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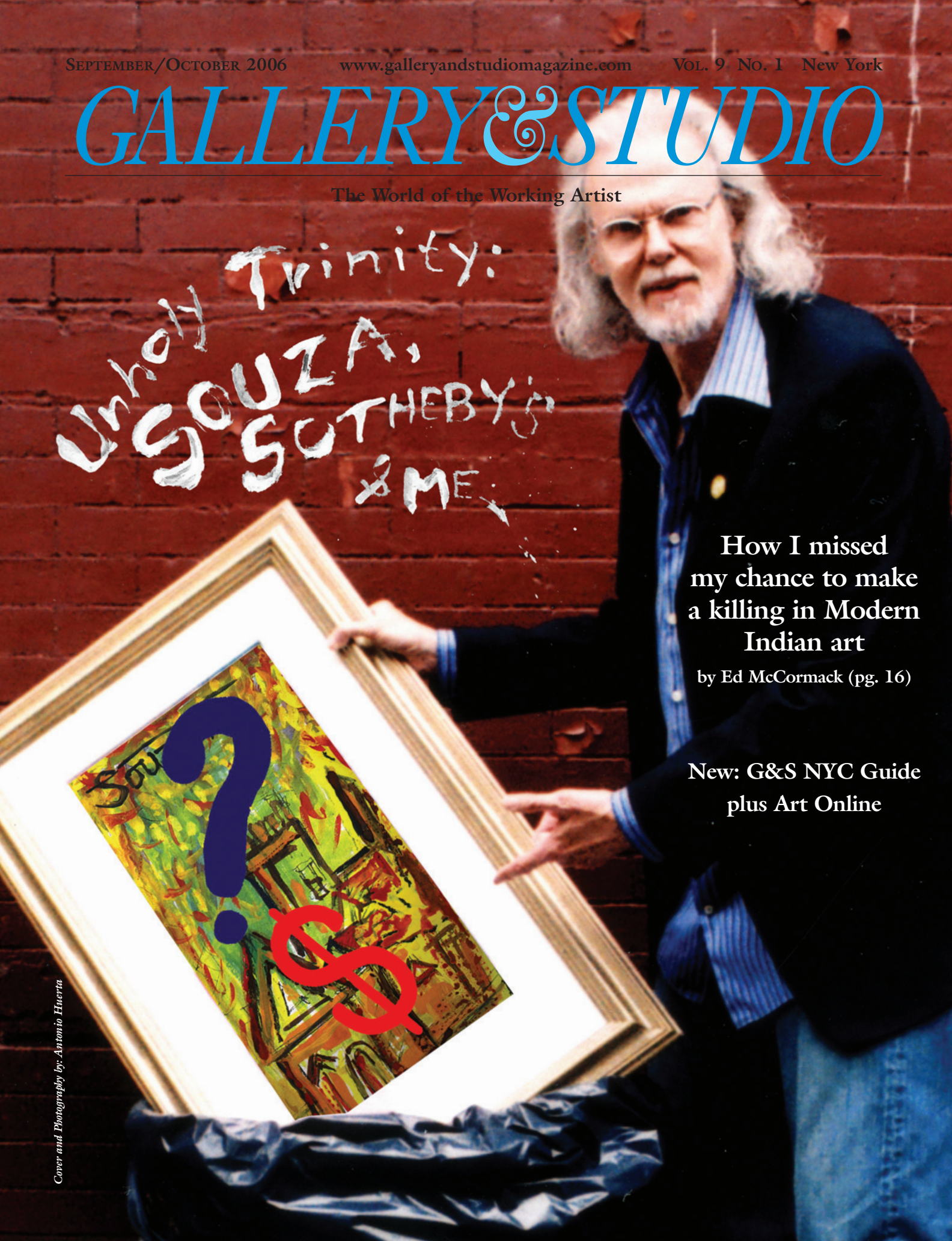
GALLERY&STUDIO

The World of the Working Artist



How I missed my chance to make a killing in Modern Indian art

by Ed McCormack (pg. 16)

New: G&S NYC Guide plus Art Online

Cover and Photography by: Antonio Huerta

Arcilesi Around the World—Part II:

Landscape Survey 1966–2006

Vincent Arcilesi "The Brooklyn Bridge" 2006 24" x 30" Oil

October 5-19, 2006

2/20 Gallery

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September 26 – October 14, 2006

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Computer generated and printed with pigmented ink on canvas, 30" x 40"

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G&S Highlights

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Although ***F.N. Sousa*** *was a pioneer of modern Indian art, he died destitute in New York City. Now his paintngs fetch six figures at Sotheby's and our writer is crying in his beer. –Page 16*

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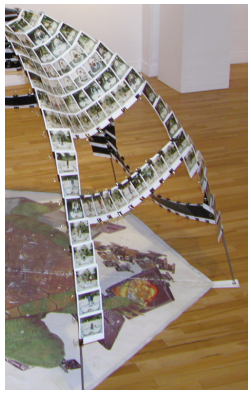

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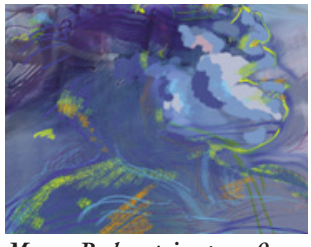

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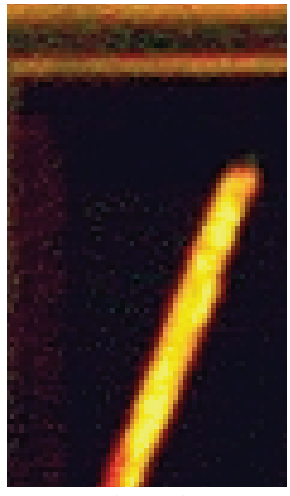

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MANAGING EDITOR **Ed McCormack**
SPECIAL EDITORIAL ADVISOR **Margot Palmer-Poroner**
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Wally Gilbert: Photographs

"Norblin Wheels 2 - Warsaw" 36" x 24"

The Norblin Project -- Images of Decay

September 26th - October 14th, 2006, Tuesday - Saturday, 10:30 - 6

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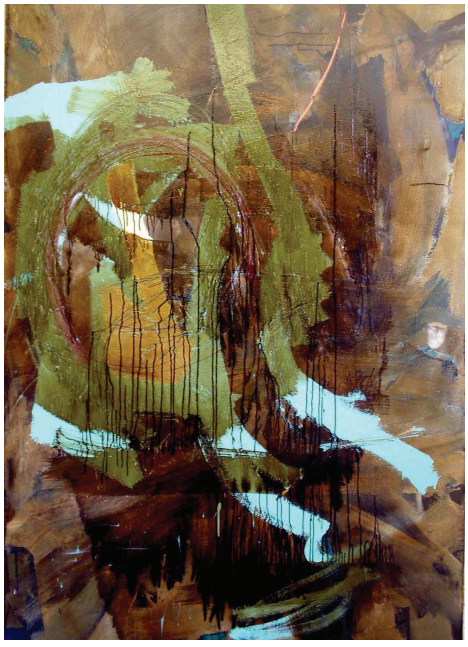

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September 15-October 25, 2006

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Tripping the Light Fantastic: The Fine Art Photography Exhibition

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Enrico Cortesano
Enrique Crusellas
Mirko Angeli
Nicole Loverso
J. Randall Harris
Rebecca Devereux
T.R. Bishop
Terry Amburgey
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October 13 - November 2 , 2006
Reception: Thursday, October 19, 2006 6-8pm

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Caroline Mars
Marga Duin
Stefan Fiedorowicz

Reveries

Ellen Marlen Hamre
Veronica Leiton
Zeiko Baheleishvili

Visions in Tune

Carol Bajen-Gahm
Luigi Castelli Gattinara di Zubiena

Calling All Angels: The Transcendent Vision of Miguel Tió

In an era when one would think we would all be shock-proof, some viewers may still be shocked by the absence of irony in Miguel Tió's solo show "Unseen Sides," at Gallerie Icosahedron, 27 North Moore Street, in Tribeca.

On view through October 14, with a reception for the artist from 6:30 to 9:30 PM on September 7 (which will also feature a performance by the classical pianist Yukiko Tanaka), this exhibition breaks what may be our last taboo: the cool postmodern prohibition against the expression of genuine passion.

One refers not to sexual passion of the ineffectually salacious kind that permeates our advertising and every aspect of popular culture, barely raising an eyebrow, but to the passionate conviction that art, when it embodies heartfelt emotion, can have a transformative effect on our way of viewing the world. Yet there is also an unabashed sensuality in Tió's paintings that compels him, in an artist's statement, to issue the following disclaimer: "Some of my work explores a range that consists of traditional religious dogma and prejudice at one end, and the instinctive and emotive nature of human sexuality on the other. Though these two subjects are traditionally contrasted as being poles apart, I aim to demystify the prejudices and preconceptions which divide them, and instead, seek to bridge them through a contemporary interpretation that is rational, thoughtful and honest, as well as spiritual and sacred. This interpretation is never intended to be controversial or offensive, but rather, conciliatory and revealing."

"8:30 AM" Oil on canvas, 60" x 50" 2002

Tió, who grew up in Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic, where he attended the School of Fine Art, cites Goya and Dali as formative influences. However, he can also be compared to Paul Cadmus for his refined technique and his classical treatment of the nude figure, as well as for his arguments for sexual diversity. And his unembarrassed visionary tendencies call to mind the great British painter-poet William Blake.

Among some forty masterfully executed paintings, pleading in various ways for tolerance, peace, and what Tió calls "the transformation of the old beliefs into new ones," one of the most persuasive is the triptych "Adams and Eves," its three panels juxtaposing images of nude gay male and lesbian couples with the traditional heterosexual pair in an Eden populated by jungle cats and angels, where the serpent morphs into an erect penis as multitudinous apples rain from the sky.

Before being taken up by Gallerie Icosahedron, a venue that champions contemporary surrealists, Tió apparently had difficulty finding acceptance in an art world where the mythic is permitted only when it is qualified with an ironic wink, where a painter who wishes to be taken seriously must disavow any eccentricities that fall outside consensus reality or the dictates of so-called sophisticated taste.

Despite—or perhaps, in part, because of— an impeccable technique and draftsmanly gifts that hark back to the Old Masters, he was forced to develop in solitude, and his estrangement from the contingencies of the art world appears to have strengthened the fierce independence of his vision, enabling him to create paintings as personal and strangely affecting as "My Mother and Her Invisible Helpers." Here, a handsome silver-haired matron, wearing a dress decorated with esoteric symbols such as an eye within a pyramid, a graphic human heart encircled by the points of a compass, and a Christian cross, sits serenely in an armchair, surrounded by phantom-like "spirit guides." It is a painting fully equal to the best self-portraits of Frida Kahlo, and a fitting tribute to a woman whom the artist credits with introducing him to "the Spiritual life," although "Considering that we were living in a very religious country and in consequence with many taboos it was something that had to be kept in utmost secrecy."

Indeed, Tió has such faith in his mother's intuitive powers that he phoned her in Santo Domingo while working on his painting "Moments of Inspiration" and incorporated monkish robed figures she had seen in her "visions" into this portrait of the artist at his easel, painting a Christ-like face, while an unknown painter of an earlier era, encountered in his own meditations ("probably Italian") gazes over his shoulder, guiding his hand. Various other mystical personages, as well, emerge from the shadows of the studio, and are joined by a contrastingly palpable and remarkably intelligent-looking black cat, sitting on its haunches, attentively watching the progress of the creative process.

The confluence of the earthly and the unearthly, of down-to-earth-details and transcendent elements, reaches its apex in the magnificent composition that Miguel Tió calls "8:30 A.M." This is a panoramic bird's eye-view of many angels soaring from all directions toward the still-intact Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, rising high above the surrounding buildings, the luminous blue river, and the distant shore of one of the outerlying boroughs, mere moments before the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001.

It is a daring, almost impossible subject for any contemporary painter to attempt, given the historical impact of the events of that morning and their emotional reverberations. Yet Miguel Tió succeeds against all odds, skirting banality by virtue of his ability to convey genuine sentiment where others might find only mawkish sentimentality. Obviously, Tió shares with the Old Masters not only impeccable technique but a belief in the supernatural that has largely fallen by the wayside in our mundanely scientific age.

Therefore he is able to paint angelic figures convincingly, even while imbuing them with all the anatomical attributes of actual, beautiful human bodies. And in the face of this ability, the viewer is able to suspend disbelief and to at least symbolically envision an uplifting denouement to the most terrible of tragedies, as the celestial rescuers arrive, ready to carry the souls of the soon-to-be-victims off to safety in the spirit world.

—Ed McCormack

Surveying the WSAC's Varied Talents in a Jam-Packed Salon

Although the Summer Salon exhibition of the West Side Arts Coalition fell inconveniently between our publication deadlines and was too inclusive to review in its entirety, it was well worth noting. Filling the walls of the organization's regular exhibition venue, Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street, the show made for a lively, if somewhat eclectic, viewing experience.

It was instructive, for example, to see an early, splashy painting from Meyer Tannenbaum's "Cosmos Series" juxtaposed with one of the more precise yet lyrical "Soft Impact" paintings in terms of the consistency that makes this prolific painter's oeuvre cohere in the face of numerous stylistic shifts. Carole Barlowe's use of foamcore to add 3-D heft to her figures was especially effective in the series shown here, where they were set against vertiginously fragmented photo imagery of the city. Marianne V. McNamara also employs the urban landscape impressively in her intricate ink drawings of brownstones delineated brick by brick and arranged in grids so that the overall effect of her compositions, for all their painstaking detail, is as abstract as an Agnes Martin.

Equally intricate in another manner, the darkly evocative collages of Shirley Z. Piniat suggest kaleidoscopes and mosaics with their myriad shard-like elements creating an overall effect of energy and movement. By contrast, Roberta Berman makes an austere formal statement enlivened by a sense of magic and mystery in her assemblage of wood, ink, metal, and what appears to be a toy musical instrument, entitled "Hommage to Jasper Johns." Characteristically Meg Boe Birns challenged the boundaries between painting and sculpture with her tactile mixed media piece, "A Concordance of Circles," which, while mounted on the wall, suggested a colorful abstract gumball machine. Lori Lata also made a memorable contribution, transforming the most declasse detritus, such as bottle caps, burnt cigarette butts and book matches, into a collage composition of uncommon elegance called "Light to the World."

Then there were Jutta Filippelli, who continues to go happily against the grain, giving us charmingly intimate and deceptively simple little works like the watercolors of a still life and a room interior seen here; Harriet Green, whose photomontages focus on the castoff objects of the city to create beautifully blooming garbage gardens; May Jeon, whose digital imagery plays tantalizingly on the margin between the representational and the abstract; Judith Barcroft, whose expressionistic portrait "Medieval Woman" showed a winning combination of formal presence and weirdness reminiscent of John Graham; four abstract acrylics by Emily Rich demonstrating the gift for gesture and painterly nuance that invests even her smallest canvases with a sense of scale that transcends their actual dimensions; K.A. Gibbons' unaffectedly folksy still life compositions in pastel; Carrie Lo's lyrical watercolors of floral and landscape subjects; and a strong composition of pregnant abstract forms by Elinore Bucholtz.

Also including first-rate works by Robin Glasser Sacknoff, Patricia Gilman, Madi Lanier, Janice Wood Wetzel, Carolyn Reus, Jeanette Ardnone-K, Don Sichler, Astrith Deyrup, Joseph Boss, Hal Weiner, Marsha Peruo, and Monique Serres that space does not permit describing here, this show featured more than 25 of the artists who make the West Side Arts Coalition well worth the attention of every art loving New Yorker.

—Maurice Taplinger

Discovering the Pastoral Side of Vincent Arcilesi

Since his art school days, the fiercely independent artist Vincent Arcilesi, whose mature work Edward Lucie-Smith described in his book American Realism as "a deliberate turning away from the accepted idea of the Modern," has been a prolific painter of landscapes—and, more recently, of cityscapes. At the Art Institute of Chicago, Arcilesi was one of the few students less interested in jumping on the "Hairy Who" bandwagon than in immersing himself in the school's terrific collection of Impressionist and Post Impressionist masterpieces.

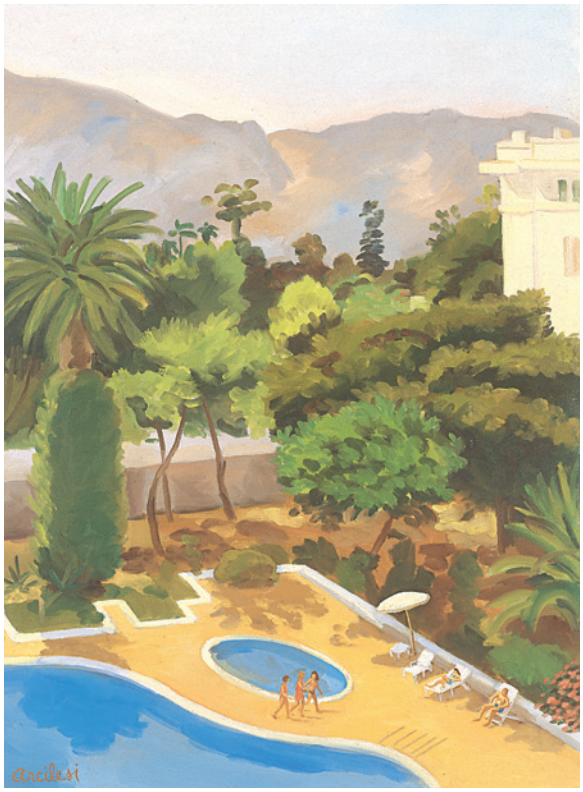
Indeed, Arcilesi invariably includes smaller landscapes and cityscapes in his exhibitions of large thematic figure paintings, set in various locales around the world. And the close observer will notice that many of them, besides being finished works of art in their own right, also serve as alla prima studies for the backgrounds in his erotically charged postmodern allegories.

Arcilesi usually reproduces some of his landscapes in his exhibition catalogs to make the point that they are not aesthetic stepchildren but an essential part of his oeuvre. Yet they are often upstaged by the spectacular sexiness of his mural-scale canvases of classically comely nudes striking poses in the streets and plazas of the world's great cities. People tend to go so gaga over the palpable pulchritude he evokes in his figure paintings that they sometimes overlook the subtler charms of his landscapes. The pity of this is that, in doing so, they also overlook the fact that every facet of nature can be as great a source of sensual delectation as the most beautiful human body, when caressed by the brush of a painter as acutely attuned to each and every nuance of visual experience as Arcilesi happens to be.

Arcilesi first made this point two years ago with a superb exhibition of landscapes at 2/20 Gallery, 220 West 16 Street, and now reinforces it with an equally splendid mini-retrospective, "Arcilesi Around the World—Part II: Landscape Survey 1966—2006," on view in the same venue from October 5 through 19.

The present exhibition of 27 oils on canvas includes works in which the painterly fluidity that still enlivens Arcilesi's most exacting compositions in a more learned and exquisitely controlled way is given free reign under the sway of the artist's youthful infatuation with the gestural exuberance of Abstract Expressionism and the protocubistic color construction of Cezanne. These influences are already skillfully assimilated in "Highland Mountain, Aspen 1966," where the clouds floating in the clear blue sky are as craggily executed as the russet hills and verdant patches below, indicating a rugged path Arcilesi could have taken had he not chosen to apply his painterly vigor to more complex challenges.

His mastery is almost fully achieved in the large 1985 canvas "Keene Valley in the Adirondacks," a peculiarly American vista, reminiscent for its heroic sweep of the Hudson River Valley School and the Luminists. Here, descending layers of shapely cumulonimbi, sunlit mountain mists, and lush green foliage evoke a natural panorama as rhapsodic as anything by Cole or Durand. Characteristically, Arcilesi updates the scene with colloquial details such as telephone poles, a yellow truck traversing a strip of highway, and the tiny figures of his own two children romping in a field in the foreground. Yet these hints of modernity in no way undercut the composition's eternal majesty; quite the contrary, they serve as markers of scale and impart to the picture an exuberance that enhances its immediacy.



"Palermo" 2006

In between the gestural excursions of paintings such as "Highland Mountain, Aspen," and the ambitious grandeur of "Keene Valley in the Adirondacks," we see the young artist trying on various modes of representation, ranging from "Kalamazoo River, 1971," where the chromatic heightening approaches the electric rainbows of Wayne Thiebaud, to the pastoral naturalism of "Trees of Windham, 1975." Arcilesi develops the latter vein even further in the 1981 canvas "Mountain View, Prattsville," a composition that puts a sophisticated spin on the type of subjects favored by the primitive limners of colonial America, with its complementary patterns of trees dotting a grassy slope and tiny cows grazing in the meadow below.

In more recent years, working up to theme shows inspired by his travels abroad, Arcilesi has progressed to a species of landscape painting roughly analogous to the work of those few writers who raise travel writing to the highest levels of literary endeavor. Among the more exotic examples are three 2001 canvases of "Palmeraie, Marrakesh," in which tall palm trees set against distant mountains or pink stucco skylines invite the gestural paint handling at which Arcilesi still excels in his alla prima work—passages of which he frequently integrates with wizardly finesse into the backgrounds of his epic figure compositions to retain a sense of freshness and spontaneity within the overall meticulousness of his realist technique.

Arcilesi's seamless synthesis of painterly fluidity and detailed descriptiveness is seen in both the California view "Golden Gate Bridge,1993," and the Paris scene "Ecole Militaire, 1997." However, it is especially striking in "Peterhof, 2003," which harmoniously melds Imperial Russian architecture and gold statuary with breezily brushed clouds, flowers, and foliage. And he continues to perfect it, as evidenced by "The Brooklyn Bridge" and "Palermo," both painted in 2006.

In the former painting, Arcilesi takes such poetic liberties as adjusting the scale of the New York skyline and even moves the Empire State Building closer to the shore in order to emphasize the dynamism of the bridge's soaring span, which he exalts in conversation as being "like a cathedral to me." The latter painting presents a bird's eye-view of three tiny female figures in swimsuits striding past the curvaceous aquamarine pool of a luxury hotel, nestled among mountains and Edenic vegetation.

The cinematic sweep of the composition suggests a scene in a James Bond film set in the Mediterranean, as though the camera is about to zoom in on the three women as they head for some mysterious assignation. For here, as in the large figure paintings for which he is best known, Vincent Arcilesi introduces a note of narrative drama that is characteristic of his best work, yet rarely seen in the genre of landscape painting.

—Ed McCormack

"A Good Run": Celebrating the Life of Charles E. Murphy (1933-2005)

One of the saddest tasks of the summer for Jeannie and me was attending a memorial service for the painter Charles E. Murphy at the Yale Club on Vanderbilt Avenue. Although every inch a gentleman, "Charlie," as he insisted everyone call him, didn't seem like a Yale guy. He seemed more like what he was: a Bronx guy— and I mean that in the very best way. But he was gifted from early on, one of those kids too talented to be kept in context, and a scholarship took him to Yale to study with Josef Albers, the renowned color theorist and painter known for his austere geometric series Homage to the Square.

After the army, where he apparently played a lot of football, Murphy went to work as an art director for a record company for several years. Like Edward Hopper, who also started out as a commercial artist, Murphy wasn't a bohemian by nature, the type to starve in a garret (even though that still would have been possible in his early years, before all the garrets were converted to condos). So he had to think long and hard before finally deciding to quit his job and make a go of painting full-time.

Because he loved the visible world too much to leave anything out, Murphy became a much different kind of painter than Albers, a realist whose cityscapes always reminded me of Hopper without the angst. However, he was the kind of painter Fairfield Porter would have admired, because he never forgot what he learned about chromatics from his revered teacher and was as stringent as any geometric abstractionist when it came to constructing a composition.

"I hope that the viewer of my work will leave with a sense of how I see, and with a deeper, richer feeling of emotional involvement with the world around us," Murphy once said. And his work certainly did that for me. He painted a bustling corner on East Broadway in Chinatown, with the facade of one of our favorite greasy chopstick noodle shops in it, and now every time we go there we see it with new eyes: Murphy's. Ditto for other parts of the city, even Brooklyn, a borough once foreign to me, where Murphy and his wife Jo Anne lived. Murphy made me see Brooklyn with a fond familiarity I once reserved exclusively for the island of Manhattan.

"Bridge Light"

He simply had a way of making people see the innate beauty of any out of the way street he chose to paint. It wasn't just how he buttered the buildings with sunlight or captured prismatic reflections in rain puddles that got you—although he could convince even the most diehard formalist that the charms of atmosphere and local color were not to be scorned in serious art—but an absolute belief in the truth inherent in the subject itself. His greatest asset, to paraphrase what I wrote about this widely exhibited artist's last solo show, at the National Arts Club in 2005, was his ability to see the magic in the mundane and make a passing moment immutable.

Too bad life itself is so much more fleeting. But as Jo Anne Murphy, one of the best helpmates any artist ever had, told us all at the Yale Club, when she broke the news to him that his long, brave battle with illness was nearing its end and it was time for him to be moved from the hospital to the hospice, her husband, with a grace characteristic of men like him, said, "Well, I had a good run, didn't I?"

Since cheap sentimentality or trite symbolism never entered into the work of Charles E. Murphy, not too much should be made of the fact that one of his last and best paintings, a luminous waterfront view of the Brooklyn Bridge with the Manhattan skyline in the distance, depicted a sunset.

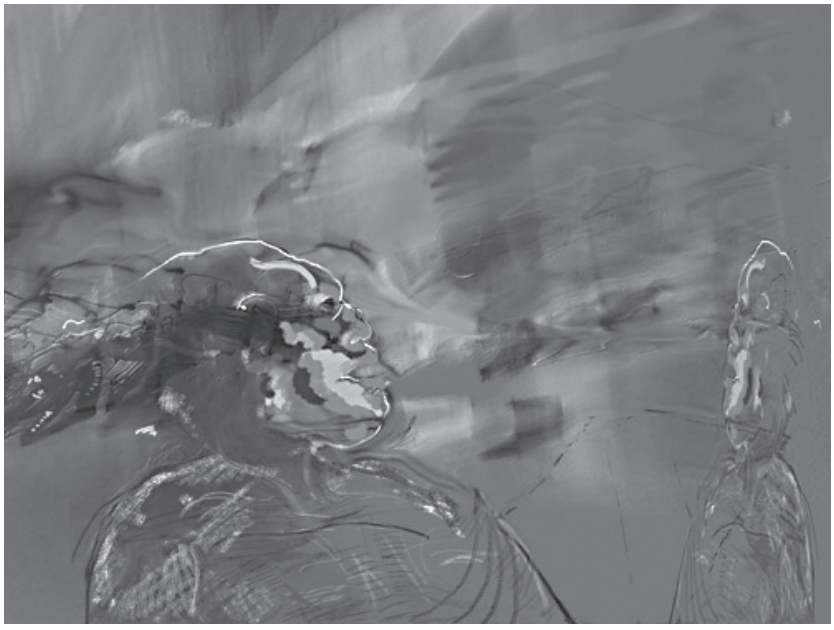
Still, it seems a fitting farewell.

—Ed McCormack

Myron Rubenstein: Ghosts Stalk The Shopping Mall

One of the more intriguing paradoxes of art is that something can be added by taking something away. In the case of Myron Rubenstein's computer generated paintings and drawings what has been taken away is some of the direct evidence of the human hand that one normally associates with work that is loosely termed "gestural."

The alert reader will be aware, however, that I qualified the last statement by adding the word "direct." For there is actually as much evidence of the human hand in Rubenstein's work as there is in the paintings of, say, Cy Twombly whose name springs to mind because of the graphic, graffiti-like ecriture that both artists, in their individual ways, employ as an expressive vernacular.



"Two Questions Facing the Answer"

Only, the evidence of Rubenstein's hand is somewhat secondhand, so to speak—which is to say, at a slight remove, since Rubenstein creates his paintings on an Apple computer, then prints them with pigmented ink on canvas. Okay, so sometimes he "cheats" a little, adding pigments to some paintings, rubbing them into the canvas.

For the most part, however, Myron Rubenstein adheres to his "hands off" agenda, and the good news is that his apparently very calculated decision to forego traditional materials and methods, rather than reducing the appeal of his work, adds a tantalizing visual tension to his solo show at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street from September 4 through 23. (Reception: Thursday, September 7, from 6 to 8 PM).

This tension arises in part because Rubenstein's work is by its very nature so quintessentially painterly, so gesturally vigorous, that the relative homogeneity of its surface creates an immediate impression that contradicts its actual process, just as the slight disconnect between the color and line in Rubenstein's compositions poses its own visual conundrum. Nothing is nailed down in these compositions; in quite a different way from the Japanese artists to whom the phrase was originally applied, Rubenstein creates "a floating world."

This ethereal quality, the impression that the figures in Rubenstein's paintings are phantoms afloat in stratospheres of color may be elucidated in the artist's statement "My paintings are about the inner soul of man's spirit. Encompassing the subconscious to arrive at a meaning of fear, love, hate, lust, envy, sloth—all the sins and emotions of men and women. The dark places that shed much light on who we really are."

Thus yet another layer of meaning is added to these compositions, alerting us that they endeavor to address more than the postmodern synthesis of fragmented figuration and abstraction they might initially suggest. Don't get the impression, in other words, that simply because Rubenstein likes to layer images that he is simply indulging in the kind of postmodern pseudo-pentimento that David Salle is famous for. Look closely and it will be immediately obvious that Rubenstein's figures have little in common with the comely splay-legged, objectified bodies that Salle apparently copies or projects from pornographic photographs.

No, the people Rubenstein draws on his computer and prints on his paintings have much more mileage on them. Which is to say they are as soulfully baggy and sagging and beat up by life as Leonard Baskin's Job-like Everymen. Only, unlike Baskin, whose Achilles heel is a kind of pompous sentimentality and a self-righteous rage toward the modern world and modernist art that brands him as a ludicrous anachronism, Rubenstein is a formally ambitious humanist. Like Leon Golub—only, dealing with the mundane universal torments of the daily existence we all must endure, rather than the extreme tortures inflicted by leering, sadistic mercenaries on the truly unfortunate few who get caught in the crossfire of history—Myron Rubenstein is as concerned with making a painting compelling in purely visual terms as he is with communicating a world view.

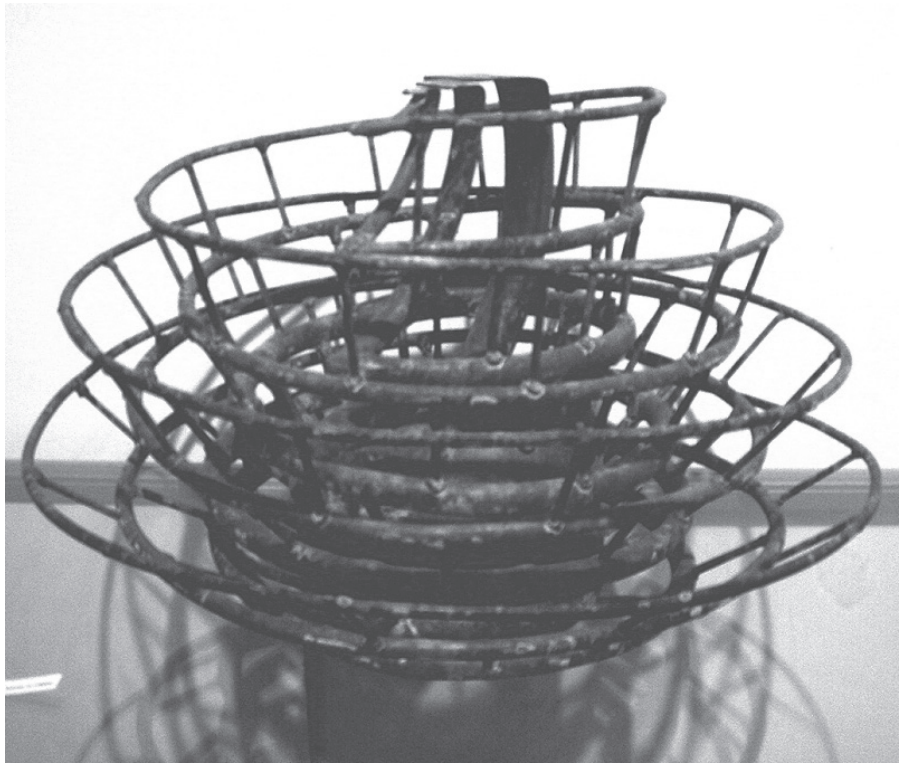
Part of the appeal of his pictures is their chromatic intensity, the feeling that his colors are lit from within, which comes from his ability to transmit the glow of the computer screen in the inks that he applies to the canvas through printing. That this cannot really be done by directly painting on canvas, unless one employs the techniques of photorealism, which would be unsuitable to his gestural style, explains something of why the technique he has evolved is so suitable to his aesthetic. For it enables, him to infuse the color fields in his paintings with an almost photographic quality, with highlights that glow like reflected neon. Thus luminous auras enliven his canvases in a manner that suggests the media-saturated light of the environment that most of us are obliged to live in, which turns the tables on ordinary reality, making what is real seem more ethereal than the air-conditioned nightmare of the shopping mall. And in fact we really do navigate the fluorescent corridors of this relatively new world we have inherited like ghosts, like the scratchy, transparent spirits or souls that seem to float over Rubenstein's iridescent color fields. We are the graffiti on the wall, so the speak, the primitive scrawls of organic matter that will be wiped away by time long before the lights are dimmed in K-Mart.

Grim? Yes, but as on the money as the titles of Rubenstein's paintings, which reflect the mind-boggling bureaucratic doubletalk terms and phrases by which we are ceaselessly bombarded and benumbed in the era of Spin and Homeland Security, "Systems Have Created a Flux," "Two Questions Facing the Answer," "Name Withheld to Protect The...", "A Remarkable Conclusion," "Assembling Rare Earth People," and the poignantly blatant "Need a Lover, Just Look!"

None of Rubenstein's paintings simply illustrates in any banal or obvious social realist sense the science fictional realm we find ourselves in all these years after Orwell's 1984 proved that fiction can be a hell of a lot less strange than truth. Rather, they evoke a much larger, more metaphysical sense of the bullshit besieged predicament of contemporary men and women. Paradoxically, it is this ability to tell it like it is right at this moment in history while utilizing state of the art technology that imbues the paintings of Myron Rubenstein with the eternal qualities that one looks for in significant contemporary art.

—Ed McCormack

Val Bertoia's Striking Synthesis of Visual Poetry and Significant Form



"Sprial Tree"

There is a kind of imaginative fancifulness that we associate far more often with painting than with sculpture. Rare is the sculptor who can approach the whimsical qualities that we see in certain paintings by Joan Miro or Paul Klee. However, Val Bertoia, whose works in bronze and copper were on view recently at World Fine Art Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, is one of the precious few contemporary sculptors who can create visual metaphors that appear to transcend all material limitations.

As the son of Harry Bertoia, the well known modern sculptor and designer who created the world famous Bertoia wire chair in the 1950s, Val Bertoia grew up in an aesthetic environment. And indeed the fluidity of his forms and his use of copper and bronze wire to create intricate formal configurations demonstrates that he absorbed something of his father's design sense. For example, one sees a certain similarity between some of Val Bertoia's pieces and "Urn," the 1962 bronze by Harry Bertoia reproduced in Herbert Read's book "A Concise History of Modern Sculpture."

Yet Val Bertoia has developed his own unique style, involving structures that are often considerably more intricate than those in the work of the elder Bertoia, as seen in "Spiral Tree," a bronze and copper configuration of swirling linear shapes that conveys an arboreal essence while transcending natural references to achieve a striking abstract autonomy. Here, Val Bertoia achieves a freedom akin to the line drawings of the aforementioned Paul Klee, even as the piece occupies three dimensions and commands space with its rounded contours in the manner that we expect of formidable sculptural form.

On the other hand, Val Bertoia demonstrates that he can compel our attention in two dimensions as well with another work called "Cycle of Life's Joys," in which the overall configuration is more literally like a "drawing in space," to apply Julio Gonzalez's apt term. Here, Bertoia presents us with a world in microcosm, symbolizing the evolution of several small creatures within an octagonal format constructed in a linear manner from copper and wire. There is a sense that the whimsical figures are traversing not only space but time, as they make their way around the perimeters of the shape like tightrope walkers in some metaphysical maze of the artist's making.

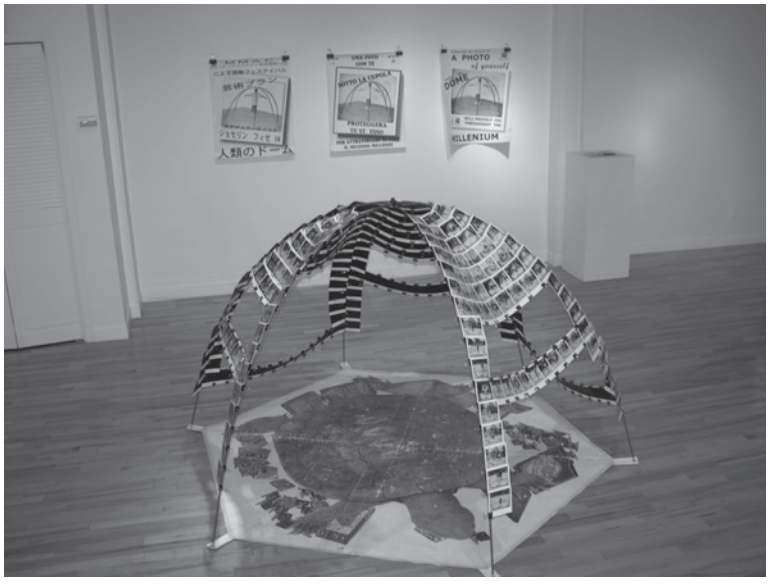
One thinks of M.C. Escher's fantastic structures based on mathematical premises in this context, but rather than dealing in optical illusions such as trick staircases that lead nowhere, Bertoia conveys the sense of an ongoing journey in terms that are as poetically evocative as they are visually appealing. It would appear that the tiny travelers within the abstract form are surrogates for us all.

In these and other sculptures, intriguing titles such as "Polarity Orbits" and "Small Swirl Bush" not only signify the exquisite formal balances that Bertoia strives for but also suggest a host of metaphorical meanings, combining abstraction with a surreal allusiveness. Val Bertoia's successful synthesis of diverse sculptural tendencies to forge a singular personal style sets him apart as a sculptor whose ongoing development will be well worth watching.

—Peter Wylie

Jocelyn Fiset Brings his "Protective Dome for Mankind" to the Fusion Arts Museum on the Lower East Side

Rarely have an artist and a venue seemed so perfectly paired as Jocelyn Fiset and the Fusion Arts Museum, at 57 Stanton Street, which is featuring this important Canadian artist's installation "A Protective Dome for Humankind," from October 3 to 31, with a reception on October 12 from 7 PM to 10 PM. Deborah Fries founded this Lower East Side cultural landmark in the early 1980s in the former storefront studio of her former art teacher Shalom Neumann, an extraordinarily innovative and influential, if woefully under appreciated, artist whose work is installed permanently in one of the museum's three gallery rooms. Trained as a realist painter, Shalom, as he prefers to be known, still makes figurative imagery a prominent component of his work. However, he has made a lifelong commitment to fusion/multidisciplinary art, utilizing light, sound, and other technological elements in his work, and the principles of his aesthetic have set the tone for the Fusion Arts Museum.



"Fusion art is the art genre that best mirrors our twenty-first century with its constant chaos, multi-sensory bombardment and ever-advancing technology," says Deborah Fries, who continues to function as the museum's director. "Because it is 'modern' it speaks to the times in which we live, to our loves, our hates, our politics, our feelings, our desires, and sometimes are innermost thoughts, all of which is reflected in the mirror that contemporary art holds up to society."

Despite its modest size and a no-frills ambiance that recalls the funky vitality of the Tenth Street gallery era of the 1950s, when clusters of small storefront galleries on the Lower East Side provided the spawning ground for the second-generation of abstract expressionists, Fusion Arts, a not-for-profit arts organization and a registered charity, truly qualifies as a bonafide museum. Devoted to bring avant-garde art to an ethnically diverse community, connected to a network of arts festivals held in Canada, Europe and Asia, it also has a long history of social activism.

Thus it is the most auspicious site imaginable in the city for presenting the work of Jocelyn Fiset, whose first ten-year cycle of "interventions" began during the summer of 1985 with La Peinture en Processus (Painting in Process)" As a reaction to the rampant commercialism of the art world (a condition, he hastens to say, which still exists) and the notion of the artwork as priceless object, rather than democratic tool of consciousness and enlightenment, Fiset was among the first to "take art to the streets," staging public painting events before a live audience. In Regina, he did a painting in a department store window and later traveled the world, painting on a dome tent.

" Like a modern-day nomad," the artist recalls, "the tent became my workshop and my art gallery, since I painted on its outside walls; my stage, since I painted before passersby; and my home, since I slept in it during my travels."

From 1996 to the present, Fiset has presented what he calls "Le Nomadisme Protecteur (Protective Nomadism)" in public spaces in France, Italy, Japan, the United States and Quebec. In contrast to the excesses of the more profit-driven areas of the art world, Fiset has positioned himself as a kind of socio-aesthetic Thoreau, "a pioneer," as he puts it, "of so-called 'Simple Living' as well as of relational art, the latest fad in this early new millennium."

His latest project, first presented at the C.R.A.N.E. Symposium in France, as well as in three artist-run centers in Quebec, before making its way to the Fusion Arts Museum, embodies his theme of "Protective Nomadism" in "a dome consisting of 350 Polaroid photographs representing at least 350 citizens of the world, as well as a DVD showing pictures (stills and videos) evidencing several interventions in Italy and the United States."

Besides being "a universal symbol of protection and shelter" (one thinks of Buckminster Fuller in this regard, as well as Reich and his orgone box) Fiset sees the dome as "a protective aura," the Polaroid as "the symbolic means of manifestation for this protection; like a modern-day talisman, it brings chance and protection to the person being photographed."

The intervention involves the artist setting up "the Great Dome, which is made of a canvas floor from which three fiberglass poles rise and intersect above the head to form the protective dome" in a public place. He is harnessed with an aluminum frame, which functions like a unique elevated sandwich board, raised high above him, to draw attention to the event. "Free: A picture of you below the dome will protect you so that you will spend the next ten millenniums in peace!" proclaims a text printed on both sides of the walking billboard, under which the artist wields a camera to take two pictures of each passerby who agrees to participate standing within the skeleton of the dome. The first picture is offered to the participant, since, as Fiset puts it, "Trading of this type, a truly millennial act between human beings, remains an essential part of creating an open, universal work of art."

Whether you think Jocelyn Fiset sounds like Paul Revere, P.T. Barnum, or Chicken Little when he declares "In these times where Humankind suffers, as much as it provokes, a whole host of upheavals, it is a matter of emergency to lay down, on each and every individual on this planet, a protective aura to have a positive influence on their destiny," this is an installation not to be missed. Certainly it is more imaginative and relevant than Christo and Jean-Claude's highly hyped and anticlimactic "The Gates" project last year in Central Park and a lot more fun. —Byron Coleman

Playing the Field: The Paintings of Quinn Stilletto

Rather than being seized upon as a license for aesthetic promiscuity, postmodern pluralism provides an opportunity for fruitful exploration in both the abstract and figurative oils of Quinn Stilletto, at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, Chelsea, from September 28 through October 18, with a reception on October 5 from 6 to 8 PM.

Stilletto's abstract paintings are allusive to begin with, in that while they are often created with small strokes of color that form swarming compositions, consuming the entire picture plane in an "overall" manner akin to Pollock, they invariably suggest specific subjects. Stilletto's "Epicenter of Eden," for example, has a decidedly pastoral feeling, very much in keeping with its title. Here, short, swirling strokes of red, yellow, and green radiate a rich sense of natural energy, a shimmering color field that pulsates with the underlying rhythms of nature. This is not a landscape in any traditional sense of the term, but rather an intuitive "channeling" of unseen forces, capturing a deeper truth than a mere transcription of the lay of the land could provide.

Possessed of a similar swarming energy, yet very different in terms of its overall effect, the painting that Stilletto calls "From the Cartoonist" apparently derives from the mass media. At least that is the impression one would get from both its title and the bulbous shapes that cover the canvas in a characteristically rhythmic fashion. However, while these shapes suggest the cursive forms that cartoonists often employ to depict their grossly comic figures—the bubble noses and clownish shoes that are the conventions of their medium and the defining characteristics of their creations—this is not a Pop painting in any ordinary sense of that term, since it is not at all figurative. Rather, Stilletto creates an abstract representation of the cartoon vernacular, fully as unfettered by specific subject matter as the aforementioned evocation of nature.

"From the Cartoonist"

In another oil called "Falling into Place," a variety of staccato strokes dissect space, as though establishing a terrain more psychological than physical, even while the earthy palette evokes natural associations. As the title suggests, Stilletto presents us with nothing less than a metaphor for a mental state in which the unpredictable elements in life can be organized toward some positive long term goal—an admittedly subtle subject for which he has evolved a surprisingly coherent visual language.

Stilletto succeeds equally well in projecting a sense of the subject without resorting to literal imagery in "Parade Route," with its loose grid of vibrantly colorful strokes and drips, as well as in "Piecing Together Just What Happened," where the sense of solving a conundrum takes shape in an intricate maze of rectangles interlocking like pieces in a picture puzzle.

Conversely, when Quinn Stilletto chooses to paint figuratively, abstract elements still come into play in the way he breaks his subjects down in bold areas of color. In "Andy Warhol" this serves to emphasize the artist's role as an enduring icon of cool, hidden behind his impenetrable shades; in "Mick Jagger," the singer's deep blue coloring seems to suggest his debt to African-American music. Both possess an emblematic power that makes them every bit as compelling as Quinn Stilletto's abstract compositions.

—Peter Wiley

Saul Lishinksy Interior Portraits

Life is the source for Lishinsky's astonishing portraits on view at Westbeth Gallery, 55 Bethune Street, through Oct. 1. (Gallery hours are 1-6 PM, closed Wednesdays. 212-989-4650.) He claims he does not paint what he sees, but looks into the person to capture their essence. He ignores anatomy and techniques. Yet despite this disregard for external appearance, he produces portraits that are exceptionally accurate descriptions. This apparent contradiction can be explained by Lishinsky's skill and compulsive habit for drawing from life. As you stand in front of his portraits, you not only see the person, but feel who they are.

Male nude, drawing

Lishinsky has led the life drawing group at Westbeth Artists Housing for years. He has produced volumes of vigorous drawings and spirited watercolors, many in this exhibit. Anyone who values the distinct aesthetic of figure drawing will be enthralled at his lively use of line to describe the nude, with a technique that also manages to convey the unique personality of each model. He finds subjects for drawing from his everyday life. A series of pencil drawings of staff at a Chinese restaurant he frequents are delightful. An art therapist, he has several sensitive drawings and paintings of patients he has worked with. He has an instinct for describing form, without needing to think about it, as a musician plays his instrument, with total spontaneity and freedom.

His portraits project intensity from his expressionistic techniques that are influenced by Picasso's remarks that art must have something to say and be an expression of life, ranging from the most extreme emotions to intense desires. Lishinsky's portraits are never conventional, but gripping statements about the human condition. His portrait "Anguish" combines a penetrating description of a woman with distortion of perspective. It throbs with unusual color combinations as a sinuous plant frames this monumental figure derived from expressive Hellenistic Greek sculpture. His portraits of his wife vibrate with intense color: purples, reds, greens, orange are not background to flesh but electric highlights on the face and limbs, worthy of Rubens' use of color highlights. Lishinsky paints in the modern idiom, but has a Baroque soul. His large painting "Two Women" utilize Bartoque's tenebrism—dramatic contrasts between light and dark. A background comprised of dense tones of gray and blue provide a startling counterpoint for the head of an elderly woman framed by an aura of bright yellow illuminating her sagging skin and hallowed eyes, staring vacantly at a TV. A young woman, with pink ribbon in her red hair and purple shirt, helplessly watches her through fashion frames.

Several portraits of male artists and scholar friends are astonishing descriptions of personality. He feels as though he were a contemporary of Rembrandt, who lived in another lively, multicultural city, and used it as a source for his art.. And, like Rembrandt, Lishinsky has a penchant for drawing and painting himself; a marvelous self-portrait is included in this exhibit.

—J. Taylor Basker

David Hewitt: The Landscape as Inner Excursion

"Dubai," oil on linen 48"x70", 2002-2003

"Between reality and imagination" is the term that the visionary painter David Hewitt employs to describe the terrain to which he endeavors to transport the viewer. Toward that end, all of the landscapes in Hewitt's solo exhibition, at First Street Gallery, 526 West 26th Street, from September 6 through 30, share a slightly skewed ground plane that defies gravity and all the laws of perspective as we know them.

Hewitt teaches design at the American University of Sharjah, north of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, and his paintings, like the novels and short stories of Paul Bowles, an American expatriate to Morocco, are permeated by the hallucinatory perspective of a stranger in a strange land.

Hewitt identifies with the Hudson River School romantic Frederick Edwin Church, whose "The Urn Tomb at Petra," Jordan, views a distant landscape through North American eyes. However, given the part of the world where he lives and works, the tension of today's headlines also permeates his exotic vistas of swirling sand, providing a haunting atmospheric subtext, punctuating his metaphysical compositions with an undercurrent of existential danger that plays off intriguingly against their serene timelessness.

In Hewitt's 2005 oil on linen, "The Cloud," a tiny human figure traverses a panorama of dunes in a stretch of desert that spans two hundred thousand square miles, recalling how the masters of ancient China symbolized the insignificance of man in relation to the overpowering tides of nature and history by making him appear little more than a speck among "mountains and rivers without end," to borrow Gary Snyder's felicitous phrase. Only, in Hewitt's desert, armies of tourists have left tire tracks in the sand and radar towers rise in the distance. The majestic, monolithic cloud of the title, however, dwarfs both man and the monuments he has erected to his technical ingenuity.

Although such anthropomorphically upright clouds are seldom seen in this region, a surreal disparity is achieved by importing cumuli from north of Sicily to Sharjah through a unique synthesis of painting and digital technology. Hewitt employs such methods with seamless meticulousness to "design landscapes that never existed"—"inscapes," as he calls them, that link the atmospheric poetry of Martin Johnson Heade's nineteenth century Luminism to the postmodern dialogue between painting and photography exemplified in the work of Gerhard Richter.

In another oil on linen called "Dubai," dated 2002-2003, Hewitt streaks the sky with condensation trails left by American bomber planes en route to Afghanistan. Dubiously beautiful, these luminous trails loom over a flamingo sanctuary located due east of Sheik Zayed Road in Dubai. Could it be mere coincidence that, from a distance, the row of graceful birds suggests sinuous Islamic calligraphy written in smoke on thin air? In any case, the artist states, "I painted as many flamingos as there were faculty in the School of Architecture and Design. Privileged, we are like hot house plants. We sit near but removed from the devastation, critiquing..."

Meanwhile, in the background, the boom town skyline's sharp-edged towers gleam like a row of upright scimitars, set against that luminous jet-trailed stratosphere.

Similarly laden with symbolism, another oil on linen, "The World" was painted in a studio in Casa Blanca, Ecuador, near the Colombian Border, where Hewitt works each summer.

"That day at breakfast Samir Kassir, an anti-Syrian journalist, died in his car, which exploded three blocks from my hotel," Hewitt states with the matter of factness of one of the novelist Robert Stone's war-weary protagonists, as if to explain the unsettling undertones of this ostensibly serene horizontal panoramic of reefs leading out to the sea. After all, the breathtaking expanse of clear blue sky, enlivened by cottonball puffs of cloud, suggests the most idyllic kind of Mediterranean weather. However, here as in all of Hewitt's recent paintings, the ground planes undulate in a manner that would make walking out to view the water a perilous endeavor...leading one to wonder about that pair of white tennis sneakers dotting the reef to the left of center.

"I am a conceptual techno-realist," Hewitt states. "What I mean is the paintings are always about ideas or are in reaction to ideas. I get emotional about ideas, moments, hunches....Detached from the actual landscape, memory intercedes to influence how and what I paint."

Much of the power of David Hewitt's work emanates from his ability to make his emotional responses contagious, investing each of his landscapes with feelings that range from the purely pleasurable to the somewhat ominous. Not only are his paintings dazzling technical and formal tours de force; they are imaginative excursions that stimulate the emotions, the intellect, and the imagination in unexpected and enriching ways.

—Ed McCormack

Discovering the Allusive Abstractions of Howard Kressler

"Beautiful Morning"

Although abstract painting was somewhat overshadowed for a time by Neo-Expressionism and other post-modern figurative movements, it made a strong comeback in the mid-eighties. With the emergence of "Neo-Abstraction," "Neo-Geo," and other new movements, painters such as Sean Scully , Sherrie Levine, Peter Halley and Gerhard Richter—to cite an eclectic stylistic sampling—introduced new ways to make abstract painting relevant for the postmodern era. One of the more interesting among the abstract artists to emerge during the past couple of decades is Howard Kressler, whose paintings were seen recently at World Fine Art Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, in Chelsea.

Both the refinement of Kressler's technique and the innate allusiveness of his forms call to mind Frank Stella's belief, as paraphrased in a text by H.H. Arneson, that "abstraction can become the art of the age by recovering the kind of robust drama and complexity found in the proto-Baroque paintings of Italy's early-seventeenth-century master Caravaggio." However, in terms of its overall effect, Kressler's work is more obviously akin to that of Bill Jensen as well as the greatly underrated twentieth century recluse Forrest Bess, in that it takes contemporary abstraction in a new direction by harking back, paradoxically, to the spirit of pioneering American modernists like Arthur Dove and Georgia O'Keeffe. For like Jensen and Bess, Kressler by and large eschews the overblown productions that have prevailed since the heyday of Abstract Expressionism for easel scale. This lends his paintings a sense of intimacy that draws the viewer near and into the work rather than overwhelming him or her with the kind of heroics that were once novel but can now appear overdone and empty in the work of many contemporary painters.

Indeed, Kressler does not require huge scale to make his painterly presence known, as evidenced by the subtle beauty of "What God Sees," one of several outstanding acrylics on canvas in his recent exhibition. Here, the composition consists of overlapping semi-circles in pale yet luminous rainbow hues. Covering the canvas in an overall fashion, these forms appear to float rhythmically, emitting a unique chromatic radiance.

Kressler's skills as a colorist are equally apparent in "Monday Morning in the Mist," another relatively modest-sized canvas that projects a presence much larger than its actual dimensions. In this painting shapes that appear more gestural, yet are actually meticulously defined, are painted in fiery orange and yellow hues that glow as though illuminated from within. If one were to Rorschach a representational subject onto this composition the general impression might be of a neon corn field, given the stalk-like configurations of the dominant forms.

Likewise, another acrylic painting by Kressler entitled "Beautiful Morning" could suggest a poignant view of dawn breaking through the barred windows of a prison, either actual or metaphorical, given its juxtaposition of black stripes and beam-like areas of brilliant color. However, as evocative as they may be, and despite the many associations they can provoke in the imagination of the viewer, to impose specific interpretations on Howard Kressler's compositions is to do an injustice to their limitlessly open-ended imagery. Indeed, work such as Kressler's demonstrates the true value of abstract painting, which will never truly go out of fashion as long as we yearn to perceive what may lie beyond the surface of visible reality.

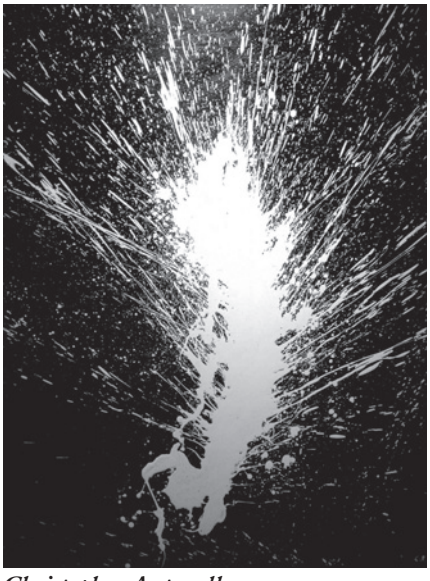
—Maurice Taplinger

Christopher Antonelle, John F. Champoli, and Eric Svitic: Making Abstract Painting New

Three talented young artists reaffirm the continuing vitality of abstract painting, amid a host of eclectic postmodern tendencies and strategies, in a noteworthy exhibition at Patrick's Fine Art, 21 East 62nd Street, from September 15 through October 25. Their aesthetic differences make for a lively three-way dialogue.

Although Christopher Antonelle had a firm grounding in realism, he eventually evolved a lyrical mode of subtly modulated color field composition. Some of his paintings are characterized by amorphous color areas that play host to freely floating forms, resembling delicate tendrils or tree limbs. Other, more stripped-down compositions concentrate on the forceful velocity of the untrammeled gesture.

Any number of other artists have attempted to begin where Pollock left off, but their efforts are often labored, clotted, and lacking in grace. Antonelle, however, has grace to spare and puts a vigorous new spin on "action painting"—that particular species of Abstract Expressionism in which the gesture constitutes an "event" in pictorial space, rather than a static compositional element.



Christopher Antonelle

Antonelle's approach differs markedly from Pollock in its spareness, which is suggestive of a Zen brush master for its sublime simplicity and sinuous fluidity. Sublime colorist that he is, he will at times limit himself to monochromes, letting the gesture speak for itself. Two of his most dynamic works are a white on black canvas and a black on white canvas that play dramatically off each other when viewed as companion pieces. Although nothing is ever as simple as it seems in this species of painting, both of these black and white works almost give the appearance of having been created with a single lunging stroke, akin to a fencer's thrust, sending liquefied pigment spattering out from the center of the composition toward the edges of the canvas in explosive configurations that engage the viewer with their exhilarating immediacy.

By contrast, in a canvas called "Red Lust," whiplash crimson calligraphy flows over the top half of a solid black background, ensnaring the eye in its serpentine convolutions. Here, as in all of Antonelle's recent paintings, it is the artist's passionate conviction that makes the work so engaging. For Christopher Antonelle is one contemporary painter who is able to imbue his compositions with an energy and elan that harks back to the glory days of the movement that put American painting on the international map, even while updating and revitalizing its vocabulary for a new era.

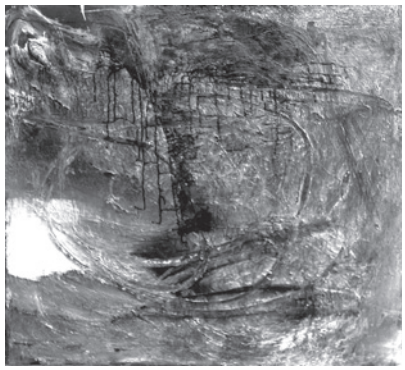
John F. Champoli improvises in another manner, employing acrylic paint and varnish on canvas to create luminously layered compositions, inspired by jazz, in which rhythmic effusions of variegated color set off wavering rhythms that seem a visual counterpart of the remarkable fluidity and complexity in Charlie Parker's saxophone solos.

Champoli's canvases are driven by electric hues and surging forms that captivate us with their carnivalesque complexity, amounting to a staggering sensory overload. The vertical compositions of paintings such as "Pinultymate PicNic" series could suggest landscape space; yet Champoli is far too engaged with spontaneous exploration and discovery (apparently heeding Picasso's famous dictum "Don't seek but find!") to adhere to even the loosest representational agenda.

He is clearly more intent on filling every inch of the composition with a sense of chromatic point and counterpoint and following his intuitive impulses in the manner of an improvising musician, rather than alluding to natural sources. And he succeeds splendidly in drawing the viewer into his deeply rewarding compositions, wherein translucent layers of strident color are overlaid by vigorous drips, swirls, and boldly delineated shapes in a style that might best be termed Neo-Baroque Abstraction.

John F. Champoli is an energetic talent whose apparent lack of inhibition charges his paintings with stunning immediacy. He gambles on spontaneity and wins by virtue of his innate ability to create compositions that play along the edges of chaos yet ultimately achieve a harmonious formal synthesis.

If one may begin with yet another musical analogy, the tactile oils of Eric Svitic can be compared to the solos of John Coltrane for their sonorous, somber, tonalities and brooding beauty. Svitic's rugged, earthy surfaces, sometimes scored with wound-like lines or graphic elements resembling roughly scrawled graffiti, resonate in the viewers' subconscious, often evoking a sense of existential angst.



Eric Svitic

"Conformity and acceptance versus primal instincts and violence are all concepts that place human beings in a constant state of dementia and derangement," Svitic asserts in an artist statement, and he makes those tensions physically palpable in the encrusted pigmentations of his paintings, as well as in the elegant funkiness of his forms. The sense of psychological unrest made manifest in material presence is explicit in both the title and the mood of the painting that Svitic calls "The Internal Vortex." Here, violently brushed reddish brown and olive green hues—colors like those in infantry fatigues, whether the artist intended that association or not!—are combined with sinister black drips and a bold circular scrawl that appears to have been emphatically scratched into the thickly impastoed surface at the center of the composition with a sharp object.

Even at their most abstract (for, although they are not on view here, Svitic also creates sexually charged figurative compositions), these paintings are invariably allusive, as seen in another powerful work called "Evolution of the Vortex," where scrawled fragments of language, partially obscured by opaque and semitransparent saturations of characteristically dark oil colorations, add a semiotic element to the composition.

Like Antoni Tapies, the modern Spanish master of Tachism—or "art Informel"—Eric Svitic has a paradoxical ability to make surfaces as emphatically material as ancient, ravaged walls suggest a host of subtle metaphysical meanings. Indeed, like the other two painters in this show, Svitic demonstrates conclusively that while artistic fashions may come and go, abstract painting will remain a rich, varied, and valuable enterprise as long as there are gifted artists who wish to probe beyond the surface of recognizable reality.

—Ed McCormack

UNHOLY TRINITY: Souza, Sotheby's, and Me (Or: How I Missed My Chance to Make a Quick Killing in Modern Indian Art)

by Ed McCormack

Because of my habit of rummaging in other peoples' garbage, my wife used to say that strolling down the street with me was like walking a dog.

"We can't go two blocks," Jeannie would joke, "without you stopping to check out the trash."

"But you have to admit I find some great stuff. What about all the books I find for you?"

"Uh huh."

Then one day, in 1996, I noticed a rather large painting leaning against a garbage can outside a building on East 83rd Street, just around the corner from our apartment. It was an oil, I could tell from sniffing it (which may confirm, I suppose, the canine tendencies my wife attributes to me), and it was as bad as bad can be: an architectural atrocity of spiky spires and angular outlines. It looked like an ersatz Bernard Buffet, if you can imagine anyone bothering, the resemblance enhanced by the big showy signature and date "Souza '57" placed prominently at the top of the composition.

I turned it around and saw scrawled on the back "The Castle" and the same signature with the initials "F.N." added. Since the masonite support was nicely mounted, I was debating whether it would be worthwhile to cover the awful picture with a coat of gesso and paint something more appealing on it, when the name of the artist suddenly struck me as vaguely familiar.

I took the painting home, and since I had not yet succumbed to the Internet, still snobbishly regarding it as a symptom of post-literate culture, scanned the indexes of several art books until I found a reference to an F.N. Souza in *Race, Sex, and Gender in Contemporary Art* by Edward Lucie-Smith. Reproduced was a painting even more atrocious than the one I had found. It was called "The Goddess Kali, 1962," and it depicted a dwarfish female nude with grossly exaggerated genitals. (Apparently, Hindus are not as touchy as Muslims about the depiction of their deities, or surely some equivalent of a fatwa would have been declared against the artist.)

The brief text next to the color reproduction stated that Souza was an Indian painter prominent in London during the 1950s who, because he was a figurative expressionist, had "suffered from the backlash against overtly emotional, densely textured painting triggered by the rise, first of Pop Art, then of various types of minimalism." Armed with this information, I made a quick phone call, then walked my find a few blocks down York Avenue to Sotheby's and straight into the office of a man named Carlton C. Rochell, Jr., then head of that auction house's Asian Departments worldwide.

Oddly, Rochell didn't ask how I'd acquired the painting, and as far as I was concerned the less said about its provenance the better. (If anyone wished to assume that I was parting with a family heirloom, I would be the last to disabuse them of that notion.) He simply propped the picture up against a chair, squinted at it for a few seconds to confirm its authenticity, and estimated its value at between two and three-thousand dollars. He then asked if I would be willing to consign it to him for inclusion in an upcoming auction of Indian and Southeast Asian art.

While the estimate was more modest than I might have hoped, it was "found money," as they say. So, I was delighted when Sotheby's notified me a couple of months later that the painting had sold for twice its highest estimate and a check for $ 6,000 soon followed.

* * *

For almost a decade I entertained friends and acquaintances with this anecdote, including how, just before walking over to Sotheby's, I noticed a scratch on a dark area of the painting and, fearing it might decrease its price at auction, was tempted to perform a bit of last minute restoration with a black Flair pen. But then I flashed back to the guilty memory of one Ash Wednesday during my teenage years when, to get my mother off my back about going to church for ashes, unbeknownst to her I scooped some soot out of the gutter and smeared it on my forehead. And I realized that, since art had always been more sacred to me than Catholicism, I couldn't bring myself to "touch up" even a painting as bad as this one. Having always felt somewhat holier than thou when it came to art, it was enough for one day to discover that I was not above speculating about a work's price, rather than its intrinsic value, without also committing a mortal sin of quite *that* magnitude.

Anyway, the story of the found painting became a conversational set-piece of mine, always ending with the punch line, "And now whenever we go out, Jeannie always reminds me to check the garbage!"

* * *

I finally stopped gloating earlier this year, when I read in the May 2006 issue of ArtNews that another painting by Souza, "Man with Cross, 1961," had recently sold at Sotheby's for $ 284,800. We were sitting at a table in the cafe of our local Barnes & Noble bookstore when I read it, and I suddenly felt as though some passerby had casually set my hair on fire. Recoiling from the shock, I made an involuntary movement, almost knocking over my tall English breakfast tea. Jeannie looked up from her magazine, alarmed, and asked what was the matter with me.

* * *

I don't think I'll be regaling anyone anymore with what a clever scavenger I am. In fact, I am writing this simply to unburden myself, as I often do when frustration at some characteristically rash act of mine—in this case, unloading the painting for quick cash, rather than holding onto it on the chance that its value might appreciate—makes me feel on the verge of exploding. I am not at all sure if I will ever publish it, but if I eventually do and you are reading it at some future date, it is probably because my innate exhibitionism has once again triumphed over shame and good sense.

In any case, after feeling stupid and smarting over the whole thing for a while, I decided to call Carlton

F.N. Sousa, "Crucifixion " 1959 oil on board 1831 x 1220 mm Tate copyright: the artist

Rochell, who now has his own gallery, Carlton Rochell Asian Art, in the Fuller Building on East 57th Street. I wanted to see if he could provide me with a logical explanation for the huge discrepancy between what "my" Souza sold for and what other works by the same artist had recently commanded at auction. I figured anything less than his being able to convince me that the value of East Indian contemporary art had skyrocketed beyond anyone's expectations would be cause for taking legal action, although on what grounds I still was not sure.

But when I called the gallery I learned that Rochell was traveling abroad and would not be back until the following week. This gave my paranoia plenty of time to run rampant. Now it suddenly seemed suspicious that Sotheby's had accepted my Souza, no questions asked. Did big time auction houses normally just take works of art that walked in literally off the street, without questioning their provenance? Couldn't I have been some junkie who had climbed into a rich collector's apartment through a window and snatched the painting right off the wall? Certainly I looked scruffy enough, hardly your high-end art collector in my usual sneakers and denim ensemble. So why didn't Rochell express the slightest interest in how the painting had come into my possession?

I also remembered reading about a scandal at Sotheby's a few years ago involving the alleged smuggling of works of art stolen right out of churches in Italy, as well as collusion and price-fixing cases against the auction house that had forced its former chairman, Bernard Taubman, to hand in his resignation. At one point I had even received a notice in the mail inviting me to join in a $512,000,000 class action suit against Sotheby's by some 100,000 buyers and sellers. I had laughed it off at the time, thinking my sole transaction with Sotheby's so relatively minuscule that it wasn't even worth taking seriously; if there were an award or a settlement, how much could my cut possibly be? Besides, far from feeling wronged by Sotheby's, I felt I had been the beneficiary of an unexpected windfall.

But now I wondered if it wouldn't have been possible for an auction house to fake a sale by having some in-house shill bid on the work, then put it on ice for a few years, and later sell it under the table for a small fortune. It seemed entirely plausible—especially if the poor schmuck who had consigned the piece, yours truly, was convinced that it had sold better than anyone expected and was led to believe that he was the one who had gotten over on them.

* * *

From what I can gather, Francis Newton Souza, who was born in a small village in Goan, India, in 1924 and was buried in 2002—"with barely a mourner at his graveside," according to one acquaintance—was something of an East Indian Gully Jimson. For like the eccentric bohemian protagonist of Joyce Cary's novel *The Horse's Mouth*, Souza was wildly self-dramatizing, given to making pronouncements like, "I want to do everything: to make others suffer, to make myself suffer. I have no desire to redeem myself or anybody else because man is by his very nature unredeemable, yet he hankers so desperately after redemption. I want to hang myself on the cross with both my hands and feet nailed to it..."

Souza was raised as a Catholic, and crucifixions—as viscerally grisly as Gruenwald's in his own more hamhanded way—were among his favorite themes. In fact, his mother, who had been left destitute when her school teacher husband died, and had also lost a daughter a year before the boy's birth, pledged her son to the priesthood after he survived a virulent case of childhood smallpox. But the boy, who would confess later in life that he drew his mother while she bathed "through a hole I bored in the door" and speculated that he had probably even "painted on the walls of her womb," was expelled by the Jesuits for making pornographic drawings on the walls at school. Catholicism, he would later declare, had failed to convince him "that the glorious eroticism of Indian art was the work of the barbarous heathen." And the tension between that early religious repression and his lusty nature would furnish inspiration for much of his strongest work.

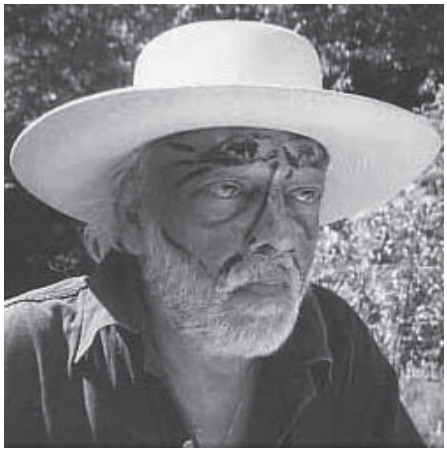
Souza found his true vocation at age sixteen in the Sir J.J. School of Art, in Bombay, but was soon expelled once again—this time for leading a student demonstration of the "Quit India" movement that infuriated its British principal.

For a time, he embraced Marxism, joined the Communist Party of India and painted socialist realist canvases centering on injustices of class and caste. But finally finding the constraints placed on artistic expression by the Party as puritanical in their own way as those of the Jesuits, he quit the party and, in 1947, founded the Progressive Artists Group with other emerging painters such as S.H. Raza, and K.H. Ara, and M.F. Husain, who is now recognized as a major figure in his own right.

With characteristic orneriness, Souza would later rail against "the leftist fanaticism which we had incorporated into our manifesto at the inception of the Group." Yet there was no denying that its formation was a giant step, marking the very advent of modern art in India, where easel painting had previously been all but nonexistent. The only genre of large scale painting was the murals on the walls of temples and the more palatial residences. Otherwise, painting was limited to traditional miniatures, which were stored in albums for the private pleasure of connoisseurs. So by adopting the aggressive scale and freedom of Western painting, the Progressive Artists Group was declaring war on their own native tradition, even as they sought, according to M.F. Husain, to incorporate "elements of Indian folk art and tribal art" into their modernist experiments.

As Prajit Dutta stated in the catalog of the exhibition "Ashta Nayak: Eight Pioneers of Indian Art," an exhibition of seminal works by Souza and some of his contemporaries, seen last year at Gallery Artsindia, on lower Fifth Avenue, in New York City, "1945 through 1955 was a heady decade for modern Indian art. Out of those grand coincidences of history—the Freedom Struggle, the Second World War, the Great Bengal Famine and India's Independence — emerged a flurry of activity and growth."

Yet the euphoria was apparently limited to the artists themselves. Outside their select circle, India's cultural provincialism remained too stifling for a temperament such as Souza's. In 1949, after two of his pictures were removed from an exhibition in Bombay for "obscenity," he threw up his hands and relocated to London. (Here an analogy might be drawn to James Joyce fleeing Ireland—except that unlike Joyce, who chose "silence, exile, and cunning," Souza retained a vocal affection for his



F.N. Sousa, photo courtesy Gallery Artsindia

childhood home of Goa and visited it from time to time, even as circumstances forced him to spend most of his adult life abroad and to die in New York City.)

His early years in London were impoverished. There, his old friend Victor Anant recalls, he acquired a habit of "theatrically picking up cigarette butts from the road," a habit in which he persisted for many years. Being verbally as well as visually gifted, Souza was encouraged by the poet Stephen Spender to try his hand at commercial writing and was eventually able to eke out a modest living through freelance journalism. By the mid fifties he was also selling the occasional painting and becoming known in the London art scene, according to M.F. Husain who has been quoted as saying, "Francis Souza was my mentor. I came into the art world because of him. He saw my exhibition in 1947 and encouraged me. He is the most significant Indian painter, almost a genius..."

Souza's strident humanism found itself in fortuitous company when he was included in group exhibitions with leading British artists such as Francis Bacon, Henry Moore, and Graham Sutherland. His first solo show in 1955 in the fashionable Gallery One was favorably reviewedby David Thompson, who wrote: "By some curious law that seems to operate among great painters, those with the most macabre or violent images to express often paint in an unusually exquisite or tender manner. In his new paintings F.N. Souza, an artist always remarkable for harsh and thorny imagery, and able to use it to express feelings of anguished rage, paints with a sort of acid tenderness..."

The somewhat more befuddled assessment of John Berger, one of the world's best known art critics, was "Souza straddles many traditions but serves none"— a memorable quote that contributed further to his growing fame. Souza's published writings also contributed to the sensation he caused in the London art world. (Typical of his style was the title of his autobiographical essay: "Nirvana of a Maggot"). He often wrote his own exhibition catalogs and was fond of promoting himself, according to the writer Theodore Mesquita, as "the descendant of the Devil and the Dadaists, an enfant terrible all the more dangerous because he belonged to the oppressed races. He managed in his writing to convert his racial malediction into angry genius, which he had contrived, accumulated and dispensed into visual and verbal benefactions."

By the mid-sixties, along with the Beatles and fashion photographer David Bailey (the model for David Hemmings' role in Antonioni's flashy period film "Blow-up"), Souza was a fixture of "Swinging London." His paintings were selling to notable people like the composer Benjamin Britten and the architect Erno Goldfinger, and he found a regular patron in the wealthy American collector Harold Kovner. But in 1967 his talent for creating a sensation backfired disastrously—although it's hard to believe that Souza's marriage to a seventeen year-old girl could cause such a stir in an era when London was literally exploding with libertine energy.

After all, in India marriages of mature men to much younger brides are hardly frowned upon. But ignoring this cultural difference in a manner that smacks of racism, the British tabloids vilified him as though he were the American hillbilly rock and roller Jerry Lee Lewis marrying his 14-year-old cousin. One dares say Souza was crucified by the scandal sheets like one of his own writhing Jesuses.

This analogy might have pleased the artist. Pointing out that his "most enduring themes revolve around his Roman Catholic background and his antagonism towards it," Theodore Mesquita wrote that Souza's "relation and identification with the picture of Christ" could be interpreted as "an effigy of his existence through which he ponders." At the same time, Mesquita suggests that Souza saw the plight of modern man as existentially more daunting than that of Jesus, when he wrote an obviously autobiographical passage that went "and you there on the top in a single furnished room, smoking, standing at the window, expressionless city-man that you are, your suffering is far more complex than the obviously simple tortured expression of one crowned with thorns and impaled with nails."

Hounded out of England, Souza fled with his young bride to New York City, which he reportedly loathed and continually referred to as "the concrete jungle." Yet, since he made his final home here, one must wonder why he never exhibited in the city during his lifetime. Even after the rise of Neo-Expressionism and multiculturalism, while still known in London, where several of his paintings hang in the Tate (which gave him a posthumous exhibition in 2005), he remained virtually invisible in the New York art world.

* * *

"Souza's years in New York City were not a happy time for him," said Priyanka Mathews, the director of Gallery Artsindia, when we met recently. "He came here with great hopes, but his marriage failed and he ended up living very poorly and in ill health."

Although she is too young to have known Souza personally, Priyanka's gallery (along with Sundaram Tagore in Chelsea, one of the two leading venues for Indian modern art in Manhattan) handles some of his work. And like everyone else in the Indian émigré arts community, she has heard all the juicy stories.

With the relish we all reserve for those whose miseries fame makes colorful, Priyanka spoke of the artist's legendary drinking binges and womanizing. She told a story about a young married couple who loved Souza's work and finally got a chance to visit with him. Although the details now escape me, the gist of her gossip was that the husband "discovered his wife with Souza, naked, in a compromising position."

According to Priyanka, Souza could get away with the most outrageous behavior because people in the Indian art scene looked on him as something of a god. He was the first to break out of the colonial mode in his art and even his outrageous personal life seemed to symbolize a new kind of freedom.

"So it's very sad how it all ended," Priyanka says. "Toward the end of his life he was living somewhere on the Lower East Side, spending all of his money on booze...He literally drank himself to death."

In the one photograph I have been able to locate, he has the bleary, bloated countenance of the heavy drinker. He has a gray stubble of beard and sports a straw sombrero that makes him appear more Mexican than Indian. As if to do the Buddhist concept of "the third eye" one better, he has painted two extra eyes onto his forehead and added superfluous lines to the ones time and hard living have already carved into his face. A perfect shambles of a man, he looks deranged, a little dangerous, like a defrocked shaman. Not even a writer intent on capturing his likeness in print can regret being deprived of the opportunity to contend with him.

Yet, even after all that Priyanka Mathews told me about his final years, Souza's obscurity, the fact that no one I mentioned his name to among my circle of acquaintances in the New York art scene had even heard of him, still seems puzzling. After all, he was such an assertive personality that it's hard to

imagine him keeping a low profile anywhere—especially in the art capital of the world. And while his work may be uneven, it is possessed of a brash vigor that many here would find appealing. He was at least as good as Schnabel or Basquiat and probably couldn't have been much more of a pain in the ass. One would have thought some savvy New York art dealer would have been willing to put up with him in order to capitalize on his reputation abroad. Even his personal problems could have been an asset, providing the kind of bad boy charisma that invariably titillates the press .

I certainly found Souza an engaging character, once I started researching this piece. I enjoyed the grandiose audacity of his pronunciamentos, such as, "Renaissance painters painted men and women, making them look like angels. I paint for angels to show them what men and women really look like." And even if I wasn't initially bowled over by much of his work, I came to appreciate what George Melly once referred to as his "wonderfully sour colour sense and a slashing line."

F.N Sousa, "Two Saints in a Landscape" 1961 acrylic on canvas 1283 x 959 mm Tate Presented by A. J. Muirhead 1965 copyright: the artist

He could certainly draw beautifully when he wanted to. The erotic ink drawings in the collection of Gallery Artsindia, if not as masterful as Picasso's, rival for their linear grace anything by Hockney or Cocteau. That said, in contrast to the powerful 1959 oil on board "Crucifixion" in the collection of Tate Britain, and "Man With Cross," the 1961 work that fetched $248,800 at Sotheby's, some of his late paintings have a tossed-off look. They look facile and distracted, like the work of a man trying desperately to capitalize on having a great future behind him.

It's quite possible that I never would have been aware of F.N. Souza as anything more than a name I vaguely remembered reading in an art book, had I not found one of his paintings discarded beside a garbage can and blown the chance to parlay it into a small fortune.

* * *

When I finally reached Carlton Rochell by phone, the first question I asked him was how much he estimated the painting that I had brought to him and that Sotheby's had auctioned off for $6,000 would go for now.

"I have no idea," he said. "You see, I don't handle contemporary Asian art anymore. I think you'd be better off asking some of the people at the auction houses about that."

While it is true that his own gallery, Carlton Rochell Asian Art, specializes in work prior to 1850, this answer struck me as disingenuous, since Rochell worked for Sotheby's for 18 years, actually founded its Southeast Asian Art Department and, according to The International Herald Tribune, had "raised his auctions of Indian art to world eminence." Indeed, the website for his own gallery will tell you, "Both the highest-grossing auction of Indian and Southwest Asian art ever held and the highest price ever achieved at auction for an individual work were supervised by Mr. Rochell." (Being a recent convert to Googledom, I also learned such irrelevant yet nonetheless interesting ephemera as the fact that, in 1992, Rochell became engaged to the daughter of the actor Charlton Heston.)

No matter how many different ways I rephrased my original question, Rochell repeated "I really don't think I should comment on that," stoking my paranoia by sounding like an evasive politician. When I persisted, asking him if he didn't think it was extraordinary that an artist whose work had once been estimated so modestly by an expert like himself had appreciated so astronomically, he said, "Not really. The prices for Asian art have jumped up in recent years. It started with Chinese contemporary art but now it's all across the board: in India, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia...But that's true in general, even in Western contemporary art. Check it out."

Check it out? While I had to laugh at this most Waspish of art dealers patronizingly affecting the jargon of the homies who hustle fake Rolexes on Canal Street, maybe Rochell was simply telling me it was about time I woke up: Did I really need him to explain the birds and bees of art marketing to me, as though it was some great mystery?

All I had to do was go online and read a two-year old dispatch from United Press International to learn that "Indian contemporary art is the fastest growing category in Asian art," and "From Singapore to Hong Kong, London and Germany via the Middle-East to New York, contemporary Indian art is increasingly painting itself in global hues, while its rising demand is fetching record prices for sellers."

Citing the same sale in which my Souza went for a song, the article goes on to say, "For instance in 1996 there was just one auction of Indian art for the global art mart that fetched about $800,000. By the end of 2004, the number of auctions, according to art market sources, is set to climb to 12 that could fetch a total revenue 'scaling $11 million'; that's nearly a 14-time jump."

Souza was called "India's most important and famous modern artist" in this article, and a May 2006 dispatch from the London Times, headlined "Souza Rules the Roost at Sotheby's," reports that the artist's painting "Amsterdam Landscape" sold in the UK for a record 624,000 pounds.

"We are delighted with the results of today's sale, which confirms the underlying strength of the market for modern and contemporary Indian paintings, a collecting category that has experienced remarkable growth in recent years," a spokesperson for Sotheby's crowed. "The overall driver for this trend has been the growth of the Indian economy and raised awareness of Indian artists in the 20th century."

And there you have it. Pretty simple, isn't it? The only reason to make it more complicated would be to blame something, or someone, else for one's own poor judgment—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, one's lack of clairvoyance. Who knew that Indian contemporary art was going to go through the roof? Certainly not the auction houses that were selling paintings by Souza and other major figures in the low thousands just a decade or so ago; not even Carlton Rochell, who precipitated the trend when he founded the Southeast Asian Art Department at Sotheby's in 1988. Could it be that Rochell is so reluctant to talk about it simply because he's kicking himself —even more than I am!—for what could have been, had he known then what he knows now?

Only one thing is certain: Wherever he is, Francis Newton Souza is having the last laugh.

* * *

The Still Life Paintings of Patricia Clements Revitalize Tradition

"Still life is the chamber music of painting," Wolfgang Born states in his definitive text "Still Life Painting in America," and certainly that thesis is borne out in the floral still life paintings of Patricia Kathleen Clements on view at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, in Chelsea, from September 1 through December 2. (Reception September 7, from 6 to 8 PM.)

For Clements is an artist whose work makes one immediately aware of why the "chromatic scale" is a term that musicologists have adopted from a term originally employed to describe the coloristic spectrum in visual art, and Clements' compositions also possess formal harmonies that easily lend themselves to musical analogies. Yet it is on their purely visual attributes that appreciation of her paintings must finally depend and these are plentiful in their own terms.

Clements is a realist given to the description of a great deal of detail and she is not afraid to fill a composition with a lot of disparate elements, as seen in her "Still Life with Oranges and Blues," where a large white porcelain vase decorated with strawberry patterns and filled with long stemmed flowers is propped on a wooden kitchen chair, sharing its seat with several apples, a small bowl of pears and an ornately patterned cloth that flows down from its backrest. There is also a white cloth behind the chair and a potted palm nearby. Yet Clements' is able to orchestrate—another musical term her work brings to mind—the composition so skillfully that the plethora of detail does not in any way distract from its strong formal qualities.

"Still Life with Oranges and Blues"

This ability to create harmony out of potential chaos is everywhere evident in Clements' paintings, where the shapes and colors of floral forms and the patterns of man-made objects create a dazzling optical cornucopia and could compete for the viewers' attention, if not for the artist's gift for melding every element into a satisfying whole. One of her most pleasurable canvases in this regard is "Anenomies with Fan," in which a shapely blue vase fairly bursting with multicolored flowers and a decorative Asian fan again share the seat of a chair, this one upholstered with a striped fabric that adds yet another patternistic note to the mix. But the pièce de resistance here is the brilliant red jacket, decorated with floral designs that mirror the actual flowers in the blue vase nearby, its chromatic lushness set off by the equally brilliant green hue behind the chair.

In this painting, particularly, Pat Clements shows her kinship with the Post-Impressionists and the Nabis and also pays homage via the fan and other props that she chooses to the Japanese masters from whom her great European predecessors learned so much about the use of clear color areas and the flattening of objects on the picture plane.

Clements' kinship with the Post-Impressionists, van Gogh particularly, is perhaps most evident in paintings such as "Lilies," a small floral study in acrylic and "Becky's Bouquet," a larger still life composition in pastel. In both, it is her expressive delineation of petals and stems that lends the picture its vital energy and does the tradition from which she draws inspiration proud.

—Maureen Flynn

A Photo Exhibit Focuses on Shadowplay

"Chiaroscuro," a recent group exhibition by members of the West Side Arts Coalition demonstrated the singular qualities of monochromatic photography, as well as the unique visions of a dozen gifted photo artists, at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street.

Jean Prytyskacz, the show's curator, showed tonally subtle silver gelatin prints. Prytyskacz has a special gift for making a beat-up old pay phone suggest a primitive mask bemoaning the advent of the cell phone, or a Bud bottle floating in a puddle near a fire hydrant speak volumes about loneliness and desolation.

Eliud Martinez employs bluish monotones to enhance the surrealism of his digital prints of people on the boardwalk in Coney Island reacting to UFOs that jibe eerily with the towering forms of the amusement rides. Even a panorama of Nathan's famous hot dog palace takes on a bizarre resonance through Martinez's slightly skewed lens. Brunie Feliciano also employs digital photography toward surreal ends in her pictures of eggs cradled in nests formed from gossamer or lacy fabrics and further adorned with beads and lengths of string to create a strikingly suggestive synthesis of nature and imagination. Feliciano's image of a single delicate flower set among black and white lace is an especially sensual evocation of the feminine principle.

Craig D. Robins' large portraits of "lived-in" faces celebrate human dignity. One captures the proud countenance of a gray-bearded Rastafarian, his tam suggesting a crown; another immortalizes the intense glare of the Beat poet Ira Cohen. Irmgard Kuhn's subway scenes are evocative of George Tooker's famous painting of that subject." Kuhn's shadowy riders climbing underground steps, traversing pedestrian tunnels, or walking toward the light at the end of them suggest souls in limbo or the narratives related by survivors of "near death experiences."

Texture and the passage of time appear to be the dual themes of Deena Weintraub's old automobiles and pickup trucks, their surfaces altered by rust and peeling paint. In one, the grill of a classic 1950s Chevy morphs into a mouth chewing a salad of Autumn leaves. The show's title truly applies to Alice Ng, whose mastery of chiaroscuro—the play of light and shadow—creates exquisite tonal balances that imbue her darkly evocative images of sites ranging from the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens to the Flatiron Building with a brooding atmospheric mystery. The ability to imply color in black and white is striking in a Janice Wood Wetzel's picture of a suntanned tourist posing with a huge metallic head of possibly Eastern origin, seeming to emit a palpable golden glow. Patricia Gilman bathes the heads of white horses and ponies in halo-like auras of light and shadow that accent their otherworldly beauty. Robert Helman evokes a sense of narrative with the cast shadows of statues moving across walls like the ghosts of history.

Two final artists also imply a great deal through minimal means: Martin Hochberg's dramatic digital photo of Saint Patrick's Cathedral sends its gothic spires soaring skyward like heavenly organ music. Jeff Kwan conjures up a sense of natural metamorphosis with his images of delicate vines on a wall forming a perfect tree or a single, flame-shaped leaf, imbuing them with an exquisite tonal poetry through his mastery of the silver gelatin print.

—J. Sanders Eaton

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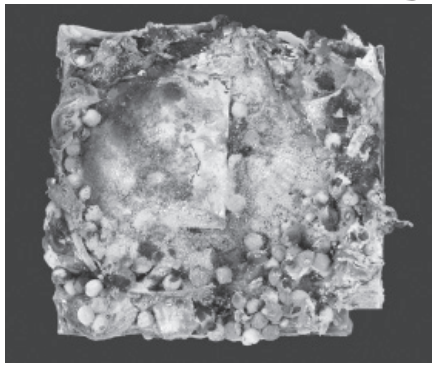

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museums

SEAN SCULLY: WALL OF LIGHT, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue, September 26 through January 14, 2007. Born in Dublin in 1945, raised in a workingclass neighborhood of south London, Scully settled in New York and became an American citizen in 1983. By the mid-eighties, he had already garnered international recognition with his abstract paintings based on two main formal elements: the vertical and horizontal bar. The present exhibition, his first major museum show in New York, features 30 small, medium, and large oil paintings, as well as a selection of watercolors, pastels, and aquatints.

* * *

PAINTING THE METROPOLIS: VISIONS OF LOWER MANHATTAN BY 19 CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS, at the Educational Alliance, 197 East Broadway, October 4 through November 30. This exhibition in the gallery of a venerable Lower East Side social and cultural institution, curated by Ken Ratner, features "cityscapes below 14th Street" by Patrick Antonelle, Violet Baxter, Ellen Bradshaw, Tad Day, Jennifer Fairbanks, Robert Feinland, Greg Frux, Jane Haher, John Hanlon, Sidney Hermel, Su-Li Hung, Ken McIndoe, Patricia Melvin, Sharon Moreau, Regina Perlin, Alan Petrulis, Joni Scully, Philip Sherrod, and John Silver. .

* * *

KATRIN SIGURDARDOTTIR: HIGH PLANE V, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, 22-25 Jackson Avenue at 46th Avenue, Long Island City, NYC, October 22 through May 7. Born in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1967, now based in New York, Sigurdardottir has exhibited throughout the U.S., Iceland, Europe, and Mexico since the late 1990s. However this "site-specific architectural intervention," depicting a mixture of an imagined and real Arctic landscape with basic building materials, is her first solo project in New York.

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MUSTANG: THE LOST TIBETAN KINGDOM, photographs by Don Gurewitz, Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art, 338 Lighthouse Avenue, Staten Island, N.Y., through November 28. Gurewitz and his colleagues hiked and rode ponies for a week through the deepest canyon in the world to reach the medieval walled city of Lo Manthang, in a semi-feudal region of Nepal, nestled on the Himalayan border with Tibet. The exhibition presents spectacular photographic vistas of an isolated region few Westerners have ever seen.

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ECOTOPIA: THE SECOND ICP TRIENNIAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO, International Center of Photography, 1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street, September 14 through January 7, 2007. Thirty-nine international artists shatter the stereotypes of nature and landscape photography in a survey that addresses concerns about national disasters, our interactions with the environment, and global perspectives on the planet.

* * *

THREE WOMEN: ART AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICE, Asian American Arts Centre, 26 Bowery, September 22 through November 3. Featured are works by Miyung Kim, Anna Kuo, and Younhee Paik, three artists who, in their diverse fashions, make spiritual concerns central to their aesthetic. (Up until very recently the AAAC was embroiled in a legal action to prevent its eviction from its Bowery location. Happily, that struggle is over for the time being. However, the rent will soon double and then gradually rise to four times its current rate. What was won is time to increase its annual income and grants. Donations are urgently needed to preserve this valuable cultural resource in the heart of Chinatown.) 212-233-2154.

* * *

NAPOLEON ON THE NILE: SOLDIERS, ARTISTS, AND THE REDISCOVERY IF EGYPT, Dahesh Museum of Art, 580 Madison Avenue. An eclectic aesthetic and historical overview presented by an institution that, flying in the face of fashion, somewhat oxymoronically invites us to "discover the new face of Academic Art."

* * *

PROJECTS 83: MONIKA SOSNOWSKA, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, through November 27. The first solo in any gallery or museum in the United States by this Polish artist whose architecturally structured installations endeavor to transform a viewer's perception and experience of a space, creating the sensation of being inside of a sculpture. Developed through paper maquettes that are works of art in themselves, Sosnowska's installations are conceived specifically for given settings, as this one was for MoMA's Contemporary Galleries.

* * *

LUCIO FONTANA: VENICE/NEW YORK, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Avenue, October 10 through January 21, 2007. The first major U.S. exhibition devoted to the Italian avant garde painter and sculptor since the Guggenheim's 1977 retrospective. This show introduces two rare bodies of work from 1961, created around the cities of Venice and New York. Exhibited together for the first time, both incorporate the cuts, punctures, and slashes that became his trademark.

* * *

PICASSO AND AMERICAN ART, Whitney Museum of American Art, 945 Madison Avenue, September 28, through January 28, 2007. As its title telegraphs, this exhibition will demonstrate by juxtaposing the works by Picasso with those of a diverse group of later artists–including Max Weber, Stuart Davis, Arshille Gorky, John Graham, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, David Smith, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Jasper Johns–just how much everybody and his brother owes the Spanish master. (Apparently, only guys may apply.)

* * *

ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENCE 2005-06: RASHAWN GRIFFIN, KARYN OLIVIER AND CLIFFORD OWENS, The Studio Museum in Harlem, 144 West 125th Street. All three artists explore the principles of quid pro quo, barter, and social exchange in everyday life through a vital mix of mediums, including drawing, sculpture, photography, and performance. Themes range from the innocuous "I scratch your back, you scratch mine" favors that neighbors perform for each other, which foster solidarity and a sense of community, to the more dubious dealings of politicians who circumvent the democratic process through influence peddling.

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HOUSING WORKS USED BOOK CAFE, 126 Crosby Street, is a nonprofit bookstore and cafe that donates all proceeds from the sale of donated books and CDs and records to provide housing, services, and advocacy for homeless people living with HIV and AIDS. The atmosphere is cozy and there are 45,000 used books to browse among, as well as sandwiches, sweets, and anything you might want to drink, including beer and wine. There are also regular author readings, as well as musical performances. One can only hope that the latter will not become the dominant attraction, turning what is now one of the more mellow havens for the bookishly thoughtful into another noisy, trendy downtown night-spot.

EVERYTHING GOES BOOK CAFE & NEIGHBORHOOD STAGE, 208 Bay Street, Tompkinsville, Staten Island, brings hipster cool and progressive culture to a borough sorely in need of them. Since the New York Times Real Estate Section has already discovered the area around the ferry terminal, Starbuck's can't be far behind. But at least Everything Goes offers islanders and visitors a community-oriented choice, with open mic nights when anyone and everyone is welcome to share "poems, jokes, stories, songs, prayers, dancing, juggling, magic etc." Local musicians of all stripes also perform regularly, along with book signings, I-ching readings, avant garde film screenings, talks by herbalists and new age healers, and even talent shows and craft events for the kiddies. All this and "organic fair-trade espresso" too.

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Monkdogz Urban Art is launching an international juried competition in search for the next "Tortured Genius." The exhibition will be open to all media and will be judged by the Monkdogz Creative Team with external resources. The deadline for all slide and jpeg entries is Monday, November 13, 2006. The show titled "The Day After Tomorrow (the Next Tortured Genius)" will be on view January 4 through January 27, 2007. An artists opening reception will be held on Saturday, January 6, 2007. Additional information and the entry form can be downloaded at www.monkdogz.com Or you may send a SASE to: Monkdogz Urban Art, 547 West 27 Street, 5th Fl., New York, NY, 10001

PHOENIX GALLERY, CELEBRATING ITS 47TH YEAR, has moved to 210 Eleventh Avenue @ 25th St., Chelsea, New York, NY 10001, is accepting applications for ACTIVE, INACTIVE or ASSOCIATE membership. Send SASE for membership application or Email: info@phoenix-gallery.com Website: www.phoenix-gallery.com

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Manhattan Arts International: Setting the Standard for Online Galleries

As I wrote recently in another context, I first discovered art in reproduction, flipping through the art books in my local public library as a kid on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. But I don't think I was less privileged in this regard than if I had grown up in an apartment on Park Avenue with Cezannes and Renoirs on the walls. In fact, it only made art more magical to me, as anything slightly remote is bound to be.

Later, when I became an adolescent and started haunting the Modern, the Whitney, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, becoming familiar with how great paintings look in the flesh, so to speak, did not ruin looking at art books for me. If anything, it enhanced the experience, because I was now able to visualize the artworks reproduced more vividly. And I suspect it has worked that way for other people as well — especially art world people who did not have the good fortune to grow up in a cultural center like New York City and had to depend even more on reproductions during their formative years.

Probably this is why most gallerists are comfortable enough making their first judgments about an artist's work from slides and why so many of us are increasingly finding the Internet handy as a vehicle for discovering new talent. Virtual galleries will never replace actual ones, nor would anyone want them to. However, they do give us an opportunity to see in a flash what artists are up to in any part of the country or the world. Even more important, they give artists a chance to reach untold thousands of people who may purchase their work or in some other way advance their careers.

One of the more exemplary virtual galleries is that of Manhattan Arts International (**www.manhattanarts.com**) presided over by Renee Phillips, who has long been a force to reckon with in the art world as a career counselor, university lecturer, and author of books such as "New York Contemporary Art Galleries: The Complete Guide," and "Creating Success: The Artist's Complete Guide to Freedom & Prosperity."

Savvy pro that she is, Phillips has selected the artists on her site in much the same way that any discerning gallery director would, choosing talents that, for all their stylistic diversity, complement each other and contribute to a consistent aesthetic agenda. And because she is always willing to consider the works of new artists, the site is constantly evolving.

Various modes of realism are represented, ranging from the sleek sensuality of Sue Kutosh's iconic images of leather-hipster fetish goddesses and Robert Mapplethorpe sprouting angel wings; to the subtle, sometimes slightly surreal visions of Beth Kurtz; to Valerie Patterson's startlingly precise and psychologically revealing large watercolors; to the romantically moody narrative paintings of painter/illustrator Judith Gwynn Brown; to Patti Mollica's vigorously brushed evocations of the urban scene.

As in any gallery, actual or virtual, it is interesting here to draw parallels between how different artists treat similar subjects; for example, by comparing Mollica's paintings to how the photographer Michael Massaia achieves painterly effects in his impressionistic cityscapes by manipulating Polaroid emulsions. One can also discover a different kind of kinship in the work of two graphic artists on the site: the atmospheric scenes of the Parisian printmaker and watercolorist Christian Le Gars and Mary Felton's highly finished charcoal drawings of human and equine figures. For both Le Gars and Felton are masters of chiaroscuro, making the dramatic play of light and shadow a primary element of their compositions.

A broad range of abstract painting is also on view, including the oils of Bronx-born John Ferdico, which combine Ab-Ex gestural energy with European-influenced finesse and chromatic refinement; Joey Archuleta's elegantly witty and wickedly titled conceptual abstractions in encaustic and mixed media; Peg McCreary's juicy postmodern take on Action Painting; Diane Leon's lyrical Mediterranean abstractions, calling to mind the musical mood of Miles Davis' landmark recording "Sketches of Spain"; Patti Brown's exuberant and versatile compositions in various media, which are equally jazzy in more aggressive manner; Jami Taback's darkly mysterious, affecting, yet formally controlled compositions; and the exhilarating immediacy of Sharon Bartel Clements' shamanic oils, composed with her bare, paint-saturated hands. Then there is Richard Straley, whose masterfully simplified portraits and figures in oil pastels have an impact akin to the sophisticated Art Brut of Dubuffet.

A growing trend to incorporate New Age notions and attitudes into the context of fine art is indicated in the oils of North Carolina painter Lisa Bartell, who employs expressively distorted plant forms in symbolic compositions that are all about healing and the life cycle. And while their work is very different, surely she has a kindred spirit in self-defined "spiritual energy healer" Janet Cristenfeld, who channels boldly intuitive, emotionally compelling imaginary portraits through a process of meditation. Then there are Judith Ellen Sanders whose Master of Science degree feeds into the unique synthesis of art and science animating her sinuous abstractions, which suggest meticulous psychedelic mandalas; Victoria Martin, creator of emblematic large canvases, wherein a host of colorful symbols related to magical spells, astronomy and other esoteric endeavors are held in check by a strong formal armature.

Renée Phillips

Gene Kaniecki, on the other hand, is an autodidact who aligns himself with so-called "outsider" art, yet is actually a highly sophisticated artist/provocateur, employing "a heterogeneous assemblage of assorted artistic ideologies and discordant processes," whose attitude and intricate imagery reveal that his heart belongs to Dada. Another "maximalist" with an outsiderish intrepidness, Ione Citrin employs mixed media to create jam-packed compositions with a dramatic impact that may reflect her theatrical background.

Several other artists exemplify the diversity of postmodern abstraction: Like colorful Rorschach tests, Joyce Pommer's graceful floating shapes hover at the edge of recognition, provoking a haunting visual de ja vu. Joanne Turney translates the exotic impressions of her travels in the Middle East, Pakistan, Indian and Bangkok into compositions notable for their rich colors and flowing forms. Armenian-born painter Jenik moves effortlessly between lyrical abstraction and freeform figuration akin to the Cobra group. Conversely, Ion Moraru pushes floral subjects, figures, and landscapes to the brink of abstraction by virtue of his fluid way with watercolor. And Arthur Jacob tests the limits of photography, deconstructing reality in swirling patterns and a spectrum of glowing colors that render the known world mysteriously new.

Each of these artists attests to the curatorial taste that Renee Phillips has exercised, calling upon her extensive experience and art world savvy to make the point that an online "gallery" can actually be worthy of the name.

—Ed McCormack

Ingo Karwath: Authentic Heir to a Great Artistic Legacy

The Expressionist tradition is alive and well in Germany, judging from the paintings on Ingo Karwath's website (**www.inka.biz**). Nor is one referring to the watered down Neo-Expressionism, which subverted that tradition with fashionable irony when it was all the rage from the late 1970s to the mid '80s. No, Karwath is the real thing, a painter thoroughly committed to a strain of subjective vision that had its origins in the expressive distortions of Gruenwald and reached its apex centuries later in the The Blue Reiter works of Franz Marc and August Macke.

Like those fellow countrymen—and particularly her fellow countrywoman Paula Modersohn-Becker who so successfully assimilated the formal influence of Gauguin and Cezanne—Karwath employs color fearlessly. Her oils have a remarkable chromatic resonance, particularly in her "White Lines" series where nudes and other figures have an almost ghostly quality, delineated linearly against shimmering color fields dominated by incendiary reds and yellows.

By contrast, "Hot in the Summer Tonight" and "Night Sky" are more somber in their nocturnal colorations. The former work is especially atmospheric, showing shadowy figures beside a body of still water in which the trees and lights on the opposite shore are reflected, while the former is a near abstract image of luminous yellow stars glowing from a nocturnal sky whose brilliance all but subsumes the verdant landscape below .

Although "Night Sky"—or Nachthimmel" in German—is a large oil on canvas, it has all the freshness and fluidity of one of Emil Nolde's tiny watercolors. Equally spare in execution and something of a departure from Karwath's Expressionist roots for its subdued colorations is another large oil executed in a spontaneous manner that one normally associates with watercolor. Entitled "Manhattan #41," this painting depicts pale gray figures moving somnambulantly through a pink mist in a rain of sooty particles reminiscent of 9/11.

More characteristically colorful and vigorously gestural, the paintings in Karwath's "Fingerprints" series include sensual nudes, and "Red/roter Pullover," a dancing figure in a crimson shirt that suggests a flickering flame, and a powerful composition centering on a crucified figure twisted like a lover around an anthropomorphically bent cross that harks back to Gruenwald. Even more brightly hued, as well as more formal in composition, are the oil pastels that Karwath creates when she works on structured cartons, such as "Samoa Session" with its seemingly inexhaustible range of figurative floral and landscape imagery in hot tropical colors and bold outlines. Also outstanding are an entire rogue's gallery of portrait heads in which Ingo Karwath adds a soupcon of Picasso-esque formal ingenuity to her already formidable oeuvre.

"Red/roter Pullover"

—Byron Coleman

David Derr's Daring Detours Down Unexpected Paths

Derr is an almost dauntingly versatile artist. Entering his website (**www.d2studios.com**) one hardly knows where to begin, given the sheer number of paintings, mixed media works, and digital drawings displayed therein. A successful graphic designer as well as a fine artist, Derr explores a variety of mediums and styles. Yet each work is stamped indelibly by his singular sensibility, calling to mind modernist predecessors such as Paul Klee and contemporaries like Lucas Samaras who eschew the limitations of a so-called "signature style" in order to make each new phase of their creativity a fresh adventure.

"For me drawing and painting is about creating a space where both the creator's and the viewer's creative thoughts are set free to explore unexpected paths," Derr states and to navigate through the pathways of his prolific output is indeed to encounter the unexpected at every turn.

In Derr's series "Ice," translucent hues, as fluorescently vibrant as those in Warhol's portraits, are superimposed over frozen surfaces further enlivened by swirling lines (possibly made by skate blades), creating a sinuous abstract dance. Thus one is hardly prepared for the witty juxtapositions of found objects in Derr's dadaistic assemblages such as "Allegory," in which a gold-plated baby doll, winged and bound with string, is transformed into a glitzy Rococo S&M cherub, or "Time Flies," in which an antique A-frame clock, fitted with ornate white wings instead of hands and topped by an actual toupee that functions as a thatched roof, appears to comment on the indignities of age and the inevitability of decay.

"Concerto for Dingo and Tiki God"

Then, just as one is beginning to think of him as a Neo-Duchampian conceptualist, Derr reveals himself to be an accomplished figurative artist as well, with a distinctive gift for strong yet harmonious color and expressive distortions in mixed media paintings such as "A Classic Case," with its witty semi-abstract take on Baroque architecture and statuary ala Hockney. And the further one progresses into the site, moving on to Derr's recently completed digital works, the more complex his compositions become.

In "Concerto for Dingo and Tiki God," zanily anthropomorphic versions of the Australian canine and the Polynesian deity cavort in a jazz combo, amid a colorful riot of fractured cubist planes; while "Spin," another work demonstrating Derr's gift for creating intriguing anatomical anomalies, depicts a demonic red-fleshed "dream spinner" set against a deep blue cosmos, akin to the brash brilliance of Chicago's "Hairy Who" school.

By contrast, "Resurrection of the Magi" is a lyrical vision of a simplified figure in a mystical landscape worthy of the aforementioned Paul Klee, its poetic synthesis of the spiritual and whimsical revealing yet another side of the multidimensional David Derr.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Mollie Kellogg's Magical Blend of Domestic Detail and Imaginative Depth

"I can only fly in my dreams"

Like many postmodern painters, Mollie Kellogg assimilates a wide range of inspirations. She has been likened, for example, to Mary Cassatt for some of the tender tributes to motherly love, with her own children serving as models, featured on her website (**www.molliekellogg.com**). However, Kellogg protests, quite rightly, that unlike that pioneering female Impressionist, her own emphasis is on the emotional resonance rather than the merely formal elements of a picture.

In her more mystical paintings, such as the graceful floating figure "Rhiannon," depicting the Celtic goddess of the moon and inspiration, Kellogg seems akin to the Pre-Raphaelites and the Symbolists for her ability to meld realism and fantasy convincingly by virtue of her technical proficiency. (Indeed, a photograph of the artist sitting in her work chair studying this painting on her easel while a white bird, just like the one accompanying "Rhiannon" on her flight, perches on her hand, attests to how thoroughly she integrates her domestic and imaginative lives.)

Kellogg's ability to convey the power of imaginative reverie from a more down to earth perspective is equally evident in "The Dream," an affecting acrylic painting of a young boy leaning over his bed and gazing at a toy figurine of a robed figure riding a dinosaur on the floor, his rapt expression suggesting that he is being transported to some distant mental realm where such things are entirely possible.

Obviously Kellogg, too, is capable of such suspension of disbelief by virtue of her complete commitment to her imagery, considering how successfully she transports the viewer in paintings such as "The Rose Will Open," which depicts yet another graceful figure, this one more angelically androgynous, sailing above mountain peaks cradling a huge rose, some of its shed petals trailing behind in the breeze.

While many of her paintings center on feminine subjects, such as the crouching blindfolded girl in "Dark Desert" or the woman just as blinded by her own flaxen tresses in "The Braid," Kellogg's equal mastery of the classical male figure is evident in both "The Little Death," in which the young man, nude except for a cloth draped loosely over his loins, reclines clutching an actual wound in his lower abdomen (although the phrase of the title is a French euphemism for orgasm), and "I Can Only Fly in My Dreams," in which another reclining figure wears strap-on wings and rests his face remorsefully on his forearm.

Both paintings, like all of Mollie Kellogg's work are richly allusive, suggesting symbolic meanings much deeper and more subtle than the sum of their parts.

—Maureen Flynn

Sylvia Hennequin's Gallery of Engaging Monsters

From the early 15th century to the present, The Netherlands has given us many great artists, including de Kooning. But it is to the post-WWII movement called CoBrA that the contemporary Dutch painter Sylvia Hannequin (**www.sylviahennequin.nl**) seems most clearly related. Trained in Rotterdam, Hannequin wields a loaded brush with as much force as Karel Appel, one of the founders of the CoBrA group and its most accomplished painter.

The resemblance is clear in Hannequin's powerful painting "Scarface." Just look at those impastos (as though the thick, viscous pigment was slathered on with a trowel!); those intense colors (particularly those glistening, visceral reds—like the ones in Soutine's flayed sides of beef); that fleshy slab of a nose and those huge, mad, asymmetrical blue eyes, which are actually photographic images of eyes, either collaged or printed onto the painting surface, then flecked with green and rimmed with hot pink paint to make them even more monstrously compelling!

Like Appel, who even went so far as to affix plastic toys to one series of paintings, Sylvia Hannequin will stop at nothing to bring her paintings to riotously colorful life. Yet her genuine sympathy for her subjects comes across as well. Indeed, Hannequin obviously savors the ugly as well as the beautiful aspects of the human condition, in her series of "Monumental Portraits," where some of the faces appear painted or tattooed with tribal designs, as they confront the viewer with a frankness that can be slightly disconcerting—especially when it begins to dawn on us that these friendly monsters may actually be mirror images of ourselves!

"Scarface"

Hannequin goes even further than her CoBrA forbearers in her "Birds and Dicks" series, particularly one witty painting of disembodied phalluses sprouting from the ground, spouting plumes of smoke like factory stacks. In another painting as starkly explicit as Gustave Courbet's vaginal masterpiece "The Origin of the World," we encounter the livid pink vulva of a woman reclining on her back with spread legs. However, the picture is anything but erotic; for her face is skeletal, with gaping black eye-sockets, and she belongs to a series of haunting figure paintings that the artist calls "The Essence of Darkness."

By contrast, even parts of the faces of the figures in Hannequin's "Berber" series are covered by their brilliant headcloths and their eyes are lowered in a manner suggesting, if not modesty, the secretive nature of a mysterious ancient culture. And, as in all of Sylvia Hannequin's paintings, including her anthropomorphic images of animals, one gets the impression of a prodigiously gifted painter plumbing the depths of our common humanity.

—Wilson Wong

Joe Moorman: A Southern Visionary Risen from the Delta

The syrupy quality of the pigment itself evokes the sultry slowness of the marshlands, in Mississippi Delta artist Joe Moorman's acrylic painting "Bayou." Its expressive distortions recalling the nature paintings of Charles Burchfield, its hot hues akin to the Fauves, the entire composition is lit by an incandescent glow.

Most of the paintings on Moorman's website (**www.riversonfineart.com**) are autobiographical, starting with a series about growing up Mormon, which interweaves the fiery myths and prophecies of the sect's founders with downhome memories of the artist's childhood. Moorman refers to these early narrative paintings as "some of my most naive works." But while they may be less vigorously brushed than later works such as "Starlight" and "Atlantis," where fragmented human and animal figures merge mystically with the nocturnal landscape or the watery flow, Moorman's memory paintings have an innate sophistication and a storytelling power akin to Jacob Lawrence's great "Migration" series.

"Bayou"

Complementing the narrative thrust of of his paintings, the nostalgic texts on Moorman's website have a literary flavor that reminds one of southern writers like Harry Crews and Dorothy Allison. His prose resonates with plainspoken poetry, as he spins the tale of how a devout local woman known as Sister Ward gently chastised him and a friend for throwing rocks at bluebirds when he was a boy, saying,"Especially you, Joseph Moorman, with a name like you have. You're young now, but you'll be grown before you know it and off on a mission spreading the Gospel."

Moorman says that when he left home for college he "put organized religion behind me," but adds "given the role of fundamentalism around the world, I think some of what I experienced as a Mormon growing up has relevance and should be explored." And strong spiritual commitment of a less conventional kind still comes across when he states, "No matter how much technical skill I acquire in the coming years, I will still be working in the tradition of the evangelical southern folk artist."

It is just this self-awareness however, that distinguishes Moorman from so-called "outsider" artists, even when he paints a deadpan memory of his grandfather drinking beer in a rubbled yard, while trash burns in a rusty barrel and the family goat strolls by, or conjures up an expressionistic vision of the golden statue of The Angel Moroni atop the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City.

Indeed, hot young figure painters like Dana Schutz and Jules de Balincourt, currently all the rage in the New York art scene for their ironic appropriations of the outsider attitude, should surely envy Joe Moorman's knockout combination of honest passion and genuine painterly panache.

—Peter Wiley

The Neo-Romantic Photography of Terry Amburgey

"Early"

Meet Aimee C. Hertog, Enfant Terrible of the New Assemblage

Assemblage, the 3-D counterpart of collage, originated in the early twentieth century, when Picasso created his famous sheet metal work "Guitar" and Marcel Duchamp stuck a bicycle wheel on a stool and titled it "Readymade," but really came into its own in the 1950s, when Joseph Cornell, Robert Rauschenberg and others made the found object the mainstay of their most innovative works. And the tradition of elevating lowly materials to the level of high art proves to be alive and well in the work of a young artist named Aimee Hertog, whose solo show "All That Glitters" was seen recently at Chashama Gallery, 112 West 44th Street.

Working with Styrofoam, plastic, torn-apart sponges, resin, glitter, paint, ink, and the discarded toys of her young son, among other diverse materials, Hertog comes across as an East Coast descendant of Bruce Conner, the California funkmeister who took inspiration from free jazz and the poetic improvisations of the Beat Generation. However, Hertog never heard of Conner before this writer mentioned him to her, and there is one very important difference between them: while Conner courted the macabre with his burnt baby doll tethered to a charred highchair with nylon stockings, Hertog's work is riotously colorful and relentlessly upbeat.

In this regard, perhaps her signature piece is "Cuckoo Totem," so named because it resembles a cuckoo clock that has somehow mated with one of those garish red and gold good luck dragon statuettes sold in Chinatown tourist shops. Here, as in all of Hertog's work, the color is joyously uninhibited and amplified by the addition of plenty of glitter, which gives the piece a kind of East Village club kid panache that harks back to the vitality of '80's downtown hangouts like Danceteria, when the visual arts and the hip underground music scene were incestuously intertwined.

"Cuckoo Totem"

That Aimee Hertog's work still has such youthful energy and enthusiasm makes it a refreshing relief in an art world that often seems too enervated and moribund from shouldering the burden of its own pseudo-sophistication. Hertog's playfulness is contagious as she employs Styrofoam balls and other unlikely objects with gleeful abandon to create pieces such as "Horse and Rider Wreath," in which the tiny, floating figures of an upside-down rider and an upright horse are as whimsical as something by Chagall (yet informed by a streetsmart sensibility that never descends to sentimentality), and the utterly zany "Groucho Licorice," in which what looks like a freaked out Smiley Face sports a pair of real sunglasses.

Hertog's "Farm Animal Driver," featuring a toy pig at the wheel of a toy car, is a cool comment on those who use our highways as speedways. Her "Mermaid" is a concoction of pure fantasy created with voluptuous bits of sponge and other detritus splashed with vibrant color and ornamented with the glitter that she employs liberally to give her pieces a garish opulence akin to Mexican and Indian devotional altars. However, Hertog, who has exhibited widely around the country and now seems ready to take on the New York scene, knows how to skirt kitsch with an innate formal sense that makes her work serious fun. —Ed McCormack

Kitty van de Rijt: Venus Liberated from "The Male Gaze"

One may momentarily be reminded of Bonnard's paintings of his wife in the bath, on first encountering Kitty van de Rijt's succulently limned images of willowy female nudes, at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street in Chelsea, from September 28 through October 18. (Reception October 5, from 6 to 8 PM.)

Certainly van de Rijt's acrylics on linen appear every bit as intimate, and like the oils of the Impressionist master, they stress shimmering color over the definition of form in space. Look more closely, however, and it becomes clear that van de Rijt is not bound by the natural light that preoccupied the Impressionists. Nor does she place her figures within the expected domestic settings to be viewed from the voyeuristic perspective of what art historians call The Male Gaze.

Rather, her women inhabit amorphous spaces lit by radiant cadmium reds, mingled with mellower yellows in the range of ocher and areas of white that read as ethereal illumination, rather than the ordinary sunshine of "a day in the park with George."

Although enveloped in these unearthly auras, van de Rijt's protagonists are generally devoid of obvious supernatural trappings, even in the somewhat anomalous canvas "Time Waits for Nobody," in which several indistinct female figures, emerging from silvery blue mists, could suggest a delegation of spirits welcoming a new arrival to the afterlife. But, putting a lighter spin on the title, they could just as easily be guests greeting the subject of a surprise birthday party—albeit a characteristically numinous one.

"Lost in Paradise"

While we seem to enter an inner world populated exclusively by sensual phantoms, it is also possible that the rarefied region van de Rijt's figures inhabit is simply the imaginative realm of pure painting, a place where the convergence of classically comely nude figures and sumptuous color needs no explication, no justification beyond the sensory pleasure such beauty provides. However, while one does not dismiss this possibility, there are also hints of a partly submerged narrative in the paintings of Kitty van de Rijt, making the notion that there is much more here than immediately meets the eye equally pleasurable to contemplate.

Certainly titles such as "Stillness of Night"—in which we gaze over large white flowers to a rear view of a shapely nude gazing raptly at what is either her own reflection in a mirror or even a more phantom-like female companion half hidden in the blaze of rapturous red—convey a sense of literary intent. And other paintings, too, such as "Lost in Paradise," where at least three voluptuous figures, somewhat more palpable in their nakedness, yet still partially obscured by luscious chromatic auras, evoke the poetic fragments of Sappho or the sisterly revelry of The Three Graces.

In any case, like "Hera," who dances with graceful abandon in a silken white slip on both panels of a stately diptych, all of Kitty van de Rijt's figures appear to be Muses, inspiring her to wield her brush in a manner that is itself a kind of dance, into which the viewer is only too willing to join.

—Marie R. Pagano

"The Norblin Project": Wally Gilbert's Visual Ode to Silence and Decay

One of the more enlightening books published in recent decades is "Art & Physics: Parallel Visions in Space, Time & Light" by Leonard Shlain." In it, Shlain, a surgeon once flummoxed by what he took to be "the inscrutability of modern art and the impenetrability of the new physics," decides to educate himself in both fields, and after exhaustive research, concludes that artistic breakthroughs throughout history have often prefigured scientific discoveries in various ways.

One can only assume that Dr. Shlain would find much to appreciate in the art of Wally Gilbert, a scientist turned artist who could also be considered something of a philosopher. For more than merely a means to an aesthetic end, the photographic process has become a way of questioning and exploring the nature of reality for Gilbert, a retired Harvard University professor who won a Nobel Prize in 1980 for his landmark work in gene sequencing.

Whereas Gilbert once employed the computer for scientific research, now it has become a tool for transforming the subjects that he captures with his digital camera into images that he calls "fragments of the whole."

"In the nineteenth century collectors and museums would recreate (or restore) the entire object based on a single fragment," Gilbert stated in the catalog of his 2004 exhibition at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. "Their vision of an object had to be complete, intact. Today, museums exhibit the original fragment of a vase, a piece of tile, the broken bronze. This allows us—since we must—to recreate in our minds the original vision of an artist. This mental image strikes us as the critical reality, however imperfect our interpretation might in fact be. Contemporary artists take advantage of the same process, intentionally using fragments to represent the whole, forcing the viewer to complete the image and the message."

Gilbert continues to explore the microcosmic possibilities of the fragment in his new exhibition "The Norblin Project," at Viridian Artists Inc., 530 West 25th Street, from September 26 through October 14. The show is, in fact, a microcosm in itself, being a hefty sampling of a photographic essay shot by the artist in Warsaw in the Spring of 2006 at The Norblin Factory, a long unused machine shop, now a technical museum and occasional art site. The images will be exhibited on site in the Summer of 2007, in a huge installation filling the cavernous space of the factory hall. Yet, given their innate qualities, they are no less dramatic in the more intimate confines of a Chelsea gallery space.

Including some thirty 36" by 24" face-mounted prints and two large hangings on canvas, each measuring 100" by 44", the show exhibition makes a dramatic case for the hidden beauty in commonplace things—most specifically utilitarian objects that are rarely appreciated for their purely visual qualities. The aesthetic riches that Wally Gilbert discovers in such things are most immediately evident in the print that he calls "Norblin Grease 1—Warsaw," where an extreme close-up of industrial sludge smeared across a steely surface and bathed in a golden glow takes on the muscular viscosity of an abstract oil by Willem de Kooning. Indeed, this image, in which what is essentially a grimy industrial residue takes on such subtle allusiveness, seems to exemplify what de Kooning was referring to when he uttered his famous phrase "slippery glimpses." The implication was that much of what occurs in art is as much of a mystery to the artist as it is to the viewer, and Gilbert obviously agrees, having said, "Much of the world operates on the principle of accident."

In an interview with Jan Kubasiewicz, who curated Gilbert's exhibition at the Massachusetts College of Art and will co-curate the Norblin Project in Warsaw with Josef Zuk Piwkowski, Gilbert went on to say, "I do think that accident is a large part of the artistic process. One observes a random world and chooses elements that one considers of aesthetic value. The artistry is in the choice of the final object rather than in the total control of the process. The artist creates strategies to promote accidents and thus to enhance the random elements during the process, followed by choice. In my case, this is often making the computer do what one did not expect it to do."

In technical terms, one can only assume that testing the capabilities of a computer in such a way can be quite an adventure and that it contributes greatly to some of the effects that Gilbert achieves in his pictures. However, a viewer more conversant with art history than with computer technology can't fail but be impressed with how successfully Gilbert extends the tradition of pioneers such as Edward Weston, Andre Kertesz, and Laszlo Moholy Nagy, transforming simple mechanical objects into powerful visual metaphors.

One need not belabor the phallic suggestiveness of Gilbert's "Norblin Piston—Warsaw," for example, or allude to bullets or rockets, to recognize the power that the artist achieves by isolating this streamlined golden form, streaked with traces of blood-red rust, against a dark background, blown up to monumental scale. Nor is it necessary to dwell in references to cruciforms or torture wracks to appreciate "Norblin Wood 3—Warsaw," an image of rough beams

"Norblin Piston 1 - Warsaw"

sharply intersecting with a blurred gray brick wall in the background. Like William Carlos Williams' "red wheel / barrow / glazed with rain / water / beside the white chickens," these things are simply what they are. And as such, they are possessed of a peculiar integrity. Yet as Williams himself said and Gilbert's pictures prove, "The particular thing offers a finality that sends us spinning through space."

Thus every image in "The Norblin Project"—two fearsome sets of gears that evoke the carnivorous smile of a crocodile, a deep crack in faded red brick, the head of a single rivet magnified like a yellow moon glowing from a cosmos of rough, mottled metal—bespeaks the raucous time-clock eternities once served by the workers in this cavernous space, where the din of voices and machinery has now given way to silence and where, in another remarkable picture, a delicate spider web stretches like a membrane of memory between two still conveyor belts.

By focusing his camera on such details, then tweaking them on his computer, Wally Gilbert reveals the secret meanings hidden in commonplace things.

—Ed McCormack

Time Trapped in Stone: The Paintings of Jack Bolen

A seamless synthesis of realism and abstraction distinguishes "The Acadia Paintings" of Jack Bolen, in his solo show at Viridian Artists, Inc., 530 West 25th Street, from October 17 through November 4. On first encounter, the intense concentration lavished on surfaces could remind one of Ian Albright's minutely detailed "magic realist" portraits of mortality and decay. But by eschewing such anecdotal obviousness, Bolen evokes a subtler response, akin to an emotional palimpsest, in oils inspired by the monumental rock formations on the coast of Acadia National Park/Cranberry Islands, Maine.

Formal issues are very much in the forefront, as Bolen makes literally clear by sparingly superimposing small opaque or semi-translucent bands, stripes, or squares over the organic forms of the rock formations. These hard-eged elements emphasize the two-dimensional flatness of the picture plane, even as they paradoxically recall the "floating" shapes in Abstract Illusionism (which serve the opposite purpose of suggesting spatial depth through trompe-l'oeil sleight of eye), achieving a timely detente between Abstract Expressionist dogma and the more ambiguous space in postmodern painting.

Bolen distances his compositions even further from traditional realism by diffusing the image along the edges of the canvas, where it fades into a softly shimmering color field. Thus "framed," the looser strokes at the point where representation trails off into abstraction become a source of considerable painterly delectation by virtue of their lyrical unraveling. Occasionally, too, glimpses of the bare primer coat are allowed to show through—a device that aligns Bolen, at least to some degree, with painters like Robert Ryman, who stress the essential properties of paint itself, the "objectness" of the canvas, and traces of "process" as vital factors in an artwork.

For all his formal savvy, however, Bolen is adamant in his assertion that there is more at stake in these works than the expressive delineation of shapes and the precise balancing of chromatic harmonies.

"Prolonged study of these phenomena," he informs us, referring to the rock formations in a statement issued in connection with the Acadia series, "impressed me with their striking visual similarity to the eroded relief paintings and sculptures in the Pharaonic temples and tombs with which I had been concerned in an earlier series, which began during an extended trip to Egypt in 1981-82. I felt a similar psychological presence, a certain shared mystery. My primary concern is to bring to the canvas this sense of emotional intensity which springs from direct observation of the motif: to rediscover through the painting process

"Acadia XXXV" 40"x 50" oil/canvas

at a given time and place that which has occurred in another time and place. Ideally, past and present merge and the future becomes possible."

The process by which this is achieved begins with the projection of one of Bolen's own photograph of the subject onto the canvas. But what occurs next is closer to the way Franz Kline created his Abstract Expressionist compositions, after projecting small ink sketches in a similar manner, than to the meticulous duplications practiced by Photo-Realists such as Richard Estes and Robert Bechtle. For rather than following the outlines of his photo sources to the letter, Bolen improvises freely, employing deliberate spatial distortions and altering colors until they bear little resemblance to the actual hues at the site.

Employing oil paint with impressive finesse, displaying a restrained expressiveness and that elusive quality called "touch," which has been all but lost by many contemporaries, Bolen brings about a potent and evocative amalgam of direct observation, memory, and imagination, making the craggy surfaces of the rocks, with their cracks, crevices, and variegated textures and shadows, allude to much more than their innate components.

In "Acadia XXXV," for example, the pinkish hues have a fleshy quality, suggesting an anthropomorphic topology, evoking what the poet and critic Selden Rodman once referred to as "the 'experienced' aspect of inanimate nature." Bolen's ability to bring mineral epidermis alive with visceral force is especially evident here, where orifice-like openings in the rocks and veined, bulging forms, abetted by the pink and purplish colorings that predominate in the composition, almost suggest human organs exposed and palpitating during surgery.

Such associations also arise in canvases such as "Acadia XXXVI" where the sensually flowing, puckered forms could suggest labial folds and other aspects of anatomy. By contrast, in paintings, such as "Acadia XXV" and "XXVI," Bolen employs luminous yellows, blues, and silvery grayish hues in concert with craggier shapes that hark back, as amplified by Bolen's hand, if not to the ancient Egyptian subjects on which he based an earlier series, perhaps to the natural Rorschach patterns from which prehistoric artists took their first graphic cues. Here, too, the geometric elements that Bolen refers to as " 'memory brackets,' linking past to present on the surface of the canvas" play an especially prominent role, since the biomorphic elements are considerably more subdued. At the same time, the subtlety of these compositions imbues them with a power of their own, a haunting sense of silence, suggesting ancient mysteries unearthed by a deeply intuitive, exquisitely refined contemporary sensibility.

Indeed, throughout the series, as well as in a related group of mixed media works called "The Acadia Drawings" (although they are actually fully realized paintings on a smaller scale), Jack Bolen shows himself to be an artist possessed of unique and enduring gifts.

—Ed McCormack

Marilyn Henrion's "Disturbances" Series: Geometry Unmoored

Much more than for many of her contemporaries, for Marilyn Henrion the medium, as Marshall McLuhan famously postulated in the 1960s, is indeed the message. Had she chosen to work in oils or acrylics, after all, Henrion could have made a distinguished career as an abstract painter and been spared the stigma that still attaches itself, in some of our narrowest critical minds, to work that elevates elements of craft to the level of high art. Nor, simply because she employs materials traditional to women, would anyone have ever extolled her art's feminist aspects over its even more relevant aesthetic attributes.

There is no question that Henrion, whose hip credentials are impeccable, having befriended the poets of the Beat Generation and participated in the Happenings that preceded performance art in the 1960s, was aware of what she was leaving herself open to when she chose to become a fiber artist rather than a painter. At very least, she would have to be better than most painters for her work to be taken on its own merits.

By choosing the path of most resistance, however, Henrion has triumphed in ways that make the difficulties she has had to face more than worthwhile. For by situating her avant-garde sensibility within a seemingly conservative tradition that references Amish quilts and other genres of women's folk art, Henrion has created a context from which to subvert our commonly held assumptions about what can and should be done in her medium.

Thus it seems thoroughly in keeping with her desire to shake up our preconceptions that Henrion's fifteenth solo show, which can be seen at Noho Gallery in Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, from September 26 trough October 14, is called "Disturbances."

The artist herself cites several metaphorical sources for her newest pieced silk constructions, ranging from the Big Bang that supposedly begot our universe billions of years ago, to the devastating tsunami that dominated the news only recently, to the domestic turmoil inherent in the title of Grace Paley's short story collection, "The Little Disturbances of Man." But in a broader sense, the most significant disturbance in Henrion's new works is the havoc that she now wreaks on geometric stability through her sinuous distortions of the rectangular forms which have long figured prominently in her compositions.

In past exhibitions, one was struck by the emblematic quality in Henrion's brilliantly colorful, opulently textured pieces. Her forms seemed as solidly moored as those of Josef Albers, before it became her mission, as she recently stated in relation to these new works, to subject Albers' "Homage to the Square" to "a wild ride through a series of dazzling permutations, reflecting various forms and degrees of turbulence."

"Disturbances 1" 48"x 40" Silks 2005

Of course, Henrion was well prepared to undertake such an exhilarating roller coaster ride, given that her passion for sensual color and opulent patterning, akin to that of Matisse, has always coexisted happily, if somewhat incongruously, with her more chaste admiration for the austere forms of the Amish quilt makers. These hot and cool contrasts, in fact, have always accounted in part for the appeal of Henrion's exquisitely hand stitched pieces. If anything, in the new works, which are every bit as finely crafted as her previous ones, the tension between freedom and discipline is amplified, as shapes swerve from their geometric moorings in a manner that can often be dizzying.

The vertiginous distortion begins in "Disturbances 1," with a sudden shift—a kind of buckling, rippling effect—at the center of an otherwise gridded composition that recalls the wrenching sensation at the pit of the stomach whenever one saw the endless replays of videotapes of the Twin Towers collapsing on the nightly news. Whether or not it was Henrion's intention, consciously or unconsciously, to evoke this association is beside the point; for the sense of dissolution carries through the entire series, with the more rigidly geometric components (which suggest two tall, adjoining structures in "Disturbances 3" and a cropped close-up of a cruciform in "Disturbances 4") variously engulfed by swirls and billows of brilliant color.

What makes "Disturbances 1" especially poignant, though, is that the grid is almost entirely intact and the sudden upheaval at its center, where the squares start to stretch and bend as rhythmically as an ocean wave, reads to the eye as an anomaly of a kind that can no longer be regarded routinely in the wake of 911. Indeed, here even the combination of metallic gold and floral patterned fabrics calls to mind some symbolic evocation of steely office towers and the plants that people sometimes place in their windows to make them more "homey."

While one does not wish to burden this series with references that the artist may never have intended, it is also true that there are events in our common history which color our consciousness indelibly. Consciously or not, Henrion appears to have tapped into a powerful communal trauma in these new works, which so dynamically deconstruct geometric formats that we are used to thinking of as inviolate.

Only by acknowledging this can we move on to a more dispassionate aesthetic appreciation of Marilyn Henrion's "Disturbances" series, a crowning achievement in the career of an artist whose evocative forms, lush colors, and silkenly sensuous surfaces have already won her prestigious fellowships, a place in numerous public and private collections, and a loyal following among those who still believe the creation of beauty to be one of the most worthy goals of art.

—Ed McCormack

Mixed Media and Meanings Enliven West Side Group Exhibition

Billed as a fine arts exhibition incorporating "craft, art, assemblage, collage," etc., the recent West Side Arts Coalition group show "A Rich Fabric of Art" was seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the central island at Broadway and 96th Street.

"Toronto," a work in oil and collage by Carolyn S. Kaplan employed the simplified shapes of three stylized fish in a semiabstract composition reminiscent of early American modernists such as Arthur Dove and Marsden Hartley for its combination of natural allusiveness and formal power. Photos of bears and deer were combined with painted mountains in another visually witty work by Kaplan.

Meg Boe Birns employed primary colors and patterns, such as stripes and polka dots, on layered strips of wood to create some of her most tactile and appealing recent assemblages. Here, as always, Birns synthesis of the painterly and the sculptural provided pleasing surprises.

A whimsical flying figure ala Chagall was juxtaposed with clock faces and other fanciful elements in "Insomnia" by Harriet Green, an artist who often combines elements of Pop (in this case images of Mickey Mouse) with flowing abstract forms recalling Kandinsky. Equally eventful in its own manner, Judith Barcroft's large collage painting of a woman quilting appeared to be a postmodern take on the dense patterning of the Nabis and Matisse's odalisques. Barcroft's composition was so densely ornate that the painting itself fulfilled its title: "Patchwork Quilt," even as something about the placement of the figure and its semiabstract quality also suggested a kinship with Francis Bacon.

Barbara Eisen White incorporated South African ostrich eggs, painted with acrylic into her innovative mixed media assemblages. Especially rich in imagery was White's "Walaza Village," in which the large egg, painted with small huts and figures, suggested a globe and was set in front of a mirror that multiplied its exotic beauty.

In Sylvia Zeveloff's "Fabric Collage #1," a row of city buildings came alive in a riot of color that extended even to the picture's frame, which became an integral part of the composition. The richness of Zeveloff's work derives, in part, from her perfect integration of painted and collaged elements.

Jeanette Arnone's terra cotta mask of John Lennon set like the moon against a dark ground and titled "Lennon in Spirit" was a striking and mysterious work that made one think of Odilon Redon. Equally striking in another manner was a related work by Arnone, also featuring a terra cotta mask, albeit with a more solar feeling, and another reference to the Beatles in its title: "Here Comes the Sun."

Emily Rich is known for her paintings which expand upon the gestural muscularity of Abstract Expressionism. Here, however, Rich showed a series of collages in which roughly torn canvas forms painted in earthy colors, their loose threads serving as lively linear elements, evoked arid landscapes, revealing yet another side of this gifted abstract painter.

Marsha Peruo's mostly monochromatic collages combine flowing calligraphic elements, akin to those in Asian painting (particularly of the Zen variety) with geometric structuring. Bold, fluent black ink lines, drawn with a large brush on small squares of paper, are arranged in a grid to create staggered rhythms that lend Peruo's compositions dynamic energy.

—Maureen Flynn

Sheila Finnigan

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Patricia Kathleen Clements

September 5 - September 26, 2006
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Heather Marie Maier
Residue
Ralph Mindicino
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Wesley Mawema

Reflections on Storefronts
Michele Kellner

September 28 - October 18, 2006
Reception: Thursday October 5, 2006 6-8pm

Prism of One
Nicole Woodford
Quinn Stilletto
Rochelle Fogel
Ruben Talberg

Subjective Elements
Azita Ganji
Irene Sfakianos
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Verve and Reverence
Fab 3
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Kitty van de Rijt

October 21 - November 10, 2006
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