

GALLERY & STUDIO

Three Weimar Masters Flaunt “Decadence & Decay”

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George Grosz. Café. 1918. Watercolor, gouache and ink. 9 1/2" x 12 1/2." Galerie St. Etienne, New York.

A Flashback to Camelot
an excerpt from **HOODLUM HEART: a memoir**
by Ed McCormack, pg. 10



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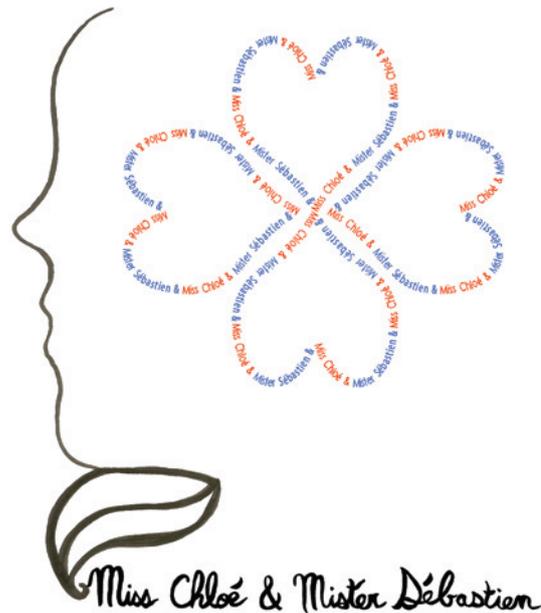
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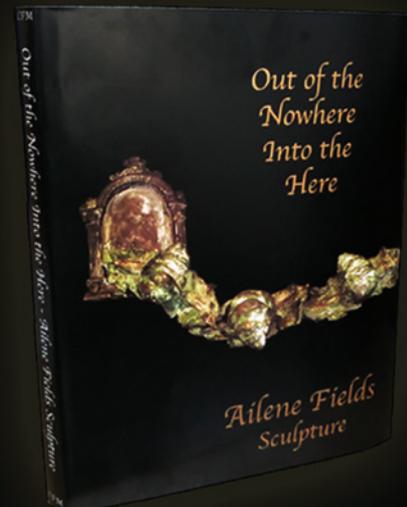
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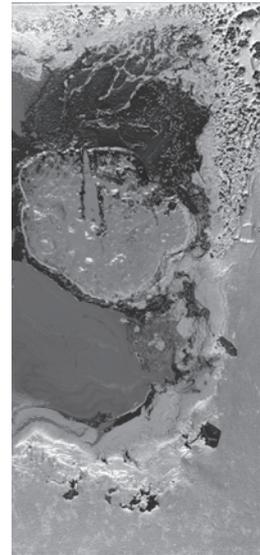
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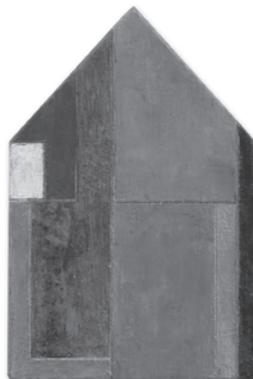
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GALLERY&STUDIO

An International Art Journal

PUBLISHED BY

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Weimar Redux: Decadence & Decay at Galerie St. Etienne

For all the obvious tottering-on-the-brink reasons, this seems to be a banner decade for reviving the art of the Weimar Republic. First came “Glitter and Doom,” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art,” in 2006, followed a year later by “From Broadway to Berlin” at The Morgan Library & Museum. What these two exhibitions shared in common with two present ones, “German Expressionism: The Graphic Impulse,” at the Museum of Modern Art,” and “Decadence & Decay: Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, George Grosz,” at Galerie St. Etienne, are the inherent contrasts

by Oskar Kanehe, an anthropomorphic creature with donkey ears stands like a stage magician before the curtains of the polling booth beside a giant tea cup in which a tempest must be brewing. “Napoleon the Fourth” depicts a tattered and battered veteran with a cane, his arm in a sling unwittingly aping the famous general’s characteristic stance. In “Back Again Soon: Ever Crueler, Ever More Human,” a skeleton in a gas mask strikes a pose like a popular comedian waving to his fans. And a drawing of a pile of skulls is self-explanatory. But, as always, it is in casual genre subjects, such as “Saxon

a losing battle for many of Dix’s portrait subjects, judging from the scars they bear. Witness the rudely rouged cheeks, wary expression, and bloated breasts of the woman in his work in watercolor, gouache, pencils, and crayon, “Female Nude, Half Length.” Consider the shifty, beetle-browed countenance of a hefty model named Anne, who looks as larcenous as a mafioso in two separate nude charcoal studies. And that relative virtue does not always have its rewards seems evident enough when one compares the worn and weary melancholy of the poor drudge in Dix’s watercolor “Maid,” with the

saucy vivacity of the painted and tainted flame-haired matron in his lithograph “The Madam.”

Although of the three artists, Max Beckmann apparently had the highest hopes for art as a potentially redemptive force, he makes the viewer complicit in a squalid kind of voyeurism in “Lovers,” where the entangled bodies sprawl immodestly in a room whose disorder adds to the sense of intrusive intimacy. By contrast, in “Dressing Room,” where a middle-aged dandy appears altogether too proprietary toward a comely young female performer, a sense of casual corruption overshadows eroticism. Beckmann’s moral stance is implicit in the drypoint “Frontal Self Portrait with House Gable in the Background,” where, in contrast to Dix’s

forementioned wolfish autoportrait, the artist comes off as stern and tightlipped as a country parson.

Yet in a “Self-Portrait in the Hotel,” where the same face wears a more intense, almost wild-eyed expression, Beckmann might appear right at home among Grosz’s cafe carousers. For some of us, however, Beckmann will always excel in multifigure compositions such as those in the three drypoints, “Ice Skating,” “Merrygoround,” and “Behind the Scenes,” where his subjects, whether in or out of doors, invariably appear crammed into spaces as patently claustrophobic as Anne Frank’s attic.

By all means, catch the big show at MoMA in order to steep oneself in a stylistic smorgasbord of Weimar art. But make “Decadence & Decay” a priority, since it not only closes earlier but provides a more intimate look at three of the period’s supreme masters.

— Byron Coleman

Decadence & Decay, through June 24,
Galerie St. Etienne, 24 West 57th Street.
German Expressionism: The Graphic
Impulse, through July 11 MOMA
11 West 53rd Street.



Max Beckmann. Self-Portrait in Bowler Hat. 1921.
Drypoint. 12 3/4" x 9 3/4."
Galerie St. Etienne, New York.



Otto Dix. The Madam. 1923.
Color lithograph. Signed, lower right, and numbered 64/65,
lower left. 19" x 14 1/2."
Galerie St. Etienne, New York.



Otto Dix. The Two Browns (Circus Performers). 1922.
Watercolor, gouache and ink.
20 1/8" x 16 3/8."
Galerie St. Etienne, New York.

between sprawling surveys and smaller, more specialized showcases.

Like the Met’s “Glitter and Doom,” the exhibition at MoMA is overwhelming in its abundance, comprised of some 250 prints representing the entire range of frenetic graphic activity that the wicked era between the two world wars inspired. Unlike “From Broadway to Berlin,” however, which was drawn from Broadway lyricist Fred Ebb’s excellent but rather random and eclectic collection of modern German and Austrian drawings, “Decadence & Decay” is a sharply focused look at three major Weimar artists with distinctly different styles and artistic missions.

The insightful but uncredited exhibition essay makes this point splendidly, drawing contrasts between Grosz’s left-wing antiauthoritarian views; Beckmann’s belief that “the moral authority once vested in religion had been ceded to art,” and Dix’s existential, even amoral, conviction that humanity was basically beyond redemption.

As could be expected, of the three, Grosz’s swift line drawings are often the most stridently political. In “Ballot Box,” a 1922 ink illustration for “Road Open,”

Miniatures,” and the brilliant gouache “Cafe,” that Grosz most scathingly fleshes out the temper of his time.

Otto Dix’s lithograph “Self-Portrait in Profile,” with its set jaw, sharp bone structure, and slitted eyes captures the wolfish aspect of a man who volunteered for combat duty as a fighter pilot and wrote, “War... must be regarded as a natural event. You have to see human beings in this unbridled state to know something about them.”

Although there was never any doubt as to which side he was on, given his own predilections and history, one has to wonder if Dix identified on a visceral level with both the victims and the aggressors in “Bombs are dropped on Lens,” where terrified villagers flee in topsy turvy perspective as a bomber overhead wreaks destruction on the quaint dwellings lining both sides of the street. By contrast, the angular semi abstract treatment of Dix’s chalk drawings “Man Reading in Foxhole” and “Grenade Trench with Dead Men” suggests how numbed to the surrounding carnage soldiers can become by means of a cool formal distancing.

Then again, everyday life appears to be

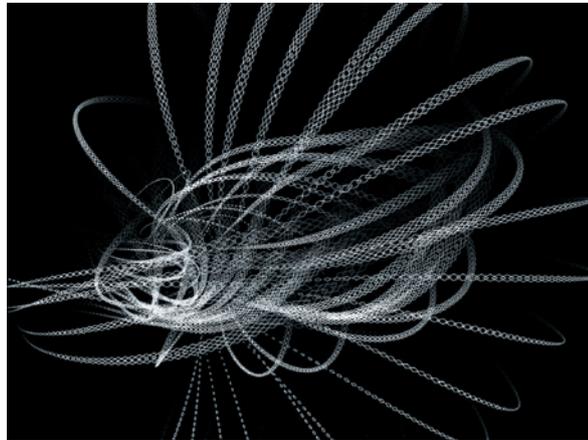
The Gesture in Paint and Software Helen Levin & Golan Levin

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curator: Diane Matyas

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"Arch Hommage VIII" 2011 © Helen Levin
45" x 44" Acrylic on canvas



A still from "Mesly" Interactive art © Golan Levin

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Urban Sprawl Soars Upward in Alan Gaynor's Photographs of the City



From "445 Park Avenue Panorama" series

"Architecture," the great nineteenth century English critic John Ruskin wrote, "is the art which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man for whatever uses, that the sight of them may contribute to his mental health, power, and pleasure."

This ideal, of course, was easier to uphold in Ruskin's time than it is in today's crowded cities, where cookie-cutter towers of glass and steel dwarf venerable stone structures harking back to a more genteel era and overwhelm the skyline. Yet Alan Gaynor, a licensed architect who studied photography with George Tice, John Sexton, and Jock Sturges to hone his own unique vision, finds beauty in the urban miasma nonetheless. And although his solo exhibition in Soho also features exquisite color photographs of ancient interiors in India, his formal yet gritty approach to New York City imagery ultimately steals the show.

"While it has been said that architecture is 'frozen music,'" Gaynor states, "my photographs demonstrate that in a city, it is not the individual buildings but the urban context which most closely resembles music. The layering of the buildings creates an overall 'ensemble' of varied man-made elements played against the natural ones."

With this in mind, Gaynor generally omits the human image from his pictures, preferring to focus on the pure geometry, the clean lines and gleaming surfaces, of the edifices he photographs. Among some of the most striking examples are those in the series titled "445 Park Avenue Panorama," where the myriad windows of adjoining skyscrapers create an intricate neo-cubistic collage. Here is a "found beauty" composed of potentially chaotic elements, a melange most certainly, but one unified harmoniously by the photographer's vision. And while it wanders far from the impossibly lofty ideas regarding secular architecture as religious inspiration and elevator of moral conduct espoused by Ruskin in his great essay "The Stones of Venice," Gaynor's work represents a noble effort to invest the cramped cubicles where urban business is conducted with an aesthetic

appeal all their own.

For without making utopian claims for the modern city, which would only invite irony, Gaynor confronts us with optically engaging abstract patterns that attest to urban dynamism, even as they evoke inevitable allusions to "Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows," as Allen Ginsberg nails it memorably in his modern poetic epic of urban life, "Howl."

It is in his "New York City Subway" series, however, that Gaynor discovers less ambiguous aesthetic qualities in spacious tiled passageways "largely defined by their structural elements, which have a wonderfully geometric purity about them, when viewed abstractly." Here, as in his other New York City pictures, he emphasizes the classical

quality of his imagery and heightens its drama by favoring black and white over color photography. This results in the linear clarity that we see in his picture of an empty subway platform where the closely spaced vertical columns, bolstered by prominent rivets, appear to bend vertiginously in vanishing perspective around the sharp rollercoaster curve of the tracks. Only the litter on the tracks and the paint peeling from the steel ceiling disrupts the abstract thrust of the composition by hinting at urban decay.

Another black and white print of an underground walkway with stairways leading down to the trains recalls George Tooker's eerie magic realist painting "Subway," in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, sans the somnambulant, zombie-like passengers. Yet its many aluminum-mirrored columns yield intriguing reflections, suggesting distorted human phantoms

resembling Francis Bacon's monsters or the elongated starvelings of Giacometti.

Indeed, Gaynor's photographs are so skillfully composed as to evoke a host of art historical references, as seen in another series where bridge girders, trestles, and the steel beams of overhead highways in Lower Manhattan crisscross with an abstract thrust

reminiscent of Franz Kline's black and white abstractions. Such references, whether intended or not, serve to make his pictures all the more engaging for the visually sophisticated viewer. Indeed, should he continue to produce pictures equal to the quality of those in his present exhibition, Alan Gaynor shows every promise of producing an oeuvre to compare with the immutable images that Berenice Abbott created of New York City in the 1930s.

Granted, the city wears a different face, now that much of the urban sprawl

has shot upward, and in the residential neighborhoods many citizens are stacked to the clouds, rather than spilling out onto the stoops and streets, as in Abbott's day.

One was reminded of this by one of Gaynor's pictures in particular, in which a few such shadowy cliff dwellers could be glimpsed (but barely) like the tiny travelers in traditional Chinese landscape scrolls, in the windows of a high-rise apartment building.

This is perhaps the quintessential image of humankind's diminished position in a century in which property all too often determines destiny. But, hey, don't blame it on this architect turned insightful photographic artist: Alan Gaynor doesn't make the news; he simply immortalizes it.

— Ed McCormack



From the "New York subway" series

Alan Gaynor, Viridian Artists,
530 West 25th Street, June 7 - June 25

James Grashow's Magnificent Monument to Mortality

“Several years ago while visiting his art dealer, Alan Stone (who was my father), he stumbled across some of his giant fighting men that had been put outside due to lack of space,” says the documentary filmmaker Olympia Stone of the sculptor James Grashow, the subject of her current project, *The Cardboard Bernini*. “They were disintegrating. Although it was deeply painful and shocking for Jimmy to see his work like that, it was also surprisingly beautiful.”

Was it a form of masochism or nihilism, triggered by the trauma of that experience, that compelled Grashow to spend three years creating a huge, compulsively detailed corrugated cardboard send-up of the Trevi fountain in Rome, which recently filled the entire exhibition space of the Alan Stone Gallery and that, like the symbolic birthday cake left out in the rain in the maudlin late '60s pop ballad MacArthur Park, he intends to eventually abandon to the elements to disintegrate?

“Corrugated board is material that understands its mortality,” the sculptor says, “it knows that it’s destined for trash. It is bonded to the human experience. They say 85% of everything on the planet has spent part of its life in a cardboard box. Corrugated board and us have a shared destiny, it is in our DNA. Rescued from the trash, corrugated

board is so grateful to have another chance.”

With Neptune’s beard rippling in the wind, nubile naked sea nymphs and tritons riding rearing steeds amid leaping fish and curling waves, Grashow’s gigantic cardboard sculptural conceit out-Baroques Bernini. Indeed, the installation filled the gallery space with an over-the-top energy that Bernini himself could never have imagined.

Most art seems to spring from a desire to create something that cheats mortality. James Grashow, however, apparently decided to embrace mortality — or at least acknowledge its inevitability. An awareness of mortality awakened by the terrorist attacks of 9/11 made Olympia Stone decide to quit an unsatisfying production job and make her first film, *The Collector*, Allan Stone’s *Life in Art*, about the obsessions of the complex man who inadvertently instigated Grashow’s three-year obsession before moving on to his own mortal fate.

There might have been the makings of a great dramatic play or film here, had truth not already surpassed fiction so dramatically that only a documentary would do. Was Olympia Stone hoping to either vindicate or reverse her father’s rash act by taking up the challenge? In any case, she has been following James Grashow since he began



working on the project in 2007, intends to stick with him to the end, and says, “There are many questions I hope to explore in the film: will Jimmy be able to follow through with his plan? What is the point of art and creation? What is the connection between creation and destruction?”

Those are big questions, all right. But at very least, in documenting “Corrugated Fountain” and its fascinating back-story, she will have preserved something of a fascinating work of art before it goes the way of all flesh and that damnable cake Richard Harris bemoans in that godawful song.

— Ed McCormack

James Grashow, recently seen at Allan Stone Gallery, 113 East 90th Street, www.allanstonegallery.com

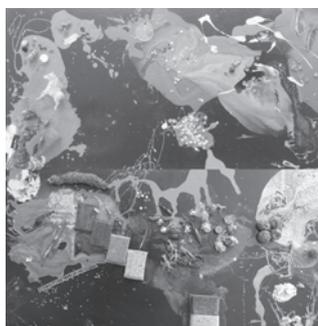
Aelita Andre: A Young Artist Begins

There are situations which not only can — but should — give any self-respecting critic pause. One of them is a phenomenon such as Aelita Andre, a four year old girl of Russian heritage who lives with her parents in Melbourne, Australia, and is presently being celebrated in major media — including by Germaine Greer in *The Guardian* and on *60 Minutes* — as “the youngest professional painter in the world.”

Let it be understood from the onset that although it is hardly the most important word in any serious discussion of art the use of the term “professional” in this context is no joke; strictly on a bottom-line level, this is a designation with which nobody, critic or otherwise, can quibble, since Aelita already has ardent collectors throughout United States, Europe, and Asia.

That said, one’s initial reaction to hearing of her was to remember Picasso’s famous statement that “It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child” (which, coincidentally, is being used in Aelita’s promotional materials). At the same time, one also had to remind oneself that a significant distinction between adult artists and children who paint is that the former are guided by conscious intent, while the latter are simply sailing along on the natural freshness of vision that makes every child, to some extent or another, something of a prodigy anyway.

One was forced, however, to reconsider this rather pat theory on encountering the paintings in Aelita Andre’s current solo exhibition in Soho. For not



only do her paintings show a remarkably sophisticated grasp of nonobjective form and color; they also appear to uncannily “channel” elements of abstract expressionism, the buoyant floating forms of Miro, the spattering techniques of Norman Bluhm, and any number of other specific stylistic facets of the entire contemporary painterly dialogue.

As for conscious intent, it was everywhere evident in a recent video of Aelita at work, totally absorbed in the act of painting (as well as immersed in the pigment itself, which streaked across her chubby Shirley Temple cheeks), as she crouched over a large canvas spread out on the floor, deliberating carefully before pouring brilliant acrylic colors from jars, then stroking them decisively with a large brush.

One thought of Mozart, already displaying

virtuosity on the harpsichord when he was three years old; of Chopin composing “Polonaises in G minor and B flat major 9” at seven; of Lang Lang, already a piano prodigy at three; of Yo-Yo Ma bent intent over his cello at four. Abstract painting, after all, can be likened to a form of visual music.

Granted, it seems more than a bit premature to burden Aelita Andre, as one unnamed Russian publication was reported to have done, with the honorific “mini-Malevitch.” And it would it would be just plain silly — and even a bit unfair to the young artist herself — to follow the lead of *Panorama*, the German magazine that called her “Jackson Pollock reborn.”

However, it would hardly be going too far to agree with Germaine Greer, the famous feminist, critic, and author of “The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work,” who is on record describing Aelita Andre’s paintings as “vivid abstracts full of life, movement and dazzling color.”

And it is pleasurable to consider this mighty mite casting her pearls before the jaded cynics of the New York art world. Is Aelita Andre a budding genius? Only time will tell. In the meantime, she is certainly a phenomenon.

— Marie R. Pagano

Aelita Andre, Agora Gallery,
530 West 25th Street,
through June 25

CFM Books Captures Ailene Fields' Fantastic Critters Between Hard Covers

Neil Zukerman, the owner and director of CFM Gallery, can trace his evolution as a publisher of fine artists' books back to a single childhood incident: The time he was inspired to get out his crayons and add color to Ralph Barton's black and white drawings for an edition of Balzac's "Droll Stories" in his father's extensive collection of illustrated volumes.

"Do you know what my punishment was?" Zukerman asks, then answers: "My father gave me the book. To this day it sits in a place of honor in my own library at home."

The library in the rambling Chelsea loft that Zukerman shares with Tom Shivers, his partner of many years, is filled to bursting with fairy tales and various other species of fantastic illustrated literature, in keeping with the gallerist and publisher's apparent conviction that life should be lived like a perpetual magical mystery tour. And his own considerable contribution to it is not limited to his crayon enhanced copy of Balzac. It begins with "Rose Daughter: A Re-telling of Beauty and the Beast," illustrated by Anne Bachelier with a text by Robin McKinley, published by CFM Books in 1997.

"An illustration tells a story and a work of fine art is the story," Zukerman is fond of saying. But with this book, and subsequent projects with Bachelier, including lavish, profusely illustrated editions of classics such as "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and "The Phantom of the Opera," it can be convincingly argued that illustration becomes illumination and the book becomes a work of art in its own right.

Still, with "Anne Bachelier: The Book/Le Livre," a hardcover compendium featuring over 400 paintings and drawings by the French fantasist whose entire oeuvre he has promoted tirelessly in the United States, Zukerman does ultimate justice to the work itself. And the same can be said of "Leonor Fini: La Vie Idéale," a hardcover deluxe edition with over 85 reproductions, as well as personal recollections of the artist by Zukerman and Joy Williams Brown.

Besides being luxurious and aesthetically impeccable, what makes CFM Books unique is how they are colored, so to speak, by Zukerman's close relationship with his artists. He spent a great deal of time with Fini in France toward the end of her life and, despite art world misogyny, did much to gain the notoriously difficult diva long overdue recognition in the top rank of the surrealist

masters.

In the case of Bachelier, he is not only her art dealer but such a close friend that he and his partner make a yearly ritual of commissioning elaborate costumes and attending Carnival in Venice with the artist and her husband.

Zukerman's most recent art book, released in late June of this year, "Out of the Nowhere into the Here: Ailene Fields / Sculpture," also grows out of a close friendship with the artist. Fields not only exhibits at CFM Gallery but has her studio in the same building and the two often visit back and forth during the day.

"The first time I saw Ailene's sculptures I was a private dealer, selling from my home,

same principle to book design, creating strikingly atmospheric printed showcases to complement the contemporary surrealist and symbolist art that he champions.

In his books with Bachelier — most particularly "The Phantom of the Opera" — the liberal use of dramatic full-page "bleeds," and double-page spreads, and the sense of a vast surrounding darkness enhances the mystery of the magical realms that her wraithlike figures inhabit. In Fields' case, starting with the book's black cover, against which a worm-like yet regal creature glows goldenly, the effect is of a cozy opulence thoroughly in keeping with the combination of whimsy, fantasy, and formal elegance that brings to a wildly imaginative personal

menagerie of real and imaginary critters, ranging from posturing primates and frog princes with actual crowns to anthropomorphic caterpillars, warthogs, and dragons.

"Her genius is the ability to distill each sculpture to its essence; to bring the 'story' to that one magical moment when the flash of recognition ignites," Zukerman says of Fields. "Frequently having had the privilege of watching Ailene sculpt I am continuously astounded at the hard work that goes into the simplicity which she brings to whatever she is doing. It is, in my opinion, that very simplicity which goes to the crux of her talent."

In contrast to the

bottom line concerns that characterize the conversation of so many art dealers at his level, what comes across when Zukerman talks about the artists he represents is a sense of wonderment and awe before their creations. He speaks with slightly rueful bemusement about how, like a man being outbid at an auction, he often thwarts himself as a dealer by ending up buying pieces for his own collection that he originally intended to sell. But who can argue with love?

"It is visceral," he says. "When my heart, head, and groin converge, the decision is made."

With Ailene Fields, the decision was made long time ago. And that Neil Zukerman has now decided to share the love is cause for celebration.

— Ed McCormack



Neil Zukerman going Gaga with Anne Bachelier at Carnival in Venice



...and with Ailene Fields at CFM Gallery

"Zukerman relates in his forward to the book. "I was captured by the work but didn't feel I had the venue that was best for her. Eventually I bought a few small pieces for my personal collection, but more importantly, came to know Ailene as a friend."

Simpatico permeates the entire project, enhancing the good humored warmth that Fields brings to cold stone, as she lends fanciful subjects immutable form. As in the books he has designed for Bachelier, once again Zukerman's sensitivity to Fields' unique vision creates an editorial context that literally caresses the work. Invariably, the pages of his volumes unfold like drawers opening in a cabinet of wonders. His characteristically dramatic deployment of liberal areas of black highlights, as in a shadowbox, the images and insights that he shares with the reader. As a gallerist, first in Soho then in Chelsea, Zukerman has always shunned the notion of "the sterile white cube" as the only suitable space for displaying art, and he applies the

Ailene Fields will be signing the book at CFM Gallery, 236 West 27th Street from 4 - 9 pm on June 28th

Gesture Fuses With Nature in the Paintings of Helaine Soller

In an essay titled “Art, Nature, and Reality,” the artist and critic Fairfield Porter wrote, “When a critic suggests that something is not worth doing because it has been done before, he is in effect urging an artist toward one of the more exciting aspects of art: the attempt to achieve the impossible.”

As one of our most savvy and sophisticated contemporary landscape painters, Helaine Soller had to know, when she started her “Paintings of Water Environments: Lotus, Taro and Water Lilies,” that she was embarking on a series most viewers would measure against the genius of Monet. This suggests an intrepidity almost verging on the foolhardy. But the good news is that Soller has indeed accomplished the impossible, in that her own style is similarly fresh and exhilarating — albeit in an entirely different way. For while Soller is equally attentive to light and color in nature, rather than the chromatic flecks of pigment favored by the Impressionists for transcribing atmospheric nuances, she employs bolder, more freely flowing spontaneous gestures harking back to Abstract Expressionism to imbue her large canvases with immediacy and vigor.

Another thing that relates her work to the latter movement is her commitment to the abstract integrity of the two-dimensional picture plane, even as she introduces a note of ambiguity to her more representational

paintings by suggesting actual landscape space. Paradoxically, however, this only enhances the dynamic of spatial tension that Hans Hofmann, the guru of the New York School, referred to as “push and pull.” At

the same time, Soller’s line is so sinuously refined and operates so autonomously in her compositions that one cannot help but also liken her to the great Zen ink painters of ancient China and Japan.

Soller’s kinship with these so-called literati artist/poets, whose spontaneous techniques actually preceded those of the American “action painters” by many centuries, and who believed that a calligraphic line could convey not only the spirit of nature but the character of the artist, comes across most clearly in the four panel painting called “Pond x Four.” Here, Soller’s exquisite linear delineation is especially effective in evoking marine vegetation with swift, vigorous vertical strokes, while she employs more sinuous cursive gestures to capture watery ripples and the graceful darting movement of golden koi



“Nature’s Melody”

fish just below the crystalline surface of the pond.

By contrast, in other paintings, such as “Taro and Lotus” Soller’s technique becomes more full-bodied in the Western manner and color is more vibrantly heightened in her depiction of exotic plants with sensual pink, green, and yellow fronds, set against a wide

expanse of blue water giving way to distant mountains and clouds. “Nature’s Melody,” a more characteristically intimate view of shapely flora and flowing water, equally strong in color and composition, is especially appealing for the artist’s mastery of patterning and chiaroscuro. Then there is “Eco,” where shimmering water, seen through breeze-blown tree limbs and verdant leaves, conjured via bravura brushwork, make for a particularly vigorous composition that lays bare Soller’s Abstract Expressionist roots. Indeed, it is the primacy of gesture in all of Helaine Soller’s paintings which infuses them with such immediacy and vitality.

— Ed McCormack

Helaine Soller, Boston Properties, The Gallery, 153 East 53rd Street, through June 30

Social Commentary Meets Beauty in the Art of Anti Liu

Perhaps the best introduction to the art of Anti Liu, a Taiwanese sculptor now living in Long Island, is his terracotta figure “Terracotta Marilyn Monroe.” We all know the pose: It’s based on that iconic picture of the blond screen goddess standing on a subway grate with her skirt billowing up around her thighs. Only, in Liu’s version, Marilyn is represented by an ancient Chinese warrior in a chain-mail vest, with bulky leggings under his billowing hem, resembling the entire army of terracotta figures dating back to 210 BC discovered in an underground mausoleum in China in the 1970s. While imitating Marilyn’s coy pretense of trying to preserve her modesty by pushing her skirt back down, he throws his head back and grimaces grotesquely.

The gesture encapsulates Anti Liu’s complex and convoluted satirical vision, as expressed in a recent interview: “My work demands reaction. I create work that both comments and plays with the notions of current affairs and political action. I subtly comment on those topics while also poking fun at them. We recognize the severity of the issues at hand yet view it as if a show we are watching or a game we are playing.”

Such is the self-admitted subtlety of Liu’s vision that his sculptures are open to a wide variety of interpretations. One possible meaning of “Marilyn Monroe” may be



“Single Couch”

the observation that celebrity worship now permeates celebrity culture, distracting us from the larger problems that plague our world. Some might even say such superficial idolatry of relatively trivial public figures offers us relief from the severity of problems that would otherwise overwhelm us with worry. One way or another, it’s all about escape. But as Liu puts it, “Who asked to be entertained?” Religion was once called “the opiate of the people.” Could it be that celebrity worship has replaced it?

To be sure, there is a comic sensibility at work in Liu’s sculptures. However, it is informed by a social conscience, in contrast to the amoral art of Tom Otterness, the American sculptor known for his cartoon-like

figures resembling Al Capp’s “shmoos” and the Pillsbury Dough Boy who has recently been deservedly vilified for shooting a dog he adopted from a shelter in the name of art for a film project.

Since moving to the United States, Liu has stated that he sees his work as a merging of two cultures. And in his work, which speaks so eloquently for itself, he appears to be telling us that one of the things uniting the global village is the universal hunger for consumer goods, an incipient materialism that has spread like a spiritual disease. Thus home furnishings as symbols of status and mindless comfort are another subject to be sent up in his clay and wax sculptures of bulky overstuffed chairs and sofas. Unlike the overblown soft sculptures of the Pop artist Claes Oldenburg, however, which resemble bloated balloons for the Macy’s Thanksgiving Parade, by virtue of his surpassing command of craft as a vehicle for conceptual ideas, Liu’s sculptures, while satirical, are also possessed of a formal elegance which transmutes what is inherently banal into an object of beauty by virtue of a unique aesthetic alchemy belonging to him alone.

— Byron Coleman

Anti Liu, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, July 26 - August 16. Reception: Thursday, July 28, 6 - 8pm

Helen Levin and Golan Levin Close the Aesthetic Generation Gap at The Staten Island Museum

An intergenerational joint museum survey is a rare enough event; but rarer still is one in which the two artists represent such opposite poles of expression as do Helen Levin and her son Golan Levin in their two artist exhibition, “The Gesture in Paint and Software,” at the Staten Island Museum.

Helen Levin carries on the painterly tradition of the New York School in her large abstract acrylic paintings while Golan

of muscularity in these strokes that rarely makes itself felt in the paintings of other female New York School painters such as Joan Mitchell or Helen Frankenthaler — a vigor and a violence which belies the gender stereotyping that often made that school seem an exclusionary boy’s club.

This painting in particular, with its energetic slashes of strident reds, greens, and blues, intersected by jaggedly architectonic black

of Contemporary Art, and in museums in Taiwan, Germany, Japan, and elsewhere around the world, he creates virtual environments that engage the viewer as a participant, and sometime collaborator, in the creative process. To be more specific, one could say he employs digital technology to put museum visitors through a kind of conceptual/perceptual mixmaster via his use of digital technology to explore issues of identity and interactivity.

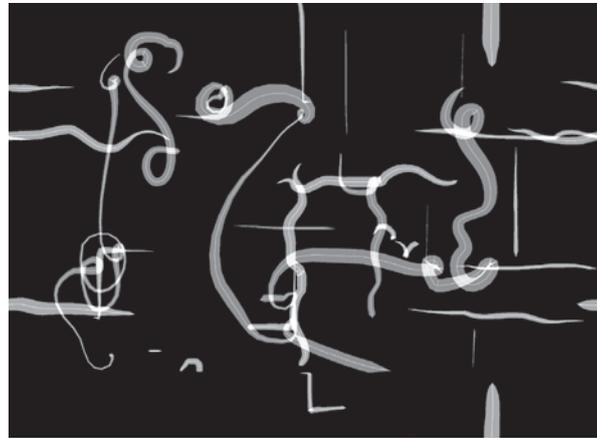
One of his best known installations, for example is *Re: Face* an updated digital variation of “Exquisite Corpse,” the surrealist parlor (or cafe) game in which several artists seated at a table would pass around a folded piece of paper to which each would add the features of a face that would not be revealed in its entirety until the paper was unfolded. Levin’s version substitutes for the piece of paper a row of six large LCD screens on which brief video slices of different participants’ eyes, brows, and mouths are scrambled and recombined in real time. Genders and races overlap and blend, giving each participant the experience of personally participating

in one of those computerized composite pictures of hypothetical interbred citizens of the future that we’ve all seen at one time or another.

Along with “Yellowtail” and “Meshy,” two pieces designed for touch screen technology that translate the users’ strokes into a variety of self-replicating abstract patterns, this show features “Ghost Pole Propagator,” an installation that harks back in time to some of the first images created by humankind to represent itself in the ancient petroglyphic stick figures carved and painted on stone surfaces and cave walls. Again in real time, visitors to the exhibition can see themselves transformed on a screen into archetypal stick figures that, remarkably, retain their own characteristic gait and individual gestures.

Among Golan Levin’s best known past performance projects was “Telesymphony, 2001,” a concert composed entirely of carefully choreographed dialing and ringing of the audience’s own mobile phones. Although his work is more in the tradition of John Cage, Yoko Ono, and other avant garde conceptualists, it shares a spontaneous spirit with the gestural abstraction of Helen Levin, and together mother and son make for a highly engaging family dialogue in this rare gem of a museum survey.

— Ed McCormack



“Yellow Tail” ©Golan Levin



“Arch-Homage II” ©Helen Levin

Levin creates interactive software projects generated with digital “motion capture” techniques. Yet the purpose of the show, according to Helen Levin, is to unify a commonly perceived dichotomy that supposedly exists between older and newer media, and demonstrate “a synergy between the paintbrush and the computer.”

For her part, Helen Levin demonstrates that the power and the immediacy of the paintbrush remains undiminished since the heyday of the Abstract Expressionist movement, from the mid 1940s through the 1950s. Levin continues to keep the faith of pure, untrammelled gesture that characterized the first major homegrown American art movement in compositions such as “Jazz Fusion,” 2009, with its fiery red forms floating against a vibrant blue ground. Here, as in all of her best canvases lush, saturated color is combined with the vigorous calligraphic strokes that signify authentic “action painting.” Unlike those of abstract painters whose compositions appear derived from landscape, Levin’s canvases yield few overt references to nature. Rather, as the title “Jazz Fusion” suggests her gestures seem to spring from inner moods, impulses, and emotions. Color, too, seems nonreferential, employed for pure chromatic impact in an intuitive, spontaneous manner.

But above all it is gesture that drives these paintings, as seen in the boldly slashing, overlapping, splintered strokes that animate the 2010 acrylic on canvas “Arch-Hommage II.” There is a sense

strokes as adamant as those of Franz Kline, blows away all such stereotypes.

Yet that Helen Levin can also employ a lighter, more lyrical touch when she so chooses is made equally evident in “Arch Hommage VII,” 2011, where both color and form are more muted. Here, gestural force is usurped by poetic subtlety, with wispy linear elements emerging, almost in the manner of penitimento, from a soft blue ground under which areas of pink, orange and yellow are partially scumbled to create delicate floating shapes. Indeed, it is Levin’s ability to move between extremes of expression, ranging from almost ferocious paint application to exquisite gestural refinement that sets her apart as a gestural virtuoso.

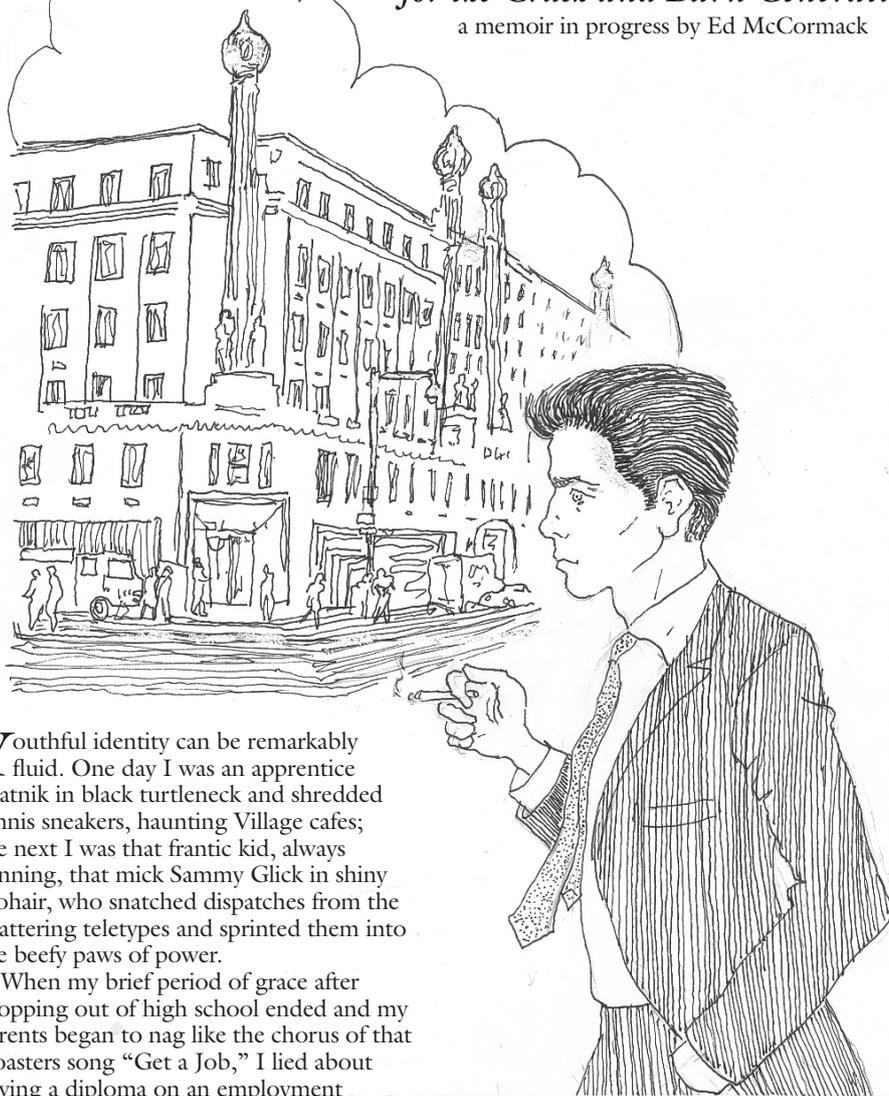
Indeed, what her work demonstrates most effectively in the context of this show is that the brush as extension of the human hand, transmitting graphic messages directly from the artist’s nervous system, mediated by the palpable sensuality of pigment, will always remain aesthetically valid and viable on equal terms with all the latest communicative developments of state of the art technology.

An educator as well as an artist, Golan Levin, presently Director of the Studio for Creative Inquiry and Associate Professor of Electronic Time-Based Art at Carnegie Mellon University, could be called a Renaissance man for the Information Age. Here, as in projects he has presented at the Whitney Biennial, the New Museum

A FLASHBACK TO CAMELOT

an excerpt from *HOODLUM HEART: Confessions of a Test Dummy for the Crash and Burn Generation*

a memoir in progress by Ed McCormack



Youthful identity can be remarkably fluid. One day I was an apprentice beatnik in black turtleneck and shredded tennis sneakers, haunting Village cafes; the next I was that frantic kid, always running, that mick Sammy Glick in shiny mohair, who snatched dispatches from the chattering teletypes and sprinted them into the beefy paws of power.

When my brief period of grace after dropping out of high school ended and my parents began to nag like the chorus of that Coasters song “Get a Job,” I lied about having a diploma on an employment application and ended up the personal copy boy of William Randolph Hearst, Jr. The Frank Sinatra Jr. of yellow journalism ran his publishing empire out of the Hearst Magazine Building, a block-long architectural curiosity with gothic turrets that looked like a crude mockup of the fairy tale castle in San Simeon, California, that his more flamboyant father famously built for his actress mistress Marion Davies. Its bustling Art Deco lobby, which faced out on the busy corner of 57th Street and 8th Avenue, always seemed on the verge of bursting into musical comedy. Indeed, all of midtown was the New York of the movies to me, having grown up as an urban provincial to whom the skyscrapers of the financial district, visible in vanishing perspective beyond two rows of tenements from Henry Street on the Lower East Side, had once seemed as distant as the spires of Quasimodo’s Notre Dame.

As a child, I rarely ventured above 14th Street, except to escort my mother to one of her many doctor appointments; or on those Saturdays when my father would use taking me to Stillman’s Gymnasium, near the old Madison Square Garden, to watch the pro boxers train as an excuse to hit every Irish bar along 8th Avenue. By the time I was an adolescent, apart from occasional excursions to the Museum of Modern Art, the Village was the only place I wanted to be.

Now, a still-impressionable kid of 18, I suddenly felt like Tony Curtis in “Sweet Smell of Success,” one of my favorite New York noir films, when I was dispatched to places like The Stork Club or Toots Shor’s on errands for Bill Hearst. Although only in and out of these swanky nightclubs during the day to retrieve an item my boss might have forgotten the night before or to pick up hot copy from the columnist

Bob Considine while he lunched with some politician or movie star, I got a buzz — call it a “contact high” — from being in an atmosphere of celebrity, privilege, and power that may account for why I eventually gravitated toward journalism as a career.

As contradictory as it may have seemed for a kid with bohemian aspirations to work for Hearst, I still had no politics to speak of. Besides, his New York Journal-American and Daily Mirror were two of our family papers. Along with the Daily News, they brought my favorite comic strips into the house during those years when my dream was to become a famous cartoonist. But it went beyond mere nostalgia: To me, the job felt oddly glamorous in an urgent Front Page kind of way, even though most of the tasks I was called upon to perform were numbingly menial and mundane.

My first duty of the day was going into the boss’s inner sanctum with a silver Tiffany atomizer containing a scented antiseptic, since Bill Hearst seemed to have a phobia concerning his own telephone receivers comparable to some peoples’ fear of strange toilet seats. Next, I would hand deliver manilla in-house message envelopes to his top lieutenants, all of whom had offices on the same floor.

One of them was Richard Berlin, the President of the Hearst Corporation, whose daughter Brigid would tell me years later, when I was a contributing editor to Andy Warhol’s Interview and she was appearing in his films as “Brigid Polk” (because, as Andy put it in his dyslexic way, “she’s always polking needles in her arms”) that around the time I was bringing her father interoffice mail she was bugging his den to eavesdrop on his conversations with Richard Nixon and other Republican pals.

Another of my stops was the office of Frank Conniff, National Editor of all the Hearst papers. Although Conniff, a big, gregarious silver fox of an Irishman, moved through a Damon Runyon world of Broadway characters, politicians, society types, and gangsters, he was something of a closet culture vulture. One slow afternoon when everyone else in the office was out to lunch, seemingly intuiting the Greenwich Village bohemian beneath my Sammy Glick exterior, Conniff showed me a coffee table volume that he kept in his office called “Picasso’s Picassos.” He also confided his fondness for the avant garde composer Charles Ives — although it was, predictably, Ives’ jingoistic marching music that he most relished.

While Conniff seemed reasonably well

adjusted, it didn't take long to notice that some of my other coworkers harbored strange strains of paranoia and spiritual malaise. Bill Hearst's secretary Mrs. Borg, whom I did not doubt would have taken a bullet for her boss and whose normal mode of speech was a conspiratorial whisper, was convinced that the office boy before me had been a Soviet spy. His name was Bob Stone, but she invariably pronounced it in quote-marks, as though it were a pseudonym for something more Russian-sounding, as in, "This 'Bob Stone' knew I was onto him. When he went in to spray Mr. Hearst's phones in the morning, I was right behind him to make sure he didn't rifle through his private papers or photograph anything with one of those miniature microfilm cameras that they use."

Once, when John Watson, one of Hearst's two head editorial writers went on one of his periodic benders, not reporting for work or answering the phone for several days, it was Mrs. Borg who gave me cab fare from petty cash and sent me down to the London Terrace Apartments in Chelsea to hand deliver a sealed envelope from the boss.

"At first he may not answer the bell," she whispered. "But just keep ringing until he does."

The Watson I knew from around the office seemed auspiciously named; for with his upper-class British accent, tweed suits, brushy salt and pepper mustache, and impeccable manners, even toward underlings like me, he could easily have slipped right into the role of his namesake, Sherlock Holmes' physician sidekick. But this mild-mannered man underwent a Jekyll to Hyde transformation when he started drinking, which seemed to happen more frequently whenever the cold war heated up and he and his editorial colleague Leo Monsky were called upon to push every confrontation between the two superpowers closer to the brink.

I was hardly prepared that first time for the haunted apparition in a stained undershirt and baggy boxer shorts who met me at the door, the stringy hairs of his comb-over dangling down one side of his head, his breath reeking of Scotch.

"What the devil do they want of me?" he growled.

After opening the envelope and reading Bill Hearst's note, however, he looked up contrite and watery-eyed, saying, "Do me a favor, would you my good boy, and tell Mr. Hearst I'll be back at work first thing in the morning."

It was not the first time I had been

greeted by a man in his drawers on an errand for the Hearst Corporation. On an earlier occasion, Mrs. Borg had sent me to the Hearst apartment, at 810 Fifth Avenue, to pick up something the boss' wife wanted returned to a department store. The door that was usually opened by a maid was flung wide by a wiry little man in noticeably more pristine white boxers than Watson's. Holding a tumbler of booze in one hand and scratching his belly with the other, he looked me up and down, and said, "And who the hell do we have here?"

"I'm Eddie McCormack from the office," I said. "Mrs. Hearst has something for me."

"Oh yeah?" he said, extending his free hand to grip mine firmly and yank me into the apartment with a jerk. "My name is Eddie, too. Eddie Condon. Come on in, pal."

"Who is it, Eddie?" a familiar fluted voice called out from another room, just before the cadaverously elegant Austine "Bootsie" Hearst swept into the foyer like the runway model she had once been, seeming not in the least abashed by either the drunkenness or the dishabille of the famous jazz guitarist and nightclub owner who had admitted me.

"Oh, it's the other Eddie," she said, flashing her icy smile. "Just stay put for a moment, Eddie, and I'll go get the shopping bag."

Why Mrs. Hearst was consorting in the afternoon with a man in his underwear was not something I wished to ponder any more than what her husband was up to with the glitzy blond actress Zsa Zsa Gabor, who visited him frequently and spent enough time behind the closed door of his inner sanctum to get tongues wagging all over the office. All I knew was that Condon was a happier drunk than John Watson and seemed a lot healthier than Watson's editorial colleague Leo Monsky, a morose, asthmatic chain-smoker with a chronic hacking cough.

Before the advent of the Norman Podhoretz neo-con, Monsky, who wheezed like a squeezebox when he spoke and reminded me of a basset hound in a vested Brooks Brothers suit, would have seemed more properly cast as a Jewish



Jeannie Sanders Eaton around the time she stole my job and hoodlum heart.

intellectual contributor to the liberal journal *Commentary* than a Hearst hatchet man. As in the case of Watson, how this refined, cultured gentleman (in his spare time a Sunday painter of muted Cubist caseins more in the manner of Georges Braque than Winston Churchill or Dwight Eisenhower), ended up hacking out rabid warmongering editorials for Hearst seems inexplicable in retrospect. But being as blissfully apolitical as I was back then, this was another matter it would hardly have occurred to me to ponder too deeply — especially after something happened that was to determine my entire future.

As usual, it was Mrs. Borg, the eyes and ears of the office, who had tipped me off a week or so earlier that something was about to change for me. It seemed that Mr. and Mrs. Hearst had a friend in Virginia whose teenage granddaughter would be coming to New York over her summer vacation from boarding school to do some fashion modeling. The Hearsts had promised to look after the girl, who had spent a previous summer with them some years earlier at San Simeon, while she was in the city. And in order that they might keep tabs on her during the day, she would be taking over my job while I would become the new assistant to Burriss Jenkins, Jr., the editorial cartoonist for the *Journal-American*.

Mrs. Borg assured me that this was a promotion; that Mr. Hearst had hand-picked me for the job because Mr. Conniff

had mentioned that I had artistic interests. But even though I had admired Jenkins' drawings since early childhood in the afternoon paper my longshoreman father brought home every evening, spending my days sharpening pencils for a cartoonist seemed more like a demotion. And I was even more annoyed when Mrs. Borg mentioned that this friend of the family for whom I was being bumped — surely some stuck-up rich girl — would be given time off whenever she needed it to go to her modeling appointments. To suggest that some pampered little Scarlet O'Hara could cover all of my duties part-time added insult to injury.

But as any attentive reader would surmise from my brief description of her in an earlier chapter, all was forgiven the moment the most beautiful girl my own age that I had ever seen in the vibrant flesh, rather than on a movie screen, appeared in the office to steal my job and hoodlum heart.

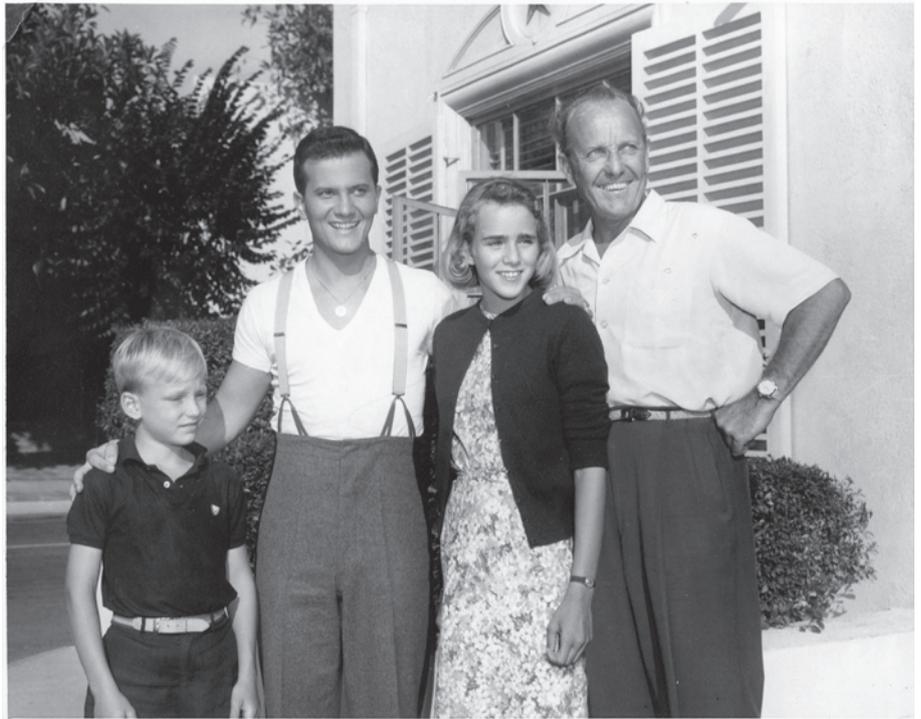
After Mrs. Borg had escorted her into the inner sanctum, I slumped in my chair in a sort of daze, wallowing in such doomful sentiments as only a young man raised on the romantic futility of syrupy 1950s rhythm and blues ballads could summon for self-torture. For while my Village hipster persona dug Monk and Coltrane, I still got chills whenever I heard the Shirelles sing, "In the whole world / you can love but one girl..."

And now that one girl had materialized as a vision of feminine perfection of a class far beyond my grubby grasp.

"Eddie, I want you to meet someone," I heard Hearst say, and shot up from my humiliating little gunmetal gray office-boy desk as he shambled toward me in one of his clownlike baggy suits and tasseled alligator loafers, with the vision in tow. "This is Jeannie Sanders Eaton."

So blindingly brilliant was her warm girl-glow that I could barely look at her up close. With her honey-colored hair, blue eyes, and bare suntanned shoulders that, it bears repeating, called to mind the incomparably evocative title of Irwin Shaw's short story "The Girls in Their Summer Dresses," she reminded me of Tuesday Weld, Sandra Dee, Carol Lynley and every other Hollywood starlet I had ever lusted for all rolled into one delicious package. Given the more ethnic aspect of my former love interests, if I had been one of the young Jewish hipsters I hung out with in the Village, I might have said she was "my first shiksa."

But when I braced myself to meet her eyes with mine, I knew I had been right: Those long lashes lowered like dewy dust ruffles; there was no way this gorgeous creature was going to fall for a low-rent Lower East Side greaser like me.



Jeannie, age 14, with William Randolph Hearst III, Pat Boone and William Randolph Hearst Jr. in California from the collection of Mrs. Marion Eaton, Richmond, Va.

Later she would confess that she had been too shy to return my gaze because boys in Virginia didn't look like me, with my slick black pompadour, slim jim tie, and shiny black suit. Three years earlier, when she was staying at San Simeon, and was still enough of a child to be impressed by that corny crooner, Bill Hearst had introduced her to Pat Boone. Now she felt as if she was meeting some cooler, dreamier teen idol like Ricky Nelson or Fabian. She would later even claim that from the moment she first saw me she somehow knew that we were meant to be together forever. But I would never would have guessed it at the time.

"So before you start your new job, Eddie, I'd like you to take some time to show Jeannie the ropes," Bill Hearst said, snapping me out of my romantic trance. Then, with a sly little man-to-man-wink, he added, "I don't think that should be too difficult, do you?"

* * *

"The first thing you have to do every day is spray Mr. Hearst's telephones," I said early the next morning, taking the opportunity to place my hand lightly in the small of Jeannie Sanders Eaton's back, as I ushered her into the inner sanctum.

"This is very important to him, something you don't want to forget," I told her, tactfully omitting my opinion about the procedure's pathological implications, as I demonstrated how to use the silver Tiffany atomizer. "If the phone doesn't smell fresh when he comes in later in the morning, he'll ask Mrs. Borg about it and she'll get very upset. She's probably

supposed to be the one doing it, but that's beside the point. Now it's the job of the copy boy ... or girl, as the case may be."

The curtains were still drawn and the light in the inner sanctum was dim. Opening them was the first thing I normally did after walking in every morning. But today I had purposely left them closed, and now wondered what she would do if I suddenly leaned forward and kissed her. The compulsion was so strong, it was almost as if that old devil Nat King Cole himself was whispering those lines from one of his songs in my ear: "Go on, kiss her, go on and kiss her." Thinking about it was not only giving me mental images of myself being led through the lobby and out of the building by a couple of cops but was also starting to give me an erection.

So I said, "Come on, I'll show you how we distribute the mail to the other offices on the floor," pulling the cord and letting the light flood in as we went out the door.

* * *

Later the same day, I got a briefing of my own from my new boss Burriss Jenkins Jr., a trim little man with a balding, light-bulb-shaped head and kindly smile-lines around his eyes, who mostly worked at home but kept a small office-studio down the hall. The son of a Kansas City minister, he was something of a preacher himself, as I would learn when I got to know him better — or perhaps I should say, when he got to know me better and started lecturing me about ethics and morality.

At first, however, I was the one who felt

morally superior, when he let me in on a Big Secret that he kept locked away in the cabinet next to his drafting table, where he also stored his extra pencils, pens, bottles of Higgins India ink, and other supplies. It was a hinged contraption called a pantograph, with a place to attach a pencil on one end and a stylus on the other, that I was astounded to learn he used for tracing photographs, either clipped from magazines or that he took with one or the other of two Polaroid cameras that he also kept under lock and key, and about which he also swore me to secrecy. Having had a natural talent for drawing the figure from imagination since early childhood, I couldn't help feeling that this award-winning editorial cartoonist, whose famous picture of Uncle Sam weeping over the Lindbergh baby had made him Hearst's answer to Hogarth, was something of a fraud when he told me one of my duties would be posing for Polaroids that he traced with the pantograph in order to get the positions and proportions of his figures right. He even kept an oversize suit jacket and a pillow to put under it in his coat closet for when he had to pose a skinny assistant as the rotund Soviet premier Nikita Krushchev, a recurring character in the stock company of political personalities that populated his cartoons.

"I've got the same kind of setup at home, where I do most of my drawings, but sometimes when the deadline is tight I work here at the office," he told me. "Besides giving you a key to our apartment, so you can pick up the mail that I get there and do other chores for me when Mrs. Jenkins and I are away at our country home on Shelter Island, I'm going to give you a key to this cabinet. Only, you must remember never to leave it open and never to mention the pantograph or the Polaroids to anyone."

He grinned wryly and added, "I wouldn't want Bill Hearst and Frank Conniff, who both think I can draw freehand like Michelangelo, to get disillusioned. They love my stuff, as well they should: Did you ever notice how handsome they look in those little thumbnail portraits that I drew to go with their columns? They look like matinee idols, when I get done trimming their jowls and squaring their jaws!"

* * *

From that first day, I started courting Jeannie aggressively. So naturally, I preferred being at the office, where I could flirt with her during the day and even treat her to a chocolate malted and a grilled cheese sandwich at the soda fountain in the Rexall drugstore on the corner opposite the Hearst Building. But

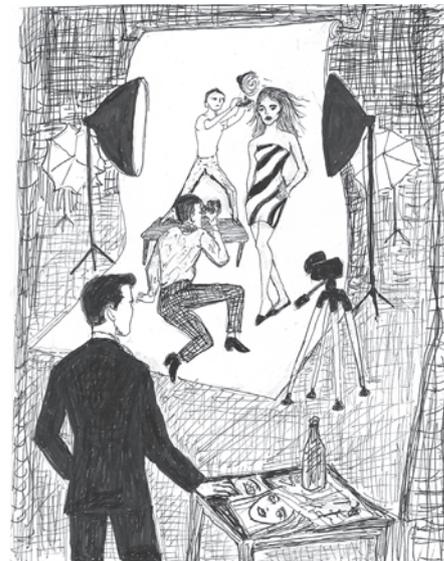
working at the apartment was pleasant enough. Jenkins and his wife, Georgia, a gracious gray-haired lady who was rarely around during the day, lived in a spacious if not particularly luxurious suite of rooms in Peter Cooper Village, on East 23rd Street. And whatever more knowing souls than myself might have thought about his politics, my new boss was a decent and amiable man. He was also well versed in literature, philosophy, and any number of other subjects, upon which he would often expound as he drew — or traced, as the case might be — while I did some routine task such as arranging his supplies or clipping pictures from Time and Newsweek for his reference files.

He was even intellectually curious enough to solicit my opinion of some paintings in a catalog that came in the mail of work by his nephew Paul Jenkins, a well-known abstract artist who would be delighted some years later, when we were introduced at a reception at The National Arts Club, to learn that the old guy had been aware enough of his work to be puzzled by it. In fact, I think it was Burris Jenkins' curiosity about a great many things that kept him youthful and consistently cheery, despite a case of ulcers so severe that the only food he could digest were chicken salad sandwiches on white bread, which he ate for breakfast, lunch, and supper.

Certainly this limited diet did nothing to diminish his good humor, as he stood at the window in his work room during our lunch breaks chomping on his chicken salad sandwich and telling me stories about ditzzy jazz age flappers, prohibition gangsters, and all kinds of other colorful characters he had known over a career that dated back to the 1920s.

Happily, I was also sent on frequent errands uptown, where there was always a chance of running into Jeannie, unless she was out of the office on a go-see or photo shoot for *Seventeen*, *Mademoiselle*, *Ingenué*, or one of the other magazines for which she modeled junior fashions or posed for beauty features. Once, after we started seeing a lot of each other and I had free time because the Jenkins' were away at their house on Shelter Island, she invited me along on one of them.

It was in a huge loft down on Park Avenue South and the popular standard "You Stepped Out of a Dream" was playing over the stereo system to set the mood for the session. Wearing make-up, which I had never seen on her before, and a skimpy cocktail dress that transformed her from an innocent country girl into a sultry, sexy woman; posed against sky-blue background paper that unfurled from a massive roll up near the ceiling, her hair "windblown"



by an electric fan held up by a stylist, she seemed the starry-eyed embodiment of that romantic ballad.

The photographer, a suave older man in an ascot named Hal Gould, moved around her in a balletic little dance, his camera clicking nonstop, as he exclaimed encouragingly, "Gorgeous! Beautiful! That's it, darling, just like that, magnificent! Oh yes, baby, you've got it — that's it, perfect!"

Not yet at all familiar with how fashion photographers coax and cajole the model to get the shot they want, to me it sounded intimate and ardent, as though Gould was her lover and I was a jealous boyfriend eavesdropping on the other side of a locked door. My heart sank as I stood in the shadows of the studio, outside the area of bright light enveloping the object of my desire, thinking that as much as I already loved her, there was no way I would be able to hold onto her. She would soon be whisked away by all these slick, fashionable people she was meeting every day, to a world of glamour and sophisticated lovers with whom I could never possibly compete. She was going to literally transcend me.

* * *

Worried as I was about who might be turning her gorgeous head whenever I went up to the office and she was not there, I dared not inquire after Jeannie to Mrs. Borg. For good German that she was, I was sure Mrs. Borg would report back to the boss if I seemed to be showing undue interest in the refined young lady whose virtue he and Bootsie were supposed to be safeguarding. Nor could I ask, without arousing suspicion, if their nephew Bunky Hearst — "Bootsie," "Bunky," who knew where these rich people got their silly nicknames? — had been hanging around the office. A chubby preppy in a school blazer whom I had never seen or heard of

before Jeannie arrived, Bunky had been making himself ubiquitous lately. And while Jeannie had assured me that she'd turned him down gently with excuses about previous appointments when he asked her out a couple of times, I feared that the Hearsts hoped to fix that shleppy rich kid up with her.

Such anxieties caused me to seek the counsel of a young reporter named Hughie Mahony, who was a few years older than me and with whom I sometimes had a few beers in one of those 8th Avenue Irish bars near the Hearst building that reminded me of the places we would stop when my father took me to Stillman's gym as a kid.

The first time I met Hughie up at the office we somehow got on the subject of boxing. He had been in the Golden Gloves and had the broken nose to show for it. I told him that I had boxed, too, in the Police Athletic League, without mentioning that I'd only had one bout, with a colored kid so emaciated that I insisted on being announced from the ring as Eddie "Hurricane" McCormack. Nor did I confess that my opponent had so thoroughly humiliated me in the first round that I had to sneak back to the gym the next afternoon to clean out my locker. Because Hughie was an aspiring playwright and I wanted a drinking buddy, I told him I was working on a play too.

"Oh, yeah? What's it about?" he said.

"I don't know yet," I said. "All I have so far is a title."

"What's the title?"

"The Pelican is a Wondrous Bird," I improvised off the top of my head.

"Not bad," he said. "Sounds like something by Tennessee Williams."

That was encouraging, and I resolved to start writing a play as soon as I had time; it seemed like the least lonely form of writing, since a whole glamorous show business social life came with it.

Now, when I confided my feelings for Jeannie to Hughie over beers at The Blarney Stone, my worldly friend immediately dispensed the following romantic advice:

"Listen kid, if you're really interested in this goil, who's probably some kind of debutante if she grew up in the same town with Mrs. Hoist and if her people are all palsy walsy with the Hoists and all that, you better do a little better than to take her out for a fuckin' grilled cheese sandwich and a malted. There's this French jernt called Le Fuckin Somethin' or Other right down the block from here that's probably more this broad's speed. I know you're a decent kid, not a gigolo or anything like that. But look at it this way: No matter what it ends up costin' you to take her there, you'll thank me some day when you end up a country

squire sittin' on a horse farm sippin' mint juleps on your fuckin' verandah, capish?"

* * *

The first thing I took was an electric typewriter from an empty office down the hall where I sometimes went to have a smoke. I just walked it right through the lobby, nodding to John, the gray-haired Irish doorman who stood there all day in his snappy uniform smiling like some kind of eunuch leprechaun or that midget bellboy in the "Call for Philip Morris" commercials, directing people to the elevators. Used to seeing me carrying things in and out of the building, he probably assumed I was taking it to be repaired. I don't remember how much I got for it in the pawnshop a few doors down the avenue. But guessing it probably wouldn't cover dinner for two in a fancy French restaurant, I went back to the office and got one of the Polaroid cameras that Jenkins kept locked up in his cabinet of secrets and took it back to the same place.

Technically, I had not yet stolen anything, I told myself, because I had the pawn tickets and could redeem the loot sometime in the future. The same could not be said, however, of the wad of British currency I found in the breast pocket of a sportjacket belonging to Peter Wilson, a visiting English journalist who was staying in the spare bedroom at the Jenkins' apartment for a couple of days while they were away in the country. I shrugged that off, too. Since my boss had told me that Wilson — a loudmouth limey with a face like corned beef and an outrageous mustache, whom I'd only met once — was a famous sportswriter for the London Daily Mirror and also appeared regularly on TV, I figured he wouldn't miss a few lousy pounds.

* * *

To impress her with my culinary sophistication, I ordered the frog legs for both of us. I had never dined in a French restaurant or eaten any part of a frog before, but since frog legs were something I associated with rich people, people with class, I told her they were my favorite dish on the menu and assured her that she would love the way they made them here too. When the waiter asked us what we wanted to drink and she ordered a Coke, I ordered a martini, another thing I had never had before but thought would appear more urbane than ordering a beer.

Although we had communicated easily from the beginning, since this was our first formal date I thought I should make "polite conversation." So I said, "Mrs. Borg tells me you've stayed at San Simeon. How did you like it?"

Instead of gushing about how luxurious

the castle was and how gorgeous the grounds were, as I would have expected most girls to do, she told me about an accident she had while out riding with Bootsie and Mr. Hearst. Because she had grown up on a horse farm and was "practically half horse myself," as she put it, they put her on their prize stallion, a beautiful white Arabian.

"Arabians are known for being kind of edgy anyway and an Arabian stud is even more so," she said, her innocent use of the word "stud" hitting me right in the groin. "But since I've been riding all my life, I was sure I could handle him. Well, we were about fifteen or so feet up a steep, narrow mountain trail when his back hooves slipped off the ledge and we went tumbling all the way down to the dry riverbed below. My mind must have gone blank for a minute or two, because I don't remember any of it. Bootsie and Mr. Hearst told me later that they had watched in horror, thinking I was about to be crushed to death, when the horse flipped over in midair with me still on his back. And I suppose I might have been, if he'd landed on top of me. But they say I slipped out from under him just before he hit that rocky river bed, landing on his back. My only injury was a sore elbow, and I must have jumped up right away, because all I can remember is standing there looking down at this beautiful white horse lying there on the river bed, so perfectly still. His eyes were closed and he wasn't moving at all, and I was thinking, "Oh my god, this is so awful, I've killed their favorite stallion!"

The happy outcome of the story was that, although the horse had been stunned by the fall, he finally came to, apparently unharmed, and she was able to ride him all the way back to the stable. But she surmised that the experience had to have been chastening for him, telling me, "I've never seen a stallion so calm. He could have seen a hundred mares and I don't think it would have excited him at all!"

As we both laughed a little self-consciously at that thought, I couldn't help wondering if she had any idea of the tumescent affect she was having on the stallion sitting across the table from her — if I may be so immodest as to refer to myself in such terms.

When the frog legs finally arrived at the table I had no idea how to eat them. So I ordered another martini for something to do with my hands while watching her to see how one went about it. But she didn't start eating right away, which was fine with me because it meant I didn't have to either. For while wolfing down a grilled cheese sandwich and a malted side by side at a drugstore counter was one thing, eating face to face in a fancy restaurant,



where someone could see if your table manners were uncouth or if something got stuck in your teeth or in the corner of your mouth, was quite another. For the first time in my life, the mere thought of it made me agonizingly self-conscious. How, I wondered, had eating become an acceptable social activity anyway? Since it was part of the same repulsive gastrointestinal process as shitting, why was it more acceptable than, say, if we were to socialize on facing toilet seats? Okay, there was the olfactory factor to consider; but, still, sitting across from Jeannie Sanders Eaton, the very idea of eating suddenly seemed almost as obscene as shitting. Or at least the thought of my doing it with her watching seemed so, although I doubted that anything she did could ever seem anything but lovely to me. Then I noticed that she still wasn't eating either, just moving the frog legs around on her plate with a fork.

“I probably should have told you before you ordered them for me that I couldn't possibly eat frog legs, because as a little girl, I thought of the frogs in the pond on my grandmother's farm as my friends,” she would tell me later that evening, as we laughed about it all. “But I was afraid it might be bad manners. So I just kept looking at those cute little legs on my plate and feeling that if I ate them I'd be like ... a cannibal!”

At the time, though, her apparent lack of appetite made me worry that our dinner date must be going badly. So I signaled the waiter for another martini, in the hope it might calm me and make me more charming. Then the room went into a spin and I knew I had to go to the men's room

and splash cold water on my face.

I excused myself to go to the “lavatory” — unable to believe, when I heard myself say it that I had actually uttered that ridiculous elementary school word! — and leaning on the table as I got shakily to my feet, forgot to let go of the tablecloth. Frog legs and everything else on the platters and plates flew into the air. Glasses and cutlery went crashing and smashing and clattering to the floor.

Her eyes and mouth opened wide for a long, silent moment, before she convulsed with lovely, uncontrollable laughter, a single delicate frog leg tangled like a flower in her tawny hair.

* * *

Jenkins never mentioned the Polaroid camera. Chances are he never even knew it was missing, since he hardly ever worked in the office and on those few occasions when he did, I was the one who opened the locked cabinet and took out the other camera. Nor did the subject of the stolen pounds ever come up. Maybe Peter Wilson, now back in London, had been too polite to mention missing them for fear of affronting his host's hospitality.

But things had progressed rapidly between Jeannie and me since our icebreaking dinner date, and soon after they got back from one of their stays on Shelter Island, my boss mentioned that Mrs. Jenkins had found a bobby-pin in their bed.

“Is Mrs. Jenkins sure it wasn't one of her own?” I asked lamely.

“Yes, Eddie, very sure: she doesn't use that type,” he answered. “Anyway, there were also a couple of long hairs in our bed,

and they definitely were not gray, like Mrs. Jenkins'.”

Knowing he had me dead to rights, I said nothing.

“If I were you, Eddie, I would just try to be a little more careful,” was all he said further on the matter, possibly out of gentlemanly reluctance to cast aspersions on a respectable young lady's reputation. But he did take thereafter to lecturing me frequently on ethics and morality. And the more he did, the more I began to wonder if he might actually have been aware of my thefts but did not confront me lest I threaten to spill his secret about the pantograph.

Recalling it now, I'm shamed to think that this decent man, who had treated me like a son, might have thought me capable of blackmail. But that it even enters my mind may mean that I might not have been above it after all. Anyway, there was a poem by Rudyard Kipling that he recited to me more than once, saying it was one of his favorites and that there might be something I could learn from it, since, “One thing I've noticed about you, Eddie, is that you always seem to go for the quick applause, rather than taking the time and effort to work for a more lasting result. I don't think you've really learned yet that nothing, be it financial success, fame, or the love of a good woman ever comes to you unless you put the work in.”

Now I knew for certain that I didn't want anything to which he seemed to be alluding to get any more specific. So I simply nodded and let him read the Kipling poem to me. It was called, “If,” and standing at the window, gazing down at the traffic passing along the East River Drive, he recited it from memory between bites of his chicken salad sandwich. It was a long, sentimental moral peptalk by a writer I would later come to regard as a racist, once I acquired a smidgen of political awareness. But Jenkins obviously intended it to be inspirational and perhaps instill a semblance of character in me.

“If you can keep your head about you when all about you / Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,” he began, and went on piling up the “Ifs” ad absurdum, as in: “If you can dream — and not make dreams your master; / If you can think — and not make thoughts your aim; / If you can meet with triumph and disaster, and treat those two impostors just the same...”

By the time he got to the part that goes, “If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken / Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools / Or watch the things you gave your life to broken / And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools,” I was silently snickering to myself about that old-timey Robin Hood word “knaves,”



and reflecting that in my neighborhood of knaves, we had called fools “chumps” or “schmucks,” and felt they deserved whatever they got.

Building up to a full head of steam, flecks of chicken salad flying from his mouth, Jenkins hit me with the final stanza: “If you can fill the unforgiving minute / With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run — / Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it, / And — which is more — you’ll be a man my son!”

* * *

Before we knew we would still be together when the ice was back in the rink at Rockefeller Center, I had promised to someday take Jeannie skating there. She reminded me of that promise after her family had agreed, however reluctantly, to let her remain in New York to continue modeling and study acting while attending the Professional Children’s School, rather than returning to Fairfax Hall in the fall.

I had never been on ice skates in my life but was so ecstatic not to be losing her that I thought I could bluff my way through by sheer force of will. Until my legs betrayed me. The second time I landed on the ice she begged me not to try again, and said she was touched rather than angry that I had risked breaking a limb to impress her. That she forgave my lie, however, didn’t stop her from teasing me: “So I guess we won’t be going to that ski lodge with the roaring fireplace that you told me all about either, huh?”

“I’ve never skied in my life,” I confessed, “I guess I was just trying to impress the beautiful debutante with my jetset lifestyle.”

“I am impressed,” she said, “with how incredibly insane you are! But who ever told you I’m a debutante? Certainly not I! Is that the only reason you’re with me, because you think I’m some kind of rich girl?”

“Of course not! But doesn’t your family

own a big horse farm?”

“Yes, but my grandmother had to work hard to keep it up,” she said. “When my grandfather bought the land and built the house, he owned a quarry. Then he got ill and had to sell the quarry to his brother Wallace, who’s the one that ended up with all the money. After my grandfather died, my grandmother had to start a riding school for children on her property in order to survive, pay the taxes on the land, and pay my tuition at Fairfax Hall and everything.”

“Well, I guess I got the wrong impression because of your friendship with the Hearsts,” I explained.

She made a face. “Oh, that’s just because Bootsie grew up in Warrenton and my grandmother has known her family, the McDonnells, from way before she became a Hearst. In fact, Bakka — I’ve called my grandmother that since I was a little girl, but have no idea what it means — even had to sell some of her land to the Hearsts to meet her expenses. And I’m sure she probably sold it to them for too little, because as far as I’m concerned she’s always gone too much out of her way for the Hearsts and all the other rich people who come to the horse shows on the farm. Sometimes I even think that’s why she pushed me to ride so well, to win so many ribbons and go fox hunting and so on — just for the snobby social part of it. I remember once how appalled I was when we were going somewhere with Bootsie and Mr. Hearst in their car and they lit up cigarettes and she took one too. I said, ‘Bakka, what are you doing? You know you don’t smoke!’ Afterward, she was furious with me, called me a brat. But I couldn’t help it. I can’t stand seeing someone I care about acting all phony just to impress somebody.”

“So I guess I’d better be careful about my phony side from now on, huh?”

“You bet you’d better,” she said, “if you want me to keep caring so much for you!”

* * *

That may have been the day we began learning to love each other for who we really were rather than for who we imagined each other to be. We never did get to go skating together at Rockefeller Center, but we went there often to lean on the brass rail and watch others whirl and twirl like miniature figures on a music box to the piped-in waltz music in the rink below. All of midtown became our romantic snow globe that wonderful winter, as we wandered for countless hours with no particular destination, from the stone lions outside the 42nd Street Library through the gaudy lights of Times Square, under the glittering marquee of Radio

City Music Hall, and all the way up Fifth Avenue alongside Central Park to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Although she had bought a set of oils and canvas boards and showed a talent for painting landscapes and other subjects early in adolescence, her artistic ambitions had been discouraged as unsuitable for a proper young lady in the Virginia horse country. Now she looked forward to starting to paint again, as we strolled, entranced, through the galleries at the Met, sure that our love would be as enduring as all the treasures on the walls and pedestals.

It was at the Met, in fact, that we had our first quarrel over something so small that neither of us could later recall what it was. We stormed off in opposite directions, sulking separately through a maze of galleries, only to find ourselves side by side again, as if drawn blindly back together by some mysterious force. Without a word, we joined hands, more convinced than ever that our paths were irrevocably intertwined.

At other times, when she wanted me to help her rehearse a scene for her acting class, we’d sequester ourselves behind the locked door of Burriss Jenkins’ office in the Hearst Building after everyone else had gone home. Some of the more ardent love scenes from *Romeo & Juliet*, especially, would end with us on the floor, with the huge suit jacket and pillow that I wore to pose as Kruschev spread out beneath us as a cushion and our own clothes in disarray.

That was how we were one night when we heard footsteps out in the hall and then the click of a key in the door. We jumped up and were frantically attempting to cover ourselves when the door opened and the head of a mustached Latino man in a gray janitor’s uniform peeked in, took us in, and quickly withdrew. Hastily buttoning and zipping, I ran out of the office, following him as he strode briskly down the hall toward the elevators, while holding a walkie-talkie to his ear.

“Excuse me, excuse me,” I called after him. “Who are you calling?”

“Security,” he said, spinning on his heel.

“There’s no need for that, I work here.”

“I know, I’ve seen you. But you’re not working now. You’re in there with a girl.”

“Listen, that girl is Mr. Hearst’s niece, and we’re engaged to be married,” I lied, making a show of reaching into my pocket for my wallet.

“I don’t need your money,” he said, looking me up and down contemptuously, before turning his back.

I felt deeply embarrassed for my feeble attempt to pull class and bribe him. But at least he hooked the walkie-talkie back onto his maintenance belt before turning and continuing down the corridor.

* * *



A week or so later, Jeannie and I crowded into the inner sanctum with everyone else in the office to watch JFK's inauguration on the boss' big mahogany TV console. Surreptitiously linking pinkies as we perched on the edge of Bill Hearst's desk, we must have seen auspicious tidings of our own future glowing on the screen. For before the combination of sunlight reflecting off melting snow and an old man's failing eyesight forced him to put aside the typescript of the new poem he had written for the occasion and recite a less inspiring older one from memory, Robert Frost observed that "Summoning artists to participate / In the august occasions of the state / Seems something artists ought to celebrate." And although he never got to the lines heralding "A golden age of poetry and power / Of which this noonday's the beginning hour," the promise that we were starting out together in a newly enlightened era seemed as clear as the sparkling winter air through which the handsome young wedding cake couple made their way to the White House.

But perhaps the biggest surprise for a self-styled bohemian such as myself was that even the once scorned institution of marriage suddenly seemed to take on new glamour in their wake.

* * *

Before we traveled to Virginia to ask for her family's blessings my intended

failed to mention that, in lieu of the uniform of one of the better military academies, a proper young man in Fauquier County (which to an unwelcome stranger, I was soon to learn, could sound suspiciously like "Fuck You County" when pronounced in the local dialect) came calling in a "collegiate" style madras or seersucker sportjacket, pressed khakis, and cordovan penny loafers.

So while Jeannie may have thought I was as dreamy as Ricky Nelson or Fabian in my black "Continental" suit and the sharp style of footwear known in my neck of the woods as "Puerto Rican roach killers" (since their toes were pointy enough to fit into tight corners), I must have appeared to her grandmother, Kathleen Sanders, like a grimy urban smudge upon the verdant picture book landscape of Hilldale Farm.

Canny judge of horse flesh that she was, the family matriarch didn't have to inspect my teeth to find my pedigree wanting. Nor did my prospective mother-in-law, Marion Eaton, who had been summoned to Hilldale by an urgent phone call to her own home some 100 miles away, seem any more impressed with me, when she told her daughter, "If you don't send this strange boy away, Pussycat, I do declare I will have to lock you in the trunk of my car and personally carry you back to Richmond!"

Earlier in the day when we arrived on the farm, Jeannie had changed from the shirtwaist dress in which she had traveled to a plaid blouse and well-worn Levis, turning into a fetching tomboy to show me around. Hoping to wow her relatives with my stylishness, I had not thought to bring anything more casual than the black suit I had on. So I climbed behind her like a preposterous shadow over rustic post and rail fences, and we wandered over vast mountain fields into pastures where grazing horses looked up and came galumphing over at a pace almost alarming to a city boy, until she placed a calming hand on their noses and nuzzled their massive heads familiarly, obviously enchanting them as she had enchanted me.

Then we hiked up a steep hill to the grave of her grandfather. With no apologies to Tennessee Williams, he was known to all as "Biggy Daddy," and was the great, kindly love of her childhood. His fatal heart attack when she was eight had left her bereft and instilled an enduring curiosity in the little girl about the mysteries of life and death that would eventually lead her to a variety of spiritual disciplines. From early on, this hill became a sacred site where she often came alone to wonder about such things or simply seek solace, she confided, before taking my hand and leading me down to the stalls outside the shady, erotically pungent

barn, to meet one of her favorite horses, Easygoing.

"She's not the prettiest thing anyone's ever seen, and she looks kind of lazy, doesn't she?" she said, yanking the nag's chin-whiskers affectionately, then feeding it a handful of grain. "But don't let her looks fool you: she can really jump. Would you like to see me ride her?"

After saddling the horse and leading it down to the riding ring, she took the huge animal sailing over the jumps, one after the other, with such startling ease that I felt physically awed, even a little intimidated, by this wisp of a girl, all the attributes of whose lithe body I had thought up until then that I already knew so well.

* * *

We had just finished an uncomfortably silent early dinner with her grandmother and an elderly uncle named Walter Mellon (secretly known as "Watermelon" to Jeannie and her younger brother, Rick, as children), whose distinctive profile reminded me of the comic strip character Andy Gump, when barking dogs and the sound of a car coming up the hill to the driveway, announced Marion's arrival.

Mercifully, after I went over like the proverbial turd in the punchbowl when she introduced me to her mother, Uncle Walter sidled up and suggested, "Why don't you join me out on the porch for a little nip, Eddie, and let's leave the womenfolk to sort things out among themselves?"

As we sat in adjoining rockers between the tall white columns, the voices of three generations of high-strung Southern womanhood could be heard inside the house, rising and falling in strident, if not quite distinct, debate. Yet warmed by good bourbon, watching dusk descend softly on the countryside, I was thinking that I might easily become accustomed to this manner of life. Then, leaning forward in his rocker and placing a gnarled hand companionably upon my knee, the courtly old gentleman prepared to disabuse me of that pleasant fantasy with a cautionary tale

calculated to give any yankee interloper serious pause.

"Let me tell you an amusing little story, Eddie, about something that happened here in Warrenton to this other city fella named Igor Cassini," he began. "This Cassini was keeping company with Bootsie and was later married to her for awhile, before she divorced him to marry Bill Hearst..."

Thus began his folksy account of an incident the more fleshed-out official version of which I would only catch up with many years later, in a book compiled by the Fauquier Historical Society called "250 Years in Fauquier County: A Virginia Story."

The published account is illustrated with a fuzzy black and white photograph of a young man as scrawny as I was at the time that Walter first told me the story. He wears a dazed expression and has what appears to be a grimy white sheet wrapped around his lower body. His chin, neck, and bare torso are covered with large black splotches of a viscous substance flecked here and there with patches of something white. The caption below the photo reads: "Igor Cassini, after his tar and feathering."

The main text of the article starts off innocuously enough: "An incident that happened in Fauquier County on the night of June 25, 1939 has become the stuff of legend." But the narrative quickly loses its benign Chamber of Commerce tone and takes on a more Southern gothic aspect. For it goes on to relate how 23-year old Count Igor Alexandrovich Loieski-Cassini, a gossip columnist for the Washington Times-Herald, was lured out of a dance at the old Warrenton Country Club that he was attending with Austine Byrne 'Bootsie' McDonnell, daughter of Maj. and Mrs. Austin McDonnell, a prominent Warrenton couple, on the pretext that someone had run into his car



Igor Cassini after his tar and feathering

and set upon by three local youths.

"A sharp blow to the base of my skull knocked me flat, and when I woke up, I was stretched out in the back of a car, with four large feet pressed on top of me and two hands in reach of my neck," Cassini is quoted saying.

The feet and hands belonged to Ian and Colin Montgomery, the two sons of a local matron named Mrs. Robert Montgomery. Another young man named Alec Calvert drove the car to a dark country road, where Cassini was knocked to the ground, stripped naked and stomped, before

being "submerged in something sticky that made me feel as if I had fallen into a swamp."

"In the beginning," the article allows, "most of Cassini's reporting on the Fauquier County social scene was neutral or complimentary. However, when he sarcastically questioned why Mrs. Robert Montgomery of Warrenton had been invited to a garden party at the British Embassy when King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited Washington D.C., he managed to raise the ire of her two sons and their friends. For the record, Mrs. Montgomery was related to the former tutor to the children of the Royal Family."

When the case went to trial "popular opinion was clearly against Cassini, and his assailants received small fines and suspended sentences." The reader is also informed that Cassini eloped with Bootsie a year later, "just before she was to leave for Hollywood under an acting contract with Howard Hughes." Here, the subtext seems to be that the scurrilous scoundrel had not only questioned the social standing of a prominent family but had also deterred a hometown girl from a film career that doubtless would have done the county proud.

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The GALLERY & STUDIO

advertising deadline for the September/October issue is August 9 for color, August 16 for black/white.

We are invited to conclude that the same shameless opportunist turned his proper punishment to his own advantage, when Cassini is quoted saying, "I confess that the incident, however painful, was also a stroke of luck. Tar and feathers had launched my career ... I became national news over night."

When Walter told me about the incident on the porch that evening, I was still unaware that Igor Cassini ended up writing the "Cholly Knickerbocker" column for the Journal-American. Surely, as a kid, its catchy title must have caught my eye enroute to the comic strips; but like most people in my neighborhood, I had little interest in society gossip. Anyway, during the Camelot era I would probably have confused Igor with his couturier brother Oleg Cassini, who was then much more in the news for dressing Jackie Kennedy.

But without all this back-story, Walter Mellon's succinct telling of the incident, which ended abruptly on that dark country road where the snide city slicker received country justice, had the chilling visceral impact of those gory E.C. Horror Comics swamp tales I had pored over bug-eyed, as a child in the early 1950s.

When it ended, the old man and I sat silently sipping our bourbon. Now the voices issuing from inside the house sounded even more strident. I thought I could discern words of recrimination, cries of indignation, fits of weeping. As a last resort, if her family refused to let us marry, Jeannie had planned to drop the bombshell that she had already slept



with me — so they might as well give in. But since my intended was still some months short of her eighteenth birthday, I couldn't help wondering what the local laws were regarding statutory rape.

Night had settled on the yard. The hills beyond looked black as tar.

* * *

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Emotion Abstracted: A Retrospective Overview of Dorothy A. Culpepper

While the trajectories of most artist's careers can be charted in "periods," during which they explore different visual strategies and often try on widely varying modes of expression, Dorothy A. Culpepper appears to have followed a consistent line of development since 2003, when her work first truly coalesced — for this writer, at least — in an exhibition at Montserrat Gallery's original location in Soho. Culpepper's stylistic consistency would seem to be a result of discovering her true expressive *métier* early on in her career and pursuing its possibilities thoroughly and with growing commitment and authoritativeness steadily over the ensuing decade to the present. The species of painting that Culpepper favors is, of course, auspiciously open-ended and replete with endless possibilities, being abstract and gestural, and involving the dripping and manipulation of poured paint on large surfaces more frequently than employing a brush in the traditional manner.

What one recalls most vividly about that landmark 2003 solo exhibition was the sheer ebullience of her style, which seemed to successfully synthesize large scale "stain painting" on unprimed linen in a manner associated with painters such as Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis and the thicker application of dripped and poured pigment recalling Jackson Pollock.

Like the latter artist, too, Culpepper often texturally augmented her hefty impasto with scatterings of pebbles, nails, bits of wire or other found materials that seemed to get swept up into her energetic painterly tide rather than being deliberately placed. Indeed, the immediate impression of her compositions was of their being natural events, rather than preconceived formal contrivances, which gave them an exhilarating sense of immediacy and inevitability.

One was particularly struck by a painting called "Reflections Among the Milkweed." For if its title was redolent of Dylan Thomas, this composition was fully worthy of it in terms of its lyricism and poetic allusiveness, with effusions of white-capped green and blue rivulets seeming to issue out from its center like cosmic fireworks.

Perhaps the greatest test of a painter's commitment to a style is its ability to withstand a life crisis and become a vehicle for powerful personal emotion. As it turned out, Culpepper's next exhibition the following year in the same venue was entitled, "Dedicated to Charles H. Culpepper," and was an elegy to her recently deceased husband. While noting

the show's elegiac mood, a reviewer for this publication went on to say, "Yet at the same time there is also the sense of a life being celebrated as well. Indeed, the sheer effusiveness of Culpepper's style invariably conveys a celebratory feeling, no less here than in earlier exhibitions. Thus, although Culpepper is an intuitive painter who apparently makes no attempt to invest her compositions with conscious philosophical content, a profound paradox nonetheless comes across in these new paintings: One is compelled to contemplate the more transcendent aspects of death as a time of spiritual passage simultaneous with the concept of earthly loss and mourning."

This combination of transcendent and emotional elements came across most powerfully in the stately vertical canvas called "Explosive," where Culpepper's densely overlapping skeins of swirls and drips of color appeared to pulse chromatically with a concentrated intensity. It was one of her most worked up, thickly encrusted canvases, and there was no question that its muscular convolutions contained an element of grief. And while one had previously considered the found elements Culpepper often mixes with her pigments as mainly textural enhancers, intended to add tactile ruggedness to her surfaces rather than to function symbolically, it was impossible in this case not to think of the role nails play in crucifixions. For all the composition's tortured complexity, however, the central placement of the main body of the painting, with areas of bare white priming coat showing around the edges of the canvas, created a sense of floatation, of ultimate transcendence, as it were.

The intensity continued in a new way in Culpepper's 2005 exhibition, where layering and collage elements began to play a more prominent role than ever before in her oeuvre. In a work called "Here Comes the X, Y, Z's," for example, sizable shards of wood and cutout alphabet letters are embedded in the pigment, creating an effect similar to bas relief. And in "Shell Shocked," sea shells become a visual, as well as tactile feature, creating an abrasive surface akin to Julian Schnabel's paintings incorporating smashed crockery. In view of Culpepper's still relatively recent loss, it is tempting to see these shells, in concert with the rueful pun of the painting's title, as symbolic armor against the sense of emotional besiegement and vulnerability that can linger in the wake of a prolonged period of grief. Since it's always something of a stretch to interpret abstract paintings too literally, it might be safer to say in a more

general sense that Culpepper seems to be the sort of consummate painter who has always been able to ride the changing tides of life and incorporate their varying rhythms into each phrase of her art in the way that Norman Mailer meant when he stated, "The mark of a true artist is the ability to work even on a bad day."

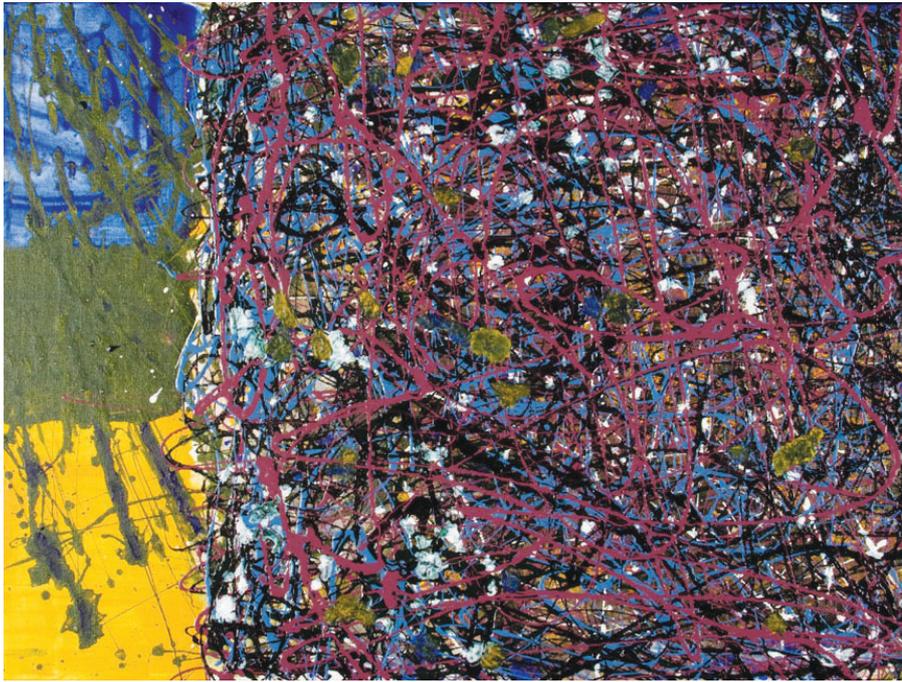
The one constant in Culpepper's paintings, however, is the cultivation of joy as a guiding principle to art's transformative powers, and this tendency becomes increasingly more pronounced, taking on added traction as the decade progresses. By 2007, the year of her first solo show in Montserrat's new space in Chelsea, she is hitting her stride, her paintings becoming increasingly more sumptuous of surface, subtle of color, and buoyant of form, even as she opts for reducing their dimensions to achieve a new sense of intimacy. For such is the openness of her compositions that actual size proves to have relatively little relationship to scale: the impact of her paintings remains undiminished when the dimensions of the canvases are reduced from mural to easel size.

One new feature of these smaller works is a centralized focal point within her skeins and drips of brilliant pigment that takes the form of a either window-like opening or a solid patch of color, such as the tangerine colored orb amid the splashes and explosions of variegated hues in "Reflection," one of her most and resplendent works of that period.

Contrasts between a sharp linear calligraphy akin to Georges Mathieu's swiftly scrawled *écriture* and a softly diffused wet-into-wet technique, causing colors to run and flow together in an almost "marbleized" manner, make themselves especially felt in the 2008 solo show that Culpepper called "Expression on the Edge." The title seemed to allude to the artist's conscious commitment to the risks inherent in spontaneity.

Culpepper has actively encouraged such risks from the onset of her exhibition career in New York, as far as this writer has been able to discern. But this show seemed to assert such values with special vigor, in paintings with titles such as "Zoom," "Agitate," and "Verve," that live up to their names. The latter work is especially exemplary in this regard, with some of the densest linear layering that Culpepper has ever created colliding with a weighty slab-like shape on the left side of the composition in a manner that visually demonstrates one of her pet phrases: "painting to the max."

Culpepper has always said that



"Verve"



"Explosive"



"Purple Deep"



"Killer Pain"

she regards paint as “an extension of my feelings or moods,” and the vital connection between art and emotion has become ever more emphatic in her painterly output over the past three years. The dominant mood in some paintings is rhapsodic, as seen in “Purple Deep,” one of the highlights of her 2009 solo exhibition, with its palette of sonorous purples and strident reds flowing through a symphonic horizontal composition. Other paintings exhibited over the next couple of years, appear to unabashedly celebrate the joys of

creation, as seen in the tellingly titled “I Am the Universe,” as well as in “Color Walks With You.” Both seem to celebrate the sense of empowerment that being a painter bestows. Especially exuberant in this regard is the tellingly titled canvas “I Am The Universe, with its central “window” in a field of densely layered drips opening upon an infinite cosmic expanse, suggesting a sense of godlike omnipotence.

Conversely, other paintings such as the jarringly visceral “Killer Pain,” in her 2010 exhibition, “Abstract Expressions,” where

the composition is as raw as an open wound, she makes painting an unflinching vehicle for exorcising more visceral emotions.

Indeed, it is just this willingness to lay her feelings bare in her art that has, for over a decade and a half, made Dorothy A. Culpepper one of our most consistently compelling postmodern abstractionists.

— Peter Wiley

Dorothy A. Culpepper's solo show can be seen from July 5-30, and her paintings are also in the Year-round Salon Exhibition at Montserrat, Contemporary Art 547 West 27th Street

Bravo! An MFA Thesis Show Where Painting Still Prevails

To paraphrase what former Beatle Paul McCartney once said of himself when morbid rumors began to circulate at the height of his band's fame, the news of painting's demise has been greatly exaggerated. Yet that there exists in New York City a nonprofit preserve called The Painting Center indicates that, in this era of conceptualism and multimedia, some consider the most venerable of visual arts endangered.

For this reason, among others, we should all be grateful that, unlike many other contemporary art schools which have all but abandoned studio practice for courses in art world politics and success strategy, Western Connecticut State University continues to make pure painterly endeavor a priority in its MFA



Doug Friday

program. Thus the school's Spring 2011 Thesis Exhibition was a refreshingly juicy affair, making clear that painting still holds serious sway among the current generation of emerging artists.

Given that Western Connecticut State University is nestled in the bucolic setting immortalized by the Hudson River School and the Connecticut Impressionists, it only stands to reason that landscape should figure prominently in this show. The succulent oils of Doug Friday seem very much in the tradition of Fairfield Porter, Neil Welliver, and other modern realists who apply the principles of abstract expressionism to nature subjects. In one canvas a frieze of fiery autumn foliage with glimpses of blue sky showing through provides an occasion for Friday to display his muscular paint handling while preserving the sanctity of the two-dimensional picture plane. In another, more spatially ambiguous composition Friday evokes dramatic contrasts of chiaroscuro. While the shadows of a row of clotted trees abutting the enclosed porch of a country house saturate the lawn, suggesting submerged domestic dramas, the fields beyond are splashed with yellow sunlight.

The intimate landscapes of Isabelle Day



Isabelle Day

project a poignant sense of fleeting time and nature's transience. In one oil on board, fluffy whipped cream clouds take on sculptural solidity, floating dreamily over massed tree tops. Like background fragments from Fragonard or Watteau sans the frilly anecdotal content, Day invests elements of the Rococo and the Baroque with plein air immediacy by virtue of sharply cropped compositions and her sophisticated contemporary grasp of abstract form.

The frenetic gestural abstractions of Kevin Dunn suggest what Willem de Kooning, in one of his more felicitous phrases, once referred to as "slippery glimpses" of elusive imagery amid their



Kevin Dunn

lively array of shuffled shapes and shifting planes. Dunn's vigorous brushwork keeps every square inch of the composition in a state of constant flux, turning each painting into a highly charged energy construct.

Alison Targett-Eaglin has a uniquely deadpan approach to imagery, judging from her oil on linen "Untitled Bear # 1," in which a simple stuffed animal takes

on an eerie, almost ominous presence that transcends still life. The innocuous little reddish brown teddy bear appears to glow from within. Engulfed in Targett-Eaglin's luminous oil glazes, an inanimate object exudes a disturbing vitality akin to a Francis Bacon portrait.

A still life subject is animated in yet another manner by Eileen Tivolacci, in her oil on linen, "Descending Upon a Prayer Rug," in which Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase" appears about to step down off a large wall-poster and onto a table immediately below it. That the table also holds a small globe, along with a reproduction of the rug, and that a sinuous something that may be a string of starry prayer beads appears to be moving serpentine through midair adds to the



Alison Targett - Eaglin

mystery of Tivolacci's intriguingly neo-surreal composition.

Mark Kuchta, on the other hand, excels at a kind of allusive abstraction, as seen in his oil on canvas, "Portal Vein," with its decentralized composition and subdued, predominantly arid color harmonies. One gets a sense of phantom silhouettes moving amid scarred walls and dark windows, perhaps in a desert hamlet. But that Kuchta's forms never coalesce into more specific imagery makes his paintings all the more evocative, encouraging imaginative interpretation.

Then there is Sarah Stewart Wright, whose monochromatic color field paintings, featuring overall layers of a single vibrant color such as bright blue or golden ochre, enlivened here and there by barely perceptible tonal shifts and smoky wisps, take the subtlety of Ad Rheinhardt's all-black paintings into new chromatic



Eileen Tavalacci



Tiffany Raccio



Mark Kuchta

areas. Wright may or may not agree with her famous predecessor, that “Art is art-as-art and everything else is everything else.” Yet her challengingly reductive aesthetic nonetheless provides subliminal rewards and also reminds one that the term “painterly” can have many diverse meanings.

This thesis exhibition also includes three of Western Connecticut State



Bonnie Rose Sullivan



Sarah Stewart Wright

University’s illustration graduates, each working in a distinctly different manner. Employing graphite on watercolor paper as meticulously as pen and ink, Tiffany Raccio revives the baroque style of 18th century fairy tale illustration for a new generation, in her magic realist drawing “Red and the Wolf,” in which Little Red Riding Hood resembles Nicole Kidman in the role of Sleeping Beauty, rather than the little girl in most tellings of the tale, and the wolf doesn’t appear to have an anthropomorphic bone in his hairy body. In an era when so much illustration is hacked out on computers, Raccio should have something precious rare to contribute to her chosen field.

Thomas A. Dowell Jr. also eschews the easy solutions all too prevalent today in his colored pencil rendering of a sequence of fantasy illustrations divided in the manner of comic



Thomas A. Dowell Jr.

book panels, entitled “Grendel Strikes.” Focusing on one of the antagonists in the Anglo Saxon epic poem “Beowulf” (AD 700-1000) Dowell brings the battling behemoth to fearsome life by virtue of his mastery of dramatic shading and the anatomically enhanced modeling of musculature.

Graceful and ornate as paisley arabesques, Bonnie Rose Sullivan’s “Outer Space Horses” prance along a cosmic trail like dainty, brightly colored relatives of sea-horses. Sullivan’s fanciful work in ink wash, intaglio, and collage demonstrates an imaginative scope that could as easily be applied to fine art as illustration, and which almost certainly would have delighted Paul Klee.

— Maurice Taplinger

Western Connecticut State University
MFA in Painting & Illustration Exhibition
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AK Corbin: The Sentience of Brick and Steel

Countless artists and poets over the years have taken the Brooklyn Bridge as a subject. Few, however, have interpreted it as intimately as the contemporary draftsman AK Corbin, whose drawings in colored pencil and pastel do not celebrate its fabled span with breathtaking views such as those that inspired Hart Crane to liken it to a celestial harp with “choiring strings.” Rather, Corbin’s gritty depiction in evocatively grimy near-monochromatic tones of colored pencil and pastel are more likely to evoke Moloch, the symbolic urban demon of brick and steel in Fritz Lang’s “Metropolis” and Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl.”

“Beware of icons,” cautions Corbin. “When you do famous images the trick is to overrode the icon and get some new juice out of it. Not very easy to do because of the way the mind works. That’s why I’m under them, looking at the bowels instead of the aerial long shots.”

It’s understandable why Corbin, who stakes out her subjects like a private eye in her car, may have been initially wary of tourist-friendly landmarks like the Brooklyn Bridge and the Eiffel Tower. In a previous series she squeezed so much atmospheric “juice” out of Red Hook, the gritty setting of Hubert Selby’s novel “Last Exit to Brooklyn,” that although the neighborhood has been somewhat gentrified in recent decades, one



musued on the visceral implications of its very name, imagining brawling longshoreman and remembering those scenes in the book when local thugs ganged up on sailors stationed at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Likewise in her bridge drawings, Corbin eschews all that is sanitizing and tritely picturesque to give us up-close images more suggestive of wounded monoliths than revered monuments.

Seen from below in one severely cropped composition, the underbelly of the structure engulfed in shadow, resembles the maw of a yawning dinosaur. In another drawing, it’s faded brick side appears so awash in yellow sunlight that it almost deconstructs like one of Monet’s haystacks. And in a nocturnal view from almost the same angle, one can picture the homeless huddled against the

inner wall below our line of vision.

For even in the absence of figures, Corbin somehow invests her drawings with a phantom sense of the human presence. This is enhanced by the uncannily sentient quality that she imparts to brick and steel, evoking by virtue of her expressive drawing style an emotive sense of what Auden, referring to Goya and Daumier, called “the human clay.” One can only compare it to the anthropomorphic quality in Charles Burchfield’s watercolors of ramshackle Victorian houses, which seem to shiver in the rain on gloomy suburban streets.

In Corbin’s case, that she had never studied perspective, never depicted buildings, streets or bridges before breaking her right hand and deciding to substitute the exercise of constant and rigorous drawing for therapy, may account for the emotiveness with which she invests such pictures. Unscientific as it may be, it’s tempting to imagine that she has devised a way to transfer some of her own pain, and even some of her own humanity, to whatever she draws. For even her picture of the Eiffel Tower, viewed from the crotch

Continued on page 27

AK Corbin, Gallery Small New York,
416 Van Brunt, Red Hook, Brooklyn
June 11 - July 23
Hrs: Wed - Sun 11:30 am - 6:30 pm

Romain Schaller, Painter of a Ravaged World

An American abstract painter whom I knew once confessed, “I respect Chinese painting but it is an entirely different aesthetic and I can’t say that I really understand it.”

I knew what he meant, given the linear, mostly monochromatic character of traditional Chinese ink painting, which relates more to wash drawing as we understand it in the West than to the more palpably pigmented quality of most oil or acrylic painting. But had I been familiar with the work of Romain Schaller at that time, I certainly would have called it to my acquaintance’s attention. For Schaller, a French artist who names Kandinsky, Turner, Zao Wu-Ki, and Wang Yan Cheng as important inspirations in the same breath, has apparently synthesized the best of two worlds in the dynamic series of large oils that he calls “Dawn of a New Age.”

“The recent climatic events and the problems which followed force us to question our existence on the planet,” Schaller states, and his paintings evoke vast mountainous vistas akin to those in Chinese scrolls, albeit in a vigorous abstract expressionist manner. And while the mood in Chinese ink paintings is generally pastoral and serene, Schaller’s compositions project a sense of a pre-apocalyptic darkness in keeping with his feeling that we are inhabitants of “an environment that is dying out.”

There is often an overcast somberness to some of Schaller’s paintings which is fully as ominous as that in some works by Anselm Kiefer. Yet it is often relieved by a gestural vivacity and painterly panache more akin to Cy Twombly. Schaller employs a varied vocabulary of painterly means, ranging from thick impastos to liquified drips of thinned pigment, with considerable élan to project a vital sense of process that lends his paintings striking immediacy while projecting a palpable sense of atmospheric agitation.

Created with brushes, rags, and fingers, his caressed and scumbled surfaces are at once rugged and elegant, in large compositions such as “A ciel ouvert,” where a brilliant swath of cerulean blue hovers, pregnant with catastrophe, in a gray stratospheric expanse above jaggedly fractured mounds of firmament decomposing toward the bottom of the canvas in runny black rivulets. Here, too, the ambiguous figure-to-ground relationship, peculiar to abstract expressionism and other modernist modes of painting that adhere to the sanctity of the two-dimensional picture plane, leaves the question of whether the area of blue is a patch of sky seen through a hole in a mass of cloud or some mysterious, perhaps threatening, natural phenomenon open to speculation.

Equally dramatic in its own way is the

large diptych “Blue Night,” where massive shadowy clouds converge form the outer edges of each panel toward an expanse of nocturnal sky set above a rocky terrain.



While Schaller’s “A ciel ouvert” debt to Chinese landscape painting is clear, he has also learned a great deal about light, color, and atmosphere from Turner’s “tinted steam,” and his unique manner of lending depth and heft to the former by combining it with the tactile qualities and chromatic radiance of the latter constitutes a significant contribution to contemporary painting.

Had he not passed on to another plane some time ago, I can only guess that the American artist with whose comment I opened this review would have found himself enlightened by the paintings of Romain Schaller and agreed that nothing has been lost in translation. — Ed McCormack

Romain Schaller, Noho Gallery, 530 West
25th Street, June 7 - July 2, 2011
Reception: Saturday, June 11, 4 - 6 pm

Stephen Cimini: Elegant Elegies in the Abstract

Encountering Stephen Cimini's new paintings in memory of friends lost in the early years of the AIDs epidemic, one is immediately reminded of a line by Emily Dickinson: "After great pain a formal feeling comes." For Cimini is the most formal of artists; yet his new paintings are pregnant with subtly submerged emotions and inhabited by phantom presences as palpable, if less visible, than the faintly delineated overlapping rectangles in his 2010 series "Ghosts."

The new series suggested itself to the artist when, while working in his studio last winter, his mind wandered to thoughts of a friend who died of complications from AIDs in 1984. That Cimini was momentarily unable to remember his friend's name only caused him to recall all the more painfully how many other friends and acquaintances turned into faceless statistics during that Orwellian decade.

The first important play about the epidemic, Larry Kramer's "The Normal Heart," recently revived to great fanfare on Broadway, was ignored by the drama critic of *The New York Times* when it opened at The Public Theater in 1985. The media blackout continued even after AIDs activists came up with the succinct slogan "Silence = Death." And it persisted after "Just Say No," Kramer's even more pointed play about a closeted mayor of "America's largest northeastern city" with personal reasons for wanting to keep the growing plague at arm's length, was staged in 1988. Apparently a lot of people in politics and the press felt in no hurry to address something that was devastating two segments of the population they considered expendable: gay men and intravenous drug users.

From the beginning the response of the artistic community, to which a disproportionate percentage of the syndrome's victims belonged and still belong, has been much more forthcoming. Understandably, much of the work has been strident and angry. Cimini's series, however, comes across as more poignant than political, in canvases shaped like a simple A-frame house of the type that children draw. Only, there is nothing faux-primitive about these paintings, which are luminous of hue, lustrous of surface, and precisely crafted in Cimini's usual medium of oil paint, wax medium and marble dust.

Although Cimini normally works on a much larger scale, these paintings are of uniformly small size (10 x 7 x 2 inches). However, they are not designated as "studies," as in another exhibition last year, which was titled "Secrets of Nature: A small study installation." Nor do

their modest dimensions in any way diminish their visual impact or the sense they give one of being in the presence of significant artistic statements. For rather than suggesting tests toward a future expansion of scale, here the small size evokes intimacy rather than incompleteness.

Indeed, Cimini's mastery of exquisitely subtle and varied color harmonies and spatial divisions makes of each canvas in the series a discrete

and highly finished art object. One gets the impression that each one of them represents a sacred reliquary, an enclosure providing safe harbor for an individual soul. The peaked "roof" of the format could also suggest those Christian icons in which the pointed top often symbolizes the Godhead. And looked at another way, the shape could also suggest a boat as easily as a house, perhaps a kind of ark for transporting the newly deceased to the afterlife.

Of course, it can often be unwise to make too specific claims for the content of abstract art, lest one fall into indulging in facile interpretations that not only limit the imaginative scope of the work but betray the original purpose of Kandinsky, Mondrian, and other early twentieth century pioneers of nonobjective painting: to create a new language for exploring nonmaterial concepts. At the same time, however, many contemporary formalist artists and critics lose sight of the spiritual search that led such predecessors, influenced by esoteric disciplines prevalent in their era, such as Theosophy and Rosicrucianism, to their experiments and subsequent aesthetic innovations. And by doing so they run the risk of relegating the work to the minor status of design.

For decades, the advent of the scientific age and the dogmatically formalist criticism of Clement Greenberg served to discredit content to a degree where many abstract artists automatically parroted Frank Stella's famous statement



"Righteous"

"What you see is what you get." Precious rare were those painters who, like Mark Rothko, freely acknowledged the spiritual component — or at least, less arguably, the spiritual impetus or intention, of their work.

Perhaps the biggest gain of the so-called postmodernist era is the more permissive aesthetic climate that enables an artist such as Stephen Cimini to connect with that older tradition without compromising the

purely aesthetic attributes of advanced abstract painting.

Cimini accomplishes this difficult feat by virtue of a coloristic and tactile refinement which enables him to apprehend elusive ethereal notions in the material substance of pigment, creating within a stringently geometric context works at once sensuous and transcendent. In "mission," the muted burnished reds and earth colors within irregularly arranged rectangular areas suggest both the literal form of simple sacred architecture (an impression abetted by a window-like square near the peak of the shaped canvas that could evoke a belfry) and the sense of purpose inherent in the title's alternate meaning. By contrast, in "desire," darker reds reminiscent of dried blood are combined with sensual pinkish and purple hues in a manner at once somber and visceral. Then there is "righteous," a stately symphony of beautifully modulated blue hues that projects a hushed, elegiac, nocturnal mood.

Paradoxically both palpably physical and transcendent, the paintings in Stephen Cimini's present exhibition transpose to another medium Emerson's definition of poetry: Emotion recollected in tranquility.

— Ed McCormack

Stephen Cimini Jadite Galleries
528 West 47th Street, June 20 - July 2
Reception: Thursday, June 23, 6 - 8pm.

Mihai Bara's Winning Confluence of Formal Thrust and Buoyant Vision

"Painting is like second nature to me," says the Romanian-born artist Mihai Bara, who has lived and worked in the small picturesque European principality of Andorra since 1992. "It is natural to think, breathe and to absorb vibrations and use them to recreate a different world while I paint, according to my point of view, my sensibility, my desires, my doubts..."

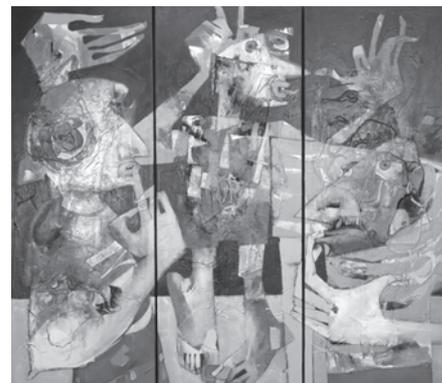
It is human nature, specifically, which preoccupies Bara most constantly, manifesting in expressively distorted figures encompassing a broad range of emotional states. In "The Pain," for example, the most salient element is the figure's hands upraised as in a beseeching hosanna of woe, fingers splayed like the snapping beaks of battling birds. Here, as in all of Bara's paintings, collage elements, particularly shapes cut from paper, are combined with acrylic and latex paints on canvas to create compelling textural effects.

Collage is as crucial to the thrust of Bara's compositions as it is to those of Romare Bearden, often defining their main forms. However, the manner in which Bara merges cut paper with thick, rugged impasto is considerably more tactile. The heft of his materials reinforces the palpable power of his neo-expressionist style, which harks back to

Karel Appel and the Cobra group for its sheer visual impact.

At the same time, there can often be an almost Braque-like formal stability to Bara's compositions, as seen to particular advantage in "Clowns," where the two zany, wildly distorted buffoons in their garish costumes, one of which contains an area of bright harlequin patterns, occupy the picture plane with the stability of floral bouquets in a still life.

Here, too, is a buoyant sense of the human comedy that also figures prominently in a large triptych format called "Kids," which corrals the anarchic energy of childhood in a particularly pleasing composition where disproportionately large, expressively gesturing hands are, again, the picture's piece de resistance. Here, as in another upbeat painting called "Wanna Play," Bara deals with childhood, a subject recalled more frequently in literature than in visual art, given occasional exceptions such as certain sunny works by the impressionists and Philip Guston's early social realist painting of slum kids with wooden swords using ashcan lids for shields. But Bara cites growing up in "a splendid Transylvanian town called Brasov" and "skiing and playing in the snow with my friends" as important formative memories



"Kids"

that still influence his highly personal approach to art.

As a colorist, Bara is as partial as de Kooning was (particularly in his "Woman" series) to various visceral shades of pink. For pink, after all, is one particular hue of the "human clay," which for this artist becomes a kind of Play Dough that can be stretched in all manner of inventive ways to depict a host of mortal foibles and feelings. Thus his subjects range from the tender emotions of "Il Bambino" to the tormented visage of

Continued on page 27

Mihai Bara, Agora Gallery, 530 W. 25th Street, June 4 - 25. Reception: Thurs., June 9, 6-8pm.

Simplicity Reigns Supreme in a Varied Group Exhibition

In an art since rife with gimmickry a group show called "Simplicity" could seem not to be aiming very high. Perhaps the element of surprise was what artist/curator Patience Prescott Sundaresan had in mind when she chose that unduly modest title for this excellent mixed media group show featuring members of the West Side Arts Coalition. Or maybe she merely wished to make the point that art need not be unduly complicated in order to be very good.

In any case, Sundaresan's own oils on linen made this point splendidly with their dramatically emblematic compositions. In "Brothers," two young boys form one dark mass as they race past shadowy telephone poles along a hilly nocturnal highway, like Kerouacian phantoms of the neon night in frantic flight from a radiant blaze of pink and green auras. Equally splendid is "West Side Tunnel," another painting by Sundaresan, in which a lone silhouetted figure traverses an actual locale where dark shadows and luminous reflections create an otherworldly atmosphere, suggesting the passageway to the afterlife often described in near death experiences.

Another kind of simplicity, closer to the linear exquisiteness of Zen ink painting comes across in five fashion drawings by Emily Rich." Viewers familiar with Rich's vigorous abstract expressionist paintings may be surprised by the subject matter of these elegantly executed images of glamorous

models, but they will recognize the linear vitality that animates all of this artist's works.

Then there is Margo Mead, whose recent paintings of idealized male and female figures in cosmic settings, vibrantly realized in watercolor, ink, and oil crayon on rice paper, are among her finest to date. Monumental and visionary, these symbolic figures inhabit starry expanses like sexy deities, at once erotically charged and ethereal, even as they embody humanistic ideals alluded to in titles such as, "We Can't Drill Our Way Out" and "Earth: For Our Children's Children."

A freewheeling versatility characterized four intimate, untitled works by Joseph Boss. One was a neocubist abstract composition on a small canvas suspended on clamps within a slightly larger frame, incorporating the gallery wall as a backdrop. Another was a collage combining a figure and cut-out numbers in a manner akin to Kurt Schwitters' "Merz" compositions, albeit with Boss' uniquely contemporary touch.

Rini Hunter employed sand as a prominent element in two intriguing mixed media works. Indeed, sand was apparently the sole medium in a piece called "Storm," where it swirled as though blown by fierce winds, creating vertiginous pictorial rhythms. By contrast, Hunter employed sand in a more precise and deliberate manner to build up surface textures akin to bas relief in a work called "Untitled Gray," where the dominant elements were

two precise vertical bars reminiscent of Barnett Newman's stripe paintings.

Subtle tonal variations and compositions built on grids are constants in the paintings of Richard Carlson. The three untitled mixed media works in this exhibition were, in keeping with its theme, among his most subtle and sublimely simple. One work sets graceful floral forms against pale areas of color and precise checkerboard patterns. In another, more exquisitely minimalist composition, luminous yellow hues burn like lights through fog from a grid submerged in milky white layers of thinned pigment.

Madi Lanier has evolved a unique graphic shorthand as succinct as that of John Marin for capturing the fleeting moods of nature. Cubistic structuring figures prominently in Lanier's crayon composition "Deep Woods," which evokes the cathedral-like majesty of an inner forest, where bare black tree limbs fracture the blue sky with stained glass planes. By contrast, in "Ocean," a work in watercolor and monotype, curvilinear configured lines and loose blobs of green, blue, and yellow pigment convey with the simplest of means the movement of whirling, sun-splashed watery tides.

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Simplicity, recently seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, Broadway and 96th Street (center isle).



"Approaching Storm, Crève Coeur"

JOHN E. WALLACE, JR. Artist, Educator

John E. Wallace, art professor emeritus at Western Connecticut State University, passed away on Friday, April 15th. Born in St. Louis on December 29, 1929, he attended Washington University, receiving a B.F.A. in 1953. He also attended the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture in Maine, and Indiana University, where he received an M.F.A. degree in 1957.

Over a 60 year painting career, Mr. Wallace had dozens of one-person exhibitions and had work in hundreds of group exhibitions. His work is included in a number of museum and significant private collections. Since 1982 he has been a member of Blue Mountain Gallery in New

York City. He was the recipient of a Skowhegan Fellowship, a Margaret Tiffany Blake Mural Fellowship, a Huntington Hartford Foundation Fellowship, and a Roswell Museum Artist-in-Residence Grant. In 1954 he created a fresco for the choir loft of the South Solon Meeting House in South Solon, Maine, which is now a historic landmark.

He taught at Prairie State College in Illinois from 1968 to 1979, where he was chairman of the department from 1971 to 1974. From 1981 through 2009 he was a professor in the art department at Western Connecticut State University, where he was department chair from 1987 through 1991. He initiated the M.F.A. in Visual Arts at Western and was co-coordinator of the M.F.A. program until his retirement.

He is survived by his wife, Margaret Grimes, also a professor at Western, his son Bernard Hulce of Naugatuck, his daughter Carolyn Wallace of Washington, his brother James Wallace of Holland, Michigan, and three grandchildren, Jacqueline, Jonathan and Kaitlin Hulce.

The family has asked that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made to the M.F.A. Fund at Western Connecticut State University. A memorial reception will be announced at a later date.



Photo: George McClintock, 2010

G&S Classifieds

opportunities

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VISION, PASSION & PURPOSE: ARTISTS AS WORLD CHANGERS is a new book by Renée Phillips, "The Artrepreneur Coach", which features stories from more than 100 contemporary visual artists as positive contributors to our society. Mention Gallery & Studio magazine for a special gift with purchase. For details visit www.ManhattanArts.com <<http://www.manhattanarts.com/>> or call 212.472.1660.

AK CORBIN

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up and cropped at the neck, before it soars skyward to grandeur, has the shabby presence of a rusty derelict robot about to urinate oil all over the street because it's too played out to walk to the nearest pissoir.

Or maybe it's simply because drawing, when it is done by a draftsman of Corbin's caliber, without resorting to photographs or other secondhand references ("hate the idea"), has an immediacy that emanates directly from the nervous system, unmediated by all the materials that painting requires. This is especially so when the artist eschews facile effects, digging in with her colored pencils and bearing down with her pastels to get at the crux of what she sees through the windshield of the car that, more often than not, serves as her studio.

"The car is a mess," she says. "Or at least the front seat."

But that doesn't seem to bother her, because there's nothing tidy or petty about AK Corbin's aesthetic anyway. Rather, her work embraces all the messy beauty of our Post-industrial era. — Ed McCormack

MIHAI BARA

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"The Sinner," to "The Rumour," in which cluster heads with gabbing gobs and a gesticulating hand pointing a finger at a blushing figure in the foreground demonstrate the cruelty of gossip.

Fresh from a critically praised exhibition in Rome, Mihai Bara brings his refreshingly humanistic vision to Chelsea in this engaging solo show. — Maureen Flynn

SIMPLICITY

Continued from page 26

Carson Ferri-Grant first made his mark in the historic "Times Square Show," which was to the East Village scene of the 1970s as the Armory Show was to an earlier generation of artists. Here, he was represented by an installation called "Clear Good Sense: Life on a Roll," featuring his recent innovation of encasing disparate nature drawings and personal ephemera, such as the 45 record by the Platters titled, "The Great Pretenders," in clear glassine scrolls to hint at nonlinear autobiographical narratives. — Maurice Taplinger



ONLINE ART AUCTION

We would like to thank the following artists for contributing to this humanitarian international arts project to raise funds for the people of Japan.

We appreciate the time, energy and compassion that it took to create the expressive work that you all kindly donated.

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