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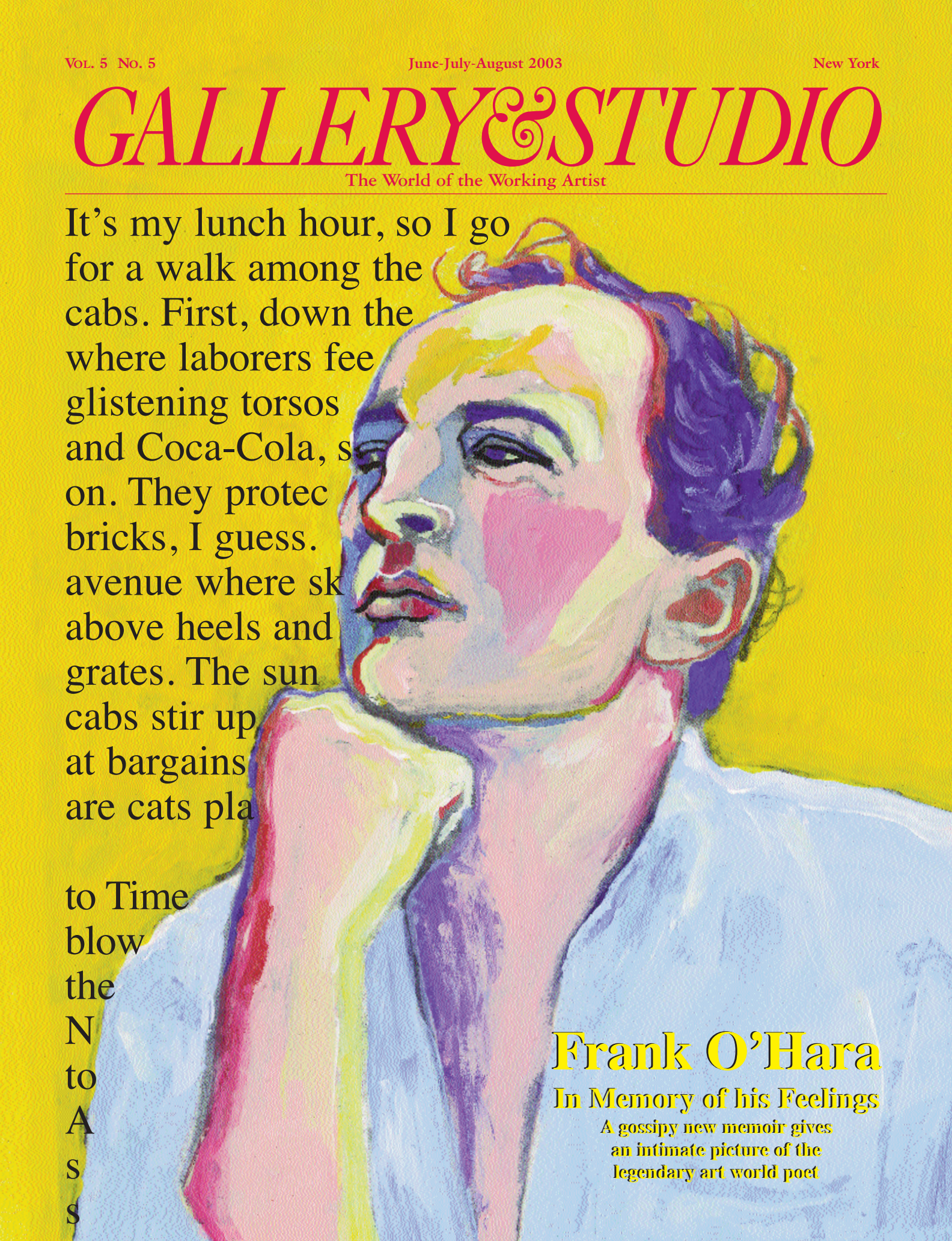
GALLERY&STUDIO

The World of the Working Artist



Frank O'Hara

In Memory of his Feelings

A gossipy new memoir gives an intimate picture of the legendary art world poet

"Night & Day", Acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 44" X 24"

Bernice Faegenburg

Night and Day

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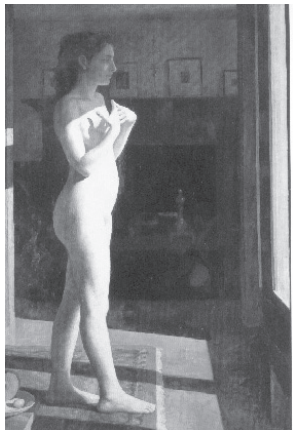
G&S Highlights

On the Cover:
Frank O'Hara *was the American Apollinaire, a tremendously influential poet and critic with intimate ties to artists and the art world during the heyday of The New York School. A gossipy new memoir by his roommate and sometime lover Joe LeSueur sheds new light on the man and his era.*
See New York Notebook–Page 14



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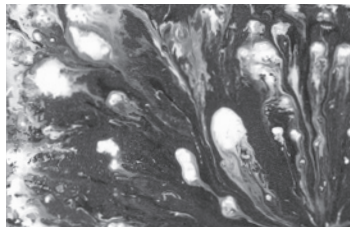

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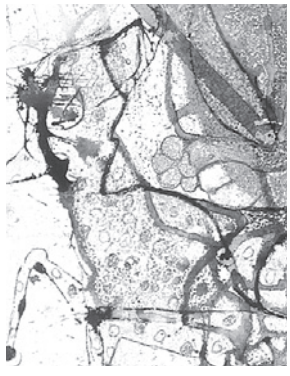

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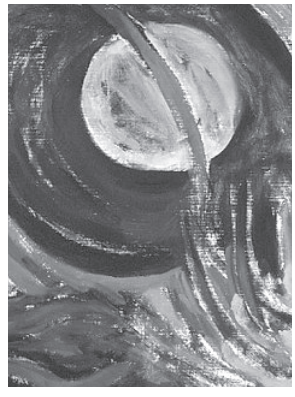

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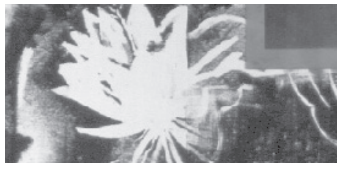

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The Courageously Unflinching Vision of John Arruda

The Brooklyn painter John Arruda is a true maverick. Judging from the evidence at hand, since the 1970s, he has steadfastly refused to pay any attention to what has been going on in the art world, preferring to follow his own personal visions wherever they might lead him.

Of course, an artist pays a certain price for this kind of independence. Arruda is not nearly as well known as he should be, given the size and scope of his talent. Nor, one can only surmise, is he as well off financially as many lesser talents who have carefully plotted their careers to coincide with the marketplace. That said, if we are to regard the excellence and uniqueness of work itself as the ultimate value of art, the benefits far outweigh the deficits. At least this was the impression that came across indelibly in "John Arruda: A Retrospective of Paintings and Drawings, 1973-2003," seen recently at Belanthi Gallery, 142 Court St., Brooklyn.

It bears mentioning at the onset that Belanthi Gallery, which celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary this year, is one of the true pioneers in what has now become a vital art scene in the borough of Brooklyn, its roster having included stellar artists such as Arruda, Jean Kroeber, and the late Harold LeRoy, among others, long before the emergence of Williamsburg and DUMBO. And surely, mounting a major retrospective of Arruda's work was a laudable project, to which the gallery's long-time president and director Paulette Hios did appropriate justice in this superbly curated show.

Pressed to place a basically unclassifiable artist within a broad stylistic and philosophical context, the very short list of ancestors and peers one could come up with for Arruda would include other mavericks such as Francis Bacon, Gregory Gillespie, and Odd Nerdrum. From the very beginning of his career, however, Arruda has had his own inimitable approach, his own brilliantly dark vision, if one may coin an oxymoron. In fact, from the earliest works in this show to those completed earlier this year, there is a remarkable consistency in Arruda's work. He has not so much developed his oeuvre as refined and broadened it over the years, as his technical skills have grown commensurate with his imaginative gifts.

Perhaps what sets Arruda apart most dramatically from other artists is his ability to plumb the most nightmarish areas of his own consciousness; to visit the darkest corners of his psyche, look unflinchingly at what he finds there, and transcribe it on canvas without sacrificing aesthetic credibility. Few artists possess the gift that Arruda has for making what is ugly beautiful through the peculiar alchemy of pigment on canvas, and therefore enabling us to see something within him—and by extension within ourselves—that we might normally not have the courage to examine.

One of the most powerful examples of this is the large painting from 1998 entitled "Self Portrait," which depicts a grotesque figure, naked from the waist down, splashed with what appears to be white paint, one of its arms a fragment of a broken picture frame, crouched on a tile floor with its long, hairless tail plugged into a wall-socket.

Having met Arruda some years back, one remembers him as a rather good-looking man who resembled a Native American with his strong features and shoulder-length black hair. Thus, this autoportrait obviously depicts a mental state rather than a physical reality; it is a monstrous symbolic transmogrification of the self seen through the distorting mirror of doubt and disgust that all people of sensibility, if they are to be honest with themselves, must experience periodically in the course of a lifetime.

"Orpheus Descending"

It takes courage for a painter to explore such subject matter very deliberately. Yet Arruda balances his intrepidness with humor in another painting, a companion piece from the same year, entitled "Rejuvenation." Here, a similarly grotesque figure, also with its tail plugged into the wall, has sprouted black fluttering wings, which although they resemble the wings of an insect more than an angel, suggest the possibility of flight—if only he might somehow unplug himself from that damnable socket!

In all of Arruda's paintings, his ability to bring off extreme visions springs from his willingness to give his considerable technical skills over to the realization of the image, to invest it with a singular intensity, imparting verisimilitude to the most unsettling anatomical anomalies. His blackly Goyaesque palette is especially effective in paintings such as the 2000 canvas "Maisie's Dream," in which the indistinct forms of animals huddled as though in some horrific holding pen emerge from darkness to haunt us with their glistening eyes. This painting seems a relative of more specific images related to animals such as "The Freezer," painted a year earlier. Here, the cow is already a carcass, flayed and hanging before its executioner, a burly butcher with a carving knife in his hand and a trail of steam issuing from his mouth. In this and other paintings from the same period, Arruda seems to share concerns about man's inhumanity to other species with the British-born artist and illustrator Sue Coe. Arruda, however, is by far the better painter, and his less journalistic, less preachy approach jolts us on a much more visceral level.

In other paintings, such as "Dogman" (2000), men morph into animals, suggesting that we may share more in common with these supposedly "lower" species than we know, or are juxtaposed with them in compositions such as "Man with Dogs," in which the canine figures are strangely skeletonized. Then there is "Kafka," a darkly evocative 1987 portrait of the author with one of his arm's apparently turning into a cockroach limb that seems emblematic of this artist's ongoing theme: metamorphosis.

Some of Arruda's earliest paintings, especially those on an intimate scale such as "Roy Rogers" (1973), have the appearance of oddly mutated family album photos, while his most recent post-9/11 cityscapes have an atmospheric, elegiac beauty that is deeply affecting. In the 2002 canvas "Our Town," a gnomish lone figure confronts the viewer against a backdrop of darkly shadowed houses and American flags. "Back Streets" (2003) presents an urban panorama of buildings, alleyways, and the looming silhouette of the Brooklyn Bridge bathed in blue nocturnal auras that is an atmospheric poetic tour de force.

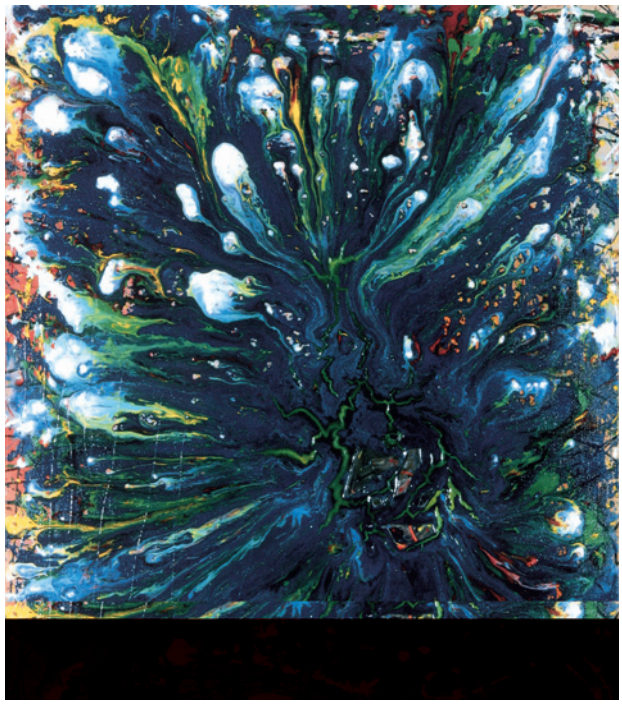
"Kafka"

Although figures are not featured prominently in Arruda's recent cityscapes, they are permeated by emotional qualities nonetheless. Indeed, all of his work pits the human spirit against death and destruction—although, much as one would like to, it is difficult to say that the human spirit triumphs in the end. It does put up a pretty good fight, though, and perhaps John Arruda is telling us that the struggle alone may be sufficient to save our souls.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Synthesis and Innovation in the Paintings of Dorothy A. Culpepper

Although women were rarely given their proper due in the male-dominated art world of the 1950s, it was a woman artist, Helen Frankenthaler, who, as Ted Loos pointed out in a preview of Frankenthaler's recent exhibition at Knoedler & Company in the New York Times, "outflanked Abstract Expressionism and anticipated the Color Field school" with her 1952 masterpiece "Mountains and Sea." The innovative painting, created with thinned paint poured onto a large expanse of unprimed canvas, is a prototype of "stain painting," a technique that had a profound influence on other artists such as Morris Louis, who visited Frankenthaler's studio in 1953 and found her work a revelation, as well as on subsequent generations of artists, who opted for a more fluid effect than the thickly impastoed surfaces favored by Pollock, de Kooning, and other Abstract Expressionists.



"Reflections Among the Milkweed"

Now, along comes Dorothy A. Culpepper, a painter born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico, who has discovered a way of combining both modes in an exciting post-modern synthesis that sets her work apart. In her recent solo exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, Culpepper demonstrated (figuratively, as well as quite literally in two canvases with the title "Folded Space") that adding a new wrinkle, so to speak, can revive a venerable mode of abstraction in significant ways. Indeed, Culpepper's mostly majestically large poured paintings, some with thickly layered pigmentations in areas, and others in which various objects collaged to the surface create a rugged tactility, have a freshness and an originality that is quite remarkable, given the longevity of both of the modes she draws upon so successfully.

Each of Culpepper's paintings is an exploration of the pure possibilities of the pure painterly dimension, an exuberant and uninhibited foray into the mystery of the materials themselves. One of the unique facets of her work, particularly in those paintings to which she adds objects such as nails and wire mesh, is her ability to create a sense of surface tension that integrates with the paint but is not an element of the overall design of the composition. Rather, the objects that she adds appear to have been swept up in the vortex of the paint, to have been absorbed into the terrain of the surface as though through some natural process, and therefore to have a life of their own, independent of the vital life in the physical substance of the paint, yet integral to its total effect.

Yet the matter-of-fact physicality of Culpepper's paintings does nothing to negate their allusiveness, which even verges on the literal in a painting such as "Blue Tulip," where the actual contour of the sensually shaped petal is clearly discernible in a large blue area overlaid with energetic green and red splashes and drips. Culpepper clearly and enthusiastically avails herself of the postmodern option of combining elements of the recognizable with the abstract, if not always as overtly as in "Blue Tulip," elsewhere as well.

In another large canvas called "River Divided," for example, the movement of the paint, which forms marbleized rivulets, evokes the sense of a vast and powerful watery flow, with areas of red and blue converging and morphing into vibrant purple waves where the two colors merge. Here, the mixing of the colors seems to occur before the viewers' very eyes, merging process and image in a brilliant blur of frozen flux that makes one party to the spontaneous magic and immediacy of the act of painting. Equally energetic and evocative of a specific natural phenomena in another manner is "A Windy Day," a painting in which skeins of dripped and swirled paint create a red and blue linear calligraphy whose rhythmic movement captures a real sense of the elusive forces to which the title alludes.

The feeling that one is witnessing an "event" as much as savoring an aesthetic object when one stands before Culpepper's paintings is enhanced by her compositional habit of often leaving areas of the canvas bare, particularly around the edges. Thus she establishes the canvas as a kind of arena for the action that occurs, which often involves the vertically surging of thinned acrylic paint at the center of the canvas to give the paint its overall thrust. However, Culpepper also employs a variety of other strategies to invest her paintings with life and movement, such as casting out expansive forms in translucent veils of color that loom luminously and overlap from several directions simultaneously. And she often adds vigorous drips and splashes of contrasting colors over these monumental shapes to enliven them internally and further animate the surface.

The addition of objects to some paintings adds further to the rich dialogue between form and texture, as seen in "Nail Pool," where horizontal scatterings of nails, washers, and buttons form a tactile constellation amid flowing blue, red, and yellow color areas set off by brown areas of bare linen canvas at the edges of the composition. Culpepper's use of tactile objects reaches its apex in paintings such as "Junkyard," where nails, clothespins, nuts and bolts, bottle caps, and even a pair of goggles encrust the canvas and are spattered with dense concentrations of dripped primary hues, while the aforementioned "Folded Space" paintings, with their horizontal crevices in the canvas emerging as even more overt elements in the composition suggest a direction that this adventurous artist may explore further fruitfully in the future.

In this impressive new exhibition of stately large canvases at Montserrat Gallery, Culpepper proved herself much more than merely a worthy successor to older painters such as Frankenthaler and Louis.

Indeed, Dorothy A. Culpepper, who has exhibited widely in Mexico, Colorado, New York, and Paris, has staked out a distinct territory for herself, in which she can freely explore the properties of paint, applied in a variety of ways from thick to thin, from flowing washes to layered impastos, as a vehicle for expressing a constantly evolving inner landscape. Her paintings are challenging and richly rewarding on several levels simultaneously, and one trusts that their fascination will prove durable as well. —Marie R. Pagano

Marjie Zelman: Fishing in the Stream of Consciousness

A tug-of-war between abstraction and the human image provides the spatial and psychological tension that enlivens the mixed media paintings of Marjie Zelman, which can be seen in her solo exhibition "Visions" at Viridian Artists @ Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, from June 10 though 28. (Reception Saturday, June 14, from 4 to 7 PM.)

"No matter how often I plan to end a painting abstractly, my involvement with people seems to have its way with me as I watch figures emerge," Zelman has stated of her intuitive method, which entails laying down lines, splashes, and drips of color on thick, lush sheets of watercolor paper and letting them evolve, almost of their own accord, into figurative imagery.

In this regard, her process seems the visual equivalent of the "automatic writing" employed by nineteenth century spiritualists to contact those in the afterlife or James Joyce's literary "stream of consciousness"—a way of plumbing her own depths to arrive at something fresh and unpremeditated. By such means, she succeeds admirably in extracting intriguing forms and images out of the maze-like configurations of lines and other marks that she manipulates with pigment diluted to a degree that it flows freely in concert with the movement of her mind and hand.

Imagining one of her paintings in the early stages, before the images emerge, one pictures something resembling Brice Marden's "Cold Mountain" abstractions, for Zelman's compositions evolve from freely looping and overlapping networks of different colored lines that turn and twist in muscular configurations. With these multicolored linear elements she almost appears to lasso her images or capture them in flight, as though in a net. This gives her compositions a sense of spontaneous movement and flux that imbues them with an exhilarating energy.

The images themselves are fanciful and elastic, ranging from more or less anatomically accurate depictions of faces and figures in a manner recalling the graceful line drawings of Ben Shahn to wildly distorted semi-abstract anomalies more reminiscent of Paul Klee's imaginative flights.

The fluidity of Zelman's style enables her to move easily between various degrees of abstraction and realism, uniting otherwise seemingly conflicting tendencies by virtue of her sheer graphic exuberance. Such is the plastic license she grants herself when she "takes a line for a little walk," to borrow Klee's lovely phrase, that she can wander anywhere she wishes and finally arrive at a coherent statement on the complexity human entanglements. (At the same time, her linear networks serve as a flexible grid to adhere her images to the picture plane and provide her imaginative forays with a formal ballast that distinguishes them from the work of those so-called "outsider" artists who fill their composition with faces and figures in a more compulsive and chaotic manner.)

"Magic's Eye"

Indeed, Zelman's method and her message meld in the most direct way, delineating the simple fact of our interconnectedness through images that merge as naturally as branches grow from a tree. Or as the artist herself puts it: "My paintings also grow out of my visceral response to the human condition...sometimes political, sometimes sociological as well as familial."

"Visceral" is an apt word, for her paintings do seem to be governed by the gut as much as by the eye, mind, and hand. This is especially obvious in an untitled painting that Zelman informs us was completed on the day that the war in Iraq began. In this intricate composition, several fragmented faces and figures are interwoven with roughly scrawled images of city buildings, all invested with intense emotional qualities by virtue of her bold expressionistic distortions.

In other paintings such as "Twilight Dance," Zelman's linear terpsichore turns to a more fanciful direction with more loosely abstracted figurative forms flowing freely amid color areas that glow as luminously as stained glass. Equally buoyant are other recent mixed media works such as "Head Trip" and "Magic's Eye," in which human and animal figures form polymorphous masses amid splashes, drips, and bits of color that propel the eye around the composition at a delightfully vertiginous pace. In "Magic's Eye," the composition is particularly energetic and the forms are as free and whimsical as those in a Miro or one of Pierre Alichinsky's neo-primitive ink paintings.

Although many artists work in mixed media nowadays, Zelman's pictures exemplify the term more than most, in that she exploits the contrasts between washes of diluted acrylic pigment, sharply incised pen and ink lines, oil pastels, graphite, gels, and collage elements to create a wide variety of visual and textural effects that lend her compositions great vivacity.

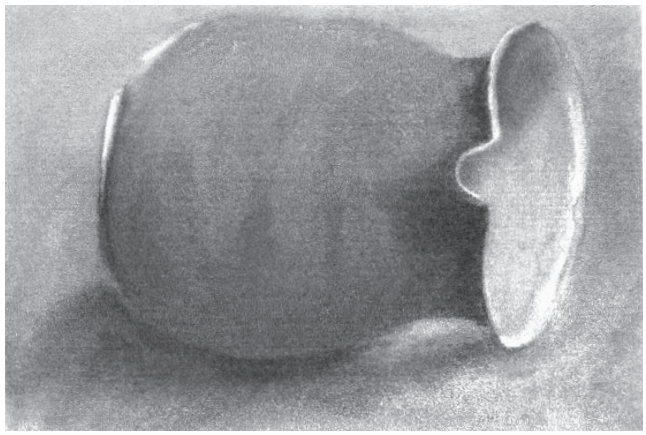
"While involved with the process of bringing images to fruition, I try to maintain the appearance of spontaneity—an objective which, I find, is best realized by working and reworking the minutest details," Zelman says, and her mixed media technique contributes to the sense that the work is evolving before one's eyes, with a variety of distinctly different strokes, gestures, and marks generating remarkable vitality.

Marjie Zelman's most impressive attribute, however, is her ability to harmonize the abstract and figurative elements in her paintings, creating a seamless synthesis of the aesthetic and the expressive, the purely visual and the emotive. Although often lighthearted and amusing, her paintings delineate the serious and complex relationships that ultimately connect us all.

—Ed McCormack

West Side Artists Stress Drawing as the "Source" of Inspiration

Since she is a draftsperson of considerable ability herself, it seems appropriate that Emily Rich should curate a drawing exhibition. What's more, she did a splendid job of choosing fellow artists for whom drawing is foremost in "Drawing: The Source," a group show by members of the West Side Arts Coalition, seen recently at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center traffic island on Broadway and 96th Street.



Jordi Waggoner

Rich's own contribution were watercolors and ink drawings in which floral subjects and abstract compositions were almost interchangeable, since both explored spatial relationships with equally sinuous gestural grace; as well as other works demonstrating the relationship between fashion drawing and fine art.

Marilyn Z. Raab was represented by a group of sensitive drawings in charcoal and white crayon on tinted paper depicting swampy landscapes in evocative detail, with wispy clouds floating over tall grass and still bodies of water, some with rowboats abandoned along their banks. Gail Rodney's pastel drawings from the nude model evoked a palpable presence with bold, well-placed pastel strokes in a limited palette; in one, three swift, sketchy views of a voluptuous female nude enlivened a single sheet, while a larger drawing of a frontal male nude was more fleshed out with solid areas of color.

Donald Mulligan played intriguingly along the border between drawing and painting, employing oils like ink in a linear still life on unprimed linen and oil washes like watercolor for a classically lovely portrait head of a young woman on wood; by contrast, Mulligan's "Irish Cottages" was a sheet of rural watercolor sketches that worked well as an overall composition. Gary B. Martin's charming, cartoonish charcoal drawings on newsprint commented piquantly on the housing crisis by isolating engaging figures or an atmospherically silhouetted New York City skyline on real estate page classified ads featuring exorbitant rents and purchase prices.

A variety of contrasting approaches distinguished a group of pastels by Jane Volpe, from the subdued realism of a portrait head and a male torso to a brilliantly impressionistic Central Park view verging on gestural abstraction, all equally authoritative in execution. Barbara Litke was represented by one large drawing in conte crayon, watercolor, and areas of collage, featuring sensual figurative contours augmented by vibrant bits of color, flaunting her way with bold neo-Picassoid-cum- postmodern formal distortions. Maryann Sussoni, on the other hand, showed a suite of small black and white ink drawings with intricate, maze-like compositions akin to psychedelic or outsider art in the obsessive intensity of their patterning; as well as two works in pastel and pencil in which the features of grotesque faces were skillfully caricatured.

Flowing biomorphic forms with a vaguely figurative allusiveness were featured in the ink and watercolor drawings of Frank Quevedo, an artist whose work appears simultaneously free-wheeling and controlled, with its graceful balance of line and color, shape and space, rhythm and movement. Eleanor Gilpatrick, a frequent exhibitor, demonstrated her characteristic versatility in a group of four works ranging from a stark, boldly brushed seated figure in black ink, to the sensitive tonalities of a mixed media grisaille drawing of a cluster of onions, to a vibrant semi-abstract image of a dancer in colored inks.

Then there were the realist pastels of Jordi Waggoner, which included images of a simple blue pot enveloped by luminous auras, as well as two subtly erotic close-ups of feminine anatomy rendered in soft strokes of color with a textural quality that enhanced their innate sensuality.

—Peter Wiley

Bernice Faegenburg's Enduring Romance with the East

It is disheartening, at this late date, to see the antiquated racialist views once held by fusty Victorians like Rudyard Kipling being revived in recent books such as Richard E. Nisbett's much-publicized "The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently...and Why." Especially since the lively and mutually enriching dialogue and interchange between East and West in contemporary art belies such unscientific theorizing about fundamental differences in the mindset of Asians and Westerners which, according to Nisbett, hamper cross-cultural understanding.

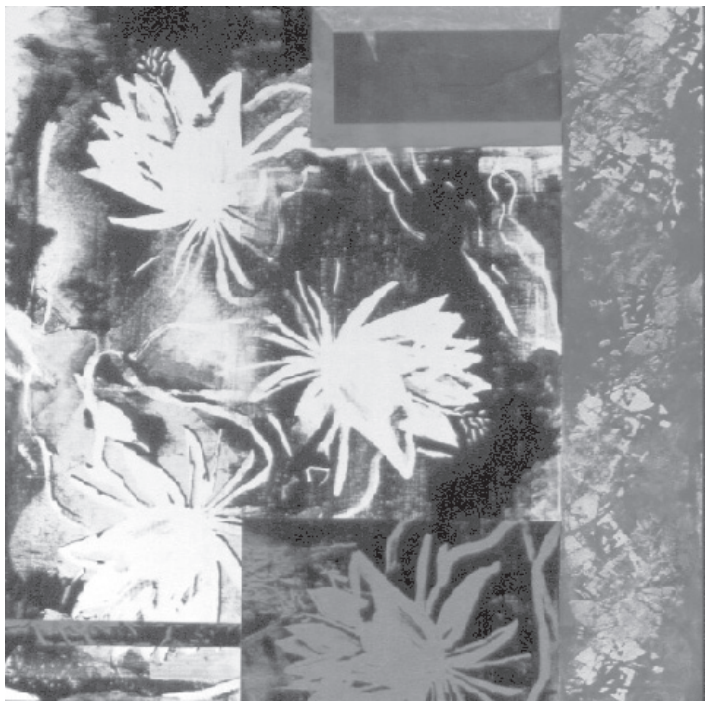
Surely the paintings and mixed media works of Bernice Faegenburg, who has exhibited her work in Tokyo, demonstrate how successfully one Western artist has assimilated certain aspects of Asian art into a highly personal aesthetic sensibility, affecting a meeting of the twains that flies in the face all such reasoning. Indeed, much as contemporary Asian artists such as Masami Teraoka and Walasse Ting have synthesized elements of East and West in order to broaden their art and achieve a more universal scope, Faegenburg has transcended cultural categories in her mixed media works, incorporating Japanese brush painting, along with photo transfer, computer imaging, and other methods of printmaking.

While her own photography incorporated via the computer is one of the newest developments in recent work, Japanese brush painting still played an important role in Faegenburg's recent solo show, "Night & Day," at Viridian Artists @ Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street.

Faegenburg's proficiency in Asian brush techniques is especially apparent in her acrylic and mixed media painting on canvas, "East Hampton Pines," in which the trees of the title, evoked in black and gray washes with lively calligraphic energy, are a central element in the composition, bracketed horizontally between a broad band of blue at the top and six smaller landscape images at the bottom.

Unlike other Western artists who adopt Eastern techniques, Faegenburg is not intimidated by tradition or the weight of history, even when she employs formats such as fans or screens that have long been staples of Chinese and Japanese culture. For she perceives them in Western terms, as well, as "shaped canvases," and proceeds accordingly to make her own bold statements. Exemplary in this regard is "Spring Sentinel," an especially lyrical composition, featuring graceful black tree limbs and white blossoms set against a subtly modulated ground and ranging over three large panels connected in a fan-like configuration. While the piece alludes to a traditional Japanese format, it also has the scale, power, and presence that we see in the shaped canvases of artists such as Charles Hinman, Peter Hutchinson, and Elizabeth Murray. Indeed, in pieces such as "Spring Sentinel," Faegenburg effectively spans centuries and cultures, connecting such Western contemporaries to hand scrolls and fan paintings dating back to the Song Dynasty in ancient China.

Elements of East and West make themselves felt in less overt ways in other works by Faegenburg such as "Midnight Swim," where the artist incorporates her own photographs of a female bather and landscapes within an abstract composition in acrylic and mixed media. Here, flowing areas of luminous blue and blue-green hues create an overall sense of oceanic masses, interspersed with smaller areas of subtle purple and pink hues, as well as piquant bursts of red and orange. While the formal thrust of the painting, with its photographic elements creating geometric divisions, is decidedly Western, the fluid lyricism of Faegenburg's brushwork and the manner in which she saturates the surface with skillfully controlled washes of translucent color is informed by her study of Asian ink painting.



"Night Blossoms"

How successfully Faegenburg combines calligraphic elements with mixed media is also demonstrated in "Song of the Cicada," where a swiftly authoritative ink sketch of an insect is juxtaposed with broadly gestural areas of vigorous Abstract Expressionist acrylic painting, and photographic elements in a deliciously topsy turvy composition. Equally exciting in another manner is "Night Blooms," a more strictly symmetrical composition in which monochromatic floral forms apparently derived from blown up photographic images are combined with geometric areas of strident color in a manner that simultaneously seems to reference Japanese decorative screens and some of Andy Warhol's silkscreen paintings.

In other works, Faegenburg generates a great deal of energy by virtue of her ability to reconcile contrasts between static and gestural elements. These contrasts are particularly dramatic in "Night & Day," the work from which the show's title is taken. In this acrylic and mixed media work on canvas, the upper portion of the composition is dominated by densely layered concentrations of bold black strokes made with a broad brush, while the primary element in the lower portion of the painting is a configuration colorful billowing shapes painted in a considerably more "hard-edged" manner.

Theoretically, these two distinctly different approaches should not jibe within the same painting. Given Faegenburg's East-West approach to composition, however—wherein the gestural strokes draw from the freedom of Zen ink painting and also evoke a "floating world" feeling, while the geometric elements can seem a savvy Westernized take on the decorative borders of Chinese scrolls—these diverse elements work splendidly. Indeed, such gracefully resolved disparities and the complex counter-harmonies that result from them give Faegenburg's compositions a unique "push and pull," to borrow Hans Hofmann's handy term for the tensions he felt necessary to activate a successful abstract painting.

Bernice Faegenburg, who has been making art seriously for most of her life, having discovered her vocation in early childhood, and has a long and active exhibition history, is an artist who appears to be always evolving. Deeply concerned with "process" for its own sake, rather than merely as a means to an end, each year she adds new dimensions to her work through her constant experimentation with new materials and mediums. Her interest in Asian brush techniques, however, remains constant, and continues to enrich her ever-expanding oeuvre.

—Ed McCormack

Caroline DeGroiselle's Art of Pleasure and Repose

"Bleu marin, les joyeux voiliers"

Caroline DeGroiselle, who lives and works in New Caledonia and whose pictures are permeated with the peculiarly beautiful light of that picturesque French territory, is a painter who obviously takes great sensual pleasure in her surroundings.

In her exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, from June 3 through 21, DeGroiselle, who was born in Paris in 1963, displays the vibrancy and joie de vivre which has won her numerous awards in Europe and is rapidly winning her a large following among collectors in the U.S.

Part of the appeal of DeGroiselle's paintings is her unabashed love of nature, which she translates to the canvas by means of her energetic brushstrokes and unfailing eye for color. Although DeGroiselle's subject matter, which includes still life as well as landscape subjects, is always recognizable, she is by no means a realist. Rather, she gives us a heightened reality in her buoyant acrylic paintings, which partake of elements of both Impressionism and Expressionism, yet are possessed of a refreshing originality. As close as one can come to classifying her style is to say that she comes out of the tradition of the School of Paris yet constitutes a school unto herself by virtue of her singular lyricism.

DeGroiselle's brush strokes have a feathery quality that activates her compositions in a uniquely lively manner. She is unself-conscious in her desire to invigorate her every composition with color, light, and movement. The landscapes that she paints spring from within as much as from without. They have an intensity that goes beyond what the eye can see in nature. The forms of trees, flowers, hills, and other landscape elements are expressively exaggerated in a manner that is invariably upbeat. She looks upon nature with the fresh vision of a child, albeit informed by a sophisticated aesthetic sensibility. Thus her scenes have an enchanted quality, like the landscapes described in fairy tales, with beams of light pouring down from the sky, illuminating verdant hills and lush fields. The heightened quality in her paintings is comparable in this regard to that in the watercolors of the great American artist Charles Burchfield, although DeGroiselle employs thick acrylic impastos like oils to lend her surfaces a more palpably physical quality that contributes greatly to their appeal.

Monet is one of the masters by whom DeGroiselle has long been inspired, but much to her credit, she does not imitate him in paintings such as "Giverny, le romantique." Rather, as the title implies, she takes her own romantic approach to the familiar gardens, depicting the footbridge over a lily-pad laden pond and the overhanging trees in her characteristic feathery strokes, intersected by brilliant beams of light that stream down in a more linear manner than the way Monet depicted light mainly as it reflected off of foliage and other surfaces. To DeGroiselle light has a tangible, almost physical substance which she depicts structurally as well as atmospherically.

In this regard, she is more of a visionary than an Impressionist, for her depiction of even such scenes as Monet's water gardens departs from naturalism to add an imaginative element which imbues her paintings with a fanciful, often even whimsical, quality. This comes across especially well in another tribute to Monet entitled "Giverny en robe douceur bleue," where the waterlily pond and its little footbridge are seen from a different angle, with large pink flowers enlivening the foreground. Here, the brilliant green trees dominate the upper part of the composition, their leaves drooping down over two small rowboats docked in the pond, the entire scene limned in succulent strokes that activate the surface with a vitality that springs from within, for DeGroiselle's paintings are never merely a transcription of external reality. Rather, they are imaginative responses to what the artist sees, filtered through mind and memory and mediated by a brush that imparts its own vital energy to every subject that it depicts,

On those relatively rare occasions when the figure is featured prominently in DeGroiselle's paintings, it too takes on a fanciful quality, as seen in "Venise, la magicienne d'azur," where two elaborately costumed personages appear before a line of gondolas receding in deep perspective against a dramatic blue sky throwing its light on the waters of the canal. This painting has a dreamlike quality that is quite haunting, yet it also affords considerable formal pleasure by virtue of its subtle colors and skillfully balanced shapes, which function abstractly as well as pictorially.

Given the idyllic island area where she lives and works, it seems no wonder that sailboats are another recurring element in DeGroiselle's wide-ranging oeuvre. One of her most dynamic compositions in which they appear is "Sortie en mer joyeuse," in which the pale blue sails flare boldly out against a brilliant sunlit sky, as the small boats traverse turbulent waves rendered rhythmically in brilliant strokes of blue. The entire composition is alive with light, color, and movement. Contemplating this exuberant acrylic painting, the viewer has the sensation of sailing along in that ultramarine body of water to the degree that one can practically smell the salt air and feel the breeze ruffling one's hair—such is DeGroiselle's ability to convey not only the visual aspects and atmospheres, but also the physical sensations of the scenes that she paints.

Figures again appear, albeit from a distance and diminutive in scale, in "Le marché aux aromes soleil," a composition in a square format depicting a perfect day, with people milling about amid market stalls set up under bright green and blue tents. By contrast, "La valleé douces fleurs" is a landscape of such unspoiled beauty that one can imagine it in primal, Edenic terms, with its sunlit hills, spacious fields, and profusion of pink, white, and blue flowers enlivening the foreground.

DeGroiselle brings to still life the same vital energy that she finds in landscape. Especially exemplary in this regard is "Mes lys raisins gourmands," a painting of shapely white blooms and green leaves in a large clear glass vase set before a burnished red wall with light entering from a nearby widow. Then there is "Bouquet aux pépites," another effusive tabletop still life arrangement in slightly more subdued blue, white, and yellow hues, in which DeGroiselle captures yet another mood with equal facility.

Like all of this gifted French artist's pictures, these two splendid still life compositions promote a sense of pleasure and repose. Indeed, Henri Matisse's famous statement that art should be "an appeasing influence, like a mental soother, something like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue" seems auspiciously applicable to the paintings of Caroline DeGroiselle.

—Stuart Leslie Myers

Linda Arnold Paints the Universal Landscape

"I tend to paint places that have spoken to me, that have given me a sense of calm and serenity," says New York artist Linda Arnold of her landscapes. "I hope that if a place has evoked such feelings in me, it may also evoke similar feelings in the viewer."

It is refreshing, in an era when so many others seem preoccupied with jumping on bandwagons and following trends, to hear a contemporary painter speak directly about her subjective responses to nature and her desire to share them with others. Such generosity of spirit harks back to an earlier time, when painters looked to landscape as a source for developing what the art historian Andrew Wilton calls "a pictorial language of the sublime."

At the same time, Linda Arnold is a thoroughly contemporary painter. Like Fairfield Porter and Wolf Kahn (Arnold's former teacher at The Art Students League), who were both colleagues of the Abstract Expressionists and incorporated elements of abstraction in their own landscapes, Arnold is a highly sophisticated artist, altogether cognizant of modernist aesthetics. Yet she prefers to apply modernist compositional dynamics and gestural vivacity to a style equally well rooted in the plein air tradition of Impressionism. Thus her oils are devoid of the distancing devices that we see even in the work of many contemporary realists, who paint "pictures of pictures," rather than responding directly to the world all around them, or use irony as a hedge against passionate engagement with their subject matter.

"Inlet at Dusk"

Linda Arnold employs no such self-protective strategies; immersing herself in nature, painting out of doors, she surrenders wholeheartedly to the landscape and the emotion that it evokes, finding, as she puts it, "joy in capturing the light at different times of the day." And she happens to be uncannily adept at transmuting into pigment the precise qualities that distinguish one time of day from another; those contrasts between warm and cool light that lend her pictures great chromatic subtlety and invest them with the immediate sense of a specific time and place.

Paradoxically, it is her sensitivity to these specific nuances which also invests her paintings with timelessness and universality. Whether depicting a landscape in Michigan, where she grew up, or Long Island, Nantucket, Vermont, or any number of other places here or abroad where she spends time, she invariably provokes a feeling of identification in the viewer. Contemplating almost any one of her paintings, one has the sense of having visited this particular place, basked in its light, felt its atmospheric sensations, and breathed its very air.

One of the means by which Arnold accomplishes this is her brushwork, the vigor of which imbues her surfaces with a vital immediacy. Her bravura technique exploits the natural viscosity of oil pigments to create fluent painterly passages from patches of color that can appear almost randomly set down, yet cohere pictorially with seemingly effortless grace. She is a true painter in that her forms emerge from masses of color, rather than lines, and in that land , sea, and light are given equal weight in the alchemical process by which the landscape manifests on the canvas.

Beachscapes play a prominent role in Arnold's oeuvre, and one of the outstanding recent ones is the canvas called "A Solitary Moment," in which a sandy path winds between patches of dry brush and the partially collapsed slats of a red picket fence, leading down to a foam-flecked blue sea, under a luminous sky enlivened with pink highlights and buoyant white clouds.

Here, as in other scenes of sand and surf, such as "Twilight," with its expressionistically scumbled dunes, sea represented by a thin streak of vibrant cerulean, and characteristically majestic sky, Arnold evokes specific elements convincingly without delineating unnecessary detail. Thus she brings us into the picture, provoking the sensation of being on the beach with appropriately brisk, breezy strokes that never bog down in static descriptiveness.

Arnold's brushwork is even bolder in "Winding Stream," in which the slightly overcast sky is evoked in broad, muscular strokes verging on Abstract Expressionism, and the dense foliage on the narrow land masses within the watery inlets and on the opposite shore are evoked in deep green hues of such succulence as to permeate the picture with a palpable sense of dampness and moisture.

By contrast, in "Light Across the Marsh," as well as in the larger canvas "Autumn Marsh," equally watery scenes are invested with a drier atmosphere by virtue of their more intense illumination. The latter picture is especially dramatic in this regard, with fiery highlights enlivening the autumnal brush in the foreground and a large, sun-lit cloud floating high above the ocher foliage on the horizon-line.

A warmer orange and pink glow permeates the large oil on canvas called "Morning Light," with its vast expanse of sky hovering over a low, hilly horizon, on which a few tiny houses nestle, dwarfed by two tall trees that preside monolithically over the landscape. Here, in contrast to the varied palette in Arnold's beach and marsh scenes, the almost monochromatic golden auras of "Morning Light" call to mind the mystical grandeur in the landscapes of the nineteenth century American painter Frederick Edwin Church, albeit with a more contemporary gestural freedom.

The picture, however, does not contradict the general direction of Arnold's work, which is determined solely by her personal response to individual phenomena in nature, rather than by some contrived and inhibiting preconception of how all her paintings should look. Indeed, someone once said that "style is character," and Linda Arnold's character comes through as a unifying factor in every stroke that she paints.

—Ed McCormack

Daniel Ludwig's Contemplative Nudes

When Daniel Ludwig paints the nude female figure, he invariably closes the gap between myth and life, between classical beauty and quirky individuality. Most often seen singly in shadowy interiors, his women inhabit a daydream realm of sensual languor akin to that in the paintings of Balthus, whom he obviously admires and with whom he engages in a formal dialogue in certain pictures.

In his recent solo exhibition at Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th Street, Ludwig made his admiration for the older artist especially clear in a painting entitled "Standing Woman." Here, the nude figure is seen in profile with arms upraised in a position recalling such paintings by Balthus as "Jeune fille a sa toilette" and "Nu devant la cheminee." Also reminiscent of Balthus is the patterned drapery behind the figure, as well as the softly muted sense of daylight that permeates the painting, contributing to its atmosphere of hermetically sealed eroticism.

Ludwig, however, does not paint generic Balthusian nymphets; his models are womanly and painted more naturalistically. Rather than a generalized conception of femininity filtered through a fetish for jailbait, he gives us the peculiar beauty of the individual face and figure.

Even more unusual is his ability to somehow suggest the intellectual as well as the physical attributes of his models. In the recent show at Allan Stone, which included drawings and sculpture as well as paintings, Ludwig showed several images of the same young woman. She has a dark biblical kind of beauty and a sensitive, somewhat bohemian demeanor, suggesting a young modern dancer or a Beat poet. Her seductiveness is not coy or contrived; rather, it springs from her physical charms combined with a sense of intellectual mystery that her contemplativeness implies.

These qualities come across just as strikingly in "Reclining Figure in the Sun," where the model is clothed, although in a state of dishabille, as in the completely nude figures such as "Standing Figure in Sunlit Room." The latter picture is particularly interesting in that Ludwig appears to simultaneously pay tribute to Balthus and Edward Hopper—two painters who took very different approaches to the solitary nude— without sacrificing his own originality.

Much of the aesthetic appeal in Ludwig's pictures comes from his paint handling, which is fluid and juicy; marvelously descriptive without ever verging on the fussy. The sensuousness of pigment becomes a surrogate for the sensuality of flesh under his brush's caress. And the more elusive qualities of light and shadow are captured with equal panache, giving tangible form to the ethereal as only paint on canvas can in the hands of an artist attuned to its special alchemy. Indeed, equal attention is lavished

"Standing Figure in Sunlit Room"

on every aspect of the composition, as seen in the aforementioned "Standing Figure in Sunlit Room," where the still life arrangement of fruits on a plate in the foreground is limned with as much delectation as the phosphorescent flesh of the model bathed in light from a nearby window.

Like his paintings, Daniel Ludwig's drawings and sculptures explore the beauty of the female body unabashedly, treating a timeless subject with reverence and skill.

—Ed McCormack

Deborah d'Arms and the Different Qualities of Beauty

In her recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, Deborah d'Arms, an artist from California who has exhibited widely here and abroad, showed paintings of beautiful young women that seemed to play off the glamour images one encounters daily in the mass media.

"Emilya Rising"

Deliberately, unapologetically seductive, her subjects look like fashion models—or like East Village "club kids" trying to look like fashion models—with their long, shiny hair, bright lipstick, and self-consciously alluring expressions. By painting such images, Deborah d'Arms seems to be commenting on the way young women present themselves to a world in which glamour has become one of our most ubiquitous commodities.

Her approach does not seem stridently feminist, however; her pictures do not hint at the oppression or "objectification" of women. Quite the contrary, a post-feminist sensibility appears to be at play here—one that does not equate unshaven armpits with a serious political statement. Rather, d'Arms appears to be celebrating a newer generation of liberated young women to whom beauty is just another avenue to feminine empowerment.

But there is also something even more interesting going on in the art of Deborah d'Arms; something more germane to her higher purpose as a artist than to the simplistic political implications that her imagery is bound to raise. This more essential element has to do with the way she subverts our expectations about such images. Unlike certain Pop artists, who parodied the banality of consumer culture with garish colors and cartoon-like simplifications that emphasized their sense of superiority over their subject matter, d'Arms transcends the stigma of banality simply by painting so beautifully.

Rather than appropriating the slick look of commercial photography, in other words, d'Arms turns to the Renaissance masters for inspiration when it comes to technique. While most of her Pop predecessors favored acrylics, which can be very effective in approximating the bright, impassive surfaces of mass produced goods and images, d'Arms works primarily in oils (although she sometimes incorporates subtle collage elements and even human hair, availing herself of the possibilities of mixed media to enhance some of her compositions), exploiting the rich possibilities of the older medium to maximum effect.

Thus her paintings are finally more about the sensuousness of pigment on canvas than about the sensuality of her subjects, in much the same way that older West Coast figurative painters such as David Parks and Richard Diebenkorn explored similar ideas in an earlier era.

Indeed, the image is really secondary, a foil for d'Arms' sumptuous paint handling, as seen in such pictures as "An Infinite Souvenir" and "Emilya Rising," where, for all the beauty of the models, the true seductiveness is the juicy paint application, the tactility of the surface, and the chromatic shimmer that the artist achieves by knowing which color to place next to (or scumble over) another.

Yes, some forms of beauty are only skin deep, Deborah d'Arms seems to be telling us; but others are eternal.

—Wilson Wong

West Side Artists in a Celebratory Mood

"Spring Arrivals," seen recently at Broadway Mall on the center island at 96th Street and Broadway, was a refreshingly unpretentious sampler by members of the West Side Arts Coalition. Curator Carole Whitton selected a group of artists whose work presented a thoroughly enjoyable visual dialogue between diverse stylistic tendencies.

Laura Loving's two large paintings of sunflowers displayed her usual energy, with the bright yellow petals and green stems outlined in sinuous black lines against a brilliant blue background, delineating the simple beauty of these flowers with cartoon-like clarity.

Eleanor Gilpatrick showed a luminous visionary painting of light streaming into a cathedral that was one of her best works to date, a romantic/symbolist tour de force in the manner of a latter day Gustav Moreau.

A group of small, atmospheric paintings of cottages, castles and ruins by James M. McDonald were notable for their intense, almost iridescent colors and quaint rustic charm. Similarly direct and devoid of contemporary irony were a series of neo-primitive expressionist canvas by Joey Infante, particularly an otherworldly picture of a lamp post blazing brightly above thickly textured foliage. Miguel Angel Mora is a different type of painter entirely; fascinated by process, here he departed from his more familiar hard edged geometry in two intriguing paintings in which flowing forms, created with Black Sealant on canvas, rose in low-relief against subtly variegated color fields.

Curator Carole Whitton was represented by an acrylic on paper called "Sun, Wind, & Waves" that recalled Marsden Hartley for its bold treatment of frothy waves and rugged rocks, even while retaining that strong sense of an individual identity that invariably distinguishes her work.

K.A. Gibbons is another artist whose sensibility is always readily identifiable, here

Renee G. O'Sullivan

with two exceptionally strong views of garden paths distinguished by simplified forms and characteristically brilliant neo-fauvist hues. Then there was Rodrigo Sanz, whose softly muted colors enhance the mystery of his subtly surreal still life and figurative compositions, as seen in one particularly evocative painting of an old man who resembles Ezra Pound, seated on a bench under sinuous tree limbs, entitled "Poet in Conservatory Garden."

Showing four canvases from his "Marble," "Flame" and "Wave" series, innovative abstractionist Meyer Tannenbaum demonstrated his ability to manipulate paint in a manner at once fluid and precise, creating an optical razzle dazzle that is enhanced by his considerable skills as a colorist.

Renee G. O'Sullivan, on the other hand, is an artist who gathers strength from close observation of outer reality, capturing views of city streets and Central Park in a breezy line augmented by watercolor in a manner akin to such earlier aesthetic flaneurs as Raoul Dufy and Constantin Guys, who did equal justice to the boulevards of Paris in an earlier era. By contrast, Linda Lessner relies on areas of softly blended color almost to the exclusion of line in her atmospheric oils and pastels depicting such subjects as a snowy landscape or a field and forest seen beyond the branches of a large tree, achieving an impressive lyricism.

All told, this was a gathering of artists whose stylistic differences provided something for every taste, which sometimes makes more sense than the pretext of a connecting theme. In this case, at least, such difference increased the pleasure quotient.

—Wilson Wong

Berkelmans' Mysterious Illuminations

Mariëtte Berkelmans, a painter who studied at Nieuwe Academy in Utrecht, in the Netherlands, draws upon a variety of multicultural sources to create enigmatic paintings in which highly stylized, starkly simplified figures are set within the formal confines of ornate borders and geometric designs with the intricate quality of mandalas. She cites Roman mosaics, Islamic mosque motifs, stained glass windows, Chinese porcelain, Indian embroidery, and African and Latin American design elements among her many influences.

In Berkelmans' exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway through June 21, one is struck by how well she assimilates these diverse sources to forge a contemporary style akin to Nicholas Africano's odd paintings of tiny figures engaged in enigmatic activities. Berkelmans has her own approach, however, and her use of decorative borders and other geometric elements grounds her figures in a different manner. Besides human figures, she also employs other elements such as animals, flowers, and butterflies as potent symbols.

Her compositions have an intricate beauty that makes one think of medieval manuscripts—especially those of Hildegard of Bingen, the 12th century Christian mystic and painter. Berkelmans' work has an intense combination of abstract and figurative elements that can also be related to the fabulous compositions of the great outsider artist Adolf Wolfli. However, while Hildegard of Bingen drew imagery from supernatural visions, and Wolfli inhabited a delusional private world, Berkelmans' paintings are grounded in rational ideas and draw upon more universal sources. She employs her wide range of imagery deliberately to address issues related to the vulnerable position of humans and other life-forms amid the prevalent violence, aggression, and intolerance of the modern world. She explores such themes through the use of simple pictorial elements that convey an odd emotional resonance, celebrating what has been referred to as "bright spots in the small, ordinary things" that "transform life to a precious, almost joyous experience."

The spiritual component in Berkelmans' work is expressed through a sense of transcendence. While the ornate borders and internal mazes of her compositions appear to confine her figures, they are also a celebration of the divine, as it manifests in the elaborate heraldry and intricate iconograpy of religious art in a variety of world cultures.

On a purely human level, Berkelmans' paintings invariably have a poignant quality that sets them apart from much other contemporary art, even while the artist acknowledges the need for "a grain of irony" to offset the surplus of feeling that makes her pictures so peculiarly affecting. In one work entitled "Sunny Side Up," a corpulent woman in a red bathing suit strikes a glamorous pose within a circular shape that could suggest either the sun or a huge egg yolk, surrounded by especially intricate and vibrant rectangular designs. In another painting called "Alone," Berkelmans employs more subdued blue hues and less strident yellows to depict a mysteriously shrouded figure set within a diamond-shape against overlapping squares. In yet another piece, "Butterfly," the delicate insect hovers within a circular shape ringed by roses and bordered by brilliant red beams.

"Alone"

In each of her paintings, Mariëtte Berkelmans gives us a rarefied experience encompassing profundity and humor, beauty and mystery. Her work is unique and intriguing.

—Laurel Foster

The Visual Music of Hye Ja Moon

When twentieth century American abstract painters like Arthur Dove and Georgia O'Keeffe set out to capture the rhythm and movement of nature, they employed organic forms quite different from the more generally geometric forms, influenced by Cubism, favored by their European peers. Hye Ja Moon, who studied painting at Massachusetts Art College and has exhibited widely in New York and throughout the Northeast, seemed very much in the spirit of those earlier organic abstractionists in her recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, in Soho.

"The Fantasy of Jazz" (The Moonlight)

Moon, however, bends her organic shapes to different ends. Rather than nature, music is her inspiration, both classical and jazz. She strives for a visual language that can convey an energy and a complexity akin to the avant garde symphonies of Stravinsky and Schoenberg, as well as to the spontaneity of jazz improvisation. And she succeeds admirably in her oils on canvas, with their combination of dark and fiery hues and their dynamically swirling compositions, as well as in her painted sculptures, which extend her explorations into three dimensions.

In her oil on canvas "The Fantasy of Jazz (Orange, Yellow, & Blue)," her chromatic intensity emerges in the central form, which blazes like a sun incongruously set against a nocturnal sky. Here, qualities of day and night intermingle in a magical synthesis of color, energy, and light. By contrast, in "The Fantasy of Jazz (Struggle of the Musicians)," the concept of a musical duel of the type that can occur spontaneously during a jazz gig takes on Olympian proportions. In this oil, colorful forms flare out in flame-like configurations, climbing upward like increasingly more strident musical notes striving to transcend each other.

Like the music that inspires them, Hye Ja Moon's compositions possess great variety, even while maintaining a striking stylistic consistency. "The Fantasy of Jazz (The Moonlight)," for example, takes on the feeling of a nocturnal landscape, with the lunar orb of the title in the upper left portion of the canvas and dark red strokes intersecting it like bare tree-limbs. While the artist herself might not interpret her forms so literally, for the viewer the allusive elements in this painting could suggest the rural origins of jazz in country blues.

Conversely, "The Fantasy of Jazz (The Trumpet)," another oil on canvas in which the baroque shapes have a cursive Art Nouveau expressiveness, could suggest the contrastingly urban sophistication of one of Duke Ellington's major compositions. It is as though, in this painting and the aforementioned one, Hye Ja Moon has taken us on a guided tour of the music's evolution from its humble beginnings in rural road-houses to its ultimate triumph in grand concert halls where jazz achieved a parity with European classical music.

Much as they lend themselves to such imaginative flights, however, the paintings of Hye Ja Moon also sustain interest in purely formal terms, as autonomous abstract expressions of a unique painterly sensibility. —Marie R. Pagano

"Music in the Key of Color" at Broadway Mall

One of the more thematically coherent recent group shows was "Music in the Key of Color," curated by Dee Winfield for the West Side Arts Coalition, at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center traffic island at Broadway and 96th Street. While some artists chose to deal with the subject of music—particularly jazz and pop music—figuratively, others evoked its spirit with form and color alone.

David Shrobe, a venturesome young artist best known for his semi-abstract paintings, surprised us with a group of canvases in which imagery has given way totally to gesture. Lyrical and musical in feeling, Shrobe's new paintings set vigorous strokes and splashes of color against equally brilliant grounds to create a buoyant sense of freedom and energy akin to jazz improvisation.

Contrastingly austere and controlled, a geometric abstraction in textured gray tones by Miguel Angel Mora set a silvery cross within a circular format dissected by geometric divisions. Entitled "Songs for My Mother," Mora's stately and beautiful painting proved that precision and emotional resonance are not mutually exclusive.

An intriguingly named artist who calls himself Sir Shadow demonstrated an exquisite way with line in an intricately stylized drawing called "Jazz Royale." Created with gold ink on black paper, Shadow's composition expressed the harmonious interconnectedness of the members of a jazz combo with a single, sinuous, continuous line.

Al Johnson also dealt directly with the musical theme, albeit in a more realist manner, in a touching tribute to Nina Simone, who passed away this year. The head of the great singer, swathed in a queenly gold turban, was set against vertical streaks of vibrant blue in Johnson's large canvas; thus the title, "Blue Rain for Nina."

Imo Nse Imeh's drawings are also figurative, but tend more toward heroic symbolism. In "Urgings from the Past" and other drawings by Imeh, sensitively delineated in pencil on paper, comely figures merge and flow in graceful configurations that seem to express states of hope and longing.

Dick Griffin was represented by one small hand-embellished print, an abstraction in muted, yet luminous, hues from his "Peace in the Air" series. While modest in scale, Griffin's composition had the power and presence that one has come to expect from this gifted musician/painter.

Geoffrey Chambers, an exciting talent new to this reviewer, showed two digital prints in which popular musicians were given iconic treatment. In both "Busta" (presumably a portrait of the rap artist Busta Rhymes) and "Fela" (clearly celebrating the late, great African pop idol) Chambers captures the excitement of the music through his use of expressive distortions and strident color combinations.

—Maurice Taplinger

Encountering "Catalan Young Artists in New York" at Montserrat Gallery

An autonomous region of northeastern Spain, Catalonia was at one time known as a 20th century center of the anarchist movement. Site of several medieval castles that draw a lively tourist trade, it is now known for more practical enterprises such as the manufacturing of automobiles, airplanes, and textiles, among other industries. However, the spirit of independence still holds sway in Catalonia, judging from the recent exhibition "Catalan Young Artists in New York," at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

The show, arranged with the support of the General Secretariat for Youth of the Government of Catalonia, presided over by Rosa M. Pujol, brings a half dozen of the region's most progressive young talents to one of Soho's premier exhibition venues, introducing the American gallery goers to an estimable yet heretofore unknown entity in the international art arena.

Surely one serious contender for avant garde acclaim is Jordi Balart, who was represented by a room installation entitled "Windows on the Soul." Created with ceramics, iron, and electric light, it consisted of rectangular forms with window-like openings lit from within supported on long triangular tripods. Two stools were positioned in the darkened room for viewers to perch upon and watch the lights flicker on and off amid rhythmically clicking sounds.

Although the shapes of the main elements in the installation suggested clustered city buildings, the long, stilt-like supports also lent them an anthropomorphic effect. One could just as easily see them as people gathered at some seminar of souls, and the sense of their independence was enhanced by the fact that all were hooked up to the same large surge protector, as though to a communal life support mechanism.

Another artist with a highly original approach to materials, as well as a unique conceptual sensibility, is Miriam Ribas, who showed a work called "The Ball." The piece de resistance was a huge white sphere composed of cotton batting and cloth that the viewer was encouraged to approach and touch, feeling its soft, silky-spongy surface, itself a sensual experience. Up close, one saw that the large ball was covered with many zippers. The viewer was encouraged to open them, slip a hand into the pocket-like orifices and extract slips of paper from within. Some of these turned out to be printed messages such as those contained in Chinese fortune cookies ("Live life, not fantasies"), scrawled quotes ("If you cry because you can't see the sun, maybe the tears will let you see the stars—R. Tagore"), and other random texts and messages. Indeed, there was a pad and pen available nearby, so that the viewer could add his or her own message or drawing to the piece. The vaginal quality of the openings, of course, also evoked metaphors of sex and birth in this intriguingly interactive work.

Joan Lloveras works in iron, creating large sculptures with a rugged and formidable presence, their surfaces suggesting either man-made armor or the natural armor of animals such as turtles, armadillos, rhinos, and crustaceans. Indeed, Lloveras' pieces alternately suggest aggression and defensiveness, with their thrustingly phallic or hermetically withdrawn forms. They are also possessed of a winning formal inventiveness, favoring monolithic structures that confront the viewer with a great deal of variety and suggestiveness.

Lloveras' piece called "Bird" was the most figuratively evocative, and certainly one of the most graceful, suggesting a swan floating on the surface of water with its long, upcurved central form slicing into space like a blade, supported by other more horizontal forms resembling a torso and wings. By contrast, other pieces lent themselves less readily to specific interpretation, and were suitably untitled, leaving room for imaginative conjecture on the part of the viewer.

If the previously discussed artists give the impression that Catalonia is producing more interesting conceptual artists and sculptors than painters, nothing could be further from the truth, as seen in the work of the three following artists:

Begonya Samit combines Neo-Expressionism and New Image painting, two movements of the 1970s and 1980s which she updates in her own manner. She shares a certain stylistic kinship with Susan Rothenberg in her vigorous brush work and ability to create spatial tension with slightly off-kilter compositions. In Samit's large, bold acrylic paintings, fragmented, sketchily drawn figurative imagery is set off by a highly activated surface of strokes, streaks, and drips. Her figures have a tentative quality with their indistinct features. Partially amputated by the edges of the canvas at times, they often have a mummified look, as seen in the large canvas she calls "Reclining Body." Supporting itself on frail-looking arms, this figure could appear to be attempting to rise from a sick-bed, the isolated strokes of red within its generally muddy colorations suggesting areas of fever, inflammation, or pain.

Here, as in another large canvas, entitled "3/4 Distance," dominated by a large skull-like head with deep, dark eye-sockets, Begonya Samit captures a dramatic and compelling sense of human suffering and isolation.

Tatiana Blanqué employs brilliant colors in combination with a smoothly impassive surface to create paintings in which chairs within shadowy room interiors figure prominently as symbols. Her pictures have a striking formal quality which is disconcertingly offset by subtle psychological undertones. This sense of something unsettling lurking just below the pleasing colors and forms is inherent in the phrase which serves as the series title, "I believe you are under stress, won't you sit down?"

The sardonic irony is further enhanced by Blanqué's habit of arranging several canvases in modular formations on the gallery wall, creating a cinematic effect. The variety of chairs, from traditional to modernistic, each casting its own somewhat sinister shadow against the lush blue, green, or purple background hues, adds to the vague sense of dis-ease. For each shape, from baroque to severe, creates its own mood within the claustrophobic interiors, revealing Blanqué's ability to imbue inanimate objects with an inexplicable emotional resonance.

The final artist, Maria Fabre employs simplified houses of the sort that children draw as potent symbols in her mixed media paintings on canvas. Employing a limited number of colors, often reds and pinks set against creamy whites or off-whites, Fabre combines an elemental iconography akin to that of Jennifer Bartlett with a tactile sense of pigment as an autonomous entity that calls to mind Robert Ryman. Fabre, however, has her own refreshingly direct approach to form and composition. Her paintings, which have titles such as "Three Houses, One Turning," evoke a sense of nostalgia for the comforts and security of childhood. Yet they also appear to comment wryly on domestic conformity from a decidedly adult point of view. The sense of ambiguity is heightened by the deadpan presentation of simple shapes on the picture plane, which also serves effectively as a formal anchor for her compositions.

Like her compatriots in this outstanding exhibition, Maria Fabre has exhibited extensively throughout Spain, and one looks forward to seeing more of her and their work in future New York exhibitions at Montsserrat Gallery.

—Ed McCormack

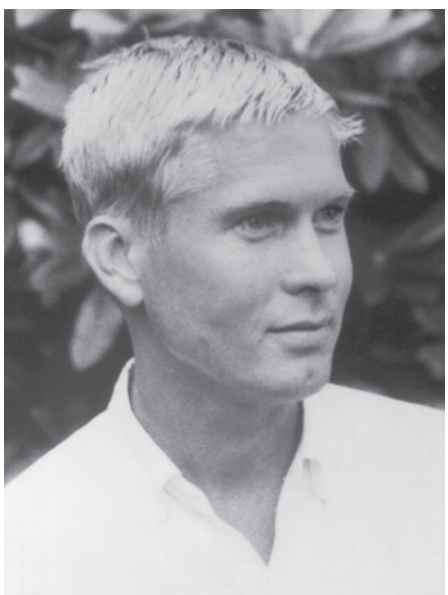
New York Notebook

Frank O'Hara: In Memory of his Feelings

We've been having a lot of fun reading Joe LeSueur's lively, gossipy memoir, "Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara," recently published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, having been quite wild about the poetry of O'Hara and his friends in the late-sixties.

Along with the "bebop prosody" of the Beats, the work of the New York School poets (a peer group of the New York School painters that included O'Hara, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler) turned us on to new possibilities for language and perception. Their irreverent, non-academic approach presented an exhilarating contrast to the constipated, over-crafted verse being perpetrated by the housebroken bards of the universities at that time.

Kenneth Koch said it all, taking such literary dullards to task in a poem called "Fresh Air," with lines like : "You make me sick with all your talk about restraint and mature / talent! / Haven't you ever looked out a window at a painting by Matisse" and "I am afraid you have never smiled at the hibernation / of bears except that you saw in it some deep relation / to human suffering..."



Author Joe LeSueur in 1961

Photo: John Jonas Gruen

Discovering these poets in Donald Allen's great anthology "The New American Poetry—1945-1960 " was a real revelation, and we were particularly struck by Frank O'Hara's "I do this, I do that" poems, many of which were written on his lunch hour while working as an assistant curator at the Museum of Modern Art. O'Hara's breezy, conversational style captured the light, life, and movement of the city and immortalized moments spent with his friends, many of whom were New York School painters.

Interviewed in a documentary film called "USA: Poetry," O'Hara said, "John and Kenneth and I and a number of other people later found that the only people who were interested in our poetry were painters or sculptors. You know, they were enthusiastic about the different ideas, and they were more inquisitive. They had no, being non-literary, they had no parti pris about academic standards, attitudes, and so on. So that you could say, 'I don't like Yeats,' and they would say, 'I know just how you feel, I hate Picasso, too.' That sort of thing—a much pleasanter atmosphere than the literary was providing at that time. Apart from the fact, of course, that the only people who were doing anything interesting were painters."

Given the mutual interest that the poets and painters had in each others' work, it was inevitable that O'Hara, Koch, Ashbery, and Schuyler would turn to writing art reviews as well as poetry. Along with doubly gifted painter colleagues like Fairfield Porter and Elaine de Kooning, who also wrote with more intimate knowledge and visceral immediacy than any art historian could muster, they became contributors to Art News, in its heyday under the editorship of Tom Hess.

Talk about fresh air!—Those poets and painters possessed a lively, improvisatory intelligence that put more academic critics to shame. They brought the same verve to art writing that they brought to poetry and painting, reinvigorating it with their energetic prose, sparkling insights, and descriptive clarity. Rather than flaunting their erudition at the expense of others' creative efforts, as the more traditionally stodgy critics were wont to do, they wrote with the enthusiasm of fellow artists, encouraging their readers to venture into galleries and museums with an open mind and avail themselves of all the excitement, enlightenment, and sheer fun to be found there.

In fact, one of the reasons that we decided to launch Gallery&Studio some five years ago was that we noticed the utter lack of such writing in other art publications today. We found it hard—and still find it hard—to fathom why so many contemporary critics write so boringly about such an engaging subject, insulting the reader's intelligence with obscure, pretentious, ultimately meaningless jargon. Having read the reviews of O'Hara, Ashbery, Schuyler, and others, we knew there was a precedent for the kind of art writing we hoped to publish, and were emboldened by its example—just as, years earlier, we had been inspired in our own poetic efforts by the work of the Beats and the New York School.

In "Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara," Joe LeSueur, who was the poet's room-mate and sometime lover from 1955 until 1965, writes at great length about O'Hara's close friendships with painters such as Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Larry Rivers, Grace Hartigan, Norman Bluhm, Joan Mitchell, Michael Goldberg, John Button and Jane Freilicher, among others. In the course of relating anecdotes about O'Hara's relationships, he demonstrates how the poets and painters supported and encouraged each other when many of them were still struggling, before the public and the uptown collectors and publishers caught on to the innovative work they were doing.

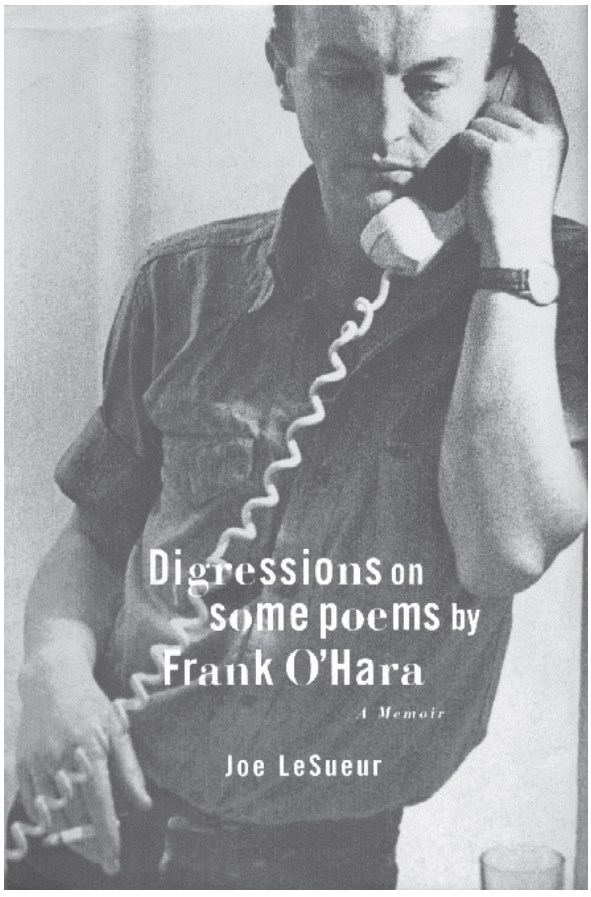
O'Hara was an especially good cheerleader for his talented friends, LeSueur recalls: "But it wasn't what he said that counted; it was his authority and passion, along with his marvelous understanding of a friend's needs, that made the difference. And there were times when I thought he was in love with at least half of his friends, for it was possible for him to get so emotionally involved that it wasn't unusual for him to end up in bed with one of them and then, with no apparent difficulty, to go right back to being friends again afterward. That was always his way in the years I lived with him. He didn't make distinctions, he mixed everything up: life and art, friends and lovers—what was the difference between them?"

Although O'Hara was openly gay, and had his share of gay lovers, many of his closest friends were heterosexual male painters who made a great show of being macho. Or else they were women painters who had to prove that they could drink and curse as much as the guys. O'Hara apparently bedded some of his "nominally straight male friends" (to borrow LeSueur's wry term for them) and even the ocassional woman—although his trysts with the latter were likely to be aborted on both ends by goodnatured giggles! No matter, it was all in keeping with the poet's desire to "live as variously as possible" (a phrase from one of his best-known poems, now engraved on his tombstone) and practice his gift for friendship.

However, LeSueur also writes about how such art world friendships, as fragile as they were intense, could end abruptly, as when Jane Freilicher broke with O'Hara because he seemed to have "lost interest in the kind of painting she was doing," or when the avant garde composer Morton Feldman was slow to respond to Philip Guston's new figure paintings and was never forgiven for it.

Always the starstruck witness, a self-described "intellectual climber with vague pretensions of becoming a writer," LeSueur was so in awe of the stellar talents he had the good fortune to find himself among that he attributes even their most ego-driven, alcohol-fueled imbroglios to higher principles. Of the rift between Feldman and Guston, he rationalizes, "Then, too, doesn't the reason for their falling out—it naturally became the talk of the art world—demonstrate how seriously New York artists once took their work? Their careers and their work were not one and the same and it was their work that mattered more to them."

While he makes a good point about art as a serious vocation—one that some of today's more careerist art yuppies might take to heart—LeSueur is forgiving to a fault when it



comes to those he admires. Conversely, he can be bitchy as all get-out about those outside his immediate circle, calling Jack Kerouac "boorish and rude" and dismissing John Updike as "just plain dumb." (While it is well documented elsewhere that Kerouac could be boorish on booze, and Updike probably has his own faults, this has to be the first time anyone has ever characterized the latter author as intellectually deficient!)

And we might as well admit to having been miffed by LeSueur's less than gallant treatment of poet Brigid Murnaghan (whose joint reading with Dennis Corbett at Pleiades Gallery was covered in this column some months back). Although O'Hara himself mentions Murnaghan affectionately in an untitled poem about the two of them and LeSueur sleeping over at Joan Mitchell's place when the key didn't work in the door of his own loft on Lower Broadway, LeSueur characterizes Brigid as follows: "Long-limbed, with dirty blond hair, quite good-looking but already, in her mid-twenties, a terrible mess (though a poet of sorts), she frequented various downtown bars like the Cedar and the more literary White Horse Tavern across town, any bar where she could cause a commotion or court attention with her spectacular, wide-ranging gutter vocabulary that surpassed even Joan Mitchell's rough-and-ready way with words."

Murnaghan, who hasn't lost her sense of humor or her raunchy style, even now that she has matured into a stately pillar of sobriety, would probably laugh off LeSueur's gossip about her wild youth and accept his reference to "her spectacular, wide-ranging gutter vocabulary" as a compliment (what true poet wouldn't?). The only thing she might object to is his patronizing her as "a poet of sorts," since her poetic credentials are firmly established, as anyone who has read her work or heard her read can attest.

A stickler for political correctness could also take LeSueur to task for being sexist when he holds Murnaghan, Mitchell, Grace Hartigan and other women to a more exacting standards of language and behavior than he demands from male artists of their boozy and bodacious era—especially since he is quick to point out, justifiably of course, when instances of homophobia occur.

But then again, LeSueur never claims to be a subjective scholar or an impartial biographer. In the best tradition of the New York School, his book is freewheeling, impressionistic, intimate. As its title suggests, it is a melange of personal memories and epiphanies spun off a generous sampling of O'Hara's poems, printed in their entirety. And the method succeeds splendidly, given the diaristic nature of the poems themselves, which are filled with everyday events and gossip, the names of friends, campy tributes to movie stars, and accounts of evenings in legendary haunts like the Cedar, The Five Spot, and the San Remo—among other evocative details that spur LeSueur's memory and provoke his digressive flights. In some cases he annotates, in others he explicates, and in yet others he contradicts the text. But always he digresses, and it is in these digressions that the book comes alive like the zany party scene in "Breakfast at Tiffany's," giving us a vivid panorama of vintage downtown bohemia at full throttle.

Unlike other poets, O'Hara's did not crave solitude. His natural gregariousness, wit, and gift for friendship made him magnetic. Other brilliant people were drawn to him and he was rarely alone. But this never stopped him from writing his poems. In fact, the boozy social ambience in which he thrived fed into his poetry, providing its background texture, like the jukebox pulsing rhythmically behind the nonstop conversation at the Cedar Tavern.

"Of course it didn't take him long to knock off a poem, and he never needed peace and quiet," LeSueur recalls, and goes on to describe how O'Hara would get up in the middle of a conversation, "as though to go to the bathroom," sit down at his Royal portable on a table across the room, and "with cigarette smoke jetting from his nostrils and in a great clatter of keys" the poem would be born.

Alas, speed of composition is not always a plus in poetry, does not always assure that a poem will go the distance—although, admittedly, you couldn't have convinced us of this when we were young and freshly under the spell of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and O'Hara. Now, though, dipping into "The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara" for the first time in several years, some stuff does indeed seem a little tossed-off.

There were many occasions in the hellzappopin art world of the late fifties and early sixties, and O'Hara apparently felt compelled to commemorate them all. Consequently, he stretches the genre of the "occasional poem" pretty thin with verses like "John Button Birthday," "Christmas Card for Grace Hartigan," and "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul." While even good poets can be driven to banality by affection for good friends, it hardly serves anyone's reputation to preserve such trifles between hard covers. On the other hand, longer poems such as "In Memory of My Feelings" and "Meditations in an Emergency" ("I am the least difficult of men / All I want is boundless love") are still fresh and compelling in that unique manner, alternately jocular and heart-wrenching, that belongs to O'Hara alone.

One fine example which will surely endure is his elegy for Billie Holiday, which begins in his breezy "I do this, I do that" mode with "It is 12:20 in New York a Friday / three days after Bastille day, yes / it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine"; builds tension with further details: "I go to the bank/ and Miss Stillwagon (first name Linda I once heard) doesn't even look up my balance for once in her life"; moves on to a tobacconist where the poet buys cigarettes "and a NEW YORK POST with her face on it" and concludes "I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of / leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT while she whispered a song along the keyboard / to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing."

So many lesser poets since have imitated O'Hara so ineptly—adopting his offhand manner without any of the emotional resonance that he slips so casually into those last three lines—that it is almost possible to forget how really good he was, much in the way one could think less of Mondrian, say, if all one saw were the "modernistic" shower curtains and dish towels inspired by his paintings.

We can only advise the reader to ignore all the clueless clones who've been misled by how easy he made it look, and go straight to The Collected Poems, a hefty volume that shows just how much O'Hara accomplished, before passing from life into legend in a characteristically offhand manner in 1966, when he was run over by an errant dune buggy on the beach on Fire Island.

The freak accident left the art world bereft. Speaking at the poet's burial service, in The Springs, East Hampton, Larry Rivers said, "Frank O'Hara was my best friend. There are at least sixty people in New York who thought Frank O'Hara was their best friend."

Joe LeSueur was obviously one of them, and his book is a loving tribute to an irrepressible and irreplaceable spirit.

* * *

(More New York Notebook on next page)

Kabbalah and The Physics of Spirituality

Although he has been a major player in the Soho art scene for several years, James Cavello still likes to think of himself a simple kid from Brooklyn. So he admits to having been a bit awed when he and his more chicly composed partner in Westwood Gallery, Margarite Almeida, found themselves in the V.I.P. room at The New Museum with Madonna, husband Guy Ritchie, "gal pal" Sandra Bernhardt (to borrow a phrase from the tabloids), and a bevy, as they say, of Supermodels. They were there for a a gala book signing with Rabbi Yehuda Berg, author of "The 72 Names of God."

Berg, who also wrote an earlier book called "The Power of the Kabbalah," is to his celebrity followers as the Dalai Lama is to Richard Gere and The Beastie Boys: the spiritual flavor of the month.

The Kabbalah, a major mystical text of Judaism has been around for God knows how many hundreds of years, but you better believe it is really getting Huge now that it has been embraced by Madonna, Sarah Bernhardt, and other icons of Page Six.

Cavello and Almeida were delighted that, with all these celebrities in attendance, the New Museum was announcing their upcoming exhibition "The Physics of Spirituality" at the event, and that Rabbi Yehudi Berg had agreed to participate in a panel discussion at their gallery in conjunction with the show, along with other distinguished Kabbalists, physicists, and artists. Although the work was not available for preview at press time, the exhibition which can still be seen at Westwood Gallery, 578 Broadway, through June 14 at Westwood Gallery, 578 Broadway, sounds promising.

After all, the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci are probably the earliest and greatest example of the symbiosis of art, spirituality, and physics, and it is also important to keep in mind that modern art was not always motivated by formalist concerns. Many of the pioneers of nonrepresentational painting, such as Kandinsky, Kupka, Mondrian, and Malevich, were initially inspired by Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, and other esoteric thought systems prevalent in the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. They were struggling to express unseen phenomena that could not be grasped through traditional means. They saw abstraction as a way of transcending particulars and approaching Absolutes.

Art criticism tended to ignore the spiritual aspects of art and concentrate on its more formal components as the twentieth century progressed and the scientific model became ever more dominant. However, the postmodern era has seen a resurgence of interest in subjective interpretations of spirituality and inner states of being, according to Cavello, who claims that in the past eight to ten years he has noticed a growing movement of artists "who are not interested in the appropriation of imagery, but are experimenting or trying to get closer to the internal truth that is presenting itself in various forms." Only recently, however, did he begin to feel that the momentum of this kind of art was building to the point where a major exhibition could be possible.

One could do worse than to bet on Cavello's instincts. He has been on a curatorial roll lately, presenting the first American exhibition by the contemporary Hungarian master Lazlo Paizs and following up with a stellar show of limited edition photographs by the legendary lensman John Thomson, who traveled throughout China and the Far East in the 1800s, giving us many memorable portraits, ranging from noblemen to street gamblers, from raffish boatmen to elaborately garbed Manchu brides.

James Cavello and Margarite Almeida's willingness to take chances, to gamble on their own catholic tastes rather sniffing at the winds of fashion, invariably makes Westwood Gallery a venue well worth visiting.

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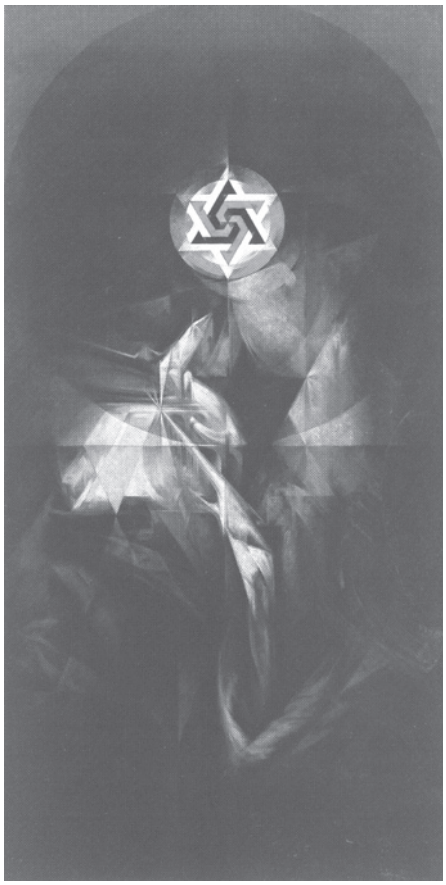
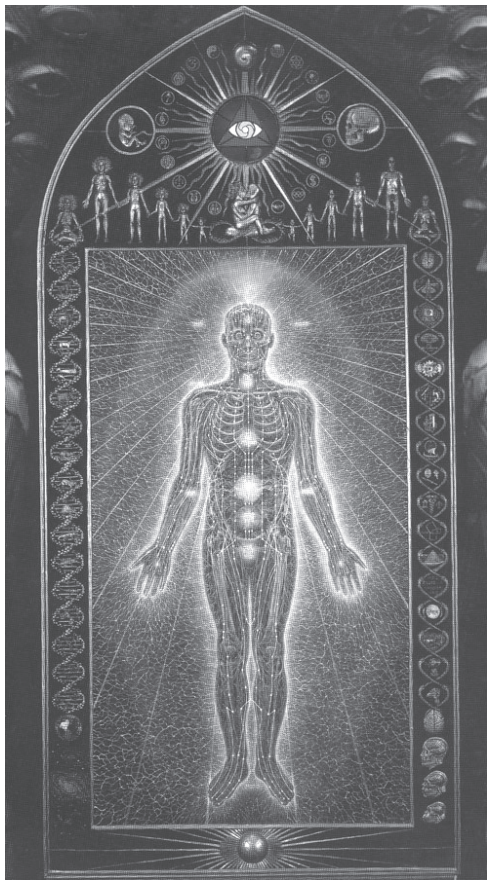
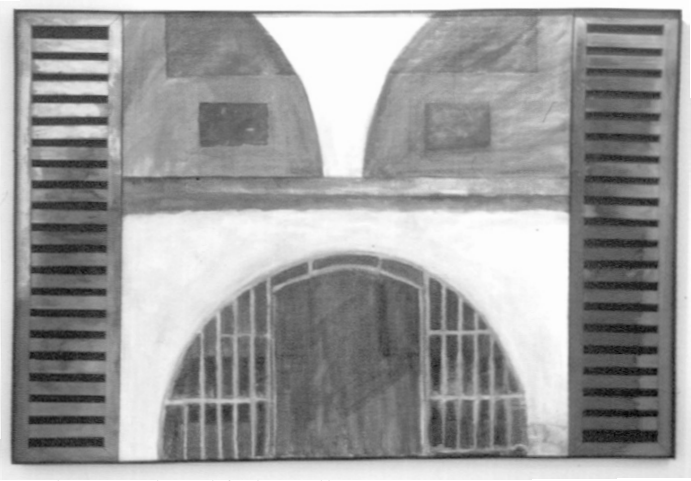


Komar and Melamid, "Symbols of the Big Bang #225"



Alex Grey, "Chapel of Sacred Mirrors"

Michael Somoroff, "Line"



Barbara Snyder, Pleiades Gallery

We saw several shows recently that warrant at least brief comment here, as we conclude the present art season and look forward to the new one in the Fall:

At Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, Barbara Snyder's solo show "Entries and Exits" continued her longstanding fascination with windows and doorways. Working with oils, wood, cast plaster, found objects and laser prints of her own original photographs, Snyder combines elements of painting and assemblage to create layered spaces that lend her mixed media works great depth and complexity.

This is often achieved with the literal inclusion of real shutters or window frames as enclosures for her painted and photographic elements, little "theaters" akin for their physical poetry to the box constructions of Joseph Cornell. However, Snyder's compositions have their own peculiar visual metaphors, with their dark portals yawning anthropomorphically and strategically placed windows contributing further to the impression of her impassively painted and constructed facades as mask-like faces.

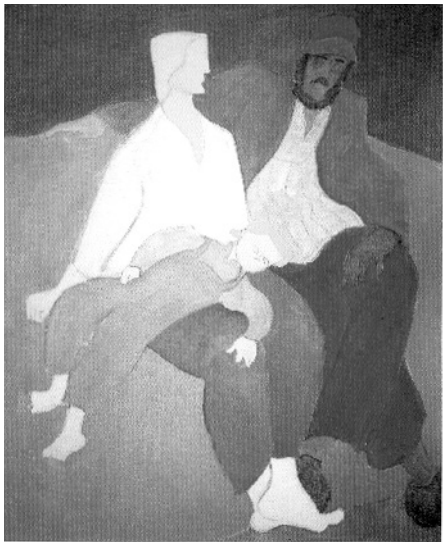
Although the final effect can be as evocatively surreal as di Chirico's uninhabited plazas, it is achieved primarily through formal means, making Barbara Snyder's assemblages all the more effective and evocative. Her conception of "places as universal visual icons" is enhanced by the fact that many of the images she employs have autobiographical significance for the artist. Titles such as "Edison Site," "Castle Ruin," and "Ghost Barn Face" refer to places that are not only compelling for their haunting visual qualities but also evoke personal memories for Snyder. Thus their universal and private meanings are inextricably bound.

The spaces Snyder evokes are at once hermetic and infinite, for there is invariably a sense of mystery, of something private yet eternal lurking just beyond the portals she presents. Between the shutters, behind the windows, and beyond the gates lie secrets and enigmas within enigmas. Something whispers to us from the shadows, for somehow we seem to know these places. There is the sense that we have visited them before, either awake or in our dreams, for Barbara Snyder has the rare ability to transport us by virtue of her singular aesthetic vision.

* * *

Whoever first called Milton Avery "The American Matisse," a designation that stuck, did him no great favor, for it only served to overshadow and distract from his considerable gifts. By the same token Sally Michel, Avery's wife, who died in January at age 100, did not serve herself well by sacrificing her artistic career to her husband's—working to pay his tuition to the Art Students League early in their marriage and devoting more time and energy to promoting his work than her own later on—since she was an artist with her own unique virtues, as seen in her recent exhibition at Katharina Rich Perlow Gallery, 41 East 57th Street.

It cannot seem anything but serendipitous that Michel's show was reviewed in the same issue of the New York Times in which another article, called "A Gifted Wife Emerges From a Famous Shadow," about Helen Torr, the wife of Arthur Dove, who was featured in a show at James Graham Gallery, 1014 Madison Avenue, appeared. Both artists deferred to their husbands in a manner that was sadly routine for women artists of their era, but of the two, Sally Michel was by far the better artist, making her sacrifice a little sadder still. For although Michel's work is in important permanent collections, including those of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, it is nowhere near as well known as it should be, on the evidence of her posthumous exhibition at Katharina Rich Perlow.



Sally Michel, Katharina Rich Perlow Gallery

To be sure, there is a family resemblance in the work of Michel and Avery—and for that matter in the work of their daughter March Avery, as well. All three artists employ bold areas of color in unusual combinations and strongly simplified forms in their landscape and figure paintings. Michel, however, has a less generalized approach to form and lavishes more attention on the specific characteristics of her subjects in her figure paintings than does either her husband or her daughter. This can be seen especially well in her large oil on canvas "Young Family," 1979. The burly, bearded husband wears a blue baseball cap. The child is sprawled across the blond wife's ample lap. The outlines of the figures flow expressively and the colors are deeper and darker than those we associate with Avery, with blue, gray, and brown hues offset by pinks and pale greens. There is also a sense of social awareness here that sets Sally Michel apart as an artist with her own way of looking at the world. For all the pleasingly flatness of her style, the figures are not mere pawns in a formal arrangement. We see each of the three figures in "Young Family" as distinct individuals and there is something poignantly weary in their postures, suggesting a life of transience and struggle.

A similar quality of thoughtfulness and melancholy comes across in the 1978 canvas "Girl with Cat," its subdued colors closer to those of Will Barnet than Milton Avery, while the landscape "Late Afternoon" is a moody, atmospheric composition dominated by deep blue and purple hues. By contrast, the large oil "Roosting Gulls" and the watercolor "Sean's Breakfast," with their brighter yellows, greens, and oranges, demonstrate Michel's equal mastery of a higher register.

One thing this splendid exhibition made clear was that while Sally Michel was the wife of a better known painter, she was her own woman and her work deserves to be judged on its own merits.

* * *

Another woman painter of a certain age who we are happy to report is still very much alive and active is Margo Hoff, whose recent exhibition at 2/20 Gallery, 220 East 16th Street was one of the surprise hits of the season.

Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1911, as a child Hoff used the soft clay left behind by well drillers to model small figures and mixed her own paints by crushing rocks and berries. Although that makes for a nice anecdote about an artist's formative years, as she grew into young womanhood she knew that Tulsa was not exactly a nurturing environment for an ambitious aspiring artist. So as soon as she felt she could support herself, Hoff lit out for Chicago, long a beacon for artists from the Western states. She worked in factories and even performed as part of a nightclub dance team to pay for her studies in painting and drawing at the National Academy and the Art institute of Chicago.

By 1940, when she married the painter George Buehr, she was already part of a lively cultural circle that included not only the local painters and writers but also people like Buckminister Fuller and Studs Terkel. As the decade progressed she became known as one of the leading lights of the Chicago art scene, regularly represented in important annual surveys

Margo Hoff, 2/20 Gallery

at the Art Insitute, the University of Illinois, and the Carnegie Institute, including the latter's landmark 1948 exhibition "Painting in the United States." Her 1955 solo exhibition at Wildenstein Galleries in Paris, a first for any postwar Chicago artist, won kudos from the French critics, one of whom praised her "strong design, interesting subject matter and brilliant color with Seurat-like handling."

In 1955, Hoff also had her first New York solo show at the Saidenberg Gallery, and moved here permenantly in 1960, winning the friendship and respect of artists as diverse as Agnes Martin, Robert Indiana, and Loren MacIver. Inspired by the intensity of the city she created paintings on an urban theme such as "The Crowd," which was included in the 1962 Annual at The Whitney Museum and was favorably reviewed by John Canaday in The New York Times. Her painting "Ikon" was included in "Art:USA: Now," a blockbuster survey that traveled the world from 1962 to 1966. Hoff was one of only two women in a group of 102 artists that included such stellar names as Edward Hopper, Willem de Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg, and Larry Rivers, among others.

Margo Hoff's exhibition at 2/20 Gallery, a modest but vital new venue under the directorship of the artist Miguel Hererra featured a stunning sampling of her vibrant hard-edge abstractions, such as the 1984 canvas collage "Celebration," and made many new fans for this important, yet woefully unheralded, American artist.

* * *

NYAEA is Awarded a Golden Grant

As we were putting this issue to bed, we learned that New York Artists Equity Association has received an award from The Sam and Adele Golden Foundation for the Arts and thought that was sufficient reason to yell "Stop the presses!"—something you can wait a long time to do in the art world, where fast-breaking news is not exactly the order of the day.

Along with individual grants to "promote and support visual artists working in paint"—which can sound like a redundancy until one thinks about how many visual artists do not work in paint nowadays—the Golden Foundation also supports worthy cultural organizations, funding artist's residencies, studio space, art services and exhibition opportunities for regional, national and international artists.

The announcement of NYAEA's award cited the organization's fifty-five years of providing professional opportunities for artists and their estates, assisting artists with economic, educational, and health needs, and disseminating national and state information regarding legislation and legal rights relevant to artists' needs.

Having long considered New York Artists' Equity Association an essential resource for local artists, we were pleased to learn of the award "to expand its services for visual artists, make the work of the participants accessible to new audiences and give new life to other work that might otherwise be lost."

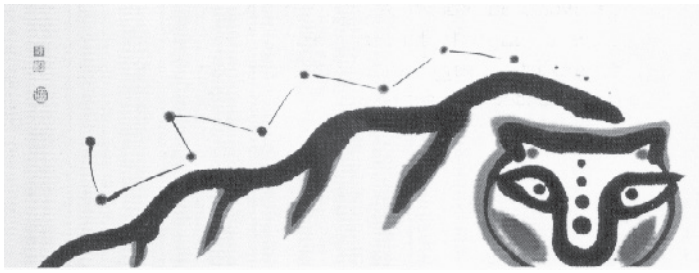
* * *

Mok-Il Lee Tames the Tiger with a Fluent Brush

A recent exhibition by the Korean artist Mok-Il Lee, at Fleet Bank Gallery, in the Empire State Building, 350 Fifth Avenue, at 34th Street, was especially interesting in that it focused on one vital facet of this versatile artist's oeuvre. Featured in the show were a series of ink paintings in which a uniquely Korean calligraphic style was employed to create fanciful images of tigers with a host of symbolic meanings.

These works were swift and spare in a manner quite different from Mok-Il Lee's work in more Western painterly modes, which is akin to the CoBrA Group, an aggregate of artists from the Netherlands and Scandinavia who probe primitive sources for their energetic gustural paintings featuring animals and gnomish figures. Like those of the CoBrA artists, the paintings of Mok-Il Lee are refreshingly direct and free of formal strictures, employing color without restraint to limn a personal universe in which all elements of nature are subjected to expressive distortions verging on the visionary.

In the show at Fleet Bank Gallery, however, by limiting his subject matter to tigers and eschewing color altogether for a more traditionally Asian monochromatic palette, Mok-Il Lee emphasized the linear mastery which is the heart and soul of his art. With a whiplash line as fluid as that of any ancient literati painter, he conjured up image after image in which the spirit of the tiger was evoked with utmost economy of means.



"Big Dipper Tiger"

The paintings were further enlivened by the artist's considerable visual wit, as seen in "Big Dipper Tiger," where a staccato dot-and-dash technique depicted the starry constellations dancing over the animal's stripped back in a manner that could also suggest fleas moving in zigzag patterns!

The painting had all the lively humor of a New Yorker cartoon, yet also possessed the more transcendent aesthetic qualities that we expect of the best Asian ink painting and calligraphy. Like Saul Steinberg, albeit without resorting to anthropomorphism, Mok-Il Lee captures elements of the feline personality in a manner that can provoke smiles, since they are as common to tigers as to house cats.

In "A Full Moon" and "Tiger's Roar," Mok-Il Lee moves freely from the figurative to the abstract. In the former painting the tiger's boldly brushed face, tail, and a Zen-like circle indicating the full moon are all that is needed to convey a sense of nocturnal mystery akin to Henri Rousseau's famous jungle scenes; in the latter, a splashy abstract gesture suggests the ferocity of the tiger's reverberating roar.

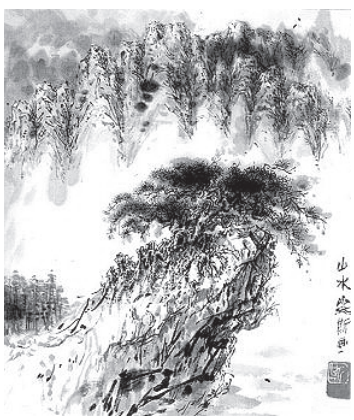
In other paintings the artist evokes the undulant grace of the animal with a single line. And in one especially succinct piece, he summons up the beast with a circle topped by two triangles for ears and four vertical slashes indicating stripes, creating a pictographic representation of the tiger that links painting and calligraphy with remarkable ease.

Mok-Il Lee, who received his B.F.A. from Jung Ang University, in Seoul, and later studied art in both Japan and New York, has exhibited widely since the 1970s. His recent New York solo show revealed how firmly his originality is rooted in tradition.

—Peter Wiley

Vyacheslav Shevchuk's Poetic Chinese Vistas

The age of multiculturalism has ushered in a host of fascinating incongruities. Among the most productive of these has been the lively dialogue between East and West. For this marriage of diverse aesthetics has produced some of the most interesting hybrids in recent painting, as seen in the work of Vyacheslav Shevchuk, whose paintings were recently seen at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway.



"The Pine on a Rock"

Although born in Kiev, Ukraine, where he studied architecture and classical drawing at the Academy of Architecture, Shevchuk has evolved over the years into an exponent of Chinese painting and calligraphy. His work, which is included in many important private and public collections in Europe and the United States, is created with ink and watercolor in the traditional manner and has all of the qualities that make Asian painting uniquely different from painting in the West.

Shevchuk has mastered brush techniques to a degree that is quite startling for an Occidental artist and his proficiency in calligraphy is even more remarkable, considering that this is the one area in which even non-Asian artists who have achieved a certain skill in painting techniques almost invariably fall short. Like the ancient literati artists that he emulates so successfully, Shevchuk makes his calligraphy an integral element of his compositions. He also follows the traditional practice of adding a red seal or "chop" with his name and style of painting to his compositions.

However, these bows to tradition are by no means signifiers of orthodoxy on Shevchuk's part. Rather, they are gestures of respect for the venerable tradition that Shevchuk entered through his studies with the distinguished Chinese painter Li Dzhin, who was himself a student of the son of the twentieth century master Zhi Bai-Shi. Indeed, originality is defined much differently in Chinese painting than in American or European painting. It has more to do with transmitting the uniqueness of one's personality through one's brush strokes than through rapidly changing schools and styles. And the individual stamp of Shevchuk's personality and character comes through strongly in the swift, sure brush work that animates both his paintings and his calligraphy.

While working within the convention of the mountainous, fog-enshrouded landscape so ubiquitous in Chinese painting for many centuries, Shevchuk adds his own special touch. Particularly impressive is his way of using a "dot" technique to depict trees and foliage, the dark specks of ink dancing amid the washes of pale watercolor and guiding the eye over the entire composition, from snowy ground or glistening waterway to craggy mountain peak.

This technique is especially effective in "Country Pleasure," one of Shevchuk's most panoramic vistas, while tonal subtleties accomplished with a wet-into-wet technique provides the atmospheric magic in the transcendent view of mountain-tops and trees entitled "Enjoying the Pine." Shevchuk's ability to evoke ethereal subjects with subtle, monochromatic ink washes is equally evident in another atmospheric mountain view called "Rocks Under Fresh Snow."

Indeed, all of the paintings of Vyacheslav Shevchuk are impressive examples of multiculturalism at its best, uniting twains once considered irreconcilable and paying tribute to tradition, even while conveying the sense of a singular aesthetic sensibility.

—Robert Vigo

Great American Medium: The AWS at the Salmagundi Club

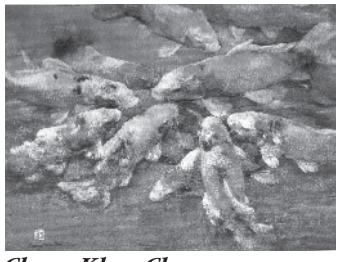
One of the first works that one saw upon entering the galleries of the Salmagundi Club, 47 Fifth Avenue, where the One Hundred and Thirty Sixth International Exhibition of the American Watercolor Society recently took place, was a superb painting by Jada Rowland. Entitled "Modeling Myself on Them," it was a self-portrait surrounded by a diverse group of artistic predecessors ranging from Vermeer and Durer to Norman Rockwell. In context, Rowland's picture seemed not only a tribute to some of greats who have inspired her but also an auspicious expression of the happy marriage of tradition and technical innovation that makes any exhibition by the AWS an occasion for celebration.

Also quite pointed was a boldly brushed opaque watercolor called "The Critic" by Frederick J. Bidigare, in which the bearded, myopic scribe resembled one of Leonard Baskin's birds of prey. But one could hardly identify with such critical sternness in relation to this show, which inspired only enthusiasm with its wide variety of techniques demonstrating the versatility of this most unforgiving yet alternately rewarding of mediums.

Penny Stewart's intricate composition "Autumn Glory" interpreted its landscape subject in sharply delineated areas of fiery color that interlocked like the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, while Serge Hollerbach's atmospheric "Snow Storm" evoked a sense of shadowy buildings, rooftops and blowing snow with a few broad forms and bold, juicy strokes. By contrast, Edward H. Shepherd employed a meticulously detailed drybrush technique in "The Last Bid," his realist painting of burly farmers at an outdoor auction. Equally detailed in another manner, more akin to certain paintings by Andrew Wyeth, was Brian Clifford's "Self-Portrait," in which the tiny figure of the artist appears dwarfed by fields and hills of dry yellow grass, as if to comment on our insignificance in the larger scheme of things.

Working in a style somewhat reminiscent of Thomas Hart Benton for its expressively distorted figures, Robert Barnum's "Water Man," depicted a rural character wielding a divining rod near an old pick-up truck, while a downtrodden couple languished nearby, the entire scene suggesting some Erskine Caldwell story set in a trailer camp. Then there was Jude Pokorny, whose photorealist handling of aquarelle turned a close-up of a Harley Davidson motorcycle's fuel tank into a dazzling, near-abstract study of light on sleek reflective surfaces.

Don Van Horn



Cheng-Khee Chee

Since taste in art is always subjective, one does not like to emphasize prize-winners too emphatically in a show of this scope and quality. However, most of the awards this time around seemed especially well placed. Among them, Don Van Horn's "Waiting for the L," a painting of passengers on an elevated train platform with city buildings visible in the background was meritorious for its virtuoso handling of a complex subject. Cheng-Khee Chee showed a different kind of virtuosity in "Koi 2002 #4," an image of colorful fish converging in luminous blue water notable for its fluid handling of the medium. Although its sparkling freshness is often employed for sunnier subjects, Bill James demonstrated that watercolor can be as effective as oils or any other medium for social realism in her painting, "Kock'n on Heaven's Door," a compelling portrait of a homeless woman seated on a sidewalk, pensively twirling a strand of her unruly white hair. And those who might stereotype watercolor as more suitable for traditional subjects than abstraction should surely have been disabused of that notion by "Rocking Horse Romp," a vigorous gestural work by Vera M. Dickerson; "Parc Guell," a lyrical exploration of subtle forms and colors by Elaine Daily-Birnbaum; and H.C. Dodd's "Patriot," a dynamic geometric composition incorporating stars, stripes, and other elements which won the AWS Gold Medal this year.

Bill James

All told, this was one of the more exhilarating exhibitions to be seen this season, not only for its vigor and variety, but for proving once again that watercolor— favored by such past masters as Winslow Homer, John Marin, Charles Burchfield, and Dong Kingman, among others— is indeed "The Great American Medium."

—J. Sanders Eaton

Francoise Nussbaumer's Paintings Defy Stylistic Limits

While many artists experiment with different modes, most carefully edit their exhibitions to present a consistent vision. Francoise Nussbaumer, however, takes the rather unorthodox approach of exhibiting her earlier paintings, in which images figure prominently, together with her more recent abstract color field compositions, in her solo exhibition at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, from June 12 through 28.

In a time when many artists seem to think it is their solemn duty to demonstrate the old saw that "consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," only the most intrepid painters are willing to defy the unspoken but rigorously enforced one-style-per-artist rule: Gerhardt Richter with his gestural abstractions and contrasting photorealist canvases ; Ross Bleckner with his stringently geometric works and more ethereal images of glowing birds and chalices.

Even while showing two modes of work simultaneously, however, Nussbaumer reveals a more unified vision than either of those two better known artists. For, despite the immediate impression of disparity, on closer inspection one discovers that her two modes are more alike than different.

Indeed, the only thing absent from Nussbaumer's color field paintings are the images. Which is to say, the color fields are very much present in her imagistic works as well. All of Nussbaumer's paintings are subtle chromatic explorations of color, tone, and light. All are distinguished by her sensitive paint handling, her sense of "touch," nuance, and gesture.

"View of the Mountains"

The only difference is that some of her paintings include an image isolated, often within a rectangular shape, somewhere in the composition. In one work it is a small boat afloat in a square of blue water near the top of the canvas. In another it is a blond woman (also near the upper edge of the canvas) wearing a black evening dress and lying on a bed. Here, the figure's listless position and brooding expression suggest that she may have thrown herself on the bed in a fit of romantic pique, creating the effect of a dramatic film still.

In yet another canvas, there is a fragmented form in the lower left portion of the canvas, suggesting part of an overstuffed chair or sofa with a satiny, striped slipcover. There is also a segment of a mountainous terrain in the upper right corner of the composition. Both images are separated by an expansive orange color field, giving the impression of a vaguely metaphysical room-setting painted in a deadpan manner akin to Luc Tuysmans.

What it comes down to, finally, is that when Nussbaumer removes the images, as she does in her most recent paintings, the change is not as radical as one might expect. It is as though she has simply shifted the emphasis slightly, eliminating a sense of incident and everyday meaning, yet retaining a larger overall painterly terrain in which the true significance of her endeavor resides.

For what it finally comes down to is that Francoise Nussbaumer is a painter of great sensitivity and subtlety, and the manner in which she manipulates areas of pigment to create surface luminosity is more than sufficient to hold one's interest.

At the same time, the fact that there is nothing in the least bit superfluous-seeming about her images when she chooses to include them adds yet another layer of paradox to the work of this gifted and challenging artist.

—Peter Wiley

The Abstract Landscapes of Daweis

That the French painter who exhibits under the single name of Daweis studied both art and architecture in his native Paris may contribute to the structural solidity of his compositions, in which even the most spontaneous abstract gestures appear supported by an invisible underlying armature. Yet for all their formidable formal qualities, a personal visual poetry plays an equally important role in the work of this artist who has exhibited widely and won numerous awards in France, Switzerland, China, the United States, and elsewhere around the world.

Indeed, in his recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, Daweis seemed at times to be a peer of the great British J.M.W. Turner for his ability to extract abstract essences from landscape. Layering streaks of luminous color on his canvases to create a sense of limitless horizons lit by dramatic skies, Daweis achieves a chromatic subtlety akin to Turner's famous "tinted steam," albeit enlivened by a contemporary gestural boldness. His brilliantly variegated surfaces fairly pulse with energy. In Daweis' paintings, the landscape is transformed into areas of light and color that convey not only the lay of the land but a sense of the spiritual magnitude of nature.

At the same time, however, Daweis' compositions function strikingly as pure abstractions, especially at a distance, when such particulars as trees or mountains tend to be visually subordinated to the emphatic horizontal thrust of his gestural strokes. For these bolder elements, even as they establish such particulars as the horizon dividing land and sky or the movement of shimmering bodies of water, transcend their pictorial function by virtue of their abstract dynamism, compelling our attention in a manner akin to Abstract Expressionism and its European counterpart Tachism.

One critic referred to Daweis as a "visionary" painter, and that description seems entirely accurate in terms of the heightened intensity that he brings to the landscape, provided one also acknowledges that he is simultaneously a singularly sophisticated artist whose decisions are determined as much by intellect and by a broader aesthetic awareness as by his passion for nature.

Thus the landscape appears to evolve from the process of layering paint on the canvas, which contributes to the ambiguous balance between abstraction and representation. This creates some of the compositional tension in Daweis' work, for the viewer experiences the duel delights of viewing his paintings from two distinctly different perspectives: alternately enjoying their allusions to natural scenery and their coloristic and textural qualities as autonomous abstract elements.

Working with a palette knife, Daweis piles on vibrant hues, building up surfaces that appear to impart substance to light. His rapturous compositions captivate us with both their tactile presence and their chromatic power. We are transported to an equal degree by their atmospheric and their aesthetic aspects, for Daweis invites us to examine that alchemy, at the heart of all good painting, by which pigment begets an illusion without losing its unique material integrity. In much the same way, his imagery expresses the magic by which nature is transmuted into pure form and color, enabling us to view familiar phenomena afresh, as if for the first time.

—Feliks Karoly

Hester Koot's Sculptures Transcend Categories

While most artists tend to limit themselves to a consistent degree of representation or abstraction, at least within the context of a single exhibition, the sculptor Hester Koot, trained at the Art Academy of Rotterdam, in Holland, moved freely between fairly realistic figures and expressively abbreviated forms in her recent Soho exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway.

In one her bronzes called "Genevieve," for example a reclining female nude is evoked with graceful anatomical accuracy and naturalism of attitude. At the same time, elements of the figure are simplified in order to imbue it with a flowing formal unity. The combination of verisimilitude and subtle abstraction is highly effective, lending the piece an enhanced aesthetic appeal akin to classicism, albeit with a highly contemporary quality.

By contrast, "Maja," another bronze by Hester Koot calls to mind both African tribal art and certain sculptures by Modigliani, with its elongated features and sharply stylized and fragmented figural distortions. Here, the head neck and shoulder of a female subject culminating in an elbow supported by a vase-like pedestal creates a graceful arabesque in space. The beauty of the piece has much to do with its streamlined economy of form, as well as with a succinct visual wit that manifests itself in the anatomical abbreviations, which have their own formal logic. For while much of the figure is in actuality absent, no part of it appears amputated or the least bit anomalous; somehow one makes the mental connections that render it whole.

"Maja" Bronze

The same can be said of "Victory," a severely simplified torso that projects the sense of triumph implied in the title by virtue of its upward thrust and a feeling of monumentality that transcends its relatively modest scale. Here, too, the smooth surface of the bronze and its warm patina lends the piece a sensuality that is quite remarkable, considering the degree to which it is abstracted. Yet, here again, the viewer makes mental accommodations in much the same manner as one looks at a fragment of a classical figure eroded by time, ignoring what is missing, focusing on the palpable beauty of what remains. For Hester Koot has an uncanny ability to conjure the image of ideal form in ellipsis.

Her fully realized figures, on the other hand, are endowed with a classical proportions and a comeliness that requires no imaginative leaps to complete. Her bronze, "Dreaming," is especially exemplary in this regard, depicting a voluptuous female nude. She is seated, her chin resting on her hand, her elbow resting on her knee. The young woman's serene expression suggests a state of fond reverie. Koot's unerring way with volumes imbues the figure with a striking physical presence. The subtle patina contributes to the sense of womanly warmth and softness in the piece, making bronze seem a sensual surrogate for flesh.

Hester Koot could distinguish herself equally well in either her figurative or her abstract mode. That she chooses not to limit herself to one or the other, however, makes her work all the more challenging and impressive.

—Lawrence Downes

Mexican Sculptor Arturo Macías Marries the Ancient to the Modern

The distinguished Mexican sculptor and architect Arturo Macías, who was awarded the gold medal in the Biennial International of Contemporary art, in Florence, Italy in 2001, is an artist who draws deeply upon the riches of his cultural heritage. Indeed, besides exhibiting widely in his native country and elsewhere, Macías has participated in conferences on Mexican art in New York City, where his latest exhibition can be seen at Jadite Gallery, 413 West 50th Street, from June17 through 30.

Carved in exotic Mexican woods or cast in silver, Macías' figures, which are often life-size, are steeped in the folkloric tradition yet thoroughly contemporary in their aesthetic thrust, as well as in their quirky symbolism. Macías is especially enamored of the heroic female figure. His women are at once earthy and mythological, Amazonian and sensual. With their lithe limbs and full breasts, they command space impressively, suggesting Pre-Columbian goddesses, Aztec priestesses or other embodiments of Hispanic culture or mythology. Often these statuesque figures brandish objects resembling staffs or objects. The magnificent nude figure called "Maya," for example, holds in one hand a creature with the body of a serpent and a human head. Yet one does not have to understand the specific symbols in Macías' sculptures in order to appreciate them. For his pieces are autonomous in aesthetic terms and universal in their power and appeal.

Like Leonard Baskin, Arturo Macías creates sculptures that transcend their original sources to take on a larger sense of humanistic iconography. We recognize these figures on a primal level as symbols of the relationship between human beings and the natural environment, even when the references in their titles are not so specific as the figure called "El Senor Del Maiz," or "The Lord of Corn."

Unlike many of Macías' pieces, with their baroquely wrought surfaces, this is an elemental male figure which harks back in its formal simplicity to Mayan masks and temple figures. By contrast, other pieces by Macías are elaborately detailed, their nude bodies adorned with human skulls, dangling earrings, necklaces and other forms of primitive ornament. In some pieces, such as the aforementioned "Maya," the figures have fantastic, gravity-defying hair styles that almost suggest antlers, while in others their bodies are embellished with baubles and designs recalling those seen on the famous bas-reliefs at Xaxchilan.

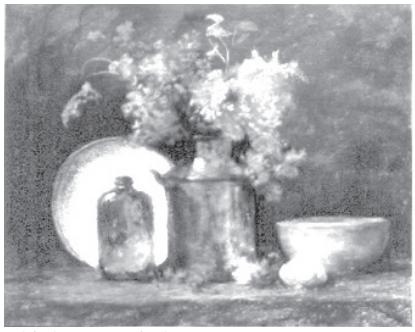
"Palencana"

Arturo Macías avails himself of the great cultural heritage of Mexican art, both ancient and modern, to inspire and nourish his creativity. Adopting formats and motifs from the past freely, he forges a highly original personal style in which vestiges of a vanished culture are transformed in a highly contemporary manner. This sense of cultural continuity lends his pieces a presence and a depth rarely encountered in contemporary sculpture. Jadite Gallery has performed a valuable service for us all by bringing the work of this major Mexican artist to our shores.

—Lawrence Downes

A Varied Members Show Does CLWAC's Legacy Proud

Named for a scholar and philanthropist who was the only woman among the 106 founding members of Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club is one of the truly venerable art institutions in New York City. And its membership lived up to its lofty legacy in the CLWAC's Annual Members' Exhibition, seen recently at Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street.



Shirley A. Fried

In an era when so much is routinely overblown, especially satisfying was seeing many excellent works on a relatively intimate scale: "Zodiac Ceiling," a mysterious architectural image, suggesting part of a planetarium, by Inge L. Heus, which won the First Award for Watermedia; " Copper and Blue," a gem of a still life by Shirley A. Fried, which took the Second Award for Pastel; and "Mulberry Street Reflections," an oil by Sharon Florin depicting a religious statue in the window of a Little Italy cigar store.

Sharon Florin

Two other oils, small in size but possessed of presence, were: "Cows at Dawn," a rustic scene by Florence Kaplan as quaintly charming as anything by Albert York; and "Pink Shawl," a portrait of a seated woman, smiling beatifically, limned in warm, old masterish tones by Gail Gibbs.

It is always exciting, too, to discover a gifted young artist like Elizabeth Torak, whose highly animated genre painting "The French Fry Eaters" captured the antics of a group of oafish young men pigging out in a restaurant, its title alluding wittily to a well known picture by Vincent van Gogh.

Jeanette Martone

Gabriela Dellosso, another youthful talent, won the Margaret Dole Portrait Award for "The Swimmer," triptych, three views of a woman in a red bathing cap painted in a hyperrealist manner akin to Odd Nerdrum. Robin Baratz showed an oil entitled "Moore Street Market II," which captured a lively street scene with snapshot immediacy, yet its casual realism was buttressed by abstract compositional virtues.

Then there was Jeanette Martone, who demonstrated that graphite, when it is employed with meticulous skill and sensitivity, can convey all the subtle nuances of a full-fledged painting medium; indeed, Martone won a Best Painting award for "On The Street," an affecting monochromatic portrait of a young girl, personifying beauty, grace, and dignity despite her impoverished circumstances.

Good works on paper were especially plentiful in this show: A virtuoso watercolorist, Eleanor Meier demonstrated her ability to balance a complex array of colors, patterns, and surfaces in her still life composition "Pepper Parade." Holly Meeker Rom showed her own unique approach to aquarelle in "Leaves," with its artfully balanced autumnal hues. Yet another way with watercolor was seen in Susan Samet's "Downtown," in which areas of flat, brilliant color evoked what appeared to be a curving street in Chinatown thronged by gawking tourists. And one would also be remiss not to mention two other fine works in that most unforgiving of mediums: Barbara Scullin's "Quiet Afternoon," depicting a young woman reading and musing by a tall, light-filled window in a pristine style that complemented the serene subject. "The Red Top," by Carlina Valenti, was a still life in subdued white and silvery tones, depicting a pitcher, a basket of eggs, and a milk bottle whose bright cap provided the piquant coloristic accent alluded to in the title.

Catherine Kinkade won First Prize for Pastel with "Amagansett," a buoyant neo-impressionist landscape notable for its shimmering sense of light. Idaherma Williams showed a woodblock print called "In a Chinese Restaurant," combining fragmented figurative imagery with characters and symbols set within a bold abstract composition.

Impressive in another manner was "Cry 'Havoc,' and let slip the dogs of war," an etching by Judith Anderson that won the Second Award for Graphics, with its sensitively delineated figures and contemporary treatment of a Shakespearean theme. Jeanette Koumjian also used seriate imagery effectively in "Pick of the Crop," a large composition made up of several small graphite drawings of cotton-pods combined within a gridded format, which received the First Award for Graphics.

The show's First Award in Sculpture went to Sandra Frank for her innovative piece "The Bride," in which metal screening was combined with welded screen to create the effect of the veil and wedding dress. A Horse's head Award for Best Sculpture went to Virginia Abbott for "Fay," a piece which set a sculptural portrait head in hydrocal against a mosaic backdrop to create an innovative synthesis of three and two dimensional elements. Janet Indick also combined unlikely materials to highly original effect in "Wreath 9/11," where aluminum, steel, and paper collage were employed to pay tribute to both the victims and the heroes of that dark day in our recent history.

Sandra Frank

Other sculptors employed more traditional mediums yet created works which were original in other ways: Priscilla Heep's stoneware sculpture "Bewilderment" lived up to its title, confronting us with a fanciful creature of no known species. Amy Unfried's bronze "A Quiet Evening at Home" captured the posture and attitude of a reposeful figure with refreshing directness. Jean Kroeber was represented by two sculptures—one in wood, the other in marble—demonstrating her heroic approach to the figure, which invariably invests her pieces with symbolic and universal qualities.

Although it is literally impossible to review a show of this size and scope without neglecting to mention other worthy artists, one hopes that the brief descriptions offered here will at least convey something of the CLWAC's lively and inclusive spirit.

—Jeannie McCormack

A Neighborhood Affair: The W.S.A.C. in East Harlem

Taller Boricua Gallery, in the Julia De Burgos Cultural Center, 1680 Lexington Avenue, at 106th Street, is hardly your typical art venue. A nerve center of East Harlem, the center provides a host of community services and hosts all manner of lively events.

Indeed, on the Saturday afternoon that we arrived to review the exhibition, "As We See It," juried by David Herman and featuring twenty-one members of the West Side Arts Coalition, a salsa band was blasting away at full volume and dancers of all ages and sizes had turned the gallery space into a scene resembling the heyday of the Corso Ballroom, when the late great Tito Puente still held sway. It was was a wonderful, upbeat family celebration and the music complemented the visual vigor of the paintings on the walls—even while one had to dodge dancing bodies to take notes and the presence of the band made it difficult to get close to some of the works...

Of course, it's impossible anyway to do full justice to twenty-one artists in the space allotted here. However, the following brief descriptions may give one an idea of the scope of the exhibition, which ranged from a large, characteristically lyrical abstract canvas in luminous blue hues by Dellamarie Parrilli to a sensual realist nude by Christian Beels.

Enid Moore showed a small yet powerful portrait of a sleeping baby, its round countenance filling the canvas as serenely as a Buddha. Ernesto Camacho's subway scene combined urban grit and fantasy, its central figure a pretty young woman enigmatically cradling a large pumpkin in her lap.

Peter Reyes' tall monochromatic canvas of entwined nude bodies possessed a stark abstract power akin to that of some of Rico Lebrun's humanistic compositions. Rena Kondo's circular collage composition centering on images of whirling dervishes projected a suitably vertiginous optical sensation. Mario Sostre showed a characteristic combination of funk and elegance akin to that of Basquiat, in his collage painting combining a portrait of O.J. Simpson with a graffiti-like gesturalism. Miguel Angel Mora explored the subtle qualities of artificial light and shadow in a composition notable for its stately formal austerity. By contrast, Laura Loving's street scene combined flat brilliant color areas, bold black outlines, and cartoon-like distortions to create a zany composition in which even the lampposts seemed to engage in a wiggly dance that mirrored the movements of the actual dancers in the gallery!

Nestor Rodriguez updated the vocabulary of Pop in a postmodern manner, combining an image of a Coke bottle, painterly quotes from Keith Haring, Abstract Expressionist brush strokes, and printed texts to comment on homophobia. The artist who goes by the single name Xavier captured a sense of mystery with a starkly composed painting of a woman with her back to us gazing into a nocturnal sky. Carrie Lo's painting of an orchid was notable for its simple beauty, while Mae Jeon's small abstract stain painting had the power of a miniature Paul Jenkins. Beth Kurtz also made the most of a modest format in her still life of three green apples and a pot of yellow daffodils limned with smooth finesse, and Eleanor Gilpatrick's canvas captured the turbulent drama of a storm brewing over a verdant landscape in bravura strokes. Then there was Joey Infante, who contributed a lively Haitian carnival scene that transcended its genre by virtue of its highly personal Expressionist energy.

Also including works by other excellent West Side Arts Coalition artists such as James Glass, Jutta Filippelli, Elaine Mokhtefi, K.A. Gibbons, Gregg Rosen and Carole. Barlowe, which could not be viewed properly amid the unanticipated festivities, "As We See It" was an outstanding group exhibition in an exciting alternative venue. —Maurice Taplinger

The Rhapsodic Abstractions of David Tobey

Authentic energy has been in short supply in recent painting. Postmodern aesthetics tend to undervalue the gesture as a conduit of honest passion. Painters like Jonathan Lasker have even gone so far as to parody the velocity of action painting in terms as premeditated and static as Roy Lichtenstein's hard-edged cartoon renderings of abstract expressionist brush strokes.

In an aesthetic climate so crippled by self-conscious strategies and cunning ironies, it takes an artist as committed to intuition and spontaneity as David Tobey obviously is to demonstrate that raw immediacy and lyrical exuberance can still thrill us in contemporary art.

Indeed, the power and presence of Tobey's work is almost startling in his recent solo exhibition of mixed media paintings and welded steel sculptures, "The Structure of Energy," at Gallery @ 49, 322 West 49th Street.

What Tobey shows us, particularly in his paintings, is that the lyrical impulse cannot be stifled or invalidated simply because some among the critical establishment would prefer to push a conceptual or political agenda; for it is a force as innate and enduring as humankind itself. And he comes by his lyricism via a unique confluence of formative experiences. The son of the distinguished history painter and muralist Alton Tobey, he began painting in his father's studio at an early age, and later earned his Masters in Studio Art from the College of New Rochelle. But it was equally obvious early on that he was musically gifted, so he also graduated from Juiliard an accomplished violinist. Today, David Tobey approaches painting as he approaches music— that most naturally abstract of all the arts: He rides the rhythms in his canvases and reigns them in, much as a composer controls the ebb and flow of a symphony as it is coaxed into being. As with a piece of music, this involves a synthesis of spontaneity and restraint, as he works and reworks the composition, balancing its various elements until they coalesce in a dynamic chromatic and formal fusion.

Through such means, Tobey's compositions achieve the visual equivalent of a truly symphonic sweep, with their flowing forms and vibrant colors writhing muscularly, rising to a rhapsodic pitch. One can compare such energetic pyrotechnics to those of Jackson Pollock, an artist he greatly admires. Much to his credit, however, Tobey does not ape the earlier painter's mannerisms. In fact, even though his painting technique involves the pouring of paint as well as manipulation of pigment with a brush, the biomorphic sensuality of his forms comes closer to Arshile Gorky, while the collage elements—ranging from photographic images, to torn sheet music, to bits of twisted wire, to shards of wood, and other found objects—that he affixes to some paintings are more akin to the surreal automatism of Alfonso Ossorio.

"Study in Red, White and Blue"

Along with his musical inspiration,Tobey assimilates a variety of art historical precedents to forge a personal style in which the overriding feature is his ability to harness energy and manipulate form to his own ends. He cites a variety of diverse elements—Rubens' sensually "intertwining figures"; the "space around Rembrandt's figures"; the "giant expressive shapes" in Picasso's "Guernica," and even the wild style graffiti that proliferated in the New York City subways in the 1980s, when he was a student commuting back and forth to Julliard—as influences on his work.

In his welded steel sculptures, created with scrap metal, it is as though the often baroque shapes in his canvases have broken free and moved out to command three dimensional space. Indeed, technical considerations aside, his concerns are remarkably consistent in both mediums. Thus, of the pieces he creates in the workshop of a man who owns a metalworking company and is, incidentally, one of his violin students, he says, "I work mainly with the concepts of balance, motion, and interacting and intersecting planes in a three dimensional space... I work with these many varied shapes and start to feel and hear the inner sounds of rhythm, wind, and melody. I know a sculpture is done when this process of sound and motion makes a dimensional and fluid transition from one section to another in the sculpture."

Granted, it is unusual to hear a visual artist speak of "sound" in relation to his work, but in Tobey's case it makes perfect sense, since the musicality in both his sculptures and his paintings is undeniable. His use of acrylics in his recent paintings facilitates the flow that makes his forms appear to be in a state of constant flux, for their characteristic liquidity and fast drying properties enable him to achieve an exhilarating sense of freedom and spontaneity. His uninhibited approach to color, in which he layers strokes, drips, splashes, and slashes of strident reds, yellows, and blues, along with softer secondary hues, in linear skeins over the surface of his canvases contributes further to the intense kinetic energy of his compositions.

Indeed, few painters today manage to generate as much sheer visceral excitement as David Tobey does in these new canvases, with their shapes and colors flowing expansively in configurations that often resemble stately energy constructs more than formal compositions, making the title of his present show seem especially apt. For Tobey's paintings seem informed by an innate, deeply intuitive sense of structure rather than by any conscious attempt to impose order or design. Yet they are possessed of a peculiar, rough-hewn beauty, with passages of breathtaking lyricism juxtaposed with a sense of compressed inner violence so pronounced that it gives the impression, at times, of threatening to explode the canvas off its stretchers.

Aside from the aforementioned photographic fragments in some mixed media collage paintings and the boldly scrawled figurative references in paintings such as "Study in Red, White, and Blue," specific images are infrequent in Tobey's work. Yet his forms are sensual and allusive after a manner that makes it possible to Rorschach an entire world of possible meanings into them. Indeed, the art of David Tobey fairly bursts with life, which makes it a welcome anomaly, as well as a vital alternative to the present surfeit of art about art.

—Ed McCormack

Glenn Lawrence Liddy's Visions of Salvation and Despair

One is informed that the artist's struggles with his Christian faith are motivating factors in the paintings of the Pennsylvania painter Glenn Lawrence Liddy. In his recent show at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, however, the range of Liddy's imagery was so broad and compelling that it seemed to invite a far greater range of interpretations.

To begin with, Liddy is a splendid draftsman, and his drawing ability enables him to create complex figurative compositions filled with subtle symbolic meanings. Working in oil on canvas, he evokes his subjects in a style that can initially call to mind the great illustrators of fairy tales, albeit with a slightly surreal twist. For his figures often appear in fanciful costumes that seem to hark back to earlier times, in settings that suggest states of mind rather than specific places.

In Liddy's "The Armor of Love," for example, a young woman wearing a hat that appears to sprout wings is surrounded by a swirl of ornate forms, including a mask-like face, as she stands pensively near the stone wall of what could be an ancient castle. As the title implies, some of the surrounding forms resemble ornate pieces of armor, yet remain unspecific. The picture commands our attention for the grace of the figure and its subtle color harmonies more than for any exact meanings we can glean from it.

Indeed, that Liddy's subjects remain so elusive is what makes them especially allusive, if one can put it that way. He presents us with visual puzzles as complex as any we are likely to encounter in contemporary art, and trying to decipher them is part of what makes his work so engaging.

This is especially true of a complex, multifigure composition such as "The Lord is My Strength and My Song," in which a gathering of incongruous personages includes a woman wearing a monk's cowl over what appears to be a minidress with a cross dangling between her breasts; another woman with a tattooed face, semi-reclining nearby and reaching up as though to embrace her, and a dreamy young man balancing a "boom-box" on his shoulder. While these figures and yet another woman wearing a Shakespearean-looking dress cluster among rocks and weeds, other, more fragmented figures appear behind them in the sky. All of these somewhat disparate elements are united by virtue of Liddy's exquisitely balanced palette of earthy yet luminous hues.

The sense of humankind's chaotic condition comes across with particular force in the oil on canvas entitled "Heaven's Been Waiting a Long Time." Here, Liddy's imagery achieves an almost Boschian intensity, with the nude figure of a sprawling brown-skinned man apparently tormented by scantily clad women and impassive onlookers in a hellish environment where dripping shapes resemble a grotesque forest of stalagmites.

"Heaven's Been Waiting a Long Time"

Here, as in other paintings, Glenn Lawrence Liddy creates a contemporary allegory possessed of a peculiarly nonlinear logic and realized with impressive skill.

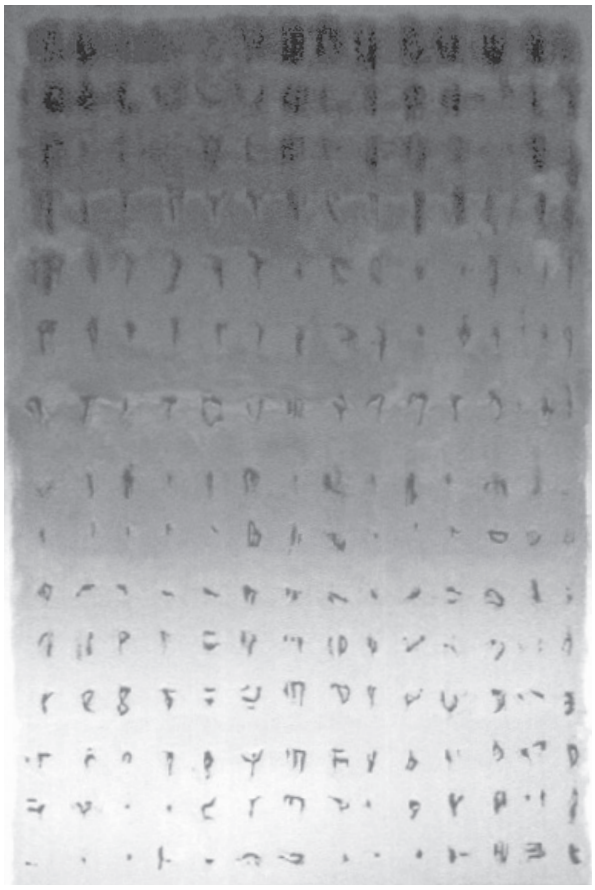
—Maureen Flynn

Susanne Tierney: The Metaphysics of Ecriture

"My creative process is inspired by an unearthing of mythologies," says the painter and printmaker Susanne Tierney. "I cast marks as characters that sometimes seem numinous, obscure, playful or reminiscent of something ancient or archetypal. It is as if the legends and poems of my youth step into the whiteness of my consciousness during somnambulistic moments in the studio. I am aware of their primal presence, as they change shape and become peculiar symbols."

Rarely has an artist expressed so well in words the nonverbal process by which her imagery comes about. Susan Tierney reveals, however, that she is even more articulate in oil on canvas in her solo exhibition of recent work at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from June 3 through 21. (Reception: Saturday, June 7, from 3 to 6 PM.)

Literature plays a large role in Tierney's work, inspiring her and lending her abstract canvases a tantalizingly submerged allusiveness. Echoes of the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke and William Butler Yeats and the prose of James Joyce reverberate in the ruggedly encrusted surfaces of her oils. In some paintings actual letter forms appear partially obscured by earthy accumulations of pigment that alter their contours until they morph into shapes resembling ancient signs.



"Book of Hours Page One"

Most recently, Tierney cites "Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing," Helene Cixous's exploration of "the strange science of writing" as "a springboard" for her new paintings, in which the above-mentioned deconstruction of letters reflects some of the avant garde French author's own poststructuralist experiments. The writers that Cixous admires—the Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva, the Austrian novelist Ingeborg Bachmann, and above all Kafka—are the ones she calls "descenders, explorers of the lowest and the deepest," and this notion seems to find its painterly equivalent in Tierney's tactile surfaces, which can be as craggy as those of Clyfford Still and seem similarly intent on transforming matter into spirit.

Although deeply rooted in the Western painterly tradition, Tierney's unique ecriture also seems to draw inspiration from the Asian synthesis of painting and calligraphy, as though striving to embody the moment of metamorphosis of picture into sign, sign into language. Indeed, the compositions of major paintings by Tierney such as "Book of Hours" and "Babel, Babble" resemble nothing so much as a greatly enlarged hand-scroll of Chinese calligraphy, with the "characters" —or, in this case, the intriguing shapes that the artist creates by deconstructing Western letters—arranged in more or less regularly-spaced rows.

But these, too, are deconstructed by Tierney's manipulation of the surface with brush strokes, subtly graduated tones, and a variety of painterly effects from thickly textured impastos to translucent washes of color, to pentimenti and palimpsests that provide the plasticity and tension peculiar to Western-style painting. While disrupting the symmetry of her compositions, these gestural elements simultaneously imbue them with a sense of depth and mystery; of the profound metaphysical meanings, half-hidden in the physicality of pigment, that make Susanne Tierney's paintings so visually seductive and intellectually stimulating.

—Ed McCormack

Katia's Spiritual Kinship with the Fauves

Katia Buteau Zucker, who was born in France and was a photographic model before turning to painting and settling in Switzerland, is self-taught ; yet her work is possessed of an innate sophistication.

In her exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, from June 24 through July 12, Katia, as she prefers to be known, depicts figures, landscapes, and still life subjects in bold areas of color. Details are kept to a minimum in order to focus attention on the overall design of her compositions.

In her figure paintings, facial features are often absent; nevertheless, one gets an impression of comeliness, as seen in "Amerique du sud," in which two severely stylized young woman occupy the foreground of the composition, as though enjoying a walk and a conversation. Both figures have long black hair and wear red dresses. They are set against large, sumptuously textured areas of red and yellow, with a smaller figure in the background seen from behind, an anonymous passing pedestrian. Here, as in other paintings by Katia, the main figures are anonymous. Indeed, given their facelessness, they could be seen as formal elements, like the bottles in the paintings of Morandi, an artist with whom Katia shares qualities in common. Yet, somehow Katia also imparts a gracefulness to her female figures that makes more than mere compositional pawns.

Indeed, in her painting "Bacchanales," four female figures, partially dressed and seen from behind, enacting a wild dance amid colorful abstract forms, project a powerful sense of erotic abandon. Although painted in a bold expressionist style akin to Emil Nolde, the picture also makes one think of Paul Gauguin's Tahitian beauties and the sensual paintings that D.H. Lawrence created as a respite from writing his novels.

In her landscapes, Katia gives free reign to her more abstract tendencies, even while expressing her affection for natural beauty, as seen in "Nature flamboyante." Here, a gorgeous blue sky hovers over verdant hills and a simple house gives way to fields painted in vibrant red and yellow hues that show a spiritual kinship with such Fauvist masters as Derain and Vlaminck. Her ability to bring her paintings alive with color can also be seen in the still life composition called "Le chaudron cuivre," in which what appears to be a simple clay pot is enveloped in luminous chromatic auras.

Equally exciting for its coloristic brilliance, as well as for its expressive forms, is "Les voiliers de St Barth," where bright yellow,

"Bacchanales"

orange, and blue sails, rhythmic waves, and swirling palm trees conspire to create an animated compositional vortex. In other paintings, too, such as the floral abstraction "La fleur éclatée" and the landscape "Fin de jour," Katia demonstrates a chromatic intrepidness that would do any latter day Fauve proud.

By contrast, Katia shows that she can also convey the sense of a wintry landscape locked in silent stillness in "Les blés coupés," which depicts a white chateau rising out of snow-shrouded fields and set against brown hills in a considerable cooler palette. Indeed, self-taught though she may be, Katia Buteau Zucker is an artist of considerable skill and versatility. —Wilson Wong

Da Silva's Personal Solar System of Symbols

Painting by Jose da Silva

Born in France of a Portuguese father and a Belgian mother, the painter/sculptor Jose da Silva is an artist who seems thoroughly attuned to a primal mythology of his own invention. Indeed, da Silva has evolved a neo-primitive iconology that enables him to give new life to old myths, as seen in his strong solo exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, from June 24 through July 12.

Both as a painter and a sculptor, da Silva draws inspiration from ancient sources. His sculptures, with their stylized forms and rough, earthy surfaces, depicting human and animal figures in ritualistic postures, have the feeling of archaeological finds from an unknown culture. His paintings, on the other hand, can be compared to those of the German neo-expressionist A.R. Penck for their starkly simplified forms, which are at once ancient-seeming and thoroughly contemporary. Like Penck, da Silva has evolved something akin to a personal visual alphabet in which fluid lines morph into signs and symbols. Even more dynamically than the better-known German artist, however, da Silva has achieved an almost child-like freedom of expression which enables him to create compositions that startle us with their freshness and vitality.

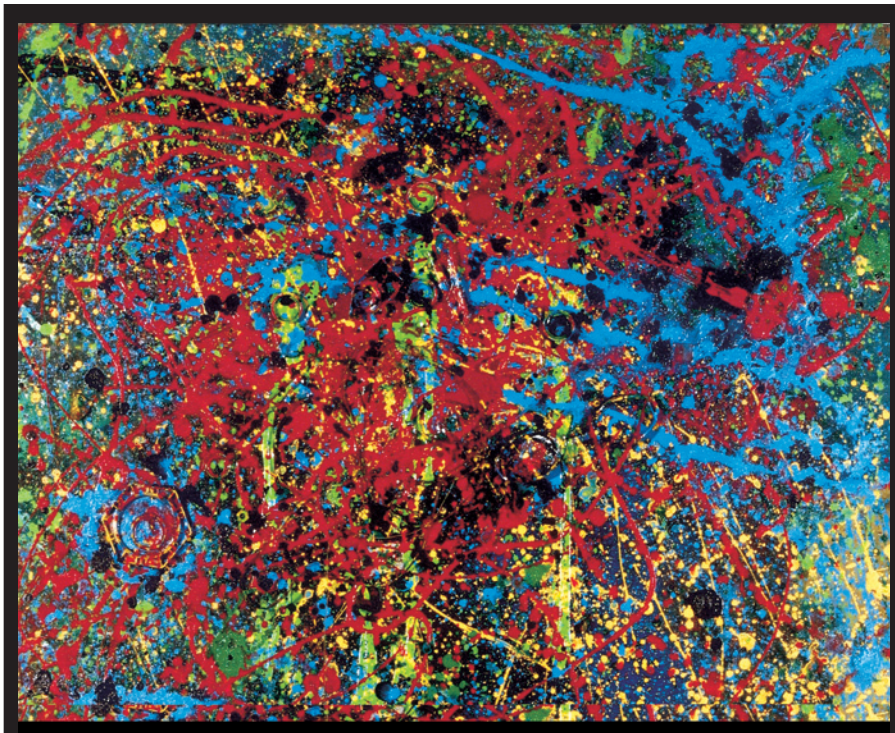
In da Silva's painting "L'embryon," for example, the sinuous green snake that is a recurring motif in his work swirls against a dark background enlivened by a white lunar orb and a brilliant red figure curled upon itself in a manner suggesting the embryo of the title (although Cassell's French Dictionary tells us that "embryon" can also have the vernacular meaning "little bit of a man, dwarf, shrimp," adding a humorous twist to the title—or at least to one's subjective interpretation of it!)

The symbol of the snake appears yet again in paintings such as "Astre, enfant et vipère" and "Le fruit, ève et le serpent," both of which cast their brilliantly colored figures against a nocturnal darkness and appear to allude to the Creation myth—although their exact meanings, as in all of da Silva's work, remain mysterious and elude easy deciphering. The latter picture is especially intriguing in this regard, with the huge green serpent flowing ornately over the human female figure, which is silhouetted in bright red and appears to be wearing an elaborately decorated hoop-skirt, and Adam conspicuously absent from the oddly festive Edenic scene.

Da Silva seems quite alone among contemporary artists for his ability to carry off such an imaginative feat with a conviction that harks back to the Art Brut of Dubuffet, even while looking forward to reinvigorate figurative form in a uniquely personal manner. Even in a relatively straightforward landscape composition such as "Sa majeste," for example, he finds ways to transform the subject fancifully. Here, a tree is divided into several baroque layers and the contours of clouds and hills rhyme rhythmically, lending the picture a vertiginous quality that makes the heavenly and earthly spheres seem interchangeable.

Nothing is ever the same once it has been filtered through Jose da Silva's singular aesthetic vision, as seen in other landscapes where the various elements have unearthly qualities, suggesting plein air productions from some distant planet! Yet for all his lack of inhibition when it comes to generating imagery, da Silva's paintings also appear firmly rooted in the School of Paris tradition and European tachisme for their purely aesthetic qualities, particularly in still life compositions where clusters of brilliant flowers explode voluptuously in gestural flurries possessed of an unabashed beauty. These pictures make abundantly clear that Jose da Silva is far from a Naif. Rather, he is a highly sophisticated painter who has made a courageous decision to give his imaginative powers free reign. And the rewards are many, for the artist as well as for the viewer.

—Feliks Karoly



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