FEBRUARY/MARCH 2010 www.galleryandstudiomagazine.com VOL. 12 NO. 3 New York

GALLERY & STUDIO

MASKED MAN

MAN RAY AT THE JEWISH MUSEUM

Noire et Blanche, *1926 Gelatin silver print Private collection of Thomas and Janine Koerfer-Weill*

FOREVER JUNG:

The Great Psychologist's Artistic Magnum Opus, *p. 30*

plus: Ed McCormack on Post-Literate Culture, *p. 16*

Erma Martin Yost

Flightscapes, Hand-felted Stitched Constructions

"Titmice" (detail) 28" x 18"

February 2-27, 2010

noho gallery

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Sheila Hecht

"Stacked", 48x36, acrylic on canvas,

Primary Spirit, No Short-cuts

March 2 – 27, 2010
Reception: Saturday March 6, 4 – 6pm

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Pablo Caviedes
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"Comme un insecte sur le dos"
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"Aphrodite"
Mari Yamagiwa
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"Dickhead"
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G&S Highlights

On the Cover:
Not only during the Nazi occupation of Paris, but for his entire career, the American expatriate who called himself Man Ray remained secretive about his ethnic heritage. Which is why the curator of "Alias Man Ray: The Art of Reinvention," at The Jewish Museum, sees the exhibition as "a poignant homecoming for perhaps the first avant-garde Jewish artist of the twentieth century." pg. 24

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Erma Martin Yost Takes Flight in a New Solo Show

We stand in awe before the medieval splendor of The Unicorn Tapestries at the Cloisters; yet so many of us remain woefully ignorant of the important work being done by fiber artists today. Or else we relegate such work to the recent art history of the feminist movement or — worse — consign it to the dead-end ghetto of "craft," simply because the painstaking pace of its creation appears at odds with the impatient, media-hungry sensationalism of so much other contemporary art.

In doing so, however, we are in danger of missing out on the work of artists such as Erma Martin Yost, whose exhilarating exhibition "Flightscapes, Hand-felted Stiched Constructions" is on view at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from February 2 through 27.

Noho is a gallery that has always given fabric artists their proper due by exhibiting several of the best ones, including Yost, Marilyn Henrion, and others, alongside painters, sculptors and installation artists. To qualify Marshall McLuhan's famous axiom, the medium may be part of the message, but it is hardly the whole story.

"Downies at Dawn"

"Outside the window of my new studio in Carlisle is a bird feeder and bird bath," explains Erma Martin Yost, who set a precedent for her present show with an earlier series called "Bird Books" in 1996.

"The number and variety of birds that attend there is truly amazing. One day while trying to work, the windows were open and the bird songs kept drawing me to look out at their activities. I thought to myself they are almost a distraction, but instantly thought otherwise — they are an inspiration and a focus. I looked back through the past two years of the weekly e-mail letters I write to my sisters and cut and pasted every reference to birds into a 'Bird Journal.' The entries totaled nine single spaced pages!"

Yost was a painter of large abstract landscapes before deciding to put the love of sewing and "playing with fabric" nurtured by growing up in a traditional Mennonite community in northern Indiana to the service of her art. After initially making the art quilt her medium for several years, she adopted the archaic form of handmade felt, attracted to how color sensuously saturates and migrates through the material's entire surface, which she often enhances with stitching, mono-printing, appliqué, and sewing "notions" such as buttons, snaps, and hooks. She further enriches her works with PhotoShop digital collage, marrying state of the art technology to a material so ancient that it predates spinning and weaving by several thousand years.

Looking at a work by Yost such as her recent composition "Garden Birds," one is reminded of an essay from John Ruskin's book "The Lamp of Beauty," in which the great nineteenth century critic extols "faultless workmanship and perfect serenity" as "the two first attributes of the best art." For in this exquisitely stitched and stained scene of two birds fluttering around an a-frame feeder, both attributes are everywhere in evidence. Especially pleasing is the manner in which Yost has "drawn" with delicate strands of colored thread, employing pink to delineate the graceful form of one bird preening at the feeder and pale blue for the torso and outspread wings of the other, soaring nearby. Here, too, the artist displays her unique manner of marrying sewn and stitched outlines harmoniously to the subtle modulations of the color saturated felt ground, where splashy yellows and softly diffused areas of white evoke a sense of sunlight and fluffy summer clouds.

That Yost has no small gift for sharing the delight that she takes in the comings, goings, and often raucous antics of the many small creatures who flock to her yard also comes across splendidly in "Chickadee Chatter," where three stout, simplified avian figures, set against a vibrant blue ground, are overlaid with diagonally slanted rows of short stitches that simultaneously suggest a summer shower (complete with stitched spiral puddle on an earth colored clump below) and the sharp staccato chirps with which the little birds protest the rain. In a manner ingeniously akin to how Arthur Dove evoked the mournful sound of foghorns in one of his most memorable compositions, Yost creates a striking visual vocabulary to convey a considerably cheerier aural sensation.

Indeed, Yost's ability to find fresh symbols for varied aspects of her subjects has always been one of the hallmarks of her art, manifesting most continuously in a melding of nature and down-home architecture, with simplified A-frame structures depicted in a skeletal manner that erases all distinctions between exterior and interior spaces, calling into question notions of sanctity and safety.

So try as she will to nourish and shelter her summer visitors in her backyard feeder and provide them modest creature comforts with her bird bath, the artist must finally acknowledge the ever-present specter of mortality that haunts us all. One poignant piece called "Requiem for a Bird" has an emblematic composition centering on a ghostly white nest suspended between two stylized trees, containing what appear to be dried and bleached stems bearing small fronds; the stitched outlines of falling leaves; and an actual heartbreakingly delicate little skull.

For the most part, however, Yost's new show is a joyous celebration of life, inspired by her sympathetic observation of humble beings with much to teach us. Each picture focuses on a specific avian attribute: soaring grace is immortalized in the figure of a bird in flight above a fanciful landscape of rhythmical hills and streams in "Catching Currents." In "Downies at Dawn," bundled felt forms lend a 3-D effect to the distinctive black and white coats and red caps of ten downy woodpeckers perched on a limb, watching for their cue, as stitched red streaks and half of a fiery orb appear over a snowy hill in the hushed moment before the chorus of daybreak begins. And abstract symbols resembling hieroglyphics again approximate the sound of music, in a particularly vibrant composition called "Robin's Song."

We must return to John Ruskin, who wrote "They have plucked the wings from birds to make angels of men and the claws from birds to make devils of men," for the most poetically succinct summary of the role avian anatomy has played in forming the symbolic iconography of religious art. But for visions of our feathered friends at once more secular, truthful, and deeply spiritual, one can only recommend this beautiful new solo show by Erma Martin Yost.

— Ed McCormack

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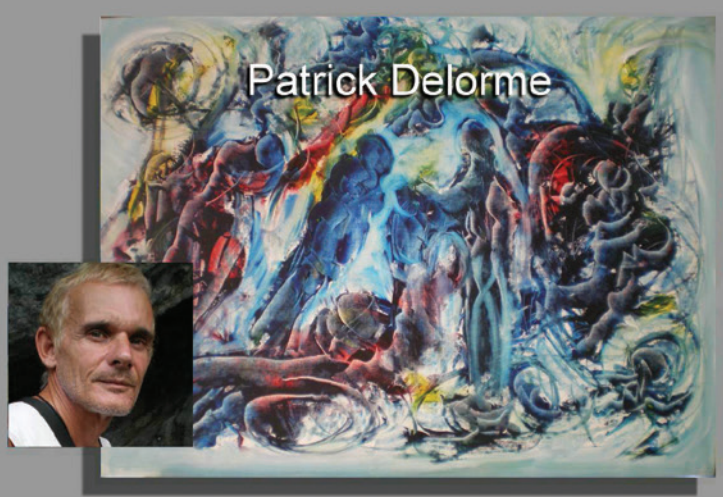

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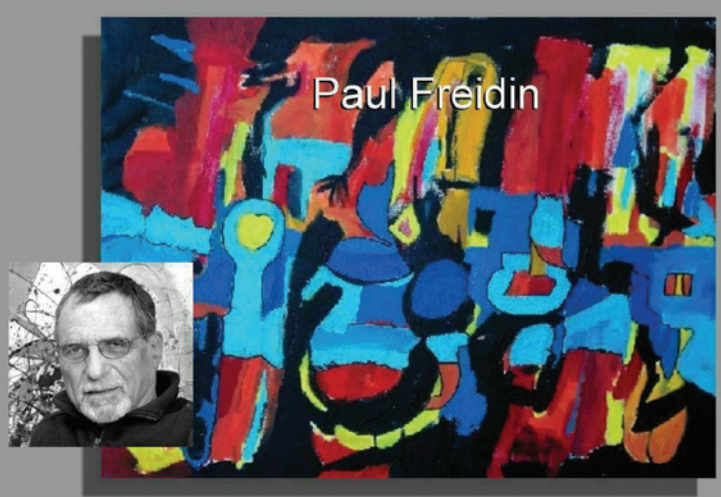

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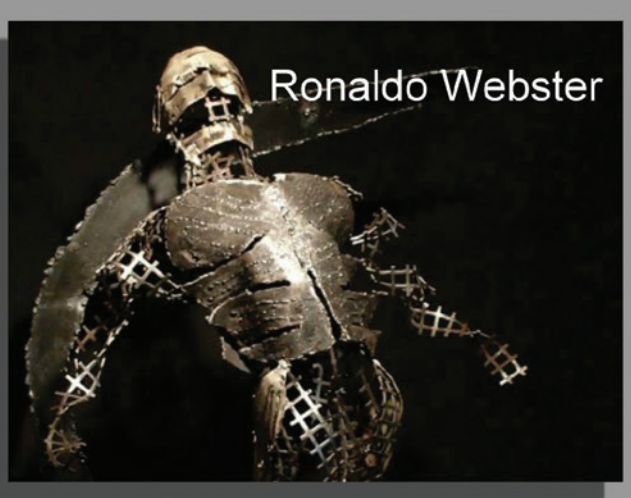

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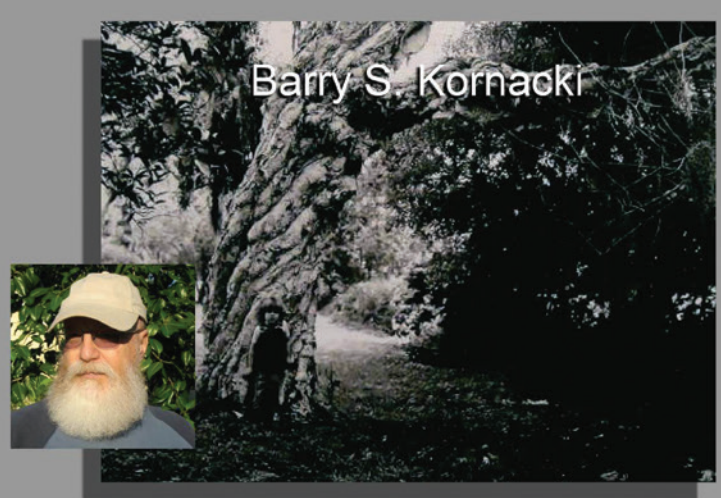

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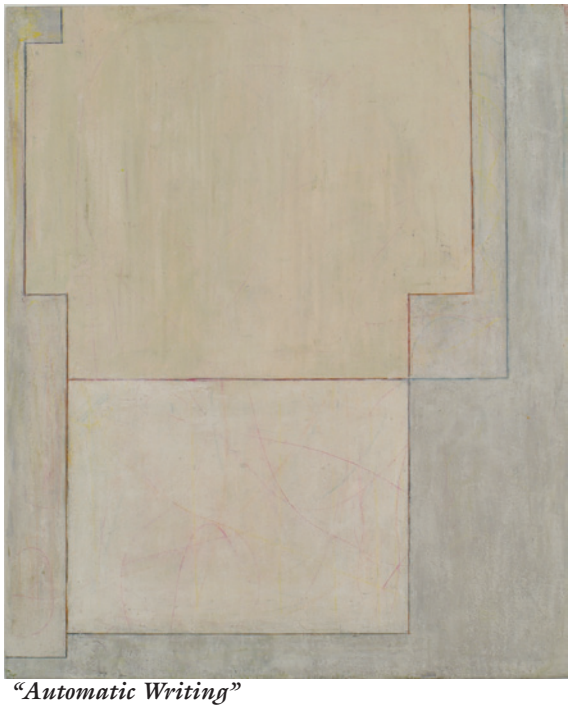
Stephen Cimini: Charting the Abstract Sublime

Normally, the formal and the romantic are regarded as polar opposites. However, the painter Stephen Cimini, a recent recipient of a grant from the Pollock-Krassner Foundation, can be seen as a romantic in the same paradoxical sense that the older artist Sean Scully, whose "stripe" paintings share a similar fondness for pure geometry, employs the term when he says, "I hold to a very romantic ideal of what's possible in art ....I'm going against the current ideal of bizarreness, oddness..."

As in his previous paintings, the thirteen compositions in Cimini's "Ghost Series" (which can be seen on the artist's website: **stephencimini.com**) are built on adjoining, interlocking, and overlapping rectangles. Yet as I have written elsewhere in regard to this artist's work, it is a romantic — even a radical — gesture in today's eclectic art scene to embrace precision and a certain reductiveness. And in Cimini's case, it would seem that the more he removes from his paintings, the richer the experience of encountering them can become for the viewer.

The latest thing to go in Cimini's "Ghost Paintings" were the deliciously saturated, sensually smoldering hues — particularly the seductive purples and violets — prominent in his solo show at Noho Gallery last year, which could then have seemed indispensable to his aesthetic.

Color is still present in the new paintings, albeit muted to a palette of pale, milky pastel and putty hues enlivened by a remarkable variety of subtle painterly textures and tonal modulations within several successive layers of oil paint mixed with the marble dust and the wax-medium that the artist employs to lend his pigments "an organic feel."



"Automatic Writing"

The chalky effect of the marble dust, combined with the soft patina which the wax-medium imparts, results in a surface that might more properly be termed *sensuous* than sensual. Its semi-translucency enables the viewer to perceive a paradoxical sense of layered depth within the ostensibly two-dimensional picture plane, as well as to see the "scribble marks," made with colored china markers, that are often a part of Cimini's painterly process, but are usually obscured in the finished painting. These now faintly visible vestiges of a Twombly-esque ecriture, most prominent in the canvas aptly entitled "Automatic Writing," not only add a daring sense of randomness within a precise geometric context but enhance the spectral element implicit in the series' title. At the same time, the delicate markings impart a phantom radiance, a sense of sinuous linear auras within the waxen "skin" of the paintings, which plays off exquisitely against the more definite traces of color that Cimini embeds within the precisely incised lines defining his geometric divisions.

What the new coloristic austerity in the "Ghost Paintings" accomplishes most effectively is to focus attention even more thoroughly than before on the classical attributes of Cimini's compositions. The artist himself has attributed the combination of restraint, balance, proportion, and order in his paintings to his early interest in architecture, explaining that his present abstract vocabulary evolved directly from "the linear landscape of New York City."

Yet what really makes one sit up and take notice is the degree to which he has refined and pared down the forms that initially inspired him to create his unique abstract style. For to a degree that has become increasingly rare in contemporary painting, the work of Stephen Cimini is informed by what the twentieth-century Swiss art critic Heinrich Wölfflin, who clarified so many principles of classicism for the modern age, referred to as "the complete cultivation and education of the eye."

— Ed McCormack

Beyond the White Cube and Through the Looking Glass:

"The work on setting up the gallery may not be completed, but the magic is already there," Jeannie said on the way down in the elevator, after we had visited Neil Zukerman, the owner and director of CFM Gallery, in his new space on the fourth floor at 236 West 27th Street.

"It's already a cabinet of wonders," I agreed, using our old term for the gallery's former space at Soho. "Well, just because he moved to Chelsea, we didn't expect Neil to create a typical white cube, did we?"

"No way!" my wife declared. "Everywhere I looked, fascinating objects seemed to peeking out from behind the packing crates and from different corners and crevices like little creatures in a garden at twilight. It was as though they were all waiting to take their proper places. A bronze lizard, I think it was, by Ailene Fields was already comfortably ensconced on a brocade pillow, and there were so many other things scattered around on boxes, on the floor, and on shelves that, if it wouldn't have been rude, I would have loved to just go rummaging among them."

Of course, we should have known that CFM Gallery would turn out to be "a moveable feast," to borrow Hemingway's memorable phrase, since the kind of contemporary surrealist and symbolist art that Neil Zukerman both exhibits and collects is inseparable from his life. After all, the rambling apartment that Zukerman shares with his longtime partner, the innovative jewelry designer Tom Shivers, whose pieces in precious metal and stone are on permanent display in vitrines at CFM, has always been an extension of the gallery, filled with room after room of treasures.

Paintings, drawings, and prints by gallery artists like Leonor Fini, Salvador Dali, Anne Bachelier, Michael Parkes, and Aleksandra Nowak, as well as by older masters such as Felicien Rops, Franz von Bayros, and numerous others that Zukerman collects and sometimes exhibits, cover the walls salon-style. Pedestals, tables, shelves, and floors boast a dazzling profusion of fanciful and sensual bronzes by Ailene Fields and Frederick Hart; fantastic glass sculptures by Lucio Bubacco; and eerily lifelike figures fashioned from fabric by Lisa Lichtenfels, among so many other diverse works as to be impossible to take in during a single visit — or even several, as Jeannie and I have learned over the years. The couples' elegantly cluttered home is a place of constant discovery, since Zukerman is forever discovering new things to add to it in the course of a life that, as my perceptive wife puts it, "is a life inseparable from art — a veritable work of art in itself."

Even his annual trips to Carnival in Venice with his partner — most recently in the company of Anne Bachelier and Ailene Fields and their husbands — for which they have opulent new costumes custom-made every year, seem to be extensions of the art that he exhibits and collects. Most serendipitous in this regard is the 2009 oil "La Fiesta Miracolosa II," by a neo-surrealist known as Andrei, a relative newcomer to CFM, meticulously depicting an orator addressing a festively costumed throng in Venice, while the sky above peels back to reveal a supernatural vision.

For one of the things that distinguishes Neil Zukerman from run of the mill gallerists is that he actually seems to believe in magic, visions, and miracles. Indeed, he has retained a sense of wonder that is reflected in a personal library filled with books of fairy tales, as well as in such professional ventures as his creative collaboration with Anne Bachelier on deluxe, lavishly illustrated editions of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and "Phantom of the Opera," among other classics published under the CFM imprint.

He has also written and published monographs on Leonor Fini, his friendship with whom and the collection of whose work launched his career as an art dealer. So in celebration of the recent publication of the first English language biography of the artist, "Sphinx: The Life of Leonor Fini" by Peter Webb (which is being offered for sale by the gallery at a special price), CFM will be presenting a major show of her work in March, immediately following its inaugural Salvador Dali exhibition in the new Chelsea space in February.

Featured along with other original works from the Fini estate and important private collections, including Zukerman's own, will be the large oil "Rasch, Rasch, Rasch...Mein puppen werten," in which five Lolita-like nymphets, one nude, others in various states of dishabille, lounge around languorously in what appears to be the anteroom of some sort of surreal sensorium, while a woman behind a glass partition kneels to adjust the puff-shouldered garment of a petite androgyne who may be a young lad in drag.

Through the looking glass, indeed!

— Ed McCormack

Tom Shivers and Neil Zukerman at Carnival in Venice. And Anne Bachelier's portrait of them.

CFM Gallery Comes to Chelsea

Leonor Fini

Michael Parks

Lisa Lichtenfels

Felicien Rops

Salvador Dali

Aleksandra Nowak

Anne Bachelier

Ailene Fields

Andrei

Lucio Bubacco

Frederick Hart

Kenneth Dinkel and the Pursuit of the Sublime

Nature and abstraction merge in a fluid synthesis in "Reflections," an oil on canvas by Kenneth Dinkel consisting of luminous bands of color that read like a nonobjective Morris Louis poured Color Field painting turned sideways, even while simultaneously evoking rainbows, sunsets, shimmering desert heat and other phenomena of the known world.

Like the other oils on view in Dinkel's solo show curated by Bob Keiber at The Berkeley Gallery II, on the second floor at Berkeley College, 3 East 43rd Street through February 27, "Reflections" prompts us to consider the possibilities of abstract painting from new angles of vision.

For Dinkel, who has also been invited to exhibit paintings in the 13th Contemporary Beijing International Art Exposition at the China World Trade Center in August, 2010, displays a refreshingly freewheeling approach to form and color. Although he is also a fine landscape painter, here as in his previous show in the same venue in 2008, he appears more concerned with capturing what is submerged, subliminal and immaterial than with outer appearances, even when vestiges of the real remain.

"Autumn Mist" *Photo: Carmen Celentano*

An excellent example of this can be seen in his oil on canvas "Autumn Mist," in which spidery black trees are set against a background of softly modulated reds, oranges, and earth colors that meld in bold streaks. But even while the pictorial conventions of landscape are discernible in the composition, the abstract factors predominate. Not only are the autumnal hues that would normally adorn the denuded trees relegated to the background, but the bare limbs appear as though fashioned from twisted barbed wire. Indeed, one tends to view them as formal configurations rather than natural representations; for clearly Dinkel is more concerned with evoking a mood, an emotional reaction in the viewer, than he is with imitating external appearances.

Similarly, the composition that the artist calls "Hope," which is saturated by a brilliant blue hue, could evoke a nocturnal marinescape with shadowy wisps of cloud, dark waves, and an incandescent white horizon line separating sky from sea. However, this canvas might more accurately be termed a "mindscape," since here, as well, the emphasis is on the abstract elements of the composition, which supercede the creation of an illusion. Yet the impression is so strong as to call the very notion of "reality" into question, as does all good abstract painting that proceeds from the known world, rather than simply presenting a formal premise.

In another oil on canvas a verdant shoreline under a vast expanse of vibrant blue sky is mirrored in an equally brilliant body of water. Paradoxically it is simultaneously one of the show's most minimalist and most literal compositions. But its title, "Life," should tip one off that Dinkel intends it to be an embodiment of a larger abstract concept, as opposed to a representation of a specific place. The word "abstract," after all, has several meanings, and here he combines the formal definition that we normally apply to painting with a suggestion of its more philosophical connotations. Which is to say, he is not so much depicting a scene as responding to the mystery of all organic life and all the drama that biology begets. Thus that bucolic shoreline, its green hills speckled with variegated floral hues, seems to symbolize the primal source from which all else springs: a slender strip of Eden just out of reach.

By contrast, a sense of something cosmic and unknowable comes across most strongly in paintings such as "In the Tube" and "Wishing Well." The former painting is a composition of rhythmic blue swirls that gradually diminish in size and culminate in a glowing white opening on the left side of the composition, suggesting the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel often described in accounts of "near death experiences" or the fluorescence at the exit from the birth canal. The latter painting is an overall composition in which small swarming forms resembling points of light enliven the aquamarine color field of what could appear to be a reconfigured solar system.

In other oils on canvas, Dinkel adapts a drip technique reminiscent of Jackson Pollock to his own ends — perhaps most successfully in "Shooting Star," where the splashed layers of color are straight and streamlined rather than cursive, creating a sense of velocity in keeping with the title. Obviously, this is not an ironic act of so-called "appropriation" in the fashionable postmodern manner, but a direct way of using an existing technique for its expressive possibilities in much the same manner one might pick up a trick or two from a Renaissance master and apply it unabashedly to the realization of a totally original contemporary idea.

Indeed, Kenneth Dinkel would seem open to any means of reaching his aesthetic goals; yet perhaps the most exciting aspect of his work is that, despite having an extensive grasp of art history and a willingness to apply its lessons wherever they seem appropriate, he makes every painting a new departure. And even more important, the obvious sense of exhilaration that he experiences in every discovery along the way becomes contagious for the viewer.

— Ed McCormack

Facets and Faces of German Art Today

That the Expressionist tradition still holds sway in contemporary Germany is clear in "Contemporary German Art: The New York Experience," at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from March 23 through April 13. (Reception: Thursday, March 25, from 6 to 8 PM.)

Its energy enlivens the abstract works of Peter Rademacher, created with pencil, chalk, charcoal and other materials on paper. With their freely brushed forms and rhythmic gestures, Rademacher's vigorous, spontaneous-looking compositions break down all barriers between drawing and painting. By contrast, figurative elements are more evident among the gestural style of Fariba Roostaei. Human forms and rough rustic architecture seem caught in a painterly maelstrom in some of Roostaei's most vigorous compositions.

Linde Unrein freely interprets and updates mythological subjects. In one of her Unrein's compositions, the boldly delineated nude figure of the wood nymph Daphne appears to be mating with or possibly even morphing into a tree. Graffiti is by its very nature expressionistic, and Dingo Babusch exploits it to its fullest in lively works, some with photo imagery submerged in skeins of painterly drips, that endeavor to cut through cultural trends to the raw essence of modern life.

Neo- expressionism, however, is by no means the only tendency in animating art in Germany today. Dr. Lusine Breitscheidel, who describes herself as "a creative scientist and a scientific artist at the same time," employs a sinuous style reminiscent of Klimt and Schiele. With a sinuous line and jewel-like colors Breitscheidel creates intricate figure paintings that suggest a new, postmodern species of Art Nouveau. Then there is CC Johnson who partakes of a vocabulary reminiscent of Cubism in colorful paintings in which tango dancers, angular architecture and sometimes Chagall-like imagery are dynamically updated.

By contrast Brigette Martha Keller, who begins with a photograph that she transforms, excels at at a kind of poetic realism in which the subject seems to be the private worlds of lonely children. Often her young subjects are seen in surreal landscape settings, daydreaming under ominous, stormy skies swarming with flocks of birds. A somewhat more distorted figurative style is employed by Peter Martin, who likes to paint angels who, because as he puts it, they are "human as well as divine," can sometimes appear somewhat demonic. Usually, they are naked, and, contrary to common belief, hardly sexless.

As everywhere else in today's art world, state of the art technology also figures in the work of some artists. Astrid Castillo Quesada, for example, employs photography enhanced by Photoshop to create images of female models with a mood of introspection and an otherworldy quality. Pari Ravan, on the other hand, looks to the Old Masters for inspiration for her meticulous realist technique. But Ravan's subjects transcend realism as evidenced by her paintings of two bats by the light of a full moon and a pair of tulip lovers embracing amid wisps of cloud and floating fragments of text.

Various styles of abstract painting are also alive and well in Germany: Christiane Lohrig's large compositions are sumptuous explorations of bright, mostly rectangular color areas with sensuous surfaces that are often texturally enhanced with sand. Lohrig sometimes adds repeated patterns or symbols to further enliven her tactile compositions. By contrast, Nadine Y. Jeners works in a more minimalist manner, with compositions often divided horizontally between different tonalities of a single, soft hue. Jeners' paintings possess a stately spiritually suggestive presence that can remind one of Rothko. Zoran Gavric

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The Ethos of Abstraction Emphasized Emphatically

"Abstract 2009," the latest installment of the West Side Arts Coalition's annual survey of the state of the art of nonobjective painting, was seen recently at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street.

Each of the participating artists possessed a distinct style that contrasted sharply with the others. Yet the overall impression was of an enlightened dialogue between peers mutually dedicated to assuring that the adventurous spirit of modernism not only survives but thrives in the postmodern era.

Jutta Filippelli showed several moody canvases, predominantly in earthy browns, ochers, and other muted hues, marked by a quiet intensity. Filipelli reveals a masterly grasp of composition in her layering of flat rectangular color areas on the picture plane to create craggy wall-like spaces akin to those of Clyfford Still. At once somber and chromatically sonorous, her acrylics convey a restrained emotional impact.

The oils in Leanne Martinson's "Cosmos" series appear to have been created, at least in part, from earlier paintings she has cut up and collaged back together to create new compositions, much as Lee Krassner once did with her drawings. Martinson's jazzy colors, however, impart a more dazzling dynamism to the jagged rhythms of dislocation, making her compositions jump like flickering neon. The impression that the artist has sacrificed older paintings to make the new ones adds an element of conceptual drama, as though Martinson is making manifest in both her process and the power of these finished paintings the exhilarating notion of "snatching victory from the jaws of defeat."

Madi Lanier's two paintings in the exhibition demonstrated two vastly different yet complementary aspects of her oeuvre. One was a work on paper in watercolor and ink, with graceful linear shapes and shadings that seemed to verge on the figurative without becoming specific woven among freeform splotches of blue, green, and yellow. The other was a larger composition in acrylic on canvas, in which colorful, confetti-like rectangular bits of collage were combined with graceful calligraphic strokes and spattered paint to create a festive sense of celebration.

Beatrice Rubel was represented by a single small work on paper in colored pencil and graphite that made an impression far greater than its dimensions. Entitled "Peaceful Valley and Farms," Rubel's piece qualified as abstract by virtue of her ability to evoke an idyllic pastoral scene (reminiscent of Jean Miro's early neoprimitive work in the collection of MoMA) almost entirely in luminous cubist planes. Not even the delicate vines, flowers, fruits, vegetables and other fanciful rural symbols drawn directly onto the cardboard map surrounding the central composition distracted from the aesthetic integrity of this charming little work.

Meyer Tannenbaum's "Random Series" is, in fact, anything but random. Like everything else that this adamantly abstract artist (who makes a principle of eschewing brushes for other methods of mark-making) touches, the series is possessed of an innovative freshness — particularly in this case for Tannenbaum's deliberate separation of line and color. The payoff for the viewer is in how the discrete elements coalesce into harmonious compositions wherein spare, sensual, florally suggestive yet nonspecific shapes swirl gracefully over flat, matte color areas with the ease of an Olympic ice skater doing figure eights.

Another frequent WSAC exhibitor, Peg McCreary showed nature-based abstractions in which characteristically fluid green shapes, suggesting leaves and stems, were set against luminous areas of harmonizing color fields. A painter with a background in music, McCreary's sinuous forms are invariably rhythmical.

Willem de Kooning once stated that, for him, painting was "not a situation of comfort," and the same might be said of Elinore Bucholtz, whose mixed media works seem to thrive on a sense of

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Remembering Rebecca Cooperman (1917-2010)

Feisty and outspoken, Rebecca Cooperman who passed away on January 7, was a lively presence on the art scene, as well as a fine painter who will be remembered for her ability to make still-life a vehicle for abstraction. She had four solo shows and ten two-artist shows at Noho Gallery, of which she was a founding member. Fellow member Leon Yost recalls "in the early years of the gallery, she constantly advocated that we spend our monthly meetings discussing her favorite subject: art."
The family is planning a memorial service in April.
—The Editors

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.

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

VIRIDIAN ARTISTS 21ST ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL JURIED COMPETITION Open to US and international artists, 2D and 3D media. Juror: Elisabeth Sussman, Curator, Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC. Cash prizes, Power-Point presentation, Group exhibition July 6 - July 24, 2010. Entry Deadline: April 16, 2010. $40/3 pieces, $5 each additional. SASE for prospectus: Viridian Artists, 530 West 25th, NY, NY 10001, or download at www.viridianartists.com. Phone: 212-414-4040, Email: info@viridianartists.com

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

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.

NEW YORK, NY: CATHERINE LORILLARD WOLFE ART CLUB, INC. 114th Annual Open Juried Exhibition at the National Arts Club, NY. October 5-29, 2010. Open to women artists. Media: Oil, Acrylic, Watercolor, Pastel, Graphics, and Sculpture. Over $9000 in awards. Entry Fee: $30/Members and Associates, $35/Non-Members. Juried by CD's or Slides. Deadline for entry is July 1, 2010. For prospectus, send SASE to Okki Wang, 431 Woodbury Road, Cold Spring Harbor, NY 11724 or download prospectus at www.clwac.org.

PHOENIX GALLERY SOLO & GROUP SHOW JUROR: ROBERT STORR, Dean of the Yale School of Art. ALL MEDIA. AWARD: SOLO & GROUP SHOW. JUNE 23 - JULY 17, 2010. Deadline: APRIL 24, 2010. Prospectus: www.phoenix-gallery.com/info@phoenix-gallery.com or Send SASE, Phoenix Gallery, 210 Eleventh Ave., 902, New York, NY 10001

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

Bringing the Coasts Together at Allan Stone Gallery

While many New York gallerists and collectors tend to be provincial and chauvinistic, Allan Stone always took a broader view. In the 1960s and 1970s, while building a stellar reputation for showing and collecting Willem de Kooning, Barnett Newman and other major figures of the New York School, he was also well on his way to making the California painter Wayne Thiebaud the international art star he is today.

Thiebaud, who has been represented by Allan Stone Gallery, presently located at 113 East 90th Street, since having his first New York exhibition there in 1962, introduced the dealer to most of the artists featured in the venue's recent group exhibition "Bay Area to New York."

Even one who has enjoyed several major Thiebaud shows at Allan Stone Gallery over the years was caught off guard by the quirky charms of "Sucker Tree," a fanciful 1962 oil of a pyramidal lollipop display in smooth sorbet hues that recall both Nicolas de Stael and the less well-known American expatriate painter Patrick Henry Bruce. Also on view was "Delicatessen Counter," a 1961 work in ink oil and watercolor on paper that has to be one of the earliest examples of what was to become a classic Thiebaud theme.

Allan Stone's discerning eye also focused on Richard Diebenkorn at a pivotal moment. The sense of Pacific landscape space in his 1954 oil on canvas "Berkeley," suggests that Diebenkorn (of whose work Stone was an early and avid dealer and collector) was just about to escape the influence of Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still, his former fellow teachers at the California School of Fine Arts, to become the dean of Bay Area Figuration. However, Diebenkorn, who already had a considerable reputation as an abstract painter on both coasts, would continue to move easily between representation and nonrepresentational art for the remainder of his career.

Stone also collected and exhibited other major artists associated with Bay Area Figuration in the Fifties and Sixties, such as Elmer Bischoff, whose untitled 1952 abstraction was so filled with muscularly configured conviction as to make his return to nonobjective composition in the 1970s seem almost expected. After destroying all his abstract paintings in 1949, however, David Park went on to forge a beautifully blunt figurative style. It was already fully formed by the time Park painted his oil on canvas "Two Boys Canoeing," c. 1950's, with its boldly squared-off figures and striking off-center composition, and continued to flower until his untimely death in 1960.

James Weeks, another Bay Area figure painter, was something of an early bloomer, judging from his 1949 oil "Portrait Head," which, for its Matisse-like simplicity and a somewhat anomalous painterly restraint, appears remarkably like his later work of the fifties and sixties.

Also included in the exhibition were "Things on Flying Carpet," a vigorous 1959 oil by second generation Bay Area painter Joan Brown, who died tragically in a construction accident in 1990 while installing one of her works in a museum in India, and two sublime landscapes by veteran Sacramento painter Gregory Kondos.

An entirely different aspect of West Coast art was seen in works by the late Robert Arneson, leader of the Ceramic Funk Sculpture school, and his colleague Peter Vandenberg, whose "Scale" humorously contradicted its purpose with its lumpily leaden presence. Arneson, who was represented by Allan Stone Gallery, where he had his first solo show in 1964, perhaps best exemplified the witty Neo-Dada spirit of California funk with one of the works in this show: a tromp l'oeil brick with his name stamped on it, exquisitely crafted in ceramic. Also including a painted metal sculpture by Charles Ginnever, this valuable exhibition covered art that is rarely given its proper due in the New York gallery scene.

— Ed McCormack

A Show That Made Good on its Title

"A Gift of Art," a recent exhibition by members of the West Side Arts Coalition, seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street, revealed a variety of eclectic postmodern tendencies. They all seemed united, however, by an overall desire to please — a rare enough goal by today's standards to provide the prerequisite novelty.

Kehinde Peter Schulz, for one example, combined circular abstract forms reminiscent of Robert Delaunay's "Orphism" with figurative realism, in his oil "Straight Into," depicting a baseball player with his glove extended to effortlessly receive a ball. Other paintings by Schulz, of ballet dancers, a symphony conductor, and an elegant woman in an alluring backless gown, were equally impressive.

Madi Lanier has evolved a simple yet expressive visual shorthand consisting of luminous, subtly brushed color fields and straight, sharp, linear elements of an almost mathematical precision. Here, she evoked rhythmic oceanic subjects through her use of richly modulated shades of deep blue and green.

Amy Rosenfeld is another consummate colorist, albeit given to more confectionery pinks and yellows. Like Barnett Newman, in the two paintings shown here, she made a single vertical line, running down the center of the canvas, the main event of her composition. However, she jazzed it up with imperfectly circular but precisely balanced forms on either side of the line, top and bottom, creating her own unique variant on the Yin/Yang effect.

East and West converge in another manner in Carson Ferri-Grant's large scroll-shaped paintings in watercolor on homosote. For Ferri-Grant's compositions, with their large centrally placed, spontaneous-seeming forms are both lyrical and muscular in a manner that successfully marries elements of each.

Anne Rudder's works in watercolor and mixed media, many of which include handwritten poems, are always surprising and filled with a bracing combination of sensuality and spiritual uplift. In the work she calls "Oblation," the lines "The rose thorn pricks/ The silky skin/ Then carmine drops as amber spots/ Upon a lovely yellow thing" are not so much illustrated as made manifest in Rudder's vibrant wet-in-to wet handling of her medium, matching visually the text's wild erotic suggestiveness.

Margo Mead's works in watercolor, ink, and craypas on rice paper are possessed of their own sensual, if not exactly erotic, qualities with classically idealized male and female nudes weightlessly afloat amid lunar orbs and stylized stars. Outlined in white and set against deep blue cosmic expanses, Mead's gracefully generalized figures appear to enact moral allegories suggested by such titles as, "In Search of Hope" and "Passivity Breeds Doom."

Ubiquitous interpreter of New York City Patrick Antonelle showed hand-embellished giclee prints in his familiar neoimpressionist manner. Partial to snow scenes of Central Park and Brooklyn Bridge, Antonelle evokes those moments when a natural event muffles and stalls urban hustle and bustle, the swirling white flakes softening the harsh geometry of skyscrapers, the sudden hush provoking a much welcome epiphany.

Like a more painterly ancestor of Georgia Okeeffe, Patience Sundaresan has a way of creating compelling abstract compositions by zeroing in closely on elements of the visible world. This skill is demonstrated dynamically in Sundaresan's large oil on canvas, "Papaya," where a close-up view of the succulent tropical fruit's green rind, yellow/orange flesh and dark seeds yield a bold formal configuration.

All of the artists in this show, handsomely co-curated by exhibitors Margo Mead and Patience Sundaresan, fulfill the promise inherent in its title. — Maureen Flynn

Clive Rowe: Exploring the Continuing Adventure of Photographic Abstraction

From its very inception in the first half of the nineteenth century, there were those who felt that photography's only true function was to document reality. This notion was as faulty as the idea that photography would eventually render painting obsolete. We have learned since that both disciplines have infinite dimensions, and one of many rich directions in contemporary photography is demonstrated in the work of the British art photographer Clive Rowe, on view at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from March 23 to April 13. (Reception: Thursday, March 25, 6 to 8 PM.)

Rowe, took his first pictures at age nine with a Kodak Brownie box camera and later studied photography in London, and has explored abstraction since 2005, when he went digital and began experimenting with Photoshop, inspired by twentieth century painting, works in sculptural and functional glass, and "commissions to produce images to promote jazz." The spontaneous spirit of improvisation in the latter musical art form has clearly influenced his own visual style, which has opened up to even more dynamic possibilities since he started experimenting with three-dimensional computer imaging in 2008, "albeit with a view to producing more challenging two-dimensional images."

What comes across most immediately on encountering Rowe's archival digital pigment prints on cotton rag paper is their "painterly" qualities. These come to the forefront dynamically in the rich color saturation of the 2006 print "Second Reflection 580311," where the interplay between vibrant blue and green hues is especially evocative in a manner akin to the nature-based abstractions of the California painter Richard Diebenkorn. Here, too, the introduction of black and white linear elements, suggesting swift calligraphic brush strokes converging angularly, enhances the rhythmic sweep of a composition. Without attempting to imitate painting — for he is obviously a photographic purist, intent on preserving the integrity of his medium —- Rowe demonstrates that photography can be the equal of the older art form in terms of both achieving abstract autonomy and projecting a sense of velocity and immediacy.

In another digital pigment print on view at Agora Gallery, "Untitled 429101," Rowe does the same thing in relation to sculpture. Whether the sense of physical palpability that distinguishes this 2009 print derives from the experiments in three-dimensional imaging that the artist has embarked upon since he started creating shapes in one program, then importing surface color and texture from Photoshop, is difficult to determine. However, the central form, set against a dark background, creates a strong illusion of an object suspended in deep space, with its sense of furled and folded contours. Indeed, the image could almost suggest a crumpled Color Field canvas, since the surface of the form shimmers with a subtly mottled array of pink and blue tones that appear to vary as they advance toward the viewer or recede into shadow.

"Untitled 429101"

In any case, what these works make most clear is that Clive Rowe is one of the more adventurous photographers at work today, breaking with tradition in various ways that promise to expand the possibilities of a still relatively young medium poised promisingly on the brink of the digital revolution.

— Maurice Taplinger

At New Century Artists Gallery: a Group Featuring Art from the Heart

As the popularity of the Outsider Art Fair, going into its 18th year this month, indicates, mainstream art is not the only attraction in town. This point was made on a more modest but no less vibrant scale in the recent exhibition "ArtShare for HeartShare," at New Century Artists Gallery, 530 West 25th Street.

The exhibition, sponsored by Morgan Stanley Foundation, featured the work of artists with developmental disabilities who are clients of HeartShare Human Services. Understandably reluctant to have the show relegated to a fashionable aesthetic ghetto, its curator Barbara N. Cuthel, asserts in her catalog essay that "It should not be classified as 'primitive' and/or 'outsider' art." One must respectfully differ with this opinion, however, since several of the HeartShare artists measured up favorably against some of the talents garnering critical praise and high prices in the latter category.

Carol Salerno

One such standout was Brandon Collins, who lives in a group home in Queens and creates complex and highly animated mixed media drawings possessed of a delicious intuitive wit. Collins' "Rockets, Planes, Stars, the City," for example, is a celebration of urban diversity featuring crowds of smiling people rollicking amid fancifully delineated buildings and a sky filled with an antic array of aircraft, red white and blue rockets, planetary orbs and bright yellow stars.

Jennifer Enny, who attends a HeartShare day habitation program in Brooklyn, also made a memorable impression with a group of five media paintings in opaque watercolor called "My Favorite Things." Some were of frontally posed faces that filled almost the entire picture space with their big compelling eyes and broad grins. Others were of a single flower, just as strongly painted in bright, flat hues. With their centrally positioned forms boldly outlined in black, both Enny's human and floral subjects have the undeniable presence of formal portraits.

Joseph Carrera, who has been drawing all his life and over the last two years has made great strides with the encouragement of his sister and his late brother-in-law, has also evolved a highly personal approach to portraiture. Most of Carrera's portraits, which are often enhanced with handwritten texts in a manner similar to that of the famous self-taught artist The Reverend Howard Finster, are of public personalities such as President Barack Obama, and The Beatles. However, that achieving an accurate likeness appears less important to Carrera than the free expression of his warmly whimsical ideas about his portrait subjects is what makes his mixed paintings uniquely appealing.

Brandon Collins

Louis Barbieri, who lives in a HeartShare supportive apartment in Queens, works in the unusual medium of pinched tissue paper, creating compositions that, with their tactile surfaces, recall the mainstream painter Joe Zucker's glued cotton balls. That Barbieri's favorite subject is flags of various countries — among them Great Britain, Bangladesh, and Panama — also calls to mind Jasper Johns. Indeed, his manner of making a two dimensional subject adhere to the flatness of the picture plane and achieve "objectness" appears similarly sophisticated. Yet Barbieri's works simultaneously exhibit an unschooled freshness and directness all their own.

Emmanuel Irrick-Walker

Brooklynite Walter Gregory drew monsters when he was young and made masks to exorcise his intense feelings. Now he draws dynamically distorted superheroes that can be seen as more affirmative symbols of his — and our — personal empowerment. Gregory states that he created his mixed media painting of a tank-like New York City police vehicle, stylized in a manner akin to the "art brut" of Jean Dubuffet, as a tribute to "our brothers who help save the world from evil."

Then there is Emmanuel Irrick-Walker, another Brooklyn artist who lives in a group home there who showed a remarkably sophisticated terra cotta relief called "The Nok Head." Although inspired by a photograph of an African mask, Irrick-Walker's piece is more fluidly configured than tribal art and possessed of impressive subjective subtlety. a HeartShare resident Carol Salerno displays a sophisticated approach to the mask in her mixed-media collage in which the image of a face is disassembling into cubistic fragments,

Also including more abstract works by other HeartShare clients, as well as an intriguing photo installation focusing on building facades by several others, this exhibition was an affecting and inspiring tribute to the triumph of the creative impulse and the human spirit over adversity.

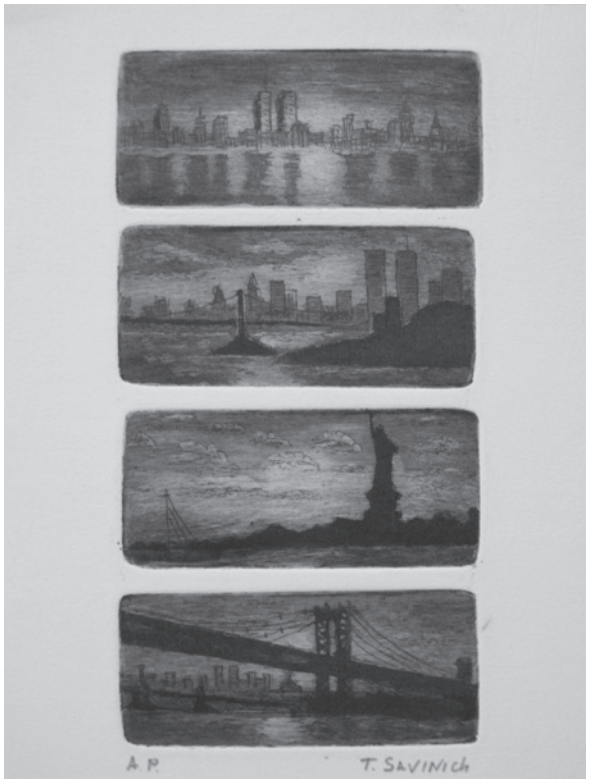
— Maurice Taplinger

Tamara N. Savinich's Atmospheric New York Visions

Particularly popular in England from the 17th to 19th centuries but less practiced by artists today, mezzotint is an intaglio printmaking technique that involves covering the copper plate with texture that will hold the ink, and then scraping and burnishing to create the image. Its ability to summon light from darkness is especially well suited to the style of Tamara N. Savinich, an artist from the Eastern European nation-state of Belarus who has resided in New York City for 16 years and whose solo show of prints and paintings can be seen at the Columbus Branch of the New York Public Library, 742 10th Avenue, through February 27.

The atmosphere, and sometimes the imagery, of Savinich's prints can call to mind such past graphic masters Gustave Dore and Alfred Kubin. This is especially true in the case of the mezzotints that she calls "Nasrtya" and "Broken Door." The former print depicts a waifish young woman standing next to the bannister of what appears to be a tenement stoop in the dim light of a street lamp. In the night sky behind her a full moon glows between dark, drifting clouds, highlighting the murky ripples of a nearby river. The girl's face is almost as round as the moon and framed by soft blond waves that tumble to her shoulders, as she gazes straight out at the viewer.

One has to wonder: is she a street walker, a homeless adolescent, or a nocturnal apparition? In any case, "Nasrtya" projects a sense of lost innocence that is at once poignant and haunting.



"New York"

The latter mezzotint, "Broken Door," is just as affecting in another way that can only be described as surreal. For it would appear that the hole in the glass pane of the door, through which daylight enters a mostly darkened room, is incongruously black with night, while the broken fragments of glass lying near it on the floor still hold the light of the day beyond the door. Furthermore, the shapes of both the hole in the glass and the shards that have fallen from it suggest the form of a simplified Braque-like bird in flight, the one above soaring through day, the one below sailing like an omen through darkest night.

Such disparities are reminiscent of Magritte; however, Savinich's mastery of subtle monochromes makes her images all the more mysterious in a manner closer to the macabre vision of the aforementioned Alfred Kubin. Indeed, her mastery of chiaroscuro also lends her prints a noirish atmosphere akin to that of German Expressionist filmmakers such as Fritz Lang. This carries over even into her still-life compositions in the same medium, such as "Gifts of the Fall," in which pitchers, gourds, and objects on a tabletop take on their own shadowy mystery, like artifacts of Flemish master's studio frozen in time.


"Brooklyn Bridge"

Even Savinich's less ambiguous and enigmatic New York scenes possess an evocative poetry, as though she views the city through a glass, darkly. She imbues the light of day on old brick with a sooty elegance that is especially evocative in her etching aquatint "Brooklyn Bridge," with its "choiring cables," as the poet Hart Crane referred to them, sweeping toward the Manhattan Skyline under an overcast sky.

Equally appealing are other images in the same medium such as "Empire State Building" and "Central Park," in which the artist restores a certain grandeur to familiar landmarks, making us see them afresh, perhaps by virtue of her foreign angle of vision as well as her flawless technique as a printmaker. In the former print the spire of the famous skyscraper rises above less formidable office towers partially erased by smoke and fog, as traffic teems along the avenue below; in the latter, surrounded by trees, with the apartment buildings outside the park hovering in the background, a small footbridge and its reflection in the pond it traverses could suggest the shape of lipstick traces on a paper napkin.


"Lake"

Perhaps most enchanting in among Savinich's urban subjects is the etching aquatint entitled, simply, "New York," in which three miniature panoramas of the city's harbor with its skyline, bridges, passing boats, and the dramatically silhouetted statue of liberty are stacked horizontally on a single sheet. In these prints as a whole, Savinich takes her place among such celebrated graphic chroniclers of city life as Joseph Stella, John Marin, and Louis Lozowick, who imposed their own unique visions on New York's landmarks and rhythms while remaining true to its essential character.

However, one of her most technically dazzling and lyrical works is "Lake," a soft ground etching in which a scene of small, shadowy rowboats drift along at dusk between silhouetted trees on a body of water illuminated by the rays of the sinking sun. For in this monochromatic tour de force, Tamara N. Savinich evokes subtle effects of light, and suggestions of texture and even color, to rival the atmospheric oils of the American romantic visionary painter Albert Pinkham Ryder — a feat that would seem next to impossible in the medium of soft ground aquatint.

This is just one thing among many that make this modest exhibition of small yet powerful graphic works and a smaller number of floral watercolors in a noncommercial public space one of the surprise highlights of the present art season.

— Ed McCormack

The Multifaceted Vision of Majbrit Bartholdy

Self-taught Danish artist Majbrit Bartholdy makes a superb showing at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from March 23 through April 13. (Reception: Thursday, March 25, 6 to 8 PM.)

Bartholdy has garnered considerable critical acclaim in her own country for her domestic scenes in acrylic on canvas and her portraits, often of well-known entertainers or other impressive individuals, as in one exhibition that featured, in the artist's own words, "strong Danish women." Her precise figurative style and clear colors have qualities in common with those in the works of both Alex Katz and David Hockney. The idealized simplicity of Bartholdy's figures recalls the first artist, and her interior scenes and landscapes recall the latter.

For an extended period of time, Bartholdy worked primarily in drawing, which may account for the strong draftspersonly attributes that serve as a compositional armature for her recent paintings.

At times, she has painted animal subjects, such as one intriguing picture of a cow in fractured neo-cubist planes, its spotted hide adding to the sheer abstract power of the composition, and another of clustered zebras in a zoo, their stripes merging kinetically in a manner akin to Brigid Riley's Op Art compositions.

More frequently, however, Bartholdy has focused in on human figures in various settings, emphasizing contrasts between the sensuality of their organic forms and the stringent geometry of their surroundings. In the present show, the painting called "What Shall We Play" centers on what could be a confrontational encounter in a dramatic film, with a person in a street pointing directly at the viewer. In the background is what appears to be a guard house at the tall stone entryway to what may be a private estate. The tense posture of the pointing figure creates the impression that the viewer may be a paparazzi or some other trespasser being warned away from intruding on some prominent figure. It's a painting with the immediacy of a snapshot, an impression enhanced by the rear wheel of a bicycle jutting into the right side of the composition. The abrupt cropping adds to the inherent tension of the scene. Yet at the same time, the carefully balanced arrangement of the various elements in the picture lends it a classical quality that plays off quite effectively against the seeming casualness of an active instant in time frozen in stasis.

"What Shall We Play"

Also in the present exhibition is a landscape entitled "Abedulles De Peer Casso" in which, as in the previously mentioned painting of the bovine, Bartholdy breaks the scene down in fractured rectangles, achieving an intriguing sense of dislocation that imbues it with a unique energy. Fragments of the slender, distinctively patterned birch trees that dominate the center of the composition and the blue sky against which they are set are compartmentalized and repeated in these rectangular divisions and superimposed over the grassy area at the bottom of the composition.

Again, the artist achieves a sense of cinematic sequencing, suggesting how fragments of instantaneous memory often invade our consciousness, making us see two things simultaneously, rather than viewing something as a whole, seamlessly. This feeling of simultaneity, as opposed to the old way of looking at the world, is one of the facets of Majbrit Bartholdy's art that makes her such a vital contemporary artist, well worthy of one's attention.

— Maureen Flynn

Wit and Energy Enliven West Side Group Show

Carson Ferri-Grant who assisted Anne Rudder in curating the recent West Side Arts Coalition exhibition "Winter Darkness Comes to Bright," in which they were both participants, is a veteran of the 1980s downtown art scene that gave us Keith Haring and others. Ferri-Grant's contribution to the exhibition, at Broadway Mall Community Center on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street, were two dynamic large abstractions in watercolor and watercolor crayon on gessoed, recycled homasote board composed with broad swirling strokes that revive the raw spirit of the Times Square Show and other events of that vital period.

Anne Rudder's own vitality comes across in works in watercolors and mixed media, in which scrawled poems and other texts merge with symbolic imagery that makes no compromise with currently fashionable art strategies. Among the works Rudder exhibited here was "End of Winter - Great Lakes," in which a darkly delineated image of a bare-limbed tree was overlaid by lines such as "Cold sharp razor winds / warm sun melts the icy shore / a white bud opens," evoking the change of seasons in the brilliant synthesis of word and image for which is becoming known and admired.

Annabelle Leigh is another artist who definitely dances to her own drummer. Leigh was represented here with a group of small watercolors in which fluorescently brilliant floral forms melted into biomorphic abstraction, as well as a fanciful collage of a Picassoid glam goddess sporting real cultured pearls and an elaborately over-the-top chapeau à la Lady GaGa.

Amy Rosenfeld's installation of six small, same-size boldly brushed abstractions seemed to be all about light and color. Their titles "Bubblegum," "Lime," "Red," "Chocolate," "Fire," and "Sunshine" were so literal as to make one think about these colors and what they represented in a brand new way. The smaller canvases in Emily Rich's "Abstraction in Light Series" feature forms that converge and interlock centrally, while the largest one has a freewheeling, airy feeling. All are characteristically muscular and juicy in a manner that would tempt one to compare Rich to de Kooning, if not for the fact that her unique sensibility puts a personal spin on the velocity and vocabulary of Abstract Expressionism.

Combining faux-primitive charm with sophisticated wit, the figurative oils of Lisa Ferber transport us to a wacky milieu where glitzy ladies and dapper gents cheerily enact dramas that make the whole world look like one big sitcom. Titles such as "Every Tuesday Ms. Cowles Pretended to Understand Spreadsheets" and "Milton had Tired of Tony Awards and Longed to Return to Being a Copy Editor" say it all!

Linda Lessner, on the other hand, plumbs the depths of nature in works such as her pastel "Cave" and her oil "Planet Earth." In both, Lessner explores nature as a vehicle for solid form, with rocks serving as as almost sculptural elements that drive the composition.

Elizabeth K. Hill is another artist who brings considerable wit to bear in her acrylic paintings, particularly one that could appear abstract until one realizes that it's a man clutching a fat cat like a bag of laundry hiding everything but his hands. Like Philip Guston, Hill also makes fragmented cartoon-like imagery function aesthetically in another painting of a pair of feet in ocher boots below the hem of a blue skirt. Then there is Yukako, who combines the swift spontaneity of Zen ink painting with the scale of Abstract Expressionism in two large acrylic/mixed media works. The painting that she calls "Tropicolore" is an intriguing departure for those familiar with Yukako's work, for it adds an element of texture unseen before to her vigorous bucolic vision.

— Byron Coleman

New York Notebook

Confessions of a Recovering Luddite Culture-Snob

by Ed McCormack

Understandably weary of deciphering my erratically typed, sloppily spliced and pasted, illegibly scrawled pages, one long-suffering editor said, "I guarantee you, Ed, if you'd just try a computer, working on a typewriter again would be like going back to the quill pen."

"I'm sure you have a point, Andy," I told her, "but as you know, I'm a romantic, and it just wouldn't feel like I was really writing if I weren't putting the words directly onto real paper."

Even my poet friend Ari, once as cranky a Luddite as me, would argue with the zeal of the recent convert that cyberspace had its own mystery, the screen glowing and beckoning "like the starry dynamo in the machinery of night from Allen Ginsberg's 'Howl,'" when the infernal thing booted up.

"You can romanticize this virtual shit all you like," I said, "but even an electric typewriter is too sterile for my taste. I feel the same way about writing on a computer that William Burroughs felt about eating tofu: 'It'd be like going down on a robot.'"

* * *

It finally took a lot of time and almost superhuman effort on the part of my wife, an editor less inclined to indulge my prima donna tendencies, to wean me away from the Olivetti Lettera 32 portable typewriter that had served me faithfully since the early 1970s, and win me over to the Apple laptop that I swear by today. And while Jeannie initially had almost as much trouble convincing me that my computer could be more than a just magical typewriter that could cut and paste without the mess of scissors and glue, I now have to admit that the Internet is a godsend for people in need of instant information, particularly journalists on deadline.

Yet I still suffer from Google guilt. Every time I click on "search," instead of reaching for one of the many reference books gathering dust in my writing room, I feel as though I'm contributing to the proliferation of what I have come to think of as post-literate culture.

* * *

Some years ago, as we sat at the counter of a coffee shop in midtown, I asked an ambitious young man named Mark Boal, then not yet the acclaimed screenwriter and co-producer of "The Hurt Locker,"

Ed McCormack at his beloved Olivetti back in the day

how he wanted to be listed on the masthead of a magazine we were talking about publishing. (When everyone does a little of everything all titles are up for grabs anyway.)

"C.E.O," he answered without hesitation, displaying a chutzpah worthy of the ferret-like protagonist of Budd Schulberg's classic Hollywood hustler novel "What Makes Sammy Run?"

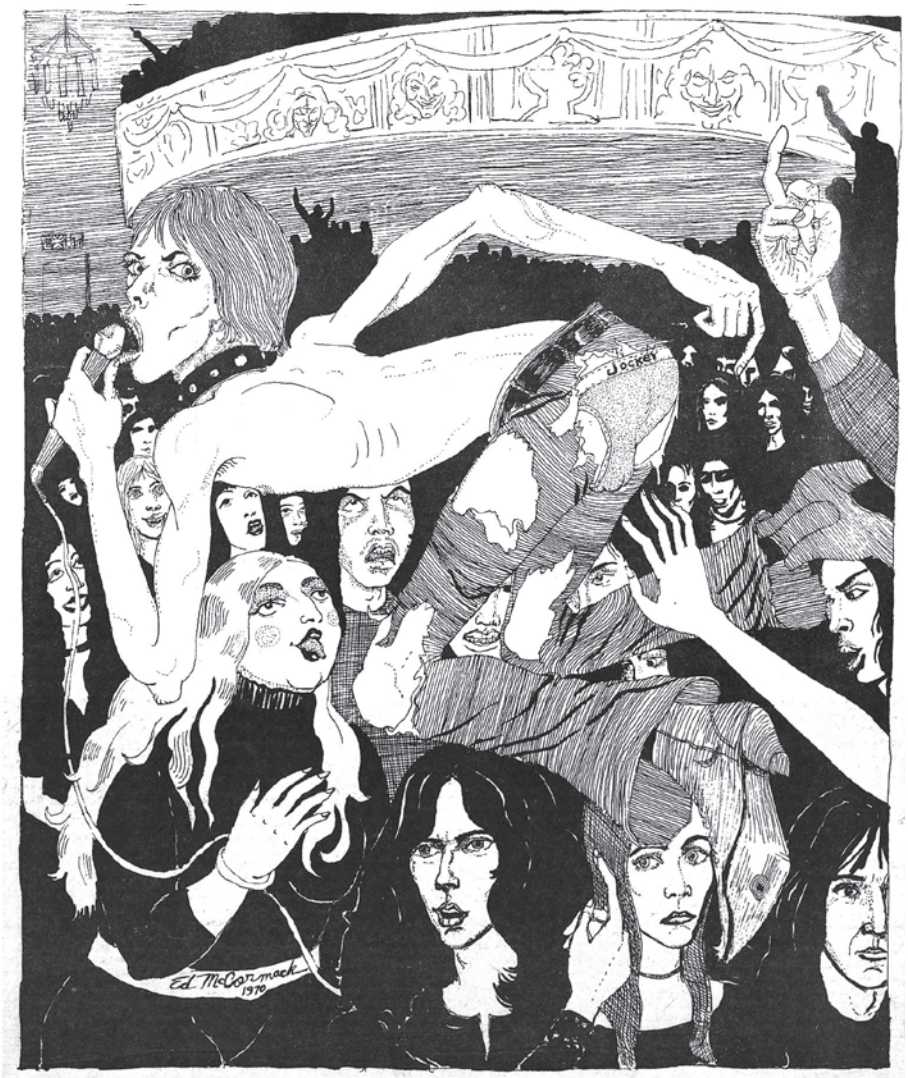
Disingenuousness not being one of my vices, I never try to appear dumber than I am. So you'll just have to believe me when I confess that at the time I had to ask what those initials stood for, and was

not the least bit embarrassed about it. In fact, I considered it a point of honor that I knew absolutely nothing about corporate terminology — further proof of antiestablishment credentials that dated all the way back to my teenage years as an aspiring beatnik in the late 1950s, hanging around espresso bongo cafes in the Village, vilifying The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit.

Nor did Boal, a pretty cool customer anyway, appear incredulous that I had to ask. Since I had written feature articles for Rolling Stone, a goal to which he still aspired, I couldn't be a complete idiot. But he probably considered me something of an idiot savant, since I had stuck with the not very lucrative trade of journalism for many years, instead of parlaying one of my first feature stories into a screenplay, as he would later do with "The Valley of Elah," his first film, starring Tommy Lee Jones.

* * *

The closest I ever came to writing a movie was when a former editor of mine asked what tag-line I wanted her to put on a magazine memoir I had written called "Summer of Love," commemorating the 20th Anniversary of a momentous year



in hippie history. Since I had no interest in film as an art form, often saying that I preferred a good bad movie to a bad good movie, I was being facetious when I told her, "Oh, I don't know...How about 'Ed McCormack is writing the 'Summer of Love' screenplay."

But my editor (the same one who was always trying to convert me to the computer) took me at my word, and soon after the piece came out, I was contacted by a representative of an independent production company interested in turning my article into a film. At first I resisted, confessing that the tag-line had been a joke; that I was not actually writing a screenplay and really had no interest in writing one.

"Oh, but you must write this one," said the very persistent young woman on the other end of the line. "It would make such a great, timely film. And because you wrote for Rolling Stone and were right there in the middle of that whole hippie scene, I'm sure we'd have no problem finding backers for the project. Please, before you turn down an opportunity to make a great deal of money, just take one meeting with my partners and me."

Normally, someone saying "take a meeting," (as though it were a pill), would have offended my sensibility and made me even less willing to cooperate. But she caught me at a particularly needy moment and the part about making a great deal of money got my attention: One big payday and maybe Jeannie and I could spend all our time writing poetry, painting, and living like the true bohemians that we were at heart.

Well, one meeting led to several other meetings and so-called story conferences during which everyone but the guy who delivered the coffee was asked for his or her "input" — another locution that never failed to make me cringe. But what bothered me even more was when they enlisted a professional screenwriter to assist me with a "treatment" — a species of non-writing totally foreign to me, with which I definitely needed help — and I noticed that there were no books in his apartment.

"How can you call yourself a writer and not own any books?" I asked him immediately. "Shit, man, don't you fucking read?"

Thereafter, for as long as we worked together, the poor bastard took abuse from me. Yet he took it good naturedly, and even as I became more convinced than ever that screenwriting had nothing to do with literary composition as I understood it, I also came to understand that there were perfectly intelligent and creative people with no artistic interests outside the branch of popular media in which they toiled.

Even more important, I came to like this screenwriter and to respect his professionalism, when it came to applying the tricks of his trade, however formulaic, to getting the job done. So after we finished the treatment, I agreed to continue working with him on the actual script.

No sooner, however, had the treatment begun to attract backers and actors (Emilio Estevez was supposedly interested in playing the hippie journalist I had based loosely on myself) than the partners called a private meeting with me. The gist of it was: now that the project was well underway we should buy my collaborator off with a nominal fee and dump him unceremoniously, in order to capitalize on my " authentic sixties street cred" — whatever that was supposed to mean — as the story's sole creator. (And of course there was also the more practical consideration of not wanting to split the anticipated spoils too many ways.)

Apparently, this was how things were done in the world of movie making, where journeymen writers were as disposable as used Kleenex and agreements were made to be broken.

"I think I'd prefer to drop the whole project," I said, deciding in a split second to operate on the same principle.

It would be hypocritical now to claim it was a moral decision. Unlike F. Scott Fitzgerald, who in a more innocent age had imagined that he could write films as great as his novels, until vulgarian Hollywood moguls disabused him of that notion by taking a "creative interest" in his scripts, I couldn't claim to be disillusioned, since I had walked into this thing with my eyes wide open for purely mercenary reasons. Nor, since I'd resolutely given up drinking and drugging, could I use it as an excuse to go on a monumental binge, as Fitzgerald did.

But since being unsociable had undoubtedly influenced my choice of a solitary profession in the first place, I could and did use it as an excuse to opt out of the interminable meetings and other vexing human interactions that screenwriting involved, and go back to sitting alone in a room silently talking to myself. And since, even as a high school dropout back in the late 1950s, I had known exactly what my first literary hero,

Jack Kerouac, meant when he wrote, "I am the Buddha who is known as The Quitter," I have never regretted that decision.

Mark Boal on the other hand, went on to write "The Hurt Locker," a film that from all indications as I write this, stands a good chance of winning him an Oscar for Best Screenplay. But I doubt that he will be willing to remain long in the relatively low profile role of a screenwriter. Next, I would be willing to wager, he will move on to direct. And eventually, if he still so wishes, I would not be in the least surprised if one of the major studios were to bestow upon him a once-coveted title: C.E.O.

* * *

The last time I saw Iggy Pop, who grew up in a trailer camp in Ann Arbor, Michigan, as Jim Osterberg, he was still known by the even more moronic name of Iggy Stooge and he was still a monosyllabic junky. It was in the dressing room of the St. George Theater, a flea-bitten former movie house in the crummiest section of Staten Island. He had just finished a gig with his band The Stooges and he was sprawled shirtless and sweaty on the floor, retching and gasping for air like a more emaciated version of Mickey Rourke in that scene from "The Wrestler" where he's recovering in the locker room after a particularly grueling bout with an opponent who shot staples into his back.

Iggy's manager, Danny Fields, had dragged Jeannie and me out to the Island (where we usually only ventured to visit my parents, who had broken my teenage heart by moving us there from the Lower East Side in the late 1950s), to watch his charge get thrown like raw meat to a ravenous crowd of young sub-suburban Huns. As usual, the music sounded like an accident in a machine shop, the other Stooges in their shades and leathers grinding out a steady electric drone like deadpan grease monkeys to jerk the nearly naked singer's strings. He flopped around in his shredded jeans and cracked flamenco boots, junk-sick, retching, yelping, smacking the microphone into his snagglely, broken teeth, tunelessly bellowing, "NOW WE'RE GONNA BE FACE TO FACE. AND I'LL LIE DOWN IN MY FAVORITE PLACE. AND NOW I WANNA BE YOUR DOG. NOW I WANNA BE YOUR DOG. NOW I WANNA BE YOUR DOG. C'MON...!

For a finale, he gave the audience the finger, stuck a finger down his throat, and threw up all over the stage. Then, arms and legs flailing, he dived down into the crowd. They swarmed all over him like locusts, and it looked as though he was about to be torn limb from limb, before the burly roadies barreled in, swinging, to rescue him.

It had been more like a geek show than a musical performance and it left Iggy limp and mute, eyes rolling back in his head, spittle dribbling down his chin.

"Wasn't he fabulous?" said his manager, Danny Fields, grinning like a proud papa. "Now, that's what you call rock 'n' roll!"

* * *

Fast forward thirty years and here of a Sunday morning was Iggy's clean and sober countenance beaming out of a full-page house ad in the The New York Times Magazine. He looked a little more lined but remarkably rejuvenated, flashing a set of nice new teeth with a canine eagerness befitting the writer of a song called "I wanna Be Your Dog." The head-shot was accompanied by a headline that said, "Times Talks: A Conversation with Iggy Pop," advertising one in a series of "interviews with prominent personalities" conducted by editors and reporters of the Times. In this, the latest in a series that also included chats with literary luminaries

such as E .L. Doctorow and John Irving, among others, the public was invited to the Times Center in midtown to "Hear the musician discuss his influences and his work."

I must confess I was curious enough to consult the Times' website, where there were color pictures of Iggy onstage at a recent rock festival, looking even more like Mickey Rourke in "The Wrestler" (such filmic references are unavoidable, inundated as we are with mass media) with his thinning bleached blond mane and his naked torso more maturely bulked up. He may have become something of a grand old man ready to discourse on his influences and his work, and maybe he doesn't vomit onstage anymore, but the sequence of shots showed The Ig up to his old tricks: giving the audience the finger, humping an amplifier, miming masturbation with a fist at his fly. Yet there was a strangely contrasting dissonance to the sane and sedate tone of the text accompanying the pictures:

"Iggy Pop recently announced some details about his new album which was apparently influenced by the likes of Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton and even features him singing in French on one track. The Stooges front man shows off his multilingualism on "Autumn Leaves," a track off Preliminaires, due out on May 19th, The record was inspired by French author Michel Houellebecq's 2005 novel The Possibility of an Island. "As I read scenes in the book, I felt music in my head," says Pop, who also composed a score for the book's forthcoming film adaptation. "I wrote less and less for the movie and started writing an alternative score to the novel."

The novelist was reportedly honored by the singer's interest in the book, saying he had been "deeply affected as a teenager by Iggy Pop's music with the Stooges." The tribute could seem ironic coming from a writer hailed by Julien Barnes as "the most potentially weighty French novelist since Tournier." But Houellebecq has also been compared by some critics to the Marquis de Sade, while others have called his novels "sleazy" and "deeply repugnant." And what he does share with Iggy is a transgressive sensibility that I first got an inkling of when he was quoted in the London Times Literary Supplement, saying, "I don't wish to be loved in spite of what is worst in me, but because of what is worst in me."

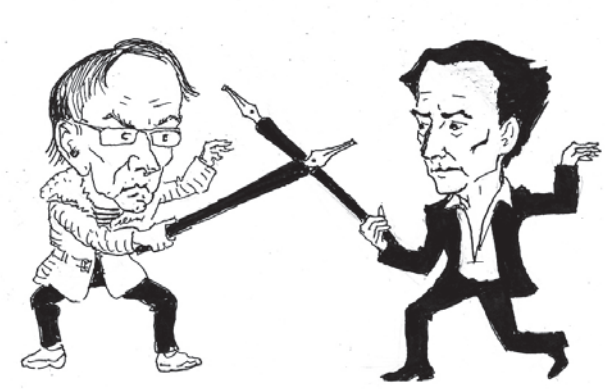
Houlellebecq's admission that his "desire to antagonize conceals an insane desire to please" suggested a handy rationalization for some of my own bad behavior. Having always held out the hope that art alone might redeem ones defects of character, I found his candor refreshing in "Ennemis Publics" a recently published book of his correspondence with the pop philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy, on whom he is even harder than he is on himself.

"A master of the damp squib and the farcical media-hype, you bring dishonor even to the white shirts that you wear," the disheveled novelist writes, referring to his smugly elegant rival's usual uniform: a dark suit with a spotless white shirt worn unbuttoned to the sternum. He goes on to call Levy "a philosopher without thought but not without connections," as well as a member of the "caviar left."

Then, while grudgingly acknowledging the nobility of Levy's advocacy of heroism and his humanitarian concern for victims

of all kinds, Houellebecq endeared himself to me even more by admitting, "I am among the legions of people who endure History, and are basically only interested in what concerns them or their loved ones directly."

Is it merely another misanthropic rationalization on my part to think a medal should be awarded for the courage it takes for any public intellectual to actually own up to so universal a sentiment? One of the more interesting revelations in the book is that Lucie Ceccaldi, Houellebecq's estranged mother, who reportedly "left him to be raised by others" (wolves, perhaps?) has written a memoir in which she reportedly refers to him as "a pervert and a liar."



No matter; Houellebecq's moral ambivalence presents a refreshing contrast to Levy's media-friendly sanctimony. And his curmudgeonly nature is not without an element of self-effacing gentleness and genuine human empathy. He even appears to briefly commiserate with his rival when he tells Levi that between the two of them they "embody the frightful decline of French culture and intelligence."

* * *

Anyone audacious enough to suggest that cultural standards have declined, not only in France and the United States but worldwide, risks being characterized as a cranky old fart, as Mark Helprin was last year when he published a book called "Digital Barbarism: A Writer's Manifesto," in which he rails against the Internet.

"The overall effect," wrote Ross Douthat, the Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times*, "is like listening to an erudite gentleman employing $20 words while he screams at a bunch of punk kids to get off his front lawn."

Admittedly, Helprin can come on a bit stodgy, and I certainly don't endorse his argument that the term of posthumous copyright should be extended for three generations, potentially enabling an author's grandchildren or great grandchildren to suppress important work for unreasonable lengths of time, simply because they may be retroactively offended or embarrassed by it. Nor, on the other hand, do I agree with Lewis Hyde, Helprin's ideological opposite, that under the auspices of the so-called Creative Commons, all art should be shared as freely as yams or coconuts in the indigenous "gift societies" that Hyde extols in his book "The Gift."

I suppose I'm torn in such matters between the Jeffersonian conviction that all people are "endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights" (only with the added proviso that certain rights are exclusive to artists) and Jefferson's more magnanimous notion that "He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening me."

However, although I would fight for their right to be inept, I do share Helprin's scorn for most bloggers and other online dabblers who, by flooding cyberspace with their amateurish efforts, not only lower the standards of literature but of literacy itself.

* * *

Lately, I've been reading Jonathan Lethem's new novel "Chronic City," and if I didn't know better, I might feel like the victim of a spooky species of identity theft that has nothing to do with credit cards. For while I don't know Lethem personally and doubt that he knows me, even second-hand, not only is Perkus Tooth, one of the novel's two main characters, a semi-reclusive former columnist for Rolling Stone, as I am, but he lives "on East Eighty-fourth Street, in one of those anonymous warrens tucked behind innocuous storefronts, buildings without lobbies, let alone doormen," very much like the one that I inhabit on the very same street.

Lethem also has Tooth make reference, at different points in the novel to no less than four of my former drinking companions from the 1970s: the ex Velvet Underground front man Lou Reed, the rock critic Lester Bangs, the personal essayist and Beat Generation anthologist Seymour Krim, and a semi-obscure cult figure of a folky named Sandy Bull. (With the exception of the first two, these are names that are not normally thought of in the same breath — not even by me!)

At one point in the novel Lethem even has him grouse that "nobody really believes in the news from beyond the boundaries of their neighborhood or pocket universe," a statement uncannily like my own frequent misanthropic insistence, to explain my own disinterest in the reality represented by global media, that "The only real news is what happens in one's own neighborhood."

Not that I relish such inexplicable similarities, mind you, since my fictional counterpart turns out to be such a misfit that, after his tenement collapses, he ends up as the sole human squatter in an upper east side apartment building that has been converted in a canine shelter. Thankfully, this is a condition that has yet to befall me. Yet perhaps some final irony may be wrung from the fact that my most cherished fan letter from my days as a columnist (which I urged my editor to print for my own glorification), is from a regular reader who signed herself "Mrs. Margaret Reynolds, Manhattan," and wrote: "Your animal Ed McCormack should be in jail for being filthy-minded, a most obscene animal who uses just rotten language, he knows no other way of expressing his filthy thoughts — a place in the zoo with apes and gorillas is too nice a place for him — he needs to be in an isolated cell because he's filthier than any animal, he's 100 percent beast").

Even closer to home, however, Lethem has Perkus Tooth insist, "So, I'm not a rock critic, you know. People will say I am, because I wrote for Rolling Stone — but I hardly ever write about music."

This is something that I myself have been saying to people for years, often in very close to the same words. While it is true that I have toured with various rock bands and rock stars, covering their antics on and off stage as sociological symptoms, I have never written a single record review. For while rock criticism was invented by my generation and came into its own in the pages of the publication for which I (and my fictional counterpart) wrote, I have never wanted to be associated with a field that, by blurring the boundaries between a new, noisier Tin Pan Alley banality and deathless poetry, has probably done more than any other to propagate post-literate culture.

Indeed, rather than attempting to excavate profound meaning from the lyrics of popular songs — an enterprise which not only makes a mockery of scholarship but which seems antithetical to the anarchic spirit of rock 'n' roll itself — I'm convinced that the intellectual energies of such arrested adolescents would be better

spent conducting an in-depth study of the feminine fashion trend I call Plumber's Plunge, which has made the ass-crack the new cleavage.

* * *

Two relatively recent books have received more media attention than either would seem to merit at a more civilized cultural moment: "The Solitary Vice: Against Reading" by Mikita Brottman and "How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read" by Pierre Bayard.

Both books are not without an element of the fashionable irony that often passes today for wit. But Brottman, a psychotherapist, does not seem to be kidding when (ironically echoing a charge that has been leveled against excessive teenage computer activity) she warns that too much reading can make us "alienated, detached from society and culture, adrift even from family and friends."

Nor does Bayard, a professor of French literature at the University of Paris, seem to be pulling the reader's leg when he insists right away in his preface "it's totally possible to carry on an engaging conversation about a book you haven't read — including, and perhaps especially, with someone else who hasn't read it either. Moreover, as I will argue, it is sometimes easier to do justice to a book if you haven't read it in its entirety — or even opened it."

I assume the good professor will give me credit for at least opening and skimming his book, even though I did not proceed much further before demonstrating his thesis. Given the old saying "So many books, so little time" (which one bibliophile of my acquaintance wore on a button to the funeral of another, not long before his reading time also ran out), I couldn't bring myself to do more than browse Brottman's book either. But from what I could gather, the main difference between them is this: As the title of his book indicates, being French Bayard attributes a certain social value to appearing intellectual, even if in order to do so one occasionally must resort to Deconstructionist double-talk such as, "Being cultivated is a matter of not having read any book in particular, but being able to find your bearings within books as a system, which requires you to know that they form a system and to be able to locate each element in relation to the others."

By contrast, Brottman's title (a pointed play on a Victorian euphemism for masturbation, as if to dismiss bookworms as jerkoffs), apparently revels unabashedly in good old American anti-intellectualism of a type I encountered frequently, growing in a family of unionized laborers.

I remember, particularly, one uncle — an Archie Bunker on steroids who told one of his teenage sons he'd rather see him shipped home from Vietnam in a coffin than walking around with long hair (like mine, he no doubt meant) — charmingly reminded me, "Some of us don't write, we work."

* * *

As convenient as it can be to move paragraphs around at will, to cut and paste without glue, and to look things up on Google, I sometimes still wish I had never abandoned my beloved Olivetti. For once "progress" begins, where will it end? Will I eventually, God forbid, resort to a Kindle, one of those electronic reading devices that can summon up tens of thousands of "e-books," and that, according to the company web site, now has a "Text-to-Speech feature," which can read newspapers, magazines, blogs, and books out loud to you..."?

The very name of the thing sounds so insidiously cozy, evoking images of curling up by a fireplace to kindle the imagination with a good book. Only, the actual physical book is absent, replaced by a machine that, once again — if one regards reading as a sensual experience, as Roland Barthes does in his famous essay "The Pleasure of the Text" — evokes Burroughs' remark about tofu. For gone is the tactile sensation of fondling a fine old volume or cracking open a brand new book and thrusting one's nose into its seam to inhale the perfume of fresh ink as foreplay to indulging in what Barthes refers to as the "erotics of reading."

* * *

"My love's manners in bed / are not to be discussed by me, / as mine by her / I would not credit comment upon gracefully," wrote the poet Robert Creeley, and I feel the same way. But without revealing too much, I must make one final confession: Lately Jeannie and I have been watching movies on DVD in bed. For years we didn't even have a working TV and had no desire to have our broken set fixed, until Time Warner made us buy a brand new one to hook up to cable, in order to get our three computers online.

But either out of habit, fear of becoming addicted to "American Idol" or "reality" shows in which contestants eat live worms, or out of lingering cultural snobbery, we still never turn on the TV. Instead, we bring one of our laptops into bed with us, rest it on top of the covers, and cuddle up close to it with the screen just a few inches from our faces. Watching movies this way feels infinitely more cozier and intimate than staring at a TV screen all the way across the room.

As much as I hate to admit it, it's almost like reading.

* * *

Exploring the Heart as Art at Onishi Gallery

Inspired by the prettified symbols on Valentine cards that can be broken like a jagged wafer by unrequited love, as well as by the actual veiny, ventricled organs that can turn really ugly and attack their hosts like fragile yet deadly thugs, "Heart" was the most conceit of hotshot Italian curator Stefania Carrozzini, presented at Onishi Gallery, 521 West 26th Street.

"Heart" by Stefania Carrozzini

One of the most elaborate pieces, Claudio Onorato's technical tour de force in cut cardboard (a technique not at all foreign to Valentine cards), depicted not only the heart but other vital organs of a headless x-rayed pregnant woman surrounded by an intricate array of human, animal, and insect threats to the baby safely sheltered in her womb. Much simpler but also quite piquant was a mazelike drawing by Marcello Sestito called "The Heart of Michael Jackson arrested (Project of an inaccessible labyrinth dedicated to Michael Jackson for Neverland)."

Sculptor and video artist Maria Chiara Zarabini contributed a digital photograph of her naked torso swathed in an improvised mesh bustier, her right breast peeking perkily out, the left one securely covered, called, "Shield for my heart." On the wall next to it, an abstract sculpture in the same material suggested in context how shed armor can also be a thing of beauty in its own right.

Grazia Gabbini took a visceral view of the theme in two works in which rough red balls of clotted papier mache propped up on wire armatures within Plexiglas boxes evoked thoughts of bloody organs awaiting transplant in a laboratory.

Barbara LaVerdiere Bachner, on the other hand suggested the many moods and caprices to which the metaphorical heart is prey with an installation of eight small panels depicting it in a fanciful variety of mixed media including fabric, feathers, and colorful modeling paste as thick as cake frosting. Rosa Spina fashioned hearts from multicolored threads that looked like Valentines to Lucas Samaras. Felipe Cardeña's collage on canvas "The holy heart," with two images of Jesus, set against a field of vibrant seed-catalog flowers and displaying his thorn-torn organ of compassion, seemed to pay similar tribute to Joe Brainard.

That the heart is perhaps the most well-worn cliché of traditional poetry made it fair game for Marcello Diotallevi's word-jumble of a concrete poem as graphic. And perhaps it also inspired Massimo Lomasto to juxtapose some strident lines of text from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" with his splashy aquatint of ocean waves leaping like the blood of a lovelorn heart.

Also featured were: Susi Zucchi's tactile mixed media heart hinting at a bullet hole in a prom dress; Giovanna Usai's elegant ten piece fabric sequence depicting the geometric fragments of a heart under construction; Marisa Pezzoli's lyrical collages of layered hearts; Giacomo Cavina's witty assemblage "People in the Heart"; Rosaspina Buscarino Canosburi's postmodern semiotic take on the formal vocabulary of Kurt Schwitters; and Annamaria Cimbal's post-Pop appropriation of Roy Lichtenstein's romance comics paintings.

Once again, Carrozzini, who recently launched her own company, I AM (International Art Media), took a theme and ran with it as only she can, proving that curating an exhibition can be an art unto itself.

— Ed McCormack

Royuela Reveals the Intimate Face of Nature

"Reflection," when applied to the art of painting, is a word that implies a quiet, thoughtful dedication to minute observation, and it is all too infrequently heard, much less celebrated, in the hyperactive, hectic New York art scene. But it is a crucial word in the vocabulary of the Spanish painter known as Royuela, whose painstakingly detailed oils on canvas can be seen at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from February 2 through 23, with a reception on Thursday, February 4, from 6 to 8 PM.

Apparently, Royuela was reflective from early childhood; for what she remembers most about growing up in La Rioja, Spain, was "direct contact with soil, with rocks, with the simplicity and depth of human beings and landscape."

This reflectiveness, and especially the love of earthy matter and nature observed close-up, carries over into Royuela's work to this very day. Her subject is not so much landscape in the traditional sense as it applies to views of vistas, horizons, and the lay of the land, so to speak; but it is the actual substance of the earth itself and all that rests or grows upon it. Thus her colors are predominately earth colors, chromatically subdued and subtle in their tonal harmonies, with which she evokes a sense of earthy essences, of things deeply rooted and the energies that animate them. These substances and forces are inherent in her brushstrokes, which seem to serve as surrogates for them, much in the manner of van Gogh's strokes, albeit of a calmer, less frenetic quality.


"Restos de Patatas"

Perhaps, in part, it is the sober palette shared by both artists that tempts one to liken Royuela's paintings more readily to the portraits of Giacometti, despite the obvious differences between their subject matter. Indeed, the comparison goes beyond subject matter and mere appearances to the sense of a living presence that Royuela brings to her paintings, even when she paints something technically dead that she refers to poetically as woven "mats" of dried grass; or something as hard and unyielding as the ruggedly weathered rocks that figure prominently in some of her compositions. Whatever she paints is invested with the sense of life that comes with deep contemplation; is rooted as inextricably as the grasses themselves in the earth for which her pigments become a tactile surrogate, not merely depicting but making palpable the textures, the pebbles, the twigs; the variegated lichen and moss on the surfaces of rocks; the actual roots, the pale young shoots and tiny wildflowers whose delicate tints enliven the somber tones of the eternal terra firma.

The details in her paintings are so closely observed and intensely evoked that the familiar takes on an almost otherworldly quality, making clear that one may have glanced at, but has never really seen, the true face of nature. Indeed, such natural minutia are as intricately delineated as the lined, aging human countenances in the Magic Realist paintings of Ivan Albright. Only, in contrast to that older artist, it is not decay that Royuela depicts. Rather, it is the energy and growth of vital organic matter in all its subtle glory, made manifest and immutable through the peculiar alchemy of oils on canvas.

— Marie R. Pagano

"Matrix of the Mind," Brings Japanese Art to Chelsea

On view at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from February 26 through March 19, with a reception on Thursday, March 4, from 6 to 8 PM, the intriguingly named exhibition "Matrix of the Mind" presents a lively and varied cross-section of contemporary Japanese art.

Midori Kakino grew up with an artist father, and paintings by the Old Masters "took the place of fairy tales for me." Consequently, Kakino's own paintings skillfully combine classical nudes with fanciful abstract forms in a surreal synthesis. Self-taught as a painter but schooled in Japanese calligraphy, Kyohei Kiyobe creates hard-edge compositions that merge colorful cartoon imagery with a sinuous line reminiscent of the Hokusai's manga. Subdued and subtle of hue, the multimedia paintings of Sachie Koyama are atmospheric explorations of ethereal elements, in which delicate gray lines, set against a neutral color fields are at once meditative and lyrical.

With photo collage and digital manipulation, Nobuyuki Matsubara conjures up phantasmagoric imagery — such as a figure composed of a floral bouquet, a butterfly, and lissome feminine legs, or a monstrous horned insect with what appears to be a halo of thorns — set emblematically against single color backgrounds. Many colorful biomorphic "cells" in a state of constant flux fill the simplified figurative contours in the paintings of Miyooon. In Miyooon's "Two," a couple merges into a lumpy protoplasmic mass; in "Alumni Meeting," various stylized hairdos distinguish the floating abstract heads.

Koki Morimoto's acrylic paintings explore monochromes in a manner akin to Zen ink painting. However, Morimoto's sensually cursive shapes, centrally placed within the picture space swirl like graceful masses of shiny black hair, evoking a suggestive emotionalism.

The luminous watercolors of Iwasaki Nagi range from a portrait of a pretty young woman named "Ann," seated in a chair with a dreamy expression on her face, to a much more intricate composition, in which a workman in a blue jumpsuit appears amid a complex maze of machinery centering on a pink dome that seems to be spewing fresh-baked cookies. Concerned with "the connection between the human body and the mind, and the connections between the real world and the surreal world," Satomi Nishino invests single isolated figures with a poignant psychological power in affecting drawings such as one in which a little girl huddled against her own shadow seems to symbolize the inner sorrows few of us ever outgrow.

In Dan Obana's digital art, layered imagery suggests infinite number of disparate associations that inform human consciousness. Obana has an ability to organize a complex array of symbols into an aesthetically pleasing whole. Umeko Okano invests her oils of tiny, shadowy nocturnal strollers with a sense of cinematic drama. Dwarfed by the somewhat forbidding surroundings, Okano's paintings suggest the solitude of the human soul in transit.

Rectangular shapes are arranged in a variety of dynamic configurations in Rie Osogoe's collages created with layers of colored paper. Osogoe employs pure geometry to give solid form to elusive epiphanies — especially the sensation of joy that exquisitely harmonized hues can provoke.

Reiko Sakai is a visionary, transforming earthly landscapes and cosmic spaces into magical realms. In one of Sakai's pictures an atmospheric dragon appears amid the stars and clouds above a range of pine trees; in another, a fantastic female figure, materializes within an apocalyptic landscape like an angelic emissary from another world.

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At Gallery 2/20: An Exemplary International Sampler

Curated by Berik Kulmamirov for New York Realism Fine Art, the International group exhibition "Season and Color" presents an intriguing variety of diverse talents, at Gallery 2/20, 220 West 16th Street, from February 25 through March 11. Four artists from Russia are prominently featured: Olga Bagina, Elena Berezina, Oleksandr Shynkarenko, and Vasily Zolottsev.

Olga Bagina distinguishes herself with lyrical oils that lend a numinous quality to floral subjects. Her "Tulips in Twilight" combines energetic brushwork in the manner of van Gogh with a coloristic sensitivity more akin to Redon. "Ladders to the sky," on the other side adds a surreal element, with sinuous white structures ascending among delicate flowers and vines like railroad tracks to heaven.

Elena Berezina puts her own surreal spin on still-life in her oil "Ephemeral Existence," wherein a large butterfly and an old-fashioned pendulum clock hover like wary adversaries over a vertiginously tilted tabletop arrangement of coffee cups, a floral bouquet bursting out of a wine bottle and what appears to be an animal's jaw bone, as a huge lobster shell intrudes into the right side of the composition like an airplane wing. The simpler composition of Berezina's painting of a floral bouquet and a seashell, set against draperies half hiding soft Summer clouds, focuses the viewers' attention on her considerable painterly finesse.

Oleksandr Shynkarenko's Magic Realist oil "Period of Silence" evokes a fanciful landscape where stars and shooting stars illuminate the stratosphere like fireworks and the horizon line emits an eerie green glow. By contrast, Shynkarenko's "Bhikkhu," in which a solitary monk, carrying what appears to be a ritual vessel as he strolls beside a crystalline lake that mirrors the surrounding landscape, projects a more down-to-earth spiritual serenity.

Vasily Zolottsev's oil "Phantasmagoria" is well named, its heightened hues evoking the unearthly radiance of a sunrise, the fiery orb ascending over a body of water whose rippling, curling waves rhyme visually with the larger curves of the brilliantly illuminated clouds overhead. By contrast, Zolottsev's "Evening on the Black Sea" celebrates the sun's reverse trajectory, with water and clouds more uniformly tinted by softer pink light.

China's Hu Zhiying also makes a strong showing with a work entitled "Buddhist Scriptures #1," in which the ancient medium of ink on silk and the linear fluidity and intricacy of traditional Asian landscape scrolls are put to the service of a thoroughly contemporary, highly imaginative artistic sensibility to create starling primordial nature fantasies filled with electrifying imagery.

Four American artists display stylistic diversity: Ethan Boisvert's abstract acrylic paintings possess a vigorous calligraphic energy that reinvigorates the formal vocabulary of Abstract Expressionism for the postmodern era. The mixed media figure paintings of Farhana Akhter are notable for combining a sense of character with chromatic intensity and dazzling Neo-Nabi patterning. Nella Khanis employs a bold faux primitive style in fancy visionary acrylic paintings with intriguingly suggestive titles such as "Once There Was a Husband" and "Good Night Moon," in which colorful, cartoony mushrooms or simplified flowers and palm trees take on a poignant emotional evocativeness. Michael Prettyman combines an accomplished realist style, seductive paint surfaces, a macabre wit in oils such as an image of a bee in flight entitled, "As Soon as It is Over, I'm

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JAPANESE ART
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Tetsuo Takashima's freewheeling linear brush compositions are possessed of a sublime simplicity. In Takashima's "Thumbmark," a vertically elongated red spiral evokes infinity; in his "Town," a complex subject takes shape with two colors and a few spare forms.

Then there is Saori Louise Tatebe, who affixes symbolic miniature female torsos sculpted in clay to the two-dimensional picture plane in her mixed media assemblage paintings. In one, several are clustered together like a wreathe on a door; in another, they appear within a vaginal-shaped aperture festooned with zippers! — Byron Coleman

GALLERY 2/20
Continued from page 22

Nostalgic for It," and the self-descriptive, "A Pink Floral Cro-Mag Skull."

Other American artists in the show and their works are: Carol Pfeffer ("Optical Color,"); Annavi Jones ("The Mime"); Jorge Namerow ("Dim Memories"); Nikki Yeager ("Girl in the City"); and Olga Papkovitch ("Pink Lily").

Also including an untitled ink drawing by Japan's Tami Uyama; an acrylic painting by French artist Marta Vaneva ("Inscape"); a work by Italian painter Alan Delaini ("The Magician'); an oil by Argentina's Ricardo Devia ("Centhya"); and a portrait by Colombian artist Carlos Bautista ("Saphera').

Although space does not permit describing their works at length, all of the artists mentioned contribute to the diverse pleasures to be encountered in "Season and Color." — Maurice Taplinger

GERMAN ART
Continued from page 9

projects a more eclectic aesthetic, alternating between the abstract and the figurative,employing a variety of mark-making elements to add visual tension. Unlike many other artists, Gavric employs abstraction to express emotional states. Michael B. Sky embraces eclecticism, moving freely and gracefully between pure geometric compositions and representational imagery. Then there is Martina Kolle who states "balance has always been my main subject," and strives to create canvases that "lead the viewer to his own inner life and feelings." Kkolle's paintings flood geometric from with ethereal light and color.

— Maureen Flynn

WEST SIDE ARTS
Continued from page 9

struggle. Indeed, Bucholtz perpetuates the spirit of Abstract Expressionism and exemplifies the dynamism of "action painting" in her muscularly configured compositions. For her vigorous strokes of fleshy pink, strident orange, deep purple, and and other electric hues appear to have been wrested from within the canvas rather than merely applied to it, demonstrating that the dynamic tensions of "push and pull" can still exert a powerful spell.

— Byron Coleman

MASKED MAN: An Exhibition at

by Ed McCormack

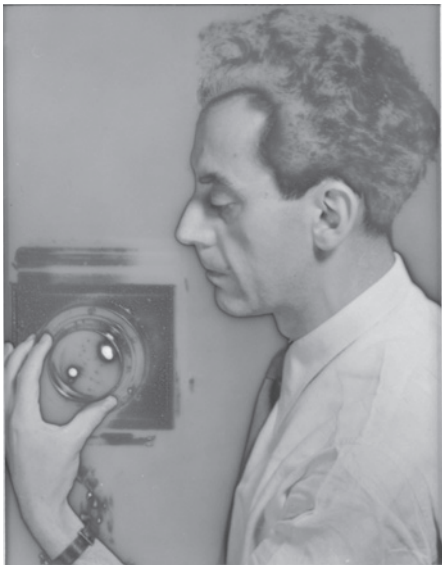
Although vaguely aware that he was American, one always tended to think of Man Ray as a pure product of the Paris avant-garde, strictly a citizen of bohemia with a small "b." Certainly the name he adopted hinted at no specific ethnicity. And that was exactly how Emmanuel Radnitzky, the son of a Russian Jewish immigrant tailor and seamstress, born in 1890 in South Philadelphia, raised in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, preferred to have it.

Thus the title of the exhibition "Alias Man Ray: The Art of Reinvention," on view at The Jewish Museum, 1109 Fifth Avenue through March 14, seems especially apt. A departure from the museum's usual policy of featuring artists who, in one way or another, explore Jewish culture and identity, this show concerns one who, long before he was forced by the impending Nazi occupation to flee Paris for New York, made every effort to obscure that identity. It's a drama of evasion and assimilation by an artist who was acutely sensitive to cultural stereotyping in an xenophobic era when, as the exhibition catalog points out, "so-called Jewish painting" was perceived as a "problem" that threatened "the purity of the French art-historical tradition."

Man Ray remained obsessively secretive about his origins, even after the war ended and he could safely return to Paris, where he was to live out the rest of his life. One of the major points that the show makes, however, is that the background he rejected haunted his art nonetheless. The family trade was reflected in early works, such as "Tapestry (1911)," a large Klee-like patchwork fabric collage composed with scraps from his father's work room; "Promenade (1916)," an oil on canvas dominated by semi-abstract dressmaker's dummies; and, perhaps most sardonically, in the first Dada object he created after arriving in France for the first time in 1921: an iron with a row of tacks glued onto its flat bottom (represented here with a replica that he made in 1963, after the original was lost).

Gift, ***c. 1958 (replica of 1921 original) Painted flatiron and tacks The Museum of Modern Art, New York, James Thrall Soby fund 1966***

Such works seem to demonstrate the adage that wherever we go, and in whatever guise, we bring ourselves with us. Yet the religious issue upstages an equally important identity crisis: that of



Untitled (Self-Portrait with Camera), ***1930, printed 1935/36 Solarized gelatin silver print The Jewish Museum, New York, Purchase: Photography Acquisitions Committee Fund, Horace W. Goldsmith Fund, and funds provided by Judith and Jack Stern***

an innovative and ultimately acclaimed photographer who longed for his entire career to be equally well respected as a painter. After all, in an era when "selling out" was still a source of shame for fine artists, Man Ray made a good living in Paris as a portrait and fashion photographer for chic American magazines such as *Harpers Bazaar*, *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*. In his spare time he tried to take the commercial stigma off the medium by placing objects on photosensitive paper and creating pictures without a camera that he called "rayographs" (although Fox Talbot, one of the British pioneers of photography, had experimented with the process almost a century earlier). He also perfected "solarization," exposing areas of the image to light during the developing process to add an iridescence to some his portraits that quite literally approximates the elusive "aura" which Walter Benjamin, in his famous essay, accused mechanical reproduction of removing from works of art.

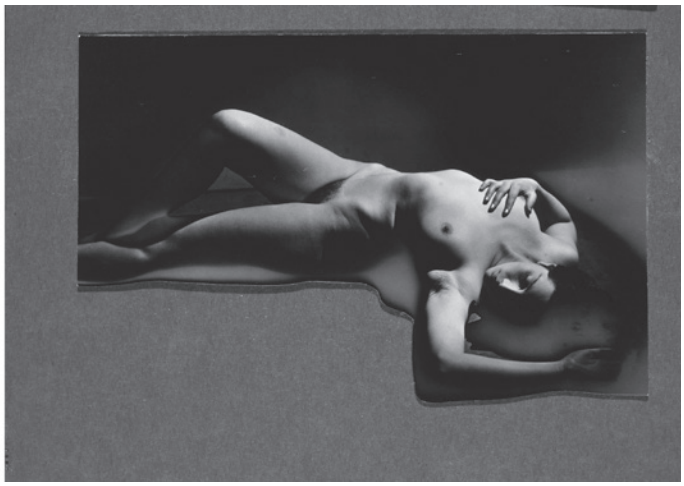
But it would still be decades before photography attained anything like the artistic status, on a par with painting, that it enjoys today, and although he never achieved the eminence he longed for, Man Ray succeeded most memorably as a painter in the emblematic abstraction "The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows (1915-16)," and the surrealist oil "La fortune (1938)," borrowed for this exhibition from MoMA and the Whitney, respectively. Yet the former work is influenced by his close friend Marcel Duchamp's then unfinished masterpiece "The Large Glass (The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even)," and the latter oil of a billiard table tilted against primary-colored clouds is clearly informed by the imagistic incongruity of René Magritte.

Indeed, as a painter, Man Ray often approaches unintended appropriation, as seen "Shakespearean Equation: Julius Caesar (1948)," one of a series of late oils based on mathematical objects he had photographed ten years earlier at a scientific institute in Paris. Back in the United States, finding his work out of fashion in the critical climate of Abstract Expressionism propagated by Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, he anthropomorphized such objects in a dry, defiantly anti-painterly style far too obviously imitative of Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical surrealism.

Man Ray's weaknesses as a painter, however, are more than compensated for by his genius for collage, assemblage, and photography. The mysterious object (actually, a sewing machine!) wrapped in blankets or burlap and tied with string in his "The Riddle, or Fhe Enigma of Isadore Ducasse (1920)," not only hints at his hidden heritage but anticipates Christo's entire oeuvre. His practice of photographing such objects to create separate works of art has also influenced subsequent generations of younger artists who deliberately set up photographic

Le Violon d'Ingres, ***1924 Vintage gelatin silver print Rosalind and Melvin Jacobs Collection***

The Jewish Museum Explores the Enigma of Man Ray



Primacy of Matter over Thought (Primat de la matière sur la pensée), *1929 Solarized gelatin silver print, cut out The Baltimore Museum of Art: Purchase with exchange funds from the Edward Joseph Gallagher lll Memorial Collection and partial gift of George H. Dalsheimer*

The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows, *1915-16 Oil on canvas*
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of G. David Thompson, 1954

tableaux or recycle imagery in various ways.

In fact, the scope of Man Ray's influence on contemporary photography is incalculable. One can't imagine the work

Lee Miller, *1929*
Gelatin silver print
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of James Thrall Soby, 1941

of artists like Robert Mapplethorpe and Peter Hujar developing as it did without images such as "Érotique Voilée (1933)," a gender-bending nude study of a nineteen year old Meret Oppenheim, one arm smeared from fingertips to elbow with black ink, standing behind the large cast iron wheel of a printing press that obscures her breasts, while its large handle juts out at crotch-level like an erect phallus, making the dark clump of pubic hair just beneath it resemble shadowed testicles.

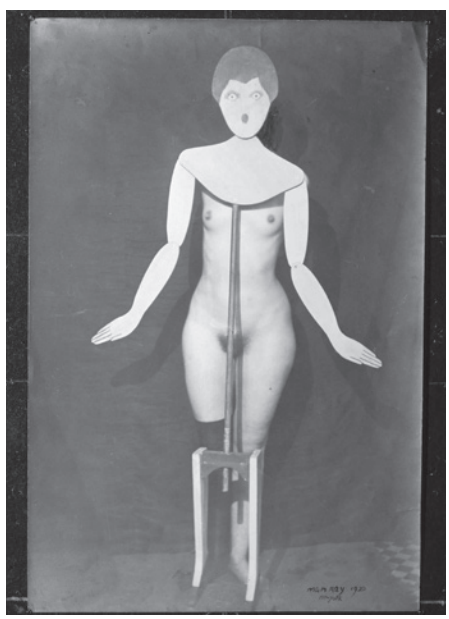
There is also, of course, "Le violon d'Ingres (1924)," Man Ray's iconic image of Kiki of Montparnasse, his first mistress in Paris, with the f-shaped apertures of a violin superimposed on her naked back. And then there are images of his beautiful blond darkroom assistant and lover Lee Miller, in which even a close-up of the curve of her neck takes on an erotic languorousness akin to Marilyn Monroe's famous nude calendar.

Mason Klein, the curator of the exhibition, suggests that Man Ray may be "the paradigmatic modernist, recasting the concept of artistic identity in terms of his protean practice as painter, photographer, sculptor, object maker, filmmaker, printmaker, poet, essayist, and philosopher." But for the very same attributes, it might be more accurate to call him the quintessential postmodernist precursor, now ripe for a wide range of reassessment in the present more pluralistic aesthetic environment. For one thing, since Man Ray lived, worked, and exhibited in Los Angeles for over a decade (after fleeing Paris in 1940 and before returning to France in 1951), a study should probably be made of his influence on the "West Coast Surrealism" of California collage artists such as Jess Collins and the late Wallace Berman. (This seems warranted especially since Berman, whose short film "Aleph" and a related series of collages based on the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet were featured in a special exhibition at The Jewish Museum in 2005, was as eager to reclaim his ethnic identity as the older artist was to hide his.)

Studying a snapshot in a book called "Surrealism: Desire Unbound," edited by Jennifer Mundy, one can only guess whether Man Ray, who died in his studio in Paris in 1976, would have finally agreed with Mason Klein that the present exhibition is "a poignant homecoming for perhaps the first avant-garde Jewish artist of the twentieth century."

The picture is captioned "Picnic at Mougins, 1937," and it shows Lee Miller, Nusch Eluard, and another bohemian beauty named Ady Fidelin sunbathing topless at an outdoor table in the company of Paul Eluard and Man Ray, both fully dressed. Eluard has his head thrown back, as though snoozing, but Man Ray, face shaded by a white summer cap tilted at a rakish angle, stares straight into the camera.

The mysterious masked man looks quite self-possessed and already very much at home.



Dadaphoto (Coat Stand), *1920*
Gelatin silver print
Fondazione Marguerite Arp, Locarno

Levels of Vision: The Art of Cecelia Duncan

Bridge Walk

The space between painting and sculpture has long been a fertile area of exploration for certain artists. Among the more notable recent examples are the layered Plexiglas wall reliefs and sculptures of Cecelia Duncan (aka Cecelia Andujar-Newkirk), through February 6 at New Century Artists, Inc., 530 West 25th Street.

For a time in the 1970s, Duncan, who holds BFA from Bradley University and taught art at high schools and colleges for 25 years while earning her MA from the College of New Rochelle, explored social themes related to her African-American background and the struggle for Civil Rights. She also worked with students on community projects and created a ceramic mural for the New Rochelle Train Station. In recent years, however, her work has evolved in a more abstract direction. Although her geometric compositions share certain qualities in common with those of the late Irene Rice Pereira for their intrinsically cubist-based architecture and use of spray paint techniques, Duncan employs a wider array of mixed media techniques, including airbrush and using her own cut up watercolors, etchings, and lithographs as collage elements.

However, her most striking innovation is her use of clear Plexiglas, to which she often imparts images created with acrylic paint airbrushed through hand-cut stencils. Her layering of Plexiglas lends her pieces various levels and dimensions of complexity, as seen in "Bridge Walk," where the simplified shapes of sneakers and shoes, stenciled onto rectangular sheets of the transparent material, are superimposed on a sumptuous blue and green field. The piece, created for a contest to design a transparent walkway at a Donald Trump project in New Rochelle, in which Duncan was one of the finalists, transcends its original purpose, evoking a metaphysical sense of nocturnal sky walking.

Other complex juxtapositions of imagery can be seen in another mixed media composition that Duncan calls "Vision." Here, abstract watercolor forms, and precisely placed Plexiglas rectangles and strips of wood, images of stylized human eyes (one cut out and dangling kinetically from a length of wire) serve as both physical representations and broader symbols of artistic vision as the motor for creativity.

Similarly intricate is "Reflected Reality," where fragmented floral and human facial imagery are intriguingly melded, and different-sized clear Plexiglas dowels containing tiny paper scrolls are characteristically layered. These dowels (like the tiny cases containing parchments inscribed with biblical passages that observant Jewish families affix to their door posts — only transparent) afford mere glimpses of the contents of the scrolls within, tantalizingly hinting that all works of art, on one level or another, contain hidden mysteries.

Other mixed media works by Duncan intrigue us in various ways: In "Summer Bouquet," streaks created with strips of masking tape that the artist removes after the paint applied over it dries jog the rhythms of a lyrical floral watercolor, adding an element of abstraction to its straightforward pictorial content. In "Sunshine and Shadows," several tiny frames, meticulously handcrafted by the artist, contain fragments of one of her lithographs, turning a sacrificed print into a triumphant lesson in aesthetic recycling.

Indeed, the addition of floor sculptures, such as "Froggy," where a small animal figurine adds levity to a multileveled Plexiglas configuration constructed along similar lines as her wall pieces, makes Cecelia Duncan's entire exhibition its own kind of triumph.

— Ed McCormack

Photo Artists Explore Nature in the Raw

Sometimes the simplest subjects can yield the most complex sensations. What could seem simpler, for example, than a photo exhibition called "From Nature"? Yet this recent group exhibition, curated by artist member Jennifer Holst for The West Side Arts Coalition, at Broadway Mall Community Center, on the center island at Broadway and 96th Street, presented a plethora of unexpected pleasures.

The 35 mm photographs of Adoniiah make one see magic and beauty in a rainbow reflected on water; a single bee on a yellow flower; or a green bird in a green tree. Adoniiah, an artist previously unfamiliar to this reviewer, frequently evokes a visionary epiphany, particularly in a print such as "Night Sun," where golden auras illuminate a body of water.

The digital photographs Myrna Harrison-Changar possess their own brand of magic, bringing an atmospheric mystery and sense of light and texture comparable to the watercolors of Charles Burchfield to the aftermath of a summer storm in Central Park. Harrison-Changer also creates a mood and tells a story with a misty view of water and trees from a footbridge in a misty manner akin to Chinese painting, and makes a blasted tree stump, seen in close-up, morph into a tactile terrain unto itself.

Jolene Varley Handy has her own broad definition of nature, but who can quibble? Are roses not still roses when they are wrapped in clear plastic to create a bouquet outside a store on Columbus Avenue? Isn't an elderly woman resting on a bench in front of a big garish mural in Coney Island as natural to her local as a cactus is to the desert? Handy's 35 mm C-prints make even chairs and tables near the carousel in Bryant Park appear integral to the scheme of things.

Jean Prytyskacz often focuses on images that speak of beginnings and ends, life and mortality, in her color film photography. Two prints featuring close-ups of dried cornstalks convey a poignant sense of the temporal, while a picture of pink roses somehow hints that beauty is short-lived. Yet rather than being morbid, Prytyskacz's compositions remind us, by virtue of their glowing immediacy, to treasure that which is near and dear.

Rudy Collins finds lush beauty, wild and unfettered as the produce of any tropical jungle, within the confines of our city in his Botanical Garden series. Collins's shots of orchids emphasize their vibrant colors and unique shapes through his painterly approach to photography, revealing that floral forms are not only sensuous but *sensual* as well.

By contrast Thom Taylor makes one appreciate the more austere side of nature in the subtle monochromatic tones of his exquisite black and white silver gelatin prints of scenes centering on mist-enshrouded woods, rugged rocks and flowing waves and water lilies. Yet Taylor shows equal talent for color in a close-up of speckled fallen autumn leaves forming abstract patterns against the moist earth of a forest floor.

There is something wonderfully theatrical about the digital photography of Archie Hamilton, in which a pale yellow lily set against a black background takes on the drama of an ingenue making her entrance, or a limp blue flower that evokes the phrase "dying on the vine." Hamilton invests every picture with a sense of depth, contrast, and poetry, imprinting it memorably on the mind of the viewer.

Another artist who employs the technology of digital photography with great panache is Jane Hoffer, whose print of carp swimming among lily pads in a clear pond is a lyrical tour de force. Hoffer also hits the bulls eye with another engaging image of delicate white wildflowers growing against a rough wall scrawled with graffiti.

Robert Helman artfully merges the natural and the artificial to create a kind of pastoral Pop imagery. Especially striking in this regard is Helman's fanciful picture of one red flower standing out like the proverbial sore thumb amid a multitude of yellow ones in a fanciful field. –

– Maureen Flynn

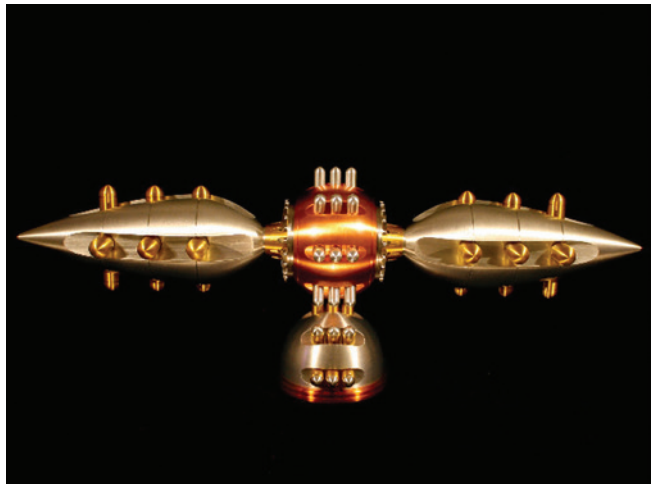
Chris Bathgate's Totems of the Mechanical Age

The bare facts of the self-taught machinist/sculptor Christopher Bathgate's biography almost beg us to regard him as some sort of wizardly outsider, tinkering in the basement of his home in Baltimore, Maryland, where he was born, worlds away from the New York art scene. Add that he was recently written up in the Russian edition of Popular Mechanics magazine, and it all begins to sound even more outside the mainstream, like some novel human interest story rather than a legitimate art phenomenon. But in 2007, along with a Creative Baltimore Grant, Bathgate was awarded a grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation — and no serious artist could ask for a more legitimate endorsement than that.

Then one gets an advance look at the work that will be on view in Bathgate's solo show at Viridian Artists, Inc., 530 West 25th Street, from February 16th through March 13th, (with a reception on Thursday, February 18 from 6 to 8 pm and a Meet the Artist event on Saturday, February 20, from 1 to 6 pm) and it suddenly becomes even more clear that, while he may not fit the stereotypical profile of the loft-dwelling downtown Manhattan art hipster, Christopher Bathgate belongs in the first rank of emerging American sculptors.

The only problem, however, is that Bathgate is so quirkily original that it's difficult to know exactly where he fits in. Since the sculptures he creates with repurposed and homemade tools in his basement machine shop resemble — well, machines — one might be tempted to relate him to the nascent movement known as Steampunk. Its leading lights are artists such as Tim Wetherell, who created the "Clockwork Universe Sculpture" for The National Science and Technology Center in Canberra, Australia, and Paul St. George, whose pod-like Telectroscope domes were installed at London City Hall in 2008.

But to relate Bathgate too closely to a movement nostalgically smitten with vaguely Victorian-looking gadgetry, evoking the fictional milieu of Jules Verne, H.G.Wells and even Mary Shelley, would only distract from the sculptural integrity of the superbly crafted, essentially abstract pieces he creates from aluminum, brass, bronze, copper, and steel without benefit of casting. For while their gleaming metallic surfaces and forms that often seem a bizarre amalgam of the streamlined and the baroque, can evoke associations from science fiction, they also have a more immediate resonance as poignant symbols of imminent obsolescence, as the digital era overtakes the mechanical age. Thus some of his pieces take on the enigmatic emblemism of technological totems or robotic deities, while others suggest old fashioned comic strip spacecraft or monuments to extinct stars.



In one local group exhibition, Bathgate showed with a photographer who documented the decaying, cavernous shells of Baltimore's once active steelworks. In their own way, for all their polished beauty and meticulous design, the sculptures that Bathgate taught himself to create by mastering manual and computer-assisted engineering, machining, welding, finish work, electroplating, anodizing, and heat coloring techniques seem no less elegiac. Through his painstaking approximation of modern manufacturing methods in the solitude of his basement studio, he brings about an altogether engaging synthesis of science and imagination.

The shapes of these sculptures, identified with long lines of numerals more like the model numbers on manufactured appliances than titles, hint at any number of things. Although largely symmetrical and revealing no hint of the human hand, they are not without a certain sensuality, owing mainly to the shiny opulence of their surfaces and the non-geometrical curvaceousness of their forms. Anything but minimal, they are notched and barnacled with elaborate surface elements that, for all their regularly spaced precision, lend them a uniquely compelling expressiveness.

In one piece, evenly spaced rows of identical bullet-shaped protrusions fill the deep crevices, like those in a drill bit, that twist around a tall phallic form. (Arrive at your own conclusions as to possible symbolism.) Here, particularly, the two-tone patina of seamlessly joined coppery and silvery-colored metals with which Bathgate enhances the sensuous visual appeal of his sculptures puts one in mind of Brancusi's statement, "The surface of things is pleasure-giving, their interiority is life-giving." For while his mechanistic inspirations may be antithetical to those of his great predecessor, not to mention more elaborately wrought, there can be no doubt that in his own more baroque way, as Carl Sandburg said of Brancusi, Bathgate "is fathoming down for the secrets of the first and oldest makers of shapes."

So it really doesn't matter what the peculiar mental storehouse of Rorschach-like associations acquired over a lifetime makes any individual see in Chris Bathgate's exquisitely tooled formal configurations: a star composed of airplane propellers; a stylized Tree of Life sprouting from a gold altar chalice; fancy brass underwear for a sadomasochistic space alien — or any other aberration or fetish-object the kinky twenty-first century mind can come up with.

What these pieces are finally about are the innovative processes by which a prodigiously gifted young artist, working productively outside the well-trod precincts of the trendy, realizes a personal aesthetic that stands an excellent chance of eventually exerting a widespread influence on the sculpture of his time.

— Ed McCormack

The Varied Visions of Vladimir Ginzburg

At a time when so much art is made in reaction to other art, rather than in response to the world around us, it is refreshing indeed to encounter an artist such as Vladimir Ginzburg, whose solo exhibition "Land of Smiles" can be seen at Ex Gallery, 872 Kent Avenue, in Brooklyn from February 1 through 28. (Reception: Saturday, February 6, 4 to 8 PM.)

Not that Ginzburg is by any means unbeholden to art history. Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, he became fascinated with paintings from an early age and spent many hours studying them at the Hermitage and the Russian Museum. But his first medium, as a teenager, was photography. Then, after immigrating to Israel, where he "was astonished by the strong colors and blinding light of the sun," he began taking art lessons. He continued painting after moving to New York, where he took part in his first group exhibition in 1993 and had his first solo show in 1996.

That the color, movement and energy of Manhattan had a profound effect on Ginzburg is evident in the cityscapes in the present exhibition. In his oil on canvas "Midtown," for example, the bright clothing of pedestrians and traffic at a busy intersection on 6th Avenue provide the artist with a lively visual cacophony that he mirrors in bravura brush strokes with the vigor of a latter-day George Bellows.

By contrast, in "Crossing Grand Street," Ginzburg captures the lingering Old World quality of certain parts of the Lower East Side, despite its trendy gentrification. Seen from above — perhaps from the perspective of a pigeon perched on a tenement windowsill — a man in the black fedora and long overcoat of a Hassidic Jew and a white-clad woman pushing a stroller or shopping cart in the opposite direction appear caught in a painterly tide that makes the gutter

"Crossing Grand Street"

resemble a raging river. Here, Ginzburg seems to suggest that the winds of change will soon overtake their way of life.

An opposite sense of stillness, akin to that in an interior scene by Vermeer, comes across in "Window in Soho," where a lone woman sits in the soothing shadows of a trendy cafe gazing out on the cast-iron facades of landmarked loft buildings. Similarly elegant is Ginzburg's oil of a single period chair illuminated by a shaft of light pouring in through a window in an opulent interior and gilding the edges of a plush red rug.

Yet it is part and parcel of Vladimir Ginzburg's all-encompassing vision that he can go from such relatively subdued everyday subjects to a series of fantasy paintings that verge on the monstrously surreal: the big blob-like head of a baby with disarranged features; a disembodied skull-like head casting its shadow on a monochromatic tan ground; alien-looking figures wiggling in midair against luminous expanses of deep blue and purple, one with a limbless lower body that curls like a prawn.

Perhaps weirdest of all is a painting of a clownishly grinning Michael Jackson surrounded by grim looking court officers, bodyguards and flunkies, one of whom holds an umbrella over his head, as in a papal procession. While some of those surrounding him wear badges, The King of Pop, sporting on his jacket one of those self-styled royal crests that he favored, obviously outranks them all in this trenchant comment on the contemporary cult of celebrity. Here, as in the other paintings in this powerful series, Ginzburg ennobles grotesque subjects worthy of Francis Bacon with a painterly sensitivity reminiscent of Redon — particularly for his chromatic subtlety in harmonizing delicate hues in the blue and purple range.

Also on view in this splendid solo show are a series of semiabstract woodcuts suggesting a highly subjective narrative sequence with a stark personal alphabet of symbols, such as a roughly carved hand with a large eye in its palm and fingers that morph into a rudimentary urban skyline, as well as various stick figures, faces, and less identifiable forms that marry the simplicity of primitive pictographs to a sophisticated graphic wit akin to that of Paul Klee.

Suffice it to say that Vladimir Ginzburg is a highly versatile but by no means eclectic talent. Each of his modes of expression emanates from the central core of a unique angle of vision and is possessed of an innate authenticity and power.

— Ed McCormack

Vladimir Ginzburg's work can also be seen on his websites: ***www.vladimirginzburg.com*** *and* ***www.theimageshome.com***

Phyllis Smith: Two Ways of Looking at Photorealism

Thomas Eakins, perhaps not so arguably our greatest American realist, was also a photographer, and often made use of the camera to create his paintings. Other late 19th century painters, most notably Edvard Munch, Edgar Degas, and Pierre Bonnard, also employed photography as an aid to painting and, in the process, became accomplished with the camera as well as the brush. There is also evidence that centuries previous, even Vermeer may have experimented with the primitive imaging device known as a camera obscura.

Photorealism, however, did not come into being until it was named and promoted by the New York art dealer Louis Meisel in the 1960s. Since, it has proved to be one of the most enduring of contemporary art movements. Perhaps due as much to its accessibility, as to its reliance on proven artistic values, it has handsomely weathered the half century since its heyday, never going altogether out of style or exhausting its possibilities. And it seems unlikely that its popularity will abate, as long as emerging artists such as Phyllis Smith continue to emerge.

"Rose of Sharon" oil on panel

Smith, whose solo exhibition is on view at Viridian Artists, 530 West 25th Street from March 16 through April 10, is unusual for not only using her photographs as visual references for painting but often exhibiting photographs (albeit, others than those she paints from, for reasons to become clear momentarily) right alongside her oils on panel.

This seems a direct and honest strategy, especially now that, in the catholic climate of the postmodern era, photographs routinely share wall space with paintings in group exhibitions anyway. And in Smith's case, since they are both products of the same sensibility, her paintings and her photographs certainly complement each other.

Indeed, in both mediums, her "naturescapes," as she refers to them, spring from the same source, as she makes clear in an artist's statement in which she says, "My work is a celebration of the natural world around me, a space so personal because it represents what I believe to be a journey through the infinite possibilities found in nature. I begin through the lens of my camera; however, the visible end product is not always a photograph. My goal is to capture the moment full of life, never to be seen exactly the same way again, caught forever in the time it took to snap the picture. I would hope to hold the viewer's attention on the surface, and transport him or her into a visual aesthetic solace, silent and uncomplicated. It is a place that has become an extension of my own intimacy with the subject. The photographs either remain what I refer to as my 'sketches' for eventual oil paintings, or they possess qualities that I believe stand on their own."

The sense of a fleeting moment captured and made immutable is indeed what distinguishes Smith's work in both mediums at its best. However the qualities that make work in either medium stand on its own are often quite opposite. Or as one perceptive viewer of Smith's last exhibition wrote in the gallery guest book: "Your paintings often reach depths of reality that photographs can't reach...and vice versa."

In two of the recent photographs in the show, for example, "Leaf with Window" and "Tree Bark at Canyonlands," an intense concentration on surface textures creates an effect that can only be called "painterly." Yet the sense of implied tactility in both pictures — the intricately embossed veins and natural patterns of the leaf in the former and the rough lumpy bark in the latter — are all the more fascinating for being "virtual." One gets the sense that to replicate their actual characteristics in the more physically palpable textures of pigment would not only be a redundant act of mimesis, but might rob both images of their mystery.

But while textures are very much of this world, color is a phenomenon of light. Thus by contrast, "Rose of Sharon" could seem a subject particularly well suited to photography, with its exquisitely delicate petals apparently possessing no more material substance than the subtle range of ethereal pale blue, purple, and pink illumination that, more than any delineation of form, renders them visible to the human eye. Yet as John Ruskin once informed us, "The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the *innocence of the eye*; that is to say, a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify, — as a blind man would see them if suddenly gifted with sight."

All things being equal, however, much more than Ruskin could have imagined in photography's monochromatic infancy, goes into the decision that Smith must make to either use her camera as a sketching tool or as the vehicle for a finished aesthetic statement. Consider "Prickly Pear in Bloom," another recent oil in which, rather than being an emissary of light, color becomes a sculptor of form, as a brilliant, buttery yellow hue washes lusciously over three clustered floral forms set against a deep blue-green background of solid fronds and thorns.

On the face of it, the contrast between this and the previous painting is certainly stark enough to suggest an entirely different artistic intention and possible choice of medium. Yet, to once again quote Ruskin, "The perception of solid form is entirely a matter of experience." And there are times when, for all the advanced technical proficiency of state of the art photography, no camera alone can equal when the camera and the human hand collaborate in the peculiar reverse alchemy of turning the material substance of pigment back into the ethereal element of light.

It is finally the considerable gift of Phyllis Smith—who states that she can almost always tell at a glance whether a subject's innate sublimity can be sufficiently apprehended through photography, or whether it will require such divine collaboration between the two arts—to share with one and all that elusive "innocence of eye" of which Ruskin wrote.

— Ed McCormack

Wrestling with "The Red Book" by C.G. Jung (1875-1961)

Written, illustrated, and elegantly hand-lettered in the manner of a medieval illuminator by the great psychologist almost 100 years ago, the red leather-bound manuscript of C.G. Jung's unfinished Blakean magnum opus The Red Book spent the last quarter century in a bank vault in his native Switzerland, before being published in exact facsimile last October by W.W. Norton & Company.

Now the tombstone-size volume, too tall to stand upright on any of our shelves, reposes in its bright red jacket on top of our blue dresser like a gorgeous albatross that I have been guiltily circling, cautiously petting, and trying to make friends with ever since I received an advance copy from the publisher last October.

Despite the Scroogiest holiday season in recent memory *The New York Times* reported on Christmas day that booksellers were marveling over the brisk sales of an esoteric tome retailing for $195. All the more reason for me to feel abashed about taking so long to get around to writing about it. The problem was, and still is, that it's thing of beauty but dauntingly cumbersome to read, an art object more than something one can comfortably curl up with. Weighing nine pounds and measuring over 15 inches high by over 22 inches wide when open, it almost demands a podium or its own table. Nor does it help that Jung's beautiful Neo-Gothic calligraphy is in German and that the English translation is way in the back of the hefty volume, requiring an almost aerobic effort to match the words to the full-page tempera paintings interspersed with, and often facing, the written text.

None of which is to say that it isn't worth the exertion, since the paintings — who, besides the most devoted Jungian scholars even knew that the father of analytic psychology, individuation, and the collective unconscious was also a painter? — are strangely beautiful. They range from abstract compositions influenced by Eastern mandalas to figurative fantasies so uninhibitedly surreal as to make clear why Jung refused to publish The Red Book during his lifetime, out of fear that it might undermine his professional reputation — and that his colleagues in the psychology field might even declare him insane!

Such misgivings may not have been exactly paranoid, were certainly justified, since the paintings in The Red Book display the intricate, swarming emotional nakedness that we normally associate with so called "outsider" art, which, at its most authentic, is usually created by the unschooled, the unsophisticated, the certifiably crazy. (In Jung's time the work that most resembled his, then known as "Art Brut," was made by inmates of a mental clinic near Bern, in his native Switzerland. And to this day, a history of asylum stays enhances any outsider artist's resume.)

The text that his pictures illuminate is no less naked. In it, Jung travels to the land of the dead, falls in love with a woman who turns out to be his sister, does battle with a giant serpent, eats the liver of a small child, and disgusts even the Devil. One can't help wondering how his former mentor and eventual rival, Freud, might have diagnosed his stream-of-consciousness dream descriptions, spiritual yearnings, inner fantasies, and such hallucinatory visions as: "I saw the black serpent as it wound itself upward around the wood of the cross. It crept into the body of the crucified and emerged transformed from his mouth. It had become white. It wound itself around the head of the dead one like a diadem, and light gleamed above his head, and the sun rose shining in the east."

For all his visionary fervor, Jung was no outsider, even though he could have sounded like one when he later confessed that he endured a severe psychological and spiritual crisis while working on the book from 1914 to 1930, when, "My entire life consisted in elaborating what had burst forth from the unconscious and flooded me like an enigmatic stream and threatened to break me."

Subjective though it was — based largely on memories, dreams, and fantasies from which he was struggling to unearth a personal mythology that might not only heal him but have universal application in his clinical practice — his text was influenced by Nietzche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Dante's Inferno and *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*. No doubt his well-stocked art library, heavy on books about Redon, Munch, Moreau, and other Symbolists, also inspired his paintings.

Yet Jung resisted calling what he did art, and added scholarly commentaries to his text, perhaps to counterbalance its confessional nature and create at least an illusion of professional detachment. Nevertheless, he seemed to know he had been beset by the demons of art when, looking back, in 1957, on the period of *The Red Book*'s creation, he allowed as to how, "Everything later was merely the outer classification, the scientific elaboration, and the integration into life. But the numinous beginning, which contained everything, was then."

He kept the manuscript locked in a cupboard in his house in a suburb of Zurich. Since he had left his five children no instructions as to what was to be done with it, they transferred the epic, eccentric, ungainly masterpiece to the bank vault after he died in 1961. And there it stayed for the decades it took for the family to overcome its misgivings about the posthumous notoriety its publication might cause, and consent to let us crown C.G. Jung with his final laurel: that of the Artist. — Ed McCormack

(The exhibition "The Red Book of C.G. Jung: Creation of a New Cosmology" continues at the Rubin Museum of Art, 150 West 17th Street, through February 15.)

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Pure, Unfettered Vision: The Brave New Paintings of Action Heroine Sheila Hecht

In a conversation that I had with him in his studio in East Hampton one afternoon in 1981, an elderly Willem de Kooning, nearing the end of his life and believed by many not to be in full possession of his marbles, yet still lucidly preoccupied with the passion for painting that had consumed him since his youth, candidly confessed that, even after so many years,"finishing one painting never solves the problems of the next."

The Abstract Expressionist master shook his thatchy white head, and with a rueful little chuckle, added, "You never really learn anything you can use. You always have to start over the next day."

Even at mid-career, Sheila Hecht, an artist who continues to build on the tradition of de Kooning and his Abstract Expressionist peers by improvising her compositions in the act of painting, rather than proceeding from a preconceived plan, would probably agree. Lately, however, Hecht has discovered that starting each new painting by drawing from elements of the last and "restating previously established visual relationships" at least provides her with instant entry into the work.

Yet that the device offers no way around the problem-solving to which de Kooning referred seems implicit in the title of Hecht's new solo exhibition: "Primary Spirit, No Short-cuts," at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from March 2 through 27. (Reception: Saturday, March 6, from 4 to 6 PM.)

Not that this is by any means a bad thing, since the kind of art at which Hecht excels relies upon split-second decision-making in the act of painting to imbue it with the fabled vitality that one has always associated with the New York School and those who, amid the calculated strategies of the postmodern era, continue to keep its faith in the spontaneous gesture. Hecht is one of the best and most committed of such artists, and the method she has evolved of catapulting from one painting to the next also adds a new dimension of interest for the viewer who wishes to follow the trajectory of her creative impulses in the twenty-five works that comprise her new show. For viewing them sequentially, in the very order in which they were painted, affords him or her a rare, almost participatory intimacy with the artist's thinking and process as she grapples with color, form, and line, in the wide-open arena of the canvas. But even more important for one of the last true "action" painters left is that, rather than hampering Hecht's spontaneity, her new approach actually enhances it by enabling her to leap without looking, so to speak, right into the fray on the wings of continuous gestures that traverse the boundaries between different canvases like Catwoman bounding across the rooftops of Batman's Gotham City.

"Smile"

That the compositions generated in this manner are strikingly diverse rather than similar or serially self-mimetic becomes immediately apparent on encountering the first two paintings in the series, "The Thrill of it All" and "Double Dip." The only thing that seems to unite them is the sense of breathless excitement, of freedom and discovery that permeates the entire exhibition. Although characteristically set against the generous areas of white primed canvas that Hecht leaves bare to air into her paintings, the brilliant red blue and yellow forms in the first canvas, accented with swift and sinuous linear strokes, are at once buoyant and densely enjambed. By contrast, the second composition is elliptical and unfettered, with forms that float like green, yellow, and blue clouds at the center of the white canvas, beset by a barrage of swift, spare black calligraphic elements suggesting swimming spermatozoa or exploding exclamation points! But the *pièce de resistance* of the composition is a rough red Zen oblong near the bottom of the painting encircling an excremental chocolate smear...Double Dip indeed !

The Zowie Factor, as I presume to call it, continues in the next two canvases, "Ask Why," which is even more spare than the painting that preceded it — an audacious combination of impulsive green smears and ochre and black scrawls zigzagging down a bare white ground a la Georges Mathieu — and "Stacked," in which, perhaps aided by the suggestiveness of its title, three big bold horizontal blotches of bright primary hues, bolstered at the bottom by thick brown strokes of palette-knife impasto, project a starkly abstracted burlesque of flouncing feminine voluptuousness.

Indeed, one of the most remarkable aspects of Hecht's paintings is how allusive they can be, even while availing themselves of utmost abstract freedom, as seen in "Smile," where blunt strokes of milky white, set against a yellow ground suggest an antic explosion of teeth; and "Kiss," in which flecks of lipstick red flying like confetti over a meaty area of bubblegum pink, further enlivened by a flash of bright yellow and daubs of piquant pimento green evoke the meaty visceral sensation, if not the literal representation, of a good juicy smooch.

From "The Thrill of it All" to "Blue," the twenty-fifth and final work in the series, a sumptuously layered beauty with slivers of neon pink peeking through the interstices between blocky patches of luscious nocturnal impasto, this is without question Sheila Hecht's brightest, boldest, and bravest solo exhibition to date. And that's really saying something, since Hecht, has always been one of our most intrepid colorists and energetic gestural daredevils. In fact, while her allegiances are to the New York School, her new paintings also make one think of Miro, who famously said, "I want to assassinate painting," even as he breathed new life into it by virtue of an almost reckless exuberance that Hecht now seems to share. In an art scene that has grown progressively cautious, may her freedom prevail.

— Ed McCormack

Danièle M. Marin's New Metaphysical Métier

It seemed altogether auspicious to once again discover the face of Simone de Beauvoir among the many diverse components in Danièle M. Marin's recent exhibition of new mixed media paintings "Image Essay," at Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, in Chelsea.

However, the conspicuous absence of de Beauvoir's lover Jean-Paul Sartre also seems consistent, since from the very beginning of one's familiarity with it, Marin's work has been centered almost exclusively on the lives and the intimate environment and inner terrains of women. Thus the dominant male figure in the codependent existentialist couple's drama, to whom the author of the feminist classic "The Second Sex" invariably deferred, calling herself "Sartre's disciple" and willingly letting her mentor/lover's literary accomplishments overshadow her own, has at last been properly marginalized.

In past exhibitions by Marin, other formidable female literary figures and fellow sufferers — be they self-effacing victims like Emily Dickinson, or feisty women warriors in the trenches of romance such as Marguerite Duras — have also made cameo appearances. Celebrated, too, have been some who, like Colette and Gertrude Stein (wittily depicted in the present exhibition with a small portrait head made up of shattered cubist planes), eschewed men and loved women, but still had to contend with male opposition, not to mention male ridicule, for their entire careers.

Without doubt, Marin is a proud feminist. But above all, she is an artist whose ability to create powerful visual metaphors elevates her work above the rhetoric of sexual politics to the level of poetry. One remembers most vividly how she made the shape of a simple dress the main motif of the installation, more than a decade ago in the same venue, that first caught the attention of many in the New York art world. The rudimentary outline of the empty garment (revisited in miniature in one of the new paintings), as well as a dressmakers' mannequin (to which Marin gave immortal life in forms and colors as evocative as the prose of the great polish literary fantasist Bruno Schulz's short story "Tailors' Dummies") became powerful and poignant symbols of the impact that fashion and self-presentation play vis-à-vis the objectification of women in modern society.

One of the innovations of the present exhibition is the strong formal context

"Image Essay # 1"

that Marin has devised to contain elements of narrative, imagination, and memory. In more than one previous series, Marin's female figures often occupied elegant domestic interiors, their listless postures suggesting the proverbial "bird in a gilded cage" to which I made reference in an earlier review. Or else they lolled or milled about in the nude, as in a classical odalisque, a harem, a couturier's changing room, or any other exclusive feminine preserve.

In the new series of five large works that Marin calls "Image Clusters," however, the figures occupy a more metaphysical milieu of shifting planes and shuffled imagery, in considerably more complex modular compositions consisting of four separate square-shaped, same-size canvases arranged in a grid. Each canvas' composition is made up of several irregular rectangular divisions, suggesting cinematic sequences that the artist employs "as a distancing mechanism, to let you unfocus from the images, to let you think them away and let the color, abstraction, rhythm take over."

Indeed, these formal elements assert themselves more strongly than ever before in Marin's new paintings, with bits of colorful checkered or floral-print fabric — and even lacier materials deliberately redolent of stereotypically feminine frippery — added to the controlled painterly vigor and the striking color harmonies, to enhance the intricate, Nabi-like patterning of her compositions. The rectangular divisions could also suggest the panels of a comic strip; indeed, appearing in one of the "Image Clusters" is actually a cloud-like thought-balloon, the emptiness of which undermines narrative suggestiveness, compelling the viewer to see the shape as a sensual formal element, rather than a semiotic container.

Fluidly distorted still-life objects take on a dreamlike quality in Marin's new paintings, perhaps referencing affinities with art historical predecessors: scattered apples that make one think of Cezanne; variously shaped vassals and bottles evoking Morandi; and even cartoon-like light bulbs like the one's in some of Philip Guston's late-late-period paintings — although one would hardly expect Marin to identify with Gustin's alpha male geezer world of empty whiskey bottles and smoking stogies! (Perhaps more to be expected are the phallically stylized flowers that, in some pictures, bend comically on their stems!)

Bolstering the formal power of her compositions, the objects often loom hugely on the picture plane, dwarfing the recurring figure of a female flaneur strolling along a lonely shore or through the boulevards and back alleyways of Paris, the city of the artist's birth, viewed in fragmented segments, like long-shots in a film by Jean-Luc Godard, Francois Truffaunt, or Eric Rohmer. Tiny as she may be in the total scheme of things, this peripatetic figure appears svelte, chic, tastefully dressed (perhaps by Chanel) in the manner of a typical French film heroine. Like the aforementioned Simone de Beauvoir, she is obviously a woman of the world. Still, there is a haunted quality to her restless strolling, as though her sophistication does not exempt her from a schoolgirl's romantic suffering.

In one panel, she even appears in a painting-within-the painting hanging on a wall in one of Marin's elegant interiors. Although these once claustrophobic spaces have opened up to new vistas by virtue of the artist's new compositional expansion, here the figure's existential angst remains fixed in time, perhaps symbolizing vicissitudes of love to which women are vulnerable as long as they are content to remain The Second Sex.

"My show is a critical reflection on our age of distraction," Daniel M. Marin stated in a note on the exhibition. "I like the fact that, when moving from cluster to cluster you experience the gallery wall space. It allows you to take a deep breath."

— Ed McCormack

Works by Danièle M. Marin will be on view at The Monmouth Museum, through February 21; as well at Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street, from February 9 through 28th.

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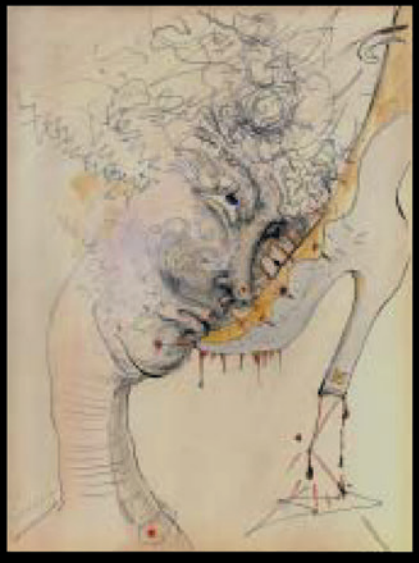

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