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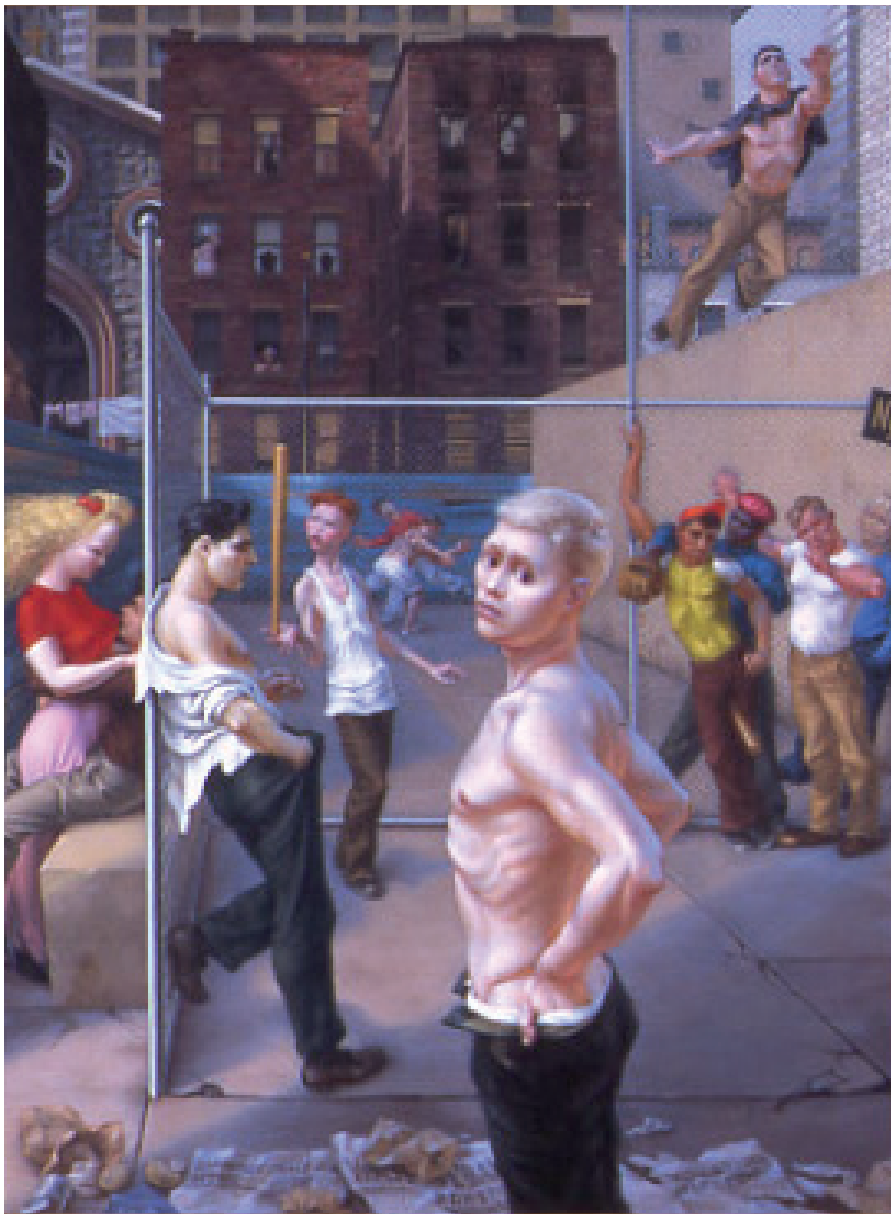
GALLERY&STUDIO

The World of the Working Artist



Paul Cadmus, Playground, 1948, Egg yolk tempera on masonite, 23 1/2 " x 17 1/2" (sight) Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia; University purchase Copyright: The Estate of Paul Cadmus, Courtesy DC Moore Gallery

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G&S Highlights

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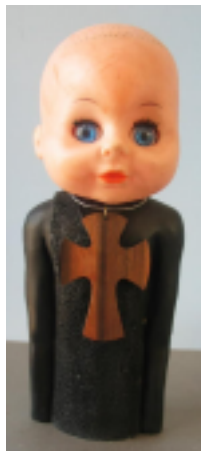
A chance encounter with Paul Cadmus' "Playground," in the collection of the Georgia Museum of Art, brought back memories of the bad old days in the writer's old neighborhood. This led him to reflect on other paintings that tell "stories the artist never intended." –Page 16



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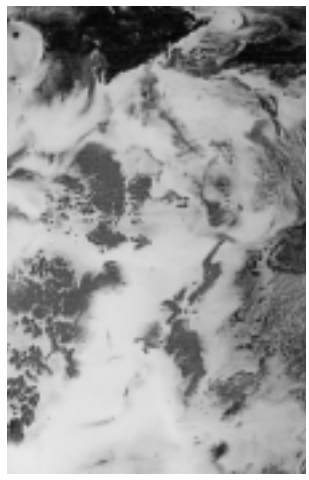

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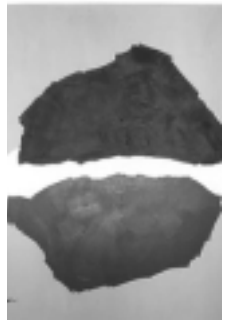

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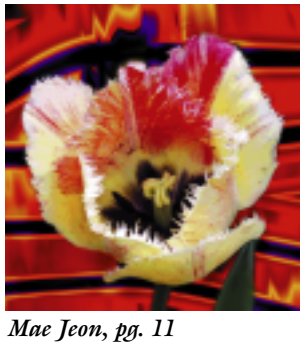

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Correction:
Reviewing the male artist Andrey Punchenko in our last issue, we referred to "her" acrylic paintings. Our apologies to Mr. Punchenko for this error.

Vincent Arcilesi's Angelic Contribution to the Whitney Biennial

As we all must know by now, the general critical consensus is that the 2006 Whitney Biennial is politically well-meaning but, for the most part, aesthetically wanting. The best rationale one of the more positive reviewers could offer was that this year's Biennial is "not about beauty"—as if it ever was, and as though that explains everything!

At least one artist in this show, however, is all about beauty, always has been; which, in the the present art scene, makes his work something of an anomaly and very much of an affirmation. The artist in question is the realist painter Vincent Arcilesi, whose huge early paintings of couples engaged in explicit sex acts probably sent more shock waves reverberating through the art world, when they were first exhibited in the 1970s, than Richard Serra's "Stop Bush," one of the more explicit protest pieces in this show, is likely to today.

"Angel of Peace"

Arcilesi's painting is included, along with works by Carl Andre, John Baldessari, Matthew Barney, Sol Lewitt, Yoko Ono, Nancy Spero, and Kiki Smith, among others, in the Biennial's "Peace Tower." Assembled by Mark di Suvero and Rirkrit Tiravanija, it is an update of "The Artist's Tower Against the War in Vietnam," a 1966 protest project conceived by Irving Petlin (a participant in both Towers), which included works by Robert Motherwell, Donald Judd, Larry Rivers, Mark Rothko, Frank Stella, and other major figures of that era. Every bit as relevant in regard to our current misadventure in Iraq, the new Tower is the centerpiece of the Biennial, rising just outside the museum entrance with its base planted in the Whitney Sculpture Court.

Vincent Arcilesi's contribution is a characteristically comely full-frontal nude with a serene expression and billowing white wings, sawing away, Muse-like, on a violin. Behind her, under a clear blue sky, the Capitol Building has never looked so classically pristine, the Washington Monument so...well, phallic. The title of the painting is "Angel of Peace," but given the palpable sensuality of the figure, it might as easily be titled (after the great old rhythm and blues song) "Earth Angel."

For Vincent Arcilesi, you see, is one artist who realizes that beauty is not only the best protest against organized brutality, but just may be the Last Taboo.

—The Editors

Another Side of Harriet FeBland's "Geometric Poetry"

A pioneer in the medium, Harriet FeBland's works appear in more than 35 books on the use of plastics in art. Besides being a highly regarded and widely exhibited sculptor and painter, however, FeBland is also an innovative printmaker. Proof positive can be seen in "One of a Kind," an exhibition comprised solely of FeBland's large monotypes, at Berkeley College, Main Floor Gallery, 3 East 43rd Street, from May 1 through June 1. (Reception, Thursday, May 4, from 5:30 to 7:30 PM.)

By virtue of her exacting technique, FeBland's monotypes bring an unusual degree of intricacy and subtlety to this most painterly of printmaking processes, so-named because it only produces one, unique image. The variety of effects that she combines within a single work are especially striking in the monotype she calls "Night Walk," with its small, silhouetted male and female figures serving as piquant emotional markers in a primarily abstract composition.

The two figures are seen amid black, jagged-edged forms that establish a mysterious suggestion of nocturnal shadows. As in the collages of Kurt Schwitters, elements of typography are a frequent motif in FeBland's compositions. Here, three representations of the letter "A" add semiotic resonance to bold rectangular forms filled with luminously modulated red, orange, purple and blue hues. More freely flowing linear elements that appear scratched or scored into the surface, rather than drawn, contrast sharply with the more precise geometric shapes in the composition. The overall effect is poetic, metaphysical, mysterious.

"Looking West"

Typography figures even more prominently in a slightly smaller monotype by FeBland called "Looking West," where various letters are juxtaposed with less decipherable signs resembling hieroglyphics, a form resembling a heart within a compass superimposed on a star, and other symbols in a composition that suggests a sense of yearning and wanderlust.

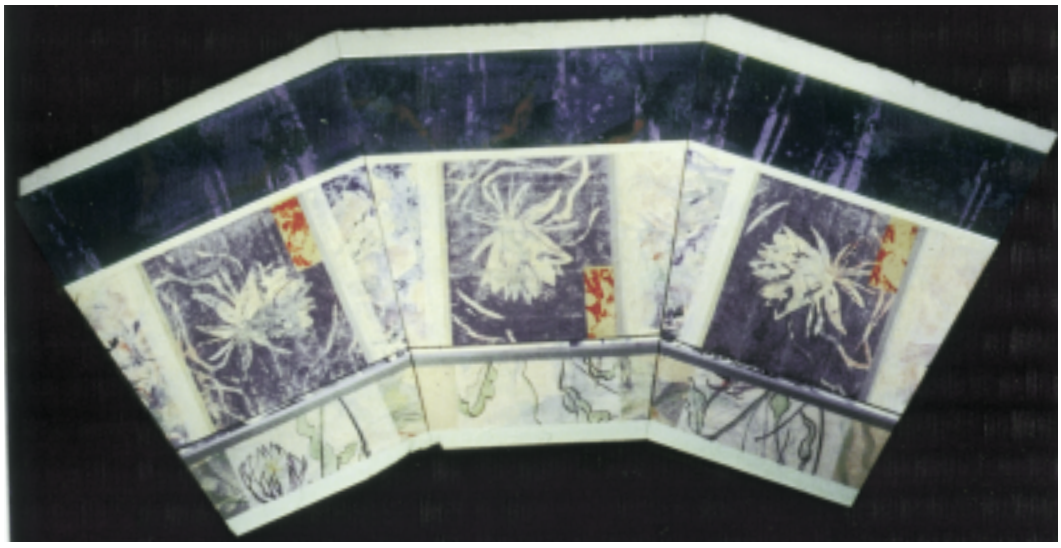
Often in FeBland's compositions, forms and images float unanchored on the picture plane with a sense of velocity that is reflected in such titles as "Free Fall" and "The Dive." The former monotype, which won an Award for Graphics in the 75th Annual Exhibition of the American Society for Contemporary Artists, features multicolored geometric shapes layered over a gestural ground, creating a visual sensation of plummeting. Among various floating abstract forms, the latter combines a large outline of a face in profile toward the bottom of the composition with two much smaller figures, one of which is up-side down, enhancing its overall effect of vertiginousness.

By contrast, FeBland employs that most anchored of formats, the grid, in a monotype called "Midnight Uptown." Yet even while adhering here to simple abstract forms, she arranges them within the thirty squares of the composition to subtly cinematic effect, evoking lunar phases and other aspects of space and time in a manner that makes clear why Paul Mocsanyi, the distinguished former director of the New School Art Center once said of FeBland, "She is the poet of geometry."

Indeed, the poetic aspects of Harriet FeBland's art have never been clearer than in this exhibition at Berkeley College, which by focusing on her monotypes reveals a more intimate side of the artist.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Bernice Faegenburg: A Vocabulary To Match Her Passions



"Night-Blooming Cereus"

Often when I am in Chinatown, I find myself stopping to admire handwritten signs as though they were paintings. In the 1960s and 70s, during the Cultural Revolution in China, these might have been rabid political diatribes. Today in New York City they are more likely to be pasted onto walls to advertise job opportunities or community meetings, or taped to restaurant windows to hawk Peking duck. Even when they are written in English with bold markers rather than brushed with black ink, these signs almost always have an unaccustomed fluency that makes the familiar letters appear as graceful as Chinese characters. And it often occurs to me that not many western painters, even ones who are accomplished and greatly respected in other regards, learn to wield a brush with the proficiency displayed even by laymen educated in China and Japan, where the brush is an instrument for writing as well as painting, and one's calligraphy is considered indicative of one's character.

Bernice Faegenburg an American artist who has studied and assimilated the techniques of Asian brush painting is an exception. Because she combines other elements such as photo transfer, computer imaging and other methods of printmaking more common to western visual expression with her graceful brushwork, Faegenburg's mixed media paintings often remind me of one of the things I find most arresting in Chinatown: walls covered with layers of posters in which all manner of photographic advertising images and other semiotic elements are randomly juxtaposed with those ubiquitous examples of casual calligraphy in visually vital "found compositions."

The only difference—and it is an important one—is that Bernice Faegenburg's compositions are anything but random, being among the most artful around. This will be obvious to anyone visiting Faegenburg's new solo exhibition at Viridian Artists @ Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, from May 2 to 20, with a reception on Saturday, May 6, from 4 to 6 PM.

The first thing that strikes one on entering the gallery is the unusual combination of lyricism and sheer visual impact in Faegenburg's works in acrylic and mixed media on canvas, most of which are extremely large. The piece called "Night-Blooming Cereus," for example is 105 inches wide and composed of three canvases connected in a kind of fan-shaped triptych, which gives it a sculptural presence akin to the shaped canvases of Minimalists like Robert Smithson and Charles Hinman. Here, however, the resemblance ends; for Faegenburg's work is anything but minimal. Rather, it is more akin in its baroque spirit to the the paintings of Robert Kushner, Kim MacConnell, Miriam Schapiro, and others influenced by Byzantine, Celtic, and Asian culture who emerged in the 70s and early 80s to challenge the taboo against pattern and decoration in Western art. But here, too, Faegenburg differs in that her use of repetition and symmetry in her compositions is less predictable, being invariably mediated by more spontaneous calligraphic elements, as seen in "Night-Blooming Cereus," where the directions of the three large floral prints in rectangle formats that dominate the composition are reversed and bordered by freely brushed linear forms.

The juxtaposition of geometric and gestural elements is another staple of Faegenburg's compositions that is especially effective in the large triptych she calls "Night Walk in the Jungle." The compositional armature of all three panels is the grid, which began as the underlying structure of the "cartoons" with which the old masters enlarged their drawings and transferred them to canvas prior to painting but moved to the forefront with Cubism, was taken up by contemporary artists like Agnes Martin and continues as a prominent motif of postmodernism. Faegenburg deconstructs the grid in her own unique manner with bold gestural bursts of blue, red, and yellow ocher acrylic paint, interspersed with large collaged rectangles on which she has painted bamboo in ink, paying tribute to one of the classical motifs from the Seventeenth Century Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting, the definitive illustrated text for learning the techniques of Chinese painting. Thus, in "Night Walk in the Jungle," the artist encompasses several centuries of Eastern and Western art, culminating in a quintessential pluralist work of postmodernism which also, by virtue of its gestural qualities pays tribute to Abstract Expressionism and in the process demonstrates what America's premier art movement assimilated from Asian calligraphy. Indeed, one could view this painting as a comprehensive history of the gesture, charting its trajectory right up to the present moment in the practice of a painter more qualified than most to undertake that journey.

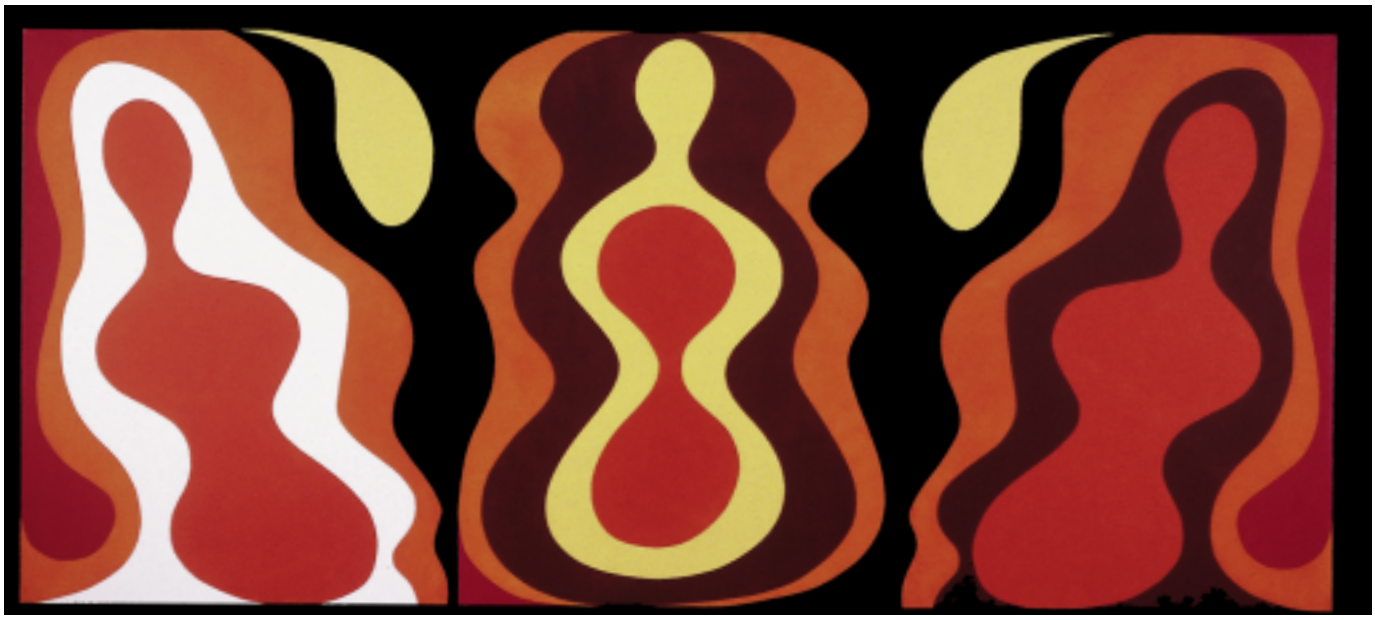
The grid also figures prominently in "Quilt" (its title suggesting a celebration of a folkloric art form practiced by women that has had a largely unheralded influence on geometric abstraction), where the squares are filled and overlaid by a veritable dance of brilliant brushwork, juxtaposed with photo-transfer elements that also signal a loose kinship with the combines of Robert Rauschenberg.

At the same time, Faegenburg takes an opposite approach to imagery. Where Rauschenberg endeavors to "act in the gap between life and art," as he once put it, Bernice Faegenburg strives to close that gap by including much more personal imagery, such as family photographs within her compositions. This is especially effective in works such as "Playtime" and "Tortuga," where family album pictures of children are juxtaposed with abstract forms in a manner demonstrating that unabashed affection can be expressed in contemporary art without becoming corny.

And in another, particularly powerful, mixed media work called "The Sky is on Fire" Bernice Faegenburg proves just as conclusively that a cataclysmic event such 9/11 can also be addressed affectingly by an artist whose visual vocabulary is equal to the depth and breadth of her passions.

—Ed McCormack

Zarvin Swerbilov Explores the Tantalizing Tension Between the Abstract and the Allusive



"Before, During, & After"

Although abstract painters often make light of their titles, or even substitute numbers for them, in order to avoid having us attach specific, unintended meanings to their compositions, it strikes one as significant nonetheless that Zarvin Swerbilov has chosen to call one of the most dynamic paintings in his new exhibition "Hero."

For Swerbilov, after all, is involved in what could be called, in the context of today's clamorous, novelty-ridden art scene, a heroic endeavor: following the path of pure form and color to create paintings that either stand or fall primarily on their plastic and chromatic attributes. That said, one should also hasten to add that, for all the formal orientation of Swerbilov's work and the deliberate stylistic limitations he imposes upon himself in order not to waver from his primary concerns, there have always been highly expressive and intriguingly allusive qualities in his paintings as well.

These have grown even more prominent in his latest works, and Swerbilov does little to discourage one from appreciating them when he employs titles such as "Mother & Child II" and "Man-Woman, III" in his solo show at Noho Gallery in Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, from May 2 through 20. (Reception: Saturday, May 6, from 4 to 6 PM.)

Swerbilov also seems to enjoy perpetrating visual puns, such as making the two dominant black and yellow forms in "Man-Woman III" resemble slightly distorted bowling pins, thereby compelling us to wonder if they are meant to symbolize how one can be bowled over by romance, or whether these shapes were arrived at for their formal qualities alone. And how could any viewer conversant with old movies not enjoy the playfulness of a title such as "Man Taken Aback By Veronica Lake" ?

Surely that wiggly yellow shape running down the center of the composition must be a reference to the blond locks that were forever hanging vampily over one of Veronica's beautiful eyes, veiling the screen goddess in mystery . . . Or was it simply put there to set off the equally curvaceous areas of red, orange, brown, and purple that really make the painting "pop" (one means visually—not Pop, as in Warhol).

Either way, it's a win-win situation, since the fun of such second guessing only serves to enhance the more serious pleasure Swerbilov provides by virtue of his unerring ability to dazzle one with emblematic abstract compositions combining brilliant colors and shapes that are simultaneously precise and sensual.

Thus, returning to the aforementioned "Hero" for a minute, one can be forgiven for seeing its figuratively evocative dominant form, looming at a slightly diagonal angle, from the perspective of a child being tucked into bed in the evening by its mother. For despite the contradictory gender designation inherent in the title, this "hourglass" shape (a familiar one from past shows) reads as decidedly feminine—perhaps further demonstrating that one interprets abstract paintings as though they were Rorschach tests at one's own peril; after all, if Swerbilov wished to provoke such an interpretation, wouldn't he have named this painting "Heroine"?

Well, not necessarily, if he also wished to avoid having it interpreted too literally to the detriment of its very considerable formal attributes, not the least of which being its lively dialogue between geometric and organic shapes. Here as in other paintings, Swerbilov happily explores such concerts, just as he exploits the tension between the abstract and the allusive. Apparently, he does so because he is confident that the abstract components in his compositions are strong enough to win out.

He is certainly correct in this assumption; for while titles such as "Space Baby," "Lucifer Rising" and "Queen & Consort," openly invite one to forage among the forms for figurative clues, even his most imagistically legible compositions— such as the magnificent mural-scale production called "Before, During, & After," with its three distinctly delineated feminine silhouettes—ultimately triumph on the strength of their nonobjective attributes. And that is only fitting for a painter as eminently eloquent in the universal language of pure form and color as Zarvin Swerbilov happens to be.

—Ed McCormack

Ernestine Tahedl: A Canadian Exponent of the Sublime

Although Ernestine Tahedl is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, and obviously has a stylistic relationship to the masters of French Impressionism, perhaps some of her closest aesthetic ancestors are the painters of the Hudson River School that Andrew Wilton and Tim Barringer celebrate in their definitive tome "American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States 1820-1880."

For like older American artists such as Thomas Cole, Frederic Edwin Church, and Asher B. Durand, Tahedl proves herself to be a contemporary exponent of sublimity in her stint as Artist in Residence at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, in Chelsea, from April 15 through July 15.

"Mountain Glow"

"Colour to me is light," Tahedl asserts in a recent artist statement; consequently, light permeates her large canvases. In "Mountain Glow," for one especially breathtaking example, a literal explosion of light bounces off the twin peaks of adjoining mountains and spills down their earthy surfaces to illuminate a body of water like quicksilver lightning.

This effect is accomplished by virtue of a chromatic subtlety akin to Monet. Indeed, Tahedl's kinship with the great Impressionist is also evident in other pictures, such as "Stillness," and "Shadow in the Pond," where her concentration on watery surfaces in compositions filled with fluent brushwork and translucent color verges on abstraction, (In this mode, "Bel Canto," a lyrical acrylic painting spanning three tall panels, is one of the highlights of the exhibition.)

However, Tahedl's relationship to the Hudson River School (whether she herself is aware of it or not) is particularly striking in some of her more panoramic compositions, such as the majestic mountain view called "Cloud Cover." Equally important, however, to the impact of Tahedl's pictures are their coloristic and atmospheric qualities, which the artist evokes through means even more related to those Hudson River School artists such as Gifford, Kensett, and Lane, who were sometimes referred to as Luminists.

For these artists, perhaps less beholden to external appearances than some of their peers, were also steeped in Transcendentalism. And Tahedl suggests a kinship with them when she states that her "intuitive rather than intellectual" approach to landscape painting "leads me towards the medieval concept of religious paintings and their spirituality..."

Indeed, the spiritual aura is unmistakable in paintings such as "Evening Serenade," with its lush, soft trees hanging like shrouds over luminously limned marshlands, the entire scene bathed in a golden glow, as well as in "Late in the Day," where the vast, light-filled sky, filled with delicate chromatic nuances, upstages the earth below. It is paintings such as this that make one eager to recognize that for all the superficial resemblances in Tahedl's paintings to the Impressionists—right down to the ubiquitous lily pads—one would be mistaken to categorize her as too easily as an artist whose primary concern, like theirs, is the transcription of optical effects of nature through an almost scientifically systematic application of color. For it is through less palpable means, apparently, that Ernestine Tahedl arrives at the intangible quality that endows her work with a sense of the sublime.

—Maureen Flynn

"Expressions": Drawing Upon the Graphic Impulse

The five artists in the exhibition "Expressions" either use drawing as a primary medium or do work that, in one way or another, has a great deal to do with drawing. They all seem to share certain graphic preoccupations, which have brought them together as a group. However, as in their previous exhibitions in the same venue, they reveal distinctly different approaches in their new show, "Expressions," at New Century Artists, 530 West 25th Street, which continues through April 15.

Perhaps the most radical "drawer" in the show for the simplicity of his means is Mark Lerer, who works in pencil, the most pedestrian of all mediums. Indeed, the simplicity of Lerer's drawings of comicbook superheroes, cowboys, and other subjects often favored by teenage boys who surreptitiously pencil their macho fantasies in their looseleaf books in class when they're supposed to be taking notes, gives Lerer's work its offbeat conceptual edge. Yet Lerer is a dynamic draftsman whose style indicates that, among vintage comicstrips, he would probably prefer the vital "crudeness" of Dick Calkins' "Buck Rogers" to the slick sophistication of Alex Raymond's "Flash Gordon." For Lerer's own pencil sketches, such as one of the superhero called "Submariner" sailing over the futuristic spires and domes of a sci-fi cityscape, combine a quirky primitive appeal with earnest nostalgia. Lerer's drawings are very much in sympathy with the post-punk aesthetic of Richard Pettibon and others who elevate supposedly lowbrow imagery by treating it with reverence and celebrating its honest expressive possibilities rather than with the campy satire of Pop.

By contrast, George C. Olexa shows sculpture and related prints in which he very deliberately seeks to forge a relationship between the two modes of expression in ways that are not immediately obvious. For example, Olexa references Picasso's harlequin pictures in a sculpture called "The Harlequin and His Fire Pole" by placing the red, white, and black patterns of the harlequin costumes in a minimalist context. In another piece, called "Drying Rack," partially printed images on strips of handmade paper hang from the wall on a found brass frame, creating an especially splendid synthesis of very different art forms. By means of what he calls an "abdicative process," Olexa realizes his goal of putting "pieces of objects together to create both tension and harmony."

Linda Ganus, who showed large drawings in previous exhibitions with this group has now transposed similarly draftspersonly qualities to very large paintings in oil on canvas based on the Tenniel's classic black and white drawings for Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland." Thus, Ganus employs painting to comment on drawing in a wonderfully peculiar manner, as seen in "Because He Knows it Teases," in which the figure of Alice is seen in a forest cradling a small creature that appears to be a dog wearing a babushka in her arms.

Linda Janus

Linda Dujack

Fritz Erismann

Mark Lerer

George Olexa

While references to Tenniel are clear—particularly in her more or less faithful depiction of Alice—Ganus embellishes the scene with imaginary improvisations and employs brushwork reminiscent of van Gogh to invest the picture with painterly vigor. Her strokes are especially expressive in the almost sinister, claw-like branches of the large, bare tree that towers over the two figures, enhancing their babes-in-the-woods vulnerability.

Fritz Erismann is deeply engaged with intuitive processes in the sequence of large format ink drawings he calls "Liquid Sketches," part of an ongoing sequence of "Dreamscapes." Fluid and intricate, these drawings in black and blue ink ensnare a seemingly infinite variety of subconscious suggestions in the net of their rhythmical linear configurations. In "Liquid Sketch I," the mazelike convolutions initially appear drawn in white ink over a black ground, highlighted with blotches of electric blue. However, the linear network is actually accomplished with the white of the paper through some process the artist prefers not to disclose, for fear of ruining the viewers' fun. Erismann's imagery, too, remains elusive, since his flowing line is richly allusive, yet alights on no specific meanings. Instead, one is obliged to Rorschach Erismann's drawings, navigating their cursive twistings and turnings, glimpsing hints of anatomy and other imagery in their baroque forms, but remaining tantalizingly unsure of one's own perceptions.

Linda Dujack has evolved a poetic vocabulary of abstract symbols and signs as hermetic as anything in contemporary art. Primarily a printmaker, best known for drypoints and colographs, Dujack works in intimate formats that enhance the feeling that one is privileged to be entering a private realm, where wispy biomorphic forms suggest enchanted landscapes, severely simplified figures, and primitive hieroglyphics on the verge of morphing into a fully readable language. Dujack's compositions provoke subtle responses by virtue of her ability to invest even the most rudimentary lines, scrawls, doodles, dots, and other, even less decipherable marks with sensual substance.

While the casual elegance of her ecriture rivals that of Cy Twombly, the scale on which Dujack chooses to work is closer to the that of Paul Klee, and is invested with a similar sense of mystery by virtue of her ability to evoke a miniature universe with minimal means.

Although line is Dujack's forte and the main vehicle for her creative excursions her compositions are augmented by delicate hues and tones that imbue them with hints of "atmosphere." Evocative titles, such as "Caravan" and "One O'clock Jump" also enhance the sense of a submerged narrative, continually unfolding in Linda Dujack's refreshingly unpretentious, exquisitely restrained little prints.

—Byron Coleman

Vincent La Gambina (1909-1994): A Wife's Memories, an Art World Romance

The story of Vincent and Grace La Gambina, which has to be one of the great love stories of recent art history, may have ended on the earthly plane with the painter's death on May 24, 1994, but it continues in the memory of his widow, who still works tirelessly to make the world aware of her late husband's artist legacy.

"Memories of him keep flooding my mind since he is gone," says Grace La Gambina, now 87. "Not a day, not an hour passes that I don't think of him and his work. Sometimes, I can still smell the turpentine."

She still has happy memories of the their years together, and speaks fondly of the W.P.A. era, in particular, when Vincent had a studio on 14th Street and many well-known artists were still living and working around Union Square Park.

"Speech making took place daily; it was a gathering place for 'Free Thinkers.' There was an Automat on 14th Street. Five cents for coffee, sit and talk as long as you want to. There was a well-known movie house and several other well-known places of business in and around the park. Artists were all over the place, so everyone knew one another. They were family."

Vincent La Gambina's oil on board, "Union Square—14th Street and Broadway," painted in 1945, captures the atmosphere of the city in their early years vividly. Fluffy white clouds float in a pale blue sky above the darker blue billboard of S. Klein's Department Store, looking South to Broadway. On the right side of the composition, lush green trees, kissed by sunlight, bloom along the sidewalk, where lithe young women dressed in the fashion of the 1940s pass to and fro, while a stout matron leans over to adjust the shoe of a little blond girl in a yellow dress and an elderly woman stands at a refreshment cart near the stone entrance to the park. La Gambina evokes all the color, light, and movement of the busy intersection in breezy strokes of textured pigment, immortalizing the spirit of a perfect day, rendering the fleeting moment immutable for all time.

In fact, it was on 14th Street that Grace first met Vincent, when he was teaching at the WPA's art school and she was a student there. Of course, she had no way of knowing then that she would soon become the wife of this young man who had arrived in New York from Sicily as a young boy in 1920, was soon orphaned, and would later be discovered and encouraged in his art by no less an eminence than Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia.

Now, for his widow, inhabiting that nostalgic time-warp where memory colors daily reality, even events such as the tragedy in West Virginia which recently dominated the news networks, call to mind works such as Vincent La Gambina's painting "Coal Mine Disaster, 1941." This powerful oil, now in the collection of the Wichita Art Museum" is painted in starkly contrasting lights and darks reminiscent of Goya or El Greco. While one miner holds a lantern aloft to light their way, two others carry a shirtless fellow worker, limp in their arms, while more shadowy figures aid injured comrades in the background. Emphasized by the cruciform character of the wooden beams in the infrastructure of the cavernous mine, the scene has all the gravity of a religious allegory such as "The Stations of the Cross," or a Pieta.

Union Square–14th Street & Broadway

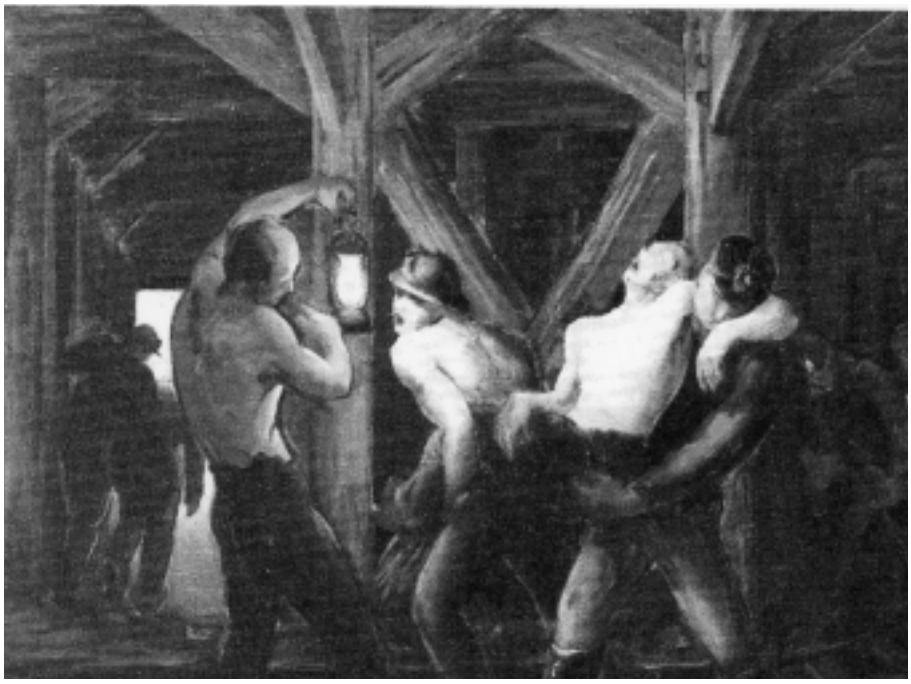
"There are several such paintings here, that were composed in the studio when he no longer went out," Grace La Gambina says, referring to the years after her husband took ill with a heart condition and his activities had to be curtailed.

"There were a few brief career moments that gave him some satisfaction, but all in all, his life was a struggle," she reflects. "The art politics always bothered Vincent. He could not play that game. There are still a few people who collect his work and a few who still think of him...I don't think he ever got the recognition he deserved."

However, those who admire her husband's work admire it passionately, among them Howard E. Wooden, Director Emeritus of the Wichita Art Museum, who has written, that La Gambina "awakens our consciousness to the rich potentials so often hidden in truth and unpretentious simplicity, in self-assurance and self-denial and sometimes even in deprivation and suffering."

And despite the suffering, Grace La Gambina also recalls the emotional and intellectual richness of life with Vincent: "We moved along in a hippy haze. We met just about everyone in the art field at some opening, exhibition, or other art function during the late fifties, early sixties, and so on...We never made the Long Island scene, but we spent many wonderful vacations in Provincetown, where many artists gathered during the Summer..."

Some of the joy that they experienced



"Coal Mine Disaster," 1941

comes across in La Gambina's genre paintings, particularly those of Coney Island, a favorite subject. One undated painting, "Merry-Go-Round, Coney Island" captures the excitement of children riding the carousel, while others kids and their parents gather around the ticket booth, waiting their turn. La Gambina accelerates the exhilarating sense of movement with the placement of bright balloons and flashes of colorful clothing dashed in here and there with staccato strokes reminiscent of the Irish painter Jack Yeats' vigorous depictions of racetrack scenes and similar revelry abroad.

By contrast, La Gambina takes a considerably more detailed approach in a beautiful sepia drawing of a woman's face surrounded by the heads of three carousel horses in a 1985 drawing which shows his stylistic kinship with Reginald Marsh. However, while Marsh was primarily a draftsman, and his paintings always have the "filled-in" look of colored drawings, rather than paintings, La Gambina was that rarity among social realists: "a painter's painter." Which is to say, he is able to flesh out a scene in pigment without getting bogged down in unnecessary detail, as seen in the almost Impressionistic handling of "Coney Island, 1960," a panoramic oil encompassing many figures on the beach with the ferris wheel, the parachute drop and amusement rides rising against the sky in the background.

Although this picture suggests the sense of a great deal of detail, it is actually painted in swift, vigorous strokes, as raw as those in the primitive industrial scenes of the renowned British painter L.S. Lowry. It is this bold and daring approach to subject matter, in fact, that gives the paintings of Vincent La Gambina their enduring vitality and an aesthetic vitality that surpasses that of most of his social realist peers.

"Merry-Go-Round" Coney Island

"She tempts him with her body and if that is not enough, she'll give him cotton candy."

But let's give Grace La Gambina the last word, as she interprets another painting by her late husband of a statuesque, scantily clad showgirl holding up cotton candy like a torch as she watches an earnest young man lifting a hammer to test his strength in an amusement park game: "She tempts him with her body and if that is not enough, she'll give him cotton candy. He is young and beautiful and will do anything to please her. He will even hit the bell and it will fly off into space...All metaphors...It is, of course, what Vincent thought of life."

And what better metaphor than this painting for her own ongoing romance with the memory of the unsung American master for whom she still carries the torch. —Jeannie McCormack

Examples of Vincent La Gambina's work can be seen at www.lagambina.com and all inquiries should be made in writing to his widow, Grace La Gambina, at 5624 San Pablo Dam Road, El Sobrante, CA 94803.

Vital Reflections of the New African Diaspora

The loose coalition of emerging artists who exhibit together under the banner "Blacker Than Thou," often in league with the West Side Arts Coalition, appear to share a common belief that the essence of a culture reveals itself not in lofty rhetoric but in the everyday lives of the people. At least this is what came across most compellingly in their recent exhibition "Painted Reflections," at Broadway Mall Community Center on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street.

With an unsentimental authenticity that eludes Norman Rockwell, Al Johnson makes an intimate moment monumental in his affecting painting of an embrace between a middle aged man and his elderly mother, inspired by his father's last visit with his own mother in Jamaica. Johnson also revitalizes the tradition of still life, turning another painting of a bottle of beer wrapped in a brown paper bag into a powerful symbol of failed hope.

Yasmin Hernandez puts a human face on myth in a mixed media painting inspired Yoruba Goddess Oya Yansan: a beautiful black woman with fierce eyes wielding a machete under a night sky illuminated by lightning.

The figure of a pregnant nude woman with flowing dreadlocks is combined with equally shapely large sunflowers in three neo-expressionistic oils on canvas by Nicole Folkes, their compositions conveying a sense of fertility with near-mystical intensity.

The artist known as Anton employs the figure in a more dispersed manner, making human torsos and masks merge with abstract forms in a gestural manner. Somewhat influenced by Jean-Michel Basquiat, yet possessed of their own funky originality, Anton's paintings appear inspired in equal parts by Abstract Expressionism and urban graffiti.

Ray Dufresne combines painting and sculpture in mixed media assemblages in which a man's dreadlocks are fashioned from real rope or a woman's ringlets are formed by what appears to be lengths of toilet-chain. Studded with nails, wire crosses, and other found objects, Dufresne's pieces project a palpable physicality.

The tradition of the icon is updated in the paintings of Corinne Innis, who surrounds her images with painted frames textured with acrylic modeling paste, paints halos around the heads of her faux-primitivistic figures, and adds dime-store lizards to the composition as three-dimensional elements, among other intriguing devices. Innis' mixed media paintings are at once folkloric and visionary in a manner that suggests a unique aesthetic sensibility.

David Shrobe's paintings are invariably possessed of a youthful energy that veers between the abstract and the figurative with an admirable intrepidness. Here, Shrobe was represented by three abstractions in which vigorous gesture overruled any hint of subject matter, conveying sheer joy in the act of painting.

Rod Ivey's acrylic on canvas, "A Baseball Card For Smokey" has a nostalgic quality, suggesting that it may allude to the great ball players in the old Negro Leagues who, never got their proper due in a blatantly racist era. In any case, the painting resonates hauntingly.

By contrast, Jennifer Ivey projects a joyful immediacy in her severely cropped composition focusing on the brilliant smiles of African women with dangling earrings. The emblematic post-Pop impact of Ivey's painting is akin to some of the best work of older painters such as Tom Wesselman and Alex Katz, yet her Afrocentric point of view imbues the picture with a broader spectrum of meaning.

—Peter Wiley

Six Digital Artists Dazzle in Chelsea Group Show

"Pixel Perfect: The Digital Art Exhibition" at Agora Gallery has become an important periodic barometer of trends in state of the art image making, as evidenced by the latest installment in the series in the gallery's Chelsea space, 530 West 25th Street, from May 10 through 30. (Reception: May 11, from 6 to 8 PM.)

Mexican artist Pablo Camilo Vergara chooses themes that enable him to indulge a fondness for contrasts between the numinous and the shadowy in his inkjet prints on canvas. His chromatic skill and penchant for dramatic symbolism are especially striking in "Wandering Angel," in which the subject, seen in closeup within a nocturnal forest partly illuminated by her aura, has a decidedly earthly beauty. Conversely, "Arcane Angel" is a somewhat more ethereal vision, with the figure enveloped by radiant swirls.

Edith Suchodrew, an artist born and trained in Latvia, who has lived in Germany since 1991, brings wide-ranging experience in oil painting and other traditional mediums to bear in digital C-prints bursting with baroque forms and blazing with brilliant colors. One can only describe Suchodrew's compositions as visionary, given their synthesis of abstraction and figurative elements, suggesting some alternate reality or higher consciousness in which the effects of light and color are considerably heightened.

By contrast, Adi Rizansky Nir, an artist living and working in Israel, finds inspiration for her inkjet prints on canvas enhanced by painting in scientific sources. Microscopic images of molecular cell culture are blown up to easel scale and employed as stepping stones to abstraction in Nir's compositions, informed by her study of biology and Masters Degree in Science. Nir calls her work "a case of art imitating life in the most literal of senses." Yet her prints go far beyond the literal interpretation of scientific phenomena, becoming abstract evocations with a metaphysical dimension that transcends even the most advanced reaches of science.

The conceptually witty French artist Ben Boutin likes to insert himself into his digital prints becoming an actor in dramas of his own devising, such as one in which he presides over a contemporary Last Supper. Especially piquant is "Ben Boutin Giving a Piece of Advice Regarding the War," in which the artist appears between George Bush and Tony Blair wearing a t-shirt that says, "Jesus is Coming." Even more germane than the artist's incongruous presence is his dressed-down appearance and insouciant expression. He casts his deadpan gaze on Blair as though noticing dandruff on his shoulder.

Another bright visual wit, New York artist Marco Mark puts a new spin on Pop in digital etchings on photograph paper with self explanatory titles such as "Britney in a Campbell Soup Can Headdress" and "Warhol Factory." Framing fragmented icons of high and low culture within geometric compositions and strident hues, like Warhol himself, Mark applies his commercial experience as a former art director in a fine art context, creating images as effortlessly persuasive as a well-oiled ad campaign.

As founder of a successful ad agency in the Netherlands, Leon Kipping is another artist with commercial expertise. However, Kipping prefers to separate his fine art from his professional experience, creating images digitally, transferring them to canvas, and painting over them with acrylic. The resulting compositions are primarily abstract explorations of form, color, and texture that often allude to landscape or floral imagery but engage us most immediately with their sheer formal beauty.

—Maurice Taplinger

The Digital Art Mae Jeon Casts Floral Subjects in a New Light

Since ancient times, nature has been used in Chinese art to symbolize human nature. In the words of Laurence Binyon, "the winds of the air have become man's desires, and the clouds his wandering thoughts; the mountain-peaks are his lonely aspirations, and the torrents his liberated energies." Flowers, in particular, have feminine associations, according to the critic and art historian Hugh Honour, who writes, "Women in their youth and beauty are compared to young blossoms and every tree and flower is thought to be the reincarnation of a woman's spirit."

Knowing the place that flowers have in the venerable traditions of Chinese painting enhances one's enjoyment and understanding of the Chinese artist Mae Jeon, whose light-filled giclee prints are on view at World Fine Art Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, in Chelsea, from May 2 through 27, with a reception on May 11 from 6 to 8 PM.

For although Mae Jeon is a digital artist, employing state of the art technology to realize her visions in a vibrant contemporary style, her work harks back to the very origins of Asian iconography. However, while traditional Chinese artists employed flowers as set symbols—peach blossoms bloom in spring and therefore can denote carefree youthful pleasures, while chrysanthemums, which bloom in mid-autumn, often symbolize the more contemplative mood of maturity—in the art of Mae Jeon floral subjects evoke a more subtle range of private feelings, as befits the complexity and individual consciousness of the modern world.

"Unceasing Anguisy"

"I found similarities between the frailty in flowers and my emotions," the artist states. "I placed flowers in digitally created space, which I discovered during my creative journey. The flowers in these pieces express my emotional and spiritual feelings. . ."

Although some might consider the computer a more impersonal instrument than the brush and ink used in traditional Chinese culture, Mae Jeon says, "I feel an interactive bond when using the digital medium to explore creative possibilities."

In her giclee print "Expectation," for example, Jeon melds elements of eastern and western art, revealing a kinship with Cubism. Delicate yellow flowers and green leaves are dissected in fractured planes, appearing to swirl as though caught in a vortex, evoking a sense of urgency, of a muted emotional intensity akin to the poetry of Emily Dickinson. By contrast, in another work called "Fragile Moment," a single pink flower, its petals spread out gracefully, seems to tremble against a luminous blue-violet ground, further enlivened by slender green shoots.

While in "Fragile Moment," the emotion of the title manifests in the chromatic contrasts between the various elements, in "Grieve Together," a sense of melancholy is conveyed in the closer values of the three clustered deep purple flowers and the surrounding green hues, dotted with drops of dew that appear greatly enlarged, as if to symbolize monumental tear-drops.

Color is central to the art of Mae Jeon, serving as a conduit of emotional nuances, and various hues appear to signify specific states of being. Thus, In both "Temptation" and "Unceasing Anguish," a vibrant range of various reds indicate a visceral relationship between passion and pain. Conversely, in "Source of Hope, white petals, inflected with hints of pale secondary hues, convey an uplifting sense of spiritual purity, revealing Mae Jeon's ability to convey a host of subtle emotional shadings.

Yet what this gifted artist does on a purely visual level is equally important in terms of appreciating the formal sophistication of her work, as well as the remarkable expressiveness she achieves with her medium. Witness, for example, the tonal and textural contrasts in the print she calls "Separation," where the gossamer delicacy of the softly shadowed white petals is set off by the gray background, which has the grainy quality of pencil shadings. Notice, too, the surreal quality of the silvery, swirling forms behind the pink flower in the foreground of "Wishing Well," which so skillfully evokes the watery allusion in the title.

There is also an element of Pop in Mae Jeon's prints, their luminous colors and their dynamic cropping akin to James Rosenquist's billboard-derived imagery, albeit presented on an intimate scale more suited to the lyricism of her subjects. The iconic quality of her flowers, however, is even more akin to Georgia O'Keeffe's emblematic modernism —especially the manner that she shares with the older artist of transforming botanical subjects into enduring feminine icons. Indeed, her gift for making visual statements that finally transcend the personal emotions which provide their impetus, becoming universal emblems, makes the digital art of Mae Jeon so much more than the mere sum of its parts.

—Peter Wiley

Robert S. Neuman's Continuing Five Decade Journey

For Robert S. Neuman, every series seems to spring from an epiphany. The inspiration for Neuman's "Barcelona Paintings," for example, literally came to him in a flash of light, after seeing sunshine stream through a narrow alleyway while he was in Spain on a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1956.

Not only evoking the ethereality of light in the succulent material substance of vigorously manipulated oil pigments, but also making it the linchpin of the composition, the series is among the highlights of "Robert S. Neuman: Fifty Years," a retrospective of the painter's thematic abstractions, seen recently at Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th Street.

Neuman, who taught at Harvard in the 1950s, was recently honored at the university's Fogg Museum, where he was included in an exhibition of modern masters. Now eighty and still at the top of his game, he appears ripe for belated induction into the canon of American abstraction. One can only guess that Neuman, whose last solo show at Allan Stone was in 1972, has escaped being better known in New York because he has spent a good deal of his career in teaching posts in places like Boston and New Hampshire, rather than in cold water lofts in downtown Manhattan.

The up-side of his distance from the epicenter of the art scene is that Neuman has been free to explore various serial obsessions sans the pressure to ossify into a so-called signature style. Thus we find him reacting to postwar angst and gravity while on a Fullbright in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1953, with a series of "Black Paintings" notable for their tactile surfaces enlivened by graffiti-like incisions and scrawls. A mere three years later, however, his palette brightens and his brushwork grows more lush in the aforementioned "Barcelona Paintings." This series culminates at the end of the decade with "Cinco Vistas de Betran y Serra," a majestic work spanning five stately panels and informed by a buoyant gestural lyricism.

That no logo-like sameness limits Neuman's vision is perhaps most evident in the fine distinction that he makes between painting and drawing— between untrammeled gesture and linear descriptiveness, making the latter discipline an autonomous aspect of his oeuvre, in which he can indulge the penchant for baroque nautical imagery and fantastic figurative allusions that we see in his "Voyage" and "Ship to Paradise" drawings.

"I could just spend the rest of my life drawing," Neuman has said. And indeed his riotously colorful mixed works on paper of the 1970s and 80s seem to anticipate the work of a new generation of postmodern

"Lame Deer Greasy Grass" 1998

artists, like Ernesto Caivano and Zak Smith, who actually do make drawing their main medium to explore elaborate personal myths and nonlinear narratives. (Similarly,"Space Signs #3," 1968, from Neuman's hard-edge geometric period, anticipates the floating-eyeball school of cartoon-influenced abstraction that is presently all the rage in Japan, even while glancing back to Kandinsky.)

But perhaps the best news of all about this five-decade survey is that some of the most recent works—such as the large 1998 canvas "Lame Deer Greasy Grass," in which rudimentary teepee-shapes set within what Robert S. Neuman refers to as "the chromatic landscape" —are among the most impressive.

—Ed McCormack

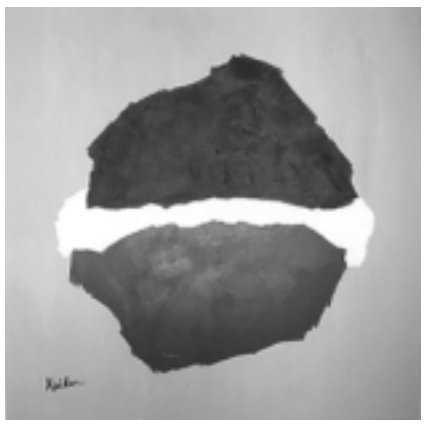
The Creative Rebirth of Robert John Keiber

While the title "Paintings Out of the Ashes" might suggest an exhibition of Holocaust art, it actually refers to the literal resurrection of twenty canvases, painted over two decades ago, which were destroyed three years ago in a fire that gutted the Yonkers home and studio of Berkeley College professor and artist Robert John Keiber.

Devastated by the loss and perhaps thinking that a change of scene might help him make a new start, Keiber relocated to Greenwich Village, but finding himself unable to paint, eventually moved back to Yonkers. However, almost as soon as he was settled into the larger, brighter studio that he hoped would inspire him to resume working, he was diagnosed with throat cancer.

The crisis spurred the artist to duplicate the paintings lost in the fire, working from memory and photographs while undergoing radiation, chemotherapy, and surgery. The upshot is that Keiber not only considers the new works superior to the original ones, but credits painting them with helping to restore his health.

And there it might end—nothing more than what the newspapers call a good "human interest story"—if not for the genuine aesthetic interest of the paintings, on view at Berkeley College's Midtown Campus Gallery, main floor lobby, 3 East 43rd Street, from April 1 through 30. (The gallery is open to the public Monday through Friday, from 9 AM to 7 PM, and Saturday from 9 AM to 3 PM. There will be a reception for the artist on April 13 from 5:30 to 7:30 PM.)



"Pepsi Color Heart"

Keiber's abstract acrylics, which often feature roughly circular central forms on vibrant color fields, bear favorable comparison to the work of the Texas visionary Forest Bess, who believed his forms to be universal symbols emanating directly from the "collective unconscious" espoused by Carl Jung, with whom he carried on a long correspondence. However, Keiber's paintings can just as easily spring from the American vernacular, a soupçon of Pop adding tang to their subjective symbolism.

"Pepsi Color Heart," for example, makes a brashly original statement with an image and colors suggesting, but not quite appropriating, the red, white, and blue logo of our second most ubiquitous soft drink; while "Loony Tune Heart" seems to take its title and inspiration from the emblem that appears on the screen at the end of Warner Brothers cartoons, from which an animated character appears, declaring, "That's all, folks!"

Another canvas called "Ghost Heart" employs similar forms in a palette of monochromatic gray tones, while a larger painting in a horizontal format, "Desolate Heart Cruising," sets a more somber incarnation of Keiber's signature shape afloat against a deep red ground, provoking a more visceral response in the viewer.

One could read all manner of meanings, either ironic or esoteric, into this series, as well as into other paintings such as "America" and "Outer Space," which employ a more varied formal vocabulary with the same compellingly raw directness. However the real theme of the show seems to be the creative rebirth. And that is good news for all of us in the case of an artist as innately talented as Robert John Keiber.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Images of the Seasons at Broadway Mall

Eleven photographic artists celebrated the cycles of nature in "The Four Seasons," a recent exhibition, co-curated by Jennifer Holst and David Ruskin, of West Side Arts Coalition members, at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street.

Like the paintings of Lorraine Shemesh or David Hockney, Robin Glasser Sacknoff's digital prints of children playing in a swimming pool are colorful studies of shimmering light, translucent color, and the movement of water. However, the youthful exuberance of Sacknoff's young subjects romping in their colorful bathing suits makes them especially appealing.

Stephen Weintraub evokes seasonal contrasts in the wilderness in his digital print of cabins in a desolate encampment in Autumn and another, more pastoral, image of a pond surrounded by lush foliage in Spring. Weintraub lets nature speak for itself, heightening its innate poetry with his astute sensitivity to nuances of color and light.

Alice Ng merges the formal and the bucolic in her digital C-prints of scenes in the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, the Catskills, Bear Mountain, and Prospect Park. Especially notable were Ng's diptych of a snowy winter scene in the Catskills in which two images of the same red barn and silo create compositional ballast.

The handcolored photographs of David Ruskin are among the most unabashedly romantic images in contemporary art. Here, the subject allowed Ruskin's lyricism to run rampant through Winter, Summer, and Autumn, with delicate tints that lent scenes in Central Park and Scranton Pennsylvania the soft-focused beauty of a dream.

By contrast Jos Wes' witty digital photos interpreted all four seasons through matter-of-fact symbols in an urban melieu: green buds on a huge tree behind the Metropolitan Museum in Spring; a boy riding a bike through an alleyway in Summer; a plein air painter on a leaf colored lawn in Autumn; a lone pedestrian dwarfed by the human faces on a large billboard in Winter.

Given the climate of the locale, the seasons are less distinguishable in Leila Elias' C-prints of Brazil. Exotic landscapes where strange natural formations mimic the heads at Stonehenge, large lounging rodents, graceful white waterbirds, and other exotic flora and fauna evoke an Edenic ambiance in Elias' gorgeous views.

Janice Wood Wenzel, on the other hand, makes what is near at hand picturesque in her views from her West Side window. In one digital print , we gaze down upon a bustling vista of Broadway on a brilliant Autumn day; in another Wenzel gives us the same scene shrouded in snow that almost drains it of color, with tiny pedestrians trudging through the gutter under the towering apartment buildings like travelers amid mountains in an ancient Chinese ink painting.

Then there is Eliud Martinez, whose still life sequence of four digital prints reflects the beauty of change and the seasons by recording the life cycle of captive African tulip tree flowers. From their budding, through their brilliantly colorful blossoming, to their final end in tatters in a bowl, Martinez' sequence creates a poignant metaphor for the transience of all living things.

In a series called "Side of the Road," Deena Weintraub focuses on things that are often unnoticed and uncelebrated from season to season. Employing the exquisitely subtle monotones of the silver gelatin print, Weintraub delineates the distinctive textures of overgrown grass, dry weeds, rocks, a rotting wooden gate, and—most symbolically— a fallen tombstone.

The photomontages of Harriet G.Green accentuate the patterns in nature to achieve the formal symmetry of tantric mandalas. Straddling photography and painting, Green's nature-based abstractions recall the evocative forms and rhythms of Arthur Dove.

Frequent exhibitor Jean Prytyskacz employs black and white photography to imbue her subjects with poetic shades of meaning. Especially lovely here is Prytyskacz's picture of the footprints left by some creature (a bird, most likely) in an expanse of sand, suggesting the graceful delicacy of Chinese calligraphy. —Byron Coleman

WSAC Group Show Features Varied Visual Frequencies

"Shouts & Whispers," a play on the name of an Ingmar Bergman film, was the promising premise for an exhibition of the West Side Arts Coalition, curated by Margo Mead and seen recently at Broadway Mall, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street.

The worked ranged from the strident to the lyrical. Among the latter were the oils of Elizabeth Moore, depicting mountainous Icelandic landscapes with an emphasis on soft clouds and the shimmer of light on water. At the same time, Moore's paintings are possessed of formal qualities to match their evocativeness.

Margo Mead also paints mountainous subjects, merging the linearity of traditional Chinese landscape with the fractured planes of Cubism. The incisive grace of Mead's calligraphic ink line is further enhanced by luminous washes of blue and green watercolor.

By contrast, Isak E. Yoxin's abstract mixed media works merge bright colors and bold forms. Among Yoxin's best works are geometric compositions assembled like mosaics from small squares of cut and painted canvas.

Somewhere between shouts and whispers, the color woodcuts and etchings of Pauline Roony are notable for their semiabstract evocation of jungle foliage, rhythmic hills, among other organic forms and natural forces. Especially dynamic was one woodcut in which angularly stylized lightning cracks illuminated a stormy purple sky.

The mixed media assemblages of Elton Tucker feature splatters and drips of brilliant pigment built up in thick impasto, their surfaces further encrusted with small objects.Tucker's inventive use of a rubber ball for a sun in one work and beads and bits of glitter in others attests to the uninhibited approach that makes his work such a tactile delight.

Ann Rudder's floral compositions offer quieter pleasures with their delicately delineated forms and soft colors. Rudder's use of pen and ink with pale watercolor washes suggests an aesthetic introversion visually akin to the literary sensibility of Emily Dickinson.

A hushed atmosphere also pervades the paintings of Ava Schonberg, with their muted color harmonies and austere, formal surfaces. Especially evocative here was Schonberg's acrylic on canvas depicting an ice cream stand on a deserted boardwalk which projected a mood somewhere between Edward Hopper and Wayne Thiebaud.

Mickki Powell, on the other hand, almost made one hear the music of the "New Orleans Band" she painted in brilliant colors enclosed in black outlines that gave her composition a similarity to stained glass. Powell's work is invariably notable for its combination of formal and humanistic qualities.

Carol Carpentieri's playful wit reminds one of Saul Steinberg. Improvisation plays an important role in Carpentieri's drawings, as seen in one lively drawing in which rivulets of randomly poured black ink or watercolor become the elongated legs of ballerinas.

Equally inventive in another manner, the hard-edged acrylic paintings of Miguel Angel consistently combine strong formal and evocative qualities. Angel's diamond shaped composition, "Ode to an Enduring City," for example, juxtaposes precise color areas reminiscent of Mondrian with a novelty store metal statuette of the New York skyline to striking effect.

Then there is Madi Lanier, another artist frequently seen in WSAC exhibitions, who is represented here by an abstract monoprint with watercolor, conjuring up the movement of the ocean with spare grace, as well as a swiftly brushed image of a winter tree as succinct as a Zen scroll painting.

"Shouts & Whispers" lived up to its promise; for while the frequency varied, the tone was consistent.

—Maureen Flynn

Geodetic Markers and Secular Rituals in the Art of von Schmidt

Although perhaps not as surreal as the spectacle of Bob Dylan singing "Knocking on Heaven's Door" during a command performance at the Vatican for the same Pontiff in 1997, the conceptual artist von Schmidt presenting Pope John Paul II with his sculpture "Ideals of Aaron" at a special audience in 2005, documented in a sequence of photographs, is a study in contrasts.

With his silver hair and square jaw, sporting an elegant dark suit, von Schmidt looks more like an idealized business tycoon in a fashion layout in Esquire or Gentleman's Quarterly than any stereotypical image of an artist, as he presents the frail, ailing Pope with his crystal sculpture of two hands holding a globe, commissioned for the occasion by the Pave-the-Way Foundation.

The purpose of the audience, held in the Clemintine Hall of the Apostolic Palace of the Vatican and attended by more than 100 Jewish leaders, rabbis, and cantors from around the world, was to honor the pontiff for his accomplishments in improving relations between Catholics and Jews.

"After Gary Krupp, the president of Pave-the-Way and one of only seven Jewish Papal Knights in history, praised John Paul II for his groundbreaking policies toward Jews, and for his opening of diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Israel," the text of a press release issued by the artist informs us, "three rabbis blessed the Pope with a traditional Jewish prayer. Then von Schmidt was called up, and with Oded Ben-Hur, the Israeli Ambassador to the Holy See standing behind him, he presented the crystal sculpture to the leader of the Catholic Church, who reached out and caressed the sculpture before warmly greeting the sculptor."

The event and its documentation is thoroughly in keeping with von Schmidt's creative approach, suggesting the Photo-Op as Conceptual Artwork. And it serves as an auspicious introduction to "Von Schmidt: Time & Space," a solo by the widely-exhibited artist, a graduate of Cooper Union and self-described "former assistant of a student of a student of Rodin," at Noho Gallery in Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, from April 11 through 29.

"The earth, subject to cataclysms, is a cruel master," Robert Smithson once declared in an interview with Gregoire Muller, and von Schmidt would probably concur, given that his new exhibition documents thirteen places around the world with one thing in common: all were, at one time or another, visited by disastrous floods.

Each piece is entitled "Antediluvian Memories," with a suffix identifying the locale. Each is conceived as a "portable geodetic marker" (geodesy, according to Webster, being "a branch of applied mathematics that determines the exact positions of

"Antediluvian Memories–New Orleans," 2005

points and the figures and areas of large portions of the earth's surface, the shape and size of the earth, and the variations of terrestrial gravity and magnetism"), and consists of a hermetically sealed glass vessel containing water and earth collected from a specific site. With the exception of the first piece in the series, "Antediluvian Memories —Paducah," in which the glass container was handblown by the artist, each takes the form of a ready-made hourglass within a wood support hand turned by von Schmidt.

The hourglass is a significant symbol for von Schmidt who, in a recent email to this writer, asked rhetorically, "What is time? The passage of events recorded in man's memory? Does time really exist, or could it be that there is no past, no future, just the present—for always? When we visit the site of an historical event we voyeuristically relive that event. Does that event then still exist? Is that 'moment in time' preserved in the earth and space of that place? These portable 'geodetic markers' preserve elements of those particular sites. The tangible evidence of place has been collected and hermetically sealed in these containers and brought together to bear witness. Is this hallowed ground? Are those events now in the gallery?"

Certainly a part of the artist's past is contained in "Antediluvian Memories— Paducah," 1995, begun on his birthday in the port city of Southwest Kentucky where he was born, which has frequently been flooded by the Ohio River. He initiated the series by collecting water from that river and soil from the grounds of Riverside Hospital in Paducah. A decade later, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, von Schmidt collected water from the Mississippi River and the earth that it flooded to create "Antediluvian Memories —New Orleans, 2005," one of the most affecting works in the exhibition, given our still-vivid communal memory of heartwrenching news photos, sound bites, and TV footage of the havoc wreaked on the people there.

Those memories come back in a flood of their own, on encountering von Schmidt's installation in Noho Gallery, which includes large color photos of the bank of the Mississippi with a derelict riverboat docked nearby, and of the lawn of a small yellow cottage which had been battered by the storm. In both photos, one can see the yellow tape, designating an "ART SCENE" that von Schmidt employs to outline the area from which the water and soil samples are collected. This tape, based on the yellow tape used by the police to close off a "CRIME SCENE" is also draped around the white pedestal on which the hour glass sculpture containing the samples rests, linking the site in the photo to the sculpture, enhancing the metaphysical notion of the event flooding into the gallery, baptising it as "hallowed ground." And the effect is particularly poignant in "Antediluvian Memories — New Orleans," where the connection between "ART SCENE" and "CRIME SCENE" seems pointed, given the governmental neglect that compounded the natural cataclysm.

Except for the site in Indonesia, where artists enlisted by a local gallerist he contacted on the Internet did it for him, Von Schmidt traveled to Shinnecock, Johnstown, Galveston, Key Largo, Venice, Holland, Dresden, and Prague, to collect the samples personally. Since it is "prohibited" to import foreign soil to the U.S., he was required to get a "soil permit" (included in the exhibition) from the Department of Agriculture—all in a day's work for a conceptual project of this magnitude.

Also included is the piece that was the genesis for the geodetic marker series, a chunk of granite collected from Malignant Bay, Nova Scotia, during the total eclipse of the sun there in 1972, into which the artist has carved a little plateau to hold the silver and gold "Monument to Malignant Bay" from which this work takes its name. In its place, von Schmidt left an unfired clay sculpture, which would "melt" in the rain.

Such improvised gestures and rituals, fraught with thought-provoking implications for how a spiritual dimension might be reintroduced into a secular society increasingly losing touch with meaningful ceremonies, is what von Schmidt's art appears to be all about.

—Ed McCormack

SUBTEXTS: Creativity, Criminality,

by Ed McCormack

Every bit as much as popular songs, which seem to have a similar affect on other people, paintings have always evoked memories for me. Of course, every sophisticated person knows that painting is not literature. ("If you have a message," someone once said, "send a telegram.") Yet to some of us who have been entranced by them since childhood, as I was when I'd cut school to pore over the few tattered art books at Seward Park Library on the Lower East Side, paintings still speak volumes— often about subjects the artist never intended:

Paul Cadmus, "PLAYGROUND," 1948, Egg yolk tempera on Masonite, 23 1/2 x 17 1/2, collection Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia.

I know that playground well. It's still there at the tail-end of Henry Street, arena of epic stickball games and gladiatorial gangwars when I was a kid in the 1950s. In the few years since Cadmus immortalized it, nothing had changed. The same women in hair-rollers and housedresses still leaned out their windows, minding everybody's business but their own. The stately stone facade of Saint Augustine's Church still lent a touch of gravity to a row of rotten-tooth tenements beyond the playground's chain-link fence. The whole neighborhood's underwear still flapped from clotheslines, and cliques of nose-picking, crotch-scratching dead-end kids still hung out in the playground, acting cool and making nasty jokes about each others' mothers.

Lincoln Kirstein thought Cadmus' painting depicted "the urban disinherited," according to Edward Lucie-Smith, who added, "It is also possible to read 'Playground' as a work whose theme is the social isolation of the homosexual." And while it is true that an undertone of homoeroticism is present here, as it is in many of Cadmus' paintings, for me "Playground" even more easily evokes the social isolation of the artist.

I am thinking of how people reacted when a kid named Louie Falco started studying modern dance at the Henry Street Settlement — the same neighborhood social agency where I first got hooked on painting as a possible alternative to becoming a comic book artist when I grew up.

Because they both carried themselves with a certain swagger that stood out even among all the other posturing hardguys on Henry Street, a lot of us expected Louie to follow in the footsteps of his older brother Frankie, who was notorious in the neighborhood even before 1963, when he murdered two police officers execution style, after making them strip naked in a bar in Lodi, New Jersey.

While Falco chose to shoot it out and died in a blaze of "MAD DOG COP KILLER" tabloid headlines, his accomplice Tommy Trantino surrendered and did 38 years in Rahway State Prison before being paroled in 2001, much to the dismay of every cop in Jersey. Trantino, who took up writing in prison and became a cause celebre among literary types like Howard Zinn and Henry Miller, paints a harrowing word-portrait of Frankie in his prison memoir "Lock the Lock," published by Knopf in 1974. In the unpunctuated lowercase stream of consciousness often favored by such raw talents, Trantino describes his partner in crime showing up at his apartment on the lam from an earlier murder:

"falco is all agitated and nervous and he's blowing his broken nose and he's running his hands through his wavy black hair and his jaw is on a twitch and his teeth are clenched tight as he tells all about how last night in the vivere lounge downtown on the lower east side he shot some dude dead over some bullshit this dude had been running there were all kinds of people around who saw him take this dude in the back room so they knew he killed him but he warned them with death and destruction if they said anything to anyone ever falco said he carried this dead dude out into his car then drove down to the east river and dumped the dude in the water"

Although Trantino admits to helping Falco disarm the two cops that night in Lodi, he has always denied participating in the actual murders. His description of Falco leaping up onto the bar with a gun in each hand literally demonizes his partner in crime like something out of a horror movie:

"frank is ticking on the bar two rumbling tanks in his claws and his horns are whistling twisting out and his fangs are blistered and bubbling with phlegm screaming out of a dark tunnel GET UNDRESSED GET UNDRESSED"

If not a hero, Frankie Falco lived on as a neighborhood legend after being gunned down by a vengeful police posse in a fleabag hotel in Times

and the Secret Lives of Paintings

Square. But his kid brother, who founded the world renowned Louis Falco Dance Company, danced opposite Rudolph Nureyev in the "Moors Pavane," influenced later enfant terribles of highfalutin terpsichore like Mark Morris, and choreographed the MGM film "Fame," before dying of complications from AIDS in 1993, was all but forgotten on Henry Street.

* * *

In the early 1980s, when Louis Falco was flying high, having recently wowed them at the La Scala Opera Ballet in Italy, I pitched the saga of the Falco brothers to an editor at the Daily News Magazine as "a real life John Garfield movie," and when she said it sounded "fabulous," called to set up a meeting with Louis.

The first thing I learned when I walked into the rehearsal loft in midtown is that, no matter how pretty they may look, a studio full of hardworking dancers smells like a huge hamper full of dirty laundry. The second thing was that Clive Barnes of the New York Times was right on the money when he called Falco "a choreographer of energy rather than grace." While rock music blared and the boy and girl dancers— all longhaired, and decked out in ragamuffin chic— flung themselves about like tough, streetsmart kids jiving and shucking in a schoolyard, Falco and I renewed old acquaintances.

Even with a shoulder length mane of bleached blond ringlets that would put Shirley Temple to shame, Louis Falco still carried himself the way you had to if you wanted to survive on Henry Street, and he seemed pleased enough to reminisce with someone from the old neighborhood. The more we talked, the more I was sure he would be amenable to the kind of story I intended to write, even though he'd never been quoted saying anything more specific about his past than, "Everything I am, everything I create, comes from what my family was and where I was born. I don't think there's any getting away from your heritage."

Yet, the minute I casually introduced the name of his brother Frankie into the conversation, Falco's whole attitude changed. And when I explained that I wanted the angle of my story to be the dramatically different directions their lives had taken, his jaw actually went "on a twitch," the way Trantino described his brother's under stress.

" Look, I'll talk about almost anything else you want me to talk about," he said. "But I definitely don't want to say anything at all about my brother in print. Anyway, didn't you say when you called that you wanted to write an article about my work ?"

The last one to call my bluff like that had been David Dinkins, when he was still Manhattan Borough President. After I infiltrated his office with a delegation of embattled bike messengers who'd requested a meeting, hoping to blend in with their motley company, he suggested that everyone around the table introduce themselves and, when my turn came, blew up: "Nobody told me a writer for the Daily News was going to be present at this meeting. Oh, I know, you're just doing your job. You guys will stick a tape recorder in somebody's face and say, 'How does it feel to see your whole family wiped out in a fire?' But what I don't like is that you misrepresented yourself. You got in here on false pretenses."

Trying to save face, I got up to go, but Dinkins insisted that I stay, saying, "I have nothing to hide."

And because I believed him, and thought it was about time we had a black man in office anyway, when he ran for Mayor a couple of years later, I voted for the first time in my politically disaffected life.

I had not expected Louis Falco to have anything to hide either, since he'd said of his "gutsy" approach to dance, "It comes from growing up on the Lower East Side. I don't have the same taboos as other people. I don't censor. I have a certain freedom that others don't."

If he didn't believe in censorship, why, I wondered now, was he trying to stifle me? My own vanity compelled me to always think of myself as an artist, even when I was whoring the mass media, and to consider every supposed taboo fair game; so it annoyed me to be treated like some snoop of a mere reporter. Since the story of him and his brother was part of our neighborhood lore, I felt it belonged as much to me as to him. Surely the guy who once said "safe, non-threatening dance turns me off... I explore identity, confusion, manipulation, whatever defines our character" should agree that an artist must be something of a sociopath, almost a criminal himself, in his willingness to exploit, even betray, any confidence, any trust, anything or anyone, in the service of his art.

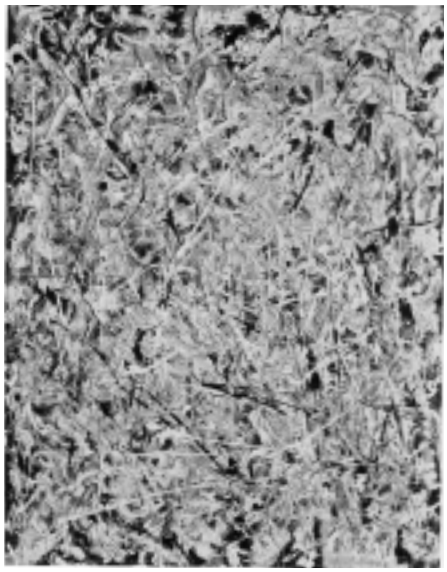
Hadn't I written at length about my two criminal younger cousins, Dennis and Richie; how they once shot a biker who burned them in a drug deal in the ass with the kind of powerful crossbow used for deer hunting; how they once robbed and gratuitously pistol-whipped a kindly old pharmacist who frequently filled their ailing mother's prescriptions on credit? At risk of being tarred, so to speak, with the brush of racism myself, didn't I even tell the story of how, when Richie was doing time at Attica, he'd sent my mother —who, having raised me, believed up until then that there was no such thing as a bad boy, only misunderstood ones— a card put out by the Aryan Brotherhood ? (It had a cartoon on the front of hooded figures gathered around a burning cross, and inside was the message, "Dear Aunt Mabel, here's wishing you A VERY WHITE CHRISTMAS!")

Didn't I tell it like it was? You bet your ass I did! I held nothing back... Yet even as others praised me for my honesty, and even for my "courage," in telling such sordid tales on my own family, in all honesty I had to admit that I was nagged by a squeamish suspicion that my candor was at least slightly self serving. Wasn't I the guy who'd pointed out in print (more than once, I'm afraid) that we're living in a time when simple notoriety has come to have the same cash-value as honest fame?

Well, there was no denying that Louis Falco had come by his fame honestly, in the perfection of an art form that allowed him to release his angst through the pure physical medium of movement, rather than in shameless confession. And once I got past my own pique and looked at it objectively, I had to admit that there was no compelling reason for him to trade in personal notoriety at this late date, neither to enhance his mystique nor to accommodate the lurid slumgullion narrative I had plotted out for my own gain. Granted, Falco had to know that, as E.M. Cioran once put it, "Every form of talent involves a certain shamelessness." Yet he could at least take comfort that his talent, unlike mine, did not require that he become, in the words of the same cynical scribe, "an indiscreet man who devaluates his miseries, divulges them, tells them like so many beads...."

As he turned his attention back to his dancers, increasingly ignoring me, it was clear Louis Falco would concur with Cioran that "to keep one's secret is the most fruitful of activities." And while his sudden sphinx-like silence told me I could forget about the story I had come to get, how could I really blame him for not wanting his private pain aired out in public like the underwear on the clothesline in Paul Cadmus' painting of our old neighborhood?

Jackson Pollock, "White Light," 1954, oil, enamel, aluminum paint on canvas, 481/4 x 38 1/4 in, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection.



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The Muse must have been looking over the shoulder of the art director at Atlantic Records who chose to put Jackson Pollock's painting "White Light" on the cover of "Free Jazz: A Collective Improvisation by The Ornette Coleman Double Quintet," an album I listened to incessantly in 1961, the year Jeannie and I got married. Together, Pollock's rhythmically layered drips and Coleman's atonal saxophone honks evoked all the excitement and atmosphere of the carefree bohemian life I imagined we were going to live as soon as we could could afford to move to Greenwich Village.

In the meantime, we were both unemployed and living, more like incestuous siblings than proper spouses, in the attic of my parents' house on Staten Island. Every morning my mother would hand us carfare and lunch money and we'd take the ferry over to Manhattan, where instead of looking for jobs, we'd hang out in the Village. Then, we'd light candles at night, put "Free Jazz" on the turntable, and turn our attic in an Archie Bunker house in the prole borough of Staten Island into an atmospheric bohemian garret.

Ornette's album was one among a whole stack of jazz records I bought from a local lowlife named Donnie Whitman. I knew that if he was selling them they had to belong to somebody else. But nobody on the Lower East Side, where I was raised, turned their noses up at goods that "fell off a truck." And every longshoreman's kid takes "swag"—silverware, towels, and other household items pilfered off the ships—for granted. So I never wondered where those records had come from until one Saturday night when my mother's youngest brother, Charlie, came over and insisted on taking us out to a local gin-mill Jack's Dog House for a few beers.

When I was still in grammar school in Manhattan, my uncle Charlie, a furniture mover who looked like the toughguy actor Mickey Rourke, blew his big toe off with his rifle in order to get sent home early from Korea and marry his high school sweetheart. But after the marriage ended (there were snapshots of my uncle cavorting in lipstick and my mother's underwear at a drunken family party, but I doubt that sort of thing, regarded as good clean fun among our wild tribe, had anything to do with it), Charlie came to live with us on Henry Street.

To Irish workingclass families like ours, Freudian psychology was as foreign as dentistry: tough titty if you lost all your teeth, went crazy. So nobody thought twice, given our cramped tenement conditions, about assigning a grown man to share the bed of his ten year old nephew. Luckily for me, Charlie was no child molester; just an overgrown kid who kept me in stitches with his drunken antics. He seemed able to fart at will, and one of his favorite tricks was to pull the covers over my head and amuse himself by nearly asphyxiating me with the stink— a regular wit!

With the loving cruelty of the older brother he was more like than an uncle, he also teased me mercilessly about my skinny arms and legs, calling me "Eddie Spaghetti" or "Mahatma Gandhi." (That he pronounced Gandhi like "bandy," as in bandy-legged, made the nickname even more devastating, since from our unworldly perspective, the great Indian leader and holy man seemed nothing more than a scrawny cartoon snake charmer.)

But even though he gave me a complex that lasted at least until the mid sixties (when the invasion of ectomorphic British rock musicians suddenly made my wasted look fashionable), Charlie was not only my favorite uncle but my best buddy. Unlike my father, who took no interest at all in me, he at least took the trouble to tease me. It was Charlie who taught me to box, took me to John Wayne movies at the Leow's Delancey, and when a bully of a teacher named Mr.Bash humiliated me in front of the class by wisecracking that my cough sounded like TB, it was Charlie who stormed into P.S. 147, backed him up against the blackboard, and promised to throw him right out the window "if you ever get smart with my nephew again."

By the time Jeannie and I were living in the attic on Staten Island, my uncle, who never got over the breakup of his marriage, was drinking himself right into an early grave. But he was laughing all the way, and we always looked forward to his visits, since his nutty, goodnatured personality seemed to ease the growing tension with my parents.

As usual, we were all having a grand old time that night at Jack's Dog House, drinking and playing the jukebox, until Donnie Whitman staggered over to our table from the bar and, leaning down with his greasy blond hair almost hanging in my beer, said, "How did you like them albums I copped from The Beatnik?"

Donnie didn't have to say more: Almost from the minute he arrived from Manhattan that Summer with his wife Sheila and their two toddlers, renting a storefront apartment on Cedar Grove Avenue, not far from Jack's Dog House, and setting up a painting studio in an abandoned hospital on New Dorp Beach, the locals had nicknamed Jay Milder "The Beatnik."

But to me, Jay, who looked like a young Marc Chagall, was something of a celebrity. There was a picture of him in "The Artist's World," a paperback book of photographs by Fred W. McDarrah that I pored over as though it were pornography, fantasizing about being part of all those lively openings and parties in the downtown art scene. Even before my younger sister, Maureen, who sometimes babysat for the Milders, introduced Jeannie and me to Jay and Sheila one day on the beach, I knew that Jay was a friend of Bob Thompson and Red Grooms. And even though Jay was considerably older than me, and I probably struck him as a crazy kid, a frantic workingclass wannabe, I was hoping we could be friends as well. (In fact, I would get to know Jay well enough, years later, when I showed my paintings at the Brata Gallery on Tenth Street, to comfortably regale him with how I'd come to own his record collection, long lost by then in the general carelessness of my hipster lifestyle.)

But soon after she introduced us on the beach that day, my sister told me she had stopped by Jay and Sheila's place to see if they needed a baby-sitter and learned from a neighbor that they'd been burglarized and moved back to the city.

"Hey, I ast you a question: how do

you like The Beatnik's records?" Donnie was saying now, raising his voice to be heard above the jukebox.

"Get lost," I told him, shoving his hand off my shoulder. "Fuck off."

Hearing this, my uncle Charlie, who was sitting nearby—probably teasing Jeannie, like he always did, about being such a teetotaler— looked at me quizzically. Then at Donnie, and said, "Excuse me, pal, do we know you?"

Donnie grinned and, with a flourish like a stage magician, appeared to snatch an egg out of thin air, and held it over my uncle's head as if he was about to crack it open. As Charlie started to get out of his chair, I jumped up faster, rushed in front of him, grabbed Donnie's egg-arm with one hand, and started to throw a punch with the other. But Charlie blocked it, stepped between us, and glared at Donnie in a way that made him back off, muttering, "Jeez, fellas, I was only foolin'...Can't anybody take a joke?"

Shaking his head, Donnie retreated across the room— more, I knew, from my uncle than from me. Yet, as Charlie held me back, I kept acting as though I had won, rather than lost, miserably, my first and only amateur boxing bout in the Police Athletic League, at age twelve, against a black kid, whose emaciated appearance and deceptively mild demeanor emboldened me to insist on being announced from the ring as "Eddie 'Hurricane' McCormack."

Now, similarly emboldened by several beers (and maybe by the certainty that Charlie would back me up), forgetting how I'd had to sneak back to the P.A.L gym on Houston Street early the next morning, when I knew no one would be there to witness my shame, to empty my locker, here I was waxing ridiculously pugnacious again. While my powerful uncle restrained me as effortlessly as a mother cat dangles its kittens, I cursed across the room at Whitman and threw Eddie Spaghetti punches in the air, flailing about in the grip of a grotesque contradiction. For even as I shamelessly shadow-boxed, showing off to the whole goddamn blue-collar bar room that I, the artsy fartsy Mahatma Ghandi kid, was as tough as the next guy, deep down I was properly appalled to be putting myself in a league with Donnie Whitman and all the posturing punks I had grown up among, rather than the bohemian artists like Jay Milder, to whose hip, enlightened company I wanted more than anything to belong.

Andy Warhol "JACKIE TRIPTYCH," 1964, silkscreen on canvas, overall 53 x 124 cm, Cologne, Ludwig Collection

Andy's painting of a tearful, grieving Jackie, appropriated from a famous news photo of JFK's funeral, reminds me that, in the Zelig-like way I have of repeatedly being swept up in the zeitgeist, I happened to be working as a copy boy at Women's Wear Daily on the day the brief, starcrossed period called Camelot ended.

As an avowed bohemian, I had no interest in fashion or the "BP" as the publication regularly abbreviated "Beautiful People." Coined by John Fairchild, the foppish publishing heir who had transformed the paper from a grimy rag-trade tabloid to a must-read for the society set, the term was always being bandied about by people like Carol Bjorkman, a Holly Golightly of a gossip columnist who sashayed around the office with her toy poodle, Sheba, clutched to her nonexistent bosom. Bjorkman was the queen bee who set the style for the all the lesser lady fashion writers and editors in their corporate uniform of little black dress and pearls. Whenever these snooty fashionistas made any work-related request of me they were invariably greeted with the supercilious smile of the morally superior underling. (While the lips signify "Very well, Madame," the eyes say, "Comes the revolution...")

Since WWD was in the Village, most its lower-level hirelings tended to be hipsters, rebels, and slackers of all stripes, much like myself or the clerks at the nearby Strand Book Store, who'd act put-upon whenever a customer interrupted their laconic conversations to ask for help. Even among the "lifers," as we copy kids called the higher ups, there were a few secret hipsters like Chauncey Howell, later to become become one of the more jocularly amusing talking heads on TV's Eyewitness News team. Chauncey wrote a rave review of an art exhibition I was having in a gallery on Tenth Street for his arts column in WWD while I worked there. And in a subsequent issue, my beautiful bride, the former Jeannie Sanders Eaton, of Warrenton, Virginia, even turned up unexpectedly in a spread by one of the paper's roving paparazzi, featuring candid shots of chic-looking young women spotted on the street. (It pleased me immensely that, even though we didn't have the proverbial pot to pee in, Jeannie had made it on sheer style and good looks into the ranks of the BP!)

Along with such serendipities, the job was agreeably mindless, leaving me plenty of energy to paint at night. That it didn't pay much was another plus, since it was still respectable, in those decades before the advent of the trust fund genius and the instant art star, for struggling artists to have day jobs— as long as they didn't take them seriously or make enough money to be branded as dilettantes.

So while I would have preferred not to work at all, I didn't have any serious misgivings about the gig, until the day of JFK's assassination, when the office suddenly went into high gear, and it dawned on me that the fashion world has its own bizarre angle on reality.

Sporting one of his Edwardian-looking suits with the nipped-in waist, his sandy forelock flopping, John Fairchild went sailing around the city room like a figure skater on steroids, stopping here and there to issue high-pitched shrieks that scattered the knots of fashion ladies like starlings, sending them into spasms of highstrung activity. Then he came sailing across the room, stopped right in front of the copy staff station, and did a pirouette to face Al Elkin, the aged teletype operator, ordering him to take a message for the Washington correspondent.

Years earlier, just before Kennedy was elected, I had been the personal office boy of William Randolph Hearst Jr. (an inauspicious position, I admit, for an aspiring beatnik, but what can I say?) in the Hearst Magazine Building, on West

57th Street. It was there, in fact, on the romantic cusp of Camelot, that I met Jeannie, who had grown up in the same small town in the horse country as Mrs. Hearst, and under her fortuitously (for me) lax supervision, was spending Summer vacation from Fairfax Hall, her Southern belle boarding school, in wicked New York City, from whence we eventually eloped.

I was that kid, always running, who snatched dispatches from the chattering teletypes and sprinted them into the beefy paws of power. I was the eager beaver who dashed down to Riker's coffee shop in the lobby to fetch coffee for the blond bombshell actress Zsa Zsa Gabor, with whom my boss appeared to be having an affair ("Tell dem I vant it in a real cup, dollink. Zsa Zsa does not drink from paper!") And it was heady beyond belief for a still credulous longshoreman's son to be privy to such inside gossip as the fact that JFK was known to his Washington cronies as "Jack The Zipper" long before his penchant for presidential cocksmanship became, posthumously, a matter of public record.

But nothing that I learned during my tenure with the Hearst Corporation— the very firm that had given yellow journalism its name!— was nearly as instructive, concerning the priorities of high powered publishing, as what John Fairchild told the tremulous teletype operator to tell the Washington correspondent just minutes after learning that the President of the United States had been gunned down in Dallas:

"Tell her I don't care who she has to fuck, I want an exclusive on what Jackie is wearing to the funeral!"

Jim Dine, "DOUBLE SELF PORTRAIT (SERAPE) 1964, collection The Whitney Museum of American Art

(picture unavailable for publication)

Around the same time that Dine's painting of two empty robes became an icon of the Pop movement, my father started living full-time in his bathrobe. He had always been an elusive character anyway, the quintessential absent father, even when he was physically present. But by the time he retired early from the docks due to memory loss that the doctors at the I.L.A. (International Longshoreman's Association) Medical Center attributed to alcoholic brain damage, he had become absolutely spectral.

Soon after my father took to sitting all day in his robe in the darkened bedroom of their little house on Staten Island, my mother noticed two men sitting in a car parked across the street. Day after day, whenever she peeked out through the venetian blinds, there they would be, sitting in the front seat, staring over at the house. Something about them reminded her of all those times over the years when she had to take loans from Household Finance to keep the bookies and the shylocks down on the docks from breaking my father's kneecaps over his gambling debts, and she began to wonder if maybe my father's memory might be better than he let on.

After all, my father had always been resourceful in his way, as he demonstrated during a long dock strike in the early 1950s, when we were behind in the rent and facing eviction from our apartment on the top floor of a tenement on Henry Street.

One morning, my father and my uncle Georgie, who lived downstairs on the fourth floor, were sitting at our kitchen table drinking their breakfast beers. I remember it vividly, since I was still young and naive enough at the time to enjoy eavesdropping on what I took to be their worldly wisdom.

"Believe it or not, Georgie, there's people up in Harlem who smoke marijuana cigarettes just as casually as we're drinking these cans of Rheingold," my father was remarking with the self righteousness of the solid citizen, when a resounding crash out in the hall sent them scrambling from their chairs.

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph," said my father, surveying the rubble and the clouds of plaster dust where a good part of the hall ceiling had fallen. Then, without a moment's hesitation, he lay down on the hall floor, covered himself with big chunks of the stuff, and started bellowing at the top of his lungs.

"Talk to me, Big Eddie, where does it hurt? Lord have mercy, the man's back could be broke!" my uncle Georgie chimed in, playing Ed Norton to my father's Ralph Kramden, as potential witnesses from the lower floors came scrambling up the stairs.

To make a long story short, the landlord settled out of court, and there was more than enough money to see us through until the dock strike was settled and my father and uncle went back to work.

Now, knowing what my father was capable of, my mother was almost certain he was no more out of it than Vincent "The Chin" Gigante, who famously walked the streets of Little Italy in his bathrobe for years, muttering to himself, to convince the feds that he couldn't possibly be the brains behind the Genovese crime family.

But my father, who had admitted to envying our Welsh terrier, Duffy, for being able to snooze near a warm radiator while he trudged off to the "those god-forsaken docks" on cold winter mornings, continued living in his bathrobe, years after my mother peeked through the blinds one morning and saw that the men in the car were gone.

John Singer Sargent, "MRS. ADRIAN ISELIN," oil on canvas, 1888, 60 x 36, collection the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

When someone asked Sargent, long after he painted her portrait, if this stately and imperious society matron had made much of an impression upon him, he reportedly said, "Of course! I cannot forget that dominating little finger."

Even more striking, however, than the subject's pinky, poised tellingly on the edge of an elegant end table (as though testing it for dust missed by an inept maid) is her haughty expression. Mrs. Iselin regards the artist with an icy condescension that summons the memory of my own chilling encounter, as a young man, with a similarly imperious older woman who, by a single act of wanton destruction, may have helped to alter the course of my life.

Admittedly, there were other mitigating factors, not the least of them being that while painting was my first love, the art with which I had hoped to make my mark, I almost immediately got more attention for writing than painting had ever afforded my needy ego. But in any case, this woman, the shrewish wife of a wellknown Broadway actor, might have affected my future even more profoundly had she not been standing out of reach behind the iron gate around the entrance to her brownstone just off Central Park West. For I swear I might have strangled her when she told me that, just a few days earlier, she had put all of my paintings—my entire life's work up to that point—out on the sidewalk to be carted off by the Sanitation Department.

True, I had misled her, representing myself as an all-around handyman, when I could hardly hammer a nail into a wall without risking bodily injury, having always shirked manual labor in my eagerness to escape my workingclass roots. And after she agreed to let me use the top floor of her house as a studio, in return for helping her renovate the rest of it, I have to admit I made a fine mess of her beautiful wooden staircase, leaving the Zip-Strip on overnight instead of scraping it off as soon as the layers of old vanish and paint bubbled up. Nor could I deny that I had taken my own sweet time, after she dismissed me in the wake of several other mishaps, in arranging to come back and remove all of my belongings from her premises, as she had requested that I do without delay.

Still, standing safe behind her iron gate, she showed not the slightest sign of remorse for her rash act. In fact, haughty head thrown back, icy eyes glittering with malice, she appeared to gloat openly about the affect her deed was having on me, as I stood out on the sidewalk, trembling with rage, utterly speechless...

All these years later, I still see her face, so like the face of the lady in Sargent's portrait, in nightmares, and often revisit the long lost masterpieces of my youth in the Museum of My Dreams.

* * *

Soho Survey Showcases the Art of Australia and New Zealand

It has been exactly four decades since Robert Hughes wrote of the conflict in Australian art between the obsessive influence of Europe and a desire for independence. Nowadays, the best artists from that part of the world combine a sense of national identity with a quirky originality, judging by "Out From Down Under and Beyond: an Exhibition of Fine Art from Australia and New Zealand," at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, in Soho, from May 17 through June 7. (Reception: May 18, from 6 to 8 PM.)

How else to describe the dark, brooding rectangular abstractions, as well as the faux primitive figurative works, of the artist who prefers to be known as Cathryn Condon? Particularly intriguing among Condon's figure paintings is a work in which a wild-eyed woman with streaming hair and the dramatic presence of a shaman or witch holds aloft a lordly-looking owl in what appears to be a rough-hewn coffin.

Other artists, as well, combine primitive power with innate sophistication in the manner of Australia's old master Sidney Nolan. Patricia Van Den Nieuwenhuijzen, for example, depicts the stark beauty of the native landscape with simplified forms and vibrant colors, and also gives us a memorable painting of a pregnant nude that rivals the land itself for its unadorned fecundity.

And while Micheline Abrahamson— also known as "Mich" — was born in South Africa, she immigrated to Australia in 1988, and her oils and acrylics, with their shimmering colors and shape-shifting forms, convey an abstract sense of nature that transcends time and place.

New Zealand artist Helga Windle merges Symbolist imagery and Expressionist energy in her starkly simplified oils on canvas. With colors alternately somber and fiery, Windle conjures up mysterious figures, glowing moons, and shadowy mountains in compositions of unusual spiritual suggestiveness.

Form and color are reduced to their primal essences in the blunt gestural paintings of Amanda Mary Fraser. Human and animal figures take on the character of abstract archetypes in Fraser's strong canvases, which extend the tactile tradition of older Australian painters like Eric Smith and Frank Hodgkinson. Anna Crawley, on the other hand, creates chromatically evocative acrylic compositions in which sumptuous colors and semi-abstract shapes set off flowing rhythms that suggest figures, flowers, and a variety of other elusive subjects.

Other artists opt for more cosmopolitan subjects. Jan Rae, for example, evokes a romantic mood with couples dancing near the ocean under a full moon, painted in softly diffused hues. The painter who goes by the single name of Starr conveys a vigorous New Wave sensibility with comely nudes laid down in slashing strokes of sensual color, among other subjects that combine painterly panache with Pop attitude.

Pure abstraction also makes an auspicious showing in the work of three other artists: Working in mixed media on linen, Pam Karp layers patches of vibrant color in compositions that add a gestural vitality to the convention of the grid composition. Melanie Miller lays down succulent, richly glowing color fields that suggest landscape yet ultimately succeed by virtue of their abstract autonomy. John Weeronga Bartoo employs the "dot" technique traditional to Aboriginal "dreamtime" painting; yet the manner in which his work projects its unique aura in this exhibition demonstrates that the best exponents of that tradition should be recognized in the mainstream, rather than relegated to some quaint folkloric category.

Indeed, although their media profile has not been ubiquitous up to now, it is high time that we began to regard the art of Australia and New Zealand in general as important ingredients in the eclectic mix of contemporary painting. For, as the artists in this show demonstrate so handily, a good deal of dynamic painting has begun to emerge from "Down Under and Beyond."

—Marie R. Pagano

Exploring Alexandra Spyratos' Wild Kingdom

Born in Kenya, presently living in Australia, Alexandra Spyratos employs African wildlife as a subject in paintings that are as compelling for their abstract attributes as for their evocation of the natural beauty and grace, in her exhibition at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street from April 15 through May 6. (Reception: April 20, from 6 to 8 PM.)

Her paintings of zebras are especially engaging for the manner in which she utilizes their stripes to create compositions reminiscent for their visual razzle dazzle akin to Bridget Riley. Spyratos' stylistic kinship with that of the wellknown Op artist is most evident in paintings such as "Colour of Wild" and "The Silver Leap," where she adheres to the dictates of nature, creating dynamic optical effects with black and white linear patterns, even while juxtaposing these monochromatic elements that provide the main thrust of the composition with solid unmodulated color areas.

However, in other works such as "A Golden Glance" and "Still in the Midday Heat," the artist endows the exotic equines with colors one would never encounter in the wild. However, in others she takes poetic license and endows zebras with colors one would never encounter in the wild: fluorescent reds and blues, as well as metallic gold or silver hues, that add a shimmering chromatic effect to her oils on canvas.

On a purely abstract level, her use of these fluorescent colors can be compared to Frank Stella's use of Dayglo paints in some of his early geometric works, especially when Spyratos depicts zebras clustered in herds, their zigzagging kandy-kolored stripes becoming the dominate elements in the composition. But the effectiveness of the fluorescent pigments is twofold; for they also evoke a tangible sense of the overall pervasiveness of African light and heat with an intensity even more convincing, in this case, than the techniques for approximating the effects of dappled sunlight and shadow employed by the Impressionists.

This sense of light and heat is especially evident in "The Pink Spirit," Spyratos' painting of a large ostrich-like bird, presumably leaping across the African plain– although no hint of a landscape is present in the composition. Rather, the avian figure is set against a solid color field that resembles a jazzed-up version of the hue that, in standard artist's colors, is known as "rose madder."

This soft, pinkish off-red radiates subtly behind the central form, which could suggest either a single bird seen in the painterly equivalent of a photographic double exposure or two birds running astride, given its rhythmic repetition of curving necks and moving limbs. Either way, the composition creates a sense of grace and velocity and its abstract quality is enhanced, here as in most of Spyratos' paintings, by the large scale of the canvas, which harks back to the glory days of Abstract Expressionism.

"The Silver Leap"

Texture also plays an important role in Spyratos' compositions, especially in those works where she employs more subdued, close-valued color combinations in an earthier range, such as "On the Move" and "The Shimmer of Savannah." The former painting depicts superimposed elephants as though in a moving herd. Here, Spyratos approaches the subtlety of Braque in his post-cubist late period work, employing a distinctive palette of pale, greyed-down browns and tactile paint application to define overlapping that rhyme rhythmically in harmonious patterns.

Spyratos, however, differs from the French painter in that her creatures are never mere decorative motifs in the manner of Braque's stylized birds. Quite the contrary, the zebras, elephants, leopards, and various bird species that she paints are invested with an authenticity that only one who has observed their habits closely and with genuine affection can bestow.

—Wilson Wong

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Gretl Bauer's "Pairings" of Incongruous Affinities and Unexpected Epiphanies

The virtue of restraint is rarely exercised in art today, and we tend to prize it all the more when it is coupled with the formal ambitiousness that we have come to expect in contemporary painting. One thinks of the meditative grids of Agnes Martin, the subdued yet tactile stripes of Sean Scully, and the paradoxical marriage of emphatic physicality and evanescence that characterizes the mixed media assemblage paintings of the New York artist Gretl Bauer.

Chromatically sonorous, Bauer's art sometimes seems the visual equivalent of music played on a cello. Strident color is as rare in Bauer's oeuvre as snow in July. Rather, she hews to earthy tonalities and bleached grays that harmonize with the weathered wood surfaces she often paints on or affixes to her canvases or panels, with occasional recourse to nocturnal blues, muted yet glowing reds, or other hues that deepen rather than disrupt the quiet power of her pieces.

With each successive exhibition, Bauer seems to closer to the spiritual resonance of Rothko; yet, there is a physicality, a sculptural dimension, to her mixed media assemblages that sets them apart as highly original hybrids. Given that her stylistic signature is the use of thread in some way or another in most of her pieces, often strung as if for thrumming, musical references spring almost too easily to mind. After all, as a former ballet dancer, Bauer once had an intimate relationship to music, and she and her husband, a physician and an avid amateur saxophone player, are friends, admirers, and supporters of some of our greatest living jazz musicians. Indeed, the sense of inspired improvisation is so implicit in Bauer's most recent pieces that it is tempting—alas, irresistible!—to venture one more musical comparison and assert that their combination of found-object funkiness and elegance calls to mind the mixture of the colloquial and the classical in the compositions of the mercurial jazz bassist Charles Mingus.

Yet, that there are also a great many other associations and allusions to be drawn from Gretl Bauer's new pieces will become immediately apparent to anyone who visits her new solo exhibition at Phoenix Gallery, 210 Eleventh Avenue @ 25th Street, from April 26 to May 20.

The show is called "Pairings," since it is comprised, for the most part, of large and smaller pieces in metal, wood, stone, and thread that the artist has chosen to place in close proximity to one another on the walls, and in some cases, on the floor of the gallery. Not only do these juxtapositions highlight Bauer's interdisciplinary synthesis of the painterly and the sculptural; they also put even greater dramatic emphasis on the

"Whitefall" 92" x 11" (Detail)

tension between palpable materiality and ethereal suggestiveness that has always been present in her work.

This melding of opposite qualities is especially striking in the pairing of the two works respectively titled "She" and "Morning Sea." The former work was inspired by a massive, twisted length of steel, rusted and mottled with remnants of paint, salvaged from a car wreck. Attracted by its brutal beauty and odd grace, the artist was moved to prop it up at one end with a large white rock, then drape silvery chiffon over it like a shimmering shroud. At first she planned to call the piece "Sheath." But when she mentioned the title to a visitor to her studio, who thought she had said "She," Bauer decided that might be an even more evocative title— not only because of the piece's more or less human scale, but also because its gossamer garment now endowed this rugged object with a sensual feminine languor that made her think of Cleopatra reclining in her bath.

Even before she decided to change its title, however, Bauer knew that she wanted to pair this piece with "Morning Sea," a contrastingly delicate mixed media work on a paper, spare as a Zen ink painting, with wavy gray strokes laid down with a broad brush, over which she had layered, horizontally, silver threads that glittered like sunlight on water.

Although the two pieces, taken together, create an evocative tableau— possibly suggesting a beached mermaid, among other things-- one would be remiss to interpret them too literally. For the poetic power of Bauer's pieces derives more from her metaphorical use of materials than from any anecdotal meaning one might be tempted to attach to them.

In other works, the ubiquitous thread is painstakingly painted with hues, such as red or yellow oxide, that impart to each separate strand the glimmer of a delicate beam of light. In "Ionian," the luminous threads are strung close together, vertically, over a deep blue color field and paired with a piece created from rusted steel mesh that rests on the gallery floor, in front of the painting. Here again, one could easily imagine a bonfire, burned down to its last dying embers, on a Greek beach, looking out on the sea to which the title refers. Yet, the effect of Bauer's work is such that it finally transcends all interpretation and must be taken on its own terms.

This point is made strikingly in the pairing of "Blizzard" (where the type of white plastic mesh used to wrap Christmas trees is employed to especially imaginative effect) with a vastly dissimilar piece called "Cobwebs," to achieve an unexpected poetic affinity. Another epiphany of exquisitely resolved incongruity, involving a large canvas called "Winter's Loom" and a sculpture in crumbled steel and stone called "Moth," also attests to the potency of Bauer's aesthetic alchemy.

By contrast, "Red Winter," comprised of a large, subtly modulated color field painting in which the strings dangle rather than being pulled taut, and a much smaller diptych in related hues that serves as its tightly strung satellite, seems an inevitable pairing.

The same can be said of "Toward April" and "Whitetfall," two pieces on tall, narrow panels of weathered wood that the artist has jointly titled "Two Totems." In both, white threads flow vertically, over a subtly articulated painterly ground, with the downward velocity of a fine rain.

Here, as in another work called "Flaxen," the way the freewheeling vigor of the brush strokes and precision of the threading play off each other epitomizes the contrasts and confluences that make the art of Gretl Bauer so consistently engaging.

—Ed McCormack

A New Sensuality Enters the Latest Paintings of Anne Bachelier

Passing a tattoo parlor on Saint Marks Place in the East Village one recent evening, my attention was arrested by the sight of a young woman half reclining on her stomach in plain view in the window with her jeans rolled halfway down her buttocks. A man with spiky bleached blond hair, himself heavily tattooed and studded here and there with various metal protuberances, was bent intently over her semi-recumbent form, inscribing an intricate tribal design into the area of her lower anatomy which has, since the advent of the fashion for extra low-rise waistbands, become the focal point of the New Cleavage.

I recalled this scene a week later, when I went down to Soho, to CFM Gallery, at 112 Greene Street, to preview the new paintings that will be featured in Anne Bachelier's solo exhibition, "Variations on a Variation," from May 5 through June 4, and saw her oil on canvas "Tattoo." For here was a situation nearly identical to the one I had witnessed on Saint Marks Place; only what was tawdry in reality had been transformed by Bachelier's patented painterly alchemy into something characteristically fanciful and romantic.

Here, too, was a window (serving as a backdrop for the two central figures in the composition); only rather than being filled with sidewalk gawkers like myself and a few other flaneurs who happened to be idling on the sidewalk that evening, bathed in the garish neon glare of a seedy commercial thoroughfare, this window gave way to a view of multiple lunar orbs and tiny winged beings, hovering like nocturnal butterflies.

The figures of the tattoo artist and his human canvas were no less fanciful: he looking less like a haggard Hell's Angel wannabe than a handsome fairytale samurai; she suspended weightless in mid-air (rather than being draped in dishabille, like her real-life counterpart, over some chrome and plastic piece of furniture resembling a padded S&M saw-horse), her voluptuous torso naked, her legs swaddled in silken wrappings in a manner suggesting a mermaid.

Not only does "Tattoo" demonstrate Bachelier's gift for filtering even the more sordid aspects of everyday reality through the rosy lens of her singular sensibility, elevating them to new levels of whimsy by virtue of her unsurpassed imaginative powers, it also epitomizes the glowing sensuality which has surfaced in this celebrated French painter's most recent canvases. Indeed, to one who has been following her progress for over a decade, this element of subtle eroticism, rivaling in its own, less aggressive way even that of her world famous gallery mate, the late surrealist diva Leonor Fini, is one of the more remarkable revelations of her new oils, especially since it manages to coexist so paradoxically with the innocent sense of wonder which has been present in her oeuvre since the beginning and continues undiminished.

"Elle sera fille de Brume"

Bachelier's ability to carry off this unlikely synthesis so seamlessly is just one mystery among the many that make her a unique figure in the contemporary art world, to the fads and fashions of which she appears to pay little regard, as she spends her days ostensibly in her studio in Grenoble but in actuality light years away in an imaginative realm she has inhabited since childhood, only to touch down every year or so with a new body of work as humanly reflective as it is unearthly.

Which is to say: Bachelier presents us with a dream-inflected mirror-image of the lives we live, transmogrified, to be sure, by all the luminous mists and smokescreens of her peculiar aesthetic wizardry, yet driven by that deeper verisimilitude and emotional recognition which is the distinguishing factor of all great fantasy.

Bachelier is so thoroughly committed to her fanciful vision that she never seems to suffer the second thoughts or failures of nerve that plague some of her contemporaries who are more beholden to the shifting winds of fashion. One thinks of a now deceased American artist whose memory it would be indiscreet to defame by name simply to make the point that he had a promising early career as a fascinating figurative fantasist, only to spend his later years perpetrating neo-expressionist pastiches so hamhanded one can only assume he grew ashamed of his unfashionable draftsmanly skills and sought to obliterate them in crude painterly pyrotechnics.

Conversely, fashion be damned, Bachelier revels wholeheartedly in her technical finesse, which enables her to transcribe each and every nuance of atmosphere her unconscious dictates to her hand as she conjures her numinous inner realm in such convincing detail that we accept every anomaly of her brush with utter suspension of disbelief.

Among her latest paintings, one of the most complex in this regard is "Quand il faudra partir..." in which an ornate antique ship with billowing sails bears a crowd of figures dressed as though for a masked ball through luminous chromatic mists, craggy peaks looming darkly in the distance. A languid being with pale purple hair, deli-

"Les Guetteurs dans I'île"

"elle ne dit jamais qui elle est..."

cate features, and an alabaster complexion lounges languorously in the foreground, while another figure leans over it and lifts its filmy white crinolines to reveal what appears to be the outline of male genitalia, albeit somewhat indistinctly fudged so as to create an impression rather than a distinct image. Here, both in the subtle ambiguity of the imagery and the soft refinement of its execution, one is reminded of the sly suggestiveness in many of Watteau's aristocratic figures or the more overt yet still quite quaint eroticism of Fragonard's rococo masterpiece "The Swing," in which the young man steals a peek up his lover's skirts as she sails merrily over his head. Such a touch in the genteel context of one of Anne Bachelier's fanciful compositions has far more impact than most of the more explicit images so prevalent in our shock-proof age.

Further evidence of a new sense of sensual daring seems evidenced in the unprecedented number of serpents that have insinuated themselves prominently into Bachelier's private garden, emerging from the opulent fabric folds in the skirt of the figure strutting in ballet slippers in "elle ne dit jamais qui elle est..."; entwined in the Medusa-like tresses of the bejeweled Asian woman in one imaginary portrait "Elle sera fille de Brume," slithering along beside two elaborately gowned adventuresses preparing to traverse a plank connecting two high peaks in the diptych "c'est un matin si calme..."

And while no snakes appear in the much larger diptych "la Chambre des Mystères," the centerpiece of the exhibition, depicting two regal women (one partially nude and donning a mask to admire herself in a circular mirror in an odd inversion of narcissism) being attended by several servants, this imposing composition suggests preparation for the boudoir, and its undertone of sensuality is further enhanced by the artist's profuse employment of the richly glowing red hues that figure prominently in several of her recent compositions.

Yet these same red hues take on a more ceremonial quality in other paintings, possibly inspired by Bachelier's recent visit to Tibet, most particularly "Les Guetteurs dans l'île," where mandarin-like characters straight out of Ezra Pound's "Cathay" are seen ensconced in a kind of towering nest, festooned with brilliant banners, rising out of and high above a body of water, as well as in other paintings where an imaginative rather than literal interpretation of Asian culture enables the artist to indulge her taste for opulent Orientalia.

Then again, Anne Bachelier transforms every place that she experiences in a manner that makes it part of her own alternative universe, where even the most remote improbability comes immediately into being in the moment that she paints it.

—Ed McCormack

At Monkdogz Urban Art, Energy Trumps Irony Every Time

While the opening of another gallery in Chelsea may not initially strike one as any more newsworthy than the opening of yet another Duane Read drugstore or Starbucks in midtown, it is unusual enough for an exhibition space to arrive on the scene with a ready-made roster of artists, each of whose work is individually distinctive yet indicative of a coherent communal vision. Such is the case with Monkdogz Urban Art, which opened amid much hoopla on March 11 and runs through April 15 at 547 West 27th Street and, on the strength of its inaugural exhibition, an international group show, promises to remain one of the more unpredictable stops in Chelsea.

The gallery's director Bob Hogge and his business partner Marina Hadley began their talent hunt several months ago by issuing an open invitation to emerging artists to exhibit gratis on their successful website monkdogz.com. The democratic gesture drew a huge response from artists around the world, giving Hogge and Hadley an almost infinite range of international styles and tendencies to choose from. They then winnowed their selection down to a few that Hogge, a gifted painter himself who has chosen to make discovering the work of others his project of the moment, felt best expressed the aesthetic they hope to impose upon the prevailing zeitgeist.

Pressed to define exactly what that aesthetic is, one would have to hark back to the East Village art scene in the 1970s and 80s in terms of the energy, conviction, and enthusiasm on view— albeit here on a global scale and with some of the rougher edges smoothed out by a good deal more technical proficiency and mature vision.

A matching fund of energy, conviction and enthusiasm emanates from the gallerists themselves. Hogge is a nonstop talker in the mode of Tony Schafrazi, the earlier artist-turned-gallerist who launched the mainstream careers of Keith Haring, Kenny Scharf and other East Village alumnae. Indeed, Hogge can riff like legendary Beat Generation motormouth Neal Cassady, once he gets going about his plans for expanding Monkdogz Urban Art in all manner of visionary directions. His belief in the project has caused him to turn his house in Long Beach (much to the bemused consternation of his supportive but beleaguered wife) into a kind of hostel for some of the international artists in this show. And one gets the feeling that if he were not careful it could turn into something resembling a hippie art commune with the charismatic Hogge as its resident guru.

Fortunately, though, Hogge has Hadley to curb his enthusiasm and keep an eye on the bottom line. An attractive, elegant Japanese-English woman with an upperclass British accent, Hadley is something of an art world neophyte. Still, she's cracking the books to catch up on art history, and she has great taste and scads of experience as a corporate consultant, which should come in handy in the highly competitive gallery scene. As a complement to Bob Hogge's manic, mile-a-minute energy, Marina Hadley may provide just the right balance to help turn Monkdogz into a winning proposition.

Another thing that could contribute to the long-term success of the enterprise is that, while most of the artists in the inaugural show have exhibited widely elsewhere, they seem to come into sharper focus and more into their own in each others' company, indicating an ability on the part of the partners to connect the dots in a manner that could prove beneficial to all.

One such discovery (at least to New York gallery-goers, although he's apparently widely exhibited closer to home) is Marcus van Soest, who hails from the Netherlands and comes on like gangbusters with canvases that seem to combine the painterly panache of late-period Philip Guston, the outrageous plasticity Peter Saul, and the sheer zaniness of the revered 1950s Mad magazine cartoonist Basil Wolverton. In his compacted figurative compositions, van Soest conjures up a kind of monster mash of fragmented faces, body parts, and—in the case of one especially visceral canvas—slabs of red meat and fried eggs that seem to express the delicious mess of being embroiled in the human stew. The 14th century Milanese painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo's paintings of human heads composed of fruits and vegetables also come to mind; however van Soest does all of his predecessors one better by virtue of his eclecticism, giving new meaning, with his bold protoplasmic configurations, to the term "polymorphous perversity."

Just as startling in another manner, the junk sculptures of American artist Steve Oatway project an eerie wax museum presence and address a host of unsettling notions. Oatway's most obvious statement is a sculpture of a blood-splattered Osama Bin Laden with a toy American fighter plane going through his chest and coming out his back. That the elongated figure of the tall terrorist leader, in his long white gown, calls to mind a tower enhances a kind of kneejerk tit for tat reaction that is undeniably cathartic. However, Oatway's strange little limbless figures in black clerical garb with babydoll heads and crosses

Sunia Boneham "Stilts Medieval Liar"

Steve Oatway "Sister My Sister"

Valerie Patterson "Undergoing"

hanging around their necks are more winningly weird and oddly affecting with their insipidly beatific expressions and big blue eyes, simultaneously suggesting the innocence of infants and the cunning sanctimoniousness of pedophile priests.

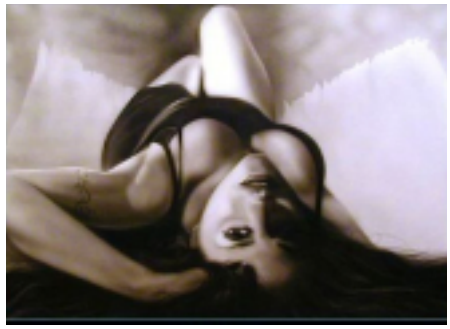
The Danish painter Bjørn Ericksen has one of the more subtle visual vocabularies in this show, enabling him to conjure up the complexity of human relationships in a semi abstract style that also provides pleasure for its formal and painterly attributes. In the composition he calls "Last Minute/If Adam Hadn't Eaten the Apple, the Banana, the Peach, or Whatever," a big blue hand (its underdeveloped thumb suggesting one of the lower primates) reaches down from the sky to snatch a nude female figure resembling a severely simplified Botticelli Venus away from a male in a bright red t-shirt who forces a clown-like smile as he strives in vain to reach out to her. The setting, by the way, is hardly Edenic, suggesting nothing so much as the parkinglot of a strip mall, its bleakness relieved here and there by patches of bright green Astroturf.

In fact, Ericksen's people appear as though they would be right at home in the deadpan interiors of another semi-abstract Danish painter, Jonna Pedersen, whose composition "Cold Sheets in Berlin" bespeaks the bleakness of an unsuccessful romantic assignation in Heartbreak Hotel with its simplified sink, empty mirror, and snot-green walls. Pedersen melds these unattractive seeming elements into an oddly harmonious and appealing composition by virtue of her unerring sense of the tensions inherent in space, as well as her ability to make essentially drab color combinations resonate emotionally. In this regard she reminds one of the group of British painters known as The Kitchen Sink School, led by John Bratby, who endeavored to capture the grimness of the postwar period. Pedersen, however, transcends proletarian soap opera by virtue of a formal restraint that lends her compositions far more resonance.

Although their names sound vaguely similar, one trusts that you will not get Pedersen mixed up with Valerie Patterson, a consummate realist whose contorted figures invariably appear to writhe within the grip of some translucent mebraneous substance reminiscent of the bloodstreaked primal slime we are all covered with when we're yanked from the dark comfort of the womb into the harsh fluorescence of this world in the Big Bang of birth. Their faces obfuscated as though by the semi-sheer stockings bank robbers or terrorists sometimes pull over their heads to mask their features, these vulnerable souls appear to be bound and gagged in a manner that can be interpreted symbolically in myriad ways. One thinks of Edvard Munch's famous work "The Scream," but in Patterson's work, rather than radiating out in fiery sound-waves, the cry is inwardly muffled, as though by one of those transparent plastic dry cleaners' bags that we are forever being warned not to let our small children smother in. Valerie Patterson's figures appear as though they have crawled into one of those things willingly, mistaking it for the womb they were so rudely expelled from, and are now struggling in vain to be born again.

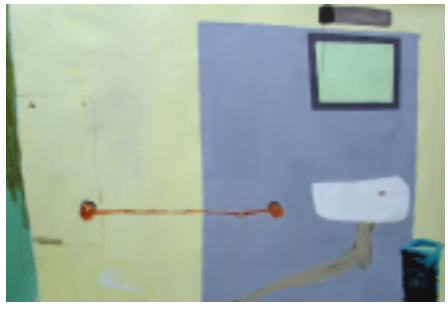
Richard Milo is another artist who puts an accomplished realist technique, involving the use of an airbrush along with layered glazes applied in the traditional manner, to the service of a singularly subjective vision in his meticulous renderings of symbolic figures and objects melding in allegorical compositions possessed of a classical repose that makes them something of an anomaly among the more funky members of the Monkdogz menagerie. Milo layers his compositions as richly as Sigmar Polke, albeit without resorting to 1980s-style irony; rather he employs images such as ancient Egyptian statues, navigation charts and schooners alluding to Columbus' journey, simulated tintypes of Indians and calvary officers, a symbolic skull-faced Uncle Sam, and the spacesuits of NASA to create pictures that convey apparently heartfelt sentiments regarding events of personal and historical significance. Although actual figures, such as a cherubic naked child, appear in some paintings, others are comprised of pictures within the picture, statues, and other symbolically juxtaposed inanimate objects, suggesting a contemporary synthesis of surrealism and the trompe l'oeil manner of 19th century still life painters such as John Peto and William Hartnett.

By contrast, the sensual female figure, as mythologized by the modern mass media, occupies center stage in the art of Michael Apice, a professor at Briarcliffe College, who employs a monochromatic palette that lends his paintings and prints an atmosphere reminiscent of film noir. Apice, who has also worked as an illustrator for Paramount Pictures, among other clients, bathes his languorous starlet-types in silvery tones that evoke the sheen of moist skin, silken sheets and the way light gleams off the peroxided hair of the voluptuous femme fatales in 1940s B-movies. Although his use of grisaille in dramatically cropped compositions could signal a stylistic kinship with David Salle, Apice's approach to womanly curves is romantic rather than pornographic; he is



Michael Apice "Brittany"

Marcus van Soest "Elephante"



Jonna Pedersen "Cold Sheets in Berlin"

Richard Milo "Instructions"

continued next page

Bjørn Ericksen "Last Minute/If Adam Hadn't Eaten the Apple, the Banana, the Peach or Whatever"

Jim Lawn "Fruits of Creation"

an artist enamored of the Goddess rather than the bimbo.

Although more abstract than most of the other work in this show, the large canvases of Sunia Boneham, which the artist calls "Scaffoldings" and states "are the untangling, reweaving, raw, complexities of experience in New York City" fit auspiciously into the ethos of Monkdogz Urban Art. Like Hundertwasser's architectural mazes or Jean Dubuffet's art brut "townscapes," Boneham's paintings are composed with convoluted and colorful linear configurations that suggest neon-splashed subway maps. The calligraphic mark-making, enlivened by staccato strokes, splashes, and drips, has a crude energy akin to Basquiat; however, her compositions have a rhythmic grace that belongs to Boneham alone.

Even more unexpected in context, the drawings of Lou Patrou and the paintings and digital prints of the Irish artist Jim Lawn provide a welcome note of lyricism amid all the clamor. Patrou engulfs human and anthropomorphic feline heads ala Saul Steinberg in vigorously applied rainbow hues that charge them with a dazzling visual electricity. Although conceived in pastels on paper, Patrou's images are reproduced as FujiFlex

Lou Patrou "Cat Guys Listening"

prints and mounted on wood behind clear plexiglass in a manner that both lends more heft as art objects and slightly "distances" the image, adding to its visionary numinousness.

By contrast, the Irish artist Jim Lawn endeavors to apprehend an elusive subject in his subtle composition "Atlantic Mist," with its amorphous forms and light akin to Turner's "tinted steam." Here, as well as in other paintings, such as "Fruits of Creation," Lawn's buoyant visual poetry and chromatic frisson are optically seductive, with soft-focused forms afloat in luminous color fields in compositions invested with expressive depth and mystery. Lawn's paintings remind one of how evocative and relevant abstract painting can still be when it is concerned with subjective exploration rather than simply achieving a formal effect.

Although too diverse, unruly, and even aesthetically contentious a crew to signify a budding school or movement—concepts that seem no longer applicable anyway, given the pluralistic climate of our day—the artists assembled under the Monkdogz banner make an auspicious debut and suggest a much needed shot in the arm for postmodern, postmovement art.

—Ed McCormack

Displacement and Rebirth Are Sonja Alaimo's Central Themes

One of the salient characteristics of Symbolist art is its rejection of literal representation in favor of an approach in which images serve a similar function to metaphors in poetry. While Symbolism flourished as a movement from the mid-1800s through the first decade of the twentieth century, when it was somewhat eclipsed by the rise of modernism, certain artists who have remained faithful to its principles up to the present day have found a receptive audience for the their work, regardless of changing artist fashions. For Symbolism, like Surrealism, is a tendency that speaks directly to the human psyche, requiring little knowledge of art history in order to be appreciated.

The contemporary painter Sonja Alaimo, whose work has been featured over the years in exhibitions at The National Arts Club and elsewhere and can also be viewed on her website, www.sonjaalaimo.com, is an excellent case in point. Alaimo's visual metaphors are invariably accessible, striking a responsive chord in the receptive viewer by virtue of their symbolic clarity and the artist's ability to present them in contexts that are as aesthetically pleasing as they are emotionally evocative.

"A Kite Named Hope"

Part of the appeal of Alaimo's paintings can be attributed to her awareness of abstract values which may not be immediately obvious to some of her most ardent admirers. Indeed, it is these underlying qualities, more evident to the trained eye, which imbue her compositions with a formal strength often absent in Symbolist work which relies solely on literary—which is to say, ostensibly narrative—elements to produce an effect.

Nowhere, perhaps, are these qualities more evident than in the painting that Alaimo calls "A Kite Named Hope," where the forms and colors are so strong and the formal thrust of the design so bold that one might initially construe the composition as a nature-based abstraction in the manner of Arthur Dove. And even when one looks more closely, the title may seem slightly misleading, since the painting does not depict a kite entangled in the limbs of a tree, as might appear to be the case, but a butterfly with delicately veined red wings fluttering yearningly toward that tree while mysteriously tethered to a tiny gold chain.

One could speculate endlessly on the possible meanings of such an image; yet it is helpful to know that Alaimo's most frequently recurring themes are displacement and rebirth— something she experienced as a young woman when she was driven from her native Hungary by the Nazis and had to make a new life in the United States. Alaimo has said that she feels a particular kinship with others who have been displaced, either by the Holocaust, the recent Hurricane in New Orleans, or for other manmade or natural causes.

In conversation, Alaimo calls herself "a transplant" and refers to having been "uprooted," thus shedding light on her use of botanical imagery in her paintings, many of which feature flowers, leaves, and vines. In some paintings, these floral forms are combined with a simplified female torso, resembling the dress forms one sees in a tailor's workroom, about which they are seen entwined in graceful configurations. Such fanciful juxtapositions remind one of the short story by Bruno Schulz (a great Polish writer tragically cut down in his prime by a stormtrooper's bullet) entitled "Treatise on Tailors' Dummies, or The Second Book of Genesis," in which a fictionalized version of the author's father declares, "There is no dead matter; lifelessness is only a disguise behind which hide unknown forms of life."

Alaimo appears to concur with Schulz in paintings such as "A Woman Named Belladonna" and "Leaf," in which the armless, headless feminine torso is embellished not only with painted vines and leaves but also with the metallic nailheads with which Alaimo has recently begun to outline and fill in some of her figures, as light-catching, tactile additions to her compositions. These graceful bodice-shapes have elongated necks that either disappear off the top edge of the painting surface or culminate in floral forms, rather than human heads (which the artists feels would distract from her symbolic aims).

The female form is featured in the work of Sonja Alaimo in other guises as well: forming the dunes that flow into the ocean in a horizontal painting called "Beached, " and appearing as a full-length dancing figure, covered in sequins and set atop an elongated pedestal, in "Later Than We Think." The latter work, as well as another free-standing piece called "Younger Than Springtime," which incorporates an actual working clock, reveal that this contemporary Symbolist painter is equally gifted as a sculptor.

—Ed McCormack

Kiki Brodkin: Radiant Auras Meet Significant Form in "Wax and Wood"

"How wonderful it is to reach into the unknown to call up the poetic power of magical visual imagery," declares the triply gifted sculptor, painter, and printmaker Kiki Brodkin, who prefers being referred to as Kiki, and whose recent solo show "Wax and Wood," at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, in Chelsea, revealed her distinctly different approaches to two creative disciplines.

The sheer, unadulterated enthusiasm of Kiki's statement reveals something central to her work: the almost hedonistic tactile pleasure that she takes in manipulating materials, employing them as vehicles for exploration, rather than as a means to execute preconceived ideas. In a time when so many others put the main emphasis on conceptual strategies to the detriment of immediacy, the sensuality of form and the sensuousness of surface that Kiki achieves through her direct approach are qualities to be savored and treasured. One is drawn into Kiki's work in much the same way that one is attracted to anything truly beautiful, without the necessity to intellectualize or rationalize the pleasure one finds there.

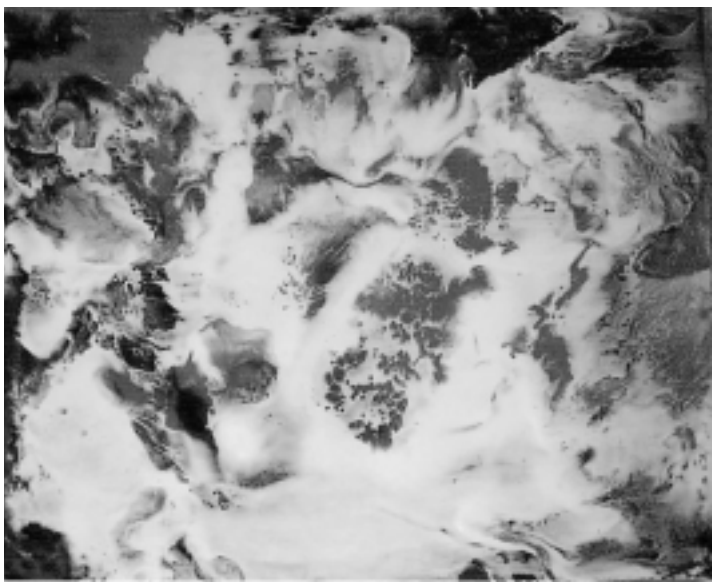
To those of us who knew her first as a sculptor, one of the most obvious differences between Kiki's sculptures and paintings— particularly evident in this show— is that the sculptures, although not overly large by today's often overblown standards, are considerably more physically imposing than the paintings. Standing on their pedestals they command space with an authoritativeness that one normally only finds in large-scale floor sculptures, combined with an almost contradictory formal poise.

In the latter regard, the work in walnut that Kiki calls "Balance" seems especially well-named. It is comprised of a large, irregularly circular donut shape that could suggest a swiftly drawn infinity symbol laid down in brush and ink by a Zen master. At the same time, this shape has the palpable heft of a primitive wheel, set atop another form that resembles a sharply pointed boulder, which appears to totter as precariously as a football on a toaster upon a third, rectangular, shape suggesting a stone tablet.

Although Kiki also works in stone, as the title of this show indicates, all of these pieces are carved in wood. However, there is an element of sleight of eye in Kiki's wood sculptures that can make them appear as weighty as stone. Conversely, because of the velocity that she imparts to her forms, which have a biomorphic simplicity that places her in the tradition of Arp and Brancusi, her pieces can also seem weightless and buoyant, as though fashioned from helium balloons.

In the mahogany sculpture that Kiki calls "Equinox," a smoothly carved form that, given the title, could suggest a squared-off sun, is held in the embrace of two narrower shapes which rise up on either side of it like arms, wings, or the hands of a perfectly symmetrical clock especially designed to mark the time when the sun crosses the equator and night and day are everywhere of equal length.

In other wood sculptures such as "Standing Figure #69," Kiki evokes a sense of the human presence with flowing contours and volumes that achieve an organic unity and an abstract autonomy calling to mind Henry Moore's belief that sculpture should have "a pent-up energy, an intense life of its own, independent of the object it may represent."



Encaustic painting by Kiki Brodkin

In her paintings, Kiki enters an entirely different dimension, quite remote from her sculptural concerns. No other painter, including the most famous contemporary exponent of encaustic painting, Jasper Johns, exploits the qualities peculiar to the medium so lusciously. Kiki obviously loves the effects that can be achieved with pigment suspended in molten wax, the "burning in" of color that produces chromatic qualities akin to the light which emanates from deep within a ruby. Indeed, the intimate scale on which she generally works enhances this gemlike quality, both in her encaustic monoprints on paper and in her even smaller encaustic paintings on panel.

Among the former, "Print in Gray" demonstrates the subtlety that she wrings from the medium with a delicate range of variegated hues that make its title a misnomer. Like votive lights glowing through smoke, delicate yellows and reds emerge from a monolithic rectangular shape set smack against the white of the paper, the appeal of its almost careless aplomb is enhanced by elegant waxen drips at the bottom. By contrast, in the more aptly named print "Brilliant," Kiki places a few soft smears of delicate translucent primaries on an expanse of white paper as though they simply grew there like wildflowers.

Although sculptors usually have a hard time not drawing when they paint, Kiki is one of those rare exceptions who knows how to court amorphousness in order to free color from the constraints of form. Oddly enough, she accomplishes this even in her paintings on panel that include geometric (mainly rectangular) collage elements, floating the translucent colors over the forms in a manner that imbues these small paintings with an exhilarating compositional freedom coupled with a sense of infinite, vibrant depth.

Numbered rather than titled, Kiki's works on panel are placed sequentially at eye level at even intervals in a manner making clear that they are meant to be viewed as a modular installation, rather than individually. Yet on closer inspection, each panel yields a discrete compositional richness, ranging from minimal to maximal; from geometric to biomorphic; from gestural mark-making to shimmering color field.

Glowing orbs are perhaps the most frequently recurring motif in Kiki's paintings, suggesting allusions to romantic landscape in the manner of Albert Pinkham Ryder, an isolated, eccentric American visionary, who evolved his own primitive version of encaustic by sometimes mixing candle wax with oil paints in his mostly nocturnal scenes.

But while Ryder simplified shapes in a manner that made many later painters revere him as a precursor of modernism, his landscapes and seascapes never became as abstract, nor as luminous as Kiki Brodkin's encaustics, which might more properly be called "sunscapes," given the radiant auras that they shed over the entire exhibition space, during her most recent and most memorable solo show at Pleiades Gallery.

—Ed McCormack

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Anatomy & Destiny: Marjie Zelman's Sophisticated Art Brut

"Thanks to art, instead of seeing a single world, our own, we see it multiply until we have before us as many worlds as there are original artists," Marcel Proust declared in his maxims. If so, it is a facet of Marjie Zelman's originality that she presents us with a world viewed, slightly askew, through a funhouse mirror.

A former dancer who also sculpted in clay for many years, Zelman has been known to fling her brushes aside and attack her pictures with paint-smeared hands and fingers. One can almost imagine her literally merging, body and soul, with the the freely distorted human and animal figures whose antic contortions animate the paintings in her new solo exhibition at Viridian Artists @ Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, from May 23 to June 3. (Reception: Tuesday, May 23, 4 to 7 PM.)

"Unholy Dalliance"

Zelman gives the old hippie maxim "Go with the flow" a good name, given how many elements of her compositions appear to grow directly out of drips, dribbles, and skeins of watercolor that she sets in motion across the paper and follows to wherever they decide to take her, discovering her subjects in process, rather than via a calculated course of action.

None of which is to imply that all is fun and games in Zelman's world, where watercolor is augmented with acrylic, ink, pastel, pencil, and collaged bits of this and that in a manner that makes her the quintessential mixed media artist. For while generally sympathetic to all the endearing picadillos that beset the human animal, Zelman's pictures also include a healthy amount of righteous indignation in regard to all that is base in our nature, as well as a willingness to eviscerate pomposity with a brush wielded like a stilleto.

Witness, for instance, the picture Zelman calls "Give Me Your Weary and Your Not So Poor," in which a floozy-looking Lady Liberty in high heels snipped from a slick fashion spread presides over a plethora of downtrodden ethnic types. Have you ever seen a more scathing indictment of all those affluent hipocrites, children and grandchildren of immigrants, who now rail against so-called "illegal aliens" and want to close all the borders against future opportunity for others? Zelman alone can make point like this across in a manner that combines the whimsy of Paul Klee with the biting satire of George Grosz.

Norman Mailer once wrote of Picasso that he was "the first painter to bridge the animate and the inanimate, to recover the infantile eye which cannot distinguish between a pitcher and a bird, a face and a plant, or indeed a penis and a nose, a toe and a breast." Granted, Mailer has always had a way with hyperbole and Zelman, like any sophisticate, would probably protest against being saddled with such anatomical innocence. Yet, she nonetheless possess an extraordinary freshness of vision that makes it possible for her to make connections few other painters would attempt.

"Unholy Dalliance" seems to prove this point splendidly, depicting an unhappy menage between Othello, his wife, and his mistress, the trio enmeshed in a linear web of lines and lies. Looking understandably beset, his curly, pubic-looking goatee dominating the center of the composition, Shakespeare's Moor appears trapped between his angry helpmate and his comely playmate, who has literal (stick-on) stars in her eyes and whose full, bare bosom makes her look like an ideal candidate for the louche men's magazine called "Juggs." Poor Othello is trying to convince the missus that he has "not had sex with that woman," to quote another famous rake. Only, to his hapless misfortune he is hardly as slick as Bill Clinton and almost as cursed as Job.

As in other paintings, visual tension is enhanced by the artist's frequent device of tilting the paper this way and that while working, to let the watercolor drips flow in all directions. Here, however, a pair of red feminine lips, cribbed from a magazine photo and gracing the upper left side of the composition, is a truly inspired touch. For the realism of this collage element contrasts sharply with the Art Brut Expressionism of the main figures, creating the kind of visual dissonance that Zelman's compositions thrive on. Obviously, these are the loose lips that sink ships—a characteristically witty telegraphic stand-in for the gossipy actor who steps to the edge of the stage to address the audience directly, delivering a soliquey in classical dramas.

Zelman's visual wit is just as inimitable in the punningly titled "Dancing Bare," where a funky beast with glued-on bedroom eyes is juxtaposed with Emma Goldman's famous statement "If I can't dance, I won't join your revolution." Another painting, still untitled at the time the work was previewed, was inspired by the artist's recent experience of becoming a "granny nanny" to the offspring of her grown children. In it, noses that actually do appear indistinguishable form phalluses pop out of a crowd of interconnected figures. These prominent proboscises seem to symbolize those cannons of profligacy through which humanity obeys the biblical command to "multiply and be fruitful."

As I emphasized in an earlier review, it is the tension between their abstract and figurative elements that animates these compositions. However, her delightfully skewed view of humanity is what makes the art of Marjie Zelman unique.

—Ed McCormack

Sandra Gottlieb Makes Us See the Sea Differently

"Having lived my life near the shores of the East Coast of the United States, the endlessly shifting moods of the sea have proven irresistible to my camera's lens," says Sandra Gottlieb, whose "Nocturnes" series is featured in the year around salon exhibition at World Fine Art Gallery 511 West 25th Street, in Chelsea.

The series is well named, given the sense of interminable night that the deep blue colorations of her photographs project. Cerulean and ultramarine waves, illumined by moonlight and topped by frothy white surf, take on a monumental grandeur in Gottlieb's large color prints, with their flickers of light shimmering and glimmering over the inky depths. In some pictures, such as "Nocturne" #8," the shadowy waves appear almost sculptural in their dense solidity, in contrast to "Nocturne #1," where the crashing surf disperses in a splashy dance of white foam, like Abstract Expressionist brush strokes laid down in heavy impasto.

Energy and mystery are everywhere evident in this series, which seems to capture the capricious force of the ocean, its movement and its lulls, its beauty and its danger. One gets the sense that Gottlieb could devote a lifetime to photographing the waves rolling into the shore and back out to the sea without exhausting their dramatic possibilities. In each picture she discovers some new facet of its shimmer, its glimmer, its ever-changing character. Indeed, her project reminds one of a wonderful poem entitled "Sea" by Jack Kerouac, included in his novel "Big Sur," in which he magically evokes the roar and rush of the waters with made up words and onomatopoeia; for Gottlieb focuses in so closely on the waves and foam and shadows that they become the very abstract essence of the watery depths. The actual sea becomes almost a metaphor for itself and for other things and energies as well.

"Nocturne 1"

In "Nocturne #3," the rhythmic swelling of the waves takes on an almost visual lilt, an almost audible suggestion of melodious movement, that underscores the title she has chosen for the series—"nocturne" being a musical term for a night-piece—with the waves splashing frothily and appearing to roll in horizontal layers as though photographed from a sidelong angle, while in other compositions the attack upon the beachfront is fully frontal. Either way, one is swept up in the sense of movement that Gottlieb captures so unerringly in all of her pictures, carrying us along on the tide, immersing us in the darkness and the mystery of something eternal and ultimately unknowable among natural wonders.

Perhaps the artist to whose work Gottlieb's is closest in spirit is the French photographer Lucien Clergue, of whom Picasso once remarked, "He is the Monet of the camera." Like Gottlieb, Clergue often photographed from the beach near her home in Arles. However, the pictures for which Clergue is best known are close-ups of a nude female model merging with the waves in a manner that suggests Venus rising from the sea, while Gottlieb eschews mythology to tackle the subject head-on, finding the deeper truth and final transcendence that can only come from confronting the miracle of what is real.

—Marie R. Pagano

Anne Bachelier

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