Nov/Dec 2009-Jan 2010 www.galleryandstudiomagazine.com Vol. 12 No. 2 New York

GALLERY & STUDIO

HOBOHEMIAN FLOPHOUSE:

The Carlton Arms Hotel, where each room is a funky art installation and there's a cat box down at the end of the hall, is New York City's last low-rent hipster haven

by Ed McCormack, pg. 22
with photos by Darek Solarski

Line of Lines no. 4, 2007, Digital Print, 44" x 80"

John Fischer
November 5 - 28, 2009

Artmus Studio
75 Warren St. Ground Floor NY, NY 10007
(212) 732-3040

Danièle M. Marin

Image Essay

January 5 - 30, 2010
Reception: Saturday, January 9, 4 - 6 pm

noho gallery

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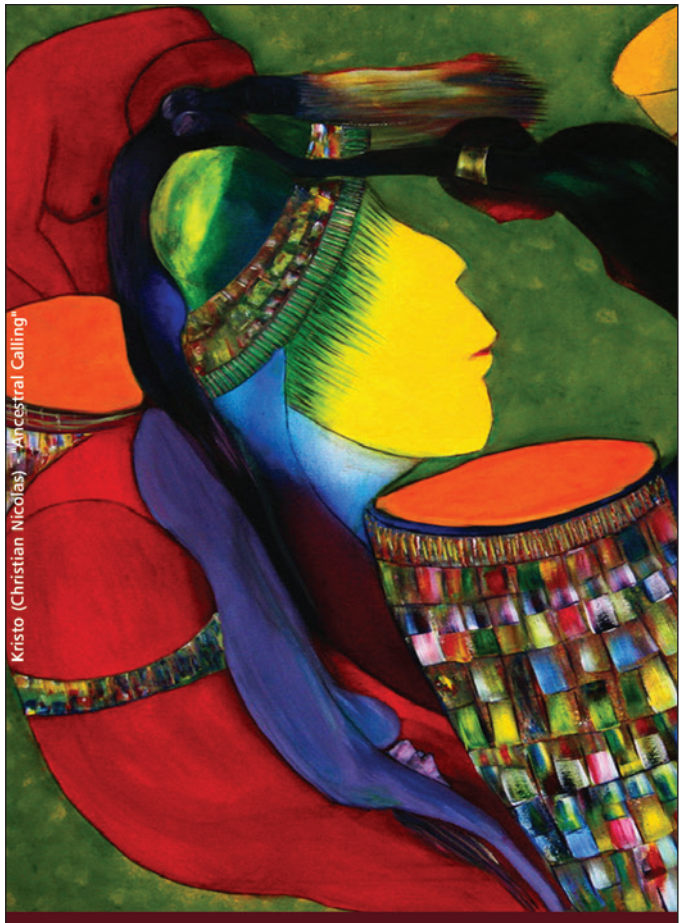

The Color of Transformation

Mats Andersson
István Csizmadia
Sunil Howlader
Kristo (Christian Nicolas)
Doug Simon

Reception
Thursday, December 3, 6-8pm

Nov 20 - Dec 11, 2009

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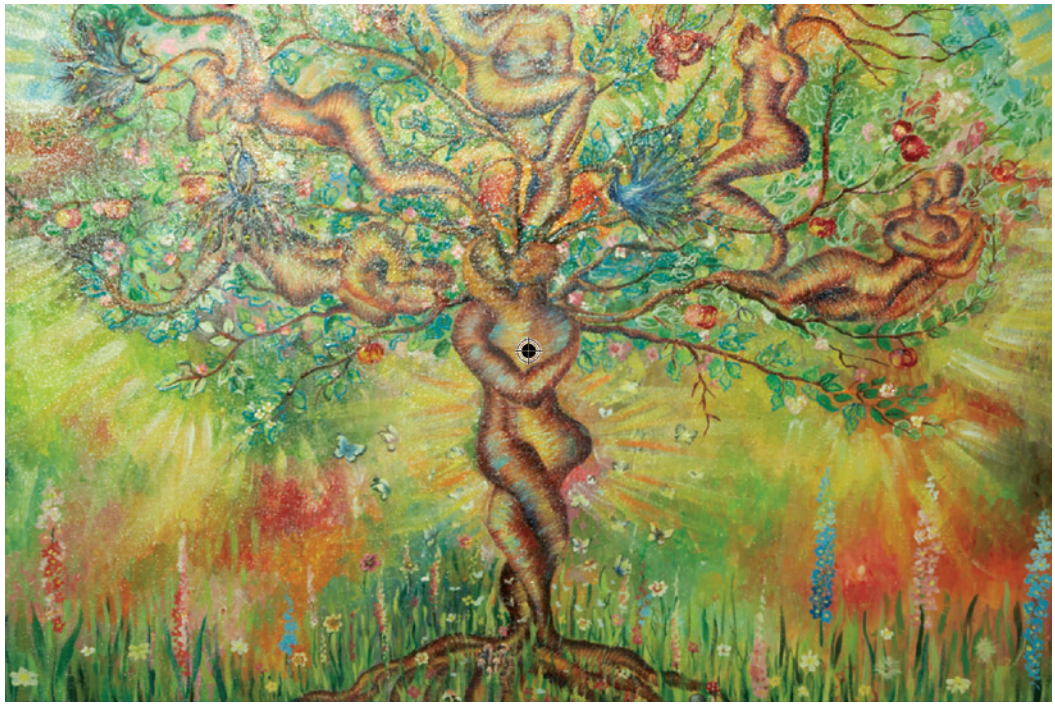
Agora Gallery

Teona Titvinidze-Kapon



"Love Tree," 39"x27"

December 1 - 12, 2009 Reception: December 1, 5 - 7 pm

Gallery Hours during exhibition: Tuesday through Saturday, 2 - 6 pm

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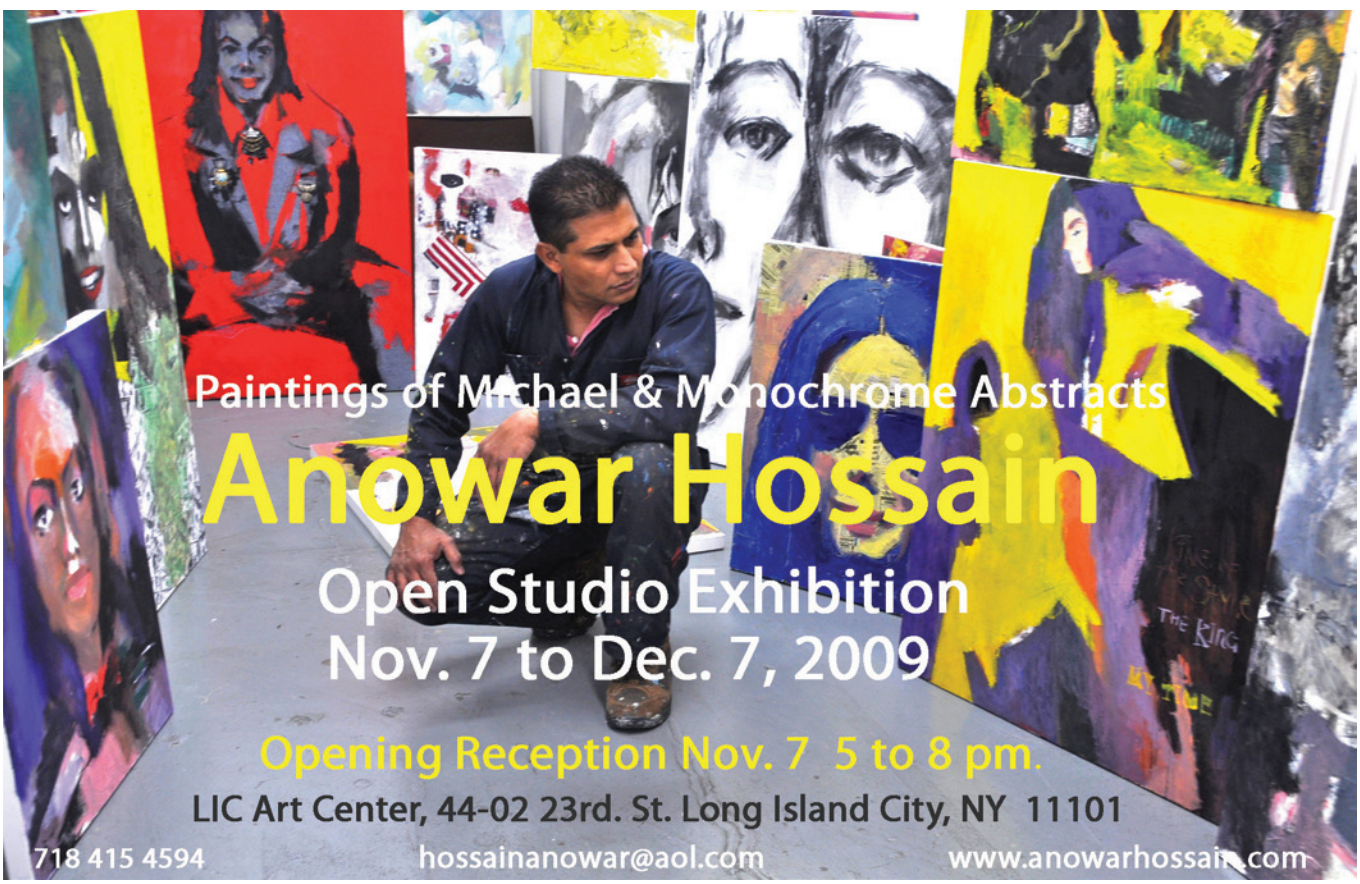

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Rad art all over the rooms and halls, body bags bouncing down the stairs, rumors of ghosts, and even (for a time) a resident serial killer — staying at the ***Carlton Arms Hotel*** *is a rare aesthetic adventure. –Page 22*

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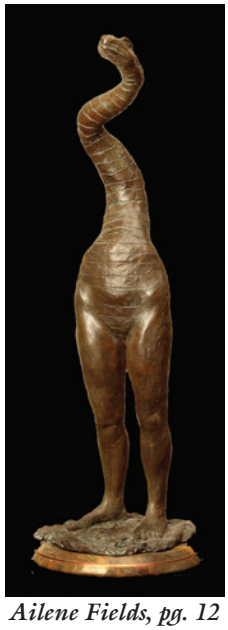

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(212) 861-6814 E-mail: galleryandstudio@mindspring.com

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER **Jeannie McCormack**
MANAGING EDITOR **Ed McCormack**
SPECIAL EDITORIAL ADVISOR **Margot Palmer-Poroner**
DESIGN AND PRODUCTION **Karen Mullen**
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR **Maureen Flynn**
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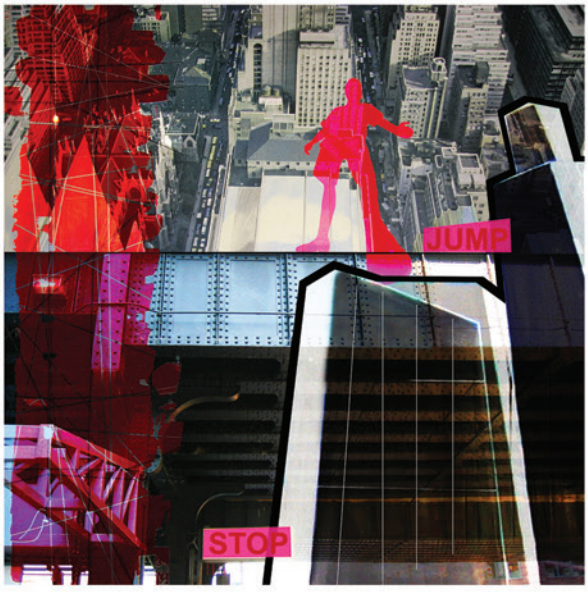
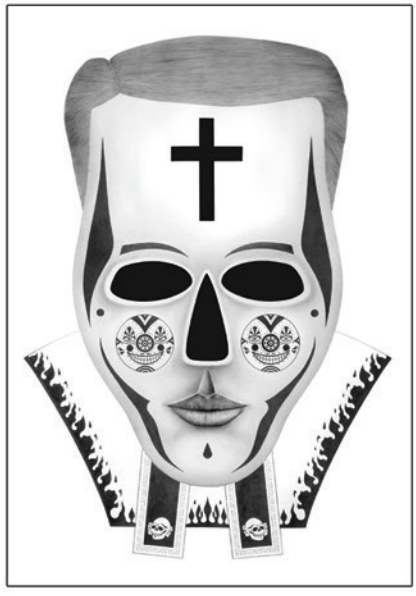
"If you enter it will no longer be the same"
Batís Campillo
mixed media - 47"

"Instructions"
Rich Milo
acrylic on canvas - 48" x 54"



"Digital B"
Karin Perez
mixed media - 31" x 31



"Priest"
Lou Patrou
graphite on paper - 40" x 33"

The Two-Fisted Aesthetic of Hendrik Smit

If what the poet and critic Frank O'Hara once referred to as the "crisis of figurative as opposed to nonfigurative art" dogged his illustrious fellow countryman Willem de Kooning throughout his career, the contemporary Dutch painter Hendrik Smit would appear to be such a naturally abstract artist as to suggest that he hardly, if ever, considered it. In the face of all the self-protective equivocation of postmodernism, Smit continues to churn out vigorous gestural abstractions with unflagging conviction in his latest New York solo show at 532 Gallery Thomas Jaeckel, 532 West 25th Street, from October 29 through November 28, 2009. (Reception November 5, from 6 to 8:30 PM.)

A tondo or two is invariably included in Smit's exhibitions and is always a good place to start discussing his work, since he is one of the very few artists today who regularly paints in the round, and he does so very dynamically indeed. A circular format seems to suit his freewheeling style, perhaps because its perfect symmetry suggests limitless space and enhances the sense of expansiveness in his vortex-like compositions.

Eschewing brushes, he paints directly with his hands and fingers, which gives his compositions their visceral impact, with bold, thick strokes of red, yellow, blue, and purple-violet twisting and turning like glistening entrails.

Smit is a burly fellow, and given the swirling circular energy that animates even the rectangular works that make up the bulk of his oeuvre, one imagines him going at the painting with both arms, like one of those great windmills so iconic to the Netherlands. Indeed, his two-fisted approach almost single-handedly (if that's not a contradiction in terms) appears to restore the macho factor to the Abstract Expressionist ethos — political correctness be damned! For, like it or not, there seems to be as much testosterone as turpentine mixed into Smit's oil pigments, and his handling of acrylics is no less muscular.

Yet that, admittedly, is a subjective interpretation of his way of painting from the inside out, athletically and from the gut, so to speak, so that his compositions, while nonrepresentational, can seem as violent as Soutine's flayed beef carcasses. Another way of looking at his paintings might be to say that they are lyrical rather than brutal, and that one especially grand untitled canvas in the present exhibition, in which the roiling, boldly torn and splintered color areas suggest, if not an earthly landscape, perhaps a raging rainbow-colored sea, is symphonic in the manner of Beethoven, clashing yellow

"Untitled"

symbols and all.

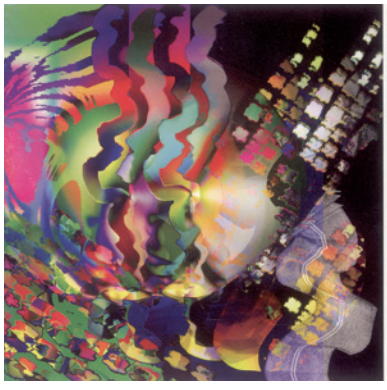
Here, as in other works in this show, the viewer is practically wrestled to the gallery floor by the artist's sheer exuberance. There is nothing passive about his compositions, which by their unrelenting intensity demand our full engagement. For one thing that can be said with absolute certainty about the paintings of Hendrik Smit is that in them, as Fairfield Porter once remarked about another painter, "Energy is a bridge to whatever is essential." Yet, if the notion of the noble savage occurs to one in the presence of Smit's work, it is promptly put to rest by the degree of aesthetic sophistication and sheer painterly panache on display.

— Byron Coleman

John Fischer: Renaissance Man of the Digital Revolution

Having long been enamored of the Belgian-born American artist John Fisher's transcendent and eclectic aesthetic vision, but having somehow always thought of him as an elusive citizen of cyberspace, I did not quite know what to expect when I learned that the legendary artist, who has been more active in Europe than the United States in recent years, would be having an exhibition at Artmus Studio, 75 Warren Street, from November 5 through 28, when I visited his studio to preview some of the featured works.

Although his distinguished history as an avant garde jazz pianist and composer and a poet, as well as a computer art pioneer, and a sculptor who attracted widespread media attention for working with bread (long before his namesake, the much hyped young art star Urs Fischer, created his "Bread House"), might have suggested a figure more in the manner of John Cage, Moondog, or Sun Ra, in the vital and sturdy flesh, Fischer turned out to bear a striking resemblance to the mature Norman Mailer, back when that pugnacious author was still in fighting form. And, like our old acquaintance Charles Mingus, Fischer radiated the physically palpable if not immediately explicable energy of eccentric genius,



Gauguin's Universe
Archival inkjet print 40" x 40" 2004

when he proceeded to explain how his new black and white linear works emanate directly from the diaphragm, from breathing deeply, as "the line begins, say, from the top and suddenly reaches the point of muscular intensity or reciprocity where motion to one or another side is dictated by the reciprocating muscle groups and the breath simultaneously."

The concept became more immediately graspable when Fischer likened the process of concentration without prior visualization required to create the original graphite drawings that he later scans and enlarges to Zen mediation. For one's first thought on entering the studio was that the large black and white works on paper (interspersed on the walls with the similarly large color prints more familiar to Fischer's oeuvre) possessed a spare elegance akin to Asian ink paintings. Indeed, the effect was enhanced by their presentation as vertical scrolls, rather than framed under glass in the usual Western manner, with the graceful linear forms swirling down the center of the composition, surrounded by generous expanses of white paper.

At first glance, too, Fischer's forms can appear spontaneous, like those that Zen masters sometimes lay down with a single broad stroke of a long-handled brush as wide as a broom. But on closer inspection, one sees that the effect has been achieved not with one swift swish of diluted black carbon ink, but with many minute, long linear strokes of graphite, laid down painstakingly over an extended period of time on a much smaller sheet of paper. Fischer then scans and enlarges his drawing in several sections, which he reconnects seamlessly to achieve the monumental scale of his finished prints.

The resulting image replicates in every detail the subtle tonal modulations and granular tactility of the graphite medium, which Fischer deftly manipulates to make the sinuous ribbon-like shapes appear to ripple and undulate in deep space, rather than hugging the picture-plane in the flat, two-dimensional manner of a calligraphic character. Thus rounded out and objectified, Fischer's forms take on a figurative allusiveness, or — in the case of some drawings, comprised of two adjoining configurations of close-set lines side — suggest two figures standing side-by-side as a couple. Yet even while evoking a human form, or at very least some semblance of a figurative presence, Fischer's forms invariably retain their gracefully fluid linear integrity as autonomous abstract entities.

Nor is line a new preoccupation for the artist. As a sinuously configured abstract oil on canvas from decades ago that happened to be leaning against a work table in the studio during our visit attested, linear forms were prominent even before he switched to computer art in the 1970s, when digital art was still in its infancy. And although they may not be the main event, linear elements also inform to a significant degree Fischer's color compositions as well, as seen in his archival inkjet print "Gauguin's Universe," where a wavy configuration scanned directly from one of his graphite drawings is juxtaposed with a serpentine rainbow of hues that evoke through their tropical radiance an abstract sense of the heat and sensuality of the older artist's self-made Tahitian Eden.

Although Fischer does not usually set out to incorporate such art historical references in his own work, he says that he often "discovers" them in the course of composing his "electronic paintings" on the computer. One of the more striking, if incongruous, examples can be seen in another archival inkjet print called "Moose Variations," in which a cartoonishly stylized frieze of moose heads harks back to the starkly silhouetted flat color areas in Braque's post-cubist still life compositions. And while Fisher also cites Matisse, Paul Klee, and Mark Rothko as figures who have influenced him coloristically, such references are but a small part of his overall artistic project, since he maintains that "the color universe made accessible with computer software is vast and enormously greater than what is possible with oil paints." (One of the most dazzling possibilities that he exploits splendidly is the layering of several luminous and translucent hues to evoke an illusion of infinite spatial depth, particularly in one long, majestic horizontal print that suggested, for this writer, the twinkling lights in a nocturnal urban panorama.)

Number 5- 1992 graphite on paper Gicle archival digital print 2007 40.5" width 72" height

However, he hastens to add, "I stay away from mathematical formulas and do as painters have always done, use my eyeballs to choose and appreciate color." And it is this final reliance on the eternal faculties of the human sensibility, in harmony with modern technology, that one feels certain will finally make John Fischer (who was honored in 2008 with a major solo exhibition at the Oberhessiches Museum Giessen, and has another major survey coming up in 2010 at the Kunstverein-Landau, also in Germany) an artist for the ages. —Ed McCormack

Everyday Alchemy in the Art of Judith Zeichner

Without making qualitative comparisons between the artists one is about to cite as examples, there is a particular strain of domestic realism that stretches from Pierre Bonnard to Fairfield Porter to Alex Katz. In their different manners, all three of these painters depict people at leisure in settings that appear to combine the creature comforts of bourgeois life with the cultural riches of a genteel bohemianism.

Although previously familiar as a landscape painter, some of whose most outstanding canvases were created during a residency in "Cape Cornwall," a rugged and remote coastal region of southeast England, the name of Judith Zeichner must now be added to this company.

Zeichner's new solo exhibition can be seen at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 3 through 28, with a reception on November 7 from 4 to 7 pm. The show is called "Hats," but the title is somewhat misleading; for while various hats, ranging from straw sun bonnets to Western stetsons to baseball caps, are worn by all of the figures in her new paintings, Zeichner actually evokes an extensive milieu, fraught with a complexity of subtle undertones.

"Secret in a Garden"

Indeed, prompted by a painting in the show called "Secret in a Garden," one was tempted to imagine the series as links in a narrative, like film stills. Aside from a couple of interior and beach scenes the setting in most of the paintings is the lawn or deck of what appears to be a sprawling country estate. Perhaps it belongs to one among a group of women who have gathered there for a weekend of friendship, sunbathing, light summer reading, plein air painting, and other convivial activities. "Secret in a Garden" could depict the pivotal moment at which the casual gathering takes on dramatic depth and conflict.

Cropped more in the manner of a cinematic close-up than a traditional composition in painting, the picture depicts two young women having an intimate tête-à-tête. Set against a background of clear blue sky and bright green lawn, their dark designer chapeaux appear incongruously funereal. The formal elegance of their dresses, in darker shades of the same two colors, also suggests that they have just arrived from the city, as one woman places a hand on the others' shoulder and imparts a confidence that causes her friend to stare off despondently with the one blue eye visible beneath the scalloped brim of her shadowy black hat.

Such subjective fantasizing on the basis of implicit content aside, the real drama in Judith Zeichner's paintings derives from the skill with which she merges nuances of figurative gesture with the actual material gestures of painting itself, to achieve, through layered or juxtaposed patches of color, the sense of pictorial tension that Hans Hofmann, referring to the most vital element of Abstract Expressionism, called "push and pull." Indeed, this more palpable sense of drama comes across even when Zeichner paints the figure in repose, as seen in "Rosanne Reading," in which the push and pull derives from the abstract confluence of the woman's green bikini, the simplification of her form, with its barely modulated flesh tones, and the bold blue, green, and white stripes on her recliner.

While "Rosanne Reading" approaches the semiabstraction of a painting by Milton Avery, the shadow-dappled figure of the nude sunbather in "Jody on the Deck" is more worked up in the manner of Bonnard's many paintings of his wife in the bath. Zeichner's handling of the chiaroscuro in the foliage beyond the deck railing behind the figure also recalls the patterning of the Nabis. But while such references to her artistic predecessors are inherent to her painterly sophistication, the youthful comeliness of the nude figure adds a more immediate erotic element to the aesthetic appeal of the picture.

"Spider Hat" is another painting of a sunbather, albeit with the composition cropped just below her yellow bikini top. The title refers to the intricate spidery shadows cast over one side of the dozing woman's face and neck by the wide weave in the floppy brim of her straw sun hat. Here again, Zeichner shows a mastery of close-up composition comparable to that of Alex Katz. However, it is doubtful that Katz's severely simplified style could accommodate such intricate shadow play convincingly, or that he possesses anything like the painterly versatility that Zeichner displays in her juicy wet-in-to-wet interpretation of the densely wooded area behind the woman's slatted deck chair.

Zeichner shows equal mastery of less fluid techniques, such as drybrush and scumbling, in two other close-up compositions: in "Yellow Hat," the opacity of the pigment employed to depict a woman hidden behind sunglasses and a big yellow sombrero, along with her blond Scandinavian beauty, enhances a sense of Garboesque mystery. Here, too, the impenetrable impasto, which solidifies even the warm-toned shadows on her sunbaked complexion, could possibly suggest an opaque personality as well.

Then there is "White Nightgown," in which Zeichner demonstrates further virtuosity with the loose gestural manner she employs to evoke a majestic full length standing figure in a transparent nightgown. Set seductively against a vigorously brushed blue ground like a strangely palpable phantom, the woman appears as though illuminated by moonlight pouring through a window into a boudoir, her breasts and pubic patch visible through the gossamer fabric conjured with smoky white strokes.

Here, as in "Reader at the Beach," where a swift, pale triangle suffices to supply the flash of light that delineates an entire face, or in both versions of "Lynn at Work," where the patchy vigor of the brushstrokes exemplify the activity in which a woman standing at an outdoor easel is engrossed, Judith Zeichner splendidly accomplishes the peculiar alchemy which belongs to the art of painting alone. — Ed McCormack

Taking a Broader View of Marianne Schnell's Painterly Oeuvre

Even taking into account that her approach is no less adamantly abstract than that of the New York School painters from whom she descends, one has such an overwhelming memory of so many gracefully floating forms with serrated edges in a muted palette of burnished reds and golden ochres set off by dark, swift "action lines," that it can be tempting to typecast Marianne Schnell as a painter of primarily autumnal hues and moods — much in the same way that one tends to think of Monet and Renoir as a painters of summer and sunlight.

The association of painter and season is so automatic that on an afternoon in Carl Schurz Park this past Fall when a member of the maintenance crew walked by with a machine that scattered the fallen leaves and sent them flying and spinning into the air, one thought spontaneously, "Ah, a Marianne Schnell!"

Of course, it is no small thing when any artist appears to own any aspect of the everyday world so thoroughly. For even if Schnell actually did make only one kind of painting, her talent is such that she would belong to the first rank of those artists who mine a strictly circumscribed milieu to make a creative contribution far greater than the sum of its parts.

However, Schnell's most recent exhibition of paintings at The Broome Street Gallery, at 498 Broome Street, in Soho, made clear that even those of us long familiar with her work have had a tendency to shortchange its variousness, due to the persistent impression of a signature style fostered by one particularly forceful aspect of her overall artistic project.

But while Schnell purposely refrains from titling her paintings to avoid promoting just such specific, self-limiting interpretations on the part of the viewer, there were, to be sure, several canvases in the exhibition that reinforced the autumnal impression through her choice of colors, as well as through the buoyant windswept character of the forms that she set in motion against a pristine white ground. Yet one also noticed — if not for the first time, more consciously than ever before — that the same sense of flotation that we often associate with her more familiar motifs also animated compositions in which the colors were more varied and the forms were more elusive.

Perhaps this sudden clarity of perception had to do with the skillful arrangement of the paintings on the gallery walls, which juxtaposed older and newer works with little apparent concern for chronology. Rather, the installation seemed calculated to demonstrate a sense of simultaneity, encouraging considerable contrasts of subjective interpretation within the stylistically consistent continuum of an artist who apparently found her true direction early in her career. That no dates were included in the price list also seemed to indicate that Schnell considers the immediate sense of a fleeting moment in time poignantly apprehended in each individual canvas infinitely more germane to her intentions than the actual date of the painting's completion.

Overall, the installation of the exhibition made it possible (at least for this particular viewer) to get a broader view than ever before of how not only nature, as reflected through the prism of Abstract Expressionism, but aspects of subsequent art movements such as Color Field Painting, have been assimilated into Schnell's aesthetic agenda all along. Her coloristic subtlety, in particular, came across most appealingly in works such as an unusual hinged triptych with wing-like protrusions displaying painted canvases on all five sides of the structure that were not flush with the wall. Thus one could view the piece as one would a sculpture, walking around it and literally into it to be enfolded by its lyrically limned extensions as if by a welcoming embrace.

"Untitled"

In this work, Schnell quite literally achieves her oft-stated goal of giving the viewer a sense of being "within nature," as opposed to being a mere spectator to it. Here, too, the intimate space that the piece beckons one into calls attention to the shimmering chromatic harmonies sparked by the blue, purple, green, and reddish hues that bring the composition alive like a smaller abstract descendant of Monet's water lilies.

Another relatively anomalous and newly invigorating feature of Schnell's most recent solo show was a series of new works incorporating gold leaf, which could admittedly seem an incongruous material for an artist known for working spontaneously with diluted, translucent layers of oils and acrylics. True to form, however, Schnell employs gold leaf not in the traditional manner of Byzantine icons but with freewheeling experimental exuberance. At times, she even paints over the gold leaf to lend her colors a radiant underglow. And in one an especially vibrant and visually witty work (to which she uncharacteristically affixed the title "24K"), Schnell appeared to playfully parody the neo-chinoiserie of "Pattern and Decoration" painters like Robert Kushner, bracketing florally allusive forms between staccato dashes quite unlike the cursively sweeping "action lines" employed in her more gestural paintings.

Perhaps the most pervasive revelation of this splendid exhibition, however, was the belated discovery of what a dazzlingly dexterous painter Schnell truly is, particularly in her use of the "wet into wet" technique to make one layer of color recede into another, as seen in an especially sumptuous untitled large canvas in which splashes of yellow, pink and orange of a more confectionery than natural aspect fairly melt into a luminous pale green ground. Here, the effect is more atmospheric than physical, like candy-colored neon burning through fog, while in other departures from her familiar practice of setting leaf-like or florally allusive forms afloat on a white ground, the artist again explores a more chromatically saturated approach.

And it is in these paintings, where her forms become less descriptive, dispersing vigorously into colorful scrawls, blurs, and drips, that Marianne Schnell finally transcends nature altogether to breathe the intoxicating ether of unfettered painterly endeavor.

— Ed McCormack

The Exuberant Vision of TUTEN at Caelum Gallery

The old saying "Turnabout is fair play" is perhaps truer in art than anywhere else. Every art student knows that Van Gogh was a great admirer of Japanese prints and even painted copies of two famous prints by Hiroshige: "Bridge in the Rain" and "Plum Tree in Bloom."

Without going so far as to copy any specific work by Van Gogh, or even to emulate his style, the contemporary Japanese painter TUTEN Hiromi-Sakurai, best known by the single name TUTEN, recently resumed the East-West dialogue in his solo exhibition "Life from O>1," at Caelum Gallery, 508-526 West 26th Street.

The title painting of TUTEN's show, a large abstraction featuring the sun as a huge yellow orb dripping light like egg yolk over a jigsaw terrain whose fiery colors match its own radiance, set the chromatic tone for his entire exhibition. Indeed, the overall effect on entering the gallery transported one back to a time when large-scale abstract painting still seemed like a heroic endeavor. The old excitement of what Clement Greenberg once hailed as "American type painting" was there again in these big brilliant oils on linen, albeit in a bright new Japanese package.

"Chrysanthemums Playing with Moon"

The show presented a refreshing change from certain other venues in the New York art scene, where one could almost get the impression that an atmosphere of gloomy recession-era austerity and uncertainty had begun to permeate the work itself. Even TUTEN's paintings in which the sun was not the main motif projected a sense of radiance and energy, with their vibrant colors and their bold, buoyant forms. While the main thrust of these paintings is invariably abstract, vestiges of landscape, organic growth, and the human figure often play hide-and-seek among the flowing, flowering color areas.

In one large oil on linen, "Chrysanthemums Playing with Moon," although nothing is spelled out specifically, not only is the lunar orb of the title indicated by a vigorously brushed form floating in the upper left-hand corner of the composition, but there is a also a strong suggestion of a nocturnal landscape, with shadowy hills, a body of water, and fanciful vegetation indicated in TUTEN's muscularly painted shapes, many of which have a biomorphic quality similar to that in the paintings of William Baziotes. However, this Japanese painter is a much more intrepid colorist than that American Abstract Expressionist, often combining colors that depart from the familiar palette of nature. Sometimes, for example, he'll employ all three values of cadmium red (light, medium, and dark), along with alizarin crimson, cerulean blue, ultramarine blue, blazing oranges, hot bubblegum pinks, deep purples and other unexpected hues, within a single canvas to sensational effect. Bumping right into each other, played off against strident yellows, such colors create a sumptuous, simmering optical frisson.

"life from 0>1"

Perhaps TUTEN's chromatic daring is at its most intense in a large canvas called "Woman & Sunlight," where the semi-abstract amazonian figure makes one think of de Kooning — only without the hint of violence toward the opposite sex that once made de Kooning's painting controversial. For while TUTEN's woman is also formidable, she is by no means a monster, and the strokes with which she is evoked, while vigorous and thickly pigmented, are not strident in such a way as to suggest misogyny. Rather, they are as luscious as those of Nicolas de Stael, expressing the artist's sheer delectation in the painterly process and unabashed affection for his subject.

These feelings are expressed most overtly in the painting he calls "Women Strength," in which a mythic female face, evoked with muscular skeins of thick impasto, appears to materialize majestically amid an abstract landscape, suggesting an archetypal "Earth Mother." In a painting such as this, one sees the most serious side of an artist who in a poetic written statement issued in connection with the exhibition expressed a yearning to unite with "the shine of the spirit toward the unknown world."

Yet what makes TUTEN such an appealing artist is that he is also just as willing to engage with a lighter aspect of human nature, as seen in another major canvas called "Manhattan Lady." Here, once again, since the painting is essentially abstract, nothing is delineated in detail. Yet the svelteness of the central form, the appealing "kandy-kolored" hues and the vertical thrust of the composition simultaneously call to mind the elegance of John Singer Sargent's society portraits and one of their contemporary counterparts (the type of sophisticated fashionista who, as she strolls along Fifth Avenue shopping, gets photographed for the Sunday Styles section of *The New York Times*) translated into a dynamic arrangement of interlocking abstract forms.

While TUTEN's largest canvases are invariably comprised of bold, often thickly pigmented, color areas that are clearly defined without becoming exactly "hard-edged," his relatively easel-size paintings, such as the lyrical composition "Rose Mind," are generally created with more calligraphic gestural strokes of variegated color in the manner of the Abstract Expressionists. Both modes of expression, however, possess his unique "touch," as well as the exuberant expansiveness of vision that made this exhibition at Caelum Gallery so downright exhilarating.

— Ed McCormack

The Jungian Imagery of Teona Titvinidze-Kapon Return to Gelabert Studios Gallery

The long awaited publication of the great Swiss psychotherapist Carl Jung's self-illustrated dream journal the Red Book seems auspiciously timed to enhance interest in the upcoming exhibition of paintings by Teona Titvinidze-Kapon, at Gelabert Studios Gallery, 255 West 86th Street from December 1 through 12. (Reception: Tuesday, December 1, 5 - 7 pm.)

For as I wrote in a previous review for this publication, Titvinidze-Kapon, who emigrated from the Republic of Georgia to the United States in 1994, is an artist whose Neo-Romantic paintings are more in the spirit of Jungian theory regarding the transformative powers of dreams than of the coldly analytical Freudian model, which inspired many of the Surrealists.

Indeed, although the paintings with which Jung illustrated the Red Book almost a hundred years ago were locked away with his manuscript in a bank vault in Switzerland for the last quarter century, only to see the light of day recently, their sinuous forms and brilliant colors show a real kinship with Titvinidze-Kapon's compositions.

An important difference between them, however, is that while Jung's pictures, conceived on the miniature scale of medieval book illuminations, are literal illustrations of his dreams, and therefore more beholden to specific content than to aesthetic considerations, Titvinidze-Kapon's paintings are conscious works of art. Thus she is free to embellish imaginatively upon subject matter dredged up from the subconscious, creating easel-scale compositions of great complexity and beauty.

The tree, a recurring motif in Titvinidze-Kapon's work, as it was for her Neo-Romantic predecessor Pavel Tchelitchew, was also an important symbol for Jung, judging from the few advance examples of his illustrations reproduced prior to the Red Book's publication. Two of the most striking among Titvinidze-Kapon's tree paintings are "Love Tree" and "Big Tree." In the former painting, the entwined bodies of lovers make up the tree's trunk and spring from its limbs; the entire composition appears lit-up in glowing rainbow hues like a tantric Christmas tree by the heat of their passion.

In the latter painting, the anthropomorphic tree filled with lovers has apparently twisted free from the earth and swirls skyward in the manner of a tornado, high above the curve of the earth and the fairy tale castle in the fanciful landscape below. Both paintings suggest a state of intense erotic transcendence, tantamount to a spiritual epiphany.

By contrast, the tree takes on a somewhat elegiac aspect in another painting called "Marriage," where the colors are considerably more subdued. And although this tree appears suspended in a metaphysical space on a plot of land torn free from the firmament, its limbs bear not the ripe fruits of passion but the ragged, down-to-earth remnants of dreams deferred: an empty groom's suit blowing in the wind on a hanger from one limb, a bride's dress flapping like a flag of surrender from another, while a naked man hugs the tree's trunk yearningly, a nude woman perches out of reach in its uppermost branches, and all around them filmy winged phantoms swirl.

From this composition, one can only gather that the ecstatic early eroticism of love has given way to the complexities of a long-term union, in which the couple has apparently reached an impasse that lends the painting its melancholy beauty.

"Big Tree" 39" x 48"

Without such complications, of course, Teona Titvinidze-Kapon would be a less profound painter; for it is her willingness to embrace all of life that makes her work resound with universality. In this regard, perhaps her most drastic vision is the composition entitled "Loneliness," in which forlorn figures inhabit a landscape of mud-colored ruins closer in atmosphere to the desolate terrains of surrealism than the bucolic settings in most of her paintings. And in another canvas called "Rain," we again see a darker dimension of the artist's psyche in a composition depicting ramshackle dwellings caught in a deluge that approaches the abstract for the pure, powerful expressiveness of its forms.

However, the prevailing mood of Titvinidze-Kapon's oeuvre is overwhelmingly upbeat, as seen in the delightful pastoral scene "Girls Picking Apples," and the more fantastic composition called "Whirling Children," in which young couples in flowery costumes take flight like Chagall lovers around an idyllic sun-drenched landscape with a decidedly folkloric feeling, perhaps influenced by East European peasant art. Another especially charming painting "Morning in Georgia," where a courting couple kisses on a bridge spanning a quaint little village also recalls Chagall, while other paintings of family groupings within landscapes, such as "Mother and Children," are tender evocations of maternal love by an artist who has two children of her own.

Somewhat anomalous for the absence of human figures, yet altogether characteristic for its visual poetry, "Butterflies" depicts many of the ephemeral little creatures of the title swarming around a tree stump with a delicate flower-bedecked bird's nest nestled in the crook of one of its sawed off limbs. This is one of her most poetic and meticulously detailed pictures, right down to the delicate wildflowers growing at the base of the stump, which rival the floral pastels of Redon for their vibrant colors, and the swarm of even tinier insects attending them. Like a symbolic crucifixion (for the stump's sawed-off limbs make it resemble a somewhat askew cross), "Butterflies" could be seen as a secular yet highly spiritual statement about natural regeneration.

Indeed, Teona Titvinidze-Kapon's entire oeuvre finally comes across as an enterprise at once aesthetically uplifting and life-affirming.

— J. Sanders Eaton

Yvonne Thomas (1913-2009) at Katharina Rich Perlow

Like drinking and brawling at the Cedar Tavern, male chauvinism was part and parcel of the Abstract Expressionist movement. Few women were admitted to that exclusive boy's club. One of them was Yvonne Thomas (1913-2009), the subject of a magnificent memorial exhibition at Katharina Rich Perlow Gallery, in The Fuller Building, 41 East 57th Street, through December 10.

Thomas, who worked right up to the end of her life, dying at age 95 of lingering injuries sustained from a fall in her studio, was born in Nice, France, and brought to the United States by her parents in 1925. She initially studied art at Cooper Union and the Art Students League, and later was a student of Amédée Ozenfant for over a decade. In an honorary sense, she became "one of the boys" in 1948, after the Surrealist painter Robert Matta's wife introduced her to Subjects of the Artist (better known as "The Club"), a loose-knit New York School discussion group in a loft on 8th Street. Fellow members, such as Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, and Robert Motherwell, quickly recognized the young artist's talent and welcomed her into the fold.

Thomas was included in all five of the New York Paintings and Sculpture annuals, as well as the seminal 9th Street Show in 1951. Her work was exhibited in the Tanager Gallery, a legendary cooperative of the Tenth Street period, as well as such prestigious commercial venues as the Stable Gallery, Zabriskie, Betty Parsons, and Xavier Fourcade (de Kooning's last art dealer). And her paintings have found their way into the collections of the Guggenheim Museum, the National Gallery of Art, and numerous other public institutions.

"Summer Quartet" 1961 oil on linen 47 x 67

The exhibition at Katharina Rich Perlow Gallery makes splendidly clear why Thomas was so widely exhibited and collected, as well as why she was so esteemed by her New York School colleagues. She was not only a vigorous gestural artist in the best tradition of Abstract Expressionism, but her chromatic subtlety anticipated Color Field painting, even in early canvases such as "Summer Day II" (1952) and "Summer Fantasy" (1954). The former painting is most notable for the elegance of its cubist-inflected color construction; in the latter, color alone carries the day, with luminous pink hues and expanses of green suggesting verdant vestiges of lyrical landscape.

And by the time she painted "Summer Quartet" (1961), in which a buildup of white strokes, bracketed between a single streak of strident yellow at the upper left edge of the canvas and a welter of blue gestures on the right, abruptly aborts a looping linear configuration, creating an exquisite sense of Zen "emptiness" at the center of the daringly asymmetrical composition,Yvonne Thomas' mature mastery was everywhere in evidence.

— Ed McCormack

"Transformation" in a Church Chapel

Although artist and West Side Arts Coalition curator Sonia Barnett didn't know her exhibition, "Transformation," would have to be relocated to temporary venue due to construction on Broadway Mall Community Center, the move was serendipitous, since the show seemed especially apropos on the walls around the altar at Second Presbyterian Church, at 96th Street on Central Park West.

Carol Maria Weaver showed lyrical figurative oils with titles such as "Nature's Revenge," and "Nature's Transformation." While the latter work focused on a beautiful female tree goddess, the other two canvases featured faceless, ethereal figures with the slender grace of dancers amid tall grasses. They appeared in a surreal state of metamorphosis into plant life, their heads and bodies partially deconstructing into veinlike tree-limbs, presumably in punishment for the centuries of ecological ruin humankind has wreaked upon its environment.

Transformation, in two florally-derived acrylic paintings of Amy Rosenfeld, took a more abstract form. Both were created with circular splotches of pure primary colors applied as though with cotton-balls in densely concentrated overall compositions. Subtle chromatic events took place at the edges of the circular splotches, where the colors partially overlapped, creating secondary hues. In "Flowers- Abstract 2," the concentrations grew more dense toward the bottom of the composition, darkening to deep purple and creating an effect that suggested nightfall occurring upside-down.

The simple emotion of exaltation has rarely been as beautifully expressed as in "Soul Flight," one of two acrylic paintings by Mikki Powell, depicting a serenely smiling brown-skinned woman in a blue frock, set against a vibrant yellow ground, a graceful white bird soaring within the wide, welcoming circle of her arms, the rhythmic arc of the composition making the emotion contagious for the viewer as well. Another painting by Powell, of man with his face hidden behind a broad-brimmed hat lowering his head to a sliver of watermelon, had strong formal appeal.

Three small compositions in mixed media on paper by Madi Lanier, from a series called "Crio," were noteworthy for their lighthearted charm and buoyant mood. Lanier has a unique gift for making visual statements that express the poetry of pure delight with gemlike collage elements floating over amorphous, cloud-like areas of bright color applied with a spatter technique and enhanced with a gracefully flowing line.

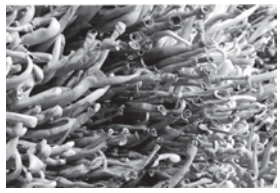
Anne Rudder is one of those gifted visionaries, like William Blake and Kenneth Patchen, who achieve a sublime synthesis of the visual and the literary. Here, along with another characteristically compelling hybrid work entitled "All Things Measures Of (Caveat Humanus)," Rudder showed an especially moving mixed media piece called "Turner Said — Tribute to Arthur Bitterman," celebrating the recently deceased Poetry Chair of the WSAC. An affecting affirmation of a kindred artistic spirit, Rudder's radiant sunburst image brilliantly illuminated Bitterman's lines, "Seldom do I see dawn but when / benediction comes along / horizon hugging, leaving space expansive and inventive, /painting white over indigo, displacing the receding dark..."

The show's curator Sonia Barnett was represented by a single work of modest scale with a remarkable allusiveness. At a glance, Barnett's acrylic on canvas "Out of the Blue" could have suggested a swiftly executed Zen-like abstraction comprised of a roughly circular red gestural shape set against a blue background. Up close, however, ghostly silhouetted figures could be discerned within the red central shape, which now suggested a kind of enclosure, such as the setting in which the Angel sometimes visits the Virgin in a Renaissance Annunciation.

The final work, a large geometric abstraction by Kenneth L. Mathewson, entitled "Metropolis," was notable for its unusual combination of geometric form and subtle, muted, harmonious color. While Mathewson's shapes are precise, they do not appear strictly hard-edged in the usual sense of the term. Instead they seem to float within the surface rather lying flat upon the picture-plane, evoking the city's atmospheric mystery.

— J. Sanders Eaton

Ambiguity Triumphant: Martha Russo's "nomos" Sculptures at Allan Stone



nomos (detail), 2007

Martha Russo, like Lucas Samaras, is an artist who plays with the boundaries between seduction and repulsion. The three large sculptures in Russo's installation "nomos," seen recently at Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th Street, were at once beautiful and scary, like gigantic man-eating flowers or an undersea species that hypnotizes the viewer and draws him or her in for the kill with its visual / tactile siren song.

With enough room between them to absorb their formidable impact, the three large pieces commanded the entire gallery space. The smallest, roughly 48 inches around, sat on the floor. It's approachable quality made it appear relatively benign. From a slight distance, it gave off the amiable presence of a giant ball of bean-sprouts. Then one got closer and was brought up short by the strange organic forms of which it was comprised. The next-to-largest, mounted on the wall like the head of some shaggy prehistoric behemoth, was immediately more forbidding. And to walk up close to the third, which measures 16 x 8 x 8 feet, spanning two walls at the corner, was akin to entering an unearthly cave entirely covered in writhing alien stalagmites.

The gallery's well written press release informed one that the artist's fixation (my term, for surely her sculptures, created from thousands upon thousands of hand-formed glazed porcelain tubes, are nothing if not obsessive) on tendril-like shapes originated with a family squid-fishing trip: "One night, a flashlight beam in the water lured a squid from the darkness. The creature flooded the water with color and shimmered in a swirling phosphorescent glow, causing Russo to decide to use color to create a similar experience of 'happy disorientation,' to surround viewers with a sense of 'floating mass' while saturating their peripheral vision with delicate texture and color."

In any case, it can be disorienting on more levels than one to encounter the myriad closely clustered porcelain projections that comprise her pieces. The overall effect is that these smooth porcelain forms are essentially flesh-colored, although some of their hollow tips are marbled with blues as delicate as the veins in fine China, or tinted with pinks like those in the lips of the labia minora—which in fact their petaled openings suggest, appearing oddly at the ends of phalloid stems. (One who wanted to go out on a somewhat zany interpretive limb might even read a hermaphroditic symbolism into these strangely original forms.) Others, however, are a deeper, more viscerally glistening red, evoking images of decapitation and inducing a queasy sensation.

Because each individual component within each of the massive monolithic forms is hand-shaped, and therefore has its own peculiar character, the tubes overall could suggest living things, as in a nest of serpents, wiggling out toward the viewer. And the unusual visual synthesis of the maximal within the minimal makes Russo's sculptures daunting in formal terms as well, lending them a dynamic, edgy energy, as though the sprawling, unruly components of so-called "scatter sculpture" were rolled in a ball and placed on the wall, or the unruly gestural strokes of Abstract Expressionist painting were corralled within the formal confines of a minimalist format.

One of the most innovative aspects of Russo's sculptures, which she has referred to as "painting with porcelain," is that they belie Robert Morris' notion that the concerns of sculpture are "not only distinct from but hostile to those of painting," even while putting a confounding new spin on that artist-theorist's contention that, in the most advanced (read: minimalist) painting, 'the structural element has been gradually revealed to be located within the nature of the literal qualities of the support."

By combining the distinctly different qualities of sculpture and painting so innovatively, Martha Russo not only brings about a harmonious détente between the two mediums but demonstrates intriguing new directions in which each may proceed.

— Ed McCormack

Ruth Gilmore Langs' Lyrical Songs of Herself

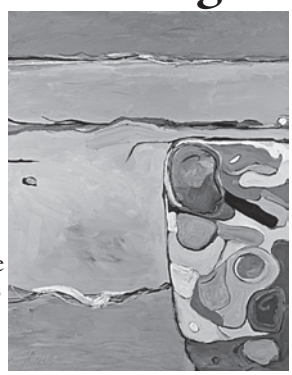
As a child, the painter Ruth Gilmore Langs, who grew up in what she calls "a very restrictive and punitive environment," spent several hours of every day locked up on a hot porch in her hometown, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

"As awful as it was for me," she said in a recent interview," it has made me an artist, because my imagination saved my life."

It isn't difficult to picture those rectangular porch screens that framed her childhood fantasies of escape morphing into the vibrant landscape-inflected abstract expressionist canvases that Langs paints today. Yet it's never quite that simple. First, Lang had to discover kindred spirits and guiding lights in Abstract Expressionists such as Richard Diebenkorn, Hans Hofmann and Joan Mitchell. She also credits Kwok Wai Lau, a teacher from China with broadening her knowledge of painting and shaping her artistic philosophy.

Langs' mature belief that "art is the language of the human spirit, the rhythm, beat and song of the self," is made implicit in the affirmative directness of the title she gives to her solo exhibition: "PAINT," on view at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 20, 2009 to March 19, 2010. (Opening reception: Thursday, December 3, from 6 to 8pm.)

Willem de Kooning once remarked to a writer for this publication who visited him in his studio in East Hampton, "All abstract painting comes from landscape." One could quibble with this generality, but not in the case of Langs, who has stated, "For me, nature is a constant theme and the abstraction allows me freedom to paint how I feel about a place."



"Swimming with Diebenkorn"

This, however, does not prevent her from also expressing how she feels about painting itself and other artists whom she admires, as seen in "Swimming with Diebenkorn." In this large, wittily titled oil on canvas, Langs pays tribute to the older California artist who, like herself, evolved a personal approach to abstract expressionism outside the orbit of the New York School. Here, she appropriates a sense of Diebenkorn's wide open spaces and characteristic palette of Pacific blues, marrying them to her own unique compositional boldness and gestural panache.

Langs' affinity for Diebenkorn, as well as for Joan Mitchell, another artist whose work is especially in tune with nature, seems logical given that the bucolic mood is everywhere evident throughout her own oeuvre, distinguishing it from the more gritty urban Abstract Expressionists such as Franz Kline. An especially buoyant sense of the pastoral comes across in a painting such as Langs' "La Valleries," where a verdant hill pops up like a big bubble amid sensual areas of fleshy pink that suggest fields of flowers seen from an aerial angle, the delicate hues that illuminate an early evening sky in Summer transposed to the earth, or an anthropomorphic take on landscape.

Other paintings by Langs, especially ones with horizontal compositions such as "River No. Ten," read to the eye like abstract versions of sweeping Hudson River School panoramas, with vast land masses, bodies of water, stratosphere, and sky suggested by luscious pastel color areas. Then there are compositions such as "Island Series: River No. Six," in which form and color are both particularly buoyant, and "Blue Moon," where Ruth Gilmore Langs' brushwork is at its most exuberantly vigorous, and muscular.

– J. Sanders Eaton

From the Silly to the Sublime: The Incomparable Sculptural Fantasy of Ailene Fields

Sculpture commands space like no other art form besides dance. But usually being stationary and bound by the force of gravity, it rarely transports us.

Virtually alone among contemporary sculptors, Ailene Fields commands a peculiar alchemy that enables her to make fantasy palpable in stone and bronze. Perhaps the most literal example is the exhilarating piece she calls "Flight," in which a sleek swarm of delicate bronze insects takes off in graceful formation from a craggy burred oak base.

Encountering Field's pieces individually or in small groupings over the years, one tended to regard her as a kindred spirit of Lewis Carroll working in three dimensions. Who else would put a pair of dime store spectacles on an anthropomorphiic annelid and title it

"Sunset"

"Bookworm?" Or envision a rotund Pied Piper leading a conga line of upright rodents, as in her fanciful sculptural tableau "Rats"?

Then Fields created "Eve," a life-size hybrid figure in bronze, in which the lower body of a human female gradually narrows to become a snake, and it became clear that, when she chooses to, she can also seem a sculptural descendant of Dante.

At last one can experience the full scope of Ailene Fields' oeuvre in "Out of the Nowhere ... Into the Here," a major retrospective at CFM Gallery, 112 Greene Street, from November 20 through December 6. Curated by the artist's close friend and art dealer Neil Zukerman, the owner and director of CFM Gallery, this is the final exhibition to be presented in the venue's Soho space, before it relocates to spacious new quarters at 236 West 27th Street, suite 4F, in Chelsea.

Although many literary writers have found inspiration in fairy tales, far fewer

"12:01 A.M."

visual artists, much less sculptors, have availed themselves of their wealth of psychological and moral archetypes, as Fields has in pieces such as "Be Careful What You Wish For," and "It Was the Most Amazing Thing." In the former, based on the tale of King Midas, the greedy monarch is seen sitting on a gold throne woefully contemplating a gold banana ... Be careful, indeed! In the latter, inspired by Hans Christian

"Eve"

Anderson's "The Princess and the Pea," a willowy bronze beauty writhes uncomfortably atop a tall stack of alabaster mattresses. Clearly visible on the bottom mattress is the single green pea that ruined her sleep and proved her royal pedigree, since "nobody but a real princess could be as sensitive as that."

But perhaps the crowning achievement of Fields' fairy tale series is "12:01 A.M.," a magnificent orange alabaster pumpkin on ornate bronze wheels, surrounded by tiny bronze mice — not only for its evocation of the most poignant moment in the tale of Cinderella, but for its sheer formal splendor.

Fields' Lewis Carroll-like sense of whimsy also comes across in "Baby," a fetching little bronze dragon that so reminded Neil Zukerman of his beloved pet puppy that the sculptor named the piece after the pampered pooch. However, that Fields' imaginative and aesthetic scope stretches far beyond mere whimsy, into the realm of the seriously fantastic and the truly sublime, can be seen in "Drawing Down the Moon," a three part sculptural sequence, exquisitely realized in pink alabaster, in which the lunar orb, electronically illuminated from within, gradually sinks into a clump of trees that, in the final piece, enfold it like a lovely breast caressed by a furry hand. (One can't help thinking of an X-rated Beauty and the Beast!)

Another illuminated alabaster orb emerges from a cloud-like mass in

"Rats"

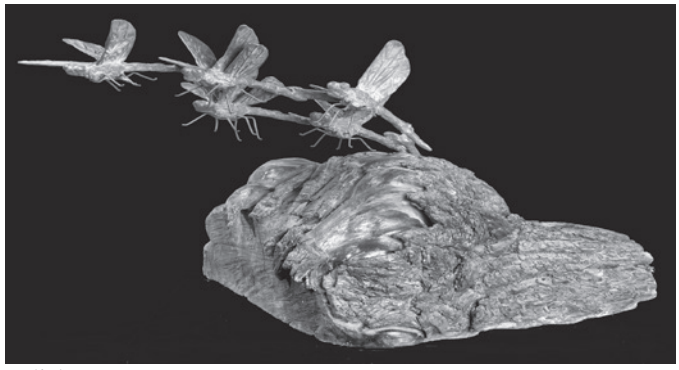
"Sunset," one of Field's most abstract yet evocative pieces, and is also a prominent motif in her "Sanctum Porta," where it nestles in the shoulder of a mysteriously fragmented structure with an arched doorway that suggests the hallucinatory setting of one of Paul Bowles' macabre short stories set in Tangier. In fact, her entire "Sanctum" series — in which the ethereal clear crystal material and interior steps of "Sanctum Silentium" suggest spiritual ascent, while the pink alabaster surface and fleshy portal of "Sanctum Eros" evoke the entry to the womb — is as intricately wrought as the metaphysical mazes of M.C. Escher. Yet other sculptures, particularly her life-size bronzes, such as "Bacchus," a majestic male nude, and "Parable Fountain," are among the more heroic accomplishments of contemporary neoclassicism.

"Parable Fountain" is perhaps Ailene Fields' most over-the-top creation to date, like Benvenuto Cellini's famous salt cellar with Neptune and Ceres blown up to gigantic scale, only more elaborate. The central figure is a full-length Botticelli-like bronze mermaid with a mane of long, wind-blown locks being held aloft by the tentacles of a large octopus perched atop a huge mass of coral fashioned from alabaster, out of openings in which the snouts of dolphins poke and water gushes in a steady stream into a pool at the sculpture's base.

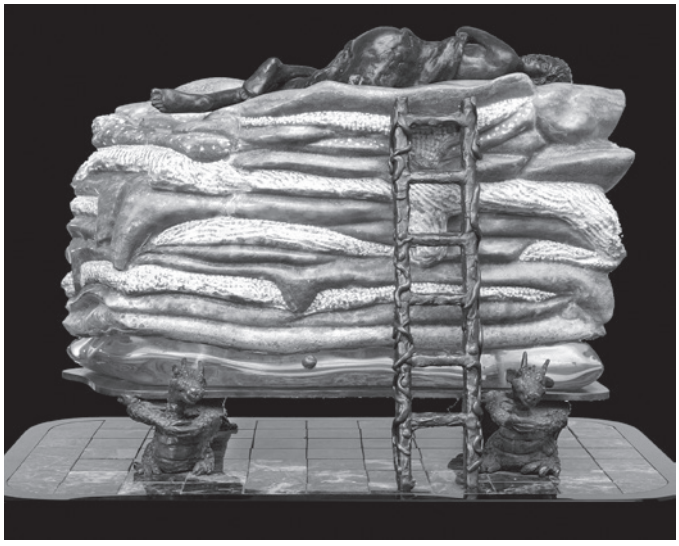
One cannot think of another sculptor at work today who could carry off a baroque production such as "Parable Fountain," then turn right around and create such modest masterpieces in alabaster as the erotically allusive "Kissee Rose," the scrumptious "Black Eyed Susie," and the exquisitely minimalist "Calcite Shell."

Such stunning virtuosity within a conceptually consistent aesthetic is what makes Ailene Fields one of our most thrilling talents and makes this long-awaited major solo show indispensable.

— Ed McCormack



"Flight"



"It Was The Most Amazing Thing"

Robert Cenedella, Gadfly for Social Realism

Activists — political, cultural, or otherwise — can be a real pain in the ass. Take Robert Cenedella, for a prime example of the species. The opinionated social realist painter likes to test peoples' mettle by putting them on the spot. He certainly tested ours when he reserved a full page ad on our back cover months in advance, then close to deadline, sent us a big color picture of what appeared to be a painting by Mark Rothko crudely scrawled with the phrase "Bull Shit!"

Jeannie, my wife and editor, being more attuned to the esoteric than myself, has long been an admirer of Rothko, while I've always been a bit put off, not by his paintings, but by his insistence on their spiritual significance. Neither of us, however, has ever considered Rothko's work "bullshit." So we were taken aback by Cenedella's limited edition print "Un Hommage del Maestro, Rothko." But only for a minute. For while neither of us was eager to give even the dimmest of our readers the slightest impression that we shared Cenedella's opinion of Rothko, we knew that to reject the ad, which appeared on the back cover of September / October 2009 issue, would make us no better than anyone else who decides he or she has the right to hamper any artist's freedom of expression. (We could feel no more justified in censoring Cenedella for scrawling a fake Rothko with graffiti than had we condemned Duchamp for doodling a mustache on a reproduction of the Mona Lisa or Rauschenberg for partially erasing and exhibiting a drawing that de Kooning had given him. Art has no sacred cows, baby; let the good times roll!)

Besides, being a pain in the ass is part of Robert Cenedella's job description. The other part is being one of our most courageous, imaginative, and conscience-driven figurative painters and arguably the most charismatic and popular instructor at The Art Students League since his own teacher, mentor, and artistic hero George Grosz.

And don't think for a minute that Cenedella is not an equal opportunity pain in the ass. Surely someone at The Art Students League must have had to roll his or her eyes heavenward on the more than one occasion that Cenedella tested that venerable institution's mettle as well. But God bless The Art Students League: nobody there would even think of knuckling under to public pressure when the Daily News ran a big banner headline that said "Crucified Santa Triggers Crossfire," after William Donohue, president of the Catholic League called the painting that Cenedella exhibited during the 1997 Christmas season in the school's big front window on 57th Street "unnecessarily offensive, especially at this time of year."

"I'm not the one who replaced Christ with Santa Claus," replied Cenedella, a Catholic, claiming that he painted the picture to protest the commercialization of Christmas, not to mock Jesus.

Admirably, the school didn't succumb to the pressure to remove "Crucifixion" from its window. But ironically, the same painting had been removed from Cenedella's retrospective at the ad agency owned by the Charles Saatchi, the supposedly hip collector of outrageous avant garde art. Thus one can only assume that had Cenedella tried to include in his show a later painting, depicting a giant load of excrement elevated on a pedestal in a museum, it would also have gone over at Saatchi & Saatchi like the proverbial turd in the punchbowl.

But that painting, too, hung in the League's window, not be removed no matter how many grossed-out passersby, public decency monitors, or self-designated guardians of good taste threw shit fits. And that quite a few reportedly did perhaps demonstrates better than anything else the value of an artistic provocateur like Bob Cenedella. It

"Southern Dogs"

may also validate his claim that not only the art world's designated Tastemakers but all sorts of other nutjobs and commercial interest groups are bent on surpressing what he refers to as "The Democracy of Vision."

All you have to do is see Cenedella holding forth on a bar stool in his favorite downtown pub, Nancy Whiskey,

"Man About Town" by David Chalfin

or making his pugnacious way up 57th Street in his broad-brimmed Stetson and grizzled white Hemingway beard, on his way to The League to lay The Word on his adoring and adored students, to know that he'd defend that vision to the death. The man is a veritable steam-driven dynamo when it comes to laying out what has to be changed in the world in general and the art world in particular. Hell, he feels so strongly about it that he has put it all down for posterity in an illustrated screed of a pamphlet that he calls "The Robert Cenedella Commentaries," culled from among the copious bloviations on his blog **www.whatisntart.com**.

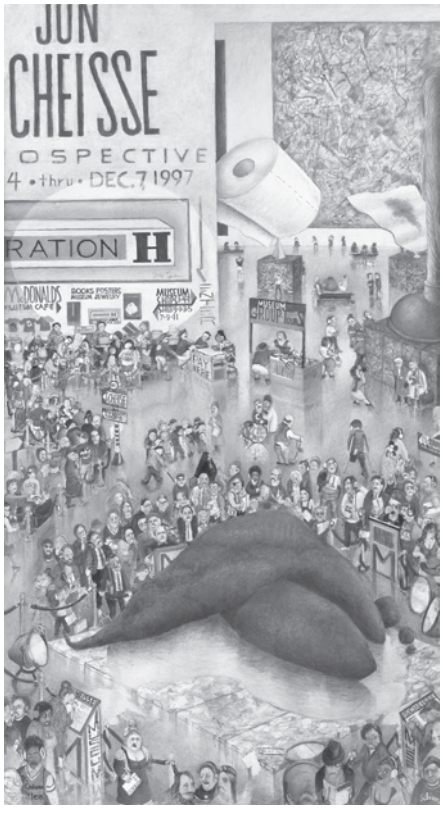
In the Commentaries, Cenedella asserts, "Today we have direct and indirect censorship both in the news media and by the art establishment." In another paragraph, he goes on to say, "Today's art world is an interdependent mix of businesses that control price and access at every level. Recent scandals involving auction houses attest to this. Museum boards have trustees with holdings of the very artists' works which are in featured shows." And he concludes,"In this environment, artists and viewers alike become dupes in the shell game of manipulation and art works become mere currency."

Like his hero Grosz, who expressed his disgust at the Nazi regime as a prominent figure in the Dada movement in Berlin before being forced to emigrate to the U.S., Cenedella lashes out at the political establishment as well as the art world system. One of his most amusing Neo-Dadaist pranks was a sculpture called

"Fun City Express"

"Giant Waste Basket," with George W. Bush's face grinning like Mad magazine's resident imbecile Alfred E. Neuman (of "What Me Worry?" fame) under the slogan "White Trash." Later replicated in red lacquer as an actual limited edition waste basket, it was picked up in an item by the nationally syndicated columnist Liz Smith, reaching an audience far wider than that of the gallery and museum circuit.

However, Cenedella, like Grosz, has made his greatest contribution as a protest painter, starting with the 1962 oil on linen "Southern Dogs." This affecting statement, painted in response to the suppression of the Selma civil rights march, depicts a black man being set upon by a mob of half-canine cops and rednecks.



"The Museum"

"Untitled Landscape"

The same year Cenedella painted his touching tribute "The Death of George Grosz," showing the German émigré artist, who had become disillusioned with life in America, lying at the foot of a window staircase after a fatal drunken fall, images from some of his familiar paintings and drawings swirling eerily above his head. Both pictures rank with the best work of older social realists such as Ben Shahn, Jack Levine, and Philip Evergood.

A steady stream of powerful political and humanistic subjects, scathing satires, and urban genre scenes with the hectic energy of a latter-day Bruegel have followed over the decades. But perhaps Robert Cenedella's most prophetic statement may yet prove to be the large 2005 oil on linen "Untitled Landscape," in which a desolate, cubistically angular landfill of discarded canvases, ranging as far as the eye can see, suggests the ultimate detritus of commercial junk culture. — Ed McCormack

Robert Cenedella and his wife, the fiber artist Liz Cenedella, will be featured in a two-person exhibition at Broome Street Gallery, from Dec. 8 through 20.

Discovering Janese Hexon's Affecting Humanism

Whether she intends to do so or not, the Western Pennsylvania sculptor Janese Hexon takes a radical stance when she asserts that her goal is "to express clearly feelings and thoughts that all of us, at once time or another, have experienced in our lives." For in the context of today's art scene, where a sophisticated irony has become dogma, such unadorned direct expressions of human empathy may be, to borrow a phrase coined by another writer for this publication, The Last Taboo.

Yet there is no denying the humanistic resonance of the pieces on view in Janese Hexon's first New York City solo exhibition, at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from November 3 through 28. (Reception: Thursday, November 5, 5 to 8 pm.)

Indeed, one of Hexon's greatest strengths is having the courage to invest her human figures with a clearly emotional resonance at a time in art history when formal values are often privileged over expressive ones. Her tactile relationship with her pieces —- most of which are created in resin, terra cotta, or mixed media for ultimate rendering in bronze through the lost-wax casting method — lends them a raw power that harks back to the tradition of Rodin.

Even when working on a relatively intimate scale, Hexon restores a sense of the monumental to the human figure, a mixture of pathos and dignity which honors our common condition. There is also a satirical side to Hexon's art, yet it is never devoid of sympathy. Selden Rodman once wrote of James Kearns, a fellow sculptor with similarly humanistic proclivities that he "laughs (or smiles ruefully) *with* the various victims of vanity he portrays, never *at* them," and the same might be said of Hexon.

"My Pretty Hat has Fallen" (Detail)

Witness, for example, the piece she calls "My Pretty Hat Has Fallen," in which a young woman with wavy bobbed hair who resembles an old fashioned film starlet in the manner of Jean Harlow or Marion Davies throws her head back toward her bare shoulder in a posture of world weary narcissism, as though her own beauty is the cross she must bear. Or contemplate "Predator/ Prey?" which depicts the face of another woman merging as one with the grimacing visage of her grotesque inner demon. In both pieces, through a mastery of gesture and expression which is becoming increasingly rare in contemporary art in any medium, Hexon zeroes in on the psychological core of her subjects, making sculptural statements as impressive for their human drama as for their formal attributes.

Indeed, Hexton's sculptures invariably engage the viewer on different levels simultaneously: while harking back to the eroded figures of antiquity, the fragmented face of terra cotta sculpture "Untitled III" evokes the female subject's poignant sense of spiritual incompleteness, just as the rough surface modeling of the two clutching figures in the mixed media piece "No Consolation" enhances the palpable sense of codependency and crisis that it evokes.

In the same manner, Janese Hexon employs varying degrees of realism and abstraction to create entirely different moods from piece to piece. This enables her to explore a wide range of plastic possibilities as well as emotional and psychological nuances, making each individual sculptural statement as much of a new adventure for the viewer as it clearly must be for the artist herself.

—Maurice Taplinger

Steven Mark Glatt and the Majesty of Melancholy

"My work comes from a place that few people get to visit," says Steven Mark Glatt, whose paintings will be on view at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from January 8 through 29, 2010, with a reception on Thursday, January 14, from 6 to 8 PM. "This place is blessed and cursed."

Because he was raised in the back country of North Dakota, is self-taught, and can make such a statement without any apparent irony, there could be a tendency to classify Glatt as something of an "outsider." However, the innate sophistication of his large Color Field paintings in acrylic on canvas belies that evaluation, since Glatt's vision is far too expansive to be confined to the ghetto of innocent obsession. And while he has arrived at that vision intuitively and without pretension ("My approach towards painting is simple. I just paint myself. I stay true to my feelings and use honesty as my main ingredient."), it resonates with a spiritual authenticity which reminds us that abstract painting originated not with formalist theorizing, but with the desire of Kandinsky and other avant garde pioneers who were inspired by Theosophy and other esoteric belief systems, to apprehend some essential essence of the unknown.

Seemingly searching in a similar way, Glatt employs a poured paint technique and manipulates diluted pigment with his fingers, creating ethereal veils of color that could appear to have materialized of their own accord, rather than to have been created by conscious will, on his large canvases. The sense that one is being drawn into a mysterious milieu can give even the most pragmatic viewer pause and make him or her consider the artist's statement about a place both blessed and cursed.

For Glatt's paintings possess an undeniable presence and power paradoxically coupled with great delicacy. His forms are at once abstract and allusive, as seen in the poetically titled large canvas "A Crown Upon Her Foot," in which deep purple linear swirls around the outer edges of the canvas veering toward its center could suggest tree limbs set against a vibrant blue sky swarming with stars resembling celestial fireflies. Even while the overall nonobjective character of the composition allows for a range of subjective interpretations as infinite as the space that it evokes, one is put in mind of William Blake's famous line "The sky is an immortal tent." For like that great British visionary, Glatt appears to have a gift for internalizing vast mysterious vistas, as seen in "The Mistakes I Make," another majestic canvas wherein rhythmically pulsing veins within another luminous blue field lend cosmic dimension to personal emotion.

"Bottles of Emptyness"

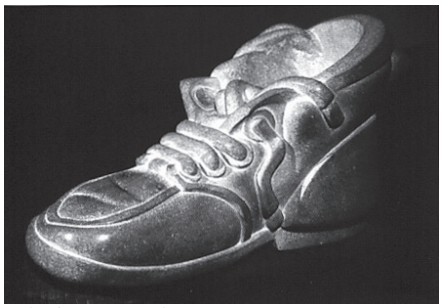
Then there is "Bottles of Emptyness," a title worthy of a country and western song for a composition organized along more formal lines, with Glatt's characteristically fluid color field—this one of a mottled reddish hue appropriately suggesting a mixture of whiskey and blood—overlaid by evenly spaced vertical divisions.

Of course, no one can really know if there is any truth to the meanings he or she reads into paintings as essentially abstract as those of Steven Mark Glatt. Yet there is no question that since they are clearly motivated by the artist's authentic emotions, every perceptive viewer will discover his or her own truth in these lyrical works. —Maurice Taplinger

The CLWAC's 113th Annual Open Exhibition at the National Arts Club

Gloria Spevacek is a unique sculptor in that she bridges the gap between classical and the Pop with inimitable volumic grace and visual wit. Her "Workman's Shoe" is a clear case in point: a blue collar monument in smooth white limestone, well worn and full of character, yet eternal as a Roman head on its pedestal.

Spavacek's piece was but one of many delightful surprises in the epic (more than 250 works) 113th Annual Open Exhibition of The Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club, named for the only woman among the 106 founding members of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, seen recently at the National Arts Club,15 Gramercy Park South.



Gloria Spevacek

Although greatly outnumbered, the sculptors in this year's exhibition made an especially strong showing, which seemed auspicious, since the 2009 Honored Member was Amy Bright Unfried, perhaps best known for her figurative bronzes, as well as sculptures of birds perched on branches cast from nature. Especially evocative here was Unfried's "House in the Woods," in which cast branches became trees clustered around a miniature cottage.

Antonia Layton

More in the spirit of Dada, Marsha Tosk made a wry visual pun with pig in a blanket, a porcine figure in poly resin with a Scotch-plaid scarf wound around its middle. Then there was "Narcissism," a piece consisting of a dazzlingly glitzy pair of platform shoes and matching handbag covered with shards of shattered mirror by Sue Arnold. Another standout was Lena Olson's portrait bust in bronze and concrete "Frida Kahlo," which impressively joined elements of painting to sculpture with a varied patina to depicting the Mexican surrealist's red lipstick, the roses in her hair, and her famous unibrow. In her work in walnut, "Hot on the Trail," Barbara Beatrice gave visual definition to the term "hangdog" with her semiabstract depiction of the quintessential hunting hound, its nose as elegantly elongated as the torso of a Modigliani nude.

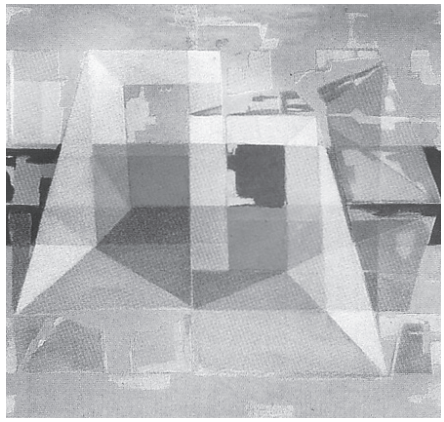
Lena Olson

Other pieces that made the sculptural component of this year's show especially strong were: "Kore," a partial female nude figure in marble with the classical grace of a Greek fragment by Jean T. Kroeber; Antonia Layton's "Swimming with Pride," capturing the movement of a fish in alabaster with the swift fluidity of a brush drawing by Hokusai; and "Thalia," a voluptuous nude female torso by Jinx Lindenauer.

One of the more striking pieces gracing the painting gallery was "At the Opera," a large watercolor by Nadine Charlsen that stood out for the artist's ability to evoke a winding stone staircase, crystal chandeliers, and numerous other baroque architectural details in chiaroscuro without sacrificing the freshness innate to her medium at its best. By contrast, Holly Meeker Rom made a statement more spare yet no less impressive in "North Country," a snow scene in which one could almost feel the crispness of the air on an overcast winter's day and imagine trudging past that bare skeleton of a tree to reach the cozy red cabin in the distance.

Like Irene Rice Pereira, Elvira Dimitrij has the rare ability to imbue pure geometry with poetry, as seen in her abstract composition in oil and acrylic "Ruins," with its evocative forms and subtly harmonized hues. By contrast, Toni Silber-Delerive turned a realist aerial view of a suburban intersection into a bold geometric abstraction in her oil "Church Tower Road," which also recalled an old Americana genre painting of an Iowa town square by Grant Wood. Another fine example of a genre for which a writer for this publication coined the term "abstract realism" was "Party Papers XII," a watercolor by Carol Z. Brody, in which a meticulous trompe-l'oeil rendering of scraps of decorative wrapping paper created the illusion of collage.

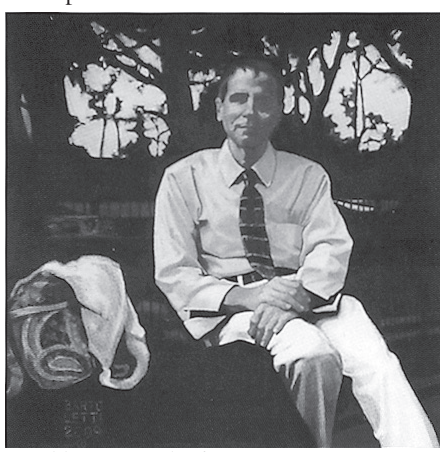
Among the several excellent landscape painters in this show Jane Bloodgood Abrams made an a special impression with "Effusive Glow," a hauntingly atmospheric panoramic oil of three shadowy trees on a high grassy ridge set against a vast golden sky alternately darkening with clouds and shot through with



Elvira Dimitrij

light. Dramatic contrasts between light and dark also figure prominently in "Not Fade Away (In Memory of Frank)" an affecting portrait of a gently smiling man seated half in shadow on a porch at dusk with the trees and foliage of a garden silhouetted behind him by Kathleen Bartoletti. Also notable among the portraits were "Esperanza," Liena Dieck's realist painting of an elderly woman's deeply lined face in the unusual medium of dyes on silk; and "Self Portrait," an intimate tondo in pastel by Lucille Berrill Paulsen, with the artist's face distorted as if seen through a zoom lens.

Although it would be literally impossible to do justice to all the worthy works in an exhibition of this size — especially given the high standard maintained by the CLWAC — others that caught one's eye for one reason or another were: Lita Schwartzberg's mazelike abstract watercolor "Continuum," its brilliant colors contained within black outlines in the manner of stained glass; Jaye Moscariello's bold and witty painting of a jungle primate leaping from limb to limb "Capture the Moon"; Elizabeth B. Derderian's exquisitely accomplished realist still life "One Fine Morning"; Dora Natella's haunting Neoclassical bronze wall relief "Gaia"; Helene Mukhtar's vigorous and funky mixed media composition "Triumphant Trumpets"; and "36 Golden Landscapes," a remarkable grid of exquisite miniature paintings in oil and gold leaf by Cary Thorp Brown.—J. Sanders Eaton



Kathleen Bartoletti

The Hand of Carmen Raset Mir

What distinguishes painting from other forms of image making and accounts for its longevity in the face of photography and other technology, which should logically have led to its demise, is invariably the touch of the human hand. One artist who makes this point auspiciously is the Spanish painter Carmen Raset Mir, who recently had a solo exhibition at Montserrat Gallery, 547 West 27th Street and also exhibits in that venue's year round salon.

Mir is a realist who, rather than replicating exactly what she sees before her, strives for something more elusive and affecting: its essence and its spirit. Granted, such things are intangible. However, that is where the hand comes in as a conduit of human emotion, flowing directly from the painter's nervous system onto the canvas. And in Mir's case, the hand of the artist is everywhere in evidence, as seen in her acrylic on canvas, "Velas al Viento," where the irregular rhythms of the brown hills flow smoothly into the sparkling semitranslucent aquamarine waves, traversed by nine little sailboats with white sails bent like scimitars by the breeze. The entire composition comes alive by virtue of Mir's peculiar painterly fluidity, which is especially impressive here where the milky, pink inflected sky meets the burnt umber earth and their overlapping hues create a misty yellowish aura around the humps of the hills.

Other subtle painterly felicities and coloristic surprises can be seen in such contrasting yet complementary canvases as Mir's "Manhattan "Bridge" and "Soledad." In the former painting, the graceful span of the majestic bridge, like a vast stringed instrument placed on its side, is juxtaposed with the Manhattan skyline, its spires and facades ruddy with sunlight, bracketed between the brackish green water and the infinite sky. By contrast, in the latter painting, a large black rowboat takes on the brute scale and presence of a beached whale, locked between land made tangibly tactile by sand mixed into the pigment and a stunning purple sea that lends the composition a striking abstract appeal.

Mir's ability to imbue simple subjects not only with formidable formal qualities but with an underlying sense of the surreal can also be seen in paintings such as "La Puerta Del Jardin" and "Manzanas Mirando El Mar." In the former work, (the title of which translates loosely as "Door to the Garden"), the green foliage and the tall poplar tree in the garden beyond are converted into forms as solid as the cement globes that give the impression of two sentries standing at the entryway of the garden wall. Yet, even while enhancing the abstract frontality of the composition, the large expanse of solid cerulean blue sky suggests that a realm of enchantment lies just behind the picture plane.

"Soledad"

In the latter work, (the title of which translates even more loosely, albeit poetically, as "Apples Looking at the Sea"), Mir presents us with a shapely vase of piled-up apples placed on the broad sill of a stucco window facing out upon a serene blue body of water under a pale pink-violet sky. The only incongruity in the entire composition is the choice of that last color. Yet, through her pristine technique — particularly in evoking shadows and the vibrant red and green skins of the apples — Carmen Raset Mir lends this simple picture a surreal quality worthy of René Magritte.

It's all in the hand.

— Ed McCormack

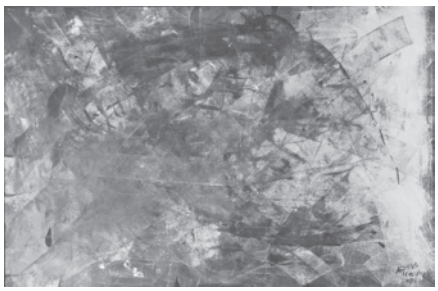
Lyrical Vivacity in the Paintings of Alyssa Traub

Although twenty-one year old Alyssa Traub has a BFA degree in Fine Art Photography, she is also a sculptor and painter. To be exhibited at Agora Gallery 530 West 25th Street, from January 8 through 29, 2010, with a reception on January 14, from 6 to 8 PM, Traub's paintings are refreshingly free of the trendy trickery practiced by many youthful artists today.

Indeed, Traub's lyrical abstractions suggest a mature, fully formed aesthetic, combining the chromatic complexity of Color Field painting with the gestural vivacity of Abstract Expressionism.

While her overall love of vibrant color could have been inspired by growing up in the sunny clime of St. Petersburg, Florida, Traub possesses an innate gift for harmonizing a wide range of subtle secondary hues that goes far beyond mere exuberance.

This is especially apparent in her oil and acrylic on canvas "Gold Rush." Here, a brilliant blue rectangle is energetically laid down over a burnished bronze-colored undercoat that forms an irregular border around the edges of the canvas and shines through the blue, imbuing it with a subtle radiance. The central blue area, also energetically activated by swirling strokes of thick impasto, plays host to a plethora of short cursive daubs of golden yellow and flecks of red that appear to chase each other around the composition like playful fireflies. While the calligraphic energy of the composition could call to mind the personal calligraphy of Mark Tobey, the complexity of color relationships calls to mind the Color Field innovations of Jules Olitski.



"Portrait of a Fish"

Along with their purely nonobjective attributes, however, Traub's paintings are further enriched by an element of natural allusiveness that comes across most overtly in a painting such as her large acrylic and oil on canvas "Dreams of Green." This is an especially lyrical picture in a palette dominated by lush blues and greens, augmented with streaks of yellow and bits of red. Without resorting to specific description, the artist evokes a strong sense of verdant vegetation around a body of water, the effect is enhanced by swift gestural streaks suggesting the shimmer of sunlight on tall grasses bending in a gentle breeze.

Equally lyrical in its own manner is Traub's acrylic painting "Morning Illusion," in which the dance of spare strokes of soft pastel hues against a brilliant blue field is sufficient to evoke a sense of early morning freshness. Then there is the buoyant composition "Portrait of a Fish," in which bold circular strokes of green acrylic, apparently applied with a palette knife, wittily create the creature of the title through the most economical of means. The poetic playfulness of this painting, if not the more freewheeling manner of its execution, recalls the whimsy of Paul Klee.

Yet Traub can also evoke an entirely different dynamic through the animated layering of one color upon another. And she does so quite dynamically in "Anarchy and Deceit," another large canvas in which more violently configured strokes of pinkish white and gray, set against a variegated reddish field, provide a more visceral visual jolt.

Alyssa Traub's ability to convey a variety of subjects and mood through form, color, and gesture alone sets her apart as one of our more promising among the new generation of abstract painters.

—Maureen Flynn

Password: The ASCA's 92nd Annual Exhibition

From the works available for preview, "Password: Art's Secret Symbols," the 92nd Annual Art Exhibition of the American Society of Contemporary Artists, at Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street, from November 10 through 22, promises to be one of the more inclusive and varied upcoming group shows of the current season.

The venerable artist's organization boasts close to one hundred members and a good many of them can be seen in this exhibition, the stated intention of which, to paraphrase the press release, is to assert the role of art as an affirmation of life in these times of global crisis.

Mina Myer

Sachie Hayashi

One of the exhibiting artists, Olga Kitt exemplified this goal on the grass roots neighborhood level by forming an alliance with young graffiti artists while teaching art at DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx. While influencing some of the the young artists to paint on canvas rather than in subway cars, Kitt found that the influence flowed both ways. A long time gestural painter who had studied with Hans Hofmann as a young woman, she came to regard graffiti as being in the tradition of Abstract Expressionism and began to champion the cause of the these kids, speaking out as an adult advocate on their behalf against authorities who dismissed their work as vandalism, thereby "banning a school of art," as she puts it. Indeed, she came to identify with them to the point where she now considers herself a graffiti artist, at least in spirit.

Anita Adelman

However, Kitt's "Flora," an acrylic painting on Tyvek (a plastic taupelin material)), which translates Rembrandt's famous portrait of his wife Saskia as the goddess of Spring into an exuberant semiabstract statement in line and color, appears as much beholden to Matisse as to urban grafitti.

While other works in this exhibition do not come with such an elaborate "back story," most speak eloquently for themselves. One dares not even guess, for example, what the title of Imelda Cajpe Endaya's mixed media work "Spoliarium and Agnes' Carcass Cornucopia" could possibly mean. Suffice it to say, it's a rich visual melange of form, color, texture, and disparate imagery, artfully juxtaposing a partially obscured reproduction of a classical painting, a silhouetted swan-diving female figure, and a large serpentine shape ala vintage Rauschenberg, albeit in Endaya's own unique manner.

Mina Myer, on the other hand, employs mixed media in an altogether more abstract manner in "ASCA Series II," wherein the work's considerable visual / tactile appeal derives from the artist's strong, roughly rectangular forms, ruggedly scumbled paint surfaces, and elegantly ragged collage technique. With tiny traces of brighter hues showing through a palette dominated by subtly tinted off whites and earth tones, Myer's forms float and loom against a solid gray field like ghostly monoliths.

The sculptor Barbara Browner Schiller's bronze figures suggest more upbeat cousins of Alberto Giacometti's Existential starvelings. For their elongation comes across as lithe, rather than emaciated, and they have a sprightly charm that is especially winning in Schiller's two figure tableau, "After Glow." Here, one skinny character leans on the shoulder of the other in a configuration of relaxed, gangly limbs engaging for its formal grace and levity.

Olga Kitt

Isabel Shaw, on the other hand, projects a pared-down essence of feminine sensuality in her bronze torso "Counterpoise," its curvaceous contours giving the illusion of swaying sinuously in space. Two other sculptors, both working in marble, adhere to a more minimalist aesthetic.

Imelda Cajpe Endaya

Ray Shanfeld's "Flight" presents a stout, smoothly rounded form poised upon its tall pedestal with a balloon-like buoyancy that belies its formidable bulk. While the vertical form of Ray Weinstein's "Nocturne # 7" suggests a monkish robed figure, rather than suggesting an orifice the circular negative space in its "head" evokes the moon as a poetic phantom presence in the mind of a contemplative soul.

Similar contrasts can be seen in the work of two painters of cityscapes: Anita Adelman's street scenes show the more intimate side of the city. Adelman's breezily brushed composition "No Parking Anytime" touches upon the notion of privilege with the contrast sign posted in front of an elegant edifice, rather than near the modest brownstones down the block. By contrast, like a 21st Century counterpart of the America Futurist Joseph Stella, Allan Simpson is attracted to Gotham's mythic majesty. Simpson's precisely delineated silkscreen print "Night, Midtown" is wholly characteristic of his style, with its illuminated skyscraper spires and lit-up windows glowing dynamically against a brilliant blue sky.

Barbara Browner Schiller

Yet other complementary contrasts in the interpretation of landscape subjects could be seen in the work of two final artists: Miriam Wills combines elements of Neo-Cubism and Neo-Expressionism in her acrylic abstraction "The Sun Behind," with its luminous primary colors and outlined shard-like shapes. Sachie Hayashi, on the other hand, takes a lyrical approach to nature in her mixed media composition "Here Comes the Morning," where luminous pink and yellow hues ignite verdant green mountain peaks.

If the artists reviewed here are representative of the many others to be seen in the ASCA's 92nd Annual, this is an exhibition not to be missed.

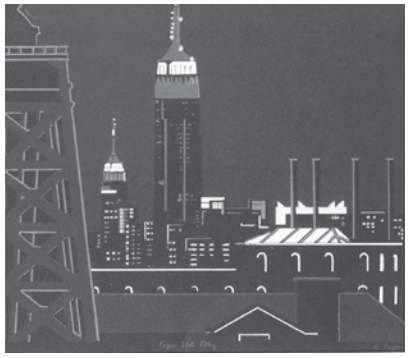
— J. Sanders Eaton

Ray Shanfeld

Isabel Shaw

Ray Weinstein

Miriam Wills



Allan Simpson

FusionArts Museum Hosts a Zany Caravan of "Art Cars"

Leave it to Shalom Neuman, the interdisciplinary art pioneer and mastermind behind FusionArts Museum, 57 Stanton Street, to stage an aesthetic demolition derby on the Lower East Side.

"Art of the Crash" (its title a double entendre, referring both to the art created from salvaged automobile parts featured in the show, along with a fur and DVD-covered "Techno Truck" by New York artist Hi Tek Hoop, and the current state of the economy) opened with a gala reception featuring poetry and performance by Steve Dalachinksy, Carrie Beehan and other downtown luminaries on Sunday evening, October 18, which reportedly attracted over 2,000 spectators.

The event coincided with a screening, earlier in the day at Anthology Film Archives, of Harrod Blank's "Automorphosis," winner of The Royal Flush Festival's prize for Best Documentary.

Some of the vehicles from Art Car World Museum in Douglas, Arizona, that were featured in the film — including Harrod Blank's "Camera Van," covered with 2,700 cameras — spent the week prior to the event at Shalom's drive-in studio, in Brooklyn, and were parked outside the Fusion Museum during the reception.

As with all of FusionArts Museum's exhibitions and events, the ultimate aim of "Art of the Crash" is to promote multidisciplinary — or "fusion" — work as a recognized contemporary art genre. The show continues through December 27.

— The Editors

FusionArts Museum director Deborah Fries (second from right) with art car creators (left to right) Alan M. Bolle, Harrod Blank, Shalom Neuman and Hunter Mann

"Camera Van" (detail) in Shalom's studio

G&S NYC GUIDE

opportunities

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 info: 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.

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AMERICAN WATERCOLOR SOCIETY, INC. 143rd Annual International Exhibition. Estimated $40,000 in Cash and Medal Awards. April 6 - May 2, 2010. Slide or Digital entries, postmarked no later than Nov. 16, 2009. Prospectus available after Sept. 1st. Send SASE to American Watercolor Society, Inc. 47 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003 or download from website, www.americanwatercolorsociety.org.

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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

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

ATTENTION ARTISTS – A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY–IN CHELSEA–THE ART CENTER OF NEW YORK CITY VIRIDIAN Artists, Inc., established in 1970, is accepting applications for membership. For information please visit www.viridianartists.com or call 212-414-4040.

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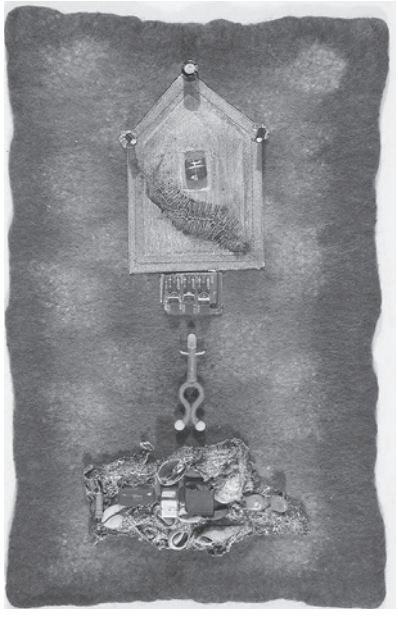
2010 GROUP SHOW AT GELABERT STUDIO GALLERY

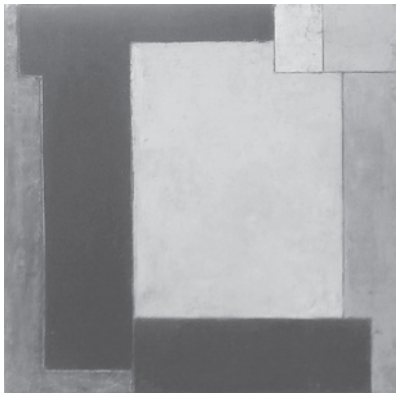
Artists are invited to submit images of two paintings and a page-long biography for possible inclusion in a group exhibition to be presented from January 9 through February 2, 2010. All services (reception, mailing list, invitations, press release, publicity, lighting and hanging) are provided by the gallery, for a reasonable fee. Submission fee $30 (non-refundable.) Deadline for submission: December 1, 2009. SASE required for return of materials. For further information, please visit our website at http://www.gelabertstudiogallery.com or e-mail us at info@gelabertstudiogallery.com. 255 W. 86th St., NYC 10024

Bidding on the Gift of Art at Noho Gallery's Annual Benefit Auction

Augusto Bordelois



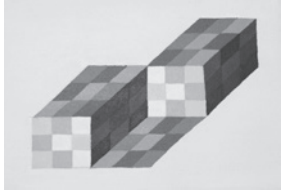
Erma Martin Yost



Stephen Cimini

Stephanie Rauschenbusch

For the fifth consecutive year, veteran and novice collectors will have an opportunity to acquire original works of art at much lower than usual prices by members of one of Chelsea's most venerable and respected artist run venues, in the Noho Gallery 5th Annual Art Auction, from December 15 through January 2, 2010.

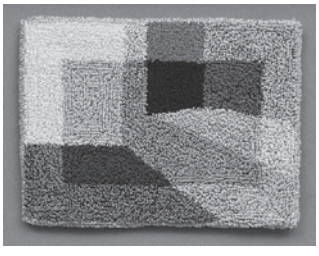


Tina Rohrer

There will be an opening reception on Saturday, December 19, from 4 to 6 PM. Silent bids can be placed on-line until December 31, or in person at any time until the final live bidding takes place at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street at the closing reception and live auction on Saturday, January 2, at 4:00 PM.

The auction, a great success in previous years, is not only a good way to start a collection, but is also auspiciously timed for truly unusual holiday gift giving. And since all proceeds will benefit Noho Gallery, bidders will have the additional satisfaction of facilitating its stated mission "to offer a quality venue to actively working artists based on the integrity of their work."

Nancy Staub Laughlin



Marilyn Henrion

Shown here are just a few of the many paintings, prints, photographs, fiber pieces, and sculptures donated by participating artists and viewable at **nohogallery.com**.

— The Editors

Anne Kolin

Leon Yost

Sheila Hecht

New York Notebook

HOBOHEMIAN FLOPHOUSE:

The Carlton Arms Hotel, where each room is a funky art installation and there's a cat box down at the end of the hall, is New York City's last low-rent hipster haven

by Ed McCormack
Photos by Darek Solarski

If it happens to be laundry day, a visitor to a nondescript tenement on Third Avenue at 25th Street with a pizza parlor on its ground floor and an incongruous red awning that says "Ye Olde Carlton Arms Hotel" might encounter an obstacle course of plastic bags the size of large boulders, spilling down the long, narrow stairwell and blocking the entryway. This presented no problem for a trio of youthful Scandinavian backpackers, two boys and a girl, who scaled the stairs as effortlessly as Alpine climbers, with barely a glance at Darek Solarski's ambitious mural, reprising in miniature the multitude of works by other artists that cover virtually every square inch of the hotel's five floors.

It was not just their clean-cut blond Hansel and Gretel looks and knapsacks that evoked the term "babes in the woods." While one of the boys took care of business at the first floor check-in window, the other two kids gawked through a guest-room door — presumably left open to air out the stuffy little cubicle — at the riot of color swarming the walls within, and took in the signs saying "toilet" and "shower" that jutted out into the narrow corridor.

After confirming their reservation for a triple, a member of the managerial staff, a tall, taciturn Argentinean man named Hugo Arizmendi, who sports a Borat mustache, handed the boy at the window several keys and said, "Go upstairs, take a look at the empty rooms, and pick the one you want."

This seems a sound policy, since the decor of some of the rooms could hasten a nascent case of the DTs or heebie jeebies. In fact, in much the same way that a fresh coat of paint can sometimes magically delouse a decrepit old apartment, it may have been the murals that drove out some of the former residents, described by one staffer as "madmen, junkies, comedians, ex-cons, pushers and hookers, transvestites, drunks and nuts of all kinds..."

Over the past century and a half, the Carlton Arms has evolved from a respectable mercantile stopover with a stable to a prohibition bordello with a speakeasy to a sleazy SRO with frequent stabbings, muggings, and fires caused by guests freebasing cocaine. It was during the latter incarnation, some twenty or so years ago, that the then manager, Eddie Ryan — reasoning that art might cover a multitude of sins, including cracked walls and exposed plumbing — started inviting his artist friends to grace the rooms and halls with their creations.

He might have hoped to eventually turn the place into a refuge for hip eccentrics like the legendary Hotel Chelsea, where we once showed up for a party thrown by the composer George Kleinsinger, who kept a veritable jungle of exotic plants and pets in his suite, and our host immediately handed my wife Jeannie and our friend Beverly two live boa constrictors, saying, "Don't worry; they won't crush you unless they sense fear."

Or maybe, given the more modest size of the building and its advanced state of decrepitude, Ryan had something more modest in mind; something on the order of another small rundown establishment in the Latin Quarter of Paris, once nameless, which became known as "The Beat Hotel" after William Burroughs, Gregory Corso, and other writers and poets of the Beat Generation took up residence there in the early 1950s.

In his forward to the poet Harold Norse's memoir of the period, Burroughs recalled, "There were no carpets, no telephones in the rooms, and the toilet facilities consisted of a hole in the floor on each stair landing."

However, the manager, Madame Rachou, liked writers and painters, placed few limits on their personal behaviour and let them decorate their rooms any way they wished.

Norse remembers the entire room that Burroughs was holed up in when he wrote "Naked Lunch" being "covered with black marker drawings of endless paranoid labyrinthes."

In any case, by letting artists paint the rooms at the Carlton Arms, Ryan may have been hoping to attract a better class of outcasts.

* * *

Next to the smudged plexiglass check-in window there's a door with a novelty-store sign that says "Insane Asylum." Behind it are two small rooms, one with an old desk and rows of room-keys on the wall, the other with a half-full bottle of booze on a table opposite a row of green metal lockers. If it looks more like a clubhouse than an office, the four men who man it seem more like an overgrown boys club than a managerial staff. Today John is sitting behind the desk. He was the first of the four to arrive, so he holds the official title of Hotel Manager, but he holds it lightly, almost as though by default. For he, Hugo Arizmendi, Andrew Hickey, and Geof Green are, to a man, non-hiararchal types and share

most of the duties and responsibilities of running the Carlton Arms equally between them.

"When I first came to work here in 1986, they had just passed the law ending SROs and the place was in transition," John is saying now, as we all sit around on the odd assortment of old chairs and stools in the Asylum. "We never kicked anybody out; the SRO tenants just gradually died off — the last one was, an old guy named Charlie Byrd who had lived here for ages, and went in 1997. But we were gradually turning into a transient hotel, particularly popular with young Europeans, Scandinavians and Asians. They're still the majority of our guests today, since they generally come to explore the city, not just sit in their rooms. They're attracted by our low prices, which start at just $ 80 for a single room and $110, for a double; they like the funky, artistic atmosphere, and they aren't put off, as a lot of Americans might be, by the fact that there are no TVs or phones in any of the rooms and that over half of the rooms don't have a private bath. Come to think of it, for some odd reason, the only guests who seem to complain about no TV are the ones who come for what we call 'short stays,' a special three hour for $30 deal that's a holdover from the old days."

"They probably want to watch pornos," I suggest.

John chuckles and continues: "For awhile, we were also a mecca for transvestites. (I think one of the previous managers had a thing for them.) But these were not your fastidious, elegant transvestites. They were the type that frequently needed a shave! They were, like, if I just stuck a woman's wig on my head!" And here he grins and strikes a comic pose.

Like most boys clubs, the members of the managerial staff seem to delight in telling gross-out stories. High on their list are ones about "smell issues," as John refers to them.

"By the time I got here, I'd say at least twenty-two of our fifty-four rooms were still occupied by the SRO tenants," he says. "One of them was a really stinky old lady named Myra, who lived in room 2B and pretty much kept to herself. We rarely saw her, but we certainly smelled her. She had such serious personal hygiene issues that I sometimes had to go up to her room and have a talk with her: 'Myra, honey, you've really gotta do something about the smell!' Then one day it got to be too much, overwhelming, everybody was complaining. But when I went up to her room and knocked, then pounded, on her door and she still didn't answer, I had to kick it down — just like a detective in the movies!— with these big Doc Marten skinhead boots I wore then. It turned out she had been dead about a week and the body fluids had begun seeping out into the hall and into some

of the other rooms. The coroner has this deodorant that they use in cases like that, but it doesn't help much; it might even be worse, because once you get familiar with it, it still smells just as much like death."

Another time, when an old guy named Frank didn't show up in the lobby for a longer time than usual, and a putrid stench started to permeate the whole place again, Geof said, "John, I think we have another one."

"It was August, hot as hell, and we found him by the bed," John recalls. "He apparently had had a heart attack and his body was so bloated that, by the time we discovered him, he had inflated like one of those huge balloons in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. In fact, the coroner's guys actually had to pop him like a balloon — that's exactly what it sounded like!— to fit him through the door."

One of the things John learned is that, while the coroner's guys are pretty delicate and respectful when they come to take away a body in most situations, when you die without any next of kin in an SRO type of hotel, even an arty one like the Carlton Arms, all formality goes out the window.

Mrs. Chu, the elegant wife of Mr. Chu, the Chinese businessman who owns the Carlton Arms, happened to be standing in the lower landing when, thump, thump, thump, the body bag came rolling down the stairs. That was fifteen years ago, and Mrs. Chu has not set foot in her husband's hotel since.

Everyone who works at the Carlton Arms has had their own initiation. Andrew's came on his first overnight shift when a cop showed up and said,"Did you have an old guy living here?"

"Well, we have several old guys residing here," Andrew said in his nice British accent, and the cop led him downstairs and around the corner. It turned out to be an old guy named Mike who had lived in the hotel for a number of years and had become increasingly more paranoid over the last few. He was convinced that someone was sneaking into his room through the window and stealing his socks and underwear when he was out. It's possible that he may have jumped. But since he was more paranoid than suicidal, Andrew and the others think it's more likely that he went up on the roof to investigate how the imaginary thieves might be gaining entry to his room and accidentally fell over the edge.

"Another old bloke named Fidel came downstairs to help me identify the body, which was pretty messed up," Andrew says. "He took one look and said, 'Yeah that's Mike all right, can I have his room?' because Mike, you see, had a room with a bath."

Although some of them could be a royal pain in the ass, for the most part Andrew, Hugo, and John speak with bemused affection about all the characters who have come and gone. John remembers Charlie Byrd coming into the Asylum one day and asking to borrow the wire-cutters.

" 'Sure, Charlie,' I said. 'They're hanging right there on the wall, go ahead and take them.' A few minutes later, I happen to glance out into the lobby, and there he is, sitting in a chair with his shoes and socks off and his incredibly long toenails curling around his toes like talons, performing surgery on his corns with the wire-cutters!"

By that time the Carlton Arms was well into its transition from ordinary fleabag hotel to what John describes as "a cross between a Fellini film and Pee Wee's Playhouse." The old guard characters like Fidel and Charlie Bird were now joined by a new breed of characters like Sylvain Sylvain, the guitarist for the seminal glitter-punk band The New York Dolls, and the late character actor and standup comedian Rockets Redglare.

"You know how fat Rockets got in the last few years before he died, right?" John

asks. " Well, I remember one night when he feel asleep in a chair in the lobby with his false teeth propped up on his enormous chest. Now, there was a sight!"

It was Rockets who discovered the body of Nancy Spungeon, the groupie girlfriend of the Sex Pistols guitarist Sid Vicious, after he stabbed her at the Hotel Chelsea, where Rockets also stayed sometimes. Not to be outdone, John says, "We had our own Sid and Nancy, this punky junkie couple who used to stay here with their two kids, one a toddler and one slightly older. One day the older kid comes running into the office and says, "Mommy's not working!" And right away I knew what he meant: she had overdosed. While Andrew called 911, I ran up to their room. She had stopped breathing, but I did CPR and, luckily, I was able to revive her."

Although painters, poets, and musicians like the bluesmen Dr. John and Michael Powers have stayed at the Carlton Arms over the years, unlike the Hotel Chelsea, it has not played host to many A-list celebrities. Some of the cheaper ones, however, have been known to park their assistants and other underlings here. One day John showed up for his shift and saw a stretch limousine parked right outside the building. A beautiful woman in a long fur coat got out and flew up the stairs. When John made it up to the lobby, he realized it was Racquel Welch. She was storming around and screaming, "I've been trying all morning and I couldn't reach any of my staff people! Doesn't anybody ever answer the phone around here? What the hell kind of hotel is this supposed to be anyway?"

John shakes his head and rolls his eyes heavenward at the memory. "I was, like, 'Well, why don't you put them in a better place?'"

But, in fact, you get the impression that John (who frankly admits that he doesn't feel qualified to work anywhere other than the Carlton Arms, that he is "totally unemployable"), can't really imagine a better place. And it seems clear enough that the other two members of the managerial staff who are hanging out in the office (and probably Geof, too, who happens to be off today) feel the same way.

At the same time, while Mr. Chu pretty much leaves the day-to-day operation of the place to them as long as business is reasonably good, who knows what his eventual plans for the building may be? At times he has talked about adding more floors ("First five floors art hotel, rest nice hotel for tourists!"), a notion that would be the kiss of death as far as the fleabag integrity of the place is concerned and fills them with dread. Then there's this swine flu scare, which has seriously hurt business lately, since widespread advisories have been issued by governments overseas against travel to the U.S., scaring away a lot of foreign backpackers like the ones we saw earlier in the lobby.

It's almost as bad as after 9/11 when business got so slow, according to John, that every day they expected Mr. Chu to come in and announce that he was going to raze the hotel for a parking lot. It might have been around that time, with their future completely in someone else's hands, that they decided it wouldn't hurt to have some kind of backup. So all four of them eventually became partners in an outside project: an art gallery called Artbreak in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, featuring the work of some of the artists who have painted rooms in the hotel. But they only got around to opening it just as the recession was kicking in, so now the gallery's future is a little uncertain.

But it's obvious anyway that the Carlton Arms is their real home away from home. In one way or another, they all seem to think of themselves as outsiders and to feel a genuine affinity with many of the fellow outsiders who have passed through the hotel over the years, ranging from the long gone old SRO geezers; to the various artists, musicians, and lowlifes such as one guy who had the dubious distinction of being first heroin addict in the city to be put on the methadone maintenance program; to Chino, a Puerto Rican dude with a Che Guavara beard who lived here with his wife when they were first married and stayed on to become the main room cleaner; to a painfully polite African American named Alfonso who actually grew up in this place with his mother back in its bad old days and is still considered part of the hotel family.

Hugo, a man who carries himself with unpretentious dignity, seems more reserved than the others, even a bit shy for such a big guy. But you can see his eyes light up and his Borat mustache twitch with bemusement when Andrew says, "Why don't we tell them about Mickey Cass? Now, there's a story!"

"Oh my God, Mickey Cass! Mickey was this handsome, muscular young drifter who showed up here about four years ago," John begins. "He had no money but he offered to do carpentry in exchange for a place to stay, and at that time, since we needed a lot of work done, we thought, 'Why not?' And he did do good work when he felt like working. In fact, he built this shelving over the desk here. But Mickey had serious drug issues, and after awhile it was hard to get him to do anything. Not only that, he turned out to be a real mooch, always borrowing money from everyone on the staff, twenty here, twenty there. He got away with it for awhile because he could be quite winning and seemingly sincere. But when I realized that he never paid anyone back, that he was probably spending it all on drugs, I finally got fed up one day and started yelling at him. I said, "Mickey, you're nothing but a loser. All you do is stay in your room getting high and you just sleep all day and mooch off everyone. I don't want to hear that you borrowed another dime from anybody in this hotel. Do you hear me, Mickey? Because if you do, I'm gonna throw your ass out. Are you listening to me, you goddamn loser you? I mean it, Mickey: do it one more time and you're outta here!"

It was only a week or two after John finally had to make good on his threat that a couple of detectives showed up at the Carlton Arms. They wanted to question Mickey about the murder of a gay man in Buffalo, New York. And not long after, Hugo, who commutes to work from Connecticut, saw him on the street.

"I was over by Grand Central Station, on my way home," he says, "when I spotted him for a minute before he vanished into a crowd. He was just walking along eating an ice-cream cone .. Only in New York, right?"

Soon after that it was all over the news: Mickey Cass had been arrested for the

murder of another man, who he picked up in a gay bar out in Coney Island and strangled with his bare hands.

"I'm gay, so that really freaked me out," John says. " Just to think that I had been right here in this office with Mickey standing right across the desk, screaming my head off at him, insulting him, calling him everything in the book. I could have been killed!"

* * *

Although the sunlit cat box under the window at the end of the hall, belonging to the hotel's free roaming mascot, Charlie, lends it a homey touch during the day, some people at the Carlton Arms are convinced that the D-floor (the 5th floor) — where the corridors display auspiciously spooky faux hieroglyphics, sarcophagus-like cast plaster 3-D life-masks of the hotel staff, and a full body cast of the artist, Diana Manni, wearing nothing but a Cleopatra tiara — is haunted.

Tamara, a friend of John's, swore she once saw horrible faces in a mirror in one of the rooms up there. And when he's cleaning the rooms, Chino often sees, hears, smells, and feels things on that floor all the time: doors that open or close on their own; lights that go on or off inexplicably; disembodied voices; unfamiliar, musty odors; and gusts of air that blow from nowhere. It got so intense in one room he cleans regularly on the D-floor that he and his wife had to perform a Santeria ritual, burning sage to exorcise malevolent spirits.

"Right after checking in, one guest came running down from there in his tightie whities, trembling," John tells us. "He claimed someone was in his room. So I went back up with him. I even opened the closet to show him that nobody was hiding in it. But just then the curtains stirred and he let out a shriek and ran all the way down five flights of stairs and right out onto the street. After awhile, when he didn't come back, I called our local police precinct: 'Did you by any chance pick up a man in his underwear?' 'Whereabouts?' ' Twenty-fifth Street and Third Avenue?' 'How about Lexington?'"

Even before we heard these stories, Jeannie, who is more attuned to psychic phenomena than I am, said she definitely sensed something in a couple of the rooms that we visited with our own handful of keys, courtesy of Hugo. Most doors had standard locks, while a couple — perhaps reserved for guests more concerned with protecting their belongings than their privacy or safety — were padlocked from the outside. One intricately painted door on the D-floor bore the warning: "This room has transpeople. If you are uncomfortable with this, please choose a different room. Do not alter my painting. I am transgender. Venus

the Artist, 2003."

Inside, the walls were painted a deep nocturnal blue and adorned with Venus's life-size figures of winged hermaphrodites — onto whose lower male genitalia, Hugo tells us, one guest saw fit to tape paper loincloths. That same guest might also have taken offense at Irene Dogmatic's mural of cute copulating pandas in a room on the B-floor. Still, there seems to be something for everybody at the Carlton Arms: a room by Noelle Elia decorated like a Day-Glo Hindu temple, with big paintings of Ganeesh the Elephant god and other exotic deities; another done up like a shrine to the Almighty Dollar with Neo-Pop monetary imagery by Jennifer Sands Deane; Yunichi Ochi's black and white room, with sinuous Sumi-ink calligraphy and intricate floral forms all over the walls; a room by Scott Forbes where eerie, zombie-like figures loom over the bed, gazing down in a mournful manner calculated to unnerve the more morbid visitor; another was turned into a cartoon jungle by the anonymous artist known only as Banksy, who also adorned the stairwells of the B-floor with a riot of zany characters; an Edenic environment of idealized floating figures ala Michelangelo by Darek Solarski; a visionary arboreal fantasy of spidery trees and floating clouds by Doug Ford; and a battleship gray room by Brian Damage, who, instead of camouflaging the hotel's exposed plumbing with zebra stripes or decorative vines (as other other artists have done quite resourcefully), added a maze of trompe l'oeil painted pipes to the real ones, creating something like the basement domain inhabited by the protagonist of Ralph Ellison's novel "The Invisible Man."

* * *

While I honestly can't claim to have perceived anything remotely supernatural on the D-floor or any of the other four floors of the Carlton Arms, I did see a remarkable range of artistic ingenuity put to the service of environments that, for their wealth of weirdness and visual wit, often outdid many gallery and museum installations. ("Whenever a new room is completed, we have an opening reception, just like in a gallery," Bruno says. "We send out invitations, serve drinks, and sometimes even have live music. For our last one we must have had about 400 people here.")

What I did feel very strongly everywhere throughout the building was a sense of how the actual history of a place can haunt it in a very down to earth way. Which is to say, there is a lingering atmosphere here of hard luck lives lived on the margin that defies self conscious artistic renovation and cannot be buried under no matter how many layers of paint. At best, this residue of the past can collaborate with the art, lending it additional depth, as in a room that Hugo Arizmendi created around a noirish mural by Colette Jennings featuring a 1940s pulp fiction floozie loitering against a brick wall emblazoned with the motto, "Live Fast, Die Young."

* * *

Because of their transient clientele, the constant comings and goings of varied characters, hotels of all types and classes

naturally lend themselves to storytelling. Former hotel worker turned artist and writer Ludwig Bemelmans gave us a now sadly forgotten comic masterpiece set in a New York luxury hotel in "Hotel Splendide." Joseph Mitchell, that superb urban archaeologist, wrote an unforgettable account of rooting through the dusty relics left behind in a long-empty flophouse for retired seamen on South Street in his immortal *New Yorker* piece "Up in the Old Hotel." And of course we all remember great old movies like "Grand Hotel."

Perhaps it's a vestige of my long lapsed Catholic upbringing that hotels have always struck me as purgatorial way stations where, as my experience as a traveling journalist later bore out, one stood a better than usual chance of encountering what F. Scott Fitzgerald called "the dark night of the soul." But that wasn't the main reason I turned down Hugo's generous offer to be his guest for a weekend at the Carlton Arms. Having given up itinerant journalism years ago, when I quit freelancing for Rolling Stone, I have simply become too happily habituated to the modest creature comforts

of our fifth floor walkup in Yorkville to take him up on it. Hugo, being the old school gentleman that he is, had courteously extended the invitation to both my wife and me. But since to stay almost anywhere with someone you love is to be essentially a tourist, insulated from the existential terrors of solitary introspection, I knew that to get what Hugo called "the whole Carlton Arms experience" I would have had to go it alone. And frankly I just didn't feel up to it. Not being an adventurous young tourist from France, Sweden, or Japan — or even for that matter, the whacked-out younger self to whom my wry friend Fran Lebowitz used refer as "The Existential Ed" — I preferred to imagine, rather than experience what it would be like to make one's woozy way down those narrow corridors to the water closet in the middle of the night, naked light bulbs illuminating the garishly painted walls, making them glisten like entrails in the belly of the beast. (Like something out of one of Charles Bukowski's worst nightmares, I should think!)

Surely I wasn't as intrepid as Heinz Krautberger, an Austrian artist who migrated to Australia and for some strange reason reinvented himself as Andre van der Kerkhoff, a name that would seem to have little to do with either his actual or adopted nationality. It was through Heinz that I first heard about the Carlton Arms, the name of which initially evoked that of The Ritz Carlton, the real-life model for "Hotel Splendide," giving me an ironically misguided notion of what class of establishment it might be. Heinz — well, hereafter let's do him the courtesy of calling him by his assumed name — Andre moved into the hotel about a year ago while in New York for an exhibition at Artbreak Gallery, in Brooklyn, and stayed for awhile to paint room 14D.

Given a sizable public space to decorate, most artists will use it as a billboard to advertise their signature style. Richard Hambleton, for example, splashed one of his life-size "Shadow Men" in the downstairs vestibule; Andre Charles perpetrated characteristically funky graffiti all over the 4th floor corridor; and art guerilla Banksy adorned the building with images like the ones he became notorious for sneaking into museums. So since van der Kerkhoff is best known for exquisitely erotic photo-based works, one might have expected him to paper the walls of 14D with blown up images of naked girls striking seductive poses, creating a single occupancy oasis for lonely onanists. But being one of those precious few contemporary artists more driven by spontaneous inspiration than self-promotion, he says, "I saw the room and I began to paint circles which grew into a homage to my adopted country's aboriginal people who are the only keepers of the dream time."

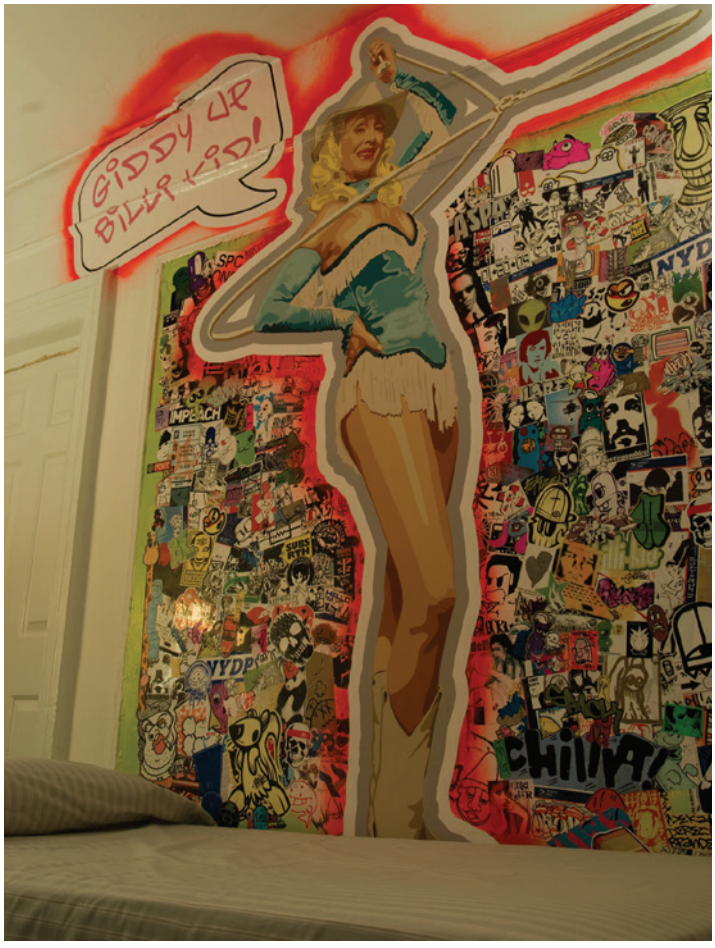
He ended up creating a spiritually edifying cosmos of circles and boomerang shapes as visually dazzling as an early Op Art canvas by Larry Poons or Brigit Riley. However, his sense of the engagingly louche still fully operative, he also became the eyes and the ears of the hotel during his two-month stint as an artist in residence, producing a series of memorable black and white photographs documenting its characters and day to day life in a gritty style akin to Robert Frank and Larry Clark, which he later exhibited in a solo show in Brisbane.

Andre, who may be The Last Romantic, was bowled over by the Jim Jarmusch

movie atmosphere and sense of fellowship that he found at the Carlton Arms, where he befriended a resident blues musician named Michael Powers and hung out in the Insane Asylum with "the head honchos," as he called them. For all intents and purposes, he went native as only a foreigner can. And although primarily a visual artist, he was moved to compose a series of impressionistic "love poems" to the place, written in a breathless Kerouacian stream of consciousness prosody made even more impressionistic by his Germanically inflected broken English and a wide-eyed yokel-like enthusiasm for New York weirdness unequaled since John Lennon first embraced the city that would fatefully put an assassin in his path.

Even while enduring "nightmares featuring virtual armies of bloodsucking bedbugs and copious pissing patrons leaning against walls shouting from below Fitzgerald's and across the avenue," Van der Kerkhoff fondly describes communal feasts of take-out pizza and Puerto Rican food with fellow inmates and confesses with unabashed sentimentality his possibly unrequited affection for his fellow residents: "Aware of the one sidedness of my emotions, the cynical bloke in me doesn't care too much about equilibrium, but simply rejoices in every moment with the folk of the place who have given him for the first time in his lonesome life a simple nickname that wasn't negative in its connotation. I was and still am Mr. Dot of 14D (also known as de Angelo) and those two names hang proudly from my old man's shoulders..."

While Andre's rhapsodic outpourings sometimes swamp specifics and smother clarity, they possess a peculiar poetic resonance from which an attentive reader can occasionally excavate perceptive cameo



characterizations of a staff and guests well matched in their eccentricity, and come upon half-buried gems of poetic description like the "shredded threads of suffering silk" (referring to the much-clawed armchair where Charlie the cat often reposes like a leonine lord of the manor) and the "feline mementos of similar color" that the same creature leaves in place of the gift chocolates found on the pillows of fancier hotels.

After evoking "Finnish Absolute drinkers" who "hibernate in arty farty rooms for weeks on end to appear dressed confusingly in Scot's kilts to march with Celtic pride and matching harmonies down 5th Avenue on St. Patrick's day," van der Kerkhoff concludes his ode to his newly discovered hobohemian flophouse with, "To put all those things in a single sentence I need to write an epic without full stop or a jingoistic jingle, and I have decided to do neither and say simply with all my heart: I love you, Artbreakhotel!"

Nor was Andre van der Kerkhoff the first to be inspired to literary expression by the Carlton Arms. A young hipster named Mike Tyler moved in after his girlfriend kicked him out of their East Village pad, ended up staying several years as "poet in residence," and wrote a somewhat fictionalized book about it called "Hotel Stories." In fact, being a lazy researcher (as my refusal to accept Hugo's offer and "embed" myself, even for a weekend, should indicate) I had hoped that Tyler's book, out this year from a small press called Art Cannot Be Damaged Inc., would be a rich source of anecdotes from which to quote. (In truth, I probably wanted him to have done some of my research for me.)

But while, unlike Andre, English is supposedly Tyler's first language, many of his sentences turn out to be as much of a shambles as the room in which he appears in the large author photo on the book's back cover, striking a Johnny Rotten pose, his fingers hooked under the suspenders he sports over a soiled wifebeater undershirt. He is decidedly an exponent of so-called "experimental" prose (something I probably should have guessed from such downtown credentials as his association with the Nuyorican Poet's Cafe, where, according to the dust jacket copy,"he famously broke his arm while reading a poem"). Writing about the chotchkas cluttering the Insane Asylum, for example, he sounds like the bastard child of Gertrude Stein: "The things were all kinds of things. And the walls were also walled with all kinds of things. It was corny of plenty. It was shaken and stirred. It was a mess. It was beautiful."

Yet he has moments of inspired standup-style schtick. Taking poetic liberties with an already improbable reality, he describes "The Pickle room," where, "Embalmed pickles were hanging from the ceiling and attached to the walls, walls in the main painted green"; "The Diaper room, where you slept in a cradle"; "The Bachelor Pad," where James Bond music blared when you opened the door, the bed was a see-through waterbed with olives floating through it, the ceiling was mirrored, and the bathroom wallpaper was made with cutouts from old magazines with names like Swank and Swoon"; and, best of all, "the Hotel Room room, with a framed picture of ducks, a plastic mint taped to the headboard of a sorta brass bed, a phone with a red LCD above it that added exorbitant amounts to your bill every time you tried to use it (it didn't do that really), a television (the only television in the hotel), and a 'do not disturb' sign permanently affixed to the outside of its door."

In fact, there actually is one rather plain parody of a regular hotel room at the Carlton Arms. But what it really evokes, with its neatly folded towels, its miniature bars of soap artfully arranged on a little wood table, and its Edward Hopper ambiance of shabby hopefulness, is what all of the rooms might have looked like just before the hotel began its steep decline and eventually had to be resurrected as a unique walk-in work of art.

* * *

Levan Urushadze: A Russian Painter's Dynamically Variegated Aesthetic Vision

Someone once wrote that "style is character," and certainly no contemporary artist whose name springs immediately to mind demonstrates this truism more effectively than the Russian painter Levan Urushadze, who has exhibited widely throughout his own country, as well as in Paris, New York, Vienna, Rome, and elsewhere. For Urushadze is a restlessly prolific talent who works in such a wide variety of figurative and abstract veins that he could conceivably put together his own group show!

However, what holds all of Urushadze's modes of expression together as a consistent oeuvre is the unique stamp of his individual sensibility, which overrides his eclecticism and comes through forcefully in every stroke that he commits to canvas. None of which is to deny that the sheer abundance and diversity of his output can make navigating Urushadze's website: **glu.ru** — which is organized under categories such as "landscapes," "portraits," "abstraction works," "still lifes," and "available works" — a challenging experience. Yet it proves well worth the effort for the aesthetic riches to be found therein.

"Composition # 43"

Perhaps a good place to start is with the painting entitled "Sunny Tram," which is one of Urushadze's most coloristically vibrant canvases and could appear almost abstract, if not for the tram of the title and the small figures on the lower left side of the canvas. For with its golden auras, this picture, which looks as though painted with a brush dipped in liquid light, achieves an auspicious synthesis of the artist's different modes of expression, proving that they are not as disparate as they may initially seem. Thus prepared, one can proceed on to the other works on the website with a better understanding of how Urushadze approaches each painting with untrammeled energy and passion, uniting all of them by virtue of a shared chromatic power and tactile sumptuousness.

It is instructive, above all, to study the recent paintings on the section of the site labeled "Available Work," where one gets the impression that rather than pursuing one direction for a time and then moving on to another, Urushadze works on all of them more or less simultaneously, according to his mood of the moment. In this regard, he appears to follow the example of Picasso, whose so-called "periods" were often determined not by chronological fact, but by dealers and later by art historians on the basis of what the artist chose to release for public consumption at any given time from the enormous and varied inventory constantly accumulating in his studio.

A similarly unchronological approach makes surfing Urushadze's site an ever-changing journey during which one may encounter in quick succession: mellow, street scenes of Lisbon such as "Old Town," with its subtle, earthy colors which evoke a sense of a timelessness as atmospheric as that in Utrillo's paintings of Paris alleyways and thoroughfares; female portraits like "Young Woman, Profile," stylized in an elongated manner akin to Modigliani; or a composition in which four different faces appear within a roughly configured abstract grid, entitled "Family."

Urushadze is a painter who has obviously absorbed a wide range of art historical influences, as any ambitious artist must who hopes to maintain the continuum of a certain painterly tradition, even while extending its perimeters. For example, in Urushadze's "Game," the three women playing cards are subjected to a formal simplification and a chromatic heightening that can recall the primitive force of both Nolde and Rouault. And in Urushadze's "A Girl," the purposely childlike imagery can remind one of the "art brut" of Dubuffet, as well as the fanciful figures of Klee.

In each case, however, he invariably assimilates the lessons of earlier centuries into his own unique painterly vocabulary, making the subject entirely his own by virtue of his highly individual "touch" and tactile paint application. Urushadze further enlivens his distinctive combination of gestural "handwriting" and sensuous paint quality with a uniquely appealing visual wit in paintings such as "Meeting," wherein two ram-like creatures stubbornly lock horns, as well as in "Film," where a sequence of vibrant neoprimitivistic, cartoon-like images is set within a narrow band traversing a monochromatic color field to suggest a semiabstract treatment of an actual film strip.

It is finally in his abstract paintings, however, where his formal gifts are set apart from considerations of subject matter, that one sees Urushadze's painterly prowess at its most nakedly impressive. Yet even here there is a great deal of variety, ranging from the relatively austerity of "Composition # 39," with its central spiral form and basically geometric quality to "Sunny Square," a dynamic composition in which densely layered small rectangular forms in a palette ranging from strident yellows through deep greens, blues and earth hues converge dynamically. Here, the artist combines elements of Cubism, Color Field painting, and Automatisme akin to that of Jean-Paul Riopelle, to create an overall effect of gemlike radiance, like points of light refracting off the fractured planes of a diamond. Indeed, it is in a work such as this that Levan Urushadze's unique form of color construction achieves its apex, making the palpable substance of pigment appear to transcend physical matter altogether and become somehow ethereal.

But perhaps one of his most appealing paintings, in terms of its festive beauty, is "Composition # 43," a recent canvas that fairly explodes with color, light, and gesture, like one of the great British painter Turner's epic nineteenth century novel battle scenes updated in abstract terms. For like Turner, whose contemporary Constable once exclaimed that he painted with "tinted steam," Levan Urushadze is an artist whose combination of gestural energy and chromatic intensity often casts an almost incendiary spell.

— J. Sanders Eaton

Robert Gaudreau Celebrates the Dreams, Nightmares, and Vanity of Homely Humanity

What seems to set the figurative painter Robert Gaudreau apart from a lot of other artists today is that he is not going through all sorts of clever conceptual or stylistic contortions to overcome what one critic recently had the audacity to refer to as "the fallen state of painting since the 1960s, when Andy Warhol merged it with mechanical reproduction and Minimalism petrified it with a basilisk stare."

If, in fact, painting actually has fallen nobody seems to have told Gaudreau about it; for he still proceeds as if painting matters, and in doing so, makes it matter in the way that it always has when it is any good: as a way of looking at the world and humanity quite apart from the declarations of critics and the currents of fashion.

"Alone and not Alone"

Gaudreau, who was born in New Jersey and still resides there, at a safe remove from those thoroughfares where art intersects with fashion, is self-taught. However, as always in the case of an autodidact in the age of the MFA, it is necessary here to make clear that Gaudreau, a former professional sign painter, has developed a highly sophisticated personal iconography which combines elements of Expressionism, Surrealism — and even hard-geometric abstraction, in a somewhat anomalous series of compositions depicting brightly-colored books on shelves.

However, the overwhelming majority of Gaudreau's paintings are figurative, and that he is without question one of our more prolific observers of the human condition becomes immediately clear upon logging onto his website: **robertgaudreau.com**.

Indeed, the swarming profusion of figures one encounters there can be initially overwhelming. For like Walt Whitman, Gaudreau — or at least his teeming imagination — literally contains multitudes. A cast of thousands populates the hundreds of oils and pastels that, along with a lesser number of gouaches and photographs (soon to come) make up his online oeuvre.

But it is not the sheer number of works that impresses one most; rather, it is the many bizarre situations and psychological states that his paintings portray that tempts one to regard Gaudreau as a contemporary peer of artists such as Ensor and Munch, who link Expressionism to Symbolism, and with whom he shares a lineage that goes all the way back to Bosch and Bruegel.

The site features pictures from the 2000s, the 1990s, and earlier; but while one can discern a steady, subtle progression as the artist becomes more technically proficient in the handling of his mediums, the overall vision appears to have been present fully formed from the beginning. Humanity is depicted in the raw; usually naked in both emotion and body; lumpy of physique, flesh scored with swirling "elephant skin" lines recalling the figures Henry Moore sketched huddled in air raid shelters during the W.W.II bombardments of London. If the notion of beauty or elegance ever comes up it is normally seen merely as a facet of pretension, in a pose that one of Gaudreau's figures strikes in a moment of grotesque, self-parodying vanity. Yet their lack of comeliness does not stop these beings, most of whom, male or female, are as hairless as exterterrestials (which, with their dome-like sculls, they often resemble) from coupling hungrily .

In "Nibble," two faces of indeterminate gender, seen in close-up, appear intent on cannibalizing each other; in "Plowing" two deathly gray nudes do it doggy-style with the wheel of a motorcycle jutting into the picture behind them; in another picture called "Cuddle," fornicating with a woman in the missionary position, the strident colors suggesting the moment of climax, the male partner swivels his head around as if to invite applause from the viewer.

Such self-consciousness seems to be a constant in Gaudreau's world, where the drawn or painted characters often seem to pose and preen for us, like the man flashing a big toothy grin with a grimacing child propped precariously on his shoulders in "Father and Son." It is a situation that many of us may recognize from leafing through an old family album and wondering, "Was Dad really that proud or just blind drunk, as usual?"

Yet there are also pictures such as "One Moment," in which a sweetly smiling, relatively normal-looking woman cradles the head of her rotund mate, who grins like a contented sea lion. Illuminated by rays of light that may emanate from a TV screen right outside the picture space, the couple seem to be enjoying one of those simple moments of domestic tenderness that make all the rest worthwhile. And then there are slightly kinkier consolations, the artist seems to tell us in another picture of a naked man kneeling submissively before a woman descending a staircase in a filmy white nightgown titled "Obey," as well as "A Spanking," its very title telling the whole tail (if one may be permitted to indulge in a bad pun).

But then again, Gaudreau obviously sees no point in denying the more vexing situations to which we were are all prey, such as "Friend," in which the person of the title literally attaches him or her (here, it's hard to say) self to one like an albatross. And then there are horrific nightmares that lodge themselves in the subconscious, such as "Guilty Until Proven Innocent" where hapless figures attempt to escape a surreal room where a hangman's noose casts the shadow of a clock on the wall, and "Alone and Not Alone," in which a woman and a small child, clutching hands, approach a queue of other naked souls that could be the line for the "showers" at Dachau."

Although he can conjure up complex multi-figure tableaux as hellish as anything ever imagined by Bosch, as indicated by titles such as "West Bank" and "Totalitarian," that Robert Gaudreau is also an astute student of human behavior (as well as the pathos of conformist social conventions) can best be seen in intimate pictures such as "How to Blow a Kiss," in which a morose-looking couple appears to be attempting to teach their child to be just like them. — Ed McCormack

Robert Gaudreau will be exhibiting at World Fine Art Gallery, from December 2 through December 23. Reception December 2, 6 to 8pm.

Adventure and Enterprise in the Art of Joseph Swenarton

That the realist painter Joseph Swenarton is an artist of many facets is the first thing that becomes obvious on visiting his web site: **swenartongallery.com**. One of the more unusual series to be seen there is the painter's posthumous collaboration with his late father, much in the spirit of the dubbed duets between Nat and Natalie Cole.

Robert Swenarton was an accomplished amateur photographer who shot mostly in black and white, and in the series called "Like Father, Like Son" Joseph Swenarton interprets some of his pictures in color, photo and painting set side by side to create striking diptychs. Since the son is primarily a nature painter, the father inspires him auspiciously with subjects such as the woodsy scene "Golden Shadows," the lyrical vision of which Joseph Swenarton expands upon with a full palette of luminous hues, the dappled chiaroscuro of the photograph suddenly bursting forth in a symphony of yellows and purples.

"Golden Shadows"

Similarly, the son sensitively tweaks the rustic charm of the father's "Autumn Rapture" by virtue of his chromatic amplification and subtle compositional reorganization. Since Joseph Swenarton seems to be generally more of a landscape than figure painter, his dad appears to encourage him to try a new approach in "Clara." Rising to the occasion, the son puts a new spin on this rearview portrait of an elderly woman in a sun bonnet, positioning the portion of her head that is cropped out of the photograph in reverse order to jog the viewers' perceptions in an intriguing manner.

The son slightly alters the composition of the father's photo "Bird Lady of the Beach" in his painted version, creating the cinematic illusion of a shift from medium shot to close-up, lending a sense of sequential movement to two static images.

Juxtaposed in this fashion, each photographic and painted image in the "Like Father, Like Son" series reveals its own individual merits, making not only for a heartfelt tribute, but also for an engaging aesthetic dialogue animated by complementary contrasts.

Other series on the website feature Joseph Swenarton's landscapes in oils and acrylics, primarily of locales in Italy and Key West, Florida, where he arrived in 1985 and claims to have found love, spiritual rejuvenation, and artistic inspiration. The paintings in his "Joseph's Garden" series reflect this sense of epiphany with their exotic vegetation and vibrant tropical colors.

Joseph Swenarton could be termed a Neo-Impressionist, since his light-filled plein air style suggests that he has absorbed the inspiration of Monet, Renoir and other nineteenth-century French masters. Rather than appearing dissolved by light, however, his forms retain more detail and palpable substance. He also seems to eschew the Impressionists' pseudoscientific theories regarding light and color phenomena, in favor of an exuberantly intuitive interpretation of nature.

Along with producing giclee prints, Joseph Swenarton has innovated what he calls All Weather Art, a process by which fine art reproductions of his paintings can serve as outdoor murals on patios and elsewhere. Described on his website in the section called "New Horizons," as well as on a related site called **patiopizzaz.com**, this new process is yet another facet of this versatile painter's enterprising spirit.

—Byron Coleman

Fanny Escolar de Siere's Magical Dimension

If the Kandinsky exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum celebrates the master who, in the early twentieth century literally invented abstract art, that the possibilities of pure form and color as a major aesthetic direction continue to fascinate some of our most adventurous contemporary artists was made auspiciously clear by Fanny Escolar de Siere, a painter from Argentina whose work was seen recently at Jadite Gallery, 413 West 50th Street.

As a professor of Spanish, Latin, and Literature, de Siere brings a sophisticated world view, bolstered by her studies of Art History and her workshop experience in a variety of studio techniques, to bear in her energetic and colorful canvases, which have been widely exhibited and were featured in the definitive art book "A View of Argentine Art," published in 2008.

One of the most immediately impressive aspects of de Siere's paintings is her refusal to succumb to stylistic formulae. Rather than cultivating a stylistic trademark, she prefers to make each new painting a new adventure. While this is very much in the explorative spirit of Kandinsky and other modernist pioneers, it requires real courage and conviction in an era when a certain instantly recognizable iconography has become very much a part of many artists' marketing strategy. Obviously de Siere puts a higher premium on discovery than on the form of light manufacturing that much postmodern art has become. And that she refuses to cater to our expectations makes her work an adventure for the viewer as well as for the artist.

"Untitled"

In the mixed media painting called "Affinidades, for example, the fiery reds and yellows that de Siere favors are combined with linear configurations "drawn" with sinuously twisted wire affixed to the canvas. At first these collaged forms appear totally abstract, but on closer viewing they become figuratively allusive, suggesting people in a crowd moving rhythmically, their linear relationships evoking the communal feeling implicit in the title. Yet while this humanistic idea comes across quite vividly, the artist's more pressing interest in color harmonies and abstract autonomy defies literal interpretation, making such connections metaphorical rather than literal.

By contrast, "Untitled," with its swirling gestural spirals generating a sense of energy, movement, and light divorced from matter (albeit paradoxically evoked in the substance of tactile pigment) is all about cosmic phenomena, rather than vestiges of the physical world. Here, de Siere transcends even the metaphorical to approach the plane of pure metaphysic — a subtle but significant distinction in relation to this painting. And that she avoids titling the composition leaves it open to an infinite range of imaginative conjecture.

Then there is "Ficciones," in which de Siere bridges the physical and the metaphysical in an especially vigorous composition with sensual forms that seem to vacillate before one's eyes, morphing from the figurative to the abstract and back again in the manner of those mythical beings known "shape shifters."

That this particular painting shares its title with the most popular anthology of short stories by the great Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges seems especially appropriate. For like a visual peer of her fellow countryman, Fanny Escolar de Siere is also something of a magician.

— Maurice Taplinger

Anowar Hossain Dissects the Michael Jackson Myth in Pigment

If fame is the cut-rate immortality of a secular age, celebrities are our disposable gods and goddesses, clay feet and all. As the principals of our tabloid myths, they often pay dire consequences for being perceived as larger than life. Few, however, have ended as tragically as Michael Jackson, our recently deceased King of Pop, who after growing up in public sought to transcend race, gender, and even the aging process, only to succumb to an early death in that peculiar squalor and isolation which all too often attends outlandish notoriety.

Sadly, once the mass hysteria that serves as emotional catharsis for the legions of fans who live vicariously through them subsides, such latter-day deities have a relatively short posthumous shelf life, unless they are resurrected in a medium less popular but more enduring than their own.

Only time will tell if Anowar Hossain has accomplished this feat for Michael, but in the meantime the paintings that the singer's myth inspired the Bangladesh-born American painter to create are impressive on their own merits, in his Open Studio Exhibition at L.I.C.. Arts Center, 44-02 23rd Street, in Long Island City, from November 7 to December 7. (Reception: November 7, 5 to 8 PM.)

One thing that should be understood about Hossain at the onset is that he is one of our most accomplished contemporary exponents of the Abstract Expressionist idiom. Perhaps the best place to see how thoroughly he has mastered its entire formal vocabulary and range of effects is in the series of recent mostly black and white (except for touches of ocher in a few canvases) compositions he is showing along with his Michael Jackson paintings. Few painters today can match the sheer majesty and velocity of his Hossain's brushstrokes, which appear in his large canvases as though laid down with broad house painters' brushes like those that early New York School painters such as Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline often employed.

Indeed, although he also cites great Indian artists such as the writer Ravindrath Tagore and the filmmaker Satyajit Ray as early cultural inspirations, these American abstract painters would appear to be Hossain's most immediate artistic ancestors. Of course, when Hossain works monochromatically, as in this series, it is Kline's name that comes most immediately to mind, not only for the stark beauty he achieves without benefit of color but also for the architectonic structuring of his compositions and his bold, sweeping strokes in paintings such as "The Hanger" and "Old Dock Yard." However, the painterly fluidity in most of Hossain's compositions is actually more akin to that of de Kooning, who had a broader and more refined arsenal of techniques than Kline.

In paintings such as Hossain's "Snow Storm" and "River Side," for two examples, while solid draftsmanship is the underlying armature on which the compositions rest, all traces of linear structuring are swept away as though by the very forces of nature to which those two titles allude, even though the artist does not literally depict the storm or the river in even the most vaguely illustrative manner. What is captured instead is the spirit and untrammeled essence of such things; their energy and sense of flux. These intangible things are evoked by the sheer speed and power of Hossain's gestures: the strokes of a broad, loaded brush spitting forth sparks of whitewash at the point of impact with the canvas like froth from crashing surf; or a muscularly configured shape in black pigment as viscous as tar that flips off the sudden twist of a wrist with a practiced dancers' grace.

"Michael Jackson in Red" 36x48 mixed media

Many of the qualities that make Hossain such an engaging painter are combined in the composition oddly titled "Lower Side Brooklyn." A sinuous black line, bolstered by more broadly brushed broken strokes of rusty ocher and areas of much thicker black calligraphy. Variously overlaid with semi-translucent washes of white that allow bits of pentimento or "process" to show through and imbue the painting with a sense of immediacy, or completely canceled here and there with opaque slashes of grimy urban gray, these elements all swirl furiously around each other, gathering force like a tornado. Here, as in other paintings by Hossain, a sense of spatial tension pushes out against the edges of the composition — as if to implode the very stretcher bars to which the canvas is stapled!

One might validly wonder how an artist could assimilate specific figurative imagery coherently into such a powerful gestural force field. In the case of Hossain's Michael Jackson series, this is achieved in just the opposite manner of de Kooning's "Women." Which is to say: rather than wreaking monstrous distortions on the figures themselves, Hossain integrates classical realist draftsmanship within the color areas in a manner more akin to the hybrid style of Larry Rivers. But while Rivers sometimes diluted both the Abstract Expressionist and figurative elements in his compositions by succumbing to a fussy illustrative tendency, Hossain integrates drawing and painting more organically, as seen in "Michael Had a Style," where the appealing smiling face of the very young pre-plastic surgery Michael floats like the man in the moon within a vibrant pink field enhanced with cloud-like areas of yellow and green. Or else, in the contrastingly spooky "Michael in Blue Hair," he gives us a Halloween vision of the singer's later mask-like, wig-framed visage, with opaque blue sunglasses and garish red lips suggesting the empty eye-sockets and mortal grin of a skinned human skull.

By contrast, in "Michael in Thriller," Hossain depicts the singer sitting pretty on the success of his most famous album, a toothy Sphinx afloat in a field of dollar bills. Then, in "Michael with Makeups," we see the fading star as a painted and tainted specter, as rouged, bruised and doomed as one of Andy's iconic "Marilyns." Hossain's lyrical pastel hues make paint a literal surrogate for cosmetics, reducing the King of Pop to a clown prince as grotesquely pathetic as the lovelorn decadent middle-aged protagonist of Thomas Mann's "Death in Venice," his mascara diluted by tears.

Apparently Anowar Hossain set himself the task of making each of his Michael Jackson pictures a unique painterly statement. That he also makes each one a powerful comment on the rise and fall of a tragic American icon makes the series all the more remarkable.

— Ed McCormack

Out of the Nowhere.....Into the Here

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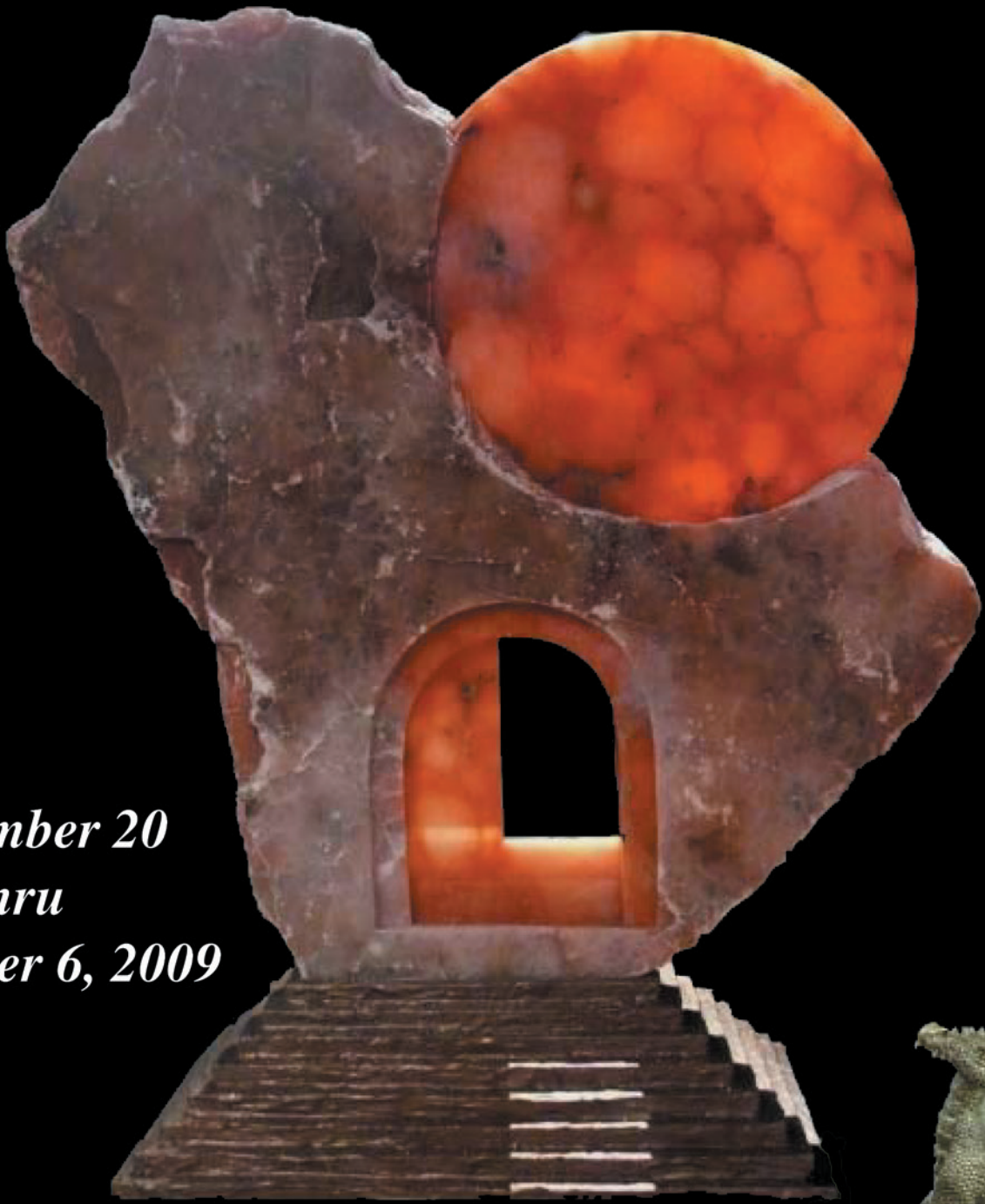
Sculptor



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