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GALLERY&STUDIO

The World of the Working Artist

ANNE BACHELIER

April 4 through May 11, 2003

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Untitled 2002, acrylic and plastic film on canvas, 36" X 36"

Missy Lipsett

April 22-May 10, 2003

plasticity

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NYC, 10001 tel: 646.230.0056
gallery hours: Tues - Sat 11-6pm
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"Morning Sun at the Pond, Giverny" Oil on linen 60" X 41"

Brown Hagood

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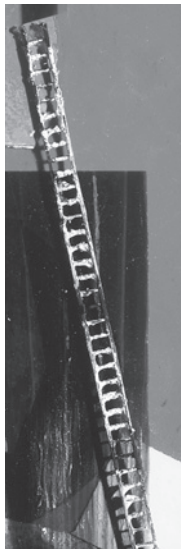

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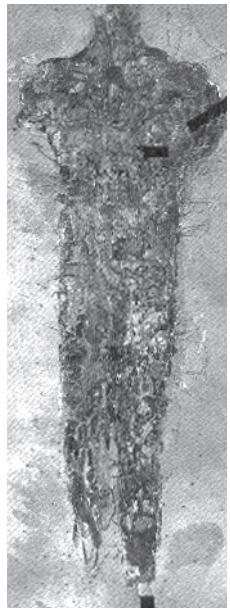

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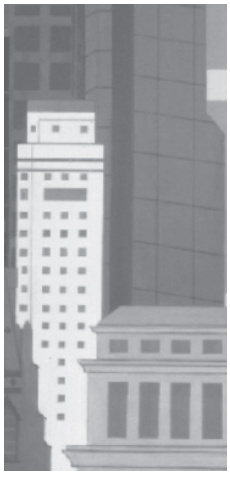

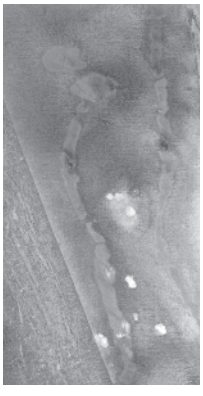

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The *GALLERY&STUDIO* advertising deadline for the June/July/August issue is May 13 for color, May 20 for black/white.

In Her New Oils, Anne Bachelier's Ingenues Blossom into Divas

"So even though La Princesse's watery gaze saw cruelty when it first met that of her owner, she could do nothing but silently weep as love lit the crystal enclosure." *Illustration by Anne Bachelier for the* **Princess of Wax** *mixed media*

Even if Anne Bachelier had never put brush to canvas, perish the thought, she would still be one of our greatest book illustrators—although, sadly, today there are few opportunities for a great illustrator to prosper, given the realities of book publishing in this age of cost-cutting and computer graphics.

As an illustrator of books, then, Bachelier belongs to a tradition that no longer exists, which flourished in an era when masters of the art such as Aubrey Beardsley, Arthur

Rackham, and Alfred Kubin illuminated texts rather than merely complementing them; when the illustrator breathed visual life into the book, imbuing it with magical atmospheres inseparable from the author's prose and every bit as important.

Although that golden age of illustration is long gone, Bachelier's art dealer and creative collaborator Neil Zukerman has made a heroic effort to revive it, just for her.

"It's fortunate that we both have understanding spouses, because Anne and I are lovers," Zukerman says. Then, lest one get the idea that the two couples live like characters in some ultrasophisticated French art film, he adds, "I mean, in the creative rather than the sexual sense!"

So far, under Zukerman's CFM imprint, of which he is the designer as well as the publisher, their affaire de livre has spawned a deluxe hardcover monograph centering on Bachelier's oeuvre as a painter, as well as two lavishly illustrated works of fantastic fiction: "Rose Daughter", a retelling of Beauty and the Beast with a text by Robin McKinley; and, more recently, "The Princess of Wax—A Cruel Tale," written by Scot D. Ryersson and Michael Orlando Yaccarino, the imminent publication of which was noted in the February 2003 issue of Vanity Fair.

"The Princess of Wax/La princesse de cire," with texts in English and French (including a deluxe limited edition) is a decadent fairy tale spun off Ryersson and Yaccarino's "Infinite Variety: The Life and Legend of the Marchesa Casati," a biography of an eccentric Belle Epoque beauty who paraded a cheetah on a leash and, as Vanity Fair put it, "plunged into extravagant-exhibitionism-aestheticism-narcissism—living a life of striking surrealism."

Several of Anne Bachelier's original pen and mixed media illustrations for the book can be seen, along with her new oil paintings in her solo exhibition at CFM Gallery, 112 Greene Street, from April 4 through May 11.

Bachelier's creative process is so deeply intuitive that it is difficult to determine exactly how her illustrations influence her paintings, or vice versa, although there definitely seems to be a crossfertilization between the two art forms. Further complicating the attempt to speculate on the degree to which any aspect of outer reality impinges on the inner dream-realm from which this unique artist draws her inspiration is the fact that she has inhabited her private world since childhood. Thus her illustrations, like her oils, appear to be conjured rather than plotted, as though she channels them from the same mysterious source as her paintings.

Nonetheless, many of the female protagonists of her recent canvases have become noticeably more formidable. Less the willowy ingenue and more the imperious grande dame, they appear decidedly more self-possessed than the passive, dreamy heroines of her past work. This points to the possibility that— just as a greater range of brilliant red hues appeared on her painting palette in the wake of her illustrations for "Rose Daughter"—the central figures in Bachelier's new oils have absorbed some of the flamboyant spirit of La Marchesa Luisa Casati, who desired to be "a living work of art" and, toward that end, commissioned countless portraits of herself from the leading painters and photographers of her day.

Certainly this exhibition is especially rich in the imaginary portraits that have always been an important part of Bachelier's oeuvre. In the past, these have often suggested surrogate self-portraits, projecting something of the artist's retiring, almost ethereal personal demeanor. Now, they appear more assertive, robust, even dangerous, as seen in one picture of a regal porcelain-skinned figure, her red hair billowing up like a mushroom cloud and serving as a nest for serpentine creatures and even a crouching red demon. Also notable in this regard is "The Memory of Magic," a triptych on hinged panels in which two fantastic creatures are tethered by red ribbons to a central figure who appears to be a sorceress, holding a mysterious object from which another tiny figure dangles like a doll.

Another portrait features a bewitching beauty with slender branches encircling her head like a tiara and continuing down over her torso.Yet another figure is surrounded by circular masks that resemble sun and moon symbols yet also have a skull-like quality that makes them somewhat forbidding.

Overall, there is the sense that Bachelier's women have recently come into fuller possession of their powers; that they have blossomed into full-fledged femmes fatales with more than one trick up their silken sleeves —when in fact they wear sleeves, since some now bare creamy white shoulders.

In Bachelier's multifigure compositions as well, most of her female characters now comport themselves more like divas than ingenues. No longer do they resemble passive waifs and wraiths at the mercy of preposterously posturing human males or horny chimeras who might wish to have their weird way with them. Now even brilliant red demons with long curling tails fall at their feet like the male supplicants who grovel before indifferent young goddesses in the great Polish writer and draftsman Bruno Schulz's masochistic print portfolio "The Book of Idolatry."

Indeed, all manner of subordinate personages, human and otherwise, flutter about them like courtiers, as they flaunt their statuesque beauty in flowing silken gowns even more opulent than those in which Marchesa Luisa Casati had herself painted by Giovanni Boldini and others. For while the artists commissioned to immortalize Marchesa Casati were, to some extent at least, constricted by the bounds of recognizable reality, Bachelier recognizes no such barriers. And the painterly alchemy that enables her to imbue her most fanciful visions with flawless verisimilitude grows more impressive with each exhibition.

Yet, while the technical finesse that Bachelier began developing as a student at Ecole des Beaux Arts, La Seine, in the mid-to-late sixties serves her well in making her images palpable in pigment, her most precious creative resource is still her ability to transport us imaginatively, to make us complicit in her daydreams.

Witness the new large canvas called "Through The Wall," where four fantastic personages parade into the viewers' field of vision as though glimpsed in passing on a nighttime sidewalk: a tall, beautiful woman wearing a pink opera mask and luminous pink gown; a creature with the head of a raven and the nude body of a nubile young girl; a spectral white-winged being, and a prancing companion of indeterminate gender in dark evening wear.

Only Bachelier could impart to such an unlikely quartet of anomalies the completely natural quality of two carefree couples out on the town on a double date!

An image of a raven (albeit here without the anthropomorphic alteration seen in the above-mentioned picture) appears once again in another large new oil called "Lost in Her Dreams." Perched on a large orb, the bird gazes over the shoulder of a young woman in a long white dress, who sprawls on the floor watching a small red devil, nude and quite anatomically correct, posture in a manner suggesting a lascivious dance. Yet, even as she communes with this demonic being, she retains an innocence that makes her seem a throwback to the fairy tale princesses who appeared in some of Bachelier's earlier pictures. Indeed, the news that Bachelier's husband recently presented her with a pet raven reinforces the impression that "Lost in her Dreams" is the sole surrogate self-portrait in the present exhibition.

As always, however, all of Anne Bachelier's new paintings exist in an unearthly and timeless realm where not even the laws of gravity need be respected. Limned in sumptuous glazes of glistening oil pigments, lit by mysterious orbs or ornate lanterns, enveloped in atmospheric mists, her fanciful figures soar through vistas as seemingly limitless as her singular aesthetic vision. —Ed McCormack

László Paizs
"To the Memory of the Book Burners, No.1," 1986, paper, plexiglass block, 25.5 X 14 X 8 in.

László Paizs is Hungary's greatest living artist, a figure of comparable stature to Joseph Beuys or Anselm Kiefer. Yet, he had to wait forty years for his first U.S. solo exhibition, which took place recently at Westwood Gallery, 578 Broadway, in Soho. Read all about it in New York Notebook (centerfold).

Diverse Angles of Vision in the Art of Sung Mo Cho

The Korean- born artist Sung Mo Cho expands upon a theme he debuted in a previous exhibition in his new solo exhibition, "Along the Road," at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from April 22 through May 10.

Cho, who is presently an adjunct professor at Mercy College in New York and has exhibited widely in both Korea and the United States, cannot be called a landscape painter in any traditional sense of the term. For while elements of landscape are present in his paintings, his compositions delineate a terrain that is not only partly manmade but also often includes superimpositions of diverse imagery.

In one acrylic on traditional Korean paper, for example, Cho juxtaposes gracefully delineated trees, clouds, floating floral forms, and a small self-portrait. More typically, he gives us simultaneous views of natural and urban vistas in the same picture. These juxtapositions imbue his compositions with a sense of time; of the shifting visions and views, as in a Chinese handscroll, where the land unrolls before one almost cinematically.

Cho, though, expresses the more disjointed sensations of our fragmented modern world in another manner: by dividing his compositions into sections separated by highways. These symbolic linear highways, with their white divider lines, are painted in different colors in different paintings and wind gracefully through the compositions, in which they are major elements. Although they are seen from an aerial perspective, much as highways are delineated on a map, the images that they weave between are painted head-on.

In one particularly affecting painting in the "Along the Road" series, Cho combines images of a graceful Asian tree, a large, stylized red rose, and the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, with other city buildings clustered far below them. Here, rather than the linear highway symbols seen in most of Cho's other paintings, the divisions between images are created with jagged red strokes, broken off like lightning bolts, seeming to symbolize a sense of violent fracture.

Aside from these singularly stark elements, however, the more delicate strokes of color with which Cho knits all of his compositions together, combining primary and secondary colors with great sensitivity to create subtle chromatic harmonies, make the overall mood of this painting tender and elegiac. For along with being an exquisite colorist, Sung Mo Cho is a sublime painter, possessed of a technical mastery which lends his relatively small paintings a presence and a power surpassing that of many larger works.

While the overblown scale of many contemporary paintings tends to keep the viewer at arm's length, Cho's intimate pictures seduce us with their "touch": the finesse with which he wields his brush to build the surfaces in his pictures with myriad strokes that simultaneously resemble the sunny, succulent daubs of Impressionism and the linear delicacy of Asian ink and watercolor painting.

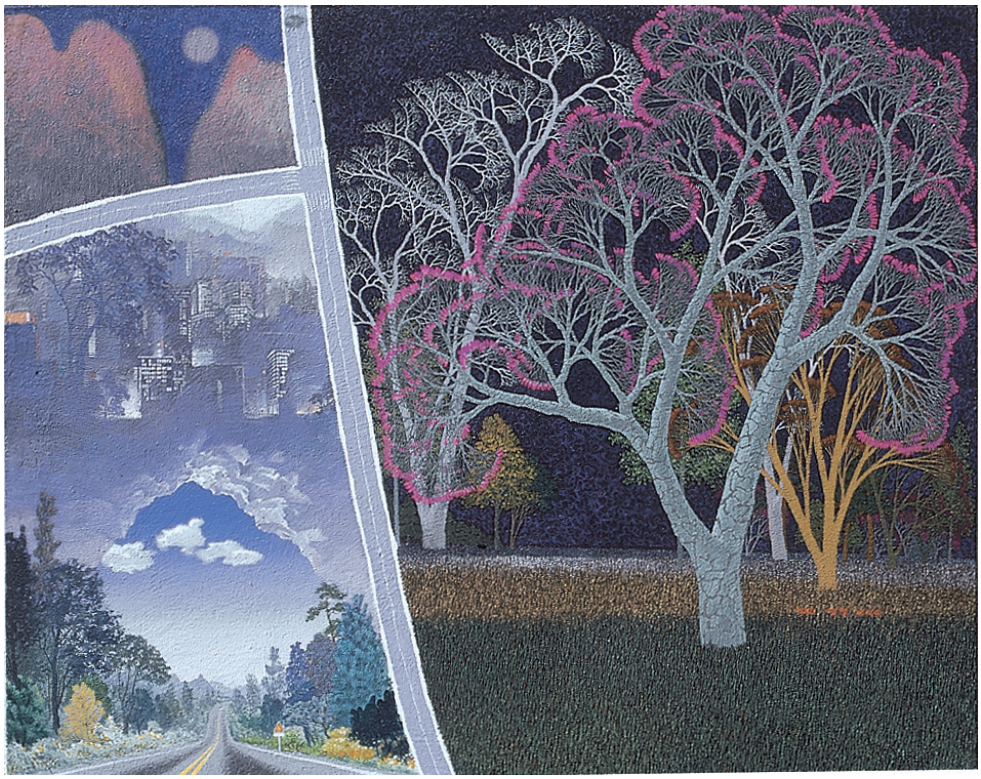
Particularly lovely in this regard is the acrylic on Korean traditional paper entitled "Along the Road—City & Nature," 2002, in which Cho combines several different techniques in different areas of the picture. In the lower left portion of the composition, an earthy, hilly terrain lit by a full moon is limned in softly muted strokes, while the larger area on the right combines a neopointillistic sky with a glistening tour de force of an atmospheric nocturnal cityscape. Over this, a slender tree is superimposed and sharply delineated in a precise, decorative manner reminiscent of art nouveau.

Few other painters could merge so many diverse elements into a harmoniously satisfying whole. Nor could they carry off a composition such as Cho's "Along the Road—Nature," 2003, a more loosely painted work in acrylic on matboard, in which the windblown branches of bare winter trees, juxtaposed with a winding gray road, are distorted in an eerily elongated manner akin to the hair-raising Expressionism of Edvard Munch. In yet another acrylic on canvas, "Along the Road—The Image of the City & Nature," three landscape images painted in pale colors with a distinctly Asian atmosphere give way to a larger image that suggests a rainy night in the city seen through the gridded panes of a window, loosely brushed in a vigorous semi-abstract manner.

Equally striking is Cho's unusual handling of space, as seen in "Along the Road —S. Nature," 2002," an acrylic on canvas in which the dominant image of a sinuous tree with red buds, set against a deep ocher ground, hugs the picture plane flatly, while an area immediately below it opens to a vista of a landscape where a winding highway weaves between trees in deep perspective. Here, as in other paintings by Cho, discrete areas bordered by his linear highway symbols open like windows within the larger composition, offering glimpses of other places and contrasting spaces.

It is Sung Mo Cho's ability to combine so many different techniques and angles of vision, even while working within more or less consistent formats and with similar subjects, that enables him to imbue each of his compositions with its own distinctive mood and make it a complex and challenging visual metaphor for our transient age.

—Maurice Taplinger



"Along the Road - Garden" 35 3/4 " X 28 1/2 " mixed media on canvas. Sung Mo Cho's solo show at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from April 22 - May 10. Cho will also have a solo show at Locust Valley Library, 170 Buckram Rd., Locust Valley, from June 2-28.

Allan Simpson: Iconographer of the Jeweled City

John Russell once called New York City "one of the supreme subjects of our century," and that statement still holds true for the present century as well. Certainly the contemporary painter Allan Simpson captures something of the sublime in his depictions of even the most uncelebrated corners of the city.

Simpson, who in the year 2000 was Visiting Artist at the American Academy in Rome, brings his particular visual poetry to bear not only on the concrete canyons of midtown and the glittering skyline of Manhattan, but also on the Hudson River Valley and Long Island shoreline in his solo exhibition at Amsterdam Whitney Gallery, 511 West 25th Street. Entitled "Urban Metaphors, Machine Nature and Design," the show can be seen from May 8 through 31, with a reception on Thursday, May 15, from 6 to 8 PM.

In the decades preceding the advent—or perhaps one should say the explosion—of Abstract Expressionism, there was a vital strain of painting called American Scene. Its rural wing included Regionalists like Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and Stuart Curry, while its urban exponents encompassed Precisionists such as Sheeler, Demuth, and even, for awhile, Georgia O'Keeffe when she was painting her famous cityscapes. (Those two brilliant loners Edward Hopper and Charles Burchfield also intersect with this loosely related group.) Although they were soon to be marginalized, these artists were as daring and original in their own way as the action painters who would usurp them, having rejected European influences to forge their own homegrown modernism.

Allan Simpson, who grew up on a farm in Illinois and now lives in Long Island City, revives the spirit of the American Scene painters by virtue of his ability to gaze on the urban landscape with unjaded wonderment. Yet while the pristine architectural forms and the absence of figures in his compositions recalls aspects of Precisionism, his pictures are pervaded by an atmospheric melancholy, a sense of peculiarly American longing that belongs to him alone.

This quality comes across with particular poignancy in Simpson's oil on canvas "Winter, Hudson River," where the river, with its zigzagging patterns of ice, fills the foreground and the gray, misty skyline can be seen beyond the bridge that spans the width of the horizontal composition. There is the sense in this picture of great psychological distance; of how the city can be seem as icily aloof and inaccessible as a kingdom of dreams from just a few miles away—at least to those who do not partake in its power and its glamour.

Evocative as the painting is, however, it is equally impressive for its formal qualities. For Allan Simpson does not strain for atmosphere by exploiting the picturesque.

"Midtown Manhattan"

Rather, the poetic qualities in his paintings are made more exquisite by restraint. Here, the jaggedly delineated shapes and sober palette of grayed-down blues and earthier hues make one think of Clyfford Still's uncompromising abstractions. Indeed, the composition of Simpson's painting is similarly craggy and that its forms simultaneously seem to recede in perspective and advance to the picture plane enhances the spatial tension.

A considerably more heightened palette enlivens "View of Maspeth," with its blocky brown buildings and industrial tanks and smokestacks locked into a vise-tight composition between a vibrant pink and blue striped sky and the bucolic foliage that foams around the bottom of the picture like candy-colored clouds. Here, with a coloristic audacity to rival that of Milton Avery, Allan Simpson uncovers the hidden beauty of an obscure location much in the manner of the great fabulist writer Bruno Schulz, who immortalized the small Polish village where he spent his entire life by virtue of his peculiarly heightened receptivity. Simpson possesses a similar gift for finding the magic in the ordinary; yet unlike Schulz, whose prose was deliberately florid, he tempers his visual poetry with an austere formalism, even when he turns up chromatic volume, as he does in "View of Maspeth."

In other pictures, such as "Tappen Zee" and "Kosciusko Bridge," Simpson employs flat clear color areas in a more muted range to build compositions with spare, clean forms that verge on abstraction, even while capturing the specific qualities of places outside the city proper. By contrast, "Midtown Manhattan" and "Night Light Manhattan" take us right into the belly of the beast, so to speak.

In the former painting, skyscrapers, steeples, and office towers overlap in a composition that shows Simpson's neo-precisionism at its most plainspoken and severe, while the latter picture is a nocturnal dazzler on a par with some of O'Keeffe's great noir cityscapes. In "Night Light Manhattan," the jeweled lights of the city blink from silhouetted buildings set against a luminous red sky streaked with angular areas of blue. With larger yellow flashes of light in the foreground stylized in star-like patterns, this picture is simultaneously a romantic tour de force and a triumph of formal design.

Allan Simpson, who obviously learned a good deal about how to orchestrate a composition with uninflected yet expressive areas of flat color from his former mentor at the Art Students League, Will Barnet, emerges with this exhibition as one of our major iconographers of urban America. His work seems destined to survive for as long as the supreme subject that he has made his own.

—Marie R. Pagano

Process and Physicality in the Paintings of Missy Lipsett

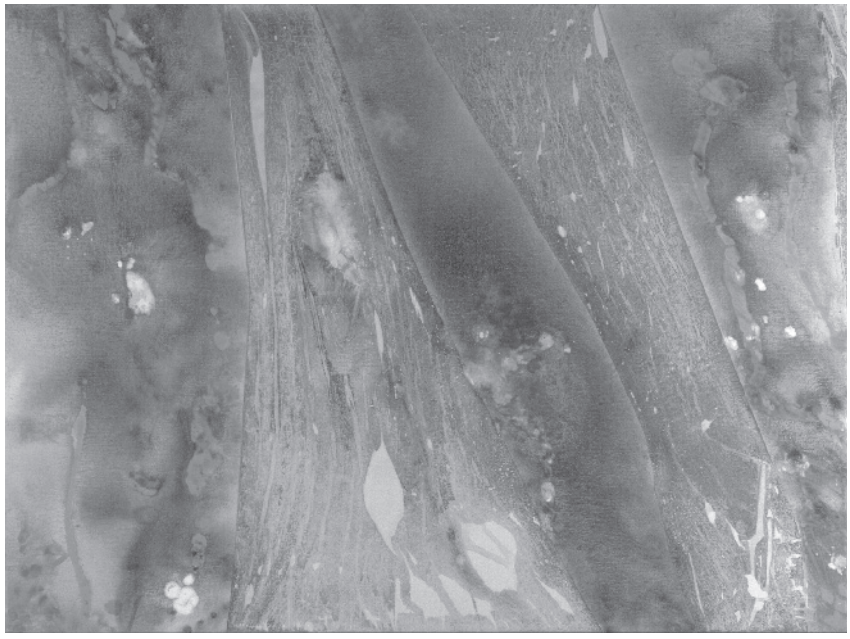
It seems safe to suppose that Clement Greenberg, that most unforgiving of critics, would not find much to approve of in contemporary art, given how the diverse tendencies huddled under the umbrella of postmodernism tend to fly uniformly in the face of all he championed as paramount in progressive modern painting. Yet Greenberg would probably be heartened by the audacity of Missy Lipsett, the title of whose third New York solo show announces itself like a bold banner boiling down everything that Greenberg propagated to a single, profoundly meaningful word in regard to the art of painting: "Plasticity."

Granted, in the context of Lipsett's exhibition, which can be seen at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from April 22 through May 10 (with receptions on Thursday April 24 from 6 to 8 PM and on Saturday April 26 from 4 to 6 PM), the term actually has two meanings. The first and most literal of these is that Lipsett has employed plastic film, along with her usual medium of acrylic (or polymer, itself a form of plastic) on canvas, as a prominent element in her new series; the second, and the one which would doubtless be most meaningful to Greenberg, is that Lipsett insists emphatically on emphasizing the pure plastic values in her paintings, above and beyond illusion, explication, or anything else that could be interpreted as even nominally literary or anecdotal.

Use of the term "plasticity" in an aesthetic context dates back to 1931, when a group of abstract painters in Paris that included Hans Arp, Frantisek Kupka and others issued a statement calling for "purely plastic culture." Yet its use by Missy Lipsett at this time seems almost as radical a declaration that uncompromisingly abstract painting can still be a viable endeavor, as vital in the postmodern era as in its original incarnation.

Indeed, one of the things Lipsett's exhibition demonstrates is that the achievement of pure plasticity is especially challenging and stimulating today, given our general agreement at this late date that a certain residue of allusion will invariably attach itself to even the most intently abstract works of art. In a time when we can no longer agree on what is avant garde, when all is permissible and open to semiotic interpretation, every sophisticated nonobjective artist attuned to the complexity of our age must now allow for this ambiguity.

In the latter regard, Lipsett, who has recently relocated her main studio from the city to the country, is well aware that a certain sense of landscape has found its way into her compositions. Indeed, she welcomes the expansiveness that this brings to even her relatively smaller canvases and appears to concur— to some degree anyway— with Willem de Kooning's statement (which a writer previewing her new work quoted to her recently) that the space in most abstract painting "springs from landscape."



"Untitled"

This sense of landscape space is further abetted by the crumpled plastic film that Lipsett has affixed to some of her new canvases as a formal, expressive, and tactile element, creating the feeling of a rugged or even mountainous terrain, especially in those compositions where it protrudes considerably out from the picture plane.

Conversely, in other paintings in the new series the plastic wrap serves an entirely different function when Lipsett peels it away, leaving only an impression, as in a monotype; or else she employs it as a "masking" device, to create hard edges where poured or dripped acrylic paint is prevented from reaching the canvas. Yet from these techniques, too, a suggestion of land masses or of a map-like delineation of topography emerges. And this is further enhanced by Lipsett's liberal use of water to dilute her acrylic pigments and create a sense of flow, of flux akin to the movement of natural elements and forces.

That said, the main thrust of her work remains adamantly abstract in intent. One encounters her paintings as autonomous phenomena, which finally succeed most dramatically in nonobjective terms. The viewer is swept along by the sheer energy that Lipsett generates by applying skeins of color (quite densely layered to create depth in some paintings, set sparely against the white of the canvas in others) with a stick, a stylus, a squirt bottle, or any suitable object that comes immediately to hand. She eschews brushes as too conventional for her vigorous, spontaneous approach, preferring to keep the "gesture" at arm's length and avoid the personalizing cliché of the "brushstroke," in order to imbue her surfaces with a sense of freshness and inevitability.

While her compositional dynamics are the real piece de resistance in her work, Lipsett's colors—luminous yellows, brilliant reds, verdant green or blue hues—can be quite beautiful, especially when she applies them to the white ground with splashy fluidity. In some of her more densely tactile canvases, where the plastic film remains integral to the composition as a collage element, the translucent surface gives off glints of captured light that spark another kind of chromatic charge in concert with crusty opaque pigmentations or more viscous impastos built up with acrylic gel medium.

In fact, as in the work of Jules Olitski and other color field painters, the particular qualities of acrylic paints, a more modern medium than oils, are innate to Lipsett's aesthetic. Often, she adds considerable quantities of water to these water-based yet rugged and permanent pigments to increase their fluidity. Tilting the canvas this way or that, she makes her colors puddle and pool or run together in almost marbleized configurations or flow in rivulets and elegant drips that add to the sensual, matter-of-fact immediacy of her compositions.

Thus she achieves her ultimate plasticity, capturing that alchemy by which process manifests as physical entity. This magical metamorphosis of movement into materiality, is what the art of Missy Lipsett is all about.

—Ed McCormack

Irving Barrett's Layered Meanings and Harmonious Disparities

With their densely layered and often disparate images and their sharp sense of irony, the collages of Irving Barrett are so ostensibly postmodern that it would be easy enough to liken him to David Salle and other new wave wonders who emerged in the 1980s. Barrett, however, is an artist with a more subtle and intimate sensibility. In contrast to the overblown scale that we see in the work of Salle and others, his collages are generally of modest size, yet crammed with lively visual incident. In this regard, he has more in common with the late Ray Johnson, another highly original intimist with a penchant for maximalism.

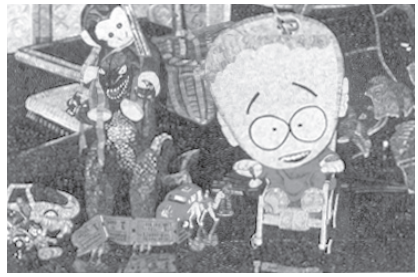
"Dualities — Studies in Confrontation and Connection" is the title that Barrett attaches to his new exhibition in the style that he calls "Dada-Pop-Surrealist," which can be seen at Noho Gallery in Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, from April 22 through May 10.

According to the artist, "The starting point of departure for this show concept is the drawing, painting and/or collaging of two divergent and/or related items, figures, animals, portrait busts, etc., together on the same surface in juxtaposition to suggest a potential relationship between the two items."

"Jimi and the Duke," for example, juxtaposes the film hero John Wayne in his "Green Berets" costume with Jimi Hendrix in his electric Afro and psychedelic finery. An icon of patriotic machismo and an icon of hippie "peace and love" confront each other across the generation gap. Yet they are reconciled—at least visually— by Barrett's collage technique, with its gridded surface in which each tiny square contains a stylized floral form, providing an abstract armature of underlying geometry.

A wry hint of the pomposity that often drives great artists is behind the title of another intricately wrought collage called "Crackpot Aspiring Men," in which the mammoth egos of Salvador Dali and Pablo Picasso share a single cafe table. Each stares out of the picture with dark Spanish eyes, as if blind to the presence of the other, as strange biomorphic forms float through the air and the entire rippling surface appears to crackle with the electricity of their rivalry. Implicit in Barrett's parody of these two giants of Modernism is the sense that their monolithic male chauvinist contest would be comically passé in the current political and aesthetic climate.

Considerably more lighthearted is the comic rivalry between a cartoon character and a toy dinosaur figurine in "Timmy and Godzilla." Here it is the sheer visual disparity between the images themselves, more than any mythic rivalry between them, that creates the visual tension in the composition, as well as creating a sense of surreal incongruities. Other collages, such as "Descent from the Skateboard," "Two Soldiers," and "Couples," embed imagistic incongruities within vibrantly colorful grids to optically dazzling effect.



"Timmy and Godzilla" 2002

In his new collages, as well as paintings such as "Two Towers," a complex diptych juxtaposing images from 9/11 with disembodied human skulls and the outlines of the destroyed towers, Irving Barrett succeeds splendidly in confronting a host of intriguing dualities. His paintings and collages are visual conundrums to which there is no real need to find an answer. We can simply savor them at face value. —Maureen Flynn

The Imaginative Independence of Emile Snellen van Vollenhoven

"I am totally 'free-form,' a free human being," declares Emile Snellen van Vollenhoven, whose exhibition of paintings was recently seen at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, in Soho. "My work takes on abstract, figurative and surrealistic dimensions. All the work is subject to symbolism and each paintings is my signature."

As his statement indicates, van Vollenhoven is that rare thing, a sophisticated outsider totally unbeholden to art world trends. His work fits neatly into no known categories; besides drawing and painting, he writes poetry, haiku, and stories, as well as composing music and playing guitar.

"On the first of April 2001 I deliberately chose my life," van Vollenhoven adds histrionically. "I was ready to present myself as Creative Artist."

This statement, implying the mysterious decision to follow a calling, is much in keeping with the visionary spirit of his paintings. However, it is obvious from the technical finesse that he has evolved even within an ostensibly primitivistic style that van Vollenhoven has been honing his technique in private for a long time. For while his figures hardly reveal academic training in classical anatomy, they are sensual and convincingly expressive. In addition, his paint surfaces are succulent and his color sense contributes unerringly to the atmospheric qualities of his fantastic landscapes.

Indeed, van Vollenhoven's unconventional, apparently autodidactic approach empowers his "free-form" aesthetic, enabling him to pull off formal and symbolic juxtapositions that would daunt a traditionally trained painter. This seems especially evident in "The Buddha," where several smaller human figures appear as apparitions within the large figure of the deity, as well as in "The Journey," in which a white robed wizard presides over a nocturnal realm with a nude female figure and large looming faces of a decidedly supernatural cast. In van Vollenhoven's private imaginative world, such anomalies present themselves as perfectly natural, and the viewer is able to suspend disbelief by virtue of the artist's ability to meld them seamlessly within the self-determined perimeters of a highly peculiar compositional logic.

One of van Vollenhoven's most appealingly visionary pictures in his recent exhibition at Montserrat was "Children of Nature," in which willowy nude female bathers are seen wading among tall stalks of bamboo in a landscape where the smaller stooped figure of an old-fashioned Oriental sage in a pointed straw hat is seen traversing hills in the distance. A self-described "product of two cultures, East and West, being Indo" yet hailing from the Netherlands, Van Vollenhoven often includes deliberately exotic Asian motifs in his paintings. While such images might be seen as kitschy chinoiserie in the work of a less unique artists, van Vollenhoven's lack of irony imbues them with an odd imaginative authenticity.

Although some of van Vollenhoven's visual stories summon deep subconscious archetypes and situations suggesting spiritual yearning through a combination of imagery at once mythic and psychological, others evoke a more down to earth sensuality with equal conviction, as seen in "Dreaming a Dream," which depicts a comely female nude sprawling languorously with a small green lizard crawling along her collar bone. By contrast, van Vollenhoven unites the spiritual and the sensual in "Woman Inside," where another nude figure, adorned with a glimmering gold necklace painted with metallic pigment is juxtaposed with both the Bible and the Koran.

Emile Snelllen van Vollenhoven is an artist so thoroughly attuned to his own inner vision that it seems quite impossible to classify him in any historical or currently popular context. His work is indeed "free-form," and that is its saving grace.

—Byron Coleman

Brown Hagood: The "American Sublime" at Giverny

There is a quote from Paul Valery that the painter Brown Hagood first heard many years ago from Morton Kaish, his teacher at the Art Students League, that is never far from his easel:

"Let us imagine that the sight of the things that surround us is not familiar, that it is allowed to us as an exception, and that we only obtain by a miracle, knowledge of the day, of human beings, of the heavens, of the sun...What would we say about these revelations, in what terms would we speak of this wonderfully adjusted data? What would we say of this distinct, complete, and solid world, if this world only appeared to us very occasionally...?"

On encountering Hagood's paintings, one can see immediately that this quote had a profound affect on him; for he paints with an exuberant, sparkling freshness of vision. Indeed, only an artist confident of his ability to respond to nature not only as though seeing it for the first time, but as though it had never been painted before, would dare to tread the garden paths of Monet at Giverny confident that he would produce pictures worthy of respect in their own right, as Hagood has done regularly for some years now.

Not that Hagood is arrogant enough to challenge the master on his own turf, mind you. Quite the contrary, he possesses the humility to keep his own counsel with nature, knowing that any artist who wishes to paint it truthfully must approach it on its own terms, learn from direct observation of its many moods, and devise his own way to translate them into the foreign language of pigment on canvas. Only through this alchemy can one give that which is ethereal material form.

Hagood, who grew up in Evergreen, Alabama, and now lives and has his studio in Poughkeepsie, New York, also cites his French aunt, Marguerite Fournials, a protégé of Guirad de Scovola, as another early influence. He took to heart and continues to heed a bit of advice she gave him many times over: "Il faut faire vibrer les couleurs et la lumiere!" ("You must make the colors and light vibrate!")

Toward this end, Hagood and his wife, Monique, also an artist, spend several several weeks each year in France, traveling by car, and often even by barge, searching for new scenery with those precise qualities of color and light that we see in his paintings.

"But we always end up making our annual 'pilgrimage' to Giverny," says Hagood, who was featured in a 1991 article in American Artist magazine called "Special Report: Learning from Monet."

Brown Hagood revisits those magnificent gardens, among other locations in France, in the new oils featured in his new solo show, "France and Flowers," at the Gregg and Marquis Galleries at National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South, from May 7 through 17.

One of the two large canvases that serve as the dual centerpieces of the exhibition, "Rose Trellis Path, Giverny," is a tour de force of chiaroscuro. It boasts a shimmering vortex of a composition that draws one in by virtue of its almost visionary treatment of the sun-saturated foliage swirling with flame-like virulence around the trellis and into the earth below. Rows of red, pink, yellow, and purple flowers on both sides add further to the chromatic intensity.

"Rose Trellis Path, Girverny"

The luminous organic conflagration at the center of the canvas is bracketed all around the edges by equally intense strokes of darker hues, evoking lush overhanging branches and the shadows that they cast on the grass, as though one is viewing the trellis from the sheltering embrace of a large tree, thus providing the viewer with the best of two worlds: a beautiful summer day savored from within a shady oasis.

By such dramatic compositional contrasts, so unlike the diffused surfaces of Impressionism, Brown Hagood asserts his bold American identity and claims his independence from the French giant whose spirit haunts these gardens. Indeed, by such theatrical presentation, in some ways antithetical to the science of pure visual sensation that the Impressionists sought, Hagood introduces an element of that raw romanticism that the writer Andrew Wilton refers to as "the American sublime."

Then there is "Stormy Skies, Versailles," a smaller painting that is about as far from Monet's manner as one can get, in its clearly delineated depiction of the severe geometries of the formal gardens, with their pristine walkways, manicured lawns, maze of crew-cut hedge-rows, and mathematically spaced trees. Upon all this manmade order, Hagood imposes the natural chaos of storm clouds roiling up like thick purplish smoke above the magnificent palace that once served as the royal residence, filling the entire sky with upcurved strokes as physically palpable as the tactile pigmentations of the hedge-row zigzagging along the bottom foreground of the composition.

This and other views of Versailles offer a sharp contrast to the shimmering liquidity of Hagood's Giverny pictures, where forms dissolve in juicy strokes akin to those of that other fine contemporary realist Neil Welliver. In "Morning Sun at the Pond, Giverny," the other large centerpiece of the show, the reflections on the pond and the leafy trees soaring skyward in graceful arcs are limned with the same luminous limpidity and airy lyricism.

While a picture centering on waterlilies is a perilous undertaking for any contemporary painter visiting this sacred site, Hagood acquits himself admirably in "Water Lilies, Willow Reflection, Giverny," where an upside down willow tree and bits of blue sky and white cloud are mirrored under lily pads floating on the glassy-smooth surface of the pond. Here, even while his brushwork retains a lively fluidity, Hagood brings a crystalline clarity strictly his own to this familiar subject.

It takes a strong painter indeed to tackle such subjects without succumbing to imitation or sacrificing his own aesthetic identity. Brown Hagood's gem of an exhibition, which also includes several other major French landscapes and a series of vibrant floral still life compositions, finds an accomplished contemporary realist at the top of his form. —Ed McCormack

Natsu Takahashi Reinvents the "Crazy Quilt" as Art

From Kishio Suga's sculptures in paraffin, to Masunobu Yoshimura's stuffed pig with ham slices hanging off its rear (created three decades before British bad boy Damien Hirst's sliced cow), to Yayoi Kusuma's pieces made with airmail stickers and installations of egg cartons, contemporary Japanese and Japanese-American artists have always been innovative in their use of materials.

None, however, has explored the "crazy quilt"—an anything goes fiber crafts medium to which various objects are often added that peaked in popularity in America during the Victorian period—as a medium for fine art as successfully as Natsu Takashi, whose solo show can be seen at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, May 24 to June 10.

Born in Kochi prefecture, in Japan, Takahashi now resides in California after living for a time in the Northeast. Since the move her colors have grown brighter, she says, adding, "It's probably because of the sun, since I choose colors and patterns in the natural daylight."

According to Robert Bishop, an associate for Antiques Monthly, there is a Japanese connection to the crazy quilt that dates back to the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876 when "a Japanese house and related displays sparked a taste for anything Oriental." Victorian writer Almon C. Varney even went so far, in an article called "Japanese

"Ribbon Party"

Piecework," as to offer a recipe: "Collect a quantity of scraps and ribbon, brocade, satin, velvet, plush and silk. If the pieces are small and odd in shape, so much the better..."

It would take a scholar far more diligent than the present writer to determine whether the crazy quilt actually originated in Japan or whether this is some naive figment of the Victorian imagination, which tended to "exoticize" aspects of Asian culture. Either way, one thing is certain: Natsu Takahashi has added her own wrinkle, so to speak, to the crazy quilt in order to elevate it to the level of fine art with her "crazy patchworks." Takahashi enlivens her pieces with all manner of materials and objects, including metal and plastic plates, as well as anything else that can somehow be sewn or otherwise affixed to fabric.

At the same time, there is a good deal more to her work than the novelty value that accrues from the use of odd and unusual materials. Takahashi is a magnificent colorist, for one, and her pieces compel one with the complexity of their designs. In both chromatic and formal terms, her pieces are dazzling, particularly the large work she calls "Face Off," which is suspended from the gallery wall by a rod in the manner of both a traditional scroll and a modern shower curtain (that its presentation could resemble either is totally in keeping with Takahashi's style, which is at once stately and casual, elegant and funky).

The pieces Natsu Takashi shows at Cast Iron Gallery are sumptuous in color, intricate in design and tactile. Some are composed with regular patterns in a grid, while others are comprised of bolder, less symmetrical areas of color. All reveal Natsu Takashi to be an artist with her own unique aesthetic and approach to materials.

—J. Sanders Eaton

The Conceptual Rebirth of Heinz Gerber's "Nymphaeum"

All great works of art exist in a metaphysical space and a realm of time that transcends the limitations of the physical world. Once such a work of art has been created and documented, its spirit and its metaphysical meanings can never truly be destroyed, even when the work itself ceases to exist on the physical plane.

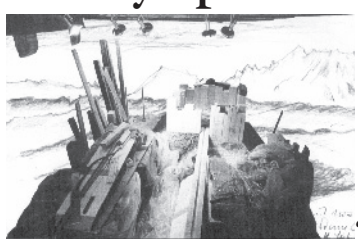
This was demonstrated most powerfully in a recent exhibition by the internationally renowned Swiss-born artist, ceramicist, and industrial designer (under the pseudonym C.H. Clayberg) Heinz Gerber, at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, in Soho.

Since 1970, Gerber has been creating a thematic cycle of sculptural works that have been featured in exhibitions, events, and happenings in Germany, Switzerland, France, Italy, England, the United States and elsewhere worldwide. Of the materials employed and his aesthetic and intellectual intentions, he has stated succinctly, "In the confrontation of wood and metal, concrete and water with clay, I displayed forms and deformations that stand in place for our human situation."

For the breadth and complexity of his vision, Gerber can only be compared to the German painter Anselm Keifer. Yet Gerber's work is concerned with more universal themes than Norse mythology and the conceptual sensibility behind even his most physically imposing productions frees him from materiality in a manner that made it possible to convey the spiritual substance of a large, no longer extant sculptural project originally shown in Solothurn, Switzerland, in 1984 and in a New York gallery in 2003.

The "Nymphaeum" that Gerber originally exhibited in Switzerland was created with a pyramidal block containing a wooden water retainer which, as described by the critic Fred Zaugg, of Berne, "could be interpreted as a small temple. The simple beam construction includes a narrow opening, a slit, out of which water flows into a wooden channel, supported by a clay base."

The rebirth of Gerber's "Nymphaeum" in his exhibition at Montserrat was accomplished by means of photographs of the original sculptural installation superimposed over colored pencil drawings that the artist made from the cockpit of an airplane in which he was flying over the Valais alps and then reproduced as large, inkjet prints on paper . The sculpture creates the sense of monumental architectural forms soaring heavenward out of a rough, mountainous terrain. With the sculpture looming against the backdrop of an aerial landscape that Gerber sketched from the cockpit, these



"Layers 6"

graphic representations go beyond resurrecting the spirit of the original exhibition. Rather, presented in eight poster-size segments, they create an almost cinematic sequence sense of a metaphysical terrain of transformation. Here, as Fred Zaugg points out, poetically, in an essay accompanying the exhibition at Montserrat, "the source returns to its origins in glaciers and clouds, thus completing the cycle of time, while on the other, clay — as a symbol of the Earth and life on our planet — is joined to the sky and cosmos. The work which was understood as a temporary creation when it was made, is thus released from the restraints of time." The holy site known in ancient times as the Nymphaeum, the home of the "source nymphs," was transformed into a powerful contemporary statement in this transcendent exhibition by Heinz Gerber, focused on a metaphysical space between earthly and heavenly terrains. —Peter Wiley

The "Circus Maximalism" of Barbara K. Schwartz

When we hear the word "circus," we normally think of more or less modern entertainments involving clowns, equestrians, aerialists, and acrobats, in the manner of those presented by Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey. However the term actually originated in ancient Rome as the Circensian games, brutal gladiatorial contests terminating in the deaths of the losing participants that took place within a circular arena thronged by bloodthirsty spectators.

Barbara K. Schwartz sees elements of both circuses—the clownish frivolity of Barnum and Bailey and the mindless violence of the Roman games—reflected in the television news and newspaper coverage of the terrorism and warmongering that increasingly shadows our lives.

Thus, Schwartz has titled her most recent body of works in mixed media "Circus Maximus," and employed circus imagery to symbolize the dangerous duplicity of present-day politics in her powerful new solo exhibition at Viridian Artists @ Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, from April 29 through May 17.

Characteristically, this widely exhibited artist employs a range of mixed media, including oils, oil crayons, acrylics, and gold leaf on archival quality paper and museum board, to create her memorable visual metaphors. She also adds found objects (such as the tiny figurines in "Giant Clowns & Little People"), along with fragments of drawings in ink, graphite, and charcoal. Although classically trained and possessed of surpassing draftspersonly abilities, she often subjects her exquisitely drawn figures to radical deconstruction to avoid predictability, defeat conventional compositional habits, and imbue her pictures with a stunning immediacy. The drama is often heightened by her penchant for setting brilliant colors against dark grounds to produce a peculiarly theatrical effect.

Such methods are especially effective in the present series, where fragmentation and striking shifts in scale —particularly in her images of aerialists, jugglers, and acrobats— are employed to approximate the sense of disequilibrium that the news media subjects us to with its daily, often distorted, reports of terrorism, war, and other atrocities. At the same time, her mastery of classical composition enables her to maintain a sense of balance that makes her paintings aesthetically appealing—even when she proceeds with the seemingly reckless daring of an aerialist performing without a net.

"Giant Clowns & Little People" 23" H X 19" W

Medium and message meld to create edgy pictorial tensions that add new meaning to Hans Hofmann's famous term "push and pull," in Schwartz's phantasmagorical circus maximalism. In "The Supreme Juggler, " for one splendid example, abstract swirls of movement as graceful yet muscular as the linear forms in Brice Marden's "Cold Mountain" series surround a sinister master of dexterity. Adding to the ominousness of the image is the fact that the orbs the figure juggles are circular mirrors, in which the viewer sees fragmented parts of him or herself.

Just as clearly reflected in another work entitled "The Clowns Fill Up the Entire Screen" is the artist's disgust with the blow-dried talking heads of television news and the politicians with whom they conspire to create absurd distortions of reality. Here, the painted features of a clown emerge forcefully from a composition that is equally striking in formal and symbolic terms, with its figurative fragments set within roughly geometric color areas that update the dynamism of the Russian Constructivists.

Such strong formal qualities invariably keep Schwartz's compositions from getting bogged down in the illustrational bywaters of Social Realism, no matter how directly she addresses specific issues. Her ability to captivate us in purely visual terms, even while juggling a complex range of personal symbols and meanings, is especially evident in "The Big Picture," where Xerox copies of her drawings, intricately patterned gift wrapping paper, and other collage elements are combined with vigorous gestural strokes of color to evoke performers under the Big Top and multitudinous spectators in a sweeping composition that suggests so much more than its ostensible subject.

Schwartz's multileveled symbolism comes to the forefront yet again in "Caged Space I," where photocopy images of prowling tigers, bits of suede, roofing tiles, and other diverse collage elements are combined with the figure of an animal trainer created with twisted wire. That the fierce beasts roam freely while the negative spaces within the wire figure suggest an empty cage raises intriguing questions. That she invariably leaves such questions unanswered, however, is what makes the art of Barbara K. Schwartz so open-ended, mysterious, and ultimately fascinating.

—Ed McCormack

Celebrating the Brush at New York Open Center

John Dilgen

For a Western artist, mastering Asian brush techniques can be a daunting discipline, since wielding a brush to practice calligraphy is as foreign to Western culture as eating with chopsticks, and, unlike people raised in Eastern cultures, occidentals do not normally develop the manual dexterity for either skill at an early age. But that it can be rare exceptions was demonstrated by the three artists featured in the Neiman exhibition "A Celebration of the Brush," at New York Open Center Tea House Gallery, 83 Spring Street, through April 12.

It is not enough, however, for a Western artist merely to master Eastern brush techniques. He or she must also bring something unique to the art, in order to accomplish more than a trick of cultural mimicry. Fortunately, John Dilgen, Eva G. Mihovich, and Carol Itzkowitz Neiman, the three artists featured here, each bring a great deal of themselves and their own cultural heritage to the paintings.

"I am an artist in the Sumi-E tradition," declares John Dilgen in an artist's statement and adds, "I am an American artist in my own time." And Dilgen makes clear that those two sentences are in no way contradictory by combining salient features of both Eastern and Western techniques to forge a strong personal style.

Carol Itzkowitz Neiman

One of the most dramatic examples of this crosscultural synthesis can be seen in Dilgen's painting "November Wind," a work in Sumi ink and watercolor that merges the linear grace and velocity of Asian ink painting with the coloristic richness of Western Expressionism. Graceful black tree limbs are overlaid by splashy dots of color that cover them like a dense rain of confetti, creating an exhilarating overall effect.

A similar subject is treated more monochromatically in Dilgen's "Full Moon Bloom," where the bold composition has a spareness akin to Zen literati painting. By contrast, "Catskills" transfigures a landscape in upstate New York into a classic Chinese landscape by virtue of his vigorous black brushstrokes set against gray and pale blue washes.

Carol Itzkowitz Neiman, another gifted brush artist, employs Sumi ink and watercolor on fibrous paper in generally smaller formats to create paintings notable for their intense colors and visionary poetry. Although working with Asian materials and exploiting their ethereal qualities most effectively, Neiman's landscapes share certain qualities in common with the great English painter J.M.W. Turner, as well as the American visionary Albert Pinkham Ryder.

In Neiman's paintings "Sunset — Blue Ridge Mountains" and "Through My Window," a combination of luminous and somber colors create magical atmospheres. In other paintings, such as her "Province" series, she brings cobblestone courtyards and archways that might have appealed to the Impressionists alive in her own unique manner and medium.

The third artist, Eva G. Mihovich, is especially adept in line, which she employs with admirable facility, velocity and spareness, proving the old saw that less can sometimes be more—particularly in ink painting.

Mihovich's "The Heavenly Horse" captures the grace and beauty of its equine subject with fluid strokes, while "The Arabian Horse" is a more tonally varied composition focusing on the curve of the animal's neck and its majestic head. Both paintings are notable for their dynamic monochromatic simplicity. Yet Mihovich is also a formidable colorist, as seen in her vibrant and fresh studies of floral subjects set crisply against the white of the paper, as well as in her more darkly saturated pictures such as 'Dusk," a shadowy atmospheric tour de force.

Eva G. Mihovich

Like the other two artists in this gem of a show in one of New York City's leading venues for holistic and New Age studies, Eva G. Mihovich contributes a vibrant contemporary sensibility to a venerable aesthetic tradition. —Marie R. Pagano

Form and Humanism in the Bronzes of Amy Bright Unfried

While trends in art come and go, those artists who have steadfastly refused to abandon the figure belong to a great tradition of humanism that extends from Ancient Greece through the Renaissance to the present. Amy Bright Unfried, who lives and works in Wyoming but exhibits here so frequently that one almost tends to think of her as a New York artist, surely belongs to this tradition, for she is as wholeheartedly committed to the human figure as any contemporary artist could be.

Although she has also worked in more abstract modes at various times in her career, and these sojourns into more modernistic modes of expression have doubtless contributed to her experience and proficiency as an artist, it is in classical realism that Unfried finds her most enduring inspiration for her sculptures in that most enduring of mediums, bronze.The aesthetic benefits that she has reaped from her unswerving devotion to her subject, which has preoccupied her since the 1980s, can be seen in her newest solo exhibition "Three Ways of Looking at the Figure," at the National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South, from April 17 through May 1, with a reception on Tuesday April 22, from 6 to 8 PM.

"Persephone"

Modeling her figures for casting by the lost wax process gives Unfried the immediacy and freedom that she needs to imbue her bronzes with their characteristic sense of movement and emotional expressiveness. And while her figures are anatomically accurate in the classical manner, her pieces are not polished smooth by machine tools after being cast in limited editions in the foundry. Rather, the finished bronzes retain subtle marks made by the artist's hands and tools as the pieces take shape in clay, which not only enhances their ability to catch light but lends them an added tactile vitality.

That Unfried often combines different colored patinas in a single piece for a polychrome effect also adds an element of painterliness to some of her pieces, as seen in the bronze she calls "Pomona." This animated piece depicts a slender yet shapely young woman dancing, her hands above her head as though frozen in the act of clapping. That her body-hugging dress is a shimmering green hue, while her skin is a warm brown and her hair has a brilliant black patina, gives the piece the rich pictorial evocativeness of a painting, even while retaining the volumic palpability and physical presence in space that belongs to sculpture alone.

In a more overtly classical mode are figures such as "Spindle Back Chair," a sensual seated female nude, and "Dreamer," a semi-reclining male nude with arms resting on a cushion suspended in space. In the former, a pale green patina enhances the flowing sense of unity that distinguishes the piece, while in the latter the contrasts between the pale green figure and the black seat and cushion directs our attention to the intriguingly metaphysical balancing act of a man leaning into empty space. By such means Unfried emphasizes the differences in the two figures, one projecting a sense of reposeful serenity, the other an edgy spatial tension.

The range of expressiveness in Unfried's work can also be studied by juxtaposing the portrait head "Grandfather," with the wall relief "Persephone." While one is a down-to-earth depiction of a modern man and the other a figure of myth, the two achieve equanimity in the timeless medium of bronze. Indeed, the elderly gentleman could easily be an ancient senator, while the young woman, her "big hair" adorned with various ornaments, could be a modern teenager dolled-up for the discotheque.

By contrast, "Winged Victory" spans time in a different manner, for while the headless green patina'd figure with flowing robes and outspread wings suggests classical antiquity, here Unfried's more generalized treatment of form and roughly gestural modeling is contrastingly abstract.

Along with a variety of figures expressing a wide range of moods and emotions, this exhibition also features sculptures from the "Tree Series," begun in 2001, when Unfried started casting small branches directly in bronze to create fanciful miniature trees adorned with leaves and blossoms and inhabited by creatures such as butterflies, birds, and squirrels.

By 2003, these pieces had developed more anthropomorphically to symbolize the unity of humans and their environment, culminating in the personification seen in "Tree Series II: Pas de Deux," where two slender saplings in close proximity suggest willowy dancers.

Even trees, apparently, lead Amy Bright Unfried back to her abiding fascination with the human figure as the ultimate subject for her fertile aesthetic explorations.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Soho Solos: Hesketh, Krejsova, Andranowski, and Lagunes

Testing the boundaries between figuration and abstraction,Gary Hesketh recently exhibited a group of strong black and white paintings at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

Born in Montreal, Canada, in 1950, educated at Champlain College and The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts School of Art & Design, Hesketh has stated, "In my new paintings I am expressing a revived discovery and relationship with the patterns of nature." In the paintings seen at Montserrat the aspect of nature in which Hesketh found patterns to explore was the female body and it proved a fertile field for discovery. Broadly brushed in black on a white ground, a brunette model in black bra and bikini panties struck casually seductive poses on a plane white field. While the figure was depicted in a convincingly realistic manner, the boldness of Hesketh's brushwork broke the compositions down into areas that could also be read as abstract patterns. The energetic execution added to the gestural power of the pictures, with vigorous slashes of black reminiscent of Franz Kline's monochromatic abstract expressionist canvases.

"It struck me after I had begun this new work that the new paintings were as close to music as a visual medium could get," Hesketh recently stated, and indeed these pictures are musical in their rhythmic sweep and a sense of improvisational immediacy akin to jazz. Hesketh breaks the female form down into severely simplified areas of abstract form, even while retaining its innate sensuality. Thus the paintings succeed simultaneously as formal and pictorial terms, making them compelling in more ways than one, in keeping with Hesketh's belief that it is the job of the artist to address "the rational and the abstract" and "reconcile the seeming incompatibility of the two." Indeed, this is one of the issues at the crux of postmodern art and Gary Hesketh appears to be a painter deeply involved with its solution.

Laura Krejsova, a Czech painter now exhibiting regularly in New York, also made a strong impression with a recent show in the same venue, revealing a good deal of variety and virtuosity with subjects ranging from a snow scene, to fanciful figure compositions with a fairy-tale quality, to paintings of great cosmic expanses filled with a sense of awe and mystery.

Krejsova is an intrepid young painter whose willingness to take risks pays off handsomely in compositions such as "Earthrise Above the Moon," which as its title indicates, wittily reverses the natural order in which we earthlings are accustomed to viewing things.

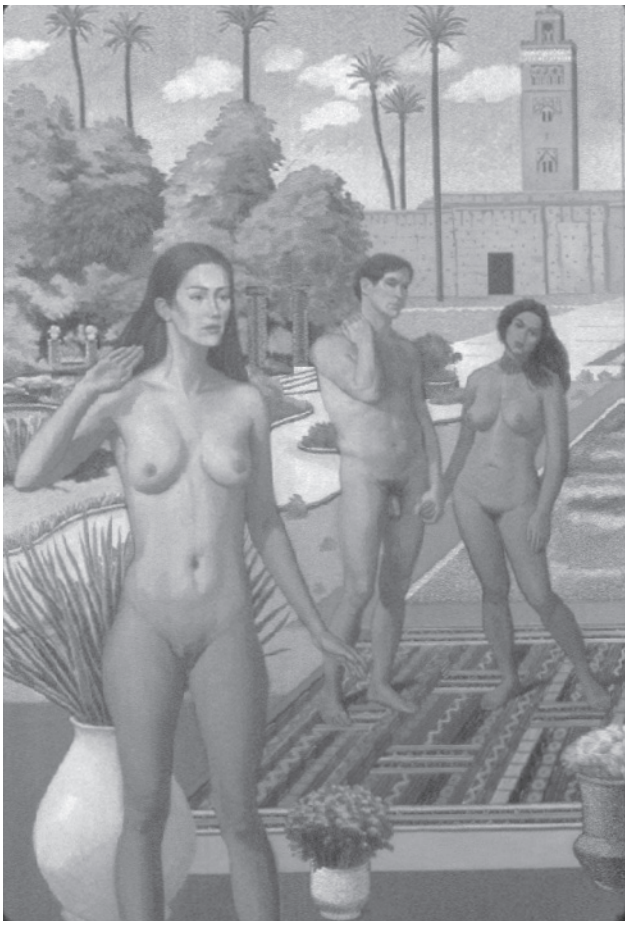
Also seen recently at Montserrat Gallery were works by Barbara Andranowski, whose "Baya Bottles" are unique art objects that close the gap between sculpture and fetishism. Encrusted with gemlike fragments, they have a tactile oddness akin to the chair covered with safety pins and other objects with which Lucas Samaras made his reputation in the 1960s. Like Samaras, Andranowski imbues familiar objects with an almost disturbing beauty. The bottle, a familiar prop of still life composition takes on an exotic quality in her work, like tribal relics whose ceremonial uses elude us but whose aesthetic qualities are undeniable.

Then there is Maria Lagunes, a gifted sculptor whose work can also be seen in the same venue's year-round salon exhibition. Lagunes' bronzes are composed of clusters of wavering forms, enlivened by negative spaces within, that simultaneously seem to suggest a sense of organic growth and decay. Her furled shapes flare upward like flames or undersea plant life, filled with a sense of movement and energy, suggesting not only natural phenomena but the hidden forces behind them.

Lagunes appears acutely attuned to the role of sculpture in art as a steadying influence amid the clamor and contention created by the constantly shifting styles of its sister art, painting. Her pieces have a stolid presence and a sense of inevitability, like the aspects of nature from which they spring. Although abstract, they are possessed of a classical calm that soothes and comforts the viewer.

—Maureen Flynn

Vincent Arcilesi in Morocco: Postmodernism Meets Omar Khayyam



"Al Badi Palace Marakesh," left panel

If not for the misleading onus of criminality it might invite, one would be tempted to call Vincent Arcilesi's new exhibition of paintings "Gangs of Morocco." For like Martin Scorsese's film "Gangs of New York," this show, with its large cast of characters, ornate settings, and exotic costumes (at least in the case of those few figures that are clothed) is Arcilesi's long-awaited epic.

After catching our attention with paintings that monumentalized explicit acts of lovemaking, Arcilesi cemented his reputation as one of our most adventurous realists with dreamlike scenes of comely nudes and semi-nudes comporting themselves as casually as grazing cattle in public settings in the world's great cities.

In his Moroccan series, Arcilesi outdoes himself, evoking an ornate sensuality reminiscent of The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, even while maintaining the neoclassical cool that makes his large multi-figure compositions such impressive formal feats.

Although he does not hesitate to take poetic liberties, rearranging landscapes and landmarks to suit his compositional whims, Arcilesi unfailingly captures the specific atmospheres of the places he paints, just as he remains faithful to the individual features and figures of his models.

Rather than stylizing his nudes as generic archetypes in the manner of less exacting realists, Arcilesi emphasizes their quirky modern beauty, lifting the veil on art's artifice to remind us that the past masters he emulates probably found models for their mythic themes among the milkmaids and peasant girls of their time.

For all the meticulous detail he invests in his pictures, Arcilesi's brushwork never gets fussy. His paint surfaces remain fresh and fluid, filled with the vitality of warm sunlight, soft flesh, and crystalline air, as seen in "Al Badi Palace, Marrakesh, 2002-03," the magnificent nine-by-eighteen-foot centerpiece of his present exhibition at Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street, from May 13th through June 1st.

Here, Arcilesi merges two picturesque sites in Marrakesh: The Majorelle Garden, a lush botanical extravaganza owned by Yves St. Laurent, and Al Badi Palace, once the home of Sultan Ahmed el Mansour and now a majestic 16th century ruin. No less than eight nude figures and three costumed ones, including two Moroccan musicians in long robes and a flamenco dancer with her skirt aswirl, make up this complex scene. Their ebony-to-ivory skin pigmentations suggest the rich ethnic diversity of Morocco, as they strike animated poses amid an array of ornate Berber rugs, potted plants, luminous bathing pools, exotic architecture, and towering palm trees.

Further enlivened by cumuli like cotton-balls tossed against a clear blue sky, in which the red flash of the Moroccan flag provides yet another piquant accent, this superbly choreographed composition seduces the eye and stimulates the imagination on several levels simultaneously.

Along with a baker's dozen of the gem-like plein air landscapes that Arcilesi invariably paints to acclimate himself to a new locale, the Moroccan series includes two other major canvases. In "La Menara, Marrakesh," an elaborately costumed palace guard is bracketed between and dwarfed by two Amazonian nudes.

Looming symmetrically as classical columns against a low horizon where an elegant nineteenth century pavilion is set against a reflective lagoon under the sharp peaks of the Atlas Mountains, the two statuesque beauties take on monumental proportions.

The third large canvas "Moroccan Odalisque" is an inevitable subject for a painter so smitten with art history. Only, Arcilesi's harem scene denudes the pasha as well as his concubine. Wearing only his turban, he stands beside her with his prominent paunch and "family jewels" unselfconsciously exposed. A voluptuous blond, she sits, legs slightly parted, exuding the comfortable sexual confidence of a spouse, rather than the diffidence of a slave or a concubine.

With the desert sands and palm trees visible through an arched doorway nearby, they seem as easeful and erotically attuned as vacationing honeymooners, personifying the audacious beauty that makes the paintings of Vincent Arcilesi so uniquely appealing.

"Essaouira"

—Ed McCormack

The Linear Lyricism of Ingrid Rosas

It seems auspicious that the Mexican painter Ingrid Rosas, who has published a collection of poetry entitled "Between Heaven and Exile," is a writer as well as a visual artist, since her paintings not only incorporate words and phrases but also gain their thrust from ecriture—that gestural juncture at which handwriting and painting meet and merge.

Widely exhibited in both Mexico and Canada, Rosa's recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, showcased an exquisite sensitivity to linear lyricism. Her mixed media paintings, like those of the two American artists Mark Tobey and Morris Graves, seem to spring from an Asian source, in that they are calligraphic rather than painterly in the Western sense of the term. Rosas, however, does not by any means imitate Asian techniques or themes. Rather, she employs line as an autonomous expressive entity to convey a highly personal sensibility through abstract means.

In some works, she effectively combines word and image to especially poetic effect, much in the manner of the literati painter/poets of ancient China and Japan.

In the "Way to Heaven," for example, floating forms resembling butterflies are juxtaposed with thrusting vertical strokes that suggest tall weeds. These elements are enclosed within a border in which the artist has written out the following poetic text: "Wake up / Long is the way to heaven / Thorns in the shadow / Wake up / Open the wings of your soul." This exhortation, combined with the swiftly drawn imagery, has a directness and simplicity akin to the

"Trail 4003"

avant garde "picture poems" of Kenneth Patchen and Bob Brown. Indeed, Rosas achieves a similarly successful synthesis of word and image, placing her in the artist lineage that includes medieval illuminators, the great English visionary William Blake, and the French surrealist poet Henri Michaux. Like great such predecessors, Ingrid Rosas strives to simultaneously merge and transcend her two mediums, to create a multidimensional form of expression that appeals to both sides of the brain simultaneously.

At the same time, however, some of her paintings can stand on their own as visual expressions, as seen in "Trail 4003," a work in oil and acrylic in which cursive black calligraphic forms flow in rhythmic waves and are intersected by a vertical red line that traverses the composition swiftly, as though laid down in a single bold stroke. Here, Rosa' forceful gestural velocity recalls Jackson Pollock. By contrast, another work in mixed media, entitled "Encounter 4006," achieves a more delicate lyricism, as well as an allusive symbolism, with graffiti-like crosses and simplified floral forms scrawled onto a subtly modulated surface enlivened by areas of white pigment scumbled over a tan ground.

In these paintings, as well as the larger composition called "Chronos 4001," notable for the tension the artist creates between rhythmic linear shapes and a row of regular rectangular shapes, Ingrid Rosas employs her elegant ecriture to create compositions in which painting and poetry meet and marry happily.

—Gloria Feinberg

Master Drawings from Italy at Gelabert

It is always newsworthy when a commercial gallery hosts an exhibition of museum quality. Just such a show was "Disegni Italiani, XVI - XX secolo," an exhibition of Old Master and somewhat more modern Italian drawings, recently presented in conjunction with Galleria Marcello Aldega, at Gelabert Studios Gallery, 255 West 86th Street.

This show was a literal treasure trove of works on paper, including a magnificent drawing in pen and brown ink with traces of black chalk on tan paper by Baccio Bandinelli (1493–1560), a Florentine sculptor and pupil of Rustici who was much favored by the Medicis. The drawing, entitled "Four Female Nudes," its subject a rarity in Bandinelli's oeuvre, is notable for its fine crosshatchings and the languor of the figures, reminiscent of the artist's well known work, "A Group of Standing Male Nudes," at Christ Church, Oxford.

The Italian painter Paris Bordone (1500–71), admired for his arresting portraits of women, as well as his narrative paintings of secular and religious subjects, was also well represented with "Man leaning Forward with Arm Extended," a drawing in his preferred medium of black and white chalk on blue paper. Although a pupil of Titian for a time, he developed his own, more linear style. The drawing seen here, although bold and sketchy, shared qualities in common with the rhythmic treatment of the figures in "Fishermen giving the ring to the Doge," Bordone's great painting in the Accademia, in Venice.

Another major work in the exhibition was by Cristofano Roncalli (1551/52 – 1626), called Il Pomarancio, an essentially self-taught artist who fused aspects of Mannerism with his own ideas, executed many prestigious fresco commissions, and became a favorite of the pontifical court. "Seated Male Prisoner with Trophies in the Background," the large oil on paper, en grisaille, in this exhibition demonstrates how successfully Roncalli assimilated the influences of Raphael and Michelangelo to forge his own monumental and forceful style. The picture is remarkable for its command of monochromes to create an almost sculptural sense of form.

Roncalli/Pomarancio was also represented in this show by "Flying Angel," a masterful drawing in red chalk related to one of the figures in his painting "The Nativity," in the W.E. McConnell Collection, Stocksfield, Northumberland.

One of the truly unusual works in the exhibition, given its fully developed painterly qualities, was "Landscape with Buildings," an oil on paper by Alessio De Marchis (1684 - 1752), a Neapolitan landscape specialist primarily influenced by Dutch Italianate landscape artists and the late work of the French painter Dughet. Here, De Marchis demonstrates his command of color and atmosphere in a pastoral scene capturing the precise qualities of early evening light. At the same time, there is a sense of imagination and mystery in this exquisite little oil akin to the much later work of the American visionary Albert Pinkham Ryder.

Christofano Roncalli

Another anomalous little stand-out in this show was "Portrait of a Woman in Profile," a simple drawing in black charcoal by the internationally renowned portraitist Giovanni Boldini (1842 – 1931). Although Boldini knew Manet and Degas and although the rapid brushwork and tonal range in his paintings was influenced by Hals and Velasquez, the vivacity and the sense of caricature in the this charming sketch recalled Toulouse-Lautrec.

Also including splendid drawings by Novelli, Testa, Leoni, Benso, Pippi, and Bartolozzi, among others, "Disegni Italiani, XVI – XX secolo" was a landmark of the season, beautifully installed in one of the Upper West Side's more elegant exhibition spaces.

—J. Sanders-Eaton

The Sumptuous Food Paintings of Marie-Louise McHugh

Such is the complexity of modern life that our relationship to food has evolved over the past century or so from an obsession with getting enough of it to stay alive to an obsession with making sure we don't eat so much that we kill ourselves—or, even worse, gain a few pounds and fall grossly out of fashion.

Eating disorders such as a anorexia (systematic self-starvation) and bulimia (gorging and purging) have reached epidemic proportions, particularly among young women, we are advised avuncularly by the same mass media that seduces us with images of impossibly thin young models, many of whom apparently suffer from the syndrome themselves.

The performance artist Vanessa Beercroft, who has made a career out of documenting her food obsessions, with which she has been struggling since adolescence, recently told a reporter for the New Yorker, "In the end, I don't even care if people say I'm a good artist. I only care whether or not I'm fat."

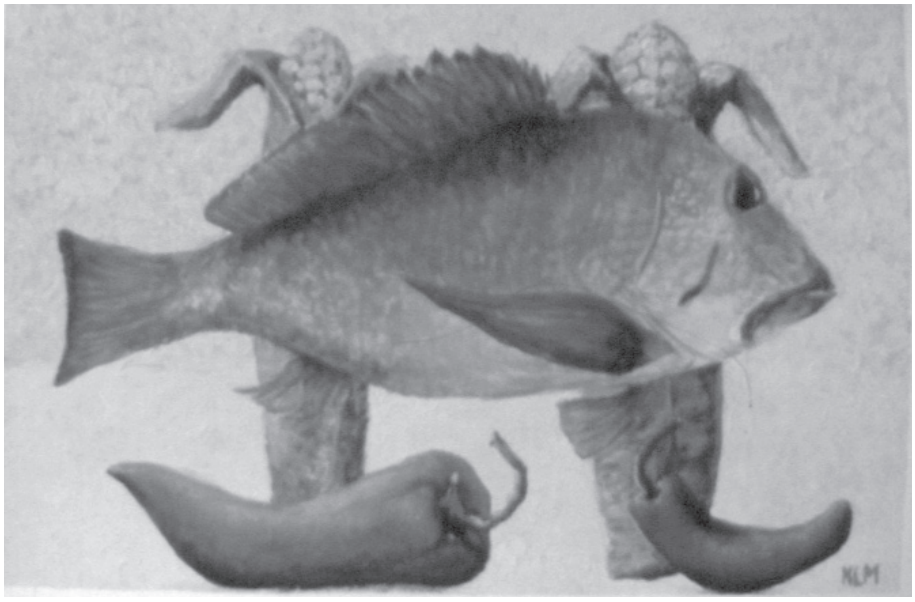
What a refreshing relief it is, then, in this clinically dysfunctional climate of starving and gorging and purging and kvetching about body-image, to encounter the painter Mary-Louise McHugh's wholesome and delectable solo show, "All About Food," at Phoenix Gallery, 568 Broadway, from April 30 through May 24.

And how refreshing it is as well to hear an artist talk about her work in a manner that is angst-free, direct, informative, and relevant to the paintings themselves, as McHugh does when she says, "My love for organic shapes (pears, female nudes, cones, flowers) led me to this new body of work. Last year, while working on a small family cookbook, I started exploring simple images of food and ended up creating a number of small still life paintings grouping ingredients for various recipes, appetizers, entries and desserts. The small size of my canvases allowed me to explore the use of thicker and more textured application of paint. I wanted to create luscious, colorful and sensuous small works in oil."

While McHugh is also known for nudes celebrating full-figured womanly beauty, as well as surreal narrative compositions, here she paints edibles exclusively, imparting to them an elusive and pregnant symbolism that makes these small canvases fully as fascinating as her larger, more complex compositions. Indeed, their intimate scale enhances her food paintings, which gain in intensity from close scrutiny. In this regard, her approach is the opposite of that of Andy Warhol, who when he painted objects such as the familiar soup can emphasized their mundane, everyday qualities as deadpan icons of consumerism. That was his whole shtick, after all: bland is beautiful. By contrast, nothing in the world appears to be bland or mundane to Marie-Louise McHugh, who invests the most ordinary objects with a heightened significance by virtue of her coloristic intrepidness and the sensual emphasis that she imparts to forms. This is seen to particular advantage in "Pear," which along with another sizable work called "Gourd" is an anomalously large canvas in a show of mostly small pictures. Its subject could not be simpler: a big, juicy yellow pear set against a vibrant red ground. The pear is painted in a perfectly realistic manner, not in the least bit distorted, yet its swelling curves are so femininely alluring that one cannot help but see its broad bottom portion as a pair of shapely buttocks. Not that McHugh puts too fine a point on this or strives for a sense of surreal metamorphosis or anything quite so tritely obvious as that. She is simply pointing out how forms in nature tend to replicate themselves in different organic entities, and in doing so, she takes something very simple out of the realm of the mundane and puts it into that of the fabulous. This is what painting, in its purest and most abstract form is supposed to do, and McHugh succeeds splendidly in making this "portrait" of a particular pear an object of aesthetic delectation. She does this by virtue of the picture's chromatic intensity and the sensuousness that she lavishes not only on the fruit itself but that beautifully modulated red background with her brush work.

These qualities, which are foregrounded by the simplicity of the composition in "Pear," also elevate the smaller paintings in this show, where McHugh explores the more complex relationships between more varied edibles with winning visual wit. These paintings truly are staged dramas starring organic actors, rather than still lifes in any conventional sense of the term. For one thing, most of the fruits are not seen on a tabletop, as is usually the case in nature morte. Rather, they are suspended against the solid yet sumptuously modulated background color as if in space, which lends the compositions a metaphysical rather than down-to-earth quality.

This sense of fantasy is pushed even further by the odd way that McHugh puts the objects together, as seen "Fish & Polenta," where the large pink fish that dominates the composition is arranged horizontally against two upright ears of corn with small red pimentos at their bottoms resembling pointed elf-shoes. As in one of the 17th century Milanese painter Giuseppe Arcimboldi's fantastic heads composed of fruits, flowers and vegetables, the configuration takes on an anthropomorphic quality, as if the fish has grown legs and is about to flee the composition before preparation for dinner gets underway.



"Fish & Polenta"

Other amusing readings can be given to other paintings, such as "Fish for Dinner," in which two asparagus stalks lie across the neck of a fish like pillories or the blade of a guillotine; "Fish and Chips," in which the fish enters from the top of the composition staring down dolefully at a pair of asparagus propped against a potato; and "3 Pimentos," in which the trio of peppers lines up against a luscious yellow ground like a tap-dancing trio.

But while it's fun to speculate on what they may mean, the real deliciousness in the new oils of Marie-Louise McHugh has to do with their colors, forms, textures—the staples that nourish and sustain all good painting.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Catching Up with László Paizs, Hungary's Greatest Living Artist, in Soho

László Paizs "Standing Figure, No. 2"

Although this column normally partakes of the editorial "we," being a collaborative effort with my wife and editor Jeannie McCormack, chronicling sundry subjects encountered in our wanderings around the city, in this issue I will break with tradition to relate a story from personal experience that may help to put into perspective why four decades had to pass before László Paizs, Hungary's greatest living artist, could have his first U.S. exhibition, at Westwood Gallery, in Soho.

Several years ago, before the collapse of communism, Rolling Stone magazine, for which I wrote regular feature stories and a column called "New York Confidential" sent me to Hungary to write about a rock band called Locomotiv GT, then commonly referred to as "the Beatles of Budapest."

They were the first Iron Curtain band to sign with an American record label, RCA, and tour the States. But as luck would have it, one of their original members, landing in L.A. and deciding that it was Rock and Roll Heaven, had defected. Ever since, the Hungarian Supergroup had been grounded by the Ministry of Culture. Still, convinced that publicity could conquor even politics, and that Soviet Bloc Boogie was going to be the Next Big Thing, Jann Wenner, the editor and publisher of Rolling Stone, had scheduled the story for a cover piece. The plan was that I would go over first and get started on the story. Then, Annie Leibovitz, with whom I had recently collaborated on a cover profile of the Jamaican reggae star Bob Marley, would follow in a few days to photograph the band. (This was some time before Leibovitz had such clout that, on the strength of her reputation, a whole hunkering herd of Hollywood leading men would gather in one place at one time to pose together for a Vanity Fair group portrait. The world didn't come to Annie yet; Annie still went to it.)

Minutes after I arrived in Budapest I caused considerable commotion in the airport simply by trying to buy a pack of cigarettes with American currency. Joe Laux, Locomtiv GT's drummer and his wife Anne Adami, who wrote the band's lyrics, had to cough up the required forints and spirit me out of there in their Mercedes before a riot erupted.

Ed McCormack (left) wih Anna, Joe, and the other members of Locomotiv GT backstage in Budapest.

Later, as we recovered in an espresso bar in the Buda, the oldest and most beautiful part of the city, they told me how skittish the Ministry of Culture was about popular youth music. The couple were rock and roll royalty, filthy rich by socialist standards. They had the Mercedes, the much sought-after American-made jeans, the lizard skin boots, a palatial pad in the Buda—the whole megillah. Yet they constantly had to be looking over their shoulders wondering when the Ministry was going to lower the boom. They explained that in Hungary there were three cultural categories: Approved, Tolerated, and Banned. At present, rock and roll was Tolerated—but only to keep a lid on the kids, since no one was sure what they might do if the government took away their musical opiate.

"Who knows?" Anna mused. "Maybe the kids would take to the streets with molotov cocktails, like in 1956, if the Ministry didn't tolerate us! So we're safe for now. But at any moment that could change..."

As it turned out, her forebodings were not all that far-fetched. For while I was able to watch the band play for a wildly enthusiastic young audience in Budapest the following night, later in the week something ominous happened: We traveled with the three other band members to a gig in a city called Miskolc, only to be greeted by hundreds of despondent young people milling about in the parking lot behind the darkened and locked concert hall.The gig had been mysteriously canceled, and the band felt so sorry for their disappointed fans that they told them I was a visiting American rock star to whom they had been telling me I bore a striking resemblance, and had me forge his autograph to cheer the kids up.

The next day, after returning from a meeting at the Ministry to which he had been hastily summoned, Joe told us that the gig had been aborted because the officials did not think an American journalist should see the inelegant workers' hall where the band was to play. After other gigs were canceled and it became clear that the Ministry was going to thwart all of my efforts to get my story, I called Jann and told him to save Annie's air fare; I was coming home...

The next day at the airport, as Anna and Joe and I hugged goodbye and vowed to see each other soon in New York, I had the feeling that my visit to Hungary may have hindered rather than helped their chances of bringing Soviet Bloc Boogie back to the U.S.A. And as it turned out, Locomotiv GT never did release their American album or tour here again...

We can only be thankful that fine art has a much longer shelf-life than rock music. Still, László Paizs' first American exhibition was decades overdue and James Cavello, the co-owner of Westwood Gallery, who curated it, can tell you that transcontinental culture shock is still alive and well in Budapest.

"The people were wonderful—I love the Hungarian people—but some of the situations that we encountered there were absolutely unreal," he told me, rolling his eyes heavenward.

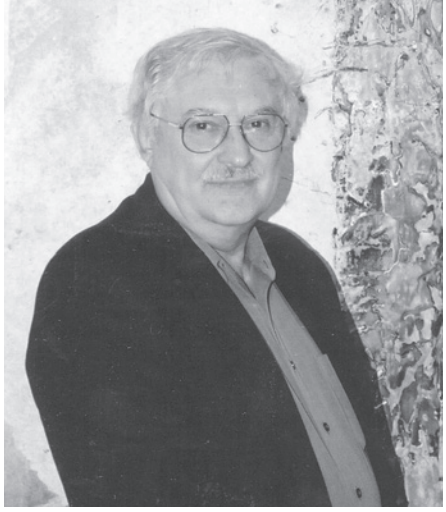
"It's almost as if some residue of paranoia left over from the communist era still haunts many of the people there," Margarite Almeida, Cavello's svelte, savvy business partner confirmed. "They act really uptight about little things that would seem insignificant to us. Like, if we wanted to order eggs after the breakfast hour, it seemed to cause consternation and even a certain amount of suspicion!"

But despite some of the more harrowing experiences—including a mad Magyar pilot who insisted, harrowingly, on taking the two visiting Americans touring in a rickety prop-driven aeroplane that Cavello terms "a vintage antique"— both agree that the trip was well worth it. And Cavello tells why in his curator's statement in the exhibition catalog:

"When I first saw László Paizs' painting in his studio in Budapest, Hungary, I felt like an explorer who had made a discovery.The paintings appeared to be modern day relics of a past civilization, partial figures excavated with heavy textured polyester and glimmering tones of pink, silvery or golden hues. I found myself contemplating each work of art. After a few steps around the studio I saw an eerie light, a red glow from embers floating within a block of plexiglass. Upon closer view, I noticed that they were actually the remains of burned pages of books, some pages still appearing to be on fire, trapped forever in a clear acrylic block. This work reflected a moment Mr. Paizs experienced during the 1956 revolution in front of a bookstore in Budapest. He watched as classic volumes of Marxist-Leninist books were thrown onto the pavement and the piles were set aflame. In his words, it conjures the moment into a 'conscious fossil.'"

Although not a man generally given to understatement, Cavello was putting it mildly when he told me recently that he also was determined to show László Paizs' work in New York, because, "Here is a man who has dedicated his entire life to his art and has had to fight every step of the way to do it."

After completing his studies at the College of Applied Arts in Budapest in 1959,



László Paizs at Westwood Gallery

Laszlo Paizs had to "kick against the pricks," to borrow Ezra Pound's felicitous phrase, since young artists in Hungary were routinely cautioned by cultural watchdogs against indulging in "petit-bourgeois pedantry" and straying into the "bog of abstractionism."

In the late sixties, after years of showing only innocuous still lifes, Paizs was finally able to exhibit a few of his nonobjective oils in a group show at the Studio of Young Artists in Budapest.

"I felt that here at last I was being given the chance to catch up with the century in which I was living," he recalls wryly in a hefty volume dedicated to his work, published in Budapest in 2000. "I didn't mean 1967; I meant more like 1900 or 1910..."

But even this minor progress was reversed the following year, after Paizs had abandoned oils to experiment with mixed media, when some of his new mixed media works were yanked from an exhibition by officials and dumped into a basement storeroom, along with works by several other young artists who had gone too far afield of officially sanctioned aesthetics. Around the same time, even the architectural commissions by which he and his fellow artists had been earning a meager living were suddenly withdrawn.

"This was too big a blow; some of us never really recovered from it," he was later to recall. "...I knew that there was no way I was going to be able to exhibit those pictures, and everything to do with painting, everything I had learned thus far, began to seem hopeless."

Tormented by the thought of his works rotting away in a damp cellar, a lightbulb lit up above Paizs' head after he saw insects preserved in plexiglass in a shop window. But since the raw materials for making plexiglass were hard to come by in Hungary, he had to experiment for years—often at risk to life and limb, he recalls: "The chemists had no idea how to do it or what kind of catalysts I should use to get a thick block of plexiglass. I worked it out for myself...until I got it right there were one or two explosions in my studio."

Once objects are embedded in plexiglass they "lose their impermanence, they are given new value, they become timeless" Paizs noticed when he finally accomplished some of these works, which were to be among his most enduring in more ways than one. Enigmatically combining objects such as articles of clothing, egg-shells, newspapers, an exploded TV tube, charred books, beetles, and even the skeletons of small animals, they are nothing short of postmodern masterpieces. Indeed, they are equal to the best works of Joseph Beuys and Anselm Kiefer for the emotional resonance that Paizs imparts to unexpected materials, as well as for the daring and compex statements that they make.

While U.S. Pop art parodied conspicuous consumerism, Paizs' earliest plexiglass pieces, created in 1969 and containing items of deconstructed clothing, poked perilously pointed fun at the shoddy workmanship of Hungary's state-owned factories. The following year, a powerful plexiglass piece "Gauze Mushroom Cloud" addressed the threat of nuclear war from a humanistic, nonpartisan perspective well outside the guidelines of socialist realism. While much American Pop art of the same period now seems dated, Paisz's work continues to resonate in a way that once again, alas, seems disturbingly prophetic. But it has always been a sign of Paizs' greatness that he never tries to ingratiate himself to the viewer, neither in his choice of materials or the cold facts he employs them to convey, as seen in pieces such as "Atomic Cloud with Dog's Backbone," which makes its point with poignant and unflinching eloquence.

Predictably, Paizs had to finance his own exhibition when he showed his plexiglass pieces in 1971, since Tolerated art was not supported by the state. Just as predictably, the reaction from the state's critical sycophants was hostile ("empty and vapid wittering," carped one), although most of these works would eventually end up in major public collections. Indeed, by persevering and learning to navigate the system, Paizs managed to continue exhibiting in Hungary over the next couple of decades, to execute large sculptural commissions in hotels and other public places, and even to participate in the 1980 Venice Biennale. Yet, even as his fame grew and certain aspects of his work found popular acceptance, the continuing climate of cultural repression made it necessary to constantly fight for "the Hungarian avant garde's right to exist."

Hon. András Simonyl, Ambassador of the Republic of Hungary, Ms. Margarite Almeida, co-owner of Westwood Gallery, Mrs. Simonyl and Mr. James Cavello, co-owner of Westwood Gallery and curator of the exhibition, at Westwood Gallery.

For all intents and purposes, for much of his miraculously productive career, like Locomotiv GT's music, László Paizs' art was merely tolerated before the old regime fell and the new one rushed to embrace him as a native genius.

Ironically, the artist was finally able to give formal thanks to a long list of cultural, corporate, and government sponsors (including something called the "Ministry for Cultural Heritage") for helping to make his first American exhibition at Westwood Gallery possible. Andras Simonyi, Ambassador of the Republic of Hungary and his wife were among the many dignitaries in attendance at the gala opening reception, and it was rumored that no less a connoisseur of cultural politics than Henry Kissinger had ducked into 578 Broadway one afternoon to have a peek at the show.

Aptly entitled "Embodiment," the exhibition was installed by Cavello in the gallery's spacious and handsome exhibition rooms with the stately dignity of a museum survey, and provided a comprehensive retrospective of Paizs development from the 1960s to the present. Among the most recent works were a series of large works signaling Paizs' return to oil painting. Created over the past three years, the paintings in the "Standing Figure" series, are based on the outlines of the ancient Greek sculptures. Ideal in form yet dramatically eroded, they are monumental in scale and built up to relief-like tactility with oil and polyester enlivened by metallic pigments.While one critic referred to them as "a modern version of the classical and Renaissance ideal of beauty," they also suggest human fossils, like the mummified, partially decomposed bodies preserved for centuries in the peat bogs of Ireland. At once heroic and vulnerable, they can be seen as totems for modern man, his flesh flayed and stripped bare by the corrosive acids of modern existence. Yet, on closer inspection one can also discern the hint of a phantom wing jutting out from some of the figures' armless shoulders, suggesting the possibility of transcendence...

Indeed, the transcendent qualities of art —its ability to survive in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, official or otherwise, and finally triumph in the end—is just one of the lessons that one took away from this important exhibition. Granted, it was hardly the year's hot ticket like Matisse/Picasso at MoMa Queens or one of those other worthy yet redundant mass cultural exercises, in which the public is herded through museum corridors as crowded as rush hour subways to gawk upon familiar greatness at twenty bucks a clip.

No, Paizs at Westwood was something infinitely more rare: an exhibition in a private gallery that introduced a mature master to a whole new audience. In his curator's statement James Cavello said that he felt like "an explorer who had made a discovery." And while it is true that Cavello is not a man given to understatement, one must concur that coming upon the work of László Paizs at this late date is very much like stumbling upon an entire continent that one did not know was there.

Dr. László Mólnar, Ambassador of the Republic of Hungary to the United Nations, Mrs. Paizs, Ms. Agnes Niemetz, Ms. Diane Monet, Ms Margarite Almeida, co-owner of Westwood Gallery and Mr. James Cavello, co-owner of Westwood Gallery and curator of the exhibition, at Westwood Gallery.

—Ed McCormack

Alan Munro:

"Gooch" Acrylic over bone pigment 16" X 20"

Some of us still think of the great state of Alaska in the same breath as the French Foreign Legion, as a semi-imaginary last outpost of adventure, populated by hard-drinking fugitives and roughnecks right out of Jack London or more recent potboilers such as Joe McGinnis' "Going to Extremes."

Never mind that all manner of unexpected people settle in Alaska for a host of complex and often mundane reasons. Take the painter Alan Munro, for example. A self described "native New Yorker from Old Westbury," he was no outcast drifter in flight from a checkered past on that "rainy, windy and very black night" in 1971, when he and his wife disembarked from the ferry at Juneau with "five of our seven kids, two dogs, an overstuffed green Volkswagen bus

Alaskan Artist, American Original

and a silver eighteen foot Sears canoe."

In fact, Munro, who has earned his living painting murals and designing and constructing dioramas for museums and cites "working alongside mature, accomplished artist friends at the American Museum of Natural History in New York" as among his "most important art experiences," had accepted a museum job in Alaska.

"We were more than willing to try Alaska for one year and then ended up staying twenty-eight and counting," says Munro, whose work has flourished in the state, where the distinctive rhythms, colors, and atmospheres of the rugged landscape and the native culture— as well as quite literal depictions of the wildlife— have increasingly found their way into his figurative works and also come to inform his more abstract canvases.

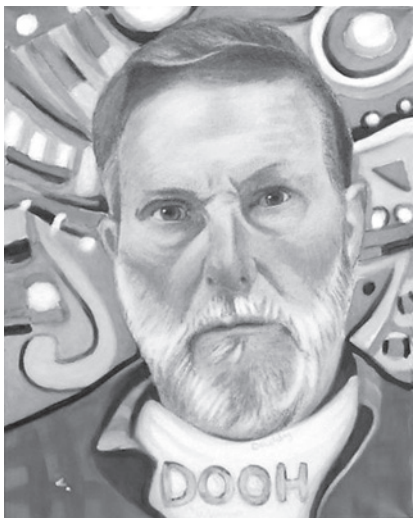
It may surprise some who cling to patronizing notions of Alaska as a place where so-called civilized culture seldom intrudes, to learn there are actually several fine museums in the state. Among them are: the Alaska State Museum, where Munro had solo shows in 1973 and 1977; the Anchorage Art Museum, where he participated in the All Alaska Juried Exhibition in 2000-01; and the CBJ Museum, in Juneau, where his new solo exhibition is on view through April 19.

In the present survey, "Moose, Mountains, and Men," Munro employs words from the Tlingit language, limned in bold block-letters, in some paintings. Combined with his strong forms, clear, bright color areas, and iconographic compositions, these words lend the paintings a poster-like emblemism. Yet their meanings go beyond post-Pop semiotics to touch a raw nerve in Alaskan culture.

In one painting, for example, the odd-looking word "XOOTS"— a Tlingit native noun for "brown bear"— is superimposed on the chest of an imposing grizzly, standing upright with great creaturely dignity against a background of swirling abstract shapes. In Pop terms, the picture could be seen as anthropomorphically amusing, suggesting a burly football player wearing his team name on his jersey. At the same time, there is a deeper, more elegiac meaning to the painting, a poignant plea for the continuation of this noble species.

Munro explains that certain aspects of his paintings are "directed at the cliche Alaska enjoys amongst the urban, high-art establishment and most Alaskan tourists," and he admits that "I knowingly play right into their hands with this recent work." On the other hand, he adds, "I'm an adopted Tlingit and do take that lifelong responsibility and great honor very seriously."

Another recent painting juxtaposes the word "GOOCH," (Tlingit for "Alaska Gray Wolfe—a species found only on the mainland and in rare instances on a nearby island) with strongly stylized images of these beautiful wild canines set against luminous areas of color. Here again, while the composition needs no explication to be savored as an aesthetic entity, it enriches one's appreciation to learn from Munro that it also refers to "native subsistence issues, ones presently being hotly debated politically and so far not being addressed or resolved. The white sports hunters want equal access to 'game' regardless of the cultural necessity of their use of this wild game for traditional food. And wolves are being targeted by whites for mass destruction under the guise of required predator control."



"Daddy Dooh"

A jolting one-two punch is delivered in two other paintings by Munro: In the first, "Guwakaan," the Tlingit noun for "Black Tail Deer" is superimposed in white on the tall evergreens in a snowy forest where one of the graceful animals pauses; in the second, a lone deer lies dead in blood-stained snow.

By contrast, a bold and insightful self portrait depicts the white-bearded artist against backdrop of sinuous forms. While Munro's grave expression, as well as the placement of the block letters inscribed across his upper chest, suggest a mug-shot, it turns out that the word "DOOH" is not a Tlingit term for the artist-as-endangered-species— but, rather, a pet name that his youngest daughter bestowed on him!

Equally upbeat in another manner is "Clear-cut Eagle," a dynamic canvas in which the majestic avian figure of the title emerges from characteristically vibrant areas of color, exemplifying Munro's unique ability to combine figurative and abstract elements in a seamless synthesis.

Indeed, along with other strong canvases featuring human and animal figures (one with the English word "MOOSE" lettered in blue over a monochromatic image of the winningly doleful mammal is especially appealing), Munro is also represented by some of the more gestural abstract compositions that are an equally important part of his oeuvre. These works, with their intricate configurations of colorful, rhythmic shapes, are invariably inspired by nature as well. In some, liberal areas of white suggest the patterns made by thawing snow. In others, starkly simplified animal shapes reveal an affinity for primitivistic forms akin to that of the Cobra group.

Munro, however, is a quintessentially American artist in the tradition of such early twentieth century pioneers as Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, and Georgia O'Keeffe, who looked toward Europe yet developed their own inimitable brand of homespun Yankee abstraction. Alan Munro has revived and updated their raw vitality for the postmodern age. Only, Munro found his aesthetic frontier in Alaska, and he has explored it richly and adventurously, giving us some of the most original, passionate, and powerful images in recent American painting.

—Ed McCormack

The Casual Magic in the Landscapes of Chong-Ok Matthews

There is a species of visionary landscape painting that partakes of the best of two worlds, for it evokes a true sense of place, even while conveying something more general and ethereal about the poetic qualities of nature. One of the more promising contemporary exponents of this tendency is Chong-Ok Matthews, an artist who has already had several impressive solo and group exhibitions in the U.S., England, France, Italy, Denmark, and Spain, among other places, and whose work is a pleasure to encounter for the first time.

Born in Seoul, Korea, holding an MFA from the University of Houston, Matthews is a painter whose work partakes of the romantic tradition exemplified by Turner, Ryder, and the recently rediscovered Ralph Albert Blacklock. Her oils on paper are softly atmospheric and impart a sense of natural mysticism to every scene that she paints.

At the same time, however, Matthews is equally sensitive to the formal elements in her paintings, which makes them as compelling in abstract terms as for their depiction of specific locales. This combination of romanticism and abstraction made Chong - Ok Matthews' recent exhibition at Gallery 32, 32 West 32nd Street, a show that one could savor on both levels simultaneously.

"Twilight"

The picture called "Twilight" was particularly engaging in this regard, its simple composition comprised of just a field with the suggestion of some high weeds here and there and a row of trees clustered on a horizon line, which is placed rather high in the composition. Both the sky and the field below are bathed in the same amber glow, as though the artist were not capturing the separate elements of sky and land but, rather, the ethereal substance of light itself, the rarified light of twilight.

Thus the picture is all about a moment and a mood, a magical synthesis of outer and inner vision, as opposed to a simple transcription of the landscape. Yet it has the sense of a larger truth about it, the type of truth that transcends mere fact.

These qualities carry over into Matthews' other paintings as well, as seen in a series of Venetian scenes painted in a bold yet muted manner in a somewhat more subdued palette dominated by soft blue hues. Matthews resists the temptation to exploit the picturesque aspects of Venice as most lesser painters have a tendency to do. Rather, she conveys a deeper beauty by treating its large areas of blue water and sky, as well as its fabled architecture, in a more formal and subdued manner.

In paintings depicting empty gondolas parked along the canals and other typical subjects, Matthews makes no attempt to dazzle us with her brushwork; nonetheless we are impressed with the authoritative manner in which she evokes the scenes, with her utter economy of gesture. Indeed, Chong-Ok Matthews accomplishes the kind of casual magic that can only come when a painter has so thoroughly mastered his or her craft that technical skill is second nature.

—Peter Wiley

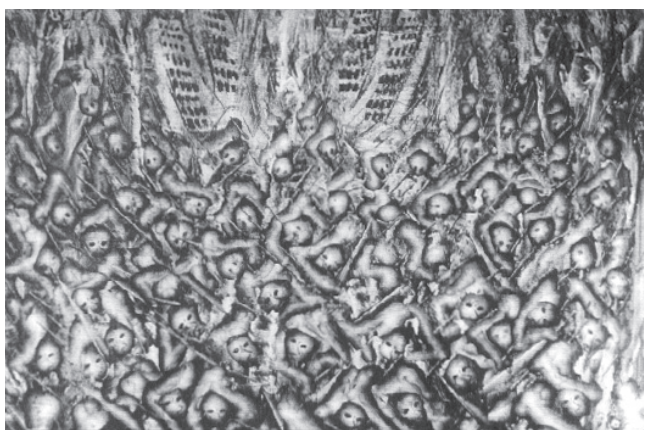
Emilio Tabasco Paints the Haunting Face of Atrocity

It is not always easy to look at what the Italian-born painter and poet Emilio Tabasco, who sees France as his second homeland, insists upon showing us. But he is an important artist nonetheless, because it is necessary that we see it. For Tabasco paints the devastation of war and terrorism, which has a long history in art, as seen in Goya's "The Disasters of War" and Picasso's "Guernica."

Tabasco, however, has his own approach to composing a picture, and it is unlike that of any of his predecessors, as seen in his recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

One could almost see Tabasco's paintings as examples of Art Brut, to use a term originated by the French painter Jean Dubuffet, or Outsider art, the American designation that has come into vogue in recent years. Yet there is nothing naive or crude about Tabasco's work. Like Dubuffet, Tabasco is a sophisticated painter who strives for an emotional directness that is often only seen in the work of untrained artists who work directly from their emotions, rather than from a preconceived plan or from a grand design based on an overall aesthetic intention. It is obvious in the case of both artists, however, that their passion is informed by real aesthetic values. Like Dubuffet, too, Tabasco works in a direct and simplified manner, creating compositions that transcend the niceties of conventional design in order to achieve a raw power that few other artists can equal.

An important difference between them, however, is that while Dubuffet often deals with whimsical and even comical subjects, even taking a light view of the human condition, Tabasco's vision is considerably more apocalyptic. Indeed, in this regard Tabasco can more readily be compared to Hieronymus Bosch in that his pictures address hellish extremes of human behavior.



Painting by Emilio Tabasco

Indeed, like Bosch, albeit in a more broadly contemporary manner, he depicts a veritable inferno of writhing figures bathed in an eerie light which he achieves through the use of a monochromatic overall tone. This tone, the modern equivalent of Bosch's gothic twilight infuses the picture surface with a weird irradiated glow into which Tabasco apparently scratches or etches his skeletal figures. These figures are often piled in heaps, their simplified skull-like faces with black eyesockets and akimbo limbs evoking memories of newsphotos we have all seen of heaped bodies in Nazi concentration camps or the killing fields of Cambodia.

Some of the most immediately compelling paintings in this exhibition are those such as "A Cry for New York," "La tragedie New York," and "Le 11 September," all of which deal with the destruction of the Twin Towers. It is inevitable that these pictures of so recent an atrocity would be most affecting, especially to New Yorkers. Emilio Tabasco's paintings, however, are all of a piece, since they all deal with extremes of suffering caused by man's inhumanity to man, and this is a universal theme with which all feeling people can empathize.

—Maureen Flynn

Venus in Tennis Sneakers: The Art of Ruth Poniarski

One can hardly imagine a more auspicious theme for Ruth Poniarski than "Atlantis," the subject of her newest solo show at Jadite Galleries, 413 West 50th Street, from May 8 through 30, with a reception on Thursday May 8, from 6 to 8 PM. For the myth of the ancient city swallowed by an earthquake and covered by the sea provides a perfect stimulus for this fabulist painter's fertile imagination, pictorial wit, and atmospheric skills.

A superb colorist, Poniarski is particularly partial to blue. The hue dominates her pallet and permeates her canvases, saturating them in nocturnal atmospheres out of which her other colors glow like gems against velvet. Perhaps the most quintessentially nocturnal picture in her new show is the aptly titled "Nightfall." In this acrylic on canvas, we see a shapely woman in a leopard-spotted bathing suit reclining on her side with an oversize rose placed near her midriff like the garnish on a blue plate special. She glances slyly over her shoulder at a lone white water fowl sailing by on its belly under a deep blue sky in which clusters of clouds pass over a fat full moon. No other artist whose name springs immediately to mind could make so much from such simple elements as Poniarski does here, imbuing the scene with a unique sense of mystery and humor. Perhaps her most kindred spirit is the great French naive fantasist Henri Rousseau, to whom she has been accurately compared, both for her ability to transform reality imaginatively and for the wit that enlivens all of her paintings.

"Night Fall"

Poniarski, however, reveals a much more sophisticated sensibility than Rousseau, the naif who admired the academic painters of the Salon, yet finally transcended them by virtue of his unschooled genius. In "Thinkess," for example, she combines distinctly different art historical references with particularly postmodern panache. Here, an Amazonian Atlantan maiden adopts the posture of Rodin's best-known sculpture. Hand on chin, she gazes out to sea, her head quite literally in the clouds, her long hair curling around the legs of her chair and continuing to trail out of the picture space, while a single gull stands nearby, regarding her curiously.

While the reference to Rodin is overt, there is a subtler hint of Rene Magritte in the painting's surreal mood, and particularly in the way the figure merges with the stratosphere. Yet the overall effect is pure Poniarski, owing not only to this artist's wry humor, but also to the formal qualities that make her work unique.

Not the least of these is the chromatic subtlety which lends her canvases a shimmering luminosity that is especially striking in "The Eclipse of Venus," where her tonal range shifts into a slightly higher register. Here, another of Poniarski's bathing beauties reclines dreamily in a grassy field, while the phantom-like figure of Venus, her large seashell floating like a vacated rowboat on the surface of a nearby body of water, wields a flowing cloak, apparently preparing to eclipse the full moon that burns through a violet sky in which a mysterious face and a reposeful leopard appear as faint apparitions. As usual in Poniarski's postmodern allegories, the symbolism remains tantalizingly obscure, compelling the viewer to collaborate imaginatively with the artist. Still the picture delights us for the manner in which it plays off the familiar in totally unexpected ways.

Another intriguing canvas in this regard, is the title picture of the exhibition, "Atlantis," in which the central figure is a woman wearing a pale violet nightgown, as though she rose somnambulantly from her bed to take a nocturnal stroll. Although a full moon glows brightly and the precipitation possibility seems nil, she holds above her head a rainbow-colored umbrella from which a single thin stream of water flows mysteriously, replenishing the lake in which she wades ankle-deep. Meanwhile, on two different areas of the shoreline, a lion and a leopard regard her with the puzzlement that the activities of the human figures in Poniarski's pictures seem to inspire in other species.

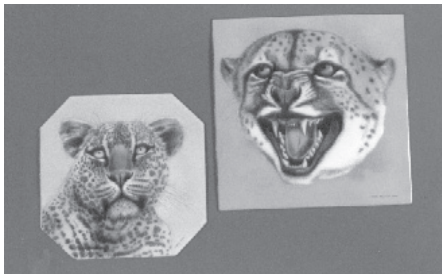
Like characters in an ongoing saga, certain figures have a habit recurring in different paintings by Poniarski. The somnambulant woman in the nightgown with the rainbow umbrella appears once again in another canvas entitled "Venus Descending." In this composition, her long red hair flows out from one side of her head in the windblown manner of Botticeli's Venus as she stands on the shore scattering golden seeds to a flock of water fowl waddling around her white-sneakered feet. Meanwhile, a familiar figure from one of Rembrandt's etchings that Poniarski has appropriated in the past to augment her cast of characters appears in the background, holding her white garment above her knees as she wades in the water.

That characters from art history mingle freely with the other figures in her canvases suggests the vital connection between art and everyday life, between dreams and waking reality, that makes the paintings of Ruth Poniarski such richly rewarding visual experiences.

—Marie R. Pagano

Art is a Family Affair for Sigal-Ibsen and Loved Ones

Rose Sigal-Ibsen, a Romanian born artist living in the U.S since 1957 who has become one of our leading exponents of Chinese brush painting, is a frequent

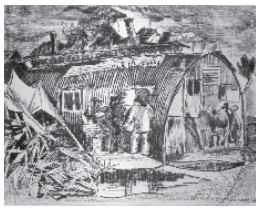


Daniel Sigal

exhibitor in various New York venues, as well as world wide. Her recent exhibition at the Romanian Cultural Center's East West Gallery, at 573-577 Third Avenue was something of a departure, however, since Sigal-Ibsen showed her own work along with that of her her late husband, Albert Dov Sigal, and her son, Daniel M. Sigal.

Before she took up brush painting, Sigal-Ibsen was an enamelist, an art form she learned from her husband, who was preeminent in the field, as well as being a painter in oils and watercolors. Daniel Sigal, born in 1946, has a degree in architecture from Tulane University but chose instead to become an enamelist himself, after learning the art to assist his father with his work during his final illness, and has sold his work to members of the British Royal Family, among other notables.

The exhibition showcased the distinctly different creative paths of this talented family. Rose Sigal-Ibsen, who long ago put enameling behind her, showed only her distinctive brush paintings in a style that combines the graceful fluidity of Eastern brush - painting with the energy and spontaneity of Western Abstraction. Calligraphy is the basis for most of her compositions and she has mastered it so successfully that she was the only non-Chinese artist in a group exhibition that included such masters of the art as C.C. Wang and the late Fangyu Wang.



Albert Dov Sigal

Especially outstanding among the works by Sigal-Ibsen in the more recent show with her husband and son were a series of five large scrolls in which she created buoyant compositions from specific characters, as well as a smaller work called "At the Races," in which five images of the character for "horse" pranced animatedly across a luminous field of yellow watercolor.

Rose Sigal-Ibsen

Albert Dov Sigal's mastery as an enamelist was made clear in pieces such as "Safed," an image of a small village evoked with great charm and "Israeli Teens." The latter picture was especially evocative, showing two girls in miniskirts chatting under a full moon amid small houses. Also outstanding were "Cluj," Dov Sigal's nostalgic watercolor of the small town in Romania where he was born, painted in an angular manner akin to John Marin, and several lively streetscapes in oils executed in impastos with a brio reminiscent of the Ash Can School.

Although Daniel Sigal learned the art from his father, he has evolved his own distinctive style as an enamelist. His pieces partake of a more literal realism, as seen in his compositions featuring tigers, which capture not only their feline grace but also the primitive instincts in their gaze. Other pictures of a Japanese geisha and an owl perched on a tree branch by Daniel Sigal show an almost Pop clarity of design by which the younger artist distinguishes himself from his father's atmospheric poetry and his mother's celebrated brush work.

—Peter Wiley

Susan L. Zeller's Intrepid Neo-Expressionism

The species of painting that emerged worldwide in the late 1970s, commonly known as Neo-Expressionism, differs from its prototype, German Expressionism, in several important ways. Chief among these is that it partakes of aspects of Surrealism, Abstraction and other diverse tendencies. One contemporary painter who avails herself of all available options is Susan L. Zeller, whose solo exhibition was recently seen at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

Zeller began her creative activities in childhood and cites a diverse range of influences as instrumental in her development, including the making of mud pies, the illustrations of Norman Rockwell and Arthur Szyk's pictures for Anderson's Fairy Tales, as well as the pin-up photographs in Playboy magazine. These eclectic inspirations make themselves felt in her bold Neo-Expressionist oils on canvas, which have an impressive variety of imagery as well as an exhilarating formal and coloristic freedom.

From Playboy magazine, Zeller says, she gained a sense of the female anatomy, and one can see how successfully she employs it in a painting such as her large oil on canvas "Eve." Here, a shapely blond standing nude is the dominant figure of the composition. But while the figure is alluring in a manner akin to "Playmate" centerfolds, it is not presented in as explicitly erotic a manner. Rather, it is half concealed by loosely brushed floral forms and gestural flourishes that partially deconstruct the composition in a manner that makes one think of de Kooning's famous "Woman" series, albeit without resorting to similarly monstrous figural distortions.

In contrast to the bubblegum pink that Zeller employs to depict the fair flesh tones in "Eve," the male figure in the companion painting "Adam" is darkly pigmented and solidly rendered, as he emerges in a crouch from a dense jungle of foliage that parts like a curtain.

The large female figure that dominates another major canvas called "Fruit Bearer" is equally formidable in another manner. In this vigorously brushed, boldly composed canvas, the fruit referred to in the title are the children that the woman bears in her arms, which appear partially sheathed in leafy coverings like ears of corn, suggesting the offspring of a literal Earth mother. Here, too, Zeller's coloristic intrepidness comes to the forefront in the contrasts that she employs between strident oranges and deeper green hues, which bring the composition alive dynamically in a manner recalling the vibrant palette of the late African American artist Bob Thompson.

Zeller also allows herself a great deal of latitude where subject matter is concerned.

"Eve"

For example, one relatively small painting called "A Healthy Stock" depicts two somewhat comical cows, one with grass sticking out of her mouth in a pastoral landscape in a rather goodnaturedly straightforward composition. The large, diamond shaped canvas called "Spiritual Enlightenment," however, features a more metaphysical image of a disembodied head floating amid spirals and stars on a brilliant red ground.

Both paintings reveal the adventuresome spirit that makes Susan L. Zeller a constantly surprising, consistently engaging painterly presence.

—Byron Coleman

Pino Chimenti Caricatures the Face of Civilization

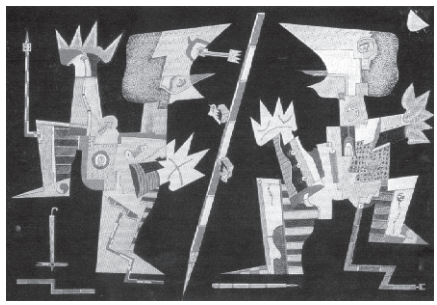
The widely exhibited, much written-about Italian artist Pino Chimenti has evolved a complex alphabet of pictorial symbols to delineate a strange personal universe. Chimenti's realm is an antic place, filled with zany characters (prominent among them a comical knight in armor, Quixotically insisting that, even in our crass age, chivalry is not dead!), hidden meanings, and intriguing clues to an imagination at once hermetic and gregarious that seems a veritable hatchery for provocative contradictions and incongruities.

The intricate shapes into which Chimenti divides his compositions resemble the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle that has already been assembled, yet is still just as puzzling, presenting the viewer with unanswered questions and mysteries that continue to tickle the mind long after one has encountered them.

Thus no aesthetically adventurous New Yorker should miss the all too rare opportunity to be mystified by this singular Italian magician's solo show "Hermetic Microcosms," curated by Stefania Carrozzini, at Gallery @ 49, 322 West 49th Street, from April 15 to May 6.

The only other recent artist who even comes close to Chimenti's iconographic complexity is the late Swedish genius Oyvind Fahlstrom, whose comic-strip influenced style caused clueless critics to mistake him for a Pop artist, although he was infinitely too subtle to be so designated. And one should be careful not to relegate Chimenti to a similar fate. One should steer clear especially of lumping him with such flash-in-the pan American hotshots as the overpraised and overexposed Carroll Dunham. For while it is true that both artists often employ wildly distorted figures as receptacles for internal imagery, Chimenti's use of the device is elegant rather than deliberately crude, and if comparisons are to be made at all, he could be more accurately compared to the approach of some of the artists of Chicago's Hairy Who School.

Chimenti, however, employs a cartoonish playfulness with unequaled finesse, cosmically caricaturing not only figures but computers, pinball machines, aircraft, architecture, and a host of other warts on the face of contemporary civilization with a whimsical inventiveness that can only be compared to artists much higher up on the historical food chain such as Victor Brauner and —most especially —Paul Klee. For like Klee, Pino Chimenti seems to "take a line for a little walk"—since his



"Danza apotropaica con asta viruale"

style is primarily linear, with areas of brilliant comicstrip color contained within—and end up mapping the entire terrain of human consciousness. As with Klee, too, this is done with much chest-thumping, but with winning wit and humility, as though making great art is no big deal.

This is what is so delightful about the work of Pino Chimenti, who introduces a note of levity and grace into an art scene much in need of it, in a city that often takes itself much too seriously. One can only thank the curator, Stefania Carrozzini, of D'Ars International Exhibition Service, Milano, for bringing him here to deflate and inspire us with his wacky nobility. —Feliks Karoly

Nature and Geometry in the Art of Mark G. Picascio

The environment of modern, civilized people is composed of two elements, nature and architecture--although one must concede that the latter has come to increasingly dominate. Mark G. Picascio, a painter from Los Angeles, California, takes these two elements as the starting point for the series of paintings he calls "Elevation Lines," recently exhibited at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

At an early age, Picascio was inspired by the hills of Malibu, where he was raised, to create watercolors that were precursors of his current style, which combines the soft, organic shapes and colors of nature with harder, more geometric, architectural forms. Acknowledging Frank Stella's paintings of the 1970s as a formative influence, Picascio has evolved a personal style in which disparate elements achieve a striking abstract synthesis.

A superb colorist, Picascio's luminous hues have a pastel softness that complements the seeming weightlessness of his forms. Warm pinks and yellows are combined with cool greens and grays in softly harmonizing combinations that lend his compositions a subtle optical charge. One enters a rarefied space in which the colors of nature and of manmade elements appear to merge in a unique chromatic synthesis. The overall effect is at once lyrical and intellectual, given the deliberate manner in which Picascio applies color, carefully balancing values and tones to evoke the shimmering shifts and subtleties of natural light and the stricter dictates of an inner vision, atmosphere tempered by aesthetic restraint.

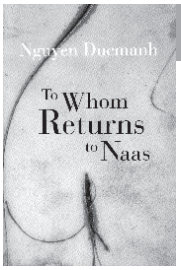
Indeed, his painterly process is obviously informed by his professional experience in graphic design, architectural design, and commercial photography. He draws freely on his experience in the applied arts to lend his fine art paintings a sleek and striking sense of design akin to that other Los Angles painter Edward Ruscha, while his palette is closer to the California landscapes of Richard Diebenkorn. Apparently, Picascio has assimilated the lessons of both of these diverse West Coast artists, even if only by means of geographic proximity and environmental osmosis.

But even more than either of those contemporaries, Picascio's paintings bring to mind a famous 1943 canvas by the well known American artist Charles Sheeler entitled "The Artist Looks at Nature." Although Sheeler was known as one of the leaders of the Precisionist movement, in this somewhat uncharacteristic painting, he verges on the surreal, depicting himself working at his easel within a verdant landscape (actually, the walled town of Carcassonne, in France) whose expansive manicured lawns are divided by maze-like configurations of manmade structures.

Mark G. Picascio conveys a similar sense of the convergence of nature and architecture, albeit in a more thoroughly abstract manner in acrylic paintings on canvas such as "Foundation Lines," "Twilight Lines," and "Life Lines." The latter painting is particularly lyrical, with its complex arrangements of flowing naturally allusive shapes in soft green, yellow, and earth colors intersected by more sharply delineated geometric elements that crisscross the composition, simultaneously suggesting beams of light and perhaps the foundation beams of a country house under construction.

Such ambiguous perceptual shifts between the ethereal and the concrete add to the mystery in Picascio's abstractions, for he is an artist who avails himself of the allusive possibilities of postmodernism to convey a highly personal vision. This exhibition of acrylic paintings and iris giclee prints provided New York audiences an auspicious introduction to an artist who has exhibited widely and attracted considerable attention in Southern California.

—Wilson Wong



The Duke of Linguistic Deconstruction

$29.95
from
Nguyen Ducmanh
334 East 82nd Street,
NYC 10028

"I name the book with this current title because Mon Grand Amour Deborah, she took me to a mountain and under the waterfall I drowned myself in her bluest eyes...She gave me her armpit for love...I gave my love for her heart."
—Nguyen Ducmanh,
from "To Whom Returns to Naas."

New York painter turned writer Nguyen Ducmanh, whose recently published autobiography "To Whom Returns to Naas" has to be one of the most unjustly unheralded literary events of the year, may believe that he's writing in a known language. But he's actually doing something more avant garde: originating a dialect in which, wittingly or not, he approaches an almost Joycean poetry.

I said it once and I'll say it again: In his rhythmically fractured broken English prose (which most often chronicles his amorous adventures in the wild manner of a slapstick Henry Miller, antic accounts of bold schemes, epic drinking bouts, and comic seductions) Ducmanh proclaims himself an inveterate rascal, and a struggling sex addict, encapsulating all the reckless vigor of an extravagant and bohemianly exemplary existence.

Born in Hanoi in 1933, Ducmanh (or "Duke" as he is known to his Western intimates, not only as an Americanization of his name but also because the moniker suits his rakish persona) left his native Vietnam in 1950 for France, came to the U.S. in 1965, and has enriched this land of ours with his citizenship since 1973. He claims to descend from a "long line of kings, chieftains, barons, robbers, slaves traders, traitors, whores, ac/dc propensity dc, poets, duchesses, junkies, gamblers, revolutionaries, mostly hard-core alkies."

That's just by way of introduction, in a short paragraph preceding the title page of his tome, which has one of Ducmanh's whiplash Zen lunatic nudes on the front cover, handsomely designed by his fellow painter Bo Joseph. Flip the book over and there on the back cover is a color picture of the author, looking properly authorly in glasses with a granny-string, nice suit , nice bow-tie, nice smile, with the following excerpt blurbed above it: "Without mother love, I was taken care by nannies and aunts. My sister hates me. I sucked my grandma titties until I go to school, 6 years old (Jesuit Prep). I was spoiled; in the evenings try to spell the alphabet by pupitre, sat across the amah who spilling out two alabaster melons feeding my half-brother; as soon as she put the little turd to sleep I jump on top of her; my head buried in her chest and I play dead for awhile."

Had he not been able to come up with something much more imaginatively puzzling and tongue twisting (I still don't get it, but that's beside the point) Ducmanh might have called this book "Thanks for the Mammaries," so often is this primal scene reenacted in its pages. For example, on a bus in Paris "a busty girl keep smiling and said to me she has an Oriental beau and is a schickle..." One thing leads to another, as it usually does with Duke, and "I took her to hotel de passe . I, 24, she is very young 23, copper hair, her pair of mammoths burst out like volcanoes ready to seismic! She try to hide them with a mere chemise. Alas, my undernourished brain has prefigured a steak saignant. She let me aspire the nipples. I feel like Romulus."

Not that all is fun and frolic in Ducmanh's memoir. Serious regrets, such as a grown daughter he hasn't seen since she seven, lead to serious philosophical musings, albeit in our hero's inimitable manner: "I don't know is my raison I am here on earth, microscopically related to Infinite Light, Space, Time and Matter Macro, but I know when 2 buffaloes collide the flies get hurt and that is what happen to children of dented families."

Alcohol, the fuel of Duke's manic energy for years, led to other surreal awakenings:

Author Nguyen Duemanh

"Blackout:
Flashback vividly I found myself in a surrounding...a wedding. I don't know how I got here. Mingled with people eating, drinking. Probably they think I am a friend of their friends. I invited myself here and stay a week! Pleasant time...I parked my car by the square along all the fancied restaurants, eating there and here, but I could not remember what town and in what purpose I was here!"

Four ex-wives and several years of sobriety later, a chastened Nguyen Ducmanh sat down at a computer owned by his art dealer Allan Stone and wrote this madcap masterpiece filled not only with his misadventures and ruminations but also riddled with marvelously mangled quotes from other greats ("Who sees the difference between body and soul don't have neither."—O. Wilde; "Love conquest all!"—Da Vinci), as well as his own priceless aphorisms duly credited : "I saw a man pray in front of a tree, because God is invisible. That makes sense to me."—Duke.

And, finally: "I gave my diskette of this book to Ron Williams to read. He told me is to be ashamed of myself but an excellent book..."

No need to be ashamed, Duke; art redeems all.

—Ed McCormack

Materials and Metaphors in the New Reliefs of Janet L. Bohman

While we generally assume art that is minimalist to be inexpressive and anti-poetic, the opposite is true in the work of Janet L. Bohman, whose new solo exhibition of works in acrylic on shaped paper and acrylic on linen over wooden armatures, "Reliefs in Flight," can be seen at Viridian Artists, 530 West 25th Street, from April 8 through 26. (There will be an opening reception on Saturday, April 12, from 3 to 5 PM, and coffee and conversation with the artist on Saturday, April 19, at 1 PM.)

Although Bohman remains faithful to the simplicity and purity that emerged in the 1960s and dominated American art through the 1970s, when she first moved away from two-dimensional paintings to explore painted reliefs, her work has gone beyond the narrowly prescribed formalism of that time into the realm of the sublime. Indeed, her willingness to admit an element of spiritual suggestiveness into her painted reliefs puts her more in harmony with postmodern tendencies than most other artists who came of age in the same period. No doubt this accounts for at least some of the fascination that her work holds for us.

"Flying I," Acrylic on sculpted paper, 27" X 27 1/2" X 4 1/2"

Another important factor is the materials in which Bohman works. Minimalist artists such as Don Judd, Robert Morris, and Ronald Bladen, among others, began as painters but eventually rejected painting for materials such as fiberglass, molded plastics, and sheet metal. Their intention in doing so was to depersonalize their pieces, in order to relate their elemental volumes to the matter-of-factness of architecture and industrial products, thereby removing them further from any sense of illusion or even allusiveness. Robert Morris put it quite bluntly when he stated that " the concerns of sculpture have been for some time now not only distinct from but hostile to those of painting," and added that sculpture, because of its physical nature, had "never been involved with illusionism."

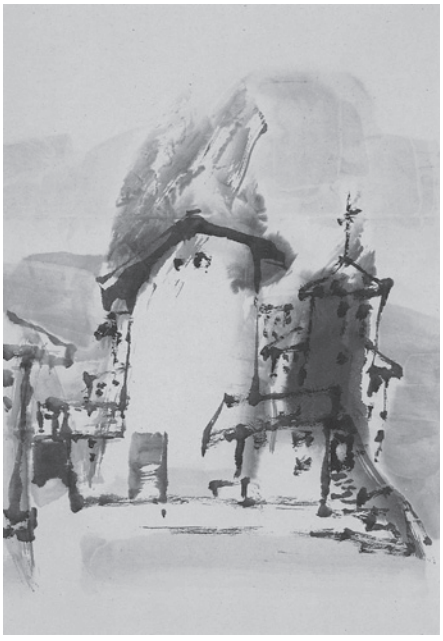
Neither is Bohman's work involved with illusionism, although it is certainly allusive, and this has to do—at least in part— with the fact that Bohman, unlike these older minimalists, never really rejected painting. Indeed, her interweaving bands of color, while stringently hard-edged, are rendered remarkably expressive by the manner in which her pieces flow in space, their contours turning and furling sensually, causing the stripes of of blue, yellow, green, violet, and other harmoniously matched hues to ripple like ribbons on a breeze.

Bohman seems effortlessly to achieve a synthesis of painting and sculpture that disproves Morris' theory regarding the "hostility" of the two mediums. This, too, is more in keeping with the pluralistic spirit of postmodernism, which now makes Morris' insistence on segregating the two mediums seem almost comically retro— a stodgy, disgruntled, and finally artificial construct born of an era in which only contention, conflict, and usurpment were regarded as signifying aesthetic progress. That old Oedipal ritual in which one art movement —or even medium —must wipe out another now seems a throwback to a time when the art world was totally dominated by the male ego. In her ability to merge the two mediums so successfully, as well as to combine a sensitive expressivity with formal rigor, Bohman seems a minimalist for a more enlightened era.

That many of Bohman's pieces are made with shaped paper also seems significant, since paper is an organic material and as such possesses properties distinctly different from plastic, fiberglass, or steel, among other "industrialized" sculptural materials. In the simplest sense, these more porous properties can be termed softer, warmer, and more "viewer-friendly" and are particularly effective in Bohman's new pieces, as seen in the series called "Flying." Indeed, all of the Bohman's painted reliefs in both shaped paper and linen share a buoyancy that is reflected in titles such as "Rising," "Soaring," "Leaping," "Zig Zagging" and "Winter Gliding."

Even while these pieces hold the wall with a weighty and impressive physical presence, the actual lightness of the materials advances the metaphor of flight by evoking the sense of kites soaring in the sky, an association that is made all the more striking by Bohman's brilliant colors. Unlike kites, however, Bohman's painted reliefs in both sculpted paper and linen are not one-dimensional. Rather, they are possessed of considerable depth. Some parts of their surfaces recede into shadow, while others advance into the light; yet the overall thrust of their movement is fluid and undulant, the forms flowing, flaring, and unfurling as the pieces take flight. As the eye moves over the piece, the undulating bands of vibrant color rippling over the surface appear to expand and contract with a kinetic energy equal to that in the paintings of Bridget Riley. This further enhances the velocity of the pieces, which varies subtly with their shapes: some with gracefully curving edges that curl out from the wall suggest the outspread wings of majestic birds, while others have the streamlined phallic thrust one associates with aerodynes . All possess a beauty, at once allusive and emblematic, that sets Janet L. Bohman apart as an artist with a singularly exhilarating vision. —Byron Coleman

Hong Purume: A Korean Painter's Universal Synthesis of Form



Painting by Hong Purume

The painter Hong, Purume (the comma between her two names is not meant to give one literal pause; it is traditional in Korean culture to put the surname first, and to employ the same order when translating Korean names into English) is one of the best exemplars of the crossfertilization that is very much a part of the East-West dialogue in contemporary art. She will be showing her paintings at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer street from May 3 through 21. There will be an opening reception on May 3 from 4 to 6pm and a closing reception on May 21 from 5 to 7pm.

In Hong's work, Asian ink painting and the influence of Cubism, the formal armature upon which most Western modernism is supported, converge and merge in an especially apt manner. One can only speculate about how deliberate this synthesis is, since there is invariably a close relationship between painting and calligraphy in Asian cultures and Korean calligraphy has in common with cubist form the fact that its characters are generally less cursive and more angular than either Chinese or Japanese calligraphy. Since Hong is obviously a progressive and sophisticated contemporary artist, attuned to the possibilities and challenges of multiculturalism, it seems only natural that she would choose freely from both sides of the menu in order to enrich her personal expression.

In any case, Hong's squarish shapes are laid down in clotted, monochromatic washes that lend her compositions greater tactile suggestiveness and weight than one is accustomed to seeing in ink painting. There is also the matter of how she handles shallow space. Which is to say that while we all know that Western notions of perspective do not apply to traditional Asian painting, where the illusion of depth and distance is through placement of the various elements of the composition in two dimensions, Hong's landscapes appear little concerned with illusion. Rather, her bold brushstrokes and wet-into-wet tonal modulations emphatically emphasize gesture over meaning, as well as the sanctity of the picture plane in a manner more selfconsciously akin to Abstract Expressionism.

Here one is tempted to digress, to take a detour into the debt that Western abstraction owes to Asia, and particularly Zen ink painting, for its "flatness" as well as its gestural force. But most of us know all about that by now, and what is most significant about the art of Hong, Purume is how successfully she has synthesized these elements of the long, ongoing dialogue between Eastern and Western aesthetics to forge a personal style in paintings which depict a rough rustic terrain with a folkloric feeling that is not merely Asian but peculiarly Korean.

Hong Purume

In Hong's composition, small, squared off country dwellings are drawn with broad strokes of the brush into wet gray washes that puddle and pool to evoke land masses and bodies of water. Interspersed with these square little abodes are country churches with crosses on their steeps, conveying the entrenchment of Christianity in Korean culture, where churches are a more prominent part of the landscape than in any other Asian country.

The power and the meaning in Hong's paintings, however, does not lie in her matter-of-fact depiction of such specifics, but in the life of the line and the vigor of the gesture.

For most Asian painters who honor their national heritage, even as they emerge in the international art scene, Hong, Purume makes her mark in contemporary art by virtue of her ability to imbue traditional aspects of her culture with personal immediacy and universal appeal.

—Ed McCormack

At Monique Goldstrom Gallery: Exploring Notions of Shelter

In New York City, where homelessness is rampant and real estate prices are "through the roof," so to speak, the group show "Shelters" takes on particular resonance, at Monique Goldstrom Gallery, 560 Broadway, through April 15.

Curator Stefania Carrozzini, of D'Ars International Exhibition Service, Milan, Italy, contributes a text to the catalog that is more of an eloquent prose poem than an essay. She explores the notion of shelter as a "space reconciliation" and for "spiritual retreat," among other things, and concludes by stating that "To seek shelter does not mean to escape from the world, rather to find oneself, to find the world anew." And the nine artists she chose for this show support her thesis with their generally affirmative approaches to the theme.

Barbara Bachner, the lone American among several Italians, is well known for her conceptual approach, based on her dream journals, from which she develops mixed media paintings, sculptures and videos. Here, Bachner addresses the theme with a mysterious video that includes images of a masked woman making her way through a secluded green thicket, suggesting shelter as both hideaway and place for exploration.

Maria Rebecca Ballestra, a journalist as well as a visual artist, is represented by an installation juxtaposing two images of young boys with elementary houses and the phrase "my home" scrawled on them with a ramshackle house haphazardly constructed of toys and a TV set. Poignantly, her work seems to address issues of childhood insecurity.

Maria Rebecca Ballestra

The mixed media assemblages of Fiorenzo Belfiore, on the other hand, convey a more metaphorical sense of shelter, with recycled objects such as vases and marbles collected within enclosures of glass or plexiglass. Here, Belfiore is represented by a piece called "Molecular Bell," its whimsical and graceful shapes projecting an ethereal feeling akin to some of Giacometti's early surrealist sculptures.

Massimo Franchi

Pino Vastarella, a widely exhibited artist and architect who has worked on a wide range of projects from graphics and fashion designing to image editing, shows an acrylic painting on canvas called "Other Panoramas." It is a monumental monochromatic close-up of a dazed-looking middle aged man in profile, staring up at tall buildings enveloped in smoke and debris that no New Yorker can look at without recalling the shock of 9/11.

Vincenzo Torcello

For Massimo Franchi, the body itself is obviously the ultimate refuge. In Franchi's oil "The Shield," two monochromatic realist images of a male torso, painted in a sketchy gestural manner akin to Larry Rivers, are juxtaposed with symbols resembling the red stamps—or "chops"—that Asian artists use to sign their paintings, perhaps signifying the "language of the body" that preoccupies this artist.

Giovanni Garasto is a multifaceted artist whose photographs, watercolors, collages and poetry all deal with the convergence of outer and inner realities, leading one to wonder if the internal realm is where he finds his own solace and shelter. Here, Garasto approaches the theme directly, with a color photograph in which cubistically clustered yellow rooftops convey a sense of not only the shelter of one's own home but that of one's own village, a concept rapidly disappearing in most parts of the world.

Clara Scarampella, who has exhibited widely since 1974, combines the conceptual and the physical with striking results. Her work in powder in glass fusion and graphics is called "Galaxy" but it's circular shape and tactile surface also suggests an esoteric sundial, in keeping with her desire to create works that are projections of her soul, "of its light and shadows."

Among the more intriguing exponents of postmodernism are those artists who are finding ways to employ minimalist forms expressively rather than as formal statements devoid of content, as seen in the work of Giorgio Tonti, one of the pioneers of serial art in Italy. Although the shape of Tonti's untitled piece in acrylic on cut-out board could suggest a tombstone (the final resting place as shelter?), the vertical waves of textured color down its center invites myriad other interpretations as well.

Vincenzo Torcello, widely known in Italy for works which might be termed "neo dadaistic" should be familiar to some New York gallery goers for his past exhibitions at Nexus Gallery and Scuola Italiana Gugliemo Marconi. Torcello appears to interpret the theme of the present show with a touch of macabre irony, exhibiting a mixed media work resembling a bird's nest with visceral red stains at its center, perhaps suggesting that no shelter can offer ultimate security— or safety.

Pino Vastarella

—Wilson Wong

Holly Meeker Rom and Jean T. Kroeber: A Natural Simpatico

On the face of it, Holly Meeker Rom and Jean T. Kroeber are two very different kinds of artists. Rom is a watercolorist who takes an intimate approach to landscape, zeroing in on her subjects like a naturalist, while Kroeber is a sculptor whose interpretations of the female figure achieve monumentality on a relatively intimate scale.

But in their recent joint exhibition "Transformations of Nature," at The Pen and Brush, Inc., 16 East Tenth Street, it became clear that the two artists have a lot more in common than one might think. For they seem to share a deep and abiding respect for the natural world.

In Rom's case, this manifests in the acute attention that she pays to the minutia of the forest and the beach, to the individual qualities of tree-bark, shells, and leaves; while in Kroeber's it comes across in her relationship to the materials themselves: the stone and wood from which she carves her figures.

Between them, these two women transcend the barrier that often divides painting and sculpture when they occupy the same gallery—those sharp distinctions between the two mediums that can sometimes create visual discord. By contrast in the work of Rom and Kroeber, the organic relationship between image and actuality provokes a remarkable natural dialogue. The subtle textures and colors of the wood and stone that Kroeber carves so skillfully —the Georgia pink marble or reddish-brown Manzanita wood—are reflected in the colors that Rom discovers in nature and applies to her sparklingly fresh watercolors. Thus one tended to view their work in concert, rather than separately, which lent the exhibition an unusual sense of natural unity. This visual simpatico, however, in no way obscured the individual qualities of these two distinctly different artists.

No artist demonstrates more effectively than Holly Meeker Rom how watercolor lends itself to capturing fleeting qualities of light and making immutable the chromatic magic that they wreak on natural surfaces. She employs the translucent freshness of aquarelle to evoke the play of light on trees and leaves and foliage with luminous washes of color that play off against the sparkling white of the bare paper.

Holly Meeker Rom

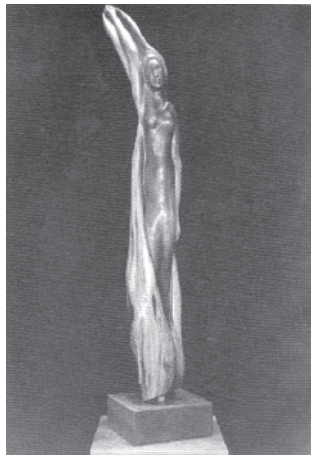
Like all the best exponents of this demanding medium, Rom makes the bare paper a prominent element in her compositions. Indeed, she takes it even further than most, often leaving large expanses of the paper untouched, to isolate a delicate evergreen branch laden with pine cones against its whiteness in an almost Asian manner, or to lend a sense of space and air to a cluster of clam and mussel shells in a beachscape with miniature rainbows playing around their edges.

Holly Meeker Rom respects and the specific character of each natural object that she paints, however humble. Yet her sure command of her medium enables her to convey its essence with an impressive abstract freedom that makes her paintings much more than literal interpretations of nature.

Jean T. Kroeber, on the other hand, takes considerable abstract liberties with anatomy in her stone and wood sculptures, simplifying her figures to emphasize their dynamic abstract qualities and imbue them with expressiveness.

Influenced early on by Greek and Romanesque carvings, as well as by Maillol, Kroeber has evolved a highly individual style, within which she is able to express a great deal of formal and symbolic diversity.

While one full length figure in Manzanita Wood will be as elongated as a Giacometti (yet sensual rather than gaunt), another will be a voluptuous torso in Champlain Black Marble. One piece will depict a mother and child, their severely stylized figures merging in single, tender synthesis. Yet another full female figure freezes a sense of animated movement by virtue of Kroeber's brilliant delineation of the folds in her robes and the textured flow of her long hair.



Jean Kroeber

Although possessed of entirely different approaches and visions, Holly Meeker Rom and Jean T. Kroeber complemented and brought out the best of each other in this thoroughly enjoyable exhibition.

—Jeannie McCormack

Power and Transcendence in the Tondos of Mary Frances Judge

One of the more unusual pleasures of this city is finding excellent exhibition spaces tucked away in unexpected places. One of the more interesting of such venues is the Digital Sandbox Gallery, at 55 Broad Street, 4th floor. This is a handsome alternative venue in a large office building right across the street from The New York Stock Exchange, which places it in a location where finance and art can be said to intersect, since it's close to both Wall Street and within walking distance of Tribecca, where many artists live and have their studios.

Generously donated by the Rudin Corporation for art exhibitions under the direction of Jane St. Lifer, an independent curator and appraiser, the gallery is open to the public free of charge Monday through Friday from 9 to 5 PM. (ID is required to enter the building.)

Featured through the month of April is a solo exhibition of paintings by Tribecca artist Mary Frances Judge, who has exhibited widely throughout the United States, as well as in Italy and Brazil, and whose work is in numerous prestigious public and private collections here and abroad.

"A recycler of human material and energies, I collect the cast-off personal effects of people living and dead," Judge has stated of her work. "A commitment to some type of psychic and spiritual human ecology moves me to rescue these materials representative of human life so that they not be disrespectfully abandoned or discarded...The psychic energies invested in these abandoned materials by their former owners seek release as I grapple with them, playing with them and allowing them to speak to me as they dictate to me their desired new state. As I embed them in the paint, the original features of these materials are more or less lost in the process of transfiguration."

Although Mary Frances Judge has worked with the figure in past exhibitions, such as her major solo show at Monogramma Arte Contemporanea, where paintings such as "Degli Dei al Tevere" centered on mythological faces, the overall thrust of her paintings in the present show at Digital Sandbox gallery is abstract. Even when figurative elements can be discerned, as seen in her large mixed media painting "Europa," where the suggestion of a simplified profile appears in the left hand corner of the circular canvas, the composition compels our attention by the sheer force of form and color. Here, boldly brushed areas of luminous orange and green hues are juxtaposed with gestural strokes of red violet to create a chromatic dynamism suggesting that the painter has dipped her brush in liquid light. Further enlivened by splashes and spatters of darker hues, "Europa" combines the lyrical sweep of abstract expressionism with a more postmodern sense of submerged content and symbolic allusiveness.

Described by the artist herself as "a mythological expression of Global Outreach in the united forms of feminine and masculine archetypes," this canvas, like all of those in the present exhibition is a tondo, a circular format that became fashionable in the mid 15th century Italian Renaissance, which she has revived more consistently than any other contemporary artist that one can name. The tondo is an auspicious format for Judge's paintings, since a circle is infinite in its dimensions and complements the natural expansiveness of her forms, lending even her smaller compositions a sense of scale much larger than their actual size. This seems particularly true of her painting "911," in the present show. As befits an abstract interpretation of a dark day in our nation's history, the colors in this canvas are more somber than those that Judge employs habitually, while its especially rough textures, created with collage elements submerged below the thickly pigmented surface, suggest the density of the debris in the gaping cavity at Ground Zero.

Larger tondos such as "Dawn" and "Gemini" demonstrate the impressive range of compositional and coloristic diversity that Judge achieves within the format. While the former painting is amorphous in the manner of color field painting and enraptures the viewer with its chromatic subtlety, created with close-valued variations of yellow and orange hues that evoke a sense of the rarefied light of the early morning hours, in the latter canvas Judge sets a monolithic red central shape, limned in a flat "hard edge" manner, against a lighter blue in a composition notable for its emblematic boldness.

Then there is "Al Lago," another dynamic tondo in which a sumptuous expanse of blue is set against rhythmic yellow textured forms in the lower portion of the composition, suggesting a horizon of waves flowing against a nocturnal sky.

"Europa" 72" Mixed Media

Mary Frances Judge is an artist with the ability to covey a host of meanings, both material and spiritual, through her powerful yet subtle manipulation of abstract form and vibrant color. The innate tactility of her relief-like painted surfaces imbues her tondos with a physically imposing presence, bespeaking a sensuous worldliness, while her lush and lyrical use of color conveys something more ethereal, akin to spiritual auras. Her work is filled with quiet conviction and conveys a contagious sense of joy and fulfillment to the perceptive viewer. Such transcendence is a rare quality in contemporary painting and deserves to be savored.

—Maureen Flynn

Sumio Inoue's Poetic Images of Prayerful Silence

"Untitled"

Some of the refreshing new approaches that Japanese artists have brought to photography—particularly in relation to the interpretation of space, time, memory, and specific cultural symbols— were surveyed in the landmark exhibition "Photography and Beyond in Japan," which originated at the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo in the late nineties and traveled to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, in Washington D.C., among other American museums.

As Toshio Hara, director of the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art pointed out in the catalogue for the show, in the work of many of the best contemporary Japanese photographers "centuries-old artistic traditions, concepts and philosophies metamorphose in the artists' hands to resurface in motif, format and emotion."

Certainly this tendency to celebrate and honor the old within the context of the new can be seen in the work of Sumio Inoue, a highly original Japanese photographer who will be showing his series "SILENZIO —Silent Prayer" which consists of images of European cities printed on handmade Japanese paper, at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer street from May 3 through 21. (There will be an opening reception on May 3 from 4 to 6pm and a closing reception on May 21 from 5 to 7pm.)

Inoue, who refers to his work as "Harmonization of Japanese and Western," traveled to Ogawa-cho, a village in Saitama prefecture known for its fine paper, to learn the technique of making Japanese paper. He created a special heavy paper and then spent ten years perfecting the technique of printing on its rough surface.

"Because of the thickness of the paper, color keeps soaking into the paper and soaking into the area around it," Inoue says. "So it's hard to create black. It's hard to create the image that I imagine. I like that it's hard."

He has also developed painstaking methods for tinting his contact paper, applying colors from tree barks and treating it with emulsions to make some areas darker than others, creating subtle ground-hues and tonalities that enhance the poetic atmospheres in his pictures, lending them the timeless quality of Old Master drawings in sepia or objects preserved in amber.

Indeed, Inoue's photographs are also like drawings in that each is a unique original —"one picture for one negative," as he puts it— and cannot be duplicated. It takes him a month to create one picture, making it possible for him to produce only a few prints per year. Each print preserves a magical moment when times stands still and a sense silence is made manifest in light and shadow.

"I am attracted to the mysteriousness of the shadow," Inoue has stated, and his use of shadow is especially dramatic in his European series, where architectural details are thrown into high relief by contrasts of light and dark. The interiors of churches provide him with some of his most auspicious opportunities for exploiting chiaroscuro as a means to create the sense of "silence and warmth" that he seeks as a spiritual signifier in his pictures.

Yet, the drama of light and dark is enacted in many different ways in the natural and architectural details on which Inoue focuses his discerning lens: Towers, fountains, statues, and steeples soar skyward, their forms delineated by areas of shadow. Portals and columns loom majestically. Areas of light slice sharply through darkness or are swallowed by yawning doors and archways. Windows are illuminated against black walls. Silhouetted figures scurry like ghosts through a great marble hall as blinding light pours through a tall entryway. A baroque outdoor carousel is set against ancient buildings adorned by elaborate carvings and accented traceries of bare tree-limbs...

To stop time and enable his viewers to "feel God inside their hearts and spend a moment of peacefulness" may seem a lofty goal, but Sumio Inoue achieves it admirably in this affectingly meditative series of pictures.

—Ed McCormack

The Rugged "New Naturism" of Alicia De La Torre

Alicia De La Torre, whose work was recently seen at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, in Soho, belongs to that category of postmodern painter for whom a writer for this publication coined the apt term "New Naturist." For while De La Torre, who has also worked with stained glass and pottery, is inspired by landscape, she does not so much delineate the lay of the land as plumb the inner essences of nature, capturing its soul rather than its superficial appearance.

Although De La Torre works in oils on canvas, the most traditional of mediums, her approach is by no means conventional; for while a general sense of specific aspects of nature— foliage, sunlight, water— inform her compositions, her pictures can also be viewed abstractly. Indeed, her forms lie flat on the picture plane and a sense of the grid comes through her application of color areas, relating the structuring of her canvas to Cubism. Indeed, while she cites Monet and Pissarro as inspirations and is clearly influenced by Impressionism, the master she appears closest to is Cezanne, given how her blunt manner of laying down pigment builds on those distinctive strokes that universally influential master evolved as the building blocks of modern painting.

De La Torre also shares qualities in common with Frank Aurbach and Leon Kossoff, two contemporary British painters who practically sculpt their paintings out of thick oil impastos. Like them, Alicia De La Torre simultaneously discovers and deconstructs her subjects in the act of painting: Thick, dark vertical strokes establish a sense of the tree line in a forest, only to be subordinated to areas of green and yellow that assert the density of the foliage. Staccato horizontal bursts of blue, mediated by foamy bits of white, convey the sense of a lake or pond winding through the lush landscape. Yet these patches of color, too, are all but consumed by the crusty materiality of pigment, which activates the entire surface of the composition, obliging the viewer to seek the depth in the image.

All of these elements, however, do indeed create a shimmering sense of immediacy that is in many ways more alive and accurate than a more pictorial treatment of the same subject. The sumptuousness of the pigment itself seems a surrogate for the succulence of the greenery, the richness of soil, the tactility of tree-bark. All are made manifest, rather than merely evoked, in the impastos De La Torre layers so insistently. It seems as though she is attempting not so much to depict the landscape as to rebuild it by the cumulative application of the pigment,

"#1 untitled"

which finally achieves a reality of its own, quite apart from the subject matter.

It is a testament to Alicia De La Torre's obsessive determination that most of her compositions are quite similar, apart from slight variations in the placement of the patches of color from one canvas to the other. For it is not a variety of resemblances that she seeks but a synthesis of all landscapes in one indelible and immutable image. And she succeeds splendidly in making the elusive qualities of nature come alive on the canvas.

—Jane Morgenstern

Cecily Barth Firestein Sends in the Clones

When an artist is as good as Cecily Barth Firestein, and has been exhibiting regularly for as long, one has to wonder why she is not better known. Not that Firestein has been ignored; her work is in many prestigious collections and she is greatly admired by other artists—which is perhaps the most significant tribute of all.

Yet the fact remains that Firestein's art, on the face of its considerable merits, deserves much more attention and recognition than it has received over the years.

Thus every exhibition by Firestein becomes an occasion for puzzlement as well as for pleasure. This is especially true of her solo show, "Send in the Clones," at Phoenix Gallery, 568 Broadway, from April 2 through 26, with a reception on Saturday April 5, from 6 to 8 PM. That this is quite possibly her best exhibition to date raises all the old questions anew.

One of the more simplistic answers could be that as a well-bred young woman in the Tenth Street gallery scene of the late fifties Firestein tended to shun the Cedar Bar and the boozy socializing of her male peers. (Surely, as the overwhelmingly male canon of the New York School attests, she would not be the first gifted female artist to be penalized for not being "one of the guys.")

Another answer may be that while Firestein's work is preeminently painterly, she stubbornly insists on defining herself as "primarily a printmaker," even though she does not print multiple editions and her large mixed media monotypes are one-of-a-kind works, virtually indistinguishable from paintings. In an era when mediums often merge or overlap, one is tempted to quibble with her self-definition, since printmaking is all too often wrongly marginalized as an activity outside the larger arena of painting, where most of the spectacular, attention-getting action supposedly occurs.

Given that Firestein, like many of the best artists of her generation, studied painting with Hans Hofmann, and that her work partakes of the scale and immediacy that we associate with the medium, her willful insistence that print techniques are central to her process, while admirably uncompromising, may add to the misunderstanding of her work.

But perhaps even more germane is that, even as Cult of the Ugly has become increasingly fashionably in contemporary art, Firestein has embraced beauty more unabashedly with each succeeding exhibition. As she has learned to trust in her own innate elegance her surfaces have grown ever more sumptuously appealing, as seen in the recent monotype "You Can Do Anything, But Don't Step On My Blue Suede Shoes."

In this large work, eight identical collage figures of traditionally costumed umbrella-wielding Japanese geishas anchor the bottom portion of the composition under a downpour of milky white pigment sparely accented with floating autumn leaves. As the witty title of the present exhibition indicates, these figures are "clones" for being identical; yet the term can also be taken as a wry comment on the practice of making multiple editions of prints, which Firestein so eschews.

"Man, if you gotta ask, you don't know" Mixed media monotype

In any case, like the elephants in a previous exhibition, the variety of human and animal figures in the present show, even while affording the artist an opportunity to exercise the visual wit that finds its verbal equivalent in her titles, are primarily a formal device, serving as imagistic foils for Firestein's dynamic gestural pyrotechnics: In "Stag Party" a line of stags is set against an expanse of shiny black enamel, enlivened by long white drips, a single falling leaf, and explosions of ocher; penguins line up like chorus girls, juxtaposed with a dancing couple a la Fred and Ginger, in "Black Tie"; in another composition ("One Lump or Two?"), five camels traverse a floral terrain against a luminous yellow field.

Splashy effusions of pigment, controlled drips and splatters, and contrasts between glossy oil-based printing inks and matte tempera paints add to the sheer painterly delectation of Firestein's recent monotypes. These are further enhanced by a variety of collage elements such as bits of textured or patterned cloth, tactile clumps of shredded paper, and drawn or incised lines that contribute to the the overall lusciousness of effect.

In an essay called "Taste and Energy," the artist and critic Fairfield Porter once stated that while "good taste is not essential," energy is "a bridge to all that is essential." In the course of proving, perhaps as convincingly any artist alive, that those two qualities need not be mutually exclusive, Firestein has probably caused further confusion among the critically clueless as to where her work fits into the hierarchal categories of contemporary art.

For while Porter did not come right out and say so, in modern art "taste" is synonymous with "French" and "energy" with "American." Granted, male artists like Robert Motherwell and Cy Twombly can display a certain European elegance in their work without being expelled from the rough and ready boy's club of modern American painting. But for a woman artist to show as much panache as Firestein does and still have energy to burn is a far riskier business, given the sexual stereotyping that prevails, even at this late date, in certain sectors of the art world.

Still, on the evidence of Cecily Barth Firestein's newest exhibition, it seems safe to predict that the same qualities which make her work difficult to define and market in the present art climate will be the very ones to assure that it will ultimately endure.

—Ed McCormack

"I Love Manhattan": Visual Tributes to the Greatest City

While themes are often imposed on group shows merely as a pretense to gather disparate artists at cross purposes under a coherent banner, "I Love Manhattan," a recent exhibition curated by Renee Phillips, at Equity Properties Lobby, 850 Third Avenue, was one exhibition that truly lived up to its name.

Bill Heard

The ten artists in the show were selected from a national competition organized by Manhattan Arts International, a twenty year old network of "Artrepreneurs," of which Phillips, an artist career counselor and author, is director. One of several theme exhibitions that the organization plans for public spaces throughout the city, the show captured the indomitable spirit of the city and its people post 9/11— even as new reports of possible biological terrorism had some among the citizenry sealing their windows with duct tape.

Carlos Esquerra

In this regard, one of the most relevant works in the show was Gerda Kastl's painting "Approaching hoofbeats —The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." That this image of sinister symbolic figures emerging from clouds above the Manhattan skyline was actually painted prior to 9/11 made this work not only powerful but prophetic and garnered the artist much media attention.

Raul Manzano, an artist who has had made The Statue of Liberty a recurring theme in his work was another auspicious presence. Manzano's Magic Realist painting of the statue seen from behind, facing toward the Twin Towers, magically restored by the power of art, was especially affecting.

Lady Liberty also figures prominently in Bill Heard's large, horizontal harborscape "Blue on Blue," as well as in another canvas of tourists gazing from the observation windows in her crown, set against a starry nocturnal sky. Heard, like Manzano, is a painter who imbues realism with strong emotional content.

The internationally exhibited Swedish-born artist Benny H.V. Andersson may or may not have had the victims of 9/11 in

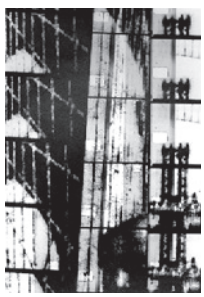
Benny H.V. Andersson

mind when he painted "Angels Over Manhattan," a spiritually uplifting little picture, in which the city's glowing lights competes with the numinous beings soaring through the night sky. In any case, this image seems a suitable tribute, as do other meticulously painted visionary compositions by Andersson in the series entitled "The Other Side," depicting tiny figures in heavenly vistas.

The most abstract painter in the show is Joanne Turney, whose canvases combine lyricism with rugged tactility in a manner akin to color field painters such as Jules Olitski. However, Turney's scroll painting, "Springtime in NY," an acrylic on canvas with agate, captures a sense of its subject in nonobjective terms.

Donna Cameron, a McDowell fellowship recipient whose avant garde films are in the collection of MOMA, also takes an abstract approach in works in archival pigment on canvas such as "Brooklyn Bridge," where a familiar landmark is schematized in a compelling geometric composition.

Equally abstract in their own manner, the digital photographs of Carlos Esguerra extract a severe geometry from light and shadow on the glassy facades of familiar corporate sites such as Metlife and Citigroup Center. Esguerra's pictures make us see the dynamic thrust of our native urban architecture from new and exciting angles.



Donna Cameron

Most of the artists in this show, however, take a more representative approach. Patti Mollica captures local color in boldly slashing strokes in paintings such as "Gridlock," in which cars, buses and yellow cabs caught in stasis create a strong composition, and "TKTS," where a familiar Times Square ticket outlet comes alive with vigorous hues.

The C-prints of photographer Jolene Varley Handy capture similar subjects from yet another highly original perspective. Handy's "Times Square NYC" focuses on the patchwork patterns of Broadway show posters over a Sbarros pizzeria, with pedestrians and colorful traffic adding to the lively visual cacophony at street-level.

Then there is Melissa Fleming, whose digital prints present the quieter poetry of watertanks and bridges silhouetted dramatically against deep blue skies. Fleming also gives us her own interpretation of Times Square as a jumble of neon signs scribbled onto darkness like Cy Twombly's elegant graffiti.

Melissa Fleming

Curator Renee Phillips scored a real success with this sharply focused gem of a group show, which held up a mirror to the city in a suitably public space, inspiring a sense of civic pride among all who passed through the Equity Properties Lobby. (A larger version of the "I Love Manhattan" Exhibition, featuring over 35 artists, can be seen on www.ManhattanArts.com.)

—J. Sanders Eaton

Thiebaud's "Riverscapes" Veer Nearer to the Visionary

It almost seems superfluous to say that Wayne Thiebaud, at age eighty-two, is one of precious few living masters of contemporary American painting. As his New York dealer Allan Stone puts it, "Thiebaud has entered the time-space continuum of Willem de Kooning and Barnett Newman using landscape as his vehicle instead of abstraction." This is not just any art dealer speaking, mind you, but one who has had a long, intimate relationship with the major figures of Abstract Expressionism and has served as an advisor to de Kooning's estate. And the aptness of Stone's simile is bolstered by an off-the-cuff assertion that de Kooning himself made to this writer some years ago to the effect that "all abstraction is based on landscape anyway."

Although Thiebaud first gained recognition in the 1960s with his famous paintings of pies and cakes, which were misconstrued to the point that some critics classified him as a Pop artist, from the onset his work was really all about painterly delectation; and while he has also proved himself to be a formidable figure painter, it is his mature landscape paintings that will surely secure his place in art history.

For, as seen in his retrospective at the Whitney Museum in 2001, as well as in his recent exhibition of "Riverscapes" at Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th Street, (which originated in October 2002 at Paul Thiebaud Gallery, in San Francisco and will be on view at Faggionato Fine Arts, in London, from April 8 to May 24), Thiebaud's landscapes are his most unique creations.

"Fields and Furrows"

The six monumental canvases in this show, revolving around the Sacramento River Valley, resolve the tension between representation and abstraction even more successfully than his San Francisco cityscapes, with their steeply veering perspectives, in that the elements of their compositions are arranged more flatly on the picture plane. In them, serpentine waterways viewed from vertiginous aerial angles wind through land masses that create patterns as alien to anything commonly encountered in nature as the so-called "crop circles" whose origins have puzzled geologists for decades.

The colors that Thiebaud employs in these paintings are just as unearthly, ranging from pale violet, to lime green, to pink and peach and purple hues of a kandy-kolored incandescence that one would be equally hard put to locate in nature. Furrowed fields shed light like neon tubes. Swelling intestinal curves along riverbanks emit their own weird luminescence. Bodies of water that also appear lit from within like fishtanks are limned smoothly in offbeat pastel shades, appearing at once translucent and meaty.

While the manner in which Thiebaud's thickly slathered pigment became a surrogate for cake frosting got him lumped with the "New Realists" earlier in his career, similarly sumptuous impastos when applied to landscape push the envelope nearer to the visionary. Shape and color are tweaked and heightened in these new paintings to an optically boggling degree that makes the retina resonate deliciously. Fields and rivers waver and wiggle. Confectionery rainbows pool in the shadows of lollipop trees popping oddly out of shapes that suggest sinuous traffic islands and highway abutments that follow the flow of the riverrun along the serpentine topology.

Thiebaud's supreme confidence as a mature painter fully in command of his hard-won gifts enables him to take poetic liberties that would be foolhardy for a less experienced, not to mention less brilliant, painter. He does not so much abstract from nature as reinvent nature for his own purposes with an almost godlike arrogance that makes one think of how reckless— even crazy!— some of Picasso's formal choices must have appeared before they became so familiar a part of our visual vocabulary.

Indeed, some of Thiebaud's moves and choices seem just that bold, even in an era when so much stylistic innovation has gone under the bridge, so to speak, that it is remarkably difficult for any artist, no matter how gifted, to seem truly original anymore.

—Ed McCormack

The Many Faces of Black Art at Broadway Mall

While Black History Month exhibitions present familiar names, such as Jacob Lawrence, Bob Thompson and Romare Bearden, less familiar artists also worthy of attention are featured in "Black is Blue and Other Colors Too," currated recently by Dee Winfield for the West Side Arts Coalition, at Broadway Mall Community Center, Broadway and 96th Street.

David Shrobe, who recently had an impressive solo show at The Interchurch Center, showed a characteristically busy composition with a stylized face playing hide and seek among abstract forms, as well as a figurative painting distorted in a manner akin to Francis Bacon. Both revealed a prodigiously gifted young painter trying on modes and testing his powers.

The charcoal drawings of William Hunt combine the Afrocentric graphic power of Charles White with a more updated Hip Hop sensibility. Hunt's "Father and Son" depicted a baby supported by a man's flowing dreadlocks as though floating on a cloud, while his multifigure composition "Diversity" was a casual catalog of African-American styles and types wittily combined with a hand presenting the artist's business card.

Amazonian female nudes would appear to be the specialty of Weldon Ryan, whose two large canvases were monumental images of an African queen wearing only a blue turban. Her lithe dancer's body struck graceful postures, half hidden by pink curtains.

Frequent exhibitor Neeci Sims was represented by a strong painting of a purple rose set against a violet and green leaves, all in deep tones that lend the image an emblematic sense of mystery. Here, as in a contrastingly luminous skyscape in delicate pinks, blues, purples and yellows, Sims imbues a simple subject with drama and significance.

Al Johnson made a pointed moral comment with a painting of three African masks entitled "See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil." Johnson seemed to be reclaiming his heritage from Picasso and others who would exploit African Masks for their own purposes.

Imo Nse Imeh puts a strong grasp of classical anatomy to the service of a thoroughly contemporary sensibility in symbolic paintings featuring monumental figures emerging from dark grounds with titles such as "On Responsibility" and "Retained Ideologies." Imeh's dynamic compositions seem to cry out for huge walls and social murals in the manner of Jose Clemente Orozco.

Eleanor Gilpatrick, on the other hand, captures the attitudes of musicians playing in streets and subways with considerable insight and painterly panache. Gilpatrick's convincing yet casual realist style suits such unassuming subjects auspiciously.

Unassuming in its own manner, yet characteristically compelling, is Dee Winfield's "Violets for Dora." A floral painting with strong abstract qualities akin to those in the work of Georgia O'keeffe, it is limned with the same smooth sensuality that makes Winfield's more familiar portraits of beautiful black women so aesthetically alluring.

By contrast Joey Infante's "Into the Light" is appealing for its subdued colors and exotic imagery, with the stylized outlines of running giraffes set against a scumbled textural ground and illuminated by a blazing yellow sun.

Then there is musician/painter Dick Griffin, whose large abstract canvas continues his "Love in the Air" series, unveiled in a previous group show in the same venue. In this buoyant composition, swift, bold strokes of purple and splashes of red interact on a brilliant yellow ground creating an effect so musical as to indicate that Griffin sees his two art forms as interchangeable.

—Peter Wiley

At Phoenix, a Savvy Director's Smart Choices

Founded in 1958, Phoenix Gallery, now located at 568 Broadway, recently presented a group show called, "Global Crossroads — Director's Choice," artfully curated by director Linda Handler, herself a respected sculptor.

The first thing that struck one was how well the show represented postmodern pluralism, from the delightful zaniness of Chris Sharp's sculpture of a larger than life polka-dot giraffe man (or whatever it was!), to the poetic sobriety of Gretl Bauer's stringed wall-assemblage; from Phyllis Carlin's totemic painted floor sculpture, in which whimsical forms on long rods simultaneously evoke flowers and birds, to Pamela Flynn's mixed media piece, in which sparkling stars and delicately stitched collage elements give way to the jolting photo-image of a dead deer in snow; from an evocative large mixed media painting by Jun Ho Lee, juxtaposing printed and photographic imagery within an austere abstract format to convey a diaristic resonance, to Edward Fletcher's intriguing oil of a bizarrely distorted guitar player.

Steven Dono's small sculpture of an abstract form resembling a battleship gray spider squatting over a golden orb was as unique in its own way as his more familiar room-sized installations, while Hope Carter's nearby room-sized installation played wittily with the idea of scale with scattered elements such as strings, stones, and cut-out shapes, creating the sense that one had stepped inside a collage.

Other complementary contrasts: the near-perfect synthesis of sophisticated draftsmanship and childlike freedom in Eva Bouzard-Hui's small pencil drawings, and neo-fauvist boldness in Marie-Louise McHugh's big oil of an upside-down blue nude set against a vibrant red ground; a meticulously executed abstract icon in egg tempera and eggshell mosaic on wood by Joseph Di Bella, and small, swiftly brushed oil on unsized canvas by Myung Kim, notable for its Zen-like grace; Dorothy Deon's dazzling mixed media piece, with intricate circular shapes bubbling up all over two plastic panels, suggesting frantic cellular activity, and Gerri Moore's poignant two-part documentation of a funeral, comprised of a sequence of sketchy ink drawings resembling a filmic storyboard and a tiny faux-naif oil of a lone mourner sitting beside a huge basket of flowers; a characteristic abstract " twisted print" painting by the French artist Jean-Pierre Vuillaume, whose impressive first solo show in the same venue was recently reviewed in these pages, and an affectingly direct black and white photograph by Robert Blank of Vietnamese rice farmers laboring in a field.

Susanne Nestory employed pink and tangerine hues with a subtlety reminiscent of Ad Reinhardt's black on black paintings in her oil on canvas, with its "phantom" hard-edge forms, while Emilie Snyder juxtaposed symbols such as a heart, a ladder, and the shadowy outline of a simplified bird in a symbolic semi abstract composition. Paul Gazda showed a characteristically tactile screen assemblage in which a broken plate and five sets of rugged work gloves suggested an altercation at dinner, while Pamela Bennett Ader employed contrastingly delicate abstract effusions of rosy hues in her lyrical abstract oil.

Anna Bisso's jigsaw shapes and blotchy paint application lent her small yet strong painting a figuratively allusive energy, while Joseph Brown's deadpan self portrait projected a haunting presence, despite its pale, almost diffident execution. Joan Goldsmith's vigorous gestural abstraction juxtaposed swirling linear strokes and drips with checkerboard squares to create contrasts and tensions; Kurt Delbanco showed a buoyant linear abstraction, and Cecily Barth Firestein (whose solo exhibition is reviewed elsewhere in this issue) was represented by a small monotype with all the vigor, energy, and humor of her more familiar large works.

Choosing one representative work by each artist, Linda Handler showcased the diversity and quality that accounts for Phoenix Gallery's longevity.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Geneviève: A Vivacious Virtuoso from Paris

While even the single name by which she is known sounds quintessentially French, the versatile artist called Geneviève, who lives and works in Paris, actually hails from Montana, and seems in that regard to be one of her own imaginative creations. In any case, Geneviève transcends national identities and cultural categories to create her own passionate reality in her exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, from May 12 through May 31, with a reception for the artist, May 14, from 6 to 8 pm.

A former student of the Russian sculptor Zadkin, Geneviève is equally proficient as a painter and a sculptor. Her work in each medium shares similar concerns with the expressive human figure as a vehicle for conveying her exuberant energy and zest for life. In her paintings and in her sculptures, which are often painted as well, there is a romantic lyricism which can be compared to that of Marc Chagall. Her figures move through fanciful landscapes with a similar sense of weightlessness and her colors are every bit as magical and harmonious. Yet, being a postmodern artist, Geneviève also displays a more contemporary sensibility akin to that of the Italian neoexpressionists of the "Transavantgarde" movement who emerged in the 1970s.

In the latter regard, Geneviere's work seems to share a particular kinship with that of Sandro Chia for its freewheeling imagery and coloristic richness, as well as an ability to build on the accomplishments of predecessors like Chagall, adding a touch of contemporary irony to offset the saccharine sentiments of an earlier time. As a Francophile who has adopted Paris as her home, she has obviously also soaked up some of the influence and atmosphere of the School of Paris in terms of her chromatic harmonies and willingness to pay tribute to beauty rather than indulging in the gratuitous grotesqueness that mars much postmodern painting. In one of her paintings, for example, brilliant floral bouquets dominate the foreground of the composition, giving way to images of a church set against a blue sky and other picturesque elements. The entire composition is enlivened by Geneviève's buoyant brushstrokes and takes on a sense of heightened reality, as though she has captured the very soul of a lovely spring day and made its fleeting qualities poignantly immutable in pigment.

In another painting, a still life is codified in a more semi-abstract manner, with the vase and flowers reduced to stylized areas of color that enact an energetic angular dance in homage to the fractured planes of Cubism.

Yet another major picture presents an image of a magnificent architectural anomaly that fills the composition with luminous color like a stained glass cathedral, and is further enlivened by forms that suggest figures and landscape elements as though viewed through a kaleidoscope. Here, too, Geneviève shows her sophisticated awareness of the various schools of modernism, which she absorbs and transforms for her own purposes.

"Yin & Yang" Plastic-Epoxite 39x35x25cm

Geneviève's gift for transforming art historical precedents is equally evident in a painting in which forms that resemble tree branches adorned by Autumn leaves and set against a pale blue sky hark back to the abstractions of Kandinsky, even while the picture is filled with her own special lyricism and stamped with her inimitable stylistic signature. She appears completely uninhibited in her love of life and art and transmits this enthusiasm to her paintings through her rhapsodic approach to color. In her sculptures it comes across in the way her freewheeling forms command space and confront the viewer with their dynamic anatomical distortions.

Perhaps the fact that she is a painter as well as a sculptor has helped Geneviève to transcend the supposed physical limitations of three-dimensional form, for she seems to recognize no boundaries. In this regard the plasticity of her figures seems akin to that in the sculptures of the painter Willem de Kooning. In fact, some of Geneviève's pieces have similarly craggy surfaces and forms that flare out in a similar manner, as though the figure is metamorphosing before one's very eyes.

Geneviève, however, seems less concerned with abstract qualities in sculpture than does de Kooning—or perhaps one should say that the abstract emerges through the humanistic in her work. Which is to say, the passion with which she invests her figures provokes an unselfconscious expressiveness that provides the abstract thrust of her pieces.

This emotional expressiveness invests her sculptures with a presence and a power that is undeniable, be the subject the anguish of a powerfully contorted crucifixion or the joy of a cellist embracing his instrument as though it were a lover. Her pieces cover the entire range of human experience and emotion, even while providing purely aesthetic pleasure with their graceful contours, volumic dynamism, and exquisite balances of positive and negative spaces.

That Geneviève also imparts color to some of her pieces enables her to add yet another expressive element and combine her two mediums in a unique manner, as seen in her sculpture of a reposeful female nude, the different parts of her body enlivened by bright areas of yellow, pink, blue, and green, suggesting both the vogue for "body painting" of the 1960s and a figure sprung to life out of a Fauvist canvas.

In this piece, as in all of her work in both of her mediums, Geneviève reveals herself to be an inventive and intrepid talent whose work bears serious notice.

—Laurel Kronenberger

A Major Latin American Sampler at Agora Gallery

Although a strong strain of surrealism has always run through the modern art of Latin America, other forms of figuration, ranging from the actual through the fantastic, also appear to take precedence over abstraction in that area of the world. At least, a preference for humanistic expression over formal experiment was evident in the Latin American Fine Art Exhibition, a comprehensive survey seen recently art Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, in Soho.

One of the show's mature masters, a veteran of over 300 exhibitions in South America, Europe, and the U.S., is the Portuguese artist known as Pedro Portugal. An accomplished romantic realist represented here by characteristically fanciful figure paintings in a style that combines aspects of the Baroque and the neoclassical in a poetic postmodern synthesis.

Mexican artists have long made a considerable contribution to the surreal tradition, and are particularly adept at combining it with the folkloric, as seen in the paintings of Lorena Rodriguez, where elements of Mayan and Aztec culture haunt Dali-esque dreamscapes. Rodriguez possesses the technical proficiency to imbue the most fabulous imagery with a striking verisimilitude.

Another gifted Mexican artist, Rodrigo Hernandez, creates tactile works in which paint and mixed media take on the weight and depth of sculpture, with mixtures of dry pigment, tobacco, soil and other natural substances secreted in compartments, lending his pieces a sense of mystery and ritual. Like his great countryman Rufino Tamayo, Hernandez filters elements of primitivism through a sophisticated contemporary sensibility.

Although born in Mexico City and acutely aware of her heritage, Karen Deicas DePodesta tends to rely on what she calls "subconscious perceptions," rather than recognizable cultural symbols. Her peculiarly engaging paintings, which present faceless stylized figures in geometric settings, are at once whimsical and psychologically compelling.

Two brothers, also from Mexico City, take distinctly different approaches to materials and subject matter, yet their work shares a fluid expressiveness. The sculptor Renato Dorfman creates mixed media pieces in which human figures and other organic forms command space with their flowing contours. In his hands, clay becomes a conduit to a hidden world, where sensual semi-abstract forms take on a phantasmagoric life of their own, reflecting Renato Dorfman's belief that "the earth is a living being."

The paintings of Adan Dorfman are notable for their coloristic intensity, as well as for their emotionally charged figurative distortions. Like the American painter Peter Saul, Adan Dorfman is not afraid to verge on the grotesque in his desire to embody and personify a range of human feelings, from anguish to ecstasy, and his passion lends his compositions great energy.

Opening reception for the Latin American Exhibition at Agora Gallery

Then there is Sabrina Villasenor, who was included in two Altar for the Dead Cultural events in Mexico and Canada, and whose earthy mixed media paintings merge elements of the figure and landscape in a highly original manner. Sensual shapes, anatomically allusive yet simultaneously elusive, merge boldly in Villasenor's paintings, suggesting the mythic couplings of nature deities.

One of the more ostensibly abstract painters in the exhibition is Tuma Pacheco, the scion of an artistic family, who is inspired by Mayan culture, along with a host of more modern influences, to create oils animated by brilliant color and a frenetic gestural energy. Although initially seduced by bold chromatic and tactile qualities, the viewer soon discerns human and animal figures half submerged in Tuma Pacheco's tides of surging pigment.

By contrast, the figure comes to the forefront in the work of Brazilian realist Fernanda Veriga, whose oils on canvas of women with formidable proportions have qualities in common with the paintings of Lucian Freud. In both her clothed and nude figures, Fernanda Veriga captures the palpable presence of her plus-size models with affection and impressive painterly panache.

Another artist from Brazil, Vitor Azambuja, finds his sole inspiration in floral forms, which he paints to the exclusion of all else. Like Giorgio Morandi's famous arrangements of bottles, Vitor Azambuja's flowers are a vehicle for endless chromatic and formal exploration, capturing their delicate tonalities and shapes with such subtle, sumptuous variety as to make other subject matter seem superfluous.

The Argentinean painter Susana Bonnet, on the other hand, explores a variety of subjects, both figurative and abstract. Whether painting figures swarming around an oversized apple or luminous, flaring nonobjective forms, Bonnet imbues all of her oils with a visionary quality that suggests spiritual striving.

The paintings of Marynes Avila, also Argentinean, reveal a contrastingly Pop sensibility. Often depicting stylized images of entwined lovers in bold outlines and brilliant primaries, Avila's lively oils combine qualities of stained glass and comic strips in a lively personal synthesis.

The Venezuelan artist Jorge Humberto Gonçalves-Romero puts his faith in the untrammeled gesture, employing acrylics, ink, and mixed media to create compositions in which swiftly drawn male and female figures are often superimposed or merged amid splashy color areas. More concerned with capturing the energies and personalities of human beings than representing them with anatomical accuracy, Gonçalves-Romero has evolved a vigorous and exhilarating gestural freedom.

The human gaze as mirror to the soul is a favorite subject in the paintings of Francisca Rota-Loiseau, who has found some of her most compelling portrait subjects on the Pacific coast of Ecuador, Emeralds, and Chat. Rota-Loiseau's acrylic on canvas of a woman in a green head scarf and veil regarding the viewer with deep, dark eyes is an especially strong example of her work.

Colombian artist Fernando Tovar is known for his paintings of beautiful women, but he also imbues the fruits in his still life paintings with a striking sensuality. With meticulous, light filled Magic Realism, in pristine compositions apparently informed by his architectural training, Tovar lends these and other objects nature mortise a metaphysical suggestiveness that transcends genre.

This was the second such survey of Latin American art at Agora Gallery in two years. And on the strength of its success, one can only hope that this thoroughly enjoyable show will continue as an annual event.

—Lawrence Downes

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