SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2011 www.galleryandstudiomagazine.com VOL. 14 NO. 1 New York

GALLERY&STUDIO

SENATEDELLA!

The New York Art World's Controversial Gadfly, Robert Cenedella, Skewers the U.S. Senate

plus: LOOKING FOR AMERICA,
another excerpt from
Ed McCormack's memoir in progress
HOODLUM HEART

pg. 14

Norman Perlmutter
"ORDINARY THINGS"

"File Box," Acrylic on Canvas, 24"x30"

October 25 – November 8, 2011
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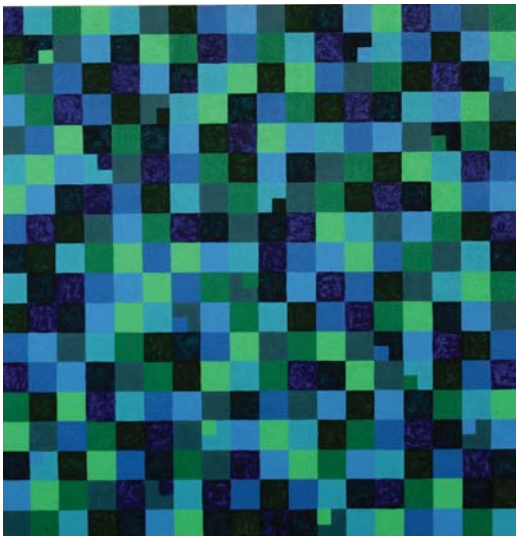
TINA ROHRER
Awash in Blue and Green
Geometric acrylic paintings presenting color interactions and impresssions of movement



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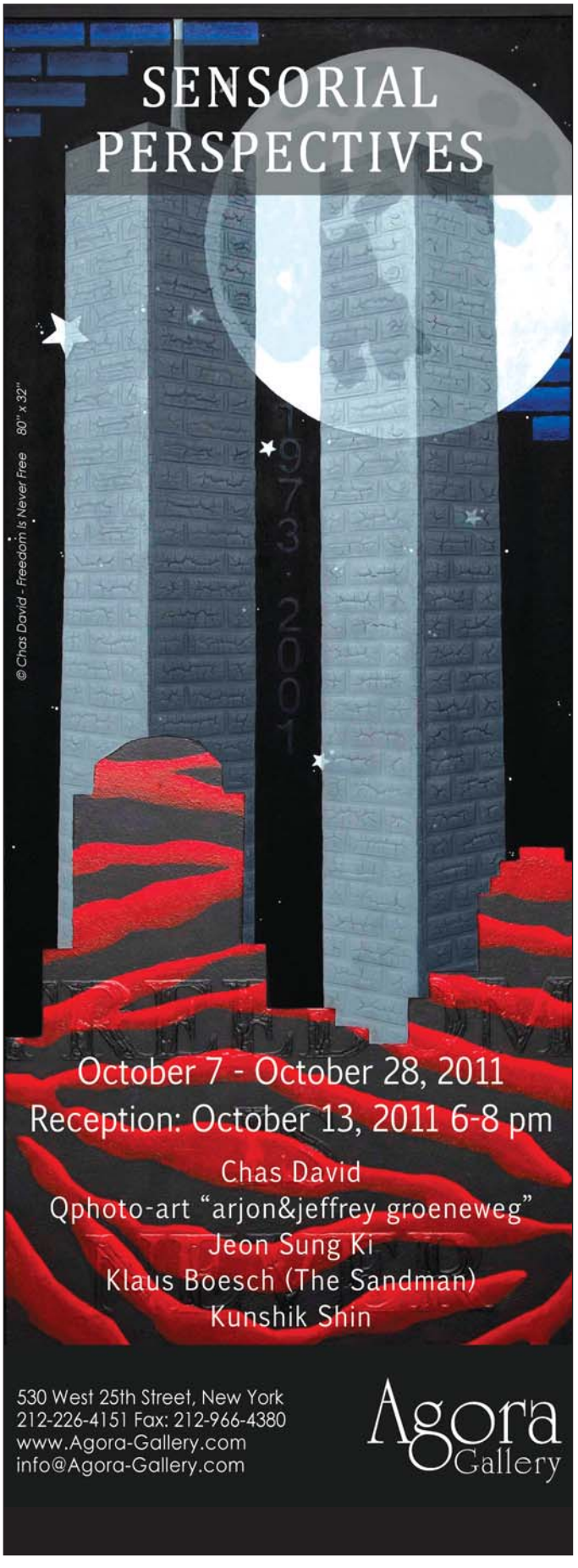


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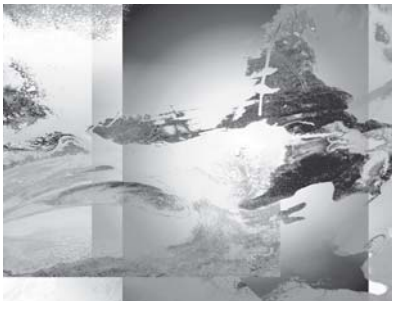
G&S Highlights

On the Cover:
Cenedella Takes On The Teabaggers — pg. 9

PLUS: Eloping to the tune of a Simon & Garfunkel song ... Living a La Boheme fantasy like incestuous siblings in a blue collar family attic ... Starry-eyed on the brink of nuclear apocalypse ... the HOODLUM HEART saga continues — pg.14

Sharyn Finnegan, pg. 8

Joan Marie Kelly, pg. 20



Catherine de Saugy, pg. 21

Tina Rohrer, pg. 4

Marcia Clark, pg. 5

Malka Inbal, pg. 7

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Many Paths Converge in New Century Group Show

Like phrases such as "uncontrollable urges" or "unsolicited advice," "Undeniable Tendencies" is an admittedly novel concept for an exhibition; yet it applies quite literally to some of the trends spotted in the intriguing group exhibition of that name.

Prominent among them is a species of organic abstraction exemplified by Mira Satryan," whose punningly titled painting "The Bright Site of the Moon" is notable for its muscularly configured forms and a palette combining cosmic blue and visceral red hues. Another gifted abstract painter, Basha Maryanska, appears even more directly beholden to nature in "Toward Light," where she accomplishes the seeming alchemical feat of evoking the most ethereal of subjects in the material substance of pigment, with shimmering showers of luminous golden yellow strokes streaming down like heavenly beams.

More geometric styles of abstraction, albeit subtly modulated with scumbled surfaces and layered palimpsests and pentimento, also made a strong showing in the work of two other painters: While serving as a striking formal armature for these compositions, Jan Niksinski's rectangular shapes simultaneously allude to windows and architectural structures, while paying homage to artistic predecessors with titles such as "My home with the cross of Tapies/recycling 2009," and "Naturelle abstraction or talk with Mark Rothko." Witold Adamczyk, on the other hand, employs a varied vocabulary of geometrically derived forms in shaped canvases and modular formats in which recurring motifs and slightly shifting color values create chromatic frisson within emblematic compositions.

Quite an opposite aesthetic made an appearance in the work of artists who specialize in fantasy and fabulation, as seen in "Call a Lady," Karin Zukowski's wildly imaginative oil of a one-armed woman holding an egg with a human face aloft as an anthropomorphic bird perches on her helmut-shaped coiffure, as well as in her more down-to-earth yet ironically titled mother and child diptych "Bourgeois Emancipation." Elizabeth Castonguay evoked a neo-surreal private realm as mysterious as that of Odd Nerdrum, in her darkly nocturnal paintings of realistically rendered human figures set nakedly adrift in the company of exotic birds or butterflies within an atmospheric existential void. Carol Pepper-Cooper evokes her own rarefied dream realm in paintings of crowds of small figures gathering as if for some spiritual act of witness in landscapes that range from the hellishly fiery to the sumptuously heavenly, as seen in one work where mountainous candles burn amid more dispersed conflagrations that appear dangerously close to consuming the shadowy pilgrims, and another in which figures clad in brilliant blue convene gaily amid giant flowers and marmalade hills. Then there is the painterly wizard known simply as Wioska, who weaves lyrical spells in a palette of pale yet luminous hues, summoning softly diffused figures to emerge from pastel mists amid picturesque ruins and fanciful landscapes enlivened by delicate flora, fauna and phantom faces hovering in midair.

Assemblage would also appear to be thriving, judging from Steven Rodrig's wonderfully zany neo-dada sculptures intricately constructed from computer innards with titles such as "Data Roach Motel," "Attempt to Transfer Data into the Organic World V-9," and so on — all of which appear to be about the frustrations of conducting a sane human life within an increasingly virtual reality. One was also quite transported by Helen Zajkowski's "American Dream" installation, a model home with a facade covered entirely by lotto tickets and a cut-a-way back revealing rooms filled with gilded grownup and baby shoes, its message as poignantly redolent of broken dreams as what Ernest Hemingway came up with when a drinking buddy challenged him to write a novel in six words: "For sale: baby shoes, never used."

That more traditional three-dimensional art forms also continue to gain aesthetic traction was made strikingly clear by the prolific sculptor David Green, whose works in stone, wood, and bronze range from gracefully swirling organic abstract forms to a severely simplified female figure, all sharing an exquisite formal reductiveness.

Although no one needs to tell us at this late date that figurative art remains an undeniable tendency, it's heartening anyway to see how many artists in this show have headed Pound's exhortation to "make it new." Marian Solisz, for example, presents erotically suggestive close-ups of female anatomy, pristinely painted in a style influenced by realistic comic strip art, within a lively context combining elements of Pop and geometric abstraction. The versatile painter Ismena Halkiewicz, however, employs diverse figurative strategies ranging from fractured cubist planes containing eyes and other facial features, to a brilliantly hued and radically distorted New Image manner, to the gracefully stylized female nude floating amid amber waves in her painting "Honey."

Wojtek Pakowski attacks the figure with the entire arsenal of abstract expressionism — its slashing strokes, drips, and violent gestural thrusts — to activate the human figure with a passionate energy, as seen in "Spotlight," where a lithe yet voluptuous nude diva, perhaps a pole-dancer in a Times Square bar, occupies center stage in hazy red light, and "Adam and Eve," in which the sexual tension between the two figures is made palpable in pigment.

By contrast, the symbolic figures painted by Kathryn Hart are, paradoxically, physical and spectral at the same time, given the artist's use of thick impasto to evoke featureless beings that emerge from painterly swirls and spatters, taking on an almost haunting presence akin to the emaciated sculptures of Giacometti. Quite an opposite effect is created in the unusual medium of wire mesh by Bonnie Shanas, who achieves a remarkably detailed semblance of classical anatomy in a seemingly unyielding industrial material, imbuing her single or entwined nude figures with a sensual grace that harks back to sculptural fragments salvaged from antiquity.

Then there is the photographic artist Susan Hammond, who evokes an idyllic *menage a trois* in almost cinematic terms, in a sequence of images in which a young woman watches from a rock as a couple swims in a lake below, before joining them, the three comely nude swimmers merging harmoniously in a romantic water ballet amid the sparkling ripples.

Undeniable tendencies indeed!

— Maurice Taplinger

Undeniable Tendencies, New Century Artists Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, August 29 - September17, 2011.

A Classical Concern: The Abiding Art of Tina Rohrer

To keep the faith of geometric painting in the postmodern era requires considerable conviction, not to mention courage. But it is doubtful that, in the privacy of her studio, basking in the warm chromatic glow that radiates from her vibrant acrylic paintings, Tina Rohrer ever thinks of it that way. Surely she must be too engrossed in the primacy of pure form and color as visual conduits to the sublime to even consider the imperatives of an art market desperately dependent on novelty and what the Australian art critic and TV commentator Robert Hughes once called "the shock of the new." (Never mind that novelty has a notoriously short shelf life and we are by now so benumbed as to be virtually unshockable.)

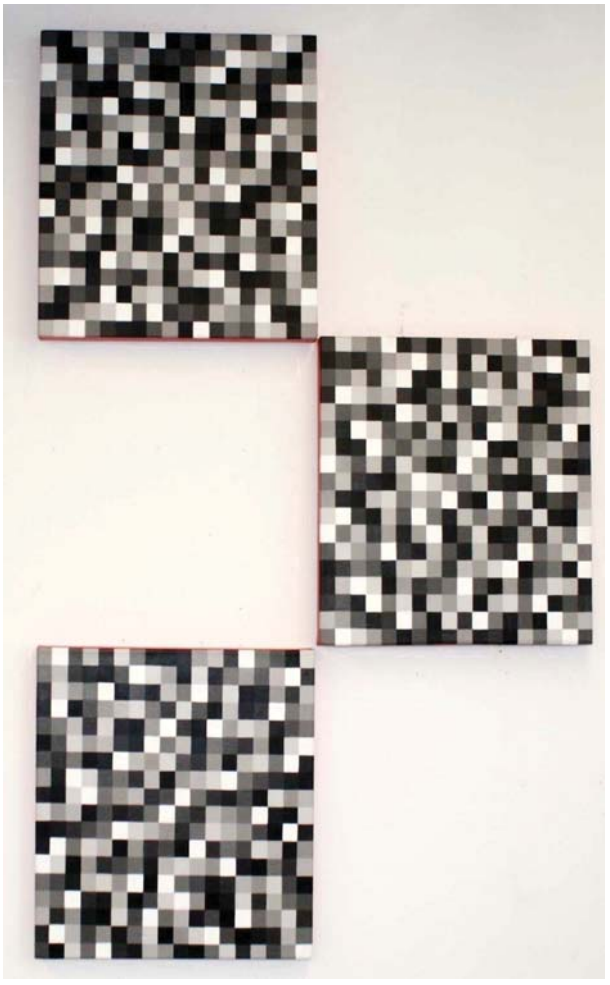
Tina Rohrer's allegiances have never been to the passing trends of disposable culture anyway. She defers only to such distinguished predecessors as Seurat and Albers, the former for opening her eyes to the optical qualities of color, the latter because his use of the simple square to explore his color theories in a manner unhampered by the distraction of other theories suggested the geometrical presentation that has become a hallmark of her own paintings.

Her formalist approach seems to have set in soon after she graduated from Harvard University and has sustained her through a long career in which she has seemingly not taken the stylistic detours that many other artists do. Rather, she has more less stayed a steady course of stringent formal exploration from the start, deepening while simplifying her manner of pared down color construction with a doggedness that can only be compared to Agnes Martin's contrastingly monochromatic fidelity to the grid.

What unites the work of these two distinctly different yet somehow kindred women artists is an abiding concern with a classical aesthetic. Indeed, had Rohrer's present work been available to him in the 1970s when he evolved his thesis regarding "the hyper-realism of simulation in an age where reality has been co-opted by mass media," the esteemed postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard might have included Tina Rohrer, along with Albers, Agnes Martin, and Ad Rheinhardt, in the excellent company of Piet Mondrian, as exemplary of those rare artists who "achieve originality through repetition."

For in the native color relationships of paintings by Rohrer such as "Blue Construction," wherein the skillfully calculated proximity of small, intricately varied squares of blue, green, and aquamarine, arranged within two vertically stacked large rectangles and set afloat emblematically against a lush blue field, Rohrer creates a subtly, shimmering optical frisson. And in the six modular units that make up the composition called "Awash in Blue and Green," where pure white squares mingle (like windows on the wall) in not quite random patterns among others in the blue, green, aqua range, yet optically scintillating chromatic epiphanies reward the attentive viewer.

Nothing could be more "fraught with imminent peril," as W.C. Fields used to put it, for a colorist of Rohrer's seductiveness, than to risk a monochromatic composition. So naturally she takes up the challenge in works such as "Black and White Configuration," an especially small yet significant acrylic painting in which she not only dispenses with her most crowd pleasing asset but blithely violates the sanctity of the two-dimensional picture plane, the "opacity" of which, according to Rosalind Krauss, is the "bedrock" upon which modernism rests "and must be retained as a fundamental concept."



"Black & White and Red All Over II"

"Oh, yeah? Why?" Rohrer appears to ask in this modest little work, in which she introduces an illusion of deep space with two brick-shaped forms arranged in vanishing perspective, one even casting a "shadow," albeit filled not with darkness but more of the small gray squares that make up both bricks.

For an artist so steeped in the traditions of modernism to create such a work, even on a diminutive scale, constitutes more than a playful excursion, an aesthetic "tchotchke," so to speak. It indicates a willingness to think "outside the box" (if the reader will pardon the irresistible aptness of the cliché) that suggests we are in the presence of a creative sensibility unwilling to dismiss any possibility out of hand. At the same time, in another monochromatic work titled "Black and White and Red All Over," Rohrer returns to the picture plane in a "staggered" triptych of three same-size canvases, arranged vertically on the wall, consisting primarily of characteristically intricate patterns of black, white, and gray squares. The pièce de resistance here, however, is a thin strip of brilliant red at the bottom of the top panel, on the side of the middle one, and on the top of the bottom one. Together, the three thin red stripes converge to form a "phantom" panel on the white wall, only three fourths complete yet with a presence fully as palpable as that of the other three. Could any avowed formalist make a more magically allusive statement, even while adhering to the classical modernist doctrine of the artwork as literal object?

Here again, Tina Rohrer demonstrates the exquisite refinement, as well as an ability to surprise us within the strict formal perimeters she sets for herself, that makes her work a constant source of pleasure for viewers seeking a more subtle and thought provoking aesthetic experience than is commonly available in the often sideshow-like environs of postmodern painting.

— Ed McCormack

Tina Rohrer, Noho Gallery,
530 West 25th Street,
October 4 - 29, 2011.

Marcia Clark: Making a Melting World Immutable

"Edge of the Icefiord Ilulissat, 2009"

Although they are, admittedly, very different types of artists, I always tend to think of Marcia Clark in the same breath as Rockwell Kent, whose Arctic memoir, "N by E," purchased secondhand at an antiques sale upstate the month we lost our son Holden to AIDS, provided intermittent distraction, if not escape, from my raw grief. For something about the unforgiving vastness of the Arctic, at least as I imagine it, has always given me cold comfort: a sense of the ineffable forces of nature and fate that rule our destinies and mock our puny human sentiments.

This profound pitilessness is what strikes one most powerfully about the massive, implacable edifice of ice dominating Marcia Clark's "Edge of Icefiord, Ilulissat, 2009," a panoramic oil on twelve frosted Mylar panels affixed to a six by twenty-two foot folding screen. A synthesis of observation and memory, Clark's magnificent composition confronts the uninitiated with a crystalline mountain range of ice as forbidding as it is beautiful. But with the extra-human empathy of the artist/naturalist Clark is drawn to the vulnerability of the hugely looming polar ice monsters that she paints, saying, "Icebergs can appear permanent as mountains, yet one turns for a moment and forms may shift, collapse, or vanish. There would be a poignancy even if Arctic melt were just a cyclic occurrence."

But apparently it is not. Like Rockwell Kent, Clark has written eloquently about her travels in arctic areas of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Svalbard. And she reports that on an earlier visit to Ilulissat, in Northwest Greenland, a local museum director assured her that a warming trend had been common knowledge for almost a decade.

"In Greenland (2007)," Clark wrote, "I watched vistas of Arctic atmosphere, and huge chunks of ice carried by the current, with a new, poignant awareness of movement and change. I can't help but be aware that I'm observing a threatened landscape. Trying to understand my place in this changing panorama, I find myself like the naturalist John Muir and many others today, traveling to the ends of the earth, and I bear witness as an artist."

And it truly is *as an artist* that Clark bears witness in vistas that combine factual documentation with emotional immediacy and aesthetic appeal . Especially striking in "Edge of the Icefiord, Ilulissat, 2009" is what can only be called the "natural cubism" that she finds and highlights in the shifting planes and luminous reflections on the craggy surface of the ice, as well as the gestural animation, redolent of abstract expressionism, that her vigorous brushstrokes impart to the surrounding watery flow.

Altogether peculiar to Clark's Arctic landscapes, however, is a sense of vertiginousness that can only occur in a place where, because the ice is always melting, the very horizon line is up for grabs, creating the feeling that one could slide right off its slippery slopes of ice and hardened snow as if off the curve of the globe itself. Thus it seems especially apt that in another painting on frosted Mylar, "City Center Intersection, Reykjavik," a map detail is at the center of the composition and map fragments of Iceland are mounted behind the painting, creating a "palimpsest" in the sense that Gore Vidal meant when he used that word for partially erased fragments of handwriting as the title of a memoir.

"Harbor Ilulissat #2, 2011"

For Clark, too, endeavors to include what she refers to as "the element of time" in this and other constructs of observation and memory in which maps or fragments of them figure prominently.
Such layered allusions also enliven "Old Harbor Intersection, Reykjavik," comprised of five drawn, painted, and collaged images arranged in a cruciform format.
The sensation of vertiginousness that enlivens some of Clark's compositions emanates, here, not from the ever shifting lay of the "land," so to speak, but from a cinematic sense of being visually wheeled, as in a fast vehicle, around the picturesque harbor, catching topsy turvy glimpses of the gateway to the ice-world.

By contrast, in the oil on aluminum, "Harbor Ilulissat, #2," the clustered dwellings, smokestacks, and muddy hills of the hamlet are blocked in on the picture plane as solidly as the elements in a Cezanne. Yet hints of "process," such as traces of pencil-line peeking like pentimento through the pigment in places and the artist's characteristically vivacious brushwork imbues even this relatively serene composition with its own sense of immediacy.

Bravura brushwork also enlivens "Ilulissat Icefiord, 2008," a vibrantly glowing oil of the majestic ice

Continued on page 22

Marcia Clark, Blue Mountain Gallery,
530 West 25th Street,
October 4 - 29, 2011

Pat Fairhead: A Painter Who Goes with the Flow

Despite the accomplishments of its great modern exponents such as John Marin and Charles Burchfield, watercolor has yet to be acknowledged as the major medium that it can be when employed for finished works on a grand scale, rather than merely for sketches and studies.

One artist in point is the Canadian painter Pat Fairhead, who was born in England, a country with a history of great watercolorists (as well as accomplished amateurs such as Prince Charles), before her nationality was changed in childhood when her mother remarried to a Canadian man. Indeed, along with being included in over 200 corporate, national, and provincial collections in Canada and the United States, one of her watercolors is in the Royal Collection of Prints & Drawings, in Windsor Castle, England.

"Water #8"

Fairhead defies the stereotype of watercolor as a finicky medium most suitable for traditional realism in her dynamic semiabstract compositions on large sheets of paper (some measuring more than fifty inches), with bold forms and colors that command the wall as powerfully as any work in oils on canvas.

As a child, Fairhead fell in love with the untamed wilderness of her new country, adopting its national pastimes of hiking, camping, and canoeing. She remains to this day a dedicated outdoorswoman, taking inspiration from an active participation in nature, while sketching the scenic wonders of the wilderness to be developed as large scale watercolors in her studio.

Although she also works in oils, acrylics, and printmaking, the medium is especially well suited to her latest series, "Water." Saturating the surface of the paper with luminous washes of color, employing the very element that she is depicting as the vehicle for her pigments, she achieves a stunning synthesis of medium and subject matter, the translucence of the aquarelle reflecting that of the water itself, even as she invents abstract equivalents for the forces of nature, rather than slavishly imitating them.

The spirit of surf splashing off rugged rocks clustered on coastal shorelines cloaked in fog comes alive in her compositions through a sense of its vital, surging energy, rather than through any attempt at the picturesque depiction of specific scenes.

Indeed, Fairhead works within an abstract framework of bold, roughly rectangular color areas, usually saturated with a single green-blue aqueous hue, its luminous, shimmering surface further enlivened by subtle tonal variations suggesting the play of sunlight and shadow

Continued on page 22

Pat Fairhead, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, October 7 - 28, 2011. Reception: Thursday, October 13, 6 - 8 pm

Water, Water Everywhere in West Side Photo Show

Although we are impressed to learn how much water makes up our bodies and covers the surface of the earth, we still tend to take this ubiquitous element of nature for granted. Thus a photo exhibition called "Aqua" could have seemed little more than a novel notion, until one actually saw how many intriguing images the theme inspired in its participants.

Dr. Barry Pinchefsky took a wide-angle approach to the subject with aqueous images ranging from a mother and child romping in a pool on Long Island to a great heron in flight over the Amazon River, in Brazil. Dr. Pinchefsky's purist approach to black and white photography recalls the plainspoken poetry of William Carlos Williams.

Dan Gelb, on the other hand, offered an intimate view of watery places in his digital C-prints of reeds, puddles, and lily pads observed up close. Gelb's pictures revealed an appreciation for the small things in nature akin to that of the ancient Chinese ink painters.

In a rare departure from the hand-colored photographs for which he is best known, David Ruskin showed untinted silver gelatin prints of subjects such as the Tulleries Gardens in Paris, its trees and statues mirrored in rain puddles, and the weekend crowds around Bethesda Fountain, in Central Park. Yet even these relatively straightforward images were imbued with the romantic quality that invariably distinguishes Ruskin's work.

One of the show's more dramatic contributions was a luminous vision of the Luray Caverns, in Virginia, composed with multiple layers of clear film, vellum, and frosted glass, presented in a lightbox by Jonathan Morrison. By contrast, in "Small Waterfall," Morrison demonstrated equal skill in capturing one of nature's more modest phenomena thriving within the circumscribed wilderness of Central Park.

In a new series of exquisite silver gelatin prints frequent exhibitor Jean Prytyskacz paid particular attention to subtle textural qualities, as seen in "Muddy Waters," as well as in another picture of park benches near a pond and a lawn covered by a dense carpet of fallen leaves. With this emphasis on tactile qualities, Prytyskacz adds a new wrinkle to her already impressive photographic oeuvre.

Upside-down boats on tall dry grass project a poignant mood in "Lake Gleneida NY," a silver gelatin archival print by Deena Weintraub, making water all the more conspicuous by its absence, as in a drought. By contrast, the entire land appears awash in Weintraub's dramatic "City Island," where dark rocks and what appear to be remnants of a broken pier jut from the rippling tide.

The ubiquitous giant cupcake that serves as the piece de resistance in so many of Jack Cesareo's recent pictures takes on an oddly anthropomorphic presence when placed in a rowboat on a river in Monticello, New York. Seen from different angles sans the gawking, interactive crowds it attracts in an urban setting, the oversize confection becomes the solitary protagonist of a mysterious ongoing narrative.

A sense of stillness, expectancy, and melancholy haunts the black and white marine photography Carolyn Reus, whose "River Boat" evokes the opposite of Mark Twain's colorful tales of gamblers and fancy ladies on the paddle-wheeled "floating palaces" of the Mississippi: a small craft dwarfed by the expansive body of water it traverses and the towering bridges above. A single silhouetted bird, however, appears as self-possessed as a Buddha as it perches on a river railing.

Then there is Daniel Jumpertz, whose digital print, "The Things You See When Your Toddler Wakes Up at 5 am" is a shimmering, crystalline vision of a tall tree reflected in a private pool at dawn that justifies its awestruck title. And Jumpertz again evokes magic in "Clouds Condensing," another visionary view of a city skyline bejeweled by beads of water on a windowpane. —Maureen Flynn

WSAC, "Aqua," recently seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, Broadway and 96th Street (center island).

The Emotive Body in the Photography of Malka Inbal

In an essay entitled "Representation and Presence," the art historian Sally O'Reilly states, "Over the course of the 20th century, profound developments in art's relationship with the human form have overturned centuries of convention, radically repositioning the body of the subject, the artist and the viewer. The main thrust of this development has been from passivity to active agency, so that the body is no longer a static optical phenomenon, but the embodiment of dynamic human relations and even a medium of change and influence within the artwork itself."

At the present postmodern moment in art history, it happens that this new attitude toward bodily representation converges auspiciously with the growing recognition of photography as a major art form on a par with painting or sculpture. No longer must the photographer track daily life like a hunter and lay patiently in wait for that "perfect moment," that visual epiphany worthy of recording. More and more of our best photographers create their own reality in the studio in a manner that takes their medium far beyond its original documentary function into new areas of autonomous aesthetic discovery.

Asked to name a currently active artist who best exemplifies the merger of these two significant contemporary tendencies, this critic would choose none other than the innovative Israeli photographer Malka Inbal. At first glance, the skillfully distorted human forms in Inbal's new pictures could recall the paintings of the renowned British artist Francis Bacon. But this initial impression dissipates with prolonged perusal of her work. For while Bacon's figures provoke the squeamish sense of grotesque lumps of protoplasmic matter, trapped in mortality like meat on a butcher's block, Inbal's are possessed of a dancer's grace that suggests transcendence, as they twist and turn as sinuously as wisps of smoke on the shimmering surfaces of her large black and white prints, whose absence of color yet rich variety of subtle gray tones enhances their overall effect of ethereality.

"In most of my series I dealt with the human soul," Inbal has stated. "Through my many observations, I've staged my works as a type of mirror into human nature, in accordance with my feelings and interpretations." In this series in particular, the mirror is turned toward the existential condition of the inner self, as reflected in the abstract play of light and shadow on the terrain of the human — and specifically female — body.

Inbal has also said that light is "the lead actor" in her work, and indeed it assumes a starring role in her latest compositions, illuminating them with unearthly auras. At the same time, however, there is also an undeniable sensuality to Inbal's imagery, wherein feminine anatomy is reflected as if in a funhouse mirror (once again, that looking glass, originally referenced by the artist herself, recurs as the apt metaphor which springs most immediately to mind), creating a kind of perceptual striptease by revealing the dark areola of a milky white breast or the suggestion of a pubic thicket in a torso that appears to meld with another figure as though in erotic embrace so intense as to melt two bodies into one. One quickly realizes, however, that this mating is strictly symbolic, signifying a spiritual nurturing of the self rather than a sexual union with another.

"From White to Gray 2"

Yet by virtue of their fluidity, the apparent anatomical anomalies that result from the abstraction of figurative forms in Inbal's compositions never descend to the level of grotesquery; for set against the silvery swirls that the artist reportedly creates with a mysterious and unique technique involving carefully arranged and folded fabrics exquisitely lit, every element appears constantly in a state of flux, of metamorphosis. Indeed that nothing in her compositions remains stable imbues her pictures with a seemingly limitless allusiveness. As in life itself, one's consciousness is constantly being buffeted between the sacred and the profane, as mediated by the products of a singularly refined aesthetic sensibility intent on unflinching self-examination.

For what is being explored here is a communion between the body and the soul to which the artist appears to allude when she says, "In this series I chose to investigate the issue of femininity, a fascinating subject in and of itself, and even more so now when I am in my 50s. At this age, the great fear of loss of femininity has faded away, replaced by inner calm. I choose to enjoy the infinite process of learning and different developments in my life."

Indeed, one is reminded of Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous definition of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquility." For at the half-century mark, Inbal appears to have achieved an enviable perspective on past experience that enables her to introduce a fresh sense of objectivity into her work, even while dealing with the supremely subjective subject of the body as a conduit for individual consciousness.

As Sally O'Reilly suggested in the essay excerpted at the beginning of this review, more enlightened attitudes toward morality, gender, and sexuality, as well as the forthright presentation of nudity in performance art and other areas of aesthetic endeavor, have revitalized representation of the human body, making it once again one of art's vital frontiers.

Malka Inbal's experience of bodies has been more extreme and perhaps more emotionally indelible than that of many others, judging from a quote included by this writer in a review of one of her earlier exhibitions, which bears repeating here: "I joined the army at the end of the 1973 war, when the corpses were brought from the battles to be buried. One of the female soldiers' duties was to go with the soldiers' families and place bouquets of flowers on the graves ... So much sadness and tragedy ... so far from glory ..."

Surely undergoing such a morbid experience in one's youth must intensify the emotions one feels toward the body, both as a vehicle of pleasure and pain, of joy and mortal destiny. Such intense feelings and the hard-won wisdom they must bring are everywhere evident in the photography of Malka Inbal.

— Byron Coleman

Malka Inbal, Noho Gallery,
530 West 25th Street,
September 6 - 30, 2011.

Sharyn Finnegan's Self-Portraits Project an Unflinching Beauty

I have always thought that the 1970s would have been a much more exciting time to be a woman than to be a man. To put it in the most simplistic terms, it seemed as if every thinking woman was a revolutionary and every man — even many men who declared themselves revolutionaries — were behaving like, well, Republicans, in regard to jealously protecting those privileges they had long considered to be their birthright.

Sharyn Finnegan's graphite drawing "Anger 74" seems iconic in this regard. The viewer is greeted by a close-up of an almost stereotypically pretty young woman in her early twenties. But even with her fair hair in girlish braids, her aspect is less like Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm than Cochise. The haughty angle at which her head is thrown back, the sharp slant of her high cheekbones, the slight narrowing of her feline eyes, the set expression of her down-turned lips — all indicate that this is someone not to be fucked with, if one will pardon the expression.

In "Scream 75," an oil from the following year, judging from her furrowed brow, the repressed pain beneath the anger appears to burst forth from the gaping mouth of the young artist, as she stands in her studio with her arms at her sides (although her hands vanish below

"Evolution"

the canvas, one imagines clenched fists), wearing a blue denim work shirt over a turtleneck, with blank sheets of drawing paper taped to the green wall behind her back. Here, one thinks of the Primal Therapy popularized by John and Yoko, rather than the stark terror of Edvard Munch's famous painting.

For while the self-portraits in Finnegan's new solo show, ranging from her 20s to her 60s, are deeply, bravely personal, they are also representative of the angst and exaltation of an entire generation. "Woman, 35," for example, based on the figure of Eve in Jan van Eyck's "Ghent Altarpiece," is a picture of empowerment writ large. The artist confronts the viewer in full frontal nudity. Her long hair streaming to her shoulders, she holds up a fine-pointed sable brush in the same position that van Eyck's Eve holds a small citrus fruit known as an "Adam's apple," which he substituted for the traditional apple.

Art historians consider Van Eyck's painting an important departure from the idealization of the medieval tradition in favor of more naturalistic depiction of the human body. Likewise, while Finnegan still cut a comely figure in her mid thirties, her flesh firm, her features fine, her gaze frank and intelligent, her depiction of her curvaceous body departs somewhat from the anorexic ideal of her time.

"I hated my thighs before I painted that picture," she says. "But when I finished I thought, 'Hey, my legs look pretty good — they're strong!' It was better than years

Continued on page 22

Sharyn Finnegan, Blue Mountain Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, September 6 - October 1, 2011

Janese Hexon: "The Human Clay," Cast in Bronze

One of the major vices to which many figurative sculptors all too often succumb is a tendency to generalize. The very nature of materials such as stone or bronze, with their potential for monumentality, encourages them to blur the features of their figures into those of Everyman — or Everywoman, as the case may be — making them symbols rather than people; vessels of angst, vehicles for a mawkish sentimentality.

Happily, this is a tendency that the Pennsylvania-based artist Janese Hexon avoids assiduously, achieving a more genuine monumentality by virtue of her ability to couple the delineation of individual character with a grasp of significant form that appears to come as naturally to her as the human empathy that makes her figures so affecting.

"I want my work to reflect the communion that we all experience with our exchange of feelings and emotions," states Hexon, the earthy appeal of whose pieces, even cast in bronze, invariably evoke W.H. Auden's phrase "the human clay."

Witness, for one, the work she calls "Holding Grief," in which a female figure modeled in a rugged, tactile manner appears to clutch absence to her bosom, lending the invisible object of her grief a presence as palpable, if not physical, as the ache that some amputees are said to feel in a "phantom limb." Indeed, a receptive viewer who has suffered personal loss may even experience this piece on a visceral level, with a pang of physical empathy that bypasses mere intellectual reasoning or aesthetic delectation to strike a deeper emotional chord.

"La Introspection ll"

In another bronze that the artist calls "La Introspection ll," a haggard female figure with a lined face appears more naked than nude, her body more narrow than slender, with the worn, poignantly lived-in quality of a cast-off garment. In a global culture so inundated with images of youthful, cosmeticized, eroticisized, seemingly immortal femininity, when every Hollywood starlet is a nymphet and there would seem to be no place in the popular iconography for women of a certain age, it is almost shockingly novel to encounter the female soul embodied so blatantly in the aging, vulnerable flesh. Here, Hexon fills an important gap for future archeologists by providing a distaff counterpart of Leonard Baskin's naked Job-like patriarchs.

In yet another another bronze called "Fractured," a naturalistic female head and torso merges totemically with three vertically stacked abstract forms to evoke an unsettling emotional state in stark visual terms. And in "Untitled," a pale blue visage with serenely shut eyes is cradled protectively within huge, dark, graceful arms that flare out in a flowingly harmonious synthesis of the figurative and the abstract, suggesting nothing short of the night sky's embrace of the lunar orb.

In an introductory essay for his book "The New Humanism," Barry Schwartz, a critic, author and project organizer for the Archives of American Art, extolled artists who provide a humanistic alternative to the

Continued on page 22

Janese Hexon, Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, September 6 - October 1, 2011

SENATEDELLA!

While I read My Tea-Tags, Robert Cenedella, the New York Art World's Resident Gadfly in the Ointment Deflates the Tea Baggers and the U.S. Senate with the Same Skewer

Even though a certain political party has lately given tea a bad name, I still prefer it to coffee because since I switched I can get more caffeine into my system without the inevitable nausea that drinking one cup of black coffee after another all day long will produce. Tea goes down easier and I like the idea that I don't automatically think of it as "American industrial fuel," as I do coffee. And I also get valuable advice from tea-tags, those little labels on tea bags, much as some people get their fortunes told by tea leaves — at least from the brand that my wife and I drink.

It's called Salada and not only is it cheaper than any of the other brands on sale in our local Gristedes on the Upper East Side but it has a certain nostalgia value because it was one of the most popular brands on the Lower East Side when I was a kid in the l950s. I seem to remember that the slogan back then was "It's Salada Tea," (the way you'd say "a lotta tea" in our neighborhood dialect) and the only thing as good was the slogan of the other popular brand "Swee-Touch Nee" which, dirty-minded kid that I was, always sounded to me like an allusion to how sweet it could be to touch a girl's knee (something I didn't get to do as much as I would have liked to back then).

Anyway, even more than its nostalgia value, the cheap price of this brand appealed to me, since I drink so much tea every day in order to get myself wired to the point where my teeth are grinding as though I were writing on amphetamines, which I once did routinely but had to give up, along with drinking, in order to continue living. For all I know Salada may be cheap because it's rotten tea, which I probably wouldn't notice and wouldn't make much difference anyway, since I drink tea the way I drank alcohol, for the effect rather than the taste, and was never adverse to the worst brands of beer, bourbon, or vodka either as long as they did the job.

Another reason I buy this brand, though, is because the pithy little sayings and musings and messages that the Salada company puts on its tea tags can often seem uncannily personal, as though they are actually trying to tell me something. The other morning, for example, as I began work on my memoir in progress, "Hoodlum Heart: Confessions of a Test Dummy for the Crash and Burn Generation," the tag on my first cup of the day warned "Never write about a wrong."

To someone else that might seem just a bad pun on the locution "righting a wrong." But it struck a particular nerve for me because a lot of my book is about all the wrong — and sometimes even criminal — things I did in my reckless, feckless youth. I mean, the entire project amounts to an enormous act of self-scandal fraught with all manner of possible danger and possible repercussions, so I couldn't help wondering if this cautionary tea-tag was trying to pull me back from some abysmal brink into which I was about to plunge.

But of course the sense of danger is the very thing that excites me about this wildly indiscreet magnum opus I am writing (my old friend Fran Lebowitz didn't call me "The Existential Ed" for nothing). So I couldn't really heed this tea-tag warning in the way that I could at least try to be mindful of the earlier one that said "Poise — the art of raising an eyebrow instead of the roof," and may have kept me from blowing up at someone who on that same day sorely tested my inability to suffer fools. Just as another tea-tag that said, "Exercising thrift keeps you fiscally fit" may have reminded me to reconsider an extravagant venture I was thinking of undertaking; or the way yet another that said, "A poet can survive anything but a misprint" seemed to rub it in when, although I had checked the proofs myself, the word "except" instead of "excerpt" appeared on the cover of the issue of this magazine in which the first installment of my memoir ran...

Anyway, further proof that these tea-tags, which guide me much in the same way fortune cookies guide the destinies of credulous types who patronize inauthentic Chinese restaurants with names like Lo Fan Palace, can be uncanny occurred this very morning when I first started writing what was to be a piece about Robert Cenedella's painting of the U.S. Senate, when my tea-tag said, "Oxymoron: Senate Ethics."

Thus rather than starting right into describing this eye-boggling Boschian vision of one of our more august and dubious governing bodies, recently literally unveiled by the artist himself amid the kind of PT Barnum-by-way of Andy Warhol hoopla that invariably attends Cenedella's forays into the public arena, to hordes of hooting cheering citizens crowding the street-level window of Studio 57 Fine Arts, I was diverted into the preceding personal rant about my beverage of choice.

But this may be for the best, considering the saying on another tea-bag that turned up in my cup the other day (the trick is never to choose one but let them choose you if you want the magic to work) that said, "When your work speaks for itself, don't interrupt."

That's always good advice for someone as garrulous as me ("Ed, you can talk someone into something and out of it in the same breadth," a musician friend who knew me too well once said). And it also applies especially well to Cenedella's work, which always speaks eloquently for itself and hardly needs a great deal of explication or bloviating from me. Indeed, his paintings offer a refreshing respite from the self-conscious obscurity of so many other painters by clearly addressing issues of the day in a manner akin to that which made it prudent for his one-time teacher George Grosz to leave Germany after the Nazis came into power.

After Grosz came to New York and started teaching at the Art Students League, his work lost much of his satirical bite. That can happen when you're not on your native turf anymore and don't really know the players very well and are faced with the reality of having to eke out a living as an exile in a strange land. But Grosz was a great teacher and late in his teaching career, which spanned the years from 1933 to 1959, he had a great student named Robert Cenedella who became his class monitor and picked up the cudgel and continues to bludgeon the worst among his fellow countrymen — and women (let's

Continued on page 22

Robert Cenedella, Studio 57 Fine Arts, 211 West 57th Street

Nicole Alger: A Painter for the True New Age

"New Age" is a term with a broad application, often encompassing a variety of multicultural disciplines that offer alternatives to the spiritual barrenness of modern life. Normally, when the term is applied to art, however, we picture images of unicorns, wizards, earth goddesses, fantastic landscapes in imaginary fairy tale realms, and other lighthearted, often banal subjects related to popular notions of a generalized gift shop "spirituality."

Wisely, Nicole Alger, a New York painter trained in classical realist painting techniques in Florence, Italy, does not apply this term to her own art. However, her paintings elevate the concept of what New Age art can be by virtue of her serious immersion in the chakra system, a term originating in ancient Hindu texts, derived from the Sanskrit word for "wheel." The term is employed in traditional Indian medicine, which holds that "consciousness is pure energy and our thoughts directly impact our bodies," as Alger puts it in her artist statement. The system divides the body into seven energetic wheels or chakras, each represented by a color.

Thus the light and color in Alger's vibrant oils on canvas derives from the symbolic language of the Chakra system rather than from outer sources, as in Impressionism and other schools of Western painting. Yet at the same time her work is steeped in the aesthetic traditions of Western figure painting, as seen in two youthful female portrait heads, respectively titled "My Siddhartha" and "Prayer II."

The former focuses on the compelling countenance of an exotic beauty with clear almond eyes, the red dot Hindus called a "bindi" in the center of her forehead, and areas of luminous blue light emanating from the thick, dark mane that surrounds her face like a halo. In the latter, another young woman's soft features and serenely shut eyes appear enveloped in radiant auras which are enhanced by the gold leaf that Alger occasionally integrates holistically with oil pigments, rather than applying only to backgrounds and other discrete areas of the composition, as is traditional in Christian icons.

More in the spirit of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Symbolists, Alger's paintings project a sense of beauty and transcendence, as seen in both "Red Sun" and "Spectrum," where the nude female form takes on new meaning as spiritual emissary rather than merely erotic entity. In "Red Sun," a woman appears airborne against a swirling blue field enlivened by a scarlet solar burst. In "Spectrum," a meditating figure levitates within a circle of light, the emblematic composition combining elements of Western realism and the Eastern mandala.

"Red Sun"

A female nude in the lotus position also appears in an oil on canvas by Alger entitled "Aspiration," here amid a panoramic vista of majestic mountains and rivers awash in glowing pastel hues. By contrast, in "Presiding," all of the majesty is embodied in the figure itself. Although the nude model, posed grandly against an expanse of brilliant blue, resembles a blonde Nordic goddess, the glowing whiteness of her torso, accented by her contrastingly suntanned face and limbs, suggests the tantric mingling of mystical and sensual elements in the Hindu and Buddhist belief systems.

Nicole Alger is clearly a visionary painter whose work recontextualizes and invites us to examine anew ancient wisdom and intriguing notions heretofore woefully unexplored in contemporary art.

— Peter Wylie

Nicole Alger, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, October 7 - 28, 2011. Reception: Thursday, October 13, 6-8pm.

A Photographic Exploration of Urban Diversity

Vital contrasts enlivened the West Side Arts Coalition's recent photo exhibition "Uptown, Downtown," in the art gallery of an historic public library in Harlem. Jonathan Morrison showed atmospheric urban scenes, shot from high above, of streets, avenues, traffic islands and bare winter trees glistening with snow, as well as a panoramic print of a couple walking with their pram and leashed dog in "Pier 1, Riverside Park" under a magnificent sky. His use of Archival pigment ink on Valley Litho Gloss paper imbued his prints with a luminous quality that enhanced their subject matter.

In his vibrant digital prints, Cal Eagle, caught young people romping in sunlight at Coney Island, their mood and fashions conveying a lively hip hop mood. One was especially struck by Eagle's portrait of a comely young mother poised like a classical statue on the stairs above the crowds swarming around Astroland.

Jean Prytyskacz's exquisite small black and white silver gelatin prints suggested the superimposition of disparate images and reality endemic to city life: an elevated train passing above a huge Green Project mural; an Amazonian image of a model who resembles a latter-day Brigitte Bardot striking a seductive pose decorating the entire side of an open-topped sightseeing bus with tourists on its deck gawking elsewhere.

Random still life setups glimpsed amid urban complexity capture the attention of Daniel Jumpertz, whose sharp eye for ironic found poetry comes across in his digital print of a children's ride with a handwritten sign saying, "Duck Not in Service." But Jumpertz also shows a more lyrical side in his vibrantly colorful print of florist's display presenting a pocket of urban Impressionism in the bustling city.

There is invariably a strong formal component in the digital prints of Jennifer Holst, here represented by a print in which the gridded pastel windows of a modern building suggest one of Mondrian's stringently geometric compositions. Another picture by Holst, "Highline Park #1," focuses just as engagingly on the patterns of windows on a more severe stone edifice.

Khuumba Ama captures the changing face of a neighborhood in black and white in her companionable picture of a middle aged Black woman and a young Caucasion woman sharing a bench and laughing together in Jackie Robinson Park, pointedly titled "New Harlem." Yet Ama also gives us splendid images of proud young majorettes smiling and strutting in the African American Day Parade, as well as a serene picture of venerable brownstone stoops piled with snow on 119th Street.

The incongruous contrasts of busyness and leisure that can occur both uptown and down come to the forefront in Carolyn Reus's picture of fenced off ice skaters gliding along as hectic pedestrians rush by or disembark from a yellow cab. Reus also showed an intriguing picture of a covered walkway between two downtown buildings, suggesting the antique science fictional style of the old Buck Rogers comic strip or the fad called "steampunk," with its focus on 19th century futurism of authors such as Jules Verne.

Janice Wood Wetzel employed digital technology like freehand drawing to convert photographic imagery into colorful linear patterns and riff jazzily on neon signs, restaurant facades and moving traffic set against a dark background in her print

Continued on page 22

WSAC "Uptown,Downtown," recently seen at Countee Cullen Library Art Gallery, 104 West 136th Street.

Celebrating a Happy Marriage of Art and Craft

Transcending boundaries between fine and applied art, a recent group show by members of the Artist-Craftsmen of New York featured many examples of how utilitarian and purely aesthetic objects can interact and often overlap. Although the prizes awarded in categories such as Collage, Fiber Art, Jewelry, Mixed Media, Photography, and Sculpture, were all well deserved, casual viewers enjoyed the luxury of wandering through the exhibition and picking their own personal favorites.

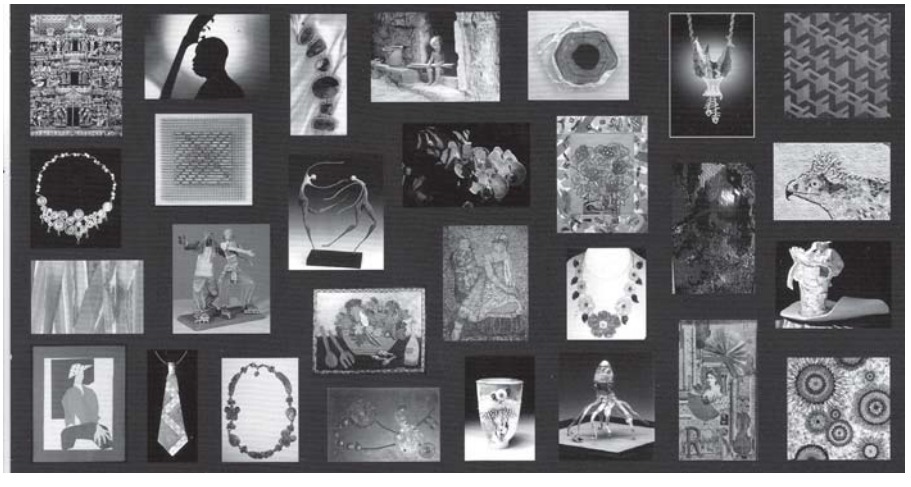
Among ours were Shula Mustacchi's intricate, ornate, and opulent collages, particularly "Joseph and Six Birds," and "Paper Quilt with Persian Miniature #11"; and prizewinner Dongjune Lee's works with religious iconography in the unique medium of fiber/dye on fabric and Plexiglas; Babette Meltzer's tactile mixed media wall relief "Soft Spots," and Lila Turjanski-Villard's mixed media table sculptures in paper, with their graceful elongated figures harking back to Giacometti; and Ruth F. Levine's fanciful monoprint "Butterfly Dreams" and watercolor collage "Opening Act," with its linear chorus line in a winningly direct style.

Sally Shore showed a group of eye-dazzling geometric "Twill Drawings" possessed of a striking formal and coloristic power, created with fiber, ribbon, and twill weave. Prizewinner Dorothy Hall was represented by a group of collages jam-packed with intriguing antique magazine and newspaper imagery, as well as a 3-D assemblage called "Music Box" as poetic as a vintage Joseph Cornell. We were also captivated by Lauren Singer's witty and funky found object assemblages, such as "Blowin' in the Wind," with its references to the famous song by Bob Dylan song (whose brooding face appears in a crude line drawing set against wire mesh, as in a junkyard icon); Gloria Prival's Neo-Pop "Necktie 'Mirror'" collage, in which the viewer saw him or herself reflected in the tie's sterling silver surface; as well as the Neo-Dada mixed media configurations of Evelyn Letfuss, particularly " 'Taxi!,' she whinnied, flicking her tail,' " combining an actual woman's high-heeled pump, a horse tail, and a horse shoe with nails sticking out of it, creating an intriguingly fetishistic effect.

Francine Medoff apparently takes inspiration from folk art dolls and possibly the 3-D tableaux of Red Grooms in her colorful and lively freestanding sculptures such as "Kleizmer Band #1," with its five musicians in brightly patterned garb playing the frenetic folk music sometimes called "Jewish jazz."

Equally playful in another way is the jewelry of Alice Sprintzen, which like Alexander Calder's famous "Circus" transcends craft and rises to the level of fine art by virtue of Sprintzen's ability to adorn the wearers' body with masklike faces and simplified figures possessed of winning simplicity and grace, as seen in her "Wrench Man Pin," in which miniature tools and a golden cog morph into an Inca Sun God. Pearl Brody's jewelry in precious metals, pearls, and gemstones is possessed of classic elegance. By contrast, Karen Strauss employs novel materials and techniques such as wire and silkscreen and image transfer to create colorful jewelry with a playful, youthful quality. And Laura Godler combines the simplified shapes of butterflies and birds fashioned in polymer clay and framed in sterling silver to create poetically evocative wearable art, such as, "I Remember Spring."

Continued on page 19



Artist-Craftsmen of New York,
Recently seen at
New Century Artists Gallery,
530 West 25th Street.

A Salon Show That Does Justice to the Name

In order to be worthy of the name, salon exhibitions should be richly varied affairs encompassing a wide range of styles, and a recent one by the West Side Arts Coalition, called appropriately enough, "Salon Show 2011," fit the bill perfectly. Each genre, from landscape to figurative to abstract and everything in between was well represented.

In both painting and photography, one of the most fertile areas was landscape, which included works ranging from realistic to various degrees of abstraction. Linda Lessner's oil "Cape Code Shoreline" was among the more literal interpretations, with its crystalline evocation of sand and surf beneath a luminous and cottony clouds that rhymed visually with the foamy white curl of the rolling waves. Marguerite Borchardt combined similar elements in her own unique manner in her oil "Pine by the Shore," where the tree of the title perches on a rocky mound, dramatically windblown above a still body of clear blue water.

David Ruskin, our leading contemporary proponent of the hand-colored photograph made an especially atmospheric statement with "Hyde Park, London," in which tall trees, misty tints and autumn leaves scattered across the grass suggest the perfect setting for a nineteenth century duel at dawn. By contrast, in Herbert Fogelson's painterly digital photograph "Sunset in Ulster County," where surf crashes against dark, craggy rocks and boulders and the blue of the water is brilliantly intense, the very forces of nature seem to reflect the political turmoil of a troubled land. Thus George Jellinek's lyrical oil on linen, "Water Lilies at Monet's Garden," presents an auspiciously serene contrast with its lyrical treatment of another watery subject.

Then there is Marsha Peruo, whose two small works in watercolor and ink from her "Land and Sky" series reduce an entire terrain to an intriguing semiabstract visual shorthand, as succinct as musical notation, in which comicstrip clouds outlined in black hover over geometrically codified land masses enlivened by delicate washes of aquarelle. And for sheer charm it would be hard to top Marie Robison's oil pastel "The Old City," in which a man and a child stroll down a cobblestone alley while a woman gazes out the window of an adjoining house in a quaint little hamlet that time seems to have forgotten, evoked with faux-naif sophistication reminiscent of early Chagall.

Figurative art also made an impressive showing, and interestingly enough one of the most simultaneously realistic and abstract works in this category was Jesse Robinson Jr.'s acrylic on canvas "Monk at the Minton," in which the great jazz musician's distinctive mode of dress and posture at the piano, as well as his architectonic style of harmonic improvisation, is masterfully evoked in brilliant areas of hard-edged color in a tour de force of a composition combining the best qualities of distinguished predecessors such as Jacob Lawrence and Stuart Davies. Carole Barlowe also abstracts from the figure with economy and grace in her diptych in acrylic and collage on canvas "Doorway Tenant," wherein two versions of the same mysterious lurking personage, altered slightly by collage elements, are conjured in a combination of line and spare color areas, set against a pure white ground.

Another standout was Nate Ladson's oil print on canvas "Guys on the Block," a photorealist triple portrait in grisaille of three elderly African-American men, one in a wheelchair with a leg missing, lounging against a brick wall and watching the world go by, their strong character revealed by the artist's skillful depiction of the lines of their well-worn faces. The gifted young draftsman William Hunt made his own strong graphic statement in "Caring About the Earth 2," a large charcoal and pastel on paper of a woman with flowing waves of hair balancing on one palm and planting a fervent kiss on a symbolic globe on which one green land mass morphs into a masklike face bearing lines that simultaneously suggest seismic cracks and streaming tears.

Another of our most astute contemporary symbolists, Margo Mead, addressed similar concerns from a more celebratory perspective in a work in watercolor, ink, and oil crayon on rice paper, depicting graceful cosmic dancers cavorting amid a fiery yellow orb and an ethereal earthly sphere that floats like a soap bubble upon a sumptuous blue expanse. More down to earth but no less compelling is a close-up double portrait by Larry Frank of a middle-aged man who confronts the viewer with a thoughtful expression, the painter's vigorous bravura brushwork in oil on canvas and mastery of close color harmonies in the fleshy pinks and yellow range imbuing the image with the sense of an intense human presence.

In his own manner, the innovative photographer Archie Hamilton also evoked a presence, albeit a more spectral one, in his black and white silver gelatin print, "Flashhlight Face," apparently created by photographing a light-beam swiftly tracing a visage in darkness, but also suggesting scrawled graffiti or the linear gestural explosions of the showy French abstract expressionist Georges Mathieu. And speaking of abstraction, a brave undertaking in the postmodern era, it too acquitted itself handsomely, starting with Jutta Filipelli's "Abstract Red," which was just that: a blazing but almost contradictorily diffused composition nearly entirely in that color, subtly set off by the merest touches of blue and other complementary hues that made one look at red anew for both its optical heat and subtle visceral identification.

Robin Goodstein also displayed the panache of a consummate colorist in "Purple Salad," an oil on canvas in which maplike patches of pigment akin to those of Clyfford Still — albeit in candy yellows, reds, greens, and caramel ocher — fairly danced across that luscious purple ground. Marivi Peralta projects her own exuberant gestural sensibility with sinuous brushstrokes like scarlet smoke, interspersed with swirls of white, enlivening a luminous yellow field in her acrylic and oil pastel "Spring Spirit." Conversely, in the unusual medium of acrylic on foam, Jack Cesareo employed angular strokes and thick pigment in his abstract composition "Walk With Me" to create a rugged physicality and power akin to Tachisme. In "The Great Connect," Robert N. Scott employed watercolor with a bold expansiveness in a composition built on overlapping circles of roughly the same size that created dynamic visual rhythms by virtue of the manner in which the artist overlapped them. And working with acrylic, metallic paint, and pumice stone on Plexiglass, Jonathan Morrison achieved subtle sense of amorphous forms floating in space in a color field composition called "Breath (n) Create (v) Love (n)."

Nancy Johnson, opts for an allusive approach to abstract composition in "Blue Abstract Square," where the title apparently alludes to the symmetrical shape of the canvas, rather than the forms within it, which are flowing and organically suggestive, owing to the artist's skill in blending softly diffused secondary hues.

Elizabeth K. Hill demonstrates that humor can be a serious business in fine art with her witty acrylic on canvas "No Sand" in which a conglomeration of colorful mops and brooms sprouting up out of a large sweeping compound

Continued on page 22

WSAC, Salon Show 2011, recently seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, Broadway and 96th Street (center island).

Felicities of Form and Touch in the Paintings of Cecilia Fernandez Q

Because she began as a sculptor, the Chilean painter Cecilia Fernandez Q came first to form. Color followed in due time: subtle and refined combinations of complementary secondary and earthy hues that define, without being subordinated to exquisitely drawn human and animal figures informed by an underlying sense of abstraction. Because drawing, the bare bones of all visual expression, is central to her work, the essential armature on which her structural aesthetic rests, a firm charcoal line remains a visible element in her oils on canvas.

Fernandez Q's compositions featuring dog subjects are especially engaging, but not in the manner that one is used to; for they contain not a hint of canine cuteness. Quite, the opposite, they seem more akin to certain works by Francis Bacon or Marshal Arisman for their starkness. There is no sign, however, of fangs, of feral beastliness in these pictures.

In "Dog 1" and "Study 1," for example, the animal is seen sleeping, curled into itself in that almost fetal manner of its species, harmless and unguarded. The position is poignant but it is hardly the point of these pictures, wherein the tension emanates from Fernandez Q's taut handling of the spatial relationships to which the great Abstract Expressionist teacher/guru Hans Hofmann referred as "push and pull." Indeed other kinships with the practice of the New York School (and of the Englishman, Bacon, as well for that matter) are also evident in the style of this Chilean artist. Perhaps most prominent among them is her use of drips and rivulets of diluted oil pigment as formal and expressive elements, as well as spontaneous markers of painterly "process," as seen in "Study 1." Here, too, the title seems significant, in that there is really nothing tentative or study-like, nothing sketchy about this superbly resolved and finished work. What the term seems to refer to in this context is the sense of immediacy and discovery experienced by the artist in the act of creation.

Another distinctive feature of Fernandez Q's aesthetic is her use of the intriguingly off-center, asymmetrical composition, as seen in "Dog 1," where the severely cropped, curled sleeping canine figure hovers pregnantly at the upper right corner of the composition. Its form is at once weighty and weightless. Seemingly aloft, like a balloon, its grayish brown hue hovers against an area of pale pink, positioned above a broad block of baby blue, enlivened by variegated lines and drips, that anchors the bottom of the composition. It is characteristic of Fernandez Q's painterly panache and subtlety as a colorist that she carries off the painting with such striking élan.

"Woman I"

Drawing and painting are combined with a winning insouciance reminiscent of Larry Rivers in another oil and charcoal on canvas by Fernandez Q called "The Beginning." Here we encounter a slender young woman with wispy bangs seated barefoot with crossed legs on the floor, her arms hugging the knee on which she rests her chin. Her eyes wander away from the viewer, as though dreamily gazing at something outside the right edge of the canvas; yet the picture engages one fully, due to the artist's engagement with subtly tactile qualities of mark-making and "touch."

It is precisely her ability, exemplified here, to make the subject at once palpable and elusive, with the edges of forms alternating tantalizingly between blurred suggestiveness and sharp linear delineation, that makes Celia Fernandez Q such a complex and consistently fascinating painter. — Maureen Flynn

Cecilia Fernandez Q, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, September 13 - October 4, 2011. Reception: Thursday, September 15, 6 - 8 pm.

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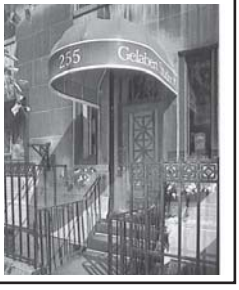


LOOKING FOR AMERICA

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

a memoir by Ed McCormack

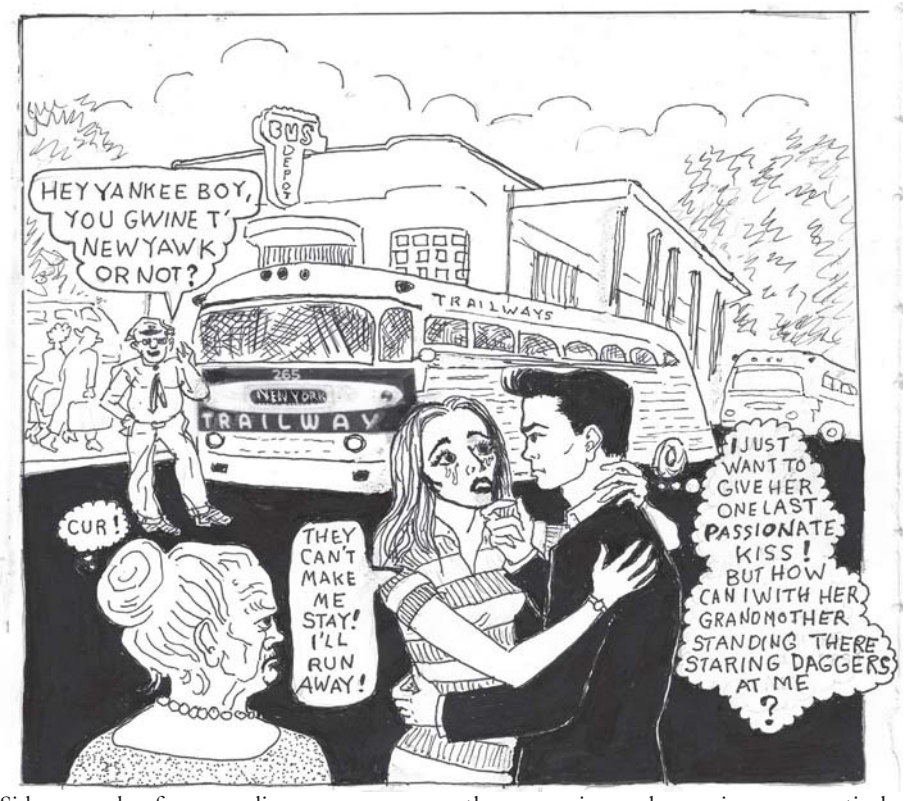
While I sincerely believed that I would have been willing to die for love, I was hardly prepared to be tarred and feathered for it. I might shriek like a girl as the hot sticky goo was applied and appear ridiculously unattractive to my love — like a big molting ostrich! — were she to see me immediately afterward.

Yet in his own genial way, Jeannie's uncle Walter had made such a fate seem like a distinct possibility, should I stick around and push my luck much further in Fauquier Country in the Virginia horse country. And the following morning, after her grandmother shot me a withering look and muttered something under her breath that sounded like "cur," I wondered if I was as good as tarred and feathered already.

So it was with a confusing mixture of sorrow for my intended's tears and fear for my own sorry ass that I allowed myself to be driven to the Trailways depot that morning and boarded the bus back to New York without a fight.

* * *

As my Uncle Charlie proved after his marriage ended and he drank himself into an early grave, people on my mother's side of the family could literally die of a broken heart, even if the official cause on the death certificate was cirrhosis of the liver. But Charlie was still with us that night, after I got back from Virginia, when my relatives took me out to drown my sorrows at a bar called Jack's Dog House, in New Dorp, the blue collar beachfront community on Staten Island to which my parents had moved from the Lower East Side a couple of years earlier.



Such maudlin occasions were a specialty of my mother and her siblings. Although they were all grown and out on their own by the time my grandfather became a widower, after he followed his wife to the grave they would sometimes reduce themselves to tears over beers around our kitchen table, singing a sentimental old song that went, "Daddy, dear old Daddy, way up above she could see/ You were more than a dad/ You were the best pal I had/ Daddy, you were a mother to me."

Now, to paraphrase a more recent song, it was my party and I could cry if I wanted to. But having always been embarrassed by my family's mawkish displays, I refused to give them that satisfaction, even as my uncle Georgie kept feeding coins into the jukebox at Jack's to play a selection with the hatefully haunting refrain "Love letters straight from the heart/ keep us so near though apart/ I'm not alone in the night/ When I can have all the love you write..."

Yet, convinced as I sometimes was that there must have been a mix-up at the hospital, I now felt grateful for having been born into a family that, rather than opposing early marriage on practical grounds as most sensible people would, supported me lavishly in my romantic anguish. In fact, the more they drank the more serious Charlie and his older brother Georgie began to sound about renting a car, driving down to Virginia, and transporting a minor they had yet to meet and had only seen in an ad for American Airlines that I had proudly showed off to them, across state lines. Neither of my uncles had been around on the day I brought Jeannie home to meet my parents and my younger sister Maureen, who were already crazy about her (even my habitually silent and noncommital father had to allow as to how she was "exceptionally pretty, Eddie, a very sweet kid" — albeit in a somewhat incredulous manner, indicating that he couldn't imagine what she saw in me). But in the romantic spirit of our crazy clan, both of my uncles were ready to incriminate themselves on behalf of a foolhardy adventure.

"I'm not bullshitting you, Chumley," Charlie, who invariably addressed me by my embarrassing family nickname, kept insisting, as his older brother, Georgie, nodded in agreement, "All she has to do is tell us where to come and pick her up and we'll drive down and bring her right back here."

Fortunately my uncles' reckless scheme

never had to be put into action. Jeannie called me a few days later with the exhilarating news that, after her mother had returned to Richmond, secure that her impulsive plan to marry "that strange boy" had been thwarted, her grandmother had a change of heart and decided not to stand in her way. One could only surmise that upon further reflection a woman born in 1900 had decided it would be the lesser of two evils to let the foolish child marry the Yankee cur who had seduced her than to condemn the girl to the scarlet woman's half-life of shame and social ostracism.

In any case, we arranged to meet in Washington D.C. and ran into each others' arms that gloriously sunny day.

"Wow, this thing is heavy," I said, picking up her suitcase. "What have you got in here anyway?"

"Oh, just my undershirts and things," said my bride-to-be, and I knew right then our life together was going to be interesting.

We boarded a bus back to New York in a scene I would later remember fondly whenever I heard Simon & Garfunkel's song "America," about two equally clueless kids setting out on a Greyhound in search of that same mythic land. Only, Jeannie and I traveled no further than New Dorp Beach, Staten Island, a place to which I felt I had been shanghaied by my parents against my wishes and where I had sworn I would never willingly settle.

* * *

My Uncle Georgie and my Aunt Delores had started the tribal migration from the Lower East Side soon after their youngest son, Jimmy Boy, had settled a dispute with an older bully on Henry Street with a hammer and they decided that the old neighborhood was changing too fast to remain a place where children might be respectably raised.

Almost from the day they moved, my mother never stopped telling my sister Maureen and me how much Jimmy, his big brother George, Jr., and their elder sister Jane were enjoying suburban life. Although my sister and Jane were around the same age, Jimmy Boy and Georgie Boy were both several years younger than me. I had already decided where I was meant to be and balked at the idea of being uprooted from a place so convenient to my beloved Village and transplanted to what I considered the most remote, backward, and bigoted of the white flight boroughs. But as soon as the upstairs apartment in the two-family rental house where my uncle and aunt lived on the ground floor became available, we were already on our way to that blue collar backwater.

As usual my father, who came to hate the ninety-minute commute to work by bus, ferry, and subway even more than he had hated the Lower East Side, had no say in the matter. All he could do after the move had become a fait accompli was point disgustedly to our new typical suburban family dog, Duffy, and complain to his downstairs neighbor, "I swear to Jesus, George, sometimes of a cold winter morning when I'm sitting here fortifying myself with a Rheingold or two for that goddamn trip on that godforsaken ferry to Pier 57, I look at his nibs over there, snoozing by the stove, and wish to Christ I could change places with that lazy mutt."

No one, however, was more distraught about being banished to Darkest Nowheresville than yours truly. Unable to afford a place of my own on a copy boy's salary, all I could do was stay with friends in Manhattan whenever possible; get wired on espresso and sit up all night at Cafe Figaro; or on those too frequent occasions when I had no other choice, go back to Staten Island and let my mother fill me in on the most recent developments in the family soap opera.

Her youngest sister Irene, the latest to make the move, was already complaining that her Italian truck driver husband Frank (who used to put on the gloves with me when I was about ten, staying with them while my mother was in the hospital, and on the pretext of boxing lessons, resentfully knock me around their livingroom) was too much in his element on "this island of goombahs."

Frank, whose nickname for some reason was "Buff" (and to whom my father unfailingly referred as "Buffalino," in honor of his Italian origins), had always been a good amateur balladeer in the Tony Bennett mode, performing mostly at weddings and other family functions when we all still lived on the Lower East Side. Now he sang on weekends at one of the Island's many Mafia-owned nightclubs and had turned into a real prima donna, according to my mother.

Every Saturday night, as he got ready to go to the gig, he treated Irene and the kids like gofers and valets, throwing tantrums worthy of Maria Callas if they didn't have his shoes shined or weren't prompt enough in fetching his tux and toupee. Once, when his spaghetti wasn't sufficiently al dente, he tossed it up in the air and it stuck to the kitchen ceiling, the red strands dangling down like those long ruddy hairs between a buffalo's legs.

Always the biggest news, though, were the latest exploits of my other aunt Emmy's criminal offspring Richie and Dennis, both of whom splendidly demonstrated that while you could take a boy out of the Lower East Side, you couldn't always take the Lower East Side out of the boy. Either they had pistol whipped and robbed the kindly neighborhood pharmacist who filled their mother's prescriptions on credit; or one of them had shot an arrow into someone's ass with a powerful cross-bow of the type

normally used for deer hunting over a drug deal gone wrong; or any number of other violent incidents and armed robberies for which they were constantly in and out of jail or prison.

Only Emmy's oldest son Eddie seemed to have made a success of himself, until the Staten Island Advance reported that his used car lot was the front for a stolen car ring. My mother laughed when I remarked that it was heartening to hear someone in the family was involved with slightly more organized crime. Yet her sympathy for the two younger thugs, big babies who got too homesick to run very far even when every cop on the island was out gunning for them, seemed inexhaustible.

"Richie is on the run again and he stopped by my stand the other day," she would tell me, referring to the salted pretzel concession in the Pathmark store in New Dorp Plaza where she had taken a part-time job. "Every time him or Dennis is in trouble again I try to talk sense into them before they get themselves killed trying to escape. And of course they yes me to death: 'I know aunt Mabel, you're right, I gotta stop livin' like this.' Then they go back and do the same thing again. But they're not really bad kids. How else could they turn out, all through their childhood having to watch that dumb Polack father of theirs beat the hell out of their mother?"

Perhaps because she wished to keep faith in her own son's virtue despite all evidence to the contrary, my mother seemed to agree with Father Flanagan, the founder of Boys Town, that "There's no such thing as a bad boy." So she'd invariably slip her fugitive nephews a little something from the unofficial "bonuses" she regularly awarded herself out of the pretzel stand till. (What her cheap bum of a boss didn't know wouldn't hurt him, right?)

But even Mama was appalled by a holiday card Dennis once sent her from Rahway Prison. Put out by the Aryan Brotherhood, it had a picture on the front of three hooded Klansmen burning a cross on a lawn, and when you opened it, it said, "Wishing You a White Christmas."

* * *

For a long time, for reasons I seem to have made clear here, it had behooved me to keep a safe distance from family life on Staten Island. But now, with a fiancé in tow and no immediate prospects for supporting her (obviously, it would have been awkward to show up for work at the Hearst Corporation as though nothing had happened), the prodigal son conveniently returned to the fold.

On the assumption that Jeannie's parents, being of slightly more recent vintage, might not exactly share her grandmother's old-fashioned notions regarding the stigma of premarital sex and attempt to thwart us, our plan was to hide out in the family attic until we were safely married. To throw them off our trail, we instructed my mother to tell anyone who contacted her from Virginia that we had eloped to South Carolina.

So fortunately, she was prepared when Claude Eaton, a handsome and charming descendant of Mayflower passengers with a drinking problem, showed up unexpectedly at her door one afternoon while my father was at work, my sister was at school, and, fortunately, Jeannie and I were across the river attending to our blood test and marriage license.

Jeannie's father had a yellow cab that he had taken all the way from Manhattan (presumably via the vehicle deck of the ferry, since the Varrazano Narrows Bridge had not yet been completed) idling outside the house with the meter running and a bottle of Jack Daniels under his arm. When my mother told him our cover story, he shrugged amiably as if to say,"Well, that's that," requested a couple of glasses, and insisted that she join him in "a toast to our children's happiness."

When Jeannie and I got back from the city that evening, my mother, who always had a weakness for handsome alcoholic men anyway (or why would she have married my father, the tippling heartthrob of the company health club, and why would she be such an avid viewer of Dean Martin's TV show?) was as flushed and giddy as a schoolgirl. For the afternoon, she told us, had ended with Claude chasing her around the dining room table, until she managed to convince him that her husband was due home from work at any minute and he reluctantly took his leave.

Not until years later would we learn that my future father-in-law had used the occasion as an excuse to go on a monumental binge, not returning to Virginia for several days.

With my uncle Charlie as best man and my mother, my father, and my sister as our witnesses and only guests (we were in a hurry, it was a weekday and all the other relatives were at work), the ceremony took place at an Episcopal church called Saint Simon's, which had a more liberal attitude toward quickie weddings than our local Catholic parish. It was followed by an intimate, impromptu reception at Chinatown Chinese Restaurant in the nearby Hylan Boulevard shopping center.

Our honeymoon was spent in my family attic, where we ended up living more like incestuous siblings than proper spouses for the next couple of years. God only knows what grunts, moans, shrieks of delight, mad giggles and things going bump bump bump in the night disturbed my mother's eternal cooking and cleaning, my father's perennial television watching, my sister's teenage reveries in her room, as we romped energetically in the playpen of polymorphous perversity, testing all the possibilities of our healthy young bodies in every innocent, inventive way.

After awhile we began to test my mother's patience as well, by behaving as irresponsibly as Paul and Elisabeth, the rambunctious adolescent brother and sister who inhabit a realm of private games and fantasies in Jean Cocteau's novel "Les Enfants Terribles (The Holy Terrors)." Mama had always been my chief enabler. (Back when I was a teenage poet as lawless, if arguably not as gifted, as Rimbaud, hadn't she diverted investigators from the public library who showed up to inquire about all the unreturned books checked out on her son's card to that same convenient state of South Carolina?) Now we had rewarded her for helping us avoid annulment by turning her attic into a bohemian garrot where we hid from the adult concerns of the workaday world, as in an ivory tower.

Under my influence, Jeannie had resumed the artistic interests that had been discouraged as unsuitable for a proper Southern belle during her adolescence. She painted and wrote poetry. She even started styling my hair.

Able now to pursue self-expression with a vengeance, she began to think of modeling as frivolous, or at very least "superficial" — one of our favorite words when we were feeling especially deep — and let her agency contacts lapse. I had mixed feelings about her modeling anyway. While it made me proud to see her picture in a magazine, I was still insecure enough to fear she might get swept away by a world of glamour in which I had no place. And I was insanely jealous the one or two times she posed with a male model, despite her assurances that the superficial vanity of the guys in that business made them anything but attractive.

In any case, I was pleased that now she modeled exclusively for me — at my request, almost always nude. Don't believe anyone who tries to tell you that aesthetics and salaciousness don't mix; that a male artist leaves his libido outside the studio door when he works from the nude female model. What would be the point in that? Being a vigorous young man, I can't

remember ever not being in a state of tumescence with my beautiful bride, ever the eager helpmate, standing, sitting, or lying naked before me. Painting her that way was invariably foreplay to the foreplay.

If anything, the sense of being in the presence of something as eternal as a classical statue made it all the more erotic, as I alluded in some lines I scribbled in my poetry journal after one session: "Look/ on the avenue/ the same come-/ liness we see/ in Antiquity/ only with arms!"

Objectively, those youthful nudes may have been among my most derivative paintings. I seem to recall that in more than one, the warm flesh tones I stroked into Jeannie's naturally elongated torso owed something to Modigliani. Yet there was nothing objective about them for me. And they would be among the works I grieved for most viscerally, some years in the future, after a vindictive madwoman who lent me a studio took it upon herself to dispose of almost all my paintings as a calculated act of revenge.

But long before we could even imagine anything bad ever happening to us, we were simply blissful in our attic. We spent our evenings painting, writing, regaling each other with poetry (our own, as well as everything from Donald Allen's The New American Poetry to the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam), and listening to Ornette Coleman's LP "Free Jazz," which had a painting by Jackson Pollock on its cover that made it all the more appealingly avant garde to us. I had acquired it dirt-cheap, along with a stack of other hip modern jazz albums, as "swag" (a longshoreman's term for items like the "Grace Line" towels and other stolen goods I grew up with and took for granted) from a local thief named Billy Whitman, who hung out at Jack's Dog House.

We didn't learn until years later that they had originally belonged to an older artist named Jay Milder, for whom my sister occasionally baby-sat, and who I would eventually befriend in the downtown art scene long after the albums had gone the careless way of most of our material possessions. He and his wife Sheila had lived for awhile in a storefront on Cedar Grove Avenue, the same street as our seedy neighborhood bar, and he had set up a studio in the cavernous shell of Seaside Hospital, an abadoned infirmary on New Dorp Beach. They were known as "the beatniks down by the beach" and, being outsiders, were apparently considered fair game by the local burglars, as we too would probably have been were we not so securely sequestered in a reputable workingclass home.

Hardly being stupid, however, it was inevitable that my mother would eventually weary of supporting our La Boheme routine, as we squandered the money she gave us to travel across the bay and job-hunt on idle hours in Village cafes. It was as though we had each found in the other our missing twin and were so incestuously contented together as to be without further aspiration.

After months of this, my mother, who had initially been charmed by her new daughter-in-law's "you-all's" and other cute Southern belle mannerisms, attributing to her none of the faults she saw in my sister, of whom she could be unfairly critical, realized we were two of a kind. Calling us "thick as thieves, partners in crime," she finally blew up and ordered us out of her attic, leaving me no choice but to call upon the limitless good nature of my favorite uncle, former bed-mate, childhood buddy, and best man, Charlie.

Jeannie's first Christmas on Staten Island, when my child-bride was crestfallen to learn that we Yankees bought trees in a shopping mall rather than chopping them down in the woods, it was Charlie who stalked onto a neighbor's lawn like a serial killer with an ax and abducted a plump young pine, later explaining to his irate older sister, "I just hadda do it Mae, we don't want the poor kid to be homesick, right?"

Now he immediately offered Jeannie and me the Castro convertible sofa in his apartment in Elmhurst, Queens, where he drove a delivery truck for a furniture chain called Koos and sought sexual solace after work with rummy barmaids old enough to be his mother. But I realized from my divorced uncle's forlorn expression, as he carried the bedding into his living room, that to stay with him too long would be to rub his nose in our wedded bliss — not to mention inhibit our conjugal gymnastics. So I called my mother first thing in the morning and sweet-talked us back into the attic.

Although I had long practice at winning my mother's sympathy, no matter how angry I managed to make her with me, it was her daughter-in-law who placated her in a more practical and lasting way by taking steps to remedy our unemployment situation. First Jeannie got hired as a receptionist on Wall Street, always easy for a young woman as decorative as she. Then she contacted the Hearsts, probably playing upon the guilt they must have felt for not having chaperoned her more successfully, to secure me a new newspaper position. This one was with the Brooklyn Section of the New York Journal-American, in the same building on South Street where I had fraudulently filled out the application

that got me my first job with the Hearst Corporation.

That John Newton, the ornery editor of the Brooklyn Section — who, because of Bill Hearst's personal intervention, may have assumed I was a rich kid with a dillitantish whim to try newspapering, and have resented being stuck with me — had the same name as a notorious 18th century slave ship captain seemed entirely appropriate. When he got after me about not keeping up the shelves of back issues in the office, a duty in which I was admittedly remiss from the start, I felt more like a miscreant cabin boy under the lash than the copy boy I was supposed to be. However, since the original Newton eventually underwent a religious conversion and ended up writing the repentant Christian hymn "Amazing Grace," something I could never have imagined his namesake doing, it would probably be more accurate to compare the editor to Captain Bligh, as played by Charles Laughton in "Mutiny on the Bounty."

A hulking, white-haired, red-faced old man, whose pronounced limp suggested a peg-leg and added to the seafaring impression, Newton had worked for the Journal-American in one capacity or another for over five decades, according to Stan Fischler, a reporter for the Brooklyn Section who tried to give me practical advice about how to humor and get around him. Although Newton would sometimes be a little mellower in the afternoons, following a liquid lunch at Mutchie's Bar, the old newspapermen's hangout down the block, his habitual crankiness may have been exacerbated by a raging case of hemorrhoids that made it necessary for him to cushion his desk chair with a rubber donut almost as big as an inner tube.

But as the former Brooklyn Section copy boy who had been mercifully transferred to another section of the paper to make room for me put it over beers at Mutchie's, "That old bastard just likes to bust balls, period."

Since there was only one other reporter besides Fischler, a veteran newshound named Al Sekine, on staff, I occasionally got to try my hand at a short filler item. Inexplicable as it seems now, I was especially proud of the headline I came up with for one that I rewrote from a press release about an old whaling kettle in Mystic Seaport, Connecticut, that was being used to collect charitable donations: "Whale of a Kettle Kicks Off Salvation Army's Local Fund Drive."

The Hearsts had hinted to Jeannie that the job, if I stuck with it this time, could lead to a reporter's position. And since it appeared that I would have to make a living at something in the square world anyway, a future journalism didn't sound too bad. (Kerouac's good buddy Lucien Carr was an editor for the United Press, after all, and it didn't stop him from making the Beat scene).

But a future in anything suddenly seemed like a moot point, once the Cuban Missile Crisis got under way in October of 1962, not long after I was hired at the Journal-American. Since imminent doom has a wonderful way of enhancing romance, if nuclear annihilation was a distinct possibility Jeannie and I chose to treat it as a certainty.

Without telling my mother we were skipping work or even bothering to call in to our respective jobs, we decided to wander around the city doing whatever we wished until the missiles rained down and we moved on to spend eternity together. Everywhere we went, people were crowding anxiously around newsstands to gawk at headlines, listening to staticky news reports on transistor radios, and staring at television screens set up in store windows at ominous black and white images of the Soviet ships that JFK had ordered to turn back steaming toward Cuba, bearing more nuclear warheads.

Reasoning that the Chinese, having survived so many centuries of drastic history, were unlikely to be as hysterical as everybody else in the city — or if they were, the language barrier would muffle the anxiety level, at least for us — I suggested that we go hang out in Chinatown, a much smaller, more insular neighborhood in the early sixties than it is today. And I seemed to have calculated correctly, judging from the relative calm, as we sat in a seafood bar on Mott Street called The Lime House, where I introduced my recent bride to the exquisite sensual pleasure of washing down raw clams with cold beer, which she rarely drank, her father's alcoholism having had the exact opposite effect on her as my father's had on me. (Being the more thoughtful youngster, she saw the shame, secrecy, and stigma attached to overindulgence by polite Southern society, while I saw working people who were gloomy all week whooping it up on Saturday night, and couldn't wait to get drunk myself.) But Jeannie gamely agreed to drink with me that day and was delightfully tipsy by the time we were working on our second dozen clams and second pitcher of beer.

Since I also wanted to give her a taste, however abbreviated, of some of the other earthly pleasures I had hoped to share with her over the course of a long life together, next we headed west to the Cedar Tavern, on University Place, one-time haunt of my Abstract Expressionist heros. There were only a couple of other customers in the Cedar that afternoon and we took a table in the front, right across from the bar. I was telling her a story I had read about how that prodigious drunk Jackson Pollock was always getting 86'd from this place for brawling with fellow artists, but would come back and smear his face against the plate glass window like an imploring gargoyle, until they let him back in, when I noticed a middle-aged man with a shock of salt and pepper hair shooting straight up from his head like porcupine quills staring over at us from a corner seat at the bar. When I stared back at him, he flashed a crooked, kindly grin, and called over, "Hey, I'd like to buy you two lovebirds a drink."

Since it was the Cedar and his dialogue had that slightly dated Bogart style some of those old New York School artists affected, I took him for a painter — perhaps a lesser known peer of Pollock and de Kooning, waxing sentimental on a bender. Then he came over to the table, stuck out his hand and introduced himself, and suddenly I was star-struck.

I had been a fan of William Steig's cartoons ever since I first encountered his work as a young kid in the back issues of The New Yorker on the end-tables in my mother's doctor's waiting room. Since my mother suffered from a chronic heart condition and her checkups often led to lengthy hospitalizations, visits uptown to Dr. Basile's office were invariably anxious occasions for me. Thus the magazine's many gag cartoons provided welcome distraction from worrying over the outcome while she was in being examined.

What attracted me to Steig's cartoons in particular was that, along with those of Syd Hoff, a lesser cartoonist who also favored prole subjects, in contrast to the sophisticated nightclub denizens and Park Avenue swells of Peter Arno, Rea Irvin, Whitney Darrow, Jr. and others, Steig's streetsmart urchins, stoop-sitters, lamppost-leaners, and tenement dwellers who dined in their undershirts had a rude Lower East Side vigor with which I could more readily identify.

And in that circuitously associative way that memory often works, meeting him now as the world prepared to end made me flash back to my mother's account of how she first met Dr. Basile, a suave little Frenchman who thought nothing of patting his female patients on the backside in an affectionate way, and with whom I had always suspected she was at least a

little bit in love.

If the good doctor, who was several years older than my mother, were still alive and practicing today, I have no doubt he'd be up to his stethoscope in sexual harassment suits. But as far as Mama was concerned, Dr. Basile could do no wrong, ever since the day she grabbed his sleeve while he was passing through a ward in Saint Clare's Hospital in midtown Manhattan shortly after her first heart attack.

Having been informed by the attending physician that her childhood bout with rheumatic fever had developed into a life-threatening condition and micro valve surgery was her only hope, she clung to his white coat, begging for a second opinion.

Attempting as gently as possible to disengage himself from her grasp, he pleaded that he was a gynecologist and not qualified to diagnose heart ailments. But she tearfully implored him to look at her chart, and realizing that he would not be allowed to finish making his rounds unless he did so, he sighed and took the clipboard from the foot of her hospital bed. He studied the chart for awhile, raising his eyebrows significantly several times, shaking his head, and making little "tsk tsk" sounds that, along with his accent, my mother relished imitating the many times over the years that I heard her repeat the story to anyone who would listen.

Then, leaning close and putting his stethoscope to the chest of the wanly pretty young woman languishing in the beds while surreptitiously slipping his card into her hand, Dr. Basile whispered in my mother's ear, "Listen carefully, dear. You must never repeat to anyone what I am about to say, because if they knew I told you this, they could take away my license to practice medicine. Do you understand this, dear? Very well, now pay attention: You must not sign for this surgery. It is very risky and you are in no condition to survive it. Maybe when it has been perfected this will change, but definitely not now. So after you are released from the hospital, I want you to come to my office and I will try to take care of you as best I can in the meantime."

From that moment on, he was her Maurice Chevalier of the bedside manner, treating her for many years for a fraction of what he charged his more affluent uptown patients, and affording me the opportunity to devour those first precious issues of *The New Yorker* piled up in his waiting room.

With more gratitude and affection than malice, my father always referred to Dr. Basile as "that little frog." And my mother liked to joke that, with his eyeglasses dangling like a monocle from a long black ribbon down onto the cute little potbelly beneath his starchy white coat, he resembled Mr. Peanut.

"He's such a shrimp, I could eat spaghetti off his head," she'd say, perhaps to ridicule the very idea that anything could ever go on between them. But she was clearly crazy about him and I got the feeling that he had a special place in his heart for her as well.

After one of her attacks he even made a house call, traveling downtown to a neighborhood whose squalor obviously offended his French bourgeois sensibility, and doing so during a dock strike, when he had no chance of being paid. My father was in his usual chair at the kitchen table and my uncle Georgie was standing at the stove, frying porkchops. It was not quite noon, but they had already gone through a couple of sixpacks. As Dr. Basile leaned over the sofa with his stethoscope, listening to my mother's heart in the livingroom, which was continuous with the kitchen of our railroad flat, Georgie kept interrupting him, pulling the meat out of the pot with a fork, waving it around like a flag, saying, "Are you sure you don't want one of these chops, doc?"

At one point, just as he glanced up, annoyed, to insist once again that he did not, my uncle dropped the meat on the floor, picked it up, and put it right back into the pan.

Dr. Basile leaned closer and whispered to my mother, "You will never recover, dear, if you don't get away from this madhouse!"

It was just the sort of absurd human situation that William Steig savored in his drawings. Perhaps he saw Jeannie and me in cartoon terms as well, when he first spied us through the mirror behind the bar at the Cedar, all scribbled together at our table like the couple in his wonderful drawing "Newlyweds."

Past the initial introductions I don't even recall what we talked about — certainly nothing so depressing as the day's news! All I remember is that the kindly cartoonist was memorably gracious to two scared kids he saw clinging to each other for dear life and decided to favor with a Doomsday drink.

* * *

When the Soviet ships turned back, the missiles were withdrawn from Cuba, and the world didn't end on schedule, I told Jeannie that her plan to show up personally at the Brooklyn Section and try to convince John Newton to give me one more chance would be a waste of time.

But my wife was adamant: "If there's one thing I learned from growing up with my grandmother," she insisted, "it's how to deal with stubborn elderly people. So, I'm going to try anyway, okay?"

She never told me exactly what she said to the old tyrant. But she must have worked some powerful Southern belle mojo on him, because she came back talking about what a sweet, gallant old gentleman he was.

"He even sent someone out to get us coffee and took out his wallet to show me some pictures of himself as a young man," she told me. "And after I told him how handsome he looked in them, he agreed to give you one more chance, as long as you show at nine sharp tomorrow morning and don't ever disappear like that again."

If I was not as ecstatic as I should have been about still being alive to return to Newton's slave galley, at least it was a consolation to realize, once again, that I had married a most formidable young woman.

* * *

ARTIST-CRAFTSMEN OF NEW YORK

Continued from page 11

"Maximalism" is the only word that suffices to describe the mixed media/ Polymer clay wall reliefs of Joan Israel whose "My Own Zoo" evokes an entire bestiary of fanciful creatures and critters surrounded by all manner of colorful and ornate rain forest flora. Like those of Romare Bearden and Matisse's "Jazz," the collages of Elizabeth BouRaad are bold explorations of cut colored shapes that create figurative compositions, of which one of the most striking is "La Bamba," depicting a jaunty figure in tiger-patterned shorts. Then there is Judy Pestronk, who moves easily between sculptural jewelry and jeweled sculpture, as seen by comparing her wearable piece in sterling silver, "Face Pin," with her freestanding figure "Peacock," in vermeil with colorful gems for eyes and decorating its tail.

Photography made a strong showing in the late William Englander's haunting images of children in Paris, one of a shy little girl half hidden behind a hall door while a bigger boy grins mischievously through an adjoining glass panel. Also outstanding in this category were Robin Herstand's large color print of a solitary figure strolling on a nocturnal beach enveloped in moody indigo auras, evocatively titled, "Dreaming of a Steinway... and Jazz Piano Blues #1." We were also impressed by Trudy Jeremias' exquisite close-up of beads of water on a delicate tree-limb, "After the Storm," and Lauren Golden's unearthly landscape "Illumination," both of which were awarded Honorable Mentions.

— Maurice Taplinger

Joan Marie Kelly: A Painter Among Sex Workers

For centuries artists have been painting brothel and harem scenes, almost always from the romantically skewed perspective of what art historians refer to as the Male Gaze. Some examples that come most immediately to mind are the many paintings and drawings of brothels in nineteenth century Paris by Toulouse-Lautrec and Jules Pascin, in which prostitutes and Madames are depicted lolling about in plush Victorian parlors; teasing or even bullying customers — as in Edgar Degas' monotype, "The Client," where a sassy nude tart takes charge of a timid little Milquetoast of a bourgeois in a derby and dark suit, boldly yanking him into the boudoir by his cane-arm while three of her fellow working ladies look on much amused; or, in their idle moments engaging in indolent erotic play with each other in a manner especially compelling to the perversely voyeuristic aspects of the Male Gaze.

Ingres, of course, gave us the ultimate classical courtesan in his "Odalisque," a term which has come into common usage for an artistic convention later adopted by Matisse and others, of painting voluptuous female nudes, often in settings of hokey Orientalia, suggesting harems or exotic bordellos.

It would appear, however, that the ultimate contemporary odalisque has been painted by a woman artist named Joan Marie Kelly, as part of a series called "Zones of Contact," centering on sex workers and their clients in red light districts in Singapore and Calcutta. Indeed, the nude in Kelly's large oil on canvas, "Eco-Cyber Feminist" is every bit as voluptuous as the languorously reclining figure in Ingres' painting. But rather than lying supine on a divan, she sits upright on a sofa with earphones on, a cell phone in one hand, and an open laptop on the low coffee table before her, off of which spills a veritable serpent's nest of wires and cables. Being a proactive rather than a passive odalisque, electronic gadgetry helps her maintain "zones of contact" with her clients.

With this canvas, powerfully painted in an accomplished realist style, the light of the laptop screen illuminating the serenely smiling face and formidable hourglass figure of the enterprising sex worker in a manner that harks back to the candlelit scenes of Georges de la Tour, Kelly updates and revitalizes a venerable theme for the ages. But even while extolling her for replacing lasciviousness and exoticism with the superior wit and empathy of the Female Gaze, one should make clear that Kelly is, above all else, one hell of a painter.

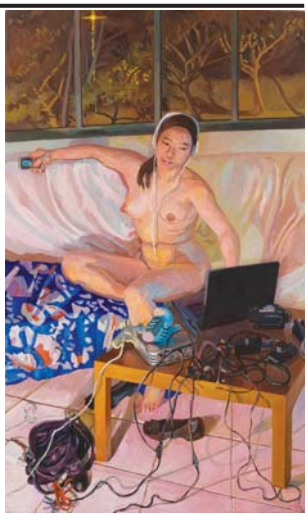
Indeed, among contemporary realists only Alfred Leslie approaches her mastery of chiaroscuro, which is also evident in another large oil on canvas called "Throw the Lily Under the Couch," in which the semi-nude body of another sex worker, this one as zaftig as a female sumo wrestler, is just as dramatically illuminated from a source outside the picture space — conceivably a gigantic flat TV screen of the sort one might expect to find in an up to date art Asian fleshpot — as she leans back on a sofa draped with a satiny blue cloth, apparently studying a text-message on her cell phone. ("This is Zen, a Chinese sex worker from Singapore," Kelly tells us in her informative exhibition notes. "The hand phone was a part of her business. She sang Hokkien songs and answered the phone postponing all engagements until the painting was finished.")

That even the poorest prostitutes in Singapore sport trendy "skinny jeans" and employ state of the art technology in plying their trade are among many revelations to be gleaned from Kelly's pictures, of which one of the most poignant is "Night Negotiations." This large canvas in a vertical format apparently depicts the delicate commercial courtship between an attractive young couple, which here apparently involves a literal dance before a mirror around a dimly-lit room where two wine glasses can be seen on a nearby table, he touching her upper thigh, she messaging his bare chest with one hand and with the other gently restraining one of his hands from venturing beyond her upper thigh, which it already clutches — at least until the exact terms of engagement have been agreed upon.

In another life they might have married. But she is by economic necessity a sex worker, possibly still kicking back her entire first year's wages to the brothel owners to pay her passage to Singapore. And he is most probably an itinerant immigrant laborer from Bangladesh who can barely afford to buy her favors for an hour or two, much less support a wife, on his paltry wages from the factory or construction site. Thus the sadly romantic stalemate in which the artist freezes them for all time.

Such imaginative speculation, which the narrative allusiveness of these paintings encourages anyway in the viewer, is based in part on Kelly's web site, which offers a wealth of information about the conditions under which sex workers and their clients in India and Singapore are forced to live. For the artist truly "got down with the people," so to speak, by establishing herself as a benign, not to mention novel, presence in the bustling nighttime streets of Little India, painting portraits of all comers — or at least anyone who wished to sit — at her portable easel.

Several of these plein air portraits were also featured in Kelly's recent exhibition at Blue Mountain Gallery in Chelsea, and some can be seen, along with photos of the artist at work on the streets, on the website.



"Eco Cyber Feminist"

In contrast to the meticulous classical realism of her larger studio paintings, the on-site studies are vigorously immediate impressions of particular sitters, as well as crowd scenes of workers seeking nocturnal distraction or pleasure in their off hours amid the brightly lighted stores, stalls, and bordellos, executed in bravura strokes of bright pigment.

Kelly won the confidence of the local people by spending every Friday night painting in Geylang, one of the red light districts of Singapore and inviting comments from bystanders.

"Because the people of Geylang thought I 'should' want to paint 'beautiful women,'" she says, "they brought the sex workers in the area to pose for me.'"

She developed a rapport with the women, who took this friendly red-haired foreigner into their confidence and shared the intimate details of their lives with her. She reciprocated by giving them drawing pads and encouraging them to sketch their memories of home and even to "collaborate" on some of her more casually executed paintings of them by signing their names or adding background details, as seen in "Thai Woman with Lipstick" and the group portrait "Thai Women Getting Ready," where the more raw colors, looser paint handling and the Buddhas, sampans, and other exotica sketched in by the sex workers creates a painterly effect curiously akin to some of Matisse's odalisques.

Even more germane, however, given the hard economic facts of the sex workers' existence, is that Joan Marie Kelly paid her models a fair trade posing wage — something quite unheard of, from what one gathers, in that part of the world. Yet those of us who have been afforded enduring glimpses of a fascinating closed world by this immensely gifted painter are by far the biggest beneficiaries of that deeply human transaction.

— Ed McCormack

Joan Marie Kelly, recently seen at Blue Mountain Gallery 530 West 25th St. Her work can be viewed on her website: **www.joanmarikelly.net**

Luminous Transcendence in the Art of Saugy

On first encountering the innovative paintings employing mixed techniques on Plexiglas of the Swiss-French artist Catherine de Saugy, who prefers to be known simply as Saugy, their intriguing combination of fluid organic shapes afloat amid more rectangular forms suggesting portals, evoked memories of Aldous Huxley's "Doors of Perception," its

L'envol

title lifted from a line in the great British visionary William Blake's poem "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell."

Huxley's book was inspired by an experimental mescaline trip undertaken over the course of a single afternoon as part of a much broader program of consciousness expansion. And although Huxley eventually decided that psychoactive (later to be referred to as "psychedelic") drugs were merely "toxic shortcuts" to a "self-transcendence" which could be more lastingly achieved through meditation, autohypnosis, and The Alexander Technique, and other more holistic methods, the experience yielded "purely aesthetic" benefits that led to insights suggesting that, along with Vermeer, Chinese painting, and other examples cited in the text, the author might have had a keen appreciation for the metaphysical aspects of Saugy's art. For her works create a visual language for how the mind expands and experiences a timeless dimension wherein the physical world disperses and becomes pure energy.

One especially apt example can be seen in "L'envol," in which sinuous graceful shapes float like wisps of smoke or translucent rose-colored clouds over superimposed window-like rectangles. As in ancient Chinese scroll painting, these ethereal elements seem like envoys from infinity, an effect enhanced by the perfectly square shape of the Plexiglas panel which, like that of a circle, signifies a limitless eternal expanse (as do, in fact, the symmetrical formats the artist favors in other works in the series as well). Indeed, for all its visual attributes of purity and balance achieved with a pristine and refined technique characterized by subtle shadings and tonal felicities calculated to please even an aesthete whose primary concern is with formal relationships, "L'envol" transcends its purely aesthetic virtues — as well as the drama of otherworldly incongruities that are normally classified as "surreal" — to achieve a sense of what Huxley, viewing a van Gogh under the influence of mescaline, referred to as " a sacramental vision of reality, where everything shone with an Inner Light and was infinite in its significance."

Here, as in all of Saugy's works on Plexiglas, which she substituted for canvas in 2005, twelve years into her artistic career, the sense of ethereality is enhanced by the translucence of the material itself, which is auspiciously suited to her exquisitely delicate delineation of her forms, as seen in another work on a Plexiglas panel entitled "Le Bouquet de Dulcinee," where the romantic notion of presenting of bouquet to one's sweetheart, inherent in the title, is somewhat ironically dampened by an image that, while essentially abstract, nonetheless suggests the melancholy lyricism of scattered windblown petals of an autumnal burnished orange hue in flight past the unforgiving geometry of a stony gray facade.

Interpreted in such a manner, this composition has the poignant beauty of an Edith Piaf song. Yet one must be cautioned about reading too-specific meanings into any work by an artist as innovated, adventurous and multilayered as Saugy, and in whose richly varied oeuvre such symbols invariably take on a broader, more metaphysical, abstract suggestiveness — here possibly having more to do more with the transience of time itself, rather than with the dissolution of a romantic liaison. After all, of her initial decision to move beyond the canvas to Plexiglas, Saugy herself, a musician trained at the Geneva Conservatoire de Musique before turning to painting, has stated, "I had a desire to experiment with painting by introducing another dimension to it; to expand 'finite time,' to drive emotion to express itself by using materials that are supposedly cold and techniques that appear to be complex and inaccessible; to mingle inner vision and outer vision, both of which are captured by our eye, over and beyond logic, analysis and observation."

Obviously, the decision was not determined by considerations of mere novelty, since Saugy's works on paper are entirely consistent with those on Plexiglas and impressive in their own right, particularly the composition called "Don Quixote," with its complex overlappings of rectangular and circular forms engaging in a geometric dance through which more fluid forms and sinuous linear configurations thread like strains of an elusive melody. She perceived correctly, however, that she could imbue the particular forms in her visual vocabulary with further depth and mystery in the newer medium, the unique qualities of which become immediately apparent in a work called "Winter 1."

For here is all the beauty and mystery of the season encompassed, as in a snow globe, in a sublime minimalist composition comprised of a single white-on-white orb contained within the rectangle of the Plexiglas panel. Its perfect symmetry plays off against the subtly irregular configurations of white strokes within its circumference, which could almost appear akin to those in Robert Ryman's white-on-white works, except that in Saugy's painting, rather than merely exploiting the materiality of pigment, they are insulated beneath the surface of the transparent support rather than upon the surface of a canvas and thereby transcend the palpable to suggest more complexly variegated qualities and contrasts between the matte whiteness of powdery virgin snow, the sheen of slippery ice, and even the cirrocumulus clouds that our warm, vital human breath issues out into the frigid

Intuition

winter air.

Indeed, it is Saugy's ability to juggle so many diverse allusions within a single composition and make them speak to us on several levels simultaneously that makes her works on Plexiglas infinitely compelling, amounting to a veritable visual manifestation of the ever shifting kaleidoscope of memory fragments and sense perceptions about which Huxley wrote so eloquently. —Peter Wiley

www.catherine-de-saugy.com

SHARYN FINNEGAN

Continued from page 8

of therapy!"

Even more relevant from an artistic standpoint, however, is that in this exacting, exquisitely painted large canvas, with its rich gravy-brown background and warm flesh tones brought alive by beautifully limned shadows and highlights, Finnegan goes toe-to-toe with the late Flemish master without coming away the least bit bruised.

Equally powerful in its own way is the earlier diptych "Split Self, N.M., '76," in which the artist straddles two canvases, clothed in one, nude in the other, with hands on hips and legs parted in a bodacious pose reminiscent of Wonder Woman. Ostensibly, this large work harks back to a time when Finnegan traveled between studios in two different places, but the psychological implications of the title suggest the self-questioning endemic to a tumultuous period in "herstory," as they used to say.

In Finnegan's case, the personal narrative also includes her triumph over a serious illness, celebrated in the small oil "Haircut, '85," in which her locks are not as long and lustrous but have at least grown back. Then there is "Death in the Family, '05" another small but powerful facial self portrait painted just a few days after her mother's death on an old masonite panel, the distressed condition of which matches the artist's grief- drained expression.

Perhaps the most affecting painting of all is "Woman 60, '07," another large oil in which Sharyn Finnegan pays tribute to that Alice Neel's famous nude self portrait at age eighty, four years before her death. For by painting herself in the same state and approximately the same position, Sharyn Finnegan (whose style is closer to the unflinching realism of Lucien Freud than to Neel's personal take on expressionism) flies bravely in the face of fashion, imparting a similarly liberating nobility — and, yes, beauty, to the aging female body.

— Ed McCormack

JANESE HEXON

Continued from page 8

increasing "technocratization" of society — and art — by infusing their work with "poetic or lyrical qualities derived from an inherent respect for the human being."

Whether it is the totem of fused faces in her "Distant Memories," or the poignant parody of defensive hauteur in the single figure "Alpha-Omega," those qualities are everywhere evident in the sculpture of Janese Hexon. And given her passionate, almost self-effacing, commitment to an eternal subject, it seems a safe bet that Hexon's work will outlast the trends with which she now seems so much at odds, and endure.

— Peter Wylie

MARCIA CLARK

Continued from page 5

edifice painted over a map of the region transfer-printed onto the canvas, creating a metaphysical synthesis that splendidly realizes Clark's stated aim of creating a tension "between the measure of a place and the immediacy of the painted view." Nor could inveterate creatures of concrete like myself, who have never experienced anything more Arctic than the record snowfalls that blanketed New York City this past January, have wished for a more appropriate work to preserve our great adventure than "Riverside Drive, Winter 2011."

For no less than her series of muscular oil sketches of icebergs in Greenland on aluminum, this large oil on collaged Mylar of snowed-in cars lining the slippery slope alongside the park and bare trees clawing a frigid white sky evokes the terrible beauty of winter as only Marcia Clark can.

— Ed McCormack

PAT FAIRHEAD

Continued from page 6

upon and within a body of water. Her broad areas of boldly blocked-in color are often separated by narrower bands of a contrasting hue indicating a horizon line between watery depths and endless sky, in compositions as stringently formal in their own way as the Color Field paintings of Mark Rothko.

In Fairhead's case, however, the serene stillness of the overall format is sensationally disrupted by vigorous bursts of splashy "action painting" which, unlike the calligraphic lines of Mark Tobey or the drips and spatters of Jackson Pollock, are all the more powerful for springing from a natural source rather than from a formal imperative.

Indeed, like the British master of marine scenes J.M.W. Turner, who once had himself lashed to the mast of a schooner in order to experience the full force of his subject, one gets the feeling that Pat Fairhead literally paints from within the center of the storm.

— Maurice Taplinger

SENATEDELLA!

Continued from page 9

not be politically incorrect and leave out Republican pinup girls like Michel Bachmann, Sarah Palin and Ann Coulter) — as only a native son can.

And now we have the U.S. Senate with all the usual suspects on both sides of the aisle in that veritable rogue's gallery cavorting like characters in an Ensor carnival or a three ring circus staged in a gaudy shopping mall where Newt Gingrich rides astride the GOP elephant and the present pope and the ghost of Osama Bin Laden recite from their respective holy books side by side as our beleaguered President balances on a tightrope up near banners in the peanut gallery that say "Defeat Health Care," and "Help Save Capitalism," and "Tea Party, The Party of God," and "Corporations Are People" (the latter recalling the billionaire dwarf Mayor of New York's astounding statement that "K-Mart is a good corporate citizen"), while down below the president's erstwhile opponent is flashing his little pit bull fangs and probably still going on patronizingly about "Joe the Plumber," while his dim bimbo of a former running mate strikes a prayerful Christian Right icon pose and...God help us all!

But by now (since they're multiples, you see, not unique works like Cenedella's) my umpteenth tea-tag of the day is again reminding me not to interrupt that which speaks eloquently for itself.

So I rest my case, fellow Americans, and refer you to the full color reproduction on our front cover.

— Ed McCormack

WSAC "UPTOWN DOWNTOWN"

Continued from page 10

"129th Street." And she also showed a more traditional gift for incisive portraiture in her picture of a street vendor in African garb standing in front of mural of great African-American leaders and the greeting "Welcome to Heavenly Harlem."

Jack Cesareo is perhaps best described as a photographic conceptualist, since all of his pictures center around a giant pink-frosted cupcake that he apparently moves to different parts of the city, documenting peoples' reactions. In "Columbus circle", bemused pedestrians rally around the imposing confection, creating a festive mood. On "142nd Street and 5th Avenue," however, workers busily shoveling snow appear oblivious to the incongruous cupcake.

It's all about contrasts.

—Mark Spencer

WSAC SALON SHOW

Continued from page 12

drum with the phrase of the title printed on it appears at first glance to be a floral still life. The same genre is also delightfully revamped by Meg Boe Birns in her deliciously tactile painting of a painting "French Flowers," with textures like cake frosting and a label on its painted "frame" that says, "Les Fleurs Francais." Richard Carlson also puts a new spin on floral still life in his mixed media work "Light," in the geometric compartments that distinguish his more abstract compositions function effectively as containers for more traditional imagery.

Two final artists, Deborah Yaffe and Amy Rosenfeld, give new meaning to the term "mixed media," each through her inventive use of materials: Yaffe's textile assemblage, "Growing Flower,"suspended from a crossbar like a Chinese scroll, makes fanciful reference to natural evolution with printed floral patterns that expand as they ascend. Rosenfeld's "Assorted Collage" makes innovative use of aluminum soda can snap-tops and plastic packaging materials, transforming this banal and familiar everyday industrial detritus in a manner that makes us discover its hidden beauty.

Indeed, like all of their peers in this lively salon exhibition, splendidly curated by participating artist Margo Mead, they both demonstrate the transformative magic of art.

–Byron Coleman

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Nature is Transformed in the Paintings of L. Byrne

Contrary to the belief of strict formalists who would prefer to see it as a function of dispassionate aesthetic gamesmanship, abstract painting had its origins in mystery. For it was born when European modernist masters such as Kandinsky, and Malevich, influenced by Theosophy and other esoteric belief systems prevalent at the turn of the century, sought to probe beyond the world of outer appearances and evolve a visual language for the unseen. It remains true today that the most authentic way to approach the abstract is not through imitation of these early artistic pioneers but through the ineffable mysteries of life, one of the most deeply affecting of which is personal tragedy.

"Flower Power II"

Such was the case for the painter L. Byrne, who was moved a decade ago by a profound family trauma to abandon her early figurative style for an abstract mode of expression more suited to exploring new emotions. Born to Irish immigrant parents she has always felt ties to the heritage of that country where beauty and tragedy are inexorably bound. And raised amid the grandeur of the Canadian wilderness, she was inspired by nature's ability to renew itself. She wished not merely to capture the lay of the land, but to apprehend, in the immortal words of Dylan Thomas, "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower."

Thus in paintings such as her "Iris" and "Fuschia l" it is not so much the forms of the individual flowers that we see but an effusion of gestural strokes of luscious red, pink, scarlet and ochre pigment suggesting their earthy essences.

Byrne's large oils on canvas are invariably filled with light, color, and a sense of wonder. While her bold brushstrokes and the expansive scale of her paintings can prompt comparisons to abstract expressionism, they have also been called "abstract impressionist," a term that may be even more apt, considering their coloristic radiance.

The canvas she calls "Field of Grass," for example, features a lyrical explosion of verdant vertical strokes set against an expanse of luminous sky. The composition is exquisitely simple, but with these two elements alone, Byrne arguably provides a more accurate, not to mention more lyrical, vision of grass and sky on a warm summer day than most more literal depictions of such a subject could provide. For one feels the heat and can almost smell the chlorophyll-filled freshness of the turf with the immediacy of an indelible childhood memory.

Indeed, such reveries play an essential role in Byrne's work. "The memories of my youth were populated by the nature and wilderness surroundings of Canada," she recalls. "Long canoe trips and lingering campfires decorated by the Northern Lights are still vividly etched in my creative spirit. The environment and the outdoors have influenced the colors selected for my paintings along with the rugged texture found in most of them."

The spacious majesty and ruggedness of the landscape is everywhere evident, in "Oceanscape," with its sense of a vast horizon and the Northern Lights suggested abstractly in the patchy strokes of brilliant color enlivening the expanse of blue above; in the pile-up of thick earth colors contrasted with visceral reds and purples in "Mud Slide"; and in "Flower Power ll," with its vibrantly rioting floral forms in thickly encrusted primary hues.

In these, among other sumptuous oils on canvas, L. Byrne probes deep below the lay of the land to the very wellsprings of nature.

— Wilson Wong

L. Byrne, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, October 7 - 28, 2011. Reception: Thursday, October 13, 6 - 8 pm.

See page 2

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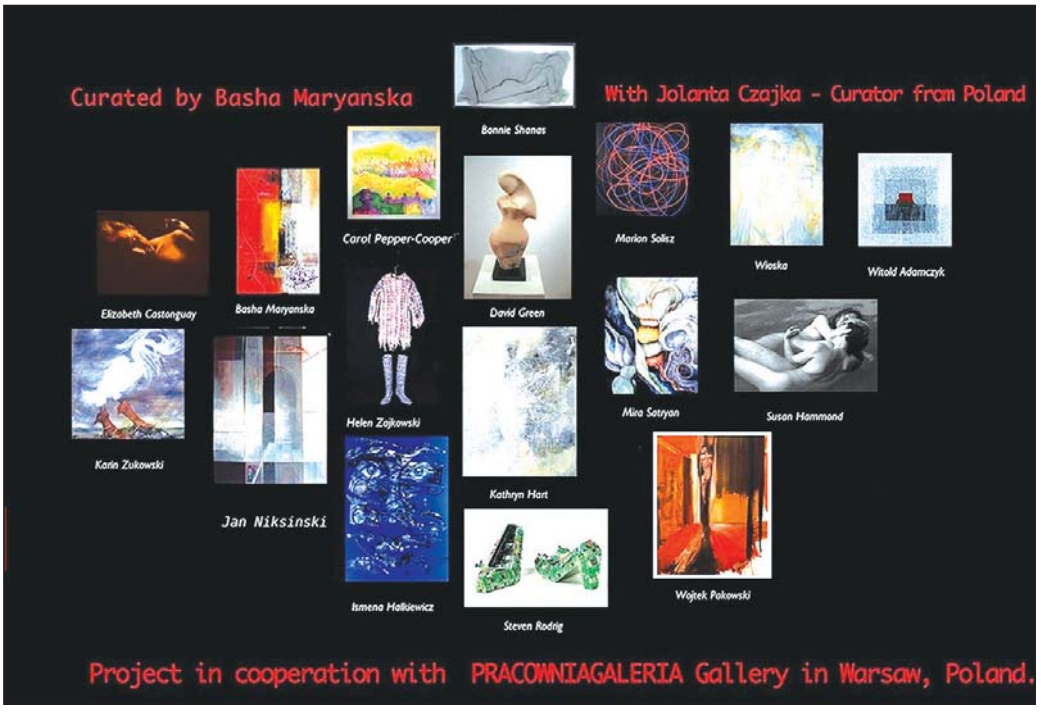
September 10th,
3 - 6 pm



INNER IDEA ARTISTS: Beauty Follows Truth

October 4 - 22, 2011

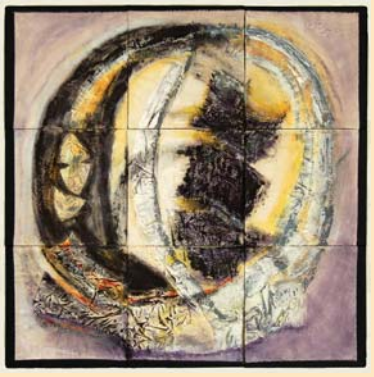
Tuesday - Saturday 12-6 p.m.

Reception: Thursday, October 6, 2011 6-8 p.m.

Fred Bender Mary Cooper Karen Frances Linda Frederick
Donna Graham Mary Jane Rivers Anna Rogers Margo Spellman
Cheryl Telford Lana Thomas David Zehring Peggy Zehring


D. Zehring


Graham


Thomas


Telford


Rivers


Cooper


Rogers


Spellman


Bender


Frances


Frederick


P. Zehring

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