Nov/Dec 2007/Jan 2008 www.galleryandstudiomagazine.com Vol. 10 No. 2 New York

GALLERY&STUDIO

The World of the Working Artist

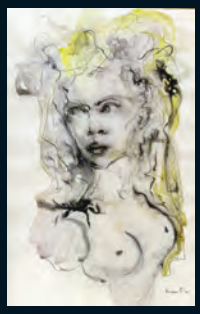
PHOTO: GERALD AND SARA MURPHY ON LA GAROUPE BEACH, ANTIBES, SUMMER 1926. GERALD AND SARA MURPHY PAPERS, YALE COLLECTION OF AMERICAN LITERATURE, BEINECKE RARE BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY. © ESTATE OF HONORIA MURPHY DONNELLY/LICENSED BY VAGA, NEW YORK, NY. PAINTING: GERALD MURPHY (1888—1964), RAZOR, 1924, OIL ON CANVAS. DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART, FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS COLLECTION, GIFT OF THE ARTIST (1963.74.FA) © ESTATE OF HONORIA MURPHY DONNELLY/LICENSED BY VAGA, NEW YORK, NY

FOR THE LOST AMERICAN MODERNIST WHOSE SOCIAL MYTH UPSTAGED HIS ART, LIVING WELL WAS NOT ENOUGH...

GERALD MURPHY

BY ED MCCORMACK, PG. 18

LEONOR FINI



1907 - 1996

A Life in Art

DECEMBER 2007

CFM Gallery

112 Greene Street, SoHo, New York City, NY 10012

Tel: (212) 966-3864 info@cfmgallery.com **Fax: (212) 2261041**

Sunday Noon to 6pm Monday thru Saturday 11am to 6pm

www.cfmgallery.com

Sheila Hecht

"Head Over Heels," 2007 Acrylic on Canvas 24" x 30"

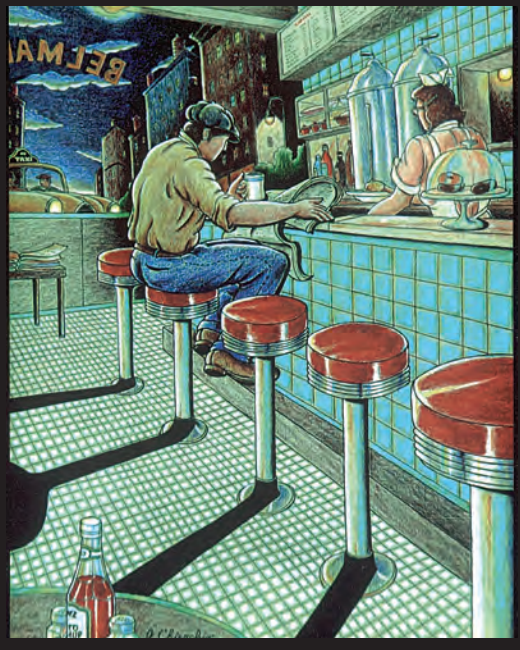
TOO HOT (OR NOT) TO HANDLE

November 6 - 24, 2007

noho gallery

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

JOE CHIERCHIO



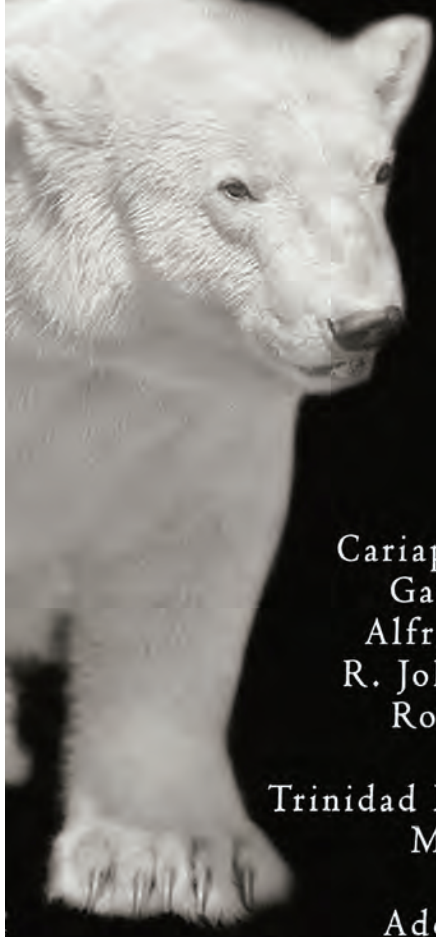
"LATE SHIFT" Colored Pencils 19" x 14"

represented by

GALLERY OF GRAPHIC ARTS, LTD
1601 York Ave. New York, N.Y. 10028
212-988-4731 Tues-Sat 11-6:30
www.joechierchio.com Jchierchio@gmail.com

Exhibition Dates
November 20 - December 11
Reception
Thursday, November 29, 6-8pm

Tripping The Light Fantastic



Cariappa Annaiah
Gary Auerbach
Alfredo Esparza
R. John Ferguson
Roberto Grilli
Perri Hart
Trinidad Mac-Auliffe
Mary Mansey
Rei Niwa
Adolfo Orozco
J. Thrush (Judit Rigó)
Jacqueline Rosenberg
Paola Tarasconi
Stefanie Young
Joe Zammit-Lucia

530 West 25th St.
Chelsea, New York, NY
Tel: 212-226-4151
Fax: 212-966-4380
www.Agora-Gallery.com

Agora Gallery

WSAC
West Side Arts Coalition 1979

Rapture Unleashed

A Fine Arts Exhibit

November 14 - December 2, 2007

Opening Reception:
Saturday November 17, 2:30-5:30pm

Artists:
George Ebbinghousen • Basia Goldsmith • Sebnem Kotoglu
Lieh-Yrieh Lin • Brian Ormond • Gloria Pearl
Robert Schultheis (curator) • Robert Norman Scott
Hanna Seiman • Sandra Vergara • Georgios Vrachnos

Broadway Mall Community Center
96th Street and Broadway, center island, NYC
Gallery Hours: Wed. 6-8pm, Sat./Sun.12-6pm
wsacny@wsacny.org 212-316-6024 www.wsacny.org

THE BROOME STREET GALLERY

Ground floor, 1,300 sq. ft.

Exhibition space rental available

498 Broome Street, New York, NY 10013 Tel: (212) 941-0130

FOCUS FORWARD

american society of contemporary artists features 60 artists

Juried by

Hallie Cohen,
Art Department of Marymount Manhattan College

Nancy di Benedetto,
Art historian and critic

Bob Keiber,
Author, curator and professor of Art and Communications at Berkeley College

October 30 to November 11, 2007

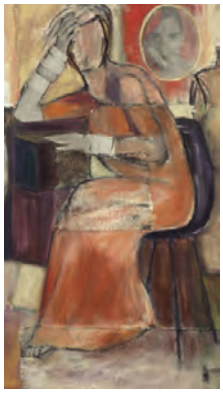
Reception: ***Saturday November 3rd, 2 to 5pm and presentation of awards at 3pm***

Broome Street Gallery

498 Broome Street
New York, N.Y. 10013
212 226 6085
hrs: Tues - Sat 11am - 6pm

G&S Highlights

On the Cover:
In the 1920's, Leger called ***Gerald Murphy****, a wealthy friend and benefactor of Hemingway and Fitzgerald, "The only American painter in Paris," and Picasso agreed. But Murphy's art was soon upstaged by his and his wife Sara's social legend as a Jazz Age "It" couple. Then a family tragedy abruptly aborted a promising career. A new book and e xhibition raise new questions about the Lost Generation's lost modernist. –Page 18*

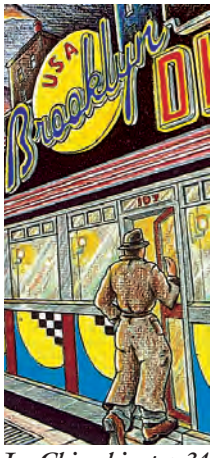


Danièle Marin, pg. 6

Leonor Fini, pg. 4

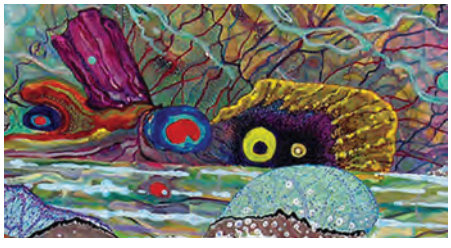
AK Corbin, pg. 29

Anowar Hossain, pg. 8



Joe Chierchio, pg. 34

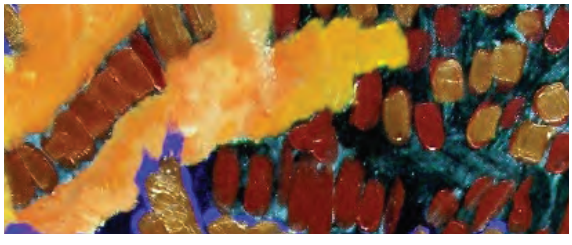
James Eugene Albert, pg. 25



Kathleen King, pg. 33

Virginia Evans Smit, pg. 31

Sheila Hecht, pg. 35

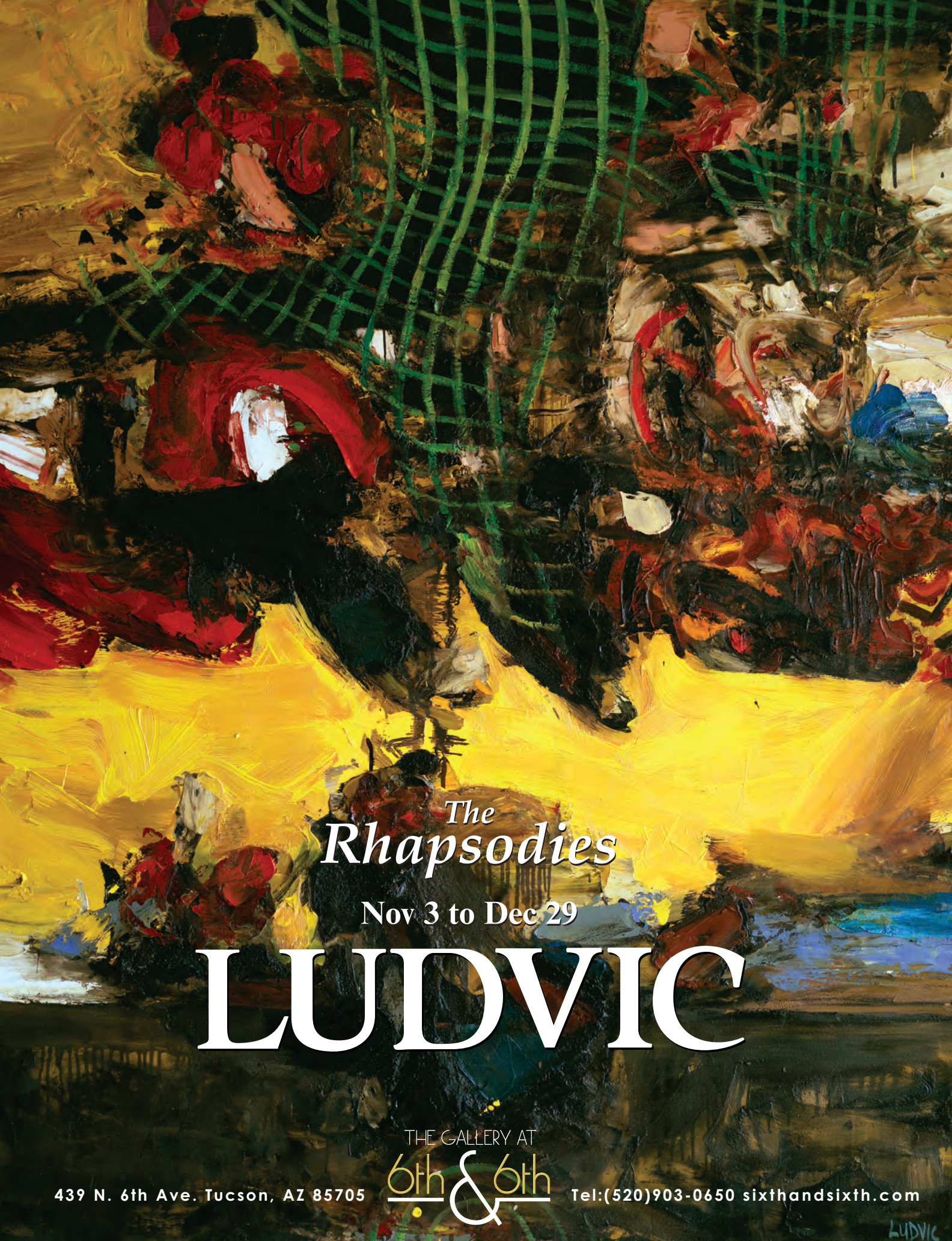


Faye Earnest, pg. 11

GALLERY&STUDIO
An International Art Journal
PUBLISHED BY

217 East 85th Street, PMB 228, New York, NY 10028
(212) 861-6814 E-mail: galleryandstudio@mindspring.com

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER **Jeannie McCormack**
MANAGING EDITOR **Ed McCormack**
SPECIAL EDITORIAL ADVISOR **Margot Palmer-Poroner**
DESIGN AND PRODUCTION **Karen Mullen**
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR **Maureen Flynn**
www.galleryandstudiomagazine.com


The
Rhapsodies
Nov 3 to Dec 29
LUDVIC
THE GALLERY AT
6th & 6th
439 N. 6th Ave. Tucson, AZ 85705
Tel:(520)903-0650 sixthandsixth.com
LUDVIC

At CFM Gallery: A Museum-Worthy Survey of Leonor Fini's Eroticized Realm

Leonor Fini

In her prime, with her feline features, Leonor Fini resembled the Caucasian sister of the sultry singer and actress Eartha Kitt. She looked like the sex kitten who had swallowed the golden canary. Indeed, if there's any truth to Norman Mailer's recent speculation that God may literally be an artist, and could as likely be a "She" as a "He," Fini certainly came across as imperious enough to audition for the role.

In any case, she certainly seemed like something of a creative deity to the gallerist and collector Neil Zukerman, who singlehandedly revived Fini's reputation in the U.S., has authenticated her work for both Sotheby's and Christie's in New York and London, and has written no less than three books about her, along with numerous catalog essays and magazine articles.

Zukerman had been obsessed with Fini's work for years before he met and befriended her in the final eighteen years of her life. He was not the only one; Leo Castelli once said, "There are in everybody's life crucial events that determine ones future. My encounter with Leonor Fini in Paris, in 1938, was one of those events." Zukerman, however, actually found his vocation as an art dealer because of a missed opportunity to purchase a particular Fini painting that he coveted.

"On the telephone with the auction house in London, my heart fell as the bidding exceeded my limit," Zukerman, who had been already been collecting Fini's work for several years, recalls in "La Vie Ideale," his poetic memoir of his personal and professional relationship with the artist.

Zukerman was devastated. But he finally used the funds that he had amassed in order to purchase the painting to open CFM Gallery, an elegant exhibition space at 112 Greene Street, in Soho. It was here that Zukerman presented his first show of Fini's work, "The Artist as Designer," and, in 1997, a year after her death, memorialized her with her American retrospective. It was here, too, that Zukerman mounted other shows in the intervening years that reintroduced her work to the American art scene just in time to reveal her relevance to the resurgence of the figure in postmodern painting. And it is here that the superb retrospective, "Leonor Fini: A Life in Art" can be seen during the month of December.

Such is the extraordinary quality of this exhibition overall as to make one wonder all over again why an artist of this caliber, acknowledged as a peer during her heyday in Paris by Cocteau, Genet, Dali, Picasso, was virtually ignored on these shores before Zukerman made it his mission to gain her the attention she so obviously deserved. It seems almost too glib to offer as an explanation the sexism that has hampered and even aborted the careers of so many worthy woman artists, since Fini has always made a point of transcending gender. Indeed, she took female as well as male lovers and it seems more likely that it was sex itself rather than sexism which put some of the more puritanical (not to mention hypocritical) forces in the art world off her work, given the frank Sapphic salaciousness of many of her paintings of slender young women as beautiful and sexy as any human animal has any right to be.

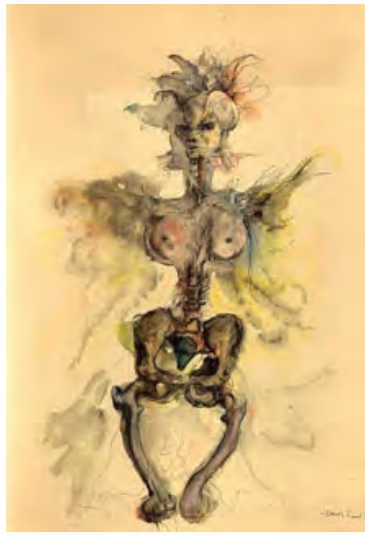
Nor does one wish to play amateur psychologist and speculate that Fini, who was born in Argentina and spirited away to Trieste by her Italian mother as an infant, may have been deeply affected by the fact that, as a child, she was disguised as a boy whenever she left her home to avoid being abducted by her father. For as with everything about Fini, her choices of lovers and subject matter, as well her willfully eccentric behavior and sometimes self-defeating refusal to play along with art world fashions or etiquette are much too complex to sum up simplistically.

Suffice it to say that everything about Leonor Fini personified the irrationality of genius. And genius is evident in everything that she painted or drew, ranging from major oils on canvas such as "L'entre deux," in which the young beauties are depicted in explicit dalliances, to small, exquisite pen and ink drawings, such as "Etude pour Les Etrangers," an image of an actual feline with such knowing eyes that it suggests a self-portrait. (Perhaps because she resembled them, and adopted many of them, felines were a frequent subject for Fini; however, none of her "chats" are cute or in the least anthropomorphized. Rather, it was obviously their wild, untamed qualities with which she identified.)

Even in her less explicit oils such as "Rasch, Rasch, Rasch, Meine Puppen Warten" and drawings such as "Pieta"—the former a group of half-dressed Lolitas lounging around in a stark sensorium, the latter a pair of voluptuous nudes in a proximity pose that appears anything but holy—are charged with an over-

"Tristan und Isolde" 1978 Oil and Oil Pastel on Board 20" x 30"
NOTE: Painted for the Metropolitan Opera's 1978 Season and used as a poster for their production of Tristan und Isolde.

"L'Entre deux" 1967 Oil on Canvas 28" x 45.5"



"Ange Sphinxe" 1948 Water Color 13" x 10"

"Bete de la Mere" 1961 Original Lithograph Edition of 8 18" x 15"

riding eroticism.

None of which is to suggest that Fini can be stereotyped as a solely erotic artist, but that rather, like all great lovers of beauty, she eroticisized all of existence by virtue of a pervasive aestheticism and a personal mythology that permeated every subject she approached and every area in which she worked, from painting, to printmaking, to book illustration and theatrical design.

The armature on which the greatness of Fini's entire oeuvre rests is her extraordinary draftspersonly abilities. No modern artist, including Picasso and Dali, ever drew more fluidity than she, nor with more classical grace. Her male figures and portraits were every bit the equal of her female ones, if not (to this viewer's eye, at least) nearly as comely or sensually evoked. And her painterly abilities ranged from a precise hyperrealism equal to that which we see in the most accomplished Surrealists and Symbolists (although she rejected all such labels as disrespectful to her uniqueness) to the surprising semi-abstract biomorphism that distinguishes "La Terre Escarlate," "L'Eau endormie," and "La Terre Fermentee," three luminous paintings from the first two years of the 1960s, which evoke fantastic terrains with a kind of lush, corrosive obsessiveness akin to Ivan Albright.

One can only lament the level of taste in an art climate that would favor a minor living talent such as Marlene Dumas with astronomical auction prices and an upcoming exhibition at MoMA, while an infinitely superior woman artist such as Leonor Fini has been deprived of such an honor, even posthumously. Until such time as Fini is finally given her proper due, however, we can at least be thankful that Neil Zukerman, who has amassed the most comprehensive collection of her work anywhere in the world, has given us this remarkable overview of her career at CFM Gallery.

—Ed McCormack

Danièle M. Marin: Revising Art History, Rescuing the Female Image

All too often the Feminist Art Movement is treated as a period in art history that started to gain momentum in the late 1960s, then peaked and finally faded a decade later, when the publicity surrounding feminism itself began to peter out. Some might debate the dates, but we'd all probably agree that placing the movement in a historical context was a handy way of dispensing with it prematurely, so the still mostly male art world powers that be could get on with business-as-usual.

For centuries, that business has involved ignoring all but a few token, or simply outspoken, women artists and subjecting the feminine image almost exclusively to the superficial, depersonalizing scrutiny of what even male art historians acknowledge as the "male gaze," which has traditionally rendered women as mute and decorative as the objects in still life painting.

Danièle M. Marin, who has never relegated feminist concerns to the backwaters of art history and whose exploration of the roles of women in art and society is a vital and ongoing endeavor, made this point graphically in the mannequin-like stances of the female figures in the series of paintings that dominated her recent exhibition "Rescue (Object Lessons)," at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street. In fact, the handful of actual still life paintings that Marin included among her more numerous figurative works made her message all the more clear, even while holding up admirably as objects of aesthetic delectation in their own right.

"Object Lesson #9"

In some of her previous exhibitions in the same venue, Marin dazzled us so with soft fabric sculptures, assemblages, conceptual texts, and installations that often included dress patterns, tailors' dummies, and other feminine accouterments, that one could become so distracted by the sheer sprawl and scope of her invention as to almost overlook what a truly fine painter she happens to be. Here, however, even more than in her 2005 solo show, where her paintings first moved toward the forefront, she not only showcases her painterly finesse but employs the whole idea of painting conceptually, to symbolize the modernist history from which women artists have been systematically excluded. Indeed, her earthy palette, stringently formalized compositions, and use of rectangular fabric swatches as collage elements, pointedly harks back to Cubism.

Yet even while referencing the conventions of modernism, Marin invariably introduces a narrative note that is decidedly postmodern, employing her tautly organized compositions as what she refers to as "a narrative arena of de / re/ construction." Like most ambitious artists Marin seems to prefer to speak of her work primarily in formal terms, stating that her surfaces are "a stage / space for communication between different techniques and images challenging the boundaries of spatial perception and moving toward the development of an active visual language."

But while this seems valid in technical terms, since her paintings are composed with complex overlapping planes and her figures and domestic props are often out of scale, she actually challenges a great deal more than "the boundaries of spatial perception," in terms of the subtext she provides about the position of women in what the late soul singer James Brown shouted so unabashedly was "A Man's World."

Although a few have photographic features grafted on like masks, most of Marin's female figures are faceless; perhaps so that female viewers may more readily see themselves in them; perhaps to emphasize their resemblance to the headless dress dummies with which they sometimes share the picture space; or maybe for both reasons simultaneously. Usually, they are seen in spaces that suggest affluent interiors, calling to mind the Victorian era song, "Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage." The implication is that nothing has changed: women are still status possessions, like the elegant furnishings that surround them—that, in Marin's compositions, bracket them claustrophobically, making their entire existences seem parenthetical, in spaces where blank walls and blackly yawning doorways appear as oppressive as the bars in a prison cell.

Some of her compositions evoke memories of 1950s furniture advertisements, wherein "happy housewives" were often pictured grinning idiotically as they showed off their new livingroom, bedroom, or diningroom sets, sometimes actually stroking or patting them like pets. This is particularly true of the acrylic painting called "Object Lesson #9," where a woman in an evening gown is seen leaning possessively against an old fashioned television console. However, since this woman's face is as featurelessly blank as her TV screen, one has no way of knowing whether she is grinning or grimacing.

In other paintings in the "Object Lessons" series to which Marin has appended specific titles, such as "Trading Places" and "Outside History," spatial tensions and disparities of scale imply psychological confrontations between women in interiors, hinting at the stereotypical feminine dramas of jealousy and competition that unfold in the soap operas which serve as cultural opiates, keeping woman from realizing their true potential.

Similarly, the obsession with body image that enslaves modern women in another way is addressed in "Exposed," an installation featuring a full-figured female nude divided (as though sawed in half in a vaudeville magician's stage illusion) between two canvases confined within taped boundaries, suggesting the barriers at a crime scene. Nearby, within a plexiglass box on a pedestal, the shape of a simplified dress evokes the outlines of murder victims that the police draw on the pavement at such scenes. Only, this one is on a platform inscribed with a witty rephrasing of a title by Virginia Wolfe ("A Dress of One's Own"), and on it sits a tiny, painted, paper doll on a miniature chair.

Indeed, the surreal wit that invariably informs Danièle M. Marin's paintings, as well as her installations, can be seen in "Light on the Subject," where the only male nude in the exhibition is seen sprawling as languorously as Goya's "Naked Maja" on a divan amid shadowy voyeuristic figures of indeterminate gender. Here, at last, Marin's "female gaze" daringly turns the tables on the tradition of the harem scene, as depicted in the 19th and 20th century "odalisques" of male artists such as Ingres, Delacroix, and Matisse.

—Ed McCormack

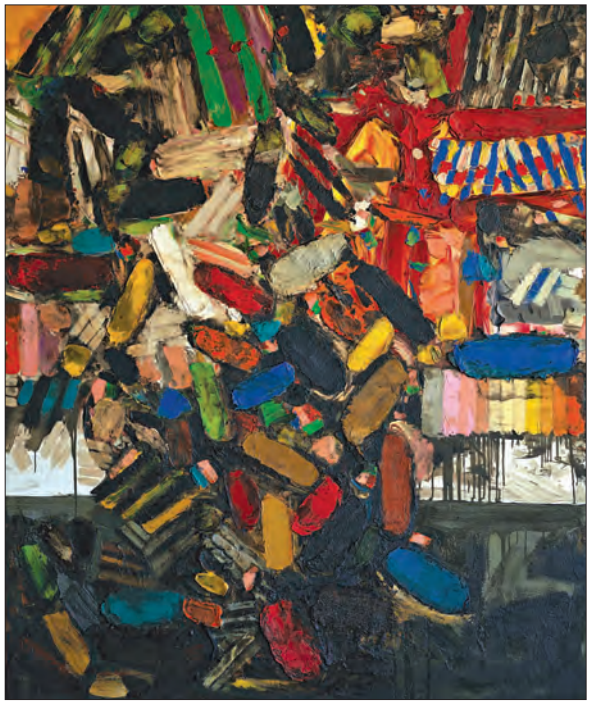
Ludvic Scales the Heights of Rapture in His "Rhapsodies" Series

Although the titles that abstract artists affix to their works are often arbitrary, chosen mainly as a means of distinguishing one series from another, in the case of "Rhapsodies," the latest sequence of paintings by Ludvic Saleh, best known as Ludvic, no other designation could possibly seem more felicitous.

For in painting, as in music, the term implies impassioned exaltation, as well as a certain improvisatory irregularity of composition. Thus it exemplifies the changes that have taken place in this artist's work since I last reviewed him in these pages in 2004, when Ludvic was the subject of two major exhibitions at The Hunterdon Museum of Art and the Zimmerli Art Museum, both in New Jersey.

Ludvic, who was born in Egypt, received his art education in Europe, and established his initial reputation in Canada, before coming to the United States in the mid-eighties, now resides in New Jersey, and his new exhibition, "Rhapsodies," is on view at The Gallery at 6th & 6th, 439 N. 6th Ave., Tucson, Arizona from November 3 through December 29, 2007.

It is for the sense of a latent lyricism set finally free that these majestic new works in oil and asphalt on canvas mark a significant departure from the mixed media works that Ludwig exhibited in 2004, in which rectangular steel plates, bolted to wood panels, were often the central motif of his compositions. In contrast to the stoic solemnity of those pieces, which impressed me mightily at the time and continues to resonate in memory, Ludvic's new paintings possess an exhilarating visual velocity and a grandeur of an altogether different kind.



"Rhapsody IX," 2007 Oil and Asphalt on canvas 72x60 in.

More than the work of most other contemporary painters working in the gestural mode, Ludvic's newest paintings demonstrate what the visionary Victorian art critic John Ruskin meant when, foreshadowing the salient characteristics of Abstract Expressionism by a full century, he wrote of the "inherent musical or harmonic element in every art." Perhaps because he apprenticed with three world class mentors —Karel Appel, Bram Bogart, and Marino Marini— during his tenure in Europe, Ludvic appears to have a deeper understanding of the true musical nature of abstraction than many of his contemporaries here and abroad.

In any case, there is a sense in Ludvic's canvases of how palpable materiality can encompass something contradictorily immaterial that we will call, for want of a better word, the "spiritual." It is this which imbues them greater depth than we have grown accustomed to seeing in abstract painting in recent decades. Invariably, when we think of depth, in either music or painting, we think of the more sonorous end of the chromatic scale, and indeed there is an almost Rembrandtian darkness to Ludvic's palette that complements the symphonic sweep of his recent compositions.

Witness, for example, the coloristic richness of the large work in oil and asphalt on canvas entitled "Rhapsody XI," where a deep brown ground plays host to visceral reds, fleshy pinks, strident yellows and other luminous hues, yet the sense of sonorousness prevails to establish the overriding mood. Here, too, Ludvic's painterly repertoire of marks and strokes is at its most varied. Yet even his most impetuous-seeming gestures serve as structuring devices— most particularly the intermittent units of regular interwoven stripes, placed close together four abreast, which function in a manner akin to crosshatching with which Jasper Johns knits some of his compositions together.

Ludvic, however, intermingles these structural elements (which function much in the manner of a Cubist armature) with untrammeled bursts of brilliant color that, in contrast to the explosive gestures that we have come to associate with much Abstract Expressionism, lend his compositions a sense of implosion. This inward unfolding is particularly pronounced in "Rhapsody IX," with its dynamically impacted forms and almost carnivalesque plethora of battling patterns and coloristic variations, ranging from deep browns and blues through bright pinks and other piquant pastel hues.

Like Jean-Paul Riopelle, a Canadian painter who spent most of his career in Paris, Ludvic often employs a palette knife to apply pigment straight from the tube, building up dense, taut concentrations of color and texture in the manner of Tachisme, the more suave and sensual European counterpart of Abstract Expressionism, with its emphasis on belle facture, or beautiful paint handling. The addition of asphalt to his pigments, makes Ludvic's surfaces even more tactile than most (as befit an artist who is also an accomplished and prolific sculptor), enhancing the physicality and presence of his canvases immeasurably.

In "Rhapsody X," for example, the textural contrasts are especially enticing, ranging from the creamy mass of brilliant yellow strokes laid down in sumptuous slashes of the brush, reminiscent of de Kooning, with which Ludvic opens up the center of the composition, to the grittier, darker, more densely textured areas at the top of the canvas. These uppermost areas appear torn loose, as though violently uprooted and set afloat from, the equally dark and more grounded areas at the bottom of the canvas. Here, too, the tautly interlocking stripes employed as a structuring device in the aforementioned "Rhapsody IX" have been replaced by longer, more sinuous green lines interlaced to form a flexible grid that enhances the sense of flotation at the top of the picture in the manner of a windblown net caught up in the painterly torrents, adding to the tumultuous quality of the composition.

Some of the qualities of the two previous paintings are combined especially effectively in "Rhapsody VIII," where Ludvic's color proves to be at its most vibrant and his textures are correspondingly sumptuous. For here, as well, there is a sense of ascension at the center of the composition, even though it is considerably more densely layered and weighty to the point of almost being top heavy. Nonetheless welter of bold strokes that grow more juicy and brilliant as they flow upward operate as a kind of visual whirligig. The effect can be likened to one of those cataclysmic natural events that lift and tear heavy objects asunder, then hold them aloft for a split second, rearranged into veritable bouquets that exemplify William Butler Yeats's brilliant term "a terrible beauty." Such is the beauty of Ludvic's sensuously resplendent new paintings, now that the lyricism once held firmly in check by formal constraints has at last been given free rein.

—Ed McCormack

Up Close and Personal With Anowar Hossain in His Studio

An open studio exhibition affords one the opportunity to encounter an artist in his or her natural habitat. The studio is an environment at once less selective and more personal than a gallery, giving one a privileged view of both the product and the process of the creative act. For the viewer, touring the work place of an artist often combines aspects of a retrospective, an installation, and performance art.

From the artist's point of view, to invite the viewer into the workplace is a gesture of trust and generosity. Like a magician revealing the secrets behind the illusions, such an artist is, in a sense, demystifying the act of creation. (For if an art gallery is essentially a theater for inanimate objects, then the studio can be compared to the backstage area, where the props that create the illusions are clearly in view.)

Anowar Hossain obviously feels no need for mystification, being a firm believer that "human life is fully intertwined with nature and the universe" and that the artist can have a beneficial effect upon humanity in a very direct way. Having exhibited widely in prestigious venues throughout Europe, Scandinavia, and the United States, Hossain is used to his work being seen within an official context and has nothing to prove in that regard either. He also happens to be more gregarious and articulate regarding his aesthetic intentions. So it should prove an instructive and enriching experience to visit his studio, at 44-02 23rd Street in Long Island City, which he is opening to the public with a reception on November 3rd, from 4 to 8 PM. (The exhibition will continue through November 30. Call 718 415 4594 or email hossainanowar@aol.com for further information.)

Hossain will be featuring his most recent paintings, which are usually quite large in the manner of the Abstract Expressionists who were his early heroes when he came to New York from his native Bangladesh in the early 80s to study at The Art Students League and the School of Visual Arts. Now an American citizen, he follows in the footsteps of Willem de Kooning and Arshile Gorky, foreign transplants who were major innovators of the most influential movement in the history of American painting. And while the postmodern era is also sometimes referred to as the "postmovement" era, given the absence of a prevailing trend, Hossain has already made a considerable contribution to today's more pluralistic art scene.

Although Hossain has stated "I believe that a true artist does not belong to a race, religion or ethnicity," his work indicates that he is nonetheless aware that he who discards his heritage completely becomes an exile from himself. He has always acknowledged being inspired by great Bengali forbearers

such as the Nobel prize winning poet and writer Rabindranath Tagore (who also painted in a bold expressionist style as a respite from his literary work), the celebrated film maker Satyajit Ray, and the famous sitar player Ravi Shankar.

Thus while this sophisticated painter of international scope makes no attempt to imbue his paintings, his work nevertheless reflects his national origins. Just as de Kooning brought the finesse of the Dutch masters to Abstract Expressionism, in contrast to Jackson Pollock's cowboy rawness, and Gorky was influenced by the baroque cursiveness of Armenian culture, Hossain calls upon the coloristic intensity of Indian art to a unique new flavor to gestural abstraction (itself deeply influenced by the Zen tradition and Asian calligraphy).

Hossain's strong color saturations fuse with his bold handling of form to invigorate both his large abstract canvases and his more figurative paintings in a manner which exemplifies the best features of the multicultural tendency in art today. What his work demonstrates most dynamically is that, now more than ever, painting has become a universal language. For along with a residue of his native culture and the inspiration of the New York School painters, traces of the Fauves —and particularly— Matisse further enrich Hossain's paintings of the female nude, to which he invariably imparts sensual immediacy, as well as an abiding awareness of the nude's role in art history.

Particularly powerful in this regard is one painting in which several nude figures, bathed in moonlight, cavort playfully in a tangle of torsos and limbs— which, in fact, verges on abstraction. Yet Hossain can command one's attention just as completely with a composition built on an arrangement of hefty earthenware vases, lending their curvaceous contours a similar sensuality, along with a formal cohesiveness that demonstrates how successfully he has also assimilated cubist structuring as an underlying formal armature.

Even in Hossain's most abstract paintings, vestiges of the human figure can often be discerned among the bold forms and color areas, laid down with a broad brush, that interact rhythmically in his canvases. Brilliant patches of color integrated with elegant linear elements lend his compositions an almost musical fluidity comparable to that in the ragas of the aforementioned Ravi Shankar.

Indeed, it is his ability to swerve from muscularly clotted passages of brushwork to flowing lyricism with a quick twist of the wrist that gives Hossain's compositions their undeniable vitality. Regardless of the subject matter or ostensible lack of it in any given canvas, one gets caught up in the sheer painterly exuberance of his brushwork, with its boldly overlapping shapes, fluid turns and dips, animated drips, and other evidence of the artist's hand reaching out to make a visceral connection with the viewer through the language of pure form and color.

In his eloquent and endlessly prolific oeuvre, Anowar Hossain creates a visual language that crosses all barriers to communicate a depth of feeling that is missing in a great deal of contemporary art. He has stated that painting is "like falling in love," and on encountering his work in the intimacy of his studio, it seems fairly certain that many viewers will agree wholeheartedly.

—Ed McCormack

Realist and Abstract Contrasts As enliven CLWAC's 111th Annual Survey at the NAC

That the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club, named for a 19th century philanthropist who was the only woman on the founding board of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, is one of the more stylistically varied arts organizations in the city was made immediately obvious by its 111th Annual Open Exhibition exhibition, seen recently at The National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South.

While realism was the dominant tendency among the veritable plethora of works displayed salon style in the NAC's two main galleries, there were also a substantial number of abstract and semi-abstract works on view as well, particularly in the sculpture gallery on the lower level.

It is a tradition of the CLWAC to feature an Honored Member Each Year, and this year's choice was Lucille Berrill Paulsen, known for her warmly engaging domestic portraits in oils or pastels, which combine snapshot immediacy with classical virtues. However, Paulsen also showed a more casually contemporary side in a witty mixed media piece called "Guarding the Fort," with an oil portrait of two children peering out of an actual crayon-scrawled cardboard box.

Among the many other realist paintings on view one that particularly stood out was "Ophelia," by Gabriela Dellosso, whose impeccable technique, handling of ornate period costumes, and ability to imbue her models with individuality, rather than adhering to aesthetic ideals, reminds one of the very best Symbolists and Pre-Raphaelites. By contrast, Nancy Pellatt's small still life of two deep red apples and a single feather on a white tablecloth, "Arkansas Blacks," recalls Chardin for the artist's ability to ennoble the humblest of subjects. Similarly simple, Merrilee Sett's intimate watercolor "Nestled," depicting a bird's nest cradling two delicate, pale blue eggs was a poetic tour de force for the artist's exquisite evocation of warm sunlight. Light as a conduit of atmosphere was also the piece de resistance of Rae Smith's "Morning Mist #10," which rendered a fleeting natural epiphany immutable in pastels.

Portraiture was a particularly strong subject in this year's show, as seen in Franke De Bevoise's oil of a young woman wearing a beret and standing with her hands in the pockets of her jeans in front of an elaborate Art Deco screen; another strong realist composition by Christine McBryan featuring three different views of the same man in close proximity as though they are having a conversation (although the images are divided in the manner of a triptych); Cynthia Harris-Pagano's strong self-portrait wearing the expression of a woman determined to probe beyond the pleasing symmetry of her features; and Anne Chaddock's intriguingly titled watercolor, "Living on Sponge Cake," zeroing in on a bearded outlaw biker wearing a devilish grin as he leans back in an almost prone position on his motorcycle. And Shin-Young An's "Clipping the 2nd Toenail" takes a novel approach, depicting the act described in the title with flawless anatomical accuracy and an actual newspaper collaged into the painting to catch the falling clippings!

Evelyn Dunphy's "Cloud Over Katahdin" depicted cumulonimbi devouring a mountain peak, translating a view reminiscent of misty Chinese scrolls into a distinctly Western watercolor style akin to Winslow Homer's breezy voluptuousness. Joan Rudman also employed the inherent freshness of the watercolor medium boldly in "The Clearing," to capture trees and foliage with crisp, unfussy realism, while Phyllis Tarlow's oil "A Winter's Stroll" evoked a companionable moment between a lone man and a dog, trudging through the snow at the edge of a forest.

Karen Whitman's big black and white linoleum cut "Rooftop Rhythms" showed her bold eye for gritty urban detail with a sweeping vista of brick facades, water towers and birds in flight. In "Snow Dusk," Emily Trueblood, another skillful exponent of the linocut medium gave us a poetic view of city buildings seen through a fine scrim of snowflakes and interpreted in subtle gray monotones. Susan Samet's large watercolor "Gingerbread" took off from the baroque details of a Victorian house set among pine trees to create a dazzling semi-abstract hard-edge composition that seemed a stylistic synthesis of Stuart Davis and Dong Kingman, albeit in her own distinct manner. Carol Z. Brody also approached abstraction through a concrete subject in "Party Papers & Ribbon V," where meticulously detailed windblown gift wrappings took on an illusion of velocity akin to Roy Lichtenstein's precise parodies of spontaneous Abstract Expressionist brush strokes.

As mentioned earlier, abstract forms of expression were more dominant in the downstairs sculpture gallery, where Jinx Lindenaur's blocky bronze "The Black Mountain" (which actually had a green patina and appeared carved in stone, rather than cast in metal) commanded space in a manner that belied its relatively modest scale. Also quite monumental, despite its intimate dimensions, was Janet Indick's "Jacob's Ladder" a minimalist bronze/aluminum piece consisting of two narrow vertical shapes intersecting at an angle. Holly Fisher's "Mammalia," as its title suggests, was a biomorphic monument to the female breast in smooth white clay with curvaceous contours that overflowed the pedestal. Then there were Phyllis Rosser's "Sea Waves," a rhythmic wall sculpture created with overlapping shards of curved driftwood, and Deborah Demitrish's "Primitive," a baroque form constructed from thousands of tiny puzzle pieces—both of which were notable not only for their auspicious use of materials but also for their formal qualities.

Sally Weiss seemed a kindred spirit of both Marisol and Saul Steinberg for her ability to combine found objects with figurative and abstract forms with lively, inventive visual wit in her mixed media sculpture, "Josephine." Jeanhee Kim's gravity-defying female nude in aqua resin, "At the Window" possessed the spare grace of one of Matisse's ink drawings fleshed out in three dimensions. Also working in aqua resin, Yupin Pramotepipop also made a strong figurative statement with her male nude "Bobby," which subtly synthesized the sharp angles of African sculpture with a more naturalistic mode of figuration.

Two other sculptors showed works in bronze that were intricate technical feats : Sylvia Jacobson with a figure of a dog walker trying to cope with six chaotic canines and Madeleine Segall-Marx with a whimsical creature-driven, creature-pulled coach, trying to go in opposite directions at the same time, worthy of Lewis Carroll!

Both exemplified the stylistic diversity that made the CLWAC's 111th Annual Open Exhibition one of our more memorable recent group shows. —J. Sanders Eaton

At Broome Street Gallery, the ASCA Fast Forwards Nearly Nine Decades

The longevity of the American Society of Contemporary Artists is not simply a happy accident. It has everything to do with the high quality of its membership, comprised of professional painters, sculptors, and printmakers selected by their peers to sustain the high standards that have been evident in the group's juried exhibitions for many years. "Focus Forward," the 89th Annual Exhibition of the ASCA will be on view at Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street through November 11.

Featuring works by sixty artists, the show will be juried by a panel that includes Hallie Cohen, curator and chair of the Art Department of Marymount Manhattan College, Nancy di Benedetto, art historian and critic, and Bob Keiber, author, curator, and professor of Art and Communications at Berkeley College, New York.

This should be a characteristically varied and stimulating exhibition, judging from a representative sampling of works that this writer was able to preview well in advance of the show, in order to make our publication deadline:

Known for combining figurative imagery with neatly lettered texts, Elvira Dimitrij will be showing a work in acrylic and oil on canvas called "Concentration." Executed with Dimitrij's usual realist meticulousness on a easel-size canvas in a square format that makes its scale seem considerably larger, the composition merges a fragmented close-up of a woman's face with the word "Reflecting," repeated in various type sizes. The effect is similar to certain works of decollage—especially by Italian artist of the Arte Povera movement who tore away layers of film posters glued one over the other, to reveal incongruous juxtapositions of imagery. However, Dimitrij achieves more deliberate interactions of image and text, akin to concrete poetry, through her meticulous trompe l'oeil technique.

Rose Segal Ibsen is one of our foremost exponents of traditional Asian ink painting and calligraphy, although she was actually born in Rumania and is now a naturalized citizen of the United States. Highly praised for her skill with the brush by contemporary Chinesen masters of her art form such as C.C. Wang and Wang Fangyu, who acknowledged her as a peer, Ibsen creates a vibrant synthesis of Eastern technique and Western gesturalism, in compositions that, while honoring the tradition she has adopted as her own, possess the immediacy of Abstract Expressionism. With its exquisitely spare composition and fluid handling of subtle monochromes, Ibsen's "Bamboo" is an especially fine example of her hybrid style.

Since the ASCA is an artist's organization, its officers are traditionally working artists themselves. Jessie Iwamoto, the association's current President, exhibits a vigorous oil on canvas called "Defeated Foe!" This canvas represents an intriguing departure from the lyrical manner of her earlier cityscapes. Closer in spirit to Willem de Kooning's "Woman," the graffiti-influenced style of Jean-Michel Basquiat, and the Art Brut figures of Jean Dubuffet, Iwamoto's new work is especially notable for a vigor that almost verges on violence. However, for all its frenzied Expressionist energy, Iwamoto also imbues this powerful painting with a coloristic sumptuousness and a formal elegance that belongs to her alone. Perhaps this aspect of her work, which endows even a strident subject with a unique beauty, fortifies Iwamoto's statement that her work emanates from "the angelic spiritual world."

Ray Shanfeld developed his distinctive sculptural technique at schools ranging from the Educational Alliance on New York's Lower East Side, where the legendary Chaim Gross once taught, to the Pietrasanta Marble Carving Studio in Pietrasanta Italy. His work combines a graphic approach to detail with a monumental sense of form , as seen in his white marble sculpture "The Chief." Although the features and feathered war bonnet of this powerful Native American head are rendered in a linear manner that gives the piece great surface interest, it commands space with impressive boldness.

Another fine sculptor, Raymond Weinstein takes a different approach in "Mother and Child," a work in Tiger Eye Alabaster with smooth, flowing contours that meld the two figures into a single entity, creating a material metaphor for the maternal bond. Weinstein's special gift is for conveying a strong sense of emotion with forms that, for all their severe reductiveness project a sense of the complexity of human relationships. Like the great British sculptor Henry Moore, Weinstein appears to believe that the intrinsic nature of the materials should dictate the form that evolves from them. Here, he employs a particularly distinctive type of marble to emphasize the organic unity between mother and child with particular effectiveness and employs strongly generalized forms to project a sense of the monumental on a relatively intimate scale.

That more than most contemporary painters Miriam Wills has strong ties to Cubism is a fact made evident not only in the formal thrust of her compositions but in the particular manner in which she integrates collage materials in her paintings. Like the Cubists, too, Wills consistently chooses the format of still-life as a solidly grounded launching pad for her abstract excursions. In her "Floral Medley Wonder #19," the sense of a lush bouquet emerges out of angular spatial divisions and a color scheme that skillfully balances visceral reds with more subdued earth colors and delicate yellow hues to create exquisite chromatic harmonies. Wills attributes the rhythms of her mixed media compositions to "musical or dance-like impulses," and indeed their seductive rhythms are what captivate the viewer most immediately, drawing him or her closer for further perusal of the many subtle pleasures to be found in her work.

The enchantment of an artist engrossed in his work at a portable easel outdoors is the subject of Sueyoshi Iwamoto's "Sunday Painter." As the title suggests, the man at the easel is an amateur—albeit in the very best sense of the term: one who paints, as the French say, for "for love."

However, it takes a serious, full-time painter of a certain caliber to lend such a scene the bucolic beauty that we see here, where the artist merges with the landscape he is painting as though in a pastoral dream. The clear blue sky, the lush green foliage, the clear waters of the little stream, the patches of sunlight and shadow on the green grass —even the crystalline quality of the air— are captured by Sueyoshi Iwamoto with a sparkling limpidity that most likely eludes the Sunday painter in the picture.

No matter: the enchantment of the creative act casts its spell over the amateur and professional alike. —J. Sanders Eaton

Organic Integrity in the Abstract: Faye Earnest's Intuitive Landscapes

Just as every country has its own culture, every landscape has its own characteristics, which artists interpret through their individual sensibilities in expressive and symbolic terms. Two opposing strains that have always been prominent in American landscape painting are perhaps best exemplified by comparing the ethereal romanticism of Fitz Hugh Lane, a leading "Luminist" who emerged in the third quarter of the 19th century, and the rugged modernism of Marsden Hartley, a pioneering modernist of the early 20th century.

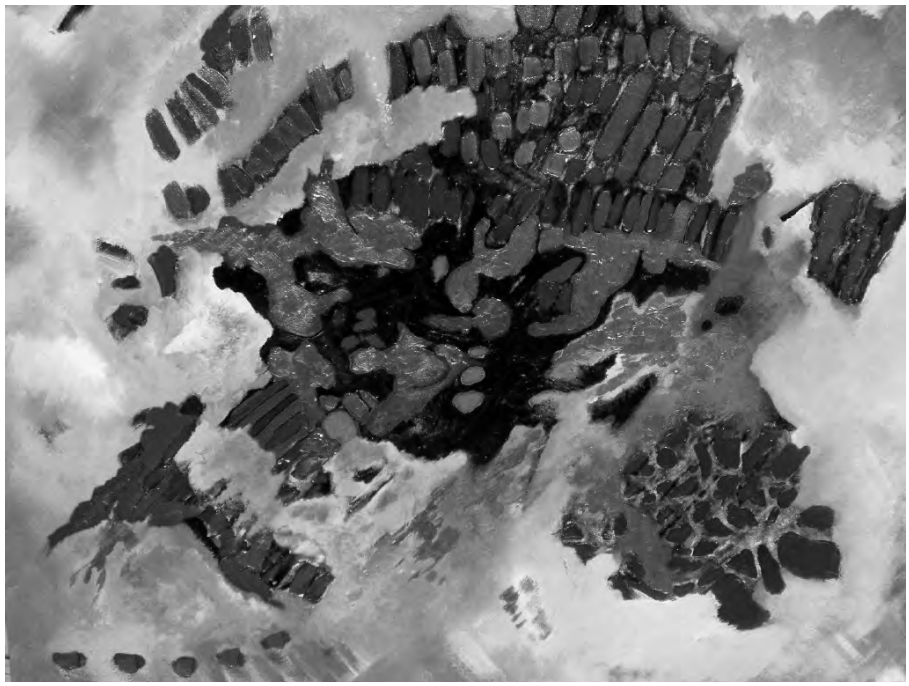
Faye Earnest, a contemporary painter from Alabama, is one of those rare artists who combines elements of both approaches, judging from the work she will be exhibiting at World Fine Art Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, from November 1 through 24, with a reception on November 8, from 6 to 8 PM.

In the romantic approach to landscape, the artist confronts the ineffable mystery of nature, while in the modernist one, the materiality of the terrain prevails. Earnest appears simultaneously smitten with the unknown and the down-to-earth aspects of nature in her large, bold paintings, which combine a sense of wonder and expansiveness reminiscent of the Hudson River School painters with qualities akin to the craggy abstractions of Clyfford Still.

Earnest's fascination with the purely physical properties of landscape comes across in titles such as "Stratification 4" and "Terra Cliffs," which refer to the mountainous forms that she builds up in low-relief in her thickly-pigmented compositions. Her paint textures and the earthy colors she often employs become surrogates for the earth itself, almost sculptural in their tactile richness. Precious few other painters employ encrustations of paint as effectively as Earnest to evoke the sense of an actual terrain.

At the same time, however, there is a deep sense of mystery in Earnest's paintings, particularly in compositions such as "Strata Rhythm," where a sense of more ethereal elements such as light and wind are evoked through subtly modulated colors and amorphous forms, conjured with a flurry of brush strokes.

In this regard Earnest seems a kindred spirit of artists such as Bill Jensen and Gregory Amenoff, for whom a writer for this publication once coined the apt term "New Naturists." For it is the underlying forces of nature, its internal essences rather than merely the lay of the land, that comes across in a painting such as Earnest's "Underground Anatomy." Here, too, she approaches a degree of abstraction that Richard Diebenkorn took up in 1967, when he abandoned his figurative mode and began to be inspired by, but not imitate, the terrain of a coastal area west of Los Angeles in his "Ocean Park" series.



"Terra Riverbend"

Indeed, "Underground Anatomy" demonstrates just how far a painter can go, in terms of abandoning the specific visual signposts and symbols that we normally associate with landscape while retaining a very definite sense of nature in the abstract, so to speak. Granted, although the title is suggestive of something subterranean, the bold, roughly rectangular forms, interspersed with more linear white shapes that suggest watery tributaries, could be interpreted as an aerial view of a flat, possibly Midwestern, terrain, with its ruddy reds and earthy ochers. But to Rorschach this composition so patly would be to narrow its inherent imaginative range.

Contemplating these paintings for any length of time, one comes to realize that, for all her fascination with the physical properties of nature and ability to evoke them through her tactile use of materials, Faye Earnest is a paradoxically metaphysical artist, as seen in "Terra Cliffs," where the dark, earthy forms of the land below and the luminous pink, yellow, and violet hues of the sky above are given equally palpable presence. This is one of her most dramatic paintings in its breadth and scope, taking in an entire vista of cliffs, clouds, and luminous auras in windswept strokes that meld the most substantial and ethereal elements of nature into a rhythmic whole. It is a composition of a symphonic sweep comparable to Thomas Cole's Hudson River panoramas, yet it's strongly simplified forms have a mystical, haunting quality akin to the the visionary canvas of Albert Pinkham Ryder.

One gets the impression that, like the latter painter, Earnest builds up her compositions over long periods of time, layering, scraping and scumbling their surfaces to varying degrees of transparency and opacity, and pulling their forms out from within, rather than superimposing them methodically. One could be wrong, but her shapes seem to evolve intuitively as a result of process rather than by deliberation or design, emerging organically, like growing things. Thus, the earthy encrustations of the aforementioned "Stratification 4," which appear to have been fortified chromatically through the introduction of metallic pigments or powers, and the gushing sense of movement in "Terra Riverbend" have an organic integrity that can only be a result of process rather than planning, of pure painterly instinct, as opposed to deliberation. The latter painting is especially exciting for the sense of movement that Earnest achieves through gestural means, stirring up sense of a frothy water rushing among rugged rock-croppings in a manner recalling the expressive natural evocations of Marsden Hartley and Arthur Dove at their best.

Like every conscious, aesthetically sophisticated artist, Faye Earnest builds upon the foundation of art history. But it is finally her direct response to the natural world that informs her art most deeply, making her landscapes come alive with a uniquely vital energy.

Carol Reeves: Still Life as Safe Haven

Matisse once said that he wanted his paintings to be "like a comfortable armchair for the viewer" and this seems a statement with which Carol Reeves might readily agree, judging from the amiable appeal of the paintings she is showing at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 20th through December 11. (Reception Thursday, November 29, 6 to 8 PM.)

What artists say about their work is never quite so simple as it sounds, however, and Reeves only arrived at her present tranquility after a period of soul searching when, straight out of art school, she wondered if a painter enamored of still life and floral subjects could still be taken seriously and attract a sophisticated art audience. Then she remembered a quote from Mother Teresa: "In this life we cannot do great things; only small things with great love."

Ever since, Reeves has attracted collectors and critical acclaim by doing exactly that: painting still life and floral subjects that offer the viewer at least a temporary respite from "the evils and suffering of the world." However, it is not simply her decision not to "add to the ugliness," as she puts it, that has won Reeves serious attention; it is the bold colors, daring compositions, and dynamic scale of her still life paintings which has enabled her to join the ranks of those postmodern painters who impart to realism a sheer visual impact that once belonged to abstraction alone.

The power of Reeves's work is immediately evident in her characteristically large canvas "Red Hot Red," a veritable symphony of vibrant cadmiums, which depicts a brilliant bouquet bursting from a glass vase set among other crystalline vessels and enraptures the viewer by virtue of the artist's way with light and shadow. Particularly impressive is Reeve's handling of the purplish shadows cast by the crimson flowers on the sparkling white tablecloth, which are rendered with such seemingly meticulous verisimilitude as to suggest photorealism. However, on closer inspection it is her restrained yet fluid brushwork, hardly enslaved to actual appearances, which brings the composition alive and lends it an abstract vitality quite equal to its convincing likeness of objects on a tabletop.

The same abstract vitality enlivens other pictures by Reeves as well, and is equally striking in compositions such as "Teacups II," where no natural elements are present to evoke a sense of life, except for the living light that gleams on the surface of the gilt-edged china cups lined up as though in a gala procession. It is part and parcel of Reeves's painterly facility that she can move easily between the fluid yet precisely detailed depiction of objects that we see in this and the aforementioned painting to the more Impressionistic technique she employs in still lifes such as "Starfish and Abalone," as well as in breezy outdoor floral subjects such as "Misty Pond #5" and "Hydrangea–Purple," where her brushwork is at its most loose and juicy.

"Teacups II"

Looking at and being transported by the paintings of Carol Reeves, one can only be grateful that there are still certain artists who celebrate the beauty that surrounds us and provide a safe haven, however temporary, from worldly care. —Lisa Rosenfeld

Leonard Baskin (1922-2000): Rediscovering a Major Humanist at Gallery St. Etienne

I first became aware of Leonard Baskin in the early sixties, while leafing through Selden Rodman's then controversial book *The Insiders: Rejection and Rediscovery of Man in the Arts of Our Time.*

Even in reproduction, the power of Baskin's sculptures, prints, and drawings was immediately undeniable. But I must admit that, as a young painter showing in one of the Tenth Street galleries, and still pretty much exclusively under the spell of The New York School, my enjoyment of his work felt like a guilty pleasure. Baskin was not exactly a name I wanted to drop while hanging out with my buddies at the Cedar Tavern, each of us trying to drink and posture like Pollock, de Kooning, or Kline.

Leonard Baskin. Glutted Death with Wings. 1982. Bronze. Signed and dated on base; foundry mark left edge. 33" (83.8 cm) high.

Still, Baskin's fierce, socially committed humanism was impressive then and has even more visceral impact now that time has taken its hammer and chisel to me. Now I can identify more readily with Baskin's ravaged, Job-like patriarchs. Since life, simply by being so mystifying, will make a mystic out of anyone who lives long enough, I can also appreciate more fully his Old Testament subjects, such as Isaac at the moment of his metamorphosis from beast to angel. And I experience a deeper existential shudder whenever I encounter one of his stark etchings of birds of prey, like "Black and Red Raptor," or fearsome symbolic figures, such as the bronze "Glutted Death with Wings, 1982."

I don't think anyone has summed up the power of Baskin's work more succinctly than Barry Schwartz did in his 1974 book *The New Humanism*, when he wrote, "Using single images without environments, Baskin explodes the existing myths of optimism and progress; he exposes modern man to a relentless vivisection. In doing so, Baskin revitalizes many of the myths found within the cultural heritage of Western civilization."

Baskin's work is in virtually every important museum collection here and abroad; his prints have a huge public following; the beautifully crafted limited-edition books he illustrated and issued through his Gehenna Press for over five decades (particularly his collaborations with the British poet Ted Hughes) are prized by collectors; and he has executed numerous important sculptural commissions, including the Holocaust Memorial, in Ann Arbor Michigan. Nonetheless, Baskin has yet to get his proper due among many art world tastemakers, to whom he did not endear himself during his lifetime by being not only at odds with, but openly contemptuous of, most formalist tendencies in contemporary art.

So it's about time we had a survey such as "Leonard Baskin: Proofs and Process," on view at Galerie St. Etienne, 24 West 57th Street, from October 9 through January 5, 2008. The show, which marks the gallery's debut as one of the Baskin estate's official representatives, explores the artist's working methods through interrelated proofs of his prints and also includes sculptures, watercolors, drawings, and an extensive selection of his rarely exhibited monoprints.

But its appeal is more than technical. For now that the advent of postmodernism has ended the dominance of any one style and opened up new avenues of appreciation for humanistic forms of expression, it offers a valuable reintroduction to an underappreciated American master.

—Ed McCormack

Contrasts of Size, Scale, and Proportion at Allan Stone Gallery

Claudia Stone knows the value of small things. But she also knows the value of gigantic things. As a little girl, her weekend outings often consisted of tagging along with her father, the late gallerist and inveterate collector Allan Stone, to a succession of artist's studios. Sometimes the bounty from their treasure hunts could be carried home in a shopping bag; at other times it might have to be delivered later in a van or even a trailer.

Reflecting that formative experience of eclectic proportions, "Talent 2007," seen recently at Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th Street, ranged from a huge porcelain and mixed media wall extravaganza by Martha Russo to the miniature Abstract Expressionist oils of Richard Schemm.

Created with thousands of ceramic tubes fitted into two enormous pegboards, Russo's "nomos" (the Greek root for both "to wander" and to "wonder") weighs 4,000 pounds and, wedged in a corner, takes up the better part of two walls. Yet Russo's obsessive tour de force projects a sense of organic mutation that awes even more than its size.

Although measuring a mere 4 x 4 inches, Schemm's vigorously streaked gestural compositions embody paradoxical disparities between size and scale, suggesting expansive vistas and furious natural forces with their scumbled, gemlike color areas and imploding compositions.
Coincidentally, Gina Minichino also works in a 4 x 4 inch format, in her meticulous and dramatic portraits in oil on panel of Catholic priests. In view of recent church sex scandals and cover-ups, the gaunt visages and taut expressions of her new subjects (a far cry from her paintings of cupcakes and "Twinkies"!) could either suggest the mortal strains of sincere soul-searching or the impenetrable mask of sanctimonious secrecy.

Two watercolors and one oil on paper by Robert Valdes depict desolate dunes and russet scorched-earth foliage with exquisite atmospheric finesse. Their somber, muted color harmonies and near-abstract compositions speak silent volumes about the unforgiving loneliness of nature in the raw, demonstrating once again Valdes's special gift for investing landscape with an emotional resonance that evokes the hidden qualities lurking within visible things. By contrast, Walt Jurkiewicz combines natural imagery with Minimalist form in his long, narrow oil on board of a panoramic horizon where verdant land meets bright blue sky.

Working in graphite on the blank insides of old book covers with a slightly weathered quality that tints them with a tincture of time, James Watkinson creates imaginary worlds wherein faint, fey figures enact confounding private rituals. In one especially intriguing triptych on three connected book covers, a procession of wraith-like sailors passes under a row of windows bearing long poles topped by model battleships.

Another postmodern conjurer of surreal allegories, Lauren Schiller's oils on panel put a Renaissance spin on the modern woman's obsession with body image and weight control. Schiller's "Renunciation" says it all, with a classically painted female figure wearing a prohibitive white cloth over the lower part of her face, as she stares longingly at the plate of food in her hand.

Marc Lambrechts's subtly nuanced neo-cubistic composition in oil on banana leaves on wood and Richard Haden's shiny carved mahogany and polychromed enamel object (simultaneously resembling a primitive mask and an armored breastplate) both employ unusual materials to emphasize the sensual pleasures of a craft aesthetic pristinely applied to the autonomous expressiveness of fine art.

Conversely, vigorous painterly qualities are invariably part of the mix in a gallery that garnered its initial reputation showing de Kooning and other masters of the New York School and still features the uniquely cataclysmic calligraphic abstractions of Nguyen Ducmanh. However, Judy Molyneux's thickly pigmented landscapes and David Wells Roth's shadow-saturated highways both hark back to the West Coast offshoot of the movement that produced painters like Richard Diebenkorn and Wayne Thiebaud (Allan Stone's first major discovery).

The gallery that introduced Cesar to the New York art audience also has a strong sculptural tradition that is upheld in various ways by David Barnett's delicate-as-a-butterfly "Tri-Plane"; Cheryl Ekstrom's, stainless steel "Large Bean Bag Chair" (a weighty answer to Oldenburg's soft sculptures); John R.G. Roth's "Evolved Organism" (a sleek shape in plaster, Styrofoam and sheet metal suggesting a new species of shark with built-in periscope); and Peter France's powerful bronze "Bull" (Ode to Allan)."

The latter work refers, of course, to Allan Stone, who left this earthly plane last year, but whose adventurous spirit of discovery persists in his daughter Claudia, the gallery's director and the curator of this handsome grab-bag of an exhibition.

—Ed McCormack

Noho Gallery's "Winter Auction": A Collector's Dream

Jerry Saltz's excellent article "Is Money Killing Art?" in a recent issue of New York magazine put its vulgar gesture finger on what now makes Chelsea less viable than it should be as a place where good art is nurtured and can be collected at reasonable prices. Saltz cites "third-rate art from second-rate artists" whose prices have skyrocketed into the $500,000 range as part of the problem.

The good news, for the time being at least, is that it's still possible to collect art that stands a good chance of appreciating without going broke, in artist-run galleries, of which Saltz writes, "Obviously they are as dependent on sales as other galleries. But their attitude feels more relaxed."

One of the longest running and best such venues is Noho Gallery, which opened its doors in 1975 and was originally located just north of Houston Street, thus the name "Noho." During its tenure in that location, the gallery gained such name recognition and art world credibility that it retained its original name, even after relocating, in 1975, to Soho, where it remained and continued to exhibit innovative art and get favorable notices for the next next seventeen years, before moving to Chelsea in 2001.

Now known as Noho Gallery in Chelsea, and located at 530 West 25th Street, the venue boasts a varied roster of first-rate artists— several of whom may yet command those six-figure prices that Saltz decries in the not-too-distant future.

All you have to do is guess which ones, since Noho Gallery in Chelsea, as it is now known, is offering new and established collectors a chance to acquire works by several among its strong stable of talents at outrageously low prices in its "Winter Auction," from January 2 through 26. (The opening bid on all works will be only $200. Bidding will be silent, submitted in writing, and will begin on January 2.) The reception is Saturday, January 5, from 4 to 6 PM. At the closing reception on Saturday, January 26, starting at 4 PM, there will be a final opportunity to bid silently. Then last chance bids will be called for orally and continue until 6PM, when the works will be distributed.)

Collectors of representational art may want to bid on one of Diana Freedman-Shea's atmospheric yet formally stringent cityscapes; Alexandra Corbin's witty narrative drawings or collages; Pat Feeney Murrell's animated lifesize handmade paper sculptures; Judith Zeichner Parker's solidly painted panoramic landscapes; individual painted or sculpted components of Siena Porta's sprawling installations; or Stephanie Rauschenbusch's sparkling scenic watercolors.

Other good bets are the stately architectural photo-assemblages of Leon Yost; the always intriguing conceptual objects of Chuck von Schmidt; Bruce Laird's lively, genre-spanning acrylic paintings; Myron Rubenstein's energetic mergers of fragmented figures and gesturalism; Rebecca Cooperman's intimate oils in which still life morphs into lyrical abstraction; Joy Saville's neo-impressionist abstractions; the emblematically dynamic geometric fiber art of Marilyn Henrion; the explosive calligraphic compositions of Sheila Hecht; Jeanne Lyons Butler's mixed media works in which drawing, sewing, and painting meld seamlessly; Virginia Davis's subtle explorations of painterly variation centered on the rectangle; the graceful linear compositions of Jessica Fromm; the earthy, meditative landscapes of Lynne Friedman; Tina Rohrer's dazzlingly intricate modular geometric works; Joan Zuckerberg's organic expressionist clay sculptures; Basha Ruth Nelson's shimmering, flowing aluminum pieces; and the fanciful yet seriously engaging hand felted stitched constructions of Erma Martin Yost.

In an event such as this, it seems inevitable even the highest bidders will take home bargains that stand to pay huge dividends, both in the aesthetic pleasure they afford and their possible future resale value.

—J. Sanders Eaton

Jacqueline Rosenberg's Aesthetic Mutations of Beauty and Power

The Dutch artist Jacqueline Rosenberg deals with issues of femininity from what might be termed a post-feminist perspective, in the photographic mixed media prints on canvas that she is showing at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November November 20 through December 11. (Reception Thursday, November 29, from 6 to 8 PM.)

"Hiding"

Rosenberg is well aware of being at odds with traditional sexual politics when she asserts that the women in her pictures are "strong, emancipated and sexy," adding that showing sensuality "is a powerful means to express emancipation, as opposed to the classical feminist that somehow denies femininity."

If this seems a controversial stance, it reflects Rosenberg's background as a fashion photographer whose personal aesthetic leans more toward the postmodern model of womanly empowerment personified by media performers and personalities like Madonna and Oprah Winfrey than the sexual politics of 1960s activists such as Betty Friedan and Kate Millet.

Although Rosenberg cites Picasso as one of her main inspirations, her style is more akin to Man Ray (who also earned his living as a fashion photographer early in his career), among other artists associated with the Surrealist movement, such as the painter and sculptor Hans Bellmer and the film maker Luis Bunuel, all of whom projected a similarly subtle eroticism in their images of women.

Being of a later generation, however, Rosenberg also brings an element of Pop to bear in her merger of glamour photography with brilliantly colorful abstract forms and patterns, particularly bold stripes and polka dots. Although she also creates sensual anatomical anomalies in some of her prints focusing on the nude female body, some of her most powerful compositions feature close-ups of beautiful women's faces variously fragmented and bejeweled.

The idea of decorating the faces of her subjects in such a manner may date back to her professional work as a makeup stylist. However, she launches it into the realm of the surreal in her fine art pieces, which, by virtue of being embellished with mixed media and printed on canvas break down the barriers between photography and painting.

In Rosenberg's fanciful piece, "Lips," the model's eyes are covered with a black strip (suggesting either a blindfold or the black strips used to obscure the identities of the participants in pre-liberated pornography) and her full lips are entirely covered with tiny red dots. By contrast, in another print called "Hiding," it is the lower portion of the woman's face that is covered, as if by a veil, albeit one decorated with a riot of polka dots that rhyme visually with the shapes of two crystalline orbs which substitute for the irises of her beautiful eyes.

In some works, such as "Do Not Tell," and "Purple Eye," the faces of the models are variously altered with elements that range from jewel-like objects placed strategically in unexpected places to graffiti-like markings that appear to have been scrawled directly on their flesh, while in others, such as "Big Eye," certain features are grotesquely magnified.

Rather than distorting her subjects, however, each of the radical alterations that Jacqueline Rosenberg imposes upon her models somehow enhances her feminine mystique and lends her the power of a gorgeous mutant goddess. —Marie R. Pagano

Stefania Carrozzini Takes a Curatorial Walk on the Wild Side

To mount an art exhibition called "Wild" is a brave, and some might say futile, endeavor, in an era when sensationalism has become such second nature that ambitious curators are willing to do anything —even drop their drawers!— to capture our attention. But although she has never been timid, the enterprising young Italian artist, journalist. critic and curator Stefania Carrozzini, who organizes shows for D'Ars International Exhibition Projects, based in Milan, is too cool and classy to crudely court controversy. Besides, as her characteristically thoughtful catalog essay makes clear, the dictionary offers many subtly shaded definitions of the word "wild ," most having to do with some aspect of nature rather than untoward behavior.

All of which lead Carrozzini (who has a Hitchcockian habit of making a cameo appearance in her shows via the catalog covers she personally creates for them, this one a dazzling collage of variously patterned animal pelts) to conclude that wildness is not only a natural component of our makeup, but "is actually the true source of the creative process," i.e., "Our ultimate aim is freedom to express our inherent nature and so wild creativity ensues." And she makes a quite convincing case for her thesis in the group show "Wild," featuring several established and emerging Italian artists, at The Carrozzini von Buhler Gallery (CVB Space), 407 West 13th Street, from October 30 through November 13.

Stefania Carrozzini

One of the true discoveries of the exhibition is Alessandro Paseri, a young artist who has been exhibiting his video and audio projects since 2001 and whose main theme is "the human body seen and used as a symbol of relations between Man and contemporary society." Paseri, who lives and works in Milan, is a broadcast editor for TV movies and documentaries and he puts the skills sharpened in that profession to use in his personal video projects, such as "Stupid Mirror Effect," in which images of human faces and bodies— the former fanning out in duplicate as in a Kaleidoscope and the latter floating like a phantom in a snowy landscape— are juxtaposed simultaneously on a split screen. The sense of metamorphosis and mutation in Paseri's pieces projects a powerful physical metaphor for how one is psychologically torn by the demands of family, society, and personal relationships.

Another innovative video artist and photographer, Stefano Reja, is known for exploring the theme of dispensing with feminine stereotypes in favor of "a new womanliness. More recently, however, Reja has moved on to an even broader subject in his project "Research on Race," based on his belief that, in the natural course of events, in the not too distant future (due, one assumes, to global gallivanting) there will be only one race. Here, he makes this prediction a reality in four lamda photographic prints in which the features of various ethnicities are superimposed to create imaginary multiracial portraits of single individuals.

Almost impossible to classify for the eclectic range of her endeavors, Carla Abbondi is a dancer, a painter, a photographer, and a sculptor who works in a variety of materials including metal, plexiglass, optical fibers and pure light, each work in every medium—but particularly her "luminous sculptures"— focusing on the concept of "Time Suspended in Curved Space." Sound metaphysical? Well, why not? Abbondi just may be the postmodern descendent of Pittura Metafisica, albeit with a high tech sci-fi spin, as seen in her transcendent piece "Alma Blanca-Bodylight," with its glowing, translucent shapes suggesting a gossamer cosmos of soap bubbles.

Then there is Giovanni Garasto, another multifaceted talent known for his photographs, watercolors, collages and poetry, who personifies the theme by focusing on the natural wildness of children with his photograph of a cute but feral-looking little girl. Although the square tiles of the pavement receding behind her make clear that she is an inhabitant of the city, her tousled hair and alert sidelong glance suggests a wild child attuned to the lore of the jungle—or at very least a streetwise urban urchin embodying all the instinctual vitality that far too many of us lose to maturity.

The painters in "Wild" generally approach the theme through energetic, visceral expressions of color and gesture, as seen in the acrylics on canvas of the Sicilian artist known by the mononym of Mella', who attributes the intense brightness of her palette to the three years that she spent in the sunny French environs of Nice and Monaco. Mella's painting "Wild 3" is an especially vibrant composition created with a veritable vortex of bright primaries in a linear manner that suggests Hundertwasser's brilliant spirals, albeit liberated from specific subject matter. Mella's abstract swirls suggest that she has harnessed nothing less than the wild energy of the sun.

His uninhibited use of color, texture, and gesture qualify Pierluigi De Lutti, one of whose paintings is also in the collection of MoMA in New York, for inclusion in this show. However, the juicy, glistening, thickly encrusted reds that dominate De Lutti's enamel on canvas "Warm Soul" are both fiery and sumptuous, visceral and elegant, despite being as eviscerated as Soutine's sides of beef. For all the splashes, drips, and violent painterly action, De Lutti's composition is sustained by a solid geometric foundation. Rectangular shapes reminiscent of Hans Hofmann's formal armatures provide an architectonic arena for De Lutti's gladiatorial carnage.

Ivan Bono also works in enamel but in a much different manner, employing neo-primitive symbols of his own devising— such as the simplified beast in his composition "Wild" (apparently painted especially for the show), as well as elements of graffiti ala Basquiat, to create lively juxtapositions of the funky and the refined, the raw and the sophisticated. Although influenced early in his career by the instinctive approach of Mario Schifano, Bono has evolved his own distinctive style, enabling him to epitomize the show's theme so blatantly by stenciling the title in white onto his canvas, yet undercut it with a jagged white lightning streak in a gestural flash of witty self-parody.

It is further testament to Stefania Carrozzini's curatorial cunning that she tops off "Wild" with a straightforward realist painting of a spotted leopard's head by Gianluigi Alberio, a sophisticated former Bauhaus researcher who converted from the avant garde to became an actual wildlife painter. Thus with a single inspired stroke, Carrozzini "re-mainstreams" a genre artist in a single stroke, proving once again that, in the contemporary art scene, context is everything! —Ed McCormack

A Global Photographic Survey Comes to Chelsea

International trends in contemporary art photography are featured in "Tripping the Light Fantastic," at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 20 through December 11. (Reception Thursday, November 29, 6 to 8 PM.)

Mexico's Alfred Esparza makes an impressive debut in his first exhibition outside that country (where he had no less than four solo shows in 2007), with haunting black and white prints focusing on themes of isolation and alienation in the modern world. Chile is also well represented in photographs of Trinidad Mac-Auliffe whose photos of painted human bodies focus on vulnerability while adding a wry new wrinkle to the historic relationship between photography and painting.

Roberto Grilli, a Czechoslovakian-born photographer now living in Ireland, finds inspiration in the raw natural beauty of his new home, which he sees as a source of creative renewal as nourishing to his spirit as the fiery sunsets and sunrises fill his pictures with vibrant color and light. Japan's Rei Niwa, on the other hand, finds inspiration closer to home in his pictures of festivals where people in traditional costumes gather to celebrate their culture, even while ironic hints of modernity often intrude.

Picturesque vistas of her native French Alps are viewed from an emotionally resonant subjective angle, often verging on abstraction, in the photography of Mary Mansey, who frankly confesses that much of her work centers on her own romantic struggles. By contrast, the Colombian architect and photographer Adolfo Orozco celebrates nature and the rituals of his Indian culture from a more objective angle in images that range from the serene to the explosive. Then there is Italy's Paola Tarasconi, who captures candid urban interactions revealing facets of the Italian natural character through subtleties of stance and gesture in relation to the surrounding architecture that hark back to the Venetian scenes of Canaletto.

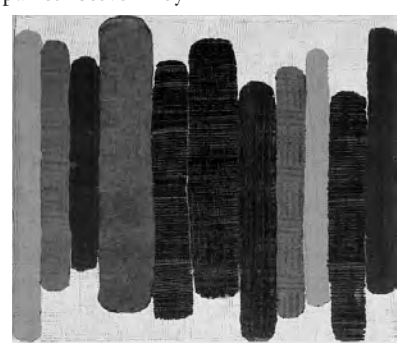
Cariappa Annaiah, who was born in India but recently became a citizen of the U.S., takes a more formal stance in his still lifes, which amount to "portraits" of a single lily, and appear akin to Mapplethorpe for their pristine delineations of sensual shapes, albeit further enlivened by this photographer's exquisite sensitivity to the nuances of color. Coloristic magic also figures prominently in the work of the Hungarian photographer Judit Rigo, also known as J. Thrush, who achieves a unique limpidity in her views trees and foliage in verdant bloom and eye-boggling watery reflections that lend her landscapes a vertiginous beauty.

Conversely, there's a gothic quality to the black and white imagery of New Zealand photographer Stefanie Young, whose "theatre of space" often transforms her human subjects into players in dynamic phantasmagoric dramas with a somewhat ominous atmosphere. Joe Zammit-Lucia, a British photographer and former physician, gains our sympathy for the endangered animal species that he chooses for his subjects by virtue of a clarity of composition that raises documentary and wildlife photography to the level of high art.

Gary Auerbach's fairy tale castles, Native American portraits, and nocturnal images in photogravure all reveal the timeless atmospheric qualities that made his work appear very much at home among that of masters like Stiechan, Strand, Durer and Goya in a recent museum exhibition near Geneva. Equally engaging in another manner, the color and black and white photographs of Indiana's R. John Ferguson, such as a self-portrait consisting of the photographer's shadow cast on a snowy-limbed tree, unearth the magic in the commonplace. Also including images in color and black and white by Perri Hart, a naturalist and photographer who combines a unique visual wit with her love for the great outdoors, this is one of the more varied and comprehensive photographic surveys we are likely to see this season. —Maureen Flynn

Starkly Striking, Steven Foy's Paintings Strip Beauty of Illusion

Like Jonathan Lasker, the contemporary American painter to whom he seems most related, the British painter Steven Foy is concerned with a synthesis of the natural and the artificial—or as he himself puts it, with "man-made order and organic growth, and the tension between the construction of the painting, like an industrial process, and the growing of something in nature from seed."



"Arrangement No. 23"

Born in the industrial city of Manchester, now living and working in Kent, Foy has exhibited widely throughout England and is just now beginning to make inroads in the American art scene with his inclusion in the year round salon at Montserrat Gallery, 547 West 27th Street, in Chelsea.

Foy's work presents a refreshingly welcome answer to much that has become trendy in so-called postmodern painting, being about as feistily modernist and minimalist as art can get nowadays, with its concentration on austere forms that he invariably refers to as "Arrangements" (apparently to disabuse the viewer of any expectation of subject matter outside the material components of the composition itself). However, he often favors the triptych, a familiar format for Christian religious iconography, which connects him more or less with a much more venerable tradition in Western art. This, too, seems deliberate, since Foy is obviously a sophisticated, historically aware painter with a keen sense of the traditions that his type of work endeavors to simultaneously contribute to and overturn.

Foy works in acrylic paint on raw cotton duck, the roughly woven texture of which becomes an integral element of his work, not only for its tactile qualities —most particularly the enhanced materiality that it contributes to his paintings— but also for the literal grid that it provides as ballast for his formal arrangements of rudimentary elements. These generally take the form of rectangles, circles, or elongated lozenge shapes that he positions on the canvas in frontal manner, emphasizing the flatness of the picture plane.

Illusion is verboten in Foy's work. As Frank Stella once famously stated, "What you see is what it is." This is indeed the inviolate ethic of determined modernists such as Stella and Foy. In other words, the beauty of the thing is in its innate "thingness," and you meddle with that at risk of creating an aesthetic falsity. Even when he speaks of nature, you will notice, Foy refers to it in terms of process; as something "growing from seed," and when he speaks of painting it is of its "construction," rather than its creation.

For Foy these would appear to be important considerations, and they demand utmost attention from the viewer who must take this work on its own terms. But for those who are willing to invest the effort, the rewards are many. Exquisite spatial relationships between simple forms and interactions between unmodulated areas of color provide subtle pleasure. And even without extrasensory or literary pretensions, these stripped down elements provide a poetic frisson akin to that in certain works by more allusive abstract predecessors such as Paul Klee.

In Steven Foy's paintings, however, there are no allusions; nor are there any illusions. Their integrity lies in the simple acceptance and appreciation of things as they are.

—Wilson Wong

Art is the Gift that Keeps on Giving in an Italian Show at Carrozzini Von Buhler Gallery

Assuming one is not being overly generous toward the impulse to make art— which can as often involve egotistical and material self-gratification as altruistic intentions— it can be said that all art is a gift offered for the enjoyment, and even enlightenment, of the viewer. As usual, however, the intrepid artist, journalist, critic, and curator Stefania Carrozzini, who organizes exhibitions for D'Ars & IEP International Exhibition Projects of Milan, New York, and Beijing, is not content to merely let it go at that. She finds cosmic significance in the presents we give to each other in her characteristically thoughtful catalog essay for "The Gift," a group show of Italian artists on view at The Carrozzini Von Buhler Gallery, 407 West 13th Street, from November 14 through 27. (Opening reception: November 15.)

"The cycle of giving and receiving is naturally connected with the harmonious, abundant, and loving flow of the universe," Carrozzini writes. "It does not attract negativity and has no relationship to precise, predictable, calculable, functional and cold relationships. Giving is the deep essence of Democracy. Gifts connect us to the society and to the world. When we breathe, we inhale and exhale the air in a continuous movement, in and out. We receive air into our body, giving and receiving, an involuntary action every single moment. It's a cycle."

Carrozzini's own gift to the exhibition is a color photograph, reproduced on the catalog cover, called "Valentina's Hands." An image of a stream of water pouring into two cupped palms, it bespeaks the more miraculous aspects of gift-giving that supposedly emanate straight from Heaven, evoking memories of holy water, baptimism, anointed saints, healing miracles and other notions that can give a lapsed Catholic the willies. Very Italianate, very cosmic!

Stefania Siragusa, on the other hand, evokes images arguably as heavenly, if not quite as holy, with her painting of a glamorous blond woman crouching in skin tight red Spandex pants and off-the-shoulder dishabille, swathed in bubble wrap and tied with a yellow ribbon. Known for her work in plastic, paper, lights, and sound, Siragusa lives and works in Cosenza, where she was born, and if this piece is any indication, she is possessed of a trendy post-Pop, post-Punk sensibility.

Then there is Andrea Schianchi, whose photograph, "Giving – Receiving" shows a man in a leather jacket, meditating in the lotus position under a giant tree. Born in Parma in 1967 and known for "Poetography," a marriage of image and text accomplished with a Leica camera, black and white film, and a Parker pen, Schianchi, who has written for the theater and published books of peripatetic street photography, exemplifies the Italian branch of the Casual Conceptualist movement.

All too often in theme shows in fashionable districts of New York City such as Carrozzini Von Buhler, at the very intersection where the Meatpacking District meets Chelsea, there is no place for intimate works in traditional media. However, Massimo Lomasto's aquatint etching "The Gift" is a pleasant surprise, attesting to the curator's catholic tastes and talent for connecting the dots in ways that make her exhibitions as intriguingly intricate in their ramifications as Chinese boxes. For like Carrozzini's own photograph on the catalog cover, Lomasto's print depicts a stream of water, albeit in a tall vertical format, flowing into a subtly modulated blue field and creating a gentle little whirlpool. This modest vision by a mature artist who lives and works in Milan, where he is known for his oils, watercolors and etchings, is indeed a gift to the viewer, reminding us of the special charms of small treasures.

The versatile artist Grazia Lavia presents an installation comprised of a red dress, red roses, and photographs, among other odds and ends. But the single component that caught our eye was an obscured body of text, either book or magazine, bound with string and covered with some wonderfully gooey waxen substance of an especially brilliant red hue. It has the startling effect of a heart, torn from the artist's breast in a moment of passionate excess and offered to the viewer in all its gory glory. What gift could possibly be more symbolically generous or apropos of the theme than this visceral Valentine?

Often the artists Carrozzini handpicks rally around the theme by creating works especially for the exhibition. Some in this show, besides the aforementioned Andrea Schianchi, have even gone so far as to name their artworks "The Gift": Christian Unti, a former fashion designer from Tuscany who became a fine artist because he wished to explore deeper themes than can be expressed by the raising or lowering of a hem-line, excels at "objecthood." Here, he makes the point that most gifts are normally objects of one sort or another by offering a glass box containing weird green lumps of something that appears to be of a mineral nature but is decidedly un-gemlike. In fact, they resemble green turds wrapped with thin black thread and seem bound to draw aghast gasps from the fortunate recipient. The preciousness of the presentation calls to mind some of Joseph Cornell's obscure poetic caprices and suggests that this artist's heart belongs to Dada, if one may be permitted to offer a bad pun as a gift to the reader.

"Objecthood" is also an important consideration in the work of Rosaspina Buscarino Canosburi, born in Bergamo, whose pieces bridge the gap between painting and sculpture. Her technique apparently involves the dense layering of oil paint on paper on canvas to create minimalist wall pieces possessed of a hefty, opaque presence that makes one think of the Japanese penchant for gift presentations which privilege the wrappings over what's inside. Here, however, the corrugated surface and its sleek blue sheen are tactile delights, proving that "skin deep beauty" can be its own reward.

Born in Brescia, Clara Scarampella shows an abstract photograph of what could be a section of a sand painting or some other object with a sensuousness simultaneously chromatic and tactile. Since the textural elements are illusory and cannot be experienced through the sense of touch, perhaps Scarampella means to make the point that not all gifts are what they are cracked up to be; yet what is held back may make them all the more tantalizing

Then there is Fiorenzo Barindelli, trained as an architect, proficient as a painter of impressive geometric purity, who presents us with a pristine central rectangle intersected by interlocking curves. Not only does this meticulous hard-edge composition provide subtle coloristic pleasure, as its title "Luminescenze in Trasparenza" suggests, but if one wishes to stretch a point and attribute literary meaning to a work so adamantly abstract, it could be reminding us that solid relationships can be born from the womb of a box.

Metaphysical mumbo jumbo? Why not? Isn't the freedom to indulge in such far-fetched speculation one of the most important gifts that art bestows?

—Ed McCormack

Gerald Murphy (1888—1964), Razor, 1924, oil on canvas.
Dallas Museum of Art, Foundation for the Arts Collection, gift of the artist (1963.74.FA) © Estate of Honoria Murphy Donnelly/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

GERALD MURPHY, LOST MODERNIST: Living Well Was Not Enough

by Ed McCormack

Few people are more annoying than those pseudo-sophisticates who confuse conspicuous consumption with culture, so called "life-style" with art. Whenever Frank Bruni, the chief restaurant critic for the New York Times comes on the classical music station and starts spewing his pretentious gastropornography, I can't help fantasizing about him in Hell, being force-fed foie gras for eternity.

Nor have rich people whose main claim to fame is knowing how to "entertain" ever been of much interest to me. So I have to admit that, until very recently, I was only peripherally aware of the legendarily stylish couple featured in *Making it New: The Art and Style of Sara and Gerald Murphy*, published by the University of California Press, in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name at the Williams College Museum of Art, in Williamstown, Massachusetts.

I knew that the Murphys were wealthy American expatriates, reputed to possess great style and charm, who palled around with F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Pablo Picasso, and just about everyone else who mattered in Paris in the 1920s and entertained them royally at Villa America, their seaside chalet in Antibes, on the French Riviera. I had also heard that they were the real-life models for Dick and Nicole Diver in "Tender is the Night"—although the main characters in Fitzgerald's novel about a jazz age marriage dissolving in alcohol had always struck me as Scott and his mentally unstable wife Zelda in thin fictional disguise.

Then again, considering all that I now know about what eventually befell the Murphys, it seems more apropos that another friend of the couple, Archibald MacLeish, would later say that he "couldn't help thinking of them as models" when he wrote "J.B.," his stage play based on the Book of Job.

* * *

Like a lot of people, I first read about the Murphys in Ernest Hemingway's memoir *A Moveable Feast*, where he refers to them dubiously as "the good, the attractive, the charming, the soon-beloved, the generous," then lowers the boom, saying, "Under the charm of these rich, I was as stupid as a bird dog."

Later I would learn that the Murphys had actually been quite supportive of Hemingway, setting him up in a studio in Paris when he broke up with his first wife Hadley and had no place to write. They had also been loyal patrons of Fitzgerald, graciously putting up with his drunken antics and even paying his daughter's tuition to Vassar. But because I took Hemingway at his written word when he implied that their wealth had somehow had a corrupting influence on his life and work, I dismissed them as opportunistic dilettantes. So, when a paperback copy of *Living Well is the Best Revenge*, Calvin Tomkins's book about the Murphys, came my way, I read it primarily for anecdotes about their more illustrious friends.

At the time, I doubt that I even made a conscious connection between the Gerald Murphy in Hemingway's book and the artist who painted "Wasp and Pear, 1929," an oddly compelling still life I had been admiring in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art for years; it was almost as though they were two different people.

In fact, Murphy may have been more or less interchangeable in my mind with Patrick Henry Bruce, another American expatriate who lived and worked in Paris during the same period, but lacking Murphy's social connections, was even more obscure. Although Bruce's paintings, influenced by the Fauves and Orphism, were a far cry from Murphy's precise style, I tended to think of them in the same breath because, as with Murphy, I was familiar with only one painting by Bruce: "Objects on a Table, 1920-21," in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This made them both equally mysterious and tantalizing to me.

Like Murphy's, Bruce's compositions were also based on still life, but they were nowhere near as detailed or precise. Influenced by Orphism and the Fauves, Bruce troweled pigment onto the canvas with a palette knife, building up thick, smooth surfaces with confectionery pinks, purples, and blues that shone like gelato.

I only learned while researching him in connection with this piece on Murphy that there were even more striking parallels between the lives of the two artists: By 1932, Bruce had also given up painting; he destroyed most of his work and left Paris for New York, where he committed suicide in 1937, the same year that a final misfortune ended Gerald Murphy's expatriate idyll for good and he committed what can only be referred to as artistic suicide.

Sara Murphy, with her legendary pearls draped over her back for sunbathing, and Ada MacLeish (under umbrella), La Garoupe beach, Antibes, 1924.

Gerald and Sara Murphy Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. © Estate of Honoria Murphy Donnelly/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

* * *

"The one thing that would take the curse off the project from my point of view would be the writer's interest in Gerald as a painter," John Dos Passos wrote back to Calvin Tomkins, after Tomkins began contacting old friends of the Murphys regarding the magazine article that would later become his book.

"Dos Passos's suggestion failed to register with me," Tomkins would later confess. "In my New Yorker profile on the Murphys, which came out in 1962, there is only one paragraph on Gerald's painting."

Such a lapse would be inconceivable if not for the fact that Murphy's entire oeuvre consisted of a mere fourteen canvases, of which only seven survive. Four of them, however, have found their way into major museum collections, including those of Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. And John Russell, the former art critic for The New York Times, is by no means alone in his opinion that Murphy made "a distinct contribution to the history of modern American painting."

Deborah Rothschild, the editor of the book and curator of the exhibition, enlists several other writers of similar mind to bolster her claim that "Gerald, who began studying art only after arriving in Paris, is increasingly recognized as a significant painter, even though he produced just a small body of work."

The artist and writer Trevor Winkfield, whose meticulous hard-edge post-Pop paintings clearly show Murphy's influence, places him in classical company, saying, "Like Poussin, Gerald Murphy elevated his paintings' attributes to the level of mythic objects, on a level with regalia." Kenneth Wayne, Chief Curator of Collections and Exhibits at the Heckscher Museum of Art, calls Murphy's paintings "quintessentially American, with their references to Precisionism, commercial sign painting and billboards," adding, "As important precursors of Pop art, they can be considered masterpieces of American art."

With only a photograph of the exhibition installation to go on, Rothschild tells us that "the monumental, pared-down simplicity" of a huge canvas Murphy showed at the Salon des Independants just a year after he started painting, "makes the other paintings look fussy and old-fashioned...."

Less convincing are Rothschild's efforts to make life-style a substitute for art, when she writes, "Moreover, as a couple, the Murphys were conceptual / performance artists avant la lettre ,"and concludes that, for them, "life itself became a work of art, prefiguring modernists such as Joseph Beuys, Allan Kaprow, David Hammons, and Rick Lowe, who have viewed the artist as a vehicle for expanding our awareness of life—someone whose role is to redefine the terms and conventions of artistic practice without necessarily leaving a single object behind."

Judged by those permissive standards, Gerald Murphy is seven objects ahead of the game. And Rothschild was able to borrow the handful of surviving paintings on which his reputation rests, along with a selection of works by Picasso, Braque, Cocteau, Leger, Gris, and others. But since the bulk of the show consists of photographs, documents, and other ephemera, and some key pieces are available only in reproduction, the book, which also features several lengthy essays and memoirs, offers almost as comprehensive an overview of the the couples' milieu.

However, that Sara—who had style and artistry to spare but was not, strictly speaking, an artist—gets first billing in both versions of *Making it New: The Art and Style of Sara and Gerald Murphy*, indicates that even for the editor and curator the couple's social legend continues to upstage Gerald's artistic contribution.

* * *

If the actress Clara Bow was known to the general public as the "It" girl of the Roaring 20s, to a smaller, more exclusive segment of the international avant garde, Gerald and Sara Murphy could have been called the era's "It" couple. But exactly what, one may ask is "It"? Joseph Roach, in his amusing recent book of that very title, explains, "To have 'It,' the fortunate possessor must have that strange magnetism which attracts both sexes," and certainly the Murphys qualified on that count, given their broad circle of male and female friends and admirers.

Roach's description of one "It" man, Dorimant, the foppish protagonist of George Etherege's 1676 novel *The Man of Mode*, who insists that the folds of his "mighty pretty suit hang just so" and declares "I love to be well-dressed and think

it no scandal to my understanding," calls to mind Gerald, who, as Rothschild tells us in her catalog essay, "would carry his belongings in a square of brightly colored fabric, so as not to disturb the strict line of his suit."

A photograph of Gerald in Venice sporting one of his dapper get-ups and dangling such a bundle from one hand almost exactly mirrors "Man with Hat," a semiabstract oil by Fernand Leger, Gerald's first artistic mentor in Paris, making clear what the art historian Wanda Corn meant when she described Gerald as "a walking machine age abstraction."

Sara, who wore her pearls even at the beach and favored diaphanous PreRaphealite-looking garments over flapper wear, was as sartorially original as her husband and even more pedigreed, being a daughter of the wasp industrialist aristocracy, while he was merely the lace curtain Boston Irish Catholic heir to the Mark Cross Company, purveyors of luxury leather goods. Five years older than Gerald, it was Sara who, in 1921, after her husband had completed his military service and studied landscape architecture at Yale, decided that they should decamp with their three small children, Honoria, Baoth, and Patrick, from East Hampton to Europe to escape, as she put it, "the heavy hand of chaperonage."

When they arrived in Paris and encountered the work of Picasso, Gris, and Braque for the first time, Gerald— who had no intention of entering his family's business, which he dismissed as "a monument to the nonessential"—is said to have said to Sara, "If that's painting, that's the kind of painting I would like to do."

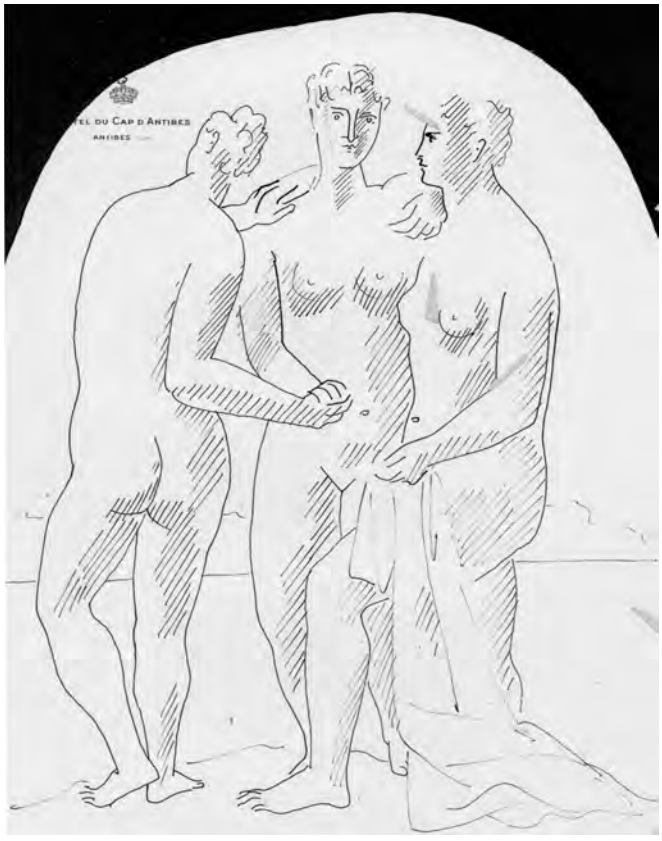
Before long, Gerald was studying painting with Natalia Goncharova, and under her supervision, he and Sara were helping to paint sets for her fellow Russian expatriate Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Few theatrical interns, however, could afford to host a party on a barge on the Seine, as the Murphys did after a performance of "Les Noces," and meet the entire Paris avant garde en masse in a single evening.

"That evening, Picasso was fascinated by Sara, a beautiful and effortlessly enchanting hostess, with a real gift for mixing luxury with bohemian spontaneity," Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington writes in her biography *Picasso: Creator and Destroyer.*

"He admired the miniature toys she had placed on the tables instead of flower arrangements; he watched Stravinsky trying to leap through a wooden laurel wreath; he chatted with Cocteau dressed as a captain and Chanel sporting a short haircut that was to launch a new fashion among women. He stayed until dawn broke over the Seine and the party was over."

Initially enraptured by Sara, Picasso became close to her husband as well. Assuming they both meant it as more than a patronizing pat on the back for a superb host, Picasso seconded Leger's opinion that Gerald was "the only American painter in Paris." Pablo and his wife Olga, a ballerina with Diaghilev's company, became frequent guests at Villa America, where their son Paulo often romped in the surf with the Murphy children.

Here, too, as a comparison of snapshots taken on the Murphys' private beach with some of his drawings from the same period reveals, Picasso was inspired by Sara's style and beauty, which he mythologized in a series of graceful neoclassical ink sketches, including one of a nude bather wearing pearls.



Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881—1973) The Three Graces, 1923, India ink drawing on Hôtel du Cap d'Antibes letterhead, Marina Picasso Collection (Inv. 3171)
Courtesy Galerie Jan Krugier & Cie, Geneva, Switzerland. © 2007 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Meanwhile, Gerald was making his own progress as a painter, exhibiting yearly in the Salon des Independants, and garnering favorable reviews in a number of French art journals as, well as the International edition of the *New York Herald Tribune*. Perhaps referring to "Razor, 1924,"a still life juxtaposing a Mark Cross fountain pen, a razor, and a box of safety matches, Jacques Mauny wrote in L'Art vivant that Gerald's work "shows us clearly the beauty of the instruments of daily life executed with perfection." Decades before Abstract Expressionism was to be touted in similar terms, the same critic enthused that Gerald's work signaled "the beginnings of the American aesthetic."

Eighteen feet high by twelve feet wide, Gerald's "Boatdeck, 1924" was the sensation of that year's Salon des Independants. Now "lost" (although it taxes credibility that something so gargantuan could be misplaced inadvertently), this monument to transatlantic travel combined, from all photographic evidence, the smooth technique and sharply defined forms of Precisionism with an aggressive scale and a bland grandeur prophetic of Pop Art. Indeed, Gerald's understated showmanship when reporters cornered him at the Salon would have done Andy Warhol proud.

"If they think my picture is too big, I think their pictures are too small," Gerald quipped to a reporter, then stated just as jocularly to another scribe that he was "sorry to have caused such a bother with my little picture."

Although Jimmy Stewart had yet to make his film debut, one can almost imagine Gerald delivering these lines in a similar gee whiz drawl to play into patronizing French stereotypes of American audacity, as he had done so sensationally a year earlier, with his stage-set for "Within the Quota," the parodistic ballet he'd created with his former Yale classmate Cole Porter: a gigantic tabloid front page with the headline "UNKNOWN BANKER BUYS ATLANTIC."

* * *

"Life itself has stepped in and blundered, scarred and destroyed," Gerald Murphy wrote to Fitzgerald in 1937, following the death of both his sons. "In my heart I dreaded the moment when our youth and invention would be attacked in our only vulnerable spot—the children."

Gerald never painted again after his youngest son Patrick was diagnosed with tuberculosis just before his ninth birthday in 1929, making the considerable impact that the stock market crash had on the family's finances that same year seem meaningless by

Three Graces pose (Left to right: Rue Carpenter, Sara Murphy, and Ginny Carpenter), Antibes, c. 1923.
Gerald and Sara Murphy Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. © Estate of Honoria Murphy Donnelly/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

comparison. The Murphys immediately left Villa America for a six-room suite in a combination hotel and sanitarium in the Swiss Alps that the writer Donald Ogden Stewart, who visited them there, would later liken for its palatial gloom to the retreat in Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain*, published just two years before Patrick took ill.

"The memory of a night with the gay Murphys of Paris and Antibes in that rarefied cold silence of 'and here's to the next one to go' atmosphere of death is one of the most terrifying of my life," Stewart would recall years later.

Fitzgerald (whose wife, Zelda, was being treated for a nervous breakdown in a nearby psychiatric clinic) and Hemingway also visited. But it was Dorothy Parker who had helped with the move from Villa America, who gave the most affecting account of that bleak period in a letter to Robert Benchley.

"Christ, thinking of all the shits in the world, and then this happens to the Murphys," Parker wrote, lamenting "that morbid, turned-in thing that began with his giving up his painting," and going on to describe Gerald's doting devotion to his stricken son as "absolute immolation."

By 1935, the family was staying in Saranac Lake, New York, where Patrick could have the duel benefits of the mountain climate and an excellent TB clinic nearby.

"Patrick is on the mend, definitely," Sara wrote to Hemingway, and her optimism seems reflected in the cheerful primaries of "Patrick Murphy in Bed, Seranac Lake, 1935," an almost cozy-looking drawing in colored pencil and crayons of the child nestled with his sketch pad among blankets and pillows by Leger, then on a sojourn in the U .S. But the artist's grave concern for the boy is mirrored more accurately in a portrait by Patrick, who had developed into a fine young artist during his years of being bedridden with little else to do but read and draw. It shows Leger, who had always been like a big jolly uncle to him, sitting by his bedside, looking as doleful as a basset hound with his pitying eyes and downcast mustache.

Later the same year, the Murphys were dealt a blow they could never have anticipated, when their older son Baoth, who had always been the more hearty one, came down with spinal meningitis while away at boarding school and died suddenly at age 15.

Gerald was still in a deep depression two years later, when Patrick went into a coma and lost his long battle with TB, and Fitzgerald, obviously unaware that no amount of eloquence can ever salve such grief, sent a letter, saying, "The golden bowl is broken indeed but it was golden; nothing can ever take those boys away from you now."

For those of us who have suffered the loss of a child (as my wife Jeannie and I did in 1993, and which I have written about at length elsewhere, so will not go into here), and for whom the only comparable shock is that such a loss is not fatal for the parents as well; that one continues to wake up in the morning and is obliged to go on living, life is forever divided into two parts: Before and After.

Following the death of both his sons, Gerald Murphy's Afterlife involved going to an office in Manhattan every morning to run the family business that he had once called "A monument to the nonessential."

* * *

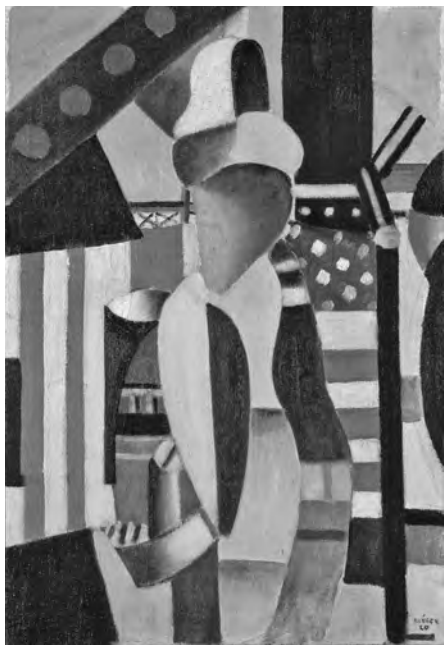
"I've been discovered. What does one wear?" Gerald Murphy quipped in 1960, when five of his paintings were included in a group exhibition at the Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts called "American Genius in Review No. 1."

Discovered is hardly the word for it. Although he was obviously pleased with the flurry of interest in his work after decades of obscurity, one can only wonder what Gerald, who died in 1964 (eleven years before his beloved Sara) and was honored posthumously with a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art ten years later, would have thought about how postmodern art historians with a gender agenda have started speculating about his sexual orientation: Was he a closeted gay, as an essay by one Kenneth E. Silver in the new book suggests, or a prototype, several decades ahead of his time, of today's new breed of "metrosexual" male?

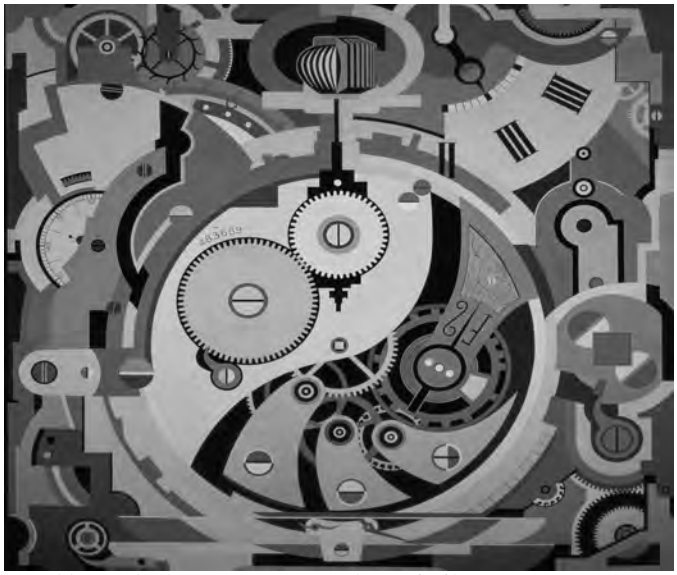
The title of Silver's essay, "The Murphy Closet and the Murphy Bed," indicates that he has already made up his mind, as does its lead sentence: "If there's an aspect of Gerald Murphy that still needs to be set free—and of which he was, as he himself believed his whole life long, the prisoner—it's his queerness."

Yet Silver admits to having no clue as to "whether Gerald Murphy led an active homosexual life or simply fantasized about doing so." How he knows what Gerald fantasized about doing is as mystifying as how he can say what Gerald believed himself to be a lifelong "prisoner" of, since Gerald himself never did. Then again, Silver implies a supernatural gift for reading between the lines when he tells us that, some time after reading *Living Well is the Best Revenge*, he realized that the book was "a queer palimpsest to be decoded."

In the same subjective spirit of fabulation, Silver submits into evidence a photograph that he describes as "Gerald on the terrace of Villa America, a giant bouquet held up



Fernand Léger (French, 1881—1955), Man with Hat, 1920, oil on canvas.
The Baltimore Museum of Art, Gift of Cary Ross (BMA.1940.63) © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.



Gerald Murphy (1888—1964), Watch, 1925, oil on canvas, 78 1/2 x 78 7/8 in. *Dallas Museum of Art, Foundation for the Arts Collection, gift of the artist (1963.75.FA) © Estate of Honoria Murphy Donnelly/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY*

across his midsection, implying, as if he were a showgirl at the Folies Bergere, that flowers alone assured his statuesque modesty." He tells us, "There are also several photographs of Gerald in a cowboy hat and chaps, taken out west when he was there with Hemingway—this is a half-century before Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of the gay leather scene."

Silver thinks it quite significant that "Gerald's best friends at Yale were Cole Porter and Monty Woolley, both of whom were famously gay later in life, although Porter, like Gerald, married and married well."

The comparison to Cole and Linda Porter's marriage of convenience (and especially the snide inference of the phrase "and married well," as though Gerald had been a gold-digger without his own family fortune) seems especially spurious, since Gerald and Sara's union was hardly a sham; it was a model of romance to all who knew them, producing three children and lasting until Gerald's death, after which the sorrowing Sara declared that she was "only half a person without him."

Surprisingly, for someone who identifies himself as a gay man, Silver seems to indulge in the same kind of stereotyping used by homophobes, equating Gerald's sense of fashion and love of costumes with effeminacy, presenting his friendships with gay men as proof of his own homosexuality. (If such circumstantial evidence were conclusive, one can only wonder why the political opponents of presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani— who roomed with a gay male couple for awhile after his marriage broke up and, on more than one public occasion, got dolled up in drag—haven't already sicced an art historian on him!)

Silver also harps on the fact that Gerald alluded at times to a mysteriously unspecified "defect" in himself. Granted, it may not all be as pat as the couple's daughter's, Honoria Murphy Donnelly makes it sound in her 1982 memoir *Sara and Gerald: Villa America and After*, when she quotes Gerald confessing to Sara in a letter "I have always had the knowledge that I lacked something that other people had, emotionally." But whether Garald was hinting at unaccepted bisexuality, insecurity about his masculinity, some form of sexual dysfunction such as impotence, or simply a vague sense of inadequacy ingrained by his businessman father, who disapproved of his artistic leanings and repeatedly demeaned him as "a great disappointment to me," we have no way of knowing.

That Gerald could have been bisexual should surprise nobody at this late date. And given the less than enlightened attitudes that still prevailed among the American expatriates of the 1920s toward "fairies" (a favorite epithet of both Hemingway and Fitzgerald) and Gerald's patrician background, it should be even less surprising that he would be reluctant to declare himself as such, and might even consider it a "defect."

Still, to define him up as simplistically as Silver does for the sake of political expediency would be to completely discount the long and loving heterosexual relationship that was obviously central to his existence. Shoving Sara (who gave no more evidence of marital infidelity than did Gerald) out of the picture so completely seems not only misleading but ungentlemanly.

Perhaps Gerald's real defect was the lack of belief in his artistic vocation that made him give up painting altogether, rather than letting it be his lifeline after tragedy struck.

"I was never happy until I started painting," Gerald said in his later years; yet that, as far as anyone knows, he never picked up his brushes again after the loss of his sons suggests the kind of penance only an Irish Catholic, no matter how lapsed, can impose upon himself. Had he persevered, working through his grief, and letting it inform and strengthen his art, rather than willfully abandoning what had brought him his greatest happiness, he might have given art historians (and just about everyone else who has written about him since Silver's essay was published, including me) something more substantial to speculate about. As it stands, however, the handful of excellent paintings that he did produce are now almost as certain to be upstaged by sexual politics as they once were by his and Sara's social legend.

* * *

In 1937, Gerald and Sara returned to New York City with their sole surviving child, Honoria. They took an apartment within walking distance of the Mark Cross Company on Fifth Avenue, as well as the Museum of Modern Art, from which, according to his friend Archibald MacLeish, Gerald averted his gaze as he walked to work each morning. (If only he had genuflected instead!)

It is said that he took a solitary lunch each day at Schrafft's, a now defunct chain restaurant with a dowdy but genteel atmosphere where the elderly Irish waitresses, in their black dresses with white collars, resembled nuns.

* * *

(The exhibition "Making it New: The Art of Sara & Gerald Murphy"continues through November 11 at the Williams College Museum of Art, before traveling to the Yale University Art Gallery in February and the Dallas Museum of Art in June).

Dellamarie Parrilli's "Reflections" Light Up Madison Avenue's Ezair Gallery

Although Dellamarie Parrilli's exuberant drip technique and the expansiveness of her compositions invariably calls to mind the idiom of Jackson Pollock, the chromatic qualities in her work are considerably more subtle in the manner of Jules Olitski's Color Field paintings. That said, the spirit of Parrilli's work is actually closer, for its open-ended sense of inner exploration, to that of the French poet/painter Henri Michaux.

This has never been clearer than in Parrilli's new exhibition at Ezair Gallery, 905 Madison Gallery, from November 1 through 30, with a reception for the artist on Wednesday, November 7, from 6 to 8 PM.

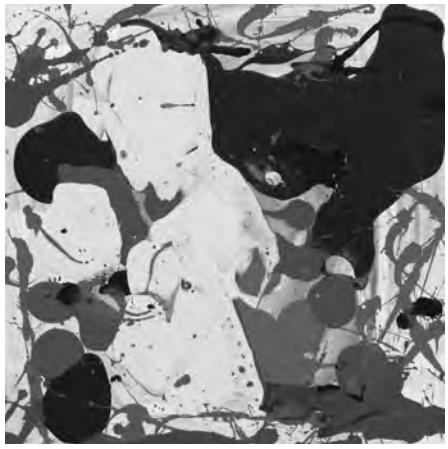
As the very title of the show, "Reflections: Within and Beyond," indicates, Parrilli's work, like that of Michaux, is very much about states of consciousness. However, unlike that of the French artist, Parrilli's consciousness has never needed to be expanded through the use of mescaline or other psychoactive substances. Experience itself provided more than sufficient impetus for creativity in the form of a serious illness which initially ended Parrilli's promising singing career and prompted her to discover her more enduring vocation as a painter.

Having begun her career as a visual artist on a spiritual footing, Parrilli has continued to climb toward the light, so to speak, and to celebrate the divine in an oeuvre which seems to grow more radiant with each succeeding exhibition. Indeed, her power as a colorist is such that it often appears that she has dipped her brush in liquid light rather than physical pigment.

This is especially true of Parrilli's most recent canvases, in which she appears to have abandoned for the most part the thick, scumbled textures she once achieved with a palette knife, in favor of building up her surfaces by pouring and layering skeins of diluted oil paint that lend her canvases greater gestural velocity than ever before.

Often, she lays down calligraphic lines over densely spattered grounds in a kind of dance that gives the impression that her brush never actually touches the canvas. Rather, although she exerts extraordinary control over her compositions, it appears that the color fairly flies off her brush and lands exactly where she wants it by virtue of some miraculous combination of unerring aim and intuitive muscular coordination.

Fans of Parrilli's work have long been familiar with her unique skills as a colorist, especially when it comes to combining a ubiquitous purple hue— intricately spattered concentrations of which often provide the ground-color in her compositions— with strident oranges, fluorescent greens, blues, and other unlikely-yet-complementary color combinations, to create her characteristic chromatic fireworks. However, a real departure from Parrilli's familiarly dense and intricate concentrations of spatters and drips can be seen in a group of recent paintings dominated by large, bold areas of bright primaries.



Dellamarie Parrilli

In these compositions, brilliant blobs of pure color adhere to the two-dimensions of the picture plane with intriguing biomorphic suggestiveness, their flowing, sensual contours indicating an exciting new development in the work of this adventurous and constantly evolving painter. It is always exciting to anticipate what Dellamarie Parrilli will do next, and these paintings, in particular, are a real teaser, suggesting that we still have much to look forward to.

—Ed McCormack

Inner and Outer Worlds Meet in "Sights & Insights"

Ten emerging artists were featured In the recent West Side Arts Coalition exhibition "Sights & Insights," co-curated by Pamela Belen Flores and Ava Schonberg at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street.

Shirley Z. Piniat showed small dark oils in which trees intersect with houses and spectral figures appear here and there, scurrying between areas of shadow. Like grainy visions from a dream, Piniat's oils project a sense of atmospheric mystery with boldly simplified forms and somber colors.

Elinore Buckholtz's acrylic paintings are at once fanciful and aesthetically engaging. Angular shapes suggesting city buildings with eyes for windows project urban mystery by virtue of the artist's ability to impart an anthropomorphic quality to architectural elements, while putting a new spin on cubism.

Passionate emotions are held in check by a paradoxical formalism in the color field paintings of Pamela Belen Flores. Fiery red and yellow hues, juxtaposed with darker colors and streaky forms, explore a plethora of moods and emotions, as indicated by ironic-seeming titles like "Silent Treatment" and "Not About the Boy."

The "Feminine Mystique" makes its presence strongly felt in the watercolor portraits of Terry Berkowitz, despite their pale colors and delicately delineated forms—or perhaps because of them. In any case, Berkowitz's paintings have a decidedly visionary quality and are poetically compelling.

In a triptych of mixed media collages, Dana Lynn superimposes cut out photo-imagery of various birds and their speckled eggs over a celestial map. The effect of this "Atlas of the Heavens," as the artist calls it, is lyrically akin to Joseph Cornell's box constructions, albeit in two dimensions.

Flat color masses and starkly stylized figures lend striking clarity to the acrylic paintings of Ava Schonberg. Her "Conversation About Milton A" is both a visually witty tribute to an older painter (Avery) and a highly original composition centering on the backs of two seated figures watching the sun sink into a sharply defined horizon-line.

Elke Albrecht's oils on paper have a forceful gestural velocity, with jewel-like colors bolstered by vigorous calligraphic elements. In one composition, a simple outline of a chair can be discerned; however, most of Albrecht's paintings evoke the morning hours in abstract terms with auspicious freshness.

In Madi Lanier's drypoint etching, "One With Nature," the softly silhouetted figure of a woman leaning back against a tree presents a pastoral epiphany that epitomizes the title by virtue of the symbiotic relationship of the different elements in the composition. In other works by Lanier human and landscape imagery merge harmoniously.

Edward Neiger presents the viewer with two oils on canvas featuring almost identical realist portraits of a young woman in a head scarf. The crucial difference is that the background of one painting is covered with soft gray washes, while the other reveals a burning city, creating a contrast that lends the juxtaposition a poignant, thought-provoking power.

Kathleen Gibbons creates pastels and oils in which still life and city subjects take on an almost metaphysical dimension, given the artist's unique angle of vision. Although Gibbons's interiors have a delightfully skewed, claustrophobic intensity, her "Hudson River Sunset I" is a sumptuously lyrical breath of fresh air.

—J.C. Byers

Mugging for the Camera: Portraits and Anti-Portraits

The human visage in all its diversity was the dominant subject of "MugShots," a recent photography exhibition curated by Deena Weintraub and Jennifer Holst for the West Side Arts Coalition, at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street.

Deena Weintraub's iconic portraits make modern people mythic, transforming a contemporary young woman with windblown hair into a Botticelli or an elderly woman in her garden into a fairy tale character. Conversely, by isolating porcelain figurines in the manner of portraits, Harriet G.Green removes them from their banal origins and infuses them with individuality that transcends generic titles such as "Naughty Boy" and "Party Girl."

One of Laurens McKenzie's pictures turned a dancer into an almost abstract whirl of movement. However, it is in her sharp-focused portraits of thoughtful young women, with the dramatic use of light and shadow that McKenzie makes her most revealing statements. Janice Wood Wetzel captures another aspect of femininity in a quartet of images of proud black women in colorfully patterned African regalia, each smiling broadly and wearing a crown-like turban that accents her queenly dignity. More deliberately than most of the pictures in "The American Snapshot 1888-1978," a recent exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, in Washington D.C., Irmgard Kuhn's small, intimate images of family and friends make the point that the most casual-seeming pictures can resonate beyond their context.

Then there are pictures that are almost as painful as they are necessary to look at, such as Harry Peronius's series memorializing a male transvestite with AIDs who had renamed himself "Angie," making a brave effort to sustain an illusion of feminine glamour during the last year of his life in an SRO.

Such profound sadness cries out for the relief that Jennifer Holst offers in her in delightful series showing people interacting with deer in some sort of rustic preserve, their unpretentious warmth reminding one how interacting with such creatures enhances our humanity.

Conversely, Don Sichler's digital prints of animals in their natural habitats are engaging for the almost human qualities that some of them show as they relate to the camera—particularly one fawn-like horned creature of unknown species (at least for this viewer) whose wide-eyed look suggests self-conscious vanity.

Jean Prytyskacz strikes an equally upbeat note, albeit in a more urban context, with her black and white silver gelatin prints of a group of German musicians in their oom-pah finery; a streetsmart smoker peering around a No Parking sign, as well as an intriguingly ambiguous image that could be an acrobat in a superhero costume hanging upside-down or a Spiderman balloon!

Also working in black and white silver gelatin print, Carolyn Reus puts a new spin on portraiture (possibly even self-portraiture) with an image of a pair of legs culminating in well-worn sneakers with lots of character pointing toward a beat-up filing cabinet.

Rudy Collins focuses on the faces of stately old Harlem brownstones in prints that take on the expressive qualities of drawings by virtue of his skillful digital manipulation, while conveying the elegiac poetry of a community in danger of losing its character to gentrification.

Then there is Stephen Weintraub, who celebrates what remains of the city's local color with a wry portrait of a latter-day Eve eating an apple in a doorway and another memorable portrait of a gray-bearded old bohemian who resembles Walt Whitman.

—Peter Wiley

G&S NYC GUIDE

opportunities

12 YEAR ESTABLISHED CHELSEA GALLERY. Quality exhibitions, location and marketing. Currently reviewing artists. Online information requests: http://www.worldfineart.com/inforequest.html

WEST SIDE ARTS COALITION (WSAC) established 1979, welcomes new members from all geographic areas. There are approximately 14 exhibits per year for Fine Arts, Photography, and Craft Arts. Music, Poetry, Theater and Dance programs available. Contact information: Tel.- 212-316-6024, email- wsacny@wsacny.org or website- www.wsacny.org. Or send SASE to the West Side Arts Coalition, PO Box 527, Cathedral Station, New York, NY 10025. Visit our ground floor gallery at 96th Street & Broadway (on the center island) New York City. Open: Wed. 6-8pm, Sat.& Sun. 12-6pm.

CUSTOM PICTURE FRAMING for artists and galleries. Museum quality, selected frames & mats. Float & dry mounting, canvas stretching. Jadite Galleries, 662 10th Ave. (Betw. 46/47St.) Hours: 12 - 6pm, Free delivery in Manhattan. 212-977-6190 jaditeart@aol.com

ESTABLISHED CHELSEA GALLERY reviews artist portfolios monthly. Send sase or visit www.noho gallery.com for application form. Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001. 212 367-7063

PLEIADES GALLERY Join our community of fine artists at this esteemed artist-run gallery with its many Winners of Awards, Grants, Fellowships and Juried Shows. Exhibit your work and advance your career. www.pleiadesgallery.com - or SASE to Pleiades Gallery, 530 W. 25 St., 4th fl. NY, NY 10001-5516, Tel.- 646-230-0056.

MONTSERRAT CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY is reviewing artist portofolios for its new Chelsea Gallery. National and International artists are invited to submit. Sase, slides, photos and brief artist bio. Send to: Montserrat Contemporary Art Gallery, 547 West 27 street NYC 10001

PLEIADES GALLERY presents its 26th Annual Juried Exhibition. Open to all media. This year's Juror is Joan Young, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art and Manager of Curatorial Affairs at the Solomon R.Guggenheim Museum, New York City. Recently Curated: "Matthew Barney - The Cremaster Cycle". EXHIBITION: July 10 through August 2, 2008. ENTRY DEADLINE: Saturday, April 5. Send SASE for PROSPECTUS to Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th St. New York, NY 10001-5516 or download from www.pleiadesgallery.com. Phone: 646-230-0056.

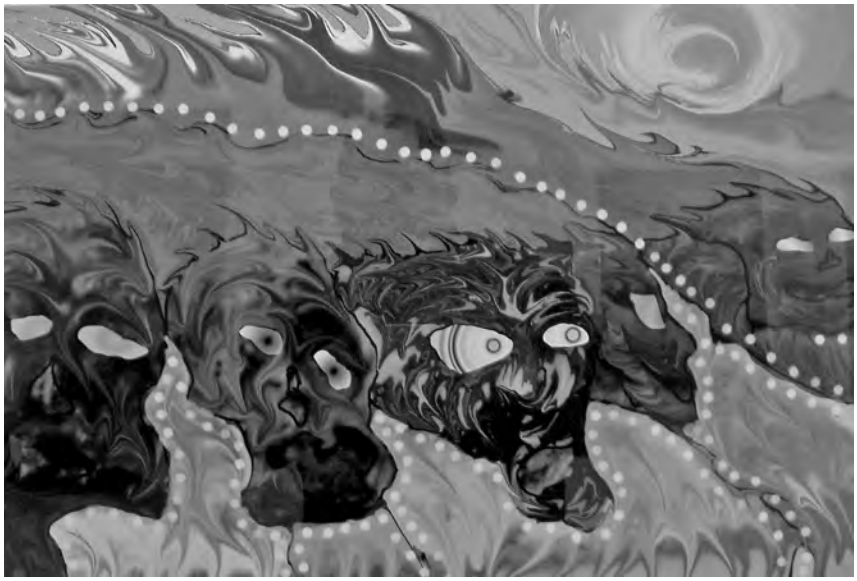
PRE-HOLIDAY SPECIAL SALES BEGIN NOW!
RENÉE PHILLIPS'S ONE-OF-A-KIND JEWELRY OF ART
Renée's wearable art pieces may be seen in her Manhattan Gallery Showroom by appointment. For more information and to view Renée Phillips's wearable art in person contact her at Tel: 212.472.1660 reneeart@ManhattanArts.com View wearable art pieces at: www.ReneePhillipsart.com

GELABERT STUDIOS GALLERY
offers artists the opportunity to showcase their work in a unique, elegant Upper West Side setting. Fully equipped gallery for rent on weekly or yearly basis. Top quality lighting. Call 212-874-7188 for rental details or visit our website: www.gelabertstudiosgallery.com. Gelabert Studios Gallery, 255 W. 86th St. (at Broadway), New York City 10024.

James Eugene Albert Explores the Painterly Aspects of Digital Imagery

Digital images permeate contemporary culture. From high-tech special effects in films and MTV rock videos, to the graphic images in cash machines and commercial displays, from advanced medical visualization to educational DVDs and a host of other ubiquitous manifestations, the electronic image has changed our way of looking at the world. And one cannot help fearing that not all these changes have been for the better.

A new generation of artists has grown up with this imagery as part of their daily lives, fostering a visual language that often seems a harbinger of a post-literate culture, in which the merging of graphics, text, and photography will constitute a new reality and eventually render our world more virtual with each passing day. Indeed, much of the art that many of today's digital artists produce is so immersed in the vernacular of the computer that it feeds into the depersonalizing effect of the new technology, threatening to create an environment in which the individual is increasingly isolated and creative production becomes more and more standardized.



"Old Souls"

For this reason, among others more germane to the particular qualities of his work, we should celebrate the talented California artist James Eugene Albert, who presents a valuable and hopeful counterforce to prevailing trends in his exhibition at World Fine Art Gallery, 511 West 25th Street, from November 1 through 24, with a reception on November 8th from 6 to 8 PM.

It is telling and significant that Albert invariably refers to his images as "paintings," since they are surely among the most personal and painterly works ever produced in his medium.

"Even though a computer is involved, I still feel the need to 'paint.' I need to have some immediacy of interaction between the image on the screen and me," asserts Albert, whose new works are fully as fanciful, freewheeling, and vibrant as anything produced with paint and brush by more traditionally-oriented contemporary artists today, as well as artists of past centuries. Indeed, Albert's digital prints suggest more of a kinship with painters such as Paul Klee and Joan Miro than with the work of postmodern digital artists like Michael Ensdorf and Gretchen Bender, whose images have "high-tech" written all over them.

"Although I have designed many computer applications, and even networks of computer applications, I usually try to keep the technology hidden," Albert states, and he succeeds splendidly in works such as "Snake 2" and "New York Moon" The former is a serpentine shape with arrow-heads at either end; the later is a simplified, almost primitive-looking moon looming above odd organic shapes that resemble high-rise towers in a darkened sky. Both compositions are playfully reminiscent of the brilliant gouaches that Alexander Calder created when he was not making his mobiles.

Another print, "Tunnel," is an abstract composition in visceral purples, pink, and reds that hints metaphorically at the birth process with a fan-like form resembling a peacock's tail emerging from a circular aperture. Yet another, "Dragon Bomber," presents us with a whimsical hybrid of insect and airplane flying like a crop-duster over furrowed fields. Here, the green/yellow sky and a blue sun resembling one of the seals on a diploma (a touch worthy of Saul Steinberg) further enhances the surreal quality of the image.

Of the orbs that appear in many of his compositions, Albert says, "I feel that since paintings should have souls, you (the viewer) need to communicate with that soul through its 'Eyes.' " The optic quality of Albert's orbs is especially explicit in the print he calls "Bird Thing," where the brilliant yellow avian figure is stylized in a manner recalling Native American motifs involving angular designs derived from nature. (For his ability to appropriate such motifs and bend them to his own aesthetic and imaginative ends, Albert seems especially related to the aforementioned Paul Klee.)

Eyes are also a prominent element of Albert's print "P-Thang," in which the subject appears to be three conical beings that resemble more geometric relatives of the endearingly elemental critters called "Shmoos" in Al Capp's classic cartoon strip "Li'l Abner." Only, Albert's creatures have a single Cyclops-eye centered close to their pointed heads as they cluster together like a trio of amiable pyramids, in the series he calls "Alien Vision," which also includes a convoy of clock-faces flying in close formation, their hands pointed to twelve fifteen. Although not quite as distorted as the melted clocks in Salvador Dali's famous painting, "The Persistence of Memory," Albert's time-pieces are oval-shaped in a manner that makes them, too, suggest eyes. Eyes are also prominent in "Old Souls" in which five ancient looking creatures appear like ghostly apparitions adrift in a cosmic sea, perhaps awaiting reincarnation.

Part of the appeal of Albert's prints is their highly imaginative qualities, which appear to be achieved with a minimum of the special effects that so many of his contemporaries in the field of computer art rely on as attention-getting devices. Rather than trying to dazzle the viewer with technical trickery, he prefers to captivate them with his imaginative versatility, creating images such as "Weather," which resembles a sunflower mandala; "Red Arrows," where yet another womb-like aperture projects a distinctively thorny quality; and "Discgo," which lives up to its punning title by suggesting an Art Deco spacecraft constructed of gorgeously glowing jukebox materials.

But all such speculation as to themes and meanings is bound to be subjective, and, what one sees in compositions such as these probably says as much about the psyche of viewer as the sensibility of the artist himself. For like all truly engaging art that stimulates both the imagination and the intellect, the work of James Eugene Albert is open-ended. Albert supplies just enough visual information to enlist the viewer in a two-way dialogue that he or she will invariably find aesthetically enriching. And he does it with such consistent success that the medium or the method seems altogether beside the point.

—Maurice Taplinger

Group Show Transcends Lackluster Title at The Broome Street

Although its title could have been more imaginative, perhaps the members of Metropolitan Artists group included in "ART works," an exhibition seen recently at The Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street were well served by not being required to adhere to any particular theme. For this was one of those rare exhibitions in which everyone seemed to be at the top of their form.

A perfect case in point are two painters who have shown together in past: M. Bonelli and Meyer Tannenbaum, both of whom have recently taken giant steps in terms of expanding and refining their respective styles.

M. Bonelli has done so by including more recognizable fragments of imagery within her ostensibly abstract hard-edge oils on linen. The result is that Bonelli's "Urban Abstracts" series combines some of the best qualities of Stuart Davis's Cubist-influenced street with Roy Lichtenstein's comic panel paintings without being imitative of either.

It would seem that Meyer Tannenbaum has been working toward what he has achieved in his "Expansion Series" through all the many stylistic permutations he has explored over a productive and varied career. These brilliant, buoyant works, with their graceful linear elements combined with luscious color areas are a culmination of Tannenbaum's freewheeling and lyrical formalism at its best.

Another artist who seems to have come into her own is Elinore Bucholtz, who showed a grid of nine same-size canvases called "Series from the Natural World" in which various elements of nature—a desert, a forest, a mountain, the moon, among others—were not so much depicted as evoked. All of Bucholtz's compositions worked in tandem to conjure up a sense of light, movement, and energy in a manner reminiscent of early abstract pioneers like Hartley, Dove, and O'Keeffe, albeit with the gestural force informed by Abstract Expressionism.

E. Janya Barlow sort of knocked us for a loop with her brilliantly colorful, somewhat zany abstractions akin to Terry Winters and the British painter Alan Davie for their audacious exuberance. However, Barlow's bubbly, bulbous forms, neoprimitivistic symbols and almost garish colors have their own wacky charm, signifying a runaway talent galloping at full speed.

By contrast, Miriam Wills, known for maximalist collage paintings with clusters of floral forms, takes a statelier formal approach, suggestive of stained glass windows, in three new paintings with considerably more angular forms. In the composition she calls "Incandescent Icing," especially, Wills makes classical modernism new by virtue of her own inimitable boldness.

Brian Tepper displayed an impressive versatility in his engaging bronze head of a little girl with bouncy twin ponytails, "Catherine," and "Flow from Within," a biomorphic abstraction in limestone. Working in fired stoneware another gifted sculptor, Sybil Maimin showed two strong semi-abstract pieces: "Personalities," a complex cubic totem, and "Come Fly With Me," a pair of neo-baroque figures composed of flowing furls and swirls. Then there was Marcia Bernstein, whose row of five narrow, scroll-like vertical wall pieces mixed media projected a strong presence, at once formal and spiritual, like amulets or mezuzahs for the door of a giant.

Marlene Zimmerman, always a delightful painter whose work is possessed of a brash Pop beauty akin to that of John Wesley, specializes in hard-edge feminine portraits in kandy-kolored hues. Zimmerman's comely ladies wear big outrageous hats and pose coyly à la Blondie Bumstead, often in familiar urban settings, as in "Brooklyn Bridge II." Barbara Yeterian, on the other hand, is a bold latter-day heir to the Expressionist tradition exemplified by Bay Area figure painters such as David Park. Two big, juicy, thickly encrusted oils on canvas from Yeterian's "Dance Series" demonstrated her vigorous brushwork and dynamic compositional rhythms.

Nancy Miller is another painter's painter, albeit with a looser, more lyrical manner that came across especially well in two acrylics from her "Fish Pond" series. Miller employs line with an almost Asian fluidity to lend her schools of fish swimming among lily pads a sense of grace and movement, but her luminous colors are more akin to the Fauves. By contrast, one big abstract oil on canvas by Peg McCreary was a calligraphic tour de force, with sinuous black lines dancing like the legs of giant insects over a field of softer golden-ocher strokes.

Also outstanding were two large abstract collage paintings from Leanne Martinson's "City Mood" series, with fractured compositions and tactile surfaces created with layers of painted and roughly torn paper; contrastingly elegant collages by Joyce B. Flora, exploring exquisitely subtle textural and formal relationships. Another gifted collageist, Myrna Harrison-Changar seemed closer to Kurt Schwitters and Joseph Cornell in two formally precise pieces that verged on base relief for her use of 3-D objects, particularly in the shadow-box piece called "The Vault."

The stark yet complementary contrasts of this show were perhaps best exemplified by Estelle Pascoe's imposing, irregularly shaped oil and mixed media wall pieces with textures that suggest giant fossils, and Julia Rogge's accomplished realist oils of delicately light-dappled woods and streams. Indeed, the generic title "Art works" may have helped these diverse works to coexist so harmoniously. —J. Sanders Eaton

The Primacy of the Gesture Energizes "Abstract 2007"

In postmodern, as in modern, abstract painting, much still depends on the intangible element of "touch," as members of the West Side Arts Coalition recently demonstrated in "Abstract 2007," at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street.

The circular forms and energetic paint handling in Leanne Martinson's compositions recalls the introduction, by Delaunay and others, of brilliant color and lyricism to the staid vocabulary of Cubism. Martinson's sense of gesture manifests in a rolling energy that lends her paintings movement and immediacy.

Emily Rich explores the power of monochromes, in her action paintings composed mostly of blacks, grays, and off-whites brushed on boldly in sweeping strokes. With a limited palette accented with just a touch of yellow ocher, Rich evokes a kind of "slippery slope" effect, a visual sensation equivalent to sliding on ice.

Farhana Akhter creates a different sensation with luminous bursts of yellow, subtly mixed with other hues, radiating out from brilliant blue grounds. A sense of natural events occurs in Akhter's paintings, which could suggest a starburst or a nocturnal flower opening expansively to envelope the viewer in a warm aura.

Two other painters also evoke hot and cool contrasts: Elinore Bucholtz combines geometry and gesture, in compositions where roughly rectangular areas of one vibrant color, scumbled over another with a drybrush technique, project a sense of chromatic heat that seems to radiate from deep within the canvas. Bucholtz's surfaces shimmer like sunlight on water. Conversely, Mary Ann Sussoni combines cool grays and blues with streaks of frosty white in rhythmic compositions that flow like ocean waves. In Sussoni's deft, muscular paintings, the chromatic temperature is decidedly arctic.

Line is another aspect of touch that has become prevalent in recent abstraction, as seen in Meyer Tannenbaum's new canvases, where sharp black lines seem to skate cursively over pulsing areas of subtly blended hues. The effect is symphonic, with Tannenbaum's graceful yet precise lines swirling through the vivid colors like a strident solo instrument emanating from the muffled orchestral hum of the softly variegated color field.

Peggy McCreary also employs line as a major element, albeit with a looser, more calligraphic energy in three canvases where black strokes flow fluidly over areas of red with their own whirlwind sense of motion. Liquid splashes and drips of white increase the considerable velocity of McCreary's lyrical composition.

Shirley Z. Piniat proves the theory that there can be an underlying order to chaos in her intricate mosaics of fragmented magazine photos melded in rich, harmonious compositions. In one of her best, Piniat increases the visual intensity and sense of mystery by further obscuring the already deconstructed imagery under a painted network of thick black lines.

Meg Boe Birns, on the other hand, opts for a riot of color and texture in a grouping of small circular works that suggest a rainbow grid of custard pies. Birns's tactile color constructions invariably test the boundaries between painting and sculpture.

Jeanette Armone really puts touch to the test in a series of works consisting of one decisive gesture set against white expanses of paper. There is no room for error when Armone lays down a few swift streaks or swirls with an impetuous yet controlled energy that suggests a self-styled Zen master. It is indeed an act of faith that demonstrates the ethos of abstraction at its most elemental and energy-based.

—Marie R. Pagano

Katrina Read Extends Australia's Legacy of Nature Painting

Given the richness of the country's natural resources, it should surprise no one that there is a strong tradition of landscape painting in Australia. It dates all the way back to the colonial period work of Thomas Wantling and Conrad Martens, continued in the modernist nature paintings of Lloyd Rees and John Passmore, and still thrives among contemporary nature painters such as Katrina Reed, whose acrylics on canvas are on view at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 20 to December 11. (Reception Thursday November 29, from 6 to 8 PM.

Read stated in a recent interview that she considers herself lucky to have been born in a place with such a diverse landscape, where "an outdoor lifestyle has always been part of the culture," and her joy in depicting it is made manifest in her affectionate views of the country's rugged terrain. Works such as "A Place of Peace" and "My Secret Place" depict vistas of sandy beach and blue sky, giving a sense of the land's vast, unforgiving beauty. These are not picturesque or romanticized views; rather they capture the matter of fact beauty before the artist's eyes, sans superfluous flourishes: the sandy stretches punctuated by scrubby vegetation, the solitude of great empty spaces.

There is a gorgeous desolation to some

"Wishful"

of Read's paintings that makes one realize why, though many Australian artists have followed global trends toward abstraction, conceptualism, and other newer tendencies, certain painters have remained solidly grounded in the land. And Read appears to be one of the more accomplished among them for her ability to evoke the raw beauty that makes this particular parcel of land so unique.

More recently, however, Read has turned her attention to a subject below the actual level of the land itself, in a unique series of paintings of koi, a species of fish ubiquitous in Australia and much beloved in Japan. Although displaying the same painterly finesse as her landscapes, this series of underwater works has its own unique qualities. For while Read's depiction of the fish is entirely naturalistic, her compositions are newly dispersed in a manner more akin to Asian art (which may be why she applies the term "Contemporary Zen" to this series).

In any case, Read creates great compositional diversity with this simple subject, capturing in minute detail the graceful movements of the koi and of the water through which they navigate. The superb handling of light, which has always been an important feature of her landscapes is subtly amplified in this series via the translucent and reflective qualities of the aqueous environment, particularly in the painting called "Through Honeyed Glass," where the surface of the water is especially luminous. The fairly large size of these canvases also adds to the impact of Read's imagery, lending an unaccustomed sense of scale and significance to a humble subject, as does the associative poetry inherent in titles such as "Wishful," which suggestively echoes the swishing movements of the fish.

Katrina Read has stated that she wishes her work to "capture a sense of calm and peace" and to achieve "a form of connectedness through each painting with the viewer," and she succeeds splendidly in this series.

—Maurice Taplinger

Paul McCloskey, a Visual Artist in the Irish Poetic Tradition

Although, at first glance, his bold compositions could appear abstract, the sweep and flow of his country's verdant soil is the actual subject of the Irish painter Paul McCloskey's "Awakening Landscape" series, on view in the year-round salon exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 547 West 27th Street, in Chelsea.

It should be stated clearly at the onset that McCloskey, who attended the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, firmly believes that a painting should be readily comprehensible to the average lay person, rather than hermetic or obscure.

"The majority of people are relatively visually literate, and if they trust their own instincts about what they are viewing, they find themselves quite capable of judging painting," McCloskey has said, indicating a refreshingly democratic, no-nonsense approach to subject matter.

Although McCloskey is also known for his portraits, in which, while he invariably achieves a convincing likeness, he captures an inner depth as well, as opposed to simply a superficial semblance of the sitter. And the same holds true for his outdoor subjects, which go beyond merely delineating the lay of the land, to evoke its vital spirit. His work has been described as "primordial," and the term seems apt, given that his oils on canvas project a phenomenological sense of natural events centering on light.

"Awakening Landscape Spring 9"

In the latter regard perhaps McCloskey's closest ancestor is the 19th century British visionary JMW Turner; for like him, this gifted contemporary Irish artist conveys ethereal qualities through the material means of pigment, as well as a subjective view of landscape that invests it with transcendent qualities. The main difference between them, however, is that while Turner's compositions tended toward amorphousness, McCloskey's appear informed by cubistic structuring, which makes itself known particularly in the rectangular suggestion of fields in his dramas of sky and land. However, rather than adhering to the two dimensional picture plane, that sacred staple of modernist practice, McCloskey penetrates it to create an illusion of infinite space.

Indeed, McCloskey's preferred angle of vision appears to be aerial; in many of his compositions, the land seems to tilt dizzyingly, almost as though rearing up like an eager lover to meet the downward thrust of the sky, which invariably bears down heavily in all its moody magnificence, as solidly present as the land itself. The notion of heaven and earth in constant struggle or embrace invests McCloskey's compositions with much of their dynamism.

In his "Awakening Landscape Spring II," green and blue hues predominate, capturing all the freshness of the specified season, with the light-kissed land veering vertiginously upward, before merging at the bent horizon with mists that melt into the luminous blue vastness of the sky, where white fragments of cumuli float like ice-flows on the waves of the sea. As would be expected, "Awakening Landscape Autumn III" projects a slightly more somber mood with its earthier hues that nonetheless take on golden auras when the transcendent light that McCloskey evokes so faithfully bathes them in its heavenly benevolence.

—Maureen Flynn

Contemporary Art Informed by the Legacy of Greece and Italy

It is a daunting task to review an exhibition as sweeping in scope as "The Odyssey Within: An Exhibition of Fine Art From Italy and Greece," at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from December 14, 2007 through January 3, 2008, with a reception on Thursday, December 20, from 6 to 8 PM. So overwhelming is its bounty of stylistic diversity that most one can do is try to provide the reader with an overview of the various tendencies flourishing in those two Mediterranean countries—both with richly documented artistic legacies dating from antiquity to the present—and recommend that he or she make a point of visiting the gallery.

Among some of the Greek artists, particularly, mythology and religious iconography persist as subjects that give rise to innovative contemporary interpretations, as seen in the gifted printmaker Ece Abay's earthy semi-abstract woodcuts, with their sensually exaggerated, rhythmically linear anatomical contours, distantly reminiscent of those on Etruscan vases; Antonis Choudalakis' evocative, sensitively delineated frescoes of fragmented figures on wood; and the slashingly energetic neo-expressionist crucifixions of Panos Evangelopoulos, which combine anguished subject matter with painterly exaltation.

Other Greek artists tackle problems of the technological era, as in Sophia Angelis's ironic painting of people ignoring each other while talking on cell phones; Giannis Stratis's figures, as starkly simplified as logos and lavatory symbols, hinting at our ever-increasing sense of isolation; and Alexis Vlahos's visionary evocations of the symbolic female figure, with their visually compelling combination of linear and curved elements.

Various species of abstraction thrive as well, in the sumptuous nature evocations of Anna Maria Zoppis, wherein organic or geometric elements often appear as piquant accents in a primarily nonobjective context; the luminous cosmic compositions of Dr. George Koemtzopoulos with their dazzling sense of light and allusions to untrammeled natural forces; the vibrantly colorful gesture paintings of Melanie Prapopoulos, with their muscular forms and palette dominated by visceral red hues; and Lebanese immigrant Tatiana Ferahian's intriguingly intricate metaphysical mazes.

At least two Italian artists favor modes of expression that verge on the surreal, as seen in Stefano Cattai's mixed media works and doll-like figure paintings, and Alessandro Fabriani's riotously detailed watercolors of a world turned topsy-turvy. Neoclassicism also makes its presence felt in the landscapes and figure groupings of Cesare Landini, while the nature paintings Mario Gabriele Marioli combine the vigorous brushwork of the post-impressionists with the strident colors of the Fauves.

Then there are Raffaele Gerardi, whose angular approach to the human figure recalls Modigliani, even while his subject matter is considerably more symbolic and primitivistic; Aurora Mazzoldi, a contemporary romantic, known for poetic, softly focused paintings with a decidedly narrative quality; and Angela Policastro, whose powerful delineated figures are notable for their emotional resonance, which springs from their insightful exploration of human relationships; and Enzo Casale's intensely confrontational realist portrait heads in oil on paper, which demonstrate the continuing relevance of the human face as a mirror of all worldly concern; and doubly gifted Raffaele Gatta's powerful black and white photographs (in which the human figure is conspicuous for its absence, which permeates the atmosphere anyway) and bold paintings of suggestively shapely forms.

Beyond the most obvious references to mythology and religious icons as signifiers of conventions and traditions essential to the continuity of European culture, one would search in vain for overriding regional tendencies in the art of Greece and Italy. This is obviously a healthy sign, in a time when all ambitious art aspires to the global scope and universal substance that is much in evidence here.

—Maurice Taplinger

AK Corbin: Dancing in Combat Boots on the Grave of Gravity

The artist AK Corbin once had a job assembling an art historical encyclopedia and had images by the great masters of Western art all over her desk. Yet she found herself more fascinated by the Civil War-era newspaper cartoons archived down in the basement. The anecdote seems to sum up the aesthetic philosophy of a woman whose work can remind one of Toulouse Lautrec one minute and James Thurber the next.

The composition Corbin calls "Lover's Spat," for example, depicts a comical imbroglio involving a man wearing what appears to be a pale blue shower cap and an orange-haired woman in a long polka-dot shift. They are both lumpish of physique and their struggle results in a kind of awkward dance, as she lunges at him and he falls backward, as though about to tip over an object that simultaneously resembles a small table and an oddly top-heavy blue vase. That's the Thurber part; the comparison to Toulouse-Lautrec is justified by Corbin's fluid contours, which, combined with her radiant use of color, suggest puddles reflecting rainbows.

AK Corbin
card board cut outs

above 8" x 14"
left 7" x 13"

If the combination sounds contradictory, well, AK Corbin seems to thrive on oxymoronic juxtapositions, as evidenced by the title of her latest solo exhibition, "Flat Sculpture, at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 27 through December 22.

Yet, there's an innate logic to the title as well, since some of her pieces take the form of cardboard cutouts set in low relief on black velcro backgrounds within shallow shadow boxes— sort of like scaled down shaped canvases by Elizabeth Murray, albeit with a more figurative bent, since Corbin loves a good storybook narrative (even if it's not exactly linear and the viewer is obliged to Rorschach his or her own meanings onto the figures she depicts).

Other pieces are collages with the figures seen within landscapes or interiors as intensely colorful and molten of contour as the figures themselves. Corbin calls these pieces "paper intarsia," since they are intricately constructed of colored scraps like mosaics or the highly developed form of inlay marquetry produced in Renaissance Italy.

In one, "Confrontation," a man with mouth agape as though yelling towers over a woman cowering on a bed and clutching a bundled baby in a scene much less comical and more frightening than the aforementioned "Lover's Spat." In another, aptly called "At the End of the Earth," a lone man traverses a landscape under a strident red sky. Here, one can't help thinking of Van Gogh strolling solitary through an Arles rendered scarily beautiful by his inner turmoil. However, a sunnier aspect of Vincent is more cheerily evoked by the big yellow straw sombrero (like the one in Van Gogh's famous self portrait) in Corbin's cut-out "Farmer Brown," where the main figure sits on what appears to be a lazy ocher cow with black markings. In any case, it belongs to the category of creatures to whom— or to which, take your pick— Corbin generally applies the generic term "critters."

Indeed, one gets the sense that Corbin sees us all, regardless of species, as critters of one kind or another, bumbling through life as best we are able, with often hilarious results. Thus, in one cutout we get an imaginative hybrid worthy of Lewis Carroll called a "Cat Bird," and, in another, encounter a Jewish cowboy more after the manner of Mel Brooks.

Named "Bang Bang Shapiro," the latter character, the artist tells us, was invented by her father, who told her bedtime stories. Apparently, Corbin's dad was a real-life character worthy of his daughter's fantastic imagination, judging from her cutout inspired by him. Called "Grim," it depicts a mysteriously costumed fellow in high lace-up boots and is based on one of her father's favorite pastimes: parading around the yard, stamping on mole-holes!

One of my particular favorites among Corbin's cutouts is of a man in a sort of Sherlock Holmesian cape-shouldered coat holding a leash at the end of which is a penguin. Although the man has his back to us, the penguin faces the viewer, with its wings crossed like arms across its chest in a posture of defiance, as though adamantly refusing to be lead. Despite the absurdity of the subject matter, this piece has a spare elegance that, once again, recalls Toulouse Lautrec, with most of the tan bare cardboard surface untouched and the contours outlined in red along their cut edges.

This confluence of whimsy and grace is a hallmark of Corbin's work: In her collage "The Wind-up," a baseball player at the plate lifts his leg in a way that simultaneously suggests Nureyev and a canine approaching a fire-hydrant. In a cutout called "Mushroom Man," a fanciful character in billowing striped trousers appears to use the crown of a mushroom for a parachute. In "With Duck," a wizard in a flowing cloak traverses a tree-lined country road that morphs into a baroque wisp of smoke.

One could go on indefinitely describing the fertile products of Corbin's runaway imagination and drawing comparisons to a diverse range of artists from Egon Schiele (for the superb draftspersonship that underlies all of her work, particularly her collages of nudes); to Red Grooms (for her good natured sense of satire and ability to capture character); to Caspar David Friedrich (for her ability to invest even an unpopulated landscape with a sense of romance and mystery).

However, Corbin must finally be taken on her own terms, as an artist with a unique way of looking at people, the world, and the serious absurdity of finding oneself just another critter stuck on this mortal coil.

AK Corbin is one of a kind, and her intimate, engaging cutouts and collages convey a profound empathy for our common lot, even while giving the finger to fashion and the many manifestations of art world pretension.

—Ed McCormack

At Pleiades: Sheila Finnigan is Back, Edge Intact!

Because she is normally such a topical artist and felt it was time for a change of pace, Sheila Finnigan, who has taken on everyone from Andy Warhol to George Bush with her scathing wit, titled her fourth New York solo exhibition, seen recently at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, "xoxoxo." As far as Finnigan was concerned, It could mean "love and kisses," "tick tack toe," or anything the viewer wanted it to mean, as long as it sidestepped topicality.

Well, it worked and it didn't: The centerpiece of the show "The Pope Abolishing Limbo," inspired by a news item about him doing just that, proved that Finnigan is an artist who just can't stop herself from thinking. In this case: "Imagine a mortal man who, by a simple decree, can move Heaven and Earth? How weird is that?"

The white-robed pontiff appears on a huge unstretched canvas, as majestic as Elvis doing his karate schtick onstage in Vegas. A towering wizard, he raises his arms in a benevolent "Presto Chango" benediction in a blaze of white gesso. In her own wizardly manner, Finnigan makes an installation appear to spill out of the painting, littering the floor beneath the canvas with scattered twigs, dried flowers, and a gesso-encrusted paintbrush stuck to a shard of plexiglass.

In medieval art, "The Descent into Limbo" traditionally depicts Christ brandishing \ the banner of the Resurrection, while demons flee into darkness. In Finnigan's update, theology has been blown to bits and the artist's task is to rearrange the pieces!

Subsequent paintings make clear that magic in general was much on her mind. In "Houdini on a Windy Day," the magician hangs by his chin from a ladder beside a life preserver, the actual model for which hangs beside the painting. A series of three canvases called "The Lovely Assistant," depicts one of those intrepid young women who cheerfully get strapped to a spinning target that knives gets thrown at— suggesting how an entry-level position for those hopelessly smitten with showbiz parallels the plight of artists today.

"I Hear the Human Linen Tear"

A second epic canvas, 96 by 70 inches and also unstretched, its puckered linen edges forming a rough frame around a monumental female nude sketched in charcoal on gesso, exemplifies the striking synthesis of drawing and painting that Finnigan achieves in her new work. The charcoal line defining the figure is delicate and graceful; yet the figure is substantial enough to stand up on mural scale, set off by the virginal gesso field, with its painterly plethora of subtle streaks and drips.

Finnigan envisioned this work as an answer to the lascivious Male Gaze, a picture of "the inner soul of the woman." Thus, the figure holds a symbolic butterfly aloft in one hand and other butterflies are seen within two imposing jars set front of the painting. But the nude is undeniably sensual and the title of the painting, "I Hear the Human Linen Tear" is a line from a poem by Andre Breton called "Le Marquis de Sade."

It's nice to see that, no matter how hard she tries, Sheila Finnigan can't lose her edge.

—Ed McCormack

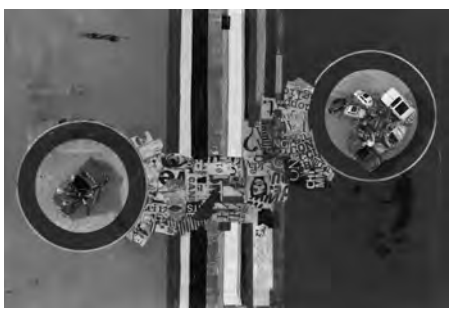
Materiality and Meaning in the Art of Monica Marioni

Born in Italy in 1972, Monica Marioni seems to synthesize some of the most dynamic developments in modern Italian art to forge her own unique postmodern style in an exhibition on view at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from December 14, 2007 to January 3, 2008. (Reception Thursday, December 20, from 6 to 8 PM.)

From Pittura Metafisica, Marioni assimilated the metaphysical spaces in her abstract compositions, while her elevation of found materials, such as costume jewelry and other detritus, is reminiscent of Art Povera.

There are also elements of Art Informel, the species of spontaneous abstract painting prevalent among European artists in the 1940s and '50s, as well as the international Assemblage movement in the gestural energy and tactile, object-encrusted surfaces of Marioni's mixed media works on wood and canvas. Indeed, Marioni, who has also been compared to the American collageist and construction artist Joseph Cornell, seems the quintessential postmodernist for her ability to juggle a broad range of influences and yet create works that are possessed of a striking visual poetry, as well as highly original formal qualities.

The metaphysical element in Marioni's work has much to do with the manner in which she transforms base and even banal objects by virtue of her peculiar aesthetic alchemy. Materials that less imaginative souls might regard as common trash take on a new life in her work, becoming things of beauty in context, like the twisted wire on the surface of the mixed media work on canvas that she calls "Miopia," which functions as graceful convoluted three dimensional calligraphy in juxtaposition with collaged fragments of text reminiscent of the torn posters of Arte Povera, albeit merged



"Infanzia"

with a painterly vigor more comparable to Robert Rauschenberg's merger of assemblage and Abstract Expressionism.

In another mixed media work on wood entitled "Infanzia," Marioni presents objects such as toy automobiles in a more geometric hard-edge composition to create a more emblematic composition with elements of Pop. For here, too, is an array of torn and rearranged bits of paper containing printed images, text, and type fragments worthy of Kurt Schwitters's "Merz" compositions at their most elegant. In yet other works by Marioni, objects such as chains are employed for both their purely visual qualities and their symbolic resonance. There is an undeniable archeological value in these works vis a vis the meanings that can be read into the detritus of a culture; however, their hermetic personal meanings resonate even more deeply on that subliminal level where material metaphors work their haunting magic.

Willem de Kooning once used the apt term "slippery glimpses" for those elusive bits of meaning that a work of art can yield, if only for an instant, before drawing them back into the mysterious realm of pure visual sensation, where all meanings are rendered moot by the seductive power of an overriding beauty. Like Antoni Tapies, whose obsession with the "noumenal," or essential spirit of materials similarly imbued his thickly-textured surfaces with ethereal qualities that contradicted, and even transcended, their aggressively palpable materiality, Monica Marioni is an aesthetic shaman in command of transformative powers that impart to her mixed media compositions attributes far greater than the sum of their parts.

—Patrick Louis Mayhew Jr.

Virginia Evans Smit: Unabashed Beauty in Full Bloom

Although one is a writer and the other a painter, I often tend to think of Virginia Evans Smit in the same breath as Jamaica Kincaid. For while Kincaid was born on the island of Antigua, in the West Indies, and Smit is an African-American woman who winters in Barbados, both are sophisticated artists who came of age in an urban environment (Kincaid as staff writer for the New Yorker, Smit as a teacher in the New York City public school system for thirty years); yet both capture something essential in their very different mediums about the local color and cadences of the tropics, Kincaid through the leisurely pace of her sentences and Smit with the languid grace of the organic forms that predominate in her mixed media prints.

But what unites these two artists even more closely in my mind is the occasional note of lyrical melancholy that lends particular poignancy to the monotype "Fall Moon," in Virginia Evans Smit's solo show "In Bloom," which continues through November 17 at Viridian Artists, Inc., 530 West 25th Street.

"In Bloom"

In this, one of the most breathtaking compositions in her new exhibition in the venue where she has exhibited since 1978, Smit presents us with a huge lunar orb encircled by blossoms, falling leaves, and fluttering butterflies, set against a vibrant purple sky. It is a vision of unabashed beauty and perhaps the work which demonstrates most clearly the kinship Smit refers to in a recent artist's statement.

"I have a special attraction to the landscape painting of Japan," Smit, who holds the distinction of being the first black woman to receive a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Pennsylvania and whose work is included in many corporate, private, and museum collections worldwide, writes. "These artists are ardent lovers of nature and they closely observe its changing moods. I too spend long periods in my garden in Barbados observing the changing flora and the other inhabitants as the days pass ."

That last phrase —"as the days pass"— is the one that resonates most significantly for me, since a sense of passing time, of its actual movement, is invariably more present in Smit's work. However, it is not suggested sequentially, as in the horizontal formats of traditional Asian hand scrolls, but as a result of the layered translucency of Smit's unique mixed media printmaking technique.

In keeping with both the pace of the Islands and the painstaking nature of Smit's working process, it is a slow sense of time that she encapsulates in her compositions, as hypnotic as the pulsing reggae backbeat that permeates much of the Caribbean. It suggests slow, circuitous movement around familiar places, rather than the long journeys over vast terrains depicted in the landscape tradition that the Japanese adopted from ancient China.

It is a dreamy slowmotion pendulum-dance of internal and eternal rhythms, timed to the metronome of the seasons, that Smit transposes directly from her garden to her compositions, through a complex process that involves photo transfer, lithography, relief printing, silkscreen, and monotype. By combining all of these techniques with spontaneous passages of pure painting, she reconciles two opposing poles of Asian art, uniting the laborious processes of Japanese woodblock printing with the spontaneous spirit of Zen ink painting in a unique personal synthesis.

There is another duality in Smit's work as well: the spatial spareness and delicate ethereality of Asian aesthetics, which manifest in her willingness to let expanses of bare paper suggest "emptiness," coupled with the compositional unity that she achieves by juxtaposing floral forms with rectangular color areas on the picture plane in compositions such as "In Bloom # 3." Her gift for balancing elements of the Oriental and Occidental traditions so gingerly enables her to couch a poignant sense of natural flux in a formal context that lends her compositions a contemporary immediacy and vitality.

Indeed, it is these intriguingly complex and almost contradictory qualities which set Smits's work apart from that of Robert Kushner, Kim MacConnel and other artists in the so-called Pattern and Decoration movement, which it could superficially resemble, given its unabashed embrace of beauty. For Smit proceeds not from a selfconscious desire to validate such beauty as a strategy in opposition to the cult of ugliness in post-modern painting, but from more intimate observation of the flora and fauna of her immediate environment, which she seems to regard in microcosmic terms that recall Tennyson's immortal lines, "Little flower—but if I could understand / What you are, root and all, and all and all / I should know what God and man is."

Thus her compositions center not only on the sensual contours and vibrant colors of the island's rich profusion of plant life, as seen in "Great Palm," with its sinuous shapes and luminous green and blue hues; but also on its population of tiny creatures, such as the lizards scampering along branches and vines in "At Play." Indeed, all of its flora and fauna makes Virginia Evans Smit's garden in Barbados a place that rewards prolonged contemplation with endless inspiration, for the viewer as well as for the artist.

—Ed McCormack

Andre van der Kerkhoff: Seduction and Abstraction

"Nude XIII"

What makes an artist known for one type of work in one medium suddenly embark on a new mode of expression in an entirely different medium is one of the great mysteries of the creative personality.

"I had not picked up a camera in thirty years before I began this series," the self taught artist Andre van der Kerkhoff, born in Austria and presently a resident of Australia, said of his exhibition "The Seduction of Citizen K," seen recently at Jadite Galleries, 413 West 50th Street.

Since he was previously known for his Australian landscapes, this series of photo-derived female nudes printed on brushed aluminum represents a significant departure for the van der Kerkhoff, who has exhibited widely throughout France, Australia, Canada, and the United States.

"I wanted to explore for the first time the human figure and embrace the new possibilities of digital media," the artist stated of his erotically charged yet formally cool images of comely young models striking seductive poses, set against bare aluminum accented with color areas of an almost Mondrian-like austerity. Exhibited unframed on the gallery walls, they have a sense of "objectness" that traverses the boundaries between two dimensional representation and sculpture. But it is the tantalizing tension between hot and cool, eroticism and formalism, that lends these works an appeal akin to the deadpan portraiture of Andy Warhol and the "Great American Nudes" series of Tom Wesselmann.

However, van der Kerkhoff approaches his nudes without Pop irony. That their poses are as overt as those in some of the more explicit men's magazines does not suggest a parody or a moral judgment so much as a direct expression of our changing sexual mores. The models are obviously comfortable vamping for the camera and the artist feels no need to depersonalize them, as Wesselmann did when he made his figures increasingly more anonymous.

Rather, he preserves the individuality of his models, even while making the spaces and shapes around them as important a part of each composition as the figures themselves. Indeed, it is the contours of the figures that create these spaces and bring them alive, so that even the empty spaces are permeated by their presence and enlivened as if by a lingering trace of perfume. Even in "Nude XXI," where most of the details vanish into the silvery surface of the aluminum, the figure is brought to life by the geometric forms around it; the placement of one filled-in nipple, like a tiny blue square in a geometric composition by Mondrian, becomes the focal point around which the rest of the figure materializes in the viewer's imagination.

In other works, art historical references are suggested by such details as the naturally elongated torso of the model reclining on her back in "Nude VIII," which recalls the slenderly graceful figures of Modigliani. And even in those works, such as "Nude XII," where the model's voluptuousness is palpably present and her pose is most explicitly alluring, it is much to Andre van der Kerkhoff's credit that, through the skillful spotting of color areas, he imparts to his compositions a sense of abstraction that makes their purely aesthetic qualities at least as engrossing as the physical attributes of his subjects.

—Ed McCormack

Markus Maria Saufhaus: A Gentler Approach to Expressionism

If every artist can be said to have had a formative experience which spurred the creative urge, for the German painter Markus Maria Saufhaus, it was seeing a photograph as a child of "The Tower of the Blue Horses," a painting by Franz Marc, a leading member of the Blaue Reiter group.

Saufhaus has been painting ever since, and although she has evolved her own distinctive style, like Marc she still occasionally paints equine subjects, as seen in her luminous work in oil and gold leaf on canvas, "Wildhorse – Triptych," in which the beautifully delineated horse's head has an ethereal, ghostly quality, appearing like a vision in a moonlit landscape.

However, that Saufhaus has mastered a broad range of subject matter, most having to do with nature, will soon become obvious to anyone visiting her exhibition at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 20 through December 11. (Reception Thursday, November 29, 6 to 8 PM.)

"My whole life I love the sky, the sea, and the rainbow," Saufhaus says. "These things make me warm in my heart and mostly I paint in these colors. And I know of no person who is not enthusiastic looking at a rainbow."

Although Saufhaus is as genuine an Expressionist as can be found in contemporary art, her work also has elements of Orphism that come across in her intensely vibrant colors, which imbue her nature subjects with mystical auras. This can be seen with special clarity in paintings where the radiance emanates from lunar orbs, such as her "Circle of Life" series. In these luminous acrylics on canvas, the dominant form of a full moon glows through sinuous fronds that sway as if in a graceful wind-blown dance. Here, Saufhaus's color has the brilliance of Orphism and the related school called Synchronism. However she appears to have arrived at her chromatic discoveries intuitively, rather than through a calculated process, combining them with vigorous paint handling to forge her distinctive style.

All too often we have a tendency to associate the term "Expressionism" with turmoil and revolt; with gross distortion and a kind of willful, almost brutal primitivism. However, in Saufhaus's native Germany, where the movement originated and flowered, there has also always been an element of spiritual fervor as well. The latter tendency is more obvious in the Blaue Reiter branch of the movement (the one that initially attracted Saufhaus through the work of Franz Marc) than in Die Brucke, its more politically strident wing.

Saufhaus reveals where her allegiances lie through her deliberate choice of uplifting subject matter, in "Miracle of Nature," where the composition verges on abstraction with its flowing linear strokes and fiery hues, which convey a sense of the cycles of natural birth and regeneration, as well as in "Caribbean Sea," with its brilliant blue saturations and overall atmosphere of serenity.

"Circle of Life 5 - 4 pieces"

Markus Maria Saufhaus has stated her belief that through the contemplation of nature, we can find relief from the onslaught of negative news transmitted by the mass media and reduce some of the stress in our lives, and the sheer, unabashed beauty of her work seems to bear this out.

—Wilson Wong

Kathleen King's "Illumatoons" Probe "Animal, Mineral, Vegetable" Mysteries

Try to imagine an alternate universe jointly presided over by the British visionary painter William Blake and the psychedelic underground cartoonist Robert Crumb— only, put through an abstract / metaphysical meat grinder and reconfigured in a manner that simultaneously calls to mind the fertile biomorphism of Joan Miro and the existential surrealist boneyards of Yves Tanguy, and you just might have some idea of what the Chicago painter Kathleen King hath wrought in her spectacular second New York solo exhibition, "Illumatoons," at Viridian Artists Inc., 530 West 25th Street, from November 20th through December 15th. (Artist's reception: Saturday, December 1st, 3 to 6 PM.)

"ILLUMINATOON, SIMMERING," 2007

The show title, a composite of "Illuminate" (as in Blake's illuminated poems) and "cartoon" (as in Crumb's Zap Comix), aptly describes the combination of the seductively resplendent and the funkily fanciful that King achieves in her new work, which also suggests the influence of Hokusai's great woodblock print "Wave" on contemporary Japanese manga and harks back to Kandinsky's cosmic orb abstractions of the 1920s.

There's always been a sense of swarming biomorphism in King's paintings— at least since I first encountered them in a group show of contemporary Chicago artists at Pleiades in 2003— and this persists in the sub-series, included in the present show, that she refers to as "Mnemomix"— another invented word, merging "mneme," a term for the single unit of cellular memory and "mix," as in mixed media. With their overall compositions of repetitive rhythmic patterns, these works suggest all manner of cellular activity and microscopic life forms writhing under a lens in a laboratory, as well as the kind of intricate old-fashioned cockroach-camouflage wallpaper designs that, if encountered by a fragile alkie in a flophouse, could provoke a serious case of the DTs. (Sturdier viewers, it may comfort the reader to know, will find King's "Mnemomix" paintings hypnotically engrossing, rather than disorienting.)

However, the new twist in "Ilumatoons" is a strong sense of narrative, postmodernly nonlinear though it may be. The gist of the action consists of what the artist herself calls "flora into fauna fables," which manifest in a sense of metamorphosis. In the "Illumatoon" called "Spooked," for example, looming mountainous shapes contain veins that make them look like lettuce leaves, even as they appear to be turning into the tail-feathers and head of a big cartoon bird half-submerged in a watery expanse, its one visible eye warily regarding ominous fin-like protuberances passing nearby.

By contrast, in "Lurking," the mountainous masses could suggest some monstrous marine mammal, possibly a whale of Moby Dick dimensions. Yet there is also more than a suggestion, on the right side of the composition, of a gigantic human heart, complete with veins, ventricles, etc., looming menacingly over a sea stubbled with strange organic totems, popping up out of the water like mutant sprouts.

In another painting called "Simmering," the lunar or solar orb near the top of the composition even more firmly locates the scene in a somewhat natural setting. Here, however, even the sky is liquefied, splashing down over the lettuce-leaf mountains into the water, where, in the manner of the related drawings called "Aquaessence" and "Mutation," all manner of exotic flora and/or fauna flourish. These latter shapes might be the envy of even Lee Bontecou, the only other contemporary artist who comes close to King, when it comes to imagining new life forms based on, but not beholden to, things already existing in nature.

Perhaps the most specific images in the entire show are the tiny, delicately delineated white flowers and sinuous green stems central to the vertical composition called "Swarming," which also happens to be one of King's most extravagantly beautiful paintings. But even these immediately identifiable floral forms are seen amid luminous floating bubbles and other elements of a bejeweled and finally mysterious richness, reminiscent of nothing so much as the lush Art Nouveau surfaces of Gustav Klimt.

King's nonlinear narratives develop not by plan but as a result of her working process, evolving over time from hand-drawn, painted, and computer-generated imagery. Apparently not even she can anticipate what they will be, until they finally "reveal" themselves, as she puts it. For the viewer, the overall effect of her compositions is primarily abstract, with hints of subject matter only coming through subliminally, prompting the eternal "animal, vegetable, or mineral" quandary, even as he or she ponders their sheer visual opulence.

Reviewing this internationally exhibited artist's first New York solo show in 2005, I referred to her "gorgeous gum ball universe." I can't top that; but Kathleen King has already topped herself. Having now eliminated any need for a reviewer to cite regional influences, such as Chicago's "Hairy Who" school, when writing about her work, in the present exhibition she flowers into utter uniqueness. —Ed McCormack

Joe Chierchio: Master of Nostalgic Art Noir

"Night Owl"

It was night in the city that never sleeps. The only light on York Avenue came from the streetlamp at the corner and the storefront where we stood. It was called The Gallery of Graphic Art, and it was locked up tight for the night. But they leave the lights on in the window so you can see the pictures inside. These ones had stopped us in tracks: Night. A dark street. A streetlamp. A man. A woman. Nobody else in sight. A lit-up storefront in the city that never sleeps.

"You ever get the feeling you could step right into a picture?" she said.

"I think we already have..."

Forgive me... One is tempted to crudely imitate the hardboiled prose of Dashiell Hammett when writing about the colored pencil drawings of Joe Chierchio. Only, Hammett is inimitable, as is Chierchio, who cites WPA murals as one of his main influences but actually reminds me more of film noir, filtered through the wry wit of Garrison Keillor's softboiled radio private eye Guy Noir. The point being that the city that Chierchio draws doesn't really exist anymore, and maybe never really did, except in the minds and hearts of incurably romantic New Yorkers like myself. But Chierchio brings it all alive again, as vividly as Edward Hopper and Reginald Marsh once did, when Hopper painted his famous oil "Nighthawks" and Marsh took us on a graphic tour of Bowery dives and burlesque shows.

The son of a plumber, Chierchio grew up in Brooklyn. He studied at the High School of Art and Design, Pratt Institute, and The School of Visual Arts. After he became an award-winning art director at Grey Advertising, Bates Worldwide, Saatchi & Saatchi and Young & Rubicam, his old man stopped hounding him to go into the family business. But when he could no longer ignore the dreamlike visions fevering his imagination and begging to be put on paper, Chierchio switched to fine art, and has since exhibited his work in galleries in New York City and The Hamptons. (Currently, he is represented by the Gallery of Graphic Arts, Ltd, at 1601 York Avenue.)

Atmosphere may be a dirty word to pseudo-sophisticates who think that the only valid kind of art is that which refers to other art, rather than to the world in which we live and dream. But that doesn't stop Chierchio from drawing guys in trenchcoats and wide-brimmed fedoras who look like they stepped right out of 1940s movies lounging on corners getting shoeshines next to newspaper stands where stacks of tabloids are weighed down by bricks, or ducking into all-nite dinners on deserted streets where sedans and yellow cabs crawl by and the necklace of lights on the Brooklyn Bridge glows against the night sky.

Flying in the face of all that is held sacred in contemporary art, Chierchio evokes such scenes in loving detail in colored pencils augmented with watercolor. He draws them in a pristine technique consisting of subtly shaded color areas contained within crisp black outlines. His style is redolent of comic books, old movie posters, '40s and '50s pulp mystery magazine illustrations, and, of course, the aforementioned WPA murals, as well as the sharp angles and shadows film noir. But he draws upon such sources without the slightest hint of irony. Unlike Pop artists, who satirize the styles and subjects of earlier eras, Chierchio explores their honest expressive possibilities to transport the viewer to a parallel world, something like our own, only different.

It's a world without Starbucks, without yuppies, where nobody ever heard of George W. Bush, where the working stiff in the floppy cap in Chierchio's "Late Shift" can sip his morning coffee and read a paper at midnight in a diner where the waitress knows how to mind her own business. All the other stools at the counter are empty, their tall chrome stems casting long shadows across the white-tiled floor, all the way to an empty table where salt and pepper shakers and a jar of Heinz ketchup make a nice little still life. Through the big plateglass window you can see a cabbie who just finished breakfast and picked up a fare turning his lights on and getting ready to pull out, as nocturnal clouds float drowsily over the tenement tops and water towers.

It is a world like the one that Tom Waits sings about in his gravel-voiced honky tonk ballad about searching for the soul of Saturday night; a world, like the one in the even older song, where "you gets no bread with one meat ball"; where, in Chierchio's "Barber Shop," a corner apple vendor notices one of those ubiquitous characters in a slouch hat and trenchcoat slip into a yawning doorway near a candy-striped pole (and maybe wonders what he's up to), while a woman carries a bag of groceries past a cellar locksmith store, and a smokestack high above them all belches great gusts of gray into the deep blue sky.

It's almost always night in Chierchio's drawings—unless it's just beginning to get a little light, with a golden glow starting to show down at the end of the tracks, as in "Subway," where another guy in a hat and coat waits alone on the tracks, while a train curves around the bend, heading in the wrong direction. Every moment seems pregnant, as though every drawing is part of some mysterious ongoing narrative with all 8 million lives in The Naked City as its vast cast of characters.

Even the two Con Ed guys in "Steam Workers," winding a thick cable down a manhole while big white clouds billow up and only four windows remain lit in the darkened highrise behind them, appear as heroic as Lacoon and his two sons, wrestling those giant serpents in the famous sculpture in the Vatican Museum. For it is his special gift to invest even ordinary moments with a sense of high drama that places the drawings of Joe Chierchio among the more unique pleasures in contemporary art.

—Ed McCormack

Sheila Hecht Turns Up the Heat in Her New Solo Show at Noho

"Too Hot (Or Not) To Handle" is the intriguing title of Sheila Hecht's fourth solo show at Noho Gallery in Chelsea, 530 West 25th Street, on view from November 6 through 24, with a reception on Saturday, November 10, from 4 to 6 PM.

In it, Hecht poses the rhetorical question, "When is the work so hot, so scorching, that it both draws the viewer in, yet holds her / him at bay?"

Painters ask themselves such questions not because they expect answers, of course, but in order to instigate impulses that will prompt other essentially unanswerable questions, which they hope will lead them in new and fruitful directions.

"It's A Wrap"

For Hecht, this was obviously the right question at exactly the right time, being open-ended and unspecific enough to get her started on some of her best paintings to date. "Best," in Hecht's case always means most spontaneous, since she is the quintessential gesture painter. While other artists devise "strategies" a popular locution in the contemporary art argot, she prefers to go it, like most romantics on sheer nerve, waxing rhapsodic as the spirit moves her, reaching out impulsively to capture the passing rapture on the spur of the moment.

In this regard, Hecht has always reminded me of those Zen literati painter/poets who worked in ecstatic spurts, "spilling and splashing ink," as one of them put it, some three thousand years before the advent of Abstract Expressionism. In other words, although this may seem a silly thing to say about any contemporary painter, one gets the impression that Hecht would have ended up painting just the way she does today, even if Jackson Pollock or his French counterpart Georges Mathieu had never existed. And while many would consider it blasphemy to mention Mathieu in the same breath with Pollock, it is necessary in this case, since even though she is an American, Hecht seems as related to Mathieu, Wols and other European members of the Art Informel movement as she does to the more "action painting" contingent of The New York School.

That said, Hecht has always had her own unique way with the Gesture (capital "G" intended!) and, if evolving as an artist can be defined as becoming more completely oneself, she appears to come most completely into her own in the present show. The indication of this is that her paintings appear to have become simpler and seem even more the result of a single spontaneous event than ever before. Mind you, I am well aware that nothing in art is ever as simple as it appears. Didn't I, in a previous review, once quote Hecht referring to what she calls "the resolution of visual enigmas" and describe her process of working and reworking her paint surfaces with a brush or palette knife; of layering scraping pigment away to reveal underlying areas of color to create "palimpsestic and elements of pentimento"?

I most certainly did. However, these actions are all manifestations of process, rather than methodical contrivances, and I doubt that we will eventually learn that Hecht actually achieves the sense of spontaneity in her large paintings by blowing up thumbnail sketches with an opaque projector, as Franz Kline did, or that she plots plans her paintings well in advance of putting brush to canvas, the way Jack Kerouac plotted his novel "On the Road" with notes and drafts before typing it up on a scroll and telling everybody he wrote it in frantic marathon burst of "spontaneous bop prosody."

No, I am certain that Sheila Hecht comes closer to actually realizing Kerouac's oft-stated ideal of composing spontaneously in the manner of an improvising jazz musician, judging from the fresh, unpremeditated quality of paintings such as "Made to Measure," which consists of just a flurry of juicy vertical strokes occupying almost the entire center of a pure white canvas with utmost authority; or "Star Struck," a much larger composition dominated by a monolithic abstract shape that my subjective eye can't help but Rorshach into the huge profile of a fire-engine-red cartoon dog with one square pinkish eye, calling to mind Picasso's words to the effect that it takes a lifetime to learn to paint like a child.

Hecht makes it look easy in "Feeling Red," one of her most chromatically stunning recent paintings, where spare calligraphic forms dance over a vibrantly pulsating red field, and the piece de resistance is just one minute spot of white-primed canvas left bare at the lower right corner to let a burst of air into the composition and keep it from overheating. The titles of other new paintings, such as "Start Your Engines," (a whirling, swirling gestural blast-off), "It's a Wrap" (a complete coloristic tour de force), and "Just Because" (a splendidly insouciant, action-packed red, yellow and pink attack on a virgin white surface) aptly encapsulate the energy, decisiveness, and visual wit that make Sheila Hecht one of our most rapturous, rhapsodic, and sumptuously sensuous abstract painters.

—Ed McCormack

monkdogz urban art

monkdogz.com

El Perro Monje

- A Latin Show -

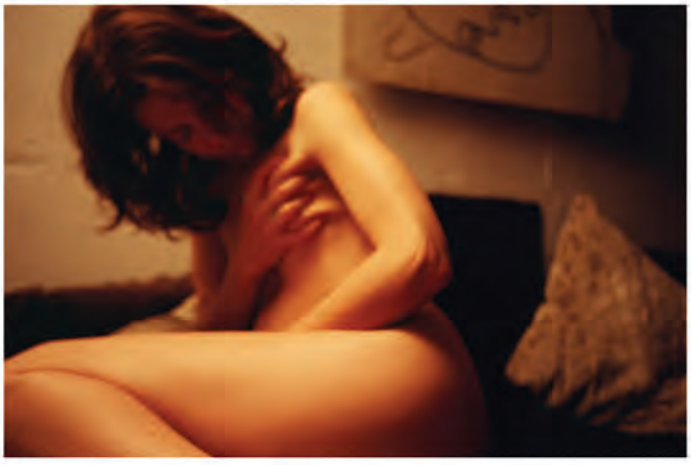
On view until November 24, 2007

Batís Campillo (Spain)
Pablo Caviedes (Ecuador)
Jesús Contreras Chávez (Mexico)
Juan Luis Gonzalez (Mexico)
Pilar Jiménez (Colombia)
Olmedo Moncayo (Ecuador)
Karina Sala (Argentina)
Norma Trosman (Argentina)
Francisco Villagrán (Mexico)

~ Flashing Flesh ~

From November 29, 2007 to January 12, 2008

Opening reception Thursday November 29, 2007 from 5 to 8 pm



Oudi Arroni (Israel)
François Burgun (France)
Dulcie Dee (USA)
Laila Escartín (Spain)
Lorena Isla (Mexico)
Mollie Kellogg (USA)
Ai Ohkawara (Japan)
Kathy Ostman-Magnusen (USA)
William Thierfelder (USA)

547 W 27 Street
Chelsea, New York
(212) 216-0030

Tuesday - Saturday
11 am to 6 pm
and by appointment

Faye Earnest

"Stratification 2"

November 1 - 24, 2007
Reception: November 8th, 6-8pm

WORLD FINE ART GALLERY
511 West 25th Street, Ste 803
New York, N.Y. 10001
Phone: 646 336 1677 Hrs: Tues - Sat 12 - 6pm
www.worldfineart.com info@worldfineart.com

James Eugene Albert

November 1 - 24, 2007

Reception: November 8th, 6-8pm

"New York Moon"

WORLD FINE ART GALLERY
511 West 25th Street, Ste 803
New York, N.Y. 10001
Phone: 646 336 1677 Hrs: Tues - Sat 12 - 6pm
www.worldfineart.com info@worldfineart.com

COLLECTIVE EXHIBITION
November 20 - December 11
RECEPTION
Thursday, November 29, 6-8pm

Beneath the Surface
Valda Batraks
Karla Caprali
Patricia Fabian
Markus Maria Saufhaus

Enigmatic Abstraction
Bill Adés
Carol Bajen-Gahm

Visions of Tranquility
Katrina Read
Carol Reeves
Sacha

530 West 25th St.
Chelsea, New York, NY
Tel: 212-226-4151
Fax: 212-966-4380
www.Agora-Gallery.com

Agora Gallery