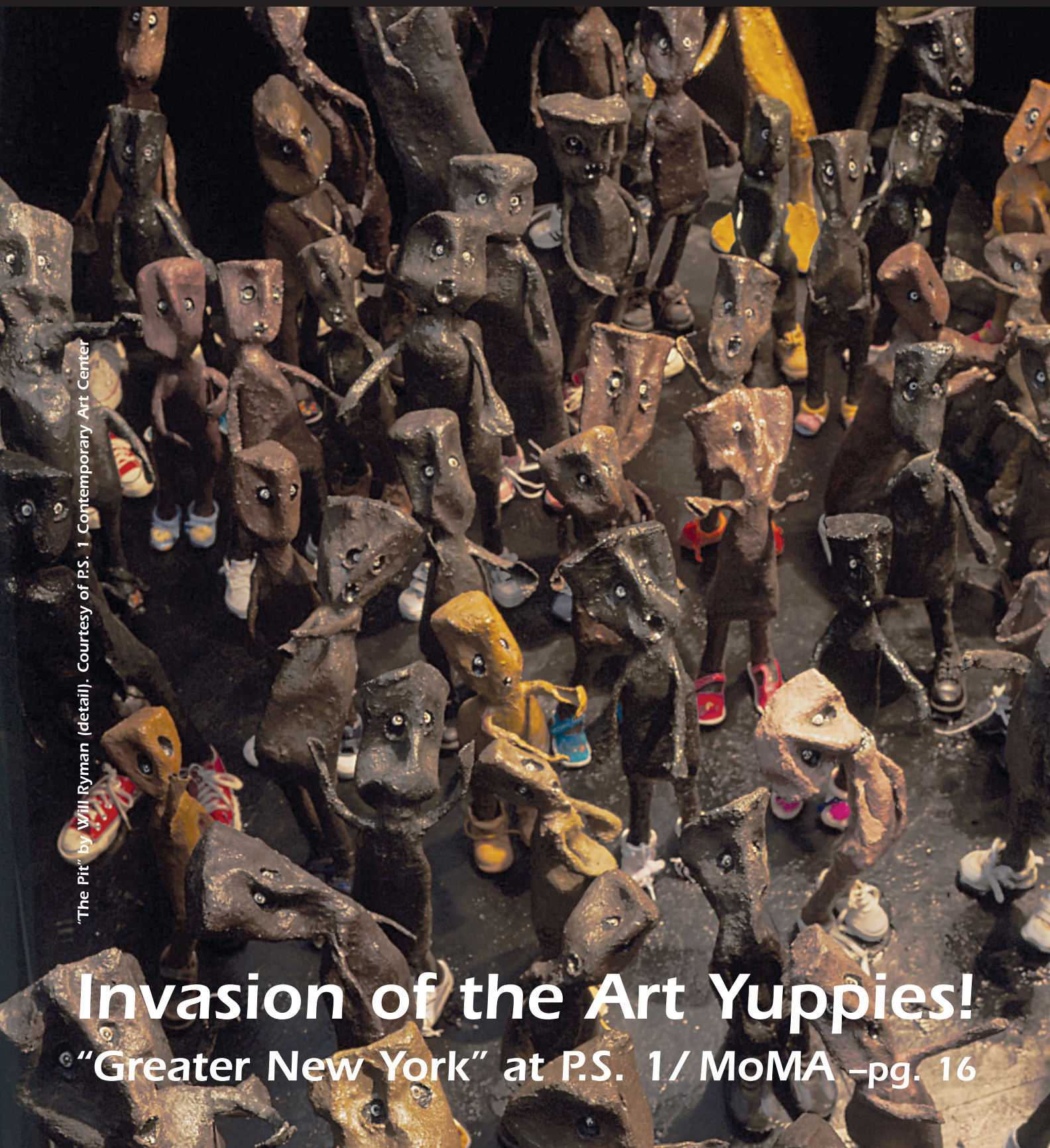
Vol. 7 No. 5 June/July/August 2005 New York

GALLERY&STUDIO

The World of the Working Artist



"The Pit" by Will Ryman (detail). Courtesy of P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center

Invasion of the Art Yuppies!

"Greater New York" at P.S. 1/ MoMA –pg. 16

"Dusk at the Marsh" Oil on Canvas 24" x 36"

Linda Arnold

Recent Landscapes

Email: LRARHA@aol.com

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Tina Rohrer

NATURE SQUARED

Detail (18" x 18") of "Forest" (72" x 90") acrylic on paper

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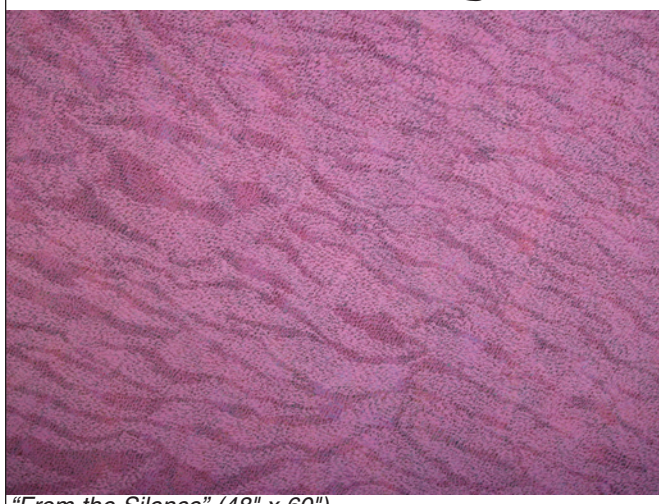
Reception: Saturday, June 11, 4-6

noho gallery

530 West 25th St., 4th Fl, NYC, 10001
Tues - Sat 11 - 6pm 212 367 7063

Hosook Kang



"From the Silence" (48" x 60")

"From the Silence"

July 20 – August 3, 2005
Reception:
Thursday, July 21, 6 - 8pm

Phoenix Gallery
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The Fuller Bldg. 41 East 57th St, 13th Fl, New York, NY 10022 (212) 644-7171 perlowgallery@aol.com

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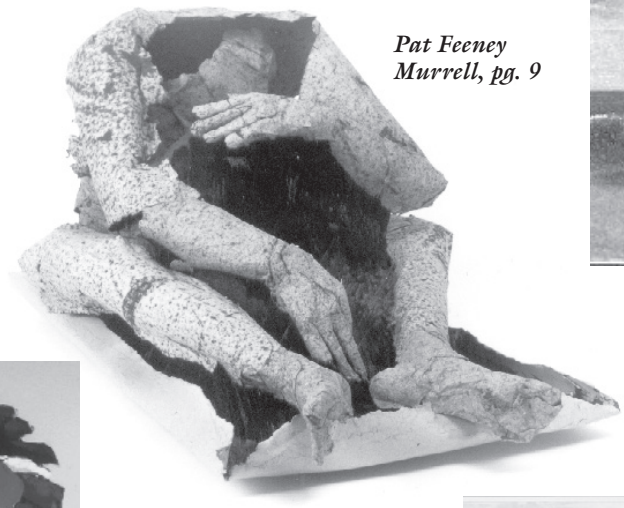
Image courtesy of P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Centers



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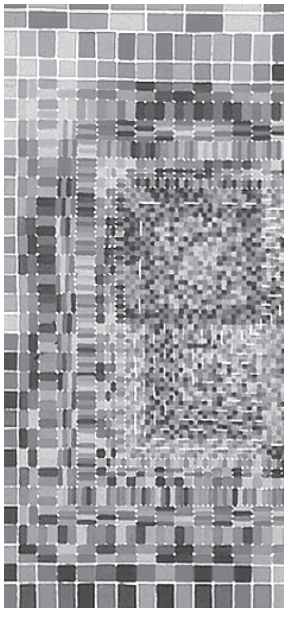

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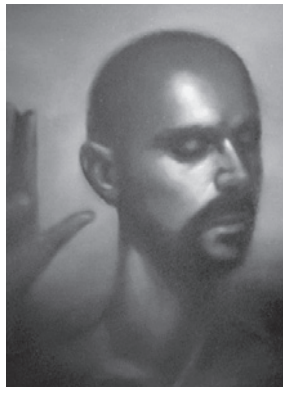

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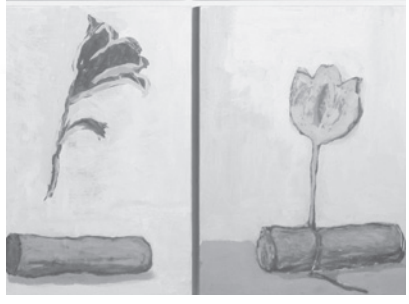

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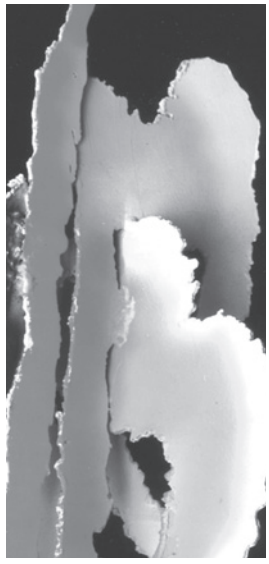

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Ambiguous Narratives

June 29-July 20, 2005
Reception – Thursday, June 30th, 6-8pm

Anders Bundgaard
Jacques Tange
Leon Van Der Slik

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Forces of Nature

August 17th - Septeptember 7th, 2005
Reception: Thursday, August 18th, 6-8pm

Keizo Hayashi
Martin Garcia
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Ahmed Mounib

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Joan Reutershan
Paintings in Oil

"Arrangement 85: DeKalb/St. Felix," 2004,
oil on canvas, 18" x 18"

jreutershan@yahoo.com
www.sonyany.com (member gallery)

Steven John Harris: A Working Class Hero Is Something to Be

Steven John Harris, whose second New York solo show can be seen from June 7 through 27 at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, has become something of an overnight sensation since the British press picked up a review of his first exhibition (this past October in the same venue), which appeared in Gallery&Studio.

A TV news crew even showed up unexpectedly on Harris' doorstep in Lancashire after The Times, The Evening Herald, and The Independent all reprinted the following quote from our critic Peter Wiley: "Although Harris is self-taught, there is nothing naive or innocent about his work. Rather, his paintings are almost wickedly knowing about the convoluted entanglements of human relationships. To the league of modern British painters, such as Bacon, Hockney and Hodgkin, whom we admire as much for their quirky qualities as for their solid aesthetic attributes, we must now add the name of Steven John Harris."

"Your Lease"

Because he's a big, bearish, down-to-earth bloke who supports his wife and kids as a scaffolder and started painting fifteen years ago, when he was laid off work for awhile, Harris has been getting the full "working class hero" treatment. However, this is more than just another human interest story, fit for a Beatles song, about a scaffolder who picked up a brush and found his true calling. For Harris really is a rarity among British painters, who by and large, have been informed more by their country's overriding literary tradition than by strictly plastic values, causing Rubin Ironside once note of Paul Nash, "Although he called himself a constructivist, poetry kept breaking in."

Like the mere handful of distinguished predecessors to whom he has been compared, Steven John Harris is an exception to the rule. He is an intrepid painter, unafraid to immerse himself in pure form and color, even while tackling subject matter that may strike some as sensational, even tawdry. Sex, the kinkier the better, is a recurring motif in Harris' paintings to a degree that can also remind one of D.H. Lawrence, the British novelist and poet who took up painting and was as explicit with his brush as with his pen.

The difference, however, is that while Lawrence got bogged down in literary literalism in his paintings of couples coupling, Harris puts a Neo-Fauvist spin on erotic engagement. Which is to say, the akimbo limbs, ballistic breasts, phallic protuberances and other anatomically allusive forms that enliven his paintings are as likely to be brilliant yellow, blue, red, or purple, as flesh-colored. And they are often cropped at abrupt angles that lend paintings such as "Blue Boner Subject," "Pisces and Venus," and "Surmise a Guise" (a particularly daring picture suggesting a ménage à trois between a purple man, a pink lady, and a red canine) a dynamic abstract quality. In fact, Harris' pictures hit you like a perceptual one-two punch: first you're struck by the forms and colors, then you're floored by what appears to be going on.

One could say that Harris provides the perfect combination of pure plasticity and polymorphous perversity. For his part, the artist feigns innocence, playing the Andy Capp card, providing perfect sound bites, saying things like, "I'm just a working class lad who works as a scaffolder," and "Freud would have a good time with me. . .Sometimes even I'm shocked or disturbed by what comes out."

But the truth is that John Steven Harris is a consummately sophisticated painter—a natural, as they say. For although he never attended art school or paid particular attention to trends in contemporary art, his paintings are not only remarkably in tune with the cheeky attitudes one sees among much younger, much more self-conscious painters today, but are seemingly informed by older, weightier aesthetic values as well. Indeed, while harking back to Matisse and Nolde—as well as later painters such as Jacob Lawrence and Bob Thompson—Harris's formal permutations of the figure and bold, flat areas of vibrant, singing color seem intuitive rather than derivative.

Somehow this self-effacing scaffolder from across the pond has turned himself, in his spare time, into a remarkably savvy painter. Several equally savvy collectors have already acquired paintings, making it possible for him to at least start thinking about quitting his day job, and Montserrat Gallery has given him its vote of confidence by scheduling his second solo show so close on the heels of his first. This is an unusual occurrence in the New York art scene, where major solo shows are usually few and far between. But then again, Steven John Harris, is a most unusual artist.

—Ed McCormack

Recognizing the Chromatic Mastery of Adrian Prisecaru

This was definitely Adrian Prisecaru's year: Out of the 150 artists showcased in the SOLO Independent Artists Pavilion at Artexpo NY, the Romanian-born painter, who has exhibited widely in the U.S. and Europe, was awarded the prestigious 2005 SOLO Prize. (In the aftermath, he was interviewed live by NBC TV and feted as the guest honor in a reception at the trendy Lot 61 club in Chelsea.)

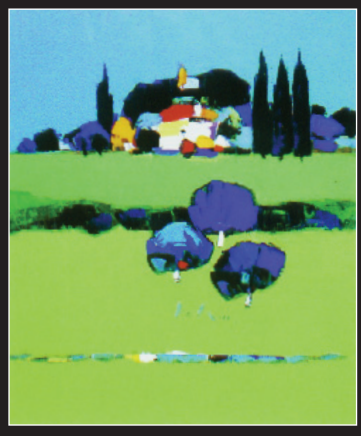
This hardly seems surprising to one familiar with Prisecaru's brilliantly colorful, thickly impastoed oils. Prisecaru has been favorably compared to both Nicholas de Stael and Giorgio Morandi, and certainly his work is firmly in that tradition with its combination of chromatic and tactile attributes. Indeed, although he has lived and worked in New York for more than twenty five years, Prisecaru remains a quintessentially European painter. Which is to say, like that of many of his modernist predecessors in the School of Paris, his work is unapologetically sumptuous and sensual. For all his years of residency here, it would appear that none of the funk or grime of the 21st century urban miasma rubbed off to sully what can only be called Prisecaru's adamant aesthetic purity.

Prisecaru has stated that he endeavors to "make color a powerful expressive force," and he certainly succeeds admirably in that goal, in a painting such as "Cabin on the Beach," one among several works that influenced the judges to award him the prize at Artexpo. Although its forms are as deadpan and clearly delineated as anything by Will Barnet or Alex Katz, Prisecaru made the sky a hue evocative of the "tangerine sky" in the famous song by the Beatles; the strip of sea on the left side of the composition as black as a licorice stick, and the sand dune that aborts its flow on the right a shade of yellow so blindingly brilliant as to rival a mirror held up to the sun. Here, Prisecaru has actually gone beyond mere appearances to paint the sensation of heat itself.

Quite opposite, in terms of its stately coolness, is the still life "White Vase," where the tall tubular container of the title holds a lush bouquet of pale yellow flowers that glow like a halo against a deep blue ground. Even here, when working with a considerably more subdued palette of hues, Prisecaru possesses the singular ability to create high drama by juxtaposing a handful of flawlessly harmonized hues. Yet he never seems more in his element than when working in the highest, hottest chromatic register, as seen in the near-abstract composition "Afternoon in Provence," where one of his vibrant orange skies hovers over a verdant horizon dotted with trees and small dwellings and a gestural purple-violet shape spills like a radiant, unearthly lake over a field saturated with luscious cadmium red light.

In this and other paintings, ranging from the exquisite small oil, "Evening in Campagna," with its juicy interaction between blues and yellow, to the much larger canvas called "Summer in Malaga," a reverie in red, pink, orange hues which crosses the line into rhapsodic abstraction, Adrian Prisecaru lays down smooth, edible-looking oil pigments with an intrepidness and panache few other living painters can match.

"Napoli Harbor"



"Umbria"

"Afternoon in Provence"

"Still-life"

—Ed McCormack

(Adrian Prisecaru:
Tel. 718 .899.1156
Email: Mprisecaru @aol.com)

Eight Gifted Artists Forge a "Fusion" at the Venezuela Gallery

One of the more consistently exciting and varied venues in the uptown gallery scene is the Venezuela Gallery in the Venezuelan Center, at 7 East 51st Street, which often shows artists from Latin America and the United States together, making for a lively multicultural mix. Most recently the group exhibition "Artistic Fusion" featured eight artists whose work reflected the diversity of contemporary visual culture yet made for a cohesive survey of complementary styles.

Kim Davolos is an accomplished realist with an obvious appreciation for beautiful people in elegant, one might even say opulent, settings. There is invariably the sense of an underlying narrative in Davolos' pictures; one often gets the sense that one is privy to the private pleasures of wealthy, slightly decadent people. This is especially true of one large canvas by Davolos in which a partially nude woman stands next to a gold statue of a female nude that appears to be her own likeness, while a completely nude man stands nearby with his back to us. Davolos brings this intriguing scene alive in a style that harks back to the cool, solidly delineated realism of the northern Italian master Andrea Mantegna. For like Mantegna, Davolos eschews painterliness and the seduction of the brushstrokes in favor of a rigorously delineated style that gives the figures a sculptural dimension. This solidity and clarity extends to the draperies and the silken evening gowns in another painting where three beautiful, haughty women manage to project just as much mystery as the previously discussed picture, even while fully dressed.

Jacqueline Matute, on the other hand, evokes a wholesome realm of sunlight and childhood memory in her very large, bold canvases. One of the distinguishing aspects of Matute's style is her ability to capture convincing detail, even while indulging in a penchant for bravura brushwork that lends her paintings great tactile and expressive appeal. Matute is also an intrepid colorist, laying down brilliant red, yellow, and orange hues that project a sense of radiance and heat to the lush landscapes that she inhabits with human and animal figures. Filled with an almost Van Gogh-like intensity, albeit with subjects that indicate a more serene disposition, her compositions are evocations of bucolic settings where colorful roosters strut and crow and children play in Idyllic gardens amid sunflowers as tall as themselves. Matute takes such intimate subjects and lends them a monumental quality by virtue of her considerable compositional gifts and the larger-than-life-scale of her canvases, which imbue simple, everyday events with a sense of the heroic, making a convincing case that while history unfolds on a global scale, these little local miracles are what really matter.

Frank Bruno is a painter whose work hovers gracefully between the representational and the abstract. In Bruno's bright, intricately patterned compositions, the picture plane is an arena for formal discovery, yet figurative allusions flit among his forms, playing hide and seek with the viewers' eye. The first thing that strikes one on encountering these compositions is a sense of shifting planes and color areas, suggesting a fresh postmodern synthesis of Cubism and Expressionism. One could almost compare Bruno's handling of form and color to the collages of Romare Bearden, if not for the fact that Bruno consistently opts for the abstract over the anecdotal. Thus his pictures appear to be effusive celebrations of the general vitality, as opposed to the literary aspects, of the world that the artist encounters.

Steve Oliver, on the other hand, invests animal and human subjects with meticulous detail, in his large ink and watercolor works on paper. Oliver is one of the new breed of artist who makes drawing a vehicle for finished works rather than sketches and studies. Indeed, Oliver lends his ink and wash drawings the complexity of paintings through a variety of line, cross-hatch and stipple techniques through which he creates a variety of textures, such as the feathers of a rooster set against a brilliant blue ground or the mane of a reposeful lion in another composition awash in golden ocher hues. Human subjects, too, are evoked in by Oliver with equal skill, as seen in one ink and watercolor drawing depicting the head of a man with a white beard, a crescent earring, and one of those floppy velvet berets that Renaissance painters often wore.

Valerie Craig is another kind of artist entirely: a painter of landscapes and still life compositions in which muted hues and fluid brushwork produce poetic, atmospheric effects. Craig's landscapes have a smoky, romantic quality reminiscent of Corot. She evokes a sense of weather and light in feathery stroke. Clouds, trees, and hills are equally soft-focused in Craig's plein air compositions, which are usually on an intimate easel scale that enhances their gentle ambiance. Similarly, in her floral still life paintings, such as one small gem depicting red and white flowers in glass vases, Craig takes an approach antithetical to the Flemish tradition, imbuing her pictures with qualities that recall Corot's admonition to artists, "Be guided by feeling alone." Indeed, even while remaining true to the general appearance of her still life and landscape subjects, Craig transforms them into poetic metaphors for the tenderest human emotions.

Sandi Lovitz is another painter who appears to follow her instincts successfully. Lovitz, however, is a latter-day Abstract Expressionist with an impressive arsenal of splashy gestural effects at her disposal. Her compositions have an impulsive power that reminds one of the work of the late George McNeil, although Lovitz does not allude as overtly to the figure or other elements of representation. Rather, she prefers to let gesture, form, and color alone carry the composition, leaving interpretive options open-ended for the viewer. Lovitz's paintings, if they have any subject matter at all, are concerned with energy and movement laid down boldly in a joyously uninhibited attack upon the canvas which suggests that she may be one of the last of the true "action" painters.

By contrast, Cyril Donkor conveys a sense of movement through forms that are paradoxically static. Donkor carves sinuous stylized figures akin to African sculpture from wood, gives them a highly polished finish, and mounts them on black fabric backgrounds to create an effect similar to bas-reliefs. His compositions have the appeal of Art Nouveau arabesques, with their cursive shapes and sensual contours, yet they also allude to the deeper cultural concerns of indigenous peoples. Especially striking is a large, horizontal piece by Donkor centering on four musicians, the stringed instrument of one figure, fitted with real strings, playing a prominent role in the composition.

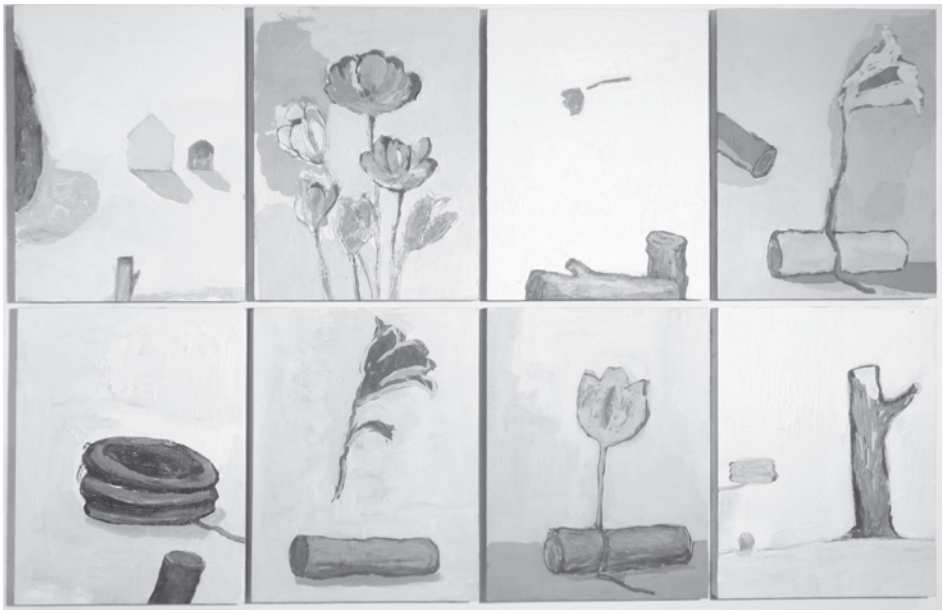
The final artist, Kyle Margiotta is a realist with a special talent for capturing those reflective moments in life when we envelope ourselves in solitude and time seems to stand still. There is a Vermeer-like quality to Margiotta's figure paintings, as seen in a splendid large composition of a woman, with a pet cat nearby, leaning on the railing of a patio looking over a vista of rooftops under a clear blue sky. Margiotta enhances the dreamy mood through the play of light and shadow, limned in a style so crystalline that we can almost feel soft breezes wafting by. Equally impressive is another, somewhat smaller, painting by Margiotta, of a middleaged woman working with watercolors at a table. The woman appears to be an amateur artist, judging from the details of the homey setting: the plaid tablecloth, the quaint patterns of the wallpaper. However, she still seems transported by the act of painting beyond her mundane surroundings, beyond the bare brick wall that fills the window behind her table.

—Lawrence Downes

In-sook Park: A Young Korean-Born Painter's Auspicious Debut

Late in his career, when he switched from Abstract Expressionism to the figurative style that has since influenced two generations of New Image painters, Philip Guston quipped that he "became a movie director." He was referring, of course, to the narrative quality of his mature work, with its cartoon men smoking and drinking under bare lightbulbs like hardboiled film noir characters.

One of the most gifted of Guston's children, however, takes the cinematic quality in a totally different direction in her serial odes to the safety, security, and the vanished happiness of childhood. She is In-sook Park, a young painter born in Korea, presently living and working in upstate New York, and her first solo exhibition can be seen at Multimedia Center Palisades Park Library, 257 2nd Street, Palisades Park, New Jersey, from June 16 to 30.



A sequence of paintings by In-sook Park

Some of Park's most affecting paintings span several adjoining panels, which increases their filmic effect, while the stylistic bluntness that relates her work to Guston's is more lyrically muted. For Park has her own distinctly restrained color sense, tending toward earthy hues that lend her compositions a diffused quality comparable in some ways to that of Luc Tuymans, another artist fond of cinematic sequencing and faded colors that suggest old film stills. The difference between them, however, is that while Tuymans appears to have little faith in painting's ability to affect anything and likes to wallow in futility ("Every art has failed," he once said), In-sook Park seems to believe wholeheartedly that art can be redemptive; that through it one can regain at least the spirit of the past.

One of the most striking recurring motifs in her paintings is the image of a small inflatable swimming pool of the type that one can see in backyards all across America, and apparently in Korea as well. This shape appears again and again, either painted or drawn in charcoal on a painted ground. At a quick glance, its bulging tubular shape can also resemble a coiled snake, inevitably suggesting the intrusion of the serpent into the Edenic garden of childhood and the subsequent loss of innocence.

In fact, such ambiguity seems innate to In-sook Park's imagery, lending it a power greater than wistfulness, a depth that transcends mere nostalgia. One of her most affecting sequences is a frieze of eight panels that suggest a comicstrip devoid of speech or thought balloons. Each panel contains two or three simplified objects. In one panel, for example, we see only a lollypop-shaped flower and an object that could be a two-tiered birthday cake—except that it is the color of a mud-pie. Another panel contains two rudimentary houses of the type that children the world over seem to draw, with a rounded form that could be part of a poplar tree jutting into the left side of the composition. In yet another panel a gray ball appears to roll up the slope of a hill toward the trunk of a bare, chopped down tree, its starkness suggesting the abrupt termination of something that was about to bloom; in yet another, a single flower appears to be tied by its stem, like a balloon, to a log. Here, the artist may be telling us that while a flower is a delicate, short-lived entity, and a log is stronger and more permanent, the ethereal flower may possess the mysterious power to uplift that which is weighty and material, transporting it to another dimension even more permanent than the most durable earthly things.

Yet one must caution the viewer against reading pat, prosaic meanings into In-sook Park's visual metaphors. Far better to take them on their own terms, as one does the metaphors in a poem, than to project interpretations that bog such images down in the literal. For Park's pictures have their own painterly logic, with their boldly simplified forms, putty-like colors, and creamy textures—all of which conspire to capture the mysterious qualities of childhood memories, and how they are transmuted in adulthood.

Similar concerns carry over into the collages that Park creates with bits of cut-up fabric adhered to thickly impastoed paint surfaces on panels. The collage elements take on the quality of densely layered flower petals, suggesting the lush vitality of organic life. In one piece, these petal-like shapes spill off the bottom of the composition, taking on a sculptural dimension, while in others, they accumulate within the rectangular format, built up in low relief.

Although these works are quite small, they have a ruggedly tactile presence and a sense of "objectness" that contrasts sharply with other works by Park in which tiny, delicate shapes drawn onto painted autumnal orange grounds have the lyrical sweep and flow of breeze-blown leaves. Here, the lyrical movement of the compositions has something in common with certain paintings by Mark Tobey which were influenced by Asian art. Park's compositions in this vein, however, seem more directly inspired by her responses to nature, as do her other works in which larger, single abstract forms, seemingly based on leaf-shapes, take on a more emblematic quality.

Also included in this impressive first solo show are earlier abstract compositions in which more freely brushed circular shapes in mostly dark hues appear to float like Monet's water lilies, albeit enveloped in shadowy nocturnal atmospheres. Park seems to have several different modes of expression, as befits an adventurous young artist still finding her way, in refreshing contrast to so many of her contemporaries who lock themselves into a signature style as soon as they get out of art school in the hope that it will be "marketable," thereby aborting any possibility of growth. And one can only hope that she will continue to follow her impulses wherever they may lead, for while her work is varied it is not inconsistent. Indeed, all of In-sook Park's diverse output is already united by her strong overriding vision.

—Jeannie McCormack

Tina Rohrer: The Marriage of Nature and Geometry

Although we generally tend to think of geometry as inexpressive, Tina Rohrer proves that it can be quite the opposite in her solo exhibition "Nature Squared," at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street from June 7 through 25th, with a reception for the artist on Saturday June 11, from 4 to 6 PM.

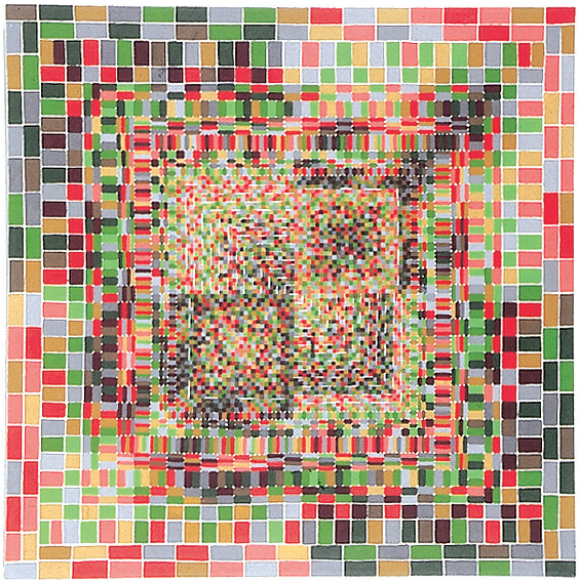
Rohrer cites Georges Seurat and Josef Albers as inspirations. Yet she hastens to make clear that she is less interested in Seurat's color investigations (having definite ideas of her own in this regard) than in his marking process. She also wants us to know that what interests her about Albers is his use of the simple square as a vehicle for presenting color (although, here again, she adheres to her own chromatic theories).

"Visual mixing of pigments, instead of physical blending of pigments on a palette in the traditional way, forms more vibrant colors," she states of having adopted, to some degree, Seurat's method of creating optical effects by the careful placement of pure, unmixed colors next to each other. However, Rohrer prefers applying her hues in small, precise rectangles like those on a color chart, rather than minute dots.Thus the overall effect of her compositions is closer to Alfred Jensen's intricate checkered motifs than to Seurat's pointillism —even while Rohrer's palette is more varied and her colors coalesce to create chromatic effects more subtle than the static patterns of Jensen's primaries.

Like Jensen, too, Rohrer acknowledges a metaphysical element, along with the formal considerations, in her work. Confronting her own mortality, she says, has made her more aware of "deeply rooted spiritual concerns" and opened up her art to dealing "not only with self-unity but also with some type of oneness with God, a Higher Power, or the Cosmos." However, as the title of her exhibition indicates, the main impetus for Rohrer's paintings is her love for nature, which she expresses most directly through her exploration of the optical qualities of color within stringently geometric formats that could be said to reflect the underlying systems and structures of the natural world.

Coloristic interaction is perhaps the most crucial component of Rohrer's acrylic paintings and painted wood constructions, and she has evolved a systematic approach to this as well. Indeed, as one might expect from someone so methodical, she is more articulate than many other artists concerning her process and intentions, explaining, "In works suggesting water, the mid-color aqua, surrounded by blue, becomes very green, whereas aqua surrounded by green appears blue. One can also view the colors as being formed from discrete constituents into one complete hue or as one complete hue refracting into individual parts."

However, the chromatic beauty of Rohrer's work speaks eloquently for itself, breaking free from theory and achieving visual autonomy in a manner that demonstrates how truly original art transcends the verbalizations of even its most articulate artist/advocates. One especially dazzling case in point is the acrylic painting that Rohrer calls "Overview I," its intricate composition created with predominantly pale pastel hues applied in small, squared-off strokes. Here, the perfectly symmetrical square format of the painting itself creates a sense of infinite space that belies the painting's actual size of 34 by 34 inches. At the center of the composition, four rectangles filled with even tinier squares of color converge and appear partially overlap, forming a densely layered focal point from which various hues appear to radiate like light-beams.



"Overview I"

In contrast to "Overview I," with its intense concentrations of color suggesting a squared sun spilling light from illimitable depths, a related painting of the same dimensions called "Overview IV" has a more formal composition dominated by a central cruciform in which the rectangles of various hues appear to expand rather than contract. Here, while the central cross, filled with a rainbow spectrum of strokes, radiates spiritual suggestiveness, the four large rectangles at the corners, negatively defining its shape —which are made up of smaller, more densely packed jots of color— advance on the picture plane insistently, creating ambiguous figure-to-ground relationships that seem to contradict any symbolic sense of spiritual certainty which the cruciform motif might imply.

While reading literal meanings into paintings as ostensibly non-objective as these can be a perilous enterprise at best, the evocative complexity of Tina Rohrer's compositions invites thoughtful interpretation nonetheless. However, the sheer visual power of Rohrer's work finally overrides its allusiveness, even in regard to her stated natural inspiration: The manner in which her numerous units of color appear to either separate or coalesce as one moves closer or steps back from her paintings creates perceptual shifts that approximate rather than imitate the effects of nature. Yet the sense of movement and flux that Rohrer achieves by virtue of her chromatic alchemy could arguably be said to give us a more accurate sense of natural vitality than any conventional depiction of a landscape may provide.

This is especially true of "Ocean II" a large wall installation made up of several small panels in which tiny, precise units of green and gray hues coalesce at a distance to create the sense of a shimmering, light-inflected watery expanse without the slightest attempt at literal transcription of particulars. Here, the multiple panels are akin to the procedure-oriented works of Jennifer Bartlett; but while Bartlett's large pieces codify various shapes, symbols, and brush strokes conceptually as discrete entities, Rohrer's panels cohere to evoke a unified field in a manner simultaneously systematic and lyrical.

Rohrer's ability to evoke natural phenomena within a geometric context can also be seen in her acrylic and wood constructions, such as "Night/Day" where two juxtaposed units of layered rectangular "frames," some squared, others tilted, are dappled with darkly nocturnal or brightly sunlit hues, and positioned in a manner suggesting the clockwise movement of the sun across the globe. Here, as in all of her best work, Tina Rohrer combines strict geometry and resonant color to create complex relationships that infuse the piece with deep personal meaning.

—Ed McCormack

The Figures of Pat Feeney Murrell Embody Emotional Chasms and Gaps

"The body acts as a husk for the spirit," states the sculptor Pat Feeney Murrell. "It's what we hang our personalities and beliefs on. I use paper because it is like skin."

Since all of Murrell's figures are lifesize, the effect of the works that she calls "handmade paper sculptural body wrappings" can be quite haunting. One felt as though one had entered a temple of human yearning, on walking into the Treasure Room Gallery of the Interchurch Center, 475 Riverside Drive, where Murrell's solo exhibition "Paper Personae," comprised of works created from 1997 to 2002, continues through June 24.

The ground floor gallery is open Monday to Friday, from 9 AM to 5 PM, but the best time to go is in the morning, when no one else is there and one can encounter Murrell's sculptures without distraction. For these figures, which hang on the walls, dangle from the ceiling, or are propped up on elaborate bamboo supports on the floor, have a great deal to communicate about our common human condition, and it is best understood in thoughtful solitude and silence. Indeed, Pat Feeney Murrell's sculptures speak to one of things that we do not often talk about, even with those close to us. They allude to the masks that we wear and come to believe are our faces, as well as to the selfconscious postures that we assume when we reach out to others, a little bit hesitantly, because we are not sure how far we can go without crossing certain irrevocable boundaries. They hold up a mirror that allows us to see how poignantly broken and incomplete we are. Murrell's figures are fragmented, often headless, their torsos filled with gaping cavities, their parts sometimes partially amputated; and yet we see them in our mind's eye and even feel them in the visceral way that we have heard actual amputees feel their phantom limbs.

"Remnant Box II"

Because these figures embody emotions so successfully, their missing parts may in fact be their most important parts, since they make our pain palpable in gaps and absences which often seem to represent the places where we cannot connect with others; where the husks that hold our spirits seem to disassemble at crucial moments, turning us into partial phantoms. This sense of being cut off is particularly poignant in Murrell's "Conundrum" series, each of which consists of a lifesize man and child.

Down through the centuries, after all, many artists have given us memorable images of women and children, the natural symbiotic relationship between mother and child being a staple not only of Christian iconography but probably just about every other culture worldwide. Far fewer artists, however, have dealt with the more vexing relationship between fathers and children, so fraught with complexity, difficulty, unspoken feelings, distances, and dangers. Thus Murrell's lifesize sculptures of men and children address this conundrum, this emotional puzzle, through the chasms between the figures: even as they embrace, the empty spaces seem to widen, the voids grow more obvious.

In "Conundrum I," for example, the child appears to race into the man's arms, the sense of motion enhanced by the piece being a "mobile," suspended from the ceiling by long strings. But even as the child rushes to him, one of the man's arms is raised in the air and his head is missing—perhaps it is elsewhere, but not here; the child's hunger for love is met with disconnection. In "Conundrum III," another headless man holds a baby almost at arm's length in a tentative manner that contrasts tellingly with images of madonnas and other maternal figures cradling infants to their breasts.

Working with paper pulp that she colors with pigment and casts, part by part, on the bodies of her models and then reassembles in newly expressive configurations, Pat Feeney Murrell has found a way to make these thwarted emotions physically palpable. Her sculptures invariably evoke a sense of identification in the viewer that is especially affecting in the "Conundrum" series, where we are prompted to reflect on the love that was absent in childhood and/or the connections we may have failed to make with our own children.

In another series called "Cocoon Bundles," the handmade paper is combined with bamboo and photo transfer on cotton or muslin to create lone figures that seem to speak of separation and withdrawal. In "Cocoon Bundle I," the figure is swathed and suspended in a triangular wrapping resembling a teepee, its legs dangling, its skull-like face and expressively gesturing hands sticking out of a narrow opening that could suggest a womb. In another suspended piece, "Cocoon Bundle IV," the figure reclines in a large, rounded shell, its akimbo limbs disassembling, as though in an acid-bath.

Then there is a another group of lifesize sculptures called "Remnant Boxes," in which the figures are more or less complete, but for a missing limb or head here or there (even while quite hollow at the core), enfolded by binder's board boxes and propped up on bamboo platforms that are often quite elaborate. In "Remnant Box III," the bamboo support is throne-like, the figure resting upon it like the cadaver of a decapitated king. While some are presented singly, others are seen in tableaux, such as the frieze of three reclining figures mounted on tall bamboo structures set against the gallery's rear wall, with one figure seated on the floor below, that serves as the spectacular centerpiece of the exhibition.

Partially inspired by the frescoes at Pompeii, this timeless tableau is a crowning achievement in the oeuvre of Pat Feeney Murrell, just as this solo show, so perfectly installed and dramatically lit, is an important milestone in her career.

—Ed McCormack

"Inklings"—New Directions in 21st Century Drawing

Almost a year ago, this publication ran a cover story on an exhibition at The Drawing Center headlined "Decade of the Drawing." Its point was that, no longer merely a preliminary step toward painting, as it was for many centuries, drawing has moved into the spotlight as an autonomous art form. Since, several other publications have picked up on the trend, including the the New York Times, whose critic Michael Kimmelman recently wrote that "drawing is the new painting."

The trend continues to gain momentum in "Inklings: Drawing in the 21st Century," at Viridian Artists @ Chelsea, 530 West 25th St. from June 7 thru 25, with a reception on Thursday, June 16, from 3 to 6 PM. This group exhibition in some ways surpasses "Talespinning," the show at The Drawing Center that inspired our cover story. For one thing, "Inklings" is annotated with statements by the participants about their working processes that are almost as illuminating as the works themselves. For another, it embraces a broader range of expressions, from the exquisitely descriptive drawings that Kalynn Alder makes in her travel journals "so I can sketch and record notes from the environment that I am immersed in" (as seen here in her location sketches from the Lacandon rain forest, with handwritten notes); to the tactile abstract explorations of Sabine Carlson who sees the act of drawing (which for her includes various forms of "scratching," be it with a nail, a screwdriver, or the end of a brush) as "akin to a google search," adding "within nanoseconds it points me exactly where I need to go, except I didn't know it before." Janet L. Bohman employs the folding and stretching of various materials over armatures as "drawing," expanding its definition in her own unique manner.

Taeko Imai, an artist from Osaka Japan, employs traditional Asian brush and ink techniques in a new way, channeling what she calls "dim pictures in Oriental world" with faint abstract shapes that float through her compositions like graceful filaments of memory. By contrast, Barbara K. Schwartz stresses physicality in her mixed media works, which incorporate collage elements with drawn and painted areas, saying, "Drawing goes way beyond pencil and paper. One can create a drawing in three dimensions with wire." Jack Bolen is another artist who adds material heft to his drawings by means of collage. In Bolen's large-scale drawing "False Door XXIII," charcoal and graphite frottage are combined with illusionistic "3-D" elements to create a tactile geometric composition inspired by a frequent motif in ancient Egyptian funerary art.

Everything, including coffee grounds combined with graphite and ink on rice paper, is fodder for the graphic impulses of Marjie Zelman. Zelman's large drawing "Coffee & Ruminations," with its brown-stained golem apparently giving brain-birth to a host of doodled figurative forms in a composition that flows freely as spilled java, suggests that caffeine can produce images as fantastic as opium visions!

Although her medium of choice is either photography or oil painting, since reading about John Ruskin and finding that "his delicate and intricate drawings of nature were tremendously inspirational," Phyllis Smith has also worked in colored pencil, delineating autumn in the fiery throes of decay. Isolated on watercolor paper, casting shadows, they become poignant symbols of mortality. Also taking her cues from nature, Kathleen King combines monoprint with hand-drawn elements and collage in her "topological" compositions, their intricate forms simultaneously suggesting abstract aerial views and cellular activity seen through a chromatically enhanced microscope.

Carol Yoshimine also mixes drawing with printmaking in "Orange Triangle in the Blue," where she employs intaglio, chalk, and collage in an abstract composition which sets a bold, wedge-shape against an intricate linear grid. "The drawing process is a collaborative one, both mental and physical," she asserts. "The act of drawing, in itself, can produce highly provocative and elegant imagery."

Rosemary K. Lyons revives the Medieval marriage of visual imagery and handwritten text in her neo-Blakean illuminated manuscripts. Lyons' compositions can also be compared, in spirit if not technique, to the literati artists of China and Japan, since she considers calligraphy an aesthetic component on a par with drawing. Innovative photo artist Susan Hockaday employs calligraphic elements in her own unique manner, often submerging her gestural drawings in bodies of water or placing them among tangled plants in fields that she then photographs. Thus she merges marks made by the human hand with the flow of "water, shadows, wind—all creating their natural patterns."

Carol Benisatto, on the other hand, demonstrates that portraiture can have timeless vitality when filtered through a fresh contemporary sensibility. "By beginning with a blind contour, I'm able to let go of the tendency to be literal in my interpretation," Benisatto says of her portraits in charcoal and pastel, which are as expressive in their own manner as the oils of Alice Neel.

Inspired by a group of mid 20th century female folk designers, May de Viney employs pen and ink with colored pencil and gold leaf to create friezes of stylized figures with a narrative quaintness akin to Amy Cutler and other contemporary artists who take off from peculiar outsiderish genres. De Viney's compositions, however, employ repetitive patterns to more striking formal effect, while her characters comment wittily on religious orthodoxy.

Although some might quibble over whether the late Bruce Rosen's works should be labeled drawings or paintings, their intimate scale and graffiti-like markings certainly qualify them for this show, given how the definition of drawing broadened to accommodate all manner of mixed media. Their diaristic nature enhances the graphic quality of Rosen's compositions, which according to Joan Krawcyk, an independent curator and former director of Viridian Gallery "mirror the artist whose life integrated the noble poetics of two languages, the written and the visual."

Unambiguously linear, the drawings of Roger Bole are executed in pen and ink in a workmanlike manner that backs up the artist's assertion that drawing is "like a trusted tool." In fact, Bole's firsthand experience in factories informs his tightly-knit untitled drawing, in which intricate crosshatching evokes the steely surfaces of a mechanical maze. Stacey Clarfield Newman creates complex colorful images of otherworldly events with hidden images and meanings that emerge only with close scrutiny. Susan Sills loves the immediacy of the irrevocable gesture, drawn with ink and impossible to erase, making drawing a daring adventure.

Process is central to the drawings of Virginia Smit, who arrives at her graphic epiphany through constantly exploring and correcting in her ink and charcoal drawings of orchids and tangled roots, a frequent theme. As she puts it, "I love plants and I'm able to explore my feelings as I work." Bernice Faegenburg sees drawing as "part of something else, in and of itself something, but not necessarily the beginning," adding that "the study of a line is part of the expression of an entity." Then, there is Rima Grad, who has progressed from the notion that she was "drawing with paper" when she worked with collage to including more actual drawing in her work "so that more of my hand is visible." Thus Grad's two black and white photocollages of a woman posing in front of tall apartment buildings, as though for a 1950s family album snapshot, are overlaid with handdrawn dots of color, the incongruity of which "compels the viewer to consider the photographic element in a totally different way." Indeed, one of the great pleasures of this show is being privy to the thinking of the artists, and being invited to tag along as the participants set out in various directions, "taking a line for a little walk," as Paul Klee once described what it is like to draw.

—Ed McCormack

A Heightened Sense of Light Enlivens Linda Arnold's New Oils

When we are overwhelmed by something in nature there is a feeling that we get that is pretty much indescribable. Only our greatest poets have come close to capturing it in words; yet even they fall short in face of its ineffable mystery. This feeling has as much to do with loss as with the pleasure that we take in beauty, since what we are seeing is transient and soon will vanish. It is vanishing even as we look at it, since everything in nature is constantly in a state of flux.

Thus, every landscape contains its own little elegy, and it is this sense of irrevocable loss, along with what it suggests regarding all that we hold dear, that Linda Arnold makes palpable in pigment, even as she endeavors only to preserve the natural splendor of the landscape before her. In other words, Arnold paints the epiphany that we experience in nature as much as she captures the lay of the land, the movement of the clouds, and the play of light and shadow across the fields and marshes of Long Island.

"Tranquility"

Of course, like all good painters, Arnold herself resists making such grandiose claims for her work. Concentrating on the task at hand, she speaks only of her technical struggle to depict those nuances of light and atmosphere that bring the scene alive. The emotional content in her pictures, if one may call it that, is simply a byproduct of her desire to capture those qualities that delight the eye and move us in inexplicable ways when we contemplate a scene of natural beauty.

One such scene is "Dusk at the Marsh," a large canvas that was recently exhibited in a prestigious juried exhibition at Lincoln Center. In this work, a luminous tangerine sky looms over watery marshlands, which are set low in the composition. Although Arnold is enamored of the contrasts between land masses and water in her paintings of marshes, here as in other paintings, the sky is the dominant feature: a seemingly limitless expanse of colored light that calls to mind J.M.W. Turner's atmospheric veils of "tinted steam."

Arnold evokes such skies by virtue of her restrained painterliness, with brushstrokes generally subordinated to an overall scheme of subtle tonal effects and delicate chromatic nuances. One of the rare instances where she succumbs to a looser mode of paint-handling is in the canvas she calls "Meandering Country Road," where the absence of water and the dominance of lush, verdant knolls and trees is also somewhat untypical of her recent work. Here, feathery strokes set cotton-white clouds buoyantly afloat against a clear blue sky in a manner that makes one feel the artist has captured something actually invisible: the movement of a soft summer breeze.

Indeed, it is Arnold's ability to suggest such intangibles that makes her new paintings so exhilarating, investing them with the suggestion of an almost Emersonian spiritual glow; for wasn't it Emerson who once wrote of banishing "all mean egotism" in the presence of creation? Indeed, some of Linda Arnold's closest artistic forbearers in regard to her willingness to prostrate her painterly gifts before nature may be found among those contemporaries of Emerson such as John Frederick Kensett and Frederic Edwin Church. For she, too, captures what the art historian Earl A. Powell, in the catalog for an exhibition of these and related 19th century landscape painters at the National Gallery of Art in 1980, referred to as "the American Sublime."

None of which is to suggest that Arnold is in any way a throwback; for she is very much an artist of today, as demonstrated by those abstract qualities in her work which also make it possible to draw favorable comparisons to Jon Schueler, the Abstract Expressionist painter who found inspiration in the light and skies of Scotland. However, her willingness to tackle subjects which are all but verboten among less intrepid realists, as seen in the exquisite small beachscape she calls "Sunset, " harks back to the aforementioned Church, particularly. Even while taking a less histrionic approach, in keeping with the cooler temper of contemporary aesthetics, and eschewing the often flamboyant effects common to Church, Jasper Francis Cropsey and others of their era, Arnold imparts similarly transcendent qualities to her landscapes. Witness, for example, the radiant overall auras and, most especially, the glimmer of yellow light that kisses the watery horizon-line of her "Sunset." (By contrast, the piece de resistance in another splendid beach scene, "Tranquility," is the foamy white surf curling along the sandy shoreline, where the waves break like ornamental cresting on the dark sea waters.)

Working from plein air oil sketches and drawings that she makes in various long familiar and much beloved locales on Long Island, Arnold later develops them in her Manhattan studio into canvases that convey a host of subtle visual sensations. While Arnold's most recent paintings are concerned primarily with light and atmosphere, she is also cognizant of abstract patterning to a degree that also makes it possible to compare her work to that of Fairfield Porter.

For like Porter, Arnold respects the two-dimensionality of the picture plane, even while evoking deep space convincingly. And marshes, with their definitely delineated patterns of land and water, provide her with an opportunity to exploit the ambiguity between actual and the illusory in an especially tantalizing manner, as seen in paintings such as "Early Morning Light" and "Reynold's Channel." In the latter canvas, where houses are nestled in the middle-ground foliage, a distant yacht club dots the horizon near where the channel flows out to sea, and the flooded marshland dominates the foreground, Arnold accomplishes this spatial alchemy most dramatically.

Above all, however, it is her ability to paint as though with a brush dipped into liquid light that distinguishes the recent canvases of Linda Arnold.

—Ed McCormack

Reutershan's Formal Evocations of Brooklyn

Located in an historic building at 138 South Oxford Street in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, the Third Floor Gallery at South Oxford Space (a project of A.R.T./New York) was an auspicious place for the recent exhibition "Arrangements: Paintings of Brooklyn and Manhattan" by Brooklyn artist Joan Reutershan.

Reutershan, a longtime resident of the Fort Greene area who was also included in the Art Students League Annual Award Recipients Exhibit Scholarship at Cork Gallery, Lincoln Center, is the quintessential Brooklyn painter. Her affection for the borough comes across in every aspect of her local scenes. Indeed, in the beautifully appointed and lit gallery, Reutershan's oils gave the impression of being metaphorical windows on the surrounding neighborhood— albeit ones in which its human-scale architecture was boiled down to its abstract essentials.

For Joan Reutershan is, above all, a painter of notable formal finesse. Weathered brick residential buildings, mom and pop storefronts, rooftops, and other elements of her street scenes are blocked in with a boldness that make her compositions function almost as geometric abstractions. At the same time, however, Reutershan invariably evokes a palpable sense of place and her use of muted yet vibrant color lends her pictures an authentic atmospheric poetry. Stylistically, her work is somewhat akin to that of Richard Diebenkorn for its synthesis of actual and the abstract. Like that well known California painter and his colleagues in the Bay Area group that also included David Park and Paul Wonner, Reutershan applies vigorous brushwork reminiscent of Abstract Expressionism, sometimes further enlivened by drips and other spontaneous evidence of painterly process, to specific subject matter to achieve a sense of immediacy. However, the easel scale of most of her compositions also imbues them with an intimate appeal that contrasts sharply with the larger canvases and relatively more generalized forms of the California artists.

This is especially true of an oil on canvas such as Reutershan's "Arrangement 56: Fulton/S. Oxford," a small gem of a canvas, measuring 12 by 12 inches square, which convincingly conjures clusters of low-lying rooftops under a brilliant blue sky, even as one savors its neo-cubistic attributes.

By contrast, a somewhat larger, yet still easel-scale, oil called "Arrangement 98: Cumberland/Lafayette" juxtaposes the backs of small neighborhood dwellings with swiftly brushed-in tree-limbs in a breezy gestural composition, while another work entitled "Arrangement 85: DeKalb/St. Felix" captures a corner where a storefront and buildings converge near a lamp post as blocky cars go by in a blur.

"Arrangement 92: King/6th Ave" 2004

While the latter painting depicts a somewhat busier intersection than some of others, it is characteristically unpopulated. Reutershan seems to prefer leaving figures out of her street scenes, which often gives them an almost de Chirico quality of solitude and stillness (those blurred autos notwithstanding), even when she paints a Manhattan view such as the fairly large oil "Arrangement 92: King/6th Avenue" (perhaps so-named because the blank white-gold facade of a building central to the composition could suggest a monarch's crown).

Here, as in other locales in both Manhattan and Brooklyn, Joan Reutershan exploits the rectangular shapes of urban architecture to create compositions whose combination of abstract and allusive qualities makes them engaging on two levels simultaneously.

—Carl Farber

In the Art of Miguel Paredes, Sophisticated Street-Style Rules

Just when Julian Schnabel's most recent New York solo show had almost convinced us that Neo-Expressionism had run its course, along comes a gifted young artist named Miguel Paredes to put a new spin on the art of the loaded brush in his exhibition, "New York Stories," at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from June 23 through July 13.

For like a savvy hip hop DJ adept at "sampling," Paredes combines elements of several seventies art stars, such as Schnabel (aggressive scale), Jean-Michel Basquiat (funky street energy), and David Salle (imagistic layering), in a highly original stylistic synthesis. He accomplishes this with a painterly panache fully equal to that of the artists he admires, adding a personal vision informed either by direct experience or astute observation of inner city street culture.

In "Papayas & Mangos," for example, images of tropical fruit are superimposed over figures on a busy street, and the familiar facade of a New York fast food landmark is juxtaposed with graffiti-like phrases such as "Gray's Papaya is fresh" and "crack is wack." One might have to be a New York homebody to decode the various symbols as they relate to Latin Manhattan, yet the composition, dominated by areas of neon yellow and vigorous line drawing, is more than sufficient to sustain interest on its own terms.

Ghetto dreams seem to be the theme of another large acrylic and oil on canvas by Paredes called "Puerto Rican Bernstein." Here, the central figure is a young man sleeping with a big smile on his face, surrounded by images of an elegant concert hall overlaid by one of the graffiti-like scrawled stream-of-consciousness texts that Paredes integrates so successfully with his painted imagery, both as a pictorial element and a wry running commentary akin to Basquiat's SAMO phrase.

In the latter regard, one of Paredes' most affecting marriages of image and text, is a large oil on canvas called "Rosarios," depicting an apparently homeless person surrounded by floral patterns (like a funky new take on a religious icon) and inscribed with ironic phrases such as "Can you spare some change so I can buy some alcohol, some crack" and "Thank you very much, God bless you sir." Social commentary on the con-man style of street-smart junkies aside, here again, the painting succeeds on its considerable visual merits—particularly the powerful delineation of the figure and its integration with the floral patterns and fragmented urban imagery in the background.

"Ghost Writer"

In purely visual terms, one of Miguel Paredes' most powerful paintings is the very large (51" by 108") canvas called "Ghost Writer," its title a pun on the term for a graffiti artist (or "writer"), who is indeed seen here as a spectral figure. We look right through him to a distant vista of a glittering nocturnal skyline that seems to symbolize dreams of artistic glory, as he stands between two brilliantly scrawled walls—one covered by a huge face resembling a spray-painted Golem. In this monumental canvas, Miguel Paredes makes a major statement: "Ghost Writer" is a sophisticated artist's moving memorial tribute to the raw talents who inspired him, some of whom succumbed to the perils of the street.

—Lawrence Downes

Juan Ramirez Paints Dark Visions of Our Spiritual Plight

In a review of one of his previous exhibitions, a critic for this publication compared an oil on board by Juan Ramirez, depicting a man partially submerged in water and emitting a silent howl, to Francis Bacon's famous series of canvases of screaming Popes, which were inspired by photographs of Velazquez's portrait of Pope Innocent X. One has no way of knowing whether Rodriguez was prompted by that review or whether it is purely coincidental that— lo and behold!— he included a painting called "Screaming Pope" in his recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

In either case, Ramirez is one of precious few contemporary artists who— either in unabashed tribute to the British master of the grotesque, or through some more serendipitous affinity with him— could create his own version of the same theme and make it utterly original.

Of course, there is no question that Juan Ramirez is a kindred spirit of Bacon, just as it is clear (as the aforementioned previous reviewer pointed out) that he also shares a certain neoclassical finesse and imaginative intensity with the well known contemporary Norwegian painter Odd Nerdrum. However, Ramirez, who was born in Mexico but has lived and worked for many years in the United States, has his own distinctly dark vision.

This singular darkness comes across hauntingly in Ramirez's "Screaming Pope." For rather than depicting the pontiff as a formidable and strangely horrific full-length figure seated upon a golden throne, as Bacon did, Ramirez presents his head in close-up, emerging from a dense black background in a manner that almost makes it appear disembodied. In contrast to the gaunt, almost vampiric visage that Bacon depicted in tribute to the Valasquez version, Ramirez paints a Pope whose round, smooth face, screwed-shut eyes, and black, gaping hole of a mouth gives him the appearance of a crying infant. (Indeed, the painting seems a companion piece to "Babe of the Abyss," another picture in the exhibition depicting an actual infant similarly enveloped in blackness.)

While Bacon's Pope is a domineering character who could be screaming because he is berating a cardinal or other subordinate, Ramirez appears to show us a revered spiritual leader in the throes of private spiritual distress.

Thus the painting possesses an unexpectedly poignant quality. For all the power that he wields among believers and all the pomp and circumstance that attends his every action, he is seen here as a sad, suffering mortal—perhaps a reflection of the New Age deity who is said to weep with us when we grieve, rather than the omnipotent, often punitive, God of popular belief.

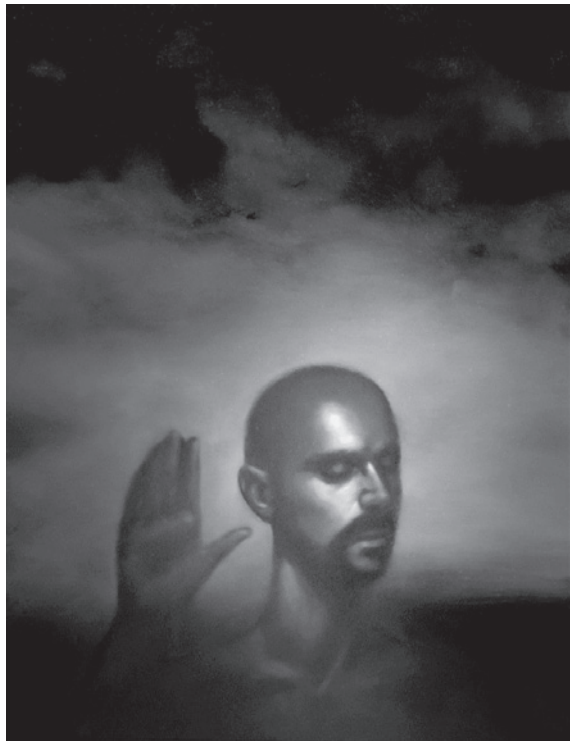
Indeed, it is his seeming sympathy with the innate helplessness of the human condition, even as it manifests in those individuals who appear to possess unusual power (or "powers," plural, of a more supernatural sort), that sets Juan Ramirez apart from artists such as Bacon and Nerdrum, whose view of humanity is less forgiving, less humanistic. Thus, even the figure in another recent painting called "The Alchemist" evokes a sense of being lost and adrift, as he confronts us with one hand upraised in an enigmatic gesture, set against one of those cloud-shadowed nocturnal skies that dominate the artist's sunless world. Obviously a man of wisdom, he stands alone, perhaps alienated and held captive by the very knowledge that he holds— the lonely secrets of the magician.

Even more mysterious is the painting called "Nemo," in which a lone figure traverses a desolate landscape and is partially obscured by fog. Here, Ramirez evokes a realm akin to the bleak existential visions of the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friederich, in which man is often seen as a lonely wayfarer, an existential foundling dwarfed by a moonlit natural terrain.

Women, on the other hand, loom larger in Ramirez's imagination, as seen in "Scarlet Woman," in which the figure of a mysterious enchantress dominates the composition, her face half vanishing in shadow, even as her full lips glow with a blood-red brilliance to rival that of the bouquet of flowers she clutches to one of her nude breasts .

Here, as in "Woman with Pomegranate," where visual analogies are drawn between the body of another nude and the ripe fruit of the title, the female principle prevails, even while burdened with the sexual superstitions imposed by the tremulous male libido. Encountering Ramirez's female figures, their nakedness cloaked in such ineffable mystery as to thwart the lascivious diminution of the so-called Male Gaze, one is reminded of a time when men so feared the awesome power that women held over them that they forbade their mates to gaze upon orchids or went so far as to burn suspected witches at the stake.

In paintings such as "Scarlet Woman" and "Woman with Pomegranate," Ramirez captures this power as few other contemporary artists can. To find precedents for his work one must go back to Symbolists such as Franz von Stuck, whose masterpiece "Sin" casts a similarly seductive spell, or Antoine-Auguste-Ernest Herbert, whose "Ophelia" finally triumphs over male-induced madness by sheer virtue of the timeless beauty the artist has imparted to her.



"The Alchemist"

Juan Ramirez's imagery is so compelling that one could almost neglect to mention the superb technique that brings it to fruition. Indeed, one all but hesitates to call attention to it, for while other critics have accurately noted Ramirez' Caraveggio-like use of chiaroscuro, what seems even more germane is how successfully he subordinates his technical mastery to the subject at hand. Which is to say: there are no unecessary flourishes in his work, no quirks of ego or personality to upstage his narrative intentions. Rather, Ramirez's technique is transparent, a window that opens onto the mysteries he engages in his search for the precise visual metaphor that will lodge itself permanently in the mind and memory of the viewer. And it is finally the consistency with which he achieves that goal that makes Juan Ramirez a most remarkable painter.

—Byron Coleman

The Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club Mounts Another Superb Members Exhibition

The Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club's Annual Members Exhibition 2005, seen recently at Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street, was a characteristically varied survey by this venerable women's art group, named for a nineteenth century scholar and philanthropist who was the sole female among the 108 founding members of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Since close to 100 works were included, and one cannot hope to do justice to a show of such size in this space, capsule impressions calculated to give the reader some sense of the show's scope will have to suffice. Genre scenes were plentiful, as they generally are among a group more concerned with humanistic themes than jumping on trendy stylistic bandwagons. At least two painters captured the magic of childhood: Fukuko Harris' "Boys on Tricycle" was a charmingly unaffected oil of two children at play on a quiet street. Small houses with blue shutters and afternoon shadows contributed to the atmosphere that Harris generated with her softly muted style, its slightly unfocused quality contributing to the feeling of a scene retrieved from the mists of childhood memory. Anne Chaddock's watercolor depicted a mother and child in Chinese dress gazing through the ornate window of "Café Napoli" in muted hues that enhanced the serene mood.

JoAnn Bishop, on the other hand, created a palpable tension in "The Exclusion," an acrylic painting in a deadpan figurative style of two men looking askance at a young woman clutching The Gospel of Mary in the doorway of a church. Although the underlying narrative was not spelled out, there was the suggestion of ugly gossip in the expressions and gestures of the two men and the timid posture of their female victim.

Certain neoclassical qualities also united some artists in the show. Amy Unfried's bonded bronze bas relief of a pensively posed woman was one fine example. Another was Kathy Fieramosca's exquisite, cameo-like graphite drawing "Portrait of Mary." Then there was "The Golden Shell," an accomplished oil by Gabriela Dellosso of a young woman with a halo tilted at a rakish angle above her head, enclosed by an ornate gold frame, painted in a manner reminiscent of the Renaissance, yet enlivened by a hint of contemporary irony.

More abstract modes of expression were also in evidence, as seen in "Refraction of Light," a watercolor by Olive Reich, in which swirling forms in pale yet luminous hues evoked a sense of rhythmic movement suggesting a postmodern take on Futurism. Another watercolorist, Judith Betts, employed bovine forms and dappled pink green and yellow hues as vehicles to abstract patterning in a composition called "Calf-Time." Water media were also employed, albeit with a splashy spatter technique, by Diane Anderson to evoke a watery landscape as autonomously buoyant as any color field abstraction. Yet, while compelling in purely chromatic terms, Anderson's painting gained lyrical momentum from its naturalistic subject matter.

Sculpture was also well represented in this show, ranging from the figurative to the abstract. A female nude by Yupin Pramtepipop in Hyrdocal and oak gained witty art historical relevance when one noted the similarity of the model's pose to that of Michelangelo's "David." Janet Indick's abstract sculpture "Big Apple" evoked the city in aluminum and ceramic with futuristic dynamism. Gloria Spevacek boiled feline form down to its formal essence in her graceful bronze "Resting Puma." Jean Kroeber showed a female figure in carved wood rendered stately by her characteristic elongations of form. Lee Hutt's bronze, "Mary, Mary," juxtaposed a plant form with fragmented feminine shoulders to oddly sensual effect. However, Hutt's real tour de force was a work in cement, steel, and lucite called "Fish Out of Order," juxtaposing a cube and a fish in a manner that justified the witty pun in visual terms.

One could go on listing other outstanding works, such as Cheryl Griesbach's exotically over-the-top oil on board of a pink flamingo in a fantastic landscape; Shirley Fried's sinuous, subdued, and poetic small acrylic "Tree Dance"; Veronika Hart's similarly animated large realist canvas depicting young African boys dancing in leopard skins; Karen Whitman's vertiginous large linoleum print capturing a Brooklyn neighborhood from rooftop to sidewalk in dazzling detail; Elizabeth Torak's tour de force of a tabletop still life; and Fleur Byers' dramatic skyscape in oil pastels. Indeed, one could go on and on. However, since that is not possible, one can only advise the reader not to miss next year's CLWAC Members Exhibition.

—Maureen Flynn

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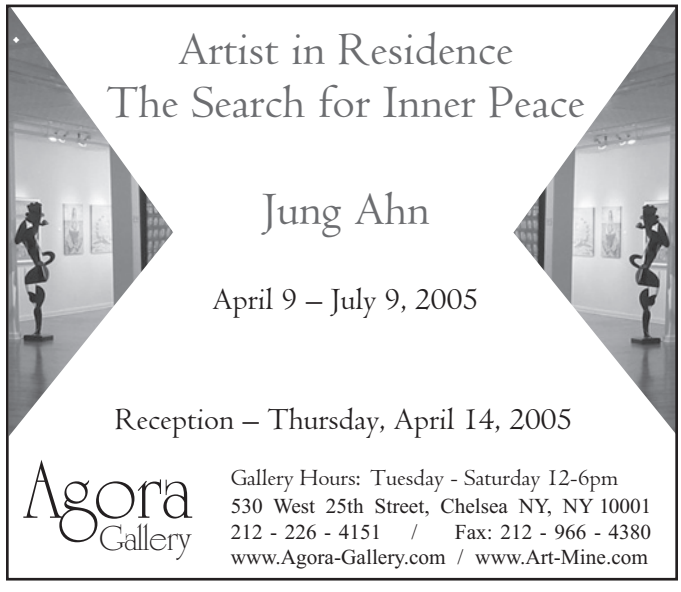


Wayne Thiebaud: Surveying an American Master

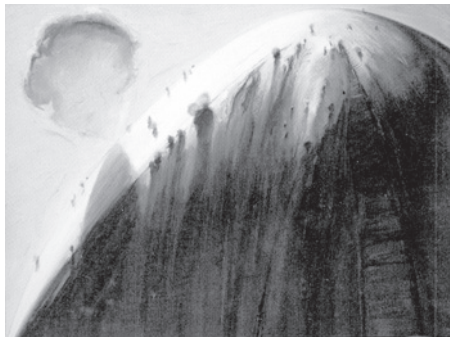
Wayne Thiebaud has to be one of the most interesting cases of mistaken identity in recent art history. Because he had the visual wit to paint bakery products, making oil pigment a succulent surrogate for cake frosting, he was initially miscast as a Pop artist in the 1960s, when his work first started attracting notice on the East Coast. This was not necessarily a bad thing in terms of getting his name known while that highly publicized movement was hot. However, his real kinships were to California School painters like Robert Diebenkorn and David Park.

These kinships were especially evident in the early paintings in "Wayne Thiebaud — Since 1962: A Survey," seen recently at Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th Street, where one had a chance to chart this important artist's evolution through a selection of key works.

The show's title refers to the year that Thiebaud had his first New York exhibition at Allan Stone, while some of the works actually date back to the 1950s. The 1956 canvas "Taffy Store" is one of the earliest examples of Thiebaud's tactile trompe-l'oeil, with thick strokes of white pigment in a store window suggesting a confectionery takeoff on one of Soutine's flayed carcasses. In 1961, Thiebaud painted an oil on board called "Boy in Water" that still showed the influence of the aforementioned Diebenkorn and Park. A year later, that influence was still present in the vigorous brushwork of his oil on canvas "French Fries," yet the banal subject put a new spin on still life. And his signature style came into sharper focus in paintings such as "Fudge and Divinity" (1962), and the larger oil "Delicatessen Counter" (1963), a full-blown example of the mode for which he is best known.

One of the real knockouts of the show was "Tie Rack," a six-foot tall canvas from 1969, in which the hanging neckties in a brilliant spectrum of hues are seen in a majestic vertical composition that dazzles the eye like the stripes in one of Morris Louis's poured abstractions. Another was "Man Reading," in which the lifesize seated figure on a subtly shadowed white ground does not engage the viewer with his eyes, but projects a palpable human presence, with his dark suit and gleaming pate. Yet another is "River Cloud" (2002)," one of those sweeping landscape vistas that Thiebaud has turned to in recent years. Like his San Francisco streetscapes of the late 80s, with their steep, vertiginous angles, these new landscapes have a decidedly visionary quality.

In the latter painting, as well as in "White Mountain," a large oil from 1995,



"White Mountain," 1995

Thiebaud invests a natural scene with a heightened sense of light and color that lends it an almost supernatural beauty, a sublimity akin to that of the 19th Century Luminism of artists such as Albert Bierstadt. Yet, Thiebaud proves that he does not really require large scale or majestic vistas to project rarefied auras, in modest-size paintings from the mid-to-late 1980s where single paint cans with color dripping down their gleaming metallic surfaces take on the chromatic glory of kingly crowns.

Indeed, it is his ability to invest simple objects with unexpected beauty by virtue of his unique way with color and texture that makes Wayne Thiebaud an authentic American master.

—Ed McCormack

Thomas Conrad's Winning Synthesis of East and West

One of the more dramatic examples of the multicultural currents that feed into the mainstream of postmodern art are the paintings of Thomas Conrad, seen recently at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway. Conrad, who earned his M.F.A. in painting and printmaking at the California College of Arts and Crafts, in Oakland, in 1982, also studied in both Europe and Asia. He spent several years in Japan, where he became fascinated with Japanese culture in general and the Edo period— "the golden age of pure Japanese art," as he calls it, in particular.

During his period abroad (later, he would also spend two years traveling and working in Italy, Spain, and France) the beauty and grace of the Japanese fish called koi caught his eye and became a central motif in much of his work. Indeed, Conrad exploits the rather phallic shape of the koi in some of his more erotic works, which have a witty, Pop quality reminiscent of John Wesley. However, Conrad is a far more elegant draftsman than Wesley with a line informed by his fondness for Asian art and an ability to capture the comely female figure which is fully equal to that of the late Tom Wesselman. So no matter how risqué his imagined interactions between women and koi may be, Conrad's elegant line and bold yet harmonious way with color imbues them with even more impressive aesthetic qualities.

This is especially evident in paintings where Conrad combines the best qualities of Japanese Shunga (the generic name given to Japanese erotic paintings, prints, and illustrated books, which translates literally as "spring drawings") with the visual impact of American Pop art. For in these works, while the imagery is sexually explicit, it is underscored by the formal grace of Conrad's line and the jazzy, electric shimmer of his color harmonies. Poetic titles such as "The Sumptuous Kimono" and "The Vermilion Brilliance of Her Lips" further emphasize the sensuality of such pictures, which demonstrate how a truly gifted artist can venture beyond the boundaries of what is generally considered good taste to create images of surpassing beauty.

Conrad also provided much to marvel at in less erotic canvases such as the one simply titled "Koi," where the fish are enlivened by fanciful floral patterns and set against a splashy background that is obviously intended as an homage to Jackson Pollock. Conrad, however, has imposed a distinctly new order on Pollock's rhythmic drips, controlling them in a manner that the Abstract Expressionist dynamo never did and rendering the koi in his characteristically meticulous hard-edge style. Thus, as in Red Grooms's tributes to predecessors like Picasso and de Kooning, Conrad transcends parody and appropriation to put his own spin on things.

Equally dazzling was another composition in which Conrad combined bamboo stalks, floral forms, and camouflage patterns to dynamic effect. However, the largest and most complex painting in the exhibition was "Primavera," an intricate composition in which layered images of fish and flowers, illuminated with hot, brilliant hues, create almost vertiginous visual rhythms. Possessed of a baroque, maximalist quality, the painting compels one's attention for the unique combination of sumptuous effects and formal cool that makes Thomas Conrad an artist worthy of serious attention.

—Lawrence Downes

Art Yuppies Strut Their Stuff in P.S. 1's "Greater New York" Exhibition and MoMA Gets the Pick of the Litter

Peter Caine

Not long ago we saw an exhibition at Center Gallery, Fordham University, Lincoln Center, by a young artist named Meghan Mullaney. The paintings were acrylics on small plexiglass panels of fragmented human figures and cartoon animals in flat bright colors. They belonged to a familiar genre of coyly obscure narrative art already well represented by Amy Cutler, Shahzia Sikander and others— which is to say they were nothing really new or special. But the title of the show, "My First Paintings," seemed a stroke of genius. It was not at all naive or self-effacing, as one unfamiliar with the direction that much recent art has taken might think. Instead, it was cunningly disingenuous, showing a sophisticated grasp of calculated callowness as a post-postmodern (if one may coin a term whose time seems to have come) success strategy.

However, Ms. Mullaney miscalculated in one important regard by not bypassing her college gallery altogether and submitting her freshman project to "Greater New York 2005," which continues at MoMA's Long Island City satellite, P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, through September 26. For it is in this follow-up to the first "Greater New York" show in 2000, which launched several bankable reputations, that The New Callowness truly comes into its own. Featuring 167 artists, most in their twenties and thirties, some barely out of school, the exhibition sprinkles a handful of already well-known names such as the aforementioned Amy Cutler, Wangechi Mutu, and Guy Ben-Ner, among a horde of hopefuls whose inclusion now gives them a very good chance of becoming the next wave of hot new art stars.

A big red municipal structure that takes up a whole block in an area of industrial blight, small residential dwellings, Pentecostal churches, and mom and pop bodegas, P.S. 1 actually used to be a public school. A photograph of its 1947 graduating class sits behind the lobby reception desk and the school atmosphere persists rather eerily in its long, narrow halls, still painted the drab institutional green that those of us who attended such thinly disguised urban penal institutions remember all too well. Glancing out one of the windows in the stairwell we noticed what appeared to be a drug deal going down right across the street, which added further to the Blackboard Jungle ambiance. Even the silhouetted figures and tree-limbs that flow from the walls up onto the ceiling in the stairwell look like out of season high school Halloween decorations;

except, rather than being cut from black construction paper, they're a tossed-off site specific installation called "In the Wood" by Ernesto Caivano, whose much more accomplished ink drawings on paper were featured in the 2004 Whitney Biennial.

In keeping with the new curatorial style of sensory saturation, the artworks at P.S. 1 even follow you into the lavatory, where there's a video installation with loud, discordant punk music so annoying that I concluded my business there as promptly as possible without bothering to get the perpetrator's name. Stuck in corners of the long, green, deja-vu-all-over-again hallways and suddenly turning up on the windowsills like those rubber novelty store vomit puddles that somebody used to put here and there in my old Lower East Side alma mater Seward Park High School, were several odd little configurations of molded glass, feathers, and corn-syrup by someone with an apparently similar sense of humor named Bethany Bristow. Such oddly plopped pieces seem to be a new sculptural tendency also evident in the work of Michael Mahalchick whose woolen sock-puppet soft sculpture "The Clown" I initially mistook for an article of clothing someone had dropped in a corner of one of the galleries.

Every high school seems to have one creepy janitor about whom the kids love to fantasize and spread rumors that he tries to lure the girls—or boys, for that matter— down to his lair in the maintenance cellar. At P.S. 1, his effigy lurks down there in a corner of the building's ancient, musty-smelling cellar, past the boiler, squatting on the cement floor under the pipes, surrounded by old bird cages filled with empty pint wine bottles. A lifelike but ghostly white figure wearing a weird jumpsuit covered with long white fur, he is the centerpiece of an on-site installation by Marc Swanson called "Killing Moon 3."

Installations featuring grotesque figures straight out of horror movies seem to be an emerging tendency among several artists in this show. You climb a flight of stairs to peer down into "The Pit," in Will Ryman's piece, at a crowd of lifesize papier mache mutants wearing real sneakers who stare back imploringly, as if to say, "Get us out of here!" In another sprawling room-size installation by Peter Caine called "Overseer," you are confronted by a cottony arctic wilderness where whole families of furry white anthropomorphic creatures and their reindeer-like pets wiggle kinetically while flashing lights enhance the sensation of having stumbled into some kind of funny/scary polar nightmare.

Dana Schutz

By contrast, Saya Woolfalk's installation seems like a slapstick tropical vacation. Brightly colored floppy fabric sculptures, surrounded by stylized palm trees, become costumes for manic dancing to tribal drums in an accompanying video. But then you enter another room (these former classrooms are just the right size for assailing the visitor with serial installations) and you are jolted back to down post-911 reality by Nicola Lopez's floor-to-ceiling ink on paper explosions and tiny circling helicopters, ironically titled "A Promising Tomorrow." And then there's "The Epic Town," a real monstrosity of an installation by Ian Burns, made from huge wooden structures and winding mazes of metal pipe. It suggests nothing so much as the bare skeleton of a vast electric train set-up and seems to attest only to the lengths of wasted effort some desperately ambitious artists will go to in order to create something ungainly and monumentally useless.

At least Kate Gilmore's video of herself trying to extricate her foot from a can of plaster was amusing in a dumb, Three Stooges kind of way; Karyn Olivier's untitled sculpture of a coffee table seemingly impaled on a square column jutting from the ceiling was a real head-scratcher; and Valerie Hegarty's site-specific simulation of a tree breaking through the wall in the hallway, shedding shards of wallpaper like institutional green leaves, was oddly lyrical.

As for painting, no one in this exhibition is "reviving" it, no matter how many of those articles slick mass circulation magazines run from time to time with pictures of fresh-faced kids, dressed like the dummies in the window of The Gap, who are supposed to be breathing new life into it. Painting does not need artificial respiration from recent art school grads, nor from feature writers in search of novelty, thank you very much. It goes on and on, century after century, regardless of the whims of the market or the cluelessness of the critical establishment. There will always be people fascinated with putting paint on canvas no matter what other people are doing with various newer, more technologically trendy media. And some of them are doing it very well at P.S. 1.

Dana Schutz is one example. There's already a lot of buzz about her, because although she only recently graduated from Columbia, her last solo show at Zach Feur Gallery sold out, she's been collected by both Saachi and the Guggenheim, and she reportedly has a waiting list of wealthy col-

Daniel Hesidence

lectors eager to buy anything she cares to paint next. Obviously, like all instant art stars, Schutz is grossly overrated, and needless to say, it's grossly unfair, given all the just-as-good or better older artists

who've been paying dues for years and are still scuffling. But that's not Schutz's fault and certainly shouldn't blind anyone to the fact that her ten by fourteen foot oil on canvas of a Frankensteinian autopsy in progress, witnessed by an audience whose faces register emotions ranging from nausea to ghoulish fascination, is a tour de force of a certain sort.

Of course, one could carp that Schutz has a way of stylizing her figures that harks back to Ruth Gikow, the late social realist painter wife of the better known social realist Jack Levine—a mode which would have been considered passe a long time ago. But Schutz's slightly queasy sensibility, vibrant palette of hot hues, and tactile painterly engagement make her work more than microwaved social realism. Certainly it has more to offer than the hammy heroics of Julian Schnabel and the kinky Academicism of Eric Fischl, among a previous generation of artists who were once hyped as painting's saviors.

Another good painter, nowhere near as well known as Schutz but equally promising in a less showy way, is Daniel Hesidence, whose group of small, grotesque heads in oil on board make him sort of an anti-Elizabeth Peyton. Which is to say, the people he paints are as ugly as Peyton's are pretty, yet he shares with the better known art star a succulent way with oil glazes and a genuine involvement with his subject matter that makes his heads resonate. In any case, that Hesidence has found a way to capture something truly harrowing about the human condition without imitating Francis Bacon certainly makes him some kind of an original.

Cheyney Thompson's life-size oil on canvas of a newsstand, with every candy bar, magazine, and Lotto sign evoked in great detail was interesting as a kind of tromp-l'oeil painter's take on installation, and others, too, put a bright new spin on painting: Garth Weiser with deliciously confectionery gelato-like pink and purple oil impastos troweled onto a large canvas with a palette knife in a pyramidal abstract color construction; Ena Swansea with a weird image of a crouching red devil in Clark Kent hornrims, juicily conjured on a swirling gray ground; Andrzej Zielinski with semi-abstract oils of computers, their textures built up in a manner reminiscent of Nicholas De Stael, as if to demonstrate a tactile sensuousness and hand-made vitality that still eludes technology.

Jules de Balincourt, on the other hand, seems overrated to a puzzling degree, given the triteness of his paintings, which look like overblown panels from a bad graphic novel with their stiff little figures inhabiting grim urban vistas. Nor does his

Cheyney Thompson

work get any more interesting when he departs from his narrative mode in one picture to map U.S. world dominance and oil interests in an obvious manner that looks like an amateur hybrid of Jasper Johns's maps and that already much-imitated Saul Steinberg poster of New York City upstaging the rest of the country. For that matter, isn't it time for a merciful moratorium on bad imitations of Johns that use his familiar motifs to make sophomoric statements about rampant militarism or consumerism, such as Phil Frost's equally obvious collage painting of a flag plastered with S&H stamps?

An awkward term we've been hearing recently is "almost outsider," to designate those schooled artists who take inspiration from the posthumous popularity of Henry Darger and other unschooled isolates and idiot savants. Elif Uras' faux primitive oil of a family of hunters in their gun and game decorated den, with all manner of carnage transpiring outside the picture window, could belong to this category, as could Dasha Shishkin's horror vacua drawings of intricate feline orgies, and Mika Rottenberg's pencil doodles of childlike figures in office cubicles. But none of them possesses anywhere near the edgy energy that we see in the work of authentic outsiders whose free ranging superegos are not reined in by M.F.A. selfconsciousness. That said, without seeming to strive for an overtly outsiderish effect, Min Kim does achieve a Darger-like oddness in "Deliberately blinding the evidence of distance-always," her large, irregularly shaped work in graphite, color pencil, gouache and acrylic on paper, with its cut-out figure and exotic foliage layered like a blown-up version of one of those Hallmark pop-out greeting cards.

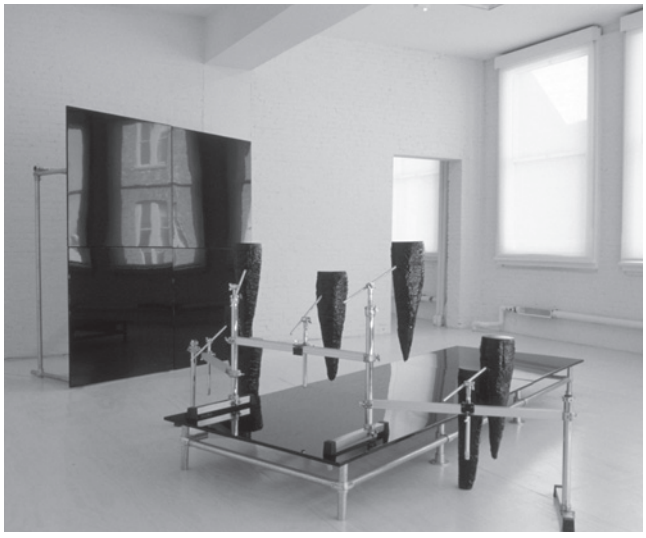
Hope Atherton

Often, video art can be an intrusive presence in shows such as this one, either obnoxiously loud and transgressive or simply silly like Meredith Danluck's video of a grunting tapdance by a bodacious woman in a tux,"Superbad," a schoolgirlish sendup of gender roles. The Israeli video artist Guy Ben-Ner, however, justifies all the buzz about him with "Elia – A Story of an Ostrich Chick." Ben-Ner, who will represent Israel at this summer's Venice Biennial, enlisted his wife and children to manipulate animal puppets which are juxtaposed with a real forest setting and voiceover narration. The funny family effort simultaneously spoofs the Disney true wildlife film genre and tells an affectingly sentimental children's story.

Much-hyped Goth guy Banks Violette's whole roomful of glossy black and chrome hardware flooded with fluorescent light is an overblown monstrosity.Talk about your instant art stars: this former tattoo artist (another Columbia alumnae) is all of 31 years old and presently having his first solo show at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Eagerly impressionable, as always, in its role as cultural arbiter, the New York Times' Arts & Leisure section recently ran a breathless feature on Violette's connec-

tion to "black metal," a genre of rock music rampant in Norway and supposedly saturated in sinister death obsession and stagy Satanism. But even with names like "Hate Them" and "Anthem (to future suicide)," Violette's glitzy pieces come off as boringly benign as pseudo-sado-masochistic furniture design.

By contrast, Tobias Putrih's heroic torso-like forms, made with layered cardboard, are genuinely beautiful, with light playing through their corrugated crevices, making them at once monumental and ethereal. Then there are the lifesize paper figures of Ryan Johnson, with their slacker outfits and every minute bit of stubble painstakingly in place; Matthew Day Jackson's vast mixed media replica of a Viking burial ship cleverly fitted with a Mondrian sail; and Hope Atherton's "Brown Unicorn," a mythical beast made from lambskin, felt, and leather, hanging limply by a nail from the wall like the crucified carcass of New Age whimsy. Utterly disappointing, after all the hype and considering that MoMA has already purchased one of her works, is Wangechi Mutu's sprawling collage installation, with its ponderous title, suspended bottles, and butterflies fashioned from spread porn-photo legs.



Banks Violette

Another much buzzed-about artist, Carol Bove, personified the "Duh" mentality when she was recently quoted as saying, "When I graduated from NYU, I just wanted to draw pretty girls. But then I thought, that is so dumb!" One of Bove's pretty girl drawings, in fact, made it onto the cover of Artforum, possibly proving that she wasn't nearly as dumb as the magazine's editors. At P.S. 1, however, Bove is represented by an installation of three prefab shelves of paperback books from the 1960s. Titled "Adventures in Poetry," the piece plays off the conventions of still life painting and sculpture with a deadpan insouciance that is also quite dumb, when one comes to think of it. But like the "Bad Painting" that enjoyed a brief vogue in the late seventies, "Dumb" can be good, right?

Carol Bove

Although P.S. 1's chief curator Klaus Biesenbach is credited in the press release as "the leading force behind this exhibition," credit is also given to a co-curatorial team from the Museum of Modern Art consisting of Ann Temkin, curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, and Glenn D. Lowry, the museum's director. Obviously, MoMA will get the pick of the litter when it comes to selecting promising new contenders, either to include in future shows or add to its permanent collection. So how could such a show not suggest a climate of art-yuppyism—especially since, as has been pointed out elsewhere, so many of the participants are graduates of prestigious and expensive art schools such as Yale and Columbia?

That the latter school alone boasts 28 exhibitors in "Greater New York" suggests that class, even more than race, sex, or ageism, may be the biggest bastion of inequity in an art scene where even the scruffy, politically progressive young are implicated in preserving the status quo. (Is it even possible anymore for someone of what used to be called humble origins to get a fair shake in shows such as this — or have all the prestigious, career-making exhibitions gone the way of affordable housing and the criminal injustice system?)

None of which is meant to suggest that "Greater New York 2005" is not worth a visit. It most certainly is, because there are some very worthy works of art to be seen there, and others that, while less worthy, illustrate the zeitgeist in often enlightening ways.

—Ed McCormack

(Note: P.S. 1 is at 22-25 Jackson Avenue, at 46th Avenue, in Long Island City, Queens, 718-784-2084. www.psl.org.)

All images courtesy of P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center

Ignored No More!

Last issue (May/June 2005) we ran a cover feature headlined "Why is Robert Goodnough Still the Most Underrated Painter in America?"

Just as we were going to press with the present issue, we received word that Goodnough had been awarded the Edwin P. Palmer Memorial Prize in the amount of $ 5,000 for his painting in "Disegno: The 108th Annual Exhibition," at the National Academy Museum.

The painting, Breakthrough, 2004-05, oil on canvas, 46X46 inches (reproduced here) can be seen at The National Academy Museum, 1083 Fifth Avenue, through July 3.

Needless to say, we feel that the prize could not have been awarded to a more deserving artist.

Jeannie McCormack
Editor and Publisher

Photo: Courtesy of Katharina Rich Perlow Gallery

Power and Elegance in the Art of Katia

The paintings of the artist who prefers to be known by the single name of Katia hark back to the glory days of The School of Paris, although Katia has found her own uniquely postmodern way of combing post-cubist structuring with Fauvist colors.

In her most recent exhibition at Montserrat Galley, 584 Broadway, Katia, who was born in France but now lives and works in Switzerland, showed a large group of paintings in which landscape subjects are depicted with brilliant areas of color that lay flat on the picture plane, even as various elements of the composition appear to recede in perspective.

Some of Katia's paintings, such as the acrylic on canvas that she calls "Champagne Region," are fairly naturalistic, while others, including the diptych called "Red Sky," are close to being abstract, but for a few simplified shapes that tip one off as to the lay of the land. "Champagne Region" is notable for its textural suggestiveness, with earthy furrowed fields in the foreground and the clearly delineated white brick surfaces of the red-roofed farm houses in the middle distance adding considerable tactile appeal. By contrast, "Red Sky" is executed in a smooth yet sumptuous manner, in hues with a strident brilliance that one rarely sees in nature creating vibrant rectangular divisions.

Katia has apparently found a way to exploit the peculiar qualities of acrylic paints to achieve glistening surfaces as rich in their own manner as anything that can be accomplished with oils. The clarity of her colors is especially striking in the canvas that she calls "The Red Earths," in which the hue of the title predominates even in the sky. Here, too, Katia's use of spatial ambiguity to create tantalizing pictorial tensions reaches its zenith, with a road zooming into the center of the composition in deep perspective, as rows of trees recede on each side, while flat planes of color thrust forward on the picture plane.

Some of Katia's most compelling paintings in chromatic terms are her sailboat scenes, such as "Race Far Away," in which a luminous spectrum of varied hues enlivens the surface, creating abstract patterns that compel our attention, quite apart from the ostensible subject matter of the picture. Here, too, the artist's articulation of forms is especially expressive, with the shapes of the boats and sails animating the entire composition with a sense of rhythmic movement.

In other paintings such as "Provence in the Light" and "Burgundy Region," Katia brings new life to the much-traveled terrain of French landscape painting. Variously colored fields, dotted with small farm houses, are set against brilliant skies, evoking a convincingly natural sense of place, even while incongruously brilliant hues and flat planes lend the composition an abstract dimension.

"Champagne Region"

Equally impressive are a painting called "Freedom of the Flowers," in which large pink blooms take on a monumental presence, set against a deep green ground, as well as a series of smaller figure paintings. In some of the latter works, such as "Special View," and "Last Moments," semi-abstract female nudes are seen within interiors, the shapes interlocking in a manner akin to some of Braque's compositions. Here, as in many of Katia's works, we encounter a formal elegance which is largely absent in much contemporary art.

—Victor Balakian

The Jazzy Urban Abstractions of Hugo Sanchez Avila

For Hugo Sanchez Avila, an artist from Venezuela presently living and working in New Jersey, the female form is a vital aesthetic sign-post that lends energy and life to his essentially abstract compositions.

In his recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, Avila displayed a strong signature style in which linear suggestions of the figure were laid down boldly on a ground made up of roughly rectangular strokes of primary color. The juxtaposition of these disparate elements apparently provides Avila with an inexhaustible fund of compositional variations, ranging from the abstract to the somewhat surreal, as in one painting where a vase in the shape of a curvaceous female torso with tropical fronds sprouting from its top was seen on a pedestal in an interior suggesting an art gallery.

Avila's style has a boldly simplified cartoon quality that enables him to put incongruous images together in a manner that makes an odd sort of sense. His approach can be compared to that of predecessors as diverse as Philip Guston and Karel Appel, yet Avila is definitely his own man. His use of color and texture, for one thing, is quite unique, with the figurative elements in his picture often outlined in thick lines which stand out in thick relief, suggesting that the paint has been squeezed directly from the tube. This technique is particularly striking in one painting where the stylized outline of a shapely nude dominates the center of the composition amid particularly energetic strokes of blue and red applied with a broad, blunt brush. Here, the thick yellow outline that defines the figure contrasts with its deep black interior form and appears to pulse like neon against a nocturnal sky. The tonal contrasts lend the picture a powerful abstract design, while the hints of subject matter add a more anecdotal appeal to the composition.

Avila is almost as fascinated by the atmosphere of the modern city as he is by the feminine form, judging from titles such as "Woman and the City," "Urban Space," "Hot City," "Lights of New York," and "From the Space to New York." His broad, squared-off strokes, while forming a rough grid to anchor his more biomorphic shapes to the picture plane, seem to allude to a variety of urban images—particularly clustered buildings or windows. Avila, however, does not depict such things with any degree of pictorial specificity, obviously preferring to provide mere hints that enable the viewer to draw his or her own conclusions. Thus he keeps his own abstract options open and is able to concoct compositions that dazzle us more for their purely visual than for their literary qualities. It also enables him to project a sense of metamorphosis, with shifty planes and layers of color suggesting a sense of flux, as though the composition is actually evolving before our eyes.

At the same time, there is the hint of a lively humor akin to that in the paintings of the eccentric but highly regarded American painter William N.Copely (who signs his work "Cply"), another artist enamored of the hourglass female form delineated with cartoon-like brevity. Hugo Sanchez Avila, however, also possesses a vigorous and varied painterly sensibility which enables him to explore a more ambitious range of aesthetic possibilities.

—Maurice Taplinger

Victor Trejo's Elegant Drawings Delineate the Spirit

As a youth in Mexico, Victor Trejo, a poet as well as a visual artist, was profoundly influenced by reading Shakespeare, Goethe, Whitman and Victor Hugo. So one could say that it stands to reason that he has a special affinity for working in black and white, the colors of language. Although he occasionally works in color, like Jose Luis Cuevas, his fellow countryman known for his satirical drawings of human monsters inspired by Goya, Trejo chooses pen and ink as a primary medium.

Trejo, however, prefers abstract forms to overtly figurative ones. Yet references to the human anatomy can sometimes be discerned within the sinuously linear compositions in his solo show at World Fine Art Gallery, 511West 25th Street, from June 1 to 30.

He cites both Kandinsky and Mondrian as "profound inspiration," and his kinships with the former artist are evident in his more sensually flowing shapes, while his fondness for the the latter can be seen in his precise technique and exquisite apportionment of space. Trejo, however, has evolved his own distinctive style, characterized by graceful cursive lines that define sensual contours, interspersed with areas of black that give weight and depth to his compositions. Indeed, his spotting of blacks is as skillful as that of Aubrey Beardsley, although in every other way the two artists could not be less alike. For Trejo's drawings are not concerned with ornate decadence so much as a precise synthesis of organic form free, as in musical composition, from dependence on references to daily reality. However, for all their formal autonomy, allusions to existing shapes are plentiful in Trejo's drawings, as seen in one work in pen and ink entitled "Pajaro Concertista," where the imaginatively abstracted image of a musician is clearly discernible.

"Cocodrilo Danzante"

It is this synthesis of the abstract and the figurative that makes Trejo's compositions especially intriguing, with their interlocking shapes set against expanses of pure white paper so that they appear to float freely in space. In the amusingly titled "Cocodrilo Danzante," one of his most rhythmic configurations, exquisitely balanced areas of black and white are juxtaposed with dots and checkerboard designs that further animate the shapes on the picture plane. All of these elements combined create a sense of lively kinetic activity that actually could suggest a dancing crocodile.

Another composition by Trejo called "Trance Hipnotico" is also outstanding in the latter regard, suggesting a fanciful state of enchantment, yet also resembling some of Elizabeth Murray's shaped canvases derived from expressively distorted still life objects. But the subject matter of this drawing by Trejo, as well as others such as "Alegria de Vivr" and "Suspenso Vital," is at once more elusive and varied in its allusiveness. Which is to say, Victor Trejo creates miniature worlds into which one can read an infinite number of meanings. Indeed, it would appear that his literary leanings inform his compositions with a poetic component that enhances their purely plastic qualities by opening up a wide range of imaginative possibilities. Suffice it to say that Victor Trejo succeeds splendidly in these drawings in capturing what he calls "the most pure and elevated movements of the spirit," and that is certainly a considerable accomplishment in either poetry or visual art.

—Wilson Wong

Agora Gallery's International Competition: The Chelsea Version

Since its first installment in 1984, The SoHo-Chelsea International Art Competition (formerly known as the SoHo International Art Competition) has been an eagerly awaited survey of emerging trends and promising talents. The Chelsea section of the exhibition, which can be seen from July 16 through August 6 at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, is one of the best to date, bringing together winning artists with a wide range of styles.

While space does not permit doing full justice to the show's diversity, the following capsule descriptions should give the reader some idea of its scope: Sculpture is especially well represented, ranging from the exquisite miniaturism of Mary McCunn's wittily biomorphic "Carrying It's Own With Earrings," to Chad Heath Moore's sinuous and strange"Spider Pez Mobile," with its octopoid tentacles, to Ranajit Sinha's animated untitled figure running up a staircase. "Cross Her Heart," another figurative piece by Jo Owens Murphy has a scary kind of beauty, with its garish red gash of a mouth and long spikes protruding from its armless torso.

By contrast, while abstract, Kaija Aniitta Poijula's sculpture "Sleeping Beauties" projects its own eerie, mood with a mysterious, coffin-like enclosure. Ana B. Hernandez' lush red abstract piece "Departure" is contrastingly buoyant, with its flaring shapes resembling sensual flower petals. Then there is Cathy Colson's intriguingly titled "Death Mixed," which presents us with a combination of expressive form and gravity. Both Toni Lucadello and Anthea Williams have styles that suggest an emerging neo-baroque movement in abstract sculpture; Lucadello with a small but commanding configuration of cursive shapes called "Quantum Forms"; Williams with a work entitled "C2," its weightless quality suggesting a kinship with the recent sculptures of Lee Bontecou.

Various abstract modes hold sway among the painters as well, suggesting how postmodern artists are finding new inspiration in the basic components of form and color. Cecil King's vigorously gestural mixed media work on canvas "Spirit Series I" illuminates milky white strokes by means of colorful underpainting that shines through. Cyrille Allannic employs landscape-based forms in a lyrical composition in harmonious pastel hues. Dolores Poacelli mixes liberal visual wit, a sublime sense of space, and vibrant colors in her work in acrylic and collage,"Window of Opportunity."

Working with household paint on board, Jane Millican creates a tactile visual ode to the color red. Suhas Bhujbal employs architecture as a springboard to abstraction in an oil called "Blue Corner." Ran Webber's casein on paper "Simplicius" appears abstract until a stylized canine face emerges from its configurations of geometric shapes and specks of brilliant color. Robin Jordan's "XO" is a complex mixed media composition on canvas in which a variety of boldly brushed signs and symbols emerge from a vigorous and chromatically variegated painterly ground.

Arthur Bernard's acrylic painting, "Seated Nude," with its gracefully generalized forms and luminous colors, combines European sophistication reminiscent of the School of Paris with contemporary scale and immediacy. Shulamite Halfon employs watercolor and collage in a flowing nonobjective composition suggesting a spiritual kinship with Kandinsky. Billha Zussman's lino cut "City Flag," a technical tour de force of printmaking, both for its unusually large scale and bold composition, is yet another example of the innovation one can expect in this year's edition of this always exciting survey.

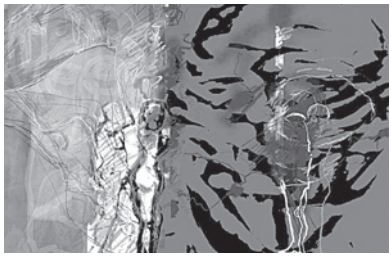
—Lawrence Downes

Rubenstein, Saville, and Tan: Showcasing Three New Members at Noho Gallery

Noho Gallery, now located at 530 West 25th Street, in Chelsea, has long been one of our most respected artist-operated exhibition venues. Familiar names from the gallery roster, such as Rebecca Cooperman, Sheila Hecht, Marilyn Henrion, Nancy Staub Laughlin, Daniele Marin, Pat Feeney Murell, Zarvin Swerbilov, Chuck von Schmidt, and Tina Rohrer, can be seen in the group show, "In the Heat of Summer," from June 28 through July 16. (There will be an opening reception on July 7, from 6 to 8 PM.)

However, the featured exhibitors are three new members— Myron Rubenstein, Joy Saville, and LiQin Tan— who, bolstered by the long-term gallery members, are being showcased in a supportive setting that one can only hope will introduce them to the broader audience each so richly deserves.

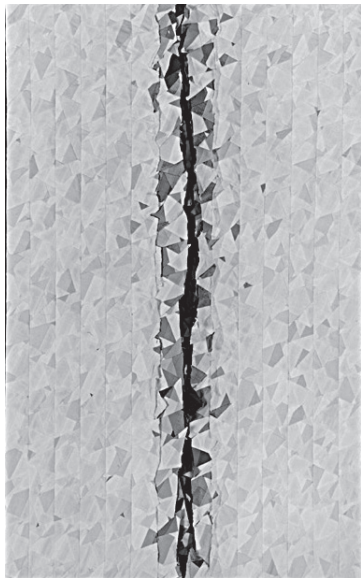
Myron Rubenstein creates pigment prints with a surprising painterly quality solely on an Apple computer. Vibrant veils of semi-transparent color float over expressively drawn figures in Rubenstein's compositions, which have a layered, Neo-Expressionist complexity. In Rubenstein's ironically titled "We Have Not Received Confirmation," areas of brown, yellow, and blue converge to capture the eye with their gestural energy and chromatic immediacy. On closer viewing, sketchy figures emerge, giving the impression of applicants waiting in some purgatorial realm for the confirmation of the title (whatever that might be!).



Myron Rubenstein

Another composition by Rubenstein, "Continuance," is dominated by the vigorous figures of a man and a woman. Well into middle age or beyond, their nudity suggests a senior Adam and Eve, as they confront us in a cybernetic Eden of light-filled verdant hues, seeming to symbolize enduring attraction. In another powerful print entitled "In the Sunset of Time, Revealed," two similar figures are enveloped in splashy red hues.

Here, Myron Rubenstein presents us with a vision as visceral in its own way as the flayed carcasses of Soutine, simultaneously suggesting unbridled passion and how the specter of mortality makes mature love all the more poignant.



Joy Saville

Joy Saville combines bits of cotton, linen, and silk in fabric constructions that have all the compositional freedom and tactile appeal of abstract paintings. The different textures and qualities of various fabrics play off each other to create subtle textural and coloristic effects that lend Saville's pieces an opulent presence.

"Color has been the focus of my work for more than twenty years," Saville states. "I celebrate color because it centers me in time and grounds me in the moment. It reminds me that we are all part of something greater than ourselves."

Small, roughly triangular shards are layered like brushstrokes in compositions filled with a sense of movement spurred by how the natural fabrics that Saville uses either absorb or reflect light. Especially effective in this regard is "St. Basils," in which deeper, brighter colors seem to emerge from beneath paler hues, creating an overall shimmer like the movement of light on water.

By contrast, "Silent Scream," where a jagged line runs down the center of the composition like a vertical scar, demonstrates the expressive range of Joy Saville's singular art.

LiQin Tan

Born in China, now living and working in New Jersey, LiQin Tan creates what he calls "Digital Primitive Art," juxtaposing rough wood burls with flat video screens showing images of the same or similar natural objects in configurations that call attention to the relationship between the real and the unreal that has become a ubiquitous facet of modern life. At once conceptual and imposingly physical, Tan's pieces reflect his Taoist philosophical leanings and his interest in state of the art technology to create an ideal synthesis of the ancient and the modern. In other works that he calls "digital parchment prints" and "digital parchment projections," this innovative artist prints images on rawhide surfaces or projects 3-D animation onto both sides of parchments that he makes by the same arduous processes once used by primitive peoples.

The ultimate message of all of LiQin Tan's work is that nature and technology need not be oppositional forces, but can enhance each other and enrich the natural evolution of our lives.

—J. Sanders Eaton

The AWS's 138th International Show Sets the Standard at the Salmagundi Club

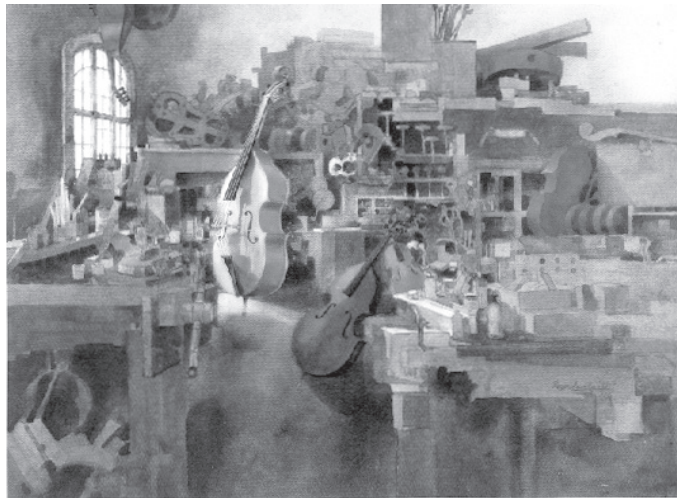
At first glance, Morris Shubin's Chinatown scene "Temple Gate II" called to mind the work of the late great Chinese American watercolorist Dong Kingman, with its stylized pagoda structure, liberal use of red, and almost cubistic layering of shifting shapes and planes. But despite this influence, Shubin has his own way with the unforgiving medium of aquarelle. Indeed, like others in The One Hundred Thirty Eighth International Exhibition of the American Watercolor Society, seen recently in the galleries of the Salmagundi Club, 47 Fifth Avenue, he adds his own special touch to a continually evolving tradition.

Perhaps because of some affinity that many watercolorists feel with Asian brush painting, Chinatown seems to be a popular subject, as seen, too, in Judy Morris's fanciful and accomplished picture of red paper lanterns, pagoda rooftops, and ornate leaf patterns set against a pale yellow sky in San Francisco. However, the larger appeal of this huge annual survey is seeing the diversity of approaches among the most accomplished contemporary exponents of the watercolor medium. For while most artists try watercolor at some point in their careers, many, if not all, of those associated with the AWS make it their primary medium and achieve a technical proficiency that eludes those who merely dabble in it. Thus, this show is chockablock with tours de force such as Gregory Bruno's remarkable work in which a multitude of matchbooks standing on end and casting their shadows on the white paper create an intricate composition one can only describe as "abstract realism" ; Dean Mitchell's evocation of light and shadow on the side of a whitewashed house, which rivals Andrew Wyeth's egg temperas (and surpasses his watercolors) for its meticulousness; and Anna Chen's virtuoso still life "Modern Art," in which clear lightbulbs rest like prisms on art books and what appears to be an original line drawing by Matisse.

Judy Morris

Other, splashier and more spontaneous types of technical proficiency can be seen in Dan Burt's "Callejon IV," where swift, confetti-like strokes of vibrant color are employed to evoke an image of tourists in a picturesque street; Tim Gaydos' dynamic abstract expressionist composition "Deconstruction V"; and Dale Meyers's light-filled neo-impressionist landscape "Clesson Brook."

Once, watercolor was thought of as a strictly transparent medium. In recent decades, however, with the advent of acrylic paints and other new kinds of watermedia and mixed media, the definition has expanded to include more opaque approaches and techniques, as seen in Delores Ann Ziegler's "Passionate Landscape I," with its bold abstract forms in deep blue and red hues, as well as in Serge Hollerbach's painting of a couple gazing into the Bay of Cannes, a nocturnal scene composed of simple shapes rendered in broad strokes and mat color areas. Even more obviously opaque is Dee Wescott's "Waitress Station," in which the three apron-wearing women and the restaurant background are evoked in watermedia with textural strokes akin to oil impastos.



Roger Lundquist

Overall, however, more traditionally translucent watercolor techniques still prevail in the paintings of artists such as Ted Nuttall, whose "Every Sunday Morning" depicts a young woman in a yellow, floppy-brimmed sun-bonnet in a manner reminiscent of Winslow Homer, albeit with expressive drips that bespeak a casual contemporary finesse picked up from certain abstract painters. In his "Fine-Tuned," depicting a workshop where bass fiddles are made, Roger Lundquist creates a meticulously detailed composition without sacrificing the medium's innate freshness; while Joe Santos retains a similar vitality in "Crossing #62," which brings a precision and clarity reminiscent of Charles Sheeler to a bold composition centering on a steel mechanical structure.

Founded in 1866, the American Watercolor Society held its first annual exhibition a year later, and the tradition continues unbroken to the present day. Certainly no other regular juried show provides us with anywhere near as comprehensive a cross section of progress and innovation in the medium. The exhibition, open to all artists worldwide, awards many prestigious prizes, exceeding $ 30,000 annually. Indeed, several but not all, of the the artists mentioned above are prize-winners. However, the level of excellence in this year's exhibition was so consistently high as to make such distinctions seem irrelevant, given that all such judgments are subjective, and it would be impossible to award prizes to all deserving artists in a survey of this size. Suffice it to say that an artist's inclusion in this show constitutes an award in itself, since the AWS's annual international exhibition sets the aesthetic gold standard by which all work in the medium must finally be measured.

Ted Nuttall

—Jeannie McCormack

Allan Goddard's Over-the-Top Contemporary Romantic Idylls

Every once in a great while an artist comes along who completely takes one by surprise. Such an artist is the Australian painter Allan Goddard, who recently exhibited his figurative works at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

Like a latter-day version of Louis Michel Eilshemius (the oddball American painter of romantic landscapes who worked prolifically for many years but received no recognition until he was discovered by Marcel Duchamp and given his first one-man exhibition at the Societe Anonyme in 1921), Goddard comes out of left field. There is an established tradition of romantic landscape in Australian art, as seen in the work of 19th and early 20th century painters like Sidney Long and Norman Lindsay, who strove for a return to the mythical modes of antiquity. Goddard, however takes that vision way over the top in his neo-mythic canvases, where classical nymphs cavort in fanciful landscapes and each tree and cloud resounds with high voltage symbolism.

Goddard's voluptuous female nudes romp with a winningly innocent exuberance that is at once refreshing and humorous. As they doggy paddle in sparkling lakes, their rosy bottoms bobbing up from the drink with balloon-like buoyancy, their equally comely cohorts on the shore test the waters with a dainty toe, creating ornate ripples. While clouds may gather with an intensity that threatens to cast a damper on the perfect moment, we know this will not come to pass: the moment has been rendered eternal by the painter's audacious brush. Like a one-man revival of the Rococo movement, Goddard produces fluffy effects that recall those of Watteau, Boucher, and especially Fragonard. Each element of his landscapes is imbued with the same emotive qualities as his figures. Yet his sly humor is thoroughly contemporary. He knows exactly what he is doing and loves to load his canvases with elements of the baroque that lend them, at times, an almost farcical sense of drama.

If there is a strain of the primitivism in Goddard's mythic approach, that too is a tradition of Australian art, present in the work of the country's best known modern painter, Sidney Nolan. Indeed, like Nolan, Goddard is in fact a quintessentially sophisticated artist whose seeming eccentricity merely allows leeway for his imaginative flights, as seen in the canvas called "Effrosini and the Blue Roses," where the main figure's streaming hair merges with tree branches as she makes her fiery descent, scattering petals on the shore. Similarly dramatic is "Effrosini Stealing the Golden Crests," in which a small furry animal watches with astonishment from the shore as the angelic nude figure swoops down and startled white parrots take off like a feathery jet-stream in her wake.

Allan Goddard is a true visionary whose work has a stunningly contemporary immediacy yet is beholden to no artistic tendency of his day. In the theory-ridden climate of today's art world, his work is a welcome anomaly. While many ambitious young artists trafficking in irony would give their painting arms to be able to pull off some of the effects that Goddard achieves, only he can lend them such singular conviction. He appears to be a natural, with an ability to invest his pictures with genuine passion and, simultaneously, to smile along with us at what he hath wrought.

—Maurice Taplinger

Rossella Mocerino in the Realm of the Pierrots

Although we think of clowns as figures of mirth they can also have a sinister side, as seen in the mysterious figurative paintings of an artist named Rossella Mocerino, featured in a recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

Mocerino's clowns are hardly the kind of benign red-nosed buffoons that one associates with American circuses such as Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey. Nor are they the matter-of-fact representation of clowns that one saw applying makeup in slightly seedy circus tents or dressing rooms, in the mundane behind-the-scenes circus portraits of Walt Kuhn.

Rather, Mocerino's merrymakers come out of the more European pantomime tradition of the Pierrot, and are painted in a somewhat surreal representational style, in a palette dominated by deep blue hues that hint at nefarious nocturnal doings. They project a strange sensuality with their whiteface makeup and elaborate, silken costumes harking back to mythical jokers and jesters of an earlier time. And in contrast to the world-weary journeyman performers of the aforementioned Walt Kuhn, who shed their costumes and make-up after the show, one gets the impression that Mocerino's Pierrots are never out of costume; that they live in a perpetual whiteface persona in a decadent realm of strange secrets and rituals.

One of the strangest of Mocerino's paintings is the large oil called "New York." It depicts a gathering of Pierrots in tall blue conical hats that loom against a deeper blue ground like skyscrapers, while down below, their large, fluffy collars flow together like the waves of the Hudson River. This associative suggestion of the Manhattan skyline, however, occurs solely in the mind's-eye, since the figures are realistically painted and Mocerino makes no overt attempt to represent the city in any literal sense. Rather, it is a feat of imaginative hypnosis on the part of an artist with an unusual ability to activate the imagination of the viewer in peculiar ways.

In another striking canvas titled "Pierrots at an Exhibition," three figures in whiteface appear to conspire, the central one wearing an elaborate hat that towers above the trio, and clutching a single rose. Other figures in other paintings, while not exactly Pierrots in any traditional sense, flaunt equally outrageous chapeau, such as the ornate, beaded turban worn by the single figure in the eerie portrait called "Cosmos II," or the floral headpiece of the female figure clutching a colorful bouquet in another large oil with the title "Vissi d' Arte."

Rossella Mocerino's considerable accomplishment is to have created a rarefied private world where one encounters a cast of fascinating characters unlike people one might meet anywhere else in the world. They look out at us as though they alone are the keepers of some arcane secret that we will never quite comprehend, the glittering gaze behind their mask-like expressions recalling Hart Crane's famous line about "the everlasting eyes of Pierrot," in his affecting poem "Praise for an Urn: In Memoriam Ernest Nelson."

Every bit as enigmatic as the Mona Lisa, these figures in fantastic raiment have a haunting presence, as they pose and preen enigmatically, the smiles on their painted lips seeming somehow more malevolent than mirthful, their mimetic gestures seeming to mock, even as they enchant. Indeed, given their sinister side, it is a tribute to Rossella Mocerino's superb skills as a painter that we nonetheless find them irresistibly seductive.

—Lawrence Downes

The Edenic Visions of Viorica Colpacci at East-West Gallery

On encountering the work of Viorica Colpacci, in her recent solo exhibition, "Digital Prints and 3-D Structures,"at the Romanian Cultural Institution's East- West Gallery, 573-577 Third Avenue, one was reminded of the title of the Bob Dylan song "Gates of Eden." For while Dylan's title is misleadingly ironic, its lyrical promise is fulfilled in the varied vocabulary of forms that Colpacci has evolved to express the lost Paradise for which we all inwardly yearn.

Colpacci was already an accomplished artist when she emigrated to the United States from Romania in 1977; her reputation had preceded her, since she had been exhibiting here, as well as in other art capitals world-wide, since 1972. In her native country, she had graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts "N. Grigorescu" in Bucharest and had worked as a product designer and ceramic sculptor, and after arriving in the U.S., she continued to study at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn College, and New York University, where she earned her MA in Studio art.

In her most recent exhibition at East-West Gallery, what struck one most immediately was the lively interaction between Colpacci's digital prints and sculptures, which one can only assume she refers to as "three dimensional structures" in order to emphasize her stated intention "to lessen the boundary line between sculpture and painting." And indeed, her pieces in painted steel succeed dynamically in doing just that. When one recalls how Julio Gonzalez, the Spanish sculpture who, along with Picasso, pioneered working in welded steel, referred to his pieces as "drawings in space," it seems apt to term Colpacci's structures "paintings in space." For their vibrantly colored abstract forms flow as fluidly as the whimsical shapes in a painting by Miro, an artist with whom Colpacci would appear to have an aesthetic affinity.

It is not simply the fact that Colpacci's forms are painted that makes them function as paintings in space, however; for this in itself is not unusual. Color has long been a feature of certain modern sculptures. Few, however, have integrated color as thoroughly subtly with sculptural forms as Colpacci does. In this regard, she has only one real peer: Frank Stella in his massive and complex painted steel relief. However, while Stella's pieces are mounted on the wall, Colpacci's are freestanding, which makes them an even more obvious—and one might add, purer— hybrid of painting and sculpture.

The degree to which Colpacci synthesizes the two mediums can be seen most dynamically in her larger painted steel pieces such as "Lyric Movement," and "Edenic Spirit," in which ribbon-like shapes flow rhythmically in space, like the lines in an abstract expressionist painting. In both sculptures, these curvaceous linear elements, culminating in cloud-like central configurations with Colpacci's characteristically serrated edges, are anchored by more geometric vertical forms, stately and stolid as towers. But what makes these works even more magical is Colpacci's use of radiant, rainbow-like red, yellow, green, blue, orange and purple hues with the same fluorescent quality as the colors in her digital prints. These chromatic elements seem to lift her steel forms out of the physical realm, lending them an ethereal beauty unlike anything else in contemporary sculpture. Indeed, the chromatic subtlety of her work can only be compared to that of color field painters such as Morris Louis and Jules Olitski. It is one thing, however to see such luminosity contained within the two dimensional rectangle of a painting and quite another to see it freed from the picture plane and unleashed into space.

"Edenic Fruit"

Even Colpacci's somewhat smaller sculptures, such as "Sacred Fire," with its flaring forms (which do indeed suggest leaping, rainbow-colored flames), and "The Temptation of an Angel," (where both the sensually layered shapes and the negative spaces within and between them appear to allude to mortal and spectral figures), are impressively imposing.

However, the primal impulse in all of Colpacci's work is graphic, and it is in her digital prints, of which a far greater number were included in this exhibition, that one sees Colpacci's ability to generate a seemingly endless variety of forms and chromatic harmonies to best advantage. Here, too, one sees the artist's ability to vacillate between the literal flatness of the picture plane in a composition such as "Playground," with its relatively simple, Miro-like shapes, and the more complex suggestions of deep space in "Exuberance," where a combination of solid and shaded forms create the illusion of being as complexly layered as her sculptures.

Also including two unpainted bronze floor sculptures with the spare elegance of a Japanese rock garden, Viorica Colpacci's recent exhibition presented an innovative artist at the height of her powers.

—Ed McCormack

Photographic Artists Engage Sundry Subjects in "New Shoots"

Several photographers demonstrated the diverse directions of their art in "New Shoots," curated by Jennifer Holst for the West Side Arts Coalition, at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street.

Deena Weintraub showed a series of black and white prints taken on the grounds of an abandoned psychiatric hospital. With images of gated windows, untended weeds, overgrown gardens, and spooky institutional buildings shot from angles that make them appear on the verge of collapse, Weintraub suggested the dashed hopes, disorientation, and neglect suffered by the patients themselves.

By contrast, in her small color prints, curator Jennifer Holst focused on bucolic settings in Colombia, subjecting lush foliage and brilliant flowers to the rigors of her exquisitely selective vision. One of Holst's most characteristically exquisite images was of deep notches in a tree-trunk (possibly made with a machete) precisely mirrored by similarly shaped shadows cast by foliage directly across the garden path.

Carol Carpentieri also prefers small formats for her color prints of floral subjects, which she isolates in her compositions in the manner of Asian ink paintings, lending each plant and flower a precious poetic presence.

Steve Weintraub exploits the unlimited coloristic possibilities of the digital print to illuminate landscapes with day-glo hues suggesting a psychedelic experience. However, one of Weintraub's most striking prints was a black and white image of an old-fashioned buckboard, the stark monochrome lending the picture a period feeling.

Robin Glasser Sacknoff projects an antic, carnivalesque mood in colorful pictures of people wearing or posing with ornate masks. In other pictures, the masks alone, sprouting brilliant plumage, create the sense of an opulent nightmare or a Fellini film.

Always an astute observer, Scott Weingarten captures the pomp and ceremony of cops marching in the Saint Patrick's Day Parade, their brass buttons and faces a festive blur; a heavily made-up Vegas showgirl bathed in reddish light like a Hindu love goddess, and sundry other subjects with consummate panache.

Telephone poles receding down a country highway suggest crosses at Calvary in one color print by Irmgard Kuhn, while a riot of half-empty wine glasses takes center stage in another picture where the less-focused revelers across the table appear boozily woozy. Kuhn's pictures are invariably rich in such allusiveness.

That Carmiah Frank is a sculptor as well as a photographer may explain her ability to give such weight and presence to her small color print of piled rocks with sky showing through the spaces between. On the other hand, Frank's photograph of a makeshift urban garden in a bathtub appears as oddly surreal as a painting by Magritte.

Another painterly photographer, Janice Wood Wetzel, finds the abstract in the everyday, making a close-up of lily stamens take on a sensuality akin to the suggestive forms of Georgia O'Keeffe, or Australian water lace suggests actual ocean waves. However, Wetzel can also make a lyrical human statement with an image of people in Bangladesh rice paddies gracefully balancing baskets on their heads.

Equally versatile in another manner, Jean Prytyskacz can strike a lyrical chord with a poetic photo of white blossoms set against a pale blue sky, then turn right around and capture the hectic pace of Herald Square. Yet Prytskacz's lyrical eye prevails even here, where pink flowers in a pocket-park harmonize with a passing pedestrian's pink bag.

Robert Helman's pigment prints are notable for their chromatic intensity, as seen in his picture of ducks silhouetted on a brilliant orange pond, as well as another composition of a field of red tulips as densely packed as one of Joe Brainard's floral collages.

—Maureen Flynn

Ann Haaland's Chromatic Metaphors For Nature

Given the natural grandeur of our native terrain, it stands to reason that landscape has always been The Great American subject. From the romantic vistas of the Hudson River School; to the plein air lyricism of the American Impressionists (whose work invariably possessed a raw vigor that distinguished them, for better or worse, from their French counterparts); to contemporary artists such as Neil Welliver and Wolf Kahn, who apply the dynamics of Abstract Expressionism to the depiction of nature, landscape painting remains steadfast and impervious to changing trends and fashions.

That said, it should be added that the most ambitious contemporary nature painters, invariably find new ways to view this timeless subject, as seen in the work of Ann Haaland, whose glowing oils and monotypes can be seen at Wright Gallery, 50 N. Front Street, in Kingston, New York, from August 6 to 27. (Reception: Saturday, August 6, from 5 to 8PM.)

Haaland, who has been the recipient of numerous grants and awards in recent years, including a Best in Show Award from the Woodstock Artists Association, has been inspired by the Hudson River Valley landscape since her student days at the State University of Oneonta, New York. Wisely, however, she has not chosen to imitate the histrionic manner of Cole, Cropsey, or Durand. Rather, she has assimilated elements of Color Field painting and Minimalism; traveled extensively in Europe, garnering inspiration from the masters of modernism; and avails herself of various postmodern influences, all of which have shaped her singularly sophisticated style.

Judging from the coloristic freedom of her work, one would guess that the most valuable lesson that Haaland has learned from nature is how futile it is to imitate it too faithfully without falling short of the vitality which belongs to nature alone. Obviously fully aware that no artist, however skilled or insightful, can compete with the glory of creation, she instead creates approximations for the effects of light and color that one encounters in a landscape—particularly the dappled effects of sunlight pouring through trees and leaves in a wood—which belong strictly to the special vocabulary of painting itself.

What Haaland endeavors to capture, then, is the overall chromatic radiance rather than the actual colors that one sees in such places, accomplishing this through her use of heightened hues in unusual combinations.

One of the most dramatic examples can be seen in Haaland's oil on canvas "Cathedral ll," its title especially apt, since the yellow and orange light pouring through the purple trees into autumnal woods suggests stained glass. Intersecting in angular configurations, the limbs of the trees even resemble the strips of lead to which stained glass adheres. Haaland, however, prevents the image from becoming too stylized by virtue of her impressive formal rigor.

"Oak, untitled"

For like Alex Katz, the older artist she most resembles stylistically, and one of the only other painters who can simplify the shapes in a landscape to a similar degree without succumbing to the pitfalls of graphic design, Haaland invariably treats the landscape as a formal entity. No matter how much she may love nature (and her affection for it comes across clearly in every picture that she paints), she is never so overwhelmed by it that she forgets the difference between a personal epiphany and a well made work of art.

Haaland's rapturousness at the beauty that she sees before her is invariably tempered by her grasp of the laws of composition and her surpassing skills as a colorist. Indeed, contemplating a work such as her oil on canvas "Belief," it is evident that she is actually an abstract painter at the core. For here, despite the spiritual connotations of its title, which might invite a more literary interpretation, the composition is driven by linear rhythms akin to those in the gestural abstractions of Brice Marden. Here, too, the slender, graceful saplings that set those rhythms in motion are evoked in a predominantly sky-blue hue, while the areas behind them (where the sky would be) are verdant green interspersed with bits of yellow.

Yet while the natural order of the colors is radically reversed, it is characteristic of Haaland's unique aesthetic that the image nonetheless conveys a palpable sense of nature. This duality manifests again and again in Haaland's paintings, as well as in monoprints such as "Oak, untitled" where monochromatic tones, set against a pure white ground, result in an image as spare in its formal components as a black and white abstraction by Franz Kline. At the same time, "Oak" evokes bare trees in a snowy forest as convincingly as the poetic black and white mezzotints of the contemporary realist Robert Kipniss. More typically, Haaland employs a vibrant palette befitting her inclinations as colorist in her oils such as "Aura," with its subtle harmonies between soft blue and green hues, and "At Duck Pond," where more brilliant yellows and reds dominate and the forms of the trees and other landscape elements take on a sinuous linearity reminiscent of Art Nouveau.

While one might be tempted to classify Haaland's colors as Neo-Fauvist, that designation would not be entirely accurate, since the French term "fauve" translates into English as "wild beast," and her paintings are anything but wild or beastly. While her colors can be strident, the overall effect of her work is lyrical. When she puts unlikely colors together it is not for the purpose of creating shock value or a jarring effect (as the Fauves were more than happy to do in the embattled aesthetic climate of early 20th century France), but rather to evoke intense qualities of light in a manner that captures a precise mood or an atmosphere without imitating the actual spectrum of nature.

In fact, one of Ann Haaland's most remarkable talents is her ability to make her scenes so convincing while employing color combinations that are not actually found in a natural setting. Her colors are, in fact, chromatic metaphors that bring her paintings alive in ways that enable us to share in her utter enrapturement with nature. Thus the paintings of Ann Haaland offer us the best of two worlds: a joyous experience of the landscape filtered through a singularly exquisite formal sensibility.

—Ed McCormack

International Competition Winners Are Seen in Soho

The SoHo-Chelsea International Art Competition (formerly known as the SoHo International Art Competition), which now requires the two separate venues of the sponsoring gallery to showcase all the winners, has been one of our most consistently excellent juried exhibitions since 1984. The Soho section of the exhibition, which differs from the one in Chelsea this year in that it tends to feature more representational artists, can be seen at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway from July 23 through August 13.

"Hudson Street Cornices," by Andrew Jones, is a luminous oil of the tops of city buildings set against a cloudless sky. Although enamored of the visible world, Jones' austere realism is supported by strong abstract design. Michael Tyson Murphy also employs a meticulous realist technique, albeit to create compositions that center on light and movement, as seen in his untitled oil of gossamer white curtains blowing in a breeze to envelop a floral still life in a window.

In Zhenmin Ji's watercolor "Breaking Against the River Bank," the innately abstract subject of a breaking wave is evoked in detail, yet retains the fluid freshness that characterizes aquarelle at its best. Judi Morton also demonstrates how the principles of abstraction can be integrated representationally in her oil on board "From Codden Hill," where a landscape is depicted in bravura strokes that unify the composition and imbue the entire surface with muscular energy. Thom Montanari, on the other hand, introduces a note of fool-the-eye fun with his oil on panel of a silvery bird that appears to be preening in a landscape— until one looks more closely and realizes it's actually a hood ornament on a vintage car!

Two figurative sculptors employ earthy media in a manner that evokes Thoreau's poetic phrase "the human clay." Rosalia Riera's "At the End of the Day" movingly depicts a woman in a state of exhaustion, as though her slumped shoulders literally support the weight of the world. Stefan Rogenmoser's crouching figure "Mankind" makes a monumental statement on an intimate scale. Susan Pittman's C-print "Baptism Two" focuses on a Christian fundamentalist ritual in a rural setting, the religious fervor of the participants conveyed by the photographer's skillful cropping. Jessica Wasilweski, on the other hand, presents a panoramic view of a quaint village enveloped in snow and illuminated by a full moon in her folksy acrylic painting "The Spirit of Christmas." Galina Perova employs a technique that harks back to the old masters in her oil on canvas "Still Life with Bread." Yet Perova's ability to invest the painting with contemporary immediacy proves that certain subjects never go out of date when they are refreshed by a singular aesthetic sensibility.

The timelessness of certain more abstract modes of expression also comes across in "Morning," a sculpture by Joseph Kronwitter, which subjects forms as streamlined as those of Brancusi to a postmodern treatment. The same can be said for "Elemental," a work in metal by Guillermo Molinero in which sleek shapes appear to orbit around each other in space. By contrast, Gabriel Branch's "Coalescence XIV" marries a sinuous Art Nouveau elegance to a thoroughly fresh conceptual vision to intriguing effect.

Also including "Clone," a powerful sculpture with muscularly knotted forms by an artist who prefers to be known by the single name of Natson, the Soho installlment of this exhibition is every bit as impressive as its counterpart in Chelsea.

—Wilson Wong

"No-Name" Group Show Transcends the Need for a Theme

"Selections of Artists' Recent Works," a group show curated by Emily Rich for the West Side Arts Coalition, seen at Broadway Mall Community Center on the island at Broadway and 96th Street, made no attempt at a unified theme. Its appeal was its eclectic mix of works, ranging from the abstract to the topical. Among the latter, Yookan Nishida's oil on linen "Power of the Mask" was a larger than life close-up of Michael Jackson sporting an enigmatic Mona Lisa half- smile.

Elisha Zeitler's two relief paintings also seemed topical in that one could not help thinking of the recent tsunami, given their forceful presence, with watery forms swirling like a vortex that culminated in a deep 3-D abyss. Created with acrylic, chicken wire, plaster and gauze, Zeitler's pieces successfully combined aspects of painting and sculpture.

Adam Adrian Brostow's acrylics present enigmatic subjects with a clarity and wit akin to that of Bruce McColl's odd utopian visions. Brostow, however, conveys a more personal poetry of incongruity in his little canvas juxtaposing different scenes in Paris via paintings-within-the-painting. Diane Casey's synthesis of figurative and abstract elements is especially interesting for her ability to make us view her paintings on two levels simultaneously. Silhouetted, stylized figures emerge from an irregular grid laid down in thick impastos, creating tactile and coloristic qualities that lend Casey's paintings an impact similar to Lester Johnson's early "Bowery" series.

Emily Rich took Christo's "The Gates," as inspiration for a fluent series of small acrylics on canvas and one watercolor on paper. Naturally, orange hues figured prominently in the series, with variations in the degree of abstraction and representation from picture to picture; however the most salient feature was Rich's vigorous gestural brush work.

Sacchi Shimoda has often used Marilyn Monroe as subject in symbolic oils on canvas. Here, however, Shimoda made a double-edged tribute with a painting of just Marilyn's lips on a slashed canvas called "Fontana's Scar," a reference to the Italian painter, Lucio Fontana, who emphasized the materiality of his paintings with knife-slashes.

Bernardo Diaz's abstract paintings in acrylic and pumice on canvas were effective for both their intense colors and the artist's use of tactile areas of rough texture. Like the great Spanish "tachiste," Antonio Tapies, Diaz employs mixed media to create seductive surfaces that appear ravaged by time. By contrast, Fernando Salomone creates oils in thin, luminous glazes in which stylized trees are a prominent feature, jutting up from rhythmically rolling hills in otherwise austere landscapes. Salomone's diptych and triptych formats enhance the formal grace of his compositions.

Betty Odabashian's abstractions compel our attention with their combination of deep purple and blue hues and forceful gestural calligraphy. In both "Bomb's Away," with its violently streaked, impetuous strokes, and "Quicksand," where strident yellow lines emerge from a somber ground, Odabashian reveals herself to be a subtle colorist with a strong sense of composition.

Employing water media on rice paper, Margo Mead merges Asian linear grace with Western chromatic power in bold floral compositions. Especially successful was "Chrysanthemums in Lavender & Cobalt," in which Mead's confident brushwork and brilliant colors were especially dazzling.

Then there was Elizabeth Moore, who displayed her ability to convey a great deal of detail while retaining painterly spontaneity and freshness. Moore's small landscapes in oils on canvas, depicting verdant land masses dotted with small villages amid mountains and bodies of water proved, simultaneously atmospheric and pleasing in purely formal terms.

—Marie R. Pagano

The Visionary Abstractions of Jason S. Gargani

Although Abstract Expressionism is generally presented as the first significant modern American art movement, there was in fact a prior movement, equally avant garde in its own way, spearheaded by such painters in Alfred Stieglitz's circle as Arthur Dove, John Marin, and Georgia O'Keeffe. Early in the twentieth century, these painters evolved a species of abstraction firmly rooted in nature. And it is this homespun American modern tradition that the contemporary painter Jason S. Gargani updated so successfully in his recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, bringing natural inspiration back into abstract painting in an especially potent manner.

In fact, most of Gargani's oils actually include recognizable subject matter, such as the lighthouse in "Mistic Nights" and the farm house in another painting called "The Farm," its bright red roof bracketed between a deep blue sky enlivened by vigorously brushed white clouds and a field of tactile green and yellow strokes. However, such images serve the purpose of creating compositions which thrive more on their abstract virtues than their representational ones in much the same manner as the landscape motifs of Marsden Hartley, another painter with whom Gargani has certain qualities in common.

Like these earlier artists, Gargani works on a relatively intimate easel scale, rather than on the huge canvases which have become so ubiquitous since the heyday of Abstract Expressionism. Thus he avoids the overblown quality that tends to dilute rather than increase the power of the work of so many of his contemporaries. Easel scale served Van Gogh and many others of his period well, in terms of making the art object an occasion for close scrutiny, contemplation, and delectation. It serves Gargani in much the same way: One is drawn into his canvases in a manner that provides a refreshing change from the attempt to bowl the viewer over at any cost.

Although "Mountain Melodies," for example, is slightly larger than some of Gargani's other oils, it is still intimate enough to be approachable in the way that makes his paintings particularly pleasing. One becomes engrossed in its flowing composition, in which mountains, watery waves, and earthy land masses merge in dynamically swirling patterns. Although there is a definite sense of landscape in this painting, it does not depict the actual lay of the land so much as a sense of its rhythms, energies, and inner essences. Which is to say, it is a portrait of the forces of nature, rather than a faithful illustration of the particulars of a landscape. Thus one experiences the picture as a visionary entity, gaining a vicarious sense of the passion that the artist felt in the process of painting it.

A similarly strong feeling emanates from another oil entitled "Desert Dreams," with its vibrant blue sky, brilliant red trees, and sandy expanses all flowing together in rhythmic harmony, making clear that this artist's special gift is for transforming natural subjects into deeply felt personal statements that transcend theorizing to arrive at an intuitive immediacy. Indeed, even in his more overtly representational paintings such as the aforementioned "The Farm," particulars are subordinated to feelings, lending the paintings of Jason S. Gargani a pantheistic intensity quite ucommon in contemporary art.

—Peter Wiley

Ursula Boylan O'Gara Renders the Immediate Immutable

Landscape painting has a long and rich history in Ireland, which should not be surprising given the beauty of the verdant beauty of the Irish landscape. And it is this tradition to which the work of Ursula Boylan O'Gara, a contemporary artist born in Dublin, so clearly belongs, on the evidence of her recent exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, in Soho.

Indeed, O'Gara's crystalline technique calls to mind that of her fellow Dubliner William Davis, an important nineteenth century landscape painter who eventually relocated to Liverpool, England—but not before painting his beautiful "Junction of the Liffey and Rye, Near Leixlip" among other memorable Irish Landscapes. Like Davis, O'Gara is a superb colorist with a knack for capturing precise qualities of light at different times of day, capturing atmospheric nuances by virtue of her ability to combine luminous hues in such a way as to convey the less tangible as well as the more prominent facets of nature.

Contemplating O'Gara's marinescape "Galway Hookers," for one splendid example, one can almost feel the delicate breezes waving over the water and activating the sails of the small boats under the delicate blue sky with its wispy bits of cloud. This ability to surrender completely to the scene at hand, subjugating one's stylistic impulses to its particulars, rather than imposing a selfconscious aesthetic agenda on the picture, is what distinguishes the best Irish landscape painters such as Joseph William Carey and Edwin Hayes, among others to whose longstanding tradition O'Gara now adds her own distinctive vision. O'Gara's coloristic clarity and self-effacing style are especially effective in paintings such as "Glenmalure," with its rocky coastline and sparkling body of water giving way to a distant vista of misty blue mountains, each element in the composition meticulously delineated in regard to its unique tonalities and textures.

Yet while O'Gara is a painter of admirable restraint, eschewing needless flourishes in favor of accurate depiction of her subjects, she nonetheless graces her pictures with subtle evidence of her singular artistic sensibility. She accomplishes this by virtue of her unique painterly alchemy, an amalgam of chromatic luminosity and sensitive brushwork that produces effects unlike those of any other contemporary painter whose name springs immediately to mind.

Her ability to invest even innately picturesque subjects with a sense of freshness and immediacy can be seen in pictures such as "Inishgort Lighthouse" and "West Pier Lighthouse," both of which evoke qualities of light and atmosphere in an especially pleasing manner. Indeed, for a lesser artist such subjects might prove dauntingly romantic. O'Gara, however, avoids the hackneyed by dint of careful observation, making one aware that this is a plein air depiction of a unique setting, rather than a generalized view of a subject that has been painted by others in the past. The scene comes sparklingly alive under her brush, leaving no doubt that one is observing an actual and irreplaceable moment in time rendered immutable by the artist's careful attention to the individual qualities that make it unlike any other such moment or locale.

Here, as in other scenes, such as "Autumn in Vermont" and "The Skelling Islands," it is this ability to combine the immediate with the timeless that makes Ursula Boylan O'Gara an artist to savor and admire.

—Marie R. Pagano

Eight New Masters of Fine Art Make Their New York Debut at Noho Gallery

Although their school is set down in the bucolic landscape made famous by the painters of the Hudson River School, the eight artists in the Western Connecticut State University Master of Fine Arts Graduate Exhibition display an urbane, up-to-the-minute assortment of styles. In an era when some art schools have all but eliminated studio courses and put the emphasis on conceptual ploys and business strategies, WCSU is a place where the art of painting still holds sway, and that is refreshing in itself.

According to John Wallace, one of the practicing artists who are resident faculty members in the university's painting department, the graduates (some of whom are teachers themselves who returned to get their degrees) are also a varied group in terms of age and experience. This, too, is refreshing, in contrast to some more youth-oriented M.F.A. programs that have lately been flooding the market with seven day wonders who are hung up on juvenelia and often lack the substance to back up their hype.

And, indeed, a winning mixture of sophisticated maturity and youthful adventurousness is reflected in the WCSU graduates' first New York group exhibition, which can be seen at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from July 19 through August 6. (There will be a preview reception on Thursday July 21, from 5 to 8 PM and an opening reception on Saturday, July 23, from 3 to 6 PM.)

Heaven Lee Darling, who has a novel name and a background as a former rock musician to go with it, is an over-the-top Neo-Surrealist who works on a large scale. Darling's oil "Unstable Rebecca Dims" is a big, bold exercise in incongruity made coherent by a Dali-esque technical ability that enables him to merge morbid and erotic imagery with impressive panache. Darling is a maximalist who is not afraid to cram his compositions with plethora of startling images and crank up the volume, so to speak.

Laurie Mathieson also works large, albeit in an abstract manner for which one critic for this publication coined the term "New Naturism." Like Gregory Amenoff and Bill Jensen, Mathieson seems a direct descendant of Arthur Dove and other early American pioneers of earthy nature-based abstraction. However, the scale and impact of Mathieson's mixed media paintings, such as "Knotted Branch," also hark back to the more biomorphic aspects of Abstract Expressionism.

Natural essences also figure prominently in "Swamp," a richly textured and coloristically intense painting by Bridget Eileen Grady, in which the forms of branches, rocks, and trees reflected in water afford the painter an opportunity for juicy, semi-abstract visual/tactile delectation. Grady's vigorous brushwork and muscularly delineated forms lend her acrylics on canvas a dynamic sense of compositional "push and pull."

Tony Zatzick sees painting as "an alchemical process, which transforms base materials into something that speaks to the essence of human experience." Zatzick's paintings, particularly, his large oil on paper "Forms and Pathways" are all about energy and gesture in a manner that sets him apart as a latter-day "action painter." That the picture is executed in grisaille calls even greater attention to the grace and vivacity of Zatzick's bravura brushwork.

Lee Cordon, on the other hand, puts a postmodern spin on Precisionism in her acrylic on canvas "Retrospect," which depicts a factory-like structure in various pale, creamy hues, set against purple hills and a vibrant blue sky in a meticulous hard-edge manner. Combining an austerity reminiscent of Sheeler with heightened chromatics, Cordon brings out the formal beauty of banal subjects.

Mounira Gareeva Stott, who also takes off from architecture, albeit in a more painterly technique, states that she is "fascinated by the modern city as a work of nature." In Stott's oil "6th Avenue," urban towers soar skyward, their rectangular geometry contrasting sharply with the sensually rounded forms of clouds. The low angle from which we view these steely, veering forms enhances her painting's vertiginous dynamism.

"For me, painting is a process of discovery about myself and the world around me," says Anne Flynn of her accomplished and witty self-portrait, confronting the viewer in a paint-stained apron, brandishing brushes in both hands and balancing a cupcake on her head. Although Flynn's figure is flawlessly realistic, she presents herself on a plain pink ground, with splashy red flourishes, rather than the expected shadow, behind her cowgirl boots. With this single insouciant gesture, Flynn subverts illusion, slyly calling attention to the flatness of the two-dimensional picture plane.

Since so many young painters today are influenced by comics and fantasy illustration, it seems fair enough to include Michael Lavoie, who earned his M.F.A. in illustration among the fine art graduates in this show. Besides, Lavoie's "Hunting Oni," an acrylic on panel of warriors in ancient armor confronting a towering anthropomorphic monster in a dark forest, stands on its own as a compelling visual entity.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Sharon Flothen-Washington and the Mystique of the Palpable

Because of its emotive content, Expressionism is a style that never goes out of style, so to speak. An artist who can manipulate paint in a manner that coincides with the symphonic flow of human emotions can touch us in ways that others cannot, especially when she possesses the intuitive skill that we see in the work of Sharon Flothen-Washington, who exhibited recently at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway.

Born in Switzerland to a Dutch mother and an English father, Flothen-Washington discovered her artistic vocation in early childhood. Tutored privately in the studio of an uncle who is an Abstract Expressionist painter and was, for many years, a teacher at the Art Academy, in Zurich, she experimented with different styles before evolving her present approach, which has been called "representational abstraction."

Although the term could sound contradictory, it is actually quite apt in regard to her way of employing a simplified symbolic figure as the focal point for compositions enlivened by flurries of textural strokes that function as energy fields. The figure, seems to represent an Everyperson at the center of an existential storm. It has been written of Flothen-Washington that her motifs allude to the natural environment as well as interpersonal relationships, and the latter idea is clearly evident in paintings such as "Encounter," where several characteristically faceless figures merge into a configuration recalling the title of the famous sociological text "The Lonely Crowd." However, there is also a spiritual element in her work, a sense of the universal search for a meaning.

Among her contemporaries, perhaps her most kindred spirit is Susan Rothenberg, who was associated with both the New Image and Neo-Expressionist movements of the 1970s. Flothen-Washington, however, has developed an even more consistent style with which to express a mythic sense of the human dilemma. Yet at the same time, the real subject of her work appears to be painting itself—or, to be more exact, how the material qualities of pigment on canvas can create a sense of life's challenges that is infinitely more palpable and universal than the mere representation of particulars.

Thus in canvases such as "Salus," "Aqua II," and "Alta," we see Flothen-Washington's faceless figures enveloped in painterly atmospheres ranging from soft, feathery strokes to ruggedly layered and scraped impastos. Their tactile presence, established with varied textures, is further enhanced by a palette of colors alternately somber and strident. Through such subtle nuances, the artist evokes a host of emotional states without resorting to the depiction of specific circumstances.

Sharon Flothen-Washington's complete commitment to the physical and chromatic qualities of the materials themselves, as she unearths them in the act of painting, lends her compositions a rare sense of conviction. Obviously, process is foremost in her work, which seems to proceed without calculation, relying on her intuitive resources to arrive at universal truths through vigorous paint application and a natural sense of gesture. For while she gives every indication of being a consummately sophisticated painter, she apparently is able to tap into areas of her creativity that could almost verge on the primitive. It is this duality—the fine line that she is able to tread between finesse and raw passion— that makes the paintings of Sharon Flothen-Washington so richly rewarding.

—Maureen Flynn

Tamir David's Dialogue Between the Narrative and the Abstract

A potent mixture of realism and expressionism distinguishes the paintings of Tamir David, an artist from England, who exhibited recently at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, in Soho. Which is to say, David does not indulge in the figural distortions that we associate with expressionism. Rather, his forte is combining anatomical accuracy with expressive brushwork in a manner that enables him to endow his paintings with verisimilitude at the same time that he imbues them with gestural vivacity and drama.

Thus in a painting such David's "Awaiting," for example, the comely female nude is a palpable presence, even while her form is evoked in bold strokes and bathed in blue hues that are not technically naturalistic. David's vigorous painting style and incongruous choice of colors, coupled with the expectant posture of the figure and its human scale, creates an overall mood that lends the painting a unique emotional power.

Another painting entitled "Aflame" is even more gestural, with the nude figure evoked in a few sinuous strokes of yellow on a brilliant red ground, giving the effect that its voluptuous contours are carved in light. Here, too, that David has chosen a cardboard packing case as his painting surface adds to the spontaneous quality of the work, with printed lettering showing through the semi-transparent red background like pentimento, enhancing the casual quality of the composition.

The artist also employs a large sheet of cardboard as the painting surface in a work called "Atonement," featuring a female nude from the waist up who confronts the viewer with a frontal frankness simultaneously suggesting pride and vulnerability. Here, the horizontal corrugations in the cardboard add textural interest while further emphasizing the picture's sketchy execution. Indeed, David has an ability to compel our attention with his technical virtuosity, even while involving us in the narrative suggestiveness of his subject matter.

Nowhere is this latter ability more evident than in the painting he calls "Attica Blues," which centers on the face and nude torso of an attractive black woman with a soulful expression and full, pendulous breasts. Here, the deep ultramarine background enhances the feeling that this woman has "the blues" in the metaphorical sense of the term, and the name of a famous American prison in the title may indicate that she is mooning for a lover who is incarcerated. However, while the innate drama of David's compositions certainly invites such interpretations on the part of the viewer, they are by no means necessary to the appreciation of his work.

At the same time, the emotional content in David's paintings seems inseparable from the formal attributes of his paintings, as seen to particular advantage in "Alone," where yet another female nude, seen crouching in a chair near a window, is enclosed within a rectangle bordered by a brilliant red ground. Here, the imagistic compartmentalization not only emphasizes the subject's isolation but adds to the formal power of the composition, with its geometric interaction between the window-like outer rectangle and the shape of the actual window near the figure.

It is this duality—the dialogue that he sets up between the narrative and abstract elements in his compositions—that makes Tamir David a most compelling painter indeed.

—Peter Wiley

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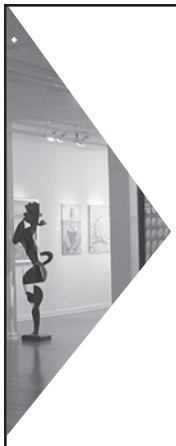
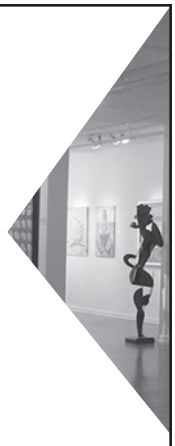
June 29-July 20th, 2005



Ian Chang



Reception: June 30th, 6-8pm

Agora Gallery

Gallery Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 12-6pm
415 West Broadway, SoHo New York, NY 10012
212 - 226 - 4151 / Fax: 212 - 966 - 4380
www.Agora-Gallery.com / www.Art-Mine.com

MFA
Western Connecticut State University
Master of Fine Arts

WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

MASTER OF FINE ARTS GRADUATE EXHIBITION

8 EMERGING ARTISTS

Lee Cordon
Heaven Lee Darling
Anne Flynn
Bridget Eileen Grady
Laurie Mathieson
Mounira Gareeva Stott
Tony Zatzick
Michael Lavoie

July 19 - August 6, 2005
Preview Reception: Thursday, July 21, 5-8pm
Opening Reception: Saturday July 23, 3-6pm

noho gallery

530 West 25th St., 4th Fl, NYC, 10001
Tues - Sat 11 - 6pm 212 367 7063

WEST SIDE ARTS COALITION

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Celebration

June 15-July 10, 2005

A multi-media exhibit

Lori Fischler and Jennifer Holst, co-curators

Opening Reception: **Saturday, June 18, 2:30-5:30**
Closing Reception: **Sunday, July 10, 2:30-5:30**

Khuumba Ama • Margo Mead • Carole Barlowe • Eliud Martinez
Meg Boe Birns • Peg McCreary • Myrna Changar • Betty Odabashian
Leila Elias • Mikki Powell • Brunie Feliciano • Jean Prytyskacz
Jutta Filippelli • Gloria Rosenberg • Lori Fischler • David Ruskin
Kathleen Gibbons • Robin Sacknoff • Patricia Gilman • Setta Solakian
Martin Hochberg • Marisa Stenson • Pud Houstoun • Elton Tucker
Irmgard Kuhn • Jan Wetzel • Rosa Maye • Marlene Zimmerman

Broadway Mall Community Center
Broadway at 96th St., NYC (center island)
Wed 6 - 8 pm/Sat & Sun 12 - 6pm 212 316 6024
wsacny@wsacny.org www.wsacny.org

Symbolic Gestures

August 17th - September 7th, 2005
Reception: Thursday, August 18th, 6-8pm

Tim Reed
Helga Kreuzritter
Shawn M. Agosta

Agora Gallery

Gallery Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 12-6pm
415 West Broadway, SoHo New York, NY 10012
212 - 226 - 4151 / Fax: 212 - 966 - 4380
www.Agora-Gallery.com / www.Art-Mine.com

In-sook Park

June 16 - June 30, 2005
Reception: June 16, 6 - 8 PM

Palisades Park Multimedia Center
257 2nd St, Palisades Park, NJ 07605
Tel. 201-585-4150

Gallery Hours:
Mon. - Thurs. 10 AM - 9 PM
Fri. 10 AM - 5 PM, Sat. 10 AM - 4 PM

ANN HAALAND

"Belief" 2005 36" x 36", oil on canvas

NEW WORK

August 6-27, 2005
Reception: Sat., Aug. 6, 5-8 pm

Wright Gallery
50 N. Front Street
Kingston, NY 12401
845-331-8217
annhaaland@optonline.net www.annhaaland.com

Gita Lapin-Treimanis

INHERITANCE

Mixed Media Installation

"Inheritance," mixed media and cloth, 62" x 21"

July 19-August 6, 2005
Reception: Saturday, July 23, 3-6PM

PLEIADES GALLERY

530 West 25 St., 4th Fl., New York, NY 10001
Gallery Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 11-6 pm
646-230-0056/Fax 646-230-0056
www.pleiadesgallery.com

INKLINGS

DRAWING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Selected Viridian Artists

Kelynn Alder
Carol Benisatto
Janet L. Bohman
Roger Bole
Jack Bolen
Sabine Carlson
May de Viney
Bernice Faegenburg
Rima Grad
Susan Hockaday
Taeko Imai
Kathleen King
Rosemary Lyons
Stacey Clarfield Newman
Bruce Rosen
Barbara K. Schwartz
Susan Sills
Virginia Smit
Phyllis Smith
Carol Yoshimine
Marjie Zelman

June 7 - 25, 2005

Opening Reception: Thurs. June 16, 3-6pm

VIRIDIAN ARTISTS @ CHELSEA
530 West 25th St., N.Y.C. 10001
Tel/Fax 212-414-4040 info@viridianartists.com
www.viridianartists.com tues - sat 10:30 - 6pm

Monkdogz.com
Urban Art

www.monkdogz.com **an internet art site**

Featured Artists
on website now:

Kelly Moore
Lou Patrou
Margherita Fascione
Mingming Bowerson
Jim Lawn
Karen Crosby
Armando Tejuca
Moin
Kathy Ostman-Magnusen
Cheryl Finfrock
Karin Momberg
Noriko Ohashi
Tom Irizarry
Ben Reche
David Novak
Mollie Kellogg

Right: Fight Fans "aka" The Management Team, 2005
Robert d. Hogge, creative consultant to monkdogz.com

This issue:
an interview with
Ed McCormack,
Managing Editor of
Gallery & Studio
Magazine.

Coming up:
The Art of Making Money
an interview with
The Morgan Mint
www.morganmint.com

Monkdogz is a communications tool, designed for the international arts community. Our goal is to present a platform and a showcase for artists from around the world to exhibit their work. We will make a concerted effort to keep the site fundamental and user friendly as to not detract from it's primary purpose, which is to represent art, talent and imagination. The only criteria will be a desire to create, inform, communicate and enlighten. Although we recognize and respect artists' right to be expansive in their pursuit of creating work, we will reserve the right not to exhibit work that is pornographic or is intended to demean or be prejudicial in nature.

Welcome to our World

Marina Hadley, publisher, Monkdogz Urban Art