Vol. 6 No. 2 November-December 2003/January 2004 New York

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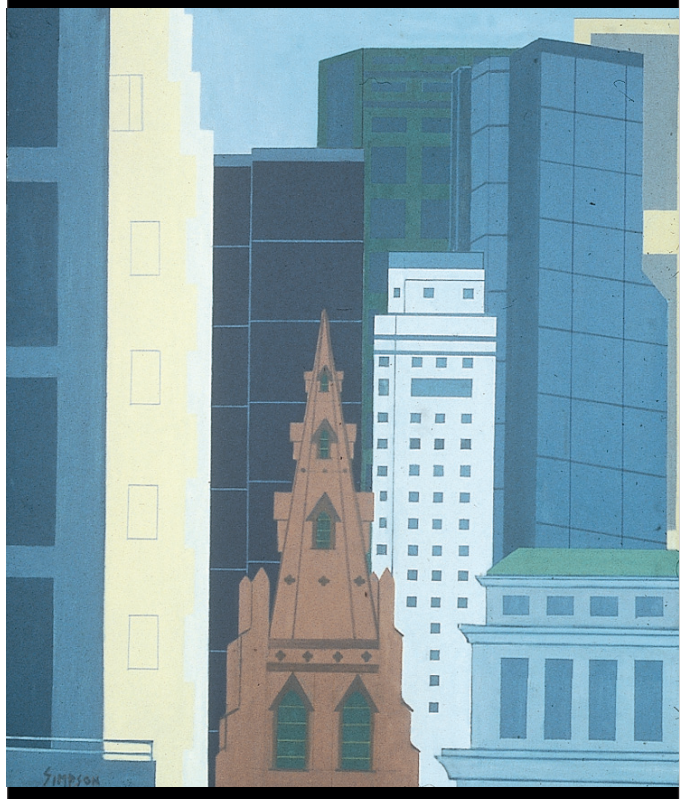

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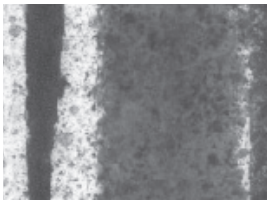

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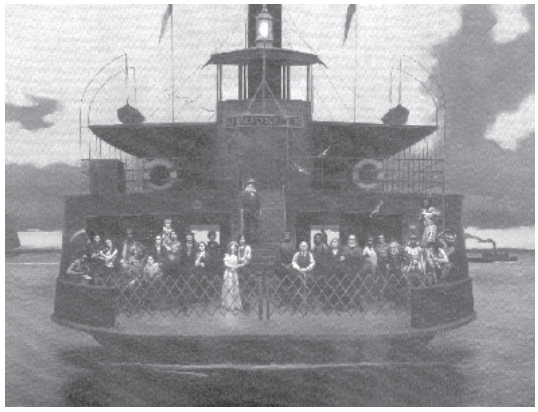

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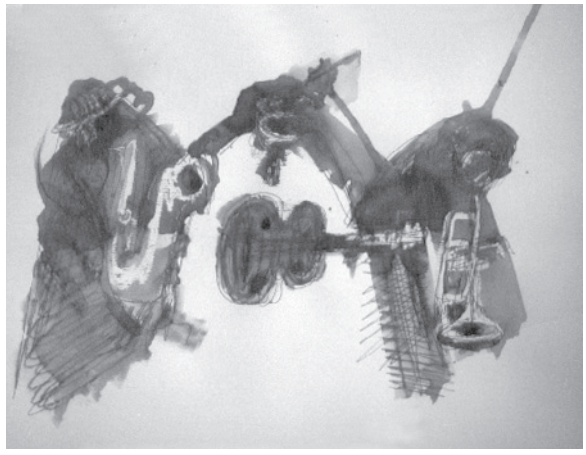

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Complementary Contrasts in the Art of Helene Wilder and Milan Heger

How dramatically contrasting styles can complement each other was seen recently in "Extra Dimensions," a joint exhibition featuring works by Helene Wilder and Milan Heger, two highly acclaimed artists from Seattle, at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

While Wilder's larger than life mixed media drawings are possessed of an exquisite draftspersonly refinement, Heger conjures up a furious, often deliberately crude, gestural energy. Yet, on entering the main room of Montserrat Gallery's elegant Soho space, where both of their works were on view, one was immediately aware that this exhibition was a harmonious marriage of opposites.

Helene Wilder' "Protect me From What I Want #5"

To begin with Helen Wilder, there is a strong feminist component in her work, which she makes explicit in her declaration, "In my drawings I want to make a statement about my feelings that organized religion still remains one of the greatest adversaries of women's rights. . . . I feel that today, in many cultures, women still have no rights or sense of identity because of the a male God inflicted curse. This has made her a shadow of her self in so many countries. Woman is made to take a subordinate role in life and hide behind a man —in some cultures literally covering her face. Women are still not entitled to decide their own birth control. This is often a decision taken by men and barren women are still looked down upon in some societies. . . . My drawings are about the great possibilities for women to shed these imposed ideals, to take on freedom and play a greater role in her life and that of her community."

Thus, Wilder's mixed media drawings on long scroll-like sheets of heavy paper that stretch almost from floor to ceiling depict visionary feminine figures. All part of a series eerily entitled "Protect me From What I Want," they are as statuesque and stately as the long-gowned Victorian portraits of John Singer Sargent, albeit in a sinuous, linear graphic style more akin to that of Schiele, and even to certain aspects of Aubrey Beardsley.

It seems unlikely, however, that Wilder would ever depict women as Schiele did, with legs akimbo, as helpless, often degraded, sex objects. Quite the contrary, even while seemingly haunted or in distress, Wilder's figures are possessed of great formal dignity which gives some of them the quality of being, simultaneously, high priestesses and martyrs. They are invariably attended by small birds symbolizing freedom or flight, as well as other symbols slightly more difficult to decipher. Multiple eyes, for example, appear on the bodice of one woman's dress like wounds. Another figure appears pierced by small crosses. Yet another has a streak of red running down her front, perhaps a symbol of menstrual shame.

Milan Hager "Mutation"

Nonetheless, all of Helen Wilder's exquisitely drawn figures have a towering presence and a beauty that is starkly compelling. Combined with a smaller series of glass wall-sculptures, suggesting saints or angels, ironically titled "Worship Me," they make a unique statement.

The paintings of Milan Heger are as uninhibited as Wilder's are restrained. Heger's approach is almost hedonistic in its raw impact. He is obviously a kindred spirit of Neo-Expressionists such as Julian Schnabel and David Salle, although he also has similarities with the even wilder visions of artists like Sam Messer and Francis Bacon.

One gets the feeling that Heger's paintings are executed in a frenzy, and that impression is enhanced by his statement, "Images and ideas come to me at unpredictable times." The brushstrokes in his large mixed media paintings on canvas are possessed of a violent energy. Often, scrawled pencil lines are combined with painted areas to conjure up faces and fragmented figures that seem to be involved in some frantic struggle with unseen opponents or forces. Some of Heger's compositions seem to have complex psycho/sexual undertones, expressed by sensual forms that seem to emanate straight from the artist's nervous system, of which his erratic lines are a graphic conduit. Accident and process obviously play an important role in his compositions, which often have the blunt immediacy of a car-crash.

In one large mixed media painting called "Private Issues," the principle figure extends a big blue hand, as if to push the viewer away. Confronting this painting, boldly executed on a human scale, one feels like an intrusive paparazzi about to be assaulted by some crazed celebrity like Sean Penn! And then one realizes that the title of the work is especially apt, for it seems to comment in its own brash terms on the general intrusiveness of the modern world and the difficulty that we all have in maintaining privacy and integrity in our media-saturated century.

Heger obviously aims to rock us and shock us, and his paintings succeed admirably in that goal, as seen in an especially large mixed media on canvas called "Inner Desires." Here, the main figure is indicated by a bold blue mass in a posture of Buddha-like stillness. Above it, another vague figure, created with scrawled strokes floats in a horizontal position, while a series of pale geometric forms, suggesting phantom steps, can be seen on the right hand side of the composition. While the various elements are obscure, the entire composition suggests a strong narrative subtext.

At the same time, Milan Heger's work is visually appealing for its sumptuous tactility and sensual paint handling. Indeed, one gets the impression that Heger would agree with Julian Schnabel's statement, "All of my images are subordinate to the notion of painting. What matters is not what is painted, but how it's painted."

There is no doubt that Heger's paintings would also be compelling as purely abstract compositions, given the gestural excitement that he is able to generate with his combination of bold color areas and scratchy, graffiti-like passages of drawing. That said, however, his subject matter is also fascinating and lends an impact to his pictures that is undeniable.

Both Helene Wilder and Milan Heger, in their different ways, make powerful, sometimes disturbing, statements about the human condition. However, that they both manage to create works possessed of a terrible beauty is what makes them kindred spirits and made their show at Montserrat so compelling. —Bryon Coleman

"Living Form" Animates the Abstractions of Zarvin Swerbilov

As art theorist Suzanne K. Langer makes clear in her essay "Living Form," when we speak of "life," "spirit," or "vitality" in a work of art, we are speaking in metaphors. Paintings or sculptures are not living creatures; they only come alive in the eye of the beholder. And not because they give us some semblance of life. Whether abstract or figurative, they spring to life only when they are autonomously expressive: unbeholden to worldly likeness yet limitless in imaginative allusiveness.

This is the true meaning of what Langer calls "living form," and it is exemplified in the work of the contemporary New York painter Zarvin Swerbilov, whose new solo exhibition can be seen at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from December 30, 2003 through January 24, 2004.

With their bold colors and sharply defined yet sensual forms, Swerbilov's acrylic paintings on canvas, are adamantly abstract in a manner akin to the Russian Constructivists and the late cut paper works of Matisse. Yet, Swerbilov says, "Compared to Nicholas Krushenick and Al Held I don't consider myself a 'hard edge' painter."

And his point is well taken. He got his classical training at The Art Students League in Robert Ward Johnson's class and painting from the model in Will Barnet's class, and says, "But as you can see, I reverted to basic instincts, using the gesture to express whatever I was sensing when I first drew a line on the page. The next line suggests a shape and so on..."

Vestiges of the figure persist in the painting he calls "Man—Woman, 2003," where the female form is quite clearly embodied in the brilliant red "hour-glass" shape that dominates the composition, its curvaceousness contrasting dramatically with slightly more austere shapes and color areas.

Still, one would be missing the point to read literal imagery into Swerbilov's forms as if they were blots in a Rorschach test. For while it might be possible to isolate a vaguely equine shape among the flowing forms in "A Horse of a Different Color," or to imagine Persian arabesques in the cursive swirls of "Aladdin's Lamp," to put too much stock in such subjective interpretations would do no justice to Swerbilov's true aesthetic intentions.

Indeed, nothing is really "black and white" in Swerbilov's work—quite literally. His "blacks" are created with a mixture of dioxine purple and hunter's green, while his "whites" are actually very light grays made by mixing titanium white with the tiniest drop of the above colors. Although his brighter hues "pop" with the impact of primaries, they too are subtly modulated and combined in unexpected combinations that lend his compositions their unique chromatic charge.

Photo: D. James Dee

"Navy Over Army, 2003" 47" x 35"

"My maternal grandmother was a theatrical wig maker and my maternal grandfather was a cutter of leather and glass... I believe I got my color sense and steady hand from them," Swerbilov says.

Perhaps. In any case, Swerbilov's use of color and his way with sharply swerving shapes are highly original. Witness the delightful dialogue between oddly harmonious orange, yellow, red, pale blue, and blue-green hues and flat yet baroquely layered shapes in his acrylic painting "The Birth of a Stone." Savor the luminous triangular shapes sailing like so many geometric autumn leaves against the ostensibly black and white vertical divisions in the exhilarating canvas called "The Rise & Fall of Bix Beiderbecke." Get swept up in the confectionery rainbow of buoyant, rhythmically swelling forms of "Hollywood Bowl."

For all the precision of Swerbilov's technique — his savvy way of exploiting the peculiar, flat brilliance of acrylic pigments as others exploit the viscosity of oils—he is not overly enamored of symmetry. There is invariably something offbeat, tantalizingly askew in his compositions that plays off against their precision and brings his paintings to life in that crucial way cited by Suzanne K. Langer.

For Zarvin Swerbilov it all begins and ends with the freedom of the gesture, frozen in motion and refined to its immutable essence. —Ed McCormack

Maryleen Schiltkamp's Fruitful Romance with Eastern Art

Maryleen Schiltkamp, an artist of Dutch heritage born in Netherlands Antilles who maintains studios in Amsterdam and New York City, has long been one of our more historically aware contemporary artists, forging "connections between the classical and the modern, the figurative and the abstract," as noted in a previous review in these pages.

Schiltkamp's growing interest in Japanese art started in 1996, when a Japanese friend introduced her to Zen Buddhism, calligraphy, sumi-e brush drawing, ukiyo-e prints, and other aspects of the culture. Later, she studied the impact that woodblock prints had on Western art— particularly that of her fellow Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh, who wrote in one of his famous letters to his brother Theo: "I admire the most popular Japanese prints, colored in flat areas, and for the same reasons that I admire Rubens and Veronese."

Characteristically, Schiltkamp enters the cross cultural dialogue from a postmodern perspective in a body of work that she exhibited for the first time at the Bungei Shunju Gallery in Tokyo 1998. It speaks well for her venture that a Western artist endeavoring to synthesize Renaissance perspective with the decorative planes characteristic of Japanese art would meet with such success in Japan that Schiltkamp was invited to have a second show in the same venue in June of 2003. And it was our own good fortune that Maryleen Schiltkamp's exhibition, "Japonismes" had its New York City debut at The Nippon Gallery, 145 West 57th Street, in October of this year.

Although the French term "Japonism" (as distinct from its more superficial cousin "Japonaiserie") originated when Western artists in Paris began to experiment seriously with Japanese aesthetic principles in the early years of the nineteenth century, Schiltkamp has brought about a much bolder synthesis of East and West than would have been possible at that time.

Included along with paintings were works on paper, scrolls, and folding screens— all demonstrating how thoroughly Schiltkamp has assimilated aspects of Japanese art, without sacrificing those virtues which have long characterized her own style. Of the challenges involved in bringing about such a synthesis, Schiltkamp observes that her venture "has the intensity of longing for a state of awareness, for the Western mind almost impossible to reach."

This is an especially astute statement, since that very intensity and longing that Schiltkamp speaks of creates an aesthetic excitement, which can only occur in a hybrid endeavor such as this one. For Schiltkamp does not merely "appropriate" elements of Japanese art in the opportunistic sense that the term is normally used today;

"Vanishing Point" 2003

rather, she apprehends its very spirit, creating works of a unique originality precisely because they are a highly gifted Western artist's take on Eastern aesthetics.

Thus, in a painting such as "Calligraphy (2003)," Schiltkamp transforms a Japanese written character into a composition in oil on canvas that seems to reference multiple aspects of Western art as well. With its boldly brushed linear forms and a palette of red and blue hues set off by a tan ground, this joyously animated painting is akin to the whimsical compositions in which Paul Klee "takes a line for a little walk." Schiltkamp, however, puts her own spin on these buoyant linear shapes, making them dance across the canvas in a manner that reminds one of the Asian ideogram's figurative origins. Thus by transforming the character in her own peculiarly Western manner, Schiltkamp ends up returning it to its roots, so to speak.

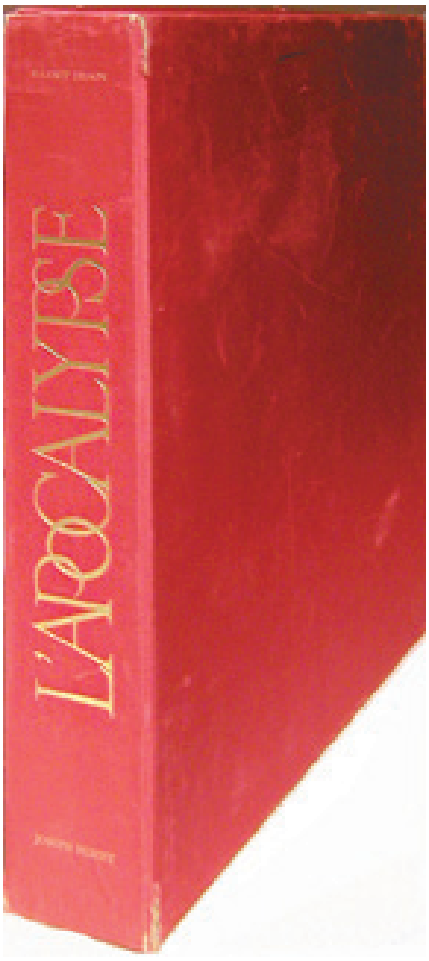
Indeed, what impresses one about Schiltkamp's encounter with Japanese art is how little she strives to make her work actually look Japanese, even when she adopts traditional materials, subjects, and even formats, as seen in "Phoenix (2003)" and "Mandarin Ducks (2002)." Although both works are Sumi-e scrolls and depict subjects familiar in such formats in a traditional ink painting technique, Shiltkamp's brush strokes remain distinctively, recognizably her own, with the same sinuous grace that we see in the contours of her neoclassical compositions in oils on canvas.

Schiltkamp's unique sensibility comes across as well in oils as "Geisha, Tortoise & Crane," which treats a traditional subject in a manner more akin to the sensual arabesques of Art Nouveau than to the more austere decorativeness of ukiyo-e prints, and "Genji," where another familiar theme takes on a neo-Fauvist boldness that can only be compared to the late African American artist Bob Thompson's strident reprises of the Old Masters.

One of the wittiest paintings in the show, as trenchant as one of Mark Tansey's wry art commentaries, was Schiltkamp's "Vanishing Point," based on a 17th century pastoral landscape by Nicolas Poussin, in which a group of shepherds attempts to decipher an inscription on a stone tomb. In Schiltkamp's painting, however, the figures in the classical grouping appear to inspect the picture plane itself, which advances by virtue of a merging of Cezanne-esque paint handling and Eastern aesthetics to contradict the implied perspective of the Arcadian landscape that they inhabit.

Another pivotal painting is "Shibashi," an oil portrait of an elderly Japanese person with downcast eyes in the act of donning a decorative kimono, painted with a succulent sensitivity that, again, pays simultaneous tribute to the planar innovations of Cezanne and the exquisite simplicity of Japanese aesthetics. Painted in 1998, in the honeymoon of Maryleen Schiltkamp's romance with "Japonismes," this painting is emblematic of the reverence and beauty permeating this entire exhibition.

—Ed McCormack



L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean: Foret's Elusive Masterwork at CFM Gallery

"I thought of having a seance for Fini, but neither of us believe in them," Neil Zukerman joked a few hours before the reception for his exhibition of Joseph Foret's "L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean," which can be seen through November 24 at CFM Gallery, 112 Greene Street.

Believer in the supernatural or not, one got the feeling that if the shade of Zukerman's beloved Leonor Fini actually did put in an appearance from The Other Side, it would not seem any more miraculous to the Soho gallerist and collector than it did to have two copies of Foret's legendary volume "drop out of the sky" and fall into his hands.

Well, to be perfectly honest it wasn't quite that simple, Zukerman will have one know. In fact, he spent years combing rare book stores in Paris and other musty haunts of bibliophiles without so much as a whiff of the art-laden treasure that Foret, the distinguished publisher known for his livres d'artistes by Picasso, Utrillo, Dali, and others, conceived as "the most expensive book in the world."

"I first learned about 'L'Apocalypse' in about 1984, when a French dealer who offered me three lithographs by Leonor Fini," Zukerman says "I bought them but had no idea what they were. I asked Jacques Carpentier, who had been Fini's French gallerist in Paris. He told me it was from the Apocalypse and then proceeded to tell me its history."

Carpentier told Zukerman that the single copy of the book published by Foret had sold for a cool million, as they say, in 1961. The price was not really surprising, given that it had a bejeweled bronze cover sculpted by Salvador Dali and that it contained original works of art by Dali, Fini, Bernard Buffet, Leonard Foujita, Pierre-Yves Tremois, Ossip Zadkine, and Georges Mathieu, as well as original graphics by Jean Cocteau, Michel Ciry, Frederic Delanglade, Ernst Fuchs, Roger Lersy and Tremois. The original book weighed 463 pounds, was completely hand calligraphed. In addition to Saint Jean's text, it also contained additional writings by Jean Cocteau, Daniel-Rops, Jean Guitton, Jean Rostand, E.M. Cioran, Jean Giono, and Ernst Junger. Realized on a handmade lamb skin parchment created solely for the project and encased in a plastic bubble, "L'Apocalypse" had been exhibited around the world before coming to rest in a Swiss vault, the property of a syndicate of French, Belgian, and German art dealers. At present, "according to educated lore," as Zukerman puts it, the book resides in a vault in Japan, and has not been exhibited publicly since 1962.


Leonor Fini

What really caught Zukerman's attention, though, and set him on his quest for what he refers to as "a holy grail for book collectors, art dealers, and experts of all persuasions" was when Jacques Carpentier mentioned that there were to have been seven unique copies of the book. Carpentier did not know if they had been done, however; had never personally seen one.

Indeed, only a handful of people over the years claimed to have actually seen one of these copies, so no one was able to prove their existence... Perfect! What better goad could there possibly be for an inveterate collector like Neil Zukerman than the possibility that the object of one's desire may not even exist?

Eventually, Zukerman managed to track down a catalog for the world tour of Foret's book. It mentioned "seven copies of the book for seven fervent collectors." Each was advertised to be on a different type of paper: parchment, silk, Japon nacre, Japon imperial, white Velin d'arches, tinted arches and Velin de Rives B.F.K. Each was contained in silk covered slipcases in seven different colors: violet, burgundy, blue, green, yellow, orange, and red. An additional "Publisher's Copy" was said to be on Velin de Rives in a red slipcase. But Zukerman still could find no one

Leonard Foujita

Pierre Yves Trémois

Frederic Delanglade

who could confirm that the apocryphal copies of "L'Apocalypse" actually existed—including Leonor Fini!

Then in 2002, out of the blue, Zukerman got a phone call from a prestigious New York book dealer who told him someone in France was offering a book that included both Fini and Dali. This got Zukerman going again, since to his knowledge the two artists had never done anything together other than "L'Apocalypse." So he gave the dealer the go-ahead to have the book sent from France.

"I went to his office with the catalog and went through the book page by page, and it appeared to be real," Zukerman says. "The only problem was that there was no colophon ... Inside were some originals, including the multi-media collage by Dali . On the basis of what I knew, I guessed the book to be the Publisher's Copy, since it had, in fact, come through Foret...Still, it did not prove the existence of the seven others..."

Other copies or not, it was an extraordinary find and Zukerman purchased the book on the spot. Then: "Maurice Hoyt, my friend, mentor and framer, to whom for some reason I had never mentioned the books, told me that he had actually seen one of the copies in 1962, when he worked at the French book store in Rockefeller Center... I began to believe."

In April of 2003, Zukerman was preparing to leave for Europe. The limousine to the airport was waiting downstairs and he practically had one foot out the door when he received a call telling him that this same book dealer was trying to reach him from Paris.

"I called back and he told me he had just found a copy of Apocalypse in a small used book store," Zukerman recalls. "He told me the price and I bit the bullet and committed to it."

The red silk slipcase tipped Zukerman off that this was the copy done on Velin de Rives paper, the same paper as the copy he already had. This book was complete, including the colophon. In fact there were two colophons in this book, and since the paper was the same he knew that one of them had to belong to the first book. This proved that there were, in fact, eight unique copies—the seven in different colors on different papers and the eighth, which was on the colophon as "another copy."

One copy of the book—the publisher's copy— will be donated by CFM Gallery to the coming Leonor Fini Museum in Paris. The second copy, the Velin de Rives copy in the red slipcase, is featured in the Soho exhibition, along with individual paintings, drawings, lithographs, and etchings, and other related works by the artists included in the project.

"Amazing how things work out for me!" Neil Zukerman says, as though he can hardly believe it himself.

Opening receptions at CFM Gallery are exclusive affairs with security at the door that almost recalls the heyday of Studio 54. If the lads guarding vestibule don't know you by sight and your name's not on the guest-list, their general demeanor is: "Here's-your-hat-what's-your-hurry-please-don't-let-the-door-bump-you-in-the-ass-on-the-way-out!"

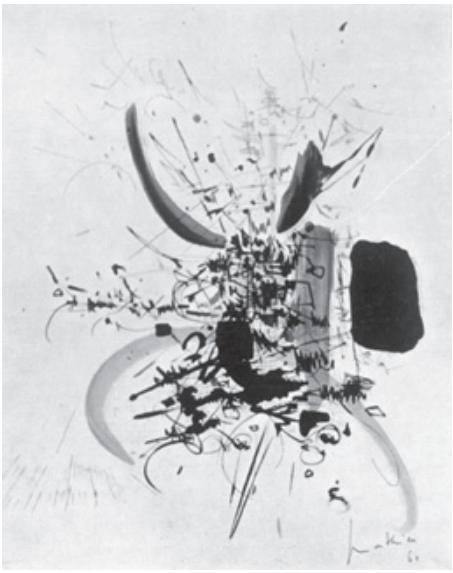
Inside, at the reception for "L'Apocalypse," those who had passed muster were milling about balletically in the atmosphere of Rococo refinement that Zukerman prefers to the usual stark white walls of boho Soho. They were greeted every few steps by wispy yet persistent young Asian women bearing silver trays of chocolate bon bons who would not take no for an answer. The open bar was refreshingly unbesieged by the usual stampede of freeloaders who make the rounds of other gallery openings for their daily sustenance. For all the festivity of the occasion, a mood of gentility prevailed.

There was, however, a minor crush around the copy of "L'Apocalypse" that reposed, as though in state, in a large plexiglass vitrine surrounded by a velvet rope on polished brass stanchions. At one point, as people pressed forward to get a closer look, the stanchions tipped over. In a flash, Zukerman, his longtime partner Tom Shivers, and even some of the little Asian bon bon bearers, rushed over to disperse the crowd and set them right.

Once the momentary crisis had ended and all was in order again, Zukerman grinned with a combination of relief and proprietary pride, as if to say, " No harm done! People do tend to get a little overexcited in the presence of The Holy Grail!"

Other guests were circling the room in pairs, oohing and ahhing over the treasures on the walls. Still others perused the profusely illustrated catalog for the show, with its inscription "This exhibition is being dedicated to the100-year celebration of the birth of Salvador Dali," and its glamorous cast-of-characters mug-shots of the principals: a proud, dark-haired Dali at the height of his powers, famous mustachios twirling heavenward; Foujita with his prototypical Beatle bangs, Harpo Marx bowtie, and granny glasses; Cocteau with his piercing eyes and that quality of bird-like hyper-alertness he always had; handsome Parisian man-about-town Bernard Buffet looking like the young Christopher Walken— and of course Leonor Fini, upstaging everyone with her raven mane, bare shoulders and imperious Cat Lady countenance...

The individual and ensemble brilliance of this stellar cast illuminated the entire gallery. With its many layers of deeply encoded meaning conveyed metaphorically, The Book of Revelations or the



Georges Mathieu

Ossip Zadkine

Bernard Buffet

Apocalypse of Saint John, as it is now known, gave lots of leeway for inspired improvisation on the notion of the Final Judgment and a variety of other profound themes—which each of the artists brought to life in his or her inimitable manner.

The centerpiece of the show, if one were forced to choose one from the embarrassment of riches it provides, would have to be Salvador Dali's original work in watercolor, ink, and collage "L'Hostie." For here Dali reprises a familiar theme through a novel use of mixed media that includes gold teeth, screws, tacks, a St.Christopher medal, and watch parts. The paper has been deliberately scorched and distressed by the artist with a hammer and God knows what else. (It is purported to have even had a shotgun fired at it!) Thus, the work has an embossed, punctured tactility that plays off brilliantly against the characteristic refinement of Dali's exquisite draftsmanship in the image of Christ suspended above two smaller figures. The pleasure of viewing this extraordinary work by an artist who, for all his more classical virtues was also a pioneer in mixed media, is enhanced by learning, from the exhibition catalog, that it was hidden away in a closed book on a shelf in Foret's office from 1962 to 2002, and is being exhibited here for the very first time. One should not be so blinded by its light, however, as to ignore the three other original etchings by Dali gracing this show.

Leonor Fini, the great surrealist Neil Zukerman befriended and reintroduced to the United States in the 1980s is also impressively represented, with three original lithographs. In one lithograph, "L'Apparition de la femme (Appearance of a Woman)," Fini juxtaposes a cluster of menacing monsters and the ghostly figure of a woman, evoked in delicate lines and luminous hues. In another, "La Bête de la mer (The Beast from the Sea)" the artist conjures up a green aquatic hydra on a yellow ground. In a third lithograph, Fini interprets the theme of "Le Combat des anges (The Battle of the Angels)," with ethereal floating figures that suggest anthropomorphized insects clashing furiously in space.

Because his career peaked so early (he was already famous at the age of twenty) and he is not as frequently exhibited in this country as he was in the late 1950s, we tend to forget how compelling a draftsman Bernard Buffet can be. "The Light of the Lamb" is beautiful and affecting, with the animal expressively distorted in Buffet's distinctively spiky style, as are his other etchings of the gentle beast. In another etching, Buffet depicts Saint Jean himself, looking like a bald, ascetic French existentialist, as he hugs the gentle biblical beast to his bony chest.

The Japanese-born, Paris-based surrealist Leonard Foujita is another artist we have not seen enough of in recent years. Writhing with linear energy, the original etchings that Foujita executed for this book are otherworldly visions filled with tiny clothed and nude figures limned with Boschian intricacy.

Pierre-Yves Tremois' etching "The Grasshopper of Destruction" depicts the formidable insect with the verisimilitude of a naturalist and the sensibility of a surrealist. Tremois, who is revered in France for his many limited edition book illustrations, is also represented by a watercolor and ink study of a classical male nude, as well as "La Fin de l'homme (The End of Man)," depicting a reclining figure floating above a landscape with a disintegrating skull covering his torso.

An original oil on paper by Frederic Delanglade puts a fanciful spin on the theme of "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," depicting the heads of three of the steeds, sans horsemen—one with a unicorn-horn sprouting from its head, another with two horns—emerging from a vortex of splashes and swirls.

The Russian sculptor Ossip Zadkine, who evolved over his distinguished career from early cubist works to a more distinctively curvilinear figurative style, contrasts markedly with the other artists in "L'Apocalypse" for the semi-abstract quality of his etchings for the project. However, Zadkine's "L'Abre et le fleuve de vie (The Tree and the River of Life)," while still formally stylized, conveys a pastoral sense of fantasy with its appealing image of a simplified figure sitting under a tree watching a rhythmically evoked river flow by.

On the face of it, Georges Mathieu, the famous French abstract artist who made a flamboyant splash in the 1950s with his public "action painting" performances could seem something like an anomaly among all these figurative peers. Yet the violently slashing calligraphic style of his three etchings auspiciously suits his theme, "The Fall of Babylon." (Indeed, there is something almost Dali-esque in Mathieu's dashing manner that makes it easy to comprehend why Zukerman, the passionate champion of figurative art, says, "Mathieu is one of the only abstract painters that I like.")

In his relentless pursuit of Foret's elusive masterwork and determination to mount this important exhibition (which also includes original works by Jean Cocteau), Neil Zukerman has restored an essential missing chapter to the history of the artist's book.

—Ed McCormack

Cristina Ruiz: Mexico's Messenger of Love Triumphant

Almost exactly one year ago, the young Mexican painter Cristina Ruiz made her New York City debut with an impressive exhibition in Soho. Critics were especially struck by Ruiz's ability to capture a mood of youthful romance without resorting to sentimentality. Still, to have won over the cynical New York cognoscenti with paintings so unabashedly in love with love was no small victory. For while Poets are given license to indulge in matters of the heart, painters are expected to seduce us by visual means alone.

Cristina Ruiz, however, is a good enough painter to ignore such rules. Known in her own country as "La pintora del amore," her first New York solo show depicted willowy young women entranced by reveries or entwined with their lovers, and these taboo subjects were realized with such exquisite aesthetic means as to charm even the most romantically challenged critics.

Cristina Ruiz's second solo exhibition in the same venue, Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street can be seen from November 18 through December 1, with a reception for the artist on Thursday November 20, at 7 PM. And make no mistake about it: You will find that romance is still on the menu, to paraphrase the old song. But at the same time, something new has entered into Ruiz's work as well. This might best be described as an intensification of the surrealist element which was present in Ruiz's previous exhibition and which is prevalent in Mexican art in general, having been prominent in the work of Frida Kahlo and other historical role models. In Ruiz's paintings, however, surrealism and romanticism have merged more thoroughly, creating a highly successful synthesis unique to this artist.

And the effort that it must have taken to meld these two tendencies so seamlessly and imbue a somewhat more daring compositional approach with a necessary verisimilitude has apparently caused Ruiz to perfect her technical abilities as well. At least this appears to be the case, judging from the prowess that she now brings to her realist technique, employing acrylics on canvas with a degree of refinement that can often resemble egg tempera for its luminous glowing surface and tonal subtlety.

Whereas in her earlier paintings, Ruiz danced gingerly upon the fine line between drawing and painting, she has now integrated her drawing skills much more thoroughly with her painterly ability, getting under the skin of her figures, so to speak, in a manner that makes her compositions more dramatic and believable, even as she dares ever more surreal

"Cover Me With Your Love"

"Light Of Love"

effects.

Color, especially, has come more into its own in Ruiz's new paintings. While still employing predominantly warm earthy tones in emulation of the Old Masters, Ruiz reveals a greater diversity of nuances, of luminous highlights and subtle secondary hues that imbue her canvases with delicate atmospheric qualities which make her backgrounds as sensuous as her figures are sensual. Indeed, figure and ground relationships are now more fully integrated; Ruiz's skillful management of light and shadow enlivens her compositions with a dramatic sense of chiaroscuro suggesting that she has been taking lessons from Rembrandt and Caravaggio.

In any case, the heightened atmospheric qualities in Cristina Ruiz's newest paintings add a new dimension of drama that enhances their surreal content, creating a sense of metaphysical realms and stratospheric spaces for her lovers to inhabit. They do so weightlessly, as though floating in dreamy auras, as seen in her large acrylic on canvas "Light of Love," where the male figure is seen within a circular shape suggesting a large soap bubble. He gazes down yearningly at the female figure, reclining languorously within a more rectangular shape, her nude body bent back, full breasts thrust upward as though in the throes of passionate reverie. Between the two softly diffused geometric forms that the figures inhabit, a mysterious beam streams, shattering a length of chain suspended in space.

As in certain paintings by the Italian contemporary artist Francesco Clemente, it is Cristina Ruiz's ability to create a subtly modulated painterly environment via her exquisite refinement of the surface that enables her to juxtapose disparate symbolic elements and make them cohere compositionally in "Light of Love," as well as in another major acrylic on canvas called "Cover Me With Your Love." Like the former painting this composition is forty inches square, the symmetry of the format enhancing the sense of limitless space in which the two figures are poised. Here, the female nude inhabits the foreground and is seen only from the breasts up, emerging Venus-like from a body of water which vanishes into the softly modulated ground, in which subtle variations of red, violet, and yellow-inflected earth colors create dramatic lights and darks. Above the beautiful blond woman, a male figure in a loincloth is seen splashing her with water from a classical jug hoisted onto his shoulder, symbolically anointing her with his love, as indicated in the title. The jug glows with more light than any reflection from the sun could logically provide, suggesting a numinous rather than physical object, a vessel of love lit from within.

Although the smaller scale of the male figure suggests that he is kneeling somewhat further back on the shore, the absence of any landscape definition in the atmospheric ground gives the impression that he is hovering angelically in mid-air, yet another expression of the sacredness with which the artist regards romantic love. This sense of reverence merges with profound sensuality in yet another new painting called "Twin Souls," its simpler composition depicting two lovers embracing in a halo of heavenly light blazing from the surrounding darkness.

Like her great predecessor Frida Kahlo, Cristina Ruiz paints from the depths of the female soul. Unlike Frida, however, Cristina is no victim, no martyr to love. Rather, she is its triumphant messenger.

—Maurice Taplinger

Olivia Koopalethes Brings Contemporary Immediacy to an Ancient Medium

Encaustic, a medium that dates back to the Favum mummy portraits of ancient Egypt, has experienced a revival in recent decades, largely due to the popularity of the well known encaustic paintings of Jasper Johns.

Few contemporary artists, however, exploit the unique coloristic and textural qualities of encaustic as successfully Olivia Koopalethes, whose work can be seen through December 3 in exhibitions in two separate venues in New Jersey: Berlex Laboratories Corporate Headquarters, 340 Changebridge Road, in Montville; and the Wayne Branch of Berlex Laboratories, 6 West Belt Avenue, in Wayne. (To view the work in either or both locations by appointment, call 201 818-8913.)

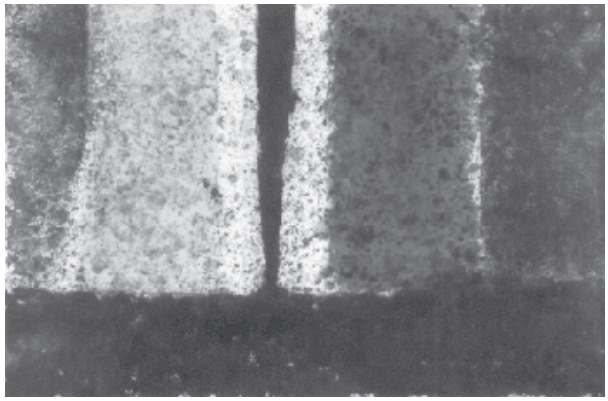
To distinguish here which works are in which of the two venues would be merely to distract the reader unnecessarily. Suffice it to say that the gallery in Montville is especially rich in major encaustic paintings, while the one in Wayne also contains a fair number of excellent paintings in that medium, as well as a selection of Koopalethes' intricate and refined biomorphic abstractions in colored pencil.

Ideally, one should visit both galleries in order to get a fuller understanding of Koopalethes, who says of her work, "I describe myself as an abstract artist, constantly exploring ways of seeing and dealing with subject elements. My ultimate goal is to create a vibrant surface with multi-dimensional relationships by discovering interesting and unusual combinations of shapes, colors and textures. This process of continual discovery, with all its infinite possibilities, poses a constant challenge influencing my journey as an artist."

The formative part of that journey started for Koopalethes at the Music and Art High School, the Art Students League, and the Cooper Union Art School. Later, with her husband Leonard Alberts, she lived in Paris and studied with Ateliers Fernand Leger and Andre Lhote.

Although Koopalethes is also an accomplished printmaker with numerous exhibitions to her credit, for the past decade or so she has been known as one of our leading exponents of the encaustic medium. Indeed, she is so identified with the medium that her painting "Cryptic" is featured in a color reproduction in Joanne Mattera's definitive 2001 volume "The Art of Encaustic Painting."

The technique of "burning" pigmented molten wax into a surface that can later be buffed with a soft cloth to a high sheen is especially suitable to Koopalethes' abstract style, with its sensual emphasis on color and texture. Unlike Jasper Johns, who has, curiously enough, been quoted crediting the technical hindrances of the difficult medium with helping him to "hide my personality, my psychological state, my emotions," Koopalethes appears to transcend those barriers and give vent to a lush lyricism. In contrast to Johns' dispassionate stance, she embraces an unabashed emotionalism in her work, as evidenced by the title she gives to her show in Montville: "Heart and Soul."



"Tablet"

Since, besides being a painter, Koopalethes happens to be a violinist with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, she equates visual abstraction with music, the most naturally abstract of all the art forms, and her work benefits from the sense of freedom that this equation promotes. Form, color, and rhythm conspire in her compositions to create a passionate synthesis verging on the symphonic in a painting such as "State of Metamorphosis."

One of the largest works on view, this is a chromatic tour de force with its luminous red, yellow, green, and blue hues and its dappled paint application, which imbues the entire surface with a shimmering vitality. Koopalethes is especially adept at exploiting the luminous qualities of encaustic to full effect, as she does here, creating the impression that the color, for all its layered richness, is suspended within a substance as light as air, rather than sitting inert upon the surface.

In contrast to many contemporary encaustic painters, who appear almost too respectful of the ancient medium, resulting in a somewhat static quality, Koopalethes plunges in boldly, creating seductively spattered surfaces with a sense of process, spontaneity, and immediacy that sets her work apart.

This can be seen especially well in "Tablet," another large work in which splashy pyrotechnics as exuberant as those of Norman Bluhm or Sam Francis activate the surface of a stately composition built on broad vertical bars of blue, yellow, and rose madder against a white ground. Here, the combination of frontal formal structure and spontaneously applied color sets off an exhilarating optical frisson.

The synthesis of freedom and formality peculiar to the art of Olivia Koopalethes is again exemplified in the painting entitled "Up Rolling Thin," where slender, shard-like shapes soar upward in a dynamic vertical composition, further enlivened by the addition of collage elements. That Koopalethes' favored support for encaustic painting is paper, as opposed to stretched canvas or wood panels, indicates her willingness to break with tradition in following her own expressive impulses, just as her frequent use of collage along with encaustic contradicts the practice of purists who view the medium in craftsy rather than fine art terms.

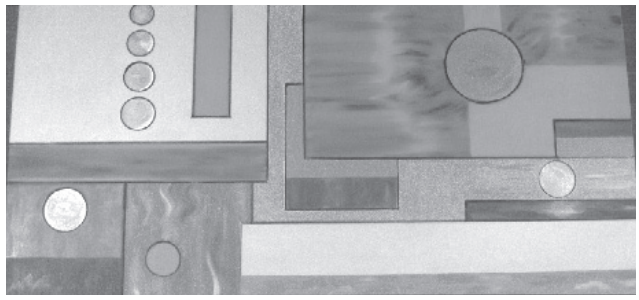
In both the Montville and Wayne exhibitions, Olivia Koopalethes' combination of technical intrepidness and formal inventiveness pays off handsomely again and again. Her compositions alternate between geometric and organic shapes, while her palette encompasses deep, earthy colors and brighter hues.

In her encaustic and collage on paper "The River Bank," craggy shapes and deep brown colorations create a painterly topology akin to the crusty abstractions of Clyfford Still, while "Ceremonial" employs a higher-keyed palette of red, yellow, and blue hues along with rectangular and roughly triangular forms that could allude to tribal designs. For all their formal and chromatic differences, both paintings are united by the overriding sensibility that distinguishes Koopalethes' oeuvre. She has that rare ability to make diverse formal impulses cohere by virtue of an intuitive trust in process, rather than premeditation, as the primary impetus for painterly endeavor.

From the earthy biomorphism of paintings such as "Imprint of Time," a darkly brooding Abstract Expressionist composition, to the synthesis of geometric emblemism, coloristic subtlety and neo-pointillist paint application in "Floating Spaces," Olivia Koopalethes has staked out an ambitious artistic territory for herself. And she has discovered the perfect vehicle for conquering it. For by honoring her medium without being overly respectful of its tradition, Koopalethes does encaustic true justice, exploring its possibilities to their fullest, as employed by an innovative contemporary painter at the height of her powers.

—Ed McCormack

Chicago's Rhythms Inform the Paintings of Mark Caffray



"Global Warming I"

Chicago at its best seems to breed a particularly bold species of contemporary artist, as seen in Leon Golub's mammoth figure paintings inspired by eroded classical sculpture, as well as in the cartoon-based imagism of the "Hairy Who" group, which emerged in the 1960s. More recently, Mark Caffray, whose abstract paintings were featured in an impressive exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 548 Broadway, proved that the windy city still produces highly original talents.

"Hog Butcher for the World, / Tool Marker, Stacker of Wheat, / Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight handler; / Stormy, husky, brawling, / City of the Big Shoulders," Carl Sandburg wrote in his famous poem "Chicago." And Mark Caffray captures some of that same vigor (without quite spelling it out in so many words!) in the brute beauty of his abstract canvases.

Created with acrylic and oil mixed with various gels and mediums, Caffray's canvases, with their vibrant colors and strong forms, transpose the energy, the movement, and the drama of the city he hails from into a visual vocabulary as personal and rhapsodic as that in Sandburg's poetry.

Jazzy is another word that suits both the city and these paintings. Witness, for example, the angular rhythms in "Going Forward," one of the canvases in Caffray's show at Montserrat Gallery. Here, allusions to the city could be seen in clusters of steely gray shapes, evocative of buildings; yet these shapes were hardly bound by the laws of conventional composition or perspective. Sharing the picture plane with other, less representational shapes and areas of brilliant color, they conjured up the spirit, as opposed to the actual appearance of the subject. For, as is almost always the case with all of the best poets, verbal or visual, Caffray confronts us not with prosaic particulars, but with powerful urban metaphors, as in another canvas entitled "Sunday," where severely simplified vestiges of city architecture could also be seen.

Caffray, however, is by no means bound to a single subject, as his equally evocative paintings on other themes demonstrated. In "Sun Apple," for example, the boldly brushed, bright red form of the fruit was combined with luminous yellow and darker scarlet hues in a veritable knockout of a composition so fanciful as to invite any number of interpretations.

Nor is this artist limited to a single approach, moving effortlessly from energetic expressionist brush work to more austere, hard-edged paint application. Thus, another work called "Global Warming III" had a decidedly more geometric composition and smooth, clear colors that generated enough chromatic heat to justify its title. Yet here, as in all of Caffray's paintings, subjective interpretations were beside the point, since the artist's abilities with form and color alone were more than sufficient to sustain our interest.

Indeed, this writer looks forward to future New York exhibitions by this dynamic Chicago painter whose work, while informed by the life and movement of his own city, has an impact that transcends regionalism to become universal.

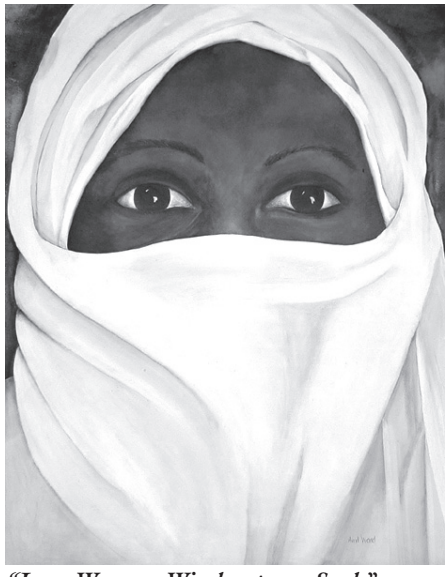
—Wilson Wong

Avril Ward Captures the Significance of Ordinary Events

The painter Avril Ward has a diverse history. Born in Scotland, she was educated in South Africa and now lives and works in Grand Cayman, British West Indies. This exposure to various countries and their cultures has obviously given her a broad view of humanity, for she says, "I want to challenge people's stereotyped mind sets. I want the viewer to think and question his own opinions."

Ward works in many media, including oil, acrylic, charcoal, and plaster, and often employs mixed media in works such as "Broken," her mysterious, monochromatic image of a shirtless man, seen from behind, in a posture of utter despondency. Of this work and others seen in her recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, Ward adds, "It is subconscious attitudes that I paint, rather than the physical things I see."

Nevertheless, Ward's acrylic paintings have a great deal of verisimilitude, as seen in "Three Men of Color," her affecting work in acrylic and colored pencil, depicting a trio of men sitting on a bench in front of a cement wall, with a strip of gray sky showing above, at what appears to be a bus stop. Each figure comes across as a distinct individual in terms of clothing, attitude, and body language. Yet together they seem symbolic of the almost heroic patience required to be an ordinary person dealing with the difficulty and delays involved in getting around from day to day.



"I am Woman, Window to my Soul."

Another powerful statement is made by Avril Ward in her acrylic painting on canvas, "I am Woman, Window to my Soul." Here the image is of a woman wearing a veil, as in Muslim cultures. All we see of her is her eyes, yet her eyes speak volumes. Dark and beautiful, they confront us with the plight of a person who must live her life in hiding. The portion of her veil that covers her mouth also functions as a symbolic gag. Yet this woman is hardly mute; for her soul speaks eloquently through those haunting eyes.

A somewhat lighter mood is projected by Ward's acrylic painting, "The Hair Cut," which depicts a towel draped over a chair, with tufts of hair scattered over the tile floor below. Although we have arrived after the event of the title, the image conveys the sense that it was a momentous occasion, as when a child's hair is cut for the first time.

In any case, the narrative subtext tickles the viewers' imagination, for the artist evokes the particulars of this scene—the shadow the chair casts on the pale blue wall, the folds in the towel, the patterns in the tiles—with such meticulous care.

Indeed, Avril Ward's ability to depict the ordinary events of daily living with sympathy and convey their significance through the subtle nuances of her flawless technique makes her a valuable and admirable contemporary realist.

—Barbara K. Bernstein

Max Victor Alper: Conjurer of Souls In Transit

Certain artists, such as Gabriel Laderman and Robert Smithson, have also had distinguished careers as scholars and critics. To this exclusive company one can now add the name Max Victor Alper, who brings a wide range of intellectual experience to his career in fine art photography.

Alper earned his Ph.D from New York University, where he later served as a faculty member and administrator. As the university's Director of Communication and Media, he oversaw programs in art, photography, writing and filmmaking. A major publisher, Macmillan, has put out two books of his photographs; he has been a radio commentator, as well as a contributing editor to Arts Magazine, and he has written art reviews for The New Republic.

Alper's diverse background undoubtedly contributes to his highly sophisticated vision in photographs that he describes as "metaphoric journeys," several of which can be seen in his solo show at Amsterdam Whitney Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, from December 5 to January 6. (There will be a reception for the artist on Thursday, December 11, from 6 to 8 PM.)

Viewing Alper's 11X14 C-prints reminds one just how far the art of photography has come since 1892, when Alfred Stieglitz published his essay "A Plea for Art Photography," arguing for the medium's acceptance as a fine art form. Today we take for granted that photography long ago transcended its documentary origins and, in the course of a little over a century, has achieved full parity with painting. Still, one cannot help but marvel at the degree of expressiveness and the latitude of fantasy that a photographic artist of Alper's caliber can achieve with his camera, wielding a mechanical device with all the subjective fluidity of a brush.

Indeed, the intensity of form, space, and color, as well as the degree of distortion, in Alper's pictures can remind one of the paintings of Francis Bacon. Although Alper's vision is considerably less grotesque than that of the British painter, he shares with Bacon the compositional habit of often enclosing his figures within geometric confines, however diffused, that contrast dramatically with their organic contours.

"Many of these photographs portray human figures who are approaching or moving through restricted space—corridors, windows, rooms, streets and tunnels," Alper says in his artist's statement. "These environments are metaphors for the physical barriers, the intellectual constraints, and the emotional boundaries that an individual must transcend on the path to freedom."

Alper speaks of his images as "scenes,"

"Desire"

implying a narrative subtext at whose meanings the viewer can only guess, which lends his pictures a sense of paradox and mystery. He creates these scenes either through the careful selection of urban sites or structures or through special backdrops and props of his own devising. These are further heightened by unusual lighting, long exposures, filters, screens, or gauze on the camera lens to create a wide variety of special effects that add considerably to the drama in his pictures.

Alper's approach is consummately postmodern, in that it can be compared favorably to various tendencies in advanced fine art photography today. At the same time, his pictures engage the viewer with a kind of romantic illusionism that can be traced back to the work of "Pictorialists," an impressionistic photo movement that crested in the first decade of the twentieth century and was characterized by muted atmospheres and sylvan nature subjects.

Alper, however, employs blurred or shadowed forms to generate a sense of contemporary angst rather than to convey the aesthetic gentility that the Pictorialists espoused to prove the lyrical possibilities of photography equal to those of painting. For, muted and bereft of detail as Alper's images may be, they have an edgy quality that speaks eloquently of our present-day anxiety, our existential uncertainty. His figures move through extremes of light and shadow like agitated phantoms of cinema verite, traversing indistinct spaces that suggest the neon-lit malls of New Hades, airless airport corridors, or garishly tiled fluorescent tunnels leading to unknown destinations.

A picture such as Alper's "Shades of Red," for example, could serve as an illustration for some postmodern update of Dante's Inferno, with its shadowy figure bracketed between what appear to be brightly glowing, blood-red windowpanes. In another image called "Corridor Games," incandescent white figures file between what could be columns of blue neon. They seem more like spectral presences than physical beings.

Even so, in "Desire," the androgynous figure silhouetted at the center of the composition, bathed in ethereal blue auras, exerts a compelling sensuality. Like a disturbing dream that arrives unbidden, it evokes a slightly queasy sense of eroticism moderated by shame and secrecy. Although the figure is chastely cloaked in shadow, in viewing it we nonetheless feel as though we are participating in an act of voyeurism. (Paradoxically, the inexplicable nature of this feeling makes it all the more scintillating.)

Yet another shadowy figure appears in Alper's C-print "Magic Entrance," only here there is the sense of a spiritual transition, as in a related print called "Into the Light," which suggests the accounts of those who have survived "near death experiences" of being drawn down a tunnel toward some shimmering illumination.

Other pictures with titles such as "Night Quest," "The Search," and "Man in White" also seem to explore mysterious journeys and states of metamorphosis, of souls in transit, of passages through the life-cycle and beyond. Seeming more conjured than staged, these mysterious images establish Max Victor Alper as a photographic artist of transcendent gifts, a true visionary whose work expands the horizons of his chosen medium.

—J. Sanders Eaton

The Future of Photography Illuminates Agora Gallery

The full range of inventiveness that contemporary photographers bring to their medium was recently seen to particular advantage in "Tripping the Light Fantastic," this year's edition of an annual survey that has quickly become an eagerly anticipated tradition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway. That all of the participants in this year's show are youthful and most are graduates of prestigious art schools contributed to the sense that one was viewing the emergence of an ambitious generation who share an ethos of advancing the medium's possibilities in new and exciting directions.

Beth Parin's large black and white print of a woman in a shirt and underpants gazing out at a panoramic landscape from within a sterile modernistic interior suggests a slightly surreal postmodern synthesis of Hopperesque isolation and the perverse subtexts of Eric Fischl. Here, as in other works by Parin, the sweeping horizontal format enhances the cinematic sense that her human dramas are being enacted on wide screen.

Born in Venezuela, now living in the U.S., Alfonsina Betancourt has her own distinctly humanistic approach to subject matter. Particularly striking was her image of three little girls dolled up in Spanish-style costumes and leaning on a railing as spectators in what one can only presume is some ethnic festival or parade. Betancourt's ability to capture nuances of character comes across particularly well in the expression of one little girl with a big flower in her hair, as serious beyond her years as one of Goya's court children.

Protacio Serna finds many of his most evocative subjects in his hometown in northeastern Mexico, where the mystery of anonymous souls and the shadows that they cast often result in images that capture a haunting sense of loneliness. In one picture a solitary stroller in a wide-brimmed Stetson follows his long shadow along the cobblestones as though to some High Noon showdown. In another memorable print, another hombre in a hat appears to morph into shadow cast on a wall plastered with posters.

Donna L. Clovis brings her experience as a Pulitzer Prize-nominated photojournalist to bear on the people of Cuba, capturing them with great sympathy and respect for their unique cultural heritage. Clovis' large print of an empty cafe table tells us as much about that enigmatic country as her insightful portrait of a wizened Cuban woman resting on stone steps.

Award winning photographer Kelly Segre's visual documentation of the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center captures the wide-ranging ramifications of that tragedy. Segre's close-up of glowing memorial candles is a poignant reminder of grief and loss, while her image of the phantom Towers of Light rising against the night sky is at once ghostly and heroic.

Like the Starn Twins, Dave Bown combines photography and installation art in his wall works composed of grids of fragmented anatomical images interspersed here and there with rectangular mirrors that bring parts of the viewer into the mix. Bown's widely exhibited pieces provoke us to consider the "far-flung facets" of the body in relation to self, society and aspects of alienation.

Another intriguing young photo artist, Maureen Delaney, combines her background in psychology and her interest in Rorschach patterns with an innate minimalist bias to create severely cropped floral images as suggestive as the paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe. Indeed, interpreting Delaney's compositions can be an exercise in introspection and self-knowledge as well as an aesthetic experience.

Wes Hardison has been likened accurately to Ansel Adams for pushing natural grandeur to visionary lengths. In his Cambodian landscapes, Hardison combines the exotic and the surreal, as seen in one especially picture of a huge, sinuous tree seemingly growing through an ancient ruin, a striking vision of simultaneous growth and decomposition.

By contrast, the landscapes of Anil Rao focus on what the photographer calls "the simple elements of striking beauty." Thus, his pictures of coastal areas, particularly, rely on his ability to isolate the abstract essences of natural locations, unearthing the peculiar poetry of specific places in a manner that makes us see them anew.

Two self-taught photographers have evolved highly sophisticated styles that make them right at home among the more traditionally schooled peers exhibiting here:

Michel Chansin creates highly sophisticated gelatin silver prints that transcend the myths of his beloved Polynesia to capture the even more glorious reality of its landscape. From a simple joyful image of a boy playing amid swaying palm trees to a humorous image of a nude bather, head buried in the surf like an ostrich, Chansin preserves the spirit of an Edenic locale.

Daniel Lai, born in Malaysia, now living in New Jersey, has won several prizes and had his images published in numerous books and magazines. Sharply focused images from an aerial perspective of land, ocean, and cloud-scapes, Lai's exquisite 8X10 prints are especially notable for their subtle qualities of light and shadow, as well as their delicately balanced monochromatic tonalities.

The two final photographers can only be classified as postmodern romantics:

Japan's Hisashi Kagawa employs the alternative printing technique called bromoil to create dramatic images that he calls "drawing with light." Kagawa's highly atmospheric black and white prints of subjects such as an empty bench and a bare tree back-lit by winter sun and bicycles leaning against a wall on a shadowy back street are possessed of an intense lyricism.

Then there is Lyn Gardiner, whose photographs rival the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites for their ability to conjure a romantic mood. Unabashedly in love with love, Gardiner's subjects range from couples communing privately in public settings to a lovely vision of a young woman reclining in an idyllic flowing garment that bridges the gap between the modern world and the classical period.

Although each of the young photographers in "Tripping the Light Fantastic" revealed singular personal style, as a group they gave evidence of a nascent movement which may yet have a significant effect on the future development of their chosen medium.

—Lawrence Downes

Sheila Hecht's Gestural Thrust Prevails "Through Thick and Thin"

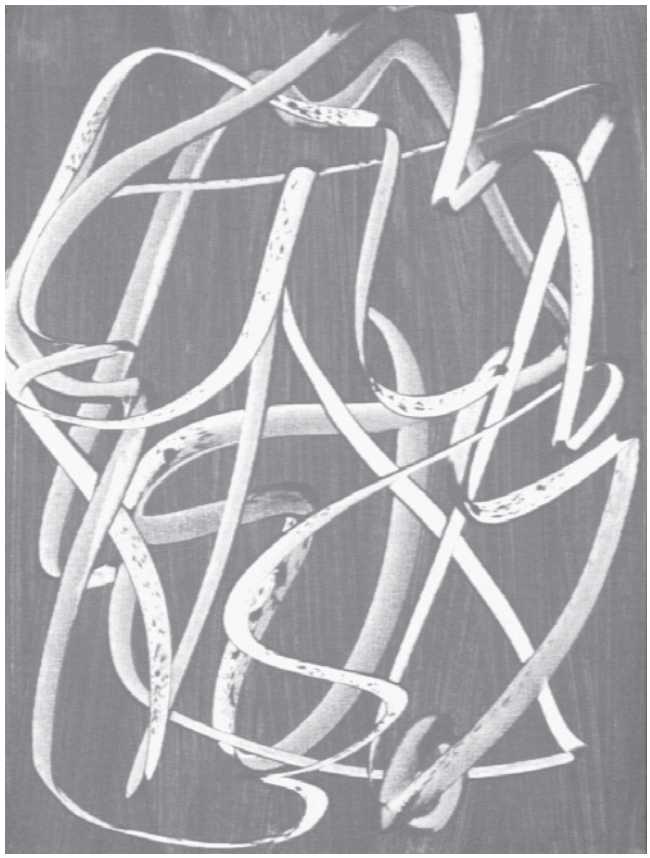
Someone once said that "style is character," and no artist demonstrates the truth of that statement better than Sheila Hecht, whose new show of paintings and mixed media constructions, "Through Thick and Thin," can be seen at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 4 through 22.

Unlike others who seem to be attempting to demonstrate the old saw that a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds in their zeal to make all of their paintings resemble each other, Hecht goes to great lengths to make each new canvas a unique visual experience. This could constitute a form of aesthetic suicide for an artist less confident of her gifts, but Hecht's unique character comes through clearly in her work without the need to contrive a stylistic signature in order to convince us that she possesses a unified vision. Thus she is able to explore a great many different approaches to color, gesture, and form, while imposing the stamp of her own personality on her every canvas that she paints. (Even the collage elements and small objects, such as leaves, stones, and shards of wood, that she combines with her usual medium of acrylics in some of her new mixed media paintings are so thoroughly integrated that they seem to take on a personal resonance of beloved possessions.)

The degree to which Hecht feels free to depart from the whole notion of a signature style in order to give free reign to her diverse painterly impulses can perhaps be seen to best advantage by examining two very different types of paintings in her new show. They are entitled, respectively, "Going With the Flow" and "Beyond the Box." The former is a freely brushed composition consisting primarily of a few broad strokes of white interacting on an uneven ocher ground, applied as though with a trowel not quite to the white edges of the primed canvas, where bits of black are visible.

As deceptively simple as some of Robert Ryman's white-on-white paintings, "Going with the Flow" is a luscious exploration of the properties of paint for their own sake. By contrast, "Beyond the Box" is a much more controlled composition featuring a fluidly wavering grid on a luminous blue ground, each of its divisions containing a confectionery daub of color overlaid by yet another thickly applied hue. Each of these thickly impastoed areas is a discrete entity, a separate occasion for visual and textural delectation, palpable as a gooey slice of pie. Yet all cohere splendidly within the unified field of the overall composition.

While the first painting appears to chart an impetuous gestural impulse brought to a successful conclusion by sheer force of instinct, the second proceeds according to a plan that seems to have evolved via a convergence of process and deliberation. Both are equally characteristic of Sheila Hecht's unique method of color construction, of building a picture by a combination of intuitive and intellectual processes that arise and converge brilliantly in the act of painting.



"Free Verse"

At her most intuitive, Hecht is capable of creating a painting such as the aptly named "Free Verse," in which a thick yet graceful calligraphic line dances over a dark olive-green ground like a wind-blown white ribbon. This composition is an exercise in freedom, more a captured action than an object, and as such it is nothing short of exhilarating, producing a sensation in the viewer that is the aesthetic equivalent of what it felt like as a small child to be playfully swung around by a trusted adult. For anyone who can remember such an experience, this painting approximates a similar sense of excitement and possible danger, for the composition is so casual that it almost threatens to veer out of control. Yet Hecht makes it succeed by virtue of a combination of gestural vivacity and control that is downright thrilling.

Just as this writer was considering applying the metaphor of an aerialist to Sheila Hecht's painterly pyrotechnics, along came another gem of a gestural composition serendipitously titled "Trapeze"! Relatively modest in size compared to some of her other paintings, "Trapeze" is yet another example of this artist's ability to make a vigorous statement with just a few swift strokes and a severely limited palette. In contrast, in another small acrylic on canvas called "Obsession," intricately interwoven forms in a full, brilliant spectrum of textured strokes create a composition of rich, layered, maze-like complexity. Equally complex is "Location, Location, Location," in which scumbled strokes of variegated and layered color move vertically and horizontally like an aerial view of gridlocked traffic, creating rich chromatic and tactile contrasts.

The diverse, sometimes opposing, impulses that make Hecht's work so intriguing, lending it tension and drama, are perhaps synthesized most successfully in the large canvas she calls "All Ways." With its juicy vertical strokes, splashes, and drips of white, green, and red set against a deep pink ground, the entire composition radiates a sense of energy and light reminiscent of certain canvases by de Kooning. Yet, Hecht is finally beholden to no other artist for the power and the energy that she generates in this painting, which strikes an exquisite balance between the complex and the simple, the material and the ethereal, with its sensual textures and evocative colors.

It takes courage for a painter to eschew trickery and contrived stylistic signifiers and trust to one's own impulses as Sheila Hecht does in this splendid new exhibition. Indeed, it takes a true act of faith to create paintings this authentic in a time when the inauthentic is all too often celebrated for its sheer novelty. But Sheila Hecht is obviously in this thing for the long haul, and her conviction that her kind of painting will ultimately prevail makes her work utterly convincing.

—Ed McCormack

Humanism and Formal Prowess in the Sculptures of Luis Montull

"My mother tongue is the human body or the milieu, the object, through which or in which man lives, suffers, enjoys himself, feels, thinks," said the German Expressionist sculptor Ernst Barlach," and the same might be said of the contemporary Spanish sculptor Luis Montull.

Known throughout Spain, where his monumental figures are in numerous public collections, Luis Montull lives and works in a studio in the Canary Islands. His pieces have a presence and a power that comes across as monumental, even on a relatively modest scale, as seen in Montull's recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, in Soho.

What immediately strikes one about Montull's pieces in both stone and wood is how wisely he has chosen his art historical influences and fashioned them into a personal style. The elemental form and raw primitivism of a piece such as his stone figure "Golpe de Viento" appears to draw some of its power from Pre-Columbian sources, yet the extreme posture and expressiveness in his simplified figure of an earthy woman in an extreme posture also recalls the prehistoric carvings of certain North American Indian tribes. At the same time, Luis Montull's work bears favorable comparison to the aforementioned Ernst Barlach, who also drew liberally from folkloric sources.

Like Barlach, Montull is above all a humanist and he appears to have an even broader range than his famous predecessor, in terms of his ability to move easily between degrees of realism and abstraction in order to accommodate the emotional temper of his individual subjects. In a piece called "Provocation," for example, he works in white stone and adopts an elongated manner to convey the pathos of a slender young woman lifting the hem of her dress in an all too blatant attempt at seduction. Even as she bares her thighs she turns her face away, suggesting shame that something —perhaps unrequited love or desperate financial need — has driven her to such desperate exhibitionism.

"Homenaje Isadora Duncan 2"

By contrast, the figure in Luis Montull's carved wood sculpture "Homage Isadora Duncan" takes hedonistic pride in her physicality as she dances with abandon, her hair flowing forward, her arms thrown back, in a dance of joyous abandon. Here, too, Montull displays his skill at working in a more realistic mode. The figure is perfectly proportioned and smoothly nude, but for a flowing scarf wound about her body—possibly a symbolic reminder of the long scarf that got tangled in the wheels of an open automobile that the famous dancer was riding in, strangling her and causing her untimely death.

"Homage Isadora Duncan" is minutely detailed, right down to the separate strands in the figure's long, lank hair and the graceful articulation of each individual finger and toe. Totally opposite the blunt power and formal simplification in some of his other, more neo-primitivistic figures, the sculpture demonstrates the remarkable versatility that makes Luis Montull an extraordinary impressive talent.

—Wilson Wong

"The Blue Hour" Celebrates an Evocative Hue

Given its emotive associations, the color blue has to be one of the most evocative hues in the spectrum. Artist/curator Meg Boe Birns explored its "literal and thematic' aspects in the recent exhibition "The Blue Hour," featuring members of the West Side Arts Coalition, at Broadway Mall Community Center, Broadway and 96th Street.

Astrith Deyrup's oils convey a sense of the spiritual majesty of nature in compositions distinguished by mysterious images of mountains, moons, boats, and tiny people enveloped in luminous blue auras.

Marlene Zimmerman's stylized female portraits often suggest gun-molls straight out of Dick Tracy, with their Pop pastel hues contained within wiggly outlines. Here, some figures are set against the Brooklyn Bridge to add further resonance to the witty noir mood.

One oil by K.A. Gibbons captures an atmospheric view of city rooftops with a water tower pointed skyward like a rocket. Another is a vibrant floral still life. Both demonstrate Gibbons' exhilarating coloristic intrepidness.

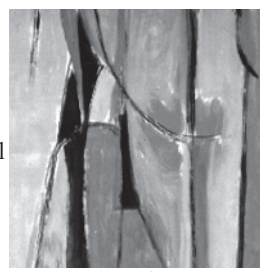
In a series of color photographs called "My Blue Heaven," Myrna Harrison-Changer focuses on light-kissed cloud formations, capturing the contrast between the sculptural quality of the cumuli and the numinous delicacy of the sky. In a time when so many other photo artists exploit digital tricks to garish effect, Harrison-Changer's technically traditional photographs have a mellow beauty akin to the great British watercolorist John Sell Cotman.

Patricia Hagood's optically dazzling acrylics on canvas are notable for their sharp geometric forms and brilliant colors. Hagood's shapes swell and flow with an expressiveness one seldom sees in such stringently organized abstract compositions.

Neo-Symbolism seems to be the only term applicable to the paintings of Farhana Akhter, who creates poetic compositions in which faces and figures emerge from somber grounds. In one of Akhter's most compelling pictures, female nudes are seen within bubbles floating mysteriously in space.

In a series called "Mostly Blue," Leanne Martinson explores the sheer beauty of the hue in abstract compositions that successfully combine austerity and gestural vivacity. Like Richard Diebenkorn, Martinson takes flat color areas and incisive lines to new levels of aesthetic sophistication.

Carolyn Simons Kaplan is at once playful and inventive, particularly in her collage painting "Paris," where birds spliced from a patterned fabric fly near the Eiffel Tower. The addition of real sea-shells to the composition furthers its fanciful appeal, while also functioning as an effective formal element.



Leanne Martinson

Meg Boe Birns achieves an impressive synthesis of color and sculptural form in her thickly encrusted relief paintings, which project a formidable physical presence that belies their modest scale. Birns' thickly impastoed surfaces are both tactile and visually delectable with their cake frosting textures, cool blue colorations, and gracefully swerving linear forms.

Young Me showed one large acrylic painting on canvas that was impressive for its vigorous paint application and boldly thrusting forms. Me's habit of letting some of her preliminary pencil lines show through the pigment that further enhanced the overall sense of improvisational energy.

Then there was Maryann Sussoni, who moves easily between abstraction and figuration in acrylic paintings on canvas that appear to explore spiritual themes through ethereal means. Sussoni's pictures balance darkness and luminosity with intriguing results.

—Robert Vigo

ASCA Mounts a Major Survey at Broome Street Gallery

The 85th Annual Exhibition of the American Society of Contemporary Arts, at Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street, from November 4 through 16, is one of that venerable organization's best group surveys to date.

Featured are paintings, graphics, and sculpture by artist members whose work demonstrates great diversity and vitality. Since sculpture often gets unjustly neglected in reviews of such shows, let's begin with Jeremy Comins' innovative wood sculpture "Invoking the Muses, " which features three enigmatic figures atop a towering abstract form. Guest artist Jennifer Mahlman, shows a tall slender piece created with fabric that suggests a feminine totem. Another gifted sculptor, Ilse Kahane is represented by a piece in marble which is distinguished by an unusual combination of sensuality and formal austerity. And then there is "Ancient Warrior," a powerful stoneware mask sculpture by Estelle Levy. Also noteworthy among the three dimensional works are Raymond Shanfeld's stylized figure of a penguin; a baroquely configured limestone sculpture by Raymond Weinstein; and a dynamic semi-abstract figure grouping in mahogany and marble by Berte D'Arrigo. Equally exciting in another manner is "White Cloud," an alabaster sculpture by Emily Mehling that makes the head of a Native American chief morph into the natural phenomenon for which he is named.

Impressive among the two-dimensional works is a lyrical linear watercolor of dancing forms by the artist known simply as Zizi. Also making poetic use of line, a mixed media painting by Elaine Alibrandi evokes a grove of slender trees, even while functioning effectively in abstract terms. Olga Kitt's painting of Sigmund Freud tormented by a demon, which is both visually strong and witty with its vibrant colors and flowing forms. Georgiana Cray Bart is represented by an evocative pastel of an interior projecting an atmosphere of genteel domesticity reminiscent of Fairfield Porter. Marcelle Harwell Pachnowski also evoked a sense of place, albeit in more abstract terms in a ruggedly tactile mixed media collage called "Brighton."

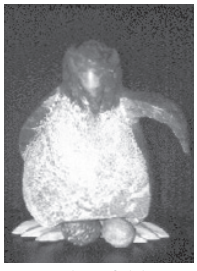
Eleanor Comins shows a watercolor in which delicate floral forms overlap the ruins of the Twin Towers, creating a hauntingly elegiac mood. Rose Sigal Ibsen, one of our leading Western exponents of Asian-style brush painting contributes a characteristically graceful calligraphic abstraction. Olivia Koopalethes combines encaustic and collage in a strong geometric abstraction featuring the interaction between circular and rectangular forms overlaid with gestural elements. Joseph V. Lubrano, president of the ASCA, once again demonstrates his prowess in transparent watercolor with an image of fishing boats permeated by an airy luminosity and a freshness that is remarkable, considering the amount of detail included.

Margery Small's neo-expressionist painting of a woman surrounded by smaller images suggesting troubling memories is characterized by great vigor and gestural force. Harriet R. Marion is a consummate "maximalist," judging from "Lobster Night @ The Moon Palace," an intricate and lively abstraction that appears to delineate a mysterious nocturnal terrain. Then there is Mariam Wills, whose brilliant solo show was reviewed in a recent issue of ***Gallery&Studio***, and who is represented here by a muscularly organized and characteristically vibrant floral abstraction.

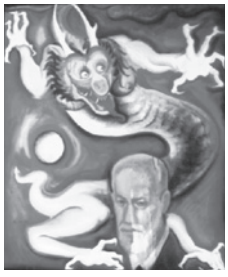
Then there is Rose-Marie Cherundolo, whose painterly compostions incorporating her sensual carved wood figures explore aspects of the feminine mystique with considerable panache.

All told, this is an outstanding show, displaying the consistent quality that has made the American Society of Contemporary Artists one of our most respected and long-lived artist's organizations. —Wilson Wong

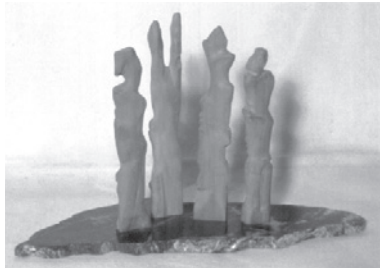
Joseph V. Lubrano



Ray Shanfeld



Olga Kitt



Bert D'Arrigo

At Noho Gallery, a Rare Opportunity for Collectors

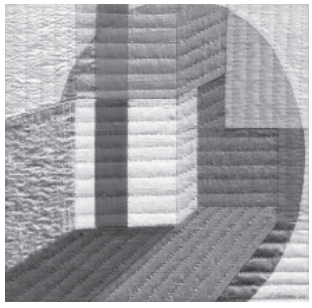
Although there can be no better holiday gift than an original work of art, the opportunity to purchase works of quality at reasonable prices does not always present itself at auspicious moments. For this reason alone "Collectors' Choice: a Five-Day Silent Auction" to be held in December at Noho Gallery in Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, is an event that one should know about.

The silent auction will take place from December 16 through 20, with a reception on December 20 from 2 to 6 PM. Thirty artists associated with the gallery have donated works ranging from paintings, to prints, to photographs, to fiber art and sculpture. Works can be viewed during regular gallery hours (Tuesday through Saturday, 11 AM to 6 PM) and bids made at any time "until the gavel drops at the Gala Reception, December 20," as the press release puts it.

Besides the promise of being able to purchase "original fine art at unbelievably low prices," there is another good reason to participate in "Collector's Choice": All of the proceeds from the silent auction will benefit and support Noho Gallery, a valuable, independent resource for artists, collectors, and anyone interested in the present and the future of contemporary art.

Named for its original location north of Houston Street, now in its third location in the heart of Chelsea, Noho Gallery was founded in 1975. For almost three decades this venerable venue has remained true to its original mission of presenting artists based solely on the quality of their work, rather than on some self-limiting commercial agenda or exclusionary stylistic bias.

From the urban scene paintings of Diana Freedman-Shea to the fine art photography of Leon Yost; from the landscapes and still life paintings of Judy Zeichner, Stephanie Rauschenbusch, and Rebecca Cooperman to the abstract compositions of Zarvin Swerbilov, Sheila Hecht, and Tina Rohrer; from the innovative fiber art of Marilyn Henrion and Erma Martin Yost, to the mixed media installations of Daniele Marin; from the surreal formalism of Irving Barrett to the diverse styles of several other gallery artists, Noho Gallery is a place where one can always expect to be surprised.



Marilyn Henrion

It is a venue which affords some of the most talented artists in our city the opportunity to exhibit their work without pressure or censorship; where ideas are germinated and innovation takes place; where discerning collectors can discover works of enduring value by emerging and established artists. As such, Noho Gallery is an exhibition space worth supporting.

And if one can find fine works of art for holiday gift giving at the same time—well, what's not to love?

—Jeannie McCormack

"Talent 2003" at Allan Stone Gallery: A Sharper Focus

The most noticeable difference in the annual "Talent" exhibition at Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th Street, this year was that the walls were not covered, salon-style, with the expected ceiling-high visual cacophony of diverse discoveries. Billed simply as "Annual Introductions and Gallery Artists," Talent 2003 was considerably more formal and sparely installed.

"This time, we wanted to make it a little sharper," gallery director Claudia Stone stated succinctly. Yet the exhibition was in no way lacking in the contrasts and surprises that always make this casual inventory-taking by one of our classiest blue chip venues an eagerly anticipated yearly treat.

As always, stellar gallery artists such as Wayne Thiebaud—here represented by a characteristically delectable pie picture in pastel and charcoal over lithograph—were present to bolster the newcomers with reflected glory. One of the more intriguing new talents—new at least to this reviewer—was Katrin Roos, whose tiny, chilling contribution featured the two remaining matches in an actual matchbook painted to represent the Twin Towers, with two minute planes swerving toward them in a clear blue sky. This minuscule piece held its own admirably amid much larger works such as Stephen Cornelius Roberts' magnificent realist oil of a gargantuan nude cradling her pregnant belly.

Other pieces on an intimate scale also fared exceptionally well: In a gem-like little oil on masonite from his "Femme Fatale" series, Robert Valdes invests a single tube of lipstick with an intense suggestive power akin to that in his visionary landscapes. Derrick Guild's two paintings of pastries treat a subject associated with Thiebaud in this Scottish painter's own darkly glowing Old Masterish manner. Scott Belville's neo-surreal oil on board of a dwarfish girl-child casts a spell comparable in visual terms to the Southern gothic short stories of Carson McCullers. Brian Haverlock, another truly peculiar figurative artist, showed a group of small works in graphite and oil suggesting daguerreotypes of some weird alternative world.

Scott Belville

Robert Valdez

Allan Stone may be the only venue in the entire city where such quirky figuration coexists happily with contemporary painting that comes out of the tradition of Abstract Expressionism. Since the early 1960s, the gallery has exhibited works by de Kooning, Kline, Gorky, and other major figures of the movement and continues to discover artists such as Ralph Turturro, whose two thickly encrusted abstract canvases in this show demonstrate its continuing vitality. Another exciting discovery, Pat Mahony, paints common objects such as pencils and bowls in a manner more akin to the West Coast artists who combined recognizable subject matter with Abstract Expressionist gestural pyrotechnics. Other gallery artists, too, such as Robert Baribeau and Nguyen Ducmanh put their own spin on energetic painterliness, the former taking off from floral still life, the latter exploding the Asian character.

More austere forms of abstraction are also at home at Allan Stone, as evidenced by the subtle geometric canvases of established gallery artist Kazuko Inoue, as well as the biomorphic compositions of another intriguing newcomer named Madeline Silber whose pristine yet peculiarly animated paintings can be as easily compared to the Cingular cell phone logo as to Miro.

These and other new and familiar artists made for exciting contrasts in a gallery whose upcoming show of works by the great American sculptor John Chamberlain should be on everybody's must-see list.

—Ed McCormack

Africa Rises in the Art of Sir Mbonu Christopher Emerem

As Andre Magnin and Jacques Soulillou point out in the introduction to their landmark volume "Contemporary Art of Africa," while African music and dance have been heralded worldwide, the relative neglect of the continent's visual arts is inexplicable, given their profound effect on Picasso, Modigliani, and other modern masters.

In fact, contemporary African artists are making a vital contribution to world culture, as evidenced by the recent exhibition of the Nigerian painter Sir Mbonu Christopher Emerem, at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, in Soho.

Although he graduated from the University of Nigeria with a degree in economics in 1983, Emerem soon abandoned that field of study to pursue his artistic calling. We can only be thankful that he did, given the untrammeled power and beauty of his work, with its muscular forms and vibrant colors working in concert to produce visionary compositions that pulse with life.

One of Emerem's most striking paintings in terms of how it turns the tables on Picasso's take on the forms of African tribal art is the dynamic acrylic on canvas "Trapped in the Dance of Destiny." In this bold composition, two shapely ebony figures obviously derived from traditional African sculpture appear to be bound back-to-back by swirling forms that metamorphose into a swarm of smaller figures. The entire picture is filled with an energy that can be likened to the early semi-abstract works of Jackson Pollock, which were, in fact, greatly influenced by Picasso's African borrowings. Emerem brings such influences back to their natural origins, while showing his own sophisticated awareness of European modernism in his treatment of abstract form and composition. The cultural cross-fertilization provides for a fascinating dialogue, the visual equivalent of the rhythmic and melodic mergings in so-called World Music.

Another major acrylic painting by Emerem with the poetic title "Woman in Her Privacy" is as richly seductive as a harem scene or odalisque in its sensual suggestiveness. Emerem, however, abstracts feminine contours to the point where they become a maze of swirling arabesques in rich earthy hues, filling the entire canvas with fertile, curvaceous forms. As the title suggests, "Woman in Her Privacy" endeavors to delineate the essence of the feminine mystique—that which eludes male comprehension yet fascinates men endlessly. In this regard, Emerem's painting keeps good company with the equally formidable women of Willem de Kooning.

In other paintings such as "Cornucopia in Nature" and "The Swamp is a Nursery" Emerem adopts a gestural vocabulary of splashes and drips to create compositions

"Woman in Her Privacy"

that capture the energy of nature kinetically with layered skeins of brilliant pigment. In the former work, splashes of yellow and red evoke both the sensation of heat and the substance of natural growth; while in the latter, various luminous hues, layered and dripped against a verdant ground, form rudimentary stick figures, suggesting a rhythmic dance of nature sprites and tipping us off to the meaning of the title.

Sir Mbonu Christopher Emerem is not only an auspicious representative of the particular qualities that make African art unique, but a world-class painter whose work deserves to be better known by anyone concerned with the ongoing evolution of postmodernism. —Stuart Leslie Meyers

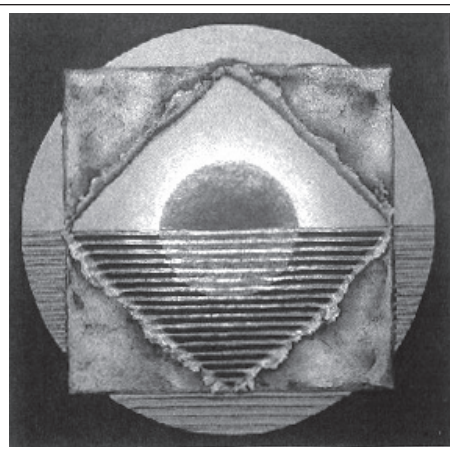
Zehring's Universal Language of Forms

Peggy Zehring, who exhibited recently at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, has traveled the world in search of what she calls "universal, visual Truths from which to form a global unity of forms and symbols."

Recently, Zehring began a study of Sacred Geometry, utilizing the ratios of irrational numbers, of which The Golden Mean is perhaps the best known example. In her new body of work she uses The Golden Mean as an underlying architecture, combining the square (which historically symbolizes the masculine) and the circle (which symbolizes the feminine) to create compositions with symbolic content equal to their visual presence. The formal relationships that Zehring sets into motion by combining these two archetypal shapes are invested with a variety of readily accessible meanings proving that art is indeed a universal language.

Tactile surfaces also play an important role in Zehring's paintings. She employs sand, ash, marble dust, chalk dust, spackle, and found objects with acrylic mediums as a binder to create a rugged textural terrain that adds considerably to the presence of her pieces. The relief-like quality of Zehring's paintings calls to mind the contemporary Spanish master of "Art Informel," Antoni Tapies. Like Tapies himself, Zehring reportedly has an interest in Zen Buddhism, and her paintings certainly do convey a pervading sense of spirituality. Zehring, however, appears to proceed in a more premeditated way than Tapies, judging from the strong formal organization of her compositions. Also, while Zehring's surfaces are similarly tactile to those of Tapies, her textures are more regular, applied in a manner more precisely calculated in its density and sculptural effect.

In addition, Zehring's colors have a burnished beauty, perhaps enhanced by the addition of metallic elements, that lends her paintings a unique glowing quality. This further enhances the spirituality that her work conveys, suggesting golden or silvery auras that for all the physicality of her forms imbues them with a sense of the ethereal. In his writings, Kant spoke of the "noumenon" —the innate spirit of materials themselves, their autonomous sense-content; yet Zehring imbues materials with a paradoxical sense of something transcendent as well. These qualities come across powerfully in Zehring's composition "Circling the Light." Within a large circle, a smaller circle is centered with a square shape superimposed upon it. This rectangle has ragged edges, built up in relief, as though some outer surface has been torn away, creating a slanted



"Circling the Light"

rectangular window within, through which we see yet another circle, partially obscured by horizontal stripes. Interestingly, although the square shape, as noted earlier, historically symbolizes the male principle, the opening in this slightly askew rectangle, with its labial folds along the edges, could suggest a womb.

In other paintings as well, Peggy Zehring employs variations on these same simple shapes, variously combined and layered, to create a host of visually stunning and thought-provoking compositions with the power and presence of unique contemporary mandalas. —Peter Wiley

New York Notebook

Last issue in this column we ran an item about the galleries of Hell's Kitchen and mused that they might indicate a trend for at least some fine art venues to move beyond the confines of established gallery districts such as Soho and Chelsea. Since, we have discovered other fine art venues in unexpected places: in the former rectory of the oldest Catholic church in the city (now the basement of an upscale tea house and espresso bar in Chinatown); in a cavernous ethnic food market on the Lower East Side, and on the former site of a Times Square porn parlor.

Chinatown

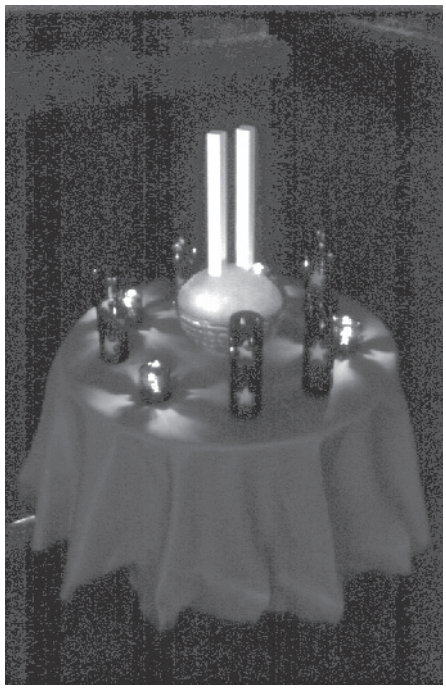
We discovered The Gallery at SilkRoad Place, 30 Mott Street, quite by accident one recent Saturday night, while strolling through the main commercial thoroughfare of Chinatown, on our way to dinner. In the window of an establishment that seems to have sprung up overnight in the storefront of a building that housed the Rectory of the Church of the Transfiguration a hundred years ago (and which for thirty years was the site of the popular Fung Wong Bakery Shop), we noticed a poster for "In the Shadow of 9/11: A Chinatown

Yoichiro Yoda

Memorial Exhibition."

That the show was being presented by the Asian American Arts Centre, a major cultural force in Chinatown, in collaboration with SilkRoad Place, tipped us off that it would be well worth seeing. Still, stepping inside, we were surprised to see an original photo-based work called "WTC Fountain" by the well known installation artist Donald Lipski on the wall right inside the restaurant, Lipski being the kind of artist one normally encounters in museums. Nearby, we also saw a characteristically humanistic group of photographs by Corky Lee, whose exhibition in a local museum we reviewed awhile back. Upstairs, on a mezzanine where the exhibition continued, we were greeted by a man who introduced himself as "Mr. Choy," one of the owners of the building and the restaurant, and offered to escort us through the exhibition.

In the spacious basement, the main exhibition space at SilkRoad Place, an installation by an artist named Chee Wang Ng symbolized the economic effect that the terrorist attack on the nearby World Trade Center continues to have on the people of Chinatown two years later, effectively epitomizing the show's title, "In the



Chee Wang Ng

Shadow of 9/11." In Ng's piece, two miniature towers rise out of the center of a large rice-bowl surrounded by memorial candles in red white and blue holders.

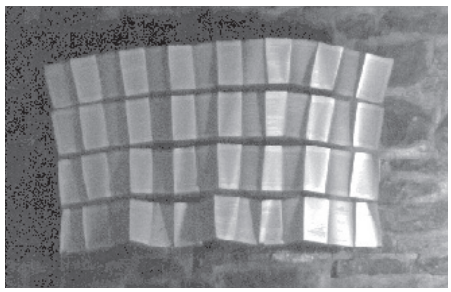
As Mr. Choy pointed out, in Chinese culture the rice bowl symbolizes one's very livelihood, and the proximity of Chinatown to the World Trade Center had a devastating effect on restaurants and other businesses that depend on tourism in general. Chinatown, where wages are generally low and where many jobs were lost, has never fully recovered.

Another powerful work, resembling a contemporary fresco, with the silhouetted figures of an adult and a child poised against a ghostly,

Corky Lee

fragmented New York sky-line was by an artist named Lambert Fernando, whose father was one of the architects who designed the Twin Towers, according to Mr. Choy. Other powerful pieces included a wood block print and elegiac poem by Su-Li Hung, a well-known artist/writer in the literati tradition from Taiwan; a calligraphic work by Chieng Chung Li, an 80 year old Chinese artist who spent years in Paris and is famous for combining elements of East and West; a large yet fragile wall piece created with delicately stitched-together book pages created by Katarina Wong, who was so traumatized by the event that she had to "regain her equilibrium," Mr. Choy says, by engaging in the "fundamental task" of sewing; and an Expressionistic painting of a bereft little girl viewing the destruction of the Towers from the Brooklyn Bridge that, in its own way, was as harrowing as Munch's "The Scream."

Although "In the Shadow of 9/11" was organized by Robert Lee of the Asian-American Arts Centre and the aforementioned Chee Wang Ng, both gave credit to "Mr. Choy of Silk Road Place for being a shopkeeper/businessman whose foresight and concern for the whole of Chinatown has enabled this kind of cultural activity to occur." In fact, Mr. Choy, is a great deal more. As a culturally curious CPA for over two decades, he befriended a great many artists, ranging from the famous traditional Chinese painter C.C. Wang to Donald Lipski, whose piece he acquired for this show. Knowledgeable and passionate about art, he vows to make the Gallery at SilkRoad Place a



Katarina Wong

neighborhood cultural hub with future exhibitions, including a posthumous show of work by his dear friend C.C. Wang, who died earlier this year.

"I want Chinatown to be known as a place where people come for more than just a bowl of cheap noodles, I want them to come for culture as well," he says.

And his enthusiasm seems contagious enough to make that happen.

Loisaida

Occupying in a long, squat brick structure about the size of a small airplane hanger at 120 Essex Street, between Rivington and Delancey, the Essex Street Market is a place that caters mainly to the Puerto Rican population of the Lower East Side—Or "Loisaida," as it is known locally.

Within its cavernous confines you will find food stalls stocked with vegetables, meat, fish, and a full line of Goya products. There is also a Botanica, selling candles for the casting of love spells, religious statuettes, and other accouterments of Santeria, an indigenous religion combining aspects of Catholicism and voo doo. Salsa sizzles on transistor radios, as housewives haggle with vendors in Spanish and old retired guys congregate with their amigos as they do in every neighborhood and culture where geezers find themselves with a lot of time on their hands.

The Essex Street Retail Market
Photo: Albert Padilla

None of these neighborhood people seem to pay much attention to Cuchifritos, the art gallery/project space located, incongruously, in the south corner of the market, which was having an opening reception for its latest exhibition early the same Saturday evening that we later discovered SilkRoad in Chinatown.

The East Village and the Lower East Side may share much of the same real estate but they are obviously worlds apart, judging from the lack of any kind of interaction between the shoppers in the market and the trendily dressed gallery goers spilling out of the packed gallery with wine glasses in their hands. Still, despite having a name that could seem slightly patronizing (cuchifritos being a kind of Hispanic fast food), this gallery/project space under the auspices of the Artists Alliance, Inc., has a worthy mission: "To act as a forum for exploring fundamental ideas, issues and concerns associated with the Lower East Side through the medium of contemporary art, to highlight the work of underrepresented artists, including artists from this, and similar communities. The gallery's location is designed to underscore the community value of The Essex Street Market by provoking interaction and debate between the multi-cultural, largely Hispanic, community of the Lower East Side and the artists who are living and working there. By providing an alternative venue to show existing work that doesn't always get a voice, and even a space for which to create entirely new works, the gallery serves as a launching off point for creators from many diverse fields in the arts."

The show opening on the evening we stopped by was called "ausderkunstweltkunslerenrumpelstiltskin," which the flyer in the gallery explained was a conflation of two words: German for "artists not of the art world" and the name of the Brothers Grimm character who spun straw into gold. In keeping with the mission of the Artists Alliance and its project space, Cuchifritos, this exhibition affirms the creative alchemy of highly imaginative and talented artists from wildly disparate areas within the vibrant Lower East Side community. The exhibition probes issues of naivete, craziness, arbitration of taste and fashion, and the value society places on art production, especially that which is perceived as falling wayward of the established system."

Included in the show were works by Adrian Cruz and Gabriel Sanes, two school children who produced their drawings during a recent summer art program at the Harborview Art Program on the Lower East Side; R.J. Goricoff, a resident of Rivington House, who has also exhibited at the Painting Center in Soho; Minn Matsuda, a long time artist and political activist who recently passed away in her nineties; and James S. Wong, an artist who has shown at Cooper Union and participates in art programs at both the Community Consultation Center and the Community Access Program in Manhattan.

All of the work on view had a refreshing outsider-ish quality that boded well for the next show coming up at Cuchifritos, which will be a curated exhibition of artists working on the Lower East Side as designated by the zip code, with proof of residence required.

Times Square

Times Square could hardly be called a community, either in its previous life as a hub of pornography, prostitution, drug marketing and all that is sleazy, or in its newly Disneyfied incarnation as a commercial entertainment mecca for the clueless. But fine art has made inroads there, too, thanks to Anita Durst, an artistic scion of the Durst dynasty –the same interesting family that gave us Robert Durst, of tabloid fame.

Anita Durst has appropriated three of her family's vacant storefront properties for temporary galleries and performance spaces. The most auspiciously named of these is Peep-0-Rama, at 121 West 42nd Street, which was the name of the pornographic book store and video arcade that used to be there, and which Durst apparently decided would do just as well for an art gallery. Two other venues on the same block, Chashama, 135 West 42nd Street, and Tixe, 113 West 42nd Street, also serve as galleries and performance spaces.

"Caress" Photo by Khang Nguyen

Recently, the latter venue mounted a group exhibition called "Body," which juxtaposed a charcoal drawing of a penis by Kate Brehm; C-prints by Amelia H. Krales of butchers and carcasses; Khang Nguyen's black and white photographs of a nude woman with words such as "caress", "nuzzle," "stroke," and "kiss," painted all over her body; and other intriguing works. Innocent tourists from middle America who wander in expecting more of the bland, newly "cleaned up" Times Square must find such works bracing. Indeed, Anita Durst is to be commended introducing at least a bit of real culture shock to a neighborhood where the word "museum" generally means Madame Tussaud's. But apparently her powerful family will indulge her artistic leanings only so far, since we are told that the entire block will be torn down next Spring to accommodate one of those monstrous corporate complexes that we never seem to get enough of in New York City these days. The good news, however, is that Janusz Jaworski, the director of Tixe, vows to continue curating exhibitions in other vacant stores around town.

Tenth Street

Gordon and Himiko Joseph with their work shown at right

East Tenth Street was an art district long before anyone ever heard of the East Village. Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline both had studios there and the street boasted a lively artist-run co-op gallery scene from the early fifties through the late sixties. Thus, Himiko and Gordon Joseph have chosen an auspicious site for their new venue, Light Box, 222 East 10th Street, which features contemporary art with an Asian aesthetic by Kumi Ito, Mukyo Hirama, and others, as well as the couples' own work.

Himiko, who has exhibited her work at the Brooklyn Museum, and her husband both create functional art for the home and office. Himiko's ceramic porcelain vases have flowing organic forms, graceful as teardrops or tips of flame. While she mixes color into the clay, she leaves the outside of her pieces unglazed to retain an earthy quality, while glazing the inside for contrast and to make them functional. Her husband Gordon's ultracontemporary lamps,

fashioned from wood, acrylic and metal, are geometric and minimalist in a manner at once austere and ethereal, like Don Flavin's neon sculptures.

Together, their pieces make for a harmonious marriage of form and function that should have great appeal for architects, designers, artists, and those wishing to create an aesthetic environment in today's compact apartment spaces.

Light Box is open Tuesday through Saturday from 12 to 6PM. Or you can visit Himiko and Gordon Joseph's website: www.lightboxgallery.com to view its online catalog.

"Process" at the Art Students League

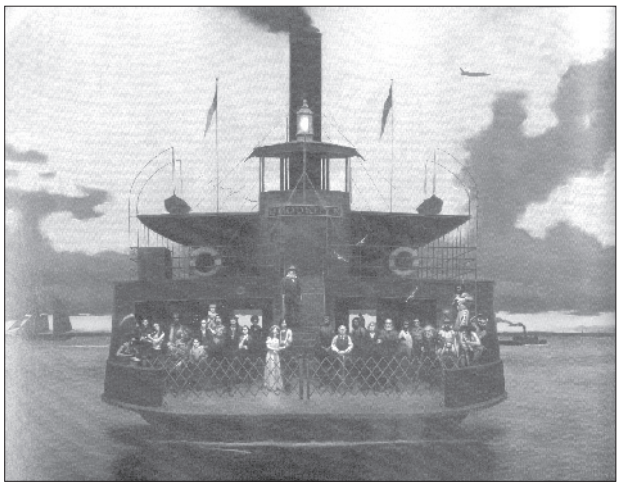
The Art Students League is 127 years old and has occupied the same beautiful building on West 57th Street since 1892. When it was announced that the building would close over the Summer for renovations we held our breath. The reason given was to install new ventilation, electrical, and plumbing systems and to expand the school's sculptural facilities. These seemed like worthy enough goals, yet we worried that the changes might adversely affect the less tangible atmospheric qualities that have always made the League such an inspiring place. We should have known that no crew of contractors could rid the place of the magic that has been accumulating there for over a century and a quarter.

For so many of our best artists, the League is where it all begins.They study there in their youth, and after they have built distinguished careers in the galleries and museums, many of them return to teach there. Harvey Dinnerstein and Bruce Dorfman are both former students and veteran instructors of painting at the League. They are featured in the three artist exhibition "Process" with Lorrie Goulet, who teaches sculpture and started her own art education at Black Mountain College, where she studied with Joseph Albers and Jose de Creeft (whom she later married). "Process" can be seen through November 29 in The Gallery at the Art Students League, 215 West 57th Street. Hours are Monday through Friday 9AM to 8:30PM, Saturday from 10AM to 4:30PM and Sunday from 1 to 4PM.

Curator Pamela N. Koob conceived the exhibition to explore the means by which these three artists make "the journey from inspiration to final expression." Sketchbooks, journals, preliminary studies, notes, photographs and artist's statements are included, along with related works, to show "the genesis and evolution of three very different works of art."

Harvey Dinnerstein took inspiration from Walt Whitman's famous poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" to create an epic oil on canvas called "Sundown, The Crossing." The setting is an abandoned ferry, docked Staten Island, that the artist painted 40 years ago, revisited once more and populated with a colorful cast of 29 figures, each realized as a full-fledged portrait. Walt Whitman occupies a prominent place on the staircase leading down from the upper deck, and the similarly white-bearded painter himself can also be seen among the various passengers below.

"An image coalesced in my mind of a multitude on a journey, from one shore to another. It occurred to me to go back over all the work I had done over the years as a way of summing

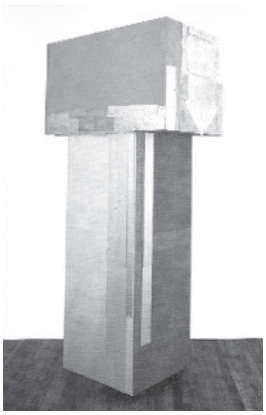


Harvey Dinnerstein

up my journey and the diverse subjects I have encountered along the way. The image would not be an illustration of Whitman's poem but a reflection of my experience, hopefully related in visual terms to the spiritual qualities of the poem."

The ferry is seen crossing New York harbor at dusk, lit by the eerie glow of a pink-tinged sky further animated by dramatic cloud formations, with a 19th century schooner, a tugboat and jet plane all visible in the distance to suggest the passage of time. Possessed of a hushed, almost spooky power, the painting reveals the mastery that makes Harvey Dinnerstein one of our finest contemporary realists.

Bruce Dorfman is an auspicious choice for this show, because his work has always seemed to be all about process. His mixed media assemblage paintings almost appear to be configuring themselves before our eyes. That Dorfman makes no attempt to cover his tracks, often incorporating strips of wood, pieces of metal, and other raw elements, as well as the nails or nuts and bolts that hold them together, as integral elements of the composition, imbues his work with a unique vitality. His tactile, often irregularly shaped surfaces are melded with areas of vibrant color executed with singular finesse. Dorfman's pieces are exquisite formal statements in which the rough, physical properties of the materials and the seeming casualness of their construction (actually arrived at through painstaking labor) contrasts with his coloristic refinement to create a sublime synthesis of the physical and the ethereal.



Bruce Dorfman

Those qualities are especially evident in Dorfman's piece "Piero's Bell Tower," featured in this show. Incorporating canvas, wood, steel, watercolor and acrylic, eight years in the making, this free-standing, three-dimensional "construct," as the artist calls it, combines the attributes of painting and sculpture in a unique manner.

Inspired by Dorfman's love of Italy and its culture, the piece carries his concern with space and color further than ever before, a progression in keeping with the theme of this show.

Of the three artists, Lorrie Goulet gives us the most complete, day-to-day account of the creative process in a journal that she kept while carving a sculpture in stone called "Enigma" especially for the exhibition. When she started the piece on May 15th, 2003, the weight of the stone (black alabaster) was 367 pounds. When she finished it on July 26th of the same year, the completed semi-abstract nude female figure weighed 130 pounds. In between, Goulet makes us privy, through her journal and sketches, to a process she describes as follows: "I search for the image of my inner vision reflected in the material. The image released from the block is the image released from me. I remove that which is covering what I sense in there. It is a finding. Carving is both a physical and a spiritual experience."

Lorrie Goulet

The truth of Goulet's statement is made manifest in her work. "Enigma" appears to reflect both the physical and the spiritual in the most direct way, through its combination of sensually rounded forms and the feeling of serene introspection embodied in the attitude and position of the figure. The formal thrust of the piece, with the ideally simplified shape curling inward on itself, creates a flowing, harmonious whole that makes palpable a thought noted in Goulet's journal on June 15. As the sculpture begins to evolve of its own momentum, she writes, "It seems like the piece is making itself and I'm just holding on to the hammer and chisel."

And indeed "Enigma," like all of Lorrie Goulet's sculptures in stone and wood, has the timeless grace and the sense of inevitability of something created by nature rather than by the human hand.

As Pamela N. Koob notes in her introduction to the handsome exhibition catalog, "Process" endeavors to make public parts of the creative journey that are usually "a private affair." The show succeeds splendidly in being both instructive and thoroughly enjoyable.

* * *

Taste and Talent Inform Choices in Pleiades Invitational

Invitational exhibitions are always interesting, often affording viewers an opportunity to discover new talents not presently affiliated with a gallery. This is especially true when the artists on view have been chosen by peers as distinguished as the members of Pleiades Gallery.

The "9th Annual Friends of Pleiades Invitational," featuring neon, paintings, sculpture, prints, photography, and encaustics can be seen from December 16, 2003, through January 3, 2004, with a reception for the artists on Saturday, December 20, from 3 to 6 PM.

One of the fun surprises this year is discovering the sculptures of Tsukasa Matsuura, whose jaunty dancing hippos not only provoke smiles but also admiration for the artist's ability to make a delightfully silly subject so aesthetically appealing. For Matsuura not only captures the personality of these lovable beasts but imparts considerable grace to their bulky, ungainly volumes.

Michael Ryan is another artist who finds incongruous beauty in odd places. Ryan's piece "Encounter" combines encaustic, metal and what appears to be gauze on a wood sphere to create an object with a funky evocativeness. The rough manner in which the nails are hammered into the metal, along with the gauze, can suggest a globe—world?— that has been blown apart and then put hastily back together, an affecting visual metaphor in times such as these.

Jean Stella's "Painted Lady" plays with the relationship between paint and make-up both literally and metaphorically. With its vibrant neo-Fauvist palette and straightforward composition Stella's portrait of a pensive young woman says something of the masks we all must don daily as social armor.

A direct attack is also a virtue of an oil on canvas by M. Brooke Taney called "Still Life of Silver." Taney employs bravura brushwork and a range of burnished hues to imbue a table setting of silver vessels with an expressive panache reminiscent of a somewhat more genteel Soutine.

Jim Ruban makes a different kind of painterly statement with his acrylic on canvas "Big X." The title describes the general thrust of the painting, but not how effectively Ruban brings the familiar letter-form alive in precise red and black color areas against a luscious yellow ground, creating a dynamic hard-edge composition.

Jean Stella

Penny Dell combines woodcut and monoprint in "Woman Tree." What appears at first glance to be an energetic gestural abstraction in red, white, and yellow gradually yields the image of a female nude morphing brilliantly into a big, beautiful tree.

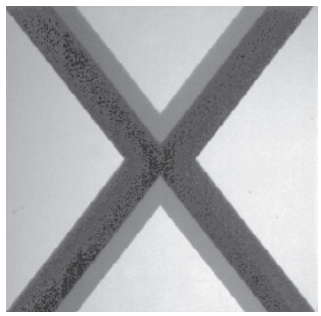
Another painter, Zuleika Bisacchi employs thick encaustic to build up relief-like textures in an abstract composition called "Detalhes misticos III." Bisacchi's "Z"-shaped yellow form, set against a subtly modulated blue ground, conveys a sense of velocity, as though laid down in a single stroke of a loaded brush, like the mark of Zorro.

Tactility also has strong appeal in a paintings of Tae-Mo Yang, who combines a rugged surface with delicate green hues to convey a sense of natural forces and essences. Indeed, Tae-Mo Yang combines art informel a la Tapies with an Asian aesthetic to create a highly effective synthesis.

Thierry Choquard employs a painted window frame and its panes to create a formal grid that contradicts the implied distance in the landscape view outside. Choquard's formal device adheres the image to the picture plane, creating lively spatial tensions.

By contrast, Connie Rakity revels in the picturesque in a color photograph of the a small village in the French countryside with its brick dwellings giving way to a vista of bucolic greenery and verdant hills.

Rowell Bowles is a New Image painter possessed of a great deal of painterly panache. Bowles' monochromatic composition presents a single, simple form set against a dark ground. While the form suggests a rudimentary head, it is Bowles' energetic brushwork that brings the image alive.



Jim Ruban

Then there is Louis Goyette, who conveys a calligraphic curvaceousness with colorful neon. Goyette employs the medium to create a rhythmic composition that contrasts buoyantly with the work of Don Flavin and others who employ neon in a more austere manner.

Also including a work by Gerry Perrino that was not available for preview at press time, this invitational exhibition attests as much to the superb taste of those who invited these artists as to their own considerable talents.

—Peter Wiley

The Fantasy and Morality in the Art of Kip Omolade

Often when fine artists draw upon popular sources, such as magazine illustration and other aspects of commercial art, they do so with a certain degree of post-Pop irony. They want you to know, after all, that they do not take such sources seriously; in fact, they feel superior to them. Not so Kip Omolade, a young artist born in Harlem whose work was recently seen in an impressive solo outing at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, in Soho.

While beholden to Rembrandt for his dramatic light and dark contrasts, Omolade also acknowledges the fantasy illustrations of Frank Frazetta and Jose Segrelles as important inspirations. Although he does not himself specialize in busty babes, musclebound super heroes, and fanciful monsters, like Frazetta, who started as a teenage comic book artist, Omolade sharpened his anatomical skills as an intern at Marvel comics . From Frazetta, too, he learned the dynamics of creating compositions that fairly leap off the page and grab the reader by the throat. Omolade, however, applies these lessons to a more personal kind of subject matter with more than a dash of surrealism thrown into the mix. From Hip hop music, another acknowledged influence, he seems to have learned the art of "sampling," for he combines popular and fine art inspirations with the winning insouciance of a more classically-inclined Jean Michel Basquiat.

Don't get the idea, however, that Kip

"Anticipated Dawn"

Omolade is some unschooled ghetto wonder, destined to make a funky flash-in-the-pan splash in the art world and burn out fast like the ill-starred Basquiat. Far from it: Omolade has a BFA from the School of Visual Arts and Masters in Special Education from the City College of New York. Along with working as a fine artist and illustrator, he has made a positive social contribution, teaching art to emotionally disturbed students at the Robert F. Kennedy Academy. What we have in Omolade, in other words, is a highly motivated young artist whose paintings have a decidedly uplifting quality, as seen in the oil he calls "Anticipated Dawn." This is a lyrical vision in which the god-like head of a jazz saxophonist appears in the moody blue cloud formations high above the city skyline, which is bathed in a luminous golden sunrise. Although the image may not refer directly to the devastation wreaked upon our city by the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, one cannot help seeing Omolade's painting, simultaneously depicting the darkness of night and the light of dawn, as a deeply moving celebration of rebirth.

Another powerful mood comes across in Omolade's oil "Gangsta Rap," which makes a mythic statement on a rebellious music which, while widely maligned in the establishment press, resonates with disaffected youth of all races for its bold criticism of adult hypocrisy and political injustice. Without endorsing its violence, Omolade captures the atmospheres and attitudes of the rap world in this dynamic composition, with its subtle tonal contrasts and succulent paint surface.

Kip Omolade is a refreshingly original talent who has transformed the popular culture of his generation, both in terms of his art technique and the subjects he employs to depict it, in innovative and exciting ways. His work elevates a frequently scorned art genre, fantasy illustration, to new levels of seriousness while commenting on social issues from a thoughtful moral perspective.

—Wilson Wong

The Fabulous Personages of Germany's Rafat Mey

The German artist Rafat Mey inhabits a realm of magic that exists apart from the usual concerns of the mainstream art world. His is a fantastic realm filled with figurative enigmas and fanciful personages. Their costumes constitute a kind of human plumage unknown to any earthly culture. Their demeanor is as fully fanciful as the beings dreamt up by Paul Klee, Victor Brauner and other masters of anatomical anomalies.

All of Rafat Mey's pictorial dramas are enacted against a black background that makes his colors glow all the more vividly, besides suggesting nocturnal atmospheres which add to the mystery of his compositions. In his recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, in Soho, Rafat Mey showed a group of works in paint on cardboard that continued and elaborated upon his fascination with the fantastically distorted human figure.

The only painting in the exhibition with a title was "Woman with Two Faces." In an earlier show in the same venue, Rafat Mey exhibited a work called "The Woman with Several Faces." No quantitative distinction need be made between the two pictures, however, for in the world of Rafat two faces can be as extraordinary as many, given the manner in which delicate strands of color converge to create images like nothing else in contemporary art. Suffice it to say that the "Woman with Two Faces" is a sight to behold, with her ornate costume— like something out of the Arabian Knights by way of Saul Steinberg— and her decidedly self-satisfied countenances. Yet for all her strangeness, she is recognizable. We have all known someone like her, and indeed this is what makes Rafat Mey's paintings so peculiarly enjoyable. No matter how outlandish his characters get, they bear a relationship to reality, as though he is delineating human psychology rather than simply the exterior manifestations of the human figure. His people wear not only their hearts, but their egos and their dreams on their sleeves. And so in some unspeakable way we are able to identify with them —or at very least to recognize them as members of our own tribe, so to speak.

The only contemporary artist it seems possible to compare Rafat Mey to is Canon, a French autodidact whose drawings are similarly unconcerned with conforming to current fashion, so deeply embroiled are they in a private world. Like Canon, Rafat Mey seems to sustain his creativity in a rarefied sense of isolation that nourishes his imagination. Indeed, how else could he produced such images as the painting in the present show of what appears to be a stylized peacock metamorphosing into a vase of brightly colored flowers?

In another work, equally strange in its own manner, three women in flowing hats and identical long braids appear themselves to be morphing into exotic plant forms. In yet another untitled painting a whimsical geometric torso figure cavorts in a landscape just as schematized, yet pastorally suggestive nonetheless.

Indeed, it is Rafat Mey's unequaled ability to present us with the outlandish projects of his fertile—perhaps it would be more accurate to say teeming—imagination and make them inexplicably believable that makes his work so thoroughly enjoyable.

—Bernard Katz

The Living Legacy of Catharine Lorillard Wolfe at the National Arts Club

Known as "the Great Lady of Madison Square," Catharine Lorillard Wolfe was an American scholar and philanthropist known for her charitable enterprises and for being the only woman among the 106 founding members of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Her legacy survives in the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club, founded in 1896, which recently mounted its 107th Annual Open Exhibition at the

Amy Bright Unfried

National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South.

As always, this year's show was a lively and stylistically varied survey, ranging from the snapshot social realism of Packy Eckola's oil painting of four sisters in clothing suggesting the Depression era, to an avant garde floor sculpture by Fleming Markel, created

Packy Eckola

from pantyhose. Other interesting contrasts were seen in Eleanor Meier's succulent still life painting of peppers in a glass bowl and Naomi Grossman's wall sculpture of a nude torso palpably evoked in twisted wire.

Sculptor Amy Bright Unfried showed an exquisitely delicate bronze of two tiny swallows on a limb. Painter Susan E. Samet was represented by a semi-abstract floral still life in watercolor notable for its formal inventiveness and subtle color harmonies. A picturesque landscape by Diane Tomash combined nostalgia with atmospheric chiaroscuro evoked in monotype. Joana G. Wardell's acrylic painting of balls poised on a chalk-drawn "ledge" on a graffiti'd wall merged trompe l'oeil technique with metaphysics. Claudia Seymour's more traditional still life in oils of sinuous stems and blossoms issuing gracefully from an Oriental vase was especially fine for its handling of lights and darks. Another oil painting by Gaile Snow Gibbs captured a gypsy woman's character and formidable girth in bravura brushstrokes.

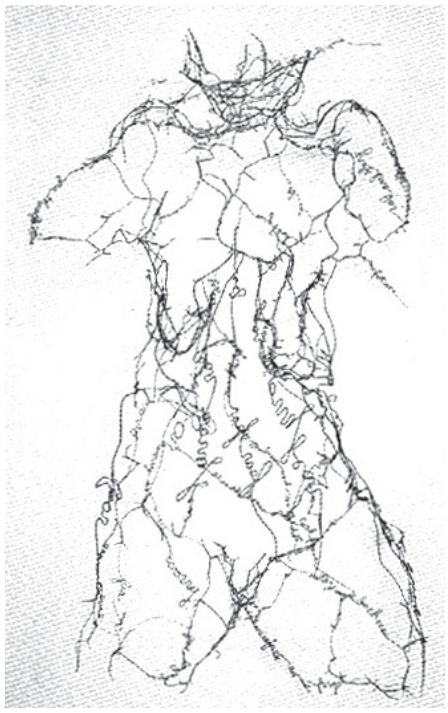
Contributions by sculptors were especially varied this year: Kathleen Megles Roberson's mixed media piece, incorporating computer parts and a compact disc, suggested a technological altar out of science fiction. Jean T. Kroeber, the CLWAC's 2003 Honored Member, was represented by a characteristically elegant piece in Vermont gray marble. Sally Weiss showed a complex wood sculpture incorporating figurative elements drawn in graphite on wood akin for its formal inventiveness to some of Marisol's assemblages. And Heather Meri Stewart's austere abstract wall sculpture in wood and masonite, with its subtle tones

Fleming Markel

and planes, represented a much different aesthetic than Pamela Shawley Weaver's bronze of a soulful boxer dog. Both were excellent in their different ways, however, and demonstrated the diversity of styles that made this show so vital.

It was also interesting to see how different artists handled similar subjects. Among the paintings, Sharon Florin's oil of taxis reflected in the glass of a skyscraper was a technical tour de force. Karen Whitman's large linoleum block print also captured a real sense of the city with its intricate composition filled with people engaged in a variety of lively activities—women pushing trams, children playing ball, a street musician playing a saxophone—against a backdrop of buildings and a distant bridge. Ruth Newquist was represented by a photorealist Soho street scene in watercolor, combining casualness with formal grace in her depiction of storefronts and pedestrians. Then there was Terry Ferrier, who employed watercolor in a loose, atmospheric manner to depict a city street from a romantic perspective.

One could go on describing individual



Naomi Grossman

works ad absurdom and still not feel that one has done full justice to the overall excellence of an exhibition such as this one. But excellence is what one has come to expect from the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club, given that many of the most distinguished women artists in the country are among its membership.

—Jeannie McCormack

Surfaces Seduce in the Photorealism of Karen Kern

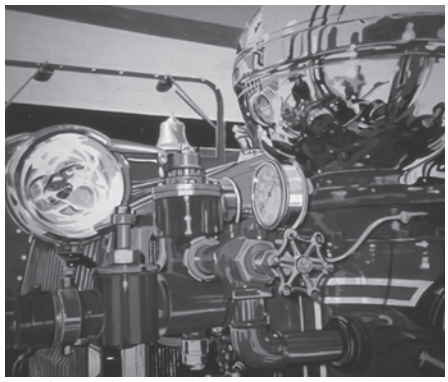
During the Renaissance it was common for young artists to apprentice themselves to the masters. Although the practice is less common today, young artists who work as studio assistants often benefit greatly from the experience. Surely Karen Kern, who served as an assistant to the distinguished photorealist Audrey Flack, is a case in point. For although Kern shares a similar aesthetic she was able to learn from her former employer without being unduly influenced or sacrificing her individuality.

Indeed, Kern, who has been praised by both the New York Times and Newsday, demonstrated her own unique approach to photorealism in her recent exhibition at Agora Gallery 415 West Broadway, in Soho.

Karen Kern does not have to venture far to find inspiration, for her paintings depict trucks and other mechanical subjects in her hometown, Centerport, New York. In this regard Kern, seems to share an attitude with Robert Bechtle a California photo realist, known for his paintings of automobiles parked outside homes in Oakland, who says that he paints such scenes because "they are part of what I know and as such I have affection for them." Like Bechtle, too, however, Kern avoids sentimentalizing her subjects or painting them in a manner calculated to make the viewer share her feeling for them. Rather, she views them head-on, without affect, as sheer visual phenomena. Thus, her severely cropped compositions might as accurately be termed "abstract realism" as photorealism, given their strong formal qualities. She also adjusts color values to achieve an intensity that is beyond the reach of photography, and the emphasis that she puts on reflections and certain details increases the impact of her acrylics on canvas.

Thus, a composition such as Antique Fire Truck (Greenlawn) has the formal presence of a hard-edge abstraction, even while depicting its subject in close-up with meticulous accuracy. The red vehicle looms hugely within the easel-sized canvas, projecting a sense of scale much larger than its actual dimensions. The gleaming grill enlivens the image with its five horizontal stripes as boldly delineated as one of Sean Scully's abstract paintings and the broad bumper bolsters the composition at the bottom of the canvas. The spatial push and pull between the implied depth in the subject and the emblematic manner in which the shapes hug the picture plane adds to the overall visual dynamism that distinguishes all of Kern's compositions.

More complex juxtapositions of forms are seen in another acrylic on canvas by Kern



Antique Fire Truck (closeup)

called "The Fox (1924 truck)," which focuses on a particularly intricate section of a vintage vehicle, its brilliant red sheen giving it the visceral effect of entrails; as well as "Block Island Dock," in which a pile of red and yellow containers in the foreground contrasts sharply with the more subdued, predominantly blue background hues.

Karen Kern's dispassionate approach to subject matter signifies her refusal to manipulate the viewer emotionally. Yet he paintings evoke a strong response nonetheless, through the clarity of her objective vision and the uninflected beauty that she reveals to us.

—Maurice Taplinger

West Side Photographers Explore Black and White

Color has become so ubiquitous in the high tech photography of today that one can almost forget that black and white was considered by some purists to be the only valid medium for art photography up until the early 1970s (color, they felt was too associated with advertising and commercial magazines to be taken seriously).

While no one would adhere to so narrow a view today, "B&W," a recent exhibition by members of the West Side Arts Coalition at Broadway Mall Community Center, 96th Street and Broadway, demonstrated the unique qualities of black and white photography.

Lee Muslin, for example, draws with light as though it were a pencil in her prints focusing on the urban landscape: the abstract patterns made by the wheels and spokes of a bicycle; reflections on windows that evoke a sense of dancing figures; the play of light and shadow on fire-escapes or corrugated steel security gates. Muslin's pictures gain considerably from the stark contrasts, as well as the subtle tonalities, of black and white.

Scott Weingarten eschews the usual picturesque tourist cliches to give us instead a real sense of what it is like to live in the fabled water city in "Venetian Alley," with its clotheslines strung between crumbling buildings that could be New York tenements. Weingarten's intimate perspective also comes across in a noirish image of the shadow of a pedestrian on a sidewalk in Rome and another severely cropped black and white print suggesting an orgy of classical statues.

Agus Sutikno is another photographer who draws with light—only Sutikno's emphasis on line lends her smaller black and white prints the feeling of Asian landscapes. A series of four exquisite "Winter Scenes" create a calligraphic effect with images of trees and twigs set against austere expanses of virgin snow, while two larger pictures called "Canyonland 1 and 2" present contrastingly baroque images of cloud and rock.

If not exactly black and white, David Ruskin's sepia toned photographs are monochromatic enough to qualify for this show, and they make a considerable contribution with their subtle, etching-like delineation of Central Park scenes, bonsai trees in a Japanese Garden. Ruskin's painterly approach is especially striking in his simple image of two pears, as well as in a dramatic view of the Cloisters rising over the tree-tops of Fort Tryon Park that looks more like Toledo, Spain, than New York.

Lori Weinless Fischler also generates considerable drama in solar prints and silver gelatin prints, with their brooding atmospheres and rich tonal contrasts. In one picture, skeletal trees claw at a cloudy sky; in another, two delicate white flowers glow from a dark background. In these, as well as an especially mysterious picture of a path through dark woods and shadowy foliage, Fischler casts a moody spell.

The photographs of Jean Prytyskacz focus on single isolated objects, imbuing them with the presence of portraits: a parking meter stands like a sentry; a sunflower, drooping on its stem, suggests a human figure bowing its head. Prytyskacz invariably finds the metaphoric meanings in simple things and conveys them to the viewer in impressive formal terms.

By contrast, Deena Weintraub sees surreal juxtapositions in mannequins and reflections in a store window or symbols of faded glamour in a run-down wig shop. Weintraub's image of a busted security gate on a darkened store-front bearing a "For Rent" sign is especially evocative, suggesting a poignant narrative of failure and loss.

—Robert Vigo

At The National Arts Club, "Pastels Only" Celebrates a Major Medium

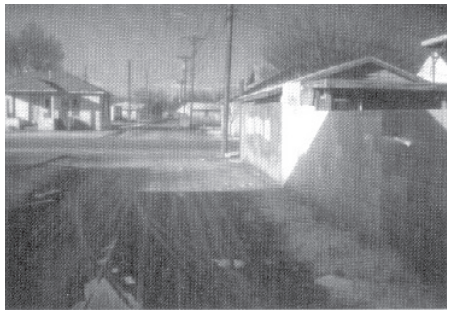
Pastel is the most versatile of art mediums. Although it can be employed for drawing, it is also a full fledged painting medium, comparable to oils, as evidenced by the rich range of effects achieved by such masters as Degas, Redon, and Whistler. And there is no better vehicle for discovering the wide range of aesthetic possibilities inherent in pastels than in a comprehensive survey such as "Pastels Only," the Thirty-First Annual Open Juried Exhibition of the Pastel Society of America, seen recently in the Grand Gallery of The National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South. (This year's exhibition catalog was also especially noteworthy, featuring an inspiring article by Peggy J. Rose on the pastels of the aforementioned Whistler.)

Reviewing such a show is a daunting prospect, for no critique of ordinary length could hope to do justice to its rich diversity, encompassing some 175 pieces. The writer can only present descriptions of representative works in the attempt to convey some sense of its scale and scope, as in the following capsule comments on some of the top award-winning paintings:

Daniel E. Greene gave us a tour de force of realism in "Bleecker Street," an evocative image of a pensive young woman alone on a subway platform, its pillars receding in perspective, its tiles reflecting the almost eerily sterile qualities of fluorescent light. Other prize-winners evoked distinctly different qualities of light, as seen in Brian Cobble's "Hatch Alley," where softly diffused sunlight and shadows evoke an elegiac mood, and Dianna Ponting's still life "Textures," with its richly modulated tonal contrasts and exquisite attention to subtly sensuous surfaces. Xiang-zhen Wang, on the other hand, demonstrated a gestural vivacity akin to abstraction in "Red Roses," where floral forms in a glass vase were evoked in vigorous strokes, while Anne Gable Allaire showed an impressive mastery of chiaroscuro in her vibrant landscape "Summer Solstice," with sun-drenched grass and foliage giving way to dark woods. Other complementary contrasts could be seen in Gang Gu's "Spring," where roosters and dry grass are rendered with a Wyeth-like exactitude, and Diane Rosen's "Two Bathers XVI," in which a dynamically cropped composition lent the figures an almost sculptural monumentality.

Being exempt from the competition does not stop the past and present officials of the PSA from exhibiting their proficiency in the medium. Present President Barbara Fischman, a consummate draftsperson, showed a work called "Guardian," depicting a pair of expressive human hands affectionately encircling the neck of a soulful-looking canine. The PSA's founder and past president Flora B. Giffuni was represented by a witty work with the title "The Models" spelled out in actual pastel sticks on a drawing of a palette containing collaged pastel portraits in place of the usual blobs of color.

The atmospheric effects possible in pastels were demonstrated in Nancy Popenoe's prize-winning picture "Chinatown," an impressionistic nocturnal view of a solitary figure waiting at a bus-stop in the red neon glow of a nearby liquor store, as well as in Angelo John Grado's "Love Lost II," an

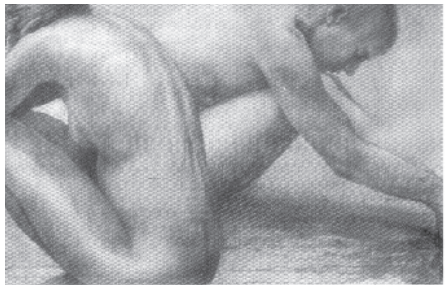


Brian Cobble

affecting image of a woman's garment draped across a chair in a cozily evoked room interior. By contrast, Pat Wipf's "Japanese Basket" transforms its subject into a strong abstract composition of thrusting green and ocher forms, the composition reminiscent for its dynamic thrust of Futurism. A sense of abstraction also enlivened Mary's Padgett's "Brook Trout," the three fish arranged on a blue plate set against a colorful tablecloth.

Ramon Kelley's "Aztec Mask" appeared to have been executed on thick watercolor paper, the application of pastel to its pebbled surface imbuing the image with a tactility akin to oil impastos. Sara Sue Pennell's approach to the medium had the lightness and clarity of egg tempera, in her fanciful image of a woman with two actual felines and a group of china bird figurines. Then there were Peter Seltzer, whose "Ascension" was a complex surreal composition involving an intricate array of objects and visions, and Joe Hing Lowe, whose award-winning "Red Robe" depicted a grouping of Chinese antiques and artifacts with a sumptuous technical virtuosity.

A new addition to this year's exhibition is "Pastels of Europe 2003," a special invitational selection of works from Russia, Bulgaria, France, Italy, and Spain. Particularly noteworthy among these were Serguey Kozovin's lyrical still life of an intriguing combination of objects on a table in front of a rain-streaked window; Mary Chaplin's luminous landscape "A Perfect



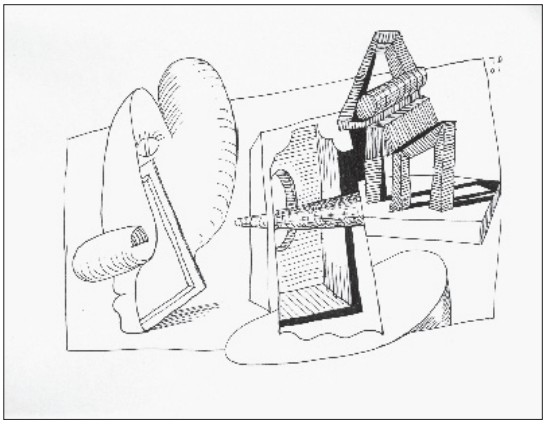
Diane Rosen

Day in Giverny," and Vladimir M. Charnyshov's "Hommage au Cubisme," wherein stylized figures amid angular abstract forms recall Richard Lindner.

Also on view were works by two European artists enlisted as honoree's in the PSA's 2003 Hall of Fame: Pierre Tchakhotine, born in Paris of Russian immigrant parents, by a vigorous pastel of a sinuous tree, and Sylvie Cabal, of Vernon, France, by a bold image of red flowers and shapely leaves set against a dark ground.

Both artists, along with their American peers in the PSA, made the point that pastel is a major international medium—or, as the organization's President put it in her introduction to the catalog "an important player in the world's arena of contemporary art."

—J. Sanders Eaton



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The WSAC's Visual Harmonies Resound in Avery Fisher Hall

The latest in a series of periodic large surveys by the West Side Arts Coalition, the juried exhibition "Creative Currents" was seen recently at Cork Gallery, Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center at 65th Street at Broadway.

Among the nineteen artists featured was the abstract painter Meyer Tannenbaum, who showed four recent paintings from his "Impact Series." These are some of Tannenbaum's most lyrical works for their graceful swerving lines and luminous color areas, akin to certain paintings by Kandinsky, albeit executed with Tannenbaum's own particular panache—and lack of brushes! Along with larger works, another abstract artist, Robert T. Shultheis, showed two exquisite smaller paintings notable for their exploration of circular forms and subtle colors. Miguel A'ngel Mora also continues to impress with his synthesis of geometric form and poetry, as seen to particular advantage in one painting juxtaposing a mirror, fragments of glass and a cruciform composition. David Shrobe, an energetic young artist feeling his way through a variety of modes, showed recent splash and drip abstractions with uninhibited color combinations. A standout among a group of abstract and figurative works by Karl J. Volk was "Requiem for Matthew," an affecting assemblage, presumably referring to the much publicized murder of a young gay man by homophobes in Wyoming. An intriguing mixture of figuration and abstraction enlivens the collages of Shirley Z. Piniat, who assembles fragments of magazine photos in mosaic-like compositions.

Eccentric, over-the-top figuration was also featured prominently: Joey Infante the- skirts banality but triumphs by sheer excess in paintings featuring voluptuous nudes in a nutty "Pink Flamingos" mood. Kehinde Peter Schulz creates bold compositions in which figurative fragments are juxtaposed with jigsaw forms in pastel hues; in one such canvas a formidable female face looms Rushmore-like in a mountain towering over a worshipful male. Then there is Marlene Zimmerman, by now well known for her big bright paintings of gorgeous women in a manner that can only be called Alex Katz meets Walasse Ting. Our favorite Zimmerman in this show featured three electric ladies as sassy as Bette Midler's backup singers. Laura Loving is another artist who pushes the envelope, combining the primitive intensity of so-called outsider art with Post-pop sophistication in her large cartoon-like painting of The Statue of Liberty set against the New York skyline. Then there is Valentina Suarez-Calvache, whose insightful large portrait of a Native American with one side of his face in shadow appears to comment on the paradox of being caught between two cultures.

Mike McDonald also turns up the volume in his own manner in bold, frosty landscapes and snowscapes with strong forms and dramatic colors. Particularly picturesque was McDonald's canvas of a woman outside a little cottage under looming mountains.

Peggy Sprung is an abstract painter with a subtle approach. Sprung employs subdued hues and seamlessly integrated collage elements to lend her mixed media works an elegant, low-key lyricism. By contrast, Leanne Martinson relies on bold black lines, strong color, and gestural energy to activate her abstract compositions on paper. Photographic artist Mae Jeon employs floral subjects that have apparently been digitally altered, creating the impression that they are decomposing or morphing into some more ethereal life form, in works notable for their intriguing abstract patterns.

Sculptors make an especially strong showing in this exhibition: Meg Boe Birns' free-standing painted pieces depict fanciful birds with great formal inventiveness; especially striking is her anthropomorphic avian figure in what appears to be ornate African garb. Contrastingly naturalistic, the bronzes of Mary Ann Geist capture figurative subjects, such as a craggy male head and a corpulent female nude with convincing detail and an impressive sense of volumes in space. Brian Tepper's abstract stone sculptures combine sensual, flowing forms and incised textures to allusive effect.

Martha Lerski's versatility ranges from the almost weightless grace of a wood sculpture shaped like a streamlined horizontal figure "8" to the more imposing presence seen in her work in limestone. Carleton B. Ingelton evokes the rhythms of reggae music visually in two baroquely configured wood sculptures that appear to relate to cubism and African sculpture. Then there is Jamillah Jennings, who comes at African themes from another direction in her powerful welded metal pieces, with their evocatively simplified figures suggesting masks and rituals.

All of the artists in "Creative Currents" were well chosen to provide the viewer with a stimulating survey of diverse trends and tendencies. One might imagine that a show so varied might be visually cacophonous. On the contrary, the artists involved, for all their differences of style and content, coexisted harmoniously. One might even say they melded symphonically in a manner auspiciously in keeping with the exhibition's Lincoln Center locale.

—Stuart Leslie Myers

At Viridian: A Sharp Focus on Select Gallery Artists

The thin line between preparedness and paranoia, patriotism and jingoism, in George Bush's America was explored by Bill Heard, one of the participants in "Focus 1: A Selection of Viridian Artists," the first in a series of showcase exhibitions, seen recently at Viridian Artists @ Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street.

Heard's realist painting "Burnie Pitzel, Patriot, Scans for Weapons of Mass Destruction" depicts a mature gentleman in a desolate landscape with Stonehenge-like rock formations and a scattering of tiny tourists in the distance. He is wearing earphones and a vigilant expression as he scans the ground with an instrument that looks like a combination of a Geiger counter and old-fashioned vacuum cleaner as an ominously overcast chemical sky looms overhead.

Equally zany is a lifesize wire sculpture by Heard called "Yee Hah." With the ease of a lasso tossed in the air, Heard's piece conjures up a gun-totin' Annie Oakley type cowgal struttin' her stuff on a star-shaped plexiglass base. Given our current political climate she seems the rootin' tootin spirit of the great state of Tex-Ass.

Nearby, Susan Sills' freestanding oil on wood cut-out sculptures cast their own wry spell. A "Bruegel Bagpiper" plays and "Bruegel Children" dance. Sharing the same floor is that dancing couple—you know, the woman in the red bonnet and the guy in the yellow straw hat—from another famous painting by Renoir. As with all of Sills' delightful post-Pop takes of familiar figures from art history, encountering them out of context, blown up to more or less lifesize, is like spotting one's favorite movie stars on the street. They look just as good in person!

Several of the artists in this show mine the fertile area between the abstract and representational:

Kathleen King's acrylic paintings can only be called metaphysical abstractions, with their intricate maze-like compositions, suggesting strange landscapes or interiors yet leaving us as to exactly what it is that we're looking at. Like the eccentric California artist William T. Wiley, King seems to dance to her own inner drummer; yet the formal boldness of her compositions and her way of layering daubs of confectionery color like bright confetti makes her paintings visually sumptuous as well as deliciously weird.

The objects that Sabine Carlson paints may be highway markers or something equally mundane, but they take on the quality of strange, impassive sentries in her mistily atmospheric oils on canvas. As a consequence one looks at these squat, fluorescently striped things as though one were a visitor from outer space inspecting the accouterments of earthlings for the first time and trying to decipher their meaning. Especially mysterious is Carlson's large triptych, in which the striped gizmos interact with clanky crane-like structures in what appears to be some toxic industrial wasteland.

Jordan Zweifler revels fruitfully in the eclecticism and ambiguity of postmodern aesthetics, life, and politics. His oils on canvas combine fragmented figures, gestural vigor, textual semiotics, and flat areas of bright color in a manner simultaneously akin to artists as diverse as R.B. Kitaj, Jean Michel Basquiat, and early pre-silkscreen Warhol—the last particularly in the canvas Zweifler calls "Good to the Last Drop." In Zweifler's "Woman Thermometer Variants," shapely female figures sprout from a thermometer like tree branches in a manner at once cerebral and surreal, as in certain paintings by Picabia, albeit with Zweifler's own peculiar painterly panache.

Bob Tomlinson employs classical anatomy as a vehicle for gestural abstraction. Employing flowing oil washes on canvas, Tomlinson sets nude male and female figures afloat in compositions that evoke baroque atmospheres, even while focusing forcefully on form and rhythm as formal autonomous entities. At the same time, the narrative subtext that Tomlinson's stridently mannered figures suggest makes his work all the more compelling.

Amid all these postmodernists, Janet L. Bohman is the odd artist out, in that she has stubbornly adhered to a stringent modernist aesthetic since the mid 1970s. Bohman's commitment pays off handsomely in her dynamic shaped wall reliefs created with linen or paper stretched over shaped armatures. For decades, Bohman has sought to evoke the spirit of flight and she does so splendidly in pieces such as "Phoenixing" and "Flying V," in which streamlined shapes, their surfaces enhanced by vibrant stripes of color, convey an exhilarating velocity.

—Lawrence Downes

Iliyan Ivanov: Visual Composition as "Musical" Event

Iliyan Ivanov is hardly the first contemporary artist to be inspired by music, but he has certainly captured its spirit more strikingly than most in his exhibition "Full Palette Jam," which can be seen at The Consulate General of the Republic of Bulgaria in New York, 121 East 62nd Street, from November 17 through 30. (The artist will be present for a reception in the gallery on November 19th from 6:30 to 8:30 PM.)

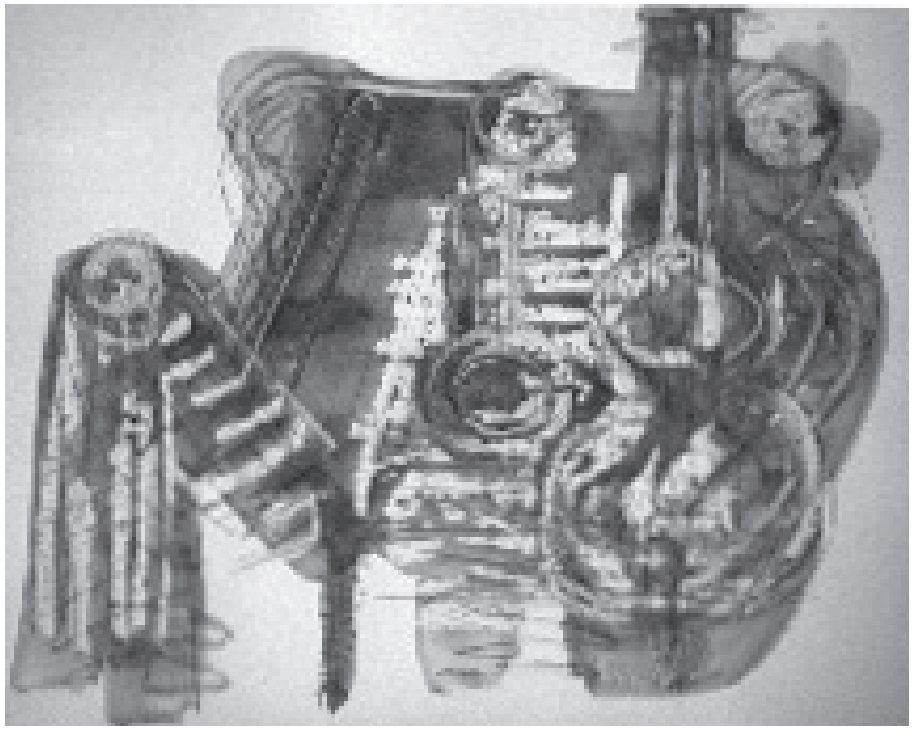
Born in 1963 on the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria, Ivanov studied with several major Bulgarian artists, including Raina Racheva, Valentin Atanasov, and Georgy Yanakiev. After immigrating to the United States in 1994, he has been living in New York since 1997. In 1997, his work was presented in a previous solo show at the Bulgarian Consulate in New York, and he has also shown in various other venues and events in the city, among them the Times Square Art for Peace Project and the Chashama Artists-in-Residence Auction.

The pieces in the present show are but a part of an ongoing project called "The Music Series," and if they are any indication of its overall quality this promises to be an important body of work. As in earlier projects, Ivanov conceives these works as "an interactive series—like words in a sentence, verses in a song, or chapters in a book."

His intention is for the viewer to become an active participant in the process of interpreting these paintings, which he believes is "analogous to the composer-performer collaboration."

Interestingly, Ivanov likes to employ what he calls "incompatible materials," such as water soluble pigments, in combination with ink and oil pastels, taking the whole idea of mixed media to an extreme that he obviously finds creatively stimulating. We all know of course that oil and water do not mix, and the artist states that their resistant qualities enhance the spontaneity of the series in a manner that he equates with "freely expanding improvisations upon classical music scales."

What immediately strikes one in "Full Palette Jam" is Ivanov's vigorous approach, which has qualities in common with both the jazz watercolors of the collage artist Romare Bearden and Zen Ink painting. The latter comparison seems especially apt in regard to the boldness and brevity of these paintings, with their



"Music Series"

gestural strokes creating a sense of swiftness and velocity. The main thrust of the compositions is accomplished with diluted gray ink washes laid down in broad strokes over linear elements drawn in crayon, creating the "resist" effect that Ivanov prizes. In many of the pictures, the starkly simplified figures of musicians and musical instruments are sketched in with oil crayon and the washes are laid over them to create the overall thrust of the composition, which often has a calligraphic quality akin to Asian written characters derived from pictographs.

In this regard, Ivanov seems a kindred spirit of the artists in Scandinavia's CoBra group—particularly Pierre Alechinsky who also works with ink and is inspired by the brush pyrotechnics, if not the imagery, of Chinese painting. Like Alechinsky, Ivanov employs such influences to achieve his own ends, following the line wherever it takes him, combining Art Brut energy with consummate formal sophistication.

Each composition comes across as a virtuoso performance, an event occurring on the painting surface as much as a visual image. In one painting, a trumpet and bass fiddle are swiftly indicated with bold strokes of golden yellow oil crayon that resist the broad areas of gray wash flowing over them, thus becoming prominent elements in the composition, while the musicians and a flowing outline of a piano take on a more shadowy quality. In another work it is a guitar and a viola that emerge similarly from an even more abstract configuration that for all its splashy freedom conjures up the impression of musicians so thoroughly caught up in the music they become one with its fluid rhythms. Indeed, few artists manage to abstract their forms so thoroughly, so freely, while still projecting a palpable figurative presence, as Ivanov does here.

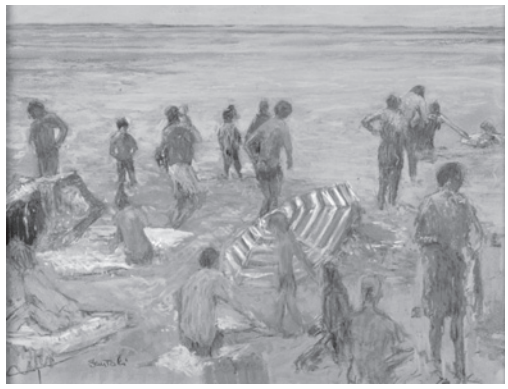
Although music is the ostensible theme of this exhibition, all of Ivanov's paintings celebrate the joys of the creative process in the most direct possible way, relying for their ultimate appeal on their untrammeled gestural autonomy and an almost audacious form of "action painting" akin to that of the French artist Georges Mathieu, who, in the 1950s, actually created paintings before an audience in a theater. For Iliyan Ivanov, however, the performance space is the painting itself, which becomes an arena for compelling visual dramas characterized by a vivacious immediacy.

—Byron Coleman

Ugo Santoli's Pastels Celebrate Simple Beauty in the Everyday

One is told that the Italian painter Ugo Santoli, who has been an artist since his youth, took up pastel as his main medium of expression after he was appointed to the faculty of the architecture at the University of Naples. Because it is a "dry" medium, one can well imagine that a professional architect and professor might find pastel painting more expedient to work into his busy schedule than either oils or acrylics. Santoli, however, seems to have found a great deal more than convenience in his choice of pastels, on the evidence of his brilliant recent solo show at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway.

Indeed, pastels seem the perfect medium to complement Ugo Santoli's neo-impressionist style, for he paints in it like a contemporary Bonnard, utilizing short, swift strokes of color to activate the surface of his genre scenes with shimmering color. Like the great Impressionists he so obviously admires, Santoli is drawn to nature and everyday life. Working on cardboard panels he conjures up subtle qualities of light in his scenes of people gathered in public parks, swimming pools, and beaches. His pictures celebrate the simple pleasures of life in a manner that is rare and refreshing in today's art world, where many seem to have forgotten such things in their desperation to come up with attention-getting strategies.



"Tutti al Mare"

Santoli's simple pictures, all executed on a modest scale, compel our attention effortlessly with their unpretentious subjects, buoyant colors, and uplifting compositions. We experience them vicariously, almost as though we can walk into them and feel the warmth of the sunlight that makes every inch of each composition glow invitingly.

In one idyllic picture, "Tutti al Mare," figures are seen wading in the water or relaxing on blankets on a beach enlivened by brightly colored umbrellas and the leisurely movement of the bathers. Especially appealing here is the artist's handling of the water in luminous horizontal strokes of pale blue and green that capture its reflective quality and enhances the sunny serenity of the scene.

Water plays an even larger part in the composition of another pastel entitled "La Babysitter," where subtle strokes of blue, green, yellow, pale violet, and white are woven together to exuberant chromatic effect in a scene depicting a woman seated at poolside watching over a wading child.

In another painting by Santoli, entitled "Mercatino a Buljarica," figures milling about in an open-air market create a dazzling patchwork effect akin to some paintings by the American Impressionist Maurice Prendergast. The manner in which Santoli employs the colors in the figures' clothing, as well as the foliage, to create lively patterns also recalls Vuillard and the Nabis, who appear to be aesthetic forbearers of this gifted Italian contemporary.

Also including dazzling floral paintings such as "Natura Viva" and unpopulated garden scenes such as "Luce Nel Giardino," Ugo Santoli's exhibition provided an exhilarating alternative to much that is negative and gloomy in contemporary painting.

—Maureen Flynn

Koho and Her Students Bring Sumi-e Wizardry to Westbeth

Koho Yamamoto is one of the true treasures of New York City, as anyone who has ever passed by the Koho School of Sumi-e, in a storefront at 64 MacDougal Street, and seen the diminutive octogenarian artist and teacher at work, can attest.

Koho, as she signs her paintings and is known to all, is a master of Japanese brush technique and her success in passing her gift on to others was evident in the exhibition "Works on Paper by Koho Yamamoto, Sensei, and Her Students," seen recently at Westbeth Artist Housing, Studio A101, 55 Bethune Street.

Featured were a magnificent selection of paintings by Koho herself. One of the most striking was a large work in Sumi ink on rice paper comprised of a few elegant linear strokes. Although it appeared at first to be an abstract composition, on closer inspection it evoked the movements of fish in water with breathtaking economy.

Also on view were a group of smaller works, basically abstract but alluding to landscape, which demonstrated that Koho is as proficient in watercolor as she is in monochromatic ink painting.

It is to her credit as a teacher that her students develop individual styles, rather than merely imitating the Sensei (the Japanese term of respect for a great teacher). Allison Armstrong, for example, works in black and white in a bold manner reminiscent of both Japanese calligraphy and the Abstract Expressionism of Franz Kline. By contrast, Eva Mihovich employs watercolor in a bold realist style, as seen in her masterful painting of a cat looking as though it was about to spring to life and snap out at the artist's red seal—or "chop"— floating above its head on the white paper.

So Yoon Lym's ink paintings have a funky, contemporary quality— particularly in one work with the word "Vito" spelled out in the style of "bubble writing" graffiti kids favor and emerging from ornate psychedelic-looking swirls. By contrast, Einat Grinbaum demonstrates how even the most traditional subjects can convey the individual character of the artist in Sumi-e painting, with her delicate image of bamboo leaves bending in the wind. Then there is M. Magid who moves easily between bold abstract compositions, such as one ink painting featuring densely layered curves, and delicate watercolors of traditional subjects such as plum blossoms.

Darlene Margeta is another artist with a delicate touch in her lyrical paintings of insects and flowers, their sinuous stems evoked in graceful strokes. Birds, another traditional subject, are depicted in distinctly different manners by three other artists: In Anne M. Lantelme's ink paintings of blackbirds, the artist's bold calligraphy and the placement of her red seal are essential elements in the composition. Leone Fogle's simple picture of a single gray pigeon also demonstrates how the precise placement of the image on the white paper can make all the difference in Sumi-e painting. Then there is Dorothy Zagami who combines strong ink lines with piquant touches of watercolor in her bird paintings, which show once again how tradition and originality can converge.

Koho Yamamoto

Dogs are a less traditional subject, especially the way Sarah Hauser paints them, making each picture a tiny portrait as humorously charming as the canines of the New Yorker cartoonist George Booth, albeit with the linear grace we associate with Japanese ink painting. Other artists, such as Kat Lutomska, who has been a student of Koho for eight years, and Elizabeth Fairgrieve employ calligraphy as a vehicle to abstraction in their own distinctive manners. All told, this exhibit spoke well for both Koho's abilities as a teacher and the individual talents of her students.

—Maurice Taplinger

Virginia Evans Smit: A Travelogue of Transformation

Over the course of her career, the painter, printmaker and educator Virginia Evans Smit, who lives in New York City, has traveled extensively around the world. However, it was not until shortly after September 11th 2001 that she realized how little she had seen of the beauty of her own country. Embarking on a trip to Japan for the opening of an exhibition she was in with other artists, she took the long way around: traveling by train across Canada and down the West Coast to Los Angeles, then flew to Tokyo and traveled within Japan. After returning to the United States, she again boarded a train and traveled to the Grand Canyon, Las Vegas, New Orleans and Florida.

All during the forty-five day journey, she took photographs and mentally absorbed the landscape from the window of her moving train, while also holding in her mind a photo that her son had taken of the devastation at Ground Zero. The confluence of that image of destruction and the beauty that she was witnessing as the American landscape unfolded before her, mingling with her memories of Japan, sparked the theme for Virginia Evans Smit's many-leveled exhibition "Snapshots: A Journey from 9/11 to 11/9," which can be seen at Viridian Artists Inc., 530 West 25th Street, from November 4 through 22. (There will be a reception for the artist on Saturday, November 8, from 4 to 7 PM.)

Anyone who saw Virginia Evans Smit's previous exhibition in the same venue in April of 2001 will remember that there is a bittersweet quality in her work, a sense of "emotion recollected in tranquility," to quote Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry, that can be deeply affecting. Smit seems bent on rescuing facets of memory from the ravages of time and forgetfulness. Her present show is especially moving for the tenderness with which she preserves her impressions of her two month journey through North America and Japan, two countries, once at war, that now share the indelible memory of having had terrible destruction wreaked upon their shores.

The exhibition presents a select body of landscapes created in monotypes in which Smit employs photo transfer to integrate some of her travel images and certain historical images, to "echo the past and present," as she puts it, along with lithography, collage. The resulting prints are richly layered with images that reflect the simultaneity of memory in lyrical compositions enlivened by Smit's characteristic gestural vitality and coloristic richness.

Subjects of this internal travelogue range from the picturesque to the haunting. To the first category belongs "New Orleans," a monoprint with chine colle. Enlivened by the freshness of first impressions, the print depicts the ornate wrought iron balconies characteristic of the architecture of the Big Easy overflowing with plant life. Here, the manner in which Smit overlays a ground saturated with a vibrant blue hue with bright linear traceries to define windows, shutters, and the lush green and yellow foliage calls to mind both Henri Matisse and Raoul Dufy.

Kyoto, monoprint, 26" x 18" 2003

In contrast to the calligraphic lines and bright colors in "New Orleans," another print called "Ghosts of Cowboys and Native Americans" juxtaposes faded historical photo-images with a hilly Western landscape awash in yellow ocher. Significantly, here the cowboys as well as the Native Americans are people of color, being African-Americans—a people whose presence on the frontier is rarely acknowledged in media depictions of the Old West.

Smit's makes copious use of her own photographs in the "Canadian Rockies Series," where images of snow-capped mountains, evergreen trees, and totems are saturated in blue and violet hues and drawn over with gestural strokes that mirror and emphasize the rhythms of the majestic vista. Here, too, the imagistic fragmentation and layering in combination with broadly brushed strokes of color of an almost Abstract Expressionist boldness and vivacity makes for some of Smits' most vigorous and freewheeling compositions.

Smit's monotype "The Plains" has an oddly melancholy beauty, depicting clustered farm dwellings on a flat horizon line under an expanse of deep blue sky. This monotype with collage speaks eloquently of the unrelieved rawness of the terrain and the often unforgiving quality of life in the flatlands, with the simple human dwellings dwarfed by that huge sky and the desolation of all that reddish brown earth.

By contrast, Smit's monoprints inspired by her time in Japan convey the excitement of discovering new territory. In "Kyoto," the portal of a temple is superimposed boldly over photo-transfer images suggesting the pleasures of tourism, her ability to unite these disparate elements in a coherent composition comparing favorably with that of Rauschenberg. Then there is "Fuji," in which the forms of the colorful Japanese fish called koi swirl splashily around in a pool of water juxtaposed with an ornate pagoda-like structure, set against the famous mountain, in a spatial tour de force.

On returning to New York, Virginia Evans Smit recalls seeing the "pillars of light" rising up where the Twin Towers once were and experiencing a sense of hope. For the visitor to this exhibition, a similar hopefulness is conveyed in Smit's monoprint with lithography "N.Y. Woods," a lyrical pastoral vision of two baby deer silhouetted amid leafy trees, projecting a redemptive sense of peace, serenity, and spiritual healing.

—Ed McCormack

Expressiveness and Flexibility in the Art of Kohichiro Tanuma

Honest passion being in somewhat short supply in the contemporary art scene, where irony so often rules the day, it is always refreshing to encounter work as direct as that of the Japanese painter Kohichiro Tanuma, who has evolved a vibrant Neo-Expressionist style in which figures, human and otherwise, are infused with considerable vitality. Tanuma achieves this by virtue of his bold brush work and color combinations that jump with a neon-like intensity. The most obvious example can be seen in the painting called "Times Square," where broadly blocked in areas of red, yellow, and blue capture the kinetic movement of the subject with dazzling effectiveness. The entire scene, which includes giant billboards, pedestrians, and vehicles streaming along the light-filled thoroughfare, comes alive with an electric energy.

Tanuma, however, imparts a similar energy to every subject in his exhibition at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, from November 22 through December 3, with a reception for the artist on Saturday, November 22, from 4 to 6 PM.

In "Horse Face II," for example, even the relatively static image of an equine head, with its bulging eyes and prominent teeth, is stylized in a manner that makes one think of the animal figures in Picasso's "Guernica," although Tanuma's thick black outlines and luminous blocks of color have a stained-glass

"The Enlightened Man"

quality more akin to the style of the American modernist painter Abraham Rattner. In any case, Tanuma delineates the figure with a fierce intensity that imparts to it a mythic quality.

Equally powerful in its own manner is "Lion," in which the animal figure takes on a regal quality personifying the term "king of beasts" by virtue of its golden hue and the baroque formal stylization that serves to give Tanuma's compositions their dynamic thrust. Here, the lion's mane and muscular limbs lend the artist an opportunity for creating ornate linear flourishes. The addition of areas of blocky brilliant red and blue in the background contributes further to the richness of effect, suggesting an opulence befitting a feline deity.

By contrast, almost cartoon-like drawing and looser paint-handling characterize the composition called "Family Affair," which depicts the apparently harmonious interaction of what appears to be two cats and one dog. One says "apparently" because here, the anatomical particulars of the animals are generalized in a manner that makes literal interpretation slightly hazardous. The picture has a brash emblematic presence akin to some of Emil Nolde's boldest watercolors.

An entirely different mood comes across in another painting by Tanuma, entitled "Song for Akio." Here, both the colors and the execution are considerably more delicate, with the figure of a rather wan-looking angel set against a pale violet background, enlivened by flecks of brighter yellow and red hues. In this painting, the artist projects a more mystical, perhaps even elegiac mood, just as convincingly as he evokes brasher subjects, demonstrating that he is capable of subtlety, as well as boldness, when the occasion calls for it. Such versatility affords this gifted Japanese artist an expressive flexibility that enables him to imbue each subject that he paints with its own unique character, as seen in his zany portrait of a clown-like figure called "The Enlightened Man," the intriguing phrase that also serves as the title of Tanuma's exhibition.

—Lawrence Downes

Peckolick's Subliminal Sign Language

We live in a world inundated with signs, a realization which has given us the study of semiotics and some of the most astute writings of Roland Barthes. Everywhere we go, we are besieged by images, logos, and fragments of text. They permeate our consciousness and to some degree define our mental landscape. As a successful designer and commercial artist Bronx-born Pratt graduate Alan Peckolick inhabited this landscape professionally for years.

Now, as a fine artist recently featured in an exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, Peckolick employs letterforms and signage in accomplished photorealist paintings in acrylic and oil pastel on paper.

While the letterforms and logos that Peckolick worked with in his design career were probably pristine and unblemished, the opposite is true in his paintings. Signs drawn from his own photography are transformed by time and the grime of the urban environment. He captures their character with the insight of a portrait painter who does not flatter his subjects. Rather, he delineates the kind of beauty that we see in the faces of mature people who have known both joy and suffering, and have survived scarred but unbowed.

Indeed, the expressive quality of Peckolick's work sets it apart from that of other artists such as Andy Warhol, who began as an illustrator, and James Rosenquist who worked as a sign painter. While both Warhol and Rosenquist carried impassive commercial surfaces over into their work as Pop artists without inflection, Peckolick does the opposite—employing them to convey atmosphere and a sense of urban drama.

Without introducing a linear narrative, Peckolick's painting "Hardware," for example, hints at the perils of modern life with phrases such as "Burglar Stop Gates." Here, too, the last letter of the word "Paint" is partially obscured, so that it registers another message—at least subliminally. A shadow falling across the sign enhances the mood, while bird droppings streaming down over the letters lend a visual appeal akin to the drips and splatters in certain canvases by the Abstract Expressionists.

Stains, tears, rust, and other imperfections, which Peckolick obviously seeks out selectively and renders in a trompe l'oeil manner, add a tactile quality to other paintings, such as "Griffon on Seventh" and "Travel" to rival that of the Italy's Art Povera artists—who present actual torn street posters as found art works.

The dramatic allusiveness that distinguishes Alan Peckolick's work from that of his

"Zipper Factory"

Pop predecessors is especially striking in the painting he calls "Coke," a word with contemporary connotations that go beyond the word "Cola," which we see emblazoned across a building in a noirish nocturnal cityscape that also includes a shadowy figure glimpsed in a window. Here, a stylish post-Pop synthesis of pulp detective magazine cover illustration and Hopperesque desolation creates a mood that makes one eager to see more of this gifted artist, who has been well received in Japan as well as New York.

For while Alan Peckolick has been justly praised by the New York Times for painting "signs as they appear on the walls, ravaged by time," his work has an even deeper dimension of submerged meanings that make it doubly appealing.

— Robert Vigo

Yoko Ito's Fertile Aesthetic Harvest

The Japanese artist Yoko Ito has staked out a single locale for her aesthetic inspiration, yet from it she generates themes with universal resonance and significance. Her subject is the culture of Okinawa. She does not fully understand why she is attracted to this one place, she says, but adds that painting is nonetheless her nonverbal way of understanding her connection to its specific culture.

In Yoko Ito's exhibition at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, from December 6 to 20, the artist explores the Harvest in Okinawa, depicting local vegetables and plants, as well as a god who presides over a rich harvest. Each of these subjects is painted as a discrete work on a separate paper or board, then all are assembled to create an overall installation.

The beauty of the individual pieces springs from Ito's combination of delicate linear detail and compositional boldness. Each painting centers on a single object, often plant forms presented in an emblematic manner that can make one think of Georgia O'Keeffe's famous floral paintings—albeit with a decidedly Asian accent. One painting, for example, depicts a single red flower filling a good portion of the composition, against a subtle golden ground. Each petal is delineated in detail, yet the red form has a strong abstract presence. Also, there is an easy interplay of naturalism and formal ornamentation, here manifested in the decorative swirls on the golden ground around the quite realistically realized floral subject.

Equally impressive is another painting of a white flower glowing from a gold background. Here, the paler palette draws the eye inward, to the graceful strokes delineating the petals, their monochromatic delicacy as evocative as that in the ink studies of orchids and chrysanthemum by the eighteenth century Japanese master Yosa Buson.

Indeed, it seems to be a particular attribute of at least some Japanese art to transcend time in a way that Western art rarely can. Yoko Ito's floral forms certainly have this quality, in that they appear simultaneously ancient and contemporary. They are timeless manifestations of a sublime sensibility that comes to us down through the ages. Often, tradition and innovation seem to go hand in hand in Japan, where apparently the pressure to be an iconoclast is not quite so desperately felt as in some Western countries —particularly the U.S.

This sense of cultural continuity lends Yoko Ito's paintings a good deal of their appeal, as seen in her painting in a long vertical, scroll-like format of a mysterious white looming mask-like face against a dark ground. Presumably a harvest god, this broad, beaming visage has a Buddha-like presence. Its oversized ears, with their floppy lobes, almost seem to sustain it like wings as it hovers, disembodied yet serene, above what appear to be two decoratively stylized gold clouds. Ideally bald, grinning broadly, his eyes radiating mirth, this is obviously a benign deity whose benevolence will encourage the crops to grow and farmers to prosper.

"Miruku"

Yoko Ito makes such subjects her own and makes us see them in a new light.

—Walter Herlihy

The Gestural Force of Ju Won Park

We admire certain artists for their unfailing ability to wrest a variety of effects from a severely limited visual vocabulary. A good case in point is the Korean painter Ju Won Park, whose newest exhibition can be seen at Gallery 32, 32 West 32nd Street, from November 10 through 31, with a reception on Monday, November 10, from 5 to 8 PM.

Ju Won Park has exhibited widely throughout Korea and Japan, and her New York exhibitions have already garnered her an enthusiastic following here as well. Her work has been compared favorably to both the American Abstract Expressionist Franz Kline and his French counterpart in L'Art Informel Pierre Soulages. Ju Won Park, however, has her own unique approach, and on the evidence of the present exhibition, she appears to be honing it continually.

Painting by Ju Won Park

Her palette consists of three colors, black, blue, and brown, with the white of the primed canvas, which plays a prominent role in her compositions, serving as the fourth. However, she attains a wide range of subsidiary tones through thinning her pigments, presumably with turpentine, to create liquidly flowing glazes that interact in a highly animated manner with her broad thrusting strokes of color. Ju Won Park's forms resemble broad beams and crossbeams that converge and intersect on her white grounds. With them, she literally builds her compositions in much the same manner that the American sculptor Mark di Suvero constructed his mammoth pieces with great beams of wood. Indeed, even in two dimensions, Ju Won Park's paintings have a similar sense of heft and presence, yet they also possess a paradoxical levity that makes them simultaneously weightless.

Few painters, in fact, achieve a similar tension between the material and the ethereal as Ju Won Park does in these muscularly thrusting compositions, which appear to have been accomplished with just a few sure strokes of a brush as broad as a broom or, in some cases, a wide trowel. Exactly how she achieves her effects is beside the point and perhaps better left to the imagination. Suffice it to say that the subtle tonal variations and contrasts between amorphous films of thinned pigment and more solid color areas create a great deal of visual interest. This is particularly true around the edges of her central forms, where deep black stains saturate the ground and sometimes mingle with transparent stains and blots of the strident blue hue that Ju Won Park favors as a piquant accent to her deeper, darker colors.

But above all, it is the authoritative way in which this artist lays down her broad, beamlike strokes to construct calligraphic compositions characterized by a singular boldness that creates the excitement in her large canvases. Some suggest cruciforms. Others are more cursive, like severely cropped Asian characters. All of Ju Won Park's paintings are powerful gestural tours de force, emphatically energetic and filled with a vitality that sets this Korean painter apart as a talent to watch.

—Byron Coleman

Tokyo in Soho Redux: Japan Art Alliance at Westwood Gallery

Here in the United States,we tend to get news of contemporary Japanese art in easy to digest sound-bites. We love populist extravaganzas such as Takashi Murakami's "Reversed Double Helix"

Masafumi Terai

installation in Rockefeller Center. We take smug pride in hearing how enamored the Japanese are of American fads and popular culture. And despite Japan's longstanding manga tradition (which actually dates back to Hokusai), we see the cartoon influence in Nyrakami's work and other Japanese Pop and so-called Superflat artists as confirmation of the alleged love affair.

In fact, there is a great deal more to Japanese contemporary art than cute cartoon characters and worshipful tributes to the most banal aspects of the American mass media. International Curator James Cavello and his business partner Margarite Almeida know this very well. They travel to Japan frequently, have a keen interest in the country's art scene, and over the years have exhibited some of most distinguished Japanese artist in their Soho venue, Westwood Gallery, 578 Broadway, at Prince Street.

Recently, Westwood Projects, a division of Westwood Gallery, mounted their second "Japan Art Alliance" exhibition, organized in conjunction with ALC, Japan, a Tokyo-based arts organization with the stated goal of providing "more opportunities for up and coming artists who have created recognition for their artwork in Japan."

As I stated in a review of the organization's first exhibition at Westwood last year, and seems relevant to repeat here, to most emerging Japanese artists, for all intents and purposes New York City is the art world. Because few opportunities exist for them to exhibit in Japan, New York City boasts a vibrant Japanese immigrant art community. Many of the younger Japanese artists are centered in the East Village, where there are now numerous Japanese restaurants and even a modern Japanese supermarket fully stocked with imported products. But by the time they have lived here for awhile, they are already so well assimilated into the neo-hipster culture of the city that they are no longer susceptible to their own country's influences and must be viewed not as contemporary Japanese artists, but as cultural hybrids. New York City will do that to you, no matter where you are from; it will pretty much erase your identity and impose a new one on you that you will need as social armor simply to survive the intense onslaught of influences that we are all prey to here every day.

Thus, it is valuable and instructive for the American art audience to have an exhibition such as the one that James Cavello recently curated at Westwood Gallery if we

Tetsugo Nakamura

are to get a sense of what contemporary Japanese art amounts to in its purest form. And the good news is that by reducing the number of artists from twenty last year to nine this year, Cavello and the ALC have given us an even more sharply focused and coherent picture of the kind of work being done by the best and the brightest emerging artists in Japan.

One thing that should not come as a surprise to those of us who are familiar with Japanese contemporary art on a level that cuts through all the media hype and yada yada yada about American influences and so on is the use of natural materials such as wood and paper by some of these artists. A reverence for nature and its resources and byproducts has always been strong in Japan, where wood carving and woodcut making are cultural staples and exquisite paper is produced from mulberry bark and a variety of other natural materials. Japanese avant garde artists such as Shirago Fujiko and Tsuruko Yamasaki were continuing the ages old tradition of using wood and paper in the 1950s and contemporary Japanese artists are still doing so today, as seen in the work of Toshihiro Noguchi and Kenichi Kato, two of the artists featured at Westwood.

Like his great namesake Isamu Noguchi— who said, "The older it is, the more archaic and primitive, the better I like it, because the repeated distillation of art brings you back to the primordial" — Toshihiro Noguchi is a sculptor with the ability to contain thousands of years of tradition in a thoroughly contemporary manner. His carved wood sculptures are possessed of great natural elegance, with their combination of craggy and smoothly worked surfaces and their graceful forms that seem to flow with the grain of the wood. They look as though they grew of their own accord or, like trees struck by lightning, assumed their fantastic shapes through some act of nature rather than by the intervention of human hand.

Kenichi Kato takes the Japanese love of handmade paper to new heights, working on an armature of wire mesh to create large scale wall reliefs with great power and presence. Despite the lightness of the material, they have the appearance of monolithic stone tablets inscribed by some unknown ancient tribe, an effect enhanced by the esoteric looking symbols that decorate their surfaces. Soon after the show at Westwood opened, Kenichi Kato's work was selected for an exhibition at an American museum specializing in art created with paper, an indication that ALC's

Fujiko Komatsu

mission of providing opportunities for emerging Japanese artists is succeeding.

The cultural continuity in Japanese art is demonstrated in another way in Toshihiko Iikubo's affecting photo essay on Munakata Shiko (1903-1975), the great 20th century artist known for revolutionizing the scale of woodblock prints in Japan, creating huge pieces for screens and wall murals. Besides being a visual artist, Shiko was a poet, and to view Iikubo's portraits of the elderly and diminutive artist at work in his studio shortly before his death is like coming face to face with one of the great hermit literati painter/poets of ancient Japan.

Shiko accomplished his work despite being extremely nearsighted. Iikubo's beautiful black and white gelatin silver prints capture Shiko carving with his face so close to the block that he almost appears to merge with it, or inspecting a brush with his thick lenses in the same manner, as though to sense as much as see it. In these and other images collected in a book that could be purchased at Westwood Gallery during the exhibition, Toshihiko Iikubo gives us an intimate and unforgettable glimpse of genius.

One of the more eccentric pleasures in the show are the bronze sculptures of Akihito Suzuki whose work makes the wildest anatomical anomalies seem oddly logical. In one of Akihito's pieces a leg and foot sprouts from an armless female nude where the head should be; in another piece, the head is replaced by a hand. In a third piece, a three-legged figure has an eyehook instead of a head and dangles at the center of a weird pyramidal structure. What makes Suzuki's sculptures so fascinating is how the artist's mastery of classical anatomy plays off against the misplacement of body parts in a manner akin to the perverse erotic drawings of Hans Bellmer.

Another kind of ambiguity comes across in the work of of Fujiko Komatsu, who wields an airbrush with great skill to create paintings in a style that could be called "abstract realism." For while Komatsu paints automobiles—apparently an unusual subject for a female artist in Japan—her images are severely cropped or seen from odd angles that make them all but unrecognizable, and the fact that all of the autobodies, and consequently the entire surface of the painting, is the same blue hue, makes the work all the more mysterious. The eye is drawn to shadows, fallen leaves, or beads of water on the surface of the hood or windshield, which becomes a reflective terrain of otherworldly microcosms.

Another woman artist, Kazumi Fujimoto, employs wire, enamel, beads, and metal to create fanciful objects remarkable for their combination of opulence and whimsy. Titles such as "Earth Sofa," and "Crown of the Sea" indicate that Fujimoto sees such subjects not as inanimate objects but unique life-forms—a notion that comes across especially well in the latter piece, which simultaneously suggests an elaborate crown and a bejeweled octopus.

Two other artists employ digital technology in their own unique manners:

One of Masafumi Terai's atmospheric prints conjures a surreal realm where a towering structure of giant mechanical cogs, illuminated by a lone lamp-post, looms amid desolate dunes, and infinite planetary expanse peeks through the gathering clouds. In another print by Terai a ghostly, smoke-spewing locomotive traverses a trestle to nowhere under a luminous golden sky.

By contrast, Rin Fujino's lyrical image of a willowy young woman in a pink kimono engulfed by delicate white blossoms demonstrates the Japanese ability to marry tradition to technology, evoking a timeless subject with state of the art computer animation techniques.

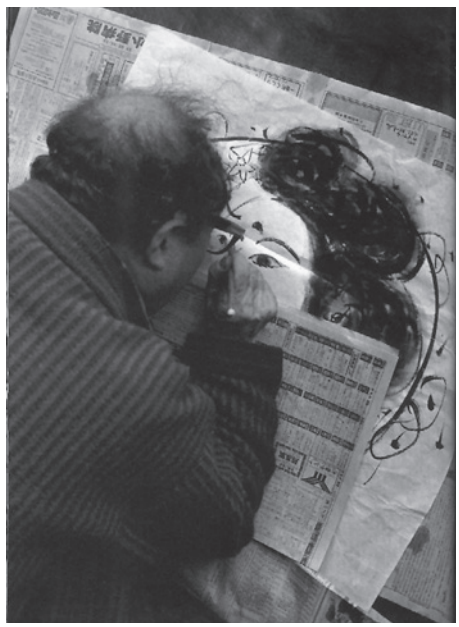
Then there is Tetsugo Nakamura, who was also featured in the first exhibition last year, and returns with new works in acrylic and mixed media. In Nakamura's Post-pop paintings, 1950s retro imagery is fragmented on fractured planes in dazzling kandy kolored compositions. By juxtaposing a classic B-movie cowgirl and her horse, a rebel motorcyclist in a black leather jacket, a sultry blonde with a cigarette dangling from her bright red lips, pastel gum-balls, and amusing broken-English phrases like "Pick-up on a come-on girl," Nakamura creates a kaleidoscopic cultural melange with wide-ranging social implications matched by considerable visual impact.

On the strength of this second "Japan Art Alliance" exhibition, one can only hope that ALC, Japan, and Westwood Projects will consider making this an annual event. As such, it would certainly be eagerly anticipated by all who wish to keep up with developments in a country where the shortage of exhibition opportunities has obviously done little to lesson the creative spirit.

—Ed McCormack

Toshihiro Noguchi

Kazumi Fujimoto



Toshihiko Iikubo

Formal Variety Animates the Paintings of Richard Kraff

Widely exhibited in his home state of Arizona, Richard Kraff is a painter whose work embraces duality. Perhaps this has to do with the fact that, as he himself put it in a recent artist's statement, "I have a formal education and employment background in both artistic and technical fields."

In any case, Kraff's style showed an intriguing synthesis of the gestural and hard-edge techniques in his recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, in Soho.

Another important influence on Kraff's work is that he has lived in the Southwestern area of the United States for most of his life, and the intense sunlight of the desert environment has undoubtedly affected his palette, with its brilliant colors, which imbue his paintings with real chromatic sizzle. Indeed, some of his sinuous linear strokes of color waver like the pulsations one sees—or perhaps merely senses—on the desert when the heat becomes so palpable as to be almost visible. And the sun itself is the central motif of Kraff's powerful large canvas "Conduits." In this work, he comes closest to painting an actual landscape, albeit in his own primarily abstract manner. The large orange orb at the center of the composition radiates beams of red and pink. The sun is seen as an explosion of cosmic energy hovering above a green blue-green hue in which a smaller area of light blue suggests its reflection on a

"Transitions"

body of water. In this painting, Kraff seems a Southwestern relative of the New York School painter Theodoros Stamos for his ability to employ biomorphic forms to codify nature in abstract terms. The painting is at once a strong aesthetic statement and a compelling depiction of natural forms and forces. As such, it succeeds more thoroughly than a more conventional image might in capturing the totality of its subject, both its visual manifestation and its overwhelming energy.

Considerably more complex in its intricate array of shapes, as well as its gestural variety is "Flow # 3." In this composition in a long horizontal format, Kraff sets in motion a veritable fireworks display of swirling gestural shapes combined with more precise stripes of red, violet, and blue. The combination of freeform and more austere elements here creates a lively visual tension, as it frequently does in Kraff's work.

More gestural in its overall thrust, however, is the painting called "Catastrophic Disassembly," in which swirling lines of pastel hues converge against a black background to create a dynamically vertiginous composition.

The combination of gestural and hard-edge elements, however, is more frequently encountered in Kraff's work, as seen in two other major paintings, entitled respectively, "Flows and Eddies" and "Transitions." That the former painting is in a horizontal format increases the sense of an abstract landscape, while the vertical thrust of the latter work suggests natural forces rather than the actual lay of the land.

Both however, include the more precise linear elements (which intersect in crisscross configurations in "Transitions") that Richard Kraff introduces to create the sharp formal contrasts which give his paintings a unique formal focus.

—Marie R. Pagano

Hashimura's Rustic Aesthetic

Born in 1951 in Fukuoka, Japan, the Japanese wood carver and designer Tokio Hashimura has had numerous exhibitions of his unique furnishings in galleries and museums in his native country. His latest U.S. exhibition will open with a reception on Saturday November 8, from 4 to 6 PM, and run through November 19, at Cast Iron Gallery, 159 Mercer Street, in Soho.

Hashimura has an interesting Zen-like philosophy in regard to his work and the cycles of nature. He says, "The best I can do for the woods and water is to create the best quality furniture. Even though the trees are cut down, they will live hundreds more years that way." He adds, "Trees represent meeting. I meet the trees by chance and treat them to be furniture. Then my clients meet them. My furniture is all waiting to meet someone."

Hashimura's works have been called "a mixture of wild nature and sophisticated modern design, tradition and contemporary life." Around his workshop, in a wooded country area, he keeps the stumps of huge trees, over five hundred years old, of which he says. "Trees gradually decay and go back to soil this way. They become part of earth, observe rain, clean the water and give it to plants. Every time I think of the natural cycle I am moved by its grandness and wonder. Why don't we recognize more that we live in nature in our everyday life? Japan is one of the few countries in the world where you can drink tub water. But even in Japan people buy mineral water. I would like more people to appreciate clean water better."

The rich, dark surfaces of Hashimura's pieces, achieved by a painstaking process involving the patient application of thirteen layers of lacquer, calls to mind the famous Japanese novelist Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's eloquent essay on the Japanese sense of beauty, "In Praise of Shadows"—particularly the part in which Tanizaki praises a room interior where "when we gaze into the darkness that gathers behind the crossbeam, around the flower vase, beneath the shelves, though we know perfectly well it is mere shadow, we are overcome with the feeling that in this small corner of the atmosphere there reigns complete and utter silence; that here in the darkness immutable tranquility holds sway."

Hashimura's pieces have a solid, rustic quality, a rough-hewn beauty that distinguishes them as sculptural objects, rather than mere home furnishings. Benches, tables, rockers, and other accouterments of everyday life take on a majestic presence

"Three-Section Table"

with their richly gleaming surfaces, hefty contours, and clean lines. Their gracefully curving contours invite the human body, even while asserting their singular sculptural integrity. In merging with these furnishings, one is made aware of their natural origins, bringing something of the wildness of the forest indoors. They seem to evoke the best of two worlds, achieving a rare synthesis of the natural and the domestic. Indeed, Tokio Hashimura has been photographed in the heavily forested countryside where he has his studio, seated on a bench supported by tree stumps, looking very much the woodsman with his axe nearby, and the unique home furnishings that he designs exemplify a lifestyle combining the rustic charm of the wilderness with civilized grace.

—Peter Wiley

Judith Zeichner: Merging the Natural and the Intangible

In order to capture the truth of nature, a painter must intensify its effect to compensate for the qualities of light, air, and climate that belong to nature alone. In other words, the information taken in by all of the senses must be translated into purely visual terms.

This is what Judith Zeichner accomplished so splendidly in her recent solo show, "At Home and Abroad," at Noho Gallery, in Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street.

Zeichner has a real gift for balancing formal qualities with atmospheric interpretation. Like an herbalist extracting plant essences, she boils natural elements down to their essentials without sacrificing verisimilitude and a sense of place. In this regard, she is a little like Fairfield Porter: a painter's painter who invariably builds an abstract composition with the specific elements of nature.

Zeichner transcribes each terrain with tender regard for its particulars; yet her brushwork retains a rugged vivacity and never bogs down in fussy descriptiveness. Thus her canvases fairly glow with a sense of nature's own effortless freshness.

In her oil on canvas "Winter Woods," for example, slender black saplings, set against blue hills and interspersed with surviving bits of greenery, are enveloped in a golden glow. Yet the long, cool shadows that the trees cast on the earthy forest floor convey a palpable sense of crisp winter air.

The piece de resistance in another especially lovely little oil by Zeichner called "Leaving St. Just" is a little blue automobile, which appears in the process of literally being swallowed by the lush landscape as it swerves along a curve in a highway bordered by lush foliage. While a vista of verdant fields sprawls seemingly to infinity in the distance, this little blue vehicle hugs the picture plane as tenaciously as one of Mondrian's piquant red rectangles, creating a tantalizing spatial tension that animates the painting in formal, as well as atmospheric, terms.

Such touches bespeak a sophistication that sets Zeichner apart from many other contemporary landscape artists. Her ability to achieve a perfect balance between the formal and the pictorial elements in her paintings can also be seen to particular advantage in another oil on canvas called "Water Reflections," in which rocks on the shore, lily pads on the surface of the water, and ripples in the pond take on a bejeweled complexity as fluidly juicy as that in one of Joan Mitchell's gestural abstractions. That Zeichner can indulge such painterly autonomy, even while evoking the particulars of her subject so convincingly, is part of what makes her work so admirable.

"Cape Cornwall, Early a.m.," Oil on canvas, 20" x 24"

By contrast, "Cape Cornwall, Early a.m.," one of the paintings Zeichner created during a residency in a remote region of southwest England, is a study in stillness. It depicts a simple cottage nestled in a coastal hillside, set against stripes of deep yellow sky and placid blue water at the horizon-line. Here, too, the viewer is drawn into the scene yet still able to savor the formal contrasts between Zeichner's bravura handling of the scrubby hillside and her smoother execution of sea and sky. One of the great pleasures of her work is the way in which she simultaneously charms us scenically and lets us in on the secret alchemy of pigment on canvas by revealing traces of "process" or leaving some small section of the picture "unfinished." Witness, for example, the lower right portion of "Cape Cornwall, Early a.m.," where she deconstructs the illusion by letting the paint surface unravel into sketchy strokes that invite our delectation of the paint itself.

As the title of her show implies, Judith Zeichner depicts a fairly wide range of subjects both domestic and foreign. In "Joigny, France," big, blowzy clouds with shadowed bottoms float above a panorama of earthy fields, verdant furrows, and breeze-blown trees. "Tours, France," on the other hand, demonstrates that this painter of landscapes can also wrest considerable beauty from a more urban view of gray rooftops and red chimneys clustered against a luminous pink sky. Indeed, Zeichner creates a compelling composition from another city subject in "Couvert De Dominicains XIII Siecle," in which patterns of shadows on an empty street of mellow gray, green, and beige buildings are employed to build an austere architectural composition that contrasts sharply with her more familiar evocations of organic forms. Even here, however, where nothing of nature enters into the picture, Zeichner manages to conjure up an evocative atmosphere by virtue of her unerring ability to evoke subtleties of natural light.

When figures appear in Judith Zeichner's paintings, they generally seem to function much in the manner of the little blue car in "Leaving St. Just," as compositional focal points as opposed to anecdotal elements. A good example is "Figure on the Rock," where the red shirt of the little girl looking out to sea among ruggedly evoked rock-croppings is a tiny yet pivotal part of the composition. And even when the figure occupies a larger part of the picture, as in "Manicure at Window," it is boldly generalized in a manner akin to certain California painters such as Richard Diebenkorn and Paul Wonner, who fused figurative subject matter with Abstract Expressionist paint handling.

Some of Zeichner's watercolors and other works on paper, such as "Couple on Beach" and "Cloud and Water," are especially exhilarating for their gestural dexterity, demonstrating her ability to block a subject in with a few spare, swift strokes and blotches of color. The latter painting is particularly striking, signaling "sky," "earth" and "water" with haiku-like brevity.

Then again, even in her simplest, most technically abbreviated works, Judith Zeichner seems capable of translating her direct responses to nature into images that evoke a remarkable sensory complexity. We feel the breath of life emanating from her compositions; thus we experience them viscerally, as well as visually. Her paintings are vital and enduring for her ability to invest that which we see with the mystery of the intangible.

—Ed McCormack

noho gallery

530 West 25th Street,
4th Floor
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Madam X Dances, II, 2002, 51 1/4" X 38 1/4"

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