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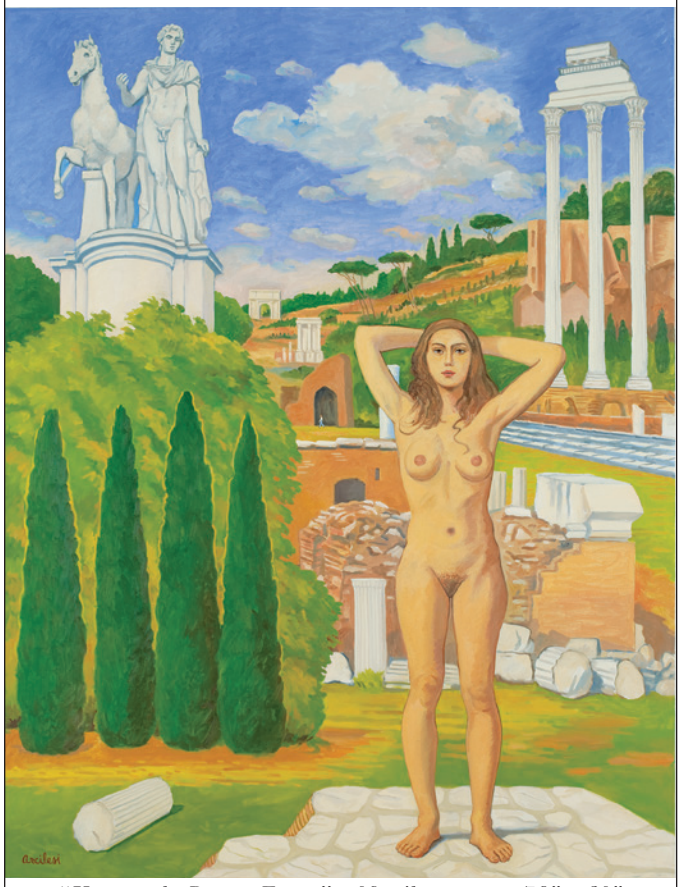
GALLERY&STUDIO

Dandelion Seed Heads and the Moon, *1961–65. Watercolor, gouache, charcoal, and graffito on lightly textured white wove paper faced on ¼-inch thick laminated gray cardboard, 56 x 39 58 in. (142.2 x 99 cm). Karen and Kevin Kennedy Collection.*

Why Robert Gober's Charles Burchfield Show at the Whitney Matters So Much pg. 12

MORE MAX'S KANSAS CITY MADNESS FROM ED MCCORMACK, Pg. 19

VINCENT ARCILESI



"Venus at the Roman Forum" - 09, oil on canvas, 78" x 60"

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© **Lee Chabot** - *Abstract Conception* - 42" x 18"

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G&S Highlights

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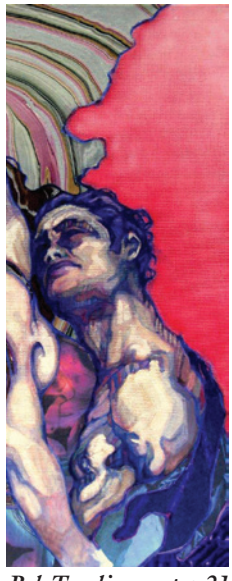

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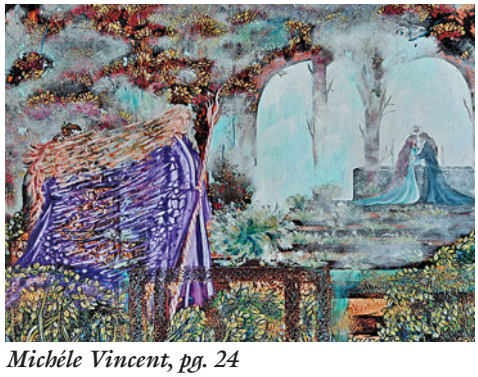

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Time to Say Yes to "No!art"

During the summer months, a time of casually curated group shows that are often the art world version of garage sales, historically significant solo exhibitions are a relative rarity in commercial galleries. For this reason, a bracingly nasty selection of early work by Boris Lurie (1924-2008) at Westwood Gallery, 568 Broadway, in June and July, was a welcome treat.

Lurie, a young survivor of Hitler's concentration camps (his grandmother,

mother, and sister weren't as lucky) who arrived in New York in 1946, was one of the originators, along with Sam Goodman and Stanley Fisher, of "No!art," a grass roots movement that was an early 1960s precursor of New Wave, Punk, and other transgressive later movements. Their "Doom" and "Vulgar" shows at the March Gallery brought funky tidings of East Village Future to the 10th Street gallery scene. But like Wallace Berman's West Coast Beat tribe, they were too hot for the art establishment of their time to handle. Today, Lurie's altered porno photomontages, pinup collages, weird shoe fetish sculptures (like his colleague Goodman's shit sculptures) click right into the zeitgeist. — The Editors

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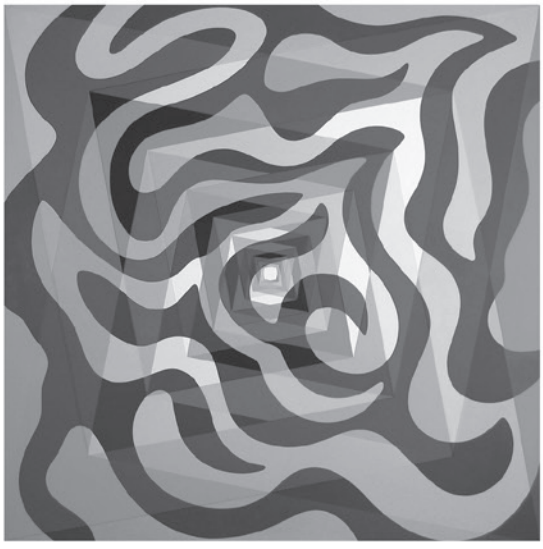
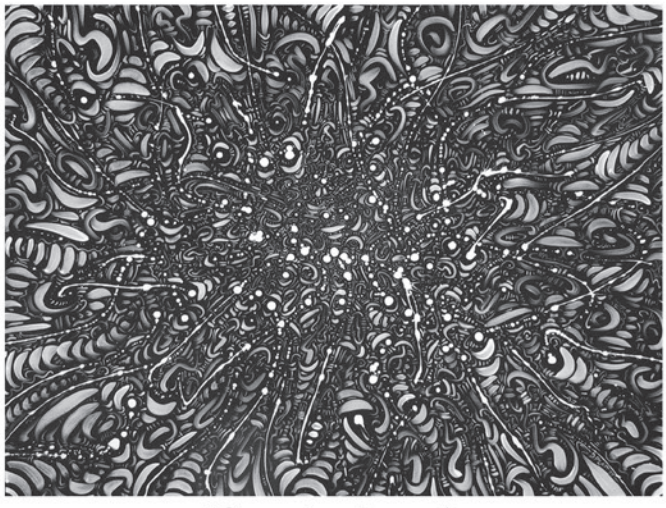
- New Works -



"Swirling Octagon Vortex"
Mattew Turov
acrylic on canvas - 56" x 56"

"Cross Narratives - Crossing"
Mark Wiener
mixed media on canvas - 55" x 55"



"Opposites Attract"
David Platt
acrylic on canvas - 30" x 40"

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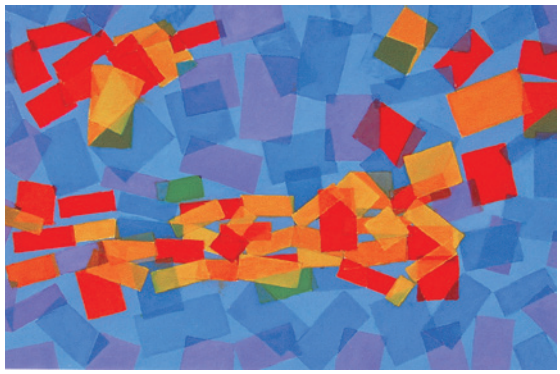
Abstract Allusions: The Métier of Francis Dosne

I was primed for Francis Dosne's present retrospective at Pleiades Gallery by his earlier exhibition this past Summer at the Manhattan Graphics Center in Tribeca. That smaller show of Dosne's silk screen prints, with their precise yet fluid linear forms, luminous stained glass colors, and sublime formal compositions, focused on an essential aspect of his oeuvre. What it demonstrated most clearly was the European modernist roots of this versatile contemporary sculptor, printmaker, and painter, who was born in Troyes, France, but settled in the United States, where he studied at the Art Students League in the early 1960s.



"Odalisque Squared"

Dosne's bio tells us that he also joined the studio of René Lavaggio, in the 1980s, to perfect his stone carving technique, then carved local marble at Dellatolas Marble Studio, in Tinos, Greece, and in New York City, "eventually made the Sculpture Center School and Studios, where he was on the board of directors, his artistic home." And indeed it is as a sculptor, particularly concerned with the play of light and shadow on smoothly flowing concave and convex forms, that Dosne has long been best known to many of us.

Although Dosne had the good fortune, as a young man in Paris in the '40s, of studying with Fernand Léger, his prowess as a painter has been somewhat underplayed up to now. Since his great modernist teacher also abstracted from female anatomy, the Leger connection comes to mind particularly in relation to Dosne's oil on canvas "Odalisque Squared." However, the question of influence is irrelevant here; for while Leger's tubular-limbed nudes remain largely recognizable, as its title indicates Dosne takes abstraction much further into the realm of pure geometry.

His composition is made up entirely of small semi-translucent squares of color set against a vibrant blue field. Subdued blues, purples, and smaller areas of green, form a backdrop for brighter red and deep yellow hues that, together, emit a heat similar to that which emanates from the burnished flesh tones in the nudes of Modigliani. Spilling down from the upper right corner of the composition and sweeping horizontally across its center, these brighter shapes evoke the sense of a reclining figure as palpable as that in Goya's "Naked Maja." Yet, that Dosne magically conjures the curvaceous contours of the courtesan (as well as a suggestion of her reflection in a mirror in the upper left area of the canvas) with sharp-edged, stringently geometric shapes, removes even the smallest hint of salaciousness from the composition.

Although there are several other reasons to savor this show, one of the most novel is that, in "Odalisque Squared," Dosne accomplishes the formidable task — rare in odalisques, which traditionally depict beautiful concubines and harem slaves —— of finally making the viewer regard the female nude as a purely formal entity.

— Ed McCormack

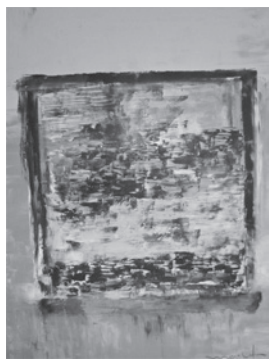
Frances Dosne, Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, 4 fl., September 7 thru October 2. Reception: Saturday, September 11, 3 to 6 pm.

Mexican Painter Marcela Cadena's Vibrant Vision

From the evidence of the work to be seen in her upcoming exhibition at Agora Gallery in Chelsea, Marcela Cadena, who has already exhibited extensively and who was also featured at Art Shanghai in China earlier this year, is among the best and brightest of the present generation of young Mexican artists.

Often working with a spatula, Cadena applies oil and acrylic pigments to canvas in bold, sometimes barely modulated areas of color. Favoring bright hues because, as she puts it with characteristic directness "Mexico is a colorful country," she sees abstraction as a conduit for emotions that resist verbal translation. But one should not be deceived by the brilliance of her colors into thinking that all of the emotions in Cadena's paintings are uniformly happy, since she also cites the deaths of loved ones as having influenced her work. Obviously, however, she does not abide by the cliché that only mournful colors can express loss, seeking instead to take the path of spiritual transcendence.

In some paintings, she tends to divide the composition into horizontal color areas, a pictorial strategy that recalls Rothko, particularly in some of her more spare paintings, such as "Entre Colores," an oil on canvas consisting of a red rectangle at the top and a deep yellow one at the bottom, separated by a staggered black and white "horizon line." However, as in the case of the older painter, even when organized along the lines of landscape, Cadena's large canvases invariably appear more numinous than earthbound.



"El Hombre"

Distinctly more "busy" than the previous work in painterly terms is an in oil and acrylic on canvas titled "Alma de Color." Its central motif is an inner rectangle consisting of multiple rough horizontal strokes of frosty white impasto inflected with purple and set against a brilliantly "breathing" blue ground. While forming a solid border around the edges of the canvas, this blue hue, bolstered by a narrower strip of equally uninflected deep purple at the bottom of the canvas, is almost entirely dispersed by the white gestural strokes that dominate the center of the composition, showing through in patches here and there in the manner of pentimento. "Alma de Color" is a subtly sumptuous painterly tour de force.

Similarly forceful in execution and impact is "El Hombre," in which the pièce de resistance is the slightly asymmetrical linear outline of a roughly inscribed brown rectangle occupying the center of the composition like an almost empty picture frame. (One might cite here a suggestion of a witty young female artist's wry take on the male principle, although such interpretations are always subjective when it comes to abstract painting!)

Then there is "Entre Suenos," where an uninflected yellow field at the top of the canvas is intersected by looser area of vertically streaked aqueous purple scored and scraped where the two colors meet in a manner suggesting splashing surf.

In other paintings as well, such as the majestic "Inundando el Silencio," where luscious areas of red and anxious strokes of yellow bleed faintly as reflections on ice down onto a pure white ground, Marcela Cadena reveals her subtle mastery that makes one eager to keep up with her auspiciously promising career. — Peter Wiley

Marcela Cadena, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, September 10–Oct 1. Reception: September 16, 6-8 PM.

Anne Kolin Captures the Visual Cacophony and Crazy Simultaneity of the Postmodern City

Graffiti has no doubt been a feature of cities for as long as they have existed. There is something about a blank wall that cries out to be defaced, be it with a political slogan, a personal message, a sexual, racial, or religious slur, or the often artful "tags" with which rebellious adolescents emblazon every available surface to make the primal declaration "I am!"

Despite signs that warn "post no bills," in big modern cities like New York or Paris empty walls become free advertising spaces, with posters plastered one upon the other by intrepidly enterprising smalltime entrepreneurs willing to risk fine or arrest in order to get their messages out to the public. Inevitably, these urban walls scrawled and pasted with successive messages of protest, obsession, malice, selfhood, or commercial ambition, are attacked by random vandals, rival advertisers, and the ravages of weather. Cheap paper cracks and peels, fugitive inks fade in sunlight or dissolve and run in rain, revealing palimpsests and pentimento buried beneath layers of time.

It is the "traces of memory" on such walls, "like scars on skin," that fascinate and inspire the French artist Anne Kolin in her new solo exhibition, "Wall Side Story," at Noho Gallery.

"My works tell the story of my life, my city, my cities, Paris and New York, essentially," Kolin says, affirming the interest that she shares with her late countryman Roland Barthes in semiology, the science of signage, particularly in a contemporary urban context, as she speaks passionately of her peripatetic daily outings in either of her cities, taking in, like an aesthetic archaeologist, the posters, the graffiti, the entrepreneurial yearnings, the personal angst of her fellow citizens.

"On the walls of our cities, the history of our lives inscribes itself," the artist asserts. "All that urban space speaks to me, amazes me, and recalls other thoughts. Some words call out to me; walls become large open books with pages reciting at times poetry, at times violence.

In the latter regard, Kolin recalls reading about the greeting that was extended to the French-speaking, Egyptian-born Jewish writer Edmond Jabes, who had written so movingly about the persecution and displacement of Jews down through history, and was finally forced by the widespread anti-Semitism in Egypt to take exile in France in 1957. Shortly after arriving in Paris, Jabes was strolling through the Odeon quarter one evening when he was brought up short before a wall scrawled with the message "Mort aux Juifs: Jews Go Home."

The sense of violence to which Kolin alludes is perhaps most immediately evident in her painting "Le Cri (The Shout)," where the grimacing face of a man with eyes and mouth agape, as though screaming an epithet, has as grotesque an effect as one of the British painter Francis Bacon's screaming popes. His head emerges, as if from a pyramid-shaped mental landfill, from a mass of other photographic fragments, snippets of typography, and bits of torn poster — one showing half the grinning mouth of what appears to be that evil-looking clown (so like Batman's villainous enemy The Joker) on the logo of Steeplechase Park in Coney Island. Gaudy Day-Glo spray-can graffiti tags, spatters of visceral red, suggesting the aftermath of a shooting, and rivulets of shiny black enamel bleed down onto a lusciously scumbled sandy-colored painterly ground laid down with vigorous abstract expressionist panache and stenciled in scarlet with the lowercase phrase "le cri assourdissant" — the deafening cry.

"Le Cri" (The Shout)

Here, Kolin's visual cacophony approximates the deafening cry of the city: the shrill wailing of sirens and ambulances; the flung out curses of angry cabbies and truck drivers raging through the roaring, gaseously exhaust-farting, honking rush hour traffic; the bleat of police whistles; the sudden, startling sonic blast of rap (music that can sound like an angry altercation starting up right beside one on the crowded sidewalk!); and the myriad other assorted aural assaults upon pedestrian sensibility that put the real-life teeth of the street in the mouth of the media term "sound bites" in a city — we're talking New Yawk right now — where a normal form of address has become, "Yo, what's your problem, asshole?"

Yet that walls can exhilarate, as well as attack, is also made splendidly evident in Anne Kolin's new solo show at Noho, in paintings that celebrate the sensuous visual cacophony of colors and textures, the complex ecriture of signs and symbols, the psychedelic arabesques, baroque or blocky letter-forms, the furtively scribbled confessions and poignant statements of selfhood that the artist finds so telling. For how could even the most pugnacious urban asshole argue with that lovely French term "Noblesse Oblige," the name of another new painting in a stately elongated format, even when that lovely phrase is ironically underlined in smaller type by the more hectoring admonishment "Privilege entails responsibility"? Besides, Kolin's paintings are possessed of such quintessentially French finesse — albeit informed by tachisme and spiced by a rougher, funkier energy akin to that of Rauschenberg and Twombly — that it might take a millisecond or two for some viewers to discern the muddy, masklike, art brut faces of victimhood half buried in the thickly impastoed skin of the pigment. Likewise, in the case of another painting as gorgeously, lividly red-drenched as Soutine's flayed beef carcasses, enigmatically titled "Je Veux Mourir Vivant," one might be so dazzled as to momentarily overlook the bold crisscrossed black and yellow stickers that read, "Humans Not Permitted."

Another possibility is that in a particularly sumptuous production called "Porte de Clignancourt," one could get so caught up in the visual relationships between an elegantly distressed partial Perrier label, big black block letters that say "PARIS D' AMOUR," a comic strip femme fatale, and myriad other intriguing fragments as to momentarily lose sight of the sheer painterly felicity with which Anne Kolin pulls all the disparate elements together in a richly satisfying composition. But that's just a risk that the adventurous viewer will have to take.— Ed McCormack

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A Hidden Sanctuary in Chelsea

Most people would agree that New York still ably wears the title 'Art Capital of the World' despite the continued efforts of several cities around the world to usurp it. In that world, Chelsea still dominates the contemporary art market.

For me, Chelsea is a place of expensive "museum-esque" galleries with cavernous rooms, pristine whitewashed walls, discrete lighting and deafening silence only occasionally relieved by looped video art. It's quite a sterile environment in which to display something which is more often than not created with great passion and energy, and even sometimes with violence.

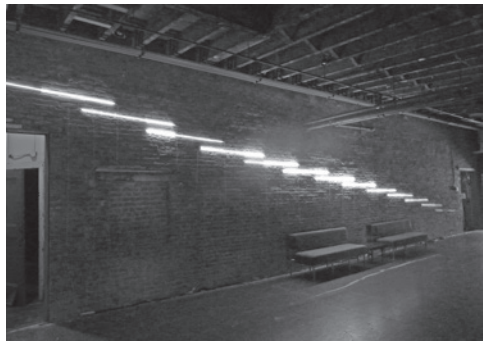
It is a place ruled by "The Art Establishment" whose members are known only to those who "need" to know for those exclusive contracts and behind the scene deals. The few small galleries left catering to emerging, new to market and mid-career artists are fast dwindling. Many people who visit galleries and attend art receptions are outsiders to the world of superstar artists, critics, gallerists, dealers, museum curators and major league collectors.

But here amongst the high gloss facades and the spin of the art market there is a secret oasis. In one of the last remaining unused warehouses in the very heart of Chelsea, a long time real estate property broker has turned benefactor, providing uncommonly affordable spaces to working artists. The building is around 100 years old with magnificent high tin ceilings, sturdy oak pillars, beams and floors. In this historic building the landlord has allowed a group of artists to create a wonderful community of studios, workshops, galleries and exhibition spaces.

The occupants have created their own artistic havens. Some work behind locked doors, others drape material over doorways while others spread out in the open. There are painters, sculptors, print makers, mixed media and performance artists. The one thing they all have in common is a desire to create art in an environment with like minded fellow artists where all they have to worry about is their current work. They support, inspire and motivate each other.

Other commentaries by Marina Hadley can by read on her blog The Gallery Diva (www.artblahblah.com)

Mark Weiner, an abstract painter **(www.mweinerarts.com)** was among one of the early groups of artists to move into the building with his partner and fellow artist Linda DiGusta. Weiner works in large formats creating very dynamic and eloquent visuals without the use of bright colors which he says helps to filter out distractions in expressing his ideas. His geometric shapes combined with splashy fluidity play like musical compositions over his canvases. By contrast, Linda DiGusta **(www.lindadi.com)** who shares the same studio, draws simple images of fruit. In her delicate linear style she imparts a voluptuous quality to her subject. Mark and Linda open their studio most days, bar Sundays, to allow the casual visitor an opportunity to see them in action.



Matilde Alessandra

Walking around the building you'll come across many of the resident artists' work displayed on the walls. Several of the works incorporating florescent tube lights are the creation of Matilde Alessandra **(www.matilde-alessandra.com)**. The modern elegance fits surprisingly well in this grand old building.

Another early occupant of the building was artist, Thomas Beale **(www.tbeale.com)** who creates organic sculptures which appear to be designed as complex puzzles on both a large and small scale. Beale has also created Honey Space **(www.honey-space.com)**, a "no-profit" gallery to show his and other artists' work. The first time I came across the gallery it took a little courage to enter the small low entryway into the unlit and unmanned room. However, it was worth the trepidation, as I saw several excellent exhibitions in this unusual location on 11th Avenue.

Mark Weiner

A more visible tenant is Cueto Project **(www.cuetoproject.com)** on the ground floor. It is an international contemporary art gallery created by Valerie Cueto who started her gallery in Le Marais, Paris in 2000 and represents many new trend-setting artists.

The space has been through several incarnations from longshoreman bar (1931 to 1970) to gay leather bar, to a rumored sex club, all of which adds a pervading mood and ambience to the building.

I spoke to Don Malone, the building's manager, who said that today there are usually somewhere between 35 to 40 tenants in the building at any one time. Leases are fairly flexible but max out at a year at a time at the moment. Currently the building is fully leased up. Although there are no immediate plans for developing the land or the property, there is no doubt that once the economy recovers this haven will exist in only memory.

There's always a little bit of selfishness that I struggle with when I find a gem of a place like this. Do I tell everyone about it because it's such a find? Or do I keep it a secret because if it becomes too popular it might change the feel of the place? I usually end up not being able to keep it to myself and with this place in particular, I think that its existence will be all too fleeting. The artists and galleries all keep their own hours but they often have at least one day a month when a large number of them are all open to visitors, such as the first Thursdays of the month (although for September 2010 please check with individuals due to the holidays). So if you're in the neighborhood the place to visit is: 551 West 21st Street between 10th and 11th Avenues. —Marina Hadley

"Out of the Archives II": a Unique Auction Shares

True connoisseurship — which is to say, the appreciation of works of art from any era for their innate aesthetic qualities — would appear to be a dying enterprise in today's art scene, where so many trend-hungry gallery and museum directors are driven solely by the the cult of the new and the question of taste is rarely raised. If this makes Neil Zukerman, the director of CFM Gallery, something of an anomaly, so be it. Zukerman, who refuses to regard art as a game of historical one-upmanship, boycotted the Whitney for many years, after the institution affronted him with Carl Andre's "Six Bricks in a Row." In fact, he didn't set foot in another trendy contemporary art museum until he went to MOMA recently for the Tim Burton exhibition. But he'll have you know that he barely glanced at the two naked sentries guarding the door, as he exited through the Marina Abramovic exhibition.

Not that Zukerman has anything against naked bodies, you understand; quite the contrary, eroticism pervades the surrealist and symbolist works that he collects by artists living and dead. But it's just too ironic to see what he calls "the emperor's new clothes" embodied so literally!

Exquisite taste in the type of art that he collects and extolls, as well as the willingness to fight for it, has made Zukerman a formidable foe of a myopic cultural establishment bent on ignoring figurative painting and sculpture that is passionate rather than ironic. Ever since opening his gallery in Soho 1992, to the present in his new space in Chelsea, he has been, to borrow Ezra Pound's memorable phrase, "kicking against the pricks." And not only has he succeeded in getting gifted living artists like Anne Bachelier, Eileen Fields, and Michael Parkes at least some degree of the recognition they so rightfully deserve; he has also been the most effective posthumous champion of those twin surrealist terrors, Salvador Dali and Leonor Fini.

In the case of Dali, Zukerman has won the trust of prominent collectors worldwide by scrupulously insisting that all of his original prints are signed in pencil by the master's own hand and accompanied by letters of authentication from their publishers. As for Fini, with whom he became close friends in her later years, he has not only amassed a vast personal collection of her works, but has presented several major exhibitions of this preeminent woman surrealist, recently the subject of Peter Webb's major biography, "Sphinx: The Life and Art of Leonor Fini."

Given how reluctant Zukerman is to part with anything by Fini, whom he particularly values for her unique combination of superb draftspersonship and unfettered imagination, it should surprise no one who knows him that none of her works are included in CFM Gallery's upcoming exhibition and auction "Out of the Archives II." However, this auction—only the second Zukerman has held in his entire career as an art dealer—does include an intriguing related item: "Leonor Fini," a Bruegel-like drawing of the artist, apparently surrounded by fawning acolytes, by Stanislao Lepri, with whom Fini one time lived in a ménage à trois with Constanine Jelenski. (Estimated value: $8,750 — starting bid $3,500)

When Jeannie and I visited him in his cozy Hobbit-hole of a book-lined office, the perennially black-clad gallerist ("It eliminates wasting time trying to decide what to wear every morning") told us that the auction will be broken down in four categories: (1) Selected original pencil-signed woodblock prints from Dali's "Divine Comedy"; (2) Selected original signed lithographs by several artists for "Variations sur l'Amour"; (3) Selected original prints from "L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean," the great French art publisher, Joseph Foret's legendary "most expensive book in the world" (a copy of which Zukerman recently donated to the planned Leonor Fini museum, in Paris); (4) Selected original prints, drawings, and paintings by various artists acquired over the years.

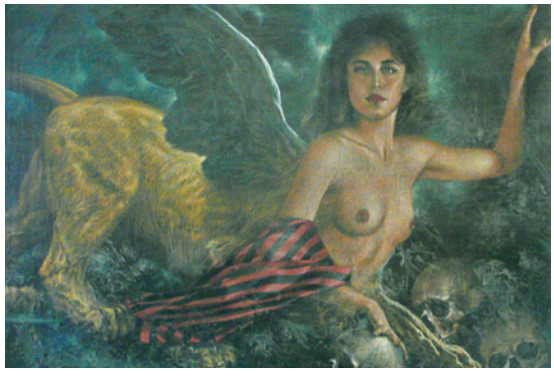
Although Zukerman had not as yet made all of his final selections at the time of our visit, sufficient examples were available to give one a fair idea of the auction's scope and depth.

The woodblock prints for "The Divine Comedy" that Dali based on a series of watercolors for Dante's epic poem (the production of which the artist personally supervised, giving final approval for each print before the blocks were destroyed) were among our favorites. In a bold, flowing style and luminous colors retaining the freshness of the watercolor medium, Dali gives us his inimitable interpretation of "Purgatory," "Paradise," and the "Inferno," each a fantastic visual counterpart to the poet's literary wit. In his "Purgatory," (obviously the agonizing way station on which the waiting room of the Motor Vehicle Bureau was modeled), hollow-eyed souls clutch each other as they await judgment, or plead their case to a towering, white-gowned magisterial being brandishing a gnarled staff. In his "Paradise," the angelic ones strike bodacious diva-like poses with flowing robes and scarves amid shafts of light and clouds that billow like stage-smoke. Or else they prance, preening in their new wings like rainbow-colored peacocks on stilts. Characteristically, Dali allows them to retain their human vanity even in Heaven!

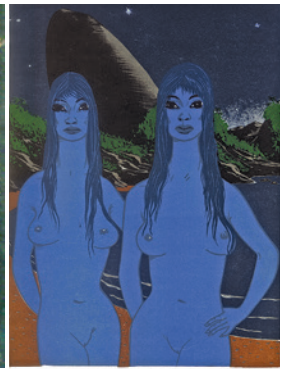
One "Inferno" image, "A Devil Logician," is truly harrowing, depicting a pair of the huddled damned hurrying past a gigantic monolithic monster with a

Dietrich Schuchardt

Salvador Dali



Walter Girotto



Félix Labisse

CFM Gallery, 236 West 27th St., 4th Fl.
Auction dates: September 15–October 15
Clicking on images on CFM website (www.cfmgallery.com) brings up an eBay page for bidding on all works in auction. Bids can also be placed directly through the gallery. Selected works will be on display at CFM and all pieces are available for viewing during business hours.

the Wealth of a Collector/Gallerist's Exquisite Taste

detached erect penis and scrotum thrust into a vaginal opening in the center of its head and a pair of human legs hanging, like an enormous tongue, from its gaping maw. (Estimated value: $2,400 — starting bid $900.)

Among the signed original lithographs from "Variations sur l'Amour," that other great Livre d'Artiste celebrating the many faces of love, we were especially taken with "Les Miracles," a brilliantly colorful image by the wonderfully quirky self-taught surrealist Félix Labisse, depicting two willowy but full-breasted bright blue female nudes with deadpan expressions, posed frontally against a background of nocturnal hills and crashing surf.

elegantly hand-scripted text, its harmonious marriage of drawing and calligraphy comparable in its own way to Asian scroll painting and the illuminated poem manuscripts of William Blake. This seems an especially auspicious signature piece for the doubly gifted Cocteau who did much of his writing in his sketch books. (Estimated value: $4,500 — starting bid $900)

Although Zukerman tends to prefer more adamantly figurative artists, it is not difficult to see why he made an exception in the case of André Masson and Ossip Zadkine, both of whom retain an element of allusiveness in even their most abstract compositions. And further proof of his catholic taste within the very definite

Fini by Stanislao Lepri

Massimo Rao

Pierre-Yves Trémois

Alex Gardega

André Masson

Lucien Coutaud

(Estimated value: $1,200 — starting bid $350)

The esteemed surrealist printmaker Lucien Coutaud, who once stated that "Nothing looks more like a pair of buttocks than an apricot," also caught our eye with a piece called "Quatre Mille Nuits." For here, Coutaud seems to prove his point explicitly with an image of an actual tree bearing sensual fruit and sprouting from the ripe nude torso of a quite literally "topless" woman who appears to be walking on water. (Estimated value: $1,2,00 — starting bid $350)

Another personal favorite was "L'Aveugle le Plus Que Vêtue," a characteristically refined image in white line on a brown ground of an idealized couple embracing, by Pierre-Yves Trémois, a French sculptor and graphic artist known for his lyrical eroticism. (Estimated value: $1,200 — starting bid $350)

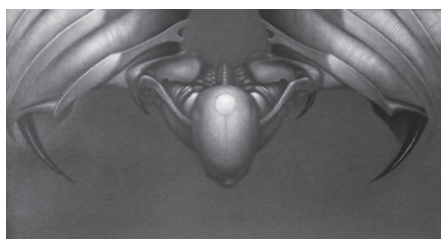
In terms of its sheer linear elegance, we were also mightily impressed by Jean Cocteau's remarqued etching for "L'Apocalypse," featuring a fanciful Picassoid facial profile juxtaposed with an

perimeters that he has established as both a collector and a gallerist, can be seen in the final, miscellaneous category of the auction. For here, the choices include oils, drawings, and original graphics ranging from latter-day Surrealists like Steve Cieslawski, Mark Davet, Michel Henricot, and Dietrich Schuchardt; to Neo-Symbolists like the late Massimo Rao, Walter Girotto, Gerard Di-Maccio, Mersad Berber, and Lorraine Vail; to Neo-Classisists such as Alex Gardega and Jurgen Gôrg; to the unique Art Deco descendant Jean-François Ibos, as well as blue-chip masters such as Giorgio de Chirico, Franz von Stuck and Ernst Fuchs, among others.

Neil Zukerman has always maintained that he would never sell a work of art that he himself would not wish to own. And anyone who has ever sat with him in his office as he showed and extolled the works for an upcoming exhibition — and actually seen him, on more than one occasion, make a split-second decision to purchase a piece for his own collection — can attest to a passion that goes far beyond the bottom line. This auction of some of his most prized acquisitions over the years attests to a level of connoisseurship that has become increasingly rare in today's art world.

— Ed McCormack

Jean Cocteau



Michel Henricot

Sampling the Wonders of a Lively Salon Show

Broadway Mall Community Center, 96th Street and Broadway, Center Island

By its very nature a kind of sampler, the West Sid Arts Coalition's recent "Salon Show," curated by Linda Lessner and Carolyn Reus offered a plethora of unrelated pleasures.

Among them were "Fauna," an etching by Robert Scott in which sinuous linear swirls suggested a variety of organic metaphors, such as leaves morphing into birds, sans specific imagery. Instead Scott's rhythmic, gracefully organized composition left much to the viewer's imagination, à la abstract surrealism of André Masson.

David Ruskin, one of very few photographers who still hand-colors his pictures, gave us his own unique take on The Gates installation in Central Park. Filtering Christo and Jeanne-Claude's conceptual rigor through his own misty lens, Ruskin made the shadowy figures traversing the rows of billowing cloth evoke spiritual pilgrimages and Tibetan prayer flags.

Anthony Kirov's mixed media paintings conjure up fanciful realms where lovers embrace in a park or an idling flute player dressed like a jester plays a flute beside a lake, as if serenading a woman in a distant boat. Kirov's idyllic scenes are enhanced by his meticulously stylized technique and the vibrant ribbons of color that envelope his buoyant compositions.

Abstract color construction takes on chromatic lusciousness in the acrylic paintings of Joseph Boss. The titles of his "Chaotic Elements" and "A Run in the Fields" underline the sense of freedom that his exuberant compositions project. Yet there's nothing "chaotic" about the arrangement of Boss's patches of muted pinks, tans, and crimsons which are anchored by a underlying grid.

Although Herb Fogelson is a photographer, his atmospheric black and white photos and digital color prints have a painterly quality akin to the landscapes of the American nature mystic Albert Pinkham Ryder. In Fogelson's "Ulster County Mountainside" dark shadows on a verdant slope, evoke an eternal sense of pastoral mystery.

Myna Harrison-Changar's digital print "Fingerplay 2010" is a vision of perceptual sleight of hand, if one may be indulged in a bad pun. For what appears at first glance to be an embryo in a glass jar — one of those grotesque specimens in a sleazy old fashioned country carnival from which one wants to look away!— morphs mercifully on closer viewing into a close-up up of a hand gripping a tumbler of whisky on which Harrison-Changar has worked art's peculiar magic.

The acrylic and foamcore reliefs of Carole Barlowe are literal slices of life that tell deadpan stories with a formal austerity akin to Alex Katz's early cutout pieces. In "The Mentor," three apparent acolytes gather around a seated man who seems the center of attention, the axis on which they orbit, even when they look away casually.

Robin Goodstein's oil on canvas "Pythagorean Theorem" translates one of the earliest mathematical theories of triangulation known to ancient civilization and a source of philosophical inspiration for both Plato and Aristotle into a dynamic abstract composition. Linking Euclidean geometry to contemporary aesthetics, Goodstein sets variously colored form afloat around the periphery of a vibrantly pulsing red field.

Fervent paternal feeling is evoked in Nate Ladson's accomplished realist oil "A Father's Love." That it happens to be a man of color who hugs the child to his breast suggests the even more urgent sense of protectiveness that some fathers must feel toward their offspring, in a world where racism is still so prevalent, even while Ladson renders the scene poignantly universal. Photographer Carolyn Reus, on the other hand, makes a more lighthearted statement on the origins of maternal love without descending to the saccharine in her delightful digital color print of a little girl hugging a puppy. Reus also celebrates friendship on its most humble level in her print of two other canines convening on a tiled floor, suggesting the simple joys that domestic animal companions can bestow on us all.

Carson Ferri-Grant is an artist with a rare ability to conjure up a certain monumentality with unexpected materials, judging from his installation of small, connected color pencil sketches of floral forms on sheets of paper that appear to cascade irregularly down the gallery wall. Although the "Happy Birthday and Farewell Cornwall" could suggest a possible bucolic allusion, the real appeal of the installation is its synthesis of sculptural and ethereal elements.

Jason LaFerrera makes a statement with unusual materials in "Virginia Red Fox," an animal outline created, in the manner of a mosaic, with fragments of a map. The latter elements suggest the barbaric chase over the countryside to which these small creatures are subjected in a state where they are still ceremoniously hunted down for sport by a pack of dogs leading a posse of humans on horseback.

Madi Lanier continues to successfully build on the aesthetic of Cezanne and the Cubists for the postmodern age in watercolors where translucent areas of blue, green, and brown enliven a strong linear armature. In "Woods by the Lake," as in many of Lanier's works, the interplay of line and color produces an engaging formal effect on the picture plane, even while convincingly evoking foliage, chiaroscuro, and natural vitality.

Marianne V. McNamara has long been one of our most accomplished urban maximalists, using pen and ink to skillfully delineate the life of the city. Here, McNamara outdid herself in "Little Houses," her detailed, brick by brick depiction of a wide variety of building facades, windows, fire-escapes, and storefronts forming an abstract grid.

Emily Rich can employ loose washes with a wet-in-to-wet boldness and fluidity that recalls Emil Nolde, as she demonstrated in her vibrant composition "Wild Flowers." But she can also delineate landscape in a more muscularly tactile manner, as seen in the rugged vigor of her oil "Maine Coast."

In two acrylic paintings simply titled "Abstract" Jutta Filippelli showed a mastery of form, gesture, and color that has always been evident, if not quite as pronounced, in her more figurative mode. Here, one saw a different aspect of her artistic sensibility, particularly in one composition where the pièce de resistance was Filippelli's handling of the interaction between areas of rusty yellow and brick red with sinuous linear elements.

Ron Caldwell's two mixed media works, sharing the title "Sentence," were composed of vertical strips of painted wood of different lengths assembled to form compositions suggesting horizontal totems. From a distance one could take in their overall qualities, while up close they yielded a fascinating array of colorful abstract and figurative imagery.

Frequent exhibitor Margo Mead has lately been exploring elegantly mysterious figurative compositions, in which classically formed male and female nudes interact gracefully within blue expanses suggesting nocturnal skies. In Mead's "Survival Earth Dance" two such figures, drawn with Matissean simplicity in white oil crayon, make an ecological plea.

Painter/poet Anne Rudder also argues for the conservation of our natural resources, in her mixed media painting "Denatured Acts," an adamant protest against water pollution in words and images. Rudder's raw hybrid works call to mind the prophetic voice of the late Allen Ginsberg — especially in such juxtapositions of the lyrical and the funky, as "Fragrant Green Mountains / "Hydrofxxxking to the shale-poisoned deep waters."

One never tires of Marlene Zimmerman's upbeat post-Pop take on girlish glamour, as seen in her "NY Hats III," where a trio of pretty fashion victims lights up an urban corner. Ditto for "The Gothic Bridge"

Continued on pg. 23

Excavating the Allusiveness of Richard Bailey's Abstractions

Long gone is that time when abstract painting was such an embattled faith that its exponents and advocates had to adamantly deny that the work they espoused bore even the slightest relationship to outer reality. Mercifully, the postmodern era has ushered in a less doctrinaire attitude which has brought about a broadening of possibilities for abstraction. At the same time, there is still a widespread belief, as formalist guru Clement Greenberg once put it, that "formalized art, the kind that most people agree to call art, offers greater satisfactions by and large than any other kind of esthetic experience."

"Rocks in Motion"

The paintings of the Nevada-based artist Richard Bailey, seen a while back at New Art Center in New York, satisfy on both counts. There is no denying that the palpable substance of pigment alone can offer great delight when it is handled with the *tachiste* panache displayed by Bailey, who appears to pile paint onto his compositions with just the right balance between abandon and control. The initial impression that his compositions give is of being created with molten lava mixed with various colors of Play Dough. Their main gestural force is generated with broad, thickly encrusted horizontal freehand strokes that create irregular stripes spanning the entire width of the painting area. Usually a single color — a muted reddish orange, green, or blue hue frosted and variegated with white — is applied in rough, juicy layers with gestures that overlap, fluctuate and waver as though responding to the artist's nerve impulses. Sometimes they shoot upward, forming pointed peaks like gothic spires or upside-down stalagmites. Although it might be possible to create such shapes by dripping paint in rivulets and then reversing their direction by turning the canvas upside-down, the thickness of the pigment would seem to preclude such a strategy, lending a sense of technical mystery to these ruggedly executed works. Titles such as "Motion in the Ocean" and "Cracks in the Earth" enhance the engaging allusiveness underlying Bailey's compositions.

In a conversation that I once had with him in his studio in East Hampton, Willem de Kooning remarked, "In a sense, all abstract painting springs from landscape anyway." One might debate the generality of that opinion, and had he lived to see them, Greenberg might have extolled Bailey's paintings solely for their "purity" and "thingness," while ignoring the implications of their horizontal bias. However, Bailey, who says that his paintings have been influenced by his experience as a pilot seems to bear out de Kooning's point in his artist statement: "Depicting imaginary landscapes with colors, texture, and movement gives me pause to reflect on youthful exploring. Treading on cross-bedded sandstone formed from ancient dunes that were uplifted in tumultuous action, eroded and exposed, the geological formations often studied from altitude while on autopilot ... I apply paint in horizontal patterns, reflecting the formation of sedimentary rock; then cause the vertical lifting, 'defying gravity'..."

Richard Bailey,
New Art Center, 580 8th Avenue
www.newartcenter.net

Like that of the late, greatly underrated American painter Jon Schueler who, in the 1950s, found inspiration for his abstract expressionist impulse in the cloud formations above the seacoast of Scotland, Richard Bailey's natural subject matter is covert. Yet it informs his every stroke, lending heft and depth to his ostensibly nonobjective aesthetic.— Maurice Taplinger

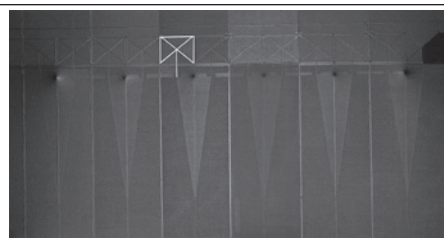
Ivanrod: Beyond Minimalism

Born in Bogota, Columbia, Ivan Rodriguez Saboya, who is known as a painter by the mononym of Ivanrod, demonstrates auspiciously John Powson's excellent definition of minimalism: "the perfection that an artifact achieves when it is no longer possible to improve it by subtraction." Yet, at the same time, Ivanrod inscribes some of his ostensibly minimalist compositions with mysterious linear elements and subtle, shadowy phantom forms, only visible up close, that add what can only be called a metaphysical dimension to his work. Certainly, his work goes far beyond the minimalist credo, often attributed to Frank Stella, that "what you see is all there is."

Trained as an architect, a profession he practiced primarily from 1984 to 1996 (when his main emphasis switched to his former avocation, painting), his work shows the discipline that he acquired in that training and practice. Working in acrylic or mixed media on canvas panels or layered wood, Ivanrod creates largely geometric compositions endowed with a stately presence. A great many of his works are created via the superimposition of layers of a single color to which he adds the aforementioned shadows and lines, while subtly altering the two-dimensional bias of the traditional picture plane by applying screws and nuts to the back of the painting support. Whether working with white alone, as in one of his painted wood assemblages simply titled "White" (where rectangles and strips of wood achieve an austere beauty reminiscent of Mondrian sans the color), or employing a brilliant red field as the basis for subtle auras that appear to emanate from a central axis in a work entitled "Rojo I," Ivanrod invariably engages the thoughtful viewer in an almost zen-like visual dialogue.

In the latter work, the sense of limitless space is enhanced by the perfectly square dimensions of the canvas. Just as germane to the overall power of the painting, however, is its inner imagery, which challenges the semiotician in one with what appear to be signs and symbols that elude easy interpretation. In the work titled "Black Negro," for example, a mysterious half-moon shape within a circle emerges from what appears from a distance to be a dark void, much in the manner of the shadowy geometry in the black paintings of Ad Reinhardt. But while Reinhardt may have made an unreasonable demand on the uninitiated viewer with works that, as one writer put it, "moved toward such a degree of simplicity that it appears almost

Ivanrod, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, September 10 – October 1, Reception: Thurs. Sept. 16, 6 – 8 pm



"Untitled 20"

nonexistent," Ivanrod's imagery, while subtle, is singularly engaging, seeming pregnant with elusive meanings.

In "Untitled 20," another mostly monochromatic mixed media work in tones of black and gray, a row of elongated triangles, arranged within rectangular divisions, create a sense of exquisite symmetry. But this viewer was drawn to a small white linear shape near the top of the composition. Logo-like in its simplicity, to him it resembled the collar of a white dress shirt, and became in his own mind a symbol of corporate conformity, perhaps here superimposed somewhat sinisterly over the esoteric geometry of an ancient culture whose magic was about to be co-opted for commercial purposes.

That this interpretation is subjective, and that every viewer would obviously have a different take on "Untitled 20," is part of what, along with their purely formal attributes, makes the paintings of Ivanrod so fascinating. — Maurice Taplinger

Why Robert Gober's Charles Burchfield Retrospective at the Whitney Matters so Much

by Ed McCormack

"Americans like in their artists a touch of the hermit crab, of the ascetic," wrote John Updike, in his collection of art essays Just Looking. "Homer and Hopper had it, and Eakins and Pollock."

He could easily have added to that list the name of Charles Burchfield, who was born in Ohio, spent most of his adult life in a small town in upstate New York, and once said, "I like to think of myself — as an artist — as being in a nondescript swamp, up to my knees in mire, painting the vital beauty I see there, in my own way, not caring a damn about tradition, or anyone's opinion."

For decades critical opinion has pretty much repaid his indifference toward it in kind. But now, "Heat Waves in a Swamp: The Paintings of Charles Burchfield," a major retrospective at the Whitney, makes a noble effort to fish this particular hermit crab out of the murky backwaters of 1930s American Scene painting, alternately known by the self-limiting synonym Regionalism, and reposition him as a rare native species of avant gardist.

That the exhibition was curated by Robert Gober, a trendy contemporary sculptor given to homoerotic themes, whose best known works are lifelike wax-museum legs sprouting real human hair and protruding from walls, seems just the kind of endorsement that Burchfield needed to convince the hip set that he is something more than a provincial crank.

"It's surprising how many really smart people in the art world don't know his work at all," Gober told *The New York Times*. In the introduction to the exhibition catalog, the curator admits, "But even if I made a mental list of influences, and at times I do, curious to see what I'm thinking, I have never heard the name Charles Burchfield come from my brain."

This is hardly surprising, given the vast distance between the approaches, styles, and concerns of the two artists. However, Gober and his partner Don own drawings by Burchfield that caught the eye of Ann Philbin, director of the Hammer Museum, in Los Angeles, when she came to dinner in their home.

Philbin, who had organized an earlier Burchfield exhibition in 1993 when she was the director of the Drawing Center in New York, told Gober that she thought Burchfield was "enormously underappreciated and insufficiently known, especially by younger artists who have been influenced by his work and barely know it."

"I sat with this over the weekend," Gober recalls, "and on Monday I took a chance and pitched the idea of a show to Annie. A show that she had basically framed."

At the Whitney's press preview for the exhibition, which had traveled from the Hammer Museum where it originated, Gober, a tall, bearded man with a wry sense of humor, confessed that had a different curator visited he could just as easily have proposed an exhibition of works by Rosa Bonheur, a nineteenth-century French animalier, one of whose drawings he had recently purchased. Bonheur, who was spectacularly successful for her animal subjects in her time, lived in a castle and — shades of Michael Jackson! — owned her own private zoo. A lesbian, she always wore male attire, having obtained permission from the prefect of police, at a time when cross-dressing was still illegal in France, by claiming that "wearing the clothing of my own sex is a constant bother" and interfered with her work.

"Bonheur was a fascinating character and would also have made for a great exhibition," Gober told the guests at the press preview.

"We'll schedule it for next year," the Whitney's director Adam D. Weinberg, who resembles the young Groucho Marx, quipped from the sidelines.

* * *

In the case of Burchfield, at least, Gober has done a splendid job of, as he puts it, "investigating another artist's life and presenting his story." Along with more than one hundred watercolors, drawings, and the handful of oils, he has included selections from the copious journals that the artist kept for most of his life,

Pyramid of Fire (Pyramid of Flame), ***1929. Watercolor on paper, 241/2 x 327/8 in. (61 x 81.3 cm). The Charles Rand Penney Collection of Works by Charles E. Burchfield at the Burchfield Penney Art Center, Buffalo State College, 1994.***

as well as his sketches, doodles, and correspondence. He also devotes an entire gallery to the original crayon and graphite drawings for the private alphabet of signs and symbols that Burchfield called "Conventions for Abstract Thoughts," which he devised and included in his compositions to represent "Fear," "Insanity," "Morbidness," "Fascination of Evil," "The Fear of Loneliness," "Mute Sorrow," "Aimless Brooding," and any number of other very subtle and specific emotional states.

Although not immediately decipherable to the uninitiated viewer, these pictographic shapes — some alluding to feelings harking back to his father's early death, which left the family destitute, and other childhood traumas — add further to the work once one is made aware of them. They are especially evocative in the haunting, darkly monochromatic composition "Church Bells Ringing, Rainy Winter Night, 1917," of which Burchfield wrote, poetically (if not quite as coherently as one might wish): "It was an attempt to express a childhood emotion — a rainy winter night—the church bell ringing . . . the roofs of the houses dripping with rain . . . the child attempts to be comforted by the thoughts of candle lights and Christmas trees, but the fear of the black, rainy night is overpowering."

In an excellent catalogue essay for the present exhibition, Nancy Weekly, head of collections at the

Burchfield Penney Art Center in Buffalo, New York, analyzes the same picture, noting how the artist "used his newly developed symbolic pictographs to illustrate not only his childhood fears but also his adult distaste for religious zealotry, provoked by a Presbyterian Sunday School teacher, his evangelical grandfather, and the example of his late, unreligious father."

Calling attention with capital letters and italics to the artist's own terms from the "Conventions" within her text, she points out, "The steeple is a monstrous bird with vacant eyes of Imbecility and raised eyebrows of Aimless Abstraction (Hypnotic Intensity). The bell tower's puffed-out white breast swirls with black and blue Fear-provoking peals, a shadow of Morbidness (Evil) inside its belfry. Fear floats at the pinnacle instead of a cross. Black rain bleeds thickly from the clouds, which are gigantic hooking swirls of Fear radiating terrifying sound waves. "

Numerous other writers over the years have noted the mask-like quality of Burchfield's ramshackle Victorian facades and the manner in which he anthropomorphizes trees and other elements of nature as well. It seems likely enough that these elements of his work could have inspired the animators of Walt Disney's more ambitious feature films such as "Fantasia," as well as some of the schlockier manifestations of 1960s psychedelia. (In citing its "hallucinatory quality" in a brief talk about Burchfield's work, before introducing Gober at the press preview, Whitney director Adam D. Weinberg even let word "psychedelic" escape his lips, before hastening to add, "although in his case, I'm sure no drugs were involved!")

Charles Burchfield,
Whitney Museum of American Art,
945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street,
through October 17, 2010

Sad to say, another blow against Burchfield's proper placement in the modernist canon may be that such widely popularized commercial appropriations of his expressive iconography have influenced some tastemakers to dismiss their original creator as a master of nothing more than kitsch.

* * *

Having never much cared for Robert Gober's sculptures of disembodied limbs and oddly configured porcelain sinks that appear as if designed for grotesque medical procedures, I did not expect to find him so personally likable, nor his take on Burchfield's work so generous. Indeed, Gober's good nature and sympathy for a sensibility so different from his own permeates the show, which he approaches with a fellow artist's sense of curiosity and wonderment rather than the all knowing attitude of an art historian. Nor does he hesitate to take a creative license that no professional curator would dare.

The Song of the Katydids on an August Morning, ***1917. Watercolor, gouache, graphite, colored chalks, and pastel on off-white wove paper, 18 x 21 3/4 in. (45.1 x 55.2 cm). Karen and Kevin Kennedy Collection.***

One of his more intrepid touches was to cover an entire gallery at the Whitney (as he had done at the Hammer Museum) with wallpaper that Burchfield designed for M.H. Birge & Sons, a company in Buffalo, New York, where he worked from 1921 to 1929 to support his wife, Bertha, and their five children, and use it as a backdrop for some of the American Scene paintings with which the artist first achieved popular success in the 1930s.

Especially resonant in this context is "Pyramid of Fire (Pyramid of Flame)," a 1929 watercolor of fire fighters spraying their hoses into a burning house, which achieves a surreal dissonance, set against the cozy domestic design of the sunflower wallpaper. Here, Gober actually elevates one of Burchfield's more banal and illustrative pictures with a touch of contemporary irony. However, he also risks upstaging and even trivializing the earlier artist's work by hanging an original watercolor rendering for the same wallpaper pattern on top of the actual product — a juxtaposition that could seem cruelly close to home, since sunflowers are also a frequent motif of Burchfield's paintings. Indeed, the entire installation could have come off as fecklessly gaudy as Warhol's cow-head wallpaper, if not for Gober's inclusion of some pencil sketches of the trucks and loading docks at the wallpaper factory that Burchfield made from his office window on his lunch hour.

Poignantly reminiscent of grim views we've all seen of fences and guard towers by inmates of prison camps, these wistful sketches turn the installation into an eloquently layered piece of storytelling.

* * *

The success that Burchfield achieved remarkably soon after Bertha, worried that what he called "hack work" might be taking a toll on her husband's health, convinced him to concentrate on painting, became another kind of prison. In 1930, a year after he resigned from his job at the wallpaper factory and his American Scene paintings had started selling briskly at the Frank Rehn Gallery in Manhattan, Burchfield had the singular distinction of becoming the first contemporary American artist to be honored with a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, which was then one year old and had previously shown only established European masters, such as Cezanne, Gauguin, and van Gogh.

Yet the name Charles Burchfield does not appear — even in the index— of Abraham A. Davidson's definitive history, "Early American Modernist Painting 1910-19." Why? Well, the title of the MoMA show says it all: "Charles Burchfield: Early Watercolors, 1916 to 1918." The retrospective slant of the show can only have seemed a backhanded slap at the artist's recent watercolors by the museum's founding director Alfred H. Barr. Tellingly,

Burchfield sent Barr a thank you note for sending him the catalogue but didn't venture the short trip downstate from Buffalo to attend the opening reception or see the show. Perhaps it would have been too disheartening to compare the relatively muddy, finicky realism of his newer Regionalist landscapes to what he lauded in one of his journal entries as "The courage to see nature with the great graphic shorthand of youth."

* * *

Over half the works from the show at MoMA (with comparable ones from the same period substituted for those that could not be located or borrowed) are included at the Whitney in a gallery labeled "A Golden Year?" The phrase was Burchfield's own nostalgic tribute to 1917, his most prolific year, and the question-mark is unnecessary: That was the year he painted "The Song of Katydids on an August Morning" and "The Insect Chorus," two works in which he not only created innovative semi abstract compositions from the confluence of botanical and architectural forms found in the suburbs, but devised visual signals for the sounds made by grasshoppers and crickets. These and another experiment in synesthesia, "The Night Wind," with its ghostly vowel-shaped forms, predate Arthur Dove's famous "Fog Horns" by more than a decade. Indeed, Burchfield's best work has always seemed closer in spirit to the freewheeling nature mysticism of Dove than to the more conservative storytelling of Edward Hopper, with whom he formed a mutual admiration society possibly, prompted by their both feeling miscast as American Scene painters. Surely such early watercolors by Burchfield as "The East Wind" and "Rainy Night," with their small dwellings melting polymorphously into the elements, veer more toward the abstract than the picturesque.

* * *

The journalist Jimmy Breslin once wittily explained the decline of the Irish literary tradition by claiming that, "like most writers today, they have a block caused by a loaf of bread stuck in the brain." In another way, a similar condition apparently afflicted Burchfield. No doubt grateful to be supporting his large family through the sale of his paintings, while contemporaries with more bohemian lifestyles — most notably Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin and Georgia O'Keeffe — were staying the modernist course and storing up historical prestige, Burchfield sailed through the Depression era as one of the country's most popular American Scene painters. As Bertha faithfully pasted newspaper and magazine clippings into voluminous scrapbooks, he gave interviews to Time and Life, executed industrial illustrations on commission for Fortune, and dutifully inserted a stiffly detailed rendering of a whisky bottle and two glasses on a terrace table into the foreground of an anemic pastoral panorama in an ad for Johnny Walker Black Label.

* * *

Although many of Burchfield's unconditional champions would doubtless disagree, to me most of Burchfield's American Scene paintings were barely distinguishable from the illustrations he did for Fortune magazine of the railroads in Pennsylvania, the sulfur mines in Texas, and the coal mines in Virginia. At their worst, as in "End of Day," his 1938 picture of a line of workers traversing a slushy hill on a street of shabby row-houses, they have the grimy atmosphere of WPA post office murals. At their best, as in "Winter Twilight," 1930, one of his few attempts at oil painting, and "The Builders," 1931, they look like second-rate Edward Hopper.

By the time he had perpetrated the worst of them, "End of Day," and the abysmally dreary "Old House by the Creek," from the same year, he was already complaining that he had "abandoned creativeness," yet calling it "libel" when critics referred to his work as American Scene or Regionalist painting. But soon, with the country in the middle of the war and the art market at a standstill, even those despised terms had lost their dubious value.

"Since no pictures of any kind are being bought, I might as well paint entirely for myself," Burchfield wrote in his journal in 1943. "This is what an artist ought to do under any circumstances, but it is not as easy as it sounds."

Determined now to regain the bold vitality and "courage" of his youth, it was to his early watercolors that he turned for inspiration. For an artist of such deeply intuitive gifts, the solution at which he finally arrived was curiously systematic: pasting additional sheets of paper onto the large number of pictures left over from the orgy of inspired prolificness that was his "golden year" (and perhaps the year or two immediately preceding and following it) to extend their compositions and create new works on grander scale with a decidedly visionary quality.

I had hoped to resist using the "v" word here, tainted as it has become in recent years by its association with so-called "outsider" art and all the unschooled compulsiveness (and even madness) for which the French designation "art brut," whose meaning carries so easily into English, once so serviceably sufficed. But

Sun and Rocks, ***1918–50. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 40 x 56 in. (101.6 x 142.2 cm). Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. Room of Contemporary Art Fund, 1953.***

Two Ravines, ***1934–43. Watercolor on paper, 361/2 x 611/8 in. (92.7 x 155.3 cm). Hunter Museum of American Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee. Gift of the Benwood Foundation.***

The Insect Chorus, ***1917. Opaque and transparent watercolor with ink, graphite, and crayon on off-white paper, 20 x 157/8 in. (50.8 x 38.1 cm). Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Museum of Art, Utica, New York. Edward W. Root Bequest, 1957.***

End of the Day, ***1938. Watercolor on paper, 381/4 x 581/4 in. (97.1 x 148 cm). The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Joseph E. Temple Fund, 1940.***

for Burchfield, as for William Blake (only mercifully, in the former's case, devoid of the flightier qualities that always tempted Nabokov to drop the "s" in cosmic), no other word will really do. Spiritual is another word one would have preferred to steer clear of in relation to Burchfield, since it has been similarly degraded by its many mindlessly promiscuous New Age applications.

Yet to avoid that word — or at least its original meaning — would be to leave unstated that the large composite watercolors in which Burchfield persevered, despite a variety of late-life illnesses, right up his death in 1967, gloriously illuminate divine qualities in nature much in the manner of Ralph Waldo Emerson. For in these final works the artist appears to concur with Emerson's claim that "the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul," and he evolves a rhapsodic visual language to convey the cycles of creation to which the great Transcendentalist poet, essayist, and philosopher alludes in the lines, "A subtle chain of subtle countless rings / The next unto the farthest brings; / The eye reads omens where it goes, / And speaks all languages the rose; / And, striving to be man, the worm / Mounts through all the spires of form."

If one were to make a conceit of the artist's own mineral metaphor, the last two and a half decades of his life — during which he painted (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say completed) the mature works that most of us who have long admired him would probably agree are his masterpieces — might be called his Platinum Period. For it was in 1946 that Burchfield gave us "The Sphinx and the Milky Way," arguably the most hauntingly beautiful nocturnal scene since van Gogh's "The Starry Night." Yet Burchfield's scenes set in daylight are equally transcendent: In the 1950 composition "Glory of Spring (Radiant Spring)," the spiky stumps of dead trees in a charred forest are resurrect by sunlight, which halos them like yellow flames engulfing the gothic spires of Blake's "black'ning church." In "Autumnal Fantasy" 1916-1944" (of which the artist wrote in a letter to his art dealer, "I had been struggling in a new painting to visualize the cry of a nuthatch and have the cry resound thru the autumnal woods"), the gray trees form arched echo chambers, resembling the stone portals of a cathedral, through which the boomerang-shaped notes of birdsong reverberate like early evening madrigals.

Like any late starter — which he truly was after the long muddy miasma of his middle period, when he would seem to have put his highest aesthetic ambitions on hold to follow literally the frugal, bitter Yankee wisdom of Frost's poem "Provide, Provide" — Burchfield could occasionally be overreaching. "The Four Seasons," dated 1951-59, is a tricky, patly stylized pastiche so Disneyfied and psychedelically vulgarized as to suggest that the artist has descended to emulating his own imitators.

Yet all is redeemed in the airy glory of "Dandelion Seed Heads and the Moon," completed just a year before the artist's death. Although begun in 1961 and completed in 1965, this great watercolor, with its shadowy windblown trees and pair of angelic-looking dragonflies suspended in beams streaming from a silvery moon above the clustered white puffs, is possessed of an incomparably ethereal freshness, suggesting the career-crowning achievement of an artist who has learned to call upon the hard-won technical finesse of a lifetime to render a fleeting moment immutable.

"Looking at this painting," Robert Gober said that morning, as he led us up to "Dandelion Seed Heads and the Moon" in the final gallery of the show at the Whitney, "I always imagine this 70 year old guy lying down in the dark in his garden at night, looking up at the moon through dandelion seed heads. And it makes me think that would be a pretty good way to go!"

Not to break the spell, but because I was curious to know what he thought, I collared Gober, as soon as I could get through the crowd around him when the press preview broke up, and led him over to another large painting called "Night of the Equinox." Pointing out the odd, flame-like shapes sticking up like the proverbial sore thumbs from some of the rain-drenched shacks, I asked him if he agreed with me that this was one of the few works in the exhibition where Burchfield failed to integrate the "Conventions" into the composition harmoniously.

"You're right," said the curator of the exhibition, chuckling. "I have no idea what they are!"

Then Gober walked me over to another work called "Gateway to September,"and pointed out the "the angular geometric shapes within the big insect tree" that he found just as jarringly incongruous, amid the more logically organic forms in the bucolic scene.

"But he was reaching," he said forgivingly, "He was taking chances in order to go beyond what he had done before. So you have to give him credit for that. After all, he achieved one of the rarest things for any artist: great art in old age."

And now it was my turn to agree with him.

—— Ed McCormack

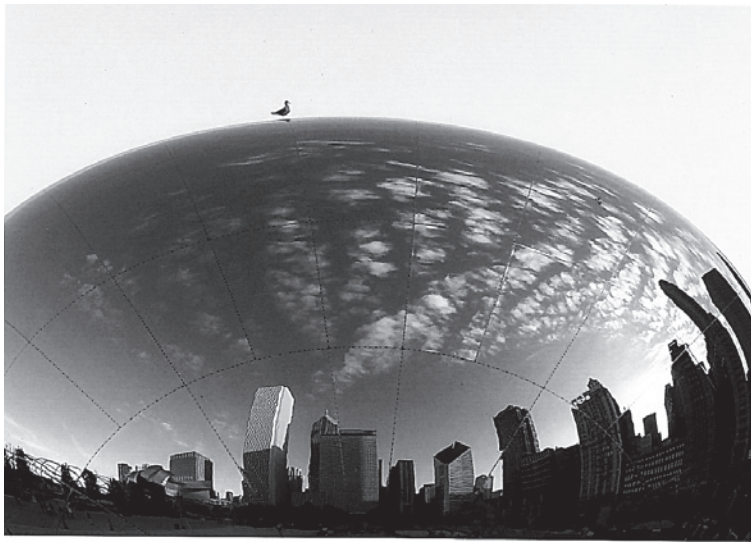
Dawn of Spring, ***ca. 1960s. Watercolor, charcoal, and white chalk on joined paper mounted on board, 52 x 591/2 in. (132.1 x 135.3 cm). DC Moore Gallery, New York.***

Glory of Spring (Radiant Spring), ***1950. Watercolor on paper, 401/8 x 293/4 in. (101.6 x 73.7 cm). Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Corning Clark, 1959.***

An April Mood, 1946–55. Watercolor and charcoal on joined paper, 40 x 54 in. (101.6 x 137.2 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art. Purchase, with partial funds from Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence A. Fleischman.

Nam Chun Cho and Kwija Lee Cho: A Harmonious Marriage of Lyrical Visions

Although Nam Chun Cho explores the new possibilities of the digital photographic print, and his wife, Kwija Lee Cho, works in the time-honored medium of oils on canvas, and both have their own unique approaches to subject matter, what they do share in common is an upbeat vision and an ability to endow simple everyday things with nobility. Seen in a two person exhibition, their works both contrast with and complement each other. The viewer moving between them feels the magnetic pull of opposite poles balanced in perfect harmony, a rarity even with artists who have shared a good deal of their lives with each other. Yet there are enough significant differences between the two artists to provide variety, given that each has a distinctive style. If anything, the viewer experiences a sense of excitement at the sheer variety of imagery that their artistic dialogue generates.



Nam Chun Cho

Kwija Lee Cho

Kwija Lee Cho appears to be a natural born painter with a direct, clear style that makes her floral studies, particularly, strike the viewer as pure bursts of unabashed joy at the miracle of nature and all creation. Her oil on canvas, "Sunflower," is an exemplary case in point. Here, two brilliant yellow flowers set boldly against a vibrant blue background, are decoratively attended by five monarch butterflies. Their large, curvaceous green leaves and stems are outlined in yellow, as though touched by sunlight. The black borders around the burnished orange wings of the butterflies are delineated as definitely as the dark leading between areas of stained glass, which in fact the beautiful insects suggest, given the luminous quality with which the painter imparts to them. And although she works in a Western medium, there is something quintessentially Asian about how Kwija Lee Cho imparts poetic resonance to the humblest of subjects.

Nam Chun Cho & Kwija Lee Cho,
The International Center in New York, Inc.
50 West 23rd Street, 7th floor
Exhibition: October 4 – 29,
Reception: Thursday, October 7, 6-8 pm

For example, in another oil on canvas called "Freedom" she depicts the several of the ornamental Japanese species of fish swimming in a pond in a palette of delicate yet vibrant hues with a characteristic combination of subtlety and boldness. Two schools of silvery white and gold creatures flutter their flared fins gracefully against the translucent green water. And in a spare desert landscape, she creates swirling near-abstract rhythms with the forms of sand dunes and overhanging clouds.

By contrast, Kwija Lee Cho's oil of a tiger on the prowl, painted in honor of the Year of the Tiger on the lunar calendar, is at once fierce and cuddly-looking, like the lion in the French naive artist Henri Rousseau's "The Sleeping Gypsy."

Nam Chun Cho, also celebrates the current calendar year with his digital print of a tiger. But even in repose in tall grass, his beast appears anything but cuddly.

Nam Chun Cho does, however, present us with a more serene scene to contemplate in his image of a mother goose supervising her long row of goslings, a single straggler waddling awkwardly off the shore to join the others as they float in gracefully curving formation. Sunlight dapples the leaves on an overhanging tree-limb on the left side of the composition and halos the water swirling about the avian family with shimmering Impressionist strokes.

Another dazzling digital print by Nam Chun Cho focuses on a single white swan floating amid swirling rainbow reflections of colorful foliage, dripping down from the curving arch of a small stone footbridge in a public park. And yet another arching form dominates the same artist's print of the Chicago skyline reflected on the surface of a large geodesic dome, creating the trompe-l'oeil effect that the bending buildings and the distorted clouds above are contained within one of those clear plastic "snow globes." The pièce de resistance of this composition is a small silhouette of a single bird perched on the curving top of the dome and set against a contrasting cloudless expanse of pale blue sky.

Water fowl, along with a lone pigeon are seen in Central Park in another digital print by Nam Chun Cho. Only now it is winter with snow on the ground, trees are bare and there is ice in the water. But the overall grayness is brightened by Christo's orange flags on the opposite side of the pond.

In their first two-artist exhibition, Nam Chun Cho and Kwija Lee Cho, both of whom have exhibited separately here and abroad and participated in group shows by Korean American Contemporary Arts, Ltd., display a kindred lyricism that makes for an especially enjoyable viewing experience.

— Maureen Flynn

Vincent Arcilesi's New Roman Idyll

The last time Vincent Arcilesi found inspiration in Italy, in 1994, he gave us an exhibition that could easily have been called "Love, Italian Style," given its emphasis on couples canoodling amid Roman landmarks and in the bucolic countryside of Sicily.
"Summer Night in Rome," the 96"x80" the centerpiece of that memorable show (which was actually titled "Arcilesi in Italy") serves as a segueway into the present exhibition, "Arcilesi in Rome," in which one of our most original figurative painters focuses more locally on that fabled city.

Such has been the global scope of the artist's themes over the past several seasons that many of us have come to regard his "Arcilesi in..." exhibitions as the artistic answer to Fodor's Travel Guides. However, every locale that Arcilesi paints is radically transformed by the poetic liberties that he takes, particularly in regard to relocating architectural monuments to suit his compositions and abolishing civic codes against public nudity to achieve his Edenic vision.

Rome provides an especially auspicious subject for the Italian-American artist, in terms of both his ethnic and artistic heritage. Indeed, in "San Lorenzo in Lucina," a view of the church where Poussin is interred (one of eight small plein air landscapes that complement the seven large figure paintings in the present show), the tiny figures of tourists, framed by architectural geometry, recall the formal components of the high Renaissance master's processions.

It is in the large figure paintings, however, that Arcilesi takes his most startling imaginative leaps and also displays most spectacularly his exquisite technical proficiency. Witness the atmospheric amalgam of artificial light and moonlight flooding in through the open dome of the Pantheon in "La Fornarina and Venus at Raphael's Tomb," which depicts a nocturnal meeting in the stately mausoleum between Margherita Luti, the sexy baker girl who posed for one of Raphael's greatest portraits and became his Roman mistress, and the Goddess of Love herself. That Raphael's fiancee Marie Bibbiena is also interred in the place where these two comely nudes preen like concubines in a Turkish harem lends an element of scandal comparable, in modern times, to when French president Mitterand's wife and mistress were seen seated together beside his coffin. Add Arcilesi's faithful copy of Lorenzetto's sculpture of the Madonna, gracing the tomb in the background, and our most intrepid contemporary figure painter outdoes himself in this masterly imaginary menage.

Although earlier in his career Arcilesi created a stir with paintings of couples engaged in explicit sex acts, one believes him when he insists that he never aims to be controversial. Never gratuitously prurient, his paintings celebrate the beauty and sensuality not only of the human body, but of all creation. His figures — more often nude than clothed, mostly but not exclusively, female — inhabit an arcadian realm of blue skies and heavenly clouds floating above palatial public squares, verdant gardens, or landscapes dotted with picturesque ruins, into which conflict rarely intrudes.

"Diana and Venus in the Villa Medici Gardens"

One of the most magnificent recent examples is the large canvas "Venus at the Roman Forum," where many of the above elements (among them the statue of Caster and his horse imported from the Campidoglio on an aesthetic whim) sprawl out panoramically behind a standing female figure, confronting us not with classical coyness, but with the frank confidence of a hip young woman completely at ease in her full frontal nudity, her arms raised, her hands clasped behind her head. One is especially impressed not only by Arcilesi's ability to carry off such an intricately detailed composition without sacrificing painterly fluidity, but also by how he imbues a mythic subject with contemporary immediacy by depicting the specific features of the model, rather than succumbing to too-easy neoclassical idealization. Arcilesi's eschewal of all such clichés lends his work an edgy sensuality absent from much figurative painting today.

Consider " Diana and Venus in the Villa Medici Gardens,"where, in contrast to the informal stance of the Venus in the previous painting, as Diana stands on her left in the magnificent garden with its precisely trimmed hedges receding in vanishing perspective, displaying the strong back and firm buttocks of the disciplined huntress, Venus actually assumes a Botticelli-like pose with her right hand above her left breast and her left hand resting on the thigh below it. Yet, here again, Arcilesi gives her a more down to earth sensuality than we see in Botticelli's celestial nymphet. And if this doe-eyed, high cheekboned brunette's charms are less dewy than those of the earlier painter's fairer figure, she has her own more seasoned and voluptuous allure, reminiscent of Bert Stern's great last photos of Marilyn Monroe (in which the photographer peeled away all the layers of Hollywood illusion and airbrushed artifice to immortalize the screen goddess's naked womanly warmth). Nor does the brash conceit of the priapic spire, rising from the fountain between the low hedgerows behind the two figures, put too fine a point on a beauty that even the sturdy virgin huntress Diana turns her handsome aquiline profile to admire.

Among several other pleasures to be savored in "Arcilesi in Rome" is the large canvas "Venus and Apollo at Hadrian's Villa," in which the enigmatic Roman Emperor's mania for collecting exotic treasures is reflected not only in the Grecian statues and over-the-top Byzantine decor, but also in the dusky male and female nudes posturing at poolside. Then there is "The Dreamer," a tender and unguarded portrait, executed with a breezy vigor more akin to the artist's plein air landscapes than his larger oils, of a tanned, tawny-haired nude dozing in a beige chair before a window looking out on a partial view of the Trevi Fountain, its stridently animated equine and human figures and gushing waters contrasting with her soft repose.

But perhaps the biggest surprise, for those who think they can predict what Vincent Arcilesi will do next, will be "The Secret," a large canvas of two pretty, fully clothed young women exchanging a sisterly buss in a Roman piazza dotted with distant tourists, its mood as exhilaratingly fresh and lyrically unforgettable as the evocative title of Irwin Shaw's famous short story, "The Girls in Their Summer Dresses."

— Ed McCormack

Vincent Arcilesi, Broome Street Gallery, 498 Broome Street, October 19–November 7
Reception: October 19, 5–8pm

An International Selection at Gelabert Studios

Summer group exhibitions require no overriding theme or better purpose than to offer deserving talents a casual showcase over the art season's slowest months. One of the more notable recent ones, the gallery's first in fact, took place at the Upper West Side's elegant Gelabert Studios.

Among the featured artists was Dawn Arena, who has had two previous exhibitions in the space and is known for making diverse aesthetic statements in a wide variety of unusual materials. Here, Arena showed two mixed media assemblages created with wasp nests, black West African Clay, leather, and bullet proof(!) lexan. Both "Wasp I" and "Wasp II" incorporated mysterious masklike faces. Partially covered with the straw-like wasp-nest materials, they seemed to pun visually on the acronym for "white anglo saxon protestant," African tribal artifacts, grass huts, and a variety of other intriguing associations. Another fanciful wall piece was a large steel, copper, silver, and brass "cutout" sculpture by Glenn Murgacz, also known for creating monumental all-weather outdoor pieces, such as one of sports figures created for the facade of the Woodbridge Community Center.

In Murgacz's witty celebration of romantic terpsichore, the only 3-D element was the female dancer's copper mesh tutu, which flared out from the wall, as if with a life of its own.

Another gifted sculptor, Roberto Recio combined visual wit with impressive formal simplicity in two actual-size vases of flowers, fashioned entirely in aluminum and presented on pedestals. Each bud and stem is streamlined and stylized, yet rendered in impressive detail, Recio's bouquets have an odd robotic charm.

Collage, the major innovation that gave 20th century modernist art its basic vocabulary is employed in the miniaturist tradition of Kurt Schwitters with exemplary elegance by Gitou Knoop, a distinguished artist from the Netherlands. Also known as a prolific painter and sculptor, in these works, apparently created with tiny fragments and slivers of glossy magazine pages, Knoop melds colors in a manner resembling graceful "marbleized" strokes of coloristically variegated enamel laid down against pristine areas of white paper. Not for all tastes, but possessed of a grace that will thrill certain aesthetic sensibilities, these modest works provide a veritable visual definition of the term "exquisiteness."

Canadian artist Janick Laberge showed abstract mixed media works on hanging scrolls in which forms with craggily serrated edges akin to those of Clyfford Still (yet more graphically conceived, sans the painterly histrionics) hinted at mysterious and elusive meanings. Clearly derived from actual things transformed beyond recognition, Laberge's compositions combine visual and conceptual elements in a seamless synthesis. New Orleans sculptor Theresa Rogers made an auspicious New York exhibition debut in this show with a bizarre wall relief gargoyle-like ceramic mask with a brass spider on its forehead, sticking out its golden tongue, as well as a vigorously expressionistic cast bronze figure called "Spanish Harlem Mona Lisa." And an untitled canvas by Belgian-born Persian painter Farzin Nikzad displayed a calligraphic style akin to Mark Tobey and Brice Mardin, but with his own distinctively muscular linear ecriture, which made one eager to see more of his work.

Also including two small, rugged, abstract steel pieces by the late, great French sculptor Albert Feraud that would add a note of distinction to any group exhibition, this gorgeous show made one eager to see future group ventures in this always surprising uptown venue.

— Maurice Taplinger

Gelabert Studio
255 West 86th Street
www.gelabertstudiosgallery.com

Tamar Rosen: Heir to a Noble Painterly Tradition

There are certain painters whose work appears to be as much about honoring the tradition of painting itself as about the subjects that their paintings depict. Upon such artist we sometimes bestow the honorific of "painter's painter," and that designation seems entirely appropriate for Tamar Rosen, an artist from Tel Aviv, widely exhibited in both Israel and the U.S., whose solo show will be featured at Agora Gallery in Chelsea this October.

If pressed to classify Rosen's style in relation to artists of the past, one would have to say that in terms of texture and intensity her oils on canvas are akin to Soutine, yet in temperament she appears closer to Corot. Her resemblance to the former artist is perhaps most evident in her still life on canvas "Fish 2," where a half dozen fish lined up on a cutting board are depicted in rugged strokes of thick impasto that would have done Soutine proud. The silvery blue skins of the fish and the reddish wood textures of the cutting board, especially, recall facets of the great Lithuanian Jewish French expatriate's work. However, this particular nature morte is as close as Rosen comes to the violence that we see in Soutine's flayed beef carcasses; for she generally seems to prefer celebrating in her still lifes the fresh brilliance of floral bouquets or the living landscape in the plein air tradition.

"Orchid"

It is in her landscapes in particular that Rosen most resembles Corot, who anticipated the Impressionists but also imbued his canvases with a sense of the intangible. For like that French master, the atmosphere in Rosen's landscapes does not emanate, as in the case of the Impressionists from outward sources of light alone. Rather, it emanates from within as well, and her deep affection for the places that she depicts in landscapes such as "Sabra- Cactus 4," and "Yarkon View 3" lends these scenes a romantic mood far beyond the Impressionists' scientific transcription of light and shadow. Indeed, each brushstroke is invested with emotional intensity, as well as a shimmering coloristic intensity that we see to particular advantage in oils such as "Yarkon View (River)," where verdant greens merge with yellows and blues to create a vision verging on abstraction.

Rosen's floral paintings also warrant further study for the sheer pleasure that her brilliant colors and vigorous brushwork provide. In "Orchid," for example, the central placement of the large flower lends the composition an emblematic power comparable to certain paintings by Georgia O'Keeffe. Yet at the same time, Rosen adds a dimension of delicacy to the painting by virtue of the exquisitely harmonized pale pink, purple, and blue hues that she employs to add depth and dimension to the flesh of the petals within the broader design. By contrast, strident orange bulbs and slashing green strokes bring an almost expressionist immediacy to "Tulips 2," where the flowers appear as though suspended in midair against a vibrant blue field.

Here, as in the other oils on canvas in this exhibition, we see Tamar Rosen's deep sensitivity to nature and its nuances of tone and atmosphere. Even more impressive, however, is the artist's gift for bringing her subjects alive and making them immutable in the palpable substance of pigment.

— Marie R. Pagano

Tamar Rosen, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, October 5-26. Reception: Thursday, October 7, 6-8 PM.

Max's Kansas City Revisited: Among the Disappeared

by Ed McCormack

She and her husband were rock and roll royalty. He was a big time booking agent for some of the most expensive acts in the business, and his mantra was "An ass in every seat, an ass in every seat." They used to pull up outside Max's in a vintage Rolls Royce. The chauffeur would get out and open the back door and they'd stumble out dressed for hippie Halloween, looking as if they'd fall on their faces on the sidewalk before they made it to the front door. It was ostentatious even for the early seventies, when you might run into Lou, Iggy, and Bowie hoofing it down dark Park Avenue South together. She looked like something by Walter Keane who painted those kitschy waifs with big liquid eyes. Only hers were all pupil and often rolling up her head until almost all you saw was white.

Those drowsy junkie eyes are what I remember most about the night she and her husband showed up in my room at the Sheraton-Cadillac in Detroit to share some coke they had when we were all traveling with the circus, me for Rolling Stone, on one of the tours he had booked. My wife Jeannie had recently left me, not without good reason, and I was up for almost anything. But not what he suggested, after we had done the coke in the cozy light of one of those little hotel table lamps, and he got up to leave alone.

"She wants to stay man," he said. "It's okay, we're both cool with it.".

I looked over at her lolling like a smacked-out rag doll on the bed, the buttons of her embroidered jeans already undone, a sickly little smile on her face, and thought of those lines from Lou Reed's 'Street Hassle": it could be a hassle trying to explain myself to a / police officer about how it was your old lady got herself stiffed..."

And I said, "But I'm not cool with it, man. I'd rather you took her with you."

I read an article a few years ago all about how the husband eventually lost everything and ended up homeless but was now off heroin and back in business. (Many of us know the drill.) I don't recall it mentioning anything about the wife, and I didn't really think much about her again until a typically spaced out picture of her from the old days turned up in a new book from Abrams called "Max's Kansas City: Art, Glamour, Rock and Roll," with a caption that said, "Unidentified."

The ex-wife of a prominent musician also turned up in the book. She had a comfortable little apartment in the Village, and when I was essentially homeless, if not literally out on the street, I sometimes stayed with her. Then, instead of bringing me a beer for my hangover, she cooked me breakfast one morning, something more intimate and domestic, to my way of thinking, than simply sleeping with someone. That made me feel too tawdry and unfaithful to the estranged wife I still loved and hoped to win back to ever crash at this woman's place again. Being a gentleman, I wouldn't be telling you any of this if her picture too wasn't captioned "unidentified."

This book (whose "very existence and essential spirit," its author Steven Kasher acknowledges in the credits, was inspired by "the great gritty photography" of my old friend and sometime collaborator Anton Perich) is full of fantastic pictures of the disappeared and the dead. Among the latter are: Andy, of course; Max's owner Mickey Ruskin; drag queens Candy Darling and Jackie Curtis; actress Cyrinda Foxe; rock encylopediast Lillian Roxon; musicians Arthur Kane, Johnny Thunders, Stiv Baters, Sid Vicious, Joey Ramone, Dee Dee Ramone, Johnny Ramone, Gram Parsons, Janis Joplin, Tim Buckley, Odetta; Factory personalities Fred Hughes, Eric Emerson, Dorothy Dean, Andrea Feldman Warhol Whipps, and Tinkerbelle; artists Willem de Kooning, Robert Mapplethorpe, John Chamberlain, Ray Johnson, and on and on...

Girl standing in front of Max's by Anton Perich
Courtesy Anton Perich and Steven Kasher Gallery, NYC

The living are also well represented in telling candid shots by Anton and a few others: distinguished poet and art critic René Richard publicly blowing one of those strange cultists who used to show up at Max's mostly naked with clothespins clamped onto their nipples, while an unidentified man at the table looks on, appalled; tastemaker Danny Fields, my early tour guide to the New York Satyricon, who could make even his favorite word "fabulous," sound like a divinely bored yawn, jamming his fingers in his ears while sitting with a scenemaker who called himself Pristine Conditioner; model and supergroupie Bebe Buell, who gave the world Liv Tyler, making as if she's about to rip her already revealing shirt off; writer-wit Fran Lebowitz before she wearied of proposing to me that we write about each other and make each other famous and made herself famous with her best-seller, "Metropolitan Life"; Alice Cooper, who, even after I wrote unflatteringly about him, asked Jann Wenner if I could also cover his next tour for Rolling Stone, since, "Fast Eddie is the only guy who will drink with me in the morning"; another old drinking companion, Lou Reed, who ruined his image by dragging me to his Park Avenue speed doctor and footing the bill for an X-ray when I was convinced I had destroyed my liver but determined not to do anything about it; and poet and Warhol assistant Gerard Malanga, to whom I finally apologized years later, after sobering up, for repeatedly calling him "Jerome Lasagna" in print ("That's all right," said mellow Gerard, "You were, like, the original punk").

There's an informative essay in the book by Steve Watson about how Mickey originally conceived of Max's as an old-fashioned artist's saloon and amassed a great collection of paintings and sculptures by letting artists run up tabs. Then Andy arrived with his Factory menagerie of androgynous glitter-tots and screaming apparitions and everything went gaga. Patti Smith's guitarist Lenny Kaye writes about what it was like "making music at Max's" after Mickey had to sell to new owners who replaced the art with video games. And Lou Reed contributes a brief Afterword, thanking Mickey's memory on behalf of those of us who probably contributed to his bankruptcy by being allowed to run up huge tabs. (Lou says he finally settled his, but some of us didn't get around to it before Mickey OD'd.)

To me, in its heyday Max's was like the snottiest, most exclusive "Gossip Girl" private high school in the world — only, for grownup misfits who never belonged to any in-group or anything else as teenagers. You might say that hanging out there exacerbated everything that was already wrong with me when I was on my own like a rolling stone and in the prime of my decline. But it could sometimes be a great comfort in a way that I think Leonard Cohen meant when he wrote the lines in one of his poems that go, "It's good to sit with people / who are up so late / your other homes wash away / and other meals you left / unfinished on the plate..."

The book will be launched in conjunction with the art exhibition "Max's Kansas City" at Steven Kasher Gallery, 521 West 23rd Street, September 15-October 9. And Ed McCormack is still working on his memoir, "Hoodlum Heart: Confessions of a Test Dummy for the Crash and Burn Generation."

Neo-Conceptualist von Schmidt Puts His Brand on an Era

In the age of Facebook, Twitter, and blogs, when motivational speakers tell us things like "in order to be the CEO of Me, Inc., you have to brand yourself, put yourself on a shelf and become a commodity in the human marketplace," the conceptual artist and sculptor Chuck von Schmidt (who seems to prefer the artistic brand "von Schmidt" to his full name) appears to be every bit as in touch with the zeitgeist of his time as Andy Warhol was when he predicted that in the future we'd all be famous for fifteen minutes.

Indeed, Von Schmidt's entire career over the past decade or so could be seen as an ongoing performance piece, filled with episodes that range from installing a sculpture of a monumental alligator at Woodstock '94 to presenting Pope John Paul II with one of his commissioned pieces in a special audience at the Vatican — an event as unexpected as when Bob Dylan serenaded the same pontiff with "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" at a concert in the same venue. Yet if von Schmidt is a brand, it is constantly being repackaged (the silver fox of a GQ model in the smart business suit glad-handing John Paul II seemed the antithesis of the longhaired art cowboy who greeted me the last time I ran into him at Noho gallery), and its content is constantly in flux.

In a previous photographic series in which he posed as his father, von Schmidt explored that juncture of familial identity that we all seem to reach at some point in adult life where we see the face of one or the other of our parents staring back at us from the mirror. In his new exhibition at Noho Gallery, he addresses issues of self-invention peculiar to a period in which Warhol's oft-repeated prophesy has finally come to pass with a vengeance.

von Schmidt, "Branded, " Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, September 7 - October 2, Opening reception: Saturday, September 11, 4-6 PM

Maybe we won't become "fame monsters" on the scale of Lady Gaga, but the proliferation of digital "social media" makes it possible for all of us to create "advertisements for ourselves," to democratize the title of a brashly narcissistic 1959 book of essays by that pioneering literary self-brander Norman Mailer. Thus "Thurifer," one of the digital prints in "Branded," von Schmidt's new solo exhibition at Noho Gallery, shows the naked lower body of a man holding a smoking branding iron, after burning the words "Cogito Ergo Ars" into his right buttock.

Although the last word of that phrase could also suggest a play on the British slang term "arse," it translates from the Latin as "I THINK THEREFORE: ART. This phrase can be interpreted as a conceptual artist's rationale for cognitive rather than intuitive expression. But given the double-edged nature of von Schmidt's art, it could also imply that by being branded with even the loftiest slogan we run the risk of becoming as depersonalized and desensitized as those slabs of meat we've all seen on butcher's blocks, stamped "Gov't Inspected Beef." Only von Schmidt's punningly titled six-foot tall artist's mannequin, "Brussels Sprout," inspired by Belgium's famous fountain statue of a urinating little boy, "Manneken Pis," is immune to such humiliation. For unlike Pinnochio, von Schmidt's dummy has no Jiminy Cricket to teach him right from wrong. Branded on the butt with the ubiquitous motto, he blithely takes aim at the gallery wall.

"Paper Narcissus"

"Many of my new pieces force the viewer to strain to fully take in the work," von Schmidt states. "They are inspired by my lifelong admiration of Duchamp's last piece, 'Etant Donné,' where one exerts oneself by peeking through knotholes in doors, in order to see the whole artwork."

Without ruining the surprise for the viewer, suffice it to say that "Osteomancer," an elegantly crafted art deco cabinet modeled on those imposing x-ray machines in old fashioned shoe stores, provides a peepshow of mortality. Then there is "Paper Narcissus," a life-size figure, as ghostly white and detailed as George Segal's plaster people, of a man with a cast paper head leaning over and pulling down his jeans to "moon" the viewer with his cast paper buttocks. Those so bold as to gaze up his anus may be abashed at seeing themselves on "candid camera," since few of us are as forthright as rock 'n' roller Iggy Pop, who recently told The New Yorker, "If somebody has a nice ass crack, I am always interested to have a look at it — that's the simian in me."

For the most personal of reasons, this viewer found "Art Critic II," a discarded casino slot machine converted into an aesthetic "peter meter" (to appropriate Screw magazine's term for rating porno films), one of von Schmidt's most potent statements. By feeding quarters into this gorgeously garish object, newly furnished with glowing glass panels that say "ART SCENE," and (naturally) "COGITO ERGO ARS," one can set snarky catchwords spinning and partake in one of the world's more dubious professions.

Another piece called "Hommage" features a film unfolding within the oval-shaped opening of an antique porcelain bedpan, in which von Schmidt, wearing a ludicrous white frightwig and oversize eyeglasses, bears an uncanny resemblance to Andy Warhol. As in Andy's earliest films, there is no sound and the camera is stationary. Standing in front of New York Hospital, he fidgets and dithers distractedly, swallowing, blinking, looking distressed, his face going through an entire repertoire of nervous non-expressions. Then the most famous brand-name artist in the world turns and disappears into the entryway of the hospital where he was to die of medical negligence, if not malpractice.

Mercifully, unlike early Warhol movies such as "Sleep" and "Empire State Building," which went on for several hours with even less happening, von Schmidt's deadpan bedpan film is just the perfect length: fifteen minutes.

— Ed McCormack

Bob Tomlinson: Embodying Love's Mythic Sorrows

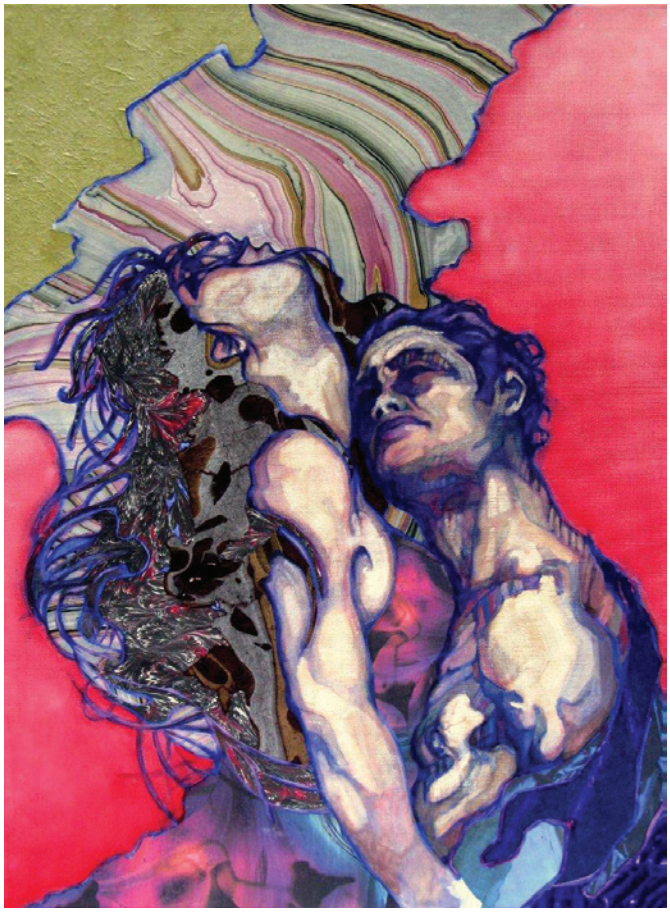
One of the themes most conspicuously absent from the figurative art of the last couple of centuries has been that of the human body's innate heroism, as exemplified most grandly in the work of Michelangelo. What we are now more often confronted by is a debasement of the body: Robert Mapplethorpe inserting a bull whip up his anus; Cindy Sherman's creepy anti-erotic pictures of dolls with grotesquely rearranged parts; Kiki Smith's repulsive sculpture of a crawling nude woman emitting a long trail of excrement.

Granted, such transgressive images may yet prove to be valid expressions of at least one aspect of the zeitgeist, something that cannot be entirely ignored in whatever guise it presents itself. Yet it's more than a little heartening, in an age at once secularly enlightened and benumbed by trendy irony, to encounter a painter like Bob Tomlinson, who restores not only the heroic but also the tragic dimension to the human figure, while unabashedly celebrating its sensual vitality.

Art historian Pierce Rice once observed of Rubens that what concerned him most was "the human body in dynamic movement, with the specific dramatic activity this movement contributed to remaining entirely secondary." And the same might be surmised of Tomlinson, whose dramatically straining, twisting, and turning figures hark back to the Renaissance, even while flirting with the spontaneous fluidity of Abstract Expressionism.

Tomlinson, a Brooklyn-born Jamaican-American who, besides being a visual artist is a scholar of French literature and aesthetics residing for the most part in France, carries more than the usual amount of cultural baggage. Hence, one can only assume that it was no arbitrary decision for him to title one characteristically flowing semiabstract composition in his current exhibition "I've Known Rivers." For the title derives from the first line of Langston Hughes' great poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers."

While the speaker in the poem references other rivers, including the Euphrates, the Congo, and the Nile, the large blue-cast male profile that dominates the composition of Tomlinson's painting interfaces with a sinuously winding, luminous yellow shape that calls to mind the lines, "I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln/ went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy / bosom turn all golden in the sunset." It is as eloquent a dialogue between painting and literature as one can ever recall seeing.



"Amours impossibles"

The title of the show, "Love and Other Sorrows," could also be a play on Harold Brodkey's famous book of short stories "First Love and Other Sorrows," albeit from a more world-weary perspective. Either way, Tomlinson's richly nuanced compositions in oil paints combined with textured and patterned papers and occasional fragments of computer manipulated photography achieve a sense of romantic complexity and conflict that is emotionally as well as aesthetically engaging.

In "Amours Interdites," for example, an opulently clothed woman, her hair flaring like Medusa's nest of writhing serpents, turns her face away and raises a restraining hand to repel the advances of a cajoling lover amid vertiginously surging abstract color areas that recall the compositions of Tiepolo at his most tumultuous. By contrast, in another oil called "Amours Impossibles," yet another female figure flings her head back — only, here, not to escape her lover's embrace, but in a swoon of passion, her lips parted as though gasping for breath, as he nestles his cheek against her neck, which lengthens in a sensual curve, emphasized by an electric blue line (a device he employs with various hues to define essential contours in his composition). Even in the throes of his own passion, however, her ardent lover's expression, as she thrusts her voluptuous body against his in utter surrender, suggests an introspective grimace of possible indeterminacy, signifying yet another face of love's sorrow.

Sorrow graduates to grief in "Orphelia," a favorite theme of the Pre-Raphaelites, which Tomlinson interprets in a much more starkly contemporary manner than Sir John Everett Millais' idealized painting of Hamlet's spurned adolescent lover, primly dressed and adorned with flowers, almost serenely sinking back to drown herself in a placid river. Tomlinson's version shows Orphelia almost entirely submerged, only her face, shoulders, and bare breasts visible, the nipples of the latter as pale as silver bullets and erected by the chill eddies of water swirling about her — as if the artist is saying, "And here is the frigid, mortified body of love's failure." Yet he invests even this harrowing image with a terrible beauty, to borrow Yeats' immortal phrase, by virtue of his richly bejeweled style, which combines exquisite draftsmanship with elements of the rococo, the baroque, and art noveau, all melded and propelled by abstract expressionist "push and pull."

Bob Tomlinson has stated that, for him, "there is no clear distinction between naturalistically depicted or abstracted figures," and one of the more remarkable facets of his work is how successfully he resolves this duality, merging diverse modes of expression in a brilliant synthesis.

— Ed McCormack

Bob Tomlinson, Viridian Artists, Inc.
530 West 25th Street, October 5 - 23.
Reception: Saturday October 9, 3-6pm.
Coffee/Conversation with the artist
Saturday, October 23, 3-4 PM.

Carrozzini's Creative Currents Converge in Chelsea

Steffania Carrozzini, of I Am International Art Media, Milan, Italy, makes a persuasive case for good human energy as an antidote to the "vibrational quagmire of cell phones, internet, TV, every sort of technological devilry," in her characteristically poetic catalog essay for "Frequency," a recent exhibition featuring artists from Italy, Japan, and the U.S..

New York painter Amy Cohen Banker seems a good place to start, since she has always been on her own wavelength, channeling her painterly energies and impulses into a style that straddles the abstract and the figurative. Elusive form, shimmering color, and untrammeled gesture coalesce dynamically in Banker's luminous oil on canvas "Oblique Fish," with its Monet-like splinters of light

Onishi Gallery,
521 West 26th Street
www.onishigallery.com

deconstructing the image of the fish even as they chart its wiggling motion through the watery depths.

By contrast, painter and celebrated product designer Alberto Baccari's acrylic painting "Graphic # 4," anchors irregularly curricular forms within stringently geometric borders with which they interact and interlock. As emblematic as the logo for a product yet to be conceived, Baccari's sublimely hard-edged color areas provide assurance against existential chaos, even while exploring along the borders of the unknown.

Masaki Asakawa, who once worked as a graphic designer for Honda, employs digital technology in a mixed media work suggesting a meticulously organized automobile graveyard for brand new car bodies crammed in at various angles with surreal efficiency. Rather than polluting the atmosphere with their fumes, Asakawa's image seems to suggest, why not use their factory fresh chassis to create a kind of colorful industrial origami?

A mysterious mixed media figure painting by artist and alt-rock musician Elena Brambilla calls to mind "aura photography" with a flesh-colored yet ethereal mass at the center of the composition more like the ghostly manifestation of a soul than a physical being. And perhaps, in the present context, that is precisely the point: a portrait of the spiritual frequency of humanity.

Michela Ianese, conjures up an equally eerie presence through contrastingly physical means, with her assemblage of an ordinary egg crate affixed inside-out to a canvas and overpainted entirely with brilliant red acrylic. The effect is strangely skull-like with the hollow receptacles becoming shadow-filled eye-sockets. Yet that the source materials remain so obvious makes this mask-like visage all the more unsettling, hinting that inanimate objects can't be trusted not to undergo an unseemly metamorphosis.

Fabio Usvardi

The abstract photographs of Giovanni Marinelli are deliberately created to redirect our gaze from the distractions of technology back to the by now, (unfortunately) alternate reality of nature. One is immediately refreshed by Marinelli's untitled photograph of what could be stalagmites or fragments of crystal, clustered like tall grass in a field. That the picture is printed on clear plastic seems not so much an ironic touch as heartening evidence of how unlikely materials can be transformed.

Using finger-painting as a way of

Continued on page 23

The Tactile/Coloristic Symphonics of Yuta Strega

Although she received her early art education at the College of Fine arts in Frankfurt, Germany, Yuta Strega lives in France and works in a studio that, in the poetic description of one writer "opens onto a long downward sloping garden where vegetal shapes and colors mingle, then stretches into an infinite rolling landscape." And as bucolic as that setting sounds, Strega's oils on linen exemplify all of the urbane sophistication that one associates with the School of Paris at its best.

"A Tempo, Tempo Primo"

The canvas that hints most directly at the artist's pastoral environment is also one of her most thoroughly abstract: "Home Sweet Home" is a lyrical exploration of pale yet luminous green, yellow, and blue hues glowing amid amorphous forms that evoke a dreamy atmosphere rather than a specific sense of place, a magical mood of summer and sunlight.

In other paintings by Strega, more intense tonal contrasts prevail, and references of the figure, architecture and objects may be discerned among the jewel like colors and strongly structured abstract forms. In these works the term "color construction" applies most aptly, given that shapes seem to result from the act of painting itself, as though the artist discovers them within areas of paint that could suggest an armature of cubism partially deconstructed by impulsive, surging tides of abstract expressionism.

Here and there, in Strega's ostensibly abstract compositions vestiges of the figure intrude, as seen in "A Tempo, Tempo Primo," and "Anges Déchus." In both paintings there is a sense of jostling crowds, and in the latter there are traces of facial features on the "fallen angels," with vertical forms in the background suggesting urban architecture. And in another oil on linen called "A Tempo Replica" the large rectangular shape in the mostly red area at the top of the canvas reads as a building, while the forms at the bottom could be seen as foreground figures somewhat obscured by blurred movement, sunlight, and possibly smoke or smog.

The total effect is of the miasma of the city rendered majestic by virtue of beautifully harmonized colors, with people melded like a bouquet of flowers by a seamless artistic vision. What could be chaotic and transitory is made immutable by a luscious painterly panache that tempts one to compare Strega to Nicholas de Staël.

Indeed de Staël comes to mind in savoring such paintings by Strega as "Bol en Mouvement" and "Jarre d'Antibes," where the recognizable shapes of various vessels appear as prominent elements in Strega's otherwise abstract compositions. But the resemblance to the older artists goes even deeper, extending to the paint quality itself, which lends these paintings a tactile appeal that complements their chromatic beauty.

In other oils on linen such as "Tremelo" and "Arpeggio," the musical terms call attention to the lilting compositional rhythms and subtleties of color that seem to function like melodies woven through the movements of a symphony. Here, recognizable forms of figures are less obvious, except perhaps for the faint faces emerging from the shimmering veils of color in "Arpeggio," like ghosts serenely transported by the music.

Indeed, although the primary focus of her paintings is their abstract attributes, which are more than sufficient to hold and capture our attention, such details are bonus surprises that make the paintings of Yuta Strega all the more pleasurable.

—Byron Coleman

Yuga Strega, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street. October 5-26. Reception: Thursday, October 7, 6-8 PM.

The Galactic Scope of the Painter Called Cody

The artist named Paul M. Cote, who prefers to sign his paintings with and be known by the pseudonym of Cody, refers to his creative project as "topographical, real/surreal paintings." And indeed that title seemed apt for his thickly textured compositions in his recent Chelsea solo exhibition, which imbued often ethereal and metaphysical subjects with a physical presence verging on the sculptural.

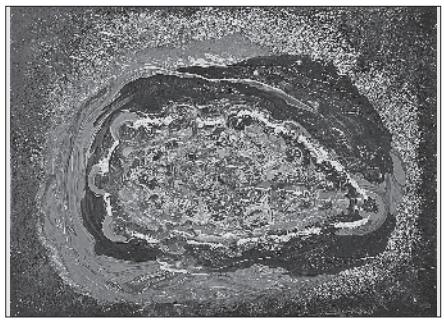
Like Jackson Pollock before him, Cody prefers to work with the canvas on the ground or the floor of his studio on a large scale. Like the great abstract expressionist, too, his approach is actively physical, with paint applied sans plan, spontaneously, in layer after layer, often over lengthy periods of time. His thickly encrusted surfaces, like those of Larry Poons, take on great weight and depth. The composition evolves in the act of painting, and although they could be perceived at first glance as abstract, they are actually inspired by the artist's lifelong interest in science fiction and the universe.

Often the viewer is tipped off to this by titles such as "Solar," "Planet Gaseous," or "Milky Way," and knowing Cody's intent makes the narrative aspect of his painting immediately evident to the naked eye. Although his style is unique, perhaps his closest artistic relative is the Belgian painter, Octave Landuyt, another artist whose work probes the "experienced" aspect of inanimate nature through the working and reworking of what that artist calls "essential surfaces," and creating what critic Emily Genauer once referred to as "not technical fireworks but a symbolic skin containing the mysteries of life and death."

Certainly Cody appears to achieve something similar in his imposing, luminous canvases, which go far beyond a scientific, diagrammatic approach to the galaxies to address the ineffable mystery of the cosmos themselves, with their freely floating forms and radiant auras, as seen in the aforementioned "Solar," where golden orbs appear to emit light that envelopes the viewer. Equally dynamic is "Liquos," in which a monolithic ovoid central form appears within a dark cosmic space surrounded by a smoky halo of gaseous antimatter made paradoxically palpable in thick pigment. In much the same manner that one can hear a ghostly semblance to the sea's roar in a sea shell, one can feel its fearsome force by proxy in this evocative shape with its eddies of cerulean blue whirling within its great yawning galactic yap.

Cody,
seen recently at Agora Gallery,
530 West 25th Street.
www.agora-gallery.com

In another acrylic on canvas called "Protection," Cody Reveals a gift for biomorphic form akin to that of the abstract expressionist William Baziotes with a composition where vividly golden tendril-like shapes resembling wiggling undersea flora are juxtaposed with planetary orbs as colorful as jugglers balls orbiting amid an atmospheric purple haze. Another especially colorful composition in which several smaller shapes surround a central solar shape emitting an axle-like configuration of white rays like the great wheel of the universe is called "Heart Attack." This might seem incongruous if not for the artist's own statement that each of his paintings has at least four or five different meanings.



"Liquos"

Such subjective complexity, come to think of it, is just what one would expect of a painter as ambitious as Cody, the breadth and scope of whose work takes in vast imaginative expanses. Indeed, as other intriguing titles such as "Hell," "Wormhole," and "Un Invicto Nuovo" make clear, we are dealing here with an artist whose horizons appear virtually unlimited.

— Maurice Taplinger

CARROZZINI
Continued from page 22
achieving intimacy and transmitting his own frequency to the canvas by both smearing and dripping his oil pigments, Fabio Usvardi animates figurative realism with Pollock-like splashes and drips. We may not be sure whether the shut eyes and wide open mouth of the young woman in Usvardi's portrait "Neda" indicate agony or ecstasy, but the energy it exudes is undeniable.

Born in Hitachi Japan in 1942, veteran artist Misa Aihara appears to be a deeply intuitive painter, expressing the impressions received by his five senses through abstract color construction. Subtly harmonized patches of layered color work like notes in a musical composition to create exquisite chromatic balances with which Hitachi transmits a sense of serene transcendence to viewers attuned to his rarified frequency. — Ed McCormack

SALON SHOW
Continued from pg. 10
in which a comicstrip beauty, resembling Dagwood's better half Blondie, outshines the structure of the title by virtue of Zimmerman's clean lines and confectionery colors. Linda Lessner's mastery of the pastel medium lends her delicate little landscape compositions a unique freshness, particularly in "Robert Frost Country," where a slender tree branch, a snippet of lawn, and a fragment of pond speak volumes. Also quite magical is Lessner's "Waterfall," in which the frothy cascade is skillfully evoked in a mere few inches.

In one of her acrylic paintings Eva Sochorova puts her own dynamic spin on the gestural vocabulary of Abstract Expressionism with her blocky red, yellow, and purple forms; while in another, still-life it is subjected to a severe formal distillation. Yet these distinctly different works are united by Sochorova's singular compositional ability.

Simple forms, coupled with lusciously sensual paint surfaces and an anthropomorphic approach to botanical shapes make Amy Rosenfeld's floral compositions especially memorable. Like the American Expressionist Jay Milder, Rosenfeld lends heft and depth to her nature subjects by virtue of a singular painterly vision.

— Maurice Taplinger

Phenomena and Paradox in the Art of Michèle Vincent

Surrealism as a movement may have given the widely exhibited contemporary French painter Michèle Vincent the wherewithal to pursue dreams and fantasies as an artistic direction. However, as in the case of her best predecessors, it is her singular vision which finally distinguishes her work from that of all others.

"Rebirth," one of Vincent's recent paintings, is one of her most complex in terms of the vast sphere of metaphysical elements and dimensions it appears to encompass. Indeed, a viewer can stand before it for an inordinate amount of time without feeling that he or she has absorbed its full meaning. But one is mightily impressed by the artist's harmonious melding of solid and ethereal elements in a composition that seems in the process of dissolving and coming into being simultaneously; of alternately deconstructing itself and being reborn before one's eyes in a manner entirely apropos of its title and ostensible theme.

"Rebirth"

The "framework" of the picture, for want of a better term with which to describe it, is a border of precisely delineated small rectangles containing luminous images of trees and intricate foliage resembling, with their delicate tints of pink and aquamarine, as well as for the almost abstract patterns that they form as the result of their repetitive motifs and designs, those elaborate Tiffany stained glass panels in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The technical finesse with which Vincent brings off this effect seems all the more remarkable when one learns that she is self-taught.

One can only compare the contrasts that the artist creates between this strongly structured surrounding border of trees and foliage and the more fluidly dissolving forms at the center of the composition — where smoky mists, a shifting sense of light that appears to emanate from no known source, and intimations of a spiritual realm suggesting the afterlife — to the similarly striking contrasts in "Morning," an 1803 canvas by the German painter Philip Otto Runge, a lesser known contemporary of Caspar David Friedrich.

Michèle Vincent (year-round salon exhibition), Montserrat Contemporary Art Gallery, 547 West 27th Street montserratgallery.com

But where Runge, who hoped to revive Christian religious painting for a new age, envisions a more or less predictably pastoral Promised Land of verdant fields, abundant fruits, and fluttering putti surrounding a central angelic figure of light, Vincent evokes a more mysteriously murky realm of melting vegetation and spectral figures in flux, suggesting perhaps one of many way stations in a cycle of reincarnation. While a stately woman in a blue robe, partially blurred as if by movement in a royal procession, dominates the foreground with her queenly grace, in the middle distance of the composition two pastel-gowned female beings with long, flowing tresses embrace, as though in reunion, in front of a gray rectangular form suggesting a slab-like aboveground tomb.

"Rebirth" is an especially vital addition to Michèle Vincent's generally ambitious oeuvre in terms of instituting a new spiritual iconography in tune with the more complex way in which we think about matters of life, death, and spirit in this secular age, when some of us, while far from being agnostics, still long for a less simplistic approach to the ineffable mysteries of eternity and the unknown.

In "Chess Game in Nature," another recent painting by Vincent, two of the beautiful, ethereal female presences who figure prominently in many of her paintings and whom we seem to be encouraged to regard as spirits, as opposed to earthly beings, given how they partially disappear into the atmosphere, are seen seated amid tall weeds and feathery foliage at an ornate, elongated chess board that also fades into the air and a nearby body of water in a manner that lends a quite literal dimension to the term "vanishing perspective." As for the chess pieces with which the two spectral women conduct their game, they too are of an otherworldly aspect — particularly the tallest one in the foreground, which resembles a transparent crystal cone with the tiny figure of a handsome blond youth apparently trapped within like a goldfish fish in a tank — their magical appearance suggests the players may be symbolic of the Fates.

Here, again, the luminous clarity of Vincent's technique, which apparently involves the layering of semi-translucent oil glazes in the manner of the Flemish masters, enables her to achieve a seamless synthesis of matter and antimatter, which makes even the most phenomenal acts of metamorphosis that she depicts appear as natural as rain. And, indeed, in the context of these paintings, they truly may be; for hers is a world possessed of its own unique natural laws. At very least, these paintings may allude to the artist's intuitive perception of hidden laws that operate beneath the visible surface of the daily reality that we all take for granted.

In the final analysis, however, many of the images in Michèle Vincent's compositions elude exact interpretation to simply delight us with their intriguing incongruities. What is one to make, for example, of a painting such as "The Church in Ruin, the Wise, and the Wolf," where the skeletal supporting arches of a great cathedral, overgrown with sun-splashed foliage, open to the sky for blue birds to fly through, becoming an airy promenade where a couple in archaic dress, the woman's fairness shaded by a pink parasol, stroll about with their pet wolf by their side? Could this be a new kind of "peaceable kingdom," free of stifling religious doctrine, where man and beast can coexist in heavenly harmony at last? What then of another painting in which flowing platinum strands of a sleeping beauty's hair merge with the fur in the head of a wolf hovering like a full moon above a pack of darker canine cousins whose coats glisten like nocturnal ocean waves?

That the paintings of Michèle Vincent are filled with such paradoxical imagery makes them endlessly intriguing to contemplate.

— Byron Coleman

MARGARET GRIMES
New Work

"Rosy Dawn; Washington" Oil on Canvas 16"x16"

October 5th–30th, 2010
Reception:
Tuesday, October 7, 5 – 8 pm

Blue Mountain Gallery
530 West 25th Street 4th Fl NYC 10001
646 486 4730 Tues - Sat 11 - 6
www.bluemountaingallery.org

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DEGREES OF ABSTRACTION

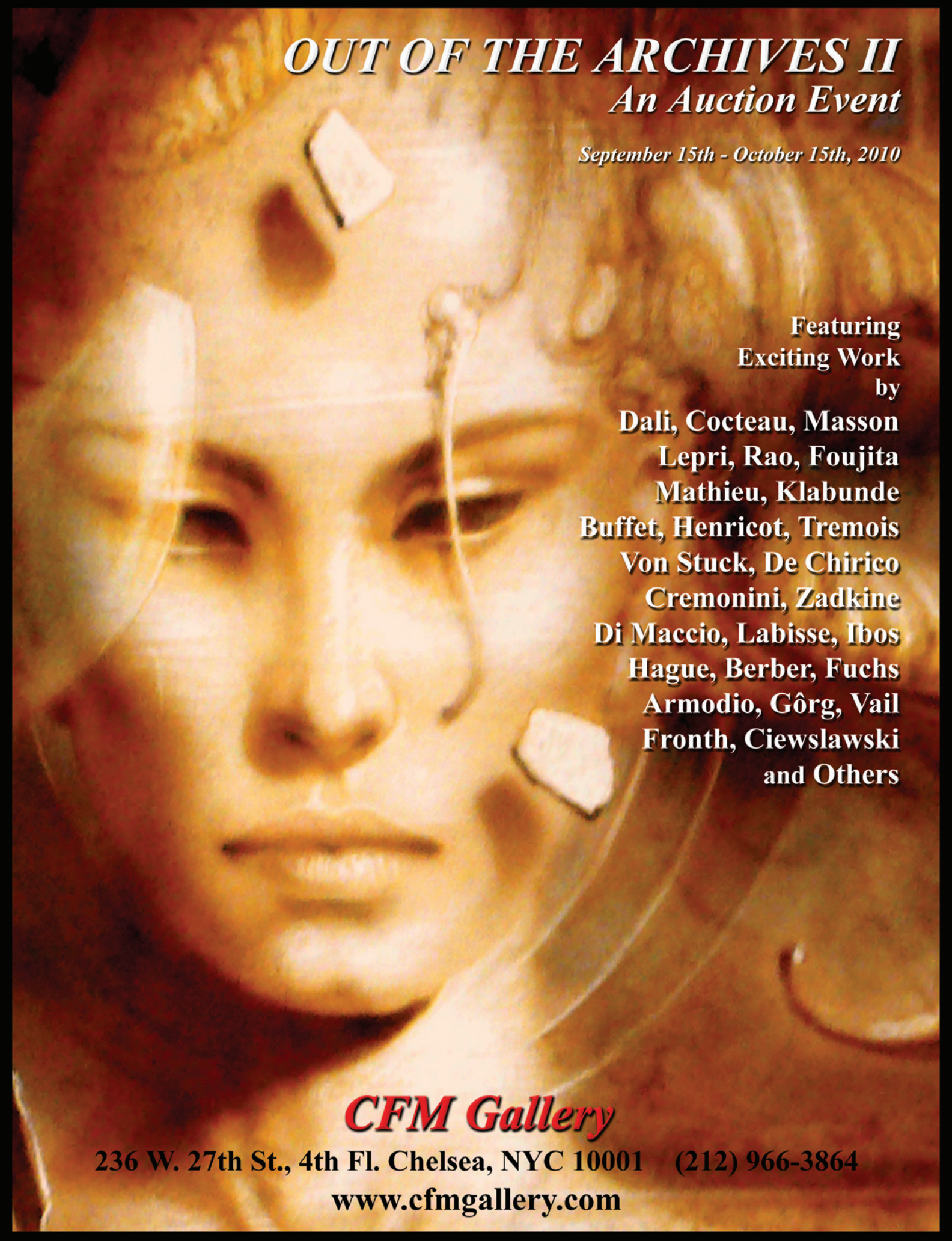
OCTOBER 5 - OCTOBER 26, 2010
Reception: Thursday, October 7, 6 - 8 pm

© Ella Prakash - *Journey of a Woman (Mother and Child)* - 36" x 30"

Nissim Ben Aderet
Kristina Garon
Claudia Manperl
João Paramés
Ella Prakash
Henriette Tibbs

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

Agora Gallery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