evocative mixed media pieces that successfully transcend the boundaries between painting and sculpture.

In a piece called "Nephillim Thoughts," the idea of Genesis generates overtly sexual images of penises, vaginas, seductive lips, and tiny nude figures forming an abstract/surreal landscape. Here, it is Arena's compositional device of layering the images in horizontal bands that makes the work succeed in formal as well as symbolic terms.

In another compelling piece, "Hell Choir," Arena recalls the more satanic interpretation that Billy Graham suggests with four horrific, gape-mouthed faces emerging in bas relief from a canvas covered with a thickly textured ground. Arena, however, appears to view the whole idea of Nephillim with humor rather than alarm, using it as a thematic springboard for technical innovation. One of her most impressive pieces in this regard is "Him," a sculpture of a large face created with crushed leaves, plaster, wood, and plexiglass. This piece suggests a synthesis of The Green Man and God.

Other sculptures, paintings, and mixed media reliefs by Dawn Arena employ intriguing images such as a tactile fragment of a tree with an eerily life-like eye peering from its surface, a meditative face emerging from heart-shaped vaginal lips, and a sensual likeness of the artist's own nude torso to project all manner of poetic meanings.

Arena is a technical virtuoso with an ability to combine unusual materials in new and surprising ways. However, her earthy, sometimes totemic, invariably intriguing works do not flaunt virtuosity for its own sake. Rather, she employs materials, textures, and surfaces to convey physical metaphors and create a unique personal mythology in pieces that simultaneously evoke the primordial power of nature and the mystery of supernatural forces.

—Lawrence Downes

The Grumbacher Palettes at Rosehill Gallery

On the face of it, the idea of a big art supply manufacturer commissioning artists to create paintings on artist's palettes could sound tricky, even hokey. This is hardly true, however, in the case of the more than two-hundred paintings on palettes, created for the Grumbacher art supply company, which were exhibited at New York University and toured the country in 1958 and 1959. Indeed, the challenge of composing a picture on palettes of various shapes appears to have brought out the best in the artists, many well known, who contributed to the project.

Henry Libert

After being hidden from view in storage for forty years, the palettes will once again be seen on October 28 in the Second Annual Art Auction of Rosehill Auction Gallery, 35 South Van Brunt Street, Englewood, New Jersey. (Phone: 201-816-1940/ Fax: 201-816-9189.)

One of the simplest and most striking solutions to what to do with the hole that the artist sticks his or her thumb through to hold the palette was arrived at by Harriet Wilkie, who turned it into the iris of a large eye in her realist close-up of the upper portion of a face. Here, too, the image makes the shape of the palette resemble an opera mask—albeit one depicting the portion of the face that the mask would normally cover, lending a quality of Magritte-like surreal hide-and-seek to Wilkie's piece.

By contrast, Henry Libert took a trompe l'oeil approach, placing a miniature painting of a still life, wrapped with string and partially torn away newspaper, smack dab in the middle of his palette. The precise, fool-the-eye realism of the painted image contrasts beautifully in this work with the dabs and smears of paint around the edges of the palette. Emil Carlson, on the other hand, came up with a voluptuous female nude holding brushes in her hand and leaning on a palette within the palette, which looms as large as the figure itself. Both the actual palette and the painted palette, however, share the same thumb-hole, although details of the artist's studio behind the nude model are painted to the edge of the former, while the smears of color appear within the latter. Here again, Carlson successfully played off the contrasts and harmonies between the object and the painted image.

Other artists felt obliged to work the thumb-hole into the composition, either as representation or abstract element. In Blodgett's juicily tactile nocturnal landscape, for example, it serves as the moon and actually appears to illuminate the entire glistening surface of the composition, while Meltzer makes it the circular focal point of a vibrantly colorful nonobjective composition comprised primarily of triangular shapes.

Although not all of the palettes were available for viewing before the auction, among the artists who painted them were such luminaries as the celebrated Chinese-American watercolorist Dong Kingman, Theresa Bernstein (a wonderful New York Expressionist who lived to 110 and painted for almost as long), as well as Rex Brandt, Carl Holty, Ben Messick, Robert Sprague, Ernest Fiene, William Meyerowitz and many more.

That the old fashioned hand-held palette, like the regulation size easel, has fallen into disuse in recent years, with so many artists working on a huge scale, adds an extra element of antique charm to these intriguing works of art.

—Marie R. Pagano

Nuiko Miyamoto's Prayerful Gift of Peace and Healing

The spirit of conservatism appears to dominate many art receptions these days, with self-conscious fashionistas in basic black comporting themselves as sedately as though they were at a Republican fund raiser. Happily, however, there was no such funereal atmosphere at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, when the Japanese painter Nuiko Miyamoto opened her solo show "Meditation for Peace" with live music and a dance performance by Minako Mitsuzumi.

A well known performance artist from Japan who has lived in New York for the past twelve years, Mitsuzumi combines Afro-Caribbean dance with free form improvisation. Accompanied by two conga drummers pounding out hypnotic rhythms, her fluid undulations and the sheer joy that she takes in movement were so infectious that she soon had the whole multicultural gathering up and dancing with her like the figures in that famous painting by Matisse.

The performance, which turned into a spontaneous "happening", was the perfect complement to the paintings of Nuiko Miyamoto, which acknowledge great sorrow yet ultimately triumph over it by celebrating life and the spirit of hope. Deeply affected by the American bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which occurred when she was five years old, Miyamoto has been painting on the theme of peace since the early 1970s and has won numerous awards in prestigious exhibitions in her homeland. She has stated that she feels it is her responsibility as a Japanese to warn the world against ever repeating the devastation and despair that she experienced first-hand, and her paintings are a powerful testament indeed.

A central image of most of Nuiko Miyamoto's paintings is Hiroshima Dome, an imposing ruin that was among the few structures left half-standing after the first atomic bomb destroyed ninety percent of the city, now designated by the Japanese government as "Peace City." The black, skeletal dome is set against a brilliant red sky in paintings with poignant titles such as "No More," "Prayer," and "August 6," the date of the 1945 bombing. (Significantly, Miyamoto held the reception for her exhibition at Cast Iron Gallery on August 11, combining the month of the Hiroshima bombing with the day of the Twin Towers attack in order to commemorate both tragedies, the second of which prompted her to offer her "Meditation for Peace" in New York City.)

Painting by Nuiko Miyamoto

Although executed in acrylics on canvas, Miyamoto's paintings are matted and framed under glass rather than mounted on stretchers. This presentation enhances their happy marriage of diverse attributes, with characteristically Japanese spareness of design and spatial elegance combined with intense colors and textures more akin to Western Expressionism.

While dominated by the powerful symbol of the Hiroshima Dome, Nuiko Miyamoto's paintings also include other recurring images, such as pigeons, which are reportedly symbols of peace in Japan, as doves are here. The birds are seen either on the ground or soaring against visceral red skies which are further enlivened by gold orbs that could represent either the moon, traditionally celebrated in Autumn festivals by the Japanese people, or the rising sun that is their country's national symbol.

Along with floating feathers— which could suggest peace torn asunder but also create lively whirling rhythms, signifying the movement of the wind— large bouquets of white flowers are also prominent elements in Miyamoto's paintings. These floral elements in her compositions lend the work a slightly surreal lyricism akin to that of Chagall. Indeed, it is this poetic lyricism which gives wings to the paintings of Nuiko Miyamoto, lifting them above grimness, sorrow, and the divisive differences of nations, into the higher realms of hope and universal love.

This spirit was everywhere in evidence at Miyamoto's opening reception, as one by one, the gallery goers put down their wine glasses, kicked off their shoes, and erupted in joyous dancing amid the colorful paintings lining the walls. In that moment, although the dancers were reacting to the movements of the vivacious Minako Mitsuzumi and the persistent rhythms of the drums, the paintings seemed especially powerful, mirroring both the grim reality of war and the beauty of transcendence.

It was clear that Nuiko Miyamoto had brought a precious gift of peace and healing to the City of New York.

—Lawrence Downes

Checking in with "Barney" Brown in L.A.

The New York art scene lost one of its livelier personalities when James Brown, aka Barney Brown, decided to leave the city after living and showing here for five decades. But New York's loss is the West Coast's gain: Barney Brown is already well established in the City of Angels, working in a bungalow studio in an area called Los Felix— which means "a village of happy people," according to the artist.

" My journey with New York City was great and very successful," but moving to L.A. was one of the best moves of my life,"

"Spider," Scott Riddle

the eternally young artist, now in his eighth decade, asserts. "The transition left me quiet and happy. I paint and create every day, and still find time to write poetry and to discover other artists."

It is characteristic of Brown's generosity of spirit that he seems to enjoy finding and promoting other artists whose work he admires as he does in creating and calling attention to his own work. His most recent discovery is a Native American ceramic sculptor named Scott Riddle, who was born in 1966 in Toledo, Ohio, and is presently living and working in Los Angeles. A member of the Chippewa tribe, Riddle continues to honor his heritage as a recorder of its history through art and craft. Brown is quick to make clear, however, that Riddle does not use traditional Native American symbology. Rather, he creates thoroughly contemporary icons in mediums such as ceramic, metal, and porcelain. Especially interesting in the latter medium is Riddle's porcelain sculpture "Spider," a phantasmagoric piece in which two sinister looking human heads wearing rouge, lipstick, and whiteface in the manner of mimes or clowns morph from the back of a many-legged insect. Although the imagery is highly imaginative and by no means traditional, there is a suggestion of Native American crafts in the artist's use of brilliant

colors and patterns. One could also speculate about the heads in whiteface emerging from a black widow as symbols of Caucasian treachery regarding Native Americans, although that might be a subjective interpretation. What is undeniable, however, is that Barney Brown has made another significant discovery: for, possible symbolism aside, Scott Riddle is a remarkable young artist whose work warrants attention on its visual formal and visual merits alone.

As for Barney Brown himself, he has recently been working at the "MOA" Institute, a Japanese school of creative arts and ceramics under the well known instructor Eumi Kiyose and producing some of his most exciting works stoneware heads to date. One of the innovations that he continues to explore is creating stoneware heads that also serve as vases, the addition of living flowers add yet another dimension to works that transcend craft to become high art. The addition of precious metals to some pieces introduces yet another element, as seen in

Edward "Barney" Brown with his painting, "Calla Lily"

"Chinese Head," a piece in blue and white with turquoise and silver accents, its face as majestically serene as one of the ancient Buddhas in the Asian Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Also known as a formidable painter, Barney Brown also produced several characteristically bold floral still life compositions since settling in California. Especially outstanding among them "Calla Lily," an acrylic on canvas in which the sensual white flower and its shapely green leaves, set against a deep violet ground, provide the artist ample opportunity to explore his love of brilliant color and flowing contours.

While New York is not quite the same without the vivacious presence of Edward "Barney" Brown, it is good to know that he is thriving creatively on the West Coast and that examples of his work, as well as that of his new discovery, Scott Riddle, can still be seen by appointment at 70th Art Gallery, 130 East 70th Street (telephone: 212-472-2234). —Lawrence Downes

Twains of East and West in the Art of Joo Sang Kim Lee

One of the biggest challenges for any artist in an era of multiculturalism—particularly an artist who experiences culture shock first-hand via geographical relocation—is how to assimilate new and potentially broadening influences and experiences without abandoning one's own tradition.

Joo Sang Kim Lee, a Korean artist now living in the U.S., has met this challenge admirably, retaining the linear grace gained from her training in traditional Asian ink and watercolor painting, while adopting a more intense approach to color from Western-style art. Thus she arrives at a synthesis that encompasses the best of two worlds, in her solo show at Holiday Inn Martinique on Broadway, 49 West 32nd Street, from October 4-8.

Painting by Joo Sang Kim Lee

An active member of the Korean American Contemporary Arts group, Lee has exhibited widely in her native Korea, as well as in Paris and New York. Not until the present retrospective, however, have we had an opportunity to see a sufficiently broad selection of her work to fully comprehend her career trajectory and aesthetic development. And her evolution is impressive, given the manner in which she has balanced and finally merged the two diverse streams that now comprise her style.

Joo Sang Kim Lee's earlier floral and landscape compositions were executed in the traditional manner, combining monochromatic gray ink washes with spare areas of color. With increasing exposure to Western art, however, her palette grew more intense and she began to integrate linear and chromatic elements in a much bolder manner. Her range of subjects has expanded commensurately as well, moving from the delicate, lyrically misted landscapes and images of boughs and blossoms isolated on expanses of white rice paper that we associate with Asian art to imaginative and complex compositions that express a more subjective approach, embracing elements of modernity.

In one such picture, the gnarled limbs of a tree in the foreground of the composition are expressively distorted, their cursive shapes contrasting rhythmically with the austere geometry of a city skyline. Here, subtly modulated gray washes are combined with areas of fiery red that seep from the sky above the buildings to illuminate the upper branches. Although the near-monochromatic palette is quintessentially Eastern, the semi-abstract thrust of the forms and the manner in which they fill the entire picture space demonstrates Joo Sang Kim Lee's assimilation of Western compositional dynamics.

The Western elements of her style are even more pronounced in the artist's recent watercolors, where luminous hues and sinuous lines are combined to capture floral subjects. No longer are the color areas subdued or circumscribed by black ink outlines. Rather, the sensual contours of petals and leaves are evoked in bold areas of vibrant color that saturate the composition in a manner akin to the watercolors of Charles Burchfield. Indeed, like Burchfield and other twentieth century American painters, such as Arthur Dove and Georgia O'Keeffe, Joo Sang Kim amplifies the shapes of her floral subjects to the point of semi-abstraction to unearth the essences and underlying energies of nature. Her colors, which range from darkly brooding blue and violet hues to radiant reds and yellows, infuse her forms with a unique vitality.

While assimilating aspects of Western art has enriched this artist's expressive vocabulary, her long experience in ink painting and her Korean cultural heritage remain equally essential to her artistry. Nowhere is this more evident than in two magnificent large folding screens, depicting apples and grapes dangling from gracefully delineated branches, that demonstrate Joo Sang Kim Lee's ability to achieve the highest aspiration of all Asian painting: capturing the spirit, as opposed to the mere appearance, of living things.

Ed McCormack
New York City, 2002

Contrasts and Kinships Enliven a Varied Salon

For a venue such as Montserrat Gallery, located at 584 Broadway, in the heart of Soho, with a growing roster of international artists, the recent addition of a salon room, in which works by gallery artists are on permanent display, provides a useful, often engaging, ongoing overview of emerging tendencies. On a recent visit, several artists of various styles engaged in a lively visual dialogue.

Roberta Nelson has her own unique approach to abstraction. Working on black grounds, Nelson creates compositions dominated by intricate linear elements that suggest rainbows appearing incongruously in a night sky. Titles such as "Emergence #1" convey the sense of vital phenomena that comes across in Nelson's compositions, with their serpentine lines and glowing colors suggesting but by no means mimicking events in nature. Roberta Nelson's compositions are are possessed of a mysterious poetry, as well as an impressive chromatic intensity.

Bobbie Koh, a frequent exhibitor at Montserrat Gallery was represented here by a painting entitled "Eternal —Borrego Springs 1," in which a field of delicate pink flowers is depicted in a tactile, densely worked composition which, while representational, shared qualities in common with the work of abstract painters such as Milton Resnick. Koh, however, is a consummate colorist and her naturalistic subject matter lends her work an added dimension of verisimilitude.

It is interesting to note how distinctly different approaches to form and color complement each other harmoniously, hanging in close proximity in this salon setting:

Eduardo Rosales is a painter particularly attuned to postmodern pluralism. Rosales demonstrates this ability to juggle different modes simultaneously in his combination of landscape and geometric elements. By contrast, the artist who goes by the single name of Katia, however, combines succulent textures and vibrant color in her landscape compositions. Katia is a "painter's painter," in that she exploits the qualities of pigment successfully for their own sensual qualities.

Jessie Pollock is a painter with the ability to express a great deal within the confines of a strict and quite austere visual vocabulary. Pollock's "Vanishing Landscape #1" is less a landscape in any literal, descriptive sense than painterly dialogue between stripes and splashy areas of color accomplished with considerable panache.

Marisol Navajo, on the other hand, makes subject matter first and foremost in her compelling figurative paintings. This is especially apparent in Navajo's accomplished picture of a woman in an elegant red evening gown ascending a staircase to a magnificent villa, which skillfully evokes the sense of a scene in a romantic filmed drama in an affluent social setting, possibly directed by Merchant and Ivory.

Two sculptors work in very different mediums and have very different approaches to form, yet are united by their equally strong commitment to extending the expressive possibilities of their mediums:

Maria Lagunes works in the traditional medium of bronze but employs it in her own unique manner. Lagunes employs a darkly mottled patina and wavering flame-like shapes arranged vertically like figures in an impressive work with a monumental quality that transcends its relatively modest scale.

Lore Burger works with paper, as well as bits of bone and rusted steel, to create works with a thrust that is primarily sculptural, even when mounted like paintings on the wall. The fascinating tension in Burger's collage/assemblage compositions springs from the contrasts between the delicacy of her materials and the strength of the forms that she creates with them.

Maria de Echevarria is a painter who imbues landscape subjects with subjective atmospheres through the use of dark, almost somber hues that appear to glow from within with a jewel-like intensity. Echevarria's mountainous views come alive through the artist's use of verdant greens and deep blues that create a dreamlike mood.

Lluisa Garcia-Solana is a painter who imparts an almost metaphysical feeling to various natural subjects through a highly personal approach to color and form. Garcia-Solana's work is at once serene and vigorous, filled with a unique sense of light, capturing the inner spirit of nature, rather than merely the lay of the land.

Then there is Orazio Salati, whose paintings juxtapose the figure and abstract color areas by virtue of a vigorous painterly approach. Salati's compositions merge nudes, trees, and roughly rectangular divisions in a manner that creates the sense cinematic sequences or the way images are superimposed in the mind's eye.

Eliot Lebow, on the other hand, works with hard-edged forms and vibrant hues to create compositions that hover between surreal landscapes in the manner of Yves Tanguy and complete abstraction. Sinuous ribbons of color waver and flow over and around sharply defined horizons, lending Lebow's intimate canvases a graceful sense of kinetic energy held in check by cool formal stasis.

Steven Rehfeld combines collage with a penchant for spontaneous mark-making to create canvases in which texture, color, and form battle for primacy. Rehfield's paintings possess sensuous tactile qualities that enhance the spatial tensions of his ruggedly appealing abstract compositions.

Alan L. Munro evokes the moods and rhythms of the Alaskan landscape in strong abstract compositions enlivened by brilliant colors and swirling forms. Munro's large canvases are invariably exciting for their unusual compositions and manner of transforming natural shapes into vibrant, undulating patterns.

Cristina Verda is a completely different kind of artist whose faux primitive street scenes incorporate a great deal of detail without becoming in the least bit fussy or stilted. Quite the contrary, Verda conveys the vitality of the city with impressive flair and charm, even while depicting figures, products in shop windows, and other elements with a seemingly obsessive amount of detail.

By contrast, Rosa Tardiu eliminates detail to concentrate on formal simplification in her painting of bicycle riders set against a similarly schematized skyline executed in a palette of monochromatic grays. Here, as in her previous paintings exhibited at Montserrat Gallery, Tardiu shows her mastery of the peculiar alchemy by which shapes assume the weight of symbols.

The artist who goes by the mononym of Rafat combines elements of Surrealism and psychedelic art to create a unique personal synthesis. Against a black ground, in one painting by Rafat, ornate birds form the outline of a human figure, suggesting an angelic metamorphosis.

Olga Lang would appear to be a contemporary counterpoint of Renoir, judging from her lyrical paintings of winsome young women enveloped in multicolored leaves. Lang's unabashed love of beauty makes her paintings refreshingly direct and her considerable painterly finesse prevents her pretty subjects from verging on the saccharine.

Joice Yaes combines the graffiti-influenced funk of Jean-Michel Basquiat with the emblematic qualities of New Image painting. Yaes makes this unlikely synthesis especially effective in a painting of a simplified bird peeking like "Kilroy" over a fence juxtaposed with musical notes and other vigorously scrawled elements, the composition simultaneously insouciant and possessed of a peculiar elegance.

Although the salon showcase at Montserrat gives only a brief glimpse of each artist's oeuvre, it provides a useful anthology of styles and approaches, while whetting one's appetite for the upcoming solo exhibitions of the more outstanding participants.

—Maureen Flynn

The Primacy of Gesture in the Paintings of Ju Won Park

Widely exhibited in her own country, as well as in Japan, the Korean painter Ju Won Park gives every indication that she will achieve recognition in the U.S. as well with her exhibition of oils on canvas, October 7-22, at Gallery 32nd Street, 32 West 32nd Street, 4th floor. The show, in a venue in the section of mid-Manhattan known as Korea Town which is rapidly becoming a cultural center as well as an area for shopping and fine dining, will open with a reception for the artist on Monday, October 7, from 5 to 8 PM.

Ju Won Park paints in a manner that on first glance can be compared to American Abstract Expressionism, until one examines her canvases more closely and realizes that her work also includes elements of Asian calligraphy, as well as Tachism or Art Informal, the manner of abstraction practiced by European artists such as Antoni Tapies and Pierre Soulages.

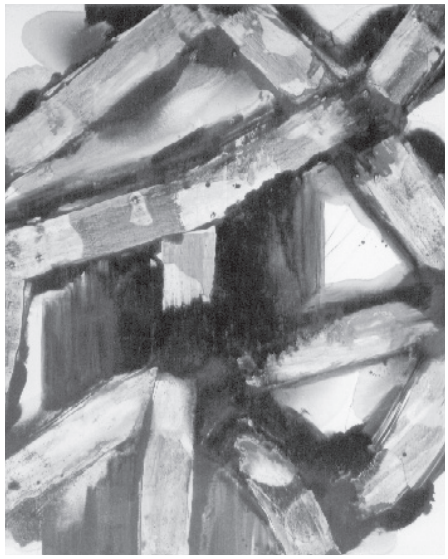
Ju Won Park appears particularly akin to the Frenchman Soulages in her use of liberal amounts of black and other dark hues applied in broad strokes, as though with a spatula. Park, however, employs a broader variety of effects, ranging from thick impastos to thin washes and stains which give her works a greater tactile range than either Soulages or his German-born Tachiste compatriot Wolfegang Wols. Like Soulages, too, Park employs a somber range of browns and blues. However, the Korean painter invests them with greater presence through her aggressive, thrusting forms, which converge from all directions to invest her compositions with great dynamism.

Ju Won Park's compositions are constructed with a solidity suggesting carpentry, their bold, flat, broad strokes connecting and crisscrossing like beams to create terrific spatial tensions. These are generally set against areas of bare, primed canvas enlivened, at times, by drips, splashes, and blotches of black that further enhance the two-dimensionality of the picture plane.

Obviously, Ju Won Park is a painter who takes great pains to avoid any trace of allusion, preferring instead to rely solely on the interaction of color and form, without resorting to referential elements. She is a pure painter in the truest sense of the term, putting her faith entirely in the force of the gesture, the materiality of the pigment, and the unadorned power of color to compel the viewer and carry the composition to its natural conclusion. Such commitment to the process of painting alone to achieve the end result is quite unusual today–-at least much more so than it was in the heyday of gestural abstraction. Ju Won Park, however, demonstrates that this approach is not only still viable in an era of conceptualism and "idea" art, but is also empowering and refreshingly vital.

Although "Meaning of Life" is a formidable title, Park acquits herself admirably in this very large canvas, the perfectly square (and therefore infinite) format of which adds even greater thrust to its boldly simplified composition of three broad brown strokes edged by lines and splatters of black. The painting is impressively authoritative, in terms of both its energy and philosophical breadth, which takes on a kind of Zen aspect, given the suggested scope of the title.

Equally powerful in another manner is an even larger, untitled oil on canvas in which several broad areas of ochre and blue, bolstered by accents of black, overlap in sweeping strokes with a more cursive quality than in Park's other paintings. Here, the composition relaxes somewhat without losing momentum or the characteristic energy that makes this artist's best paintings so exhilarating.



Oil on Canvas by Ju Won Park

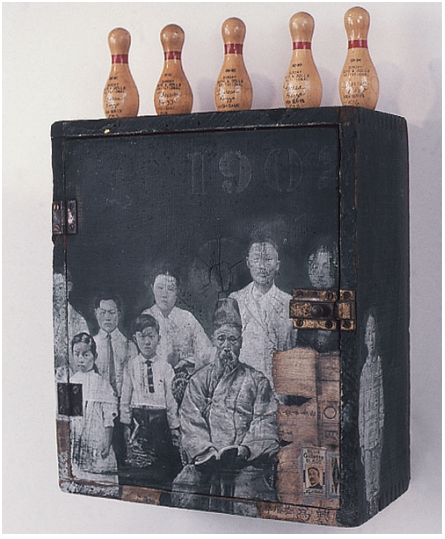
Ju Won Park is a painter with an approach that is quite unique given today's cultural climate, for she builds upon the painterly tradition from her own cultural tradition. She does this with an almost ferocious sense of commitment to the gesture as an end in itself that creates the impression that her contribution to the ongoing painterly dialogue will be considerable.

—Peter Wiley

See page 29

Jung Woon Kim and the Secret Lives of Objects

Alienation is an existential emotion native to the human condition which applies with particular urgency to the immigrant experience. The contemporary Korean artist Jung Woon Kim explores this subject through the juxtaposition of real objects and painted imagery, creating works that are at



"Alienation 6" by Jung Woon Kim

once handsome and haunting in his show at Hudson River & Conservators, 145 Palisades Street, Studio #231, Dobbs Ferry, NY, October 1-November 15.

In a numbered series of works with the general title of "Alienation," Kim exploits the resonance of inanimate objects as signifiers of human experience, props in the drama of daily life, literally employing them as his canvases in oil paintings that often appear to refer to a sense of nostalgia and cultural longing.

Suitcases are especially poignant objects in this regard, since we all associate them with travel, with transient states of being, and in some cases with separation anxiety in airports, train terminals, and other places where people say their tearful and all too often final goodbyes. Thus Jung Woon Kim's paintings on luggage are particularly affecting, as seen in one work in which a man in traditional Korean dress is limned on the flat side of a large suitcase. Framed within its borders, he sits before a tray containing several cups and containers of food, proffering a spoonful of soup from a large bowl and gazing back at the viewer with a somber, soulful expression.

Here, the foodstuffs seem to signify not only the affection and nostalgia that we all feel for the flavors of our native land, but also the essential spiritual sustenance that such aspects of our cultural heritage provide. While the man on the suitcase extends nourishment from what appears to be a modest feast of ethnic fare, the expression in his eyes, skillfully evoked by Jung Woon Kim's impressive realist technique, conveys the hunger, thirst, and despair of the uprooted.

Another affecting oil, a portrait of a woman in Korean dress painted on an old fashioned scrub board with a logo that says "National Washboard Company, Chicago, Saginaw, Memphis" appears to address the alienation peculiar to women who are far from home yet by no means excused from the burden of domestic toil, whether for family members or for strangers.

It is the dialogue between the image and the object upon which it is painted, rather than any obvious symbolism, that conveys meaning and emotional impact in Jung Woon Kim's work, as seen in yet another evocative piece, painted in monochromes on what appears to be an old medicine chest. Here, the central image is a group portrait, possibly based on an old family photograph, depicting several generations posed stoically in Korean and Western dress. Ranged along the top of the chest are a line of bowling pins, appearing as impassive and vulnerable as the people in the portrait.

Like the American artist Joseph Cornell, Jung Woon Kim creates material metaphors with orphaned objects. In this gifted Korean artist's case, however, the objects are haunted by human ghosts whose images linger on these props of their past lives, vestiges of narratives lost to the transience of time.

Ed McCormack
New York City, 2002

The Overall Vision of Takashi Tateyama

It is a rare for a painter who moves from figuration to abstraction to retain all of the allusive qualities of his former subject matter. This, however, is exactly what the Japanese painter Takashi Tateyama has done with great success in recent years. Although Tateyama had an earlier abstract phase in the 1960s, one cannot say that his work has come full circle, since his most recent paintings are informed in new and exciting ways by his figurative period.

Some of Tateyama's most interesting figurative paintings were created in the late seventies and early eighties, when the female nude became prominent in his work. These figures were quite voluptuous and sensual in a linear manner that can be compared in certain respects to the paintings of the well known Italian Pop artist Valerio Adami, but actually has its precedent in the work of the great Japanese woodblock artists, who influenced virtually all later painters who worked with line and flat areas of color, a mode theretofore virtually unknown in the West.

Tateyama's shapely nude female figures (some sprouting wings which, for all their angelic connotations in no way distracted from their sensuality) flowed in graceful black outline against subdued areas of earth colors accented in some cases by more brilliant hues.

Tateyama's mastery of feminine anatomy and ability to emphasize certain aspects of it without the sort of distortion that robs it of its power to seduce and enchant informed his compositions in a manner that he has successfully transposed to the recent abstract paintings on view in his exceptional solo show at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, from October 5 to 16.

Even without the provocative subject matter, Tateyama's new paintings are every bit as sensually compelling as his earlier ones. In the absence of the figure the entire composition has become eroticized, broadening the allusive scope of Tateyama's paintings. Now his flowing, billowing shapes evoke not only breasts, buttocks, genitalia, and other anatomical forms, but also fruits, flowers, stones, mountains—indeed, the entire inventory of the natural world transformed into a lexicon of personal symbols.

Like those of Joan Miro, Tateyama's new

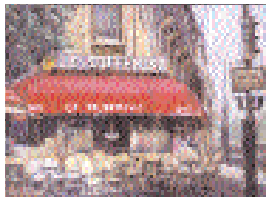
Painting by Takashi Tateyama

compositions appear to hover at that pregnant moment when surrealism morphs into biomorphic abstraction. The more sinuous shapes, can suggest tendrils, seaweed and other aspects of marine life in their undulating grace. Yet there are other forms that evoke all manner of organic matter, such as one kidney-like shape in particular that recurs in some of Tateyama's compositions, its semiotic elusiveness suggesting that Tateyama might agree with Norman Mailer, who once wryly stated, "Don't understand me too easily." For if there was always a sense of mystery in his figure paintings, his

abstractions leave even more leeway for imaginative interpretation.

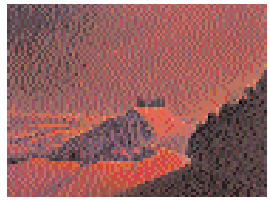
The one constant in all of Tateyama's paintings is the predominance of subtle browns and richly modulated textures evocative of the earth, interspersed with piquant pastel accents and burst of sudden brilliance—particularly reds that evoke a sense of the visceral. For what we see in the recent abstractions of Takashi Tateyama is the vision of a mature painter who has integrated the erotic with the universe of all that is organic to create an aesthetic statement of remarkable scope and depth.

—Maurice Taplinger



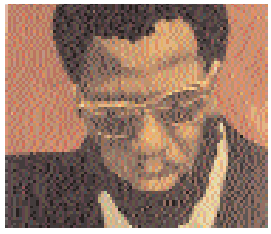
Kyoko Kito

Akiko Kawahara

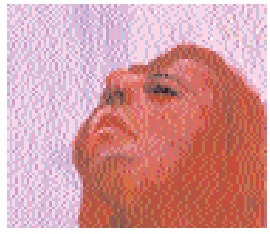


Shigenobu Oda

Ryuichiro Sotokawa



Judy Levy



John Manocherian

Subjective Visions at Caelum Gallery

"Gathering," at Caelum Gallery, 526 West 26th Street, from September 17 through 28, seems an auspiciously sociable title for an exhibition that will feature a jazz performance by the Don Pate Duo at its reception on Saturday, September 21, from 3:30 to 6 PM.

Shigenobu Oda takes bridges and other monumental structures as subjects to transform through a peculiar coloristic alchemy. Oda's subtly refined, oddly beautiful paintings are at once vibrant and poetically muted. While the atmosphere is strictly Red Planet Mars, the actual vistas are quite down to earth. Shigenobu appears bent on duplicating the chromatic magic that the mind imposes on sunsets and other natural phenomena when one is in a particularly receptive mood. Glowing from within like hot irons, steel girders rise majestically against luminous tangerine or plum-colored skies.

Every image in Shigenobu Oda's compositions is bathed in an unearthly glow, yet familiar in a way that reminds us that at one time or another we have all experienced such strange mental weather.

Ryuichiro Sotokawa is an enchantingly eccentric postmodern Symbolist whose feathery brush strokes linger lovingly on pretty young women who appear to be pious supplicants involved in fervent religious rituals. Innocence and religious passion are suggested in their prayerful postures and modest dress, as seen in one painting of an ethereal maternal figure leaning over a sleeping child, a single white candle set against the nocturnal blue background.

Sotokawa's madonna-like figures seem to exist in a realm outside time, making them intriguing anomalies in the current art scene.

The human figure is subjected to a variety of abstract mutations in the compositions of Akiko Kawahara. Rarely does drawing or painting approach sculpture so successfully without resorting to bas-relief as in Kawahara's work, where headless armless torsos twist in space, set against angular color areas that contrast dramatically with their curvaceous sensuality. Indeed, the sheer sexiness of Kawahara's figurative forms can often be quite disconcerting, given their truncated limbs and decapitated condition. What Kawahara does, however, is create the sense of a living human figure so successfully, for all the abstract brevity of these compositions, that one fills in the gaps mentally and reacts to them in much the same way that we admire the comely fragmented figures of antiquity.

The paintings of Judy Levy, on the other hand, are very much of the present, albeit a present lyrically frozen in the tempo and mood of blues and jazz. A bearded man in sunglasses with lowered head, painted in muted earth colors, evokes memories (at least for an old bebop fan) of Theolonious Monk's cool, introspective attitude at his piano. And although it is not a likeness in any conventional sense, another painting of a woman's head with parted lips and soulful eyes makes one think of Billy Holiday singing one of her more haunting ballads, such as "Strange Fruit." Other heads, as well, captured by Judy Levy in subtle, somber tonalities with considerable painterly panache, suggest a deep and abiding appreciation for the particular qualities and atmospheres of jazz and, in a broader sense, African-American culture.

John Manocherian paints heads too, but from odd angles and perspectives that emphasize their abstract qualities. One painting by Manocherian in particular, in which a head titled back at a peculiar angle enters the composition on the right, is particularly strong. Painted in harsh visceral hues, set starkly against a streaky white ground, it has the slightly unnerving presence of one of Soutine's butchered sides of beef. The pained expression on its face, laid down in bold strokes, suggests some form of martyrdom, recalling in mood and execution the work of earlier expressionists such as Munch and Ensor. At the same time, Manocherian's work has an edgy, postmodern sense of irony more akin to Luc Tuymans.

Then there is Kyoko Kito, a painter whose mellow streetscapes hark back to Utrillo, particularly a painting of an unpopulated outdoor cafe, its red awning and clustered tables and chairs depicted in considerable detail— yet with a breezy vigor that lends the composition tactile interest. Kito has an impressive ability to evoke specifics without becoming fussy. The foliage of nearby trees, a taxi stand, and shadows saturating the sidewalk are all woven into the composition with succulent strokes of pigment that are simultaneously descriptive and sensuous.

Like the other artists in this enjoyable exhibition, Kyoko Kito appears to benefit from a disregard for fashion and what appears to be a genuine commitment to realizing a subjective vision.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Surveying the 17th Soho Art Competition

Selected by Ira Goldberg, director of the Art Students League, the winners in the Soho International Art Competition were recently seen in a large and varied group exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway. Although this prestigious survey, now celebrating its 17th year, is far too inclusive to do full justice to in this space, brief descriptions of some of the works on view will perhaps give the reader some sense of its size and scope.

Traci Arney revealed a mysterious New Image sensibility in a work whose monochromatic palette, mysterious subject matter, and painterly panache seemed akin to the New Image sensibility of Susan Rothenberg. Jan Machalek showed a baroque tendency in a painting of human and animal figures that resembled a Russian icon seen through an Expressionistic funhouse mirror.

Evelyn Embry, a figurative painter with a uniquely eccentric vision, shows a picture of a corpulent female nude wearing what appears to be a primitive mask of a bearded face. Then there is Jennifer Garris, whose sculpture of a cute yet dangerous looking reptilian creature combined a Pre-Columbian quality with Art Brut power.

Marcelo Guerra applies a meticulous realism to imaginative fantasies that project the sense of a peculiar personal narrative so convincingly evoked that we accept it as every day reality. Oscar Hernandez Soriano depicts warmly humanistic subjects in myriad strokes of color interwoven to create a richly shimmering surface. Kai Hoang also creates evocative surface effects, but puts them to the service of an abstraction in which frosty white forms are juxtaposed with areas of earthier hues.

Three other artists, in their own different ways, can be termed Maximalists. Jae Ho Jung's composition fairly crawls with intricately interwoven forms that project a sense of depth and swarming energy. George Lupo combines densely layered shapes and patterns in warm hues that create an optically dazzling effect. Maria Parmo employs a palette of subtle, brown and blue hues to make angular shapes and stripes engage in a vibrant visual dance. Anthony Mark Hickling's sinuous linear forms suggest an ornate arabesque.

By contrast, Beata Kania sets a bevy of brilliant red female figures in graceful motion in an antic composition suggesting a cubistically pixilated bacchanal. Barbara Berg's painting of a snake functions on two levels: as meticulous realism and a dynamic cursive abstraction. Gonzalo Fuenmayor's monochromatic composition of a lizard crouched atop a skyscraper above a scrawled black form combines personal symbolism and gestural abstraction. Then there is William Christian Barr, whose figurative painting of a seated figure updates Picassoesque distortion in an inventive contemporary manner.

Photographer Mimi Chakarova gives us a warmly affectionate black and white image of three little African American boys posing for the camera with their heads pressed together, as memorable as the classic shots in MoMa's landmark "Family of Man" exhibition.

Ramiro Lacayo-Deshon's painting of a shapely woman wearing an opera mask, limned in Impressionistic strokes of jewel-like hues, projects an elegant eroticism. Alejandro Mendoza shows a cruciform hard-edge abstraction notable for its combination of spiritual suggestiveness and precise formal austerity. Another abstract painter who uses the single name Lark is represented by a work in which a combination of abstract and geometric forms, set against a deep green ground, evoke a host of subliminal associations. Then there is Fernanda Veriga, whose strong painting of a fleshy female nude in repose presents a palpable physical presence as astutely observed and unflinching as the figures of Lucian Freud or Philip Pearlstein.

All told, Agora Gallery's 2002 Soho International Art Competition, like its predecessors, is a laudable enterprise, giving a number of emerging gifted artists each the opportunity to present their best work to the New York art audience.

—Byron Coleman

Veteran Painter Willis Pyle Reinvigorates Old Myths

Willis Pyle has taken a giant step, moving from the fanciful to the fantastic in his most recent exhibition, at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway. Along with his more familiar circus and racetrack subjects, Pyle also included a splendid series of truly fantastic paintings centered on the cavortings of centaurs and female nudes.

To this classical subject, depicted by many other artists over several centuries, Pyle has imparted a raunchy contemporary joyousness that is particularly fresh and appealing.

These new paintings are not only infused with a lively visual wit, they are also aesthetically dazzling. Perhaps the good humor in this mature painter's work can be attributed to his background. Pyle was a master animator for Walt Disney and other motion picture makers.

Surely this background accounts, at least in part, for Willis Pyle's ability to communicate with humor and humanism in his paintings, even while displaying serious aesthetic qualities that would be the envy of many a less light-hearted artist. Pyle's paintings of racetrack and circus scenes are simultaneously accessible and aesthetically appealing in a manner akin to the work of artists such as Raoul Dufy and Constantin Guys, two earlier artists who celebrated popular pastimes and entertainments with similar exuberance and good humor.

In the present show, Pyle shows his kinship with such predecessors in paintings like "Outrider # 2," a vigorous picture of two jockeys and their mounts working out at the track and "Flying Harlequin," an equally lively composition centering on an acrobatic clown performing with a horse in a circus ring. In both pictures, however, he reveals himself to be a much more solid painter and more subtle coloristic than Dufy, as well as more substantial on all accounts than Guys, a draftsman and watercolorist best known for his equestrian scenes. Indeed, Pyle's paintings of public events are closer in spirit to those of Toulouse-Lautrec in terms of the fine balance of full-fledged painterliness and descriptive draftsmanship that he achieves.

This exhibition also includes a group of fine landscape paintings, the most exuberant among them,"Range Horses," depicting four handsome wild ponies racing freely on the open plain. It is in his series of paintings of nude women and centaurs, however, that Willis Pyle breaks new ground, bringing his considerable gifts to bear on a more mythological subject and imbuing it with a delightful contemporary vitality. One of the ways in which he accomplishes this is by combining classical motifs with the easygoing visual wit which is a hallmark of his style. In one picture entitled "Hitchhiker," for example, a comely nude woman rides on the shoulders of her centaur companion with the easy grace of one of Pyle's circus performers. In another painting, "Native Dancer," a nude with a feather in her hair dances with startling agility on a centaur's back. Here, again, Pyle seems to have been inspired by his circus subjects to take the leap into fantasy.

Other paintings as well, with titles such as "Getting a Lift" and "Good Neighbor," explore the antics of centaurs and their female cohorts with a colloquial charm that can only be compared to the work of the late African American artist Bob Thompson. Willis Pyle, however, brings these new pictures off as much by virtue of his unique painterly abilities as his amusing and quirky treatment of Neoclassical subject matter. Employing a palette dominated by piquant pink and blue hues, he seems to know just when to add a soupcon of Cezanne-esque zest to his brushstrokes or let a faint trace of charcoal show through the pigment to imbue his pictures with a vigorous sense of "process" and immediacy that imbues his time-honored myths with new life.

—Maurice Taplinger

The Fantastic Realism of Jose Cacho

The Mexican painter Jose Cacho employs a meticulous technique to capture a variety of moods and imaginative circumstances in a style that partakes of the noble tradition of Latin American inflected— and especially Mexican— Surrealism, Magic Realism, and fantastic figuration that extends from Frida Kahlo to such present day practitioners as Francisco Toledo and Cisco Jimenez.

In his recent solo show at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, a venue whose international roster of artists often features some of the brightest talents from all over Latin America, Cacho showed a group of paintings in acrylic on canvas, some including twigs and other novel collage materials, that depicted peculiarly inner worlds.

One of Cacho's most impressive canvases is entitled "The Message." It is painted in the peculiarly luminous golden-tinged hues that dominate the artist's highly personal palette. The most prominent figure in the composition is a comely young woman wearing a filmy, semi-transparent minidress. She stands in a simple interior flooded with sunlight, where other, more spectral figures appear around her like apparitions. In contrast to her own palpable, human presence, these figures have the featureless and stick-like appearance of extraterrestrials, as described by those who claim to have seen or even been abducted by them. But one has the feeling that these are creatures of inner, rather than outer space, as they dance around the young woman or even make themselves at home in the room by playfully striking easeful poses.

One of these willowy apparitions, for example, sits in mid-air, right next to an ornate chair, catching in its outstretched hand what appears to be an apple or other fruit dangling from a string in the beak of a bird that had just flown in the window.

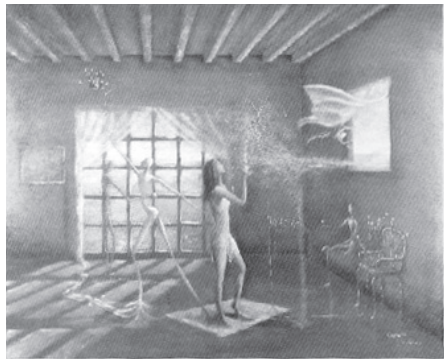
One speaks of Cacho's paintings in this sequential manner because they inevitably give the impression of scenes in progress, of actions in flux, of a drama rapidly unfolding as we watch. Here, as the title of implies, there is the sense of a message being delivered by the bird and the other fantastic creatures inhabiting the room, some of whom are tiny and appear to float before the young woman as she raises one one upturned palm to welcome them.

The entire scene, like all of Cacho's compositions, gives the impression of a vividly remembered and meticulously transcribed dream.

For another painting, entitled "Waiting," Cacho employs a primitive circular drum as a canvas to evoke a primal figure standing with a large dog in a jungle landscape. There is the sense here of a powerful ancestral presence invested with strange supernatural powers, although all such interpretations on the part of the viewer are bound to be subjective, given the mysterious imagery and the sense one gets that its real meanings are known to the artist alone. No matter, it is a strong and evocative painting that touches a deep, subconscious chord in the viewer.

In other paintings such as "Volcano Reasons," the imagery becomes considerably more complex. Here, a mountain flowing with lava is depicted in fiery hues and bold forms that verge on abstraction, yet a very specific human form emerges from what appears to be a crevice in the mountainside. The image conveys a mystical sense of immutable natural forces and energies.

In another painting, quite large, entitled "His Way," the figure of a man appears in a watery expanse against a nocturnal sky on an irregularly shaped surface composed of four pieces of canvas held together by prominent stitches that become a prominent



"The Message"

formal element in the composition. Although this is one of Cacho's least fantastic images, since no unearthly beings appear, it is somehow characteristically mysterious nonetheless. By contrast, in the intriguingly titled canvas "Tear Transportation," an image of a figure in a forest is further enlivened by the addition of actual tree branches that Cacho integrates with his painted surface in a manner that goes beyond what we normally think of as collage, so thoroughly do the physical elements merge with the imagery.

Then there is "Vertical Pollination," in many ways one of Cacho's most engaging images with its vertically stacked images of a woman's face, birds, a cat, and mysterious humanoid plant forms.

These latter elements also appear to be the inspiration for two intriguing painted sculptures by Cacho, where plant-forms that simultaneously suggest figures evoke the notion of nature sprites. Like "Tree of Life," a famous painting by Pavel Tchelitchew in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art, the paintings and sculptures of Jose Cacho appear to be all about metamorphosis and the magic by which dreams and memories transform reality.

—Wilson Wong

The Pleasures of Austerity at Cast Iron Gallery

"An overall sense of high purpose, characterized by formal austerity, is the quality uniting the otherwise diverse group of artists featured in the group show "Impressions," at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, from September 3 through 14. (The reception, on Thursday, September 5, from 5 to 7 PM, will feature a jazz performance by the Don Pate Duo.)

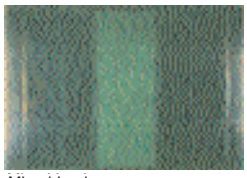
Calvin Burton's collages incorporate a variety of intriguing shapes that interlock to form muscular jigsaw-like compositions. Like those of Conrad Marca-Relli, his closest stylistic ancestor, Burton's collages feature densely layered glued shapes, interacting and overlapping amid subtle painted passages that serve to tie up all the loose ends, so to speak, pulling his compositions together to make each one a coherent statement. For all their complexity, Burton's collages have a pristine quality due to the artist's coloristic restraint. Washy, semi-transparent gray hues and lively splashes of black serve as subdued accents, setting off the soft white, gray, and beige tones of his collage materials. That some of the weathered surfaces are further enlivened by faded bits of handwriting or printed texts adds semiotic interest to Burton's exquisitely restrained pieces.


Jodi


Yoko Hayashi


Calvin Burton


Sherri A. Bustad


Minori Inada


Eiichi Suetake

The artist who exhibits under the single name of Jodi combines shape, color, and texture to create an intriguing synthesis of the formal and the evocative. While Jodi's forms are invariably minimalist—usually rectangular or circular—they are enveloped in soft, atmospheric veils of color. In one composition, three elongated rectangles are the dominant image, arranged frontally in a symmetrical row. Their stoic presences, however, are seen as though through fog and shadow, lending an otherwise geometric composition and oddly poetic resonance. That Jodi's mixed media paintings are on unstretched canvas exhibited flush to the wall not only enhances their "objectness," but gives them an ethereal quality that makes their peculiar combination of tactile and poetic qualities all the more striking and effective.

The paintings of Eiichi Suetake are contrastingly smooth of finish and meticulous, yet also evocative for the artist's ability to imbue abstract forms and odd color combinations with a sense of great depth and mystery. Against a silvery gray ground softly divided into four rectangular sections by tonal variations, wavering horizontal lines range from the top to the bottom of the composition. At irregular intervals, blotches of pale pastel color appear on or between the black horizontal lines, like delicate blossoms floating over barbed wire. Although no such allusions to subject matter are apparently intended, nonetheless the contrasts between hard and soft elements, between somber and lyrical color, in the paintings of Eiichi Suetake lends them those intriguing hints of submerged meaning that distinguish much of the best postmodern abstraction.

Minori Inada is a painter who pushes the envelope about as far as it can go in terms of creating compositions in which formal austerity is combined with coloristic sensuality. Working in acrylic on cotton, Inada structures her paintings on rectangular forms that emerge from richly saturated color fields like objects slowly coming into focus as one's eyes adjust to a dark room. At once somber and enlivened by an inner glow, Inada's paintings have a spiritual resonance that can only be compared to Mark Rothko. Yet the elegance and simplicity of Inada's forms obviously owes as much to her Japanese heritage, for while their chromatic richness, apparently achieved through a slow patient process of layering translucent veils of pigment, is in some ways antithetical to the swift, bare bones linearity of Zen brush painting, her work has a meditative quality of "emptiness" that is every bit as meditative.

Sherri A. Bustad, who has had previous solo shows at Cast Iron Gallery, is known for her ability to merge elements of nature and dreams in paintings that hover between the abstract and the representational. Bustad has a broad vocabulary of personal signs and symbols that she employs to create compositions as notable for their formal virtues as their poetic qualities. Her paintings, often featuring dark, yet rich, nocturnal hues, bring to the medium of watercolor a weight, and psychological expressiveness that we usually associate more readily with oils. Indeed, the fluidity of acquarelle enables Sherri A. Bustad to call up the contents of her subconscious and project a sense emotional and natural energy with a mastery that is impressive.

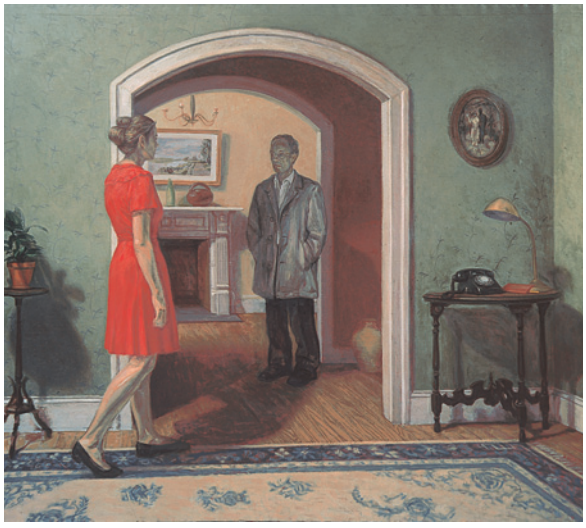
By contrast, Yoko Hayashi works with pale, poetic colors and delicate linear elements to create compositions notable for their tonal subtleties and the artist's ability to weave a lyrical spell. Hayashi can remind one of Cy Twombly for her ability to make faint, graffiti-like scrawls on thinly painted surfaces both sensually appealing and visually eloquent. Indeed, Hayashi's work is all about the primal power of mark-making and the innate poetry of gesture. She is possessed of extraordinary graphic sensitivity, which she employs with great eloquence to make visual statements of unique, piquant grace.

In Yoko Hayashi's spare visual realm, less is very definitely more, with graceful strokes moving across the composition like trails of smoke and luminous bits of color appearing to glow from within. Her paintings exemplify the austere subjective poetry that makes this exhibition consummately satisfying for those of us who want to see less empty sensationalism and more content and meaning in contemporary art.

—Maurice Taplinger

Nicholas Palermo

"Interiors"



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