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GALLERY&STUDIO

The World of the Working Artist

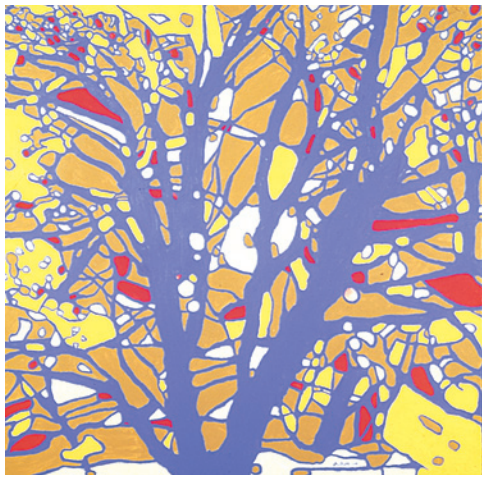
Philip Guston "The Studio" 1969 Oil on canvas 48 x 42 inches Private Collection. Photo courtesy of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth

GUSTON BY THE BOOK:

Solipsistic Riffs, Gonzo Recollections, and Reprobate Ruminations on Art, Aging, and Late-Life Rebirth

by Ed McCormack (pg. 14)

ANN HAALAND



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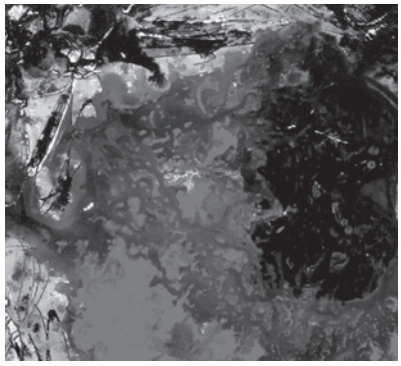
Masao Sesoko

G&S Highlights

On the Cover:
Change your style late in life, alienate your old friends, become a hero to the young. ***Philip Guston*** *showed us all a cool way to grow old. –centerfold*



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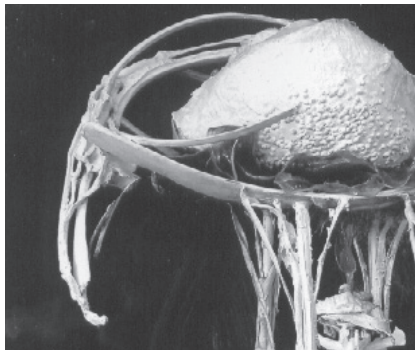

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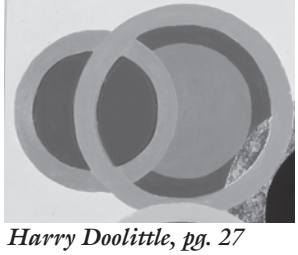

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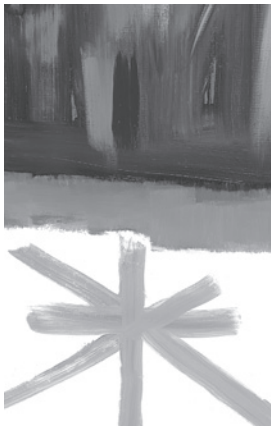

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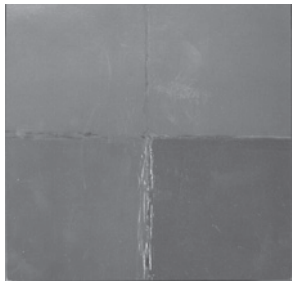

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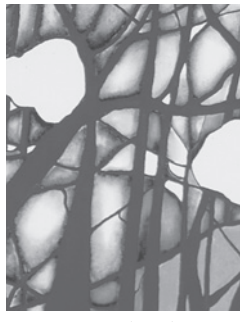

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217 East 85th Street, PMB 228, New York, NY 10028
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EDITOR AND PUBLISHER **Jeannie McCormack**
MANAGING EDITOR **Ed McCormack**
SPECIAL EDITORIAL ADVISOR **Margot Palmer-Poroner**
DESIGN AND PRODUCTION **Karen Mullen**
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR **Maureen Flynn**
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Women Artists Get All Dolled Up for The Barbie Picture Show

Who but Stefania Carrozzini, the hip young curator who jets between Milan, Beijing, and New York, organizing exhibitions for D'Ars International Exhibition Projects, would come up with the concept of framing America's favorite inanimate bimbo, Barbie, within the cultural context of the filmic cult classic The Rocky Horror Show? Carrozzini not only does so, but makes a trenchant cultural statement with "The Barbie Picture Show," at CVB Space, 407 West 13th Street, through June 13.

As usual, the show is accompanied by one of Carrozzini's provocative essays, in which she not only tells us that Barbie "has always summed up all the stereotypes of the female body," but that "the Barbie model is the flagship which powers all the industries having as their objective the profit made on the female body."

And this time, Carrozzini, whose photographs are usually restricted to the catalog covers for her shows, also enters the fray as a participating artist with her digital print "Fly Barbie Fly," in which the doll sports "Pretty in Pink" wings to match her dress and could almost be mistaken at first glance for a pink rose as she soars against a backdrop of verdant pink foliage. With this wistful image Carrozzini seems to restore Barbie's lost innocence in a manner analogous to if one could travel back in time and undo the exploitation of Brooke Shields as an object of softcore kiddy-porn in the film "Pretty Baby."

Daniela Benedetti projects a much grimmer scenario in her two-panel oil on wood "Electra Vision," in which Barbie hangs by her hands above what appears to be a laboratory sink painted in a washed-out style akin to Luc Tuymans. One can only assume she is the victim of some aspiring Hannibal Lechter practicing with his sister's doll collection.

Several Barbies do not appear to fare much better in journalist and conceptual artist Maria Rebecca Ballestra's color photograph, where they are scattered as though rudely discarded. A superimposed text ("When I was a princess...") suggests the short shelf-life of young women who buy into the Barbie myth and base their lives on being objects of superficial beauty.

Two other artists also present an unhappy prognosis for those who aspire to Barbiedom in mixed media pieces that suggest postmodern crucifixions: Gabriella Ceccherini enshrouds the doll in the kind of black veils adopted as the everyday garb of elderly and devout Italian widows and suspends her from yellow and red ribbons festooned with cut-outs of birds and encircled by wire topped by what appears to be an improvised crown of thorns.

Carla Crosio also employs wire in her piece "My Barbie is Dead, Also My Dreams." Only here, it flows from a platinum blond Barbie's eyes like a glittering river of tears as she regurgitates a mass of fibrous material that covers her frontal nudity like Lady Godiva's hair.

In both Ceccherini and Crosio's pieces there is the sense that the artist is taking revenge on Barbie for the illusions she has

Photo by Stefania Carrozzini

fostered on unsuspecting young women—the classic morality tale of a bad girl coming to a bad end. However, Olimpia Fontanelli's "Broken Barbie" is a frankly autobiographical work in which the artist explores her own obsessions with what she calls "ideal perfection." Working with iron, clay, plastic, and acrylic, Fontanelli creates a tableau in which a wide-eyed Barbie wanders through a forest of bare trees with various outfits and accessories hanging from their branches. Obviously, she is adrift in a consumer's paradise where dreams are for the taking; only the viewer knows that she will pay dearly on the installment plan.

Christina Iotti takes a more dispassionate view of the phenomenon in her drawing in ink and pastel on paper "Real Woman is Not Like Barbie." In a meticulous photorealist technique, Iotti juxtaposes closeups of a nude Barbie's smiling face, nippleless breasts, and other body parts with those of a classically plump nude from art history, arranged in the squares of a grid. While Barbie meets today's standards for slenderness, her plastic body, complete with strange seams between her moving parts, contrasts coldly with the warm curves of the classical nude, suggesting that this mechanical bride of modern consumerism may not be all that desirable after all.

In "The Deification of Barbie," a digital print on forex by Marika Franco, who is also a painter, images of the doll draped in pearls with dried blood covering her breasts and her legs spread to reveal her lack of genitals are juxtaposed with upside-down Barbie's (falling like bombs) in an ornate abstract context, suggesting the baroque opulence of religious icons. Here, again, the grid—that staple of minimalism newly revamped as postmodern image-frame—figures prominently.

Jackie Sleper, an artist from Amsterdam who appears to have become an honorary Italian through her inclusion in Carrozzini's group shows, is represented by a characteristically over the top sculpture. It consists of several bald, naked Barbies, cut off at the torso and piled in a pyramidal configuration. The top figure sports a tiny crown, suggesting a beauty queen ascending on the backs of lesser Barbies.

Then there is Emma Vitti, who weighs in with an installation composed of 44 photographs. It is called "Hybridization" and juxtaposes overlapping images of doll fragments and human models, suggesting that the anatomies of real women might be bionically enhanced through the addition of Barbie parts manufactured at human scale.

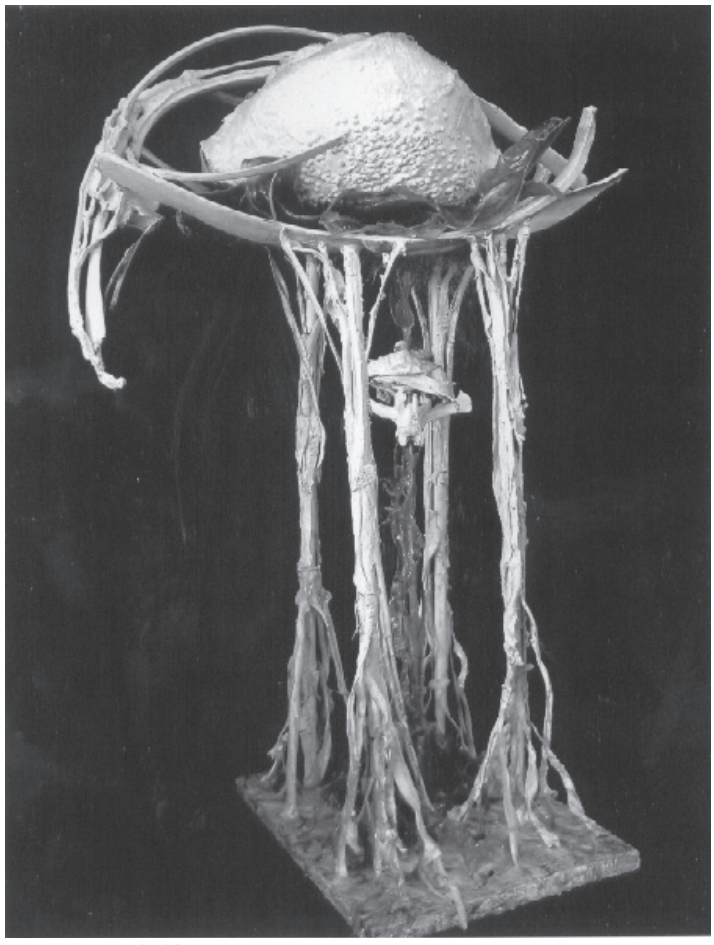
It seems fitting that all of the artists in "The Barbie Picture Show" were female, given that "the famous plastic princess," as Stefania Carrozzini refers to her, represents "the impossible ideal for every little girl and woman who strives for a perfect and unreal body." But that each artist found a unique way to express the psychological impact that the pressure for unreal perfection imposes on women is what made this exhibition memorable and important.

—Ed McCormack

Catching Up With the Natural Evolution of Tom O'Hara

The blind mystic and musician known as Moondog was one of those irreplaceable characters native to a kinder, gentler, and in some ways much more colorful New York City that vanished long ago. No one knew much about him, except that he was some sort of composer and was rumored to have written the song "Nature Boy," recorded by Nat King Cole. But his main claim to fame was being a visually startling fixture on certain streets of the city.

When the sculptor Tom O'Hara first came to Greenwich Village from Boston as a young man to attend N.Y.U., he remembers seeing this tall, bearded man standing "rooted like an old tree on a corner near Washington Square," wearing a horned Viking hat and long, hooded felt robe, still as a statue, holding a tall spear. This indelible memory provoked the totemic mixed media work "Moondog," one of the highlights of O'Hara's recent solo exhibition of fantastical sculpture and assemblage paintings "Menagerie de l' Imagination," at New Century Artists, 530 West 25th Street, in Chelsea.



"Four-Legged Ibis"

Although it is abstract, constructed from strips of rawhide, pine cones, and various other organic materials with no discernible human features, "Moondog," like so many of O'Hara's sculptures, captures the essence of its subject much more dynamically than any more conventionally representational portrait possibly could. O'Hara's use of natural materials, such as the ubiquitous rawhide that figures prominently in many of his pieces, bark, dried mushrooms, nuts, and even animal bones (the deer pelvises, for example, that are laid end to end to create the eerie, mask-like face in his sculpture "Unexpected Caller") has caused some to classify his work as "science fictional" or see it as somehow "outsiderish."

In fact, O'Hara is a highly sophisticated sculptor who should not be relegated to such essentially meaningless aesthetic ghettos. For despite his penchant for foraging like some eccentric aesthetic Thoreau in the wooded areas around his upstate studio in New Paltz, New York, for unusual organic detritus from which to construct his imaginary universe of biological anomalies rather than spending his time networking at art world cocktail parties, he is actually as mainstream in his own manner as Anselm Keifer (an artist he admires), and his intuitive conceptualism can be related to Joseph Beuys' oft-stated wish to bring to modern art "the primitive wisdom of being."

Indeed, O'Hara's disinterest in art world politics, as well as his crusty individualism in pursuing his own vision, call to mind the cantankerous recluse Clyfford Still, who, according to art historian Nancy Frazier, "believed in the transformative power of art and thought of himself as something of a shaman." While O'Hara is far too bemused and down to earth to make such claims for himself with a straight face, works such as "Shaman Princess," another thorny sculptural totem with a formidable presence, indicate at least a passing interest in mystical themes. And a symbolic sense of animism—the belief, held by some indigenous cultures, that all natural objects possess an innate soul—pervades his oeuvre.

As the title of the exhibition indicates, O'Hara also presents a veritable bestiary of imaginary creatures, such as "Four-Legged Ibis," an avian apparition as fiercely fantastic as Leonard Baskin's great drawings for Ted Hughes' long poem "Crow," and "Bearded Crocopede," a hybrid creature fancifully combining the characteristics of a crocodile and a centipede with an improvisational ingenuity akin to Picasso's pioneering mixed media sculpture "Baboon."

One of O'Hara's most lyrical pieces, however, is the abstract sculpture "Captive Moon," in which an entire atmospheric nocturnal landscape is suggested, if not actually depicted, simply with a twigs and leaves enshrouding a large orb and saturated with dappled blue-green hues that evoke the incandescence of lunar light. Here, as in other, equally poetic pieces, such as "Stellar Cloud" and "First Frost," O'Hara seems both a latter-day Symbolist in the manner of Casper David Friedrich for the romantic resonance of his work and a peer of the Color Field painter Jules Olitski for his use of pale silver-blue hues, enhanced by scatterings of fiberglass beads, to create a subtle chromatic shimmer.

O'Hara's ability to achieve a successful synthesis of formal and suggestive attributes can also be seen in assemblage paintings such as "Les Escargots," in which shells and damp lichen that he found on a beach in Libya are incorporated into an abstract composition as characteristically appealing for its tactile qualities as its visual ones, as well as in "Shell Bank," in which he employs similar marine detritus, along with more traditional collage elements, to transport one's imagination to the depth of the ocean floor.

Indeed, Tom O'Hara's imaginative range, as he strives for what he calls "a convergence of art, science, and nature," is immense, giving us interpretations of early life forms emerging from the primal sludge in assemblage paintings such as "Genesis," and "Antediluvian," and fast-forwarding many centuries from now to the demise of life forms as yet unknown in another powerful mixed media piece called "Future Fossils."

Such scope is something to be savored and treasured in a time when far too many other artists put a lid on imaginative enterprise in order to evince the reassuring repetitions of a "signature style." Having studied the natural world closely enough to make analogies, Tom O'Hara knows that such stagnation is the death of life, not to mention the death of art. So he keeps moving in order to evolve, never looking back to see if the critics and other so-called "tastemakers" are catching up.

—Ed McCormack

Sculptors Dibner, Hutt, and Pramotepipop Celebrate the Figure at Pen & Brush

After over a century of modernist deconstruction, some sculptors of the postmodern era are now endeavoring to restore wholeness and integrity to that greatest of all subjects: the human form. Three such artists, each of whom has won many prizes and is represented in numerous public and private collections, can be seen in "Celebrating Form," the 2005 Sculpture Award Winners' Show, at The Pen & Brush, Inc., 16 East 10th Street, through June 11.

"I have been sculpting with my eyes my whole life but in clay for only the past fifteen years," states Jean Proulx Dibner, who is presently at work on an epic series of sculptures entitled "The Circle of Life," which, like a novel in three dimensions, follows a mother and daughter through various stages of life, starting from before the birth of the latter and culminating with the reversal of their roles, when the daughter becomes the mother's caretaker. Two completed bronzes from the narrative in progress, "Anticipation," in which the standing figure of the mother-to-be contemplates her newly bounteous body, and "Leaving the Nest," in which the young daughter is already looking toward the future, while the mother gazes back, are included in the exhibition at the Pen & Brush. Both demonstrate the tactile, expressive fluidity of Dibner's style, which imbues telling moments of everyday life with a monumental quality.

Lee Hutt "Dreadlocks"

Also on view are individual sculptures such as "Remembered," and "Contemplation," which seem to condense a lifetime of experience into a single compelling image. In "Remembered," a broken bronze face, its upper portion missing, the corners of its mouth set sorrowfully downward, is suspended against overlapping marble rectangles suggesting the Twin Towers. In "Contemplation," the ideally bald head of a thoughtful man is supported under the chin by only a hand and an arm poised gracefully on a marble pedestal, simultaneously giving the piece an abstract quality and suggesting intellectual transcendence.

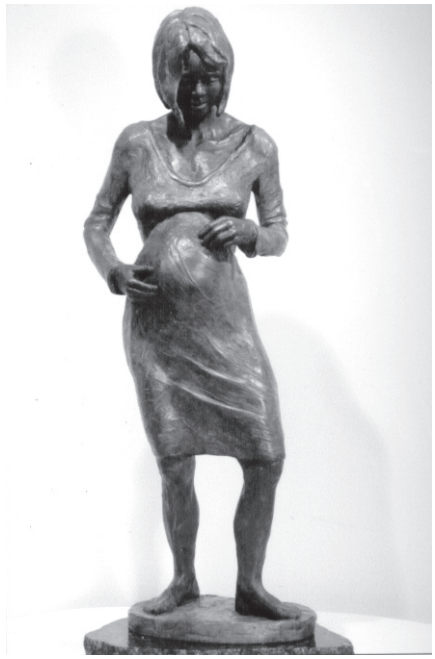
Lee Hutt is especially adept at capturing the details, gestures, and expressions that delineate character. Looking at Hutt's cast stone sculpture, "Dreadlocks," for example, one can be fairly certain that the young man slumped in a chair, wearing baggy clothing and fiddling with his lavish-

Yupin Pramotepipop "Reaching"

ly sprouting hairstyle as he reads a book propped up in his lap is conversant with reggae, hip hop, and dub poetry. By contrast, it is just as clear that another subject in a cast stone piece called "Der Youngerman" fancies himself as a worthy successor to Goethe. For, wearing the shaggy mane of a literary lion, as well as a self-satisfied expression, he is presented as a classical bust propped atop a stack of books on which his scholarly specs also rest.

Hutt's own persona is presented just as wittily, if not quite as comprehensibly, in "Self Portrait with Lavender," a bronze of a voluptuous headless torso sprouting stalks of those delicate, aromatic purple flowers, while her punningly titled mixed media piece "Fish Out of Order," involving a scaly creature too large for its tank (which it pierces like an arrow!), ventures blithely into the realm of the surreal.

Interested in "exploring the contrast between being at peace and being in a state of unrest," Yupin Pramotepipop creates both bas-reliefs and freestanding sculptures



Jean Proulx Dibner "Anticipation"

in plaster, Aqua-resin, and FGR. In her bas-reliefs she purposely allows areas of cast chicken wire or wood to show in order to introduce a slightly discordant note that interrupts the overall sense of classical repose that permeates her aesthetic. These traces of "process" bring her pieces alive in often surprising ways.

However, what comes across most in her work is her appreciation for the human body as a thing of grace and beauty. Whether depicting a muscular male nude, as in "Bobby," or a lithe, sensual female nude with upraised arms, as in "Reaching," Pramotepipop invariably emphasizes the attributes of her subjects in a manner that makes them objects of considerable aesthetic delectation.

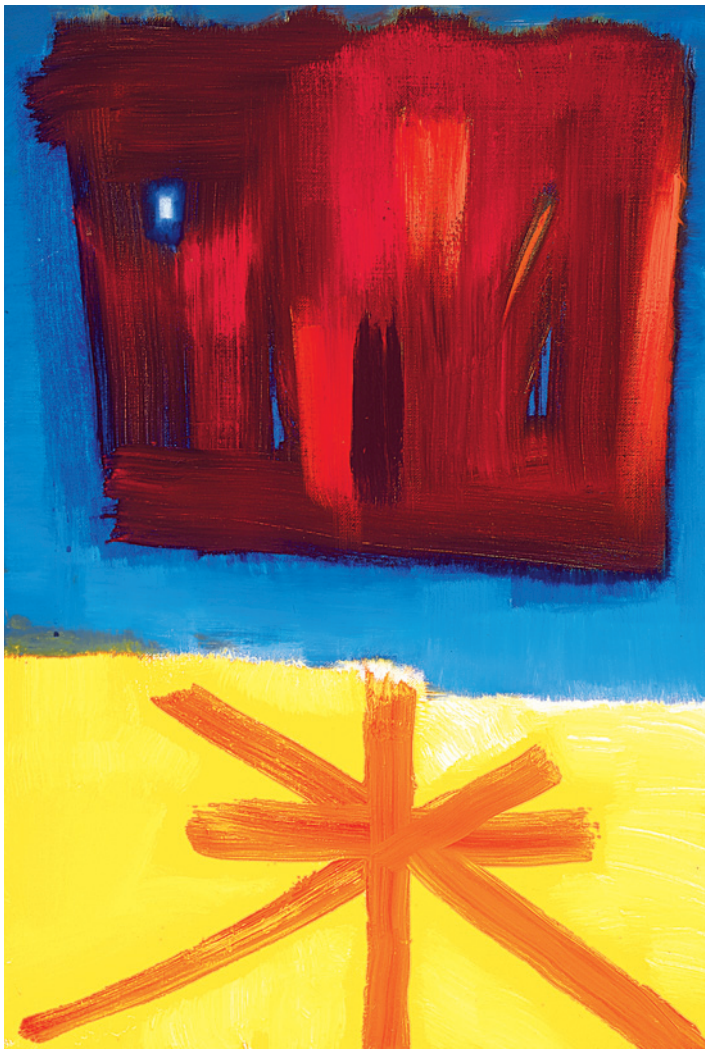
—Ed McCormack

John Grillo: The Abstract Expressionist with the Sunny Disposition

Second generation New York School artists had a tough act to follow. By the time they emerged, the shock and awe, so to speak, of Abstract Expressionism, had dissipated, along with much of the reputation-making publicity that it generated. The movement's big guns were either living gods like de Kooning and Kline, or else they had already gone out in a blaze of self-destructive glory, in the manner of Gorky and Pollock. The more mythic aspects of America's first major art movement were now a thing of the past, and it was incumbent upon the second generation to be very good indeed and rely solely on their aesthetic merits in order to get any attention at all.

One of the best among them was John Grillo, now almost ninety and recently surveyed in a splendid show of paintings and works on paper, from the 1950s to the present, at Katharina Rich Perlow Gallery, 41 East 57th Street.

Born in Massachusetts, Grillo attended the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco, where he reportedly painted gestural abstractions without prior knowledge of the work of de Kooning or Pollock. Moving back to the East Coast in 1947, he studied with Hans Hofmann, then the preeminent teacher for many distinguished second generation painters including Frankenthaler, Krasner, and Rivers, among others. (Grillo was among those chosen for the traveling exhibition "Hofmann and His Students" circulated by the Museum of Modern Art.)



"Untitled," 1997

Fairfield Porter singled Grillo out in a 1961 essay in The Nation entitled "Communication and Moral Commitment," among artists who have "given me a great deal of pleasure," and added, "To me pleasure is both communication and a sign of moral commitment." And indeed the pleasure principle seems more operative in Grillo's work than in that of almost any other painter of his generation, with the exception of Robert Goodnough (another former member of the legendary John Myers' stable at Tibor de Nagy who now shows at Perlow).

One of the things that gives pleasure in Grillo's work is its coloristic brilliance. Since, aside from Larry Rivers, most second generation New York School painters did not exhibit flamboyant public images, one cannot say for certain whether the chromatic robustness of Grillo's work reflects his actual personality. All one can say for certain is that, speaking in purely painterly terms, his work projects a particularly sunny disposition.

Indeed, as a colorist partial to brilliant yellow and orange hues used in combination with expansive areas of white, he often appears as related to the School of Paris as to the New York School. However, Grillo's gestural exuberance, broad, bold strokes, and liberal use of impasto leave no doubt as to where his true allegiances lie. In terms of the brilliance of his palette and the buoyancy of his brushwork, he seems more akin to both his former teacher Hans Hoffman and de Kooning than to more subdued, or even somber, members of the first generation, such as Kline and Rothko.

Grillo, however, evolved his own vivacious vocabulary of gestural strokes, splashes, and drips early on. Especially representative of his untrammeled energy is "Untitled, 1956," a large oil on canvas notable for its boldly swerving forms and its vibrant palette of yellow, red, green, and blue hues augmented by thickly textured expanses of white. A group of collages, one quite large, from approximately the same period, indicates that Grillo's formal language was already so fully established that he could generate a similar excitement with roughly torn pieces of paper as with paint.

Some of the most brilliant paintings seen in the Perlow exhibition were large oils such as "Yellow Burst, 1961" and "After the Sun Storm, 1963," in which Grillo evokes ethereal qualities of light in the material medium of pigment. In the former work, broad yellow strokes radiate out toward the edges of the canvas from the center of the canvas like sunbeams; in the latter, various luminous hues and vigorous forms surround a prominent solar orb in a composition that demonstrates Grillo's gestural mastery. Both paintings seem to grow out of slightly earlier canvases, such as "Untitled, 1960," in which yellow is also the dominant color and the composition approaches the amorphousness of Color Field painting.

Over the years, like many of his contemporaries, Grillo took forays into figurative territory, but he invariably returned to abstraction, exploring hard-edge compositions for a period in the late Seventies and incorporating similar forms in his recent watercolors, along with more freely painted shapes akin to those in his "action paintings" of the 1950s.

Relatively recent oils, such as "Untitled, 1997," with its brilliant primaries and gestural forms that verge on morphing into neo-primitive symbols, are among his most chromatically intense.

Along with large watercolors, such as "Untitled 2006," these paintings reveal a prodigious late flowering on the part of this important American artist, whose work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Soloman R. Guggenheim Museum, and the British Museum, among numerous others, and who was recently honored with a career retrospective at the Cape Cod Museum of Art, in Dennis, Maine.

—Ed McCormack

Anowar Hossain's Triumphantly Intrepid Sense of Gesture

Elegant draftsmanship invariably shows, even in a painter's most abstract work, as seen in the case of artists like de Kooning and Gorky, who were classically trained and whose nonobjective compositions were invariably enhanced by their drawing ability. The contemporary painter Anowar Hossain follows in their footsteps.

Hossain grew up in a family of artists, scholars, and supporters of the arts in Bangladesh and was influenced early on by the work of the writer Ravindrath Tagore, the film maker Satyajit Ray, and the musician Ravi Shankar. Coming to the United States to pursue his own art career in the 1980s, Hossain studied at the School of Visual Arts and the Art Students League, exhibited in numerous national and international exhibitions and won many awards, both for his figurative and abstract canvases. The distinguishing factor of both is his superb drawing ability, which lends his compositions an unusual vigor and formal articulation and has won it a place in collections in the U.S., as well as in England, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Germany.

Anowar Hossain's latest exhibition of large oils on canvas can be seen at World Fine Art Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, Chelsea, from June 1 through 30, with a reception on Thursday, June 8, from 6 to 8 PM. The first thing that strikes one on encountering a selection of Hossain's works is that the same qualities to be seen in his figure paintings, such as the double portrait juxtaposing a standing and clothed and a nude called "Mirror" that one saw in reproduction, are also present in his recent abstract mixed media paintings, for both share a coloristic sumptuousness and a gestural vigor that brings the entire surface of the canvas alive.

"Architecture"

"Everything we do in our life has a result and we have to remember this," Hossain has stated, and one can only assume that this applies to the act of painting itself; for he seems a true heir to the Abstract Expressionists in his ability to embody a sense of the process of painting in the finished work. Which is to say, to a much greater degree than most young painters today, Hossain is able to retain a sense of the gesture, which lends his compositions a striking immediacy, a vitality that harks back to those earlier artists of the New York School.

This kinship is especially evident in a work called "Architecture," where Hossain, a consummate colorist, eschews his usual vibrant hues to venture into monochromes. With its boldly thrusting black forms, this work could call to mind Franz Kline, if not for the fact that Hossain's linear networks are more fluid, less starkly angular than those of the well known New York School painter. Rather than reminding us, as Kline's paintings do, of steel bridge girders, Hossain's more poetic and flexible calligraphy suggests a more organic sense of architectonic form reminiscent of Antonio Gaudi's fanciful Art Nouveau dwellings. Here as in all of Hossain's paintings it is important to observe this subtle distinction between the architectural and the architectonic, given the fluidity that invariably informs this artist's painterly ecriture.

Indeed Hossain's closest kinship would seem to be with contemporary painters such as Brice Marden and Terry Winters for the flowing linearity of his recent compositions, with sinuously woven forms that he layers relentlessly in compositions such as "Breaking Through," with its vigorously worked overlapping strokes of red, blue, green, and yellow, interspersed with passages of white, that alternately create an illusion of depth and affirm the two-dimensionality of the picture plane to visually tantalizing effect.

While Hossain's style is possessed of striking immediacy and rife with insouciant touches that also reveal a sense of process akin to the happy little "accidents" that we associate with so-called "action" painting, there are of course no real accidents in the paintings of an artist as consciously in control of things as Hossain proves himself to be. However, he is obviously willing to manipulate, redirect, and take advantage of the spontaneous events and incidents that occur in the act of painting and turn them to his advantage, creating little felicities that provide sensual tactile and optical pleasures for the sensitive, visually sophisticated viewer.

Take, for example, the painting entitled "Study," in which sweeping linear strokes of red, green, and blue swerve across the canvas and intersect boldly to create a dazzling, almost dizzying, sense of velocity. While the title of this painting serves to suggest its freewheeling appearance of spontaneity, it is somewhat misleading, in that this work could hardly be classified as a "study" in the usual sense of the term. Rather, it is a beautiful resolved composition, executed on an imposing scale and with a degree of resolution that is anything but casual.

But this, too, is a successful strategy; for Hossain's seemingly impetuous yet carefully controlled brush strokes make his paintings continually eventful and surprising. For example, "Warp," where jaggedly broken vertical strokes of luminous primaries dance like neon reflected in rain puddles, in contrast to the verdant greens and deeper reds and yellows of another work called "Weave," in which he achieves a more pastoral synthesis of form and color.

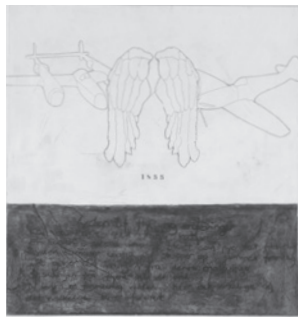
Informed by a mixture of aplomb and restraint, Anowar Hossain's painterly panache is such that he can take risks that would deter many another artist and triumph by virtue of an intuitive sense of what makes a picture, be it figurative or abstract, work.

—Maurice Taplinger

A Fertile Hybrid Style Distinguishes the Art of Kristine Gade Hansen

In conceptual art the idea, rather than the image, is the piece de resistance, while New Image painting would appear to be its opposite, in that images are often presented in a manner that eludes their usual meaning and forces us to consider them from a fresh perspective. However, these seemingly opposite attributes are synthesized to make for a potent combination in the mixed media works of Kristine Gade Hansen, an artist born in Aarhus and educated in the Design School of Kolding, whose exhibition can be seen at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, in Soho, from July 7 through August 22. (Reception; July 13, 6 to 8 PM.)

Aspects of linguistics and popular culture come into play in Hansen's work in a manner that calls to mind the best work of such conceptual predecessors as Joseph Kosuth and John Baldessari. However, Hansen's pictorial inventiveness adds a visual impact to her work that is closer in spirit to New Image artists like Robert Moskowitz and Susan Rothenberg. The exquisite balance of semiotic and textual elements in compositions notable for their formal austerity lends Hansen's hybrid compositions an intriguingly cerebral quality. Flight and intervention are powerful metaphors in her work for a variety of life experiences. One of her most prevalent symbols is the simple outline of an airplane. Another is a pair of angelic wings. Both are combined, the wings draped over the nose cones of two convey airliners in a painting called "1855," on which those numbers are also neatly inscribed. That the numbers suggest a date long before such planes existed adds to the sense of mystery which is invariably present in Hansen's work, where images taken out of context and stripped of their usual meanings take on less obvious meanings and create entirely new contexts. Here, given the artist's recurring theme of intervention, the angel wings suggest a divine force preventing the two planes from colliding.


"1855"

Handwritten texts also often contribute to the visual variety and literary allusiveness of Hansen's mixed media works. Poetic and somewhat obscure, they, too, add to the mystery rather than explicating the imagery. One interesting example of this is the painting called "Aristotle," where a Star of David is juxtaposed with the philosopher's name presented in a clean typeface on a dark background and a handwritten poetic manuscript which seems to express romantic longing with lines like "A deep breath/Whispering in your ear/A connection to a man without boundaries..."

Such incongruities appear to be conceptual ploys for provoking unforeseen connections in Hansen's compositions. These are especially successful in paintings such as "Construct," where the painting is divided into two horizontal panels, the top one containing three overlapping circles with Stars of David within them that merge at their inner edges, the bottom one containing a frontal image of an old-fashioned biplane with the word of the title printed neatly above it.

While one would be at a loss to attribute specific meanings to the various elements of the composition, they resonate on some subverbal level in the manner of concrete poetry. Indeed, it is Kristine Gade Hansen's ability to create such inexplicable connections in the consciousness of the viewer that makes her work such an intriguing stylistic hybrid with seemingly unlimited possibilities for further exploration. —Robert Vigo

Western Connecticut MFA Graduates at Prince Street Gallery

An exhibition of recent Master of Fine Arts graduates in both painting and illustration is a project that simultaneously reflects two trends in the contemporary art world: the tendency of artists today to start exhibiting right out of art school and the blurring of the distinction between fine and applied arts. The show, the second such outing by graduates of Western Connecticut State University in New York City in the past couple of years, was seen recently at Prince Street Gallery, 530 West 25th Street.

One of the refreshing things about Western Connecticut State University, which is located less than two hours from New York City "in the beautiful landscape made famous by the Hudson River School and the Connecticut Impressionists," as its brochure boasts, is that it still produces painters. This was evident in the generally high level of technique on view, and it is no small tribute to the institution's art department, in an era when so many more highly touted art colleges are indistinguishable from business schools.

This training in the fundamentals of painting shows as much in the work of abstract painters such as Carmen Lund Leahy and Eileen Mooney as in that of the figurative artists in this show. Both Leahy and Mooney seem stylistically kindred in that both deconstruct that staple of modernism, the grid with succulent strokes of pigment. Leahy, however, favors deep, rich reds and other gemlike colors, and adheres to complete abstraction, while Mooney works in subtly modulated grayish monochromes and allows a face to emerge mysteriously from behind her patchy brushwork. By contrast, Jayne Webb employs the sensuous medium of cast wax to lustrous effect in "The Breathing Exercise," a compelling work in which an ancient tome with an indecipherable text appears literally illuminated from within.

As one might expect from a school located in a bucolic setting, landscape figures prominently here, in Nancy Casey's neo-impressionist acrylic painting of woods reflected in a lake, with its juicy, jotty, fluidity and luminous hues; Helen K. Anne's muscularly expressionistic oil of a gnarled tree rising as sinuously as one Egon Schiele's figures out of packed snow; as well as in Doris Granoff Kaye's coolly composed oil of only the long blue shadow of a lone tree reaching across a snowy landscape toward distant woods like an imploring claw.

Michael J. Liebhaber, on the other hand, depicts a lone male nude standing at the far edge of the composition in his boldly executed oil on paper, as though expectantly awaiting a romantic assignation in a dense jungle evoked with a welter of vigorous green strokes. Three other painters practice a more matter-of-fact mode of realism representation in which painterly nuances carry the day. Joan Polzin poses as though for a mug-shot against a wall pinned with nude studies in her strongly painted self-portrait, both her expression and her style attesting to the seriousness of her vocation; Nicole Salva chooses an arrangement of various shaped bottles as simple as Morandi's still life setups, all the better to emphasize her austere tonal sensitivity and compositional acuity; while Joan Kelly creates a synthesis of geometric and organic forms by containing the limbs of a lushly blooming tree within a grid of window panes behind a gooseneck lamp that rears up at the bottom of the composition like the head of a serpent, adding a touch of tension to an otherwise serene domestic interior.

Clearly, the illustration graduates in this show chose their vocation as a matter of preference and temperament, since they are every bit as accomplished as their painter peers, judging from Nancy Cassidy's atmospheric evocation of a bustling old fashioned logging camp; Joel Spector's image of a sensual female nude in "Freefall" against a luminously painted sky; and Kevin Leill's "Alien on Veranda," which undercuts the innate grotesqueness of its image by virtue of its classical composition.

While these three employ the traditional techniques of realist painting in an illustrational context, in his witty watercolor of small birds and foliage within the outline of a comic crocodile, Rolandas Kiaulevicius updates the graphic innovation of Saul Steinberg and Push Pin Studios for a new era. —Jeannie McCormack

Melanie Prapopoulos' Synthesis of the Physical and the Ethereal

The paintings and drawings of Melanie Prapopoulos appear deeply intuitive, as though channeled through some inner process unbeholden to the self conscious strategies that we see in so much contemporary art. Prapopoulos moves easily between figurative and abstract modes in her exhibition at Agora Gallery, in Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, from June 28 through July 29, with a reception on June 29, from 6 to 8 PM.

Although Prapopoulos' figurative themes tend to be expressed in graphic mediums such as charcoal, pastel and ink, while her abstract works are generally realized as acrylic paintings, there is no sense that her drawings are any less complete as artist statements than her paintings; rather, they are equally essential, if distinctly different, aspects of her aesthetic vision. (Indeed, in an unusual reversal of the scale on which most artists work, Prapopoulos' drawing "Goat on Black" is considerably larger than most of her paintings.)

Prapopoulos' "The Ache," executed in a deceptively simple technique in white pastel on a dark ground, is a neo-primitivistic line drawing, reminiscent for its combination of angular and voluptuous volumes of African tribal sculpture. It depicts a nude woman with big, extraordinarily expressive eyes, her pendulous breasts dangling like melons, holding one hand up to the side of her disproportionately large head. Every line is invested with an emotional expressiveness that tells us the "ache" is more existential than physical.

By contrast, the swelling contours of the semi-abstract torso in the drawing Prapopoulos calls "Gold Lines Draw Near" are so voluptuous as to suggest a purely sensual entity; while the aforementioned "Goat on Black" is an animal portrait so ethereal as to almost seem extraterrestrial. One gets the sense that this artist is in touch to equal degrees with physical and spiritual qualities, possibly inspired by her wide-ranging studies in art history and Latin American and Caribbean literature, yet ultimately transformed by her singularly intuitive vision.

Perhaps the altogether economical synthesis of these complex opposites can be seen in her exquisitely simplified charcoal drawing "One By One," in which the swiftly drawn forms of a bird and two other creatures of less distinct species are seen in a spare composition which suggests an embodiment of innocence akin to the ability of the great Zen ink painters to encapsulate a universe in a few swift strokes.

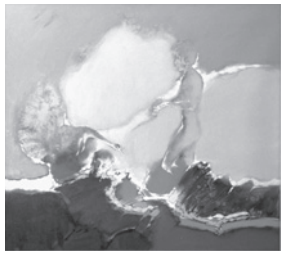
Prapopoulos' acrylic paintings, on the other hand, are filled with minute coloristic and gestural subtleties that contradict their minimalist compositions. Most are created with horizontal strokes of vibrant hues that saturate the entire surface in the manner of color field painting, with lighter tones glowing softly through darker ones, creating the effect of the composition being illuminated from within. Although Prapopoulos' luminous chromatic excursions possess a formal presence that would probably meet the criteria of critics like Clement Greenberg, they also project a spiritual force that lends them a more emotive dimension as well.

"Goat on Black"

Unlike her figurative pictures, her abstract paintings are identified only by combinations of letters and numbers such as DSCN0462," leaving their meanings open and enabling the viewer to bask in their subtle textural and coloristic modulations without being encumbered by preconceptions that might distract from their sumptuous, shimmering beauty. —Peter Wiley

Vesselin Kourtev's Painterly Evocations of Natural Unity

At first glance, the paintings of Vesselin Kourtev, a Bulgarian-born artist now living in New Jersey who has steadily gained a reputation for his exhibitions in Malta, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Belgium and the U.S., suggest a postmodern offspring of the great British landscape painter Joseph Mallord William Turner. For like that great British landscape painter, Kourtev's light-kissed oils on canvas appear as though painted with "tinted steam," to use Turner's own phrase.



"Common Origin"

One was also tempted to make comparisons to the Scottish "skyscapes" of the late James Schuyler, given that most of the canvases in Kourtev's recent exhibition at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th street, evoked low-lying horizons and land masses topped by magnificent cloud masses. Then, on closer inspection of the paintings, mysterious figures began to emerge from those luminous cumulous fool-the-eye shapes in the sky.

And suddenly one realized that Vesselin Kourtev is a unique neo-symbolist in abstract disguise, a romantic in the tradition of artists such as Arnold Bocklin, who envisioned the forces of war massing in the sky over Dusseldorf, or the Pre-Raphaelite painter Walter Crane, best known for his fanciful merger of myth and seascape "The Horses of Neptune."

A significant difference between Kourtev and these earlier artists, however, is that Kourtev's style is informed by the gestural freedom of Abstract Expressionism, making his synthesis of figure and pure form appear more subtle and organic. Rather than being obvious imaginative anomalies, grafted onto nature for symbolic effect, they inhabit the scene as comfortably as the clouds themselves, growing out of a seamlessly unified aesthetic vision, in which no element appears less real or convincing than any other.

Thus the monumental female nude surfacing among the twilight clouds in the canvas Kourtev calls "Night Warmth" seems less like an unsettling apparition than a sensual, poetic metaphor for the magical space between daylight and nightfall. Obvious comparisons can also be made to ghosts or gods, but Kourtev's phantoms seem more symbolic of moods and moments in present time than of myths or legends culled from antiquity. They are shadows of our fleeting memories and the emotions we experience in the contemplation of nature, manifesting imaginatively as reflections of our dreams and aspirations.

In Kourtev's painting "Common Origins," for example, human and animal figures appear to be materializing out of an explosion of sunlight and are one with the land and the vibrant blue river that flows through it, expressing the unity of all creatures and things in nature, regardless of whether one conceives of our origins in spiritual/religious or secular/scientific terms. This unity is a constant theme in Kourtev's works, expressed as much through the compositional balances and color harmonies he achieves in his compositions as through the suggestiveness of his subject matter. Which is to say, that the abstract elements in his canvases are as convincing as the visual metaphors he creates is what makes the paintings of Vesselin Kourtev succeed on several levels simultaneously. This is especially impressive, given that modern art theorists tend all too often to place purely plastic values and symbolic ones in direct opposition to each other. Kourtev, however, proves that these different values can enhance rather than dilute each other, and this is a formidable achievement indeed.

—Maurice Taplinger

American Watercolor Society: The Medium is the Message

The One Hundred and Thirty Ninth International Exhibition of the American Watercolor Society, seen recently in the Galleries of the Salmagundi Club, 47 Fifth Avenue, proved once again that no medium can match the luminous beauty of aquarelle when it is used well. And nowhere is this point made more clearly or abundantly than in this annual juried exhibition, open to members, associates, and independent artists worldwide.

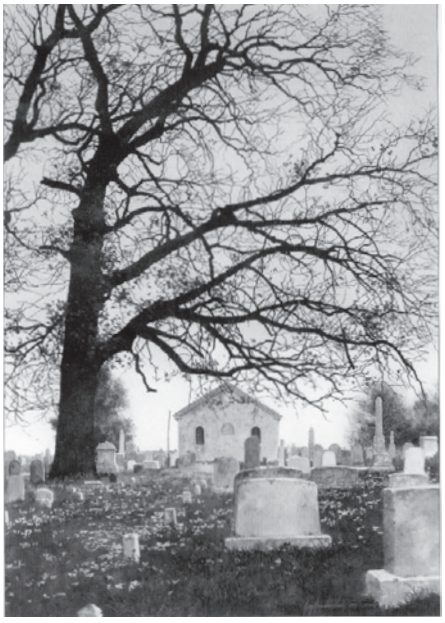
Although the exhibition awards now exceed $ 30,000, and the winners almost invariably are deserving of their prizes, the real pleasure in this show for the viewer is not so much its competitive aspect, but seeing the variety of different approaches to the medium. These range from the meticulous realism of Paul Jackson's glittering nocturnal aerial view "New York Nightlights," to the gestural freedom of Carole Pickle's "Intuitive Marks No. 8." While both artists are AWS members, and both won prizes, their styles are world's apart.

Although watercolor has always been a medium associated with natural scenes, cityscapes were almost as plentiful as landscapes in this show. One of the most arresting urban views was Karen Frey's "A Visitor to the City," especially notable for the artist's use of chiaroscuro achieved with a "wet into wet" technique that lends the image of a shadowy figure bracketed between shadowed buildings a striking tonal drama. Shadowplay is also employed effectively in "NY Shipyard II," by Izzie Barth, albeit to create an almost abstract effect with the sunsplashed facade of an industrial structure covered with old rusted pipes.

Indeed, while "abstract realism" could appear to be an oxymoronic term, it still seems the most accurate way to describe the tendency of several of the artists in this exhibition who use detailed techniques to create compositions in which formal considerations appear to be the primary concern. Linda Baker's painting of scattered clothespins creating compositional tensions akin to the gestural strokes of Abstract Expressionism is one example of this trend. Anna Chen's dynamic depiction of various dangling lightbulbs juxtaposed with a striped cloth, and set against the white of the paper, is another.

Straightforward figure painting also made a strong showing in Bill James flowing yet descriptive image of young ballerinas in brilliant red tutus; a boldly brushed portrait of a matron in sunglasses and a broadbrimmed sunhat by Bonnie Price; and Dick Cole's monumental image of three migrant workers in a field set starkly against a strident yellow sky.

In terms of an accomplished realist technique employed to create an emotional impact, perhaps one of the most powerful pieces in the show is AWS member Ray Hendershot's "Old Friends." For this view of an autumnal tree, almost divested of its leaves, towering over tombstones in a cemetery, is affecting in a way that transcends the cloying sentimentality of its title.



Ray Hendershot

Dick Cole

Nor can one cannot help but be impressed by the sheer technical virtuosity of artists who rein in the fabled "unforgiving" and "unpredictable" qualities of this most difficult of mediums to give us images as demanding as Alan Wylie's "Morning Edition." For this watercolor of a young man reading a newspaper as sunlight streams into a tastefully furnished livingroom is as evocative of genteel domestic life as the Manhattan interiors of John Koch or Fairfield Porter's oils of the good life on Long Island. Equally impressive is John Salminen's "Rainy Day, Times Square," in which figures under umbrellas amid the infernal neons are intricately reflected and fragmented, along with billboards and theater marquees, in a plate glass window dominating the foreground of the scene, suggesting an alternate reality.

Other contrasts culled from too many excellent works to do justice to in this space include a snowy landscape by Stephen Quiller that recalls Charles Burchfield for its expressively amplified natural forms; a still life by Jeffrey A. Jakub in which a bottle of Absolut Vodka is placed amid a plethora of cocktail shakers, ice buckets, bowls, and other dazzlingly rendered reflective surfaces suggesting a hall of mirrors; one landscape by Thomas Sgouros so luminously spare as to rival a minimalist composition, and another by Frederick C. Graff in which verdant fields are arranged in fractured planes that add a cubist flavor to a natural subject; Robert L. Barnum's strong figurative blend of expressionism and nostalgic regionalism in a painting of figures weathering a storm; Susan Swinand's buoyant composition of bulbous biomorphic forms, suggesting a procession of fanciful creatures; and a still life by Yumiko Ichikawa, in which an ornate circular plate and various fruits, juxtaposed with rectangular mats and decorative papers are painted in a pristine realist style, yet project the emblematic impact of a geometric abstraction.

Susan Swinand

Paul Jackson

Here, as in previous exhibitions of the AWS, the message is the medium itself: its rich expressive possibilities in the hands of its most skillful exponents, as well as the seemingly limitless range of lustrous technical effects of which it is capable.

—Byron Coleman

Hollender: The Glory of Humility Before Nature's Bounty

Riverside Park looked like a big bucolic salad on the brilliant Spring day that we went to take notes on Wendy Hollender's recent exhibition "Riverside Park and Beyond" at The Interchurch Center's Corridor Gallery, 475 Riverside Drive. Having the Park blooming so lushly right across the street from the gallery gave one an even greater appreciation for Hollender's meticulously rendered and annotated botanical drawings and equally detailed oils on linen—as well as for the unseen riches within the park itself; for her work delineated the intricate variety of plant species beyond the verdant veil, so to speak.

"Foxglove Tree"

Although some works included were inspired by the flora of locales as distant as Cinque Terre, Italy, Puerto Rico, and Sea Island, Georgia, the main focus of the show was Riverside Park, since Hollender has lived in its vicinity for over twenty-five years. She began by painting landscapes there, but for the past eight years has focused exclusively on botanical illustration in order, as she puts it in her artist's statement, "to communicate my personal experience in a work of art so that others can see as I do the uncommon beauty of a common plant."

In an era when subjectivity and sensationalism are so prevalent, it takes uncommon humility for an artist as skillful as Hollender to subdue the interpretive impulse, eschew expressive flourishes, and subordinate her artistic vision so completely to the factual transcription of natural forms. Yet in doing so, Hollender reminded us of one of our favorite exhibitions of this past season: the splendid show of intimate landscapes in watercolor by the British visionary Samuel Palmer, a contemporary of Blake, at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. For even without taking the same romantic liberties as Palmer, Hollender manages, for all her insistence on botanical accuracy, to invest her pictures with similar intensities of feeling.

While a few were in oil on linen or watercolor, most of Hollender's works were in colored pencil, a medium she handles with exquisite finesse. That the drawings and paintings were displayed behind glass, in window-like openings in the walls of the gallery or, in the case of some drawings, in sketchbooks laid flat in vitrines, encouraged the viewer to study them closely and read the artist's neatly penciled notes on the plants, which were not only informative, but added to their intimate visual appeal. Exhibited along with the drawings and paintings were actual botanical specimens, such as seeds, nuts, berries, and dried leaves, that suggested an "installation," albeit of a more intimate, sedate, and scholarly kind than that word usually implies when used in the context of a contemporary art exhibition.

That said, the chief pleasures of Wendy Hollender's show were aesthetic, owing to the austere beauty of her technique, portrait-like delineation of each plant's salient characteristics and her way of making seemingly casual elements cohere compositionally. Especially pleasing was her oil on linen "Allamanda cathartica (Allamanda)," where the restraint of her style let the innate sensuality of the green leaves and yellow flowers speak for itself, and where the addition of a tiny "lubber grasshopper" (its specific species duly noted in the artist's neat script), traversing a slender stem, added sudden animation to Hollender's especially exacting species of still life painting.

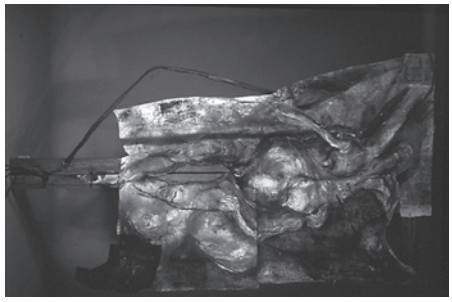
—J. Sanders Eaton

Jolanta Paterek's Material Odes to Purification and Redemption

The title of Jolanta Paterek's series, "A Woman a Man or a Human" is intriguingly enigmatic, suggesting a singular view of our species, an existential ambiguity regarding spiritual and sexual identity. Reportedly, each of her works includes "a modified bathtub, a painting and a black box" in its composition, but these elements are so thoroughly transformed by her unique artistic vision as to be unrecognizable as such in Paterek's exhibition "Symbiotic Texture" at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from June 28 through July 1. (Reception June 29, from 6 to 8 PM.)

The scale of Paterek's pieces is heroic, suggesting monumental ambition, and coupled with her aggressive approach to materials, the rugged presence of her pieces can be somewhat startling and overwhelming. Picture some unprecedented combination of the California funkmeister Bruce Connor's charred dolls, strollers, and burned furniture with an insistent humanism akin to Rico Lebrun and Leonard Baskin, and you may get some idea of the territory Paterek traverses and the impact of her work.

It has been written that the use of the bathtub in Paterek's pieces is related to a process of "purification" and a metaphorical "transformation of the human body and


"A Woman a Man or a Human #8"

spirit." However, it would appear that the transformation occurs as much by virtue of how Paterek transcends the materiality of the crude found materials she employs as through the suggestive power of her imagery. For her ability to wring a sense of human suffering and redemption from the twisted, crumpled, forms she creates with such materials amounts to a kind of aesthetic alchemy.

All distinctions between painting and sculpture are done away with in these works, which engage the viewer on a visceral rather than intellectual level, with their darkly delineated surfaces and thrusting configurations that appear to writhe with a repressed energy, as though they are about to leap off the wall. The closest comparison one can make is to the found metal reliefs of the distinguished French sculptor Cesar, as well as to the crushed automobile pieces of the American artist John Chamberlain. Paterek, however, is after something more than a formal effect. The great paradox of her work is her ability to make the type of forms that others have employed to purely abstract effect evoke a sense of emotional empathy in the viewer. Thus her preoccupation with purification is twofold, applying not only to the symbolism of her imagery but to the manner in which her pieces endeavor to "cleanse" the vision of her audience as well.

Granted, Paterek's bathers are in no way related to the graceful female nudes that Bonnard depicted languishing in sunny domestic interiors. Rather, with their bloated torsos and extenuated, emaciated limbs, Paterek's personages appear so thoroughly used by life as to be rubbed smooth of sexual identity, and their ritual baths could as well be taken in vats of acid as tubs of water. Yet, for all this, Jolanta Paterek's mixed media works, wherein subtle, fiery tones glow out of overall blackness of her compositions like embers in ashes, speak of the enduring strength of the human spirit, rising Phoenix-like from the ruins of earthly agonies.

—Wilson Wong

At CVB Space: An Urgently Topical Group Show

In the exhibitions that she regularly curates for D'Ars Foundation of Milan, Italy, Stefania Carrozzini comes across as a participating artist, rather than an aesthetic bureaucrat. In fact, she studied painting in Milan in the 1980s and her catalog essays are so artfully written that a collection of them, along with selected art essays, was published in 2005 by Pensa Editions.

As is her practice, the catalog cover of Carrozzini's exhibition, "If You Feel Something Say Something," seen recently at CVB Space, 407 West 13th Street features one of her own photographs. Taken with an automatic timer, it shows Carrozzini staring raptly at a TV screen—as we all do nowadays, when we watch the increasingly alarming newscasts—and can be seen as a supplementary artwork encapsulating the show's theme.

Photo by Stephania Carrozzini

The show's title was suggested by the slogan "If you see something say something," which has become ubiquitous on signs and loudspeaker announcements in the New York City subway since the terror attacks of 9/11. Carrozzini was prompted by this warning regarding suspicious packages or bags to curate an exhibition which prioritizes art as "an answer to the many causes of anxiety which surround us."

By substituting the word "feel" for "see" in the show's title, she puts forth her belief that "Art is the privileged field of emotions," and offers the exhibition to "those who do not desire to be overcome by preset behavioral patterns and by a pre-packed media reality which transmits anxiety and fear."

Among the five artists from Italy and one from the Netherlands in this show, the one who most clearly subverts the techniques of the media through parody to counter its influence is Stefano Reja. He presents us with a close-up image, as glossy as any in a fashion or cosmetics ad, of a beautiful sleeping woman with false eyelashes and glistening red lips. Wearing a white habit, like that of a nun, she rests her head on a white Bible, emblazoned with a black cross, in a pure white environment that makes the red of her lips, her painted fingernails, and her blood appear all the more brilliant. That her wound results from a screw (rather than a nail) driven into the back of her hand suggests more of a "screwing" than a stigmata.

In her picture, "The Initiate," another photo artist, Silvia Camporesi, presents us with a dreamy young woman who suggests the young Mia Farrow in the 1960s when she, along with the Beatles, fell under the spell of the Indian guru known as the Maharishi. Yet, as she sprawls in the grass, dressed in the gossamer white garments favored by Westerners who take up esoteric Eastern spiritual practices, she holds what appear to be Playboy bunny-ears up to the sides of her head and nibbles on the sensual red petals of a rose, adding to the impression of a "flower child" ravenous for Truth with a capital "T". Of course, the image could also suggest an especially lyrical form of oral eroticism, or evoke the passivity of a grazing bovine—or perhaps, more pointedly, a "sheep," as followers of such exotic religions are often scornfully dismissed by non-believers. What makes Camporesi's work so intriguing, however, is that she provides us with only enough clues to speculate loosely on the meanings of her pictures, making one an eager collaborator in the invention of her visual fictions.

A more abstract approach is taken by Giuliana Verzeroli, in her mixed media assemblage "Woman." Here, a semitransparent 3-D form, fashioned from mesh and filled with yellow shapes (resembling bows or butterflies) is set against a metal grid from which a smaller object, affixed by wire, dangles as though from a miniature clothes hanger. Verzeroli evokes a poignant sense of the feminine principal with delicate found materials, such as crumpled foil and paper, that seem as ephemeral as bits of gift wrapping blowing through the wreckage of the Twin Towers. Through its odd junkyard lyricism, mixing delicate detritus with less yielding elements, her assemblage suggests that tender feelings may soon be added to the endangered species list, as we hurtle further into our pitiless, hell-bent century.

Jackie Sleper, the artist from the Netherlands, projects a sense of pastoral repose, subtly inflected by surrealism, in her meticulously rendered tondo of tiny, identical flying fish swirling in the sky above a placid lake. Working with paint over a photographic image, Sleper slightly alters the landscape to unearth an underlying world with its own undeniable logic: the world of subjective consciousness, which is every bit as real as what we see. A visionary of silences and nuances, Sleper seems a postmodern counterpart of the Symbolists who, as Redon once stated, sought to reveal "everything which hides behind the appearance of reality."

By contrast, matter itself seems the only reality, the only subject, for Moreno Panozzo, who employs mixed media to create relief-like surfaces so tactile that one surrenders completely to their sensuousness, as when one stands barefoot in sand, drawing on the damp shoreline with a stick, just before the surf rolls in to wash it away. Panozzo makes what is transitory in nature immutable—which is, of course, what all art is supposed to do—not by means of suggestion but by virtue of an ability to construct entities with a discrete physical integrity. Yet, paradoxically, metaphysical associations are inescapable. For the roughly geometric grids and textures that Panozzo inscribes suggest nothing so much as the ancient marks, signs, and alchemical diagrams with which humankind first began to penetrate the mystery beneath the crust of matter— to dig all the way through to "the other side," so to speak.

The final artist, Giuseppe Orsenigo creates mixed media assemblages in which a mood of contemporary angst and foreboding is produced through the juxtapositioning of various objects and abstract forms. In the piece Orsenigo calls "Now," the profile of a shadowy figure appears amid variegated color areas, as tiny toy cars crawl randomly through the regularly-spaced holes in a jaggedly torn triangular metal shape like worms devouring a slice of pizza. Like the others in this exhibition, Orsenigo makes the need for artistic expression seem as urgent a priority as counter-terrorism measures in the New York subway system.

—Ed McCormack

A Talk With Bob Hogge and Marina Hadley of Monkdogz Urban Art

Although we're used to getting interesting feedback for our in-depth features on famous artists like Willem de Kooning, Andy Warhol, and John Graham, as well as for some of the quirkier personal essays that appear regularly in our New York Notebook column, rarely has a straight-ahead review of a new gallery garnered as much response and curiosity from our readers as the piece we published in our last issue on the inaugural exhibition of Monkdogz Urban Art. This seemed to warrant further exploration of the Monkdogz agenda; so we arranged to meet with the gallery's co-directors, Bob Hogge and Marina Hadley at the Housing Works Book Cafe, in Soho, for a casual chat.

No place in the city is more conducive to conversation over coffee or tea than this mellow, book-lined haven, where the proceeds of all sales benefit homeless people with AIDS, and where the two gallerists relax right into the rhythms of the easy repartee that is invariably more revelatory of character and personality than any formal interview can be. And while there is much laughter all around, what needs to be said gets said eloquently.

To begin with, both Hogge and Hadley are eager to have us know that their respective spouses had a lot to do with the successful launching of their venue. Hogge's wife Mary Ellen Rhatigan has been the exhibitions manager of the Fashion Institute of Technology for a number of years, so naturally her help was invaluable; not only did she design the gallery space, but, in the words of her husband, "made sure that each and every component of showing the work was handled with the utmost care and professionalism. And of course my business partner, Marina here, came with a multitude of gifts that not only included a corporate business development background but some of the best people and relationship building skills I have ever seen. She also came equipped with a husband, Mark Hadley, who is not only a genius at dealing with huge financial numbers but a brilliant guy to have around with a hammer and screw driver when something needs to get done."

Hogge, an irrepressible enthusiast who resembles David Carradine with a Jean Genet prison haircut, does most of the talking for the two, while Hadley, an attractive and fashionable model of British reserve, twinkles elegantly and occasionally interjects a wry witticism that is always right on target. Typically, she will list her partner's assets, saying, "Bob is a man of great compassion, heart, honesty and integrity. He believes in art and artists with a fierce passion and wants to provide the necessary encouragement to all artists who believe in the integrity of their own work. The fact that Bob is an artist himself means that he really understands the forces and pressures that affect the working artist. He's experienced standing in the cold streets of New York trying to sell work so that he could buy his next meal. He's felt the cold shoulder of the established galleries who wouldn't even let him in the front door. He's also felt the warm glow of success in achieving his goals. For Bob has also been very successful in the corporate world. He understands the importance of good sales and marketing plans, operational and financial budgets, great customer service and the need for a great product. He is a complex man..."

Then, after a perfectly timed pause, Marina will smile mischievously and say, "Added to this mix, he's a bit of a nutcase."

Taking his business partner's goodnatured jibe in stride with his usual wry grin, Hogge tells us, "Monkdogz essentially started as a concept with two important drivers. The first was to bring together a diversified group of talent international artists under one umbrella. The second was to create a level playing field where established artists and developing or emerging artists could share a common space. This struck us as a good idea for two reasons. It allows artists who have found success and recognition an opportunity to remember where they came from. And for artists starting out, it provides an opportunity to see future possibilities. The international aspect of Monkdogz also allows us to look at what we share in common, as opposed to what differentiates us."

Unlike a lot of other galleries, Monkdogz started out as a website, and both partners believe that their website is still the most important and effective aspect of their project.

"My feeling is that the Internet is the most innovative communication tool since the printed word—and, of course, the paint brush," Hogge adds with a smile. "And whether you are a visual artist, actor, musician, or writer, we are all communicators. The ability to send images and information across cyberspace is just an incredible opportunity to have people view your work. And for an artist it allows a continual exhibition, twenty-four seven, as they say, 365 days a year, on every continent, in every time zone, no matter what language. It just makes sense. No matter how talented you are if people are not seeing your work, nothing happens..."

In response to a question about whether he feels works of art can be represented accurately on the web, Hogge hesitates for a moment and then says, "I believe the web site or j-peg images allow you to at least get

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Helga Kreuzritter Excavates Anthropomorphic Topologies

On encountering the work of the German artist Helga Kreuzritter, who studied at the Kreynhop School, in Hamburg, and has exhibited throughout Europe, one is immediately put in mind of the evocative old phrase "the human clay." For Kreuzritter's figures are so basic as to appear formed from the earth itself in her mixed media works recently seen Agora Gallery 415 West Broadway in SoHo.

"The Crowd"

Describing her theme as "aspects of the interplay between man and nature with nature as the winner," Kreuzritter creates thickly textured surfaces akin to bas-relief in which terrains appear anthropomorphize to a degree that landscape and the figure are virtually indistinguishable. One of the most dramatic examples is in her mixed media piece "Agora." One can only assume that the title of this work being identical to that of the gallery it was shown in is merely coincidental, since the word, which derives from the ancient Hebrew, actually means a "gathering place," and Kreuzritter's work depicts a ghost village, abandoned long ago by an African tribe. The configuration of the village is circular and is built up in relief in Kreuzritter's usual manner, which involves the application of gouache and mixed media in many layers. The forms of the dwellings and storage places within the circular village have an eerie, haunted quality, suggesting some ritual configuration of human skulls in a desert, with their openings resembling gaping mouths and eye-sockets. The eerie effect is enhanced by the shadows Kreuzritter's raised forms create on the earthy surface of the piece. Thus the structures of the village itself evoke a ghostly presence of its former inhabitants. Here, as in other pieces by Kreuzritter, nature is indeed the "winner," having prevailed to "capture back the land, devastating man's artificial constructions," as the artist herself puts it, leaving little doubt as to what side she is on in this eternal struggle.

The artist's perception of naturally formed faces in the rocks in a canyon provided inspiration for another powerful mixed media work called "The Crowd," where many masklike visages showing an extraordinary range of emotions emerge from yet another earthy ground. Here one is put in mind of those amazing pictures one has seen in magazines such as The Smithsonian and National Geographic of mummified figures lined up in caves or catacombs only to be discovered by archeologists several centuries later. Kreuzritter invests each face with its own unique personality and emotional subtlety, registering fear, astonishment and a wide range of other emotions, even while she constructs them in her tactile materials with skull-like simplicity. And, again, the sculptural quality of her forms results in shadows on the surface of the piece that enhance the dramatic effect of the composition.

The interplay of humankind and nature has been an ongoing subject for Helga Kreuzritter, who has explored it successfully not only in mixed media works but also in gouaches where her technique was somewhat more traditional and two-dimensional. In works such as "Agora" and "The Crowd," however, the theme is realized even more evocatively by virtue of Kreuzrimmer's earthy, textured materials, which become tactile surrogates for actual, rugged topologies and imbue her compositions with greater depth.

—Marie R. Pagano

GUSTON BY THE BOOK:

by Ed McCormack

Having grown up in a workingclass milieu where museum visits were hardly habitual, I got my initial exposure to fine art from books in the New York Public Library. In retrospect, this seems not a bad way to get acquainted with great painting and sculpture, given the intimacy that books afford to look and learn at one's leisure. At very least such solitary perusal of pictures was superior to our occasional school field trips to museums, during which one's encounters with works of art were glancing at best, and were invariably interrupted by the antics of rowdy fellow students and the authoritarian tendencies of teachers.

Actually, only such excursion—my first to the Museum of Modern Art—stands out in memory. It took place during a period in elementary school when, because my mother was gravely ill and I was unable to concentrate, I was placed temporarily in what they then called the "ungraded class" — a euphemism for a repository for misfits even sadder than today's "special education" classes.

It seemed that I alone among my classmates—the boy who picked his nose and ate the produce like raisins; the girl who lifted her skirt at regular intervals to show her pretty cotton panties; another kid whose fixed grin had no relation to mirth—was aware that something more than our obvious disparities of age and size made us an odd bunch, as we stood transfixed before Pavel Tchelitchew's huge, neon-garish crowd-pleaser "Hide and Seek" (the most popular painting in MoMA's collection before being deemed an embarrassment to the institutional taste and stuck back in storage), in which the veiny heads of children even stranger than ourselves were half-concealed among the branches of a giant gnarled tree that morphed into a claw-like hand and a monumental foot with a fetus for a big toe...

Could this memory, as subliminated as the details in Tchelitchew's kitsch masterpiece until it came back to me just a minute or two ago while writing this, account for the inexplicable sense of unease that sometimes visits me in museums?

In any case, I was conditioned early to experience art most comfortably in reproduction, just as I seem to experience life most comfortably in books. And while I'm certainly not denying the advantages of seeing works in the original, I still take great pleasure in contemplating them in miniature at my own leisure—especially now that museum galleries are ever more heavily trafficked with hordes of obligatory culture consumers, led through by intrusively lecturing tour guides, making the conditions for thoughtful contemplation of the works on view hardly ideal.

The way we all too often rush through museums in a half-distracted blur, so eager to take in everything that we miss a great deal, was brought home to me quite literally one day last week, when my wife returned from the post office with a large format paperback called Philip Guston Retrospective, which had been sent to us for possible review by the publisher, Thames & Hudson.

"You've always liked Guston, maybe you could do something on him for the cover of our next issue," said Jeannie, who besides being the love of my life is the pushiest editor I have ever worked with, placing the book on my desk.

"I doubt it," I said, "Robert Storr already did Guston to death."

I don't mention this only because Storr, who also curated the Gerhard Richter retrospective at the MoMA and will direct the 2007 Venice Biennial, wrote recently to tell me how much he had enjoyed my cover story on John Graham in *Gallery&Studio* (although I certainly don't mind boasting about the caliber of art world professionals who read and respond to the articles in this publication), but because his book Philip Guston, published as part of Abbeville Press's Modern Masters series, is the definitive text on the artist. And since it came out in 1986, six years after Guston's death, it wasn't like there would be new work to write about.

"Well, why don't you look at the book anyway?" Jeannie said, never being one to take no for an answer. "I'm going to make a cup of tea, would you like one?"

It turned out that the book was first published in 2003 as the catalogue for a traveling retrospective that originated at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, which I saw when it came to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York. But as I scanned its numerous color reproductions and skimmed texts by Dore Ashton, Bill Berkson, and Michael Auping, among others whose names I wasn't as familiar with, it was as though I was experiencing the show for the first time.

Filled with great pictures, sharp insights, amusing anecdotes, and juicy gossip, the book felt like a good night at the old Cedar Bar, or its 1970s successor, the St. Adrien Company on Lower Broadway, with everybody shouting above the jukebox to be heard. And as my shrewd editor had probably calculated, once caught in the conversational crossfire, I couldn't resist the urge to add my own garrulous voice to the general hubbub.

How could any writer resist the innate drama of an established Abstract Expressionist master suddenly risking everything and alienating friends, collectors, and critical supporters, to pursue a dubious new species of figure painting, especially at a time when those three horsemen of aesthetic compromise—Caution, Calculation, and Careerism—were already beginning to rule the American art world? And that Guston had the courage to reinvent himself in his fifty-seventh year— even while complaining in a letter to one of the few old friends who stuck by him that "a dominating feeling of getting old puts me in the worst depressive state I've ever been in" —made his trajectory all the more inspiring, now that I could no longer look in the mirror without seeing the face of my father at the very age when he appeared most ridiculous to me.

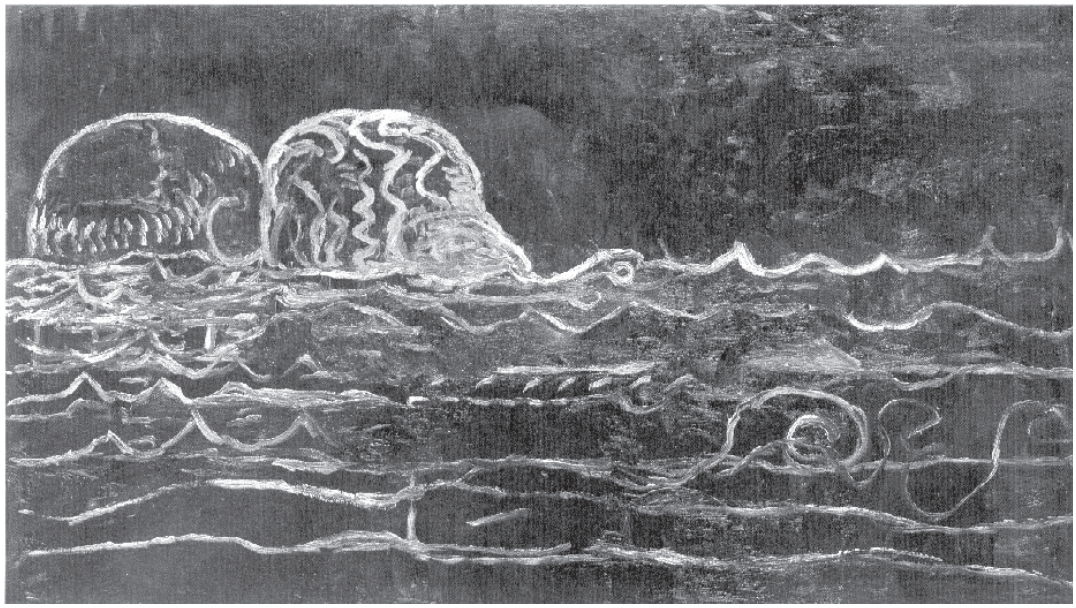
As usual, however, there would be a personal detour or two on the way to the festschrift. For one thing, I would have to go to the bathroom.

* * *

The selfconsciousness of aging is like puberty in

All photos courtesy of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

Solipsistic Riffs, Gonzo Recollections, and Reprobate Ruminations on Art, Aging, and Late-Life Rebirth



"The Night" 1977 Oil on canvas, 68 x 120 1/4 inches, Daniel W. Dietrich II

reverse. Not since adolescence has one spent so much time in the mirror. Only now it's spent watching one's hair-line recede, trimming one's graying beard, trying to make a graceful transition from leading man to character actor. (Never mind that one's mate seems forever the ingenue, poised to make an entrance!)

"It is a tradition in Chinese poetry to lament one's gray hair and failing powers, starting from a relatively early age," Burton Watson tells us in The Old Man Who Does As He Pleases: Selections from the Poetry and Prose of Lu Yu, and quotes the following lines as an example: "This year—so worn and broken/it really makes you laugh;/hair flecked gray/ashen face—ashamed to look at myself!"

One artist, much more recently, took the opposite approach: In the late 80s, John Coplans started exhibiting greatly enlarged Polaroids of his aging body stark naked in order to get in the face of "a culture that hates old people," as he put it. Moved by Coplans' warts and all close-ups of his "sagging chest, fat belly, misshapen feet," art critic Irving Sandler wrote: "there is something tragic but grand about it, in a King Lear sense..."

Only Phillip Lopate, the autumnal dean of personal essayists, is as candid (some might say exhibitionistic) in the title piece of his book "Portrait of My Body"— especially in regard to his private parts. After declaring his male equipment "ordinary," Lopate recants, confessing, "Actually my penis does have a peculiarity: it has two peeing holes. They are very close to each other, so that usually only one stream of urine issues, but sometimes a hair gets caught across them, or some such contretemps, and they squirt out in two directions at once."

Having nothing quite as interesting to report about my own aging body, I will stick to my receding hair-line, which probably disturbs me more than it should because hair was such a big deal to my generation, the baby boomers. (Ours, you may recall, was the generation that was never supposed to grow up, much less grow old; the Peter Pan generation whose favorite mantra was "Don't trust anyone over thirty.")

For a man in the 1960s, having long hair was supposed to signify an anti-macho attitude. At least that's what we wanted women (then known as "chicks") to believe. But as so many preening, long-haired rock stars demonstrated ad absurdom, it was actually just another, more insidious form of machismo. What our long hair was saying was that we were so secure in our manhood that we didn't have to settle for being merely handsome— we had the balls to be beautiful!

Delusional as that kind of thinking may have been, it was not easy to let go of, even after beauty ceased to be even a remote possibility. So we continued to let our "freak flags fly," to paraphrase one of our many self-congratulatory generational anthems, even after they became as faded and threadbare as the Jolly Roger on a pirate ship that had seen too many battles at sea.

I was reminded of all this recently, when I ran into a fellow dinosaur I had not seen for many years, one of the relatively few African Americans who hung out with the hippies. ("Spadecats" we called them, employing the term with utmost respect for the soulful note of hip legitimacy they brought to the scene but zero awareness of how ironically close it sounded to "spayed" cats.) Anyway, I used to see this dude everywhere: at rock concerts at Fillmore East; cooling it around the fountain with the guitar players and tambourine bangers in Washington Square; tossing a frisbee at the Human Be-ins in the Central Park Sheep Meadow with psychedelic swirls painted on his face and glitter in his huge Afro and Aboriginal beard.

Then I didn't see him for at least thirty years, until we came face to face a few months ago in another park in Chinatown, where he was now gainfully employed as a custodian. It was dusk and he had just finished locking the men's room for the evening. But since we still knew each other by sight, if not by name, he graciously offered to reopen "this brick shithouse," as he described it quite accurately, so I could pee.

While I was in there, standing at the urinal, I noticed a shadowy little room, not much larger than a broom closet, which in fact it may have been, just off the john. The door was ajar and in the semidark I could make out a narrow cot, a small bookcase, and an old TV propped up on a milkcrate. It was clear that he lived in there.

"Man, I gotta keep regular hours in this place or these people would be out here playing mah jong and volley ball till midnight, "he complained when I came back out, gesturing toward all the Chinese, young and old, swarming the park, as though they were unruly children in his charge.

I nodded sympathetically and considered confiding that in the lifetime or so since we were young and set out to change the world, I too had had to abandon our communal dream of unlocking all the doors forever. But being older, clean and sober, no longer eager to spill the entire contents of my psyche at every opportunity, I thanked him for his hospitality and went on my way.

Still, I was happy to see that he had made a more or less safe landing after all our generation's wild flights, and just as pleased to note that, though his old tie-dyes had been replaced by the olive drab uniform of the Parks Department, his Afro, however white and motheaten, was still Hendrix-electric. For while it had been many moons since

long hair—his or mine—had any real meaning, political or other-ise, we were still brothers under the skin.

* * *

"I used to dream of having my own strip one day," Philip Guston, who took a correspondence course in cartooning when he was 13 and living with his widowed mother in Los Angeles, told his poet friend Bill Berkson many years later.

Even as an adult, Guston still loved the way Bud Fisher, the creator of Mutt and Jeff, drew those big goofy shoes on his characters. He thought Cliff Sterrett, who drew the Gumps and Polly and Her Pals, "did the best furniture," and he also loved Gasoline Alley for "the backyards, porches, screen doors, litter on the steps, dogs, old cars being fixed, dismantled..."

But his all-time favorite comic strip was George Herriman's Krazy Kat. He was not alone in this: de Kooning was a big Krazy Kat fan, and others among his New York School cronies loved the atmospheric drawing style and poetic invented vernacular. Franz Kline, who shunned the New York Times because it didn't have comics, was also among those who faithfully followed Herriman's existential ink opera about a feline fool hopelessly smitten with a feisty little mouse who routinely repels his romantic overtures by braining him with flying bricks that he takes for tokens of love. The most perceptive painters knew that if comic strips were not dismissed, in Robert Crumb's words, as "cheap amusement for the masses, like vaudeville, early movies, pulp magazines, and so on," Herriman's genius would be seen as at least equal to their own.

But what they probably didn't know—and what I didn't know until Michael Auping dropped this bomb in passing in the introduction to the new Guston book—was that George Herriman was a light-skinned black man. It isn't mentioned in any of the histories of the comic strip that I've read over the years, not even The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics, a hefty illustrated tome that is supposed to be definitive. I had to go on the Internet to get more information, and what I learned was that Herriman "was a black man passing himself as white for his entire life" and "years after his death, a marriage certificate of his parents was found, listening their race as 'mulatto.' "

Finding out that Herriman was born in New Orleans, the birthplace of jazz, also sent flares up and started bells ringing in my brain, since jazz and the comic strip are often cited in the same breath by cultural historians as the only two art forms native to America. Suddenly the phrase "Krazy Kat" takes on new meaning, making Herriman seem a hipster ikon as heavy as Louis Armstrong. However, even without knowing his background, which it is doubtful any of them did, it still makes sense that Herriman's strip, with its Joycean dialogue and Nighttown setting, would have such vast appeal to members of America's first important fine art movement, most of whom also dug jazz.

Photo: Michael Korol

So why were some of them so scandalized when Guston switched from Abstract Expressionist canvases to big cartoon-like paintings in which bricks like those flung at Krazy by his rodent love-object were a recurring motif, along with Gasoline Alley jalopies, big clownish shoes, dangling lightbulbs, overstuffed easy chairs, overflowing garbage cans, and other funky props of the classic newspaper comic strip? Why, when they appeared in Guston's new paintings, were these things suddenly dismissed as shockingly vulgar and vilified by some of the same people who had once shared his affection for all the popular artifacts of low-rent Americana?

At the vernissage for Philip Guston's exhibition at Marlboro Gallery in 1970, where he unveiled his new paintings publicly for the first time, some guests acted as though they had showed up in a concert hall to hear chamber music, only to have the curtain rise on a raucous rock and roll band. Expecting to see more of the lyrical abstract canvases, composed with sensitive strokes and harmonious hues, which had won the artist a place in modern art history, they were greeted instead by brash images that, as critic Peter Schjeldahl recalls, "seemed a rank indecency, profanation, a joke in the worst conceivable taste."

Hilton Kramer summed the show up even more bluntly in the October 25th 1970 edition of The New York Times with the devastating headline "A Mandarin Pretending to Be a Stumblebum." Even more wounding than the condemnation of critics, however, was the rejection of the new work by close friends like the avant garde composer Morton Feldman, who later said, "I just couldn't see it. I just felt the abstract work from the fifties was so important—and now he abandoned it for the Pop art thing."

There it was in a nutshell: the Pop art thing! There could be no worse betrayal, as far as some members of The New York School were concerned than for one of their own to jump onto the gaudy bandwagon of the movement that had upstaged Abstract Expressionism in the sixties, selling out to the media's crass commercialism.

Even assuming, however, that Guston was secretly encouraged by the sudden fad for low imagery in high art (something he never could have admitted without giving even greater offense to his old crowd), his approach differed significantly from that of the Pop artists. For rather than parodying cartoons from a cool campy distance, ala Lichtenstein and Warhol, he adopted their language unambiguously, for its honest expressive possibilities. Yet the turncoat stigma stuck anyway.

"Why did you have to go and ruin everything?" one fellow painter asked angrily at the Marlboro reception, according to "The Night Studio," a memoir by Guston's daughter, Musa Mayer, published by Knopf in 1988. Mayer also quotes an entry from her mother's diary, noting that Lee Krasner, fellow painter and widow of Jackson Pollock, didn't speak to Guston at the reception and " told someone that the work was 'embarrassing.' "

De Kooning's "Women" paintings had also been regarded as heresy when he showed them at the Sidney Janis Gallery almost two decades earlier, the formalist Clement Greenberg mocking his "nostalgia for tradition." But the reaction had not been anywhere near as hostile. Repugnant as their imagery may have been to some abstract purists, at least de Kooning's paintings were all about gesture—the very crux of Abstract Expressionism—rather than the kind of louche subjects Guston depicted. Yet de Kooning embraced Guston at the opening and said, "You know, Philip, what your real subject is? It's freedom!"

It was just like de Kooning to see everything in purely painterly terms; in the old days, if Guston seemed in good humor when he strode into the Cedar bar, Bill would greet him with, "You must have made good strokes today!" But, as much as Guston appreciated de Kooning's support, these new paintings were about more than the freedom to paint a certain way—a battle

"The Painter" 1976 Oil on canvas, 74 x 116 inches, Jane Lang Davis

that had been won long ago, anyway, when they were all united under the Ab-Ex banner.

"When the Sixties came along I was feeling split, schizophrenic," Guston explained to Bill Berkson. "The war, what was happening in America, the brutality of the world. What kind of man am I, sitting at home, reading magazines, going into a frustrated fury about everything—and then going into my studio to adjust a red to a blue...I wanted to be complete again, as I was when I was a kid...I wanted to be whole between what I thought and what I felt."

But Morton Feldman (perhaps still smarting from a portrait Guston had made of him after their falling out: a big, fat head turning away) speculated that the real reason for Guston's change of style was that "The Book was out and he wasn't included." What Feldman was implying was that Guston had switched styles because he was embittered about not being rated as highly in the Abstract Expressionist canon as Pollock and de Kooning. And, admittedly, there is a slight whiff of sour grapes in some of Guston's more extreme statements around that time, such as when he complained in one of his notebooks that "American abstract art is a lie, a sham, a cover-up for a poverty of spirit. A mask to mask the fear of revealing oneself. A lie to cover up how bad one can be."

When he goes on for several more sentences in this mode, it is clearly an emotional rant, written in disappointment over the rejection of his new work, rather than the reasoned assessment of a man who once argued just as vehemently for abstraction, telling the critic Harold Rosenberg "The trouble with recognizable art is that it excludes too much...I want my work to include more."

Much has been made of the political content of some of Guston's late paintings but it is nowhere near as overt as it was in his social realist period of the Thirties and Forties. In fact, the only time his imagery falls flat is when he descends to the obvious level of the editorial cartoon in a series of drawings lampooning the too easy target of Richard Nixon, turning Tricky Dick's nose into a flaccid penis, his shadowed jowls into dangling testicles; for to say that the man was a putz is merely to state the obvious.

Far superior are those drawings and paintings in which Guston turns from public moralizing to private musing on mortality and his own vices, showing a fatheaded painter surrounded not only by the tools of his trade, such as clogged brushes, canvases and easels, but also by reprobate props like cigarette butts and empty whiskey bottles. Robert Storr commented that Guston's "queasy but unflinching self-portraits remove the cosmetic veil that obscures our view of the painter's world. Together they belie the hope of all but the most conditional transcendence of life through art."

Indeed, in its own way, Guston's treatment of himself is as unforgiving as his WPA-period pictures of sinisterly shaded Klu Klux Klansmen. The only difference is that, in contrast to the realism of that early work, the cartoon style of the later work made Klansmen in the paintings Guston showed at Marlboro Gallery in 1970 appear absurd and hapless, like George Lincoln Rockwell's bumbling little band of American Nazi Party sadsacks, who had to seek police protection whenever they tried to grab media attention with their pathetic public rallies. Still, the artist hinted that these hooded clowns had a deeper personal meaning when he said, "They are self-portraits. I perceive myself as being behind the hood."

The confession is made explicit in Guston's 1969 canvas "The Studio," depicting a hooded Klansman at an easel, painting a self-portrait. In her memoir of her father, Musa Mayer makes connections no critic could be privy to when, going through her father's studio after his death, she comes across an old canvas signed "Philip Goldstein, 1935," and remembers how her father had always regretted changing his name to one he hoped would make him more acceptable as a future son-in-law to the Christian parents of her mother, Musa McKim. Her father had always regarded this as "a shameful, cowardly act," she writes, "especially after the Second World War, when it became crucial to him to reclaim his Jewish identity..."

After Mayer speculates that Guston's ostensibly comic Klansmen hoods, may express "the anguish and shame my father felt about changing his name," it's not much of a stretch to see his paintings of skinny legs, entangled like strands of limp spaghetti, as not mere products of a grotesque imagination, like cartoonist Jack Cole's rubbery comicbook character "Plastic Man." Rather, they evoke those horrific photos of naked, piled cadavers at Auschwitz. Perhaps the most poignant example is the 1976 canvas "Ancient Wall," in which the limbs dangle over a red brick wall, while a single large eye in the lower right corner of the large canvas—the guilty eye of the of the Jewish painter who took a goyische name?— looks on dispassionately.

Bricks borrowed from Krazy Kat go all the way back to the slummy urban settings of his allegorical figure paintings of the 1930s and 40s and first reappear in the 1970 work "The Wall," parodying "overall" painting by covering the entire canvas, and perhaps also symbolizing the dead-end to which abstract painting had brought the artist, necessitating a radical change.

Six years later, bricks again appear prominently in "The Painter" showing the upper half of a head with tousled hair and bloodshot eyes peering, like Kilroy, over a wall on which rests a bottle and a glass. Also visible over the wall is one hand waving a cigarette as though it were either an anarchist's bomb or a miniature white flag of surrender. It is a painting to make one recall the British poet Stevie Smith's chilling lines "I was much further out than you thought/And not waving but drowning."

* * *

In another large oil, "Couple in Bed, 1976," the two figures are almost completely swaddled in sheets, except for the tops of their heads, a pair of hairy male legs, and a hand clutching a bunch of paint brushes. That the brushes, with their colorful tips, resemble a bouquet makes one think of a note that Guston, who painted at night while his wife slept, once left on the kitchen table for her to find when she woke in the morning, according to his daughter's memoir: "Sweetheart—perhaps I am making love

to you this way—by creation—It is so difficult for me to be in this world..."

This by way of apology, one supposes, for the artist's neglect of those who love him, his selfishness, as he sacrifices intimacy for the solitude his work requires. Both mother and daughter share the name Musa. But only the mother is the painter's Muse. All through childhood, the daughter feels neglected. Yet, rather than anger or resentment, she feels pity toward the mother for the sacrifices she must make to fulfill her dubiously exalted role. Once a promising artist who painted one panel of a post office mural while her husband painted another, she stopped painting long ago and now contents herself with the less competitive outlet of writing poems (some of which he pays her the tribute of illuminating in the manner that seems a cross between Blake and Crumb). But Musa's own creative efforts are limited to when she is not too busy trying to moderate her husband's smoking and drinking (three packs of unfiltered Camels a day and great quantities of booze), or leaving egg salad sandwiches, wrapped in wax paper and lovingly tied with white string, outside his closed studio door like offerings to some distant god.

Her efforts to save him are to no avail. And the final truth of their relationship is perhaps most poignantly encapsulated in Guston's large canvas "The Night," painted in 1977, the year that Musa, the selfless helpmate, suffered a stroke. One of the darkest works of Guston's darkest period, it shows the couple huddled together, almost completely submerged in brackish water, under a black sky. Robert Storr wrote of it: "One must look to Rembrandt to find a comparably moving or candid portrait of a marriage lived in the shadow of age and loss."

* * *

My favorite photograph in the new Guston book shows the artist talking with a group of students at Boston University in 1978. Hirsute, decked out in their generational grunge, they cluster around the artist in a semicircle, leaning forward, rapt, hanging on his every word. Guston appears paunchy and worn out. His face has the baggy melancholy of a weary old hound. Obviously, coping with Musa's stroke has taken its toll on him. Having already been hospitalized for exhaustion in the past two years, he is a man familiar with the indignities of aging, and more are on their way. A year after this photo is taken he will again be hospitalized, this time with a massive heart attack, and when his daughter visits him in the coronary care unit, she will find him "sitting on a bedside potty, glowering."

But for now, the future mercifully unknown, here he is, the collar of his shirt-jacket jauntily turned up, it's bottom button carefully fastened over his sagging belly, basking in the adulation of the young as only a vain older man can. Straddling a chair, a cigarette in one hand, jabbing a finger in the air with the other in a gesture reminiscent of the meaty pointing paws in his paintings, his gaze aimed loftily over the heads of his audience, he reminds one of Sinatra launching into "My Way."

* * *

It had to be a comfort to Guston to be discovered by the young, as the end of his decade of change—and his life— drew near. In 1979, his work was included in the Whitney Biennial, as well as in another major exhibition in London, under the auspices of the Arts Council of Great Britain, along with that of much younger artists, such as Jake Berthot, Ross Bleckner, and Elizabeth Murray, called "New Painting/ New York." As the title of the latter show implies, Guston was being paid the ultimate compliment that the fickle New York art world can bestow: Although his early work was entombed in museums, where it belonged, with that of the best of his generation, his new stuff was breathing the fresh air of the present. While the names of the twin monoliths, Pollock and de Kooning, still blazed bigger and brighter on the marquee of art history, Guston was afforded an unprecedented rebirth in the contemporary arena. He alone, among his old Cedar Bar cronies, was exerting an influence on the postmodern scene, and by 1980, the year he suffered his final, fatal heart attack in the middle of dinner with his doctor and their respective wives in Woodstock, there must have been nearly as many little gustons as cockroaches scurrying around the East Village.

Yet just as some critics had misunderstood his earlier work, calling him an "abstract impressionist" (not only an incongruous term to apply to an artist who painted at night but one that made his work seem a quirky, European-inflected footnote to the movement that put American art on the map), the substance of his late paintings is again being misconstrued by even his most ardent admirers.

For while Guston might not mind being a progenitor of the New Image school, the mandarin in him would surely have recoiled at being lumped with so-called Bad Painting, an ironically named mini-movement, promoted in an exhibition at the New Museum of the Contemporary Art, which attempted to make a virtue of the kind of deliberately crude paint handling he had never slopped onto a canvas.

One can only wonder what he might have thought of Jerry Saltz's recent assertion in the Village Voice that Amy Sillman "traverses the gap between Philip Guston's early abstraction and his later 'stumblebum' figuration." Not only is it unseemly to apply Hilton Kramer's facile insult as a generic term to Guston's late work, but utterly wrongheaded to imply that such a "gap" requires traversing. It would have been more accurate to point out that the difference between painters like Sillman and Guston is as deep as the gulf between irony and tragicomedy.

Given the shockproof climate his late work helped to create, it seems safe to say that painting will never again be as risky as when Guston's new pictures struck critics and friends alike as the aesthetic equivalent of a nervous breakdown. Yet, for all the nostalgia some had for the early "lyrical" Guston, it is for those crass and powerful later works that he will surely be best remembered. For as Michael Auping so aptly puts it, "If Pollock pioneered the way into Abstract Expressionism, it was Guston who was most suited to lead the way out."

* * *

Here I sit in my cave of a workroom on the top floor of a corner tenement in Yorkville, in the shadow of the wrecking ball, as shiny new condo towers creep closer and closer. Five stories below the two windows that wrap around me like a backwards shawl, the tireless conveyer belt of the avenue winds the tinker toy traffic around and around. Directly across the way, workmen are busy building another one of those incongruous penthouses that have replaced pigeon coops on the tops of tenements since real estate values have shot skyhigh in the city that never sleeps. Its tenements and towers, flocks of pigeons, and knots of writhing pedestrians are mirrored in the crazy-quilt collages of my drawings, remnants of ambition past, crucified to the wall opposite my desk. Also tacked up are two slogans in headline type on yellowed newsprint, their sources long forgotten but their sentiments still apropos: "Where Conformity Rules, Misfits Thrive" and "I prefer crap to the sanctimonious kitsch that's embraced as high art by an audience of suburban morons."

So what's the verdict? Has the promising young rebel ripened into a cranky old eccentric, his bohemian ideals reduced to simple squalor, his stubborn belief in antimaterialism and intellectual purity rendered irrelevant by an era that has taken all the dignity out of voluntary poverty?

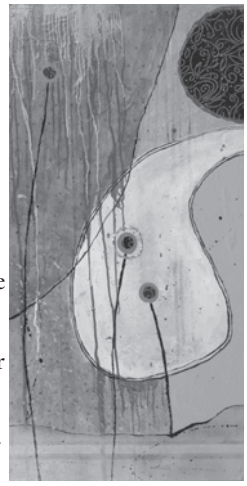
As a kid I longed not for conventional riches, but for the interesting experiences of a beatnik. Well, as Truman Capote once warned, beware of answered prayers. Yet life is good. The voices in my head still entertain me. I have closed the new Guston book and placed it on the sagging shelf, with all the other volumes that grin like a mouth of lunatic teeth and speak beguilingly of many things. My wife brings me a cup of tea.

California Dreaming: The Abstract Imagination of Corey West

Looking at the paintings of Corey West, one thinks of Willem de Kooning's marvelous phrase "slippery glimpses." Ostensibly abstract, West's compositions are simultaneously elusive and allusive. Working in acrylic and collage, combining a sinuous line with luminous color washes, West gives us sensual forms that could almost suggest unreadable details of some larger image. Her compositions tantalize us with the myriad meanings that they suggest; yet it is their refusal to resolve themselves into something recognizable in the eye and mind of the viewer that imbues them with a sense of mystery and magic. West's paintings haunt us like half-remembered memories, like lingering fragments of dreams lost to sudden wakefulness in her exhibition at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, Chelsea, from August 12 through September 1. (Reception August 17, from 6 to 8 PM.)

West was born in Senora, California, and earned her BFA from the California College of the Arts. This is relevant information because her work has qualities peculiar to the quintessentially Californian sensibility that we see in the work of older artists such as John Altoon and Frank Lobdell. West's vaguely biomorphic forms and subtle color combinations extend the the approach of these highly influential West Coast masters of postwar abstraction into the postmodern age in a highly original manner.

The cursive forms in her compositions suggest all manner of natural subjects, ranging from plant life, to landscape, to the human figure. Yet titles such as "In the Dance," "Cocktail Hour," and "Two to Tango" add a sense of the urbane world to the mix as well, discouraging one from reading her imagery as exclusively pastoral. And the sheer formal sophistication of her compositions contributes further to the feeling of a wide-ranging allusiveness; of an artist as conversant with Cole Porter as Green Peace.



"Bubble Gum"

In the above mentioned painting entitled "In the Dance," for example, an organic central form appears suspended in space amid elegant drips on a subdued ground, pregnant and formally formidable, while "Bubble Gum" combines shapes as buoyant as any by Miro with pale pink and yellow hues in a composition at once fanciful and musical. The sense of a freewheeling imagination at play creates such contrasts and lends West's paintings much of their appeal.

Although roughly geometric shapes, such as freely drawn rectangles, make their way into some compositions, the general thrust of her work is flowing rhythmical, with forms that move like waves and colors that capture one's attention without having to shout. Deep green and rich brown hues, harmonically juxtaposed, often dominate West's compositions, suggesting a sense of earthy essences. Yet the specific qualities of landscape are largely absent, and nature seems more a state of mind and attitude than a discernible presence in these paintings, with their sharply incised linear elements and elegant splashes and drips that activate surfaces and color areas with a sense of process that lends the work its enticing immediacy.

One gets the sense that Corey West is an artist for whom the possibilities of abstraction are virtually inexhaustible. She works as though no one has ever explored them before, and to a degree this is true; for surely no other artist could have come up with the particular permutations of form and color that make West's work so singularly successful.

—Maureen Flynn

Finding the Marvelous in the "Down to Earth"

Several members of the West Side Arts Coalition demonstrated the inseparableness of nature and spirit, in the group show "Down to Earth," co-curated by Berik Kulmamirov and Ruth Llanillo Leal and seen recently at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street.

Whether working on a large or small scale, Pud Houstoun's vigorous, slashing brushwork and offbeat color combinations evoke without imitating a sense of landscape and natural forces. But the real excitement in Houstoun's work comes from her commitment to the ethos of Abstract Expressionism and ability to make its gestural vocabulary vital for today.

Miguel Angel combines austere geometries with poetic conceptualism. Thus Angel's assemblage consisting of an empty black frame with a black tray at the bottom, suggesting a reliquary, containing a minute, glass-enclosed bird-feather, was named "Monumental,"in honor of the sacredness of small things.

No one could ever accuse the adamantly abstract Meyer Tannenbaum of deliberately painting a landscape. Yet the process-oriented canvases (no brushes, please!) in Tannenbaum's "Soft Impact" series convey a sense of natural light and form by virtue of their luminous colors and the new graphic grace that has entered the artist's recent paintings.

A tension between abstract and natural elements also enlivens the oils and acrylics of Emily Rich, which tease the eye with a sense of upside down horizons and other new permutations of landscape laid down in subdued hues and juicy impasto. Especially lovely in this regard is "Night Wave," where the surf curls like an arabesque against a deep blue nocturnal sky.

Another fanciful treatment of a marine subject was seen in "Sailing the Pink Sea," an oil by Leila Elias, in which small triangular shapes bob like sailboats between pink horizontal stripes signifying stylized waves. Elias combines imagery akin to Paul Klee with an exhilarating painterly freedom.

Also of special interest are Elias' "Marriage Paintings" in collaboration with her husband Berik Kulmamirov, in which her whimsical visual poetry meshes interestingly with his textural color construction. As a solo artist, however, Kulmamirov hits his peak, so to speak, with oils of snow-capped mountains that create strong abstract patterns, even while depicting their subjects with craggy verisimilitude.

Always delightfully over the top, the precise, unabashedly decorative acrylic paintings of Ruth Llanillo Leal depict insects and butterflies amid graceful grasses and fronds with an almost psychedelic intensity. Solar or lunar orbs surrounded by halos further enhance the rarefied atmosphere of Llanillo Lleal's peculiar grass roots surrealism.

At first glance refreshingly modest and direct, the watercolors and mixed media of Sonia Barnett reveal more visual sophistication the longer one contemplates them. Like Milton Avery, Barnett makes a formal virtue of simplicity, bringing subjects such as "Empty Boats" or "Bungalow on the Beach" alive with sparkling immediacy in a manner that demonstrates the old saw "less can be more."

Technically speaking, Mary Anne Holiday is the most meticulous realist in "Down to Earth," yet her small oils on canvas are charged with an underlying sense of drama, melancholy, and the ineffable that seems to emanate from her evocative use of light and shadow. Indeed, "Mountain Ruin," particularly, reveals Holliday's ability to imbue a scene with emotion in a manner that makes her paintings appear very much at home in this generally more abstract gathering of talents.

—Marie R. Pagano

Cliff Kearns Probes the Meaning in Numbers

While many artists who are doubly talented as illustrators and fine artists go to great lengths to separate their different areas of endeavor, Cliff John Kearns takes just the opposite approach, integrating printing plates from his past illustrations into his mixed media assemblages. Not only is this approach holistic but it endows his pieces with a refreshing autobiographical authenticity, in Kearns' exhibition at Agora Gallery, 415 West Broadway, in Soho, from June 10 through July 1, with a reception on June 15, from 6 to 8 PM.

Also quite prominent in Kearns' pieces are wooden and metal type, obsolete computer parts, and above all various numbers. Indeed, the title of his exhibition is "Lyrical Numerology," and he explains in his artist's statement, "Numbers are a fact of life. This numbered series suggests that each piece is related to another and therefore can only express one small facet or portion of our experience."

Other symbols, such as the heart and the cross, are juxtaposed by the artist to "express the relationship between the passion or love and hurt or sacrifice that most life experiences embody. Quite often, one can't get passionately involved or in love with someone or something without feeling some hurt, pain, or incurring sacrifice at some point throughout the course of that encounter or endeavor."

Ripped plywood and other bits of 3-D objects and materials not only add to the complex symbolic meanings of Kearns' compositions, but also enhance their textural qualities. A wry sense of humor is evident in some pieces, along with an awareness of the Pop implications of employing one's former commercial illustrations within a fine art context, as seen in one work in oil and mixed media, where a fragmented image of furniture is combined with a text that says, "Image Twenty goes with the colors of the sofa." However, Kearns also aims for an emotional suggestiveness and a depth which is generally not present in Pop art. In this regard, while the formal qualities in his work are often akin to Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, in terms of the former's use of imagistic fragments and the latter's use of letters and numerals, his pieces project an intimate poetry closer in feeling to the boxes of Joseph Cornell.

Kearns, however, has his own unique vocabulary of images and forms, which he employs to express a broad range of subjects and emotions, ranging from the relative optimistic to the darkly evocative. What strikes one most immediately about his pieces is their formal elegance, with assemblage and collage combined with painted textures to achieve an impressive range of tactile contrasts. Oil paint is employed by the artist to unify his compositions, with sensuously pigmented surfaces and vibrant colors creating a rich aesthetic context for the various 3-D elements, which sometimes include plexiglass and mirrors that integrate the viewer, as well, by means of reflection.

"Image 20"

However, Cliff Kearns never employs materials for their mere novelty. Rather, each element of his compositions is obviously intended to convey a specific meaning, even if it is not spelled out in any obvious way. For all the visual/tactile appeal that makes his mixed media assemblages so consistently engaging, they are also rich in content that the perceptive viewer will invariably find rewarding.

—Maurice Taplinger

Several Photographers Focus on the Gritty City

Over the years, New York City has been the subject of so many millions of photographs that it's hard to imagine how anyone could do anything new with it. However, each of the participants in "Applesauce: Images of the City," a photography exhibition recently curated by Jennifer Holst for the West Side Arts Coalition, and seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at 96th Street and Broadway, succeeded in doing just that.

Janice Wood Wetzel's color picture of a festive Chinese wedding party posing for a photographer on the Brooklyn waterfront, viewed together with her affecting image of an elderly woman city sitting alone and forlorn on a bench outside a bagel store, spoke volumes about the contrasts of life in the big city. Both picture's reveal Wetzel's humanistic vision.

Despite being in black and white Maryann Sussoni's print of two preadolescent girls in straw hats painting at outdoor easels had an almost Impressionist charm, while her image of wizened Latino men playing dominoes harked back to the days when New York was still a city of neighborhoods and everyone still took their pleasures out of doors.

Robin Glasser Sacknoff's color prints of people reflected on the elaborate Christmas windows on Fifth Avenue mingled fantasy and reality in fascinating ways. In some, the mannequins in the tableaux looked more alive than the benumbed pedestrians, while the shoppers in others evinced genuine joy as they gazed at the displays.

Laurie Joan Aron's small black and white picture of silhouetted equestrians cantering along the bridle path in Central Park and an opulent display of scarves at a street fair morphing into something resembling Rudolph Valentino's desert lair transformed commonplace scenes with their allusive magic.

Jos Wes' color images of a Coney Island street painter almost vanishing into an elaborately colorful outdoor mural and people waiting on a subway station said something quite profound about how easy it is to be anonymous or even get "lost in the sauce" anywhere in New York.

Jennifer Holst, on the other hand, seeks out those private areas of the city that form their own little worlds. Here, Holst showed two exquisite little color prints of swampy stretches of Jamaica Bay where ducks can wade undisturbed with the misty city skyline seemingly a world away.

Jeff Kwan's "Trash" series takes a comprehensive black and white view of how New Yorkers dispose of their detritus. In some pictures, black plastic garbage bags piled outside a building suggests "found" sculptures, while in one print the arm of a man's sport-jacket, hanging out of a dumpster, evokes the famous painting of Marat in his bath.

In contrast to the intimate approach of most of the other photographers in this show, Alice Ng presented two sweepingly panoramic views taken from the top of the Empire Building, looking South and North. In both of Ng's long horizontal color prints, the city lights glitter like strewn jewels under a vast nocturnal sky, enhanced in the northern view by the glow of a full moon.

Martin Hochberg's pictures of nighttime signs in Times Square and a child's sidewalk drawing that looks like a Dubuffet captured different aspects of the gritty city. However, Hochberg's most sensational picture, harking back to another era, was one black and white shot of cart horses being hosed down on the sidewalk of a midtown street.

Don Sichler also hit a bullseye in terms of showing urban contrasts with his picture of an American flag combined with the slogan "God Bless America" adorning a tenement above the sign for a porn parlor called "Peep World." An equally intriguing color picture by Sichler caught the wavering form of one building reflected in the glass facade of another.

Then there was Jean Prytyskacz, whose choice of black and white for her pictures of Little Italy gave them an atmosphere akin to Martin Scorsese's film "Mean Streets." Especially dramatic was Prytyskacz's terrific picture of a couple, both wearing dark glasses, who looked as though they were either incognito or under indictment.

—Maurice Taplinger

Ann Haaland: The Tree as Manifestation of Spirit

The painter and printmaker Ann Haaland has such an extensive and distinguished exhibition history in the Woodstock area and around the nation that it is almost hard to believe that her exhibition at the Interchurch Center, 475 Riverside Drive, is her first solo show in New York City. The exhibition, which runs from June 6th through August 30, is called "The Sacred Tree," and no title could seem more apt. For Haaland has done more to make us aware of the beauty and spiritual resonance of trees than any any artist since Joyce Kilmer—although perhaps Robert Frost's "Birches" would make for a more accurate literary analogy, since Haaland is an artist of great aesthetic rigor whose admiration for her subjects never descends to the level of sentimentality of which Kilmer's well known poem is guilty.

Nor could one think of a more suitable venue for Haaland's work than the Interchurch Center, where curator Dorothy Cochran has steadily gained a reputation in recent years for mounting some of the most consistently excellent exhibitions to be seen around town, invariably focusing on artists of demonstrable vision and depth, rather than on those who court a trendy sensationalism. And Haaland certainly reveals herself to be equal to any of them with the oils on canvas featured in this exhibition. (While they will not be hanging in the gallery, a selection of Haaland's works on paper, including her accomplished recent linoleum block prints, will also be available at the gallery for viewing by appointment.)

"Lost", 2005

Haaland acknowledges stained glass, particularly in church windows, as an influence on her style, and this can be confirmed in the linear clarity and chromatic luminosity of her canvases, which also call to mind the exquisitely delineated color areas in Japanese Ukiyo-e prints (leading one to speculate that the work of the Asian masters may have had a salutory effect on her accomplished linoleum block prints as well).

While Haaland has also been inspired, since her student days at the State University of Oneonta, by the landscape of the Hudson River Valley, her adventurous, non-naturalistic color choices and her sinuous linearity seem more akin to the Fauves and Art Nouveau than to the 19th century American movement named for that region.

In the best tradition of postmodernism, Haaland appears to have assimilated any number of diverse influences in the formation of her distinctive style, which achieves a singular synthesis. For example, in "Illumination," with its palette of brilliant yellow, deep red, pale violet, and subdued ocher hues, the stained glass effect is most pronounced. By contrast, in "Jubilation," a work primarily in blues, the forms of branches and leaves fill the picture plane so intricately that the painting appears to morph into an overall abstraction. Indeed, it is the tantalizing shifts in perception from the representational to the abstract, the push and pull between descriptive and purely formal elements, that provide much of the energy and tension animating Haaland's compositions.

Yet one would be remiss to concentrate exclusively on the formal aspects of Haaland's art to the detriment of their pronounced poetic and spiritual components, which the artist herself acknowledges when she asserts that she endeavors "to transcend what is seen or obvious" in order to apprehend "what is felt and experienced."

Toward this end, Haaland does not hesitate to make the trunks and limbs of her trees vibrant blue or a strident shade or purple, rather than the expected hues, in paintings such as "Away" or "In Friendship." Or else she sets afloat shapely white forms, resembling empty cartoon speech balloons, among the red trees in "Lost," like low flying clouds that have somehow become ensnared by their branches! For hers is a view of nature mediated by human emotions, rather than one constrained by the logic of visible reality. But, paradoxically, the more she pushes "my understanding of nature beyond my comfort level," as she puts it, the closer her paintings come to capturing the truth of her subjects.

In this regard, even while adhering to some aspects of actual appearances, particularly in her graceful delineation of the recognizable shapes of trees, as well as in evoking, in however stylized a fashion, patterns of light steaming through branches and leaves, her work belongs more to certain traditions of abstraction than to any conventional species of realism.

Yet at the same time, she remains true to the emotional reality of her inspiration to a degree that can often be more affecting for the viewer who has experienced a similar sense of wonder while walking in the woods than any more literal transcription of the subject might afford. For what Ann Haaland gives us, finally, is indeed the true spirit of "the sacred tree."—Byron Coleman

Julio Valdez and Co. Stand Out in the Affordable Art Fair

Billing itself as "A New York art fair without the New York Prices," the Affordable Art Fair New York City, which can be seen from Friday through Sunday, June 16-18, at Metropolitan Pavilion, 125 West 18th Street, does indeed offer works by some of our finest contemporary artists at prices well below what one might normally expect to pay for them. (For more information, visit www.aafnyc.com or call 212 255 2003.)

With over sixty galleries exhibiting, the richness and variety of visual experiences can be overwhelming. But whatever you do, be sure not to miss the four artists showing under the auspices of Julio Valdez Editions, 176 East 106 Street, a print studio that has brought new vitality to the cultural life of East Harlem.

Included are prints and paintings by Julio Valdez himself, a painter and master printmaker born in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, who besides having pioneered innovative and nontoxic techniques for printmaking, has attracted widespread attention from discerning critics, curators and collectors for his ability to translate cultural experiences specific to Latin America into meaningful universal symbols. Combining self portraiture with flora and fauna native to the Caribbean and Latin America in a style that makes for a fluid synthesis of figurative and abstract forms, Valdez expresses the essence and spirit of a people through the subjective lens of personal experience.

Whether inspired by a weekend outing with his young son, as in "Planetarium," or a poem by Neruda and memories of his late brother, as in "Oceanic Eyes," or indelible childhood impressions of luminous turquoise and blue hues shimmering in a particular body of water in his native country, as in an ongoing recent series of oils, his prints and paintings are notable for his ability to lend profound resonance to personal experience. Through what he refers to as

Julio Valdez, "Like The Echo of Bronze"

"the alchemy of art," Valdez addresses themes of wonder, loss, and hope with impressive technical finesse.

Born in Brooklyn of Puerto Rican parents, Juan Sanchez depicts the urban culture of the "Nuyorican" experience in a manner akin to the poetry of Miguel Algarin and the late Pedro Pietri in his complex mixed media prints. Employing photographic fragments, along with screen printing, paper pulp painting and collage, Sanchez creates visual metaphors for a tropical sensibility flowering behind the brick facades and rusted fire-escapes of inner city tenements that is as soulfully iconic in its own manner as Romare Bearden's collage glimpses of African-American life. Taking displacement as their theme, Sanchez' prints translate the funky vernacular of spray-paint graffiti and the baroque beauty of homemade altars into a unique postmodern vision.

Self-taught Spanish photographer Miguel Salom focuses in his Chromogenic prints on stones, peach pits, and other organic objects magnified with a close-up intensity that imbues them with a monumental quality. Looming monolithically, their textured surfaces dramatically amplified by light and shadow, these humble natural objects become pregnant symbols of nature's diversity. Each stone or pit takes on the anthropomorphic presence, individuality, and dignity of a portrait. Miguel Salom's respect for nature borders on reverence, lending his images a spiritual resonance that elevates the down-to-earth genre of still life to new levels of transcendence.

Francisco Toledo, who has been exhibiting in both his native Mexico and the United States since 1959 (and also exhibits with Julio Valdez at Latin American Masters Gallery, in Los Angeles) has spawned a veritable school of younger followers in Oaxaca, where he lives and works. An acknowledged master of Magic Realism, the artistic movement to whose literary wing Gabriel Garcia Marquez belongs, Toledo's potent contemporary combination of local myth, legend, and eroticism has gained him a large following in Latin America, the U.S., and Europe.

Indeed, all four of these artists have notable exhibition histories and make a visit to the Affordable Art Fair more than worthwhile, whether one is a collector or simply a connoisseur of multiculturalism.

—Ed McCormack

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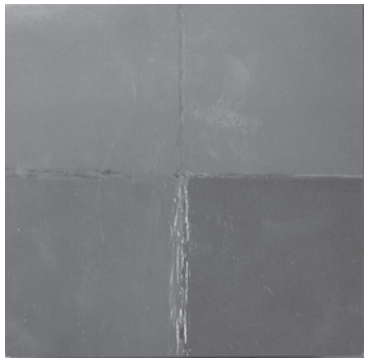
A Near-Erotic Encounter with the Paintings of Kazuko Inoue

"Flesh is the reason why oil paint was invented," Willem de Kooning once wrote, in a statement for a symposium organized by the Museum of Modern Art, and went on to say that he didn't care much for "Suprematism, Purism and non-objectivity."

What he actually seemed to be extolling, in a general way, was sensuality in art. But proof that not even an artist as astute as de Kooning can generalize about anything in art was seen in a recent solo exhibition by Kazuko Inoue, at Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th Street.



detail: Untitled (00100), 2002

Inoue works in acrylics, rather than oils, and has expressed her admiration for the Suprematist works of Kazimer Malevich. And while the luminous reds, yellows, blues, and purples in her paintings have little chromatically in common with flesh tones, they are so sensual in their own manner as to suggest that one of the best reasons for having guards in museums is to keep horny aesthetes from molesting the works of art.

Inoue, who was born in Japan and settled in the United States in the 1960s, also admires Fra Angelico, as well as Kandinsky and Matisse. But it is by Malevich that she appears most directly inspired, in her preference for minimalist grids, usually comprised of from four to nine same-size squares of pure color. For Inoue, the square is the building block of abstraction—or what she calls "the basic structure of linear construction." But in her case, the very austerity of the format makes the almost edible color, as well as the sheer sumptuousness of the paint surface, all the more enticing. It is a contrast so exquisite, so tantalizing, that it can make the heart race.

Mind you, there are purer souls, less driven by base instincts, upon whom Inoue's work can have an opposite effect. After all, the artist herself states, "I aim to achieve Spirituality, Intelligence, and Serenity in my paintings." And, admittedly, those qualities are also very much present in her work, as whoever wrote the press release for her show at Allan Stone accurately pointed out, noting her "Zen-like grace in balancing abstract form, color and painterly surfaces."

Indeed, the constant companion with whom I have been looking at art since we were both kids, and whose opinion I value highly, was so taken with these more exalted qualities that she kept likening Inoue to Mondrian and Rothko. I saw those kinships, too; but still being hooked on the hedonistic pleasures that painting can provide, I was even more seduced by the sensuality of Inoue's surfaces, which are laid down in many layers. Mostly, they are smooth and shiny as sherbet —although sometimes she will juxtapose glossy and matte squares of the same hue, enhancing the subtle tactile frisson.

I was sorely tempted to run a fingertip along the outer edges of Inoue's unframed paintings—where the acrylic pigment piles up in sexy little scallops that curl off the canvas—or touch the narrow crevices between the painted squares, which alternately recede and rise in labial ridges. But even though no guards were present in the gallery and nobody was watching me, I exercised admirable restraint. For I was in the presence of high art and knew such behavior would be unseemly—perhaps even perverse.

—Ed McCormack

Timeless Themes are Explored in CLWAC Group Show

Just because an organization formed in 1896 is named for the the only woman among the 106 founding members of the Metropolitan Museum of Art does not mean it must be bound by tradition. At least that was the impression that came across in The Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club's Annual Members Exhibition, seen recently at Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street.

Susan Samet, "Pantry Shelf"

For while it is true that representational works predominate among the club's members, they invariably find fresh approaches, as seen in Veronika Hart's large oil on canvas "Punda Milia," in which two youthful African hunters merge mysteriously with the stripes of a group of zebras in a composition made all the more surreal by the artist's flawless realist technique. Hart's painting conveys her emotional empathy for her subjects by virtue of her ability to depict a magical metamorphosis which appears to merge observed reality with tribal myth.

Animal subjects, relatively rare in contemporary art, are strongly represented in this exhibition, as seen in another accomplished oil by Cheryl Griesbach. Entitled "Paradise Regained," Griesbach's large canvas is a somewhat over-the-top Magic Realist extravaganza, a sort of New Age "Peaceable Kingdom." Like Alexis Rockman and others among a growing movement of postmodern painters who mythologize nature, Griesbach does not hesitate to skirt kitsch in order to posit utopian ecological ideals. By contrast, Fukuko Harris makes a big statement in a small oil on canvas of two white birds, painted with Braque-like succinctness, entitled "Peace on Earth." Two sculptors also depict animal figures in novel ways in bronze: Louise Peterson with an expressive horse turning its head to look at a small bird perched on its rump; Gloria Spevacek with a semi-realistic cat regarding a semi-abstract toy kitten, as though it were her own puzzling spawn! By contrast, another fine sculptor, Elaine Lavalle shows a cat in plaster that captures the feline quality of watchfulness, as though it sees a mouse and is poised to pounce.

Images of women, both mythic and ironic, also abound. Veteran sculptor Jean Kroeber shows characteristically graceful figures carved in wood and marble. Florence Kemp places an image of female hands on an actual dish-cloth and calls it "Woman's Wear Daily." JoAnn Bishop gives us an insightful acrylic on canvas of a young waitress wearing a tuxedo as she goes about the balletic business of setting wineglasses on tables, turning a mundane moment into an oddly lyrical vignette. Elvira Dimitrij shows one of her Neo-Pop oils of a pretty female face interrupted by repetitions of the word "Reflecting," its trompe l'oeil quality suggesting the artfully torn and shredded film posters of the Italian arte povera movement.

Susan Samet also employs Pop imagery freshly in her watercolor "Pantry Shelf," where various brand name food products are depicted in brilliant hard-edged color areas with a dynamic abstract impact reminiscent of Stuart Davis—albeit with a buoyant touch that belongs to Samet alone.

Women looking at men is yet another recurring theme, as seen in Delores Brink's large charcoal drawing "On Father's Day," executed with a sketchy draftspersonly elan akin to Larry Rivers; Laurel Jensen Paul's "Bonding," a portrait of a young man tenderly, somewhat tremulously, cradling a baby in his arms; and Jeanette Dick's pastel "Sleep to Dream," depicting a slumbering male figure in strong strokes of vibrant hues. Sharon Florin also makes a strong showing with "Remembering the Bottom Line," an exacting homage to the late lamented New York music venue that preceded the soon-to-be-closed Bowery punk dive CBGB's into rock and roll history.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Energy and Ambiguity Share Center Stage in the New

Dorothy A. Culpepper is a painter who has always believed in pushing the envelope, in terms of the vehemence of her painterly attack. Toward this end, in various series over the years, she has added shattered glass, nails, bits of wood, wire, shells, and other materials to her paintings with an abandon rarely seen in an age where caution and calculation have generally become more prevalent than spontaneity—even in the once freewheeling arena of abstraction. Caught up in the flow of Culpepper's thickly pigmented surfaces, these found elements often appear to fly about as though swept up by gusts of wind or carried along by waves in the sea. Ultimately, they not only add to the tactile appeal of her paintings but also accent the dynamic rhythms that animate her compositions.

A sense of context and content also sets Culpepper's paintings apart from the work of many other painters who work in abstract modes. One of her most powerful earlier series, for example, was dedicated to the memory of her late husband, and while there were no overt allusions or imagery to suggest specific subject matter, the mood of these paintings was decidedly somber and elegiac, in contrast to the buoyant forms and colors that one normally encounters in her work. And so it is with all of Culpepper's paintings in different ways and to differing degrees: no matter how ostensibly abstract they may initially appear, they invariably convey a sense of what one critic called "embedded memory" —of a humanistic subtext underlying the striking physicality and plasticity of her canvases that has never been more evident than in the works presently on view at Montserrat Gallery, 547 West 27th Street, from July 6 through 29 with a reception on Thursday, July 13 from 6 to 8PM.

If anything, Culpepper's recent paintings reveal that her work has deepened appreciably in terms of its allusiveness (albeit without compromising the abstract integrity of her style), by virtue of an even denser application of pigment, as well as a greater variety of gestures and marks that while making no attempt to be overtly symbolic are expressively suggestive. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the clearly defined yellow fish-shape occupying the center of the composition that Culpepper calls "Aquarium." Although simplified in an expressionistic manner akin to the work of Karel Appel and others in the Cobra group, this form suggests a more literal figuration than one normally encounters in the work of this artist. Here, too, the preponderance of blue and green hues contributes further to the aquatic feeling of the work, as do the configurations of overlapping dark strokes around the outer edges of the composition, which could evoke either dense undersea vegetation or the ominous approach of a fisherman's net. Of course, all such speculation is purely subjective in regard to the actual intentions of an artist as generally abstract as Dorothy A. Culpepper. Yet "Aquarium," in particular, is a work that provokes such speculation by virtue of its essential ambiguity, which causes the viewer to vacillate tantalizingly between figurative and abstract interpretations.

"Red Embraces Green"

In this regard, Culpepper shares qualities in common with both Pollock (to whom her drip technique draws the most obvious, superficial comparisons from those unmindful of his Jungian and animistic aspects, where the deeper resemblance lies) and de Kooning, both of whom also courted ambiguity in order to imbue certain of their abstract compositions with what the latter referred to as "slippery glimpses" of figurative form. Indeed, one can only guess that Culpepper would concur with de Kooning, who responded to the formalist critic Clement Greenberg's statement to the effect that, in the wake of modernism, it was "impossible to paint a portrait" with the retort, "Yeah, and it's also impossible not to!"

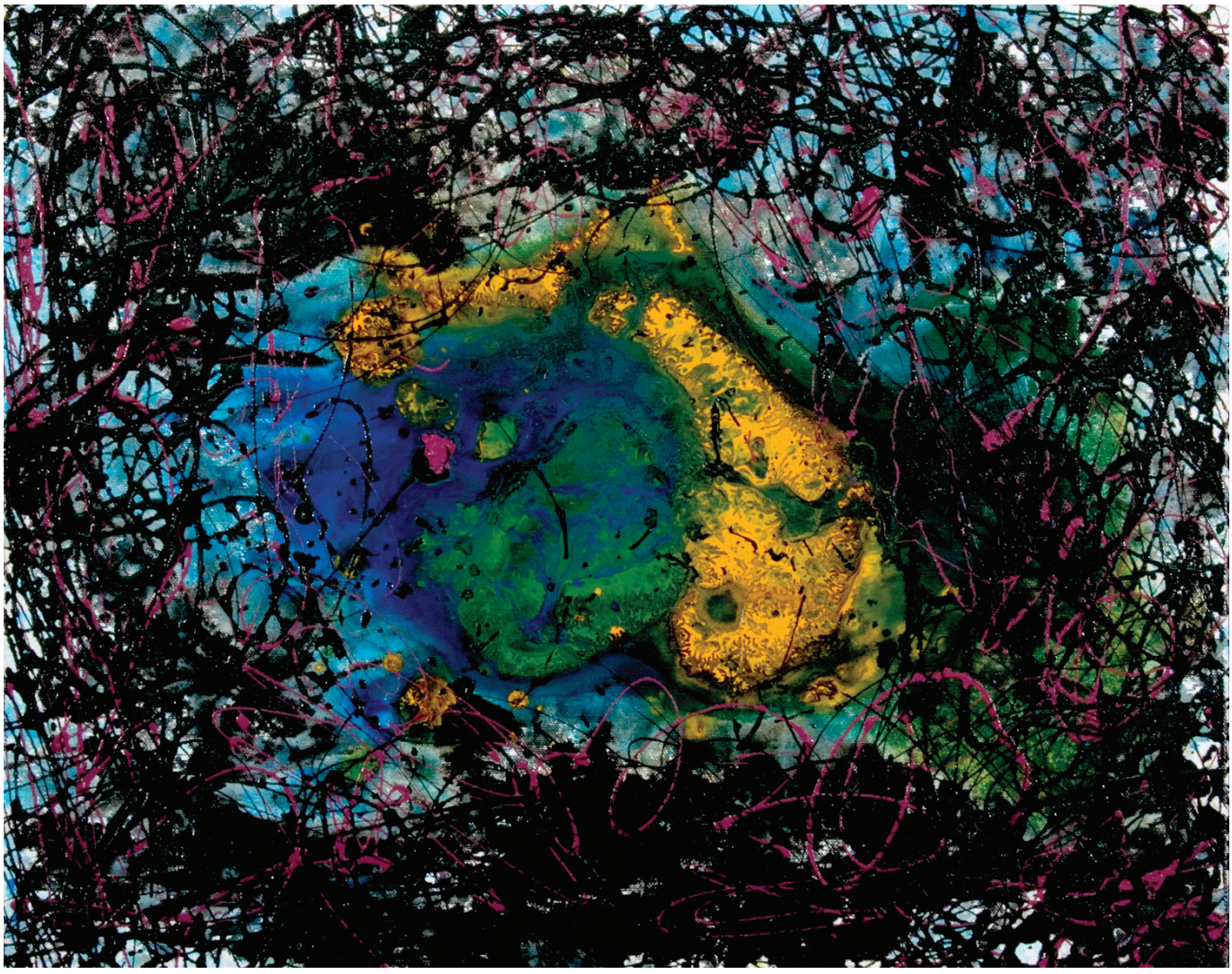
That said, scrutinizing the paintings of de Kooning, Culpepper, or any other abstract artist as though they are Rorschach tests will only take one so far; in the final analysis, it is the formal attributes that will—and must—prevail, and these are plentiful in Culpepper's paintings as well. What one notices, particularly in the newest work, is an acceleration of layering effects as well as a spatial ambiguity that seems more germane to the point of these paintings than any hide-and-seek games one may enjoy playing with recognizable forms glimpsed in the maze of paint.

For while the cross-hatching that one was tempted to read as "net-like" in "Aquarium" appears again in another painting entitled "Bumblebees Flying," in this context it has a totally different effect, functioning as a kind of visual ballast at the edges, as the eye is drawn to the areas of red and brilliant yellow at the center of the composition. Here, the tipoff as to the meaning of the title seems to be the "swarming" effect of the tiny yellow drips spattered around the two central color areas. Yet, however compelling these hints of imagery may be, they are finally subordinate to the sheer non-objective thrust of the composition, which achieves its formal autonomy by virtue of Culpepper's untrammeled and unambiguous painterly power—her ability to make a painting come unmoored, so to speak, flying free of all preconceived notions of meaning, and take on a life of its own.

Indeed, this "unmoored" quality is what lends her compositions much of their abstract autonomy and fascination. One enters into these works and is all but overwhelmed by their physical properties: their sometimes stark chromatic contrasts and the play of ruggedly textural elements upon their surfaces, where encrustations of solid, built up pigment are overlaid with fluidly linear drips and skeins of linear form tossed upon them like brilliantly colorful lariats in a rhythmic whip-dance.

This contrast (and final harmony) between sumptuous areas of impasto, flowing linear drips, and other gestural elements is especially striking in the painting Culpepper calls "Red Embraces Green," in which the embrace takes place at the center of the composition, where the fiery red hue and a green so deep as to verge on black converge and do indeed appear to

Paintings of Dorothy A. Culpepper at Montserrat Gallery



"Aquarium"

merge in a kind of chromatic synthesis that suggests a solar eclipse, given their differences of value and intensity in the two colors. And while the red is so vibrant as to avoid being consumed by the darker green hue, the surrounding areas of mottled gray and black that converge like storm clouds to frame the two central hues add considerably to the visual drama.

Equally dramatic, both chromatically and compositionally, is the painting with the provocatively poetic title "Shell Watching Cave," in which heavy concentrations of red and black drips around the edges give entry, once again, to the center of the composition, where a more fluid interaction of intermingling green and blue color areas draws the eye inward. And these same powerful elements are present as well in "Circle Around the Verdee," where the rhythmic dance is especially exhilarating, given the free rein Culpepper gives to somewhat looser, splashier overlays of red and yellow gestures and drips.

This centralizing of the compositional force by means of intense and somewhat darker gestural layering around the edges of the picture space, creating the sense of an opening in the middle that is enhanced by coloristic heightening, makes for a new kind of energy source in Culpepper's most recent paintings. And while a sense of nature's elemental forces has always been present in her compositions as a kind of natural consequence of the gestural velocity that she summons up with her spontaneous—one might even say combustive—technique, the combination of color aturation and gestural vigor in these new works lends them an unprecedented degree of density and mystery. Indeed, the overall effect of these new paintings is of something primordial and almost volcanic, with the brighter red and yellow hues flowing as moltenly as fiery lava over the darker, deeper tones on the craggy terrain of the picture plane, creating a fine tension between the static and the animate, the solid and the ethereal, evoking without mimicking the contrasts inherent in nature itself.

It is this connection to the actual, whether completely submerged or partly visible, that lends depth and meaning to Dorothy A. Culpepper's compositions, which exemplify the true purpose of abstract painting, which is to express the essence of a subject rather than to negate its meaning. Culpepper, as much as any painter at work today, upholds the modernist tradition and proves that wherever the winds of fashion may blow, there will always be a place for art that endeavors to extract such essences from the wellsprings of the invisible, as well as from the world that we see, and make them manifest and immutable in pigment.

—Maurice Taplinger

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MONKDOGZ *continued from page 12*

a sense of the work. It allows you to get a sense of the artist and their vision. If people like what they see, it has the potential to get them to explore further. But of course, what you want to do is get them in front of the actual work itself. That's the eventual goal."

Perhaps what is most surprising is that Hogge and Hadley offer their website to artist's free of charge. All one has to do is send them a web address, along with a bio, artist's statement, and/or other relevant information.

"And if the artist is not really computer proficient," Hogge says, "they can just send us a statement with their web address and tell us which image they feel best represents their work and we will take care of it for them. We do it gratis as our way of giving back to the art community."

This seems as refreshingly altruistic, some might even say naive, given the hard realities of today's art world. Yet Hogge and Hadley strike us as altogether sincere. So what's the catch? Is there any kind of work they will not exhibit, either on their website or in their gallery?

"That has been the subject of some of our most heated internal discussions," Hogge says, provoking a wicked Cheshire grin from Marina. "What we all agree on, though, is that this is not a platform for porn. I am not talking about erotic art works, mind you, but those that are clearly meant to titillate and have no real aesthetic value. And, of course, work that only aims to demean or promote hate is also counter productive."

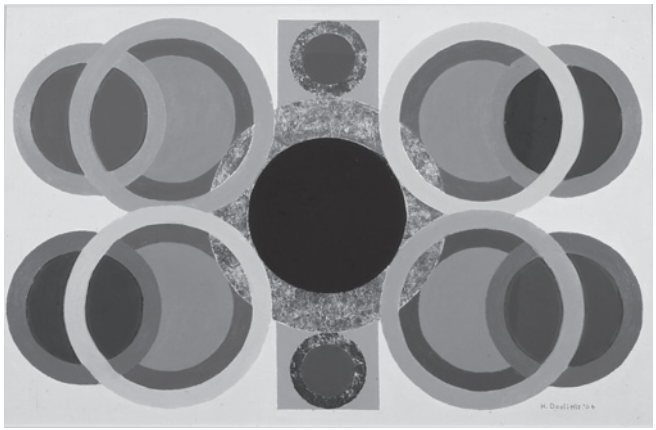
Unlike most New York City gallerists, who only see artists by appointment, both partners actually encourage them to drop into their venue, located at 547 West 27th Street, between 10th and 11th Avenues. And if that is not possible, they urge prospective exhibitors to contact them by email.

Hogge mentions that he and Hadley are already planning to open a second venue in Santa Fe, New Mexico and "looking north to Toronto and east to Tokyo. When someone comments that this sounds extraordinarily ambitious for a gallery that has just begun to find its footing in New York, he simply grins and says, "Yes, but I look at it more as a necessity, " then launches into one of his many anecdotes:

"A while back, I was in a bagel shop sipping a cup of coffee and happened to look up. What I saw was this wonderful art work framed and displayed on the wall. The imagination and color were spectacular. As I looked closer there was a little printed blurb saying the work had been executed by a group of third grade school children. It occurred to me that there were people out there that still believed in the magic. And at the same time it occurred to me that they would need a future platform to exhibit their ideas. If we can make it happen I would like to meet them at the door some years from now and say, 'Welcome to Monkdogz Urban Art.'"

Meanwhile, Marina Hadley just sits at the other end of this table in the Housing Works Book Cafe listening to her business partner expound with her dark eyes twinkling and that little bemused smile on her face. But one is certain that when everything Bob Hogge is envisioning finally comes to pass, this quiet, elegant woman will have a great deal to do with making it happen. —The Editors

Harry C. Doolittle's Vibrant Postmodern Mandalas



"One Reflecting Mandala #2"

Abstract painting has been with us so long that we often forget where it came from. We think of it as a modernist strategy for formal experiment and forget that abstract pioneers like Kandinsky, Malevich, and Mondrian were influenced by the theosophy and other spiritual disciplines popular in the late 1800s, and seeking ways to picture what could not be seen. We even forget that mandalas, which are essentially abstract paintings, have been around a lot longer than that, having existed in Eastern cultures for many centuries.

We only tend to remember the spiritual origins of abstraction when we encounter a contemporary painter like Harry C. Doolittle, whose exhibition of "Reflective Mandalas" can be seen at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, Chelsea, from June 3 through 23, with a reception on June 8, from 6 to 8 PM. For Doolittle, a former advertising copywriter and creative director turned painter takes abstract painting back to its origins in spiritual practice, even as he consciously strives to address formal issues from a sophisticated secular perspective.

Although mixed media has become so ubiquitous in contemporary art that the term will generally suffice to describe the eclectic techniques many artists have adopted, it should be mentioned that Dolittle's innovative use of glass, acrylics, aluminum and brass leaf lends his paintings a richness reminiscent of medieval illuminations. Yet, his use of pristine geometric forms and brilliant colors also harks back to Russian Constructivism and the work of independent intuitive artists influenced by spiritualism, such as the Swedish painter Hilda AF Klint. Doolittle, however, has evolved his own distinctive style over four decades, resulting in formal configurations unlike anything else in recent or past art.

Most often his circular shapes and rectangular forms are centrally located on the picture plane and set against lightly tinted grounds that emphasize their autonomy as discrete entities. Circular shapes tend to dominate his compositions, either clustered close together or overlapping in a manner that projects a sense of cosmic energy. Doolittle's use of metallic pigments along with bright primary hues increases the impact of these circles, creating the optical effect that they are rotating. One can't help making celestial associations to suns, moons, and planetary orbs, and studying these circular forms for prolonged periods of times seems to provoke a state similar to meditation.

Rectangles, on the other hand, appear less frequently in Doolittle's compositions, receding on the picture plane and seeming to serve as formal ballast behind his dominant circular shapes. Yet when they do appear, they are essential elements, especially in paintings such as "One Reflecting Mandala #2" and "Two Reflecting Mandalas #2," where they occupy the center of the composition, serving as a formal "spine" or armature for the dominant circular shapes.

Indeed, nothing in Harry C. Doolittle's paintings can be said to be extraneous; every element has its place in the formal scheme, which would collapse were it to be eliminated. In this way, each of his paintings is like a finely wrought visual poem, with each of the hues in his palette striking just the right note—the chromatic mot juste, so to speak—to make the entire composition come alive. —Byron Coleman

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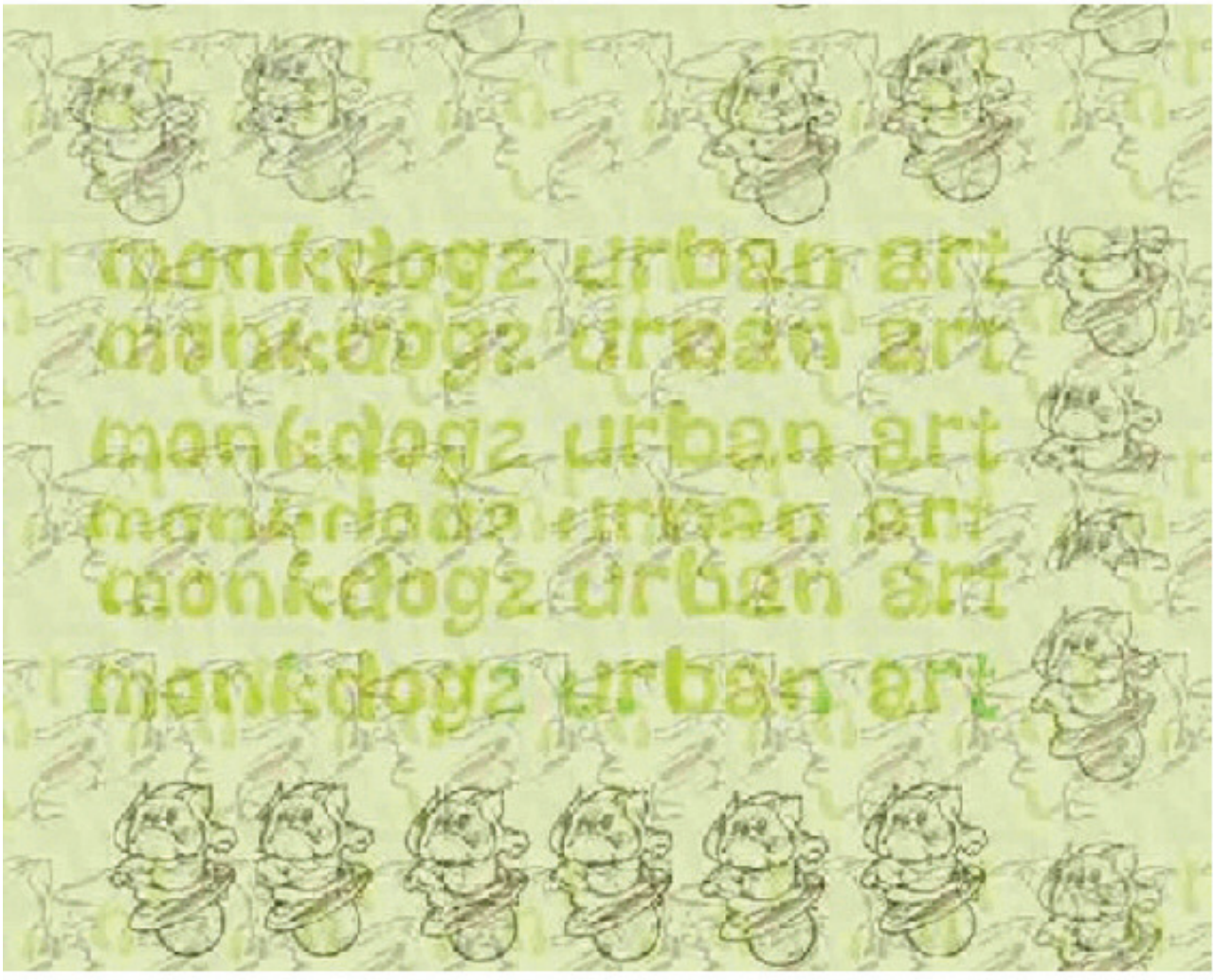

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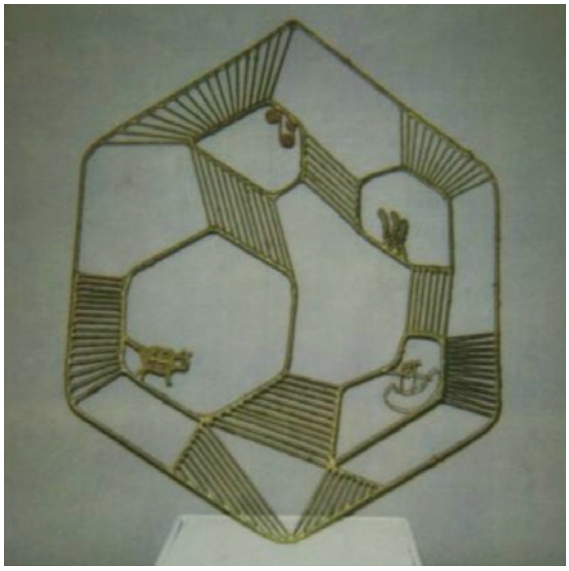

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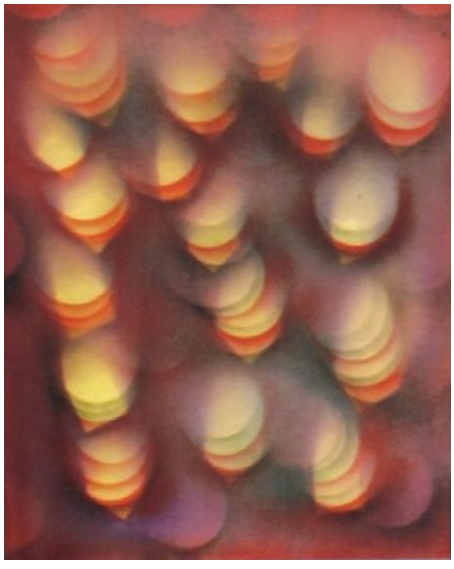

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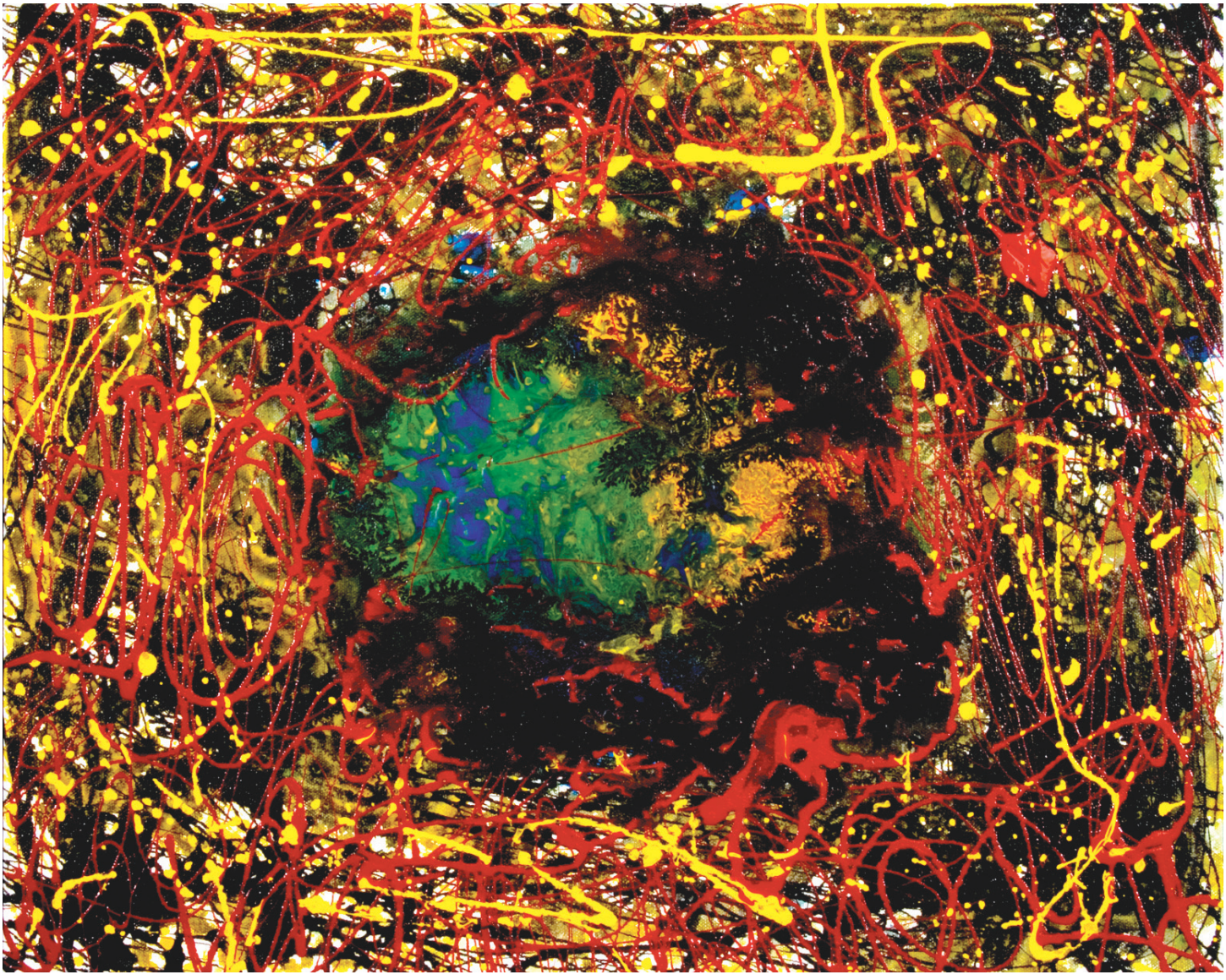

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