

# GALLERY & STUDIO

## de Kooning at MoMA: “Genius death your art is done”

pg. 4



Willem de Kooning (American, born the Netherlands, 1904-1997) Seated Woman, c. 1940 Oil and charcoal on masonite, 54" x 36" (137.2 x 91.4 cm) Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Albert M. Greenfield and Elizabeth M. Greenfield Collection © 2011 The Willem de Kooning Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

“The Good Old Bad Old Days”  
another excerpt from Ed McCormack’s memoir in progress

HOODLUM HEART

pg. 12

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© Igor Nelubovich - Krukov Canal 2 Oil on Canvas 37" x 37"

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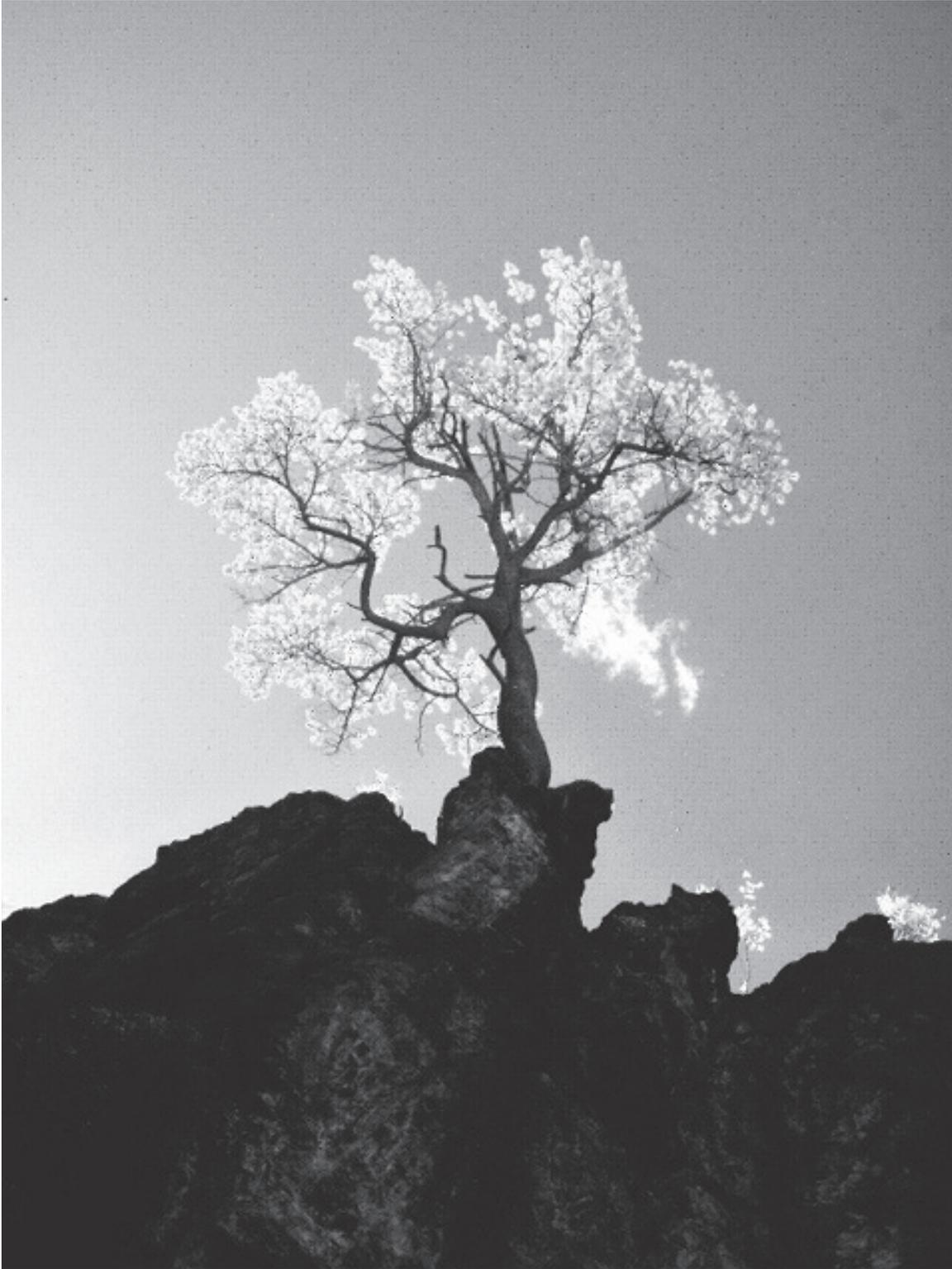
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### On the Cover:

*"It's how I imagine a man feels about a nude woman: There's a face in there somewhere — but the flesh is everywhere!" the wise woman said, as we stood before "Woman, Sag Harbor," in the de Kooning retrospective at MoMA. —Page 4*

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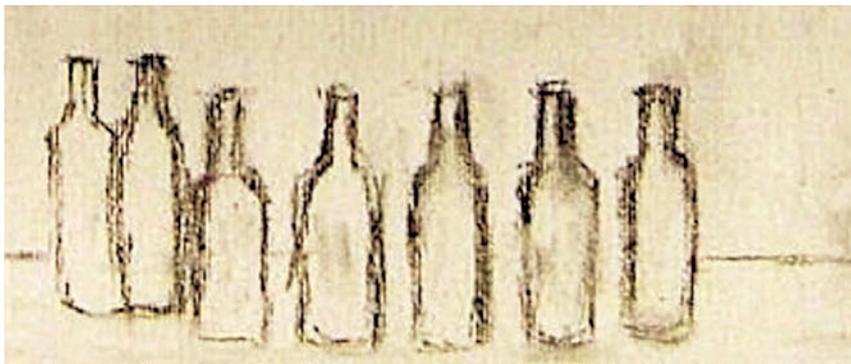
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### Mixed media paintings



*ground line is a horizontal plane in which an object sits on*

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## Norman Perlmutter's Fun-Friendly Formalism

Norman Perlmutter is every bit as enamored of every day banality as Andy Warhol was. He obviously loves common objects that we take for granted and finds in them an aesthetic autonomy and a hidden beauty that most of us miss. Yet his brilliantly colorful meticulously hard-edge acrylics on canvas are also stringently formal in a way that Andy's never were. They are punchy without being punch-lines, because there is no joke, no Pop irony anywhere to be found in Perlmutter's paintings.

So for all their snazzy vernacular appeal, it would be as much of a misnomer to classify Perlmutter's paintings of common objects such as crayons and brown paper bags as Pop as it would be to label Wayne Thiebaud's paintings of cakes and pies as such.

Fortunately for Thiebaud, he was the beneficiary rather than the victim of a case of mistaken identity, since he was able to ride the wave of publicity that attended Pop long enough for people to take a good look at his work, which is really about painting rather than cakes and pies (although his colors and textures certainly had similarly confectionery deliciousness) and realize what a truly fine painter he was in his own right.

Perlmutter is also a fine painter in his own very opposite manner, but it seems doubtful that he will have such luck, since Pop's gaudy bandwagon passed ages ago and the postmodern era might just as well be called the postmovement era.

So he will have to fly on his own unique attributes, which are fortunately quite considerable. For one thing he has an exquisite color sense comparable to that of the sixties Color Field painter Darby Bannard, particularly when it comes to the kind of offbeat, synthetic pastels — sherbet pinks, lime greens, grape soda purples — used in much product design.

In Perlmutter's acrylic on canvas "Party Hat," the conical shape of the brightly candy-striped paper hat is set against one of the checkerboard grids that anchor all of his painted objects to the picture plane. Only here the squares are of pale and paler pink hues so faint as to almost be invisible, making the central shape

also suggest one of Kenneth Noland's triangular "chevron" shaped canvases turned upside-down.

Equally pale hues also serve as the geometric armatures for two horizontal compositions titled, respectively, "Mongol" and "Crayola." The former is a painting of a classic yellow pencil, its lead sharpened to a point as exquisitely fine as one would imagine this consummately



"Pop Corn Box"

precise artist himself using to make a preliminary sketch. The latter title refers to the most popular brand of wax crayons, the kind we all colored with as children. A blue and an orange crayon are set one above the other against purple and paler purple squares as faint as the pinks in the two previous paintings, making the darker humble objects depicted appear to advance and hover, even while holding fast to the picture plane, taking on a heft which belies their humble function. Perlmutter makes us regard these simple things in a new light, as if for the first time, monumentalized yet not parodied in the manner of Pop. Rather, we suddenly see them as objects of beauty.

Perlmutter's special gift for making the most trivial detritus of our consumer culture also comes across dynamically in

"Take Out" and "Pop Corn Box," both depicting empty containers. The former sets a white cardboard Chinese take-out carton against a pink and blue grid, its thin, squared off wire handle creating a spatially ambiguous optical effect that makes the image alternately advance and flatten out on the picture plane as one continues to contemplate it. In the latter, the close-values in the olive green and

baby blue squares behind the popcorn container, with its bold, broad red and white stripes culminating in serrated edges, creates a chromatic pulsing sensation similar to that in the early optical paintings of Larry Poons. But that Perlmutter's painting has engaging subject matter to go along with its visual pizzazz is a definite plus that makes it really pop (no pun intended). Who says formal rigor can't be fun?

"Black Lamp" is a somewhat more complex composition, centering on a classic table lamp with a squared off orange shade and a black base shaped like one of those ceramic vases with a long neck and a rounded bottom. It is set against a grid of light and dark blue squares. But here Perlmutter gives the viewer a lesson in rudimentary color mixing with even areas of yellow light that emanate from the opening at the top and bottom of the lamp shade, turning some of the blue background boxes green. "Black Lamp" is a knockout of a painting, as witty in its deadpan precision as the best

work of Roy Lichtenstein, Stuart Davis, or the little known but terrific jazz age painter Gerald Murphy whose painting "Wasp and Pear" is owned by MoMA.

Then there is "Wall of Boxes," in which the background squares expand and take over, morphing into vibrant red, yellow, blue, green, purple, and orange cubes that become the main event of another composition. Once again, Norman Perlmutter pushes the envelope, so to speak. Who needs a movement? Why not say he's a one-man movement and call it Abstract Realism?

— Ed McCormack

Norman Perlmutter, 2/20 Gallery,  
220 West 16th Street,  
through November 8, 2011

# de Kooning at MoMA: “Genius Death Your Art is Done”

It suddenly occurs to me that I wrote an entire first draft about the current Willem de Kooning retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art without once resorting to the term “abstract expressionism.” But that de Kooning was much too huge and diverse a talent to be contained by the movement with which his name is invariably associated is just one of the revelations of this most comprehensive survey of his long and prodigiously productive career ever presented anywhere.

Filling seven large galleries, its nearly 200 works in various media range from an accomplished academic still-life from when the artist was a twelve-year-old apprentice to a commercial art firm in his native Netherlands to his very last painting, created in his studio in Springs, East Hampton, in 1987.

Yet another of the retrospective’s revelations is that those late abstractions, which some cheap-shot critic-clinicians were once all too willing to dismiss as “Alzheimer’s Expressionism,” are some of the most sublime works this giant of twentieth century art ever committed to canvas. This was obvious to me the first moment I saw those large canvases, with their graceful linear forms in bright primary hues billowing like wind-blown ribbons set against pale grounds as variegated as the oyster-white winter sky above the Long Island sound. At an age when many artists are stylistically ossified or — another way of putting “oldsters” in their place — “set in their ways,” de Kooning was making a fresh start.

I had been told that he had moments of forgetfulness, and saw firsthand evidence of it when he asked his studio assistant, Tom Ferrara “What was the name of that fella who invited us to the White House that time?”

“Ronald Reagan, Bill,” Ferrara answered in a way that hinted he had answered the question before. Then there was an amusing anecdote the painter Elaine de Kooning had told me about how, as she and her husband watched a film together on a plane, he suddenly said, “This is a lousy movie, Elaine — let’s get out of here!”

Still, it was obvious that he still knew exactly where he was and what he was doing when he was at work in his studio. And in the lavishly illustrated catalog for the 2007 exhibition “Willem de Kooning 1981-1986, at L&M Arts, New York, to which I also contributed an essay, Joachim Pissarro answers the cries of “dementia” from the critical peanut gallery by making an apt comparison: “One can scarcely approach Vincent van Gogh’s late works without treading on the clinical quick sand of the artist’s so-called ‘psychosis’ — and its endless, mutually contradictory, diagnoses that yield little ‘explaining’ of the artist’s creative procedure.”

In de Kooning’s case, no one had a better

opportunity to observe the artist at work during his last years than his studio assistant Tom Ferrara, a fine painter in his own right, who recalls, “When I first met de Kooning in 1979, he was taking some time off from painting but he was thinking about it a lot and he spoke about the desire to change his way of working. Matisse was the artist he chose to guide him through the change and the thing he most admired about Matisse was what he referred to as ‘that floating quality.’”

That “Matisse was the artist he chose to guide him through the change,” as his former assistant puts it, is especially telling. After all, de Kooning once famously declared, “Art has never been a situation of comfort for me.” Now, here he was bowing to Matisse, who said he wanted his work to be “like a comforting influence, a mental balm — something like a good armchair in which one rests from physical fatigue.”

Obviously, for all his occasional forgetfulness, de Kooning was still thinking like a fully functional, sophisticated modern painter. Which is to say: with the self-conscious awareness to choose his art historical models carefully and the wisdom to know that a proper swan song calls for a certain sense of serene resolution.

\* \* \*

It was clear enough that he still had his wits — not to mention his wit — about him when the pushy photographer who drove me out to The Springs that day insisted on photographing him out of doors in the chill fall air.

“Well at least put a coat on Bill,” Ferrara pleaded, draping a shabby tweed jacket over his shoulders before he was led out into the yard to pose as though for a firing squad, a long-ashed cigarette shivering in his lips.

Trying to put him at his ease, I said, “I guess this is the wages of fame, huh?”

“More like the wages of sin maybe,” he said with a wicked little grin.

Back in the studio, when I brought up the subject of fame again, the artist, who arrived in the United States from Holland as a stowaway in 1929, but didn’t have his first New York solo exhibition until 1948, when he was 43 years old, mused without a trace of bitterness that it had come too late in life to have any real meaning for him.

“The only difference now is that I have all the paint I want,” he said, showing off the hollow benches that doubled as storage trunks when you lifted the seats, containing more tubes of oil paint than the stockroom of an art supply store. “And I now don’t have to run a cord out into the hall to steal electricity from the landlord like when I lived in a loft on Tenth Street and they turned my lights off.”

I was tempted to tell him how in the mid 1960s, when I was still a struggling artist myself, I once took a temporary job painting

pseudo-de Koonings in a factory where a whole assembly line of us stood at easels, each crudely channeling a different master, turning out schlock paintings to decorate the lobbies of apartment buildings and movie theaters. But I got distracted and forgot about it when he demonstrated his new mechanical easel.

“It was designed especially for me, with a motor, so I don’t have to hurt my back tilting big canvases,” he said. “But I find it kind of creepy. Don’t you think it’s kind of creepy?”

It reminded me of an old story about him and another painter standing on a lawn in East Hampton with drinks in their hands.

“Let’s go back to the party,” he reportedly said after gazing up at the stars for a minute or two. “The universe gives me the creeps.”

Toward the end of the visit, as we sat in two throne-like Adirondack rockers surveying the works in various states of completion around the studio, he pointed to one large canvas across the room, and said, “That one over there is a real dog, don’t you think?”

It didn’t look like a dog to me. It looked like a late period de Kooning, unfinished maybe, but still quite beautiful with those buoyant ribbons of color billowing gracefully. But I was not about to contradict the great man’s judgment of his own work, not being so naive or patronizing as to think my opinion could influence him one way or the other. So we sat contemplating the painting silently for several seconds.

Then he said, “Wouldn’t you think it would get a little easier after all these years? But, you know, finishing one painting never solves the problems of the next one. You never really learn anything you can use. You always have to start over the next day.”

\* \* \*

“I think the idea that he was a misogynist, that he hated women, was ridiculous,” the wise woman who went to MoMA with me was saying, as we stood before de Kooning’s “Woman, Sag Harbor (1964).” “That’s not the way I see it at all. I don’t even see the painting we were just looking at that way. Obviously it was full of tension, as though he was possibly a bit overwhelmed and threatened by the sexual power that women held over him. But I think it was more about his insecurities, his fears and things he had to work out about women, rather than anything hostile that he felt toward them.”

We had just fled a nearby gallery, where we had been contemplating “Woman I, (1951-52),” the most Amazonianly iconic de Kooning of all, when we were practically shouldered aside by a nervously gesticulating docent in a black sheath who led a large group of clueless gawkers in search of High Kulchur into the room and started lecturing shrilly.

In contrast to the slashing strokes, razor-sharp contours and bared teeth of “Woman I,” the painting that prompted all the accusations of misogyny when it was first

exhibited, "Woman, Sag Harbor" is a soft, almost amorphous blur of juicy hot-pink hues flayed in all directions.

"This makes me think of de Kooning's famous statement 'Flesh is the reason oil paint was invented,'" I observed.

"I think that's true," the wise woman said.

As she studied the painting closely, formulating some thoughts about it, I remained silent, waiting to hear what she would say. Except for a couple of years in the tumultuous early '70s, when she cast me out into the world until I could get some youthful madness out of my system (although a year younger, she was already a wise woman), we had been living together since we were barely out of adolescence. And since we had been looking at art together for almost as long and she often made me see things in it that I might have otherwise missed, I always listened carefully to her opinions.

"Remember a few minutes ago, when you pointed out that beautiful drawing of his wife?" she said, referring to "Portrait of Elaine," an angelic, exquisitely refined little pencil drawing from the early '40s, calling upon the Renaissance technique de Kooning had mastered several years earlier as a student at the Academy in Rotterdam.

"Well, that was a beautiful, external vision of a woman. But this painting," she continued, gesturing toward "Woman, Sag Harbor," "seems all about an internalized, visceral, almost preconscious male response to the female; it's more of an instinctive, animal thing. It's how I imagine a man feels about a nude woman: There's a face in there somewhere — but the flesh is everywhere!"

\* \* \*

In another gallery, we admired a series of oils of seated male and female figures from the late '30s and early '40s, featuring classical anatomy slightly skewed toward abstraction in a manner somewhat beholden to the cock-eyed women in the eccentric surrealist portraits of his contemporary John Graham. But even more impressive was the small pencil drawing "Self-Portrait with Imaginary Brother (1938)," in which de Kooning's traditional draftsman skills prove fully equal to those of Picasso.

Then there was the breakthrough oil "Pink Angels (1945)," a veritable fleshpot of a semiabstract composition featuring voluptuous biomorphic forms derived from female anatomy in a manner that once prompted one of the artist's most astute collectors, Allan Stone, to note, "Gorky's pears became de Kooning's buttocks."

The series of muscular black and white



**Willem de Kooning (American, born the Netherlands. 1904-1997) The Cat's Meow 1987 Oil on canvas 88 x 77" (223.5 x 195.6 cm) Frame: 89 1/2 x 78 1/4 x 2" (227.3 x 198.8 x 5.1 cm) Collection Jasper Johns © 2011 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York**

abstractions in oil and enamel unveiled in de Kooning's acclaimed first exhibition in 1948 followed. On the strength of these works, the influential formalist critic and tastemaker Clement Greenberg was all set to anoint this Dutch immigrant an avatar of what he called the new "American-type Painting." But like Picasso, many of whose so-called "periods" actually occurred simultaneously rather than chronologically, de Kooning continued to paint figuratively as well as abstractly, mixing the two modes of expression as the spirit moved him. When Greenberg griped, "It's impossible to paint the figure today," de Kooning shot back, "That's right, and it's impossible not to!"

Yet for the next three decades, while continuing to paint women, he created some of his boldest, juiciest, most celebrated abstractions, such as "Gotham News (1955)," "Rosy-Fingered Dawn at Louse Point (1963)," and "Screams of Children Come from Seagulls (1975)." With muscular compositions, succulently pigmented surfaces, and a vibrant palette of hues heavy on visceral reds and fleshy pinks, de Kooning fought his only rival, Jackson Pollock, to a draw for the title of Heavyweight Champion of the New York School in the great macho pissing match that was postwar American art.

But all the while, it would seem from the

breadth and scope of the magnificent sendoff at MoMA, he was in training to go toe-to-toe with Picasso for the World Championship.

\* \* \*

"As a sculptor, de Kooning was a great painter," I remarked, winning a wry chuckle from the wise woman, as we circled the show's weakest link — the mere handful of bronzes that de Kooning turned out from 1969 to 1972: lumpish cartoon parodies of Rodin, right down to the blackish patinas.

"Come on, I'm anxious to show you those late abstractions."

Her face lit up as we walked into the final gallery.

"You were right, they're magnificent," she said, walking over to the large canvas called "Untitled XIX," to basking in its graceful rhythms. "This

one gives the sense of lying in a room with a cool breeze blowing in."

"I know," I said. "Although I'm not usually one for "Rorschaching" abstract paintings, those sensual linear shapes in the center of the composition evoke figures lying on a bed and that more rectangular, pale blue form on the upper right part of the composition almost suggests a gossamer curtain billowing out."

"How could anyone have thought he had lost it by the time he painted these?" she wondered. "They're so airy and transcendent, as though he's no longer mired in matter — finally set free of his earthly obsessions."

"Come look at this one," I said, leading her over to another large canvas, aptly named, "The Cat's Meow (1987)," "It's so vibrant and alive. Can you believe this was his very last painting?"

"Yes, in a way, I can," she said, after staring at it intently for several seconds. "He had finally said all he needed to say...His work on this earth was finished."

And I thought of a line from one of Allen Ginsberg's most affecting late poems: "Genius death, your art is done."

— Ed McCormack

de Kooning at , MoMA, 11 West 53rd St., through January 9

# Neil Zukerman's Lonely, Noble Battle on Behalf of

Although John Ruskin was the greatest and most admired art critic of the nineteenth century, to publish a book today called "The Lamp of Beauty: Writings on Art" would most certainly be the kiss of death in the contemporary art scene, where irony rules and unabashed beauty would appear to be the last taboo. Much more in tune with the zeitgeist nowadays would be the cheesy paperback, edited by Hal Foster, called "The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture," which suggests that art today should "deny the idea of a privileged aesthetic realm."

All of which suggests why Neil Zukerman has been at war with the art establishment ever since he opened his first gallery in Soho in 1993.

Now that Soho has become more of a boutique and restaurant mecca than an art district, Zukerman, who apparently likes to launch his offensives from behind enemy lines, has relocated to a more intimate space in Chelsea. No longer on street level, but discreetly tucked away on the fourth floor of a quietly nondescript elevator building, the new CFM Gallery seems even further removed from the fray. Here, one accustomed to walking into the stark white cubes in which art is generally viewed in our era gets the feeling of having entered a time capsule resembling an elegant nineteenth century salon. Think Beardsley-esque opulence and you may get the picture.

Yet despite its genteel presentation, the overwhelmingly figurative work on the walls and in glass vitrines around the gallery could hardly be called innocuous or tame. In fact, one of the true jewels in Zukerman's crown as a gallerist and collector is "L'Entre Deux," a 1967 oil on canvas by the French surrealist Leonor Fini.

This is a work so provocative that "when it was part of the traveling exhibition of erotic art curated by German sexologists Drs. Phyllis and Eberhardt Kronhauser," Zukerman delights in telling one, "it was displayed in a separate room with one of Fini's other paintings and shown only to special visitors." Apparently, even in a show of erotic art, the gallerist adds, it was deemed "too provocative and too blatantly sexual for the average museumgoer."

The picture, however, often takes pride of place in CFM group exhibitions and there is an anecdote that Zukerman likes to tell about it: "A young college student approached me and requested permission to study 'L'Entre Deux with the intent of writing his thesis on the painting. He would come into the gallery on Sunday afternoons and spend hours in front of it. One day I asked him to describe the painting. He started by saying, 'It's that moment when two people find...'" I interrupted and asked him to come down to earth and simply describe what was in the

painting. His answer was, 'Two women...' I, again, interrupted and asked, 'Are you sure?' He quietly studied the painting for a few minutes longer and then told me that he would be re-writing the thesis as he couldn't be sure if it was, in fact, two women."

Well, the student must have been half blind, and I am sure that Zukerman, a man of the world if ever there was one, was being more than a little disingenuous — either because he suspected the kid of being a voyeur who had become perversely fixated on the picture, or simply because he wanted to make the point that Fini was the original gender bender and her figures can often appear androgynous.

"Fini loved to obfuscate," Zukerman says of the greatest and most daring woman surrealist, whom he befriended late in her life; and to an extent, so does he!

For the subject of "L'Entre Deux" is clearly two women, one a voluptuous redhead reclining languorously on a sofa in a sort of swoon, the other a sphinx-like nymph, kneeling before her on the carpet and reverently parting her long, bare legs. Painted in Fini's most meticulous manner, it surpasses even Balthus, both for its aesthetic qualities and its explicitness. Indeed, "L'Entre Deux" is arguably the greatest depiction of Sapphic love since Gustave Courbet's masterpiece of two entwined female nudes, commissioned by Khalil Bey, former Turkish Ambassador to St. Petersburg, in 1866. And how refreshing that this subject is finally immortalized by a woman artist, unskewed by the patronizing salaciousness of the Male Gaze, which has dominated the theme down through art history.

The late American sculptor Frederick Hart, hailed by Tom Wolfe as a neglected contemporary neoclassical master, is another artist Zukerman has championed vociferously. Because Hart created the stone sculptures above the portal to the National Cathedral in Washington D.C., the erotic element in his work has generally been played down — even though his frieze of figures for the cathedral featured several nudes of both sexes unlike anything else in Christian art.

Along with his works in the innovative medium of clear plastic resin, which combine sensuality with ethereal poetry, however, CFM Gallery also features Hart's stately bronze fountain, "The Source," depicting a mysterious robed and hooded figure of a decidedly more spiritual suggestiveness. For here, again, the only criteria for Zukerman's aesthetic choices is beauty, be it sacred, profane, or somewhere in between.

The French artist Anne Bachelier escapes all such distinctions, inhabiting a realm of her own invention, where imagination rules. Magically, Bachelier filters the Rococo frippery of Fragonard and Watteau through the looking glass of Lewis Carroll — of

whose books, by the way, she is this century's preeminent illustrator, besides being one of its most most sublime painters. For in Bachelier's oils on canvas subject matter is married to technique in a manner precious rare in recent centuries and all but unknown in ours. One can only surmise that this special synthesis springs from a belief by the artist in her inner world fully equal to the conviction with which the great masters of the past evoked mythic and religious subjects before secular cynicism came to rule the world with the dawning of the scientific age.

Sequestered in her studio in Grenoble as in a cloister, this shy, retiring woman wields fine-tipped brushes dipped in what appears to be liquid light to lay down limpid glazes that conjure a misty counter-world where fair maidens, benign beasts, and other fanciful figures engaged in grand processions and arcane ceremonies offer a welcome relief from a workaday reality in which we are increasingly in danger of losing our capacity to dream.

If Bachelier can be said to have a counterpart in three dimensions it could only be the New York sculptor Ailene Fields, who with similarly wizardly purity of vision creates an entire bestiary of species, both down to earth and otherworldly that, without stooping to anthropomorphism and sacrificing their essential creatureliness, unfailingly suggest a host of human moods and emotions. One is at pains to isolate the intangible element in her unique artistic sensibility that enables her to thus ennoble not only dragons, griffins, primates, and lions, but also critters as tiny and seemingly insignificant as a mouse, a frog, a caterpillar — or, for that matter, even the bronze "Bookworm" (sporting removable Plexiglas spectacles) that guards the entryway to my library/study.

Suffice it so say that Fields' firm grasp of significant form, equal to that of any highly regarded abstract sculptor one cares to name, makes her animal figures as enduring as they are endearing. And her singular ability to make ethereal elements and moments of fleeting whimsy immutable in stone or metal comes across in other natural and imaginary subjects as well. Especially breathtaking in both regards are a series of illuminated alabaster moonscapes and a magical materialization of Cinderella's carriage after its midnight metamorphosis into a plump pumpkin, with tiny bronze mice cavorting around its ornately swirling wheels. A rare combination of empathy, humility, humor, and a childlike sense of wonder retained within a sophisticated sculptural sensibility enable Ailene Fields to accomplish a unique aesthetic alchemy.

If Anne Bachelier and Ailene Fields transport us to rarefied private worlds, the bravura portraits and atmospheric landscapes

## Beauty with a Capital “B”

of Aleksandra Nowak, a Polish-born artist enamored of the Austrian Secession and its adherents in her own native land, takes us back in time to a more romantic era. In her oil on canvas “Man Fin de Siecle II,” an artistic-looking young man with a waxed mustache elaborately twirled at the ends slumps in his chair with downcast eyes. His tousled hair, careless clothes, and brooding attitude suggest a poet deserted by his muse, a suitor spurned by love, or both. Such is the sequential drama of moving from one of Nowak’s pictures to another that one can’t help wondering if the source of his pain is the imperious dark-haired, full-lipped beauty jutting her chin forward like one of Ibsen’s headstrong heroines in another canvas called “Claire in Summer Dress.” The narrative suggestiveness of Nowak’s paintings, rare in a time when so-called “literary” and “plastic” values are supposedly incompatible, is secondary, however, to their pure painterly attributes — the refined brushwork, color harmonies, and tactile qualities — which add comparable drama to her bucolic landscapes and floral compositions.

Unlike so many gallerists today who prowl the corridors of art schools and court neophytes on the cynical theory that novelty — most often, it would sometimes seem, through the cult of the ugly — is all that matters in contemporary art, Neil Zukerman has cultivated a loyal following among collectors who value his commitment to work that combines “technical virtuosity and vision.” Be it the most assiduously authenticated drawings and prints of established masters such as Salvador Dali and Felicien Rops; the exquisitely crafted dancing nudes and mythical characters of the Venetian glass artist Lucio Bubacco; the eerily lifelike single figures and tableaux of the fabric artist Lisa Lichtenfels, which make the viewer feel like Gulliver amid a race of modern Lilliputians; the fantastic Art Nouveau



*Andrei*

Never Never Lands and monumental bronzes of the multitalented painter, printmaker, and sculptor Michael Parkes; the meticulously detailed neo-surrealist costume dramas of the single-name artist Andrei; or the contemporary classical symbolism of the late, revered Italian painter Massimo Rao, the criteria is Beauty in all its varied incarnations.

One can only imagine that John Ruskin would sympathize with Neil Zukerman’s lonely, noble battle to bring it back into style.

— Ed McCormack



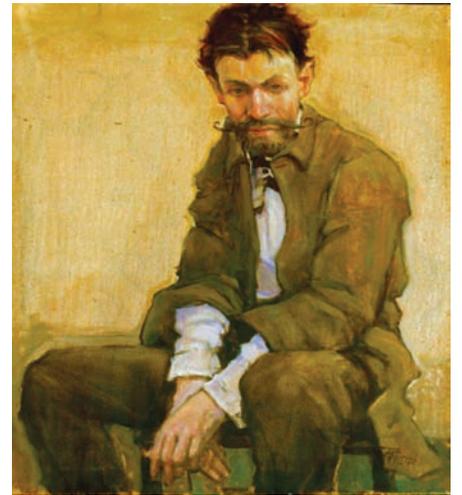
*Leonor Fini*



*Ailene Fields*



*Frederick Hart*



*Aleksandra Nowak*



*Anne Bachelier*



*Felicien Rops*

Artists represented by CFM Gallery,  
236 West 27th Street.

# Jean Marc Calvet's Rocky Trajectory from Rough Beast to Trendy International Art Star

Although I was the one who warned in an earlier review of the danger of a painter's personal legend upstaging the art itself, somehow in the case of the French painter Jean Marc Calvet, the legend and the work may be so intertwined as to be inseparable. Like it or not, one succumbs. Indeed, reading the biography of the artist penned by Marina Hadley, partner of Bob Hogge in Monkdogz Urban Art, the exhibition enterprise that handles his work world-wide, one is almost tempted to think of Calvet as a straight Jean Genet. For like the famous author of "A Thief's Journal," this younger Frenchman has risen to artistic prominence out of some deep merde, so to speak.

"Abused as a child on the streets, he grew up alternating between being a Special Ops French Legionnaire, a police officer, a bodyguard and a thief," Hadley writes, her prose taking on an intriguingly Gallic aura of purple for a proper English woman. "He admits that he was attracted to what others didn't like, to everything that was forbidden, with an irresistible attraction towards dark places and self destruction. At one point he found the love of a woman and grew to love a son, but when the boy was six he abandoned them to live an underground life in Miami, hoping for riches and a better life. However he quickly realized that he was being abused and imprisoned again, this time by his employer. So after months of furtive planning, an opportunity to abscond with a significant sum of money presented itself. He took the money and fled to Central America."

Bob Hogge first showed me some of Calvet's paintings in 2007, relating how he barricaded himself in a house to commit suicide but was saved when he put his fist through a wall behind which he discovered some paints and with them his vocation. The intricate horror vacui imagery — particularly the swarms of little gape-mouthed faces like loony tunes versions of Munch's "Scream" — called to mind the title of a rock and roll tour I once covered for Rolling Stone: "Welcome to My Nightmare."

That element of madness and paranoia transformed into a terrible beauty, to borrow Yeats' felicitous phrase, is still very much present in Calvet's most recent paintings. But there is a lot more as well to belie the impression that some may have of Calvet as an especially gifted "outsider" artist, a perception that, if perpetuated, could only deny him his rightful place in the mainstream. For if, up to a point at least, he lived the life of a not-so-noble savage and is self-taught, Calvet is no more a primitive than his elder fellow countryman Jean Dubuffet, who honed the expressive rawness of Art Brut to the point of exquisitely sophisticated aesthetic

sophistication.

But if Calvet's combination of a pristine hard-edge style incongruously wedded to wildly inventive jigsaw puzzle intricacy once appeared beholden to Dubuffet's "Hourloupe" series, his range of imagery and arsenal of techniques has broadened impressively in the prodigious number of large canvases conceived and completed in 2011.

Now comparisons can be made to the eccentric Austrian artist and avant garde architect Fritz Hundertwasser for both the gorgeously offbeat color combinations and the architectonic composition of Calvet's poignantly titled composition "The Nobodies," as well as for the new graphic fluidity, reminiscent of Klimt and the painters of the Sezzession, that we see in his opulently kandy-kolored canvas "The Lost House."

A similar richness is evident in "No tengo nada que escoder," where a grid composed of vibrant orange rivulets, intersecting vertically and horizontally, is juxtaposed with one of Calvet's large gape-mouthed heads bursting with an inner cornucopia of harrowing figures and fragmented facial figures (multiple eyeballs a favorite motif) arranged like the fruits and vegetables in the 16th century Italian Giuseppe Arcimboldo's proto-surreal still-life portraits, suggesting Walt Whitman's declaration, "I contain multitudes."

Indeed, our doomed, swarming-vermin-dime-a-dozen-humanity and cock-eyed commonality appears to be one of the artist's recurring themes, seen again in "Happy," where the large, characteristically teeming-with-images head is seen floating centrally against a Pollock-like network of loosely liquid semiabstract symbols and scrawls and positioned above the hand-painted title with the second "P" turned backwards. Here, for this viewer, at least, the skull-like aspect of the floating disembodied head suggests Keith Richards singing his signature tune "Happy" — but perhaps to the rhythms of the morbid old childhood street-chant, "The worms crawl in and the worms crawl out..."

In the previous work, as in other major new paintings such as "Luna," "Zero," and "Behind the Stars," passages of looser paint handling are combined harmoniously, if surprisingly, with Calvet's more familiar hard-edged meticulousness to stunning affect. The device is especially powerful in "Behind the Stars," where a typically detailed large figure with a tiny swimmer with upraised arms afloat in a sea of spittle in its gaping mouth (evoking British poet Stevie Smith's great lines, "I was much further out than you thought/ And not waving but drowning") appears alongside a rabid-looking brown dog as boldly brushed in broad strokes as one of

Jean-Michel Basquiat's neoprimitive Expressionist figures. In fact, Calvet's new manner of juxtaposing precise hard-edged color areas with painterly drips suggests the brilliant mutant bastard offspring of some unexpectedly fertile mating between Basquiat and Keith Haring — a reconciliation of polar opposites that he carries off with characteristic élan.

Then there's that big, beefy pink hand pointing an accusatory finger into the lovely chaos of another especially intricate kandy-colored composition called "The Box," so reminiscent of Philip Guston's cartoon phase as to call to mind, deliberately or not, the switch that older American artist accomplished in mid-career from lyrical abstraction to cartoon imagery, making the hair of his old New York School compatriots stand on end, as, like former folkie fans when Dylan went electric, they screamed, "Judas!" (Could this younger Frenchman be steeling himself for a similar reception when some of his early collectors see how their pet primitive has grown?)

Of course, it could be my imagination, but for an autodidactic enfant terrible who came out of nowhere and was hailed as some sort of cultural caveman sprung up from the muck like Yeats' rough beast slouching towards Bethlehem to be born, Jean Marc Calvet certainly crams an extraordinary number of sophisticated art historical references into his large canvases. And if somehow he has channeled them unconsciously, then he's even more of a phenomenon than one thought.

— Ed McCormack



"Behind the Stars"

Jean Marc Calvet is the subject of a feature documentary film premiering in the U.S. in Nov. His work can be seen at Monkdogz Urban Art, 150 East 52nd Street, November 4 - 10, 2011

## A Memorial Group Show that Raised the Spirits

Surely all of the 9/11 memorials that took place in 2011 were heartfelt. Yet it is doubtful that many were as aesthetically edifying as the group exhibition “Fall: Rising Above 9-11,” curated by Carson Ferri-Grant for the West Side Arts Coalition.

Among the variety of works indicating how various artists were affected by the tragedy that took so many innocent lives, one of the most poignant was Nicolas Bouteneff’s moving acrylic on canvas “Infinity,” depicting the beams of light, ghosts of the towers, that rose in tribute against the night sky for some time after the attacks. Painted with impastos akin to those of Wayne Thiebaud, Bouteneff’s acrylic on canvas gave enduring form to that ethereal tribute. Roy Szuper also gave us another powerful image of the towers in his moody photograph “Looking Out My Bedroom Window,” in which the two structures were restored to stately life by retrospective vision, yet ominously engulfed in shadow, like a premonition, against the red light of dawn.

Another gifted photographer, “Russell Swanson,” also employed shadow dramatically, to silhouette, a young man gazing through the chain link fence around the site into a void of fog in the wake of that fateful morning. Artist/curator Ferri-Grant’s oil on canvas “Replanting” was possessed of a melancholy beauty, with the figure of an apparent vegetal

being created with the same neopointillist strokes that compose the surrounding landscape, seated on the grass between two tall trees evoking the towers themselves.

Peter Tunney contributed a work featuring large jumbled stenciled letters in the semi-translucent pale yellowish hue of old newspapers, with headlines about the attacks showing through like pentimento, surrounded by a dull red ground the color of dried blood. Unjumbled, the letters spelled out, “City of Dreams.”

A fiery young angel with wings of flame, gazing up at a radiant star was seen in Shikoh Shiraiwa’s tall diptych in oil on canvas. Beside the painting was an inspirational companion poem in English and Japanese, containing the lines “suddenly / the world was overwhelmed by the darkness / despair, fear, thousands of meaningless deaths / nevertheless / we rise.” And as in Bruce Springsteen’s song “The Rising,” the theme of ascension in the face of devastation was also brilliantly evoked in Regina Valluzzi’s semiabstract acrylic on canvas, “Dream of our soul awakens,” with its lyrical pink blue, and green hues, and climbing vines soaring upward like the towers against lit-up city windows.

Urban architecture also figured prominently in “Instantaneous,” a boldly simplified acrylic on canvas by D.J. Barry, in which the towers were revived by wistful

wishful thinking as totemic structures containing cheerful images of children at play. And a similar theme was interpreted in another unique manner by Artur Pashkov, whose oil on canvas “Dreamscape” showed the two towers standing alone, apart from the city, set against blue mountains and pink clouds in a radiant heavenly realm. In a strong found object assemblage called “Free Fall,” however, Olivier Rabbath brought back traumatic memories of victims leaping in desperation from the burning towers with actual shoes and trousers set against a blank background containing a large question mark. And Ha Lee struck an ironic chord with “The Memorial of History: Dictator Laden,” in which the monstrous mastermind of the terror attacks, Bin Laden,” is seen in a garden incongruously cradling a baby lamb in his arms.

It seemed altogether fitting that, as an outdoor annex to this powerful memorial exhibition, the gifted street artist Hani Shihada, familiar to New Yorkers for over 25 years, executed one of his large sidewalk chalk murals of firemen raising the stars and stripes at Ground Zero on a sidewalk near the gallery.

— Peter Wiley

WSAC, Fall: Rising Above 9/11, recently seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, 96th Street (Center island).

## The Equine Photography of Carol J. Walker

From artists of the French Romantic period like Gericault and Delacroix to the famous 18th century British painter of horses George Stubbs, the idealized equine figure has been such a ubiquitous part of art history that one might easily mistake the images



“Mare in a Blizzard II”

of the Colorado-based photographer Carol J. Walker for paintings — especially since they are presented as Giclee prints on canvas. This, of course, should not be construed as either a compliment or detriment, since the aesthetic qualities of a work in either medium can only be determined on evidence of specific examples. It does, however, suggest Walker’s consistent ability to impart a mythic dimension to her pictures, which in photography as much as in painting, can only be the product of a very particular combination of artistic vision and individual sensibility.

Yet what matters even more is Walker’s superb sense of composition and the poetic effects she achieves, which would be remarkable in any artist, regardless of her or his medium or chosen subject matter. A less tangible but equally important facet of her

art is a sense of empathy and intimacy quite rare in animal photography, which she explains as follows: “I seek to capture the essence of the horses that I am photographing by spending time with them and becoming in tune with their nature and behavior. My goal is to provide the viewer with a connection between them

and the horse I am photographing. When I am photographing wild horses I strive to inspire people to help save them.”

Toward this end, in 2008 Walker, who has followed herds of wild horses for the past six years in Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana, has published a book called “Wild Hoofbeats: America’s Vanishing Wild Horses.” And if the photographs in it are anywhere near as striking as the ones in her present New York exhibition, they must garner considerable support for her cause. For her pictures capture dynamically the grace and the glory of these beautiful creatures, whose existence on public lands is now seriously endangered.

One of her most affecting images is “Mare in a Blizzard II,” a monochromatic composition with the delicacy of a fine pencil drawing, in which the form of the lone animal

is almost subsumed by a pointillistic flurry of falling snowflakes. By contrast, in “Dark Horses,” a herd, backlit by the sun, gallops headlong toward the viewer through a shallow body of water like shadow-steeds in a dream.

“Three Mares Running” harks back to famous horse painters of the Old West, such as Charles M. Russell and Frederick Remington, not only for the energy and velocity it projects, but for the landscape itself, with its vast expanse of blue sky, pink-tinted cumuli, distant mountains, and the sagebrush through which the animals gallop, their manes flying in the breeze. Another picture, in which a magnificent stallion is isolated against a relatively plain background like a monumental sculpture, is more reminiscent of Stubbs’ paintings of horses in domesticated settings such as ranches and racetracks.

Neither sensationalized nor sentimental, these thoughtful pictures not only make a convincing case for the preservation of these beautiful creatures that figured so prominently in the history of our country, but also for Carol J. Walker as our most gifted contemporary equine photographer.

— Wilson Wong

Carol J. Walker, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, Nov. 29 -Dec. 20, 2011. Reception: Thursday, Dec. 1, 6 - 8 pm.

# Artists Choose Artists in Noho Invitational

Invitational exhibitions are often as interesting for the differences between the gallery artists and the guests they select to join them as for their similarities.

A fine case in point is one such group effort at Noho Gallery in Chelsea, for which the leading fiber artist Marilyn Henrion chose her husband Edward Henrion, a brilliant draftsman who recently came out with a book of scathing satirical drawings. Here, he showed exquisite nude figure studies revealing the anatomical mastery behind his less traditional work.

Versatile post-Pop painter, photographer, and collagist Bruce Laird chose Rachelle Kreiger, whose lyrical triptych of graceful black linear forms, resembling swaying tree limbs, apparently belongs to a species of ambiguously allusive abstraction characteristic of postmodern pluralism.

Martine Villandre, known for elegantly emblematic abstract compositions featuring flat forms that read as symbols, chose a contrastingly amorphous work by Laurence Jeannest, whose atmospheric cloudscape above a narrow band of land also trod the thin line between abstraction and landscape.

Rather than exhibiting one of his own innovative photographic artworks, longtime gallery member Leon Yost chose two guests: Carol Westfall, whose tactile "Cascade" compositions in fiber and mixed media

also allude to abstract landscape, and Ines Fagalde, whose myriad tiny white "Doors," set against a dark ground, evoke stylized, squared-off skulls inscribed like the "white writing" of Mark Tobey.

Tina Rohrer chose an abstract artist, but one with a style more gestural than her own stringently geometric work: Sandra K. Meagher, whose drawing was a graceful, sketchy exploration of anatomically-derived forms. By contrast, the Russian fiber artist Ludmila Aristova picked Joy Whelan, an abstract painter whose flowing forms in vibrant golds and earth hues, harmonized with deep greens and blues, reflect her own rich palette of silks and brocades.

Formal sympathies can also be seen in the work of abstract gallery artist Gary Engle and Willy, the one-name artist he chose, whose soft biomorphic overall forms, overlaid with networks of sharply zigzagging straight lines, successfully harmonize seemingly disparate elements in a similar manner to that in Engle's own paintings.

Erma Yost, another fine artist among those who have gained Noho Gallery a reputation as one of the leading venues in the fiber art movement, obviously found a kindred spirit in Joan Schulze, whose "Savings" combined a stately abstract composition with intricate and meticulous craft.

The kinship between gallery artist Marla

Lipkin and guest Larry Dobens, on the other hand, was clearly coloristic; for both employed lyrical pink and blue hues in very different ways: Lipkin in a serene landscape called "Twilight on the Marsh" and Dobens in "The Factory," where those colors light a sky about to be overcome by stacks spewing clouds of noxious gray smoke.

A shared fondness for chiaroscuro would appear to be the element uniting the paintings of gallery artist Kim Heinlein and photographer Daniele Kelly. At least that conclusion could be drawn from comparing Heinlein's subtly shadowed oil of fallen Autumn leaves and Kelly's series of photographs "In Tree Shadows," in two of which human subjects are dappled with the shadows of limbs and leaves, and in the third, the leaves alone cast patterns of chiaroscuro on a sunlit wall.

Of course, to second guess the choices that artists make is invariably hazardous. Thus one would not be the least surprised if all of the gallery members mentioned here, like the ladies courted by T.S. Elliot's hapless Prufrock, chorused, "That was not what I meant at all!" — Byron Coleman

"Be My Guest," Noho Gallery,  
530 West 25th Street, December 20, 2011  
- January 7, 2012

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## Curator Carrozzini Transports us to “Dreamscapes”

The term “Dreamscapes” immediately evokes Surrealism — particularly the metaphysical terrains of Dali and Tanguy. But the Italian artist and curator Stefania Carrozzini obviously had something more general in mind when she organized the exhibition of that name, of which she says in one of her characteristically cogent catalog essays, “The dream is like a preparatory rough work, an approximate sketch, a project of the future conscious activity. Such a mental activity may be assimilated to the creative process.”

The self-taught painter Andrea Agrati, an aviation buff, is one of two painters in the show who chose to interpret its title literally. In Agrati’s oil on canvas “Dreamscapes Part 2: Today,” an aircraft soars over a blue landscape under a vibrant orange sky. At once real and surreal, the painting suggests how, even at this late date, to fly still feels somehow dreamlike.

The other painter who took off from the title “Dreamscapes” is Swedish-born Lisbeth Swensson Dal Pozzo D’Annone, now living and working in Milan. Her style, however, is hardly literal, involving graceful white skeins of acrylic pigment rhythmically looping and overlapping over a bright blue field. By contrast, in her acrylic on wood “Against the Current,” Beatrice Corradi

Dell’Acqua depicts a fanciful marine dream in which creatures of the sea are borne along on sweeping waves at once gestural and smoothly translucent. A lone fish swimming in the opposite direction, like an artist fleeing social conformity, gives the work its title.

Canal Cheong-Jagerroos, born in China, combines the lyrical calligraphic qualities of Asian ink painting with a spontaneous, graffiti-like ecriture akin to that of Cy Twombly, in her buoyant mixed media composition “Summer Dream.” Especially notable is Cheong-Jagerroos’ successful synthesis of linear grace and tactile painterliness. Born in Finland, Matti Sirvio also works in a painterly manner, albeit with softly diffused color areas, often as amorphous as clouds, and an absence of linear or gestural agitation. Sirvio states, “I’m looking for a picture behind the pictures,” and indeed there is the sense of a lurking imminence just beyond his serene surfaces.

Alessio Elli’s “Tre,” a combination of digital photography and digital graphics on crystal, is indeed dreamlike with its delicate trees and tiny figures seen as though from some otherworldly distance. The crystal surface lends Elli’s imagery an ethereal sense of magic. Another digital artist, Karen Hochman Brown, creates a precise, strikingly symmetrical composition in “Rose Frills in

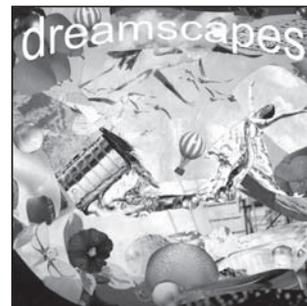
Four.” Like a synthesis of Georgia O’Keeffe and Judy Chicago, with its pearly pink tones and ornate

curves, it suggests a cross between an exotic sea shell and a labial mandala. Yeoun Lee, on the other hand, paints shimmering nature-based abstractions. Lee’s succulent brush strokes, shimmering colors, and dewy surfaces project a timeless sense of natural essences.

“Pink clouds,” a vernacular phrase used to describe a blissful state, materialize palpably in Emanuele Panzera’s oil on canvas, “Window’s Dream.” That the central rectangle floating within a field of rose madder tilts at an angle only serves to enhance the lifting quality of the composition.

Then there is Mike Wong Joon Fong,

*Continued on page 28*



*Stefania Carrozzini*

“Dreamscapes,” Onishi Gallery, 521 West 26th Street, December 6 - 17, 2011

## Protest Meets Grandeur in the Art of Kiko Sobrino

The Brazilian artist Kiko Sobrino employs a number of techniques — including acrylics, ink, serigraphy, and even computer graphics on canvas and wood — to create works that move fluently between the figurative and the abstract. Yet he is adamant in his insistence that “my formation is from the classical school of arts.”

Thus, while the fine grids, achieved through screen printing, that he features in his work may echo those that many abstract artists employ to anchor the two-dimensional picture plane, they also evoke those that classical artists routinely employed to transfer drawings to the canvas before beginning the painting process. And certainly there is a sense of classical values, as well as romantic ones, in Sobrino’s compositions, to which he refers as “visual poetry.”

Although he embraces a wide range of political and societal concerns, ecology appears to take precedence in many of his mixed media works. In the ironically titled “Greener World,” the boldly brushed grass growing wild within the four panels of the cruciform format (which makes the omnipresent grid suggest that we are viewing the scene through a screened window) is of a dull green hue, as though covered in a layer of industrial soot. And over it discarded rubber automobile tires are scattered, as if in a parody of the lily pads gracing Monet’s pond. The world Sobrino

shows us is one in which nature is so overrun with the detritus of modern society’s consumer goods that these castoff products blend in with the environment so thoroughly as to almost transform nature into a synthetic version of itself.

Indeed, in Sobrino’s skillful hands this negative synthesis attains what William Butler Yeats once referred to memorably as “a terrible beauty” — or, at very least, a kind of romantic grandeur, as in the work called “Making Clouds.” For in this image of smoke stacks as black as thick charcoal sticks spewing smoke to engulf and pollute their surroundings, what one can still see of the toxic sky beneath glows with a phosphorescence reminiscent of J.M.W. Turner’s “tinted steam.” Indeed, Sobrino’s compositions suggest a turmoil comparable to some of that great British master’s paintings of sea battles — only with the battle being waged by industry against the very air that we breathe.

Also possessed of a grudging beauty is another ironically named composition, “Clean City,” in which two brilliant orange blue plumes of flame, burning brilliantly



*“Making Clouds”*

against the vast darkness of a nocturnal sky, reminded one viewer of similar flames he once glimpsed through the window of a train traveling at night through a desolate stretch of New Jersey, bursting from two chimneys just beyond a billboard proclaiming with considerable civic pride: “Trenton Makes — The World Takes.” Here, even in the act of cautioning the viewer against the excesses of industry, the artist discovers a

hellish radiance.

But perhaps Kiko Sobrino’s most emblematic statement is one in which a single large flower, somewhat akin to those in Andy Warhol’s campy floral wallpaper paintings, is partially obscured by a gray grid and set against brash black abstract expressionist brushstrokes which boldly negate any lyrical affect such a subject might provoke. Once again, this innovative and thoughtful artist invites us to contemplate a world in which the degradation of nature has become a way of life.

— Julio Valdez

Kiko Sobrino, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, January 17 - February 7, 2012. Reception: Thursday, January 19, 6 - 8 pm.

# THE GOOD OLD BAD OLD DAYS

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

a memoir by Ed McCormack

Before Jeannie and I eloped to my family attic on Staten Island, I only made one friend there, an artist who had grown up in the Village until his entire family was driven out of Manhattan by rising rents. We met at The Village Squire, a trendy men's clothing boutique on West 8th Street where I worked as a salesman just long enough to use the employees' discount to buy the two sharp Continental suits that I eventually wore to my first real job at the Hearst Corporation.

Jesse was the store's shipping clerk. They called him "the beatnik in the basement" because, with his wispy goatee, wrinkled boat-neck jersey and sandals, he was forbidden to appear on the sales floor of that piss-elegant establishment during business hours. Right away, I sensed a kindred spirit, and for the short time that I was employed there would spend lunch hours down in his subterranean grotto, talking about matters artsy fartsy and digging his collection of jazz records. After work we sometimes took the ferry together, and on my last Friday at the store he invited me to dinner at his rented cottage in Annadale, a town at the far end of the island where he lived with his wife Angela and his infant daughter Angel.

Angela, who served us frozen lasagna that was still icy in the middle, was a tiny bleached blonde with a disproportionately large bosom and a crude, shrewish manner. She had grown up on the island and was more representative of its primarily workingclass Italian-American population than of any bohemian type one might have expected Jesse to have chosen as a mate. In fact, he had confided on the ferry earlier in the evening that he married her only because she was pregnant with his child and "she's basically a Mafia moll — not the type to just let something like that slide," as he put it.

After Angela went to bed, Jesse and I drank Gallo Port and listened to one of hipster cult figure Jean Shepard's wry radio monologues, then to Symphony Sid's late night jazz program.

When Angela yelled out from the bedroom for him to "shut off the goddamn radio," he yelled back, "I'm the one who has to get up in the morning, not you, babe. Just put your earplugs in and go back to sleep."

I suggested that maybe I should go, but he wouldn't hear of it.

"No, man, stay, have more wine," he said, filling my glass from the gallon jug. "You know how the buses run on this island — especially way out here at this hour; you could wait all night. You'd be better off falling out on our sofa until morning."

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Jesse had already left for work by the time



*Jeannie and me when we lived on 89th Street, before our bohemian simplicity turned to simple squalor*

Angela literally slapped me awake with her bare breasts. They were huge but flat, with prominent veins that, in the harsh morning sunlight flooding into the living room, reminded me of worms floating in shallow saucers of milk put out for cats. And they felt surprisingly cold as she straddled me on the sofa, holding the rolled front of her pink shorty nightgown up with both hands, and swaying them from side to side across my face.

I had a hardon, but I doubt it had anything to do with her, even though she was grinding her groin into mine; it was more like a normal waking woody. I was fixated on the line of blackheads running across the bridge of her nose, and the queasy stomach from my hangover wasn't being helped by her sour morning breath, as she tried to shove her nicotine-coated tongue into my mouth.

To spare her feelings I feigned nobility, suggesting that sorely tempted as I was by her undeniable beauty, I couldn't in good conscience betray a friend who had taken me into the bosom, so to speak, of his family, by fucking his wife. When she finally climbed sulkily off me, I knew that I had made an enemy for life.

On subsequent visits, I avoided Angela whenever possible, preferring to go straight to the house down at the end of the road, where Hannah, Jesse's mother, lived with her twin sister Ada and their three teenage kids: Jesse's eighteen-year-old sister Rennie, his twelve-year-old brother Warren, and Ada's

fourteen-year-old daughter Lucy.

The house, which was the extended family's regular gathering place anyway, was a ramshackle loft-shaped wooden structure perched precariously on a precipice leading down to a wild, driftwood-strewn stretch of Annadale Beach. Sparsely furnished with throwaways salvaged from the streets, it consisted of one large room with curtained-off sleeping alcoves and reminded me of Walker Evans' photographs of impoverished dwellings in Appalachia, except with reproductions torn out of art books rather than seed catalogs taped over cracks in the walls to keep out drafts.

But while Hannah and Ada went around barefoot in ragged black sack dresses, they were hardly hillbillies. Rather, they were wickedly witty, highly cultured protofeminists with liberal arts degrees from Barnard College ("We're barn-yard bitches," Ada liked to mock-boast), and with their large dark eyes and high cheekbones, must have been double trouble, real heartbreakers before middle-aged decrepitude set in.

As free living, free loving girls in the Village in the '30s and '40s, they had been courted by Joe Gould, Maxwell Bodenheim, and e.e. cummings, among other prominent bohemians, and they still attracted suitors: woebegone former lovers and ex-husbands, mostly obscure artists or poets, who would wash up on the beach occasionally and moon over them, feebly fanning dying embers, nursing old hurts.

One big toothless wino called Buck, who looked like a defanged John Wayne and addressed everyone as “citizen,” would arrive with a gallon jug of burgundy, trailed by a motley pack of junkyard dogs that apparently followed him everywhere. He’d whip a small spiral notebook out of his back pocket and recite his latest love poems to Hannah, which he seemed to take a lot more seriously than the sisters did. They’d humor him as long as the wine held out, then unceremoniously send “that mushy old windbag,” as Hannah called him, on his way.

One got the feeling that, while they had bewitched many men in their prime, none had ever escaped their sisterly scorn. They seemed to look upon all males of the species as hopeless dolts, including Jesse and his kid brother Warren, both of whom they ridiculed mercilessly. (I could only surmise that I was spared simply by virtue of being a relative newcomer yet to earn the contempt that familiarity invariably bred in these twin man-eaters.)

In any case, it seemed that their primary relationship was with their sibling, as they finished each others’ sentences like an old married couple, while expounding on artistic and literary enthusiasms such as Georgia O’Keeffe and Isak Dennison; or gleefully reminisced about their youthful conquests as Village femme fatales; or egged each other on to perform for company. Hannah, when the wine kicked in, liked to stick a plastic rose between her rotted teeth, leap up onto their butcher block table and improvise an abandoned fandango. Ada’s specialty was a raucous rendition of the title song from their unfinished opera “Froid”: “Ain’t you hoid of Siggie Froid? He’s the guy that invented the Id, kid!”

Jesse’s raucous bohemian family was such a welcome relief from the lower-middleclass banality of Staten Island and the plastic slipcovers protecting the furniture in my mother’s immaculate mausoleum of a living room that for a time I practically moved in with them, casually taking up with Hannah’s daughter Rennie and often staying overnight in her curtained sleeping alcove.

The only way poor Rennie could rebel against her eccentric mother was by going in the opposite direction and becoming boringly conventional, almost bovine in her lethargy. We had nothing in common intellectually or emotionally, but in her cutoff denim hotpants, she was as voluptuous as Li’l Abner’s girlfriend Daisy Mae, and was conveniently accessible. The main thing I had to do was take special care not to get her pregnant, lest I end up supporting her entire family.

For Hannah and Ada’s only income came from doing sporadic work for a display studio that made seasonal department store decorations and figures for parade floats, run

by a woman they had known for many years out of her big rambling house nearby in Annadale. (Creative improvisers that they were, both twins used a toxic-smelling display adhesive called Celastic to repair and replace their crumbling teeth!) Once, for a couple of days, I even got to make a few bucks helping them with the surreal-seeming task of painting papier mâché Christmas angels, reindeer, and snowy landscape backdrops on their friend’s lawn in the glare of the incongruously warm July sun.

Although I lost touch with them for awhile after I started working for Hearst and met my future bride, getting to know Jesse’s family was a godsend in those early days of feeling marooned by my parents having moved us to Staten Island. It would be dishonest not to admit, however, that after a weekend of wallowing in their funky lifestyle I was often relieved to return to the cleanliness and comfort of my mother’s house and head straight for the shower.

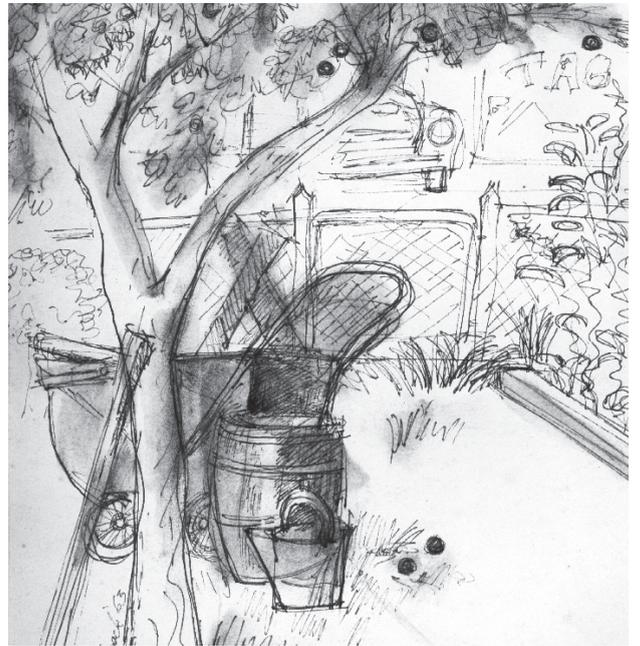
But of course I rationalized this, too, likening myself to that other mama’s boy Jack Kerouac, who would invariably retreat to the homefront and his dotting “Mémère” to recuperate from the frantic adventures he wrote about in “On the Road.”

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We had only been living in the attic for a little over a year when my sister’s boyfriend Kevin was shipped home in a flag-draped coffin, one of the early casualties of the Vietnam war. Jeannie was badly shaken and insisted on becoming pregnant sooner rather than later, to change my draft status. Since I didn’t know anybody in Canada and wasn’t sure I would have the balls to show up at the induction center in a dress, I happily reported for even more active duty in bed.

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By the time our son Holden was born in May of 1963, we had moved to a cozy little bungalow just a few blocks away. We may still have been dependent on the Care packages of groceries and other household items that my mother would often drop by on her way back from her job at the pretzel stand in Pathmark, but at least I had escaped the paternalistic largesse and right wing stigma of the Hearst Corporation for a slightly more agreeable copy boy position at Women’s Wear Daily. Never having held any other kind of job for any length of time, it was the only trade I knew. But I told myself it could be worse; hadn’t Allen Ginsberg once worked as



*The yard of our little bungalow on Staten Island*

a copy boy for the Associated Press?

WWD’s editorial offices were on East 12th Street in the Village, and like the nearby Strand Book Store, its copy staff attracted a fair number of fellow unsung geniuses — painters, musicians, aspiring neo-beatnik poets — with whom one could bitch about the indignity of having to hold a day job. Like underlings everywhere, we shared the dubious luxury of mocking those haughty fashionistas who had us at their beck and call.

Nobody was better at such mockery than Gene Closterman, a young jazz saxophonist from Seattle with a wicked wit and a taste for alcohol to match my own. Not long after Gene came to work on the copy staff, he and his wife Marilyn became good friends of Jeannie’s and mine. Since they were having trouble finding an affordable apartment in Manhattan, we told them about a place we had heard about on Staten Island, much closer to the ferry than our own. And when, for the obvious but unstated reason that Marilyn happened to be black, they were told that the apartment was already taken, Jeannie and I applied for it and were accepted. Faced with a discrimination suit, the landlord finally agreed to rent it to Gene and Marilyn and we had the great satisfaction of not only helping our friends but doing our small part to integrate that backward white flight borough.

Although Gene’s hipster humor was closer to that of Lenny Bruce, during slow times in the office he would amuse his fellow subversives on the copy staff by doing a Mort Sahl-style routine, flipping through the day’s edition of the trendy rag we worked for and commenting satirically on its contents. So one lunch hour in the office, I thought he was joking — perhaps about Jeannie having modeled — when he said, “Holy shit, Ed, did you know your wife is in here?”

But sure enough there she was, featured

prominently in a double-page spread by WWD's roving paparazzo of candid photographs, much like those that Bill Cunningham does for the Styles section of the *New York Times*, capturing elegant young women on the run in the city.

Although she had quit modeling soon after we were married, having lost interest in it as she took on more artistic and spiritual pursuits, the camera still loved her, and I was proud that she clearly outclassed all the other fashionable beauties in the spread, even though we didn't have the proverbial pot to pee in.

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Gene Closterman and I were just about to go out to lunch at Smith's, an Irish chain-bar with a steam table across the street from the office on 12th Street and University Place, when the news came over the teletypes that Camelot had fallen. We couldn't believe what we were witnessing, as John Fairchild, WWD's foppish editor and publisher came practically pirouetting across the city room, the tails of his bespoke suit flapping, lady fashion editors in their little black dresses and pearls scattering like starlings in his wake, and yelled to a trembling teletype operator, "Tell that Washington correspondent I don't care who she has to fuck — I want an exclusive on what Jackie will wear to the funeral!"

For a long time after the initial shock of the event wore off, Chauncey Howell, WWD's impish, witty cultural columnist, would regale members of the copy staff with his quietly riotous impersonation of Our Leader on that day. Imitating the publisher's high-pitched shriek sotto voce while casting cautious glances over his shoulder, he'd keep us all in stitches at lunch hour when most of his editorial colleagues were out of the office.

Unlike most of them, Chauncey didn't seem to look down on the scruffy serfs who picked up his copy. If anything this puckish, round-faced Village resident, rumored to be a product of old WASP money, seemed eager to be accepted into our society of misfits. And certainly he qualified by virtue of his engaging eccentricity. (Even years after he graduated from WWD to become a familiar TV talking head, one might see him on the evening news as the mild-mannered bowtie-sporting preppy cultural reporter, then run into him later the same night prowling the Village in head-to-toe black leather motorcycle regalia like Marlon Brando in "The Wild One")

A curious hybrid of Oscar Wildean wit and Hemingway/Mailer macho man, he was an accomplished amateur boxer who once invited one of the burlier copy boys home to put on the gloves for a sparring session. The kid showed up for work the next morning with a fat lip and reported that the bout "was quite intense."

But for all his pugilistic tendencies,

Chauncey had a kindly, slightly tongue-in-cheek avuncular side, which came out when he exhorted the copy staff to masturbate frequently as a preventative for prostate cancer — the "priest's disease," as he called it. And he demonstrated generosity beyond the call of duty when he came over to the Stryke Gallery on 10th Street to review my drawing exhibition for his column in WWD.

Calling me a "very gutsy and gifted young artist," he extolled my "wicked and enthusiastic drawings of "automaton businessmen; slum goddesses with dead faces, quivering buttocks and erect breasts flaunting their weary pudenda in see-through vinyl; jaded D.O.M. (dirty old men), surfeited and rendered indifferent by the plenitude of prey; feral egocentric city dogs whose greatest joy is doing their cynical duty where human feet are most wont to tread; and monster automobiles crowded with clothing dummy passengers, baring the fantastic chrome fangs of their grills at each other..."

A manic prose stylist after my own heart, Chauncey's review now seems prophetic of the switch I would soon make from visual art to Pop journalism — most specifically where he states: "McCormack's work is best described as expressionist reportage on the madness and obscurity of big city life."

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Our bungalow was in a leafy cul-de-sac not far from the beach, and that first summer it seemed idyllic. We had a crabapple tree and a rain barrel in our front yard, as well as a small grape arbor, from which our neighbor and landlady, Mrs. Orsini, an old Italian widow, made her own wine. It was strong stuff, as Jeannie discovered one afternoon when, once again convinced of her special ability to reason with the elderly as a result of having lived with her grandmother, she visited Mrs. Orsini to request a rent reduction. My clever wife, who seldom drank alcohol but whose Southern manners prevented her from refusing the old woman's hospitality, came back pie-eyed, having agreed instead to a monthly increase.

On warm weekends I'd sit in the yard and draw or work on poems while Jeannie, who was interested in Eastern philosophy long before it became a fad, read Ouspensky and Gurdjieff, and Holden snoozed in his baby carriage in the shade of the crabapple tree. Even though there was a beer and soda distributor right across the street and trucks backed in and out all day to be loaded with boxes of cans and bottles, an impressionable mind filled with literary allusions enabled me to imagine we were like Mr. and Mrs. William Blake in their rustic cottage in the English countryside.

Aside from my mother, we had few visitors. As far as I can recall only two strangers ever found their way to our door. One was a representative of the hokey correspondence

course called The Famous Artists School. (I had idly copied a "Draw Me" picture of a lumberjack off a matchbook cover and Jeannie had mailed it in on a lark.) One day he showed up out of the blue with good news: I had "those magic talent fingers!"

We gave him a glass of iced tea, made as if to listen raptly to his spiel, told him we'd give serious thought to signing up for the course, and managed not to crack up until we had shown him out. The other unexpected visitor was an itinerant baby photographer who had somehow found out that we had a newborn in the house. We didn't realize that we had been tricked into signing up not for a single photo session, but for several spread out over a period of five years, until the threatening letters started arriving with the invoices. They didn't stop until Jeannie wrote back that the contract was not legally binding, since she was still under 21.

That first summer on our own we were as happy in our romantic isolation as we would ever be again. But when September came and the leaves on the trees in our yard began to turn and fall, our little bungalow felt drafty, the long commute to work began to wear on me, and we plotted our escape. Longing for a more cultural milieu but unable to find anything we could afford in Manhattan, for a short while we moved near the ferry, to an apartment on the first floor of a ramshackle two-family Victorian that looked like one of those anthropomorphic ghost houses in the paintings of Charles Burchfield.

At first in our starry-eyed way we found its funkiness romantically atmospheric and were happy to be just a few blocks from our friends Gene and Marilyn and right across the street from Hannah and Ada, whose house on Annadale Beach had finally either washed away or been condemned (I don't remember which).

The only problem turned out to be that after I went off to work in the morning, Hannah and Ada, who knew a soft touch when they met one, would come over to mooch whatever money or food Jeannie happened to have around. Or else, my listless former sort-of-girlfriend Rennie, who had by then found some less cautious character than myself to impregnate her before skipping out on child support, would come over with her newborn and park herself in our kitchen to while away the day with the kind of idle gossip that my wife had little taste for but was too polite to discourage. Jeannie's only alternative was to get Holden into the stroller early every morning and spend hours hiking that depressed neighborhood's broken, hilly streets and browsing its stale-smelling Goodwill stores.

Having discovered the drawbacks of living near bohemian friends, we decided it was time to make the big move across the bay. After looking again into places in the Village

and still finding them beyond our means, we finally settled for something in a tenement on East 89th Street between Second and Third Avenues, in Yorkville, the old German section of the Upper East Side. (Thinking ahead, it was heartening to learn that the local unemployment insurance office was right down the block, which would make it convenient, when I finally managed to get myself deliberately fired from *Women's Wear Daily*, to roll out of bed and sign for the "government grant" that many of our artist friends collected periodically.)

Our new apartment was of the type known as "a railroad flat," its three narrow little rooms running in a row like train cars — although I thought of them as being more like the panels in a comic strip: spare boxes in which carefree life could unfold. Holden had his own small room at one end of the apartment, where the water closet (we loved that quaint British euphemism for an enclosure containing only a toilet-bowl) was; the kitchen was in the middle, with a stall-shower right next to the sink; and the front room, which faced the street and got the best light, was where I painted.

It was not much of a studio but it wasn't cluttered with a lot of furniture, just a book case, a record player, a drafting table that served as my easel, and our bed, which functioned as a sofa during the day. Being avowed antimaterialists, those bare necessities were all we needed. In fact, the one time we were burglarized, the only loot deemed worthy of taking was an old electric fan and some woolen squares that Jeannie had crocheted for an afghan, which it amused us to imagine some hapless junkie trying to sew together or peddle separately on the street as pot-holders!

At first we would take Holden along with us to the Friday night gallery openings on Tenth Street. There were always babies being carried on peoples' backs in papoose packs and bigger kids running wild underfoot, because it was part of the whole enlightened artsy fartsy child rearing philosophy of the downtown art scene that everything in life was a Happening in which the whole family should participate — whether they wanted to or not. With the storefront galleries, which coordinated their opening receptions for maximum attendance, lit up festively all up and down the street and crowds of revelers making the rounds from one to another, it was a scene so democratic and welcoming to all comers that when one of the better behaved winos from the nearby Bowery wandered in to panhandle, as they did from time to time, he probably thought he had died and gone to Heaven when nobody stopped him from helping himself to the cheap wine that flowed freely from gallon jugs into paper cups.

Given the sartorial tendencies of many of

our friends, it was often difficult to tell the bums from the artists anyway. Nor was there anything elegant or fashionable about the galleries, with their splintered wood floors, hissing radiators, and whitewashed walls. But rents were reasonable, art for art's sake was still possible, and fame and fortune did not figure as prominently in our fantasies as they necessarily must for young artists today, in a world ruled by real estate where all the dignity has been taken out of voluntary poverty. Back then, on the same street where the Abstract Expressionists had staged their first exhibitions a couple of decades earlier when they were as poor and obscure as ourselves, it was enough to imagine that we were all geniuses together.

When Holden got a little older and would often spend weekends on Staten Island with my mother, the most willing of baby sitters, we could stay out later with our artist friends after the openings. We were the youngest couple among them and when we made the rounds of the legendary Cedar Tavern and other bars in a big boisterous gang, we were so rambunctious and exuberant that Jeannie, who had always wanted to teach me to ride, would sometimes stop in her tracks, bend over with her hands on her knees, and invite me to climb up onto her back. Since I was still as skinny as she was, my wife, the athletic equestrian, had no trouble supporting my weight. So I'd hop on, reach around to slap her on the buttocks, yell, "Giddyap!" — and with our friends cheering us on, off we'd go at a brisk gallop, down the street.

Just a few years later, after I started writing for *Rolling Stone*, we would become involved with people and scenes that might have appeared more glamorous to others looking at us from the outside. But, once again, I don't think we were ever happier or ever had more than when we had nothing much to speak of, materially, yet were rich in hopes and dreams.

If all this sounds like Hemingway waxing rhapsodic in "A Moveable Feast," about his lean early years in Paris with his first wife Hadley and their infant son Bumby, well, that was how romantic it felt. At least for the first few years, before the alcohol and the drugs took over — for me, anyway — and our bohemian simplicity began to turn to simple squalor.

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Over time, it almost seemed as though our building itself was a living organism that gradually changed and took on another, more sinister aspect. At first it was just us and the old workingclass German and Irish people who had seemingly lived in the neighborhood forever. We were the newcomers, a young couple who looked like hippies but had an Irish name and a cute little boy to help humanize them. Knowing we may have seemed a little alien to our

fellow tenants, we went out of our way to be neighborly and polite. And over time they must have decided that we weren't all that weird after all. Walter, the old German handyman, started giving me a gruff good morning, and the Joyce sisters, two elderly Irish spinsters who lived in the apartment right next door, even invited us in for a whiskey and soda one Christmas Eve. Sitting stiffly with our drinks on napkins in our laps reminded me of visiting my grandmother from County Cork and my other paternal relatives in Woodside, Queens, that my mother, always scornful of everyone else's affectations but forgiving of mine, called "lace curtain Irish." (She also reserved the right, of course, to call my father "shanty Irish" whenever they argued about his drinking.)

But as the older tenants moved out or died off, other young people like us, with vaguely artistic aspirations and a need for cheap rent, started moving in. First came an abstract painter from Minnesota named Russ Anderson who was so new to New York and clueless that he didn't know where or how to score grass and actually admitted that he was too afraid of getting busted to even try.

I offered to cop for him from my regular connection in the East Village, and rationalizing that since I was the one taking the risk (which was really quite minimal), I would help myself to half the ounce, then bring the weight back up by adding my old stems and seeds and a healthy pinch or two of oregano before laying it on him.

Being benign compared to some of the harder drugs I eventually got into, as well as relatively cheap at that time, smoke would hardly seem something to get so larcenous about. But it seems I was already manifesting the weasely, chiseling ways of the low-level addict by preying so shamefully on a shnook so hapless that, as Jeannie pointed out, even the potted plants on his windowsill looked agonized, wilting and writhing as though crucified on the sticks he put in the pots to prop them up.

When Russ finally gave up on making it in the New York art scene and retreated back to the Midwest, his on-again-off-again girlfriend, a mousy little number named Margie, inherited his rent-stabilized apartment. She soon took up with quite an opposite sort of character: an oily actor type, Larry Something, who had recently been released from prison where he'd served a five-year prison term for what he claimed was a wrongful drug conviction.

No sooner had Margie introduced him to Jeannie and me than this sun-tanned slickster with a gold chain hanging around his neck started telling us all about how a straight but nonviolent white guy like himself could only survive and avoid constantly being raped in prison by becoming the "girlfriend" of some "black stud" bad-assed enough to offer

him protection in return for regular sexual servicing. He went on about it in a way that made it difficult to figure out if he was bragging or complaining, while mousy little Margie listened wide-eyed and doted on him as if the thought of her man's debasement somehow turned her on. They both seemed smug about it, as though it gave him some perverse fascination for her, as well as some creepy power over her, that made us queasy and made us want to avoid them.

Next to move into the building was a sallow furtive acting jazz drummer we knew only as Steve because he never told anyone his last name and never even put it on his mailbox. "Steve," Jeannie and I called him, after the comedian Steve Allen's nickname, but not to his face, since we hardly ever had two words to say to him or he to us. He lived on the ground floor and if you passed him in the hall, he'd just nod darkly behind his omnipresent shades, as he slithered along the wall like a shadow. At other times, the only way you knew he was around was from the monotonous rhythmic drone constantly churning behind his door as he practiced on his drum set.

Then there was a guitarist in the jazz/rock mode known privately to Jeannie and me as "Groovy," because that seemed to be his favorite word, the adjective this mellow cat applied to everything. Groovy, who also lived on the ground floor dressed rather conservatively and always seemed relatively healthy and wholesome for a musician of that era. At least before he started jamming with Steverino, who turned him on to heroin.

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Not long ago, I ran into Groovy in the neighborhood where we've both more or less remained over the years, although in different rent-regulated apartments in other buildings, through all the gentrification that has made Yorkville almost unrecognizable as the place we knew back in the '60s and '70s.

After contracting hepatitis C from a dirty needle, Groovy had gone from being darkly handsome to looking like death warmed over for awhile. But now he had a new liver and a new lease on life, he said.

We reminisced about the old days on 89th Street and the reckless way we lived when we were young and stupid enough to still think we were immortal.

"That was some crazy building, man," Groovy said.

"It turned into a real den of thieves," I agreed.

"Remember Steve, the drummer who lived near me on the ground floor?"

"How could I forget your buddy Steve, the ghost who walked — what a piece of work! I remember when he first got the bicycle. I thought he was changing his ways, getting on an exercise kick, until you told me he was using it to make a quick getaway when he snatched pocketbooks from little old ladies in midtown! But what about the time your cat got up in the middle of the night and turned on the gas?"

He cracked up. "What else could I say, man? Everybody in the building out on the street in their pajamas in the middle of the night, the hall filled with smoke, all those firemen rushing into my pad!"

"Jeannie and I laughed about it for years, man. You had one intelligent cat there!"

"Smart, right? Gets up to cook himself a little midnight snack!"

"A veritable feline genius, I'd say."

"Hey, man, you remember my girlfriend Nicole, don't you? Did you know she still lives in that building? The last I heard, she's shackled up with some black dude and she's turning tricks."

Yes, I remembered Nicole well, but didn't bring up to Groovy how the first time I met her, all those years ago, when I knocked on his door to ask if he had a nickel bag of

grass I could borrow or buy until I could get downtown to my dealer, she opened the door wearing nothing but a towel. She was a good-looking brunette and as we chatted the towel kept slipping, and each time it did she would giggle coyly while making a great show of readjusting it. When I asked for Groovy, she said he had just gone out on a gig and wouldn't be back for a few hours.

"But is there anything I can help you with?" she asked.

"No, that's cool," I said. "Just tell him I dropped by."

"Well, listen, I was just about to smoke a joint," she said. "Would you like to come in and get high with me?"

She held my gaze and smiled in a way that suggested I would probably get more than high. I thanked her for the offer but told her my wife had dinner ready upstairs and I really should be going.

I never mentioned that first meeting with Nicole to Groovy, nor did I mention now that I knew she was still on 89th Street because the last time I passed our old building I saw her standing right out in front of it by the stoop, openly soliciting. Her looks were gone, her body bloated, but she stared hopefully into the eyes of passing men and smiled through clownishly smeared lips. Remembering how she looked when she first moved in with him and assuming he had to have some regrets about how she turned out, I didn't think Groovy needed to know that I had seen her that way.

"I'll never forget those days on 89th street," Groovy said. "How would you characterize that time we lived through?"

"I don't know, man," I answered. "Maybe the Good Old Bad Old Days?"

We both chuckled ruefully before going our separate ways.

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## "Home"

*A Photography Exhibit*

**January 18 – February 5, 2012**

**Reception: Saturday, January 21, 2:30 – 5:30pm**

*Curator: Carolyn Reus & Jack Cesareo assisting*

**Broadway Mall Community Center**

Broadway@96St. (NYC) Center Island

Gallery Hours: Wed 6-8pm, Sat/Sun. 12-6 pm

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## "New Art for a New Year"

*A fine arts exhibit*

**December 28, 2011 - January 15, 2012**

**Reception: Saturday, December 31, 2:30 – 5:30pm**

*Curator: Margo Mead*

**Broadway Mall Community Center**

Broadway@96St. (NYC) Center Island

Gallery Hours: Wed 6-8pm, Sat/Sun. 12-6 pm

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## Z. Todorova's Language of Universal Symbols

"It is no trick to make a simple thing complex," the great jazz bassist and composer Charles Mingus once stated. "The real accomplishment is making something complex simple."

He could have been talking about the mixed media works of the artist known as Z. Todorova, who endeavors "to illustrate the important relationship between the natural world and humanity," as she puts it, "through the use of metaphor and symbols. I use various techniques and materials, including wood and metal, to create my figurative/abstract pieces. I have been interested in this guiding theme for many years – the inseparable connection between people and the earth, and how this is reflected in each individual, either overtly or behind the mask we present to others."

To accomplish this complex artistic mission, Todorova has evolved a language of simple yet profound symbols, as instantly readable at a glance as a "Stop" or "Exit" sign. (The example strikes one as apt, since inherent in her work is the implication that if we do not heed the first, in relation to the devastation we routinely wreak on our environment, we have no alternative but to do what the second sign suggests and depart the planet altogether.)

Most prominent among her symbols are featureless, genderless white silhouetted

figures of Everyperson, set dramatically against backgrounds covered by tactile, thickly pigmented earth colors, ranging from rich, dark siennas to luminous ochers, that palpably evoke the terra firma itself.

In a work called "Heavy Burden," two stick-figures as simple as glyphs on ancient rock carvings, carrying a large boulder with what appears to be a necktie wrapped around it, seem to transform before one's eyes into an insect like that which Gregor, the harried clerk in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" turns into, provoking thoughts about corporate greed and the rape of the environment.

By contrast, in "Untitled 3," one of her most direct expressions of the theme, the globe is divided down the middle on separate wood panels, with the word "WAR" visible between them, that two white silhouetted figures at opposite ends of the composition attempt to push back together. And in "Till Death Do Us Part," the message is made equally clear with the image of a figure with the globe shackled to his leg like a ball and chain. That the title is drawn from the marriage ceremony drives home the point that we truly are wedded to the fate of the earth. Together we either survive or perish.

In "On the Way," three figures with linked hands traverse the connected panels of a diptych. The one leading the way holds a candle; the middle figure is smaller, like a

child; the figure bringing up the rear is perhaps the third member of a family making its way through the murk toward a more enlightened future.



"On the Way"

Another painting called "It's Time..." appears to be a call to arms for people to take direct action to save the planet, as a standing figure points an authoritative finger, apparently admonishing a passively kneeling person to rise and join the others striking more active poses. Like all of Z. Todorova's paintings, it is an instantly comprehensible message present with sublime simplicity that inspires the viewer to contemplate a wide range of problems and their possible solutions.

— Wilson Wong

Z. Todorova, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, November 29 - December 20, 2011.  
Reception: December 1, 6 - 8 pm.



### "A Gift of Art 2011"

A fine arts exhibit

December 2-27, 2011

Reception: Saturday, December 10th, 2:30 - 5:30pm

Curators: Carole Barlowe & Ava Schonberg

Carole Barlowe • Amy Rosenfeld  
Ava Schonberg • Monique Serres  
et al.

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## Eduard Anikonov and the Souls of Machines

Like the American artist Walter Murch, active in the 1950s and 60s, Eduard Anikonov is a “painter’s painter,” in that his work has as much to do with light and shadow, color and texture, and the tactile qualities of oil paint applied to canvas as with the subjects that he depicts. But while Murch often included discarded machine parts in tabletop settings for his medium-size easel paintings, Anikonov works on a grander scale and most often depicts larger sections of machines that are still active in his “Industrial Landscape” series.

Although his paintings have the power and impact, as well as the vigorous brushwork, of Abstract Expressionism, they also partake of considerable detail, with the cogs and gears and other parts of the whole lovingly depicted in a manner that lends an unusual sensuality to their unyielding surfaces. Indeed, when the artist says “For me, painting is a possibility of verbalization of personal emotional feelings and personal sensual ‘history;’” the statement seems borne out by the manner in which his brush caresses these surfaces and imbues them with an almost flesh-like sentience. And when he speaks of “the manifestation of the spiritual in the material,” Ray Bradbury’s famous phrase “the soul of a new machine” springs most immediately to mind — even though the machines that Anikonov chooses to paint are more likely to be old machines stained by grease and rust and made all the more soulful for it.

These monolithic machines stand before us in all their grubby glory with the dignity of old, overworked circus elephants lined up in their stalls under the big top. Anikonov delineates the play of light and shadow over their metal hides in a manner that recalls the chiaroscuro in a landscape by Corot. In “Gear 1,” the vigorously scumbled fiery red area on the left side of the composition projects a sense of heat. The machine is relegated to the right side of the canvas, its begrimed and shadowed face, barnacled with rivets, suggesting that of a stunned robot.

Both “Gear 2” and “Gear 3” partake of a more mellow palette of subdued tones, the former canvas especially reminiscent of the gray browns of old master portraits.

Indeed, each of Anikonov’s closeup paintings of machines suggests a sympathetic portrait, while his busier factory views in the “Industrial Landscape” series, with their scaffolds and trestles and cacophony of brighter reds and blues, evoke a world of noise, tumult, and smoke in which one can almost hear the hiss of steam and shrill shriek of whistles signaling intervals in the hectic hustle and bustle of the workday.

Like Philip Levine the present Poet Laureate of the United States, best known for his poems about ordinary people in working-



“Gear 2”

class Detroit, Anikonov dignifies the world of labor in his art. And while more of his paintings may focus on the machines at which they toil, he also pays homage to the workers themselves, in “Thirst,” a portrait of a man with the hair under his welding helmet stuck to his forehead with sweat, as he greedily quaffs a glass of water in the hellish red glow of a foundry.

As his paintings demonstrate so beautifully, Eduard Anikonov is a man who obviously knows, to quote the title of a book by Philip Levine, “What Work Is.”

— Byron Coleman

Eduard Anikonov, Agora Gallery,  
530 West 25th St., Nov. 29 - Dec. 20, 2011.  
Reception: Thursday, Dec. 1, 6 - 8 pm.

## Will Brady’s Nobly Quixotic Conceptual Conceit

Will Brady may very well be the most prolific artist at work anywhere today. For the endless outpouring of drawings, paintings, and handwritten texts that emanate from this quirky Faux-Primitive Conceptual Expressionist (no other designation will do) seems to surpass even that of his closest runner-up among the new breed of prodigious graphomaniacs, Raymond Pettibon.

Consider that a Japanese collector recently purchased 300 pounds of Brady’s handmade books. You read that right: 300 pounds! Filling sketchbooks of all types or assembled in the manner of fanzines from scrawled drawings and writings on spiral notebook paper, typing paper, apparently whatever kind of paper is within arm’s reach when inspiration strikes, the books constitute only the first half of an enormous autobiographical project that could eventually rank with Henry Darger’s illustrated epic of the Vivian Girls. The artist hints that a lot of it has to do with a father figure whom he “put on a pedestal for most of my life until this past September 25th when I found out he was a different person than the one I thought he was.”

Now, he suggests, his art will take on an entirely different dimension. But that is a subject which should only be broached in

his future work. In the meantime, there is already this enormous body of stuff. Granted, much of it is dashed off in the hasty manner of a preschooler; but wasn’t it Picasso who said something to the effect it takes a lifetime to unlearn adult habits and cultivate that kind of expressive freedom?

Sometimes the late Jean-Michel Basquiat had it, but not as often as Brady, who obviously isn’t even trying to emulate the Twombly-like painterly elegance that Basquiat could also display when he was in the mood. In fact, among the many other symbols that clog Brady’s eclectic compositions, is the recurring image of a crown (originally, Basquiat’s graffiti signature) — but with a slanted line through it like those on “No Smoking” signs.

At the same time, some of Brady’s more finished looking paintings, as opposed to his crudest drawings, can sometimes recall Basquiat, with their jam-packed compositions, Art Brut faces and figures, vibrant colors, and jazzy gestural energy that sometimes verges on rough elegance. Yet Brady seems wary of acquiring even a semblance of the kind of aesthetic appeal that sometimes disarmed us in certain works by Basquiat and Keith Haring, when he scrawls “No decorations please” on some of

his drawings. Another recurring phrase is “Have a stack (It’s Very Cumulative),” as if to tip off the viewer that any single work does not tell the whole story.

Indeed, a very conscious artist despite his apparent scorn for skill and technique as obstacles to raw expression, he appears painfully aware of the Quixotic nature of his project. For how can his message ever achieve coherence if it can only be seen in part? At the same time, he presses on in single-minded pursuit of a kind of authenticity and honesty that the art market does not often reward. One can only hope that, driven by the purity of his obsessions, Will Brady will persist in his brave mission to fly high above the bottom line.

— Peter Wiley



Will Brady’s work can be viewed in the year-round salon at Montserrat Contemporary Art, 547 West 27th Street.

## An “Eclectic Aesthetic” Comes to Chelsea

Founded in 1917 as the Brooklyn Society of Artists, today the American Society of Contemporary Artists boasts approximately one-hundred members. Ranging from representation to abstraction, the group includes a wide enough variety of styles to justify the title of its 94th Annual Exhibition, “Eclectic Aesthetic 2011.”

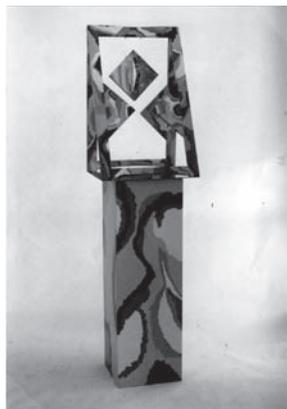
One of the more familiar artists on view who covers both ends of the stylistic spectrum is Rose Sigal Ibsen, who has made a considerable reputation in the New York art scene and abroad for her works in watercolor and Asian ink painting. Although born in Romania, Ibsen has won the admiration of many contemporary masters of Chinese painting, including C.C. Wang for her

media on canvas “Screams,” in which the brilliant red forms float as emblematically as the diamonds on a deck of playing cards in shallow space, set against a softly modulated, subtly variegated purple and blue background. In this work, as the title indicates, the strident forms represent sounds, but in a much more strident way than in the melodic tones of the aforementioned painting by Maria de Echevarria.

Hank Rondina, whose acrylic “Monk’s Dream” is also inspired by sound, particularly as made by the piano of Theolonius Monk. His composition, which conveys the freedom of Paul Klee, is based on hues that correspond to musical notes in a jazz progression.

Then there is Janet Indick, who handily merges painting and sculpture in her freestanding work in wood, stainless steel, and paint, “I’m Wishing.” This totemic piece, like other works one has seen over the seasons by Indick, commands space with impressive ease, its swirling organic shapes in reds and ochers within a semi-geometric format giving a new dimension to both of the art forms which it unites.

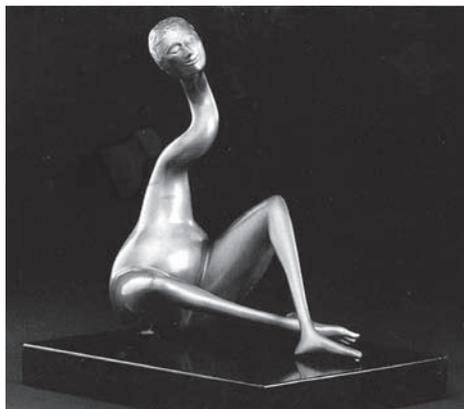
Three other artists in the exhibition work in more traditional sculptural mediums and share a fondness for smoothly generalized biomorphic forms: Raymond Weinstein makes a stately statement about feminine grace in “Rhapsody,” a standing figure in painted limestone of a woman raising one



Janet Indick



Bonnie Rothchild



Isabel Shaw



Ilse Kahane

graceful brushwork and compositions which range from traditional Asian floral subjects to abstract compositions that bridge the gap between Eastern and Western painting. Here, she is represented by an untitled work in Japanese sumi-e ink combining a muscularly knotted central form with with sinuous calligraphic lines.

Born in Argentina, now dividing her time between New York and New Mexico Maria de Echevarria is another artist who moves easily between figurative and abstract modes of expression. Seen here is one of her nonobjective compositions inspired by classical music, “Debussy, La Mer, #1,” capturing the mood of the great composer’s music with roiling gestural strokes in sonorous blue tones.

Anita Adelman also makes a strong showing with “A Sea of Color,” in which vibrant pink, purple, and green reflections on a body of water project an almost fluorescent chromatic intensity. Adelman’s painting is also compelling for its spatial ambiguity, with the color areas alternately hugging the picture plane in the manner of a Color Field abstraction and appearing to recede in space, assuming a more representational sense of perspective.

Less ambiguous, on the other hand is Elaine Alibrendi’s work in oil and mixed

Miriam Wills is a painter whose abstract compositions in mixed media are invariably jam-packed with bold, baroque shapes that fill the picture space with a sense of barely contained energy. In her painting “Red Sanctuary,” as in all of her work, Wills employs brilliant primaries along with equally strong secondary hues, adding thick outlines to enhance the rhythmic force of her curvaceously sensual forms.

By contrast, in the tradition of Abstract Expressionism, Leanne T. Martinson’s compositions, such as her “Wind Holding #1,” are driven by gesture. Like those of Joan Mitchell, Martinson’s surfaces are at once lyrical and sumptuous, channeling the forces of nature with swift, graceful strokes, buoyant forms, and an ebullient palette of light-filled hues.

Gil Passarella takes a more representational approach to nature in his expansive landscape vista, its sensitive strokes and softly diffused forms reminiscent of Impressionism, albeit from a decidedly contemporary perspective. Passarella is an exceptional colorist with an ability to create luminous effects with a seemingly effortless panache that makes his landscapes refreshingly poetic experiences for the viewer, reminding us that there are certain eternal verities which will never go out of style.

arm to her head and resting the other on her torso, its contours flowing and curving with sinuous grace. Bonnie Rothchild takes abstract form as far as it can possibly go while still evoking a ballerina with arms raised above her head like a living arabesque in her exquisitely refined abstract piece. And Isabel Shaw’s bronze “Pollyanna” partakes of imaginative anatomical distortion in her armless bronze female figure with a serenely smiling face atop an elongated neck that curves serpentine.

By contrast Ilse Kahane takes a straightforward yet strongly simplified approach to the figure in her painted terracotta sculpture of a kneeling Asian woman, her eyes calmly closed, her countenance suggesting reverence rather than abject submission.

Like a Botero nude in tree dimensions, Hortense Kassoy gives us a new view of the Goddess of Love in the full-figured volumes of her bronze, Aphrodite.

Finally, massive volumes are suggested on a relatively intimate scale in Ray Shanfeld’s sculpture “Momentum,” with its adamantly

*Continued on page 28*

ASCA’s “Eclectic Aesthetic 2011,”  
Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street,  
November 29 - December 17, 2011

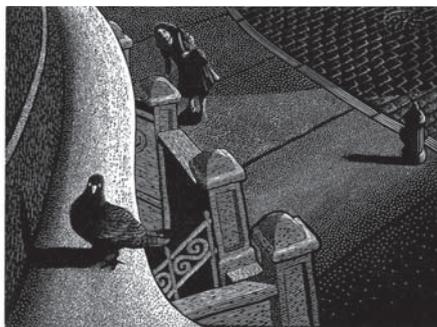
# Variety and Vision in CLWAC Annual Exhibition

Seen in the 115th Annual Open Exhibition of the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club, in the Grand Gallery of the National Arts Club, "Day Dream" by Chong-Sun Oh harked back to voluptuous salon nudes of the past, which seemed entirely suitable for an organization named for a great nineteenth century female philanthropist.



*Chong-Sun Oh*

Although overwhelmingly figurative, with a few abstract works popping up here and there, the show still displayed a pleasing variety of styles and tendencies. In sculpture, for example, there were Lee Hunt's animal figure "August Rabbit," in cement and steel, as well as "Motivating a Complacent Wind," an animated freestanding figure composition



*Karen Whitman*

created with crumpled and modeled newspaper by Susan Parker Faith. As for abstraction Tat Tank-A's "Angel of Earth," a sinuous and intricate configuration in wood and steel; Janet Indick's "White Clouds," an angular wall piece in painted steel, and Lee Apt's colorful Neo-Constructivist assemblage "Happy," may have been outnumbered but held their own handsomely.

Iris Nardini's "Final Encore" was a lithe ballerina in bronze and steel, taking a bow sans tutu. While its surface suggested a bronze patina Virginia Abbott's eccentrically clad female bust "Bohemian," was actually fashioned from cast paper. Then there were "Hold Tight," by Irene Koldorf, a strongly stylized marble



*Susan Parker Faith*

sculpture of a man carrying a child on his shoulders while another gleefully clutches his legs, and an amusingly anthropomorphized bronze of a preening turtle by Pokey Park. And while Madeleine Segall-Marx's ornate painted terracotta ceremonial figure was wittily titled, "Not Pre-Colombian," it almost would have fooled this viewer! By contrast, "Surrender," Sherry Tipton's fragmented but sensual female evocation of a figure with closed eyes and parted lips in pure white alabaster suggested the erotic intensity of Molly Bloom's soliloquy in Joyce's "Ulysses." And other aspects of the feminine were immortalized in both Joan Hermanson's goddess-like bronze of a comely crouching nude and "The Secret" Karen Jobe Templeton's tender depiction in the same medium of a smiling mother listening to a little girl whisper in her ear.

As in many exhibitions, there were fewer sculptors than painters represented here, but the best of them gave the lie to one late critic's snarky statement that "sculpture is something you back into looking at paintings."

That said, among the paintings, one standout was "The Soul Stirrers," a large three-figure grouping in oils by Robin Frey featuring a man and a woman attempting to calm or cajole an eccentrically dressed matron who appears to be in a state of agitation. Another was "Sound of One Hand," by Diane Rosen, a mixed media composition juxtaposing an operatic diva rendered in the manner of a pastel cabaret by Toulouse-Lautrec with a mysterious paint-spattered female nude in an oddly harmonious marriage of incongruous imagery. Yet another was Patt Baldino's "Briefcases in Grand Central," an oil of commuters rushing past the familiar information kiosk with the brass clock on

top, as late afternoon light streams into the famous New York train terminal through the high windows, lending timelessness to a mundane movement.

Other paintings and prints that caught our eye were: "Krista" a close-up in pastel of a young woman with agape and gold rings dangling from both earlobes and one nostril by Aubray O'Meara; "Barbarossa," by Randy Globus a hyperrealist watercolor of merry-go-round horses, their bright colors and baroque designs merging in lively abstract patterns; "Cakes Galore," a watercolor of cakes and pies on glass shelves in a bakery captured with crystalline precision in watercolor by Susan Philips; "Birdwatcher"

a noirish black and white block print of a woman on the sidewalk outside a brownstone glancing up at a pigeon perched on a ledge by Karen Whitman, its gritty urban atmosphere reminiscent of Fritz Eisenberg or Frans Masereel; "Before the Storm," a vigorous, windblown, chromatically luminous landscape in pastel by Rae Smith; "North Street, Veils of Winter," an exquisitely subtle acrylic painting of shadowy, barely visible pedestrians making their way through a blinding blizzard by Nina Maguire; and "Tea Time," an oil by Kathy Krantz Fieramosca painted with a succulent precision reminiscent of the Dutch still life masters.

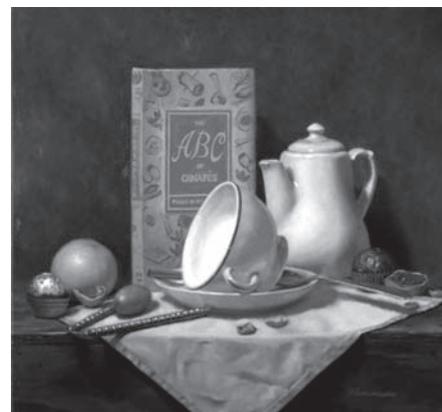
Among the plethora of paintings on view — unfortunately, far too many to do justice in this space, one of the most impressive was by Gabriela Delosso, the CLWAC's Honored Member for 2011. Called "The Mentor," Delosso's large canvas, a tour de force of academic realism, depicted an artistic dialogue across the ages in which



*Sherry Tipton*



*Lee Hunt*



*Kathy Krantz Fieramosca*

a woman artist (clearly a self-portrait) and one of her female students, both in modern dress, watch a woman in a plumed hat and satin gown replete with bustle paint a portrait of a model in garb of the same period. Like Germaine Greer's indispensable book "The Obstacle Race," a history of women artists of the past five centuries, Delosso's painting celebrates the great but often unheralded tradition to which the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Club is among our most authentic heirs.

— J. Sanders Eaton

CLWAC 115th Annual Open Exhibition, recently seen at the National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South.

NOV/DEC 2011-JAN 2012

## Alexis De La Sierra: Avatar of Cosmic Mandalas

Contrary to Marshall McLuhan's famous statement of the 1960s, the immensely gifted Venezuelan silversmith, sculptor, and computer artist Alexis De La Sierra is someone for whom the medium is decidedly *not* the message. This is no less obvious in the complex "cyber paintings" that De La Sierra creates today than it was of the large sculptures incorporating neon that he was making in 1994, when I first encountered his work in a spectacular solo exhibition at the Venezuelan Center Gallery in New York City.

Indeed, De La Sierra has a way of making any medium in which he chooses to work uniquely his own by virtue of his ability to generate a seemingly endless variety of images bearing the stamp of his inimitable aesthetic sensibility. In his cyber paintings, in particular, computer technology (with which he has been experimenting since purchasing his first Macintosh 512-K in 1989, becoming one of the pioneers of the then fledgling art form) seems particularly well-suited to the luminous surfaces, unfathomable distances, and unearthly beings he evokes in his new works, which are perhaps best described as visionary cosmic mandalas.

For in the hands of a consummate artist, capable of imposing the necessary restraint on its more facile effects and not succumbing to its superficial seductions, the medium

becomes the gateway to new levels of consciousness, as De La Sierra demonstrates dynamically in "Cosmic Nanny: Eye in the Sky," a work recently selected for the



"Cosmic Nanny: Eye in the Sky"

Charlatan Ink Prize Exhibition at the Carlton Arms Hotel in New York City.

Not since Salvador Dali in his prime has any visual artist waxed so ecstatically poetic regarding his own imagery as De La Sierra does about this work: "Grandiose and constant cosmic copulation is in the making as symbolized by the tangerine spiked wheel

penetrated by a sidereal phallic Popol Vuh, which in turn is energized by a golden Alpha & Omega spiral, breath to the never ending cycles of life. The lobster cleanses and makes way for renewed life, pressing a cosmic breast to extract a flow of nourishing fluid that gushes forth to bathe and give birth to a New Green Planet."

And sure enough, there it all is depicted literally and with winning visual wit in the composition: the phallic Popol Vuh (which resembles a cosmic corn cob), the tangerine wheel with its pubic spikes, the lobster squeezing the terrestrial tit (which looks like an alizarin crimson breast augmentation implant) with both its claws, the milky spritz ejaculating on the green globe, like an explicit photo of the Big Bang!

Only, that photo could never exist. So much for those who claimed that painting was finished when the camera was invented: only the human imagination could come up with something like this! And the computer, let's face it, by virtue of creating a virtual — which is to say, nonphysical — reality,

*Continued on page 28*

Alexis De La Sierra, recently seen in the Charlatan 2011 Ink Prize Exhibition at the Carlton Arms Hotel, 160 E. 25th St. [WWW.ALEXISDELASIERRA.COM](http://WWW.ALEXISDELASIERRA.COM)

## Saugy's Visionary Portraiture

Think of commissioned portraits, especially of the corporate or institutional variety, and what invariably comes to mind are dull, fawningly flattering likenesses of middle aged executives, clergy, or college presidents, posed stiffly in offices or libraries, cranked out in lackluster oils by academic hacks.

By contrast, the Swiss-French painter Catherine de Saugy, known internationally simply as "Saugy," primarily for her multidimensional, luminously translucent abstractions on Plexiglas, takes a characteristically innovative approach to the very few portrait commissions she accepts each year.

"Like music, portraits are a dialogue," the artist says. "I explore and capture the essence of my subject's aspirations, interests, and passions."

Toward this end, starting with her own photographic imagery, as Andy Warhol did (albeit in a more garishly mundane manner) in his famous portraits, Saugy presents her subjects in semiabstract metaphysical settings, rather than posing them in static interiors. In some of her portraits, such as "Herve Dessimoz, Architecte," more than one image of the sitter is employed to convey different aspects of the subject's personality.

In the case of Dessimoz, a close-up of the distinguished architect with his rimless spectacles and distinctive salt and pepper mustache, smiling broadly in a white, open-collared shirt and dark jacket, dominates NOV/DEC 2011-JAN 2012

the foreground of the picture. A welcome relief from the usual distant, dour, self-important, often intimidating poses in most such portraits, the viewer gets a sense of meeting this amiable gentleman in casual circumstances for a private consultation.

This image is juxtaposed with a slightly smaller likeness of the same man, now with a thoughtful, businesslike expression standing behind a scale model of a dome-like structure of his own design, surrounded by other examples of his architectural projects that Saugy has combined in a composition with a pleasing sense of formal balances akin to those of her abstract paintings. Thus the artist creates a visionary context for the portrait that enables the viewer to feel that he or she is entering directly into Dessimoz's creative imagination.

In "Patrick Aebischer, President of EPFL, Switzerland, Power Through Biotechnology," however, perhaps in keeping with a more corporate identity, Saugy reverses the emphasis of the imagery somewhat, presenting the youthful, dark-haired executive in formal business attire in the close-up portrait dominating the foreground of the composition. Here, too, to evoke the mysterious realm of biotechnology the images are multiplied and presented within a Perspex Block for added depth.

Beyond the foreground portrait is a more ethereal image of Aebischer, its continuity

slightly interrupted by overlapping rectangular shapes, holding up a small globe-like sphere in one hand.



Herve Dessimoz

Although the gesture is casual, it somehow suggests the mannered elegance of a metaphysician demonstrating an arcane principle in a Renaissance painting. Yet another rectangular area of the mostly monochromatic composition contains a bright profusion of brilliant red, blue, and green linear abstract forms, evoking a sense of natural energies harnessed by science. And in the right side of the work is a yet image of Aebischer, now seated with open collar at his desk, his casual elegance akin to that of the handsome contemporary French philosopher and activist Bernard-Henri Levy.

Such subtle associations imbue Catherine de Saugy's contemporary depictions of people accomplished in various fields with a complexity of character and personality precious rare in the portraiture of this or any other age.

— Marie R. Pagano

Saugy, [www.catherine-de-saugy.com](http://www.catherine-de-saugy.com)

## Peggy Zehring and Her Fellow “Inner Idea Artists” Invoke the Spirit of Kandinsky at Montserrat Contemporary Art



*Peggy Zehring*

Influenced by Theosophy and other spiritual disciplines in vogue early in the nineteenth century, Kandinsky was the first true abstract artist, the one who pushed art in the direction of inner reality, as opposed to the depictions of the external world common in painterly practice up to that time.

Perhaps even more than many other artists who have been influenced by Kandinsky over the several decades since, Peggy Zehring took the master's lessons to heart — particularly his emphasis on “Truth over Beauty.” An influential teacher, as well as a highly respected painter, Zehring leads an artist's group culled from her most gifted students over the years, and in exhibition they present a refreshing reaffirmation of pure plastic values that are often all but pushed aside in the postmodern rush toward superficial novelty.

Zehring's own paintings set a powerful example. Big, bold, filled with bold forms, luminous colors, and rugged textures, they project an almost tantric sense of energy. The pièce de resistance of a typical Zehring is a swirling central form which, in the case of the large work called “Reiki Corkscrew” spans the two closely aligned canvases of a diptych. Its serpentine central form — here a glowing, variegated red-yellow-orange hue — is, characteristically, so thickly pigmented as to stand inches off the painting surface in tactile relief, lending it an almost sculptural dimension.

Yet even while this central shape is anchored firmly to the “picture plane” by the uniformly spaced linear elements that bracket both sides of the emblematic composition in “Reiki Corkscrew,” these same lines simultaneously project a contradictory illusion of depth that radically departs from the notion of that shallow



*David Zehring*

— or two-dimensional — space essential to modernist practice.

That Zehring chooses to opt for the complete freedom Kandinsky advocated when he declared “All methods are sacred if they're internally necessary,” rather than knuckling under to the formalist doctrine of utter flatness advanced by Clement Greenberg and others in the Abstract Expressionist era, makes this an important painting. It also introduces an element pictorial tension that goes beyond the “push and pull” that an earlier influential teacher named Hans Hofmann cited as a way of activating the painted surface. A complex, iconic example of Zehring's work, “Reiki Corkscrew” simultaneously holds the wall and draws the viewer in with a dynamic authoritativeness that suggests an innovative, museum-worthy staying power.

Unlike other strong painters and charismatic teachers who turn out droves of “mini me” clones, one of Peggy Zehring's obvious strengths as a teacher seems to be her ability to inspire her students and spark their individual creativity, while instilling intellectual rigor, rather than influencing them stylistically. For each member of the “Inner Idea Artists” group projects a unique aesthetic identity.

David Zehring, for example, came to painting only a decade or so ago, after spending many years working as a reconstructive surgeon and semi-professional jazz musician. The latter vocation influenced his improvisational approach to composition, since he proceeds with no preconceived notions of where the painting should go, guided only by a strong belief that “it is most essential to make art that is truly one's own.” And he succeeds admirably in that goal, creating compositions, such as those in his

“Storm Series,” characterized by softly brushed, serenely stable near-minimalist forms, and quietly simmering, sometimes brooding, colors that can suggest a kinship with Rothko, yet come across as having emanated from his own unique “inner reality.”

In the tradition of Kandinsky (and perhaps her fellow Northwesterners Mark Tobey and Morris Graves as well) Seattle artist Margo Spellman sees painting as a way to “excavate the truth.” With their softly diffused forms and shimmering colors, her paintings have a searching quality that rewards prolonged scrutiny, producing a meditative sense of calm in the viewer. Donna Graham was strictly a fiber designer, working with tapestry, weaving, knitting, and crochet before being liberated by studying abstract painting with Peggy Zehring. Now she creates multimedia works that combine elements of fiber art and painting, achieving a unique combination of visual and tactile elements with a newfound freedom that is exhilarating to encounter.

The ancient discipline of Chi Gung and the rhythms of nature both inform the paintings of Anna Rogers, another artist from Washington State. Combining natural forms and esoteric symbols arrived at intuitively, Rogers' compositions are notable for definite forms and subtle textures achieved by “scumbling” colors over one another to produce subtle textures and chromatic variations.

The stylistic stamp of Kandinsky may be most obvious in the paintings of Mary Jane Rivers, with their busy compositions, biomorphic forms, and combination of a dancing lines and buoyant color areas. Rivers, however, puts her own unique spin on the master's visual vocabulary by virtue of her own indomitable spirit, which



*Margo Spellman*



*Cheryl Telford*



*Mary Sewell Cooper*



*Anna Rogers*



*Karen Frances*



*Linda Frederick*



*Lana Thomas*

shines through every stroke and gesture. Karen Frances favors strongly centralized compositions, with with flowing internal rhythms. Her forms hover in space and possess an almost hypnotic quality. By contrast, Cheryl Telford, yet another Washington State artist shows a kinship with Mark Tobey's "white writing" in her energetic calligraphic abstractions. Bold sinuous strokes, often monochromatic in the Asian tradition, lend Telford's paintings an engaging gestural grace.

There is also impressive gestural force in the paintings of Linda Frederick. However, Fredericks' lines turn inward in muscular convolutions akin to those of Brice Marden, albeit with more intense, full-bodied color, texture, and a pregnant emotional intensity that may owe in part to her study of Jungian symbols and archetypes.

Since Mary Sewell Cooper finds inspiration in various world cultures, "slippery glimpses" (to borrow de Kooning's felicitous phrase) and fleeting suggestions of primitivistic figures can sometimes be discerned in her paintings. But these elements, which apparently materialize subconsciously during the painting process, are all but subsumed by the overwhelmingly abstract force of her paintings.

Lana Thomas employs color and gesture in swirling compositions that can sometimes recall Orphism, the

more organic, chromatically heightened cousin of Cubism. Her use of texture created with both paint and collage lends her paintings a rugged, gemlike presence.

Then there is Fred Bender, whose paintings "embrace ambiguity," as he puts it with deep vibrant colors — often fiery reds and nocturnal blues — that glow from floating forms in luminously amorphous shapes, suggesting vast, mysterious spaces.

Bender's refusal to categorize his work and preference for going with the flow, as we used to say in the 1960s, affords him a freedom that appears to make each composition a journey of discovery.

The feeling that one comes away from this strong group exhibition, in which each artist reveals a distinctive aesthetic identity, even as they rally round a common cause, is that Peggy Zehring may have a nascent movement on her hands.

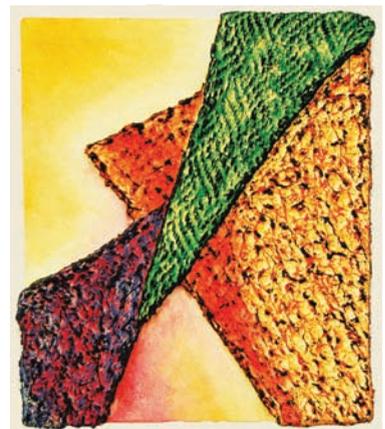
— Maurice Taplinger



*Fred Bender*



*Mary Jane Rivers*



*Donna Graham*

"Inner Idea Artists," recently seen at Montserrat Contemporary Art, 547 W. 27th St., Their works can also be viewed in the gallery's year-round salon.

## Michèle Vincent Transcribes the Soul's Yearnings

Although she is of a later generation, along with Leonor Fini and Dorothea Tanning, Michèle Vincent belongs to a very small and select spiritual sorority of women surrealists. True, she may prefer the term “art fantastique,” but her work continues to extend the possibilities of that fertile art movement into the present moment from a particularly feminine perspective.

Indeed, what makes Vincent's work especially distinctive is what can only be described as its fanciful stylistic filigree, a kind of intricate ornateness of vision that transcends the manifesto and machismo of André Breton and his masculine coterie and lends her work its special charm. Which is to say: with their delicate delineation of detail, crystal clear glazes, and often subtly erotic imagery, her paintings have the effect of a fragrant bouquet tossed like a subversive love-bomb into the decadent psychosexual dungeon of the Freudian male psyche.

The romantic fairy tale quality, mingled with darker elements of mystery, that makes Vincent's work so unique comes across stunningly in “Sacrifice in Ruins,” an especially intricate tour de force of a composition in which an androgynous figure with a classical profile, wearing only a flowing blue garment, kneels in ecstatic supplication before a mysterious vegetal queen who appears to have been created from swirling vegetal matter in an airborne realm where castles disperse into windblown autumn leaves amid billowing rhythmic waves of blue and purple clouds. The young woman smiles blissfully, even as one of her hands morphs into a skeletal claw; for at the pinnacle of the ruined castle already new green buds are blooming in the radiant glow of the light breaking through the pale blue clouds above the river of deep purple cumuli below, signaling a new day in the cycle of death and rebirth continuing ad infinitum.

Few surrealist painters can encapsulate so many philosophical notions in a single composition, as Vincent does here, as if to explain in her own unique visual language mysteries of life that humankind has mulled over since time immemorial, which she has arrived at intuitively through the process of opening the imagination to what Carl Jung called the collective unconscious.

The ambitiousness of the artist's inquiry can at times appear inexhaustible, as she piles one startling image upon another in a kind of fever of creation that also enlivens the composition entitled “Chess Game in Nature,” where two players at a board that, again, stretches to infinity in vanishing perspective, appear to be in a process of disappearing before the viewers' eyes into a woozy wavering stratosphere that, like Alice's looking glass, may serve as an entryway to the Other Side. The only earthly-looking element is the thick foliage writhing and thriving in the foreground of the picture space with a



“Chess Game in Nature”

vitality all its own.

The recurring theme behind much of Vincent's work seems to reach its apogee in the aptly named “Rebirth,” a painting which another writer reviewed in an earlier issue of this publication, accurately comparing it for its formal beauty and hues that appear illuminated from within to the magnificent Tiffany stained glass windows in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Suffice it to say here that “Rebirth” reveals Vincent to be as related to the Pre-Raphaelites as to the Surrealists for the almost morbid romanticism of her work.

Vincent alone, however, takes the kind of risks seen in the painting called “A Love of Books.” One of her most over-the-top compositions, its centerpiece is a great gnarled tree, from a limb of which an open book protrudes, serving as a bed on which an idealized couple of presumed nature sprites, both boasting long, wildly flying Medusa manes, makes love in the missionary position. The range of symbolic associations possible here — books being born of trees, to begin with — all but boggles the imagination, leaving even the most venturesome interpreter of surrealist symbolism at a loss.

For rather than rummaging in surrealism's dusty attic of timeworn props, it would appear that Vincent summons deeply personal imagery directly from her subconscious through a process of free association akin to channeling and transmits her dreams to the canvas virtually unedited. She succeeds in this by virtue of possessing the technical skill to imbue even her most

outrageous imagistic juxtapositions with a startling verisimilitude.

In the ruins of a great cathedral overrun by grass and exotic foliage a bent, bearded sage in long robes, leaning on a staff at the summit of which a bird of prey perches, encounters a young man in leather standing upright at a similar staff like a rock star behind a microphone. (It could be a metaphor for the chance meeting of The Grim Reaper and Jim Morrison of The Doors, and thus resonates far beyond the private meaning one suspects it has for the artist.)

In another painting, the same young man in leather (apparently a recurring character in Vincent's private mythology) is seen within painted shards of jaggedly broken glass that turn the picture-frame into a window, with a bird of prey perched on his shoulder amid a blizzard of what appear to be ghostly white tree-limbs. In yet another, he stands in a great hall, hoisting a woman who may be metamorphosing into a form of plant life high above his shoulders, up to the light streaming through the vaulted ceiling of yet another great cathedral.

Here again, the image eludes exact interpretation; yet it resonates with the mysterious auras that make the paintings of Michèle Vincent such universal mirrors on the submerged yearnings of the human soul.

— Marie R. Pagano

Michèle Vincent, year-round salon  
at Montserrat Contemporary Art,  
547 West 27th Street.

# Jiwan Joo: Recycling in the Labyrinth of the Information Age

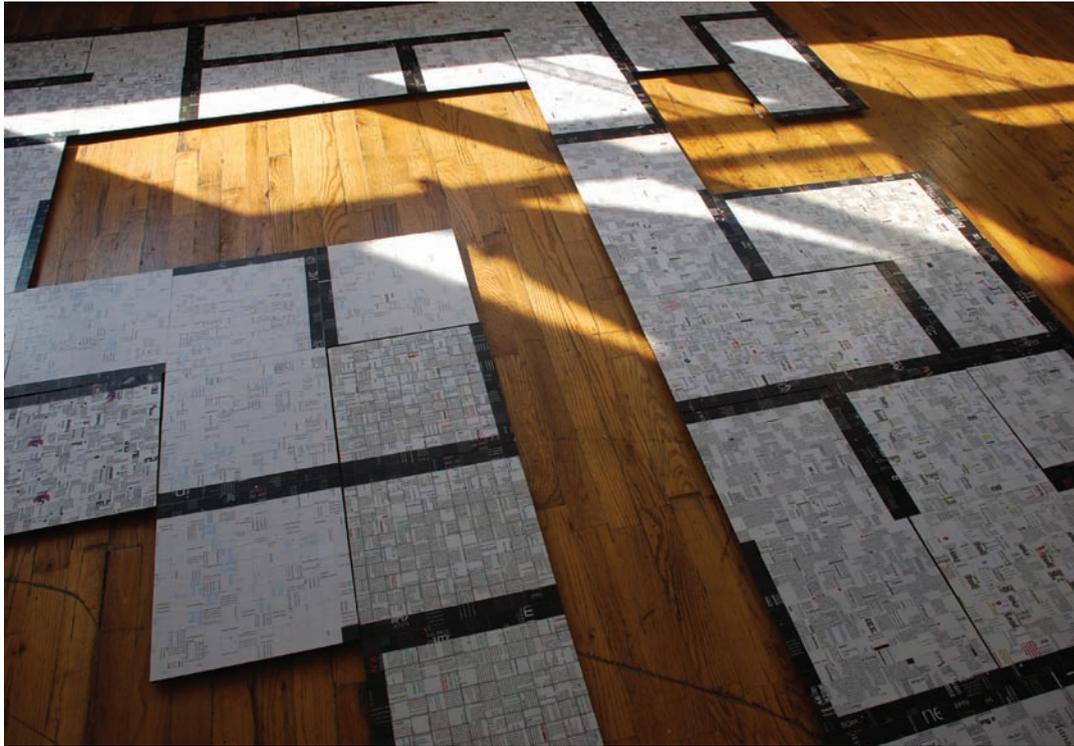
Traversing the floor-work “Labyrinth as Puzzle,” by the Korean artist Jiwan Joo, at Noho Gallery in Chelsea, someone who makes his living writing about art can feel like the Minotaur, the half-man half-bull, that the first Labyrinth in Greek Mythology, was designed by the original artificer Daedalus, on orders from King Minos of Crete, to entrap. Or else he might feel like the cartoon character Little Lulu on the vintage Kleenex box, holding up another Kleenex box on which there is picture of Little Lulu holding up a Kleenex box — and so on and so forth with the images growing tinier until they are invisible, but presumably continuing ad infinitum.

For along with other art related snippets of information contained in the intricate text collages zigzagging around the gallery floor in a daunting maze that the viewer enters and then must find his or

her way out of, are fragments of cut and pasted art reviews, among which this writer caught glimpses of the familiar names of artists he has written about — Sheila Hecht, Marilyn Henrion, Stephen Cimini, Malka Inbal, AK Corbin — taken out of context and mingled with the truncated logos of various art publications and scissored and spliced phrases of a kind that clog the minds and haunt the dreams of those of us who spend interminable hours trapped in a labyrinth of verbiage, wrestling like Laocoon with serpentine sentences, trying to still their writhing convolutions and nail their tails to pages with periods in the futile struggle to translate visual experience into language.

Obviously, Jiwan Joo must feel similarly embattled; for she states: “I’ve been working with ‘labyrinth’ as my subject matter for many years. Sometimes I feel that I lock myself up in a labyrinth that I made myself. . . . I wake up and work each day, as a part of my everyday routine. Day after day, I travel to the center of the labyrinth, where I might dream, faintly, of escape.”

Other artists — the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, author of a book of short stories called “labyrinths,” and Umberto Eco in “Name of the Rose” — have found inspiration in such mazes. But Joo, it would seem, has explored the theme more persistently than most, having created various types of mazes over the years, including a 2009 solo exhibition called “Sand Labyrinth” for a gallery in Richmond, where she was Visiting Artist in Residence at Virginia Commonwealth University in 2004-2006.



Like those labyrinths on cathedral floors which serve as substitutes for pilgrimage paths, however, the present exhibition is specifically designed for true devotees of the art world. For it references not only the literally hundreds of contemporary artists whose exhibition reviews figure in its content like characters in one of William Burroughs’ elliptical “cut-up” novels, but also well-known works from distant and recent art history.

Among the most immediately recognizable of the latter are the Merz collages of Kurt Schwitters and the flat floor sculptures of Carl Andre, which Joo brings together in a neat, if unlikely, synthesis of Dada and Minimalism.

Startled to discover my own name — or at least “Cormack,” the part of it of which I’m proudest, being the name of the last pagan king of Ireland, from whom I like to think I am descended — as well as snippets of my deathless prose (now morphed into a species of concrete poetry by Joo’s judicious scissors) among the texts that collide and overlap, I must concur with the artist, when she states:

“Materials that artists need are everywhere all the time. In prehistoric times, when there were few artistic tools and materials, people drew on cave walls, and artists used silver cigarette paper during the deprivations of war. Now we live in a society that is full of information. There are tons of printed matter that display knowledge and information everywhere. Everyday material objects inspire me naturally as materials for my art. I separate pieces of everyday life and reconfigure them. In this way, I recycle my energy and

recombine the garbage that is abandoned by human society. My work is just one small part of the flood of information in a huge civilization.”

While in ancient times labyrinths were used as traps for malevolent monsters and spirits or paths for ceremonial dances or spiritual treks, the artist seems to be telling us, today

they can serve a dual ecological and archival purpose by corraling and preserving our cultural detritus in a form that invites active participation by the viewer. But this explanation strikes one as being far too humble; for Joo does a great deal more: By reconfiguring the labyrinth as an expressive rather than ritual space, with printed texts substituted for primitive symbols and petroglyphs, she opens up new avenues for conceptualists, sculptors, installation artists, performance artists, and perhaps even choreographers, to explore.

Also a celebrated ceramics artist with a lengthy list of exhibition credits in Seoul and other cultural centers of the world, with this show Jiwan Joo establishes herself as an innovator whose subsequent exhibitions one eagerly anticipates as harbingers for coming aesthetic tendencies. — Ed McCormack

Jiwan Joo, Labyrinth as Puzzle,  
Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th Street,  
November 1 - 26, 2011.

## In the New Abstraction, Anything Goes

What becomes clear each year is that abstract painting grows increasingly allusive in the postmodern era, as seen in “Abstractions 2011 (Moving Currents),” curated by Anne Rudder and William Hunt for the West Side Arts Coalition.

Emily Rich is one of the purists, however, still finding sufficient subject matter in the way paint itself behaves when it is dripped in lovely rivulets or flows in milky semi-translucent washes over other previous forms and hues to create a kind of hide and seek pentimento. Rich is an especially interesting colorist when she juxtaposes alizarin crimsons and lemon yellows to create tart, acidic harmonies that play off brightly against mellow pink, gray, and pale blue hues. By contrast, black ink on white paper is all Robert N. Scott needs in “New Order” an intricately swirling, mostly circular, composition that unwinds like a ball of wool in sinuous linear strands. However, Scott employs a limited palette of ochers and blues with equal effectiveness in “Reassuring Mountain Breeze” and “Transition,” two organic abstractions reminiscent of early American modernists such as Arthur Dove and Georgia O’Keeffe.

Two works by Marie Robison also display a unique versatility. In “Creation,” the forms are amorphous and the colors flow together liquidly, like translucent lava, giving the effect,

as the title hints, of something coming into being. “The Joker is Wild,” however, hints at a deconstructed harlequin, with its bright, solid colors and jigsaw-puzzle composition. Meyer Tannenbaum has worked through a variety of styles to arrive at a bright universe of symbols as lively as those of Klee or Miro. His “Direct Impact” series is well named for the way it socks one in the eye with its vibrant hues and animated forms suggesting dancing geometry. Leanne Martinson, on the other hand, suggests another kind of dance — a Strauss waltz, maybe — with soft pinks, yellows, and baby blues and lilting gestural rhythms in a work called “Wind-Breakup.” But in two other oils on paper with the word “wind” in the title, dominated by blue hues, the rhythms turn more symphonically blustery.

Nate Ladson’s subtle color field compositions in oil and mixed media project a numinous glow. Particularly pleasing in this regard is “Explosion,” which suggests not devastation but the thrilling nocturnal fireworks display by virtue of Ladson’s characteristic chromatic ebullience. Those who think of Anne Rudder solely as a painter-poet who works in watercolor in the tradition of William Blake will be surprised by her “Broken Garden.” For in this composition in acrylic on canvas, with its semiabstract figures, sensual floral forms, and Nabi-like

patterns, Rudder displays an unexpected kinship with Matisse that makes one aware of her multifaceted creative complexity.

Yukako is another artist with the capacity to surprise us. For on the basis of earlier exhibitions in which she showed buoyant watercolors on paper, one had her pegged as a contemporary painter building on the Asian tradition. Here, however, Yukako exhibited a large acrylic on canvas, dominated by reds, called “Rose Curtain,” in which her graceful cursive strokes are thickly layered and take on the heft and depth of Abstract Expressionism.

In his two oils on canvas, “Windy Day” and “Sunset,” Artur Pashkov displayed a vibrant variation on nature abstraction. Combining pale yet luminous hues with precise linear elements within flowing shapes that project a sense of the underlying forces and energies that animate natural forms.

Line also figured prominently, along with intricate pointillist dots and spare, precise color areas, in the nine sections that made up Elizabeth K. Hill’s work “Nominating Morphemes.” Graceful and sinuous, the various sections conducted a varied aesthetic

*Continued on page 28*

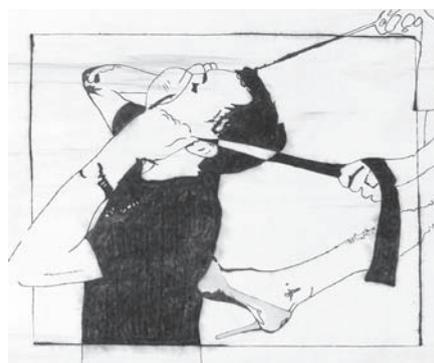
WSAC, Abstractions 2011 (Moving Currents), recently seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, Broadway and 96th Street (center island).

## Carlo Proietto: Conundrums Cloaked in a Pristine Aesthetic

Carlo Proietto has written two exhaustively researched books on pyrography, rescuing the technique of burning images into wood or fabric with a heated instrument from the misperception of being “a relatively minor art form,” establishing once and for all that it is, as he puts, “comparable to any art form.” It is in his own fine art works, however, that he drives this point home most convincingly and dynamically.

For on encountering his pointedly titled solo exhibition, “Born of Fire,” leaves no question that Proietto is a contemporary artist of the first rank, working in a graphic medium that he makes second to none. At times his lines can be as fine as those in the pen and ink drawings of the art nouveau master Aubrey Beardsley. However the brown hue that Proietto creates with the burning technique also lends his images a more mellow and even painterly quality, especially in the solid dark areas of his compositions, where he achieves subtle nuances of tone and texture.

It is above all the originality of his imagery that makes these works most remarkable, particularly in relation to the plight of human beings in contemporary society. Many of his images are mysterious, obviously based on a hermetic system of personal symbols that makes them teasingly closer to poetry than



“Domatore”

prose. However, the prevalence of anti-contagion face-masks on many of his figures hints at the toxicity of our environment, the ever-present danger of communicable disease, and the threat of chemical terrorism that haunts our troubled time.

Although there is an obvious peril in interpreting such a complex iconography too literally, in Proietto’s “Geisha,” in which the flower bedecked head of a Japanese beauty, the lower half of her face hidden by the omnipresent mask could suggest the Hiroshima mushroom cloud, with the dark area of her broad cummerbund standing in for the charred land below. Whether or not the image was occasioned by the recent nuclear plant leaks in rural Japan, it is a potent

image, evoking a modern world fraught with dangers and disasters that the Japanese print master Hokusai, whose delicacy of line Proietto appears to channel here, could never have envisioned.

Another kind of dread comes across in Proietto’s “Dal Barbiere,” where a white mass of shaving cream, rather than the expected face mask, partially obscures a close-up male face firmly in the grasp of a razor-wielding woman barber with blood-red fingernails. Here, the touch of color creates a visual effect at once Pop and visceral.

In other works, however, more formal qualities come to the forefront, as seen in “Cinese,” where a stylized, semiabstract Asian woman wearing an ornate kimono is enveloped in a serpentine dark linear swirl more overtly reminiscent of the aforementioned Aubrey Beardsley.

But lest the viewer be lulled into serene complacency by such an interval of formal beauty, Proietto once again restores the element of anxiety with “Domatore,” an image of a man in a face mask struggling against a female antagonist attempting to strangle him from behind while jamming the

*Continued on page 28*

Carlo Proietto, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, December 23, 2011 - January 12, 2012. Reception: Thursday, December 29, 6-8 pm.

# Jacquelyn Etling's Journey from Photographic Prodigy to Mature Mastery

Like Jacques-Henri Lartigue, the French “boy photographer of La Belle Époque,” the contemporary photographer Jacquelyn Etling started taking pictures early in life. In fact, both were given their first camera at age seven, Etling’s a gift from her father, alongside whom she began photographing the grand vistas of the Teton Mountain Range. And unlike Lartigue, who, after being hailed as a child prodigy, gave up photographing the fashionable ladies and gentleman strolling the boulevards and promenades of Paris in his twenty-first year to take up painting, Etling has remained faithful to landscape photography, becoming one of our most original interpreters of Southwestern desert scenes.

Discovering her artistic vocation at an early age has apparently immunized Etling against aesthetic affectations and self-conscious influences. Her preference for black and white photography over color had already made her something of a purist in the tradition of Stieglitz before she studied the subject at Sacred Heart University, where she is presently an adjunct professor of Art History. And she still steers clear of the trendy gimmickry of much postmodern photographic practice, recalling, “When I was a child I was fascinated with the old family albums at my grandmother’s house. I loved the magical quality of photography, its ability to freeze time and preserve the past. I am constantly trying to record and preserve my own experiences of the world.”

While studying for her degree in art history, Etling traveled to Europe to tour its museums, experience its many masterpieces firsthand, and photograph its architectural treasures. But just as important to her artistic development were the childhood trips that she took with her family each summer, particularly one to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she first fell in love with the rugged beauty of the desert.

In the series called “Crisscrossing the Four Corners: A Photographic Journey Through the Southwest,” she employs the infrared photo process, which highlights the infrared end of the light spectrum and is particularly well suited to dramatize the bright sun-lit landscapes of the region.

Given Etling’s abiding affection for

unforgiving vistas of arid land, one can make obvious comparisons of her work to that of Ansel Adams — at least in specific cases. In terms of the differences between their approaches to similar subject matter, however, it is instructive to compare Etling’s picture of a rustic cemetery set against a backdrop of rugged mountains under majestic cloud formations, “Taos Crosses,” to Adams’ “Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico, 1941.” Characteristically, Adams keeps his distance, presenting an encampment of scattered shacks and its rudimentary cemetery in his characteristic manner from



“Taos Crosses”

the point of view of an outsider passing, perhaps in a pickup truck, at night.

By contrast, Etling brings us as close as a visiting mourner crushing the dry brush underfoot to the crude crosses that memorialize lives lived out in this desolate stretch of land. Thus she brings an underlying emotional resonance to the image that is absent from Adams’ more dispassionate view.

In another picture, “Approaching Storm,” Etling captures clouds rolling over the desert with a dramatic dynamism all her own. Here, one can truly appreciate the photographer’s firm grasp of form and the play of lights and darks over the landscape that make for high pictorial drama, particularly in the overcast fragment of sky visible between the massive forms of the cumuli, as well as the subtly nuanced chiaroscuro that give a sense of sculptural volume to the underbelly of the low-lying clouds themselves.

Equally dramatic in its own manner is “Illumination Tree,” where the light-kissed leaves of a tree rising from the pinnacle of a craggy black rock contrast with its gnarled trunk and branches, silhouetted sharply against a cloudless expanse of sky.

Stark contrasts of light and shadow also play a prominent role in “Horses Canyon de Chelley,” where a dark horse gallops past a row of brilliantly backlit trees in an image of exhilarating freedom amounting to a visual epiphany.

Two other impressive prints, while retaining the strong sense of place that lends Etling’s pictures a regional continuity, suggest a spiritual kinship with the experimental spirit of Edward Weston, another great photographer who discovered his lifelong vocation relatively early, after seeing a photo exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago

for the first time at age sixteen.

Like Weston, who was influenced by the very facets of modernist painting that Ansel Adams resisted in his insistence on a strict documentation of landscape, Etling is not adverse to finding abstraction within a natural setting. Her “Adobe Abstraction,” for example is a primarily geometric composition created from starkly intersecting close-ups of adobe structures defined by contrasting tones and shadows. The only organic touches are a small puff of white

cloud that reads like a gestural flourish and a large mound of straw-covered clay that provides “painterly” textures to enliven the lower left portion of the picture.

Then there is “White Palace,” another picture in which distinctive tactile adobe surfaces and a prominent wisp of what appears to be white smoke create a more amorphous sense of nature transformed, elusively unspecific yet poetically redolent of desert essences.

To encounter the photography of Jacquelyn Etling is to find oneself in the presence of a talent un beholden to trends and fashions. Having discovered her life’s vocation while she still possessed a child’s freshness of vision, she has pursued it with single-minded purpose into adulthood, all the while honing her technique and perfecting her art, to arrive at her consummately sophisticated personal vision.

— Byron Coleman

Jacquelyn Etling, Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, November 1 - 26, 2011.  
Receptions: Thursday, Nov. 3, 5 - 8 pm  
and Sat., Nov. 5, 3 - 6 pm.

# Carlota Figueras Revises the Way We See Women

I was impressed by the work of Carlota Figueras the minute I first saw her nude full color photographic self-portrait posing like a female Christ on a cross with blood dripping down from her crown of thorns onto her bare breasts. At once sensual and gory, graphic and Goyaesque, that picture by this brave young Spanish artist, struck me as the ultimate feminist statement. It also seemed as Spanish as a bullfight: Cindy Sherman, eat your heart out!

Figueras continues to push the envelope in her new exhibition at Montserrat Contemporary Art, with a new series of in full color triptychs in which she poses as different sexist stereotypes: as a ballerina in a tutu; in green feather boa and derby as a Weimar era entertainer like Liza Minelli in "Cabaret"; in a spiky wig, tee-shirt, and black jeans as a hostile teenage punkette; in pink shorty nighty, long ears, and cottontail as a Playboy Club bunny; as a bodacious drum majorette in a short skirt and top hat; as a hula dancer in grass skirt;



as a wild bride, pulling her white veil aside to unveil her bare breasts; as a dominaetrix in black leather mask wielding a whip; as a Nordic amazon triumphantly brandishing one of the detachable horns from her helmet as a dildo; as a female fencer striking a menacing posture with a foil. . .

In each of her triptychs, however, the centerpiece is a picture of the costumed artist lying in a coffin, as if to acknowledge the mortality that awaits us all, regardless of what roles we assume.

A video artist as well as a still photographer, in one installation Figueras puns visually on the notion of a "fallen angel" by impersonating a falling angel. Wearing a long white gown and white wings, she hangs upside-down from a tree in a leaf-carpeted forest. Feathers float by, presumably from her wings and fall like autumn leaves. Then, after an interval of several seconds, the angel falls into the leaves with a thud.

In another sequence, wearing the same white costume and wings, the artist appears in the distance in the same leaf-carpet forest.

She runs clumsily toward the viewer, falling several times along the way. As she gets close the rustling sound of her feet thrashing through the dried leaves becomes audible. Then she falls with a crash, and the camera reels vertiginously, slanting the trees of the forest before the screen goes black.

Carlotta Figueras enters transgressively into established social/religious myths in her narrative photographs and videos, revising replaying them in a manner that some will find disturbingly controversial. In the process, she unearths underlying truths, showing that things are not always as they seem when memories and dreams take over to distort our preconceived notions.

Although she employs humor in some pieces, especially when she camps it up in various costumes the art of Carlotta Figueras is thoughtful and serious. This is especially so in regard to her works dealing with how we see women in contemporary society, as well as the manner in which the so-called Male Gaze that dominates art history has regarded them down through the centuries.

— Marie R. Pagano

Carlota Figueras, Montserrat Contemporary Art, 547 West 27th Street, through November 12, 2011.

## CARROZZINI

*Continued from page 11*

whose large abstraction of painted and scraped oil and acrylic in streaked rainbow hues suggests a sequence of elusive images within a rough grid. "After all, dreams are but shattered reflections of a broken reality," says the artist, a former engineer, whose composition suggests fragmented sequences of events transpiring in a nocturnal realm of neon and shadow.

Stefania Carrozzini's curatorial signature is the lively catalog covers she creates, which invariably summarize her exhibitions' themes. Interestingly enough, while most of the artists in "Dreamscapes" showed abstractions, Carrozzini's collage is filled with antic imagery best described as "Pop Surrealism."

— Byron Coleman

## ASCA

*Continued from page 19*

abstract forms projecting a monumental presence without making overt reference to the figure or any other recognizable subject.

Also including works by Gerda Roze, Olivia Koopaletthes, Elvira Dimitrij, Georgina Cray Bart, Harriet FeBland, Doris Wyman, and several other names familiar to frequent gallery goers which were, unfortunately, unavailable for review at deadline time, this annual delivered on the promise of its name, presenting an engagingly eclectic survey of present ASCA members.

— Maureen Flynn

## DE LA SIERRA

*Continued from page 21*

becomes in De La Sierra's oeuvre, the perfect tool for extension of the human imagination into the infinite reaches of the surreal. Indeed, the precise forms, smoothly shimmering surfaces, and luminous hues that De La Sierra produces with this technology transforms cyberspace into the perfect surrogate for outer space in compositions such as the whimsically titled "Flowers on Mars Grow Sideways."

And even the familiar forms of nature take on otherworldly auras in another new series interpreting the theme "The Four Seasons" in hues that glow like the neon in his earlier sculptures, combined with symbols (the omnipresent lobsters; disembodied torsos; in "Spring," a looming face, bathed in fluorescently verdant auras, suggesting legendary Green Man) as surreal as those in his cosmic vistas.

Dali had his faithful wife, muse, and manager, Gala. For the past 33 years, his spiritual descendent Alexis De La Sierra (who, in a Dali-esque gesture of his youth, appeared as nude as Michelangelo's David on the cover one of his exhibition catalogues, genitals hidden behind one of his sculptures, just a discreet tuft of pubic hair showing!) has had an equally loyal manager named Ion H. Pervilhac Fournier to guide his star. Long may it shine in a brilliant cosmos of his own invention.

— Ed McCormack

## WSAC ABSTRACTONS 2011

*Continued from page 26*

dialogue with each other from within their discrete panels.

Rounding out this engaging survey of emerging abstract trends were the mixed media collage paintings of Joseph Boss. Featuring boldly looping, lushly colorful shapes that gave way, like freeform windows, to photographic imagery apparently appropriated from popular magazines, Boss's baroque compositions demonstrated yet another way that purely formal and representational elements interact in the anything-goes arena of postmodern abstraction.

— Maureen Flynn

## CARLO PROIETTO

*Continued from page 26*

toe of her pink stiletto-heeled pump into the small of his back.

A comment of amore in the Age of Anxiety? One cannot say for certain. For like most of Carlo Proietto's images it is highly suggestive in a manner that leaves ample room for multiple interpretations, even as one marvels at the pristine aesthetic qualities which make even this artist's most disturbing pictures a joy to behold.

— Maurice Taplinger

# IDIOSYNCRATIC EXPRESSIONS



© Eduard Anikonov - part of - Industrial Landscape 3 - 55" x 59"

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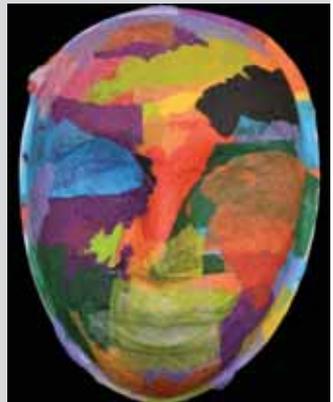
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