VOL. 5 NO. 2 NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2002/JANUARY 2003 New York

GALLERY&STUDIO

The World of the Working Artist

Victorine Hinger

Strictly Sculpture

December 1-14, 2002

"White Angel," Italian Alabaster

Gelabert Studios Gallery

255 West 86th Street, New York, N.Y. 10024 212 874-7188

MARILYN HENRION

NIGHT THOUGHTS Nov.26– Dec.14, 2002

Artist's Talk: Thursday December 5 at 6 PM

noho gallery 530 W. 25 St. 4th flr., New York, NY 10001
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"Christmas 95," Acrylic on Canvas 26" X 34"

Jewels of the Lost Artist ll
The story continues. . .
Jose Rios

Dec 17, 2002 - Jan 18, 2003
Reception: Tuesday Dec. 17, 5 - 9 pm

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ANIL RAO
World in Color

"Fire Ball," Siskiyou County, CA, December 1998

November 5 - 30, 2002
Reception: November 8, 6 - 8 pm

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Ella Sipho
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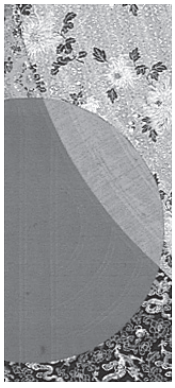
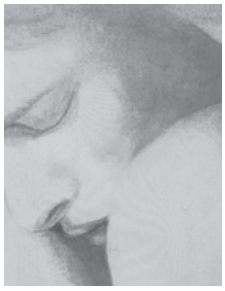
Strictly Sculpture
December 1 - 14, 2002
Reception: Saturday, Dec. 7, 5:30-8:30pm
Gelabert Studios Gallery,
255 West 86th St. NYC 212 874-7188





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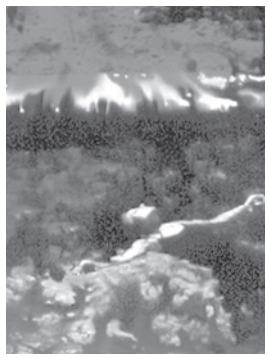

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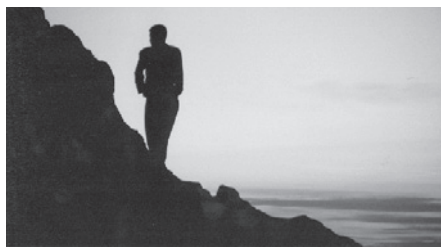

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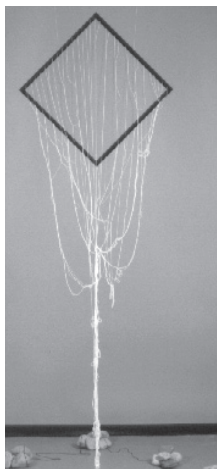

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EDITOR AND PUBLISHER **Jeannie McCormack**
MANAGING EDITOR **Ed McCormack**
SPECIAL EDITORIAL ADVISOR **Margot Palmer-Poroner**
DESIGN AND PRODUCTION **Karen Mullen**
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR **Juliet M. Ross**

Global Scope and Subjective Vision in the Sculptures of Victorine Hinger

The painter, sculptor, and world traveler Victorine Hinger could almost be said to be as much a cultural anthropologist as an artist, in that she steeps herself in indigenous cultures for inspiration and brings us something of them in her work, even while transforming these influences significantly through her own unique aesthetic vision. Part of what makes the transformation so successful is that Hinger often combines various influences, mixing African elements with Asian ones as the spirit moves her to achieve a personal synthesis that ultimately transcends its sources, even while acknowledging them respectfully and inspiring the viewer to explore first-hand —and with a better understanding— some of the sources from which she herself has taken inspiration.

In her exhibition at World Fine Art Gallery last year, for example, Hinger, who was born in Luxembourg but now resides in the U.S., showed a suite of paintings that drew upon her experiences among the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, as well as her long time love affair with African art. These paintings were especially powerful in that, while incorporating forms and symbols inspired by traditional Aboriginal "Dreamtime"designs and the body-painting of African tribal dancers, Hinger placed them in the sophisticated context of post-modern aesthetics. Paradoxically, in doing so, she made their magical properties more accessible to the Western viewer.

The same transformation of influences occurs in Victorine Hinger's sculptures, which are featured in her new solo exhibition, "Strictly Sculpture," at Gelabert Studios Gallery, 255 West 86th Street, from December 1 through 14. (There will be a reception for the artist on December 7, from 5:30 to 8:30 PM, sponsored by the Consul General of Luxembourg and the Luxembourg American Chamber of Commerce, both in New York City.)

While Hinger is self-taught as a painter, she studied stone sculpture with the well known New York artist and teacher Lorrie Goulet at the Art Students League. Growing up in a family of artists, she was initially inspired by her sculptor grandfather to work in wood. She soon discovered that she preferred working in stone, of which she says, "I enjoyed the different colors in stones and the idea of working with something that is millions of years old."

Hinger is particularly attuned to the unique energies of each individual stone. She finds Alabaster and Chlorite especially suited to her work, and while she is not generally disposed toward the harder surface of marble, she makes an exception in the case of Picasso Marble, because she loves the subtly mingled colors.

"Last year I studied with a Zimbabwean sculptor who taught me to listen to the stone," Hinger says, explaining how the Zimbabweans "talk to the stone at the beginning when they clean the stone (which means when they take the excess stone away)," and adds, "That is the time to connect with the stone."

Hinger's aesthetic focus changes from year to year, depending upon where in the world she travels and what she studies. Over the past year she has been working on more of what she calls "tribal sculptures," and other recent inspirations have come from the Maori people of New Zealand, particularly their symbols and hooks, which she says "have various meanings about life, the importance of family, togetherness, and eternal life."

Some of the works in Hinger's new exhibition were also influenced by the tragedy of September 11, 2001. She says she wanted to express "a healing for New York as well as my own healing." She sees angels as "the purest form of healing spirit," and this sense of a spiritual presence comes across dramatically in "White Angel," 2002, a work in Italian Alabaster featured on the cover of this issue of Gallery&Studio. This spiritual quality is enhanced by the luminous surface of the stone itself, with its light catching semi-translucence, subtle pink highlights, and the delicate veins within its milky whiteness. At the same time, the monumental simplicity of the piece, in which the wings, halo, and torso of the figure are severely abstracted in a few flowing, featureless organic forms, shows a formal sophistication akin to the work of Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Constantin Brancusi, the sculptors Hinger most admires.

Indeed, in her sculptures as in her paintings, it is her awareness of her modernist predecessors that gives Hinger the ability to translate her indigenous inspirations into vital contemporary works of art. Another powerful example of this can be seen in "Wolfe," inspired by two months that Hinger spent in New Mexico, studying Pueblo Indian art and spiritual traditions. When she began working on the piece, she anticipated that it would become a torso. However, it turned into a "wolf spirit," a development the artist attributes to the energy that she experienced in the mountains of Jemez Springs.

"I was told by the local Indians to etch a bear claw on the back of the sculpture, but the spiritual meanings were not totally explained to me," Hinger says of this piece, the only animal sculpture she has ever made. It seems typical of the multicultural mixing and matching in Hinger's work that while

"Wolf"

ostensibly inspired by the Pueblo art and spirituality, "Wolfe," like some of the paintings in her earlier show last year, also shows the influence of African masks as well. Indeed, the angular shorthand adopted from African sculpture is what makes this stylized head with its slanted eyes and pointed ears and snout so spiritually potent in its own right. And of course, here again, the historical connection of African sculpture vis a vis Picasso and the origins of Cubism adds yet another layer of meaning to Hinger's piece, suggesting her spiritual kinship with her modernist predecessors as well as with the indigenous artists who inspire her.

While these multilayered connections also enrich all of Victorine Hinger's recent sculptures, two in particular are especially compelling in this regard: Although carved from Picasso marble, "Torso" is perhaps more akin to the figural elongations that Modigliani derived from his study of primitive sources than to Picasso's more baroque take on African sculpture. In contrast to the aforementioned "White Angel," a piece in Oregon Chlorite entitled "Black Angel," created in 2002, makes dramatic use of negative space, with the large hole at the center of the darkly gleaming, severely abstracted figure suggesting a simplified human outline and seeming to symbolize the absence of those who died in the tragedy of 9/11.

Also including impressive works by the Canadian sculptor Heather Carroll who lives in Luxembourg, and David B. Campbell, an American Sculptor from California, both of whom are friends of the artist that she has generously invited to share her exhibition, this show should further establish Victorian Hinger as one of our more consistently engaging emerging artists.

—J. Sanders Eaton

"Why," No. 49 2001

Laura Krejsová

Genesis & Metamorphosis

December 3-21, 2002
Reception: December 6, 6 - 8pm

World Fine Art Gallery
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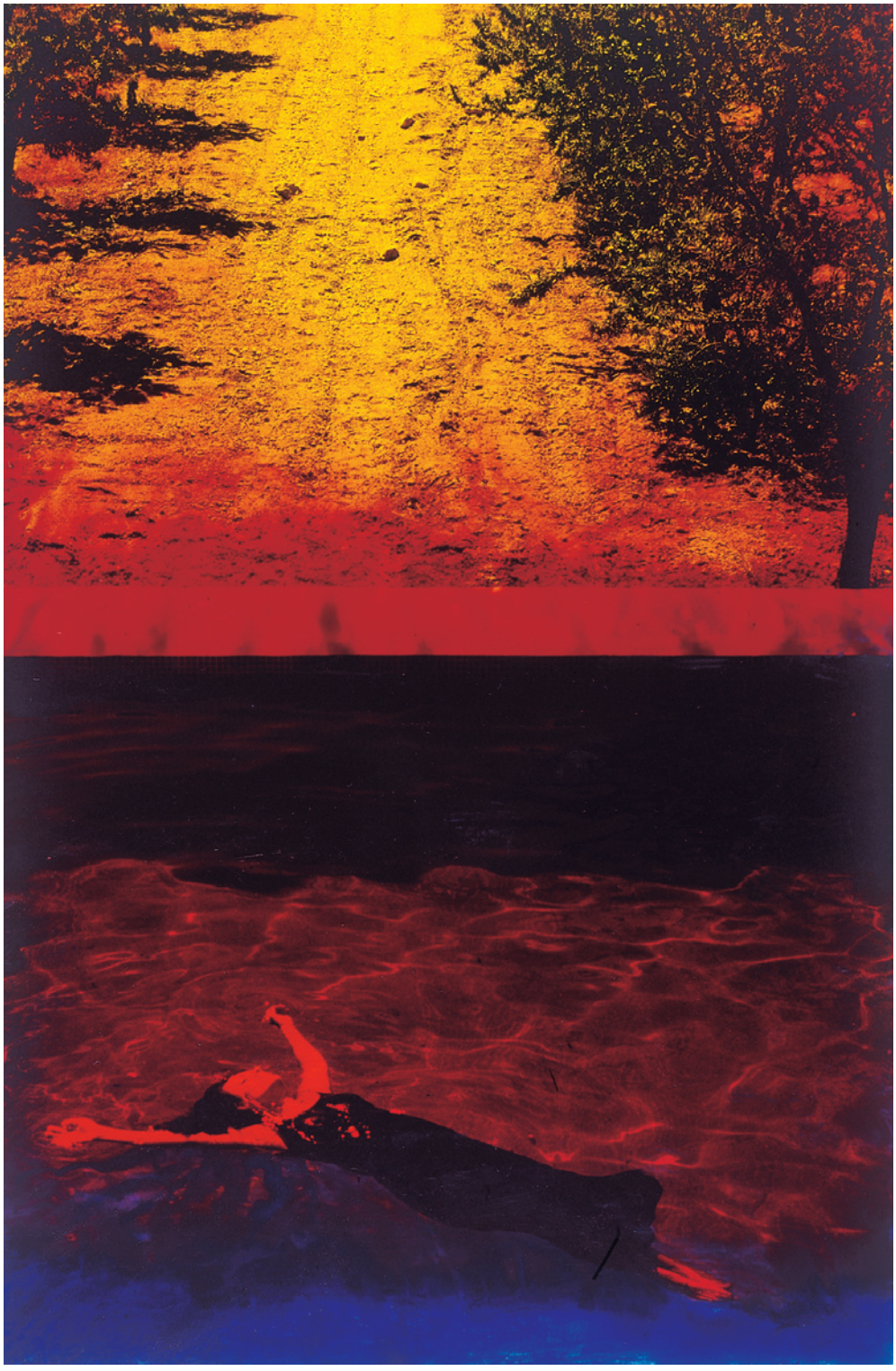

"Dream II" 90 X 60 cm Painted Photograph

November 26 - December 7th
Reception: November 26th, 5:30 - 7:30 PM

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Wanda Murphy, New Age Visionary

The painter Wanda Murphy, who studied art at Concord College in her native West Virginia and served as an apprentice to the well-known French artist Jean Paul Gaugy, calls herself a "linear expressionist," and her work lives up to the term, with its harmonious confluence of graceful line and vibrant color. Perhaps the artist Murphy is most akin to in this regard is the Chinese-American painter Walasse Ting, who combines Eastern brush work and Western color to largely decorative effect. Murphy, however, is also concerned with spirituality, which she explores through a clearly defined visual vocabulary of symbols and hues.

For example, each color in Murphy's palette has a specific meaning for the artist: White is for cleansing and purity; black for endurance; purple for the sacred spirit of healing; yellow for love and warmth; red for strength; green for peace; blue for harmony, and so on and so forth. Likewise, her ethereal figures, particularly her willowy female nudes, explore what she calls "the struggle between human desires and spiritual evolution."

The effectiveness with which Murphy incorporates such New Age notions to forge a signature style was seen in her recent solo show "Leave Nothing Untouched," at Ezair Gallery, 905 Madison Avenue, between 72nd and 73rd Streets.

Murphy cites Picasso, Matisse, and Kandinsky as important influences. However, she has assimilated their lessons seamlessly to create a mode of expression that is highly personal and distinctly her own. She casts her supple line out like a lasso to snare graceful figurative forms that symbolize what she refers to as "the intimacy between the dream state and reality," and to express "a oneness with divine energy." Her method is such that she appears to conjure her figures, which are simultaneously wraith-like and sensual, in the manner of a trance medium. Their flowing contours seem to appear effortlessly, floating amid amorphous areas of vibrant color as angels might navigate among clouds. In a manner less rigidly codified than that of Fernand Leger, yet just as distinctive, Murphy often treats form and color as discrete entities, emphasizing their separate qualities, even while bringing them into harmony by virtue of her mysterious aesthetic harmony.

Even more mysterious is her ability to make her beautiful nude and semi-nude figures at once ephemeral and palpable. Often, her compositions depict the embrace of lovers. Possessed of a similarly slender grace, her angelic female and male figure share an androgynous appeal, as they merge, enveloped by heavenly chromatic auras. If indeed, these exquisite beings are engaged in a "struggle between human desires and spiritual evolution," it must be a blissful battle indeed, as they grapple amid dapples of rainbow hues.

For want of a better world, Wanda Murphy is a true visionary in the tradition of William Blake, in that she comes to her art fully armed with a mystical philosophy that elevates the mystical above the earthly. She claims that the spiritual energies which emanate from acrylic paintings "allow people to come to terms with their lives," citing the example of one of her collectors, who had Parkinson's disease and, in his last days, eschewed his wife's entreaties to go outside and sit in the sunlight in order to bask instead in the glow of one of her canvases. While such a stance is unusual enough in contemporary art to get her labeled an "outsider," Wanda Murphy could not apparently care less about such categories, as she goes about the business of harnessing and sharing what she calls "the light of hope, the light of healing, and the light of love."

Painting by Wanda Murphy

At the same time, she is very much a mainstream painter in terms of her sophisticated handling of line, form, color, and space, as well as in her ability to ground even the most "cosmic" subject matter in solid aesthetic bedrock. In this regard perhaps closest artistic ancestor is Marc Chagall, who had a similar ability to couch fanciful subject matter in a formal context that makes it as appealing in plastic terms as in its fabulous content.

In any case, Wanda Murphy is a rare and enchanting painter whose work compels us on several levels simultaneously. And whether or not one believes that art literally has the power to heal, her paintings provide enough sheer visual enjoyment to have a generally beneficial effect on one's sense of well-being. And that is more than enough in an era when all too many of her peers attempt to make a virtue of negativity.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Marilyn Henrion's Ultimate Triumph

In assessing the stitched fabric constructions of Marilyn Henrion, a fiber artist nurtured in the avant garde atmosphere of the Beat poetry and Happenings scenes of the 1960s and '70s, it is essential at the onset to cite her elevation of the traditional craft of quiltmaking to the level of sophisticated contemporary art. For while traditional women's crafts were rediscovered and revitalized during the heyday of feminist art, when many well-known artists turned to textiles and needlework as vehicles for making affecting political statements, few have remained as faithful to such methods as Henrion has, nor have they reaped such rich aesthetic rewards from them.

Although Henrion has exhibited widely here and abroad, and her work is in several important corporate and museum collections, perhaps the most dramatic evidence of her accomplishment to date can be seen in her second New York solo exhibition, "Night Thoughts," at Noho Gallery in Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, from November 26 through December 14. (There will be a reception for the artist on Saturday November 30, from 3 to 6 PM, and Henrion will give an artist's talk in the gallery on Thursday, December 5, at 6 PM. The latter event should be especially enlightening, since Henrion was on the faculty of the Fashion Institute of Technology for twenty years, and her teaching experience should make her more articulate than many artists are in discussing their work. Some of the work in the show can also be previewed on Henrion's website: www.marilynhenrion.com.)

A piece from Henrion's first New York solo show, in June of 2000, was later included in an important exhibition at Bard College, in New York City, and another was acquired for the permanent collection of the American Craft Museum. One can only anticipate that further recognition will result from the present solo venture, inspired by the writings of Loren Eiseley, an anthropologist and poet hailed by W.H. Auden and others as an heir apparent to Thoreau. Henrion was particularly struck by the following quote from Eiseley's book The Star Thrower, from which she derived her title: "Art is the night thought of man. It may emerge without warning from the soundless depths of the unconscious, just as supernovas may blaze up suddenly in the farthest reaches of void space."

Henrion's own supernovas are the luminous colored shapes —painstakingly hand-stitched and stringently geometric, yet as animated as a scattering of stars— that lend her compositions the exhilarating combination of formal order and freedom, of austerity and opulence, that we see in three

"Night Thoughts #2"

large compositions from the "Night Thoughts" series numbered "2", "3", and "4." Here, bold circular and rectangular shapes intersect and overlap, creating clockwork rhythms that seem to evoke the music of the spheres. Flat areas of brilliant, solid color are juxtaposed with intricate floral patterns and a wide variety of fabrics ranging in texture from matte to silken. The addition of metallic brocades adds an element of reflected light to the overall elegance and richness of effect, while minute quilting stitches are applied with as much nuanced subtlety as a painter's brush strokes, their puckers and pulls further enhancing the tactile delectation.

Among her visual inspirations, Henrion cites Indian miniatures, Russian icons, the kesa robes of Japanese monks, and the art of Matisse. Very much in the spirit of Matisse's majestic cutouts, Henrion appears to draw with scissors, "cutting into color as a sculptor cuts into stone," as the master himself described the process, demonstrating the majesty that collage can achieve on a grand scale. For truly her works are abstract collages —as, in fact, were the earliest colonial American quilts at a time when the concept of abstraction was unknown in Western art—and possess the selfsame sense of improvised musicality that inspired Matisse to title his famous collage book "Jazz."

Henrion, however, also breaks with the sanctity of the picture plane in a more postmodern manner to create the sense of spatial ambiguity and optical razzle dazzle that we see in "Nocturne #1," with its dynamic linear patterns of silver and gold brocades, as well as in more minimalist compositions such as "A Vivid Air," comprised of bold triangular color areas that alternately advance and recede.

As these and other vibrant works in this splendid exhibition make clear, Marilyn Henrion's ultimate triumph is in going beyond, without disowning, the very real historical and political implications of quiltmaking, to explore the medium's enduring expressive possibilities. For in her adamant belief that quiltmaking can be a major contemporary medium on a par with painting, she both celebrates women's history and asserts that exquisitely hand-made art must, and will, survive the onslaught of technology, if visual art itself is to continue as a vital cultural category.

—Ed McCormack

The Enduring Spirit of Michael Allen Noeth

Besides being an artist, the late Michael Allen Noeth was a career sailor who served six of his seven years in the U.S. Navy at sea and earned eleven outstanding citations during two tours in the Persian Gulf. While his combination of vocations could seem contradictory, in Noeth's case they complemented each other perfectly, for he visited museums in every port of call and many of his paintings dealt with life on the high seas.

Both careers, unfortunately, were cut tragically short when Noeth, who was assigned in his last year to the Naval Command Center in the Pentagon as a draftsman/illustrator, died in the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001.

Among the projects left unfinished by the artist's untimely demise was a prestigious commission by the Department of the Navy Historical Center to create twenty-seven portraits depicting every admiral who ever held the office of Chief of Naval Operations. (At the time of his death Noeth had already completed three of the portraits and had prepared a study for a fourth.)

Those of us who have followed Michael Allen Noeth's more personal, less "official" output in his two previous exhibitions at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway (where his work is featured in the year-round salon as well), can only be grateful to this well known Soho venue for mounting a major retrospective of his paintings and drawings which will be on view from December 10 through 28.

Although he had no formal artistic training until he was a junior in high school, Noeth, who would later be accepted for advance study at FIT, was ecstatic after enrolling in The Art Students League, where he recalled "walking in those halls and working in the same studios where everybody who became somebody in American art studied and/or taught before me...Norman Rockwell, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jackson Pollock, Thomas Hart Benton and on and on and on..."

It says something about Noeth's innate sophistication, even at an early age, that he was able to extol artists as dissimilar as Norman Rockwell and Jackson Pollock. Like Willem de Kooning, who once confided to this writer without a trace of irony that he "would give anything to be able to paint like Norman Rockwell," Noeth recognized the peculiar greatness of American art, its unique idiom and vitality, wherever he found it.

In his own work, he endeavored successfully to add something new to that varied aesthetic legacy with his pictures of sailors and ships at sea, rendered with great accuracy, yet enlivened by painterly qualities that locate his work within a larger historical context.

Michael A. Noeth, the only New York City resident killed in the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

The first paintings by Noeth that this writer encountered were scenes of ships and shipboard life evoked with an authoritativeness that can only come from first-hand experience in a palette dominated by various subtle blue hues used to capture the nuances of both sea and sky. In these works, he synthesized the "official" and subjective sides of his art in an unprecedented manner, producing paintings in oil on masonite and other mediums that depict naval life from a unique, insider's point of view. While some of these early works evoke the symphonic sweep of "Victory at Sea," with their tumultuous vistas of dark clouds and foamy waves, akin to certain elements in the paintings of El Greco, others capture the more mundane moments of sailors at work and at leisure. It is probably safe to say that no artist before Noeth has ever painted such subjects as intimately or as well.

As is the case with many serious artists, Noeth's compositions became simpler and more pared down as his work evolved and he grew firmer in his convictions, increasingly stressing the visionary over the specific in a series of landscapes centering on sand dunes, blizzards, and other natural subjects and events. In watercolors from the "Dunes" series, for example, compositions comprised of sky and sand meeting at the horizon verge on total abstraction. In the "Equinox" series, cosmological phenomena provide the artist an occasion for effects that combine elements of the abstract and the surreal.

Then there is the "Oman" series of oils on masonite in which Noeth truly achieves his most impressive synthesis of the formal and the particular with images of mountains looming above bodies of water, painted with a rugged earthiness reminiscent of Marsden Hartley. Rising between sea and sky, their monolithic forms recall the French writer Rene Daumal's memorable metaphysical adventure novel Mount Analogue. That the book was in effect a spiritual autobiography published in an unfinished state after the author's death makes this connection all the more poignant.

Daumal referred to Mount Analogue as "the symbolic mountain—the way that unites Heaven and Earth, a way which must exist in material and human form." Conversely, while a prophetic symbolism can be read into the word "Oman" posthumously simply by changing its next-to-last letter, Noeth's mountains were most certainly inspired by his travels in the real world. At the same time, by virtue of their powerful compositions and their somber colors, he infused them with great depth and mystery.

Indeed, it is these intangible qualities in the paintings and drawings of Michael Allen Noeth that make them all the more impressive. For here was an artist who lived fully in the world of men, yet transmuted his daily experiences into expressions of a unique sensibility that will endure long beyond his all-too-brief earthly tenure.

—Ed McCormack

Charles S. Klabunde

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Dual Pleasures in the Paintings of Cristina Ruiz

In the art of Latin America, and in Mexico in particular, graphic art and painting have always gone hand in hand and been viewed as equal partners. Among the older generation of contemporary Mexican artists, Jose Luis Cuevas and Francisco Toledo are especially exemplary in this regard, the former making drawing his primary medium, the latter devoting as much energy to printmaking as to painting.

Mexican artists of the younger generation are continuing this tradition and expanding upon it, as seen in the work of Cristina Ruiz, whose premiere New York solo exhibition comes to the Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street, from November 19 through December 1. (Cocktail reception for the artist on Thursday, November 21, at 7 PM.)

In his passionate, if at times overly conservative, defense of humanist painting, "The Insiders," poet and critic Selden Rodman once wrote of spending time in Mexico searching for "any sign that the younger generation was venturing beyond the blandishments of Paris which still smother Latin-American creativity under a second hand blanket of formalism." Of course, this was in 1956, decades before Mexico had established its own post-Mural Movement voice, finally emerging from the shadow of its looming giants and taking its rightful place in the mainstream of world culture. Still, the happy conclusion to Rodman's search was that he finally discovered Cuevas and other "heirs of Orozco" who renewed his faith in the ability of Mexican artists to create modern art that projected qualities peculiar to their own heritage.

Mexican painting has come a long, long way in the intervening decades, partaking of the pluralism and multiculturalism of the post-modern era without forsaking its roots, as seen in the art of Cristina Ruiz, who lived and worked in Paris from 1984 to 1986, later studied in Florence, and continues to return to Europe each summer. Through her wide-ranging studies abroad and in her native Mexico, Ruiz has refined the technical skills that enable her to create her unique style of romantic figuration.

The most immediately impressive characteristic of her meticulously finished yet fluidly accomplished works in acrylic on canvas is how successfully she has synthesized aspects of drawing and painting. Working mainly in subtly modulated monotones, building her compositions with refined strokes in what appears to be a dry-brush technique, Ruiz creates compositions that succeed simultaneously in both figurative and abstract terms.

One of her most successful paintings in this regard is "Awakenings," in which a comely young model, her body curving graceful as she clutches her legs in a seated position, emerges from a welter of delicate strokes. Some of these brush strokes cover her legs and the lower part of her body like dappled shadows, causing the figure to merge with her surroundings and asserting the two-dimensionality of the picture-plane in a manner that intriguingly contradicts the naturalistic realism of the figure. Like the figures of Balthus, the youthful model has the qualities of a "nymphet," to use Nabokov's famous term. She glances over her shoulder seductively, at once innocent and self-aware. She is obviously quite cognizant of her coltish charms as she sits beside the fragments of what appears to be a large egg that the artist apparently wants us to believe she has recently been hatched from! Despite the oddness of this metaphor, however, the image succeeds splendidly in aesthetic as well as symbolic terms by virtue of Ruiz's skills in integrating the various elements of the composition. These are intricately interwoven by her brush in a manner that can only be compared to certain aspects of Asian painting. (Her generous use of white space in and around her images to fill her compositions with a sense of light can also be compared to the ethereal effects achieved by the landscape painters of China and Japan, although her approach to figuration is decidedly Western).

"Bare Feelings"

While a work such as "Awakenings" incorporates elements of Surrealism, transforming the model into a mythic being—the archetypical "wood nymph"— other paintings by Ruiz center on more down to earth images and succeed in another manner. One such picture is "The Rendezvous," in which we are made privy to the intimate embrace of a pair of young lovers. Both the young woman and the young man are as ideally beautiful as the models in a Calvin Klein fashion spread. Indeed, they both have that fashionably disheveled look one sees everywhere, she wearing a denim jacket and jeans as they press their perfect profiles together and she wraps one lissome leg around his bare torso. While another artist might choose to treat such an image with a post-Pop irony akin to Roy Lichtenstein's images derived from love comics of the 1960s, Cristina Ruiz is adventurous enough to play it straight. Intrepid painter that she is, she does not hesitate to risk banality in pursuit of beauty. Fortunately, though, she is a strong enough painter to transcend the banal altogether, cunningly diverting the viewers' attention away from the "too pretty" subject matter to the technical finesse with which she handles the wrinkles in fabric, the textures of hair, and other details through which, by a dazzling act of creative sleight of hand, she allows the more abstract aspects of her art to take precedence.

Thus, by the skillful manipulation of tone and texture and subtle variations of "touch" and emphasis, Ruiz is able to provide sufficient visual interest to satisfy the most sophisticated aesthetic tastes, even while indulging her own innate romanticism. Not only does she avoid betraying her unabashed love of beauty but she enables the viewer to have it both ways as well, in a painting such as "Bare Feelings," a strikingly abstract composition created from an extreme closeup of a female nude resting her head on her raised knee. While the image is ostensibly realistic, the finely modeled shadows on the figure's profile, arched shoulder, and the other body parts seen in the severely cropped composition, create formal patterns that provide an aesthetic appeal equal to the specific features of her own beauty.

Such dualities provide much of the pleasure in the paintings of Cristina Ruiz.

—Lawrence Downes

Lukas Kandl at CFM Gallery: An Aviary of Winged Wonders

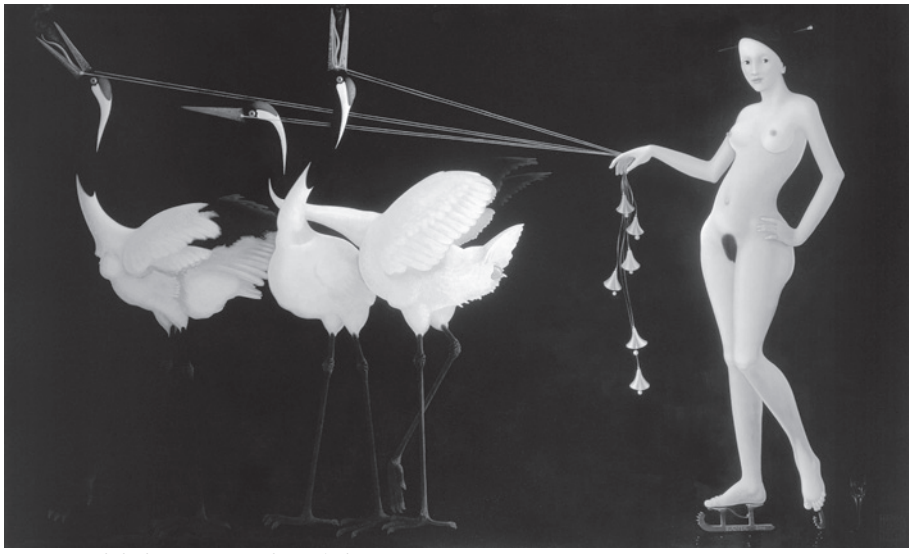
Of all living creatures, birds inhabit most naturally the realm between the earthly and the heavenly spheres. Their curious anatomies provide us with the basic design for angels and other winged creatures of myth. Perpetually poised for flight, these feathered emissaries seem not quite of this world, forever on the verge of ascending toward mysteries above and beyond human grasp. It seems no wonder then that, since the ancient Egyptians, birds have been regarded as symbols of the human soul and that poets throughout history have found them handy as metaphors for freedom, as well as for spiritual longing. Yet birds are frequently figures of comedy as well, their wobbly awkwardness as they waddle about on the ground contrasting so strikingly with their grace in flight; the preening of peacocks, in particular, so synonymous with human vanity.

All these aspects of ornithological fancy, along with even more astounding ones conjured up by a singular imagination, are present in "A Tribute to Audubon," an extraordinary exhibition of oil paintings by Lukas Kandl, at CFM Gallery, 112 Greene Street, from November 22 through December 2002.

Kandl who was born in Prague in 1944 and emigrated to France when the Soviet tanks rolled in twenty-four years later, is often referred to as a Surrealist. However, his work actually harks much further back, to one of Surrealism's great predecessors: Giuseppe Arcimboldo, the sixteenth century Italian Mannerist best known for his fantastic portraits made up of fruits, vegetables, flowers, and other organic matter. Indeed, that Arcimboldo served as a court painter in Prague during the reign of Emperor Rudolph II —who was well pleased with the Italian's portrait of him as Vertumnus, the Roman god of vegetation and protector of gardens and fruit— adds historical resonance to Kandl's stylistic kinship with him.

Kandl's well deserved international reputation rests on gothically-nuanced fantasies in which figures possessed of classical beauty and monstrous anomalies are rendered with equally Boschian exactitude. Bathed in luminous amber auras, as though viewed through honey or beer, his pictures are distinctly East European in atmosphere. In the past his compositions were often quite intricate, with all manner of objects and creatures pictured, like specimens in some Medieval laboratory, within the separate compartments of baroque display cabinet; or seen floating freely over moody landscapes or labyrinthine cityscapes suggesting the haunting Prague of Kafka.

In the present exhibition, however,



"Grus Tricinium Japonesis Lubricum"

Kandl has reined in his maximalist impulses profitably to give us more sharply focused compositions which gain from simplicity. Most center on a single avian subject.

Each bird is depicted with an apparent scientific faithfulness that makes clear why this exhibition is named in tribute to the renowned American naturalist. True to form, however, Kandl has imbued each creature with at least one anomalous feature, as seen in "Bucorvus Abyssinicus Orchis," where an exotic long-beaked bird is further embellished by a large red flower sprouting from its crown, with an eyeball dangling from its center.

It is Kandl's peculiar gift to depict such visions with a verisimilitude that makes them hardly as visually jarring as they might sound from such a description. Indeed, that we see only beauty where grotesquery should be testifies to the artist's unique ability to merge the actual and the imaginary in a manner that provides a visual definition of the term "metaphysical."

In another painting, entitled "Avis Lituus," a smaller, more neurotic-looking bird with dark feathers that almost disappear into the dense black background appears startled by a sound emanating from a gleaming gold horn on the end of a long cord growing out of where its tail-feathers should be. In other paintings, other species are subjected to other unnerving metamorphoses: In "Tockus Flavirostris Curaris," it takes the form of a pair of human ears suspended from the bird's head on one of those cable-like appendages that put one in mind of the invisible "silver cord" which, according to New Age mystics, connects the physical body to the "astral" —or spiritual body— and is broken only at death. The witty piece de resistance here is a pair of tiny pearls suspended in mid-air just below the floating ears!

A single pearl floats in space beneath what appears to be a luminous soap bubble in the painting simply entitled "Phoenix." Instead of giving way to smoke, the candle's flame elongates against the black background, culminating in an ornate infernal mass, within which the mythical bird is formed from fiery swirls. In this picture there is no pretense of naturalism. Rather, the composition combines decorative qualities reminiscent of Klimt and Schiele with the visionary intensity of more contemporary Fantastic Realists such as Ernst Fuchs and Rudolph Hausner.

An anomaly among anomalies and the centerpiece of the show, "Grus Tricinium Japonesis Lubricum" is the only painting in which a human figure appears. In this large picture an ivory-complected female nude on ice-skates stands with one hand poised on one hip and the other holds three long reins from which several gold bells dangle. These leashes are linked to the beaks of three large white cranes.

Here, as with all of the paintings in this brilliant exhibition, the exact meaning of the image is elusive. But isn't such elusiveness one of the criteria by which we distinguish poetry from prose? As one must be well aware by now, Lukas Kandl is anything but a prosaic painter. His pictures are filled with a kind of magic and wit one rarely encounters anymore, and to enter a gallery filled with them is to be transported to a world where one wonder waddles on the heels of another.

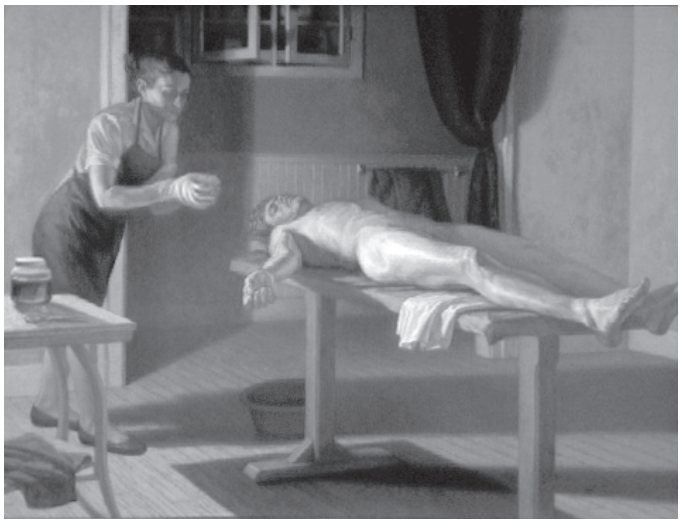
—Ed McCormack

Formalism and Narrative in the Art of Nicholas Palermo

"Beauty is a terrible thing!" Dostoevsky declares in The Brothers Karamazov. "It is terrible because it has not been fathomed, for God has set us terrible riddles." William Butler Yeats expresses a similar sentiment in his famous line, "A terrible beauty is born." Still, the sense of a contradiction lingers: How can beauty be terrible or the terrible be beautiful?

Perhaps it is one of the tasks of painting to make manifest—or, to actually embody—in pigment those particular mysteries to which even the words of our greatest writers can only allude. At least this is what occurs to one on encountering Nicholas Palermo's large oil on linen "Before the Burial," in his recent solo show "Interiors: Paintings and Studies," at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, in Chelsea.

Like Lucien Freud, Palermo is a difficult artist in that he makes no attempt to ingratiate himself to the viewer. Nor does he descend to the kind of cheap sensationalism that we see in the work of lesser but more highly hyped realists like Eric Fischl, who seek to titillate with sleazy subject matter and fudge their ineptitude with showy pyrotechnics. Granted, Palermo initially shocks us with the subject matter of "Before the Burial," which depicts a woman wearing an apron and rubber gloves, holding a sponge as she prepares to attend to a naked male corpse laid out on an embalming table. However, his treatment of the subject is by no means sensationalized to amplify its horrific effect. Quite the contrary, putting into practice in painterly terms Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquility," Palermo paints this disconcerting scene with such tender and respectful restraint that we are compelled to gaze unflinchingly at the universal ritual of preparing the dead for burial and to finally comprehend its terrible beauty. In much the same way that the Old Masters he so obviously admires could rivet our attention to the most explicit images of carnage by virtue of their sublime skills, Palermo neutralizes the affect of the most grisly details—a livid gash along the ribcage of the naked corpse, a pair of scissors and jar of queasy green liquid on a nearby table —by painting them so attractively that we are forced to regard them with aesthetic dispassion. At the same time other, seemingly more mundane, elements in the composition, such as the solemn quality of the light and shadow in the embalming room and a dull red molding halfway up the wall that appears to be the precise shade of dried blood, contribute to the feeling that one is not only witnessing but also experiencing an event of profound gravity. For it is impossible for any thinking viewer to gaze dispassionately on a painting such as this, so unflinching in all its particulars, without coming to terms to some degree with his or her own mortality.



"Before the Burial"

"Resolve #2," another large oil on linen in the exhibition also focuses on the figures of a woman and a man, in this case both very much alive in the physical sense, yet seemingly deadlocked in domestic crisis. The woman, seen in semi-profile, wears a brilliant red dress that while modestly cut calls attention to her trim figure and palpable sensuality, as she walks across a patterned carpet toward a man standing in the shadows of an alcove between two rooms. Although it is not visible, we can only presume that the alcove leads to a door, for the man is wearing a drab, grayish-colored three-quarter length coat, his hands crammed into his pockets, his lips grimly set. Bespectacled and nondescript, the perspective of the picture making him appear considerably shorter than the other figure, he not only stands in shadow, but seems overshadowed by the woman. Given the title of the painting, the man's grimly determined posture, and the fact that the woman is moving toward him, it is possible to speculate that he is about to walk out on her and she is about to beseech him not to go. Yet, even as she strides forward, there is something somnambulant in the woman's posture, her partially bare arms hanging limply at her sides, to suggest that her weariness may actually be equal to his resolve. Thus it is possible to draw the conclusion that any effort she may make to keep him with her will be half-hearted, motivated more by guilt or pity than love.

As much as the previously discussed painting by Palermo, "Resolve" appears to be about an ending rather than a new beginning and the domestic details that surround the couple—a potted plant on a stand, a lamp and a telephone on a small table, pictures on the wall, a marble fireplace in the room beyond the alcove–-make this perception all more poignant.

Looking at the studies in oil and gessoed paper or graphite on paper for the four large paintings in this show, as well as the paintings themselves, it is clear that the formal aspects of Nicholas Palermo's work are paramount to him, that he places as much importance on the underlying dynamics of composition as does any abstract painter. Yet, there is also a pregnant mood in each of his pictures that can not be discounted; these are not mere "figures" but people depicted in psychologically charged situations. Thus, the sense of a submerged narrative is at least as prominent as the faint hints of the charcoal grid, employed to enlarge his original cartoons, that he allows to show through the thinly pigmented surface in some areas of his compositions.

Indeed, the subtle tension between process and subject matter, formalism also empowers the other two paintings in this exhibition: "The Bath" depicts a nude woman in a lavatory, so serenely at peace with her aging body that one can only assume her ample flesh holds happy memories of fulfilled sensuality. In "Mother Sewing" we see an even older woman with white hair, seated at a sewing machine, what appears to be an old wedding portrait on faded wallpaper behind her. In this contemporary reprise of Whistler's most famous theme, the underlying grid emerges most prominently, perhaps to add a bit of distance to a subject perilously near and dear to the artist's heart. Or perhaps it has more to do with a note at the bottom of the list of works available during the exhibition at the gallery:

The above works are currently not for sale. While they are essentially complete, further refinement will take place after the show ends. Anyone interested in purchasing work in the future may contact the artist directly.

Either way, Nicholas Palermo, an Associate Professor of Art at the Rhode Island School of Design who has exhibited widely and won several prestigious awards, is one of the most intriguing and impressive figurative painters to come along in quite some time, and one anticipates his future New York exhibitions with pleasure.

—Ed McCormack

Ekatherina Savtchenko's Radiant Homage to Stravinsky

As a Russian-born artist who lives and works in Germany, Ekatherina Savtchenko could be said to have dual aesthetic citizenship. This is no small asset in an era of multiculturalism, and she exploits it fully, drawing freely from the rich cultural resources of both countries, ancient and modern, to augment her own unique sensibility.

So far, this approach has served her well: Savtchenko has already had numerous critically acclaimed solo shows in the U.S., Japan, and all over Europe —including a prestigious survey of her work at the Russian State Museum in St. Petersburg, quite a coup for an artist who, with her blond bangs and petite frame, could still pass for a waifish teenager.

Gallery goers who first caught up with this postmodern whiz kid in her explosive exhibition of very large canvases at Westwood Gallery in Soho earlier this year will also find much to appreciate, albeit on a more intimate scale, in her new exhibition of painted photographs at A. Jain Marunouchi Gallery, 24 West 57th Street, from November 26 through December 7. (There will be a reception for the artist on Tuesday, November 26, 5:30 to 7:30PM.)

Savtchenko calls the exhibition "Le Sacre du Printemp," after the controversial ballet, known in English as "The Rite of Spring," that the great Russian avant garde composer Igor Stravinsky unveiled for the balletomanes and haut monde of Paris in 1913.

Of the ballet, which was the main event of the Ballets Russes's fifth season, Stravinsky, who retreated to a remote area of the Russian countryside to write it, said, "I saw in my imagination a solemn pagan rite. Sage elders, seated in a circle, watched a young girl dance herself to death...to propitiate the god of spring."

Set in pagan Russia, where the peasants were ruled by the caprices of the seasons and nature worship was rampant, the ballet scandalized Paris with its cacophonous music and frenetic dancing. Although a near riot broke out in the theater on opening night and the French critics were unanimously outraged, "The Rite of Spring" was a landmark in modern music, and its revolutionary spirit influence was to have a profound impact on all areas of Russian culture.

That the spirit of that great work reverberates to this day is borne out in Ekatherina Savtchenko's powerful new exhibition, of which the artist says, "The music of Stravinsky inspired me to create the wild, extreme, intensely pained photographs. I wanted to go deep into the subconscious to feel the heathen magic power of the world."

Toward this end, Savtchenko, who has used her photogenic image in past work as well, casts herself as the central figure of the ballet, the virgin chosen to be sacrificed to the pagan god of spring, who must dance herself to death so that he, in turn, will regenerate the fields and forests when winter ends. In her pictures, which she titles individually as "Dreams," Stravinsky's piece is recast as a water ballet, with the artist's petite figure floating weightlessly amid natural scenery transformed with a fiery chromatic intensity.

Painted photograph from "Le Sacre du Printemp" series

Anyone familiar with Savtchenko's large paintings will be at least partially prepared for the coloristic dynamism of the new works, which sacrifice no impact to their intimacy. He or she will recognize, too, the artist's penchant for introducing the power of myth into the postmodern dialogue, as she did in her previous exhibition "Primal Universe," where her large acrylic paintings combined a wide range of creation themes, from Hindu myths to ancient Scandinavian legends. Here, too, Savtchenko's pictures invite many varied interpretations that go beyond Stravinsky's celebration of Russian paganism to embrace Norse nature myths, Celtic tales. They also often have a dark Germanic component of sturm and drang as evocative of Richard Wagner and Anselm Keifer as of Stravinsky.

Other artists, such as Cindy Sherman, have photographed themselves as actors in imaginary narratives. Yet others, like Arnulf Rainer, have altered photographic self portraits with paint. But none has so successfully mythologized the self or combined painting with photography as dramatically as Ekatherina Savtchenko does in this exhibition.

"The photograph is for me the reality which is the same for everybody," Savtchenko explains. "We can hold it with the camera. But everybody sees this objectively reality differently. When I put the colors on the 'reality,' it begins to change to my personal landscape of my magic world. I believe in parallel universes. There are theories of physics that tell us that every possible imaginable universe can exist. Every day we dream new worlds. Everybody is the Creator."

In the parallel universe that Ekatherina Savtchenko dreams, the artist is alternately Sacrificial Virgin, Nature Nymph, Mermaid, and Earth Mother, seen amid vibrant floods of color in a primal landscape of otherworldly beauty. In some pictures, she floats on her back in a blue and green watery expanse, her arms outstretched gracefully. Above her, luminous reds and yellows flow over a bucolic landscape, in which rows of trees recede to distant valleys and hills. In other images, only her profile emerges from the blue water, with rivulets of dark blue or black flowing outward and large trees enveloped in radiant rainbow hues. In one of the latter pictures, the water is a visceral, blood-red hue shot through with reflections radiating from the a luminous yellow sky. In yet another image, the full-length figure of the artist floats in areas of red and yellow, the hem of her long black gown forming the two distinct points of a mermaid's tail.

Here, the mythologized photographic self portrait serves a similar purpose as the invented figures in Savthchenko's large paintings, becoming the focal point and foil for her energetic painterly pyrotechnics.

Remarkably, the photographic image is as fully integrated in the latter works as in the former ones, for Ekatherina Savtchenko is, first and foremost, a painter. She encompasses a dazzling range of effects, from the baroque chromatic richness of Russian icons, to the gestural vitality of German Expressionism, to give vibrant life to her singular creative vision.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Jose F. Rios: Painting as Autobiography and Salvation

Born in New York City to Puerto Rican parents in 1923, Tito Puente, known affectionately to his millions of fans as "El Rey," was one of the most esteemed and beloved figures in Latin music. A composer, arranger, band leader, and percussionist especially proficient in the twin drums known as timbales, Puente, who died in May of 2000, after 60 years in the music business, was more than a musician. He was an outspoken, globe-trotting good will ambassador who broke through numerous cultural barriers in the early days of Latin American music, and continued to perform regularly up to right before his death from complications following heart surgery.

There have been many tributes to Puente since, but none expresses his iconographic stature more dramatically than "Magic Wand," a painting by the Puerto Rican-American artist Jose F. Rios, in his second New York solo exhibition, "Jewels of the Lost Artist II: The story continues..." at Gelabert Studios Gallery, 255 West 86th Street, from December 17 through January 18, 2003. (There will be a reception for the artist on Tuesday, December 17th, from 5 to 9 PM.)

The "magic wand" of the title refers to the drum-stick that the great salsa showman brandishes high above his head with characteristic flamboyance in Rios' portrait, which captures an unmistakable likeness of Puente, with his full head of wavy white hair, his characteristically animated expression, his black bow tie, and sharp white tux. From the tip of Tito's upraised drum-stick stream beams of light, magical auras as from the halo of a saint, enhancing the sense that this portrait is actually an icon—as, indeed, Puente was to his people.

As in a Byzantine icon, Rios' portrait of Puente contains other elements related to the main figure. Here, however, the brown brick buildings with people looking out of their windows, seen behind Puente as he plays his timbales, are not merely symbolic. Along with performing in concert halls around the world, Puente often played for free at street festivals in "El Barrio" and other inner city neighborhoods, because he never forgot where he came from.

And the same can be said for Jose F. Rios, a painter schooled in the streets and in prison, whose success story can be compared to that of Piri Thomas, the Puerto Rican-American author of the best-selling autobiography, "Down These Mean Streets."

Discovering Rios's first New York solo show, "Jewels of the Lost Artist," at Gelabert Gallery last year was a revelation similar to discovering the work of Charlotte Salomon, a young artist who created over 800 paintings tracing the events of her life leading up to her untimely death in Auschwitz at age 26, in a posthumous retrospective at The Jewish Museum a few years ago. The important difference, of course, is that Rios' life story is ongoing, and that the strength and beauty in his paintings comes from the transcendence of bitterness and the peculiar alchemy by which art can transform experience.

Since Rios' story has been told in print before, and is rapidly becoming part of his legend, the bare facts will suffice here, lest its human interest upstage what a truly fine painter he is: Born in Puerto Rico in 1954,

"Magic Wand"

raised in a New York tenement, his talent was evident from early childhood. But like a lot of poor ghetto kids, he got hooked on drugs and alcohol. As an adult, he ended up living in a cardboard box on the streets for ten years, and eventually got busted for dealing. In prison, he kicked drugs and began to paint in earnest. On release, he was reunited with his formerly estranged daughter who organized his first solo show last year, which garnered him favorable reviews and a growing following among gallery goers and collectors.

Perhaps Rios' signature work, the painting which best symbolizes his ability to find beauty in the midst of adversary is "Hope," one of only two pieces held over from his first solo show, which depicts a single dandelion growing through a crack in the sidewalk, seen from the perspective of a homeless man living in a cardboard box.

Other powerful paintings in the present show include "Prayer," which depicts a little Hispanic boy with an Elmo backpack, standing back shyly from a 9/11 memorial gathering, saying a quiet prayer for the victims as their spirits rise in an ethereal haze illuminated by many candles. Another work, entitled "All of We," is a diptych with the two panels depicting the Twin Towers, their surfaces overlaid by the stars and stripes and covered by deep cracks, their windows filled with flags of many nations, symbolizing Americans from all corners of the world who, as Rios puts it, "felt the blow of September 11th."

Even as Rios broadens the scope of his art to embrace a variety of subjects, some of his most powerful paintings are still his most autobiographical ones. Among the most moving of these is the acrylic on canvas entitled "Christmas 95." Here, we see a homeless couple huddled together, sharing a grimy green blanket, in a makeshift tent. Against one side of their humble shelter, a scrawny pine tree slumps precariously, decorated with found objects.

Nearby is a shopping cart, filled with the couples' few belongings. Yet, the deep blue of the night sky is enlivened by a numinous glow, as though emanating from the Star of Bethlehem. The light from above reflects off the shadowy carpet of snow surrounding the tent, and the entire scene is permeated by an atmospheric serenity suggesting that these two destitute souls have found their own sense of Peace on Earth—at least in this one spiritually illuminated moment of respite from their desperate daily existence.

It is in these isolated epiphanies and rare moments that give us the strength to go on in the face of adversity that Jose F. Rios finds inspiration and his own ultimate salvation. —Ed McCormack

A Retrospective View of the Singular Charles S. Klabunde

It is wholly characteristic of a Charles S. Klabunde's almost perverse originality to mount a major retrospective in the obscure little riverside hamlet of Frenchtown, New Jersey, far from the fashionable precincts of the official art world.

Klabunde, after all, is a phenomenon apart. A welcome anomaly in contemporary art, he is a prolific printmaker and painter who has chosen the path of passionate humanism over mundane careerism. In the tradition of Leonard Baskin, Jacob Landau, Maurice Lasansky, and a mere handful of other independent spirits who have bucked the system, going against current trends and fashions, Klabunde's work springs from moral and philosophical principles and convictions, as opposed to the historical imperatives of modernism.

As with all great humanists, the armature upon which Klabunde's work in both printmaking and painting has always rested is his surpassing draftsmanship. This is the focus of "Black and White," a 35 year retrospective of Charles Klabunde's etchings and pencil drawings, at Beyond the Looking Glass Gallery, 33 Bridge Street, Frenchtown, New Jersey, from November 2 through 30. (The opening reception is Saturday, November 2, from 4 to 8 PM, and the exhibition can be viewed from 11 to 5 on Saturdays and Sundays, and by appointment by calling 908-966-6464.)

Many of the works in this show, spanning the period from the 1960s to the present, have never been exhibited previously. Others, however, are well known to Klabunde's collectors and admirers, including four deluxe edition European boxed books of etchings and engravings, respectively entitled "Cycle of Sangsaric Phenomena: The Tibetan Book of the Dead (1967)," "The Seven Deadly Sins (1971)," Samuel Beckett's The Lost Ones (1984)," and "Studies of the Revolutionary Mind (2000)."

In each series, one sees how Klabunde's images illuminate, rather than merely illustrate, the texts from which he takes inspiration. In the etching "Cycle of Sangsaric Phenomena #III," for example, the mystical qualities of the Tibetan Book of the Dead are conveyed with surreal figures orbiting a darkly cross-hatched cosmos around a brilliant orb that could appear to be a portal to their next incarnation. By contrast, in "The Seven Deadly Sins" series, various preposterously grotesque beings recall Odilon Redon's desire to create figures that are "impossible according to the laws of possibility." Yet, we recognize the bloated, covetous figure of "Greed," and the fanged monster of "Anger" —the latter replete with ballistic erection!— as symbolic surrogates of our own worst traits.

"Terrifying!" Samuel Beckett himself declared on first viewing Klabunde's etchings for "The Lost Ones." This was high praise, coming from the Master of Despair, and wholly justified, for Klabunde fleshes out Beckett's desolate mindscape with visions of hapless, misshapen souls climbing crooked ladders to nowhere or idling like icons of dysfunction, their limbs propped limply on crude crutches. This series, especially, exemplifies the Existential Realist phrase of the artist's work.

"The Sirens"

But perhaps the most powerful of all Klabunde's boxed books for its prophetic qualities is "Studies of the Revolutionary Mind," the series of etchings created to illuminate his own eloquent text, focusing on "the incomprehensible horror of genocide in the twentieth century." For, while both the text and the etchings were created well before the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the figures that we see in "True Believers" and "Ideology of Madness" chillingly externalize the inner demons of those who would take thousands of innocent lives in the name of an abstract ideology.

In his most recent work, however, Klabunde has moved from inner demons and internal fantasies toward a new affirmation of life in all its most sensual and beautiful outer manifestations. This creative metamorphosis has occurred as a natural consequence of his move away from nihilism and existentialism, toward spiritual transcendence. As the visual vehicle for expressing his personal growth and philosophical rebirth, the artist has chosen monumental images of the human body. Now no longer grotesque, misshapen, or symbolically deformed, the bodies that he presents are ideally beautiful in the majestic series of very large pencil drawings poetically entitled "Burned by the Fire of Our Dreams."

The title itself is as visionary as any phrase ever dreamed up by William Blake, and the figures, derived from the dance, that Klabunde delineates so sensitively in this new series soar as weightlessly as any of the angelic beings that Blake set in flight in his heavenly illuminations.

Klabunde's figures, however, are creatures of flesh and blood, their nakedness at once sensual and innocent. Seen singularly, poised in mid-leap, or interlocked in erotic embrace, their anatomies are depicted in specific detail that lends each figure the unique features of an individual; yet, by virtue of their physical perfection, their flamboyant gestures, and the monumental thrust of Klabunde's compositions, each figure takes on the ideal qualities of an archetype.

That the figures are set against pure white expanses of paper, with no backgrounds or even the suggestion of a floor to ground them, invites comparisons with the large graphite and charcoal drawings that Robert Longo executed in the 1980s. But there the resemblance ends, for while Longo's figures are fully clothed in contemporary styles and seen in freefall, like shooting victims crumpling in some film noir drama, Klabunde's (with rare exceptions, such as the two seductive female figures perched on the rocks in diaphanous garments in "Sirens") are nude and considerably more mythic.

However, even the apparently horned and cloven-hooved satyr embracing the statuesque female nude in Klabunde's "Erotica Entwined," could very well be a dancer, given Charles S. Klabunde's recent predilection for imbuing all that he observes with a sense of magic, as opposed to conjuring magic from the subconscious.

In any case, it is well worth the short trip to Frenchtown, New Jersey, to see more than three decades of prints and drawings by this singularly gifted artist, who is reportedly now at work on a project called "The Passion of Christ," as well as a series of Native American portraits.

So, one is advised to phone the gallery posthaste for traveling directions.

—Ed McCormack

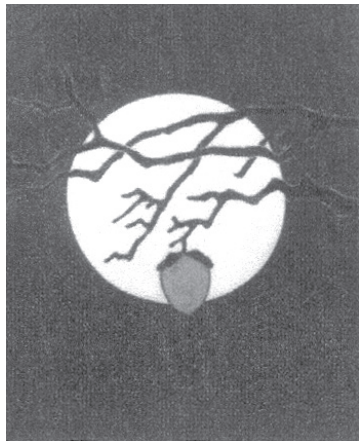
Three Korean Artists: Three Views

Staging exhibitions in alternative spaces is a healthy a trend, for it gives artists options outside the gallery system and also gives people the opportunity to have an aesthetic experience as they go about their daily business.

One excellent example is "Three Korean Artists," featuring work by Han Nong, Barbara Yousooja Han, and Daniel Daeshik Choi, at Liberty Bank, 11 West 32nd Street from December 2, 2002 through January 31, 2003. (The reception will take place on Tuesday December 3, from 5 to 8 PM.)

Daniel Daeshik Choi

Barbara Han



Han Nong

Internationally exhibited artist Han Nong was born Robert Han in Seoul, but for professional purposes adopted a pseudonym given to him by his tutors, which roughly translates as "a scholar sitting on a cloud, drinking wine, and reciting poetry."

The name suggests a reclusive artist in the Asian "literati" tradition, and certainly seems suitable, since Han Nong ignores contemporary art in order to escape undue influence. He does, however, reveal a concern with abstraction when he states, "All subject matter has been exhausted. There is nothing new. Composition, however is the most important thing."

One of Han Nong's most striking oils is Persimmon Tree," issued by the United Nations as a first day cover postage stamp and limited edition serigraph to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of UNICEF. The painting is notable for its exquisite simplicity, with a single red persimmon dangling from a sinuous tree limb, set against a brilliantly white full moon.

For acclaimed sculptor and painter Barbara Yousooja Han the human face appears to be the most fertile terrain for her work in both mediums. Although her mask-like clay and terra cotta figures, incorporating both Asian and western influences, are also quite powerful, here her oils of enigmatic faces are especially strong, with their earthy colors and vigorous brushwork. Indeed, Barbara Yousooja Han's soulful faces express a range of emotions that gives visual form to her statement, "One must go through each and every emotion to reach any other. This means that while we are happy for life, intense suffering must accompany it, and men and women must be strong to endure and overcome their challenges."

Although he has exhibited internationally as well, Daniel Daeshik Choi is especially well known in New York City for his exhibitions with the West Side Arts Coalition, as well as with the Korean American Contemporary Arts Association, a highly respected artists organization of which he is the founder. An award winning advertising designer in Korea, before settling in the U.S., he is trained as a master craftsman as well as a painter. Indeed, Daniel Daeshik Choi often combines craft elements in his compositions, particularly the disc-like metalwork forms that serve as symbolic suns or moons in his poetic mixed media assemblage paintings depicting semi-abstract landscapes. In this exhibition he is represented by powerful mixed media paintings in which the forms of mountains are boldly delineated to create gracefully rhythmic compositions enhanced by subtly harmonized colors and a graceful calligraphic linearity.

Like the other two artists in this engrossing exhibition, Daniel Daeshik Choi makes a valuable contribution to the multicultural vibrancy of contemporary art.

—Robert Vigo

Squalor and Seduction: The Maximalism of Laura Krejsová

Although a Czech born in Prague, where she still lives and works, Laura Krejsová, whose paintings are on view at World Fine Art Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, from December 3 through 21, appears to share a stylistic kinship with the Italian artist Francesco Clemente, as well as the German artist Jorge Immendorff, among other Neo Expressionists who came to prominence in the late 1970s.

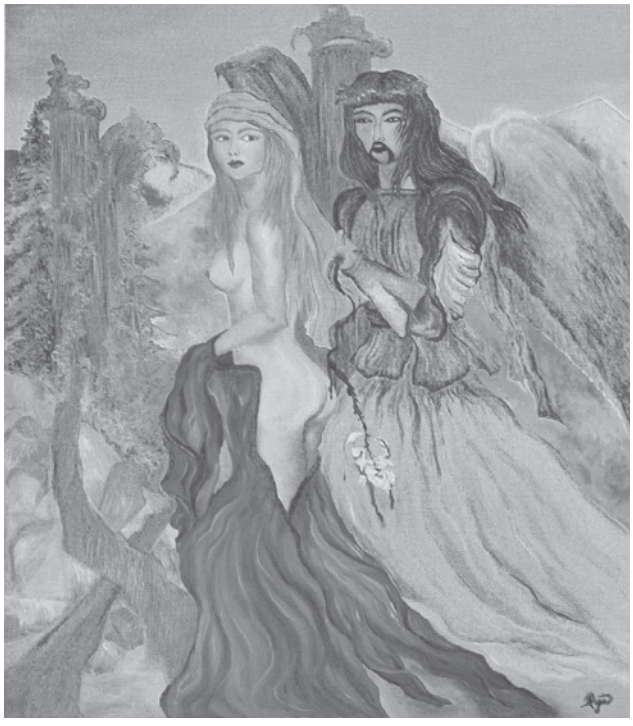
No matter that Krejsová was born in 1975 (which makes her a child of postmodernism in the most literal sense) and cites Rembrandt, Dali, and Durer as her main influences, these international Neo Expressionists are her true peers, in terms of both her bravura paint handling and her untrammeled and intrepid imaginative freedom.

Krejsová is absolutely fearless when it comes to pouring her feelings into her work and revealing her innermost fantasies in her paintings, which can only be termed "maximalistic" for their filled-to-bursting compositions. Furthermore, her psychological candor lends her pictures an emotional power that some might think excessive. But that is apparently of no concern to Krejsová, who is obviously determined to let it all hang out, as the saying goes. Perhaps this is nowhere more apparent than in the painting she calls "Why," which is at once sensual and shocking for the squalor that it depicts.

Here, the artist, who is blond and glamorous, and whose painted female protagonists often bear such a striking resemblance to herself that one can only see them as symbolic self-portraits, depicts a young woman sprawling in what appears to be a filthy alleyway, swigging from a wine bottle. Wrapped around her head is a dark blue bandana decorated with skull and crossbones designs of the type that one might expect an outlaw biker to flaunt. Her long blond hair streams out of it and falls down over her face, as she raises the bottle to her lips, a brick wall and a rusted, decrepit doorway partially visible behind her. Her torso is naked, but for a skimpy, unbuttoned denim vest. Her skin-tight, artfully torn jeans are unzipped almost to the pubis, as she sprawls with her legs spread provocatively, as though offering her nubile body to any casual passerby who will supply her with more wine.

"Why" is an image of such wanton abandonment and degradation that it will make some viewers squeamish —especially those who may be unwilling to admit to themselves that they find its squalor simultaneously repellent and seductive. But it is nonetheless a powerfully humanistic and socially concerned statement by an artist with the courage and the compassion to project her own image into a worst case scenario, the theme of which appears to be, "There but for the grace of God go I."

Other, more fanciful self-portraits enliven other canvases such as "Confession" and "Announcement." In the former, the protagonist's face and one bare shoulder fills the foreground of the composition. Blond tresses spilling down over one eye, her other dark eye gazing out at the viewer, she stands in a landscape where a mysterious stone house, a bridge, and a bare, spidery blue tree create an atmosphere suggesting a gothic fairy tale. In the latter canvas, the same blond beauty is seen in a more elaborate landscape, amid verdant mountains and classical columns, removing her silken, Elizabethan-looking crimson dress to reveal her comely naked body to an angel who resembles an East European rock star, with his long black mullet and Slavic/Zapata mustache.



"Announcement"

Although the symbols in these two paintings are not quite as clear as in the previously discussed canvas, they, too, appear fraught with intriguing personal symbols that suggest an artist preoccupied with exploring and unearthing her deepest dreams and fantasies in order to create works of art that resonate with narrative drama. Although Krejsová has cited Einstein and Freud as combined fascinations, the events depicted in her paintings also indicate familiarity with the archetypes discussed in the writings of Carl Jung.

Laura Krejsová's use of the symbolic self portrait as a vehicle for exploring a variety of themes and subjects can be compared to that of Frida Kahlo, as well as to more contemporary artists like Cindy Sherman and Nan Goldin, who are not adverse to indulging in a bit of narcissism, and even blatant exhibitionism, in order to create images that resonate beyond the personal into the universal. At the same time, however, Krejsová also creates other paintings in which a host of other figures and forms take center stage in postmodern allegories of a less personal nature.

In "The Woman," for example, the small female figure of the title wears a long blue dress and is seen from behind, strolling in what appears to be a nocturnal dreamscape or garden where a small white bridge winds over a dark body of water and large butterflies, bugs, fruits, flowers, foliage and burning candles, all brilliantly colored, merge with an intricate, vigorously pigmented intensity akin to that of the British badboy Neo-Expressionist Malcolm Morley.

Other paintings by Krejsová depict a faceless male nude rising in a livid sunset amid the cubistically clustered buildings surrounding a courtyard in Prague; a group of women camping out in a Fauvist forest where brightly colored laundry flaps on a line strung between trees; an atmospheric nocturnal view through a cruciform window frame of shadowy Prague rooftops with smoke rising from silhouetted stacks under a crescent moon; scenes profusely populated by various animal species and lush vegetation, rendered with a Technicolor accuracy that would do National Geographic proud, suggesting a postmodern take on the peaceable kingdoms of Horace Pippin and the jungle fever of Henri Rousseau; and, most recently, a series of paintings inspired by cosmic and science fictional themes that, with their intense colors and freely brushed forms, come as close as Krejsová ever does to abstraction.

The imaginative fecundity and thematic variety of Laura Krejsová's work is compelling for this young artist's refusal to limit her horizons by painting herself into a stylistic corner. Let us hope that, as she continues to grow, mature, and refine her considerable talent, she retains the almost reckless inventiveness that makes the present exhibition so refreshing and promising.

—Maurice Taplinger

Diana Freedman-Shea's Ode to the Enduring City

In her exhibition two years ago, Freedman-Shea focused on the meat packing district at a time when she was about to lose her studio there due to the ironic circumstance that artists invariably find themselves in when a once declasse neighborhood becomes known as a fashionable new art area. And the paintings in that show had a decidedly elegiac quality, with their dark gaping doorways and areas of shadow suggesting the subtle shadings of dread that can permeate a place where one no longer feels welcome.

Even more complex feelings come into play in Freedman-Shea's new solo show,"Vistas and Views of New York," at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 5 through 23. For it happens that her new paintings are views from the eighty-fourth floor of one of the Twin Towers in the World Trade Center, where Freedman-Shea set up a studio last August and worked up there until shortly before the catastrophic events of 9/11.

But for the fortuitous failure of an elevator, among other events which terminated her tenure in the tower prematurely, Freedman-Shea could very well have been among the thousands of innocent victims who died in that tragedy. As it happened, she witnessed the destruction of both towers from a few blocks away, on Broadway, and had to work her way through this trauma, she tells one, before she could "begin really making art again."

Freedman-Shea is a consummately sophisticated painter who recognizes and respects the all-important difference between naked self expression and the artfully directed aesthetic statement. Thus, she brings to this new series of oils the same stringent standard that Wordsworth prescribed for poetry: "emotion recollected in tranquility."

As a result, like Bruce Springsteen's new album "The Rising," also propelled by the events of 9/11, "Vistas and Views of New York" is a celebration rather than a lament: an uplifting ode to the resiliency of a city that has been wounded but will not be cowed. Freedman-Shea expresses this sentiment directly—one might even say, defiantly—by focusing on the sheer sweep and magnificence of Lower Manhattan.

Painting from "Vistas and Views of New York"

The city's enduring beauty comes across most romantically in the large oil "Two Bridges," where the two structures of the title gracefully span a river at once murky and luminous, toward the mist-shrouded shore of Brooklyn. While the architecture of Lower Manhattan and other aspects of the painting are limned in a relatively detailed yet characteristically unfussy manner, Freedman-Shea wields her brush much more loosely in depicting the touches of white foam on the grayed-down surface of the river.

Part of what makes her a remarkable artist is the boldness with which she carries off such unexpected flourishes. Where a less intrepid painter would back off, leaving very good alone, she forges forward, as though on a dare—and the almost reckless gesture makes all the difference between a merely accomplished picture and a really terrific one.

In contrast to the panoramic "Two Bridges," "Black Buildings," another view of lower Manhattan looking toward Brooklyn, comes off as a still life in the guise of a cityscape. Here, the blocky shadowed buildings dominating the foreground could almost make one think of Morandi, yet they actually spring from Freedman-Shea's memories of her mother's perfume bottles, with which she liked to play as a child. While the painting is convincing as a cityscape, the aspects of it that remind one of a still life create a tantalizing sense of perceptual ambiguity every bit as tantalizing as the tension always present in Freedman-Shea's work between subject and process.

What this seems to prove is that, Hans Hofmann's prejudice against subject matter notwithstanding, a savvy realist can sometimes outdo an Abstract Expressionist when it comes to so-called "push and pull!"

In other major oils on canvas such as "Lost View" and "Trinity Church," Freedman-Shea deals just as adventurously with the dynamism of reflective glass surfaces seen from vertiginous angles, with yellow cabs crawling along in the distance like ants or like the little squares of color creeping just as purposefully around the edges of the larger rectangles in Mondrian's "Broadway Boogie Woogie."

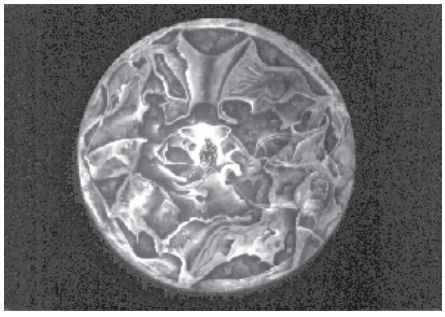
To be a realist painter in the year 2002 is a daunting business, considering the sheer volume of art history weighing upon—as well as gazing over—one's shoulder. Diana Freedman-Shea proceeds with the confidence of one who knows that she is up to the task and proves it consistently by setting new tasks for herself and surprising us in the process of solving them. With this show she set herself one of her most difficult tasks of all and has succeeded admirably in working her way through trauma to triumph.

—Ed McCormack

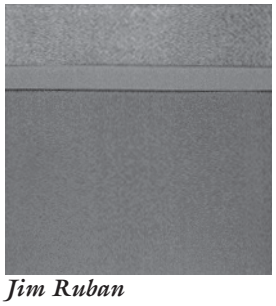
Making New Discoveries in a Varied Chelsea Invitational

Invitational exhibitions are especially valuable when they introduce us to at least a few gifted artists whose work currently can not be seen elsewhere. Especially exemplary in this regard, The 8th Annual Friends of Pleiades Invitational, can be seen at Pleaides Gallery, 530 West 25 Street, from December 17 through January 4, 2003, with a reception on Saturday December 21, from 3 to 6 PM.

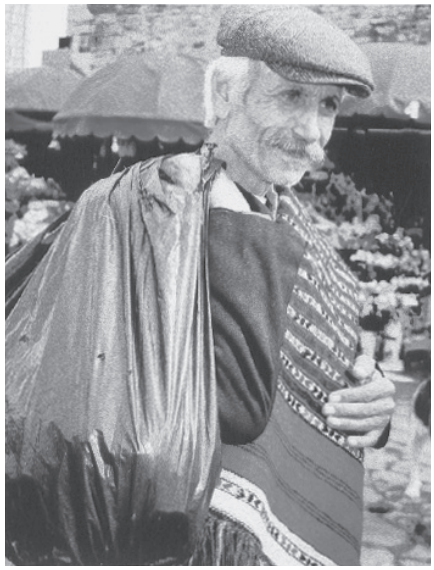
One of the most impressive aspects of this show is the number of artists who demonstrate that abstract art is still alive and well in the postmodern era. Constance Garrow Diamond's untitled mixed media work on paper makes a funky, amiably insouciant statement with two bulbous blue and red forms set against a gray ground. "Universo Anthropomorfico 1," a painting by Evelina Villaca is notable for its vibrant colors and grace of its circular shapes, afloat against a brilliant blue cosmic expanse. Working with clay on paper, Ho-Yeon Kim creates an austere composition in which great visual interest is generated by the subtle gestural variations within a mostly gray grid. Natalie Schifano projects a sense of kinetic energy in her mixed media work "Random Sequential," with its busy, animated, colorful surface comprised of horizontally stacked strips. The title "Palm Reader" adds resonance to a mandala-like mixed media tondo by France Garrido. Zuleika Bisacchi's tall vertical encaustic painting "Simbolos Ancestrais I" conveys the sense of a deep cultural memory with simple black forms immersed in a tactile ocher ground. In "Kali," a large, monochromatic oil in a perfectly square format, Rowell Bowles generates mysterious shadowy forms from a flurry of furious gestural activity. By contrast, Jim Ruban's acrylic/collage painting "Red Horizontal II," consisting of three horizontal color areas, is simultaneously stately and sumptuous.



France Garrido



Jim Ruban



Connie Rakity

Although outnumbered by painters, two gifted sculptors acquit themselves admirably: Roger Rigorth evokes an obscure but affecting sense of poetry with graceful wooden forms, resembling primitive boats, from which protrude graceful gold-tipped rods. The rugged, dark, irregularly shaped wood constructions of Sukho Choi project a primal presence, hugging the gallery wall like hefty physical shadows.

Norma Behr Menczer

Among the figurative works, without question the zaniest is Gabriele Longobardi's delightful oil of shocking pink pigs performing as circus aerialists. By contrast, Connie Rakity's color photograph "Carpet Man" is an insightful character study of an elderly, yet cunningly lively, peddler in an outdoor marketplace. Elayne Flax reveals her own ability to capture character with "Haughty Woman," in which a corpulent nude model is depicted in oil pastels with a bawdy flair reminiscent of Toulouse-Lautrec. Norma Behr Menczer also conjures up an Amazonian nude, albeit with a more formalist thrust, in her intriguingly titled collage, "Far From a Ferrari."

Two final artists employ architectural forms and room interiors as a means to create works that simultaneously function as abstraction: Penny Dell's "Atrium" is a large, subtly toned drawing in graphite and charcoal that skillfully exploits the geometry of walls and windows to create an exquisite spatial statement. Realist Thierry Choquard sets up an intriguing tension between the baroque details and the overall form of an old fashioned sofa by painting it within a grid comprised of nine squares.

Selected by the gallery artists, these "Friends of Pleiades" are an aesthetically amiable lot who should make many friends among visitors to Chelsea as well.

Penny Dell

—Lawrence Downes

New York Notebook

Bohemian Bards Hold Forth in Chelsea

Good kibitzing has been in short supply in the gallery scene since that legendary mensch Ivan Karp started spending more time in the O.K. Harris Cigar Store off the lobby of his Soho gallery, puffing away with his salesmen —Got a problem with that, Mayor Bloomberg?— than in the O.K. Harris Gallery itself.

One can only be thankful, then, that the poet and art world wag Dennis Corbett is still to be found most days behind the desk at Pleiades Gallery in Chelsea.

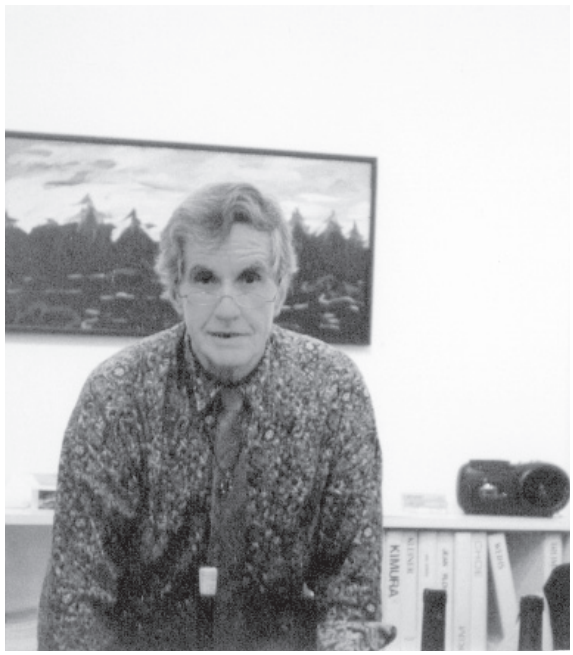
In refreshing contrast to the mute and forbidding morticians' assistants who preside over so many other venues, Corbett, the former Program Director of the Association of Artist-Run Galleries and a writer of numerous essays on the arts, is a man of great style and boundless enthusiasm. A wit and an outrageous raconteur, he can have you in stitches one minute with wickedly indiscreet confessions from a life he describes as being "like a trashy novel," and break your heart the next with stories such as one he told us recently about meeting a motherly African-American woman on a park bench who scolded that, with his fair Irish skin, he really should be using a sunscreen, then suddenly, sobbingly, started telling him all about a loved one she lost in the Twin Towers tragedy.

In some respects, Corbett can be likened to another poet, the late Frank O'Hara, who was a curator at MOMA, a confidant of the Abstract Expressionists, and as known for his art world connections as for his literary endeavors. Unlike his worthy predecessor, however, Corbett is by no means a cultural politician, a careerist, or a self promoter. Rather, he is in the Greenwich Village bohemian lineage of Maxwell Bodenheim and the even more elusive Harold Goldfinger, who while "published in Eternity," to borrow Blake's lovely phrase, remains little known on this plane.

Indeed, almost perversely, it would seem that Corbett has made a career of being one of the best kept secrets in the poetry world. So it was a rare treat, recently, when he gave a joint reading with Brigid Murnaghan at the Pleiades Gallery, partaking of a tradition that began in 1955 with the first big Beat Generation poetry reading at the Six Gallery, in San Francisco. Another historic reading (arranged by Frank O'Hara, in fact) took place two years later at the Brata Gallery on East Tenth Street , featuring Jack Kerouac, Philip Lamantia and Howard Hart. At the Brata, hepcat composer David Amram accompanied the three poets on French horn, giving rise to the dubious fad known as the poetry and jazz jam session.

Instrumental accompaniment would have been redundant, however, at Pleiades Gallery, given the rhythmic musicality with which both Dennis Corbett and Brigid Murnaghan, each in their distinctly different ways, delivered their words.

In contrast to his cohort Murnaghan's colloquial style, Dennis Corbett's poetic diction is governed by a sense of delicacy and decorum that is unusual in contemporary poetry. Tellingly, the first letter of each line in his poems is capitalized in the archaic manner, so you'll know at a glance that this is not prose snipped into flat little lines like so much blank verse today, but Poetry with a big "P"— which is to say: words with velocity! And while his private demeanor can often be antic, he's all business when he makes his way to the front of the room, a sheaf of papers in hand, horn-rimmed specs slanted down on his nose, and after striking a match to a long white candle on the podium, holds forth with a minimum of banter between poems.



Poet Dennis Corbett

Poet Brigid Murnaghan

Corbett writes and reads with a passionate lyricism that is precious rare in the bloodless, academic precincts of postmodern poetry, where the expression of naked feelings has become almost taboo. Since his poems are obviously built to last, he is unconcerned with current fashion, focused fully on the sublime marriage of meaning and music, as in "The Angelus in Vietnam," where he sings: "This is the roadless, hushless/Place from which you started,/ Name like a bell /Da Nang Da Nang Da Nang / The jellied air burst forth in flame."

By contrast, in "Trio," Corbett captures the funky particulars of downtown life with Imagist precision: "Of the indigent trio/ Two women one man / Very old / Who daily at noon / Milk the garbage cans / In front of the school / On Avenue B / Pouring drops from cafeteria pints / Into empty quarts /Boys and girls don't / Drink all your milk..."

Nor is he afraid to be vulnerable, even sentimental, in love lyrics such as "A Poet's Love": "I wanted to talk to you– / When you told me you read some of me to a friend,/These are dreams that poets have / That someone dear reads to someone dear / What's dear to him..."

Yet, he can also be as haiku-succinct as that other romantic anomaly of contemporary poetry, Samuel Menashe, in a piece such as "Earthquake," here in its entirety: "The still move, / The moving stilled / With fear / There is a certainty / In the faulty earth / I balance myself / Upon this earth / As best I can; Dreaming–/ The seamless sea."

Dennis Corbett is that rare thing: a postmodern poet unabashed by beauty and unafraid to display his broken, bloodied heart prominently on his sleeve. In a time dominated by so-called "language poetry" and other empty formalist experiments, this is especially brave and laudable.

Brigid Murnaghan, for those who don't know, is a living legend who, along with Diana di Prima, was one of the very few women tough enough to hold their own in the misogynistic climate of that veritable boys club called the Beat Generation. She is the real article: what highly hyped red hot woman poets of today, such as Patti Smith and Anne Waldman, can only hope to become when and if they ever grow up.

One of our favorite photographs, taken by Fred McDarrah, who chronicled the downtown art and poetry scene for the Village Voice in the fifties and sixties, captured the young Murnaghan on her way into the Kettle of Fish Bar on MacDougal Street with a baby in her arms. A classic beauty in the Maureen O'Hara mold, Murnaghan was photographed often by McDarrah and others, but that shot of her taking a child into a notorious bohemian gin mill with no male escort anywhere in sight was special, for it embodied the absolute scandal of being a woman poet in the Eisenhower era!

All these years later, Murnaghan is still a strik-

ing, statuesque presence, a bright floral ornament clasping her long silvery hair in the manner of her beloved Billy Holiday (to whom she dedicated an affecting poem), gauzy garments trailing down from her like willow leaves. But while she has the bearing of a Diva, Murnaghan is actually a street singer like the late Jack Micheline, whom Allen Ginsberg once extolled to us as "a diamond in the rough."Murnaghan, though, has with a wider and more subtle range of poetic effects at her disposal. Thus she moves easily between the wistful melancholy of her Dublin poem "The Giant's Causeway" ("Oh for the days of the sea sick Giant / and the fairy people playing / by the light of the moon") to the tough beatnik broad bravado of "The Big Reading": "Living is the thing that beats the ghost. / With a bit of luck / you can even bury them / before they bury you."

Whether referring to Daniel in the Lions' Den as a "nut in a loin cloth," or lamenting the lost "smell of the pickle barrels" on Avenue C, or beginning a piece about poets with a deliberately dumb joke ("Did you hear the one about the Polish poet who was in it for the money?"), Brigid Murnaghan delivers her lines in the vernacular, with bawdy, crowd-pleasing humor that her stately bearing makes all the more engaging.

If one believes, as Plutarch did, that "painting is silent poetry, and poetry is painting that speaks," there can be no more auspicious venue for a poetry reading than an art gallery. By the same token, both Dennis Corbett and Brigid Murnaghan can be said to be painterly poets in that they eschew fashionable obscurity to illuminate the life of the human mind and heart. Together at Pleiades, singing their poems to an appreciative audience amid the powerful figurative paintings of Nicholas Palermo and the radiant abstract monoprints and sculptures of Francis Dosne, they made for a brilliant double bill.

(Dennis Corbett and Brigid Murnaghan will give another reading at 3:15 PM on Sunday December 8 at the Back Fence, 155 Bleecker Street. Be there or be square!)

Remembering Holly Solomon at the Guggenheim

We did not have the pleasure of knowing Holly Solomon well, but we did get to know something of her graciousness and ability to laugh at herself—a true sign of higher intelligence, as far as we're concerned—when we wrote about an exhibition of photographs by Allen Ginsberg in her gallery, some years back, when it was still located at 725 Fifth Avenue.

The piece was somewhat irreverent, for it described an awkward conversation between Solomon and novelist William Burroughs, during which she made an indiscreet reference to the novelist's killing of his wife in a William Tell overture that went fatally awry when he tried to shoot a champagne glass off her head at a drunken party.

While a woman with a less subtle sense of humor might have taken exception to our mention of her faux pas, shortly after the piece appeared, we received a handwritten letter from the late gallerist that said, among other nice things, "Many thanks for your unusual insights—Do hope to see you again," and signed, graciously, "A Fan, Holly."

Others, too, recalled the great lady's humor and generosity of spirit at a memorial Tribute to Holly Solomon (1934-2002) that we attended one recent evening at the Guggenheim Museum. It was raining heavily but the gallerist's friends and admirers turned out by the hundreds to fill the entire ground floor of the Guggenheim. There was a big box of hot pink buttons that said "Holly" at the door and everyone pinned one on —even those fashionistas with whose outfits they clashed— out of affection for the great lady.

Standing at the podium in front of a huge backdrop painted by Kim MacConnel one of the artists Solomon discovered, National Public Radio personality Jacki Lyden introduced the speakers.

Holly's two sons, John and Thomas Solomon, visibly moved by the huge turnout, thanked everyone for coming, then art historian Linda Nochlin reminisced about being one of Holly's art professors at Vassar College fifty years ago.

Nochlin remembered her first encounter with a cute little student named Hollis Dworken (Solomon's maiden name) who had requested an appointment with her. Wearing no makeup but sporting "a sort of Bavarian hat with a feather" that already showed the highly original fashion sense for which she would one day be known, the earnest young woman confided that she had serious concerns about Mondrian.

"Holly wanted to know," Nochlin recalled, " if Mondrian looked like her kitchen linoleum,

Holly Solomon (Photograph by Vera Isler)

and she liked both... was this wrong?"

Considering that Holly Solomon, many years later, would be the driving force behind the art movement called Pattern and Decoration, Nochlin's story was more than simply another amusing anecdote about a woman whose larger-than-life personality provided fodder for many. While postmodern "isms" are a dime a dozen, Pattern and Decoration really was a full-fledged art movement. It started in the early seventies, when artists like the aforementioned MacConnel, Robert Kushner, Brad Davis, Ned Smith, Valerie Jaudon and Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt, who felt alienated from the Minimalism then dominating the mainstream art world, reacted against it by creating works influenced by floral patterned wallpaper, Japanese fans, Celtic interlaces, and other aspects of decoration and design.

Whether or not Holly Solomon was influenced by her old art professor Linda Nochlin's reassurances that it was okay to like both Mondrian and her kitchen linoleum when she began championing these artists is anybody's guess. Either way, as one of the pioneering art dealers in the early years of Soho, she pushed the movement into prominence, becoming beloved by her artists for her warmth, her spirit, and her wit, as well as for the glitzy parties she threw.

Along with the Pattern and Decoration people, Solomon showed other quirky talents such as William Wegman, best known for his fanciful photographs of his Weimaraner dogs; Nam June Paik, the veteran video artist, who braved the rain to arrive for the memorial in a wheelchair; as well as younger artists like Izhar Patkin, who seemed as bereft as if he had lost a parent when he remembered her from the podium.

Several other speakers, among them Kirk Varnedoe, former director of MOMA, eulogized Holly movingly, speaking of her art world acumen, her devotion to her artists, her stylishness, and, above all, her vivaciousness: Robert Kushner recalled Holly showing up in a floor-length white mink coat in her chauffeur-driven limousine to take him dumpster-diving in Soho when he needed to collect fabric scraps for his collages. Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt remembered how Holly took charge when she visited his studio and smelled smoke, racing right into the firehouse across the street, where the fire fighters were having dinner, yelling, "Men! Fire! This way, men!" —and bravely leading the brigade right back into the burning building!

William Wegman seemed to sum it up best when he said, "She was an original, as strong a personality as any of her artists. She loved art and people. Her death, like Warhol's, leaves a gap."

Still, almost everyone who spoke had an amusing story to tell, and there was much laughter at the Guggenheim that evening. Then the lights dimmed, speakers fell silent, and a recording came on of junkie jazz musician Chet Backer singing "My Funny Valentine."

It was a hauntingly apt tribute to a lady who was both funny and beloved. During her eventful colorful lifetime, Holly Solomon had embraced the tawdry and the tacky, elevating it to the level of high art. She had been turned into an icon, like Marilyn, Liz, and Jackie O, by Andy's portraits. She had acted in experimental films and made one of her own. She had made a lot of artists happy and had a lot of laughs.

Now, as Chet Baker's eerily, ethereal, fallen angel voice wafted down from the spiraling heights, it was time for the tears.

* * *

At Cork Gallery, Diverse Styles in a Lively Dialogue

"Synthesis of Style," a group show by the West Side Arts Coalition, seen recently at Cork Gallery, Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center, lived up to its title by presenting a stylistically eclectic array of artists, each with a strong vision, all in concert exemplifying the pluralistic spirit of postmodernism. No artist's organization better represents that spirit than the WSAC, a freewheeling and aesthetically contentious conglomerate of artists who often appear to "agree to disagree" by exhibiting together. More often than not, however, the contrasts in their exhibitions prove to be complementary, as seen in "Synthesis of Style," curated by artist member Joyce Lynn, with the assistance of associate curators Carole Barlowe, Marilyn Walter, and Marlene Zimmerman.

In a show of this size, to single out a few for lengthy comment does a disservice to all. Better to let capsule descriptions suggest its eclectic spirit: Xavier makes strong social statement in his hip hop-inflected canvas juxtaposing a tug of war between an eagle and a mangy urban dog with a stars and stripes bandana and by other charged symbols. Carole Barlowe also deals with urban imagery, albeit in a more austere manner in her coolly painted, spatially exquisite compositions, some with small canvases layered on top of larger ones. Exuberantly lyrical, the large, freely brushed abstract canvases of Dellamarie Parrilli, with their lush, sensuous hues, invariably provoke a joyful response in the viewer.

Upbeat in another manner are the thickly encrusted, slightly eccentric figurative paintings of Joey Infante, such as one in which real lace is collaged to the canvas to represent the dresses of the ballerinas performing an antic version of "Swan Lake" under a glowing full moon. Harriet Redding Marion generates her own antic energy in an abstract mixed media painting called "Don't Wear Too Many Hats, notable for its hellzappopin maximalism.

"Abstract realism" is probably the most accurate phrase to describe the small cityscapes of Thomas Kerwin, in which buildings, rooftops and skies are blocked in with strokes of succulent oil pigments. Patrick Antonelle, on the other hand, appears to paint each delicate snowflake in his impressionistic yet highly detailed Central Park scenes. In James Glass' vigorous New Image painting the improbable subject of a cat riding a bicycle is evoked with characteristic energy. Madi Lanier's bold watercolors of verdant landscapes derive their unique energy from slashing, cubist-flavored strokes and angularly stylized shapes that recall both Karl Knaths and John Marin. Two mixed media paintings on paper by Marilyn Walter, one of a meditating figure, are notable for their darkly mysterious atmospheres and baroque compositions.

Vija Doks showed a large oil of a winter landscape, in which sinuous trees, shapely clouds, and snow are evoked with moody elan. Joyce Lynn also offered an atmospheric winter scene entitled "The Visitor," its thickly piled impastos evoking the actual mass of snow drifts, its formal virtues enhanced by the narrative drama of a small figure trudging toward a lone house.

Watercolorists were an especially strong presence in this show, each with a unique approach to the medium: Carrie Lo was represented by a group of fresh, fluid aquarelles of floral still life subjects, the contours of flowers and leaves sensually evoked in flowing strokes. Nicholas Kodjak's watercolors are remarkable for the artist's ability to evoke complex realistic subjects with washes of color, as seen in his macabre composition juxtaposing a human skull with a rose and another evocative picture of subway riders crammed into the "N" train. Softly focused realism is the forte of Lee Haber in atmospheric oils of Brooklyn Bridge and Central Park. Camilla Wier combines vibrant washes with pen and ink in intricate, visionary compositions where disparate images flow freely to create poetic pictorial metaphors.

Offbeat as Chicago's "Hairy Who" school, the vibrantly colorful, hard-edged yet expressive cartoon inflected portrait heads of Marlene Zimmerman are uniquely appealing. Margo Mead has mastered the difficult art of Chinese brush painting to a the degree that she can make watercolors evoke still life subjects such as "Three Peonies in Cobalt Vase" or a cuddly reclining feline with a few swift, graceful strokes. Beth Kurtz who invariably manages to impart a subtly surreal feeling to even the most straightforward subjects, showed exquisitely smooth oils combining Chinese objects and motifs with flowers and fruits. Meyer Tannenbaum's three powerful paintings from his groundbreaking "Direct Impact" series demonstrate, with their bold colors and combination of precise and splashily gestural forms, the energy and inventiveness that makes him one of our most consistently engaging postmodern abstractionists.

A strong semi abstract treatment of the figure makes Leah Zara-Acevedo's large oil "Grandmother" stand out, with its broadly generalized forms and vibrant yet subtly harmonized colors recalling the Latin American modernism Rufano Tamayo. Another artist who revitalizes elements of early modernism in a contemporary manner is Patience Sundaresan, represented here by "Still Life with Pumpkin," an oil whose boldly stylized semi-abstract forms and dark, muted colors recall certain aspects of Picasso and Braque, yet retain their autonomy by virtue of the artist's own strong sensibility.

Realists of various persuasions are well represented as well, as seen in the precisely painted Central Park views of Julia A. Rogge, whose oils capture qualities of light and specific settings in impressive detail. Lee Haber employs a more softly focused realist technique in atmospheric oils that evoke subjects such as the Brooklyn Bridge and a sailboat pond bathed in atmospherically evocative areas of light and shadow.

Lori W. Fischler's darkly saturated color Cibachrome prints present a poetic personal realm where large red roses bloom in the sky amid darkly delineated tree limbs. "Rejoice," by Mikki Powell depicts a woman in Africa garb with dynamically condensed forms and vibrant color areas. Ernesto Camacho's mixed media painting of ballerinas is notable for its dramatic handling of light. Patricia Hagood's "Zeus" is a vibrant composition composed of intricate shards of brilliant hard-edge color. Elizabeth Moore's gem-like oils luminously limn skies and land masses with near abstract brevity. Marcia Ostwind's bold Expressionist brushwork is especially effective in her acrylic painting "Dr. C's Roses."

An oil by Jose Morine merges figurative elements and vibrant patterns to create a dazzling Expressionistic composition. Michael Tice pits postmodern irony against 1950s family values in a witty figurative oil with a Dick and Jane retro-feel. And Meg Boe Birns' engagingly weird sculpture "A Rabbit as Red as a Rose," which its title describes literally, seems the perfect finale for this boisterously enjoyable stylistic extravaganza.

—Byron Coleman

CLWAC: Showcasing Women's Art for 106 Years

There is a nice symmetry in the fact that the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club, founded in 1896 by a philanthropist who was the only woman among the 106 founding members of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, recently held its 106th Annual Open Exhibition.

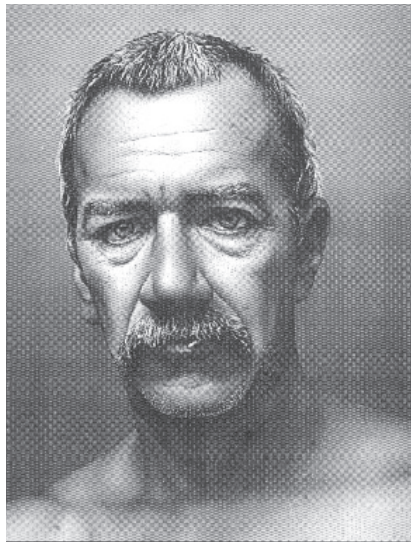
Even more relevant, though, is that the show, which benefited the Metropolitan Museum of Art's curatorial travel fund and took place at The National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South, was comprised of many more excellent works than space permits mention of here.

Since sculpture often gets unjustly overlooked in surveys of this size, perhaps one should begin with some of the outstanding sculptors on view. Jean Kroeber, one of our best carvers in both stone and wood, exhibited a piece in Georgia pink marble of two graceful, willowy figures entitled "Sorelle." Irene Koldorf made an impressive contribution with a delightfully topsy turvy piece in Tigers Eye alabaster called "Acrobats." Marian Flahavin captured the magic of childhood in "Lightning Bugs," a bronze of a little boy gazing in wonderment into a real jar illuminated by solar energy. Amy Bright Unfried showed a graceful bronze of a female figure poised atop a triangular base, aptly titled "Balancing Act II."

The interlocking forms in Nili Leichter's abstract bronze, "Dona," suggested a three dimensional, freestanding Chinese character. "Rock Alliance VI," by Barbara Kormnan, made a strong formal statement with a circular shape sandwiched between bronze barriers. Phyllis Rosser's "Whirling Dervish" made a dynamically calligraphic arabesque out of sinuous shards of found wood. Marlene Bremer's "Two Dozen," a witty assemblage created with egg shells, inhabited the fertile territory between sculpture and painting.

Among the painters, Fleur Byers showed a work in oil pastel depicting urban pedestrians in bold strokes of oil pastel that captured the energy of urban life with impressive vigor and depth. Jane Bloodgood-Abrams' pastoral landscape "Autumn on the Creek," emitted a golden glow reminiscent of the Luminists.

Marian Flahavin



Robin Freedenfeld

"Lillian," a work in watercolor with touches of pastel by Judy Perry made an affecting statement with the face of an elderly woman, filled with character and depicted in loose yet descriptive, strokes. Club President Eleanor Meier made a characteristically fresh, direct statement with her accomplished still life in watercolor "Silk, Silver and Plums." Magic Realism at its best was represented in an oil by Mary Ann Cannella called "The Money Box," depicting a young boy at the top of a suburban staircase, summer foliage visible in the window behind him, dreamily regarding the object of the title. An equally meticulous technique was put to the service of a more surreal subject by Cheryl Griesbach in an oil entitled "Liberation," in which bulbs, plants, and butterflies floated in mid-air. By contrast, Ginger Bowen's "Sharpening My Skills" made magic from a more mundane subject: pencils and pencil sharpeners festooned with bright ribbons, rendered with a colorful clarity that emphasized their abstract qualities.

Good portraits were especially plentiful in this year's show. Gaile Snow Gibbs showed a bravura oil portrait called "La Reine," in which a buxom, bare-shouldered woman in Spanish clothing is seen poised against a dark ground, her grand demeanor reminiscent of one of Goya's court matrons. "In Self Portrait 2001," Debra Irizarry depicted herself confronting the viewer in an outfit that suggested the heroine in a 1930s film. Robin Freedenfeld almost fooled us with a portrait of the late artist Gregory Gillespie, painted in a style so close to his own that one could almost have mistaken it for a self portrait —perhaps the greatest tribute one could ever give to a departed colleague.

—J. Sanders Eaton

"Elegy," a Thoughtful Group Show Offers Solace

As Arthur Danto pointed out in an article in The Nation (in which he gave a glowing mention to a photograph by N'Cognita aka Vernita Nemec, the director of Viridian Gallery, which appeared on the announcement card for the show to be reviewed here, although it was not in the exhibition itself) memorials and elegies "use art as a means of transforming pain into beauty."

There was much beauty and still much pain in the recent exhibition "Elegy: Viridian Artists in Memory of 9/11," at Viridian Artists @ Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, where one of the most affecting pieces was by May DeViney. It was comprised of thousands of tiny glass vessels, each containing a slip of paper with a single musical note and the name of one person who perished on 9/11, the entire installation suggesting a symphonic song of mourning.

Another imposing installation by Goran Petmil juxtaposed shards of wood and metal suspended from strings as though in a freeze frame of an explosion, a full-size ladder and various tools to create a palpable sense of how a tragedy of this magnitude leaves lives and so much work unfinished. Indeed, in the context of a show such as this a simple still life like Nadja Loyko's pastel painting of a red coat draped over a chair near a potted plant and two switches that say "off" and "on" seems fraught with symbolism: did these the orphaned objects belong to someone who never made it back home? Even a vigorous abstraction by Betty Thalheimer that we might admire in another exhibition for its gestural energy alone evokes swirling smoke, as in a rigged Rorschach test into which everyone must read the same image. In the same manner, we can think we discern flames in the sinuous shadow forms that enliven Susan Hockaday's mysteriously abstract photograph, although its title, "Halfway Brook—4" would suggest other imagery. Judith Funkhouser, however, makes a more hopeful statement with a characteristically lyrical work in watercolor and chinese ink called "Skyscraper Rainbow."

Some artists project a poignant wish for healing and closure, as seen in Robert Smith's soothing photograph of pebbles in the sand, "Rest in Peace"; Bernice Faegenburg's serene black and white image of a faded cross, "With Hope"; and three mixed media collages by Rima Grad which express the elegiac aftermath of the tragedy through various urban images, rather than its violence. Similarly, Virginia Evans Smit makes a movingly affirmative statement with her vibrant mixed media work, "I Still Love NY," which includes diagrammatic drawings of the city with and without the Twin Towers. Fran Suder, on the other hand, takes a nostalgic approach in her oil "The Way it Was," wistfully restoring the skyline to its former grandeur in an austere neo-Precisionist style.

A mixed media painting by Diana Soorikian combines elements of figuration and gestural abstraction to create a strong image of what appears to be hands holding a shroud. Rows of charred wooden matches affixed to a charcoal ground in a work by Kiffi Diamond eerily evoke figures —although, here again, the same work might be interpreted as strictly abstract in another context. Likewise, Janet L. Bohman's work in fluorescent acrylic and formed paper might be seen as a fine example of post-minimalist formalism if not for the hint of apocalypse in its title, "Flamingoing."

Other artists took a more directly documentary approach, as seen in Kelynn Z. Alder's mixed media collage of fallen heroes superimposed on an American flag and a New York City subject map; James P.Q. Sperber's "My Towers/My America," a painting of a distorted flag with the Twin Towers serving as two of the stripes, rendered in a bold, post-Pop style; a funk assemblage of polymorphously merged figures and buildings mounted on a cruciform with contradictory street signs by Marjie Zelman called "It's a Topsy Turvy World"; and Bob Tomlinson's collage painting "Elegiac Figure," a timeless vision of human suffering; and a drawing in crayon and colored pencil by Renee Borkow, in which the stars and stripes are deconstructed to strong visual and symbolic effect.

Kathleen King showed a densely layered, meticulously painted mixed media work juxtaposing staring eyes, fragments of the burning towers, and quotes from the Tarot and Osama bin Laden, pointedly entitled "Manifestation of Tribalism." Barbara K. Schwartz characteristically combined strong sculptural and painterly qualities in a mixed media relief painting in which two powerful yet helpless hands, set within rectangles against an earthy, textured ground, seem to symbolize an alienated deity, either unable or unwilling to prevent human folly. Katherine Ellinger Smith was represented by a mysterious round box construction containing intricate photo montages, its poetic effect akin to certain works by Joseph Cornell. Susan Sills departed radically from her familiar figurative cut-outs in a tiny abstract ink drawing entitled "Vortex," in which sinuously swelling abstract shapes conveyed a sense of compressed, barely contained intensity. Rick Mullin's small, Expressionistic oil on canvas of the Brooklyn Bridge had another kind of intensity, with its fiery colors and muscular impastos. Then there was Jose Antonio de Aranaz, whose Magic Realist still life of two eggs set beside a clear glass bowl containing several other eggs —entitled "Why Eggs?"— seemed, in this context, to allude to other, much larger questions.

It is the task of artists to ask questions to which there can be no easy answers. This exhibition raised many of them, even as it revived painful memories, and offered the bittersweet solace that only art can provide.

—Maurice Taplinger

Four Japanese Innovators of Signs and Symbols at Cast Iron

The symbolic and formal permutations of distinctly different personal semiotics created by four Japanese artists make for a fascinating exhibition at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, from November 2 through 16.

Working in acrylic and ink on canvas, Kazuko Fujiwara explores "The Form of the Circle." Because Fujiwara is Japanese and employs monochromes in a swift, gestural manner reminiscent of Zen ink painters, one could make easy assumptions about the circle as a symbol of infinity. But the implications in these paintings are even more universal. For the circle also looms prominently in the cosmic semiotics of all the world's cultures, as both a symbol of the sky and heaven and of the cyclic character of phenomena.

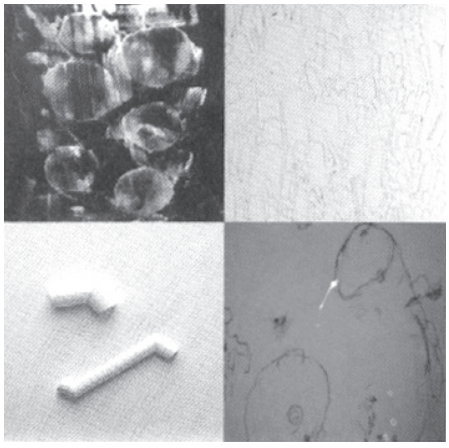
Fujiwara employs this potent symbol in a powerful and personal manner, inscribing it over and over in cursive strokes against a streaky white or faintly tinted ground. In some paintings, sinuously curving lines move vertically over clusters of roughly circular shapes, suggesting water rushing over rocks. In others, various combinations of freely formed circles converge with gestural activity on the surface to suggest an infinite variety of profound yet elusive meanings.

One gets the feeling that Kazuko Fujiwara could go on drawing this single, simple form forever and still compel our attention.

"I think nowadays no-mindedness is related to a valuable thing," says Tamiko Washizu, and to Western ears, this too sounds very Zen. Washizu, however, creates works which are too complex to be so easily categorized.

The one constant in Washizu's work is a basic grid of tiny squares, like slightly irregular tiles, against which other elements sometimes play off.

The freehand quality of these small squares activates the surface to a degree where their subtle expressiveness is sufficient to sustain interest in some paintings, while in others, Washizu introduces relief elements created from Styrofoam that interrupt and interact with the grid in various ways. Either circular, tubular, or somewhat triangular like shards of broken crockery, these 3-D shapes are also covered with gridded squares, which give the impression of having mutated off the background to become separate entities.



Clockwise from upper left: Kazuko Fujiwara, Kyoko Suchi, Akiko Onda, Tamiko Washizu

Like cells or atoms, these tiny squares seem to be the building blocks of a personal universe for Tamiko Washizu, who has, at times, alternately employed them in paintings, wall reliefs and sculptures —all enlivened by an engaging conceptual complexity.

By contrast, another artist named Kyoko Suchi engages us by virtue of an intricate personal ecriture, creating networks of intense linear scrawls, like convoluted handwriting, at times overlaid by collaged forms resembling white arches or portals.

In other works, similar shapes are drawn rather than glued onto the surface, but in each case they act as a foil for the frenetically scribbled and scrawled elements. These sinuous traceries invariably suggest indecipherable sentences that one longs to untangle, even as they guard their revelations, leaving one to ponder their gliding shapes as eternally elusive signposts of a language one can never learn.

Far better, one finally decides, to appreciate Suchi's calligraphic mazes for their autonomous grace, as symbols of the centuries-long struggle that primal marks must undergo before morphing into symbols that convey concrete meanings.

In the course of celebrating this journey toward meaning, Kyoko Suchi gives us a gift of unmediated beauty in these dense linear configurations of gracefully wrought black lines, turning endlessly inward upon themselves, as though strenuously resisting the resolution that would rob them of their mystery.

Then there is Akiko Onda, another gifted artist who presents us with an intuitive personal semiotics, albeit in a painterly language more akin to that of the American artist Cy Twombley.

Onda's brush dances over a sumptuous painterly ground, delineating shapes that loop and turn loosely, as though verging on description. At times their sensual curves and turns could suggest elements of anatomy, as in the paintings of Sue Williams, but just as suddenly, they veer off in another direction entirely, leaving us in the lurch. Onda's work seems to be all about the sensuality of line and surface, as they interact and compete for our attention, creating a tantalizing tension between the implied and the material, the descriptive and the tactile.

The viewer is seduced by both elements simultaneously. But there is no need to choose between them, for Akiko Onda is a strong enough painter to marry these contradictions successfully by virtue of an impressive virtuosity.

—Marie R. Pagano

The Chromatic Alchemy of Ella Sipho

"Painting gives me the opportunity to express within the art realm my love of color and explorative nature by intermixing colors to the fullest extent without boundaries," states Ella Sipho, a widely exhibited painter from Kansas City, Missouri, whose exhibition, "Visions in Color," can be seen at World Fine At Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, from December 1 through 22.

Like members of the contemporary abstract art movement called New New Painting, whose leading lights include Irene Neal, Graham Peacock, Bruce Piermarini, Bram Bogart, and several others, Sipho is a "pure" painter in that she perpetuates Greenbergian materialistic aesthetics—as bold and, yes, avant garde a position as one can possibly espouse in the postmodern era. Surely Clement Greenberg would have approved of Sipho's approach to color as an end in itself, as well as her reliance on the tactile sensuality of pigment itself as the main impetus for creative exploration.

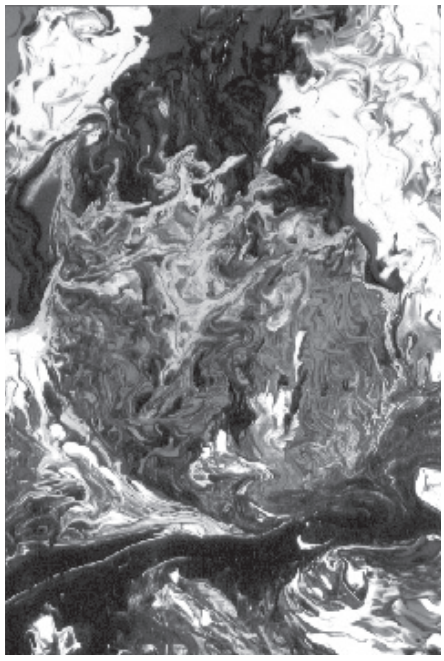
Arlene Raven wrote of the New New Painters that their art is rooted in the "precise here and now," and certainly that description applies just as accurately to the work of Ella Sipho, to whom process is first and foremost. Her method is to work spontaneously, alternately pouring paint and manipulating it with a brush, or her fingers, or by rotating the canvas in order to bring about a sense of flow, movement, and flux. As she works, overlapping layers of color accumulate on the surface, creating textures that lend the work impressive physical presence.

Indeed, acrylic pigments appear to have a life and a mind of their own in Sipho's paintings, where the forms appear to materialize of their own accord, crashing like ocean waves, leaping like flames, flowing with a molten energy that makes the painting as much an event as an object. In this regard, Sipho's paintings can also be compared to those of Jules Olitski and his Color Field cohorts, as well as to the "materialism" of slightly younger artists like Lawrence Poons who push paint manipulation and surface tactility to their limits. Sipho, however, has her own distinctive touch and color sense, which make her paintings uniquely her own.

These qualities can be seen to especially good advantage in a painting such as "Mystical Mountain," where many intermingled hues —aquamarines, deep blues, visceral reds, strident yellows— flow together in a dynamic overall composition to create a variegated surface that fairly shimmers with a combustible chromatic energy. While the title is specific, the painting, like all of Sipho's work, is totally abstract. Any natural allusions that the artist may intend are obviously to the forces and energies underlying landscape, rather than to its outward manifestations. In this work, Sipho's intricate coloristic layering achieves a marbleized quality akin to that of Graham Peacock; unlike that British born artist, however, Sipho prefers to extend the possibilities of pure painting within the traditional rectangular format, rather than resorting to shaped surfaces. This places her work more squarely within the continuum particular to painting, rather than that of sculpture or relief.

In another powerful acrylic painting, entitled "Gases," the dominant hues are deep blues, greens, violets, and purples intermingled with brighter bursts of brilliant yellow, while the forms that they flow into are larger and bolder than those in the previously discussed painting. And despite its title, both the deep colorations and the movement of the forms here suggest the tumultuousness of a stormy sea. But all such interpretations are strictly subjective in the case of an artist like Ella Sipho whose thrust is entirely abstract and whose compositions must ultimately be viewed as immediate and autonomous physical entities, rather than as allusive pictorial statements.

Sipho's skills as a colorist come to the forefront perhaps most spectacularly in the aptly named canvas "Mardi Gras," where vibrant pink, orange, pale blue, and violet hues are slightly more diffused than in the aforementioned paintings and appear to



"Gases 2001"

blur and drip like melting cake frosting down the center of the vertical composition. And that simile seems especially accurate for this is a visually delectable painting, confectionery in its appeal without being the least bit saccharine.

By virtue of her highly personal vision, Ella Sipho is able to proceed via intuition, relying on the sheer spontaneity of the gesture and the innate wisdom of the retina, rather than on ordinary intellectual processes, to achieve the perfect synthesis of form and color that makes her paintings compelling in purely visual terms.

Paintings such as these justify themselves in purely visual terms for the sheer optical pleasure that they provide. However, they also have a spiritual component as well, for when color is used as Ella Sipho employs it, the material substance of colored pigment takes on, paradoxically, the ethereal qualities of light. This is a form of alchemy and, as such, it is both joyous and spiritually uplifting.

—Peter Wiley

Anil Rao: A Photographer's Iconographic Views of Nature

"My interest in photography stems from a background in science," says Anil Rao, a photographic artist and an engineer, born in Shillong, India, now residing in San Jose, California. "I was drawn to cameras and film primarily for their ability to faithfully record scenes. That initial fascination soon developed into an avenue for artistic expression."

Where that avenue led can be seen in Anil Rao's exhibition "World in Color," at World Fine Art Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, New York City from November 5 through 30, with a reception for the artist on November 8th, from 6 to 8 PM.

As Rao's work evolved beyond its modest documentary beginnings, its scope has grown increasingly more ambitious, as the artist seeks to unearth and isolate by careful selection those elements he refers to as the "hidden jewels" that lie beneath the surface of everyday scenes.

The ultimate goal of Rao's work is to create what he calls "abstract commentaries on nature," and he succeeds in this goal splendidly in the images selected from his California Rt.1 and Shasta—Winter Wonderland series, on view at World Fine Art. Perhaps the photographer with whom Anil Rao has the most in common for his, "purist" compositions is Edward Weston, although the improved technology since Weston's time enables Rao to manipulate color much as a painter might in capturing the rugged beauty of the California landscape.

In any case, Rao's approach to nature photography, as befits his subject, is more American than European, in that it can also be compared to predecessors such as Ansel Adams for his straightforward, yet dramatic, celebration of landscape subjects, at least in terms of his insistence on preserving the integrity of the image. Which is to say, whatever abstract qualities we encounter in Rao's pictures come from elements innate to his subjects themselves, rather than any attempt to obscure, disguise, or distort natural forms as many European photographers did in the post-war period in imitation of avant garde painting.

Rao eschews such common strategies of "defamiliarization." One is never in doubt about what one is looking at in his pictures, for he takes pains to preserve the clarity of his forms, even while technically "tweaking" and intensifying aspects of color and lighting to achieve his dazzling painterly effects.

This combination of imagistic purism and chromatic drama is especially exemplary in "Fire Ball," a panoramic view over the tops of pine trees of a blazing sun, amid shadowed clouds as variegated as wrinkled silk, in Siskiyou County, California. With its delicate yellow and pale violet colorations in the sky and areas of snow peeking through the pine trees, "Fire Ball" is a rhapsodic tour de force of natural imagery.

"Silhouette"

Pine trees again figure prominently in the print called "Colors of Light," where they are silhouetted against areas of sky and snow tinged once again by luminous yellow and violet hues, although here the colors glisten more liquidly, particularly on the snowy expanse in the foreground.

By contrast, "Flowers at Bodega Bay," a somewhat anomalous composition for Rao, judging from the other prints on view, is an exquisite image of a brilliant yellow buttercup supported on a slender stem, the electric green coloration of which puts one in mind of Dylan Thomas' famous poem "The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower." Poised in sharp focus against more diffused green and blue hues probably belonging to other flowers and foliage hinted at in the pluralistic title, this simple single bloom has an almost stately majesty.

Anil Rao has the unerring ability to capture images which can stand as icons of the distinguishing characteristics of the specific locations that he chooses to photograph: Bare, gnarled tree limbs rise from rugged black rock-croppings to claw at a golden sky above a pale blue body of moving water in "Desolation," and one knows instantly that this could be no place on earth other than Monterey, California. In "Flowering Giants," interminable tree trunks soar heavenward, their yellow leaves mingling with areas of clear blue sky, and one is equally cognizant of being nowhere else but in the ancient redwood forests of Big Basin, California.

Even more impressive than his ability to capture such specifics, however, is Rao's genius for making each image that he photographs appear timeless and universal, as seen in "Silhouette," from his "California Rt. 1" series, where the shadowy figure of a lone man is merged with a back hill and set against an expanse of yellow sky streaked at the horizon with deeper hues. This thoughtful, meditative image speaks volumes about human solitude, as well as about our eternal relationship with nature.

Indeed, all of the photographs of Anil Rao raise profound issues and questions through deceptively simple means. Rao employs form and color like a painter, to create images that possess striking abstract qualities, even while while remaining faithful to the particular details of specific places. It is this ability to simultaneously record, intensify, and communicate the subtle sensations of a momentary, yet deeply felt, experience and render it immutable that makes his work challenging and rewarding.

—Wilson Wong

Kathleen Goehring Havens: Simplicity Equals Sophistication

Kathleen Goehring Havens, whose solo exhibition was seen recently at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, is a painter who seems to know exactly what her artistic mission is and she accomplishes it with an impressive lack of pretension, as well as a great deal of conviction. Like the late Fairfield Porter, Havens celebrates the simple things of every day life, ennobling and elevating the mundane in a manner that makes us look upon the world with fresh eyes. Genteel, slightly shabby domesticity is lovingly limned in succulent strokes of sunlit color. Yet there is a great deal more to her work than simply the transcription of what can be seen. Like the aforementioned Porter, whose circle of colleagues included most of the major figures of the Abstract Expressionist movement, Havens is a highly sophisticated painter whose pictures are invariably built on a solid abstract armature and enlivened by an autonomous gestural vitality.

" I have always been fascinated with composition line and color," Havens says. "By studying the world's great artists , I have incorporated what is meaningful and important to me. I challenge myself to paint the familiar in a personal and new way."

Havens brings this reverence for the ordinary to bear with impressive skill in a painting such as "Comforts of Home." In this

The artist (right) with visitors to her exhibition

simple canvas, depicting a glass bowl filled with fruit, a striped shirt, a flag, and other familiar objects, she incorporates elements of Impressionism and Abstract Expressionism within a relaxed realist style that makes a virtue of seeming effortlessness.

An even simpler subject makes for a strong composition in "Bags Alive," where six shopping bags are painted in a palette of pinks, ochers, and blues with a brio akin to some of Alice Neel's portraits. Havens' picture is all the more remarkable, however, for her ability to compel our attention just as successfully without the obvious psychological component that made Neel's portraits so gripping. Havens does so by sheer virtue of her painterly abilities, as well as her unerring eye for what constitutes a strong composition.

Equally exciting in another manner are two paintings entitled "Suburban Comfort, circa 1920," in which Victorian houses, embraced by leafy trees are painted with great vigor and obvious affection in buttery strokes. But above all, what impresses one most about Havens' paintings is the casual way in which she introduces complex aesthetic qualities to homely subjects, making it possible to enjoy her pictures equally well for their familiar atmospheres and their pure painterly delectation.

The fact of the matter is that the paintings of Kathleen Goehring Havens are much more ambitious than they appear at first glance, for their simple subjects provide the artist with a sounding ground for a host of art historical references, which she has assimilated, and by virtue of her innate sophistication, made peculiarly her own.

She is one of those uniquely secure painters who has carved out a comfortable niche for herself, in which she can express her singular sensibility to its fullest, unbeholden to the fickle fluctuations of artistic fashion. More power to her; for her work appears destined to endure on its own merits. —Maureen Flynn

Different Strokes: Five Soho Solo Shows

Five artists recently featured in solo shows at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, revealed diverse approaches:

Widely exhibited Swiss painter Christoph Helmlin showed paintings with a complexity that can be compared to that of the German artist Sigmar Polke for their imagistic layering, sophisticated kitsch, and postpop, postpunk vitality.

Helmlin's "Chinese Door depicted an ornate portal morphing into a strange simplified face, merging cartoony expressionism with Dali-esque surrealism. "Tensions" was a considerably more realistic portrait of a greenfaced man constructed from the neopointillistic strokes that are a constant of Helmlin's work.

Helmlin is a compelling painter on several levels simultaneously, presenting us with visual puzzles that tease the mind, even as his skillful figuration and varied paint handling offer a sumptuous feast for the eyes.

Shirley Kephart is an antic artist whose penchant for irreverence extends to self parody, as seen in her habit of signing her paintings "Scenes by Shirley." Her drawings in ink and mixed media are every bit as complex as her paintings, often featuring a mixed cast of humans and mannequins and even robotic angels in landscapes where ominous satellite dishes and other mechanical contraptions loom amid mountains and rivers. Kephart's figures are often menaced, attacked or simply carried off by huge eagle-like birds that appear to swoop down periodically out of nowhere, adding to the sense of lively, often violent, incident that animates her witty and always engrossing pictures.

The well known Brazilian painter Renato Emilio Sossi works with intricately interlocking areas of brilliant hard-edged color that remind one of jigsaw puzzles and those paint-by-numbers pictures that were popular in the 1950s. Although he also paints outdoor views and restaurant scenes, one of Sossi's favorite subjects is the artist's studio, which he depicts in great detail, right down to the last pencil or tube of paint, yet weaves into a coherent composition by virtue of his precise technique and jazzy chromatic skills.

The painter to whom he can most readily be compared, especially in his room interiors, is the Pop artist Clayton Pond; Sossi, however, is considerably more ambitious in the complexity of the subjects that he is willing to take on, making each picture a kind of tour de force.

Richard Gins sets a few flat shapes in subdued hues afloat against the bare cream-white field of the paper to create compositions with an exquisite austerity. His abstract compositions can only nominally be called portraits, although vague semi-circular shapes incised in the surface of the painted areas could suggest facial features by a stretch of the imagination. This is purposeful, since Gins is an artist who makes no attempt to endear himself to the viewer or seduce us visually. Nevertheless, his compositions engage us by virtue of their subtle shifts and balances.

Kwang Cha, who earned an MFA degree from Indiana State University is the quintessential Neo-Impressionist. Her paintings in oil on canvas shimmer with life, light, and energy. Scenes in Central Park and elsewhere are evoked in vibrant flecks of color that activate the entire surface with chiaroscuro. Sun dappled leaves blaze in woods where slender saplings bend in the breeze.The craggy surfaces of rocks are enlivened by shifting shadows. Kwang Cha captures each nuance of nature in swift strokes of color that accumulate on the canvas to create a sense of overall unity. Her brush lights up the picture surface with a chromatic beauty that is rare in contemporary painting. Kwang Cha succeeds splendidly in her stated goal of creating "landscape and floral paintings that capture the deep beauty of nature and life."

—Byron Coleman

West Side Photo Artists Focus on "Places and Faces"

In the West Side Arts Coalition's group show "Places and Faces," seen recently at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the traffic island at Broadway and 96th Street, photographer and curator Leslie Nagy gathered a group of her peers who demonstrated diverse documentary approaches.

Nagy herself captured the moods of specific places with refreshingly unadorned directness:The stately forms of mission doors in an ornate stone facade; shacks, small boats, and late afternoon shadows on a marina; two color views of sunsets notable for their near abstract compositions created through contrasts of dark and luminous hues. Leslie Nagy makes such subjects memorable by virtue of her understated yet dramatic sense of composition.

Scott Weingarten's views of Venice are unique in that he chooses to focus not on the canals, gondolas, and other picturesque aspects of the fabled water city, but on mundane things such as hats and dummy heads in a shop window; two waiters idling in their white coats; a woman in a red dress walking on a shadowy street cluttered with motor scooters; a man slumped as though drunk or dead in a chair; and a flutter of pigeons and pedestrians amid collapsed umbrellas in the Piazza San Marco. By avoiding tourist cliches, Weingarten achieves a sense of intimacy that brings the reality of Venice alive for us.

Nora Ruth Roberts' pictures of kids at play reflect the specific experiences of childhood with refreshing directness. In one picture three young boys radiate delight as they crouch in the limbs of a tree; in another a girl relishes an ice-cream cone; in yet another black and white print, kindergarten children with made up faces impersonate circus performers. All of Roberts' pictures have a documentary directness that allows her subjects to speak for themselves. Their integrity lies in their lack of trickery.

"Break Time," Kim Vu

Lynn Coporale's color prints gain drama from their stark tonal contrasts. In "Ground Zero, Hiroshima," for one fine example, the skeletal outline of the Hiroshima Dome is silhouetted against a golden sky shadowed by dark cumulus formations. In "Shadows of the Parthenon, British Museum," the play of overlapping shadows of passing figures creates an evocatively suggestive abstract composition. Other prints capture fiery colors on moving water or indigenous people at work and play in the Rainforest of Borneo in a manner at once exotic and humanistic.

Shirley Piniat shares her own poetic perspective on people and places. One of her most intriguing pictures has the figure of a man in a shadowy interior gazing out as though isolated by some mysterious force from the brightness of the day. In another picture, a woman confronting two distinctly different reflections of herself in angled mirrors is imbued with surreal and painterly qualities by virtue of the artist's hand tinting. Yet, Piniat's distinctive color sense comes across just as strongly when she works with color film.

Lori Fischler's evocative Cibachrome prints use reflections and distortions to create a sense of mystery, as seen in a view of figures through a blurred glass door. In two other pictures, a young woman in a white dress pauses dreamily in a field of flowers, and a figure appears enveloped in bubbles, as though undergoing some strange metamorphosis. One of Fischler's most striking pictures, however, shows a shadowy personage set against a blaze of amusement park neon and darkness in a composition that takes its title from a book of poems by Lawrence Ferlinghetti: "A Coney Island of the Mind."

Jean Prytyskacz captures a variety of New York experiences in pictures of such subjects as people around a fountain in Central Park and skaters circling the rink in Rockefeller Center, their compositions pleasingly panoramic. In "Street Reflection," however, Prytyskacz takes a more impressionistic approach, focusing on store windows and signs to create a lively visual cacophony.

Kim Vu, an American photographer of Vietnamese extraction, captures the contrasting simplicity of life in the land of her ancestors in a series of poetic prints. In one picture an elderly woman adjusts her hair as she sits in a small boat. In another two people cross a red bridge among lush trees like figures in an Asian ink painting. Vu makes timeless statements in these and other pictures in which she apparently explores aspects of an alternate life she might have experienced more intimately had she been born in another time and place.

—Maureen Flynn

Bertorelli: Sensualizing the Sign

Antonio J. Estrada Bertorelli, who recently followed up his major exhibition at the Venezuelan General Consulate Gallery with another strong solo show at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, is a man of many aspects and gifts. Although he has been been painting seriously since 1943, and has exhibited widely in his native Venezuela and elsewhere around the world, garnering considerable critical acclaim, he is also an Agronomist Engineer, university professor, and successful businessman.

Estrada Bertorelli's passion for painting was ignited by the statement of an early art teacher that it was virtually "impossible to paint something different." He felt compelled to challenge this statement, and thus began the endeavor that has preoccupied him for the past fifty-nine years. In the process, he has created a huge body of work of remarkable variety and vitality.

One of this artist's rallying cries is a statement by Henri Matisse: "The truly original artist invents his own signs. The importance of an artist should be measured by the number of signs that he has introduced in the language of art."

If one takes Matisse at his word, Antonio J. Estrada Bertorelli is an important artist indeed, for he appears capable of generating an inexhaustible number of signs which take the form of vigorous painterly gestures. One after another, they materialize in his richly textured, brilliantly colored acrylic paintings, appearing to multiply endlessly, either in single works such as the large, square canvas wittily entitled "Sex and More Sex," or in other compositions divided into grids of twenty 8"X10" connected canvases, each executed in a different manner.

The sequences in these latter works seem almost cinematic, or like panels in an abstract comic strip wherein mysterious gestures, signs, and symbols create a narrative that functions just beneath the level of consciousness. One panel may consist of a single, swirling, calligraphic stroke of color set against a contrastingly luminous ground. The next may contain an image suggesting the movement planets or a mountain landscape with green hills set against a strident yellow sky. Then we might see a fragmented form suggesting a female nude, or a juicy fruit; or four ice-cubes floating against a dark blue nocturnal sky; or wine bottles bobbing along in what appears to be a body of water; or interlocking circles suggesting cells under a microscope; or strangely stylized angular stars. (So related by an underlying logic do these individual panels seem, one gets the sense that they would work equally well in almost any sequence —although Bertorelli obviously means for them to be seen in the order that he has determined.) At times, even the written word comes into play, adding to a semiotic complexity that can only be compared to the metaphysical chart-paintings of the eccentric American abstractionist Alfred Jensen, whose work is only now beginning to get the critical attention that it has long deserved.

"Sex and More Sex"

The entire universe appears to be up for grabs in Antonio Estrada Bertorelli's paintings, in which the juxtaposition of the endlessly multiplying signs creates, in effect, a private visual alphabet, a language filled with elusive meanings. These juxtapositions set off a host of subconscious associations in the viewer, triggering aspects of memory and poetic reverie, hinting at submerged myths and texts with profound mystical connotations.

Even apart from their symbolic complexity, however, with their rich textures, vibrant colors, and intriguing formal juxtapositions, the paintings of Estrada Bertorelli are objects of sheer aesthetic delectation, justified by their beauty alone.

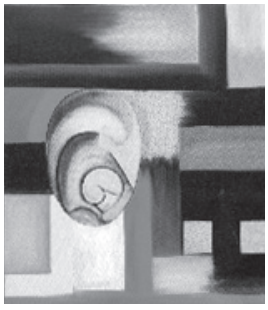
—Maurice Taplinger

Sudipta (Bubbly) Choudhry's Singular Metaphysical Perspective

The Indian artist Sudipta (Bubbly) Choudhry, who is the scion of a family of painters and sculptors which includes Jamini Roy, long one of India's leading painters and Meera Mukherjee, an internationally acclaimed sculptor, was the subject of a recent solo show at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

Choudhry showed a group of paintings in oil on canvas in which flowing organic forms and severely simplified figures suggested states of life and mystical union. Some of her forms suggest leaves, shells, and flowers, among others things, while others hint at more ethereal elements, such as wind and fire. All of her paintings, in one way or another, appear to be about the interconnectedness of the physical world and energetic forces that unite all physical matter. Even in one painting of a flower within a geometric setting, ostensibly a still life, there was a feeling of the physical world morphing into the mystical, with vessels depicted in a manner that suggests an organic softness.

Titles such as "Escaping Time" and "The Visitation" telegraph a sense of the supernatural, as well as qualities innate to Indian art that cannot be replicated by painters such as Francesco Clemente who attempt to adopt those qualities to more trendy ends. In the latter work a shadowy, spectral figure appears in a dark portal, while in the former, sea shells and leaves seem equally weightless as they swirl gracefully in mid air. Both paintings project a timeless quality, as well as a mysticism unique to the East Indian tradition. In this regard, Choudhry can be compared to other artists from her country, such as Francis Newton Souza and Balraj Khanna, who successfully balance elements of East and West to create paintings that exemplify the best qualities of postmodern multiculturalism.



"Karma"

Choudhry accomplishes this especially well in "Karma," one of her most magical visions. Here, an oval organic form with inner divisions that suggest a more complex configuration curled within itself floats against a ground of sharply geometric rectangular forms painted in luminous rainbow hues. Although the shapes are sharply delineated, the paint quality is fluid and subtly modeled to give the sense of shading. That "Karma" is one of Choudhry's most overtly abstract compositions, with no hints of the figure or other recognizable objects, allows one to concentrate on its formal virtues, which are considerable. Indeed, what Choudhry accomplishes with color in this work seems to validate the title of her show, "Chromatic Quest."

That her mysterious subject matter exerts its own spell, however, is made clear in other oils on canvas, such as "Sun Dance," where figures are juxtaposed with a crescent moon and swirls of color, as well as in the "The Road Less Traveled By," where figures recoil from sinuous bare trees in a barren landscape amid glowing orbs and swirling ribbon-like shapes. Such pictures explore a range of human emotions, from joy to stark terror, yet the main thrust of Sudipta (Bubbly) Choudhry's work is invariably spiritual, which should make it of equal interest to those inclined to New Age ideas, as well as to admirers of bold, adventurous formal innovation. —Marie R. Pagano

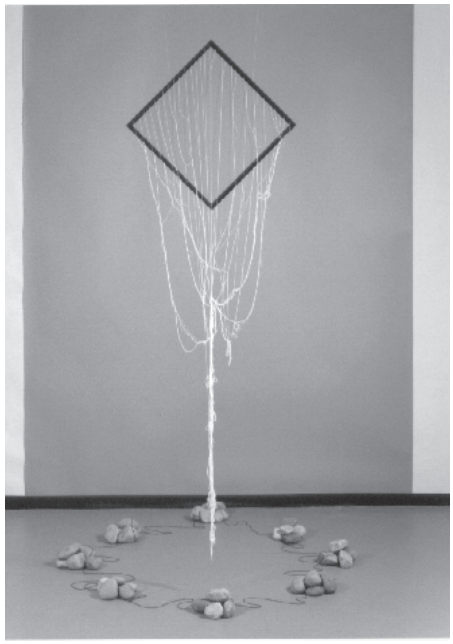
Intellect and Imagination in the Art of Hope Carter

Last year, Hope Carter created an untitled installation in which she employed characteristically incongruous industrial materials to evoke the small forest in Hopewell New Jersey where she lives and works. A year earlier, she showed a piece called "A Rain of Two Thousand Stones," which used similarly unlikely materials to create the sensation of meditating in a nocturnal garden. Both pieces were memorable for the manner in which they provoked subtle feelings in the viewer by making her or him central to the installation, as an active participant rather than a passive voyeur.

Carter's newest installation, along with a collection of her drawings and collages, can be seen at Phoenix Gallery, 568 Broadway, from October 30 through November 23, with a reception for the artist on Saturday, November 2, from 5:30 to 7:30 PM. It is called "A World for Water Sprites," and as the title indicates, in it the artist has set an even more daunting task for herself.

The new installation is something of a departure for Carter, in that the viewer does not become a participant in the piece in the same manner as in her earlier installations. Although it is still possible for a visitor to the gallery to enter into the piece, in this case, as the artist puts it, "I have created an environment for imaginary creatures to inhabit rather than for the viewer to participate in. The viewer remains essentially an observer of the space and is free to conjure up imaginary inhabitants or not, as the case may be..."

In the hands of a less resourceful artist, this would be a risky business. For what Carter asks us to do could seem almost impossible, considering the austere materials she has used to create so fanciful an environment. Indeed, this piece is a daring departure for Carter in more ways than one. To begin with, she does not usually title her pieces in a manner that will tip us off as to her intentions as clearly as she does here.



"A World for Water Sprites"

"Ordinarily, even if I personally see something in my work I avoid spelling this out for the viewer," Carter recently explained. "This time my reaction was strong enough that I actually named it before I had finished it."

Conceptually, this is an important consideration in regard to "A World for Water Sprites," because, regardless of what the artist saw in the piece as it was developing, it is highly unlikely that the viewer would be able to arrive at the same perception of it without the poetic nudge that the title provides. With it, however, the various elements, obscure and abstract as they might initially appear, come into focus and cohere, quite magically, as material metaphors.

For example, the central focus of the piece, which hangs from the ceiling, is a black aluminum frame with nylon screening stretched inside of it and long white threads hanging down from it. At first glance, making a wild guess, one could imagine this to represent an anomalously rectangular basketball hoop with a shredded net —as, perhaps, in one of David Hammons' funky installations inspired by urban ghetto life!

Nudged by Carter's title, however, we can see that the long white threads dripping down, pulled from woven artists' canvas, actually evoke a waterfall. Arranged around it in a circle are piles of river jacks connected by a loosely curving string. In context, this configuration suggests water lapping at the bank of a pond.

Other elements in the installation include a square created by black chains suspended to form panels, within which strips of screen stiffened by thin red wires form loosely knotted shapes. While the hanging chains surround only air, their panel-like shapes create a surprising sense of solidity and weight. Yet, within them, the loosely knotted hanging shapes are so light and ethereal that they move or turn with the slightest currents of air, taking flight like the wispy creatures in the 19th English century faerie paintings of Edward Robert Hughes and John Atkinson Grimshaw.

By virtue of her ability to combine and juxtapose mundane modern materials metaphorically, Hope Carter brings about a kind of aesthetic alchemy, transforming the gallery space and transporting the viewer to a rarefied imaginative realm, even while maintaining the intellectual rigor that we expect from advanced contemporary art.

—Ed McCormack

Photography: The State of the Art at Agora Gallery

The diverse range of contemporary photography was explored recently in the comprehensive survey, "Altered States of Reality," at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway. Subtitled "From Darkroom to Digital," the show focused on the diverse means by which photographic artists employ new technology and subjective vision to expand the boundaries of their medium.

Brazilian artist Fernanda Calfat, for example, takes fashion photography beyond the glossy magazines in which her work is also frequently featured into the gallery to comment on the newly cozy relationship of art and fashion. Calfat's pictures of fashion shows artfully capture the movement and excitement of the runway from odd angles, often with the models' faces turned away, leaving it to the viewer to imagine their beauty.

Rebecca Lynn Fitzsimmons, who holds a BFA from Syracuse University, also captures a sense of movement and mystery with her digital prints of the hems of lacy wedding and christening dresses swirling across polished wood floors. In one picture, a pair of bare, child-like feet creates a wistful sense of Cinderella fantasy.

The poetry of anonymity also figures prominently in the photography of Donna L. Clovis, whose pictures often feature masked female figures within landscapes. Clovis, who has a background in photojournalism and is currently Director of Technology at New York University, employs surreal imagery to explore issues of identity.

Craig Gordon

Bohdan Vandiak, born in Ukraine, now living in Canada, creates digital prints with startling images that reflect aspects of the human condition, dreams, and spirituality. Like Joel-Peter Witken, Vandiak does not shy away from grotesque human anomalies, as seen in one powerful picture of a bizarrely abbreviated figure crammed into a box.

By contrast, Dan Kramer, educated in Switzerland, now living in San Diego, employs optical screens to create romantic, impressionistic images of nudes, landscapes, and other subjects that transport us to timeless places and rarefied moments. Especially striking in this regard is Kramer's simple image of a white bird emerging from a grainy field of muted colors.

Zanzibar and Mozambique, Africa, provide inspiration for the photograph of Greek-born Andre Lascaris. However, Lascaris prefers capturing the universality of everyday reality, as opposed to exploiting the exotic qualities of such locals, in his sensitively shadowed images of boys on a beach.

Craig Gordon takes an opposite approach, pushing surrealism to its limits to make magic an everyday occurrence in his digitally manipulated photos. In one of Gordon's prints, a flock of birds swarms out of the open mouth of an ideally bald personage in one picture; in another two large hands swoop up a circle of water in which a pair of miniature swans wade serenely.

Then there is M Young who discovers another kind of magic through her subtle vision and peculiar manner of excavating the ordinary in unpopulated views of out of the way places. Particularly striking for its desolate poetry, akin to that of Andrew Wyeth, is M Young's spooky picture of an abandoned hospital, rising out of tall weeds, its black windows as empty as the eye-sockets in a skull.

The sharp eye of a professional press-photographer for LIFE and magazines throughout Europe serves Renee Falcke well in her slice-of-life style of art photography. Her images of a jostling crowd and of beads of rain dripping down the protective mask of a motorcyclist in Paris demonstrate Falcke's ability to wring drama from diverse scenes.

The poetic photographs of the Greek-born artist who uses the single name Yiannis employ cloud-laden skies, reflections on water, and other ethereal subjects as springboards to abstraction. Yiannis deliberately avoids titling his pictures in order to avoid emotional responses and direct the viewer toward their purely cerebral content—or as the artist might prefer, "non-content."

Abstraction is also paramount in the photographs of Colombian-born Jose Maria Barrera, whose colorful, tactile photographs of crumbling, peeling walls, some with fragments of torn posters, recall the Italian art movement called Art Povera. Barrera finds beauty where others perceive only ugliness, enabling us to see the world afresh.

Renée Falcke

Michael Rambo's images relate to his dreams but are discovered in nature. Rambo, who earned his BA at Ithaca College, creates metaphors for what he calls "psychological cues" in vibrant, painterly photographs of the tracks left by wood-eating insects and other unique natural subjects.

Christopher Light's digital prints focus on on water lilies to make fleeting moments immutable. While Light's subjects are intimate and delicate, he renders them monumental by virtue of clear color and strong composition.

Another approach to nature is seen in the digital prints of Dinah D. Smiley. Trained as a painter as well as a photographer, she employs the computer and free-hand techniques to create floral images of remarkable freshness, alive with color and light.

Roy Bradley is a sculptor with light, employing the nude bodies of female models in his dramatically shadowed silver gelatin prints to evoke volumes in space. At once sensual and aesthetically cool, specific and abstract, Bradley's pictures project the eternal feminine form as a palpable physical presence.

One of the season's outstanding group shows, "Altered States of Reality" whets one's appetite for another major survey of contemporary photography scheduled to take place at Agora Gallery in October of 2003.

—Wilson Wong

Metaphysics and Metaphor in the Prints of Miwa Hamaguchi

Although we generally think of Ukiyo-e prints when we think of a "floating world," the phrase can be applied with an entirely new meaning to the contemporary Japanese artist Miwa Hamaguchi, whose radiant silkscreen prints are on view at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, from December 7 through 21.

While the term "floating," when used in relation to Ukiyo-e, generally means "passing," as in glancing images of every day life seen in passing, in the compositions of Hamaguchi it has a less plebeian meaning. For Hamaguchi's forms, representing landscape, still life, and figurative elements, actually have the quality of being suspended in time and space, of floating past our vision like delicate, wind-blown things.

She captures fleeting moments in much the same manner that a butterfly collector's net seizes beauty in mid-flight. Her prints are notable for their ability to depict a sense of flux in subtly harmonized color areas that simultaneously obscure and reveal half-hidden images of human figures, trees, vases of flowers, and other elements that meld magically in her skillfully controlled compositions.

In one picture, we see fragments of a blue mountain juxtaposed with the thick brown limbs and delicate green leaves of a formidable tree. Out of the tree's trunk, the faint

Silkscreen by Miwa Hamaguchi

image of a female figure emerges mysteriously, like a faint phantom or a figment of memory. Here, too, foliage and a body of brilliant blue water interact with bits of blue sky, wisps of cloud, and a flock of white birds circling gracefully amid the tree's leafy upper branches. All of these elements are skillfully orchestrated by Hamaguchi in a composition whose fractured planes reveal the painter's sophisticated awareness of analytic cubism, which she exploits effectively toward her own ends.

Even Miwa Hamaguchi's most straightforward still life compositions take on magical qualities by virtue of her manner of layering color areas, so that objects such as a vase of flowers or a chair appear to be overlapping and interacting, as though glimpsed out of the corner of one's eye and reassembled mentally.

This sense of interchangeability is part of what makes Miwa Hamaguchi's compositions so successful in evoking a kind of visual poetry wherein objects and the spaces between them take on equal significance.

Hamaguchi's refined color sense is every bit as important as her unerring spatial sense, in that her chromatic subtleties enhance the formal balances that hold her compositions together. For while her images are so ethereal that they could almost appear on the verge of floating off the picture plane, they are grounded on a neo-cubistic armature and located precisely in space by her unerring ability to create color values which advance or recede to just the right degree to imbue each element in her pictures with the sense of a palpable presence.

Thus, each flower, tree, bird, human figure, or inanimate object in Hamaguchi's prints is a unique entity that lends itself to creating the metaphysical and metaphorical qualities that make her compositions, as a whole, so engrossing and aesthetically appealing.

–Byron Coleman

Tradition and Innovation in the Ceramic Art of Kyoung-Joa Park Suh

The art of ceramics was already well developed in Korea by the late 11th and early 12th century, when the Koryo period and its celadon kilns gave us masterpieces to rival those of China. Particularly innovative in that period were the bamboo shoot ewes, a shape unknown in either China or medieval Japan, and Korean ceramics continued to excel during the Choson period in the 16th century, when painting and ceramics replaced sculpture as the predominant art forms. During this time, Korean "farm" wares, particularly, were highly prized in Japan, where they became treasured accouterments of the tea ceremony. And it is also significant to note that, even with all the resources of its own available at that time, Korean ceramics were also highly prized for their unique qualities by the Chinese court .

And that Korea is still producing ceramic artists of the highest caliber is made clear in an exhibition by the contemporary pottery artist Kyoung-Joa Park Suh, at Gallery 32, 32 West 32nd Street, from December 6 through 15. (Hours are 12 to 6 PM daily.)

Born in Seoul in 1955, Kyoung-Joa Park Suh graduated from the department of Craft Design at the College of Fine Arts in the Korean capitol, where she later became an instructor. From the late 1970s to the present, she has also exhibited widely in Korea, Germany Japan, and the United States. Now a resident of New Jersey, Kyoung-Joa Park Suh continues to apply the particular qualities of the Korean ceramic tradition to contemporary pieces notable for their grace and innovation.

Among the pieces that demonstrate how Kyoung-Joa Park Suh adopts aspects of her national legacy to create distinctive works of applied art are a series of tea services that hark back in their combination of earthiness and elegant simplicity to the aforementioned Korean "farm" wares so coveted by the Japanese for their tea ceremonies. These stout pots range in coloration from burnished golden hues with smoky patinas to off-white or beige tones overlaid by thick grayish glazes that drip down over their surfaces in an almost random manner, lending them great tactile appeal. The set of four cups that complete these services are bowl-shaped, without handles, and their ample feminine contours perfectly complement the masculine thrust of the tea pots. Indeed, each set could suggest a hefty nobleman with four concubines, although this is admittedly a highly whimsical subjective interpretation. That one could arrive at it, however, indicates the unusual degree of expressiveness, as well as the suggestive possibilities with which the artist, wittingly or not, imbues these unusual vessels.

Ceramic teapot and cups

Distinctly different are a series of plates by Kyoung-Joa Park Suh which seem closer, if not for their shapes for their glossier surfaces embellished by colorful designs, to the less rustic stoneware of the Koryo period, such as the porcelaneous bamboo shoot ewe alluded to earlier. However, the designs of these pieces are by no means traditional; for rather than the characteristically Asian dragons and nature motifs prevalent in the Koryo period, they are decorated with bold geometric shapes and stripes with a decidedly modern western feeling.

Such hybrid qualities are what makes Korean contemporary art so interesting, since fascinating mergers are bound to come about when artists with a strong cultural identity and sense of tradition innovate in the mainstream, and Kyoung-Joa Park Suh is certainly one of the most original artists at work in the medium of ceramics today.

—Marie R. Pagano

"Fibrations!" Showcases Innovation in Textile Art

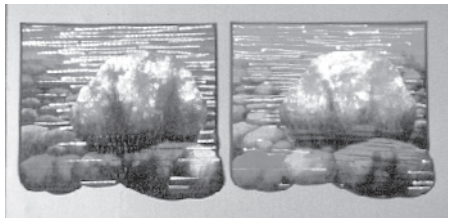
If anyone still doubts that textile art has come into its own as a major contemporary phenomenon, no exhibition could be more educational than "Fibrations!", at Noho Gallery in Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, from January 7 through 25. (There will be a closing reception from 3 to 6 PM on the latter date, at which the artists will be present to discuss their work.)

Featuring mixed media fiber works by Art Quilt Network/New York, a select group of two dozen established artists from around the country who have been meeting annually since 1989, the show's diversity makes clear why prestigious galleries and museums now acknowledge textile art as a significant movement.

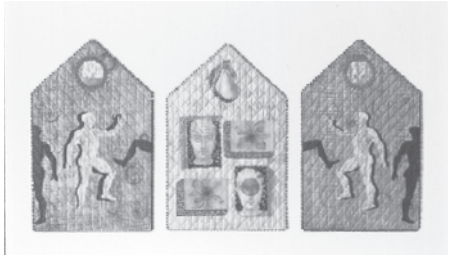
While no review could due full justice to a survey of this size, perhaps the following brief descriptions will entice the reader to experience the exhibition firsthand:

Margaret Cusack's cut fabric piece "The Kiss" is a witty post-Pop take-off on Roy Lichetenstein's romance comics parodies, with red and white gingham patterns replacing the Ben-Day dots. Cynthia Nixon also creates a compelling figurative image in "Mirror Quilt," where a poker-faced woman peers out of a circular design. Joyce Carey couches a serious anti-smoking message in a witty context in her "Smokin' Women" quilt, where images of women puffing away are juxtaposed with cigarette packs and a skull. In "A Fragile Vitality," B.J. Adams combines quilted cottons and machine embroidery with painted canvas to create a memorable image in which a delicate pink orchid and a graceful human hand add up to a poetic statement about life and mortality. Although ostensibly abstract, Elizabeth Barton's "Red Shift" is as atmospherically evocative as one of John Hultberg's eerie nocturnal citiscapes, with its richly layered geometric shapes and palette of subtly varied red hues. Wendy Huhn's "Mind Games" suggests a narrative of cavorting neighbors with figures set within three separate A-frame shaped quilted panels. "Free Time Boogie," a large work comprised of four rectangular quilts by Sue Pierce also suggests a sequence of events, albeit here symbolized by a colorful array of jazzy geometric shapes.

Although equally abstract in its own manner, Dominie Nash's "Pied Beauty 4," its title inspired by Gerard Manley Hopkins' praise of pattern in nature, evokes landscape with boldly overlapping shapes . Deborah Anderson also makes a natural allusion with her appliqued work "Marché aux fleurs," albeit with an intricate "garden" of precisely patterned cottons. "Canyon Falls," a work in cotton, linen, silk by Joy Saville evokes its subject with a cascade of colorful triangular shapes that create a shimmering neo-Impressionist effect. Tafi Brown's



Karen Perrine



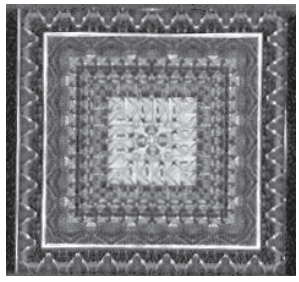
Wendy Huhn

Cynthia Nixon

"Aizu-Wakamatsu" is another work that evokes nature, here with a combination of abstract forms and printed images of trees in subtly harmonized blue hues. "Tranquility," a work by Jeanne Butler, lives up to its title with its austere, Zen-like monochromatic composition, created with textured white and cream-colored fabrics accented by a row of spare gray strokes.

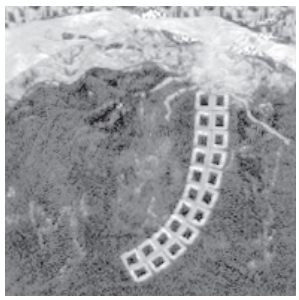
Conceptual and semiotic elements also come into play in contemporary textile art, as seen in Robin Schwalb's piece, "Strong Words," where a challengingly enigmatic text presents an intriguing contrast to the innocuous sentiments usually expressed in samplers. Although she grew up in a traditional farming and quilting family, Karen Perrine's two-part piece,"Night and Day" interprets nature as freshly as any New Image painting. Sandra Sider, raised among Appalachian quilters, also deconstructs tradition, incorporating photography and printmaking to explore the possibilities of images on fabric. Jeanne Williamson demonstrates admirable imagistic complexity with her urban art quilt "Orange Construction Fence," which plays off the collage-like, poster-plastered fences one sees around building sites.

Other artists, too, create abstract textile art that rivals painting for its expressiveness and opulence of surface: Randy Frost's



Nancy Herman

Margaret Cusack



Randy Frost

"Almost Perfect Timing" is notable for its brilliant colors and offbeat, asymmetrical forms. Marilyn Henrion (whose solo show is reviewed elsewhere in this issue) employs stately hand-stitched abstract shapes in silk, cotton, and metallic fabrics to visually approximate the joys of music and dance. Although primarily on paper, Karen McCarthy's "Turning Variations" finally qualifies as textile art because she uses thread, along with paint, pigmented starch paste, and colored pencil; however, her collage method, with its compartmented images, is attractively quilt-like.

Nancy Herman combines a mandala-like intricacy with serial imagery of printed faces to handsomely transcend both categories in Toscanini," from her "Music Stamps" series. Patricia Malarcher combines fabric with various mixed media and handstitching in works where sinuous linear patterns and images interact to allude to the use of textiles in ritual and celebration. Susan Faeder's abstract interpretation of March haze in a mountainous area of Pennsylvania is evoked in subdued tan and gray hues in a manner that suggests a metaphysical maze. Paula Nadelstern's sumptuous kaleidoscopic quilts succeed in her stated goal of combining the symmetry one expects from fabric art with the "happy surprises" that can only result from spontaneity .

Also including work by Linda Levin that was not available for preview, "Fibrations!" is a lively sampling of the work of many of the best textile artists at work today.

—Maureen Flynn

Etsuko Sumi: Illuminating Poetry in Pastels

There is a long tradition in Asian art of combining visual art with poetry, and it is to this tradition that the Japanese artist Etsuko Sumi adheres in a series of works entitled "Blue Ballad," at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, from December 7 through 21.

Although, traditionally, the poems accompany ink paintings, Sumi works in pastels, creating landscapes influenced by Western art, particularly Impressionism. This makes the interaction of words and images all the more intriguing, since they evolve from two separate traditions; yet Sumi manages to resolve them with considerable success due to a refreshingly direct way with both words and images.

Often the whimsical tone of the Sumi's poems is reminiscent of the British artist Stevie Smith. However, while Stevie Smith illustrated her writings with simple cartoon-like line drawings, creating a disparity —one might even say a gross inequality— between word and image, the more finished quality of Sumi's pastels complements the poems more fully, fleshing them out, so to speak.

A particularly fine example of this can be seen in the painting and poem entitled "A Street Corner." The poem, translated from Japanese into English, goes as follows: "Skies of blue, walls of white / They come alive in broad daylight / The streets empty, but for a few / I wonder what they want to do."

Of course, one cannot really judge any poem in translation, since poetry depends so fully on the nuances of the particular language in which it is written. However, the opposite is true of images: they are universal, Sumi's pastel is a highly sophisticated composition, depicting two figures strolling down a shadowed street between white buildings, above which a vibrant wedge of sky can be seen. Even more than the poem, the pastel captures the sense of a very specific time and place. We are struck by how keenly Sumi has observed the scene, and the picture finally helps us to appreciate the poem, above and beyond the problems of translation. The picture brings the poem into focus until the two seem as inseparable, as in the illuminated manuscripts of that other doubly gifted creator William Blake.

"A Calm Bay II"

Indeed, in both the poem and the pastel entitled "Town encircling the Ruins III," Etsuko Sumi departs from direct everyday observation to take on a more visionary tone reminiscent of Blake: "The third rock from the sun / Or earth as it is known / Are we the only one / Or not really alone / Many different races within our own land / And some strange happenings we can't understand / Progress is moving faster than light / So in the future perhaps we might / Head for a planet that's not our own / There all our questions will be known."

The pastel is especially mystical, depicting a landscape illuminated at its center by a crystalline glow. Here, again, the earthly and the ethereal elements are merged more successfully in image than in language; for Sumi depicts the scene with great coloristic subtlety. Blending delicate violet, yellow, and blue hues to create the sense of an unearthly glow, Sumi suggests a Blakean marriage of Heaven and Earth.

Perhaps the poem that best encapsulates the artistic philosophy and mission of Etsuko Sumi is the one that ends with the lines "Never forget where you have been / Imagine and picture every scene / Seize the day like your own face / An experience lost, you can never replace."

The pastel for which this painting was written is entitled "A Calm Bay II," and it is one of Sumi's most beautiful works. Its panoramic composition depicts a vista where a brilliant blue body of water is juxtaposed with a blue sky and blue mountains, with gently rolling green hills in the foreground. The bay is dotted with tiny white sailboats and the entire scene sparkles with the sense of a perfect moment preserved forever in memory, made immutable by the artist's skill.

—Bela Miklos

French Painter Daweis Revitalizes the Landscape

While trends come and go, the essence of painting is the gesture, the stroke laid down by brush or palette knife, whether it provides the central thrust of a work of art or is woven into its entirety in some more subtle fashion. Yet, it takes great strength and commitment to keep the faith in pure painterly endeavor, given the carnival atmosphere that often makes the art world seem an extension of fashion or the mass media.

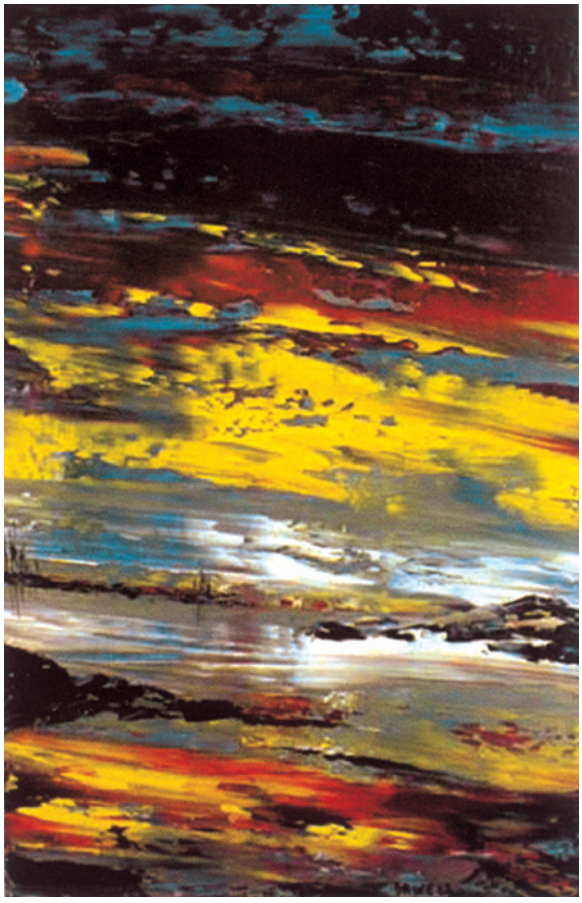
Daweis, a painter born in Paris, has faith and commitment to spare, judging from his solo exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, which can still be seen through November 16. Like Gerhard Richter, with whose abstract paintings (if not his figurative ones) he reveals a certain kinship, Daweis works in a vigorous gestural manner with layers of color that overlap to create richly variegated surfaces with a shimmering chromatic resonance.

One gets the feeling, however, that while Richter's abstract paintings, which alternate with an opposite photorealist mode, are wedded to a selfconscious postmodern strategy, Daweis is motivated by primarily a passion for the natural world that he interprets in striking gestural terms.

Indeed, in his artist statements accompanying some of his exhibitions, Daweis takes pains to make clear that his abstract paintings are invariably inspired by landscape (as, in fact, Willem de Kooning once opined that almost all abstract paintings are). This French painter, however, is especially insistent on his landscape themes, which he evokes with vibrant bands of horizontal color in compositions that, while ostensibly abstract in their overall thrust, reveal within their gestural fields actual details of the landscape as one moves closer and studies them more carefully.

Suddenly within the luminous bands of color, one can discern the shapes of rivers and lakes, of mountains and trees, of rugged rocks and scrubby vegetation at the shoreline. Now, once one's eyes locate these figurative signifiers amid horizontal streaks, the pictorial elements come into focus. The composition is suddenly flooded with natural light; atmospheres emerge that transform one's initial perception of the painting as an abstract exercise of form and color in the Abstract Expressionist mode into a full-fledged evocation of an imaginary place.

The visionary aspects of Daweis art make one think not only of the wonderful American painter Albert Pinkham Ryder, who once stated, "I saw nature springing into life upon my dead canvas. It was better than nature, for it was vibrating with the thrill of new creation. Exultantly I painted until the sun sank below the horizon, then I raced around the fields like a colt let loose, and literally bellowed for joy."



Painting by Daweis

Although Daweis apparently summons his scenes up from imagination, rather than going out into the fields to paint in the plein air manner, his joy in painting and in nature itself comes across no less exultantly, no less emphatically. Perhaps one could say more accurately that he "discovers" the landscape in the act of painting like an explorer in the deep seas suddenly sighting land, or in much the same manner that the great French writer Victor Hugo, who was also a visual artist of considerable gifts (although he did not choose to exploit them professionally), would "find" and then develop various figurative and landscape forms while manipulating blots from his inkwell.

All the same, the earlier comparison to Ryder still stands in terms of how Daweis lays down layer upon layer of pigment with a palette knife to build up the surface in thick impasto and how his boldly applied colors alternately suggest the ethereal sense of light and the solidity of land masses. The tactile sensuality of Daweis' paintings enhances their purely visual appeal, creating a physical counterpart to their chromatic beauty, the sense of a scene embodied as well as depicted. Indeed, paint becomes a surrogate substance as much as a medium of depiction in these sumptuously appealing compositions.

Part of the appeal of Daweis' pictures is that they intensify natural effects to a degree that makes us see the landscape afresh, as a visionary environment enlivened by gestural streaks of pigment that often transcend their natural sources: luminous red, yellow, blue, violet and purple hues that function simultaneously as color and signifiers of light. Skies are especially dramatic in these paintings, with dark and light streaks suggesting cumulus formations and the shifting qualities of light that mark the transition from day to night. Indeed, Daweis brings an entire rainbow of vibrant colors to bear, along with liberal areas of white that allow the painting to "breathe," creating a palpable sense of not only the lay of the land but also the essences, energies and forces that underlie the landscape or keep it in a state of constant flux.

These latter qualities, which activate the purely pictorial elements, spring directly from the vitality of the gesture, which is primarily abstract in its thrust, moving horizontally, in a direction that often contradicts the logic of illusionism. For it is finally not the illusion of landscape that Daweis is after, but rather its overall vitality, which can only be captured by the force of the spontaneous gesture, for it too is an abstract entity, a metaphysical element that defies logic or the static strategies of literal depiction.

Daweis, who studied both architecture and art in his native Paris and has had numerous exhibitions around the world, including France, Switzerland, China, and the United States, as well as winning several prestigious awards, is a painter at the height of his powers. His work is important, not only for his abiding faith in primacy of gesture, form, and color in an era that can often seem hostile to those basic ingredients of good painting, but also for the exuberance with which he demonstrates the ongoing vitality of direct expression as a viable direction for postmodern art. In a time when the critical tendency all too often values "schtick" over substance, Daweis is a painter to be be embraced and encouraged.

—Sheila Lessing Marcus

Michael Parkes at CFM Extended through November 17

Guests at the opening night reception of Michael Parkes' new solo exhibition at CFM Gallery, 112 Greene Street, were already taking bets as to how soon the two large pencil drawings on vellum on the far wall would be snatched up by some eager collector. Sure enough, they sold out in a matter of days, along with other works by the renowned American painter, printmaker, and sculptor.

Indeed, this first solo show of Parkes' work at CFM in several years has been so successful that Neil Zukerman, the gallery's owner and director has decided to extend the exhibition, which was originally scheduled to end on November 3, through November 17.

What makes this show—for that matter, any show by Michael Parkes—so exemplary is that Parkes is one of our most accomplished draftsmen. No wonder those works on vellum went so quickly, with their fascinating palimpsests, where the artist left faint traces of phantom limbs or other details before changing the position of a figure, giving precious glimpses into his working process. Sound drawing is at the heart of everything that Parkes does. His oils, original stone lithographs, and even his bronze sculptures, are all informed by a draftsmanly ability that comes as close to that of the Old Masters as any contemporary artist is likely to get. But technical skill alone, no matter how surpassing, is not sufficient to take an artist as far as Parkes has come. Equally important is the vision and imagination that he brings to his work. And in Parkes' case, all of these attributes are put to the service of Beauty with a capital "B"—particularly as it manifests in the feminine form.

Almost every one of Parkes' pictures centers on some statuesque female figure, usually unencumbered by clothing (although often adorned by jewelry), almost always in the company of wild life of either the animal or human variety. Lions and tigers turn docile when they lie down with Parkes' leggy goddesses in elysian settings, amid marble columns, gargoyle or Sphinx statuaries, and other elegant classical props.

Gnomish humans and semi-humans who look as they might be treacherously untrustworthy in other situations are also disarmed by adoration when Parkes' regally unfettered enchantresses join them on those lofty parapets and precipices upon which they are prone to perch. And even the more princely male figures who have begun to appear in some of Parkes' recent paintings and prints are helplessly smitten.

One of the highlights of the present show is an original stone lithograph entitled "The Sculptor," which CFM gallery will offer exclusively for a year before it is released elsewhere. Juxtaposing a typically ravishing female nude, a handsome young male admirer, and a dwarfish sculptor, the picture satirizes the artist as the Ultimate Voyeur.

This strikes one as a winningly self-effacing revelation from an artist who has made a career of making happy voyeurs of us all!

—Lawrence Downes

Kazuko Shiihashi's Modern "Momoyama" Paintings

The majority of contemporary artists from both China and Japan who endeavor to connect with their Asian heritage tend to draw inspiration from literati painting, the monochromatic Zen-influenced style of brush painting that most obviously influenced Western gestural modes such as Abstract Expressionism. This is understandable, considering the primacy of the gesture in modernism.

That the contemporary Japanese painter Kazuko Shiihashi has chosen a different path entirely, however, is evident in her solo exhibition at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, from December 7 through 21.

Working with mineral pigments on handmade paper, Shiihashi appears to draw from the decorative tradition in Japanese art—particularly the mode which flourished in the sixteenth century during the Momoyama period. Because it is free of the Chinese influence that we see in the literati style, the decorative mode is considered by many to be the most original contribution of Japanese painting. Unlike literati painting, in which the depiction of nature is beholden to certain brush conventions derived from the Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Chinese painting, Momoyama painting is more naturalistic, in that the rendering of forms is based on direct observation of nature in a manner closer in some respects to Western art.

At the same time, its exquisite aesthetic qualities are considered to be distinctly Japanese in character, and it is these that Kazuko Shiihashi translates so successfully into an original and modern mode of subjective expression.

Like many of the artists of the Momoyama period, Shiihashi divides some of her paintings into the panels of the sliding screen or folding screen formats. What makes her paintings contemporary rather than traditional, however, is how radically her compositions depart from those of the great Momoyama painters such as Kano Eitoku Ogata Korin. Shiihashi's grasp of composition is much bolder and more frontally centered on floral images that take on an abstract formal presence, and her paint handling, too, is much looser than the meticulous rendering of her great predecessors. Although her floral forms are naturalistically full-bodied and shaded, and she employs a full palette of rich, opaque hues, more in the manner of the Momoyami than literati modes, she also permits herself some of the more spontaneous effects that we associate with the literati school, such as the spatters and drips which have also become staples of the modern Western painterly vocabulary. She is not adverse to employing the bold calligraphic strokes that are the signature of the literati style where applicable, as seen in "Mann 2002," where a swiftly brushed black tree limb, bearing purple buds, snakes across three of the four aquamarine panels.

These looser gestural elements are especially effective in "Hana 2002–1," where the four tall vertical panels that comprise the work are covered with splashes that crisscross rhythmically over the composition of several flowers on slender, graceful, green stems. Although spare areas of splashed ink are a common enough component of Zen ink painting dating back many centuries,

"Hana 2002—1"

Shiihashi's manner of splashing paint here, with various lighter tones layered over a dark ground is closer both gesturally and texturally to the technique of Jackson Pollock.

Even while working on paper with the kind of mineral pigments that have been in use in Japan for many centuries, Shiihashi's opaque, textured strokes and variegated coloristic qualities are closer in some ways to Western painting than traditional Asian painting in other works as well. Indeed, both her use of color and her frontal composition, with four single, long stemmed flowers ranged out over four connected vertical panels is more akin to the post-Pop paintings of Jim Dine than to her Momoyami predecessors in a painting such as "Ritu 2002."

In several other paintings as well, Kazuko Shiihashi updates a glorious period in Japanese painting with impressive contemporary immediacy.

—Lawrence Downes

Surveying ASCA's 84th Annual at Broome Street Gallery

A wide sampling of recent trends in painting and sculpture can be seen in the 84th installment of the Annual Exhibition of the American Society of Contemporary Artists (ASCA) at the Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street, from November 5 through 17, with a reception on Saturday, November 9, from 2 PM to 5 PM.

Miriam Wills exhibits a large mixed media work entitled "Fruit Medley," in which colorful collage images are seamlessly integrated with painted passages to create a bold semi-abstract composition notable for its emblematic neocubism.

Margery Small pushes color and gesture to its expressive limits in her large mixed media painting "Don't Forget the Children," where vigorously painted faces and grafitti-like phrases such as "Stop the Violence" are layered in a veritable vortex of a composition. In Harriet Regina Marion's "Canyon of Heroes," swirling linear forms range over a a tactile field created with shredded tire rubber, enamel, silicon flakes and various other unusual materials, the rugged surface seemingly alluding to the obstacles overcome by the rescue workers at Ground Zero.

Joseph V. Lubrano celebrates the enduring beauty of New York City in his technically remarkable watercolor "General Sherman at the Plaza," with the statue and the facade of the hotel glimpsed through graceful tree limbs and a plethora of lively details adding up to a beautifully orchestrated, highly atmospheric visual statement. Alan Roland, another consummate watercolorist, is represented by a tour de force of an Autumnal landscape with golden leaves, rocks, and rushing water intricately intermingled.

Georgiana Cray Bart makes an austere yet pregnant statement with an oil of five eggs on a white cloth, set against a subtly modulated blue and green ground. Jane K.Petruska's mixed media sculpture depicts a female nude holding a carnival mask in flat yet flowingly sensual forms. Another gifted sculptor, Berte D'Arrigo shows a piece in white alabaster that evokes an undersea theme in compelling abstract terms.

Postmodern approaches to painterly abstraction can be seen in a darkly sumptuous acrylic painting by Joanne Beaule Ruggles, as well as in a characteristically bold and energetic gestural monotype by Gerda Roze. Harriet FeBland also shows a monotype, here with fanciful forms and symbols floating against a luminously colored ground to strike a delicate balance between abstraction and surrealism. Then there are Kathy Fujii-Oka who shows a painting in which fish and undersea flora form vibrant, near-psychedelic patterns; and Marcelle H. Pachnowski whose mixed media piece is notable for its earthy hues and stately emblematic composition.

Haim Mendelson's mixed media collage "Off Stage Moment" effectively schematizes several figures within angular geometric color, while Robert Fabian contributes an untitled composition in which figurative elements and skillfully harmonized hues are put to the service of an essentially abstract sensibility. And Rose Sigal Ibsen sets brilliant red Chinese characters against a swirl of red and white in her calligraphic collage "America! Peace & Love."

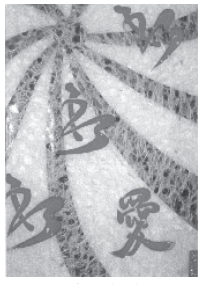
Erika Weihs' oil painting of a woman on a shoreline with swooping gulls projects a sense of melancholy by virtue of her subtle coloristic skills, while Olga Kitt captures the grace and movement of a pas de deux between dancers Mikhail Baryshnikov and Emily Coates in swift, sure strokes of pastel.

Sculptors are especially well represented in this show: Isabel Shaw by an exquisitely balanced piece in bronze and steel depicts a slender female nude tightrope-walking on a rectangular form. Raymond Weinstein's wood sculpture "The Agony of 9/11" depicts a heroic male figure with an expressive pathos that recalls Leonard Baskin. Ilse Kahane's marble sculpture "Partners in Dance" projects a lively sense of terpsichore with skillfully juxtaposed circular and squared-off shapes. And Ray Shanfeld's alabaster piece "Moons" creates a sense of cosmic motion with spherical forms emerging from a central coiling core.

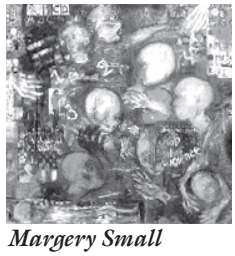
All told, the artists of ASCA live up to this venerable organization's longstanding reputation for excellence —Wilson Wong

Joseph V. Lubrano

Miriam Wills

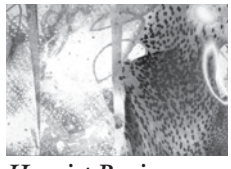


Rose Sigal Ibsen



Margery Small

Jane Petruska



Harriet Regina Marion

Unity of Art and Craft Showcased at Broome Street Gallery

As their name indicates, the Artist-Craftsmen of New York is a group dedicated to rendering often arbitrary creative definitions moot. Their most recent exhibition, at Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street, demonstrated the wisdom of their cause, both by its inclusiveness and its general excellence.

Collage is a medium that can often fall between categories. Several artists here employ its versatility successfully: Dorothy Hall employs various sized typefaces, photo-images and other collage materials, in a dynamic manner reminiscent of Russian Constructivist graphics in her freestanding accordian-fold book work. Ruth F. Levine's large collage is an autobiographical tour de force, incorporating personal photos, exhibition cards, and texts in an intricate composition. John Gampert employs collage to construct colorful semi-abstract landscapes and cityscapes. Shula Mustacchi combines photo-imagery of city streets in sequences that capture a sense of urban flux and surrounds them with a frame collaged with fragments of a subway map.

Quilts are essentially collages created from fabrics and Liz Cenedella is one of the foremost artists working in the medium, as she demonstrates here with a brilliant composition of geometric shapes in gemlike colors. Another talented fiber artist, Louise Sharakan, also showed circular works created with colorful fabrics, richly stitched and beaded, suggesting opulent mandalas. Then there was Gilda Weinstein, who created her own unique tondos in the form of ceramic wall reliefs in which black and white bowls, ostensibly split down the middle and recombined, created the effect of yin/yang symbols.

Jane Arnold's fluidly formed ceramic vessels, with burnt-looking surfaces and rough handles made from twigs, have a primitive effect, like artifacts from some unknown tribe of innovative craftspeople. Cecily Fortescue creates ceramic vessels with generous, gently curving rims that suggest huge yet delicate sea shells. Claire Clark, on the other hand, employs ceramic materials to make expressively figurative sculptures, one of a pair of felines, another of two women dancing. Annette Needle showed substantial clay reliefs in which human and animal figures move in flowing circular rhythms.

Robert Levin's wood and mixed media sculptures are unique totemic affairs that lean against the gallery wall, one of which featured what appeared to be a simplified house on stilts and incorporated bits of rusted metal. By contrast, Joan Gampert's stone sculptures feature gracefully rounded shapes that command space with their hefty contours.

Robin Herstand's color photographs of a rainy night in Times Square take on an almost phantasmagoric quality with their mysteriously blurred distortions and reflections. Bill Englander's contrastingly sharp-focused black and white photos capture the movement of people going about their everyday activities with snapshot immediacy. Patrick Binns' big color prints of what appear to be graffiti-splashed warehouse or factory interiors have an almost sinister atmosphere, like the settings in the gory gangster film "Reservoir Dogs."

Also included in this exhibition —along with several other artist/craftspersons too numerous to do justice in this limited space— were original handcrafted jewelry in precious metals and other materials by Ronnee Lee Medow, Trudy Jeremias, Karen Strauss, Pearl Brody and others. Displayed in vitrines, these works of wearable art added yet another layer of interest to this altogether engrossing exhibition.

—Lawrence Downes

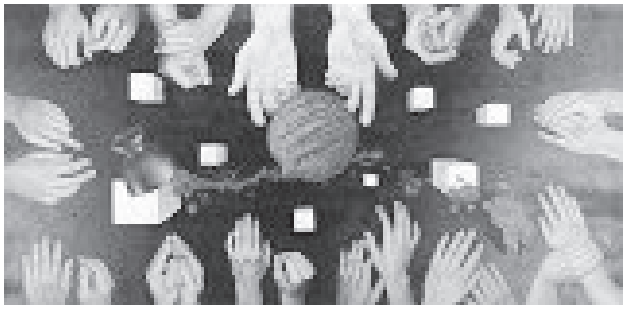
The Prolific Imagination of Lorena Rodriguez

Most figurative artists will tell one unabashedly that of all parts of the human anatomy hands are the most difficult to draw and paint convincingly. For the young Mexican painter Lorena Rodriguez, however, hands do not present a problem, given her impressive drawing ability. And this is fortunate, since hands figure prominently in her paintings.

"I generally avoid faces because they seem overly 'personal' to me," Rodriguez says, intriguingly. "Why hands? Simply because they are my life's center."

In the period since 1992, she has exhibited her work widely throughout Mexico and has begun her exhibition career in the United States as well, most notably with a recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, in which she showed paintings that depicted hands from a variety of angles.

In her work in acrylic and graphite entitled "Al Chile," Rodriguez's use of expressive foreshortening was especially impressive in the figure of a man, waist deep in water, thrusting an open hand out toward the viewer in a manner that made it almost appear to protrude from the picture plane in three dimensions. Indeed, the dynamism with which Rodriguez brings off this feat of perspective recalls certain images by her fellow countryman,



"La ultima cena" ("The Last Supper")

the renowned Mexican muralist Orozco.

Rodriguez, however, has a more surreal sensibility as evidenced by other incongruously juxtaposed elements of the composition, which include a smaller image of a woman with her face turned away holding what appears to be a human heart and a green pepper suspended on a string against a starry cosmic expanse.

Several hands gesturing expressively are featured in the mixed media painting called "La ultima cena (The Last Supper)," which approaches that famous subject from above, giving us a new perspective, as well as a more surreal view than we are accustomed to, given that the loaf of bread and spilled wine appear to float in mid-air above the table, along with several white cubes, perhaps alluding to a famous crucifixion by Rodriguez's great predecessor Salvador Dali.

Rodriguez once again reveals her ability to depict the human figure from an extreme perspective in the acrylic painting entitled "La vida y la muerte (Life and Death)," where the central figure is also seen from above, this time with both hands raised high above its head and thrusting dynamically toward the viewer. Here, too, the figure appears to be wedged between a mysterious dark area and a kind of checkerboard design, presumably representing the two realms referred to in the title in a strikingly metaphysical manner.

Lorena Rodriguez cites a wide variety of influences and interests —from science psychology and religion; to the Mayans, Aztecs, and Teotihuacans; to videos, and MTV— as inspirations for her meticulously accomplished pictures. All contribute to the complex and intriguing array of symbols that this prolific young artist invites the viewer to interpret.

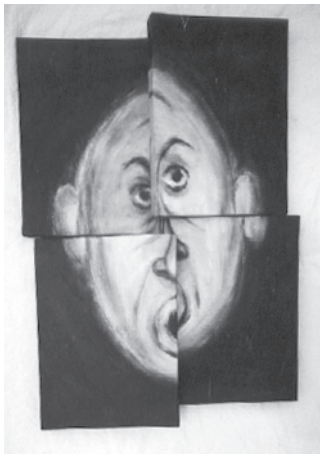
—Marie R. Pagano

Face Value: Claudia Bianchi's New Combine-Paintings

The human visage has been such a constant subject in art for so many centuries that it is almost impossible to imagine how any artist could do anything new with it. Claudia Bianchi, however, managed to do just that in her recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway.

Bianchi, who holds a BFA from Northern Illinois University and also studied at Salzburg College, in Austria, the American Academy of Art, and the Chicago Art Institute, applies "vigorous Expressionist brushwork" to a figurative style that has qualities akin to the funky, cartoon-influenced vitality of the Hairy Who movement, which originated in her native Chicago. Her recent paintings of faces become vehicles for expressing a wide range of psychological states through arrangements of multiple canvases and formal fragmentation.

In her oil "Inside Out," Bianchi juxtaposes four canvases on which the features of a boldly defined face are merged with a central image on vellum to create a composition with the unnerving power of both Munch's famous picture "The Scream," and "Echo of a Cry," a painting by the Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Bianchi's use of layered surfaces, with the mouth of the central figure on vellum forming a circular shape, creates a similarly disconcerting sense of a hair-raising shriek, albeit through her own unique manner.



"Rearranged"

In another work called "Rearranged," Bianchi projects a less strident but no less disturbing image of human suffering by overlapping four images of one face, set against a black ground, in a manner that squeezes its features together. The sense created here is one of emotional repression and quiet desperation. Although the face was probably created as a single entity by placing the four canvases together before they were painted upon, now the features do not meet in the usual way and the separate quarters of the face no longer match. Unlike the contemporary German Neo-Expressionist Georg Baselitz's, who shows his crudely painted figures upside-down to emphasize their abstract qualities—a self-conscious formal trick that makes one wonder why he doesn't simply paint abstractly in the first place—Claudia Bianchi employs fragmentation and distortion to imbue her paintings with emotional qualities. In this regard she is more similar to Susan Rothenberg, who combines elements of Expressionism and New Image painting to forge a unique personal style.

In another work called "Five Faces of Man," Bianchi juxtaposes disjointed, severely cropped images of different faces painted on small panels and hung near each other to create an installation that suggests social dislocation and the inability of people to communicate with each other. Yet another piece called "A Rip in Time," a face resembling Osama bin Laden, made up of texts handwritten in pencil on vellum, is sandwiched between two halves of a another face painted in oil on canvas that appears to be decomposing in horizontal streaks.

As in all of Claudia Bianchi's powerful recent paintings, it is an image at once innovative in formal terms and emotionally harrowing. —Linda Bernstein

Yu-Whuan Reinvests Minimalism with Meaning

Modern sculpture has always been the most literal of arts, never having had to deal with divesting itself of illusionism as painting has had to do, and thus its concerns are often assumed to be quite opposite from those of painting. Painting's long struggle, if one chooses to take the most dogmatic avant garde view, has been to disengage itself from illusionism in order to arrive at the notion of painting as an "object." We all agree that sculpture, on the other hand, is already an object, no matter what else it may purport to be at any given period in art history, and therefore has not had to concern itself quite as much with moving from the literary to the literal.

By the mid 1960s, champions of Minimalism such as Robert Morris felt secure in the belief that while painting was an optical medium, sculpture was a tactile one, which by virtue of its literal nature had finally freed itself from all referentiality.

In art, however, there are no absolutes, and the postmodern era ended the taboo against meaning in sculpture as much as in painting. Thus, it is now possible to encounter an artist such as Yu-Whuan, whose enigmatically titled installation, "Inheritance Wet. Dry Inheritance," can be experienced at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 5 through 23. (There will be a reception for the artist on Thursday, November 7, from 5 to 8 PM.)

For all intents and purposes, the objects that make up Yu-Whuan's installation have the pristine appearance of Minimalist sculptures, for they are rectangular shaped objects, approximately a foot high, arranged more or less equidistantly on the gallery floor. Although they look quite substantial, they are actually created with paper napkins supported internally on an armature of drill rods. Apparently the forms are shaped by some process similar to papier mache. The artist then ignites them with matches and a cigarette lighter, before putting out the fire with water. The burning blackens the upper part of the forms, creating irregular patterns of contrast between the scorched and untouched portions of the piece.

Obviously, Yu-Whuan's working process involves an element of ritual, which she explains as follows: "A new life and a new soul burns in each sculpture and takes its own course as it burns down from the top and spreads to the bottom. A language of fire is created by the interaction between me and the burning design, which has a life of its own. The charred design may be said to symbolize a journey, an imprint of past experiences and memories. I balanced and harmonize black and white, wet and dry. The black represents life in the Universe, the white represents the soul and the spirit.

Installation

These sculptures, even though they are burned, continue to exist and represent the everlastingness of the spirit."

That Yu-Whuan also asserts that these works represent "a spontaneous expression of my relationship with New York City," and adds, "It could only have been created here," makes it difficult not to mentally connect her installation with the memorial candles one saw all around the city after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. For whether this association was the artist's intention or not, it seems inescapable given that the charred sculptures metaphorically suggest not only the memorial candles but the burned and destroyed towers themselves.

In any case, when Yu-Whuan employs words such as "soul" and "spirit" in relation to her work, she reinvests Minimal forms with meanings that circle all the way back to the very origins of abstract art, more than a hundred years ago, when modern artists first began to explore spiritual notions that could not be pictured through traditional means.

—Lawrence Downes

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