Vol. 7 No. 2 November-December 2004/January 2005 New York

GALLERY&STUDIO

The World of the Working Artist

Sizing up the new **MoMA**

ROMARE BEARDEN

at the Whitney

BOB DYLAN

on RED GROOMS

JACK KEROUAC

before the Deluge

All in

New York Notebook

(centerfold)

Marla Lipkin

"From New York to Maine"

"December Day" 34" x 44", oil painting

November 9 - 27, 2004

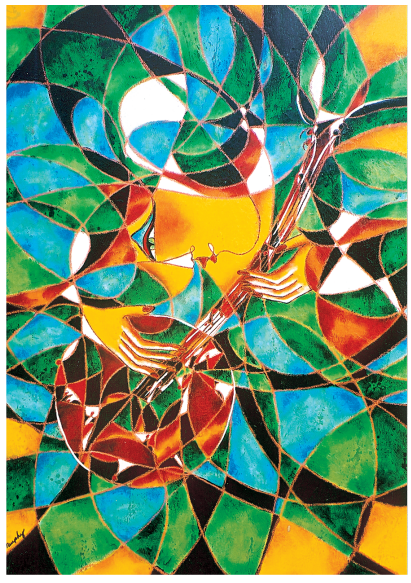
Reception: Sat., Nov. 13, 4-6pm

noho gallery

530 West 25th St., 4th Fl, NYC, 10001
Tues - Sat 11 - 6pm 212 367 7063
Sun. by appt. www.nohogallery.com

Wanda Murphy

"The Gift to Be"



"Always For You" 2004 30" x 38"

November 1-30, 2004
Reception: November 10, 6-8pm

EZAIR GALLERY
905 Madison Ave. between 72nd & 73rd Streets
New York, NY 10021
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"Driven To Abstraction"

sculpture / paintings / prints

Jan 18 - Feb 24, 2005

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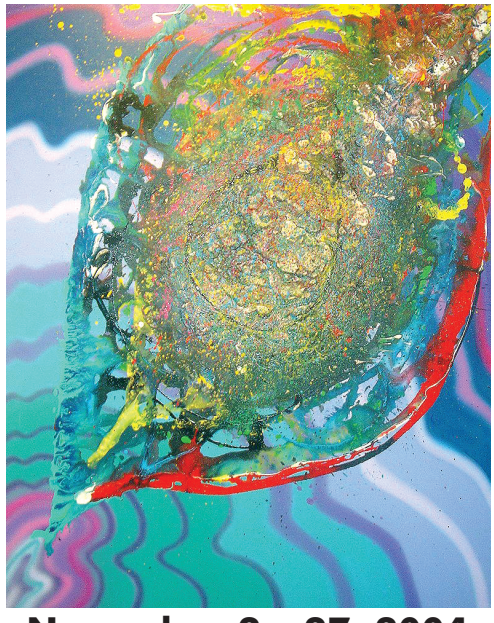
11 invited artists of the
American Society of Contemporary Artists

Stephen Beveridge · Harriet FeBland
Judith Huttner · Rose Sigal Ibsen
Frank Mann · Harriet Regina Marion
Jane Petruska · Ray Shanfeld
Jami Taback · Frederick Terna · Raymond Weinstein

Paul E. Leeming



November 2 - 27, 2004

Reception: November 12, 6 - 8 pm

World Fine Art Gallery
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646-336-1677 wwww.worldfineart.com
Tues - Sat 12 - 6 pm

DANIÈLE M. MARIN
CONVERGING REALITIES

Realities show room of women voices

"New reading #3" Acrylic, notions, on canvas hanger 18" x 20"

Installations and Mixed Media

January 11 - 29, 2005

Reception: Saturday, January 15, 5-7pm

Snow date: Saturday, January 22, 5-7pm

Noho Gallery

530 West 25th Street 4th Floor (between 10th & 11th Aves), NYC 10001

212 367 7063 • www.nohogallery.com • Tuesday - Saturday 11 - 6 pm

G&S Highlights

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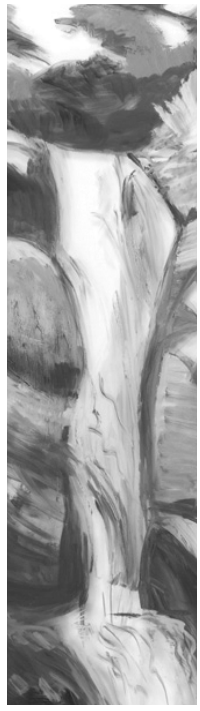

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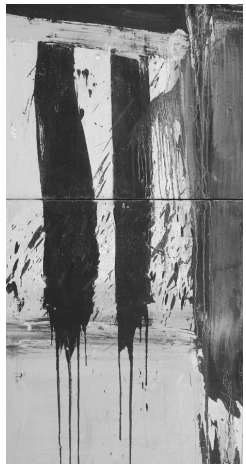

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EDITOR AND PUBLISHER **Jeannie McCormack**
MANAGING EDITOR **Ed McCormack**
SPECIAL EDITORIAL ADVISOR **Margot Palmer-Poroner**
DESIGN AND PRODUCTION **Karen Mullen**
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR **Juliet M. Ross**

Gita Lapin Treimanis: Neo-Constructivist Shaman-Songs

In a section of the preface to his ground breaking anthology of indigenous poetry, Technicians of the Sacred, entitled "Modern and Primitive: Intersections and Analogies," Jerome Rothenberg calls for kinships between avant garde and tribal art that go deeper than Picasso's appropriations from African sculpture, in order to achieve a true spiritual synthesis with broader multicultural implications.

One was put in mind of how harmonious and successful such a marriage of the ancient and the new can be, while viewing a recent solo exhibition by Gita Lapin Treimanis at Pleiades Gallery, at 530 West 25th Street, in Chelsea.

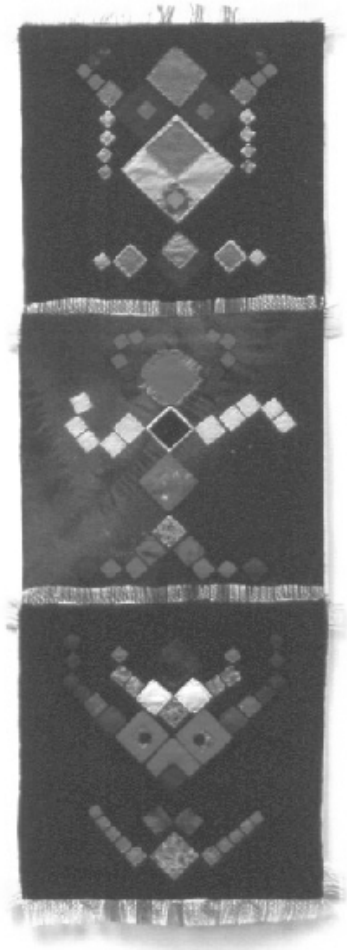
Treimanis' biography tells us that she was born in the small East European village of Tirza, in Latvia and that she descends from a long line of artisans, wood carvers, weavers and potters. One can only speculate on how much this background has influenced the rapport that she seems to have with other forms of art which are deeply rooted in concepts of community yet strike a universal chord.

It is also interesting, if not quite as relevant to her chosen medium of mature expression, to learn that Treimanis was schooled in the theatrical arts and was performing in the theater until the outbreak of World War II which made it necessary for her to emigrate to the United States. Here, she encountered an art world that was considerably more complex, advanced, and vital than in her homeland, and was inspired to study, to paint, to weave, and to sculpt. Although earlier in her career, she worked in many mediums, as any artist must in order to explore all the available possibilities, Treimanis has become especially well known for her fabric wall hangings, the most recent of which are inspired by Native American culture.

Thus, her exhibition at Pleiades was called "My Other Brothers," in acknowledgment of the affinity that she obviously feels for the people and the traditions that she celebrates in this exhibition. However, in the true spirit of multiculturalism, Treimanis also brings an avant garde sensibility, reflecting her East European origins, to bear in her work, resulting in compositions that combine an imaginatively enhanced Native American iconography with a Neo-Constructivist aesthetic.

One is initially so struck by the formal sophistication of Treimanis' art as to be tempted to discount its symbols as secondary characteristics, employed mainly for their visual appeal. But to do so would be to grievously misjudge her intentions and to deny an entire dimension of Treimanis' enterprise. Indeed, the artist makes her deep and abiding sympathy for Native American experience manifest in titles such as "Sold for Trinkets" and "You Never Walked in Her Moccasins."

Although the viewer is immediately seduced by the beauty of the colors and the combination of geometric and more fluid forms in Treimanis' wall hangings— as well as by her use of feathers, bits of hammered copper, lengths of string, and other unusual additions to the tactile appeal of her opulent fabric constructions— on closer perusal of her compositions the more allusive aspects of her compositions emerge as



"Under Big Sky," cloth, 62" x 21"

equally important .

In "Sold for Trinkets," for example, the very profusion of the various elements (simultaneously suggesting an intricate map and a plethora of colorful objects) seems to symbolize the cunning appropriation of land by outsiders who dazzled the Native Americans with worthless wampum, as the title implies. And in "You Never Walked in Her Moccasins," the artist's use of string to fashion forms resembling semi-abstract figures within a large grid of vibrant fabric squares creates a sequential effect, as in a story board or comic strip, suggesting the narrative of an actual journey. Thus, Treimanis evokes a sense of the story-telling tradition through which tribal law is preserved in Native American culture, even while employing sophisticated contemporary aesthetics to command our attention.

A more totemic figurative suggestiveness, created with brightly colored shapes set against a dark ground within three large connected, vertically stacked panels, can be seen in "Under Big Sky," a sparer composition which, while drawing upon Native American motifs, is especially revealing, in terms of emphasizing Treimanis' grounding in Constructivism and other European modes of hard-edge abstraction. Yet the artist's use of rough burlap fringes at the top and bottom of the composition, as well as to divide the three stacked rectangles in which the totemic figures are contained, offers a rough-hewn contrast to the austere geometric shapes, as if to reaffirm her commitment to the Native American theme.

Here, the overall effect, at once formal and exotic, is similarly dynamic as Marsden Hartley's series of paintings utilizing American Indian motifs within the context of Modernism painted during his stay in Taos, New Mexico. For like Hartley, Treimanis pays her respects to indigenous themes without adhering to the rigid symbolism of tribal art, in which a triangular shape will signify a tent, concentric rings of color a rainbow, slanting lines sunshine, and any number of other forms will represent other set elements. Rather, in the more individualistic manner of mainstream art, she invents a new vocabulary of forms and symbols to represent an array of personal notions and perceptions, enabling her to express broader social and subtler spiritual ideas, which are independent of communal beliefs or rituals.

For example, wall hangings such as "Praying for Water" and "Red Moon's Daughter" make extensive use of angular and totemic shapes that evoke tribal designs; yet they apparently belong to no known system of signs or symbols. By contrast, compositions such as "Northern Lights" and "Helpless Was My Brother" are more loosely organized, with flowing outlines created with lengths of string, many brilliantly colored orbs and other organic shapes, such as simplified leaves and stenciled hands, adding to their natural allusiveness. And while they have no counterpart in tribal imagery, the shadowy hands running vertically down the long, scroll-like composition of "Helpless Was My Brother" speak volumes about the tragic exploitation of Native Americans by the early white settlers.

Overall, however, the fabric wall hangings of Gita Lapin Treimanis cross cultural boundaries to make universal and uplifting statements. They are the veritable shaman-songs of a singular aesthetic sensibility, and as such, appear possessed of a healing energy.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Rosalyn Engelman's "Echo Sonata": A Career-Crowning Achievement

Although we have witnessed remarkable advances in world-wide communication over the last couple of decades, the arts are still the only field of endeavor in which it is possible for kindred spirits to converse over the centuries.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic examples of this is the dialogue that takes place between the New York painter Rosalyn Engelman and the 17th Century Japanese painter and calligrapher Honami Koetsu (1558-1637), in Engelman's solo exhibition "Echo Sonata," at Queensborough Community College Art Gallery, 222-05 56th Avenue, Bayside, NY, from February 17 through March 31. (Following a major group survey of works by Robert Rauschenberg, Warhol, and other contemporary masters, the exhibition will help to inaugurate the spacious and elegant new exhibition venue.)

"No Libretto – Imperial Visit to Ohara"

Engelman, who holds a Masters Degree in Asian and Japanese Art from the University of Rochester and has been a frequent visitor to Japan over the years, expresses her kinship with Koetsu in fourteen monumental canvases that wed the exquisiteness of classical Asian calligraphy to the scale and impact of contemporary mainstream painting. Just as Koetsu harked back to the Heian period (794-1192 AD) and ancient Chinese painting for inspiration, Engelman takes the next quantum leap in this exhilarating aesthetic relay race across the centuries, interpreting Koetsu's calligraphy and poetry on a physical scale and with a gestural dynamism akin to Abstract Expressionism.

Unlike her New York School predecessors, however, who denied conscious subject matter, Engelman is an assiduous researcher. For this series, she steeped herself in her Asian source materials for months, making numerous drawings, assimilating them so thoroughly with her own sensibility that she could conjure up the spirit of an ancient poem or No libretto while working spontaneously in her studio. Her postmodern approach allows for literary, as well as visual, references to enter her paintings, enriching them by virtue of a seamless synthesis of form and content.

Indeed, standing before Engelman's huge canvases, one almost has the feeling of being present at that precise moment in the history of civilization when form morphed into sign and written language was born. Their opalescent white, silver, and gold hues (a dramatic departure from the blues, reds, and other brilliant colors featured in her recent exhibition at Caelum Gallery, in Chelsea) are contemporary relatives of the mica that Koetsu often employed in paintings and screens. They shimmer iridescently as the eye moves over the composition, the brushstrokes seeming to flicker and change color and value in a manner that conjures up an ethereal sense of mystery.

Engleman has evolved a personal vocabulary of color, form, and gesture with which to reinterpret specific facets of Koetsu's oeuvre, subjecting his written characters for a No drama in which an empress steps out of her hut to formal transformations that evoke elements of the landscape in which the scene is set; or conjuring with sinuous strokes the sense of a raging conflagration, in a painting based on a poem about palace guards watching a fire; or channeling through luminous veils of pigment the rarefied atmosphere of a verse about white frost settling over a moorland in the moment that night fades into morning mists.

Such subtleties would seem almost beyond the reach of abstract painting. However, Rosalyn Engelman, whose work is represented in numerous private and public collections, has evolved a personal language for them in this career-crowning achievement on view at Queensborough Community College. —Ed McCormack

Marla Lipkin Finds the Sublime in Unexpected Places

One of the most beautiful books on landscape painting to appear in recent years is "American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820-1880," published by the Princeton University Press in 2002, in conjunction with a major exhibition at the Tate Museum, in London.

The show celebrated an exalted approach to nature painting which would seem all but extinct today, were it not for a handful of independent contemporary realists such as Marla Lipkin, whose new solo exhibition can be seen at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 9 through 27, with a reception for the artist on Saturday, November 13, from 4 to 6 PM.

Lipkin, who has exhibited widely throughout New England and whose work is included in many private collections, is a painter of particulars. Her present exhibition is called "From New York to Maine" because the pictures in it were painted either in Wells, Maine, where she spends time every August, or in the New York Botanical Gardens, in the Bronx, where Lipkin grew up, and where she still finds pastoral settings that belie one's preconceptions of that obviously underappreciated borough.

Indeed, part of what makes Lipkin's work so refreshing is that she enables the viewer to experience a sense of the sublime in unexpected places— places that may be modest by comparison to the wilderness vistas in the aforementioned show at the Tate, yet which are possessed of their own natural grandeur. However, she does not distort or romanticize the scenes that she paints; rather, she imbues them with immediacy and freshness through the intensity of her vision, as well as through the meticulous descriptiveness of her painting style, with its controlled yet exuberant brush work.

One of the paintings in which Lipkin's painterly alchemy is particularly impressive is "December Day," an exhilarating view of the Bronx River running through the New York Botanical Gardens. In this dazzling oil, the banks of the river are still ablaze with golden foliage and fallen leaves float on the surface of the river, in which the nearly bare trees are mirrored. Miraculously, through the crystalline clarity and precision of her technique, Lipkin evokes precise qualities of light that make one almost feel the crisp, chill winter air— even while traces of leftover greenery still stubbornly persist in the foliage of the wooded areas around the river.

Although Lipkin transcribes the scene in splendid detail and with stunning verisimilitude, the juicy beauty of her brush work can also be appreciated for its own sake, quite apart from the particulars it delineates so effectively. At the same time, her many tiny, vigorous strokes not only knit the various elements of the composition together— unifying its many diverse textures and subtle qualities of light into an aesthetically pleasing whole— but serve as surrogates for organic energy. The vitality of the paint application, with its tactile, variegated flecks of pigment, mirrors the vitality of nature as literally as the winter trees are reflected in the clear blue waters of the river that runs through the woods and into the foreground of the composition.

"Salt Marsh IV," 32" x 40", oil painting

Lipkin brings the same astute observation of nature and technical finesse to her series of paintings of a salt marsh in Wells, Maine, called the Rachel Carson Preserve, as well as to paintings such as "Yesterday's Barn" —where wispy clouds float over the weathered structure of the title, creating ethereal contrasts to its stolid form— as well as to "A Winter's Day," a wonderfully atmospheric view of icy water and snowy woods back in the New York Botanical Gardens.

In her "Salt Marsh," numbers II, III, and IV, Lipkin depicts flat land-masses, bodies of water, and vast expanses of sky in compositions that can be read from a distance or through squinted eyes as bold abstract forms frontally arranged on the picture plane, giving one a sense of this artist's and ability to evoke expansive spaces in canvases that, while large, are hardly overblown by today's standards.

Then, one focuses in more closely, and the overgrown green and ocher grasses of the salt marsh, as well as the watery bodies and the blue sky above, come vibrantly alive, caressed into being by virtue of Marla Lipkin's seemingly impossible yet highly successful synthesis of sharply focused realism and neo-Impressionist vivacity.

—Ed McCormack

The Humanist Tradition is Continued and Extended in the Art of Juan Ramirez

Although he is a long-time resident of the United States, the painter Juan Ramirez was born in Mexico, and one cannot help feeling that his work retains some of the spirit of his country of origin, where there is a long tradition of humanism in modern and postmodern art. This was especially apparent in Ramirez's most recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, where the moral force of his paintings was every bit equal to their aesthetic qualities.

Ramirez has been compared to Caraveggio for his mastery of chiaroscuro and to the contemporary Norwegian painter Odd Nerdrum for his neoclassical technique. These analogies are certainly accurate enough, just as one could also liken Ramirez to independent American figure painters such as James Kearns and the late Gregory Gillespie, who have been steadfast in their refusal to wholeheartedly embrace an aesthetic of art-for-art's and strong in their resolve to explore the human predicament in pigment.

However, it is to Ramirez's Mexican roots, as well as to the passionate humanism in the Hispanic Diaspora in general and Latin America in particular, that one should look, above all, in attempting to gain a purchase on what motivates this immensely gifted painter on a deeper level. For one can find in his work very real kinships to the social outrage of Mexican masters like Jose Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, as well as to the contemporary graphic artist Jose Luis Cuevas—although Ramirez's subject matter is personal and mysterious, rather than political or satirical.

At the same time, there is a strong social component to his paintings, however metaphorically transformed, as seen in the large oil entitled "Standing Male," in Ramirez's recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery. In this powerful painting the central figure is a man wearing a business suit who stands in one of those glistening dark expanses in which Ramirez's paintings are invariably set, pointing a finger accusingly at a naked man and woman groveling at his feet. The picture is a scathing indictment of every self-righteous moralist—every small time preacher, big time televangelist, and flag-waving right wing politician with a secret agenda— who would dare to throw the first stone or to impose his own standards on the behavior of others. Indeed, one could say that "Standing Male," is Juan Ramirez's wry contemporary take on the theme of The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden. And as such, it is both scathing and slightly ironic.

It has been stated that darkness is an important component in Juan Ramirez's compositions, but this can not be emphasized too strongly. Ramirez employs dark backgrounds to set off the human vulnerability of his figures. They appear to be enveloped by the forces of fate and mortality, shrouded in shadow. In this regard he shares a kinship with an Italian-born painter who made his reputation in America, Rico Lebrun, whose powerful dark canvases of corpses at Dachau concentration camp are among the classic humanist statements of modern painting, as well as brilliant studies in light and dark.

Ramirez, however, employs chiaroscuro even more dramatically in his large oil on board "Refection," a term from the Latin referring to the refreshment of the mind or spirit. The painting depicts a young woman, nude, her face hidden in shadow, her voluptuous torso illuminated by an area of light, possibly streaming in through an unseen window. Here, amid the muted monochromes, the eye is suddenly drawn with a jolt of shock to the visceral brilliance of some tiny drops of blood glistening on the subject's loins and thighs. No other painter who comes to mind has treated this subject as explicitly as Ramirez does here. Indeed, menstruation is a daring, almost taboo subject for a male painter. Yet, Ramirez approaches this female mystery that some women refer to as "the curse" with a delicate respect verging on reverence. Thus, the image that he creates, far from being crass or vulgar, is possessed of a poignant power and beauty. Indeed, one can only compare "Refection," for its spiritual purity, to Andrew Wyeth's affecting tempera, "The Virgin," which depicts a fawn-like adolescent nude anointed by a shaft of light streaming down from a hay-loft. Ramirez's painting goes further, however, by daring to tackle an even more sensitive subject.

Another female nude is the focal point of "Night Scene," the largest oil in Ramirez's recent exhibition. She is seen reclining in a nocturnal landscape enlivened by glowing auras. Her near-fetal position would almost indicate regression, the level of depression that leads to infantile withdrawal. However, her expression is oddly undespairing, given her apparent isolation in what appears to be a desolate, forbidding wilderness. Indeed, her features are reposeful, serene, lending the picture an enigmatic quality. Here, too, like the aforementioned Odd Nerdrum, Ramirez's remarkably accomplished technique enables him to imbue the composition with subtle atmospheric qualities quite unusual in contemporary painting, as well as to convey a sense of psychological contradiction that brings the painting peculiarly alive.

This emotional component is also quite striking in a much smaller, yet no less powerful, oil on board entitled "Cloudy Sky," depicting a man submerged in water so as to appear cut off from the waist down, his eyes screwed shut and his mouth gaping wide in what appears to be a howl. One thinks of Munch's famous image, "The Scream," as well as Francis Bacon's famous paintings of screaming popes and marvels that Juan Ramirez has created a painting which can hold its own so admirably with the works of these acknowledged masters. "Cloudy Sky" is an unsettling little gem of a picture, a vision of human agony by an artist who is not afraid to confront the common condition unflinchingly.

Indeed, Juan Ramirez is one of our most gifted contemporary exponents of what Barry Schwartz, a critic and Associate Professor of Communication Arts as termed "The New Humanism," which had its roots in the Renaissance and has continued to comprise an alternate canon through all the permutations and movements of modernism and postmodernism. Certain painters will always choose the subject of humanity's suffering and triumphs over an art that deals mainly with aesthetic issues, embattled as this position may be in a climate dominated by novelty. Ramirez is one such artist, for he appears to approach every painting in a manner that Rico Lebrun describes metaphorically in the following quote from Selden Rodman's classic volume "The Insiders: Rejection and Rediscovery of Man in the Arts of Our Time":

"I made up a story once, of Durer, Michelangelo, and Gruenwald, painting from the same model. After a while Michelangelo says to Durer, 'What's that screeching noise, Al? And Where's Matthias?' and the model finally lets on. 'He's crawled right under my skin and inside me,' she says, 'and now he's scratching, trying to find his way out."

By changing the names of the other two artists to those of any number of his less passionate colleagues, the same story could be told to illuminate the art of Juan Ramirez.

—Lawrence Downe

"Superhighway" Surveys the Fast Lane at CVB Space

Each and every one of us is "trapped in a collective monologue with the illusion of sharing a real experience," writes the Italian curator Stefania Carrozzini, of her latest exhibition "Superhighway," which can still be seen through November 15 at CVB Space, 407 West 13th Street, and which she organized through D'Ars International Exhibition Projects, of Milan and New York.

Massimiliano Contu

Carrozzini, whose catalog texts are as esoterically eloquent as the essays of Roland Barthes, is as close as we come to the-curator-as-conceptual-artist. For this show, she invites twelve international artists to explore the metaphor of the Superhighway as "the road where the inorganic conquers the senses and wins against the organic in the game of life."

Perhaps the artist who deals with the plight of pawns in this game most directly is the Italian painter Massimiliano Contu, whose meticulous oils in a bright comic strip style depict a befuddled Everywoman adrift

Barbara Bachner

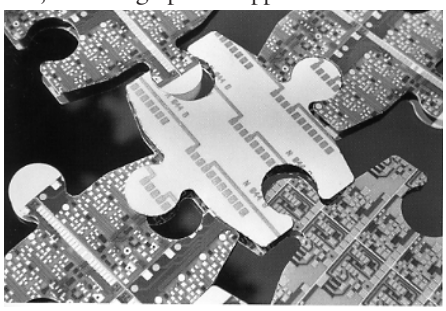
in a metropolis where she is beset everywhere she turns by block letters that spell out words like "BUY," "PROFIT," "MONEY," and "LONELY." These messages even blaze, neon-bright, from the surrounding skyscrapers when she ventures out onto her little balcony to take the night air, indicating that there can be no escape from the alienating constraints of an all-encompassing consumerism.

Photo: Stefania Carrozzini

The American artist Barbara Bachner is assaulted from another source: The New York Times. She dutifully ingests its newsbites every morning, and here juxtaposes tidbits about the war in Iraq, problems with mobile phones, and the production of Disney's "The Lion King," among other subjects, with photographs of her half-finished breakfasts over several mornings of distracted digestion. Known for integrating information from the Internet with her elaborate dream journals, Bachner's work documents the struggle to remain in touch with the self amid the daily bombardments of the Information Age.

Even Art Povera is subjected to technological intervention nowadays, as evidenced by the work of Roy Andrew Beyer, an artist born in the Netherlands, who salvages street trash and photographs it to create tableaux with a slightly sinister science fiction atmosphere, merging Brave New World with New World Order.

By contrast, Gianni Lodi, a sociologist and ex-researcher at the University of Milan, excavates for archetypical forms in urban detritus, convincingly transforming the body of a demolished motorcycle into a primitive mask to convey a bizarre cultural continuum; or dolling up what appears to be a



Giovanni Gurioli

charred mannequin's leg in a high-heeled shoe and leaning against the gallery wall to give us a jolt that combines the classic funk of Bruce Connor with the anatomical morbidity of Robert Gober.

Mario Giavotto, born in Varese in 1968, works in an eclectic style, mixing sculpture, drawing, painting, and video, to achieve, as he puts it, "Something grander than we are that gives Real Peace." The "hand-made" quality of Giavotto's work suggests poignant human messages stuffed into bottles and cast hopefully into what Carrozzini refers to as "a sea of SPAM."

Giovanni Gurioli, who graduated from the Ceramic Institute of Art in Faenza, explores the relationship between the organic and inorganic with cookie cutter pieces of the human puzzle that interlock and separate, their reflective aluminum surfaces

Amalia Knoll

imprinted with electronic circuits. Venturing close, the viewer might see his or her face mirrored in this modern maze and contemplate its elusive meanings.

Mazelike in another manner, the drawings of Amalia Knoll, an assistant professor at the Istituto Europeo del Design, Milano, are executed in ink on polyester scrolls. Their intricate compositions depict stylized human and animal figures enmeshed in meticulously rendered linear networks, suggesting a writhing pasta of technological entrails from which no escape seems possible.

Hani Rashid, born in Egypt, raised in England and Canada, now a professor at Columbia University, in New York, expresses the dilemma of modernity in another way with his manipulated photo-image of a two-faced trailer truck stalled in two directions at once on the Superhighway to Utopia, to once again paraphrase Carrozzini's catalog essay.

Then there is the Italian sculptor and graphic artist Giacomo Cavina, who poses with bare arms upraised in a histrionic Michelangelo gesture in what appears to be a graveyard for discarded computers and other mechanical detritus. Affixed to the gallery ceiling with other postmodern plays on Renaissance imagery, Cavina's piece suggests a cybernetic chapel.

Also including Giovanni Compagni's elegant, colorful collages of birds and other animals traversing a miasma of pipes and cables; Cristina Cary's hyperkinetic video ode to urban simultaneity; and Franca Maschio's unsettling realist oils of babies decked out like Hindu deities in baubles, bangles, and crowns, "Superhighway" succeeds splendidly in pointing out how art, as Stefania Carrozzini puts it, "serves to rediscover the real meaning of communication."

—Ed McCormack

Hilda Green Demsky Evokes the Vitality of "Elemental Forces"

No serious artist who chooses to paint landscapes today can afford to ignore developments in recent art history. That said, the mistake that many painters make, especially in this country, is distancing their work too self consciously from the natural energies that have made landscape painting such a deep-rooted tradition in American art.

Hilda Green Demsky seems to know this instinctively, for she never fails to animate her pictures with a sense of authenticity, even while taking an innovative approach to her subject. Demsky's ability to combine close observation of fleeting facets of the natural world with enduring aesthetic values is especially impressive in her new solo exhibition "Elemental Forces," at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 9 through 27, with receptions on Saturday November 13, from 3 to 6 PM, and Thursday, November 18, from 6 to 8 PM. (The exhibition will also travel to the National Gallery of Costa Rica in February 2005.)

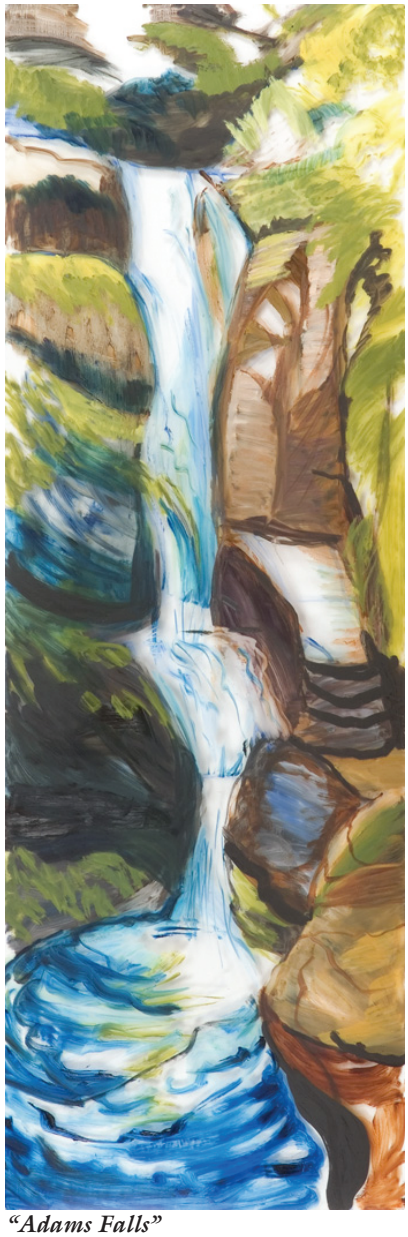
In her previous show at Pleiades last year, along with her oils on canvas, Demsky debuted some of her new oils on mylar. The novel new painting surface turned her exhibition into an overall installation, with the transparent sheets suspended from the ceiling and layered to enhance the sense of flux and shimmer that has always been a salient feature of her paintings of waterfalls and water rushing over rocks. Oils on mylar continue to be an important aspect of Demsky's oeuvre, as seen in "Adams Falls," a monumental scroll-like composition in a vertical composition that captures the movement of water flowing down a corridor of boulders in bold gestural strokes. Here, too, Demsky's unfailing eye for color and light contributes to the vitality of the composition, with luminous blues playing counterpoint to earthy browns, vibrant yellows, and pale green hues.

Demsky has learned as much as any contemporary painter from Cezanne's blocky, planar translations of natural forms; however, she also brings to them a gestural thrust assimilated from Abstract Expressionism, in the light-filled composition of "Adams Falls," which gains momentum from the velocity of her paint handling and the translucency of the mylar. By contrast, in another major oil on mylar in a horizontal format, "Water Carves a Wedge," Demsky strips her formal vocabulary down to linear forms almost as spare as the Cold Mountain abstractions of Brice Marden, yet still retains a convincing sense of the rocky terrain.

One should not get the impression, however, that Demsky relies on the novelty of her newer medium to lend her paintings their unique luminosity, nor that she requires large scale to enhance their presence. For she conveys the foamy tumult of a waterfall, as well as the qualities of light on verdant foliage, every bit as convincingly in a smaller oil on canvas called "Climax." And the same can be said for "Between Two Rivers," another watery view that transcends its relatively modest size by virtue of Demsky's unfailing sense of scale, which enables her to imbue all of her compositions with expansiveness and monumentality.

Indeed, her ability to evoke the majesty of nature in vigorous painterly terms has not only garnered Hilda Green Demsky numerous solo exhibitions here and abroad, but won her prestigious fellowships, including a Fulbright, and gained her the patronage of important private and public collectors.

—Ed McCormack



"Adams Falls"

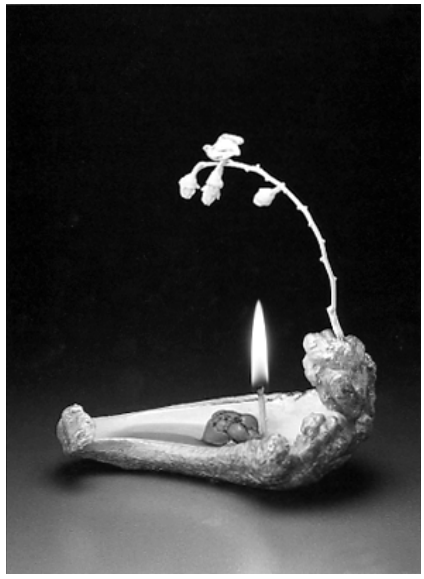
Nature is Rendered Immutable in the Sculptures of Oh, Won Tack

In Korea, as in other Asian countries, there is a much closer relationship between art and craft than in most parts of the Western world. Master craftsmen are revered as fine artists for their special ability to bring aesthetic values into everyday life. Jewelry is highly regarded as one of the most meticulous and demanding of all crafts, and one of the true masters of Korean jewelry is Oh, Won Tack. Doubly gifted, Oh is also a renowned metal sculptor, and it is his sculptures that are featured in an exhibition at Gallery 32, 32 West 32nd Street, from November 18 through 30. (There will be a reception for the artist on Friday, November 19, from 6 to 8 PM.)

Born in Seoul in 1948, Oh is presently Dean of the College of Art & Design at the Seoul National University of Technology in his home city, as well as a professor at Yanbian University, in China. He is also the author of several important texts on precious metals and jewelry and has exhibited widely in Korea and the United States, where he recently was the subject of a major solo show in the gallery at Bausch and Lomb World Headquarters, in Rochester, New York.

The attention to fine detail that one must develop as a jewelry artist serves Oh, Won Tack well in his sculpture, to which he brings a refinement that makes his work quite unique. So much modern sculpture is overblown and aggressive. Oh presents a refreshing alternative to this trend. His pieces in electroformed silver, combined with turquoise, coral, pearl, quartz and other unusual materials are intimate and poetic. Often, they include wicks lit with burning flames that cast a glow over these materials, enhancing their luminous qualities. Oh's pieces are almost always inspired by nature and all incorporate organic forms. Indeed, some suggest sections of natural terrains characteristic of Asian art, as seen in "Raging Waves II," where a delicate twig-like form suggesting a miniature tree, hovers gracefully above the main silver shape, which surges like foamy surf around a turquoise component that serves as blue boulder. Here, the dancing flame bathes the piece in radiance, evoking a sense of moonlight by a nocturnal seashore.

Indeed, each of Oh, Won Tack's sculptures creates the sense of a natural vignette as poetically evocative as an ancient Asian ink painting, albeit reimagined in modern terms in unexpected materials. Often a single flower or other delicate plant shape with a flame dancing on its tip rises up from a gracefully swooping shape resembling a seashell or other natural formation or terrain. Titles such as "Drifting," "Ripple," or "Contemplation" convey the meditative



"Raging Waves"

sense of nature innate to Korean art and Asian aesthetics in general.

Oh's pieces are further enlivened by a subtle sense of movement: his delicate plant forms bend gracefully, as though swaying in a gentle breeze; spiraling lines within the main forms evoke swirling pools of water; small semi-abstract forms suggest fluttering butterflies or perching birds. Indeed, it is his ability to suggest all the vital activity of nature in microcosm that makes Oh, Won Tack a master sculptor.

—Chris Weller

The Resonance of Paper in the Art of Lore Burger

For those of us who are both bibliophiles and paper fetishists, the recent exhibition of Lore Burger, at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, was a rare, sumptuous treat. Cindy Bowden, director of the Robert C. Williams Museum of Papermaking in Atlanta Georgia, has hailed Burger as "one of the great paper artists of our time," adding that "Lore's artwork illustrates her respect for nature, and found objects are utilized for their own beauty and to complete the overall message of each piece."

Each of Burger's pieces is a three dimensional construction created with paper that she makes herself by hand. She dips, vacuum-forms, and rolls her sheets of paper. She layers paper strips with deckled edges, which are then individually sewn or tied onto a backing, to create the deep space in her compositions, each of which is as complex and filled with fanciful allusions as any of Joseph Cornell's box assemblages.

Burger's love of books is everywhere evident in her work— but especially in the large work that she calls "The World of Books." This is one of her most complex constructions, with old prints and texts about early bookbinders juxtaposed with a quote from Ben Shahn ("Where there's a book there's no sword") and miniature books, among other small objects arranged around part of a circuit board and sandwhiched between several layers of deckle-edged paper standing on edge.

"This piece," the artist says speaks to me of the importance books have in our culture, and the knowledge that they hold and convey." The truth of this statement is inarguable, but "The World of Books" also speaks to the viewer on an immediate, sensual level as well, through Burger's skillful layering of materials and the sheer physical opulence that she achieves. Indeed, all of her pieces possess a delicious lushness, oweing not only to the variety of handmade papers that she creates and employs in various ways— folding and furling them to lend her compositions sculptural presence and depth— but also to her elegant use of found materials.

Especially rich in the latter regard is "Chinese Year," where big, red Chinese New Year firecrackers are combined with an ancient coin, and an antique paper dragon with accordian folds that appears on the verge of leaping out of the composition.

There is also a literary element in Lore Burger's works, expressed in texts such as the one in the poetically titled piece she calls "Dream Clouds Are Passing Throught It," which goes: "high above a chain of white clouds/full of old light going home/now even the things that we do/reach us after long journeys/and we have changed."

The enigmatic nature of such texts complements Burger's esoteric visual vocabularly auspiciously, adding yet another layer to her densely conceptual creations. In some pieces objects are enclosed within containers. These "small treasures," as the artist refers to them, can be found bones, stones, bits of rusted metal, sea shells, or souviners that she collects in her travels. Combined in unexpected ways with handwritten texts, old illuminated manuscripts, antique book pages, and a variety of other elements, they resonate in a manner that has made Lore Burger one of the most highly respected and widely exhibited paper artists at work today.

—Dorothy Whittemore

The Alternate Universe of The Swedish Painter Monika Juliette Wally

In her native Sweden, where she has an impressive exhibition history, the critic and artist Hans Janstad referred to Monika Juliette Wally as an "astronaut of art," and in her exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, she demonstrated the aptness of the term.

Wally's paintings, inspired by what she calls "my passion for the fascinating universe," depict cosmic expanses in vibrant streaks of color that fill her compositions with a sense of endless space and brilliant light. Her universe, however, is a personal one, in no way beholden to scientific data or photographic accuracy; rather, it is a realm of the imagination, of human yearning for mysterious places. Still, her paintings evoke a convincing sense of swirling elements and actual atmospheres by virtue of her vigorous paint handling and innate ability to conjure up luminous chromatic fluctuations.

Planetary orbs often figure prominently in her pictures, as seen in "Oneness," where, as the title suggests, a single monolithic globe dominates the center of the composition. Bathed in light and shadow that lends it a sculptural presence, this central form hovers in an expanse of deep blue streaked with cloud-like shapes that anchor it in place, creating a compelling tension between implied depth and the two-dimensions of the picture plane. The painting conveys not only the literal sense of an object suspended between heaven and earth, but also a more metaphorical sense of spiritual wholeness.

By contrast, in "Whirl," numerous planetary forms are set into motion on a ground filled with subtle modulations of blue and violet hues, suggesting an entire solar system orbiting in motion. But even as we are imaginatively transported, we are equally taken with the painterly activity on the surface, the manner in which Wally manipulates color and form, not only to create the illusion of movement, but to call our attention to the physical qualities of the medium itself.

Indeed, it is this ongoing dialogue between her subject matter and the materiality of the surface that makes her work so fascinating, as seen in a composition such as "Ecstasy," which is, for all intents and purposes, completely abstract, consisting of subtly graduated streaks of dark reddish and orange hues laid down in bold strokes. One one level we can perceive this canvas as nonobjective and find it eminently pleasing in purely formal terms. However, the imaginative elements invariably intercede in Wally's work to further enrich the experience. We are caught between the material world and the realm of cosmic dreaming, and thus perceive the painting on two levels simultaneously.

In other paintings as well, such as "In Touch with Light" and "Light," we are seduced by the formal beauty of the composition. Its sumptuous surface and its other abstract attributes—the delicate strokes of white that illuminate the vibrant blue ground of the former work; the radiant reddish hues and deep ceruleans that animate the latter painting—are more than enough to hold our interest.

Yet Monika Juliette Wally insists that we look beyond the surface of the canvas into the realm of the unknown, and it is her ability to transport us there that makes her a doubly rewarding painter.

—Maureen Flynn

Kyu chang Cho's One-Man Post-Pop Poster Movement

The Korean artist Kyu chang Cho is acutely aware of how ordinary people are often transformed into figures of myth in our minds, and makes this metamorphosis the basis of his art.

"Every day I meet new people and forget about them as my life goes on," the artist says. "After days have gone, I still have sweet memories or bad memories about them. I want to pick up a piece of those memories and frame it into the poster by assembling codes of symbolic images."

In his recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, Kyu chang Cho showed several large color prints of the type that he prefers to call "posters." This distinction is important because a poster implies the commercial deification of a person and is suitably impersonal to convey the sense that this person is a media figure rather than just another private individual. Like Andy Warhol, Cho obviously likes the idea of democratizing fame. However, because Kyu chang Cho's subjects are symbolic rather than actual, they are metaphorical portraits. In other words, he is not mythologizing the image of an individual but the image of that individual's character traits. Thus, his work is more surreal than Warhol's, more in the manner of Rene Maigret, to whom he appears to be referring in one print called "Strategic," where the personality of the subject is expressed through a large pipe and hat, two symbols appropriated from the older artist.

Most of Kyu chang Cho's compositions follow the traditional format of the head and shoulders portrait. Often when it is a male subject he is wearing a tie and business suit, as in a formal or corporate portrait. In the poster called "Pornographic," the subject's arms are crossed in a manner that indicates a certain insouciance, and he has a bunny head, resembling the famous logo of Playboy magazine, with one of those black bars across its eyes of the type that are sometimes used to obscure someone's identity when they appear in a compromising picture.

In each of his posters, Kyu chang Cho chooses objects that serve as succinct symbols of the subject's character or dilemma. In "Addicted," the subject is a young child whose head is the remote control of a television set. This would appear to be a tribute to Keith Haring, another artist who depicted the ubiquitousness of the tube in a similar manner. For Kyu chang Cho, appropriation is obviously fair play, especially when the images are so much in the public domain as to have become a part of our visual vocabulary. Thus, in his poster "Jealousy," the eye of a young woman from one of Roy Lichtenstein's dot paintings based on romance comics comes into play as a central image of the composition, and the cartoon mother from The Simpson's figures prominently in another picture called "Chatter Box."

In these large, imaginatively expressive and colorful prints, Kyu chang Cho succeeds splendidly in giving a surreal new face to Pop.

—Marie R. Pagano

Everything Ventured is Gained in the Intrepid Art of Paul Edward Leeming

One of the things that separates truly ambitious artists from those of lesser scope is the willingness to take risks. By this criteria, the Rhode Island painter Paul Edward Leeming is a very ambitious painter indeed, judging from his new solo exhibition, which can be seen at World Fine Art Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, from November 2 through 27.

In Leeming's case, the willingness to take risks means refusing to be satisfied with a merely "pretty" composition —which he is certainly capable of creating at will, given the overall lyricism of his work and his surpassing skills as a colorist. Leeming, however, will settle for nothing less than a "terrible beauty," to borrow William Butler Yeats' brilliant term. Toward this end, his big, buoyant canvases bypass superficial decorative effects in order to achieve something tougher, more challenging. In other words, they ask a great deal from the viewer, yet make the effort well worthwhile by providing more profound pleasures. And much to his credit, they do so without attempting to ingratiate themselves to us through conventional means.

"I am inspired by the idea that paint is paint," Leeming states, making his uncompromising stance clear: What you see is what you get; the material substance of paint is the main event in these pictures, with their vibrant colors and their often rough, tactile, surfaces encrusted with layer upon layer of acrylic pigments, either poured or dripped in a dynamic manner that epitomizes the term "action painting."

Yet, for all of his insistence on sheer physicality and his refusal to indulge in illusion for its own sake, Leeming's abstract compositions often evoke aspects of the natural world, particularly landscape (which Willem de Kooning once claimed in an interview with a critic who now writes primarily for this publication is almost invariably the reference point for much abstract painting—establishing its bearings and sense of space).

This is especially clear in the canvas called "Puerto Rico," where the landscape references seem more overt than in other paintings by Leeming. In this horizontal composition, thick encrustations of pigment enlivened by the glitter that Leeming sometimes mixes with his acrylic paints to create a chromatic shimmer akin to some of Jules Olitski's Color Field compositions, evoke atmospheric impressions of nocturnal sky, water and shore. At the same time, its most engaging features are its coloristic and textural attributes, which transcend the contingencies of subject matter.

As with all of Leeming's paintings, one experiences the canvas as a rugged physical entity more immediately than as a literal depiction of something in the outside world. It is an autonomous object in the way that Clement Greenberg insisted that all progressive painting must be, first and foremost, in order to remain relevant. And whether one shares Greenberg's dogged and dogmatic opinions or not, one must admit that Leeming's paintings provide a palpable, almost visceral, physical experience.

"Uribamaba"

Yet the underlying poetry of his vision persists as well, exemplified by such titles as "Starry Pond" and "Silver Embrace," which, seen together, also reveal the breadth, depth, and diversity of his vision. "Starry Pond" is a composition of variegated hues laid down in streaks that appear as though troweled on with a broad palette-knife in broad streaks. This technique of "scumbling" one layer over the other, with areas of the underpainting showing through the translucent glazes, creates a sense of luminous aqueous depths and reflections that make the title seem especially apt.

In contrast to the vibrant palette of "Starry Pond," metallic monochromes laid down in relatively thin layers provide the subtle chromatic experience in "Silver Embrace." Here, in keeping with the title, there is a suggestion of phantom figures, rather than landscape, in the sensual contours of the the curving lines incised vertically and ever-so-faintly into the paint surface. As with all of Leeming's paintings, however, the composition is essentially abstract and can be appreciated for its formal qualities alone.

One of the most dynamic among the paintings in the present exhibition at World Fine Art is the large canvas called "Conception," in which a particularly varied arsenal of techniques comes into play. Set against a background of sinuous, rhythmically swelling bands of red, blue, and purple with a smooth, air-brushed appearance, a monolithic oval form hovers like a balloon in mid-air. In contrast to the smooth surface that it floats upon, this pregnant central form is filled with a dense concentration of multicolored splashes and drips and encircled at its outer edges by thickly impastoed outlines of brilliant red and blue that further enhance its weighty presence.

Combining the aggressive scale and gestural excitement of Abstract Expressionism with the chromatic qualities of Color Field painting in an exciting postmodern synthesis, "Conception" is a demonstration of the daring that makes Paul Edward Leeming one of our most consistently ambitious postmodern abstractionists.

Indeed, those who have been following Leeming's progress over the past several years that he has been showing at World Fine Art Gallery, never knowing quite what to expect, yet never being disappointed by the outcome of his bold experiments, will find his newest paintings some of his most venturesome and accomplished canvases to date.

—Maurice Taplinger

Celebrating 86 Years with the ASCA at Broome Street Gallery

Artist's organizations that survive several decades usually reflect their longevity in the enduring quality of the work that they champion, as seen in the 86th Annual Exhibition of the American Society of Contemporary Artists, at Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street, from November 9 through 21 (reception November 13, 2-5 pm).

Margery Small captures the poetry of the urban scene evocatively in her atmospheric collage painting of an elderly woman feeding pigeons amid blazing nocturnal neons, the scene evoked with patches of patterned fabric, newsprint and other elements mediated by areas of vigorous brushwork. Marilyn Weiss also makes a highly original statement in her large paper and mixed media work in the shape of a woman's dress suspended from a bar, unframed. Jesus Gonzalez is represented with a figurative oil animated by strong color and Expressionist paint handling. The sculptor Isabel Shaw employs elongation expressively in her statuesque bronze of a standing figure. Miriam Wills conveys a symbolic eroticism through brilliantly colored floral forms in acrylic and collage on canvas. Joseph V. Lubrano combines dynamic abstract design with sparkling realism in his watercolor composition of various vegetables arranged frontally on four plates in a grid. By contrast, Alan Roland employs aquarelle in a more impressionistic manner akin to Prendergast in his shimmering view of a harbor.

Erika Weihs contributes an expressive yet austerely executed oil on masonite of a blues singer who resembles the late Janis Joplin. Elvira Dimitrij makes a surreal statement about addiction with the face of a female smoker enclosed in a rectangle amid clouds. Harriet R. Marion employs the format of a basket as the context for a cornucopia of colorful forms in a lively mixed media composition. Gerda Roze shows a monotype with a gestural and chromatic energy reflecting its title, "Joi de Vivre." Elaine Alibrandi's luminous red and yellow abstraction simultaneously suggests a blazing forest fire and an infrared image of veiny networks. Estelle Levy's mixed metal sculpture wittily evokes a mutated microscope. Raymond Weinstein's walnut sculpture conveys the eternal dance of courtship with gracefully flowing male and female contours. Georgiana Cray Bart's painting of a studio interior with still life is notable for its cool color harmonies and exquisite composition. Olga Kitt proves the old adage that less can often be more with her small, lyrical vision of a budding tree in pastel, marker, and pencil on paper. Dorothy Cochran, a guest invited by the ASCA to participate in the exhibition, demonstrates mastery of several different techniques in her hand-colored relief/intaglio/collage, with its array of circular and rectangular esoteric symbols.

Isabel Shaw

Hedy O'Beil reveals a gestural side to her painterly personality that may surprise fans of her earlier symbolic still life paintings in an acrylic painting on paper featuring vigorous black lines moving rhythmically on a blue ground. Isobel Folb Sokolow's rugged welded steel figure "Atlas" balances a globe of swirling shards. Rose Sigal Ibsen's splashy abstraction in blue and black demonstrates the whiplash brushwork that has made her one of our leading Western exponents of Chinese ink and watercolor painting.

Two gifted sculptors round off the show with their varied treatments of the female form: Raymond Shanfeld's marble piece "Dream Girl" evokes a sensual torso, while Ilse Kahane's alabaster figure "Femme Mystique" makes imaginative use of negative space and organic semi-abstract form.

—Maureen Flynn

Miriam Wills

Joseph Lubrano

Margery Small

Nature Has Many Faces in the Art of Jesus Alonso Ruiz

A phenomenological view of nature animates the paintings of Jesus Alonso Ruiz, an artist from Andalusia, widely exhibited in Switzerland as well as Spain, whose oils are on view from November 12 through December 4, at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, in Soho.

The visionary quality of Ruiz's work makes him appear at times to be a contemporary offspring of the German Romantic Caspar David Friedrich. For Ruiz's landscapes convey a similar sense of urgency and mystery. Nothing is underplayed in Ruiz's compositions. In a painting such as "The Alps at Dawn," the snow-covered peaks ripple like the waves in the sea. They appear to be in movement, rather than stationery, as though racing the clouds.

In "Summer Thunderstorm in San Francisco," Ruiz approaches the chromatic fireworks of Turner, employing fiery reds and muted blue hues to depict clouds erupting over the bay in a composition that combines representation with abstraction in a highly original manner. By contrast, in "Stormy Blast in Summer," the entire landscape is bathed in blues and violets. The clouds are illuminated by lightning, and a rainbow also appears in the sky. Everything is happening at once, as though Ruiz has captured

"Summer Thunderstorn in San Francisco"

the storm and its aftermath in a single canvas. This is nothing so simple as a linear image of a specific place at a particular moment in time. Rather, Ruiz presents us with a metaphysical vision in which sequential time has ceased to exist and all events occur simultaneously.

The relationship of Ruiz's work to that of the aforementioned Caspar David Friedrich becomes especially clear in the oil entitled "In Search of the Light." For in this nocturnal scene, depicting a beachscape with crashing surf in the foreground and a distant lighthouse sending its beam out under a full moon, the lighthouse seems to serve as a symbol for humankind's spiritual striving, while the natural elements seem to be keepers of the mystery: While we search for the light, the power of the night is overwhelming; the faint beam is swallowed by darkness. Yet in aspiration lies our salvation, the artist seems to be telling us in this haunting picture, with its softly modeled forms and almost eerie atmospheric beauty.

What distinguishes Jesus Alonso Ruiz from earlier Romantics, however, is that he calls upon a broader range of historical precedents, as seen in "Phoenix," and "Bay of San Juan," two especially energetic canvases which employ a heightened palette and bold, sweeping Expressionist brushwork to especially dramatic effect.

Also enlivened by high drama are "River Through a Grove," where the blue trees seem to flow as fluidly as the water, and "Lucerne Bridge on Fire," where the leaping flames and their reflections on the water lend the scene the feeling of a surreal nightmare—as though one of Utrillo's quaint postcard views were suddenly engulfed by a Boschian inferno!

At once lyrical and tumultuous, the landscapes of Jesus Alonso Ruiz depict not only natural forces and unpredictable events, but the internal climate that determines our relationship to the world around us.

—Chris Weller

Nana Chen's Pictures Mirror Our Foibles in Miniature

It is possible to say of Nana Chen that she paints as though she is inventing the art; as though no one ever painted before! In her recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, Chen impressed this reviewer with the direct, almost childlike, power of her work, which went beyond even the rawness of most so-called outsider art, reminding one of Jean Dubuffet at his most uninhibited.

Indeed, like Dubuffet in his great early pictures, Chen puts a perplexed face on the human race, capturing something essential and basic to our nature. In Chen's wonderful little oil, "Yulonda," for example, we are face to face with the quintessential clueless blond. Chen captures her confusion with such brilliant simplicity that we can only wonder how an artist can be so simultaneously guileless and cunning. The only possible explanation would be that simplicity is the ultimate wisdom; that by going directly to the heart of the matter and committing an image to canvas that verges on caricature one can actually apprehend complexities of character that go far deeper than conventional portraiture. In any case, to see "Yulonda" is to fall instantly in love with her; for she is every endearing bottle-blond bimbo that Hollywood ever dreamed up summed up in paint in one priceless image.

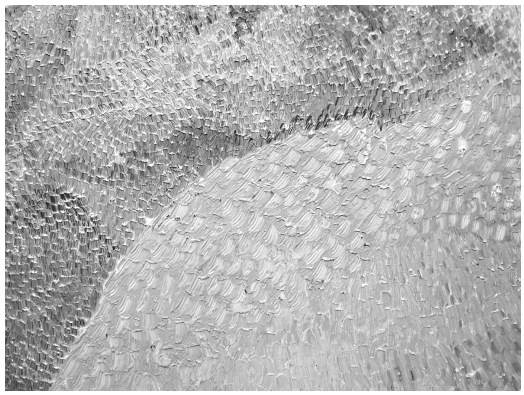
Then there is "Woman with a Bun." We've all known her as well. Perhaps she was our first grade teacher or local librarian, a very exacting type of lady who demanded that we always be on our best behavior. She is prim and proper to be sure, yet her face is rather green and her scarlet dress reveals that she may have a hidden wild side, as she gazes out from an ocher ground laid down in feathery strokes that suggest turmoil and tension brewing behind her prim facade.

Other paintings by Nana Chen nail complex moods and attitudes with admirable aplomb and casual painterly panache. In "Suspicion," the female subject's sense of distrust comes across in the very colors that the artist chooses: acidic yellows, greens, and reds that somehow manage to say a great deal in the most unconventional manner. Nana Chen, like the aforementioned Dubuffet, and like Grandma Moses for that matter, is what they call "a natural," plain and simple. There does not appear to be a whole lot of irony in her work but there is certainly a warm humor and insight into the human condition. Her portraits are incisive, yet they are never mocking or mean spirited. Quite the contrary, her work shows a great love of humanity and all its foibles. Her figures may be rough and somewhat twisted-looking, but they are genuinely likable. Chen is an expressionist without an agenda; she seems to peer into the interior of our souls and express that vulnerability that belongs to all corporeal beings.

There is much resonance even in her nonfigurative subjects, as seen in a terrific little picture of what appears to be a religious temple. Yet it is Nana Chen's powerful little portraits such as "Hollow Glance" which stop us in our tracks and make us realize that we are in the presence of a quirkily original talent.

—Peter Wiley

The Inner Light of Francisco Jesus Jimenez Ales, Spanish Visionary



Painting by Francisco Jesus Jimenez Ales

To those artists for whom we can find no other suitable category, we often apply the term "visionary." However, the term seems properly earned by Francisco Jesus Jimenez Ales, a painter from Spain whose work can be seen at Jadite Gallery, 413 West 50th Street, from January 4 to 16.

Ales certainly eludes easy classification; yet his work is possessed of such intensity of vision as we see only in artists who work outside the boundaries of mainstream aesthetics; who paint as though no one ever painted before; as though they are making everything up as they go along, and for this reason are often called "Outsiders."

Usually such artists do not possess formal training in painting, and whether or not that is true in Ales' case, his work definitely appears deeply intuitive. Yet, what it lacks in traditional finesse it more than makes up for in energy and passion, which lends it an engaging freshness. One is told that the artist refers to himself as an "Abstract Impressionist," and that designation is not at all inaccurate, in that Ales creates his compositions with small daubs of color that accumulate on the canvas boards that he favors over the usual stretched canvas, much in the manner that we associate with the Impressionists and the Pointillists. Only, there the equation ends; for while the Impressionists employed their short, jotting strokes to capture, in an objective, almost scientific manner, an optical perception of light in nature, Ales appears more concerned with an inner vision of light tempered by an emotional reaction to visual stimuli.

Thus, landscape is transformed in his paintings into a realm of dazzling hues unbeholden to the dictates of the natural world. Scrutinizing his paintings, we enter a world wherein physical matter and atmosphere are magically malleable— even interchangeable. Which is to say, while we can perceive the lay of the land in his compositions and make approximate distinctions between horizon-line and sky, both are covered with densely layered concentrations of strokes in a complex spectrum of pink, purple-violet, blue, green, hues seen in configurations that one is unlikely to encounter in nature.

At the same time, we experience in Ales' paintings a heightened, extra-visual sense of nature, harking back to things we have all felt in those rare, epiphanous moments when all of our senses were exceptionally attuned to nuances of light and atmosphere that normally escape our notice. Van Gogh, although also more concerned with the actual appearance of landscape than Ales appears to be, often captured something similar through chromatic heightening and formal distortion, and more recent artists such as Charles Burchfield and Forrest Bess also have in their different ways.

The manner in which Francisco Jesus Jimenez Ales achieves this transformation of landscape is closer in its abstract spirit to the "Dreamtime" paintings of the Australian Aborigines, albeit from a more personal perspective. And this alone makes this Spanish artist's work quite unique and well worth discovering.

—Maurice Taplinger

Authenticity and Power in the paintings of the artist known as Barbara

The old saw that "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree" can as easily be applied to artistic pedigree as familial destiny, judging from the work of the artist who calls herself Barbara, whose work can be seen year-round in an on-going salon exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

Born in Germany, Barbara attended the Freie Kunstschule in Berlin for several years, but left her home country at an early age. She lived for periods of time in Brazil, Canada and the United States, before arriving in Belgium, where she resides presently. Still, her oils, acrylic paintings, and watercolors hark back to the heyday of German Expressionism so strikingly that one must declare Barbara a quintessential German painter.

And, indeed, this is something to be celebrated, given the weak tea that much so-called Neo-Expressionism turns out to be, with its sloppy sturm undo drag of reckless brush work, its contrived angst watered down by self protective irony, and its indulgence in the gratuitously grotesque. Barbara, on the other hand, is a passionate and committed painter who employs an Expressionist technique toward uplifting ends. Like her spiritual forbears in the Blue Reiter group, whose outlook was more mystical than that of their colleagues in Die Bruce, she is dedicated to passionate celebration of life, rather than to depicting the baseness of human nature.

Thus, even when Barbara employs frenzied strikes of thick pigment to depict a city smoldering against a fiery red sky in the aftermath of the worst terrorist attack in recent history in her large oil "11th of September," the overall thrust of the painting is transcendent. She appears to be assuring us that the human spirit will invariably survive the horrors of history. Indeed, the painting itself is the proof of this; for it is an amulet against despair, with its richly stumbled surface of vibrant hues apparently slathered on with a palette knife, with radiant bits of golden yellow—perhaps representing a redemptive light glimmering here and there through the haze of visceral red. What Barbara shows us in this painting is not the image of the ruined towers, but a vision of the structures that still stand, huddled together like mourners at a funeral, yet stalwart, majestic in their determination to prevail.

Another major oil on canvas, "Sunset Over the City," also has an elegiac quality, its composition dominated by a vast sky looming over a low urban horizon line. Yet here, too, Barbara employs radiant color to project a spiritual glow; its golden aura radiates from the sun, melting like an egg yolk in a pink sky, illuminating the city below. In other canvases, such as "Stonehenge" and "Atlantis," Barbara evokes mythical landscapes in vibrant areas of color laid down in vigorous strokes that lend her canvases a shimmering chromatic beauty.

Barbara brings equal passion and commitment to her paintings in acrylic and watercolor. (Her figurative compositions in the latter medium are especially noteworthy, recalling Emil Noodle for their lyrical fluidity.) Indeed, Barbara's ability to imbue every subject that she paints with emotional resonance has won critical acclaim for her exhibitions in Belgium, Germany, Paris, and New York.

—Peter Wiley

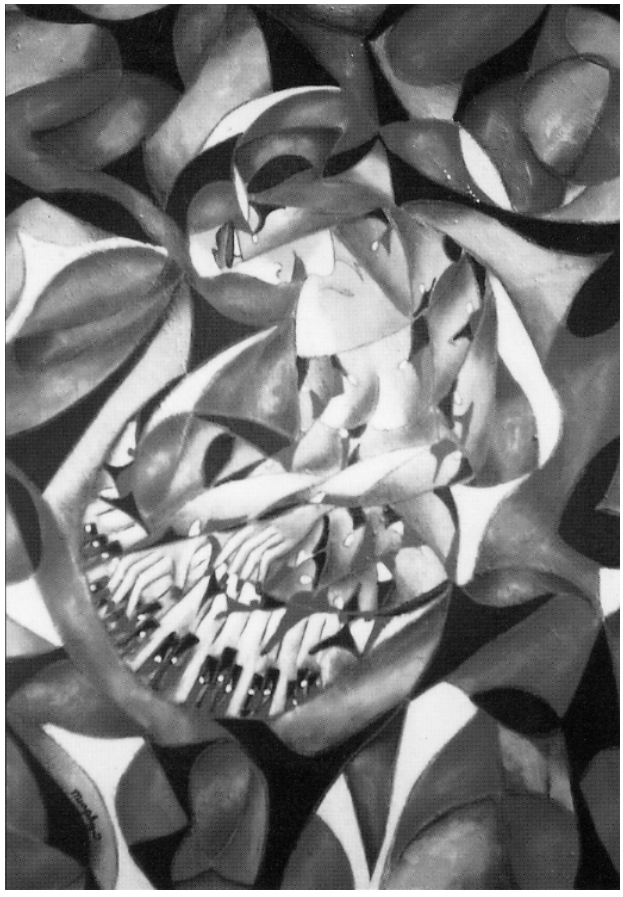
Painting as Spiritual Practice in the Art of Wanda Murphy

One of the satisfactions of charting a truly imaginative artist's career from exhibition to exhibition is bearing witness to the deepening and ripening of an oeuvre that can occur even over a relatively short period of time. One especially dramatic example of this are the paintings in Wanda Murphy's new exhibition "The Gift to Be," which represent a major departure for this artist, and can be seen at Ezair Gallery, 905 Madison Avenue, from November 1 through 30, with a reception on November 10, from 6 to 8 PM.

In her previous solo show in the same venue two years ago, Murphy, who studied art at Concord College in her native West Virginia, and later served as an apprentice to the well-known French artist Jean Paul Gaugy, showed a flair for setting sensual figures, often classically beautiful couples, afloat in luminous areas of color in compositions notable for their romantic auras. More recently, however, Murphy has begun to concentrate on color construction in the more formal sense of the term, and the single figure has taken precedence over the entwined lovers that graced her earlier work. At the same time, her compositions have become considerably more intricate and her figures are now more fragmented in a manner akin to the Cubists' integration of figure and ground. Rather than looming monolithically within the composition, Murphy's figures now play hide-and-seek with fractured planes of color that resemble stained glass; for they appear lit from within and are often contained within lines that resemble the leading used to connect stained glass shapes.

Line has long been prominent in one way or another in the work of this artist, who sometimes refers to herself as "a linear expressionist." In some of her earlier paintings, her sinuous linearity endowed her compositions with an unabashed decorativeness approaching the baroque flourishes of Art Nouveau. Now, however, line serves an even more essential purpose in paintings such as "Not Space, Not Time," where Murphy employs it to create swirling rhythms akin to those in the work of certain Futurists who broke down their compositions into small patches of color to express a sense of light, movement, and speed. In this glowing canvas, deep nocturnal blues, brilliant emerald greens, and golden ocher hues are contained within linear swirls that sustain two mysterious figures in black opera masks. These two fanciful beings appear to be suspended in a cosmic realm which is, as the title suggests, beyond space, beyond time.

Although line plays a slightly less prominent role in another acrylic on canvas called "The Connection," the vortex of forms from which the lone figure emerges are



"The Connection"

especially intense and the composition is, again, more tautly controlled than in Murphy's previous work. Another important change worth noting is that while Murphy stated of the paintings in her previous show at Ezair that they were concerned with expressing "the struggle between human desires and spiritual evolution," in her more recent pictures spiritual evolution would appear to have won out. As its title indicates, "The Connection" personifies the spiritual connectedness in the figure of a pianist, her slender fingers merging with the keyboard, the areas of vibrant color that swarm around her symbolizing the music that connects her to the larger scheme of things.

Musicians and musical instruments have figured prominently in the work of many artists over the years, some of Picasso's works being among the more notable examples. Murphy, however, employs the figure of the musician as both a formal and symbolic element in some of her new paintings. In each case, the musician would appear to be a surrogate for the artist in general and the symbolism would seem to relate to the spiritual path that every sincere artist follows, as seen in "Always for You." In this brilliantly colorful composition, which is one of her most abstract, a stylized figure strums a stringed instrument amid flowing forms that fan out like blue and green petals and leaves. Here, too, the face and hands of the figure are bathed in the radiant golden ocher hue that is prominent in her recent pictures, where her chromatic vocabulary is more developed and distinctive than in her previous work. Its prominence, along with the beatific expression of the musician's stylized features and the formal strength, lends the painting a quality akin to a Medieval icon. And as usual, Murphy's title is right on target, for the phrase "Always for You" drives home the idea that art is a service vocation; that, ultimately, the artist creates to enrich us all, rather than merely to express him or herself.

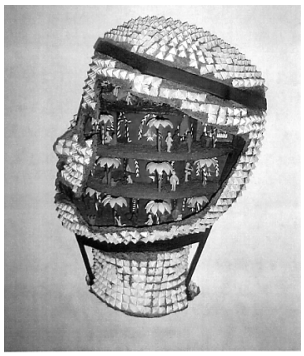
The formal evolution that Murphy's work has undergone in the past two years is impressive indeed. While the paintings in the exhibition she called "Leave Nothing Untouched" were refreshingly direct and possessed of a lively lyricism, her new work is more sharply focused. Not only has her palette coalesced into a distinctive chromatic vocabulary that she employs to fill her canvases with gemlike auras, but her recent mode of color construction has unified her compositions and given them a dynamic impact. Her paintings now command our attention with even greater urgency than before, their color harmonies demonstrating how well she has assimilated the lessons of her beloved Kandinsky to enhance her own native vision; their linear rhythms as vital in their own manner as the whirlwind automatism of the early Surrealist master Andre Masson.

Unlike the latter artist, however, Murphy does not espouse an aesthetic agenda or represent a movement. Rather, she approaches painting as an independent spirit, with all the hopeful optimism and receptiveness of a spiritual speaker. Indeed, Wanda Murphy has often spoken of her wish, as an artist, to experience "a oneness with divine energy," and her recent work seems to indicate that she is striving ever more passionately toward this noble goal.

—Byron Coleman

At Pleiades Gallery, Artists Choose Their Creative Cronies

Generously in the spirit of the holiday season, the "10th Friends of Pleiades Invitational Show," the most recent installment of a traditional event in which gallery artists offer an exhibition opportunity to worthy colleagues, can be seen at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from December 21 through January 8, 2005. (Reception: Thursday, December 23, from 5 to 8 PM.)



Charles R. Cutietta-Olson

Human faces figure prominently in the work of four different artists: Sun-Cheol Kwun suspends disembodied heads in space to dramatic effect in tactile, vigorously expressive paintings with real emotional power. Although they can be appreciated for textures akin to those of rough and ready British painters like Leon Kossoff and Frank Auerbach, Kwun's heads, with their somber colors and features as rumpled as old work-gloves, also possess a poignant psychological quality.

The sculptor/assemblage artist Charles R. Cutietta-Olson, on the other hand, employs what he calls "very mixed media" to create a compellingly crafted head with a cutaway view of little people and palm trees cavorting in colorful relief within. The setting of the internal drama, as well as the intricate studs decorating the head that contains it like tribal tattoos—and for that matter, the title, "Development #2, suggest an alienated individual's nostalgic tropical idylls.

The faces of homeless women, clustered like grapefruits around a rough cross made from broken crates, emerge from a brown shopping bag, in an assemblage by Lois Brandt called "Bag Ladies' Altar." Surrounded by a frame of grimy bricks that lend the composition the look of an urban icon, these faces have a haunting quality.

By contrast, Elvira Dimitrij presents the face of a comely female smoker, contained within a rectangle, floating amid clouds, in a painting called "Addiction," which combines elements of Pop and Surrealism. Although Dimitrij makes the subject as attractive as any magazine model, her wholesome features are stamped with the word "Unwelcome," indicating that her habit still makes her a social pariah.

Connie Rakity captures a character who probably couldn't care less about social status one way or the other in her digital photograph "Night Musician."

Connie Rakity

Seated in a doorway in Barcelona, the white bearded flute player appears to inhabit a timeless world all his own as he graces the night with notes that one can only assume are both lyrical and plaintive.

Wonderfully offbeat and romantic, an oil by Judith Gwyn Brown depicts figures in an imaginary museum in a shadowy style that captures the atmospheric sense of timelessness which only exists in places where history is entombed. Planets and stars float freely around one gallery and reconstructed dinosaur skeletons loom hugely in another, dwarfing the patrons who stroll, rapt, through this chamber of marvels.

Judith Gwyn Brown

If apples symbolize the fall, pears are all about redemption, according to fine prose stylist Guy Davenport. And if we take this symbolism as gospel, then Patti Hirsch sees sensuality as redemptive, judging from her painting of three shapely yellow pears floating in an unknown dark substance on a dark ground. Yet this slightly mysterious menage of succulent fruits also possesses a formal austerity reminiscent of Braque.

The real and the metaphysical strike an intriguing balance in another still life by Renee E. Rubin, in which a loaf of bread, balanced on a table between a jar and a jug, is severed by a free-floating knife, yet remains suspended in mid-air. Rubin's skillful delineation of these objects, as well as of the dusk sky and mountains in the background, makes her gravitational anomalies oddly convincing.

Gravity, however, is quite beside the point in the watercolors of Norma Behr Menezer, where floral subjects, delineated in a manner alternately delicate and bold, bloom autonomously amid flowing washes of luminous color.

Lois Brandt

Equally buoyant in its own manner is Emily Rich's work in watercolor and acrylic from her "Wave Series," in which the movement of watery forms is merely a pretext for a characteristically lively excursion in color and form by this frequently exhibited abstract artist.

Virginia Cantarella combines abstraction and realism effectively in her "Composite Painting," where several small panels are arranged in an irregular grid. Some panels contain painted objects such as a peaches, apples, or pliers or scissors, while others contain abstract forms. All are set within the painted grids that fasten all of Canterella's abstract or representational shapes securely to the picture plane.

Also including work by Robert Seydel, a collage artist whose work was not available for preview, this invitational show offers a great deal of pleasurable diversity.

—Lawrence Downes

The Bold, Blunt Beauty of Ju Won Park's New Paintings

Every good painter must develop a personal vocabulary with which to distinguish him or herself. For the Korean artist Ju Won Park, already widely exhibited in Japan and in her own country, and quickly becoming a presence in the United States art scene as well, the alphabet of address is the broad, blunt stroke. Although color is important to her work it is subdued, limited to earthy browns, black, and touches of blue—all subordinate to gesture.

Indeed, Ju Won Park's gestural thrust appears to grow bolder with each succeeding exhibition, judging from the paintings that will be on view in her new solo show at Gallery 32, 32 West 32nd Street, from December 1 through 15. (There will be a reception for the artist on Friday, December 3, from 6 to 8 PM.)

While Ju Won Park's paintings are aggressive enough to command one's attention from across the room, they are also possessed of subtle nuances, such as the contrasts between the juicy, tactile strokes of the dominant, earthier hues, and the thinner washes of black— and sometimes strident blue— applied in the manner of "stain" painting, that play around their edges.

An uncompromisingly abstract painter, Ju Won Park's large oils on canvas do not appear to be concerned with even the most spare form of story telling. Like the Abstract Expressionists, to whom she is often compared, she is adamantly "against interpretation", to borrow Susan Sontag's felicitous phrase. However, like much of the best postmodern abstraction, her work manages to be allusive anyway. Her big broad strokes of brown, accented with streaks of black, remind one of big wooden beams. And their various configurations can evoke many things: fences, when they are frontally arranged on the picture plane; the skeletal structure of houses under construction, when they intersect and overlap at various angles in some of her more intricate compositions; and even cruciforms, when they crisscross in a certain way.

(Those paintings in which crosses appear are some of her most powerful, and can be related to both early Christian art for their iconography and Zen ink painting for their gestural velocity—suggesting a truly broad range of multicultural meanings for those of us who are in the habit of reading forms as symbols.)

Such interpretations are inescapable, given that Ju Won Park literally "builds" her paintings with her broad strokes, and given that her compositions are so architectonic—if not literally architectural. However, while it does no harm to read such meanings into her compositions, and may even increase our enjoyment of them, it is important to keep in mind that these paintings are more about the act of painting than anything outside of themselves. Which is to say, they are vigorous and

painting by Ju Won Park

powerful vehicles for the expression of form, color, texture, and gesture —especially gesture!—above all else. Thus, in order to do her paintings true justice, we must ultimately respect the artist's intentions and view them primarily for their abstract attributes. And rest assured, the rewards for doing so are rich and many; for Ju Won Park is a superb painter indeed.

—Maurice Taplinger

Corbin Hollis Choate's Heavenly Pop Formalism

Andy Warhol once said that "once you 'get' Pop nothing ever looks the same," and the work of Corbin Hollis Choate, seen recently at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, is a perfect illustration of what he meant. For once you have viewed Choate's paintings, you can never again view cherubim, or putti, in quite the same light.

Whether Choate considers himself a Pop artist or not is really a moot point at this late date. It is very likely that he considers himself an abstract painter who uses imagery simply as an ironic attention device to draw the viewers' attention. And a good case could certainly be made for this way of looking at his paintings, considering their formal virtues. These are considerable, since Choate's paintings are executed in a meticulous hard edge style that calls attention to the clarity of his form and his cool, carefully harmonized color areas. There is also a good deal of white space in his paintings that adds to their formal purity. So one can easily appreciate these cunningly conceived works for their abstract qualities alone.

That said, Choate's preoccupation with putti can not be dismissed as a mere formal ploy, being far too resonant of art history, religiosity, the heavenly realm, as well as more down-to-earth aspects of love. Cherubim, after all, are among the most ambiguous of symbols. We can just as easily think of them as messengers of Eros and harbingers of profane love as biblical attendants of God or a holy place. Indeed, they had their origin in Greek and Roman antiquity; thus in their more pagan incarnation they often figure prominently in depictions of the feast of Venus and are seen flocking like so many playful birds around a statue of the goddess. In much Renaissance art however, they are guardian spirits, benign little angels, protecting souls during life and finally conducting them to heaven.

Corbin Hollis Choate seems to play off this ambiguity by employing neon colors and dynamically cropped compositions that give his images a campy charm in paintings such as "Gabriel III," where the figure wears its halo with a suggestion of foppish wickedness, as though his important role as messenger of God and herald of birth in the Annunciation has led him into vanity. By contrast, in "Raphael," the almost Grecian purity of the figure's profile does indeed suggest the archangel, the guardian spirit and protector of the young.

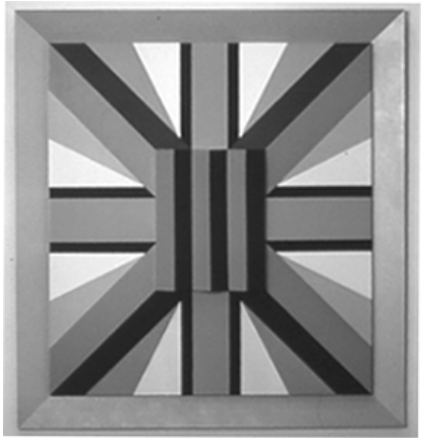
In most of the paintings in his recent show at Montserrat, with the exception of the full figure entitled "Solaris," the composition consists of close-up views of a face and part of a wing, the severe cropping increasing the abstract impact of the composition. However, in the work of John Wesley, that other Pop formalist, we are compelled to consider possible meanings in Choate's work, even as we take pleasure in its formal attributes, which alone are sufficient to compel our admiration. This duality lends a complexity to the paintings of Corbin Hollis Choate that deepens and enriches their appeal.

—Gloria Kiehl

Surveying Postmodern Abstraction at Iona College

The advent of postmodernism, rather than ending abstract art, has only served to extend its possibilities. Eleven invited artists of the American Society of Contemporary Artists, an 86 year-old non-profit exhibiting organization to which well-known modernists like Adolph Gottlieb, Chaim Gross, and William Zorach once belonged, demonstrate this conclusively in "Driven to Abstraction," at Iona College Council on the Arts, Brother Chapman Gallery, 715 North Avenue, New Rochelle New York from January 18 through February 24.

There will also be gallery talks by two of the exhibiting artists: "Through My Eyes," featuring Harriet FeBland, an internationally exhibited painter-sculptor and director of the Harriet FeBland Art Workshop for 32 years (February 3, 2005, 12 noon); and "Arriving at Abstraction," featuring Frank Mann, renowned painter, art writer, and critic (February 8, 12 noon).



Harriet FeBland

Starting with the two featured speakers: The sculptures and wall-hung painted constructions of Harriet FeBland breathe new life into the hard-edge aesthetic with their brilliant colors and emblematic forms. FeBland has been called "the poet of geometry," and that description is apt, given her striking synthesis of the lyrical and the precise. FeBland imbues pure form and color with unusual expressive power, as seen here in her painted wall relief-construction "Jubilee," with its aggressive forms and vibrant colors.

By contrast, Frank Mann mines a more organic mode in chromatically luminous oils on canvas in which sensually rounded forms appear to allude to a host of anatomical permutations and possibilities without sacrificing their slippery abstract autonomy. Mann's smoothly painted shapes flow freely in compositions notable for their buoyancy, as well as for their chromatic luminosity. Mann's exquisite draftsmanly abilities enable him to interweave figure and ground with consummate grace.

Jami Taback

The abstract acrylic paintings of Scottish-born New Yorker Steven Beveridge are notable for their vigorously swirling compositions. Working in acrylics, Beveridge exploits their particular properties to the maximum in paintings such as "structure," where a muscular maze of whiplash linear layerings of black, white, and glowing ocher conduct the eye on an exhilarating roller-coaster ride.

Harriet Regina Marion strides gingerly between the abstract and the representational in paintings such as "Fireworks: Dumont Plaza," where a combination of roughly architectural forms and more buoyant elements evoke, without spelling out, the event of the title. The surfaces of Marion's paintings are further enlivened by a variety of lively patterns, and a patchwork of overlapping color areas that infuse them with an almost antic sense of incident and energy.

Jami Taback, on the other hand, makes a muted but strong statement on a modest scale with relatively few well-chosen forms, in her monoprint with collage and drawing, "Garden at Dawn." With simplified shapes, set against an earthy ground, which appear to morph from floral forms to gardening tools, Taback creates celebratory symbols for her ongoing theme, "World Peace."

Another artist who works on paper, Rose Sigal Ibsen has won praise from the Chinese master C. C. Wang for her unique approach to Asian brush technique. While its bold, liquescent forms are monochromatic, Sigal Ibsen's watercolor "Dragon Head" is as lyrically evocative in its own way as one of Helen Frankenthaler's color field canvases.

Born in Vienna in 1923, Frederick Terna is a survivor of the German concentration camps who transmutes memories of human suffering into a personal vocabulary of private symbols. In Terna's powerful painting "Logos 2," with its tactile surface and interplay of strident and somber colors, the central shape could suggest ribs of flame culminating in a cruciform, yet the meaning is open to a host of subjective interpretations.

The watercolors of Judith Huttner also suggest private meanings, albeit of a more upbeat kind, as seen In "Back to Basics," where fragments of block-lettered text and shard-like shapes evoke half-obliterated messages on shredded urban wall posters. The allusiveness of Huttner's work exemplifies the more permissive postmodern attitude toward abstraction, which leaves space for personal concerns to enter into the formal dialogue.

The modernist taboo against allusion in abstraction is being bucked in sculpture as well, as seen in Jane Petruska's lively and engaging mixed media piece "Masquerade." Petruska employs flat yet sensual contours and fragmentation, akin to Mary Frank, to evoke a female nude reclining with her head thrown back in a posture of joyful abandon— of life-embracing liberation.

Ray Shanfeld

The alabaster sculptures of Ray Shanfeld possess an Arp-like purity, with their smooth surfaces and fluid organic forms, which are obviously derived from nature but not overtly descriptive. Shanfeld, however, has his own way with negative spaces, as seen in the punningly titled "Strada– Various," where a black opening suggests cavities as various as skull-sockets, the mouths of caves, and the holes in stringed instruments.

An engaging ambiguity also enlivens the sculpture of Raymond Weinstein, whose walnut piece "Genesis," features two smooth circular shapes that could be seen as orbiting planets or merging lovers. As with the other artists in this show, however, any such interpretation of Weinstein's work is bound to be strictly subjective; for his primary concern appears to be with the exploration of abstract form. —J.Sanders Eaton

Paul Richard Mason: Portraits of Our Shared Absurdity

An eccentric style can be an asset for an artist, provided he or she is as naturally gifted as Paul Richard Mason, whose acrylic paintings on canvas were recently seen at Agora Gallery's Chelsea location, 530 West 25th Street. And make no mistake about it: Mason is one of our great eccentrics in the tradition of William N. Copley (CPLY), and of Chicago's wild and woolly Hairy Who School.

A poet and musician as well as a painter, Mason grew up in Pennsylvania and the United Kingdom, and now lives in St. Tropez, France. Already attracting attention for his unique style in both Europe and the U.S., his present show should win him many new fans on this side of the pond for his zany take on portraiture.

Indeed, Mason's people are every bit as engaging as Jean Dubuffet's Art Brut personages of the 1940s and 50s. Mason, however, has also assimilated elements of geometric and pattern painting, which he employs to anchor his heads and full-length figures to the picture plane. Thus, for all their freewheeling distortions, his paintings have a formal quality which is enhanced by a restrained, mostly monochromatic palette of gray, beige, and other more or less neutral hues. These are combined with a contrastingly "broken" black line that gives the figures a jagged, discombobulated appearance.

"Face to Face"

Like members of the aforementioned Hairy Who school such as Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson, Mason captures the absurdity of the human condition by combining broad caricature with subtle psychological insight. By holding up a distorting mirror, he forces us to view ourselves in a new light. And while what we see may not be flattering, it is executed with such good humor that we are amused rather than appalled. For his paintings thumb their nose at existential despair, suggesting that we might as well revel in our essential silliness, rather than trying to deny it!

In Mason's painting "Face to Face," the two antagonists confront each other with bared teeth and narrowed eyes. Yet their angular heads, depicted in bold black strokes from which splashes fly like sparks, spattering the beige background grid, are oddly harmonious. Their apparent discord is resolved visually by the artist in a manner that makes the confrontation more pleasing than threatening.

The head entitled "Hector" makes an equally amusing statement, since its facial expression—particularly its squared-off mouth—suggests a hectoring presence, a swaggering bully who attempts to intimidate others with his bluster. But here, too, Mason renders this character harmless by overpowering him with stridently striped wallpaper patterns that appear to be advancing forward to engulf and restrain him like the bars of a jail cell.

In another canvas called "Nirvana" Mason appears to put his own frantic spin on the classical theme of "The Three Graces." Posed frontally, their breasts bared near the bottom of the starkly cropped composition, the three women confront the viewer with an agitation that wittily disavows the transcendent title. It is just this ability to emphasize contradictions that makes the paintings of Paul Richard Mason not only fun but more profound and insightful than immediately meets the eye. —Wilson Wong

Photographic Profiles from "Penthouse to Pavement"

If the recent photography exhibition "Penthouse and Pavement" proved one thing conclusively, it was that everyone who views a city sees a different metropolis.

Curated for the West Side Arts Coalition by Jean Prytyskacz with the assistance of David Ruskin and presented at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway at 96th Street, the show highlighted urban visions by ten photographic artists, each with a distinctive style and point of view.

The two photographers involved in assembling this show demonstrated its diversity in microcosm: Jean Prytyskacz's color photographs captured such subjects as a storefront so submerged in graffiti that it looked like an Abstract Expressionist painting, as well as the humorous synchronicity of a man in Little Italy standing outside The Mulberry Street Cigar Company, next to a wooden Indian that seemed to mirror his own stoicism. David Ruskin interpreted the more romantic qualities of the urban scene with his hand colored photographs, such as one of lights glowing through bare tree limbs at dusk and another of a cozy apartment interior reflected on the glass of a window looking down on a park shrouded in snow.

Former cinematographer Richard Shore's color prints focused on striking the contrasts in his pictures of a male Armani model on a billboard towering over a preoccupied middle aged woman outside a bank of phone booths, as well as a fragmented statue, set like The Hulk against a backdrop of apartment buildings.

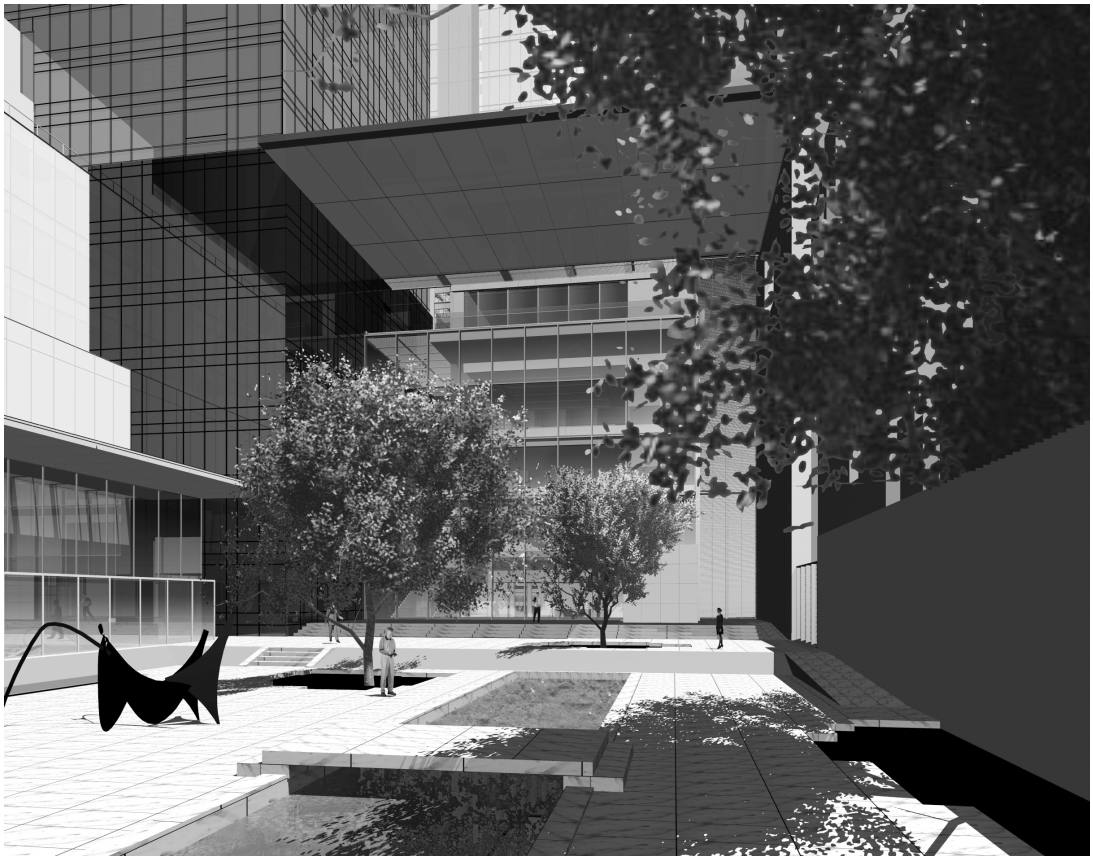
In her "Dyckman Street" series of black and white prints, Deena Weintraub's close-up color prints of crowded store windows, fruit stands, clothing hanging on garment racks, signs, and subway stations recorded the visual cacophony enlivening a shopping center in Brooklyn.

Lori Weinless Fischler expressed the timeless sophistication of Manhattan in her noirish nocturnal visions of a party on a penthouse terrace, people walking under theater marquees, and the neon signs of the Hotel Claridge burning through darkness.

The archival Giclee prints of Beth Slavin exemplify "found" abstraction with severely cropped views of a Chinatown gumball machine, a brilliant blue wall, and a parking meter with the "posed" quality of a formal portrait. Scott Weingarten's black and white digital and classic silver gelatin prints evoke vertiginous views of New York buildings soaring skyward toward swirling clouds and the mysterious shadow cast by a nocturnal stroller on cobblestones in Rome with equal panache. By contrast, Robert Helman's pigment prints are all about intense color-saturation in subjects ranging from images of awnings, umbrellas and signs, to a long view of the city skyline bathed in a luminous pink haze.

Two final photo artists project a warm humanism: Jennifer Holst shows a fanciful image of a small boy playing a concertina in Verona Italy, entitled "Little Romeo," as well as a witty picture of the shadows of tourists cast on a wall in Venice bearing contradictory street signs. Gloria Waslyn photographs her charismatic pair of parrots, Baby and Merlin, interacting with a variety of different people, ranging from a Buddhist monk clutching a Metrocard to a subway cellist, as they lobby on the photographer's behalf for peace, tolerance, and other good causes.

—Marie R. Pagano



Garden view. The Museum of Modern Art, The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden, western view towards the Gallery Building, Digital Images © 2004 Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates

At the "New" MoMA,
The Museum is the Message

We got a letter from MoMA. Maybe you got one too. It said "all of us here at the Museum consider you to be part of the MoMA family," and went on to urge us to hurry up and mail in our Membership Renewal, so that we would be "in good standing" for the Grand Reopening on November 30.

"Even as I write, extraordinary modern masterpieces are taking their home one by one," Meagan Johnson, director of membership, enthused: "Dali's Persistence of Memory, Monet's Waterlilies, Picasso's Les Demoiselles D'Avignon, Sherman's Untitled Film Stills, van Gogh's Starry Night, Warhol's Campbell Soup Cans, just to name a few."

She listed them as though not only Andy's Campbell Soup Cans but all the other titles were brand names. She sounded, even in print, sort of hyperventilated, like one of those glitzed-up reporters on "Access Hollywood" or "Extra! Extra!" She made it sound as if all the "modern masterpieces" were celebrities walking the red carpet into some glittering V.I.P. event.

Still, compared to all the other mad construction in midtown, from the physical evidence at hand, you really wouldn't know much was going on. We know they knocked down the Hotel Dorset on 54th Street and expanded northward, but we never paid much attention to the Dorset anyway, hardly noticed it was gone. From our usual angle of vision on 53rd Street, it really hasn't looked like all that much has changed. MoMA's familiar facade has remained intact. It has just looked a bit gutted and shrouded, as though minor renovations were underway or maybe it was in the process of being gift-wrapped by Christo and Jeanne-Claude. You almost had to wonder what they spent that $858 million on or where they are hiding those several thousand extra square feet that have supposedly been added on, almost doubling the size of the place.

Admittedly, we have tunnel vision, and have not even bothered to walk around the block and take a look. We're still nostalgic for the old, old MoMA, even before the one they recently renovated, when it was still connected to the Whitney, which you could enter through a doorway, free of charge. They say the whole idea of this new MoMA, redesigned by Yoshio Taniguchi, is that it will have doors all over the place, galleries branching off in all directions. This will supposedly demonstrate that progress in art does not necessarily move in a straight line, that it sometimes goes sideways— or even reverses direction and goes backward a little bit before lurching forward again (wherever forward is supposed to be). Now we won't be strapped in on a fast lane trajectory from Cezanne and van Gogh, through Picasso and Matisse, through Abstract Expressionism to Minimalism. It will be possible to "detour" into Surrealism, Expressionism and other supposed backwaters off the beaten path to the sublime.

This is definitely a more postmodern attitude and we applaud it. But wasn't that the way MoMA was when we were kids, and while there were plenty of Cezannes, Picassos, Matisses, and Mondrians on the walls, the real crowd-pleasers were Pavel Tchelitchew's "Hide-and-Seek" —that big, veiny tree!— and Peter Blume's "Eternal City," with its green-faced Jack-in-the-box Mussolini among the ruins?

Alas, we haven't heard about any plan to take those marvelous monstrosities out of mothballs and put them back up. They probably wouldn't go with the Canon of Cool decor. We're happy to hear, though, that Taniguchi has expanded the sculpture garden, always a great place to hang out on nice days, and what's not to love about the "soaring light-filled atrium" that Meagan Johnson extols so chirpily in her letter to us? But have we really become such a race of Starbucks mutants that we need pit-stops on each floor "where visitors can refresh themselves—a place to buy an espresso, to talk on a cell phone or flip through a catalog?"

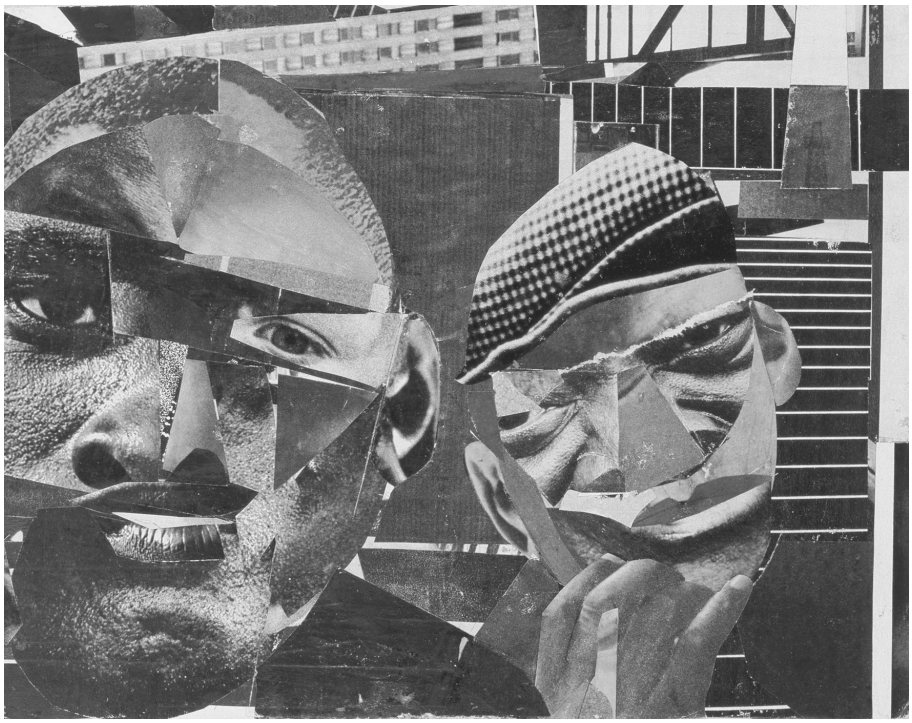
And if MoMA insists on using the word "soaring" so enthusiastically in its promo material and renewal pleas, why not apply it to the 67% hike in the admission price? Needless to say, twenty bucks seems a little steep for art students, artists who don't show at Gagosian, seniors on a fixed income, and all those un-chic, non-Zabar's consumers from the bridge and tunnel boroughs like Queens, where the collection has been slumming in a former staple factory for the past two years while the remodeling went on. But when citizens in some of those groups expressed concern about this, our billionaire mayor, Bloomberg, shrugged, "Some things people can afford, some things people can't."

Shades of that other Republican sweetheart, Ed Koch, telling lifelong New Yorkers to just "move somewhere else" if they don't like the skyrocketing rents in Manhattan! At least Glenn Lowry, MoMA's director, has the class to pay lip service to liberal contriteness when he says the same thing in a slightly different way: "I'd love it if we were free. Because I think cultural institutions belong to the people. But we are a private institution. We do not get public subsidies. And we're not asking for any."

Not now, maybe. But isn't it true that "over the past five years, the city funneled $65 million in taxpayer money to help fund MoMA's expansion"? Or is the Daily News— not exactly a bastion of liberalism— just making that up?

And while we're at it, we might as well say that were not thrilled that MoMA's first exhibition is an exercise in narcissism: "Nine Museums by Yoshio Taniguchi," presenting MoMA and other art museums the famous Japanese architect has designed over the past 25 years. Adding further to the self-referential sense of deja vu all over again will be a concurrent exhibition called "Michael Wesely: Open Shutter at The Museum of Modern Art.," featuring slow exposure photographs of MoMA's renovation spanning nearly three years.

However, other exhibitions scheduled for 2005 sound promising, particularly



Romare Bearden, Pittsburgh Memory, 1964, Collage of printed papers with graphite on cardboard 8 1/2 x 11 3/4 in. (21.6 x 29.9 cm) Collection of halley k harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld Copyright ©Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York

"Pioneering Modern Painting: Paul Cezanne and Pissarro 1865-1885 (June 24-September 12), and later in the Fall, a retrospective of paintings and drawings by Elizabeth Murray and "Odilon Redon at MoMA"— a detour into Symbolism suggesting that they may be serious about broadening the canon.

So what are we waiting for? Why is that Membership Renewal Form, in its postage-paid envelope, still sitting like a question mark on our desk?

Romare Bearden: A Life in Collage

For our money—Okay, so we didn't actually pay— the best museum show to see right now is "The Art of Romare Bearden," at the Whitney, 945 Madison Avenue, which continues through January 9, 2005. First presented at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., is the most comprehensive exhibition ever of the great African American artist whose collages capture the jerky syncopations of urban life, as well as the slower rhythms of the rural south.

Among the strongest pieces in the show are the seminal black and white photo montages that Bearden created in the mid 1960s, when he first started working with scissors after several years of false starts as a figurative and abstract painter. By contrast, Bearden's paintings from the early 1940s—gouaches on big sheets of brown wrapping paper inspired by childhood memories of summers spent down south— are derivative of the frescoes of the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera and the temperas Jacob Lawrence, whose "Migration" series had already been published in Fortune magazine.

Fame was to elude Bearden himself for decades, as he wrestled with influences ranging from the Mexican muralists, to Picasso, Matisse, and Arshile Gorky. So most of the early paintings in the show are of mainly historical value, as examples of what a doggedly ambitious painter can go through as he explores and discards influences—the arduous process jazz musicians call "paying dues."

By 1950, Bearden still had no gallery to represent him, and was painting halfhearted attempts at Abstract Expressionism, the prevailing movement of the day. For awhile, he became so discouraged that he devoted the better part of his creative energies to writing songs, twenty of which were recorded by singers such as Billy Ekstine and Leslie Uggams. He finally found his way as a visual artist in 1963, when he invited a group of fellow African-American artists to his studio to discuss how they might contribute to the civil rights movement, suggesting they might all collaborate on a collage. But when the idea met with little enthusiasm, he began to experiment with the medium on his own.

Almost as soon as Bearden started making collages, he started hitting his stride. Finally, he had a vehicle in which he could combine formal sophistication—all that he had learned from his close study of European modernism during a sojourn to Paris on the G.I. Bill of Rights—with a folkloric sense of

his peoples' journey from Africa, to the sharecropper shacks, country churches, and jukejoints of the American south, to the teeming streets, tenements, and jazz clubs of Harlem. One of his major innovations was merging photo-images of African masks with the faces of real people in a way that simultaneously references the influence of tribal sculpture on Picasso and captures the continuity of the African Diaspora with brilliant formal ingenuity.

These merged masks and human faces are especially intense in Bearden's Harlem scenes, where they loom disproportionately from clusters of figures sitting on a stoop, lounging on a corner, leaning out of tenement windows, or strolling down the street under a melange of pawnshop and liquor store signs. By assembling figures and faces from disparate parts and features, Bearden arrived at a more subtle expressiveness than any single image could provide. While the people in his Southern scenes seem more resigned and inward-gazing, his stoop sitters and sidewalk strollers confront the viewer with eyes that suggest longing and anger, hopefulness and alienation, and any number of complex emotions that came with being black in urban America in an era of profound struggle. Their often oversize fingers strum beat-up acoustic guitars or flutter cigarettes to lips with jerky movements set in motion by the neo-cubist fractures of Bearden's collage technique. Extreme dislocations of scale capture how particular faces will literally leap out of a crowd, magnified by the zoom-lens of split-second perceptions; or the way specific details of someone's cool attitude or rakish angle of snap-brim fedora or bebop cap will burn themselves into our consciousness in a flickering instant.

Bearden learned a great deal from how Picasso distorted, deconstructed, and reassembled human anatomy—and perhaps a thing or two from the funky Berlin street scenes of his former teacher at The Art Students League, George Grosz. However, he assimilated those lessons from the unique perspective a black American whose parents were part of that great migration from Down South to Up North.

Born in Meckleburg County, North Carolina in 1911, Bearden grew up in Harlem, in a home where larger-than-life figures of the Harlem Renaissance like the poet Langston Hughes, the painter Aaron Douglas and the composer Duke Ellington were frequent visitors. He belonged to the cultured middle class but was still conversant with the street at a time when Harlem was a cohesive community, where jitterbuggers and church folks still had a nodding acquaintanceship as they passed each other on the sidewalk along the way from Saturday night into Sunday morning.

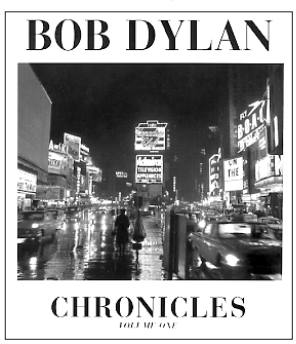
"The Art of Romare Bearden" covers every stage of his mature evolution, from his early and white collages, which flowered into the large, brilliantly colorful collages of the early seventies, such as his panoramic cityscape "The Block"; to the lush tropical landscapes of the same period, inspired by the time he and his wife spent on the Caribbean island of St. Martin; to the mural-scale fabric collages of the late '70s, such as "Captivity and Resistance," which celebrated the 1839 rebellion aboard the slave ship Amistad in a manner influenced by southern quilt-making; to the "Profile Series" of autobiographical collages, a sort of summing up completed in the final decade of his life.

To those for whom even the Whitney's relatively modest admissions fee might prove prohibitive, those who just can't get enough of Bearden, and those actually in a position to consider owning one of his works, we also recommend "In the Garden of Dreams: The Art of Romare Bearden," at ACA Galleries, 529 West 29th Street.

Two excellent companion pieces to both the comprehensive survey at the Whitney and the smaller, beautifully focused show at ACA, are the recently published books *Romare Bearden: His Life and Art,* by Myron Scwartzman (Harry N. Abrams), and *Romare Bearden: Photographs* by Frank Stewart (Pomegranate Communications).

The former is a lavishly illustrated biography and monograph, while the latter affords us intimate glimpses of Bearden working in his studio, relaxing at home with his wife Nanette, and enjoying the company of Albert Murray, Jacob Lawrence, Dizzy Gillespie, Alvin Ailey, Benny Andrews, and others among the many close friends and creative colleagues he attracted in his long and productive career.

Bob Dylan's Back Pages



The one high point of Bob Dylan's first film in a decade and a half, last year's "Masked & Anonymous," was the characteristically perverse spectacle of an icon of the Sixties Counterculture performing a rousing rendition of that rallying cry of the Confederacy, "Dixie." But perhaps the movie's most telling moment is when Dylan, as his transparent alter ego Jack Fate, croaks, "I was always a singer and maybe no more than that."

For this disingenuous delusion is apparently what the former Robert Zimmerman would have us believe in his bizarre, histrionically titled autobiography *Bob Dylan—Chronicles, Volume One,* just out from Simon & Schuster.

"Reporters would shoot questions at me and I would tell them repeatedly that I was not a spokesman for anything or anybody and that I was just a musician," the most elusive masked man since The Lone Ranger declares from behind his latest disguise—that preposterous pencil-thin Cisco Kid mustache— claiming a case of mistaken identity.

It's true that he was never really a revolutionary in anything but artistic terms. But he was the pop prodigy who wedded Beat poetry to Tin Pan Alley Banality. (Without his example The Beatles probably would have gone on singing teenybop pap like "I Wanna Hold Your Hand" forever). And his prophetic pose was enough to get him and his family harassed at their house in Woodstock by "rogue radicals looking for the Prince of Protest...unaccountable-looking characters, gargoyle-looking gals, scarecrows, stragglers, looking to party, raid the pantry..."

Dylan tells us he moved his wife and kids to New York City "in the hopes to demolish my identity, but it wasn't any better there. It was worse. Demonstrators found our house and paraded up and down in front of it, chanting and shouting, demanding for me to come out and lead them somewhere—stop shirking my duties as the conscience of a generation."

He implies that even his reported rediscovery of his Jewish roots was a ploy to throw these scary ghouls off his trail: "I went to Jerusalem, got myself photographed at the Western Wall wearing a skullcap. The image was transmitted worldwide instantly and quickly all the great rags changed me overnight into a Zionist. This helped a little."

Perhaps the weirdest symptom of his distress at this time (the height of his fame in the early '70s) is that he takes his wife to the Rainbow Room to see a performance by Frank Sinatra, Jr. and actually takes a liking to the guy: "Why him and not somebody on the hip circuit? No hassles and nobody chasing me, that's why...that and maybe because I felt a connection to him—I reckoned that we were about the same age and that he was a contemporary of mine."

Dylan reveals other unexpected enthusiasms as well, among them military strategy, Ricky Nelson, Bobby Vee, polka music, and Senator Barry Goldwater (He doesn't say what he thinks of George Bush, and one might prefer not to know).

"Chronicles" is by no means chronological. The narrative bounces back and forth between his early days as a struggling folk singer in Greenwich Village to the '70s and '80s. Successive spouses (he's had two that we know of) are simply referred to as "my wife" and there are frequent mentions of "my kids," but they are never named. Nor does he seem the least bit interested in the supposed landmarks of his career, though they've prompted an academic discipline called Dylanology, spawned numerous research papers, and earned people actual degrees.

He writes nothing, for example, about the fabled fiasco at Newport Folk Festival when he enraged purists by going electric and Pete Seeger pulled the plug, and dismisses his famous motorcycle accident (which some claim was a cover for another kind of crack-up) in a terse sentence: "I had been in a motorcycle accident and I'd been hurt, but I recovered." Nor does he shed any light on his supposed flirtation, in the 1980s, with Born Again Christianity.

Given Dylan's eccentric approach to memoir, we wouldn't even take for granted that we'll get the lowdown in Volume Two on what had to be one of the most surreal events in showbiz history: His 1997 performance at The Vatican, where he sang "Knocking on Heaven's Door" to Pope Paul II, who, according to the Italian papers, rose from his throne, embraced him warmly, then paraphrased "Blowing in the Wind" when he addressed the crowd of 200,000 Dylan worshipers: "How many roads must a man walk down before he becomes a man? I answer you: One. There is only one road for a man and it is Christ."

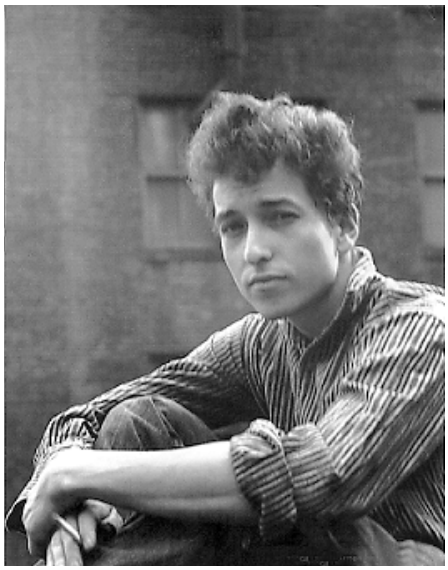
We wouldn't expect any mea culpas to the feminists for Dylan's recent Victoria's Secret commercial, either, from a public figure who declares, "What did I owe the rest of the world? Nothing. Not a damn thing."

What the walking contradiction whose first film was called "Don't Look Back" does give us, however—in between paranoid rants about preying fans and prying press, and tedious accounts of various recording sessions that could only interest a die-hard Dylanologist—is a vivid Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Young man.

With an atmospheric vintage black and white photo of rainslick neonlit nighttime Times Square on the cover to set the mood, "Chronicles" opens with Dylan on his own like a rolling stone in New York, an ambitious kid from Hibbing, Minnesota, owning nothing but his guitar and a head full of Woody Guthrie songs: "It wasn't money or love that I was looking for. I had a heightened sense of awareness, and was set in my ways, impractical and a visionary to boot. My mind was strong like a trap and I didn't need any guarantee of validity. I didn't know a single soul in this dark freezing metropolis but that was all about to change—and quick."

You may recognize the syntax from the songs (with maybe a bit of his fellow Minnesotan Garrison Keillor's radio private eye Guy Noir tossed into the mix). But the nostalgia and straightforward narrative style, unobscured by convoluted metaphor, are new to Dylan's repertoire.

He takes us back to Greenwich Village, circa. 1961, evoking long-gone haunts of folk music and poetry like The Gaslight Cafe, Cafe Wha?, and The Kettle of Fish in loving detail. Anyone who knew that scene can tell you that period was a lot closer to the 1950s than what is generally referred to in florid psychedelic script as "The Sixties"



Bob Dylan in the Gaslight era

(most of which actually occurred toward the end of the decade and peaked in the early '70's). There had always been a counterculture in the Village, but there was no official Youth Culture yet. Nor, aside from rare bongo-beating Hollywood beatniks like Brando and Dean, did the mass media provide role models for rebellion.

In fact, there was no Bob Dylan yet, to speak of, but he was working on it, inventing himself from scratch, laying the groundwork for his edgy, cockroachy charisma. And he generously gives credit to those great unknowns, the obscure but colorful bohemian characters and less famous folk singers who became his witting or unwitting mentors, providing the spare parts from which to construct a persona, in much the same way that Romare Bearden assembled collages from fragments and features of various faces. Dylan remembers them with affection and a genuine respect that has not waned over all the years of his fame.

For awhile he crashed on the couch of an intellectual tool and die maker named Ray and his beautiful girlfriend Chloe, who checked hats in a belly dancing dive on 8th Avenue and modeled occasionally for a low-rent girly magazine called Cavalier. Raised on Uncle Milty, I Love Lucy, Peyton Place, and Mickey Spillane ("a cultural spectrum that left my mind black with soot"), he devoured the couple's haphazard but comprehensive book shelves, discovering Dante, Rousseau, Machiavelli, Shelly, Faulkner and Freud—"stuff that could make you bug-eyed," as he puts it in that Catcher in the Wry (sic) voice that he adopts for this part of the book.

Although he had not yet started writing songs, he read Poe's poem "The Bells," and "strummed it to melody on my guitar." Opening a copy of Dante's Inferno and finding the cryptic phrase "the cosmopolitan man" scribbled by his host on its title page, while Roy Orbison warbled on the radio, the kid from Hibbing started storing up connections that would come in handy once his songwriting career shifted into high gear.

From a bar stool in the Kettle of Fish, next door to the The Gaslight, where he had his first regular gig, Dylan studied "The kind of people who come from nowhere and go right back into it—a pistol packing rabbi, a snaggle toothed girl with a crucifix between her breasts—all kinds of characters looking for the inner heat." He made regular trips to Morristown, New Jersey, to visit his hero Woody Guthrie, terminally ill in a hospital out there with Huntington's disease, and sing him his own songs.

Dylan once described himself in that period in another context as "a Woody Guthrie jukebox," and Guthrie's daughter Nora supposedly complained (though not in this book!), that, with his jerky movements and slurred diction, he was "even imitating Woody's disease." Then he discovered that Rambling Jack Elliot's Woody impersonation was better than his, and writes "I felt like I'd been cast into sudden hell."

Dylan says of Rambling Jack, a Jewish doctor's son from Brooklyn whose self-transformation surely guided his own metamorphosis and future mastery of image manipulation: "Jack was some master of musical tricks. The record cover was mysterious. It showed a character with a certain careless ease, rakish looking, a handsome saddle tramp. He's dressed like a cowboy. His tone of voice is sharp, focused and piercing. He drawls and he's so confident it makes me sick." (Having spent an evening a few years back at composer and Beat pied piper Dave Amram's apartment in the Village, listening to Amram and Rambling Jack, both hunched over guitars, trade songs

and stories, we can attest that he was still a charismatic presence with vocal inflections that Dylan obviously picked up on. The grizzly old timer in the battered ten-gallon hat—like the one Dylan often sports nowadays—grinned as Dave launched into a new song he had written, in which he rhymed "Rambling Jack" and "Kerouac.")

Dylan also revered Dave Van Ronk, who landed him his gig at the Gaslight: "He was passionate and stinging, sang like a soldier of fortune and sounded like he paid the price. Van Ronk could howl and whisper, turn blues into ballads and ballads into blues. I loved his style. He was what the city was all about. In Greenwich Village, Van Ronk was king of the street. He reigned supreme."

Dylan also paints a word portrait of the legendary black bluesman Robert Johnson, glimpsed in a rare old 8-millimeter film—"playing with huge, spiderlike hands and they magically move over the strings of his guitar...wearing a white linen jumper, and an unusual gilded cap like Little Lord Fauntleroy"— that is as vivid in its own way as one of the aforementioned Romare Bearden's more down-home collages.

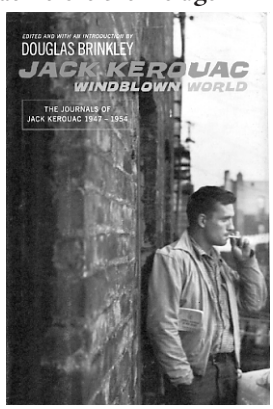
The biggest surprise, however, is his glowing appreciation of the contemporary visual artist Red Grooms. A sometime painter who published a book of drawings awhile back and once wrote a song called "When I Paint My Masterpiece," Dylan turns out to be an enthusiastic art scribe. Here, after describing visits to the Camino and Aegis galleries on Tenth Street, he rhapsodizes about making the rounds of other art venues with his first New York girlfriend Suze Rotolo, the beatnik dreamchick who graced the cover of his first album, and discovering Grooms' work:

"A new world of art was opening up my mind. Sometimes early in the day we'd go uptown to the city museums, see giant oil-painted canvases by artists like Velazquez, Goya, Delacroix, Rubens, El Greco. Also twentieth-century stuff—Picasso, Braque, Kandinsky, Rouault, Bonnard. Suze's favorite current modernist artist was Red Grooms, and he became mine, too. I loved the way everything he did crushed itself into some fragile world, the rickety clusters of parts all packed together and then, standing back, you could see the complex whole of it all. Grooms's stuff spoke volumes to me...It was bold, announced its presence in glaring details. There was a connection in Red's work to a lot of the folk songs I sang. It seemed to be on the same stage. What the folk songs were lyrically, Red's songs were visually—all the bums and cops, the lunatic bustle, the claustrophobic alleys—all the carnie vitality. Red was the Uncle Dave Macon of the art world. He incorporated every living thing into something and made it scream—everything side by side created equal—old tennis shoes, vending machines, alligators that crawled through sewers, dueling pistols, the Staten Island Ferry and Trinity Church, 42nd Street, profiles of skyscrapers. Brahmin bulls, cowgirls, rodeo queens and Mickey Mouse heads, castle turrets and Mrs. O'Leary's cow, creeps and greasers and weirdos grinning, bejeweled nude models, faces with melancholy looks, blurs of sorrow —everything hilarious but not jokey. Familiar figures from history, too —Lincoln, Hugo, Baudelaire, Rembrandt—all done with graphic finesse, burned out as powerful as possible. I loved the way Grooms used laughter as a diabolical weapon. Subconsciously, I was wondering if it was possible to write songs like that."

While we wouldn't recommend that Bob quit his night job, if he ever gets a hankering to do some more art writing, he has an open invitation here at Gallery&Studio. The gig doesn't pay much, and we might have to edit him a bit; but over the obscure, constipated jargon of academics, we always prefer the honest passion and living language of poets.

Jack Kerouac Before the Deluge

If Bob Dylan was hounded by fame, Jack Kerouac, whose breathlessly energetic novels preceded Dylan's emergence by a decade, was done in by it as surely as if someone had put a gun to his head.



Although *Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac, 1947-1954,* edited by Douglas Brinkley and recently published by Viking, gives us an intimate view of the young Kerouac, struggling to finish his first novel "The Town and the City," and looking forward to success, it was to be all downhill after his second novel, "On the Road," was greeted with a rave review in The New York Times in September of 1957, and Kerouac found himself a wildly popular bohemian symbol.

It only made matters worse when Mademoiselle magazine ran a feature that year on the emergence of Beat Generation and published a photo of Kerouac in a plaid shirt with tousled hair, looking more like a disheveled movie star than an author. The picture, which was widely circulated, established him as an icon of rebellion, the literary equivalent of James Dean or Marlon Brando. Soon he was making frequent appearances on TV, being interviewed by John Wingate on "Nightbeat" or reading from "On the Road" on "The Steve Allen Show" while the comedian, who fancied himself something of a hipster, tinkled cocktail-jazz accompaniment on the piano.

It was wildly disconcerting for a man who was actually a conservative, guilt-ridden Catholic mama's boy to be suddenly crowned "King of the Beatniks" (a title at least as repugnant to him as it was for Dylan to be seen as the "High Priest of Protest") and swept up in a popular movement whose ideas and attitudes were often antithetical to his own —even though he had given that movement its name; even though he went along with it in the beginning, guzzling prodigious amounts of alcohol to prime him for the role.

Bob Dylan, who later would tell Allen Ginsberg that he had learned a lot about poetic freedom from reading "Mexico City Blues" may have been a frail wisp of a kid, but he was a lot tougher and more resilient than Kerouac, the former Columbia University football star whose rugged appearance belied his timidity.

"Kerouac was such a sweet guy, he didn't like to fight, but every time he went out drinking he'd end up getting beat up," Beat poet Jack Micheline once told us, remembering the night Kerouac went to The Kettle of Fish, Dylan's favorite bar, and some hopped up furniture mover took him outside and cracked his head on the sidewalk. "Guys were jealous of his fame, his looks, they always wanted to take him on."

Like Dylan, Kerouac would later claim that he had never intended to become a spokesman for anything, much less the hippies, whom he called "a bunch of communists," telling one of his editors, Ellis Amburn, "I don't take credit for the hippies, don't want my name associated with them in any way."

By 1969, his alcoholism had progressed to the point where the once handsome

writer was a bloated recluse, living back in his home town, Lowell Massachusetts, with his gravely ill mother and his high school sweetheart, Stella Sampas, whom he had apparently married mainly to serve as her nursemaid. (It seems portic justice, in this regard, that the Sampas family now manages the Kerouac estate.) His drinking, which had been heavy for many years, finally caught up with him that year, when he was rushed to the hospital with a fatal stomach hemorrhage that struck while he was working on "Beat Spotlite," an unpublished novel about his life after "On the Road."

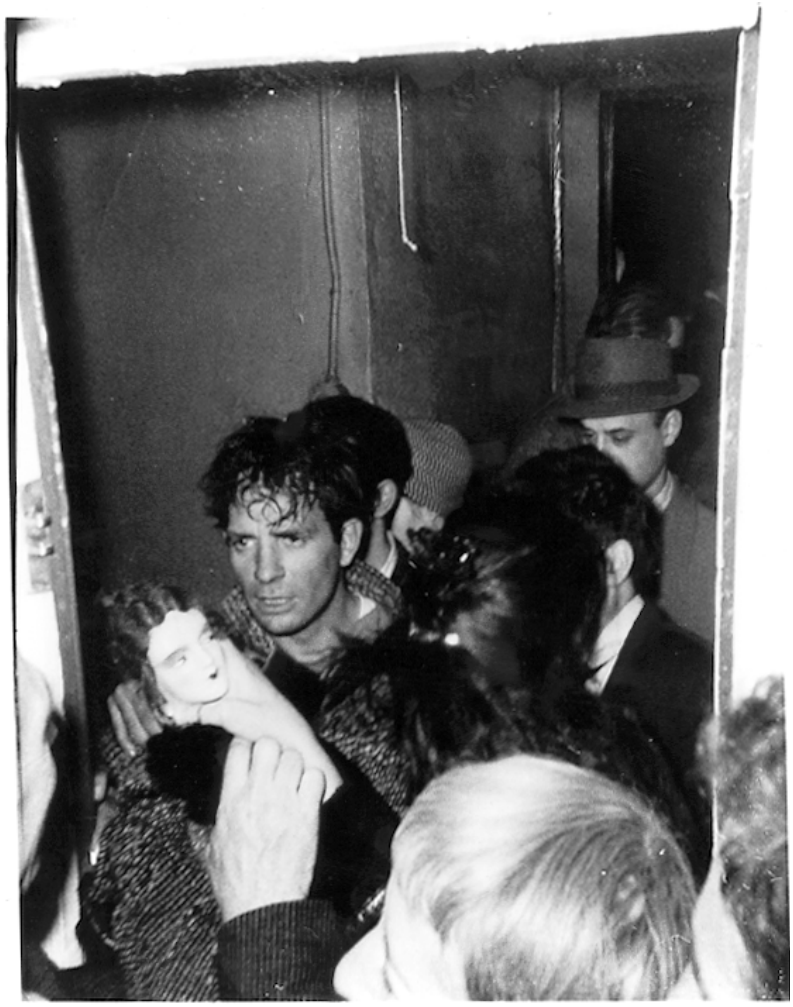
"Doug Brinkley's gift of Windblown World is a must for anyone who has an interest in Kerouac and the Beats, of course," says actor Johnny Depp in a blurb on the back cover of the new book. "But more than that, it is for all of us who are curious about a time when innocence was still a possibility."

How Kerouac would have felt about being adopted by Hollywood hipsters like Depp (as well as by rock stars like Tom Waits and Bono, to whom he has become a cool guy icon all over again) is anybody's guess. But the actor is right about one thing: There is a refreshing innocence to these journals, written before "the Deluge," as Kerouac ruefully referred to his fame.

(Indeed, it is for this that Walter Kirn chose to fault Kerouac in a review of the book in The New York Times. Kirn, not much of a writer himself, calls him "impossibly young and serious" with "the virginal earnestness of a Miss America contestant." But this is to be expected in era of self-protective irony, when even the youngest writers are expected to affect a jaded pose and honest passion may be the last literary taboo.)

The earliest pages were written while Kerouac was living in a small apartment above a drugstore in Ozone Park, Queens, with his mother, not far from Utopia Parkway, where that other mama's boy Joseph Cornell lived in similarly conventional surroundings.

Picturing Kerouac typing away at the kitchen table in Ozone Park all night, while Cornell tinkered with his poetic box assemblages in his basementin Utopia Parkway, another section of Queens, reminds us of how many times we have discovered wonderfully subversive creativity flourishing behind the facades of Archie Bunker row houses in other working-class neighborhoods far from the chic culture districts of Manhattan.



Jack Kerouac at The Artist's Club, New Year's Eve, 1958. **Photo © Fred W. McDarrah**

"Wrote 2000 words tonight, beginning on an entirely new kind of section (The War)—and pondering how much it deserves in view of proportions and necessity of getting my theme towards conclusion," Kerouac notes in an entry dated Thursday December 4th (1947). "I'll never have to worry about this kind of thing in my future novels, for reasons unclear to me now, but I just know (more sense later on?)."

Of course, what he was sensing but was not yet able to grasp intellectually, was his coming breakthrough to freer methods of composition, new forms for narrative determined by sheer rhythmical momentum of word-flow, rather than by contrived plans and conventional plot structures— making this entry especially illuminating regarding the intuitive mysteries of artistic creation.

This was the period, too, when Kerouac was first becoming acquainted with Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Neal Cassady, who would become characters in his novels and major figures in the pantheon of the Beat Generation. At this time, however, Kerouac still saw himself as a rhapsodist of American life in the tradition of Thomas Wolfe, rather than a culture hero or a harbinger of wild new lifestyles. He dreamt mainly of being a major American novelist, and the big revelation of the journals is how hard he worked at it, tallying up his nightly word count and revising like crazy.

His habit of diligent revision gives the lie to the legend of spontaneity that he himself later fostered by claiming to have composed "On the Road" in a three-week marathon of "spontaneous bop prosody," typing it all out to radio jazz on a hundred-foot scroll of taped-together Japanese tracing paper. As Brinkley points out in his introduction, "That the manuscript Kerouac typed in Chelsea in April 1951 was the outcome of a fastidious process of out-lining, character sketching, chapter drafting, and meticulous trimming is clearly evident from even a cursory glance at what he called his 'scribbled secret notebooks.'"

Kerouac's claims to the contrary were merely self-mythologizing, no more true than the stories a fresh-faced kid called Robert Zimmerman told reporters early in his career about riding the rails like some hobo in a Woody Guthrie song. Once he acquiesced to the role the media had cast him in, he felt obliged to make us believe that he wrote without effort, like a jazz musician improvising on his horn, and wrote fast because "the road is fast."

Fast or slow, even now, those of us who were inspired by Kerouac's prose in our youth still get the same old thrill, encountering a sentence like the one from which this book derives its name: "Now the roaring midnight fury and the creaking of our hinges and windows, now the winter, now the understanding of the earth and being on it: this drama of enigmas and double-depths and sorrows and grave joys, these human things in the elemental vastness of the windblown world."

—Ed McCormack

"YW": Bushwhacking For Dear Life at Viridian Artists @ Chelsea

If George Bush has made no other cultural contribution, at least it can be said that he has galvanized protest in the arts more swiftly than any other president in American history. Not even at the height of the Vietnam war (when thousands of protesters chanted "LBJ, LBJ, how many babies did you kill today?") did feelings run so high against the man in the White House. Even Tricky Dick seemed a small time crook compared to the dissolute fratboy turned Born-Again cowboy, this self-described "war president," who, after seizing power in a shady coup with the help of his brother Jeb, Ralph Nader, and the Supreme Court, gloated "They misunderestimated me!"

Photo of the exhibition by Teppei Takazawa

Everything about the man who used 9/11 as a pretext for settling an old family feud with Saddam Hussein while letting the real culprit, his fellow oilman Bin Laden, vanish into the desert, offends ones moral, intellectual, and aesthetic sensibilities, and no recent event needled him more adroitly than "YW (Why War? Why Dubya?)" a blockbuster exhibition curated by Vernita N' Cognita and Stuart Nicholson, at Viridian Artists @ Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street.

Presented by Viridian Artists, one of New York's oldest and most respected artist owned galleries, and Ridge Street Artists, a not-for-profit curatorial association that is a hub of Brooklyn's vital art scene, "YW" was billed as "a forum show focused on exceptional issues around the war, the presidency, the election & current life."

Since the exhibition featured more than one hundred artists, there is no way of doing true justice to it here. By extolling some of the works in the show one runs the risk of excluding others, equally worthy. Suffice it to say there were powerful works by familiar names from the Viridian artists roster such as Barbara K. Schwartz, Susan Sills, Kelynn Alder, Marjie Zelman, Sabine Carlson, and May DeViney, as well as by artists associated with the Ridge Street Group, such as Tony Lindenberger, Richard Mock, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Silvianna Goldsmith, and that the co-curators were represented as well: Vernita N' Cognita with a cast paper collage called "History Repeats Itself," tweaking the macho impulse to make war with erect penises serving as cannons, and Stuart Nicholson with a work in resin and latex on computer printouts called "Vietnam Firewalker" that connected the current conflagration to an equally senseless earlier fiasco.

The inclusion of kinetic works such as William Whalen's "Political Machinery" and floor installations such as "George's Sandbox" by Chandra Smith (in which the viewer was invited to search among various plastic tschotkas for "weapons of mass destruction"), along with the paintings, drawings, prints, and mixed media works swarming the walls salon style, added to the antic atmosphere that made the gallery feel like a carnival midway. Visitors appeared to be struck dumb by the raucous visual cacophony, the sheer profusion of lively and relevant imagery, as they entered. Gradually, their eyes would light up and some would begin to grin as they took in the combination of passion and play- fulness that made "YW" such serious fun.

More than anything else, this big, beautifully gaudy exhibition, which had to be one of the most heavily trafficked shows in Chelsea, demonstrated that there is still a place for social commitment in contemporary art. One only wishes it could have reached an even broader public than those of us who frequent art galleries and almost unanimously want done with the scary interloper in the White House. Still, preaching to the choir can be cathartic.

—Ed McCormack

Discovering Another Side of Francis Dosne

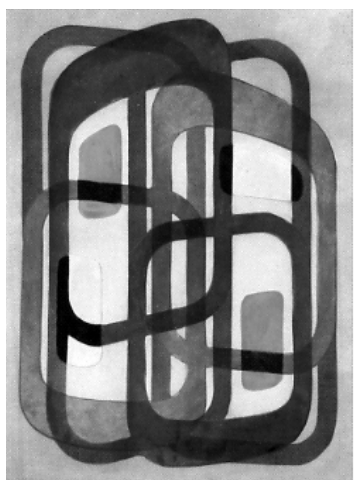
In the 1940s, Francis Dosne, who was born in Troyes, France, studied briefly with Fernand Leger. This connection to the great modernist, however, did not stop Dosne from becoming a sculptor rather than a painter—and a distinguished one at that, long on the board of the Sculpture Center School and Studios in New York. But while he perfected his stone carving technique in the 1980s in the studio of Rene Lavaggi, in the nineties, besides carving local marble at the Dellatolas Marble Studio in Tinos, Greece, Dosne joined the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop.

And that Dosne is a double threat, proficient in both mediums, was evident in his recent exhibition at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, where an impressive sampling of his intaglio monoprints and mixed media works were on view alongside his stone sculptures.

Especially evocative among the prints were the mixed media monoprints "Interlaced" and "Midsummer Night's Dream." The former, as its title suggests, sets a sinuous configuration of interlacing blue and blue green linear shapes against a soft ocher ground further enlivened by four lozenge-forms in alternating red and yellow hues. The former featured more organically flowing blue forms with piquant accents of red, yellow, and green, and while characteristically abstract, suggested a nocturnal garden in full bloom.

Something of a delightful anomaly were a grid of four large intaglio prints titled "Hommage a Rembrandt," featuring identical portraits of the master with a decidedly Pop feeling—albeit in more appropriately subdued hues than the Dayglo colors employed by Warhol.

Contrasting in a complementary manner with several of Francis Dosne's organically flowing marble and alabaster sculptures—a couple dramatically backlit to enhance their luminous qualities—these prints afforded us a new perspective on this gifted and versatile artist.



"Interlaced" 2002

—Ed McCormack

Raw Power and Formal Wit in the Sculptures of Karen Kettering Dimit

Karen Kettering Dimit is an eclectic concrete poet of the unexpected. Her mixed media sculptures combine stone and metal, along with metal chains and other found objects, in juxtapositions that form material metaphors of a most marvelous singularity. Several examples of Dimit's assemblage alchemy can be seen in her solo exhibition, "Mind, Body, Soul," at Pen & Brush," 16 East 10th Street, from November 11 through 24.

Along with her mixed media pieces, Dimit also creates sculptures in marble alone, as seen in the series she calls "Observed." Created in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks, these are monumental heads, often fully modeled on one side and flat, with the features incised into the stone on the other, combining elements of the dimensional and the drawn. Although Dimit states that these heads "deal with how we tend to view others as types rather than individuals and the tragedy that results," their gaping mouths and sorrowful eyes recall news photos of people on the street on 9/11 watching in horror as others jumped from the burning towers. Among these pieces, one of the most powerful is "Observed 4," in which dark vertical veins in the stone suggest the shadow of smoke and streaked tears running down one side of a feminine face.

In another series, Dimit works with the idea of wings, which she states that she initially resisted when it occurred to her because she was "not interested in contributing to the mass-hysteria for treacle angels." One need have no fear on that score: Dimit's handling of the theme is characteristically untreacly, unsentimental, and tough minded. In "Transporting Wing," for example, the wing-form is seen fastened onto a knotty manzanita burl on a metal dolly with wheels. While the wing is gracefully carved in luminous translucent orange alabaster, lending it a suitably ethereal quality, the knotty burl and the metal dolly lend the piece a rugged matter-of-factness that contradicts any hint of New Age preciousness. This wing is obviously on its way to the body shop for repairs!

An alabaster wing also figures prominently, atop an elaborately mosaic structure with a nest at its base, containing egg and a small fertility figure, in "Nature/Nurture (Mother)," a sculpture prompted by the artist's experience in caring for her aged parents, and metal dollies again appear as supports for fragmented stone torsos in sculptures such as "Gaia I" and "Gaia II." The former piece, in which the female torso is tethered to the dolly by a metal chain is evocative on several levels, simultaneously suggesting a figure from Antiquity, a powerful metaphor for the oppression of women down through the ages, and, as the artist herself puts it quite eloquently, "the dignity, beauty, strength and strength of our life force emanating from a body that has been broken, degraded and devalued." However, not one to be accused of being monodimensional, Dimit states that these pieces also "deal with "ecological and cultural destruction, the degrading of the goddess, and the devaluing of traditional mediums by some in the contemporary art scene."

"Gaia 1" 2004

Such conceptual complexity seems thoroughly in keeping with the formal wit and layered inventiveness that distinguishes the sculptures of Karen Kettering Dimit.

—Jeannie McCormack

Samir Sobhy: From Sorcerers, to Serpent Dreams, to Guys and Dolls

Samir Sobhy ventures where few other artists dare to go, into the realm of magic and sorcery, an interest he has had since childhood and now interprets in mixed media compositions as elaborate in their own way as the Symbolist paintings of Gustave Moreau.

In his recent exhibition, "Fetishes," at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, Sobhy's drawings in marker, watercolor, and ballpoint pen are inspired by West Africa, where he started living in 1990.

"I was surprised to discover that sorcery still had an extremely important and strong cultural presence up to now in today's society," Sobhy explained in an artist's statement accompanying the exhibition. "People strongly and deeply believe in special powers by certain beings."

Although many of today's so-called sorcerers turn out to be charlatans, he explains, "as a surreal painter I could not help but be fascinated by the intriguing and mysterious traditions of sorcery. Not in their current deformed nature under false pretense, but rather in their original, primitive, and 'romantic' original nature."

In any case, Sobhy conjures up a fascinating range of fantastic imagery in his mixed media drawings on paper, which are as worked up as paintings and have the vividness of beautiful yet disturbing dreams. Many of them depict nude people engaged in mysterious rituals in jungle settings in a meticulous technique with vibrant color applied in translucent layers over elaborately cross-hatched pen lines. (It is especially remarkable that Sobhy achieves such effects with ballpoint, not normally a fine art medium, but one that Alberto Giacometti also used effectively for many of his drawings.)

In "The Seance," for example, a nude female witch is seen in a cave amid snakes and idols of various sorts. It is a haunting image, eerie and powerful. In two companion pictures called "Sorcerer & Birds of Prey" and "Sorceress," Sobhy creates mythic figures as innately sensual as they are forbidding. The Sorcerer, who resembles the rock star Lenny Kravitz with his nose ring and muscular build is seen with a falcon perched on one hand. The Sorceress is a shapely nude with the powerful physique of a female body builder. Brandishing a sword, she inhabits a composition that also includes human skulls propped up on sticks like horrific trophies. She is an especially formidable figure, a demonic beauty, and despite our misgivings, we fall under her spell by virtue of Sobhy's ability to make her simultaneously fearsome and seductive.

Other drawings by Sobhy include "The Couple," in which a male and a female nude are seen with knives, sacrificial roosters, and impaled skulls, as well as a series called "The Serpent's Dream."

"I doubt that serpents dream! But I tried to imagine the dreams of African serpents," Sobhy says of the later works, intricate mindscapes filled with "things usually coveted by serpents: eggs, rodents, birds...!"

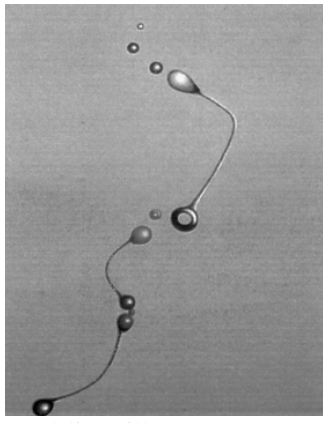
Something of a departure are two accomplished realist oils of nude male models clutching toy dolls; but they, too, illustrate the imaginative range and psychological complexity that makes the work of Samir Sobhy so fascinating.

—Maurice Taplinger

At Allan Stone: A Convergence of Diverse Traditions

Billed as "a mixed media salon-style exhibition," GROUP, seen recently at Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th Street, exemplified that venerable venue's policy of showing emerging artists alongside established names. Characteristically, too, they were a stylistically diverse gathering of talents, ranging from the energetic Neo Abstract Expressionist pyrotechnics of Ralph Turturro, who incises his thick impastos with graffiti-like markings, to the "Southern Gothic" figure paintings of Scott Belville, who showed an especially bizarre variation on the artist and model theme in a funky Bible belt setting.

An equally personal take on Americana came across in John Parks' deliciously tactile, smokily atmospheric little oils of train stations and rail yards, while other aspects of painterliness were celebrated in Kazuko Inoue's sumptuous monochromatic grid paintings; Robert Valdes' memorably moody gouache of a dark, desolate beachscape; a wonderfully peculiar abstraction by Madeline Silber, combining pristine execution and biomorphic zaniness; and a smashing collage painting by Rebecca Cuming, wherein an actual woman's slip emerges from a painted bed of tulips with a delicately limned hummingbird perched on one of its shoulder straps.



Madeline Silber

Several other artists put a new spin on landscape: Joan Levy, an heir to the Bay Area Plein Air School, with a monumental oil pastel on paper depicting a mountainous terrain in a style that combined the ruggedness of Marsden Hartley with a metaphysical sense of nature akin to Charles Burchfield; Nancy Scheinman with mixed media compositions on panel filled with shifting perspectives, slippery serial imagery, and luminous layers of color; Judy Molyneux with a muscular seascape in oil impastos as thick as cake frosting; Eric Barth with a Turneresque marine dream in oil pastel and soft pastel showing a sailboat on a far horizon illuminated by a pale morning moon.

Scott Belville

Allan Stone Gallery made its initial reputation in the early 1960s showing not only Big Guns of Abstract Expressionism such as de Kooning but also poetic intimists like Joseph Cornell, and both tendencies still find a home there. The grand gesture continues in the work Nguyen Ducmanh, who evokes a voluptuous white-on-white nude with a few Zen-swift strokes of industrial caulk on canvas, as well as in Peter Beckett's big, lush, crusty composition in slashing areas of red and black oil paint.

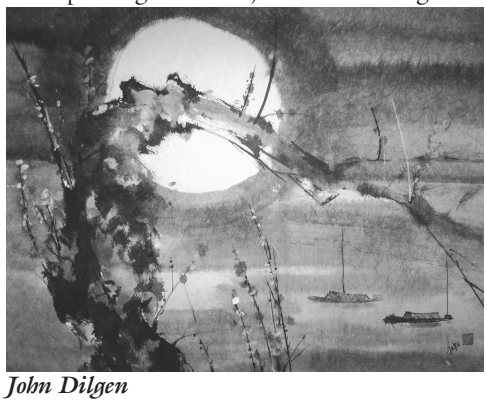
By contrast, mixed media works by Matt Bult and Brian Haverlock evoke private worlds on miniature scale, the former with cut paper images of birds and other lyrical fragments à la Cornell; the latter with surreal hybrid figures meticulously delineated in graphite and oil paint. Then there are Oriane Stender, who wittily reinvents Warhol's silkscreens of Liz Taylor with woven strips of shredded dollar bills, and Clare C. Stone, whose sharply focused Ciberchromes of subjects such as the Great Sphinx and a mysterious cavelike space are visually arresting enough on their own terms to have won them exposure in a gallery that has never appeared particularly partial to photography.

Good realist painting, on the other hand, has always been present at Allan Stone Gallery, since the early days when it first exhibited then-emerging artists like Richard Estes and Wayne Theibaud. Among the new crop of realists, Hollis Dunlap imparts surprising vitality to traditional portraiture; Stephen Cornelius Roberts lends the larger-than-life figure hyper-palpable presence, and Gina Minichino imbues a still life of Hostess cupcakes and Twinkies with sinful seductiveness.

It stands to reason, too, that a gallery that in its early days gave a boost to the young John Chamberlain and also mounted a stunning show of his smaller pieces a while back would present exciting new sculpture like Ioanna Sardellis' assemblage of wooden shards and nails; Gary Spradling's neo-Dada object "Self Portrait as a Shovel," and Chris Duncan's "If the Dark Gets Noisy," a mushroom cloud of found steel that more than lives up to its ominous title. —Ed McCormack

In "Crosscurrents," Three Painters Reinvigorate a Tradition

One of the most difficult tasks any artist can accomplish is to assimilate a rich, deeply entrenched cultural tradition without hampering one's own individuality and creative autonomy. John Dilgen, Eva G. Mihovich, and Carol Itzkowitz Neiman all belong to a group called Brushmeisters of Brooklyn, and all three artists have studied and been influenced by Sumi-E, or Japanese brush painting. However, whether working



John Dilgen

in ink, watercolor, or oils, they assimilate the techniques of this ancient art form to create a vital contemporary synthesis, at the Open Center, 83 Spring Street, through Nov. 26.

The Open Center, where classes are held in various new age disciplines, some with decidedly Eastern origins, is an auspicious setting for the work of these artists, given the spiritual component in Semi-E painting and the meditative quality of many of their subjects. John Dilgen, for example, captures a sense of silence and serenity that evokes a spiritual mood in his work in Sumi ink and watercolor, "Spring Trip." The full moon is a recurring symbol in Dilgen's paintings. Here the moon glows through the blossoming branches that are also ubiquitous in his compositions, lighting the way for small boats traversing a luminous river laid down in fluid translucent washes.

Although Dilgen can be a dazzling colorist in paintings such as "Blue Vase,' with its brilliant blaze of flowers, he can also be just as dynamic in monochromatic ink paintings such as "Cat," in which sinuous feline grace is evoked in a few swift strokes.

Eva G. Mihovich creates a striking merger of Eastern and Western pictorial traditions in "Lotus Meditation," a work in watercolor and Sumi ink on canvas, depicting a woman with serenely downcast eyes touching one hand to her cheek in an introspective gesture amid large pink lotus flowers and green leaves.

In contrast to the more Western handling of densely saturated color areas in "Lotus Meditation," Mihovich's use of monochromes adheres more strictly to the Sumi-E tradition in her landscape "Marshlands. Like her colleagues in this show, however, Mihovich manages to invest her composition with a decidedly contemporary freshness and immediacy.

Carol Itzkowitz Neiman departs most radically from the Eastern tradition in "8 Card Nudes," in which several separate female figure studies on small sheets of heavy watercolor paper are mounted as a single composition; as well as in a miniature painting called "The Falls," where her dense application of watercolor and Sumi ink on gesso board has the opaque quality of enameling.

However, even while working on watercolor paper rather than the traditional rice paper, Neiman invests the composition she calls "Mountains on High" with the misty ethereality of an ancient Chinese scroll painting. Conversely, in another mountainous composition entitled "A Far Walk," Neiman works in Sumi ink and watercolor on rice paper, but employs a vibrant red hue and slashing black strokes in a manner akin

Carol Itzkowitz Neiman

Eva G. Mihovich

to Abstract Expressionism.

All three of the artists in "Crosscurrents," in fact, bring new ideas to reinvigorate a venerable tradition. Their contribution is considerable and bodes well for the future of Sumi-E as a vital contemporary art form.

—Byron Coleman

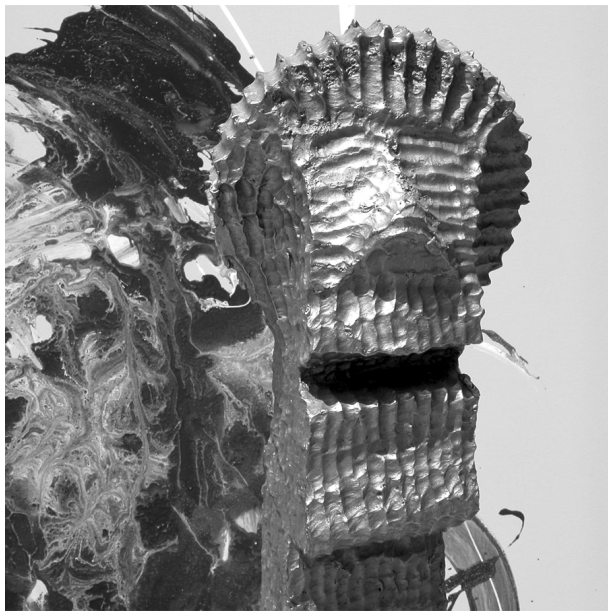
Ludwig Haas: Innovation and Vision Carved in Steel

When we speak of steel sculpture, we are almost always referring to sculpture created with the welding process pioneered by Julio Gonzalez, popularized by Picasso, and practiced by innumerable sculptors ever since.

Ludwig Haas, however, a sculptor born in Austria, has evolved a unique method of creating a sculpture from a single block of steel, much as others carve in stone, and the results of his labors make for a powerful exhibition at Agora Gallery, at 415 West Broadway, in Soho, from November 12 through December 4.

Although steel is too hard to be carved in the traditional manner, Haas has developed what he calls a "melting and removing process" with which the surface of iron, steel, or stainless steel is "fluidized" at temperatures exceeding 4000 degrees and the hot melt is blown away by air pressure. Up to now, he is the only artist known to practice this method of sculpting directly in steel, and the works that he has produced with it do indeed have a unique quality.

Haas, however, is more than merely a technical innovator; he is an artist with a singular vision. Most of his pieces project a strong sense of humanistic symbolism by virtue of severely simplified figures fully as universal as Ernest Trova's "Everymen". But while Trova's figures are sleekly fabricated out of nickel-plated bronze, and deal with the single issue of the increasingly robotic merger of man and machine in the modern world, Ludwig Haas' sculptures have a more primal, timeless quality. They are not fabricated in foundries or factories but created from conception to finished piece by Haas alone, and they address a much broader range of human experiences.



"Astonishment"

Indeed, Haas' sculptures have a raw primitive power, with their ridged surfaces, which give some of them a quality similar to Egyptian mummies or accident victims entirely swaddled in bandages. Following the latter interpretation to its logical conclusion one might be led to reflect on whether the accident might be the one that befalls us all: life itself...

Some of Haas' figures are featureless, while others have only one feature, emphasizing a single certain quality or trait. In "Astonishment," for example, the figure has only negative space indicating a gaping mouth. In "Faithfulness" two indentations on an otherwise featureless face create a soulful effect that seems to express the virtue to which the title refers. Haas' figures are without limbs, leading to viewer to reflect on helplessness as a staple of the human condition—at least in regard to the ever-present awareness of our common mortality. However, one of the two companion figures in "Adam & Eve" has a rather prominent protrusion below the waist—perhaps suggesting how we engage with each other and achieve forgetfulness. Yet, while bound together, the two figures in another piece called "Separation" seem to symbolize the solitary fate we all must eventually face.

Indeed, it is this ability to express any number of complex ideas through the primitive power of his figures that makes Ludwig Haas a sculptor whose vision finally exceeds even his considerable technical contribution.

—Lawrence Downes

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Alfred Leslie: A New York School Journey

Mention the name Alfred Leslie and most people think of his huge, monochromatic self-portrait with open shirt and bulging belly in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art or his series of monumental realist allegories dealing with the death of his friend, the poet Frank O'Hara. Those who have been around the New York art scene for a while, however, know that before he turned to realism, along with Joan Mitchell and Michael Goldberg, Leslie belonged to the core-group of the second generation of Abstract Expressionists.

Whether dancing a jitterbug with fellow artist Dody Muller at a party in his downtown loft or circulating in black tie at one of his jam-packed openings at Martha Jackson Gallery uptown, Leslie, with his then-athletic weight-lifter's physique and head of black Harpo Marx curls, was an energetic and ubiquitous figure at gatherings and Happenings in the 1950s and the early sixties. Besides producing some of the most dynamic abstract paintings of his era, he was an innovative underground film maker, the publisher of a historically significant one-shot review called The Hasty Papers (to which important avant garde writers ranging from Jack Kerouac to Jean-Paul Sartre contributed), an energetic scene maker, and all around New York School mover and shaker... So it's about time someone organized a comprehensive survey of Leslie's early abstract work, and what venue could seem more suitable to present it in than the Allan Stone Gallery, which has ties to the New York School going back to 1960?

"Alfred Leslie, 1951-1962: Expressing the Zeitgeist," at Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th Street through December 22, features 11 large oil paintings and 27 small collages and mixed media works. During the exhibition there will also be screenings in the gallery of three of Leslie's movies: "The Last Clean Shirt," its wittily deadpan title predating Warhol; "The Cedar Bar," a poetic filmic ode to boozy nights at the legendary watering hole of the the Abstract Expressionists; and "Pull My Daisy," the Beat Generation classic that Leslie co-directed with Robert Frank, staring Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso.

"Texas Baby" 1959

Leslie's paintings, however, steal the show by virtue of their brash beauty and gritty elegance. Characteristic of his larger canvases is "Texas Baby," a 1959 oil on linen in which a broad block of industrial green converges with areas of gorgeously grimy white, further enlivened by bold swathes and juicy drips of black. Obvious comparisons can be made to both Kline and de Kooning, yet Leslie has his own, instantly recognizable style. His compositions are generally more geometrically blunt in their thrust than those of either of his most immediate spiritual mentors, and the two bold vertical bands that appear in so many of his paintings amount to a distinctive visual signature that appears to have exerted an influence on painters as diverse as Knox Martin and Sean Scully. Although deeply rooted in Abstract Expressionism, Leslie's compositions also come across as precursors of Pop for their subtle allusiveness—or, at least, the more abstract species of Pop one would later encounter in harder-edged painters like Nicholas Krushenick.

Funky as ravaged urban walls and billboards (but without the more obvious literary trappings of Art Povera), Leslie's paintings have an emblematic impact that hits one like the proverbial Mack truck. And remarkably, the same sense of scale is evoked in Leslie's relatively miniature collages, such as "Untitled 1960," where blocks of rusty brown, frosty white, bright green, and two brilliant red stripes evoke vast spaces in a few inches.

This important exhibition of diverse works by a veritable multimedia dynamo also includes boxed sets of limited edition volumes by New York School poets such as Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, John Ashbery and James Schuyler illustrated by Leslie, Joan Mitchell, Michael Goldberg and Grace Hartigan. These books, a limited number of which are for sale at the gallery, exemplify the collaborative spirit of the vital creative era in which Alfred Leslie was a key participant.

—Ed McCormack

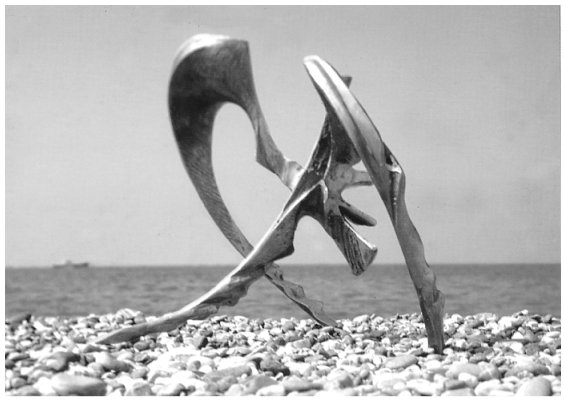
Nature in the Abstract: The Sculptures of Vittorio Fumasi

The dissonance of modern life has become the preoccupation of many sculptors in recent years, creating a free-for-all atmosphere in which it is often difficult to make sound critical judgments. The Italian sculptor Vittorio Fumasi, however, has evolved a style at once thoroughly contemporary and celebratory of nature. While others have opted for novelty, Fumasi has found time-honored materials such bronze, steel, and stone auspiciously suitable for interpreting an eternal subject (although he also works occasionally in brass, aluminum, silver, and gold and has mastered the techniques of micro-casting, sand casting, lost wax, lithography engraving and serigraphy.).

That the originality of Fumasi's work is of a higher order than much other recent sculpture becomes immediately obvious in his recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, in Chelsea.

Painters have always had an easier task than sculptors, when it comes to interpreting nature, given their relative freedom to reflect its colors, atmospheric conditions, and qualities of light. Fumasi, however, chooses not to merely imitate or approximate natural things but to embody their movement and their spirit in graceful abstract and semi-abstract forms that appear to soar through space. Birds are a favorite subject and he captures their ethereal beauty most often in polished bronze, the medium that he favors for its brilliance and plasticity.

"Sea Gull" is one of Fumasi's most striking polished bronze sculptures, appearing to capture the water bird in the precise instant that it lifts itself aloft, wings outspread. Although the piece is abstract and only nominally beholden to avian anatomy, it evokes this perfect moment more dynamically than any accurate rendition of a sea gull could. Indeed, Fumasi's sculpture is a material metaphor, in that evokes in the mind's eye of the viewer, not only the bird, but the water and sky between which it is poised.



"Cormorant"

Another species of water bird is embodied in the polished bronze piece called "Cormorant." Here, there is less of the sense of a creature hovering between water and sky, since the weight of the piece is supported on three continuous abstract shapes representing its wings and body. This seems entirely in keeping with a somewhat more sedentary species that one usually sees perching around water, rather than soaring through the air. Yet, cormorants do rouse themselves occasionally to swoop down and snatch fish from the water, and Fumasi also gives us a sense of this capability in his emphasis on the generous curves of the bird's wingspan. Indeed, the gracefully articulated wings provide the main thrust of "Cormorant," flaring up in a manner that creates the sense of a much larger, more formidable species, even while the actual dimensions of this sculpture are slightly smaller than the previously discussed one, "Sea Gull."

Another, much larger avian subject, "Bird 75," captures a streamlined sense of flight with a soaring formal economy that can only be compared to Brancusi, while other exquisitely pared down sculptures such as "Leaf" and "Sea Form" evoke natural subjects with a delicacy and grace that makes Vittorio Fumasi a welcome anomaly in the novelty-ridden realm of contemporary sculpture. —Marie R. Pagano

Robyn Kahukiwa's Modern Interpretations of Maori Culture Transcend Exotica

Robyn Kahukiwa, whose paintings were recently seen at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, in Soho, is obviously very much aware of the need to employ formal restraint when dealing with a subject that can be seductive in its own terms for its exotic qualities. Thus, in her "New Zealand Natives Series," Kahukiwa seems to take particular care to create compositions which are every bit as fascinating in pure painterly terms as for their unusual and their ornate imagery.

One feels that when venturing among the natives of New Zealand, Kahukiwa has a feeling similar to what Gauguin expressed when he wrote in "Noa Noa" of his time in Tahiti, "I have escaped everything that is artificial and conventional. Here I enter into the truth, become one with nature. After the disease of civilization, life in this new world is a return to health."

Whether or not the subject of New Zealand and its native peoples is actually as "new" —or as foreign— to Kahukiwa as Tahiti was to Gauguin is unknown to this writer and quite beside the point; she "makes it new," to paraphrase Ezra Pound's exhortation to poets (and, by extension, to visual artists as well) through the absolute freshness of her vision.

Her pictures simultaneously possess a refreshing innocence and an aesthetic sophistication that indicates an almost supernatural sympathy for her subjects. She seems to enter into their spirit so thoroughly that her paintings take on the quality of ritual objects. Indeed, she chooses to ritualistically revisit the same subject, yet manages to invest each painting with its own qualities, its own individual power.

The subject that Kahukiwa returns to again and again is that of a woman with almond eyes and primitive adornments such as facial tattoos and feathers or other decorations in her hair in communion with a bird. Her painting style is similar to that of Alex Katz, in that she employs relatively flat areas of color and an impassive style, in which unnecessary flourishes of the brush do not disrupt the clarity or purity of the composition. Yet, while Katz depicts urban people, often in sterile settings, Kahukiwa paints people who live in nature, are as at one with nature as Gauguin' Tahitians, and their environment provides her the opportunity to include exotic foliage as part of the composition, as well as to give her bold skills as a colorist free reign.

In one painting, for example, she includes a cabbage tree in a composition depicting a Maori woman with chin tattoos and her head turned to the side in an almost completely horizontal position which does not look in the least unnatural, given the stylized quality of the picture. The woman possesses the striking almond eyes that are a distinguishing feature of the Maori people and a wood pigeon is perched on her upraised hand.

Here, as in other compositions by Robyn Kahukiwa, the bird seems to serve as a symbol of the connection of the New Zealand natives to their natural environment, as well as a charming compositional adornment . —Laurel Foster

Phantoms and Prisms Enliven Yasuhide Kagii's "Lovepop"

Up until five years ago, when he began his newest body of work, the widely-exhibited young Japanese painter Yasuhide Kagii was known primarily for his acrylic paintings on canvas, executed in flat color areas somewhat akin to Alex Katz—albeit in hotter hues, in keeping with his interest in Pop subjects such a s music, dance, and fashion.

Kagii still paints on canvas, only now he photographs sections of the composition, scans them into his computer, and prints the images onto clear acetate sheets. The sheets are either layered and suspended from the ceiling, or, in Kagii's smaller works, positioned at various distances from a painted back-board hanging on the wall. The piece is then carefully lighted so that the images cast colored shadows on the wall or base, much in the manner of a prism.

"In 'Lovepop,'" the artist states, referring to the name he has given these new works, "I have tried to capture the essence of that feeling you get when you start something new and, more importantly, the unease you feel when that feeling is slowly disappearing yet you must continue. While painting represents something more solid and enduring, the use of acetate and shadow in this work reflects the transient nature of the feeling I wish to explore and the unsettling nature of its loss."

The work in which this sense of ambivalence came across most strikingly was the centerpiece of Yasuhide Kagii's recent exhibition at Caelum Gallery, at 508-526 West 26th Street, in Chelsea. This is a very large work on layered sheets of acetate, involving several figures amid blocks of translucent color, creating an overall abstract effect, resembling fractured Cubist planes. On closer inspection a group of figures wearing white jackets comes into focus. They have their backs to us and the indistinct quality of the image, as well as the large area of brilliant yellow behind them, gives the impression of people in a blurred news photo witnessing a blazing conflagration. However, this initial impression of viewing some perhaps war-related emergency gradually gives way to a more accurate reading of the image, which is actually of a group of men standing at a bar in a nightclub with bright lights behind it.

LOVE POP 0421 "Next"

Thus Kagii delivers a perceptual one-two punch which enables the viewer to experience a sense of relief, yet reminds him or her that we are living in uncertain times, when the most innocuous situation can suddenly turn ominous and implode into something quite grim.

This would appear to be the most extreme manifestation of the "unease" Kagii describes in the artist statement quoted earlier. Most of his works on acetate, however, explore a more winsome sense of the mystery of time and loss, as seen in another large piece depicting a man and woman kissing. This has the effect of a romantic close-up on a movie screen— yet the fragmentation of the image suggests that the romance may already be fading. And that the man sports a wide-brimmed yellow fedora adds a rakish (perhaps even pimpish) aspect to the drama, as if this may be a goodbye kiss.

Other pieces by Kagii depict single life-size figures printed on overlapping sheets of acetate suspended from the ceiling that one encounters in the middle of the gallery. They confront one like fractured phantoms of the chat-rooms, their digitalized appearance seeming to signify our increasing retreat into virtual reality and the ultimate threat of isolation that it poses. Yet each of these single figures is possessed of a distinctive personality: A mysterious man in a slouch hat and suit who seems to have stepped out of a 1950s noir detective film; a pixyish woman in a blue dress and matching shoes who comports herself like a coy fashionista; various jazz musicians, singers, and dancers in animated postures, as though moving in time to the old standard "Me and My Shadow."

By contrast, some of Kagii's wall pieces have a more dispersed, abstract compositions, in which colored squares printed on acetate are superimposed and cast their shadows on spare, linear figures. Printed on the acetate sheets in white are texts expressing upbeat messages, such as: "Violence can never solve anything. But if you have a flower in your heart, the flower can make a difference."

The fact that it is easier to read these messages in the shadows that they cast on the white background than in the white lettering on the acetate itself seems to symbolize how difficult it is for most of us to practice what we preach and to exemplify the poignant beauty of Yasuhide Kagii's new work.

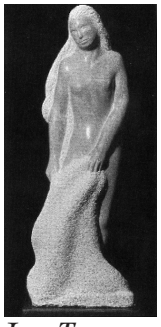
—Ed McCormack

Three works from the LOVE POP series at Caelum Gallery

CLWAC's 108th Annual Open Exhibition

Seen recently at the National Art Club, 15 Gramercy Park South, the 108th Annual Open Juried Exhibition of the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club was a benefit for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The connection between the two institutions goes back a long time, since the club's founder, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe, a scholar and philanthropist, was the only woman among the 108 founders of the Met.

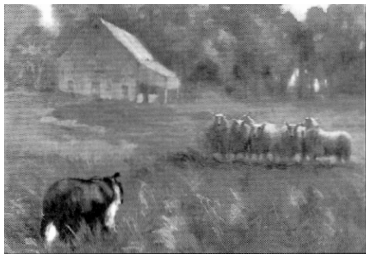
In the latter regard, it bears mentioning that all of the nearly 300 artists in the show were women, since the purpose of the CLWAC, founded in 1896, was to provide opportunities for women in the arts. And that such opportunities are still very much needed was made clear by the number of artists in this show who really deserve to be much better known.



Jean T. Kroeber

One of them is Eleanor Tyndall Meier, this year's Honored Member, whose mastery of watercolor was especially impressive in "Daisies, Oranges & Paul Revere Bowls." In this and other still life subjects, Meier is invariably able to include a good deal of detail without becoming "fussy" and without sacrificing the freshness so essential to her difficult medium. Another was Gloria Spevacek whose marble sculpture of an oversize running shoe was at once witty and aesthetically commanding— a kind of "hard" answer to Claus Oldenburg's "soft sculptures" which imbued a banal Pop with the enduring qualities of a timeless medium! Also Outstanding for both its technical finesse and its symbolism was "Life B" by Nilda Maria Comas, which depicted a blindfolded baby on its back on a pedestal, making a trenchant comment on how we all begin and end. One could not help musing on the relationship between this piece and Shelly Bradbury's emotionally wrenching bronze of a hungry child with scrawny limbs and a bloated belly. Both made strong humanistic statements of the kind quite rare in today's irony-ridden art scene.

Jean Kroeber's stone sculpture of a partially draped female nude also commanded attention for its graceful form and the textural contrasts between the smoothness of the figure and the roughness of her hair and the drapery. The virtue of Kroeber's figurative sculptures is that they are both classical and contemporary in the best sense of both terms.



Pamela Barba-Turinage

Two other outstanding works among too many fine sculptures to mention in this limited space were a bronze of fanciful figures such as a rag doll and a teddy bear perched on a house of cards by Marsha Tosk and an intriguing metal piece by Yupin Pramotepipop, in which graceful vines wound around an abstract form incorporating a large vessel containing a treasure trove of clear glass marbles.

Some frequent exhibitors with the CLWAC consistently surprise us: Gabriela Dellosso, a young romantic realist painter, with a terrific oil called "Tattered," which combined a Pre-Raphaelite quality with something more bizarrely akin to the work of the late Gregory Gillespie; Ruth Newquist with a deceptively casual Soho street scene in watercolor combining snapshot immediacy with more enduring aesthetic virtues; Karen Whitman with yet another of her always animated and remarkably detailed linocuts of gritty cityscape.

Anne Kulllaf

Claire Paisner's pastel of a man emerging from the subway on deserted Wall Street late at night amid rainbow-hued streetlamp auras and Arlene Cornell's watercolor of rundown waterfront buildings with a bridge in the distance were also atmospherically evocative urban scenes. Both of these artists were new discoveries to this reviewer, as were Doris Davis-Glackin, who made the banal mysterious with her shadowy watercolor of an industrial scene, and Pamela Barba-Turnage, whose large oil of a dog confronting a flock of sheep in tall grass at dusk with barn in the background imbued what could seem an innocuous country occurrence with an underlying tension akin to Eric Fischl.

With a show of this size and scope one could go on and on, describing excellence in a wide variety of styles and media, from realism to abstraction. That being impossible, suffice it to say that this exhibition, which included works by members of the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club, as well as by non-members, was a major event of the present art season. And, oh yes, prizes were awarded in all categories. But mentioning them would have seemed superfluous, given the overall excellence of the entire exhibition. —Jeannie McCormack

Atanas Kotzev: The Figure Laid Bare

A fascination with the human figure and an ability to put it through a seemingly inexhaustible variety of permutations in order to test its expressive possibilities distinguished the recent exhibition of acrylic paintings by Atanas Kotzev, at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, in Soho.

Born in Bulgaria, Kotzev now lives in Germany, where his Neo-Expressionist style has won him a large following among local and international collectors and where he has executed numerous commissions for a well-known restaurant chain and created murals for several building facades. Indeed, the monumental quality of Kotzev's figures calls out for large spaces, and the large canvases in his exhibition at Agora had an aggressive scale and a physical presence that enhanced their power.

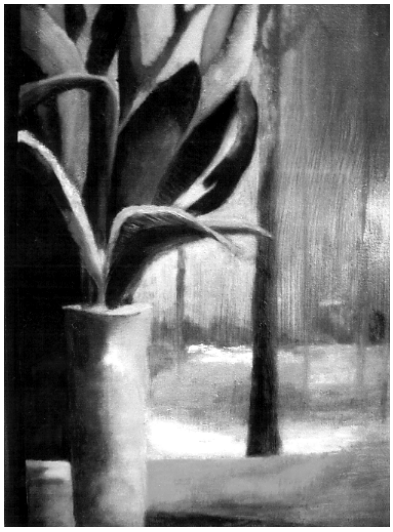
Kotzev's most immediate spiritual mentor would appear to be Oskar Kokoschka, for like that great Austrian Expressionist, Kotzev evokes the human figure with vibrant strokes of color that lay bare its very soul, even as they delineate its contours. Kotzev's figures appear to be enveloped in a veritable whirlpool of emotional turbulence, expressed through the vitality of his brushwork. In some paintings, particularly his sensual female nudes, Kotzev reveals his grasp of classical anatomy, while in others, he deconstructs the body with surgical precision, bathing it in visceral reds and brilliant blues and subjecting it to the extreme distortions that verge on abstraction. However, the sense of a living, breathing presence in his paintings invariably remains intact, infusing his canvases with a powerful emotional resonance.

At the same time, Kotzev avails himself of all the vigorous painterly pyrotechnics of Abstract Expressionism— the swift, calligraphic brushstrokes, the drips, and other extemporaneous traces of "process"—to lend his compositions a sense of immediacy, of "push and pull" that enhances their impact. In the large acrylic on canvas "One Night in New York," for example, Kotzev captures a young woman with the willowy figure and blasé attitude of a fashion model, nude but for a yellow cloth draped across her loins, leaning back and adjusting her hair in manner that seems to signify post-coital languor. Here, the figure's graphic linear incisiveness and explicit eroticism seems akin to Egon Schiele, while the scale and bold, monochromatic gestural thrust of the overall composition recalls Franz Kline. Kotzev carries off this synthesis without sacrificing his own stylistic individuality, just as he moves easily into more abstract modes in "Sparkling Red Dance," where the two

"The Reverse Side"

female nudes are featureless, fragmented, and enveloped in fiery hues. Yet Kotzev's versatility also enables him to combine near-photographic realism with hard-edge abstraction and emblematic elements of Pop, in the painting he calls "Rhapsody in Blue," where the nude female figure reclines amid sharply defined areas of brilliant color.

What unites all of Kotzev's modes of expression, however, is the intensity and muscularity of his draftsmanship, which is especially impressive in semi-abstract compositions such as "Dream," a voluptuous nude amid vigorously slashed color areas, as well as in "The Reverse Side," where another nude inhabits a painterly maelstrom as through propelled by an explosion. Both paintings possess the energy and daring that distinguishes the work of Atanas Kotzev at its best. —Leo Munsky



Wendy Lax

"Inside Outside" at Gelabert Studios

Seven women painters who seem to specialize in evoking a sense of place through their use of color, chiaroscuro, and less tangible elements, were featured in the group show "Inside Outside: Interiors & Exteriors," at Gelabert Studios Gallery, 255 West 86th Street.

Gail Gardella's muted realism imbued "Entering," a painting of two pairs of slippers outside a door with intriguing romantic undertones. Gardella's ability to evoke a mysterious mood and the sense of an underlying narrative was equally impressive in another painting of an empty bench bathed in light in a deserted park.

Wendy Lax employs dramatic color combinations in paintings where "inside" and "outside" are combined by showing landscapes through windows. Such anomalies as a pink sky with green clouds are natural occurrences in Lax's paintings, which combine a coloristic daring akin to Milton Avery with spare, sinuous compositions reminiscent of Art Nouveau.

Sandra Nystrom limns mountainous vistas in a romantic realist style, lending vast spaces an intimate charm by virtue of her cool color harmonies and a restrained painterliness that melds all the surfaces of her compositions into a unified whole. Nystrom's "Distant Sky" is especially inviting, with its winding paths that carry the eye over rhythmically rolling hills leading to curvy configurations of mountains and clouds.

Whether painting big fat sunflowers or city buildings that loom and bend like trees in the wind, Claudia Redel brings a visionary quality to everything that she paints. In Redel's "Grey City" and "Golden City," skyscrapers, a bridge, and other elements of the urban scene take on an almost anthropomorphic quality, brought to life in bold, sweeping strokes that lend Redel's relatively small canvases a sweeping sense of scale beyond their actual dimensions.

Sherri Paul is a realist who captures aspects of the feminine mystique in still life compositions comprised of high heeled shoes, clusters of handbags, or intimate apparel, in silky strokes and candy colors such as pink and lime green. Like Audrey Flack's photorealist pictures of vanity tables cluttered with cosmetics, Sherri Paul's paintings make inanimate objects resonate poignantly in compositions as notable for their abstract virtues as their skillful realism.

Renee Baley employs a subdued, near-monochromatic palette of earthy hues in her atmospheric evocations of shadow-dappled landscapes. In paintings such as "Surrounding Light" and "Twisted Limbs," Baley evokes the hushed poetry of lushly blooming trees and foliage through her subtle, close-valued color combinations and skillful handling of chiaroscuro.

By contrast, Rona Senior is attracted to

"Style & Substance": Having it Both Ways in WSAC Group Show

In terms of living up to the qualities of its title, one of the more successful recent juried exhibitions was "Style & Substance," presented by the West Side Arts Coalition, at Cork Gallery, Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center Plaza, 65th Street and Broadway.

Beth Kurtz, for example, employed a flawless technique to create a sense of light, shadow, and mystery—particularly in her paintings of deserted park benches in the snow. Gail Rodney's subway scenes captured the isolation and ennui of passengers while bringing the surface alive by virtue of subtle painterly activity. Meg Boe Birns surprised us by showing sculptures, rather than her more familiar paintings; yet her odd, totemic structures were characteristically offbeat, with their clustered forms and candy colors.

Another surprise are the lyrical hints of landscape, as well as shapes that can be read as symbols, in Meyer Tannenbaum's "Soft Impact" series, although this adamantly abstract painter (whose constant evolution seems to be the only set element in his work), still compels our attention primarily for his formal finesse. Maryann Sussoni is another abstract painter who slides in and out of allusiveness in her compositions that set swerving shapes and more geometric elements within deep blue grounds. Margo Mead's works in watermedia on rice paper achieve a successful synthesis of East and West by virtue of an immediacy that transcends tradition. Fran Del Re's atmospheric paintings of shadowy rustic interiors with light streaming in are equally evocative in oil and watercolor, suggesting silence, stillness and secrets.

Elizabeth Moore's oils are more accurately termed "cloudscapes" than landscapes, with their low horizons and vast skies evoked in striking detail. Mary Anne Holliday, another meticulous realist, observes her desert scenes so intently that they almost take on a surreal intensity. The poetic abstract watercolors of Arlene Sheer gain from their intimate scale, evoking a sense of natural essences and cosmic mysteries with their flowing forms and luminous green and blue hues. Ina Simmons has her own approach to nature-based abstraction in her cut paper and pastel compositions, which evoke single objects such as a feather or a leaf through graceful contours and soft, harmonious colors. In one large and two small canvases, Dellamarie Parrilli, one of our more exuberant abstract painters, employs a vortex of confectionery colors, further enlivened by metallic pigments laid down in vigorous drips and splashes, to convey the power and presence of pure painterly energy.

Realism is a vehicle to abstraction in the paintings of Lucinda Prince, where shadows and fire escapes on urban buildings create compelling compositional tensions. Rodrigo Sanz approaches surrealism through still life paintings in which a fragmented memory of a woman's face appears mysteriously among more mundane objects; or a flute, two wine glasses, and a bottle, enveloped in blue and purple, evoke a magical mood. The still life paintings of Ellen M. Prescott, on the other hand, are down-to-earth explorations of form and color, relying solely on vibrant floral subjects and arrangements of everyday objects to project a life-affirming optimism. Then there is Robert T. Schultheis, who transforms a hectic New York thoroughfare into a serene neoclassical composition through his cool formal mastery in his oil "Astor Place."

Two fine sculptors round out this aptly named juried show: Working in limestone, wood, and cement, Brian Tepper creates fluid organic forms that turn and twist to suggest all manner of intriguing anatomical allusions. Created with hydrocal and canvas, Cati Blanche's slender white and gray figures combine a spectral quality with a striking physical presence in her figurative tableau "The Seven Guardians."

—Peter Wiley

"Thinking Red": A Blazing Anniversary Show at Noho

Red is the most overbearing of colors. It tends to dominate any composition in which it appears like a loudmouthed drunk at a dinner party. We tend to associate red with fire, flowers, blood, and very little else. Like that inebriated boor at the dinner table, it can not only hog the conversation, but be boringly repetitious, if not dealt with firmly.

So, it could seem that the members of one of our most intrepid artist-run galleries set a daunting challenge for themselves in their 30th Anniversary Exhibition "Thinking in Red," which can be seen at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from December 21 through January 8, 2005. (Reception December 23, 5 to 7 PM.)

Grounds for inclusion were liberal, though: Even works with a nominal amount of red in them qualified, and those in which the color was truly the piece de resistance were by artists who tend to indulge in fiery pyrotechnics successfully anyway.

Sheila Hecht, for example, has always

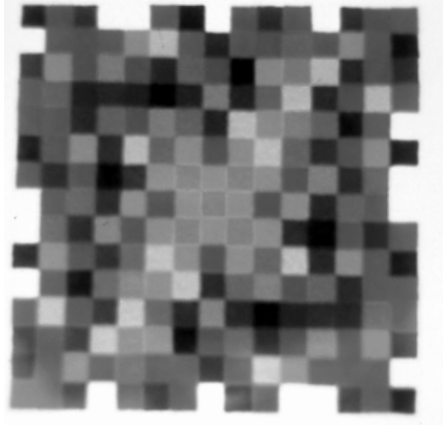
Sheila Hecht

been very much at home with vibrant hues, as has Jessica Fromm. Both show gestural works for which the word "conflagration" seems appropriate. Hecht even goes so far as to call her painting "Red and Then Some", and while its main form is a large area of brilliant cadmium set starkly against a white primed ground and shedding drips down to the bottom of the canvas, energetic slashes of strident yellow and brilliant blue more than hold their own in the vigorous gestural battle that ensues. Jessica Fromm, on the other hand, employs red in a more overall manner, in combination with verdant greens and other hues that neutralize the dominant color by virtue of their lyrical calligraphic dance, matching, if not upstaging, its showiness.

Stephanie Rauschenbusch

Then there is Zarvin Swerbilov, a master of hot and cool, whose clear, flat color areas are so perfectly controlled and meticulously delineated that he can put the most brazen colors in the spectrum right next to each other and make them cohere chromatically within the scheme of his big, heraldic compositions.

Tina Rohrer is another artist who reigns in the boisterousness of red and makes it behave civilly with less aggressive colors, as seen in "Red/Green Progression," a sequence of three exquisitely austere acrylic paintings on paper in which the grid is the crucial element of control. And Virginia Davis employs a similar strategy in her work combining acrylic and Ikat weaving, where deep red rectangles fade to pale pink.



Tina Rohrer

Two artists in this show found the prerequisite red amid the canals of Venice: Stephanie Rauschenbusch made the weathered red brick buildings lining the San Trovaso Canal a dominant but not overbearing factor in her breezy realist watercolor. Leon Yost juxtaposed images of similarly weathered stone structures, tomatoes in a vegetable stall, and a bright red boat, in one of his dazzlingly panoramic Chromogenic photo-assemblages.

The last we heard, Diana Freedman-Shea was working feverishly to finish a painting from her new series, "inspired by Amsterdam's red light district," for inclusion this show; but she is a notoriously deliberate worker and may have to show one of her earlier cityscapes, which while not always red, are invariably well painted.

It will be interesting, too, to see how other gallery artists—such as Jeanne Butler, Rebecca Cooperman, Lynne Friedman, Bruce Laird, and Chuck von Schmidt— whose work was not available for preview before

Leon Yost

our deadline meet the challenge of "Thinking in Red."

—Ed McCormack

Reverence for Nature in the Paintings of Margaret Inye Chung

At first glance, the landscape and still life paintings of Margaret Inye Chung, a Korean-born former professor of art at Kyung Hee University, now based in New York, could appear to be in contradiction to the values of modernism. However, beneath the placid surface Chung's pleasant scenes is an armature of rigorous abstract design. And while her pictures may be simple and direct in terms of their subject matter, she invests them with unusual intensity through her highly detailed style.

Chung's recent paintings of locations in New York State, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, and New Hampshire, recently seen at Gallery 32, 32 West 32nd Street reveal a deep commitment to nature as a reflection of spirituality.

While Chung seems to share with certain surrealists a faith in sharply focused detail as a way of imparting otherworldly intensity to worldly things, she employs this device to celebrate the natural world rather than to render it bizarre. Her seeming desire to depict each separate blade of grass in her landscapes is akin to the meticulous technique of Andrew Wyeth. Like Wyeth, Chung is a highly reflective painter whose work has an unhurried charm, as though she is determined at any cost to create something that will last, and is unconcerned with flashy effects. Capturing precise qualities of light is obviously important to her, for it is through them that she lends her canvases a sparkling vitality.

Painting by Margaret Inye Chung

One fine example of this is her picture of a small house, near a lake, nestled among blazing autumnal trees. What makes the scene convincing is not only the chromatic accuracy that Chung brings to the orange and yellow foliage, or the clarity of the reflective surface of the lake, but the less intangible sense of light and air that permeates the picture. This is even more impressive because not even an inch of sky is visible in this composition, where the trees rise right to the upper edge of the frame. Yet Chung still manages somehow to give us a precise atmosphere of light issuing from an unseen source, a difficult feat for any painter, and certainly an impossibility for an artist of less accomplished technique.

Chung's detailed technique is especially impressive in her painting of a swamp-like body of water running between high grasses with clusters of yellow flowers in the foreground. Here, not only is each blade of grass delineated with a fine brush, she also captures the subtle quality of dispersed cloud fragments in the sky above with uncanny accuracy.

Other notable paintings in the present show are a winter scene depicting an isolated cabin with snow-covered mountains looming above and an icy lake in the foreground, as well as a still life featuring a profusion of delicate flowers in a stout china vase.

In each of these pictures, Margaret Inye Chung displays the sensitivity to form, color, and atmosphere, as well as the careful attention to the minutiae of nature, that sets her work apart from that of other contemporary realists. —Marcia N. Malkoff

"Green Dreams" Bring Beauty to the West Side Scene

While the quality of verdancy might seem a slender premise for an exhibition, several members of the West Side Arts coalition made the green theme resonate in "Green Dreams," seen recently at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street.

Meg Boe Birns, the show's curator, took a title from William Carlos William for her mixed media painting "Of Asphodel, that Greeny Flower," and combined her handwritten text from his poem with gracefully flowing organic imagery in a composition notable for its own poetic grace.

Shirley Z. Piniat has evolved a vigorous shorthand for evoking landscape in her broadly brushed little acrylic paintings, which have great freshness and unpretentious charm. K.A. Gibbons, another artist with a refreshingly direct and highly personal approach, showed a splendid small still life in pastel and pen and ink on paper in which a glass vase filled with flowers was juxtaposed with a dish of fruit.

Lucinda Prince's beautifully composed oils of scenes in Italy, such as a deserted piazza or a marble quarry in Carrara, convey a mysterious mood akin to de Chirico—albeit without indulging in clichés of incongruity or dragging out dusty surrealist props! Betty Thornton, on the other hand, harks all the way back to the stylized figurations of ancient Egypt in her lively little paintings of dancing figures interacting in a manner suggesting mirror-images or appearing in stagey contexts that suggest ornate, over-the-top production numbers.

Farhana Akhter successfully combines pastoral evocativeness and geometric stringency in abstract landscapes distinguished by luminous color and compositional precision, evoking a sense of vast vistas with impressive economy of means. Adamantly abstract, yet ever allusive, the paintings of Young Me are vital and vigorous gestural excursions, as in the characteristically large canvas seen here, where painterly elements that project a sense of physicality process emerge from an armature of circular and rectangular shapes laid down in energetic strokes of charcoal.

Miguel Angel Mora has his own unique way of imbuing abstract imagery with strong emotional content, as seen in "Dreams for Penny (My Beloved Gone Cat"), a feline elegy inventively evoked in a variety of unusual found materials arranged in a formal yet expressive composition. By contrast, Regina Chiu employs softly focused floral or landscape forms (either in extreme closeup or frontally poised in the middle distance) to create oils that combine formalism and romanticism with peculiar and poignant effectiveness.

The witty use of collage materials in combination with bold passages of painting makes the mixed media works of Carolyn Simons Kaplan invariably surprising, in landscape and still life compositions combining playfulness with serious aesthetic intent. Landscape is seen from an aerial perspective in the oils of Robert Halasz, who shows an ability to evoke a great deal of detail yet retain painterly fluidity in compositions where converging land masses and bodies of water create compelling abstract patterns.

Then there is Patricia Hagood, a frequent exhibitor with the WSAC who has evolved a personal idiom of abstraction in which checkerboard squares and a variety of other geometric and more organic elements, further enlivened by jazzy color combinations, provide much optical excitement. —Marie R. Pagano

Andreas Jaeggi's Cityscapes and Figures Evoke a Shadowy World

Certain artists develop techniques for evoking atmospheres in their work that become instantly recognizable stylistic signatures. One such artist is the frequently exhibited painter Andreas Jaeggi, also an opera singer, who was born in Basel, Switzerland, and is now known for his street scenes, many of New York City. Inhabitants of the city will recognize familiar places, albeit transformed by the artist's distinctive vision, in Jaeggi's recent exhibition in the Chelsea location of Agora Gallery.

In both the series that he calls "New York Zippers," painted in oils on canvas flags with side zippers and top eyelets, as well as the figure paintings that he refers to (with a bow to Picasso) as his "blue period," Jaeggi employs a palette of deep, saturated hues to imbue his compositions with darkly evocative dark atmospheres. One of the paintings in the former series, "New York Zippers: Thomas' Temple (Egypt in the Metropolitan Museum)," depicts the museum gallery where the ancient tombs are displayed, evoking the eerie sense of timelessness that one experiences there.

This is an especially powerful painting for its use of the interior space to projects a specific sense of place, while also functioning as a striking geometric abstraction. Jaeggi's use

"New York Zippers: Thomas' temple (Egypt in the Metropolitan Museum)"

of somber brown and blue hues also enhances both the mood of the picture and its austere formal beauty.

Another painting in the series captures the Brooklyn Bridge in shadowy blue monochromes, enlivened here and there with sweeping strokes of white that evoke the atmosphere of a rain storm. The bridge, the harbor, and the building huddled at the shore-line have a shadowy, almost ghostly quality, lending the composition an unusual poetic power.

Even the towers and billboards of Times Square are transformed by Jaeggi's subtle tonal magic in yet another oil. While most artists allow themselves to be seduced by the blazing neons of that fabled street, Jaeggi opts for a more characteristically lyrical quality. He presents Times Square in one of its quieter moments— perhaps as seen in the first light of morning after a long night of revelry, when the signs are momentarily dimmed, and an introspective hush settles in, before "The Deuce" once again resumes its hectic hustle and bustle.

Yet another work in the series, "Treasure Island, Manhattan," is a bird's eye view of the island, predominantly in rusty brown hues that suffuse it with a sense of some ancient topography. This is one of Jaeggi's most abstract compositions, yet it is every bit as evocative as his other cityscapes in its own fashion for its somber, burnished tonalities and gracefully delineated forms.

The figures in Jaeggi's "blue period" series are evocative in another manner. Each painting depicts a single nude in predominantly blue hues, accented here and there with touches of the reddish brown color that the artist also favors. White highlights and, less frequently, bits of green, help to flesh out these beautifully realized figures into palpable physical presences, which one encounters as though in the half-light of a dim bedroom. —Maurice Taplinger

Mario Plascencia's Uncompromising Color Field Paintings

Often, when an artist pares down the elements in his work to the degree that Mario Plascencia has in his recent paintings, it can be seen as an act of renunciation. In Plascencia's case, however, exactly the opposite is true, judging from the celebratory quality that came across in his recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

The two main paintings in Plascencia's exhibition were "Untitled (blue)" and "Untitled (red)." The former was a large vertical canvas, and the latter was a slightly smaller work in a horizontal format. Both were composed with streaks of pigment in the single color and a slightly darker hue that create a sense of gesture and movement without any element in the picture space taking precedence over any other.

The monochromatic character of these paintings added to their minimalism. Yet within the strictures that he sets for himself, Plascencia generates a sense of energy and sheer joy in the act of painting that is surprisingly sensual. Indeed, his delight in process is contagious, and the viewer cannot help but get caught up in the excitement of these compositions.

While some abstract paintings refer obviously to landscape or to the figure or to still life, Plascencia's paintings appear self-referential, in that they refer primarily to painting. Of course, it would be easy enough to read images of a sky at sunset into "Untitled (red)" or of flowing seawater into "Untitled (blue)," but to do so would be to falsify the artist's intentions and to interpret his compositions in the manner of a Rorschach test. This would not only cheat the artist but the viewer as well; for there are much subtler meanings and pleasures to be discovered in paintings such as these.

The fact of the matter is that Plascencia's paintings —at least the two largest ones included in this exhibition— transcend such simplistic interpretations altogether by doing away with any clear distinction between "subject" and "background." They are autonomous entities that derive their energy and their aesthetic value from staking off a territory that is neither "here" nor "there" in imaginative or metaphorical terms.

In fact, Mario Plascencia's paintings thwart imagination, for they exist in the realm of the actual. What they are really about is the material itself, in a way that makes Mario Plascencia more akin to European Tachism, or the Art Informel of the Spanish master Antoni Tapies, than to American Abstract Expressionism. For, as even his refusal to title his paintings indicates, Plascencia has no interest in allusiveness or in perpetrating lyrical effects. Rather, his interest is in what Tapies called the"noumenal" or essential spirit of materials.

In this regard perhaps Plascencia's closest kinship is with the French painter Pierre Soulages, known for his monochromatic canvases composed with streaks of pigment, whose artistic credo was "the more limited the means, the stronger the expression."

Soulages, however, was a somber colorist, while Plascencia obviously revels in color, choosing monochromes as a vehicle for the unadulterated chromatic intensity that can only result from isolating a single vibrant hue.

Also included in this excellent show were eight small canvases arranged in a narrow grid, all entitled "Eight times Eight," in which the most sensually cursive figure in our numeric system served as the centerpiece for a series in which form, rather than color, was the piece de resistance. In these, as well as in his larger Color Field painting, Mario Plascencia proved himself to be a challenging and highly engaging artist.

—Wilson Wong

The Enduring Power of Akihiko Iwanami's Gestural Paintings

The media can have a distorting influence, and we in the art press are no less guilty of "spin" than reporters who cover politics and other news. For example, from reading most art publications, one might get the impression that all young artists in Japan belong to Superflat, a movement influenced by cute cartoon characters.

Nothing, in fact, could be further from the truth, as witness the art of Akihiko Iwanami, a gifted contemporary painter who draws from the deeper wellspring of Japanese culture, and particularly calligraphy, to create his large gestural paintings, seen in his exhibition at Visual Arts Gallery, Adirondack Community College, 640 Bay Road, Queensbury, NY, through November 18.

Although he works on a large scale that lends his paintings a physical presence and an impact reminiscent of Abstract Expressionism and acknowledged the work of the huge works of American artist Richard Serra as an inspiration, Iwanami favors traditional Japanese materials such as mineral pigments and rice paper. However, he employs them in his own unique manner, applying gold leaf of the type used in traditional Japanese screens to create a grid on rice paper glued to a wooden panel, which he then works over with ink and mineral pigments to create bold abstract compositions that combine qualities of both Eastern and Western aesthetics.

Iwanami has stated, "In my opinion 'unintentional' is 'natural,'" and he employs drips and other "accidents" much as the Abstract Expressionists did to lend his compositions a sense of immediacy, urgency, and vitality. Liquefied mineral pigments are applied in broad, saturated strokes. Stains and discolorations are assimilated into the painting as natural occurrences, traces of process that lend a sense of flux, movement, and thrust to Iwanami's majestic compositions. Indeed, his paintings often have an impact and an energy suggestive of natural phenomena, such as crashing surf or volcanic activity, with large areas of empty space often adding to the sense of scale and openness that enhances the sense of the composition as a kind of terrain that the brush, and in turn the viewers' eye, traverses.

Although there is also a calligraphic basis to some of Iwanami's forms, as well as in his use of sumi ink, with its many subtle gray gradations, calligraphy is adopted more for its gestural energy than for its literal, linguistic meanings. The monochromatic elements traditional to Asian art converge with red, blue, green, and yellow mineral colors in splashy configurations that surge and flow over the picture plane, evoking a majestic synthesis of the natural and the spiritual.

"Untitled"

Influenced both by traditional Japanese culture and modern American artists from whom he says that he learns "how to emphasize my individual characteristics," Akihiko Iwanami has evolved a style notable for its heroic ambition and global scope. To stand before one of his large, lyrical paintings is to find oneself engulfed by an atmosphere of form and color that provokes an exhilarating sensory experience. Iwanami's work appears destined to transcend the popular fads and tendencies of the moment and endure as a permanent part of Japan's contribution to world culture. —Ed McCormack

"Visions on View" at Broadway Mall

Once again, the West Side Arts Coalition demonstrated the unique vitality that can result when artists moonlight as curators, in the group show "Visions on View," seen recently at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at 96th and Broadway.

One of the curators, Leila R. Elias showed two collages featuring layered floral forms on gossamer paper titled "Circus" and "Pink Sea," both notable for their pleasing, poetic delicacy in a manner akin to Pattern Painting. The other curator, Isabel Rivera, was represented by a subtle color field work in acrylic on canvas, its piece de resistance a tiny rectangle afloat in a welter of textured strokes.

Frequent exhibitor Miguel Angel Mora's unusual combination of austere geometric composition and expressive content was especially effective in a large assemblage called "Did You Find Yourself in My Vision," where a small gem-like crystal was combined with funkier found materials with characteristic elan, and the viewer was provided with a magnifying glass for self discovery.

Joan Phares, also works with found objects, such as dismembered dolls, and a working clock—albeit combined with skillful realist drawing and painting in a particularly poetic manner. A new discovery (at least for this reviewer), Phares' mixed media assemblages are reminiscent of Marisol at her most inventive.

The lithographs of Ann Marie Heal deal with various species of endangered birds, lending each of them an iconic quality that makes its impending extinction seem all the more poignant. Heal's "Dream of the Pelican" was especially striking, with one watchful eye peering soulfully out of a welter of silver gray feathers in the severely cropped composition. By contrast, another graphic artist, Babette P. Meltzer, creates computer prints in which the appeal is strictly visual, with little linear wiggles or organic or geometric forms contained within colorful grids.

Belying periodic rumors of its death, representational painting also made an impressive showing: Mary Laren's oils treat still life subjects with exquisite formal restraint, employing shifting planes and subtly harmonized colors to activate the shape of a cactus or a composition centering on plants and books.

Vija Doks showed a large canvas that parodied a banal calendar image of ducks on a pond in a vigorous painterly manner akin to Larry Rivers—albeit with a lyricism coupled with visual wit that belongs to Doks alone.

Adam Brostow is another painter who tweaks pictorial conventions in a highly original manner. Brostow showed a series of small, meticulously executed acrylic paintings that took off in a whimsical manner from the type of snapshots that tourists take when they travel in Europe, all in a sophisticated faux-primitive style.

Joey Infante seems to specialize in pushing the envelope, gleefully risking kitsch in order to test the limits of taste. Here, in landscapes every bit as outrageous as his figure compositions, Infante rendered familiar sites exotic with his hot neon colors.

Another landscape painter, Lucinda Prince showed autumn scenes in smeared, shimmering hues that functioned beautifully as abstractions in a manner similar to the figure paintings of the late Jan Muller. Prince, however, is an even more conscious colorist, and her compositions give off luminous chromatic auras.

Then there was Madi Lanier, a painter who mines a manner directly descended from Cezanne and the Cubists, yet inflects it with a peculiar postmodern vitality. Lanier's monoprints and watercolors, while modest of scale, exert a breezy presence, with dashes of color mediated by a vigorous linearity.

—Peter Wiley

THE ART OF ROMARE BEARDEN
October 14, 2004-January 9, 2005

Romare Bearden Piano Lesson, c. 1983 Collage of various papers with paint, ink, and graphite on paper29 x 22 in. (73.7 x 55.9 cm)
The Walter O. Evans Foundation for Art and Literature

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