

GALLERY & STUDIO

Edouard Vuillard at the Jewish Museum: From a “Secret Society” to High Society

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Edouard Vuillard, *Woman in a Striped Dress*, from *The Album*, 1895, oil on canvas.
The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, 1983.I.38.

A BELATED MEA CULPA FOR SIGH MORE GRIM,
ALICE ALIAS, AND THE RAZORBLADE HEIRESS
a new excerpt from Ed McCormack's **HOODLUM HEART**

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Edouard Vuillard's Journey From "Secret Society" to High Society at The Jewish Museum

One tends to think of Edouard Vuillard's early work in the same breath as his lifelong friend Pierre Bonnard's later work, as "indoor Impressionism," with chiaroscuro on foliage often replaced by the patterns in wallpaper, carpets, draperies and other decorative domestic materials. With Bonnard in the 1890s, the young Vuillard fell under the spell of the Nabis, a "secret society" named from the Hebrew word for prophet.

Led by the Symbolist painter Paul Serusier, in whose Paris studio the group met weekly to study the supernatural aspects of Eastern religion as interpreted by the new cult of Theosophy, founded in New York by the Russian mystic Helena Blavatsky, the Nabis were influenced artistically by the flat-patterned Symbolist compositions that Gauguin created in Brittany, particularly his "Yellow Christ," before setting off for Tahiti to be seduced by the beauty of the native women and find his true métier.

During this period Vuillard painted some of his most memorable pictures, such as the 1895 oil on canvas "Woman in a Striped Dress," where the foreground figure of a pretty young woman in red and white candy-stripes and the older female companion looking over her shoulder as she arranges a vase of flowers, are all but subsumed by a brilliant plenitude of colorful patterns laid down with vivaciously dappled brushstrokes. Its opulence presents a marked contrast to the earlier oil on cardboard "Mother and Daughter Against a Red Background, 1891," where the Gauguin influence is more obvious in the sketchy lines, flat areas of color, and lack of modeling that makes the composition almost abstract in its simplicity.

Vuillard employs the same medium of oil on cardboard, a surface which contributes to the flattening effect by virtue of its absorbency, in the much more complex composition "Misia and Vallotton at Villeneuve," 1899. Here, Misia Natanson, the wife of his first art dealer Thadée Natanson, is seen at a table in the foreground either removing or putting the lid on a china bowl while the painter Felix Vallotton, Vuillard's friend and fellow Nabi, stands in the background casting a sidewise glance her way. In a soap opera sense, it is intriguing to imagine that Vallotton's look may be a glance askance, since Vuillard and Misia had an affair. But the real drama in the picture is provided by how masterfully Vuillard melds the quiet riot of floral patterns in the wallpaper with the floral still life on the wall, the real flowers in a blue vase on the table below, and the darker pattern on Misia's garment in the

foreground, lending the entire composition a unifying harmony.

In "Misia," 1897-99, Vuillard again employs oil on cardboard — but here more in the manner that Toulouse-Lautrec used it, primarily as a drawing medium, almost as one might apply pastel, leaving the tan color of the surface untouched all around the head and shoulders of the pale young model with rouged cheeks.

When the Nabis broke up around 1900, as such groups are bound to do as artists mature and get on with their individual



Edouard Vuillard, Lucy Hessel at the Seashore, c. 1904, Oil on hardboard. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, the Armand Hammer Collection, Gift of the Armand Hammer Foundation.

pursuits, Bonnard retreated into domestic seclusion to concentrate on painting his well known pictures of his wife in the bath (where she spent a great deal of time, having an almost pathological obsession with personal hygiene), Vuillard took up a form society portraiture akin to that of John Singer Sargent, to which he imparted a Proustian dimension.

Indeed Proust and Vuillard moved in the same social circles and the novelist is thought by some to have based his character Elstir at least in part on the painter, even while making him a mouthpiece for the author's own ideas about art. Had Proust been more privy to Vuillard's intimate affairs he might have added yet another dimension to the character by exploring Vuillard's penchant for falling in love with the wives of his art dealers.

The raven-haired beauty who eventually replaced Misia as Vuillard's patron, muse, and lover when her husband, Jos Hessel, replaced Thadée Natanson as his art dealer, certainly makes an appealing subject in the

1904 oil on hardboard "Lucy Hessel at the Seashore." Wearing a light summer dress as she leans back in an almost recumbent position of repose on a deck chair on a patio overlooking a pale green sea, she is enveloped in sensuously fleshy pink tones almost as freely brushed as those in any abstraction or violently deconstructed nude by de Kooning. Her dark eyes and the soft curve of her smile, both accomplished with just the slightest swipe of a brush are serene, however, appearing almost post coitally sleepy, as though the open book that she holds might at any second fall from her lap.

Equally vivacious for the swift certainty of its brushwork is the still-life "Guillemet Roses and the Venus de Milo," 1905, in which the floral bouquet and white plaster torso are both reflected in the mirror above an ornate mantelpiece. Then there is "Luncheon at Les Clayes," 1935-38, a work in glue-based distemper and charcoal on paper in which the seemingly spontaneous and breezy execution of a scene showing several diners at a table belies the apparently lengthy period of the picture's conception and completion.

Compare the sparkling freshness of all the previous paintings to "Marcelle Aron (Madame Tristan Bernard)," an obviously commissioned portrait in the same medium on canvas, in which the elegantly dressed matron with a strand of pearls dangling from her neck seated on lace-draped sofa petting what appears to be a pampered white afghan hound, in a parlor so fussily detailed that it could serve as a set for a photo shoot in Better Homes and Gardens — and, well, all one can think is, "Everybody has to make a living."

Far more vigorous is Vuillard's 1939 portrait of the art dealer Sam Salz, sporting a natty blue suit with a white pocket square and tan suede shoes, as he leans forward on a divan as though engaged in an animated conversation with an unseen friend.

The show features 50 paintings, along with a selection of prints photographs and documents detailing Vuillard's relationships with the most influential figures in the cultural life of Paris, many of whom were Jewish. Covering the period from the Fin de Siècle to 1940, the year of his death, this is the first major New York exhibition of this important French painter's work in over twenty years.

— Ed McCormack

Edouard Vuillard: A Painter and His Muses, 1890 - 1940, through September 23, 2012, The Jewish Museum, Fifth Avenue 1109 Fifth Ave. at 92nd Street

WSAC Artists Reveal Their “Gems”

Curated by participating artists Robert Schultheis and Robert Scott, the West Side Arts Coalition group show “Spring Gems” was an auspiciously refreshing seasonal sampler.

Included were small yet commanding fabric works by Michelle Melo, who literally draws with thread, creating graceful linear abstractions. Like the elegant scrawls of Cy Twombly, Melo’s forms are possessed of a rare grace and delicate tactility in the series wittily titled “Do Not Play With Needles.” Subtle textural elements of another kind enliven the minimalist abstractions of Mary Ryan. In compositions whose creamy mixed media surfaces, primarily in sky-blue tones, delicate wavering forms rise, barely visible to the surface, suggesting wisps of cloud or smoke given a palpable physical presence.

Abhijit Goswami, on the other hand, pulls out all stops texturally, in compositions such as “Unscheduled & Unlettered in the Land of Lapis Lazuli,” where mixed media is employed to create an effect that suggests pointillist bas-relief. Like Alfred Jensen, who went his own metaphysical way during the Abstract Expressionist era, Goswami combines strong composition with lush color and decorative borders in a manner reminiscent of classical Persian and Islamic art.

By contrast, Basia Goldsmith applies the spontaneous attack of “action painting” to classical floral still life subjects to vigorous effect. Goldsmith’s red, yellow, and violet blooms bleed brilliant rivulets of dripped paint amid slashing gray strokes that evoke the surrounding walls of room interiors as energetically as the organic objects themselves.

Then there is Robert Scott, whose oils evoke floating orbs and flowing ribbons of fiery color set against dark cosmic expanses. Scott, whose painting style hangs on the firm armature of strong draftsmanship skills can be compared to Matta for the almost science fictional dynamism of his approach to abstraction.

Gloria Pearl sets buoyant forms afloat on brilliant color fields in oils such as “Reverie” and “Nocturne,” which project a festive mood. Yet Pearl also reveals an ability to make a more sonorous statement with rich earth colors and muscularly interlocked shapes in “Afro Pop,” its title referring to a contagious rhythmic sound currently in vogue in the World Music field.

Then there is Hanna Seiman, whose large acrylic painting “Reflection of a Thought” features a vertical central form resembling a golden exclamation point. Reverberating on a blue color field amid ghostly areas of white light intersected by a faint horizon line, Seiman’s symbol suggests how an intellectual idea can be received as an almost spiritual epiphany.

The multiple circles in Liz Hill’s work in acrylic, markers, and scratchboard, appear mysterious until one learns the work’s title, “Dry Trilogy,” and realizes that they are the Moloch glass eyes of familiar washing machines and the swirls within them are clothing. Even more specific is the title of another work in acrylic: “In the Laundry Room,” but here Hill starkly pares down circular shapes in linear monochromes within a grid to make a strikingly spare formal statement.

Figure painting also makes a strong showing in Arne Lewis’ portrait “Chana,” in which she combines the portraiture skills of Alice Neil with the iconic simplicity of Alex Katz by way of Matisse to conjure up an elegantly coiffed and confident young woman in a bright red dress. Lewis’ aesthetic poise and economy of line also come across in “Natsuki,” a charcoal drawing of a woman wearing a Japanese kimono. Another gifted figure painter, Aya Ogasawara made an impression with an oil entitled, “The Ritual Giving Birth to Me.” Painted in subdued tones in the unadorned Surrealist manner of Magritte, Ogasawara’s compelling self-portrait, depicted the standing figure of a slender young woman swaddled in a purple cloth, out of the other end of which a replica of herself is emerging.

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WSAC, “Spring Gems,” recently seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, 96th Street (center island).

The Rhythm of Color



© Katherine DuTremble - Mini Lakes - Oil on Canvas - 24" x 12"

July 31 - August 21, 2012

Reception: Thursday, August 2, 6 - 8pm

Patricia Brintle Sarah Cousineau Katherine DuTremble
Nada Herman Julia Ismambetova Roland Morin
Ingrid Roth Paul Satheesh

THE FRENCH PERSPECTIVE Contemporary Art from France



© Cécile Guicheteau - Le Monde - Oil on Canvas - 51" x 31.5"

July 7 - July 27, 2012

Reception: Thursday, July 12, 6-8pm

Nathalie Armand Doussineau Claude Julien Eustache
Cécile Guicheteau Ainhoa Menchaca Taitmès Soinoff
Danielle Stange

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Gabe Tong's Paintings Reinvalidate the Formal Vocabulary of Cubism

Since Cubism originally had all to do with exploiting the flatness of objects and forms on the two-dimensional surface of the picture plane, the phrase “3D” cubism could seem a contradiction in terms — that is, until one encounters the paintings of an intrepid and innovative Chinese-American artist named Gabe Tong.

Tong, who was born with multiple eye defects that should have stopped him from seeing, much less inventing his own one-man movement, creates vibrantly colorful oils on canvas that immediately reveal the accuracy of his term. Perhaps Tong's closest artistic ancestor would be Fernand Leger for the shaded sense of solid volumes that he brings to his forms, which while abstract often allude to the figure, as seen in his “Duet Pianist” series, inspired by watching concert performances by his two musician daughters over a period of twenty years.

These glowing canvases with their complex, rhythmic interlocking forms suggest not only the musicians but the transcendent shape of the music itself. Here, as in all of Tong's paintings, the composition takes on an almost sculptural dimension that does evoke a sense of three dimensional depth. (Indeed, someone I showed them to remarked that they could resemble pictures of sculpture.) While the first painting in the “Duet Pianist” series is executed in the

subdued earth tones, ranging from deep sienna to pale ochre that one normally associates with Cubism, and the forms of both figure and piano, although stylized, are readily discernible at a glance, later works in the series, such as “Duet Pianist VIII,” dynamically deconstruct the forms of the figure, the piano, and even the individual keys, more abstractly and heighten the colors to a brilliant chromatic pitch.

There is an innate good humor to Gabe Tong's paintings that also makes him a kindred spirit of hip young artists like Dana Schutz and George Condo who wreak delightful havoc with aspects of art history and Pop culture. In “Twilight, The Movie,” for example, the characters of that popular film franchise come alive as organically merged shapes locked in mortal combat by the eerie light of a big fat full moon.

Someone once said, “In order to be a real abstract artist rather than just a ‘nonobjective’ one, you have to abstract from something,” and the sources of Tong's inspiration, while often distorted, are almost always evident in his compositions. This is especially true of his “Harley Davidson Softail” series, where the rider and the machine merge in a manner that not only shows his formal kinship with the aforementioned Leger but also with the Nutty Putty fluidity of the much revered veteran Chicago painter Peter Saul. Wheels

and flamelike waves of brilliant color conspire in these compositions to create a sense of exhilarating velocity and multileveled simultaneity also reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's “Nude Descending a Staircase.”



“Duet Pianist VI”

Then there is “Uranus + 27 Moons,” where Tong seems to invent yet another school that one might call 3D Orphism (an offshoot of Cubism and Synchronism notable for its radiant pure color harmonies, often evoking what its chief practitioner Delaunay once described as “music pulsating through the universe.” Tong goes even further in his artist statement, saying, “Here thick layers of paint simulate the gravitational pull between

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Gabe Tong, Agora Gallery,
530 West 25th St., July 7 - July 27, 2012.
(Reception: Thursday, July 12, 6 - 8pm.)

Beyond Photojournalism: Photo Artists Reflect on 9/11 a Decade Later

Advertised as “A documentary photography exhibit on the aftermath of 9/11 and the resurgence of downtown and Lower Manhattan,” and curated for the West Side Arts Coalition by Jean Prytykacz, one of the participating artists, “Ten Years After” was filled with contrasts, some heart-wrenching, others heartening — or at least hopeful.

Among the former were Richard Zapata's almost cinematic sequence of images “Burning,” “Smoke,” and “Running.” The smoke billowing from the towers against the clear blue sky turned an idyllic Fall day into a surreal nightmare with pedestrians gawking up in horror, then fleeing for their lives. Zapata's color pictures, which included others called “Safe Zone,” “Collapse” and “Coming Down” captured it all with poignant urgency.

Dr. Barry Pinchefskey also showed moving images. One called “Collateral Damage” focused on a battered Police Emergency vehicle appearing wounded beyond repair in a manner that gives it an almost anthropomorphic quality. Another, called “Clean-Up Crew,” by this always humanistic photographer, captures two men in face masks, one giving the ambiguous hand sign one can only assume in this case means Victory rather than Peace.

It's amazing how many different meanings

Jack Cesareo's signature giant pink cupcake can take on in different contexts. Here, in one severely cropped close-up, the gaily decorated confection seemed to symbolize an almost somber sense of reverence and stand at attention to salute a row of American flags blowing in the breeze. Another, less characteristic black and white print by Cesareo zeroed in on a votive candle next to a newspaper with the headline “Honoring those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001.”

In her digital archival print “Ground Zero,” Janice Wood Wetzel takes a stark glance back to the immediate aftermath of the attack in a digital archival print of the charred ruins of the towers still smoldering with a crane at half-mast among them. In another image called “Remembering 9/11,” Wetzel closes in on a memorial bas relief with symbolic figures of three of the brave firefighters who perished that day, its bronze surface glowing with fiery hues.

In “Re-Elevation” and “The Resurrection,” Gael Georges gives us two crystal clear digital color images of the Freedom Tower, seen from an angle that lends it the dynamic thrust of a Futurist painting or an Art Nouveau architectural rendering. Both pictures project the artist's ardent desire to create a heroic vision of ultimate triumph over almost unutterable tragedy.

Carolyn Reus, on the other hand, concentrates on the twin reflecting pools with cascading waterfalls in the footprints of the destroyed towers that architect Michael Arad, who won the design contest, envisioned as “voids reflecting of absence.” Reus' color prints “Night Reflecting Pool” and “Named Over Pool” respectively bath the pool itself and the “river of names” memorializing the victims inscribed on the pool's bronze parapets in an eerie light.

Paul Margolis runs the gamut of emotions and reactions to the tragedy in three black and white silver gelatin prints: The first, “Crowd Watching the Twin Towers Burning, September 11, 2001” captures the intense horror and sorrow in the faces of office workers in Lower Manhattan with their heads tilted skyward. In the second, “Tourists at Grand Zero — October 2001,” a couple strolls down the middle of the street in white face masks that make their faces resemble skulls. The third, “Twin Towers Neckties, Early 2002,” we find ourselves in the murky gray area where commemoration meets commercial exploitation.

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WSAC, “Ten Years After,” recently seen at
Broadway Mall Community Center, 96th
Street (center island).

Maturity of Vision Distinguishes “Emerging Artists” in 2012 WCSU MFA Thesis Exhibition

Several years ago, the first time I heard the director of a quite fashionable downtown Manhattan gallery use the term “shtick” — which one would have thought more appropriate to standup comedy — in relation to painting, it became obvious that a new era

hues and shapes, suggesting elements of a Kandinsky-esque abstract landscape, appears to balance gracefully, yet a bit precariously, on the dark shadow of an ambiguous shape that could either be a flexible-necked desk lamp or an office chair set against a vibrant

neon light and shadow entering through the open window of a motel room, creating a dramatic “noir” effect. At the same time, her compositions also suggest essences of landscape in the manner of Gregory Amenoff’s “new naturalist” paintings. In either



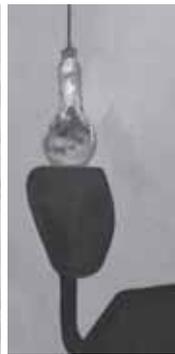
Marden (detail)



Donnelly (detail)



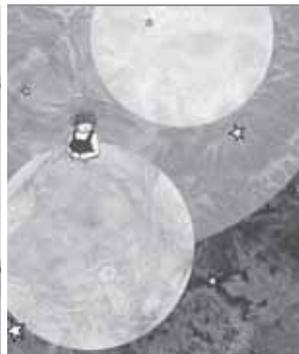
Rynkowski (detail)



Almeida (detail)



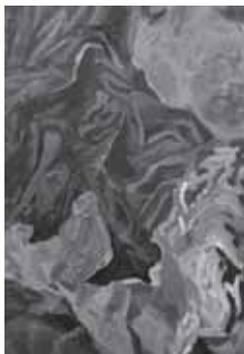
Robinson (detail)



Wyzzkowski (detail)



Johnson (detail)



Ciacci (detail)



Bascetta (detail)



Park (detail)

case, Ciacci states, “I am particularly interested in shape and color functioning as weight and air. Finding the shapes through observed forms and the use of my own intuitive sense of color, I seek to portray experiences or situations in my life.”

Tiffany Johnson, on the other hand, has gradually evolved from a painter of expressive compositions centered on the human portrait head to a more abstract, less detailed style in which the figurative origins are replaced by simple abstract shapes, and are all but subsumed by layers of thick impasto. Color and texture have come dynamically to the forefront of Johnson’s newest compositions, which project a sense of nonspecific “presences” possessed of an engaging tactility reminiscent of Nicolas de Stael’s spare and simple yet sensuously encrusted canvases. The latter impression is strengthened by the intimate scale of Johnson’s pictures.

By contrast, Megan Marden is a painter of large “maximalist” still life compositions jam-packed with multiple objects and symbolic clutter. In her oil and mixed media work on canvas “Outlet,” the title refers to two plugs in sockets on the wall, but the main action involves a toy dinosaur that appears in many of Marden’s paintings. Here this miniature Godzilla appears on the verge of attacking a small painting within the painting propped up on a tabletop containing an entire bestiary of other toy monsters. The entire composition is a veritable riot of color and lively incident, yet Marden displays an

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was dawning in the mainstream art scene.

Sadly, shtick (in this context meaning an immediately recognizable stylistic gimmick very much akin to a corporate logo), along with business strategy, takes precedence over the fundamentals of painting and sculpture in many art schools today. A laudable exception, however, is Western Connecticut State University, which continues the tradition of the Hudson River School painters who first put the region on the art world map over a century ago. It does so by stressing serious studio practice over superficial stylistic contrivance, an emphasis that is consistently made evident in the high quality of WCSU’s MFA exhibitions. These shows showcase the work of graduates who have undergone two years of intensive study involving extensive interaction with resident faculty and visiting artists, as well as professional internships and individual research.

The Spring 2012 exhibition features seven painters and three illustrators, all of whom show a promising maturity of individual vision. In her large paintings, Amy Almeida employs light bulbs and chandeliers as surreal vehicles to abstraction with a slightly surreal quality. In Almeida’s oil on linen “Gone,” a dangling bulb containing a prism of verdant

orange background. Although painted in an ostensibly realist manner, these mechanical elements are somewhat starkly simplified on the two-dimensional picture plane to emphasize their emblematic qualities. Although more academic realists tend to shun perfectly asymmetrical formats to avoid “monotony,” here Almeida exploits the 58" x 58" dimensions of her canvas to lend her composition a striking sense of expansiveness, even while placing the silhouetted desk lamp fixture slightly to the right of center and cropping its base abruptly at the bottom edge of the composition.

Christina Ciacci plays abstractly off the notion of “drapery,” or the fall and folds of cloth, so prominent in classical painting. Freed from their usual function of emphasizing and acting as a counterpoint to underlying human anatomy, to emphasize and make palpable the volumes and rhythms of the human body in repose or in motion, in Ciacci’s oil on board, “Duo,” the folds and furrows suggest a terrain observed from an aerial perspective. The artist’s use of contrasting cool blue and hot pink hues, coupled with the painting’s title and her bravura brushwork, however, could also suggest crumpled bed sheets bathed in

“Ten Emerging Artists,” Blue Mountain Gallery, 530 West 25th St., 4th Floor, June 19 - July 7, 2012.
(Reception: June 21, 5 - 8 pm.)

Kathryn Hart Excavates Mystery from the Palpable

“A painting with heart should come from the gut,” says Kathryn Hart, “expose a piece of the artist in a very raw way. My works reflect the human condition, all of the crags and crevices, what we want others to see and what we hide... who we are when we are alone and our endless ability to rise from the ashes.”

Indeed some of the mixed media works on wood panel in the series that Hart calls “Metamorphosis” — most particularly the irregularly shaped and proportioned triptych “Metamorphosis III” — give the impression of fragments from antiquity, with their scarred and distressed surfaces caked so thick with rugged layers of pigment as to create the weighty effect of stone tablets. Others, such as “Metamorphosis I,” with its piled and pocked tactility and prominent fissures and cracks, are almost all about surface in the manner of the European branch of Abstract Expressionism, “Tachism,” or the mixed media works of the leading Spanish painter Antoni Tàpies, who was obsessed with what he called the “noumenal” or essential spirit of materials.

In Hart’s case, in keeping with her use of the phrase “from the gut,” the surface takes on a visceral, almost sentient quality of skin, although paradoxically when figures appear in her compositions, they seep into her cracked and fissured epidermal surfaces like phantoms or shadows. It has been noted in previous reviews of Hart’s work that these haunting faceless humanoids appear to be distant relatives of Alberto Giacometti’s rail-thin sculpted personages. But while Giacometti, like his literary soul mate Samuel Beckett, was plagued for his entire career by existential doubts concerning the efficacy and meaning of art, Hart possesses an apparently unshakable sense of purpose and certainty about her creative vocation. Perhaps this comes of having discovered her true calling when she was already deeply involved in a career as a market researcher in the medical field, and suddenly finding it irresistible.

“I was always artsy as a young child, but being the youngest in a predominantly scientific family, that spark got overwhelmed . . . One summer I took a drawing class and all of my childhood creativity and passion for art came flooding back to me. My life had always involved art but now I was the one creating. I delved into my passion, studying with artists I admire and catching up with the art education I never got.”

After first establishing a national reputation as an award winning representational painter, Hart evolved her more abstract style of personal expression, inspired by a diverse selection of older artists ranging from Bay Area (California) Expressionists like Thiebaud and Park to New York School masters such as Motherwell, Rothko, de Kooning, as well as European painters of earlier centuries — particularly Degas.

Obviously, it did not take long for Hart to meld all of these early influences into a unique personal style, which imparts a relief-like sculptural dimension to the art of painting (and comes to the forefront in Hart’s freestanding assemblage painting “Metamorphosis VI”), even while preserving the sanctity of the two dimensional picture plane so central to modernist aesthetics. For there is no room for illusion in Hart’s paintings, which excavate a deep mystery from the actual physically palpable substance of pigment, as seen in “Cocoon I.”

Here, a ghostly white figure emerges from built up layers of white-on-white impasto. Beside the figure, like something it has just shed, floats a black collage torso-like shape enlivened by white splashes and drips and connected to the panel by a length of black wire suggesting an intravenous hookup or a lifeline of some sort. Immediately above, near the top of the composition, a cloud-like form, created with crumpled, white-paint-saturated cloth, also floats freely, enhancing the sense of a submerged narrative that lends Hart’s work much of its mystery, depth, and poetry.

Those qualities come across in a subtler but no less powerful manner in “Cocoon IX,” where most of the figure vanishes into the thick, rough monochrome tactility of the paint surface, except for the contour of the head, neck, and shoulders, with a single vertical line of red extending downward from the shoulder, where the arm would normally be, like a streak of blood or an X-ray view of an artery. This, like the cracks and crevices that play such a vital part in her compositions, is an exquisite touch, demonstrating the delicacy that, along with their ruggedness of her surfaces, lends yet another asset to the paintings of Kathryn Hart.

— Ed McCormack



“Cocoon I”



“Cocoon IX”

Kathryn Hart, New Century Artists Gallery,
530 West 25th St., June 5 - 23, 2012.

The New Romantic Vision of Jeff Woodger



“The Approaching Storm, Kanayama Japan”

New Romantic Landscapes” can sound like a contradiction in terms until one encounters the paintings of the Australian artist Jeff Woodger and discovers the vital contemporary spin he puts on the tradition he so passionately embraces and revives.

A good place to start is with Woodger’s oil on canvas “The Approaching Storm Kanayama Japan (2010),” which combines two of his most important inspirations. In connection with his MFA project “An Inquiry Into 19th Century Landscape Painting and its Presentation,” Woodger enacted a postmodernist performance / installation in which he dressed as an 18th century Western journeyman painter and hung his neo-romantic landscape canvases in a burgundy walled gallery. Two years later, in his uniquely varied artistic development, he studied sumi-e and suiboku-ga with a sensei while exhibiting his Western classical landscape paintings in Japan. This cross cultural experience led to a Ph.D. thesis entitled “An Inquiry into Suboku-ga and Kano School Influences on Rococo and Romantic Landscape Painting

Through Claude Lorrain 1600-1682) and Salvator Rosa (1615-1673). When Woodger read his proposal speech at a university in Victoria it elicited a charmingly Australian-seeming response (at least for an American film fan besotted with the Sam Neil, Tara Fitzgerald and Hugh Grant film “Sirens”) when someone in the audience yelled, “It’s just your imagination because you have lived in Japan too long!”

But putting Woodger’s colorful history and intriguing art historical theories aside and moving on to the painting under discussion, “The Approaching Storm, Kanayama Japan” is a magnificently atmospheric visionary vista, with shafts of light breaking through darkly brooding cumuli in a tumultuous sky and a huge mountain looming like King Kong over modern apartment buildings, as traffic and pedestrians ant-crawl along the curves of the rain-slick streets below. In true Romantic fashion, everything is dramatically heightened by the artist — the intensity of the light between the clouds; the windblown movement of the lush summer trees and foliage outside the apartment building on the

left side of the composition; the blurring effect of the drizzle that often precedes the full force of a rainstorm on forms in the distance to capture and render immutable the underlying magic of a mundane moment in a more or less ordinary present-day residential district.

Woodger’s admiration for Claude Lorrain, whom he points out “had a great influence on the British landscape painter Joseph Turner ... amongst many others,” is especially apparent in “Journey to Manhattan (2011),” which bears favorable comparison to the Lorrain’s “The Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba (1648).” Indeed, Woodger’s luminous depiction of the huge sky with its gilt-edged floating cloud-wisps is every bit as compelling as the earlier painter’s. And even if the four tiny, trendily dressed modern women in his picture are apparently preparing to embark via a sleek white Mercedes behind a yellow cab already in motion outside a weathered but rambling stone estate amid reflective leftover rain puddles, rather than by a schooner from a 17th century seaport, the effect is every bit as picturesque. Then there is

Continued on page 17

A BELATED MEA CULPA FOR SIGH MORE GRIM, ALICE ALIAS, AND THE RAZORBLADE HEIRESS

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

a memoir by Ed McCormack with drawings by the author

Angry letters to the editor normally never bothered me. In fact, I was especially fond of quoting one from a Mrs. Margaret Reynolds of Manhattan which began: “Your so-called writer Ed McCormack is a most obscene 100 percent beast who belongs in a cage with animals.”

To arouse such bluenoses made me feel that I must be doing something right. It was quite another thing, however, to be lambasted by my fellow writer Seymour Krim in the Letters column of *Changes*, the music, arts, and pop culture tabloid I wrote for before *Rolling Stone*.

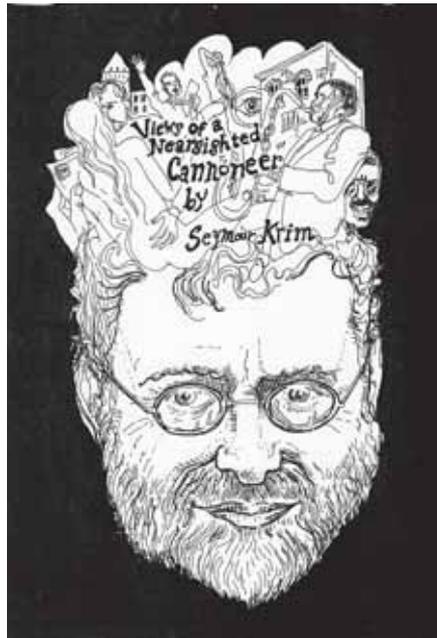
Changes was published and edited by Susan Graham, later to become Susan Graham Mingus when she married the great jazz bassist and composer Charles Mingus. A foxy blond former debutante and Smith College graduate who had worked as a journalist in Europe and New York, Sue was always just on the verge of getting this great Mafia distributor who would go around breaking people’s arms to get the magazine on every newsstand in the city. And then, of course, we’d all be lighting our cigars with hundred dollar bills. But you stopped taking Sue’s promises seriously, once you learned that the punch-lines of her two favorite jokes were, “the check is in the mail” and “I promise not to come in your mouth.”

Probably because I was still enamored of Jack Kerouac’s first-thought-best-thought ethos of “spontaneous bop prosody” and regularly turned out more copy than any other contributor for the peanuts that *Changes* paid, Sue boosted my ego by introducing me to people as “our star writer” and putting my name just below her own on the masthead as Managing Editor.

Not that I ever really edited anything or even bothered to show up for most editorial meetings. But it was the heyday of hip “underground” papers and the title got me loads of invitations to press parties at upscale restaurants with open bars. Nor did I mind taking credit for some of the talented contributors who were drawn to the magazine by Sue’s editorial savvy and social connections.

Forget about a cocky, pug-faced runt of an unknown singer-songwriter named Billy Joel, who wrote a column called “Diary of a Young Artist,” for *Changes*, all about his futile struggle to get a break in the music business. (“This month is almost half over and I have only half of my rent in the bank ... Mom offers to help sometimes but I try to stand on my own two feet.”) If his music is anything like his prose, I remember thinking at the time, Billy had better learn a trade. But we did have a brilliant little curmudgeon of

a film reviewer named Fran Lebowitz who had not yet published her first best seller but was already well on her way to becoming the next Dorothy Parker; Myra Friedman, already a National Book Award finalist for “Buried Alive,” her biography of her friend Janis Joplin; and photographer Jill Krementz, who took great pictures for our exclusive interviews with Philip Roth, Anais Nin, and Jane Fonda, and would eventually become well known for her portraits of literary figures. Sue’s man Mingus even contributed occasional editorial rants with provocative headlines like “Open Letter to the Avant Garde,” composed in what his fiancé termed “his own voice and holler.” (Far as I can remember, Sue never wrote for *Changes*. But many years later after she was widowed by Mingus’ death from Lou Gehrig’s disease, she published a moving and beautifully written memoir called “Tonight at Noon: A Love Story” that was extravagantly blurbed by everyone from the distinguished critic Harold Bloom, author of *The Western Canon*, to Elvis Costello.) But for me the biggest kick was getting to know Seymour Krim.



* * *

Amazingly, for a girl who grew up on a horse farm in Virginia, knowing nothing of the Beat Generation beyond TV sitcom caricatures (while I was already haunting Village cafes and jazz clubs while still in high school), it was Jeannie who first turned me on to Krim’s writing in the early sixties, shortly after we were married.

“I found this while browsing in the Eighth Street Bookshop, and I thought what I read

of it was interesting — but I knew *you* would love it,” she said, handing me a paperback edition of Krim’s first collection of essays “Views of a Nearsighted Cannoneer,” with its intriguing cover photo of the author looking like a horn-rimmed Lenny Bruce, as he aimed down the barrel of an antique cannon in some unidentified public square.

Like Tom Wolfe before me (who sent him fan letters in a florid calligraphy that Seymour would eventually show off as we drank together), I was immediately struck by the eccentric force of the writing in “Cannoneer.” It was a real revelation to discover personal essays with as much raw confessional energy as Allen Ginsberg’s bravest poems. They struck me as a daredevil high-wire act by a regular flying Wallenda of the typewriter who, unlike my first Beat hero Kerouac didn’t even bother to pass his work off as fiction or change names to protect the already notorious.

Krim’s most frequent fall guy was himself. In “The Insanity Bit,” for example, he chronicled a nervous breakdown that put him in the psycho ward at Bellevue in emotionally charged prose that, in keeping with its subject, threatened to veer over the edge: “In the summer of 1955, when I was 33, the thousand unacknowledged human (not literary) pressures in my being exploded. I ran barefooted in the streets, spat at members of my family, exposed myself, was almost bodily thrown out of a house of a Nobel Prize-winning author, and believed God had ordained me to act out every conceivable human impulse without an ounce of hypocritical caution.”

Krim came down from that manic episode cured forever of writing constipated lit-crit for stuffy intellectual journals like *Commentary* and *Partisan Review*. Now, freed by the emergence of the Beat Generation, he acted out and exposed himself in print, rather than in public, in wildly subjective, often painfully personal, essays for more countercultural periodicals like the *Village Voice*, *Evergreen Review* — and by the time I knew him, *Changes* — that blasted the way for the reckless gonzo journalism of Hunter Thompson and others.

In another piece in “Cannoneer” called “Ask for a White Cadillac” Krim wrote about what it was like to be a horny white hipster trying to score for interracial sex with prostitutes on 125th Street and being “suckered out of \$50, either by girls who promised two tricks and gave only one (or none) or ‘guides’ who maintained they knew great flesh-parlors, and then disappeared over the squeezed-together Harlem roofs after letting me wait on a fourth floor landing

while they made the ‘arrangements.

But even braver for a card-carrying white liberal to own up to in print were the racist implications of his confession in the same piece: “For the first time in my adult life I felt completely confident and masterful in my relationship to both sexes because society judged me the superior ... oddly enough my Harlem experiences made me feel how and why many uptown Negroes act as they do and also made me feel like a Southern white, understanding for the first time the tremendous psychological *impregnability* to the cracker (every white man has a built-in colonel kit!) in having an ‘inferior’ class beneath him.”

And in “Making It!” — perhaps his boldest essay in terms of alienating many of his fellow artsy fartsy types back in an era when “selling out” was still a scandal rather than a goal — Krim blew the whistle on the dirtiest little secret of all: the yen for worldly fame and material success hidden beneath the holier than thou pose of even the most sanctimoniously “anti-materialistic” bohemian dreamers. He Skewered their saintly pretensions in slangy smart-alecky italic shtick as acidic as any Lenny Bruce routine: “*This bit about being a fine writer, a dedicated actor, a moviemaker with Modern Museum notions of heaven, a musician because you truly love it, a painter because you die when you smell the color? Don’t make me laugh — it’s not good for the stitches, dad. This world (nuts, this rutting universe!) is a Mt. Everest, kiddo, and you’ve got to start climbing now or the dumbwaiter of this age will slam you down into the black basement...*”

In 1968, ten years after the first magazine publication of Krim’s essay, that soon to come out as-a-neocon putz Norman Podhoretz not only stole his idea but also his title almost verbatim — dropping only the manic Krimian exclamation point. Puffed up to book-length, Podhoretz’s “Making It,” was hailed in the *New York Times Book Review* for “exposing the intelligentsia to be fraudulent when it pronounced its disinterest in power, money, and fame,” gaining Podhoretz the bestseller that might have been Krim’s, had he been cunning enough to practice the self-promotional chutzpah he preached.

Tom Wolfe not only imitated Krim’s hyper, hectoring way with the interior monologue, but as Dan Wakefield, Seymour’s former colleague at the *Village Voice* points out, he also copped Krim’s coinage “Radical Chic” and ran with it as the title of one his most famous New Journalism satires. And competitive as he was with his contemporaries in his unabashed bid to become Heavyweight Champion of American Letters, Norman Mailer may have been paying his own personal debt

to the man’s balls-out nonfiction style in the forward he contributed to that first trailblazing collection, when he wrote: “Krim in his odd honest garish sober grim surface is a child of our time. I think sometimes, as a matter of style, he is *the* child our time, he is New York in the 20th Century, a city man, his prose as brilliant upon occasion as the electronic beauty of our lights, his shifts and shatterings of mood as searching and true as the grinding of wheels in a subway train.”

Still, it rankled Krim that young “literary snatches” he was trying to put the make on in the Village were always asking him what Norman was really like. So he wrote a surly diatribe for *New York* magazine (later reprinted in his second collection, “Shake it for the World Smartass,” as “Ubiquitous Mailer vs. Monolithic Me”) headlined “Norman Mailer, Get Out of My Head !”

Saner friends may have warned him against biting the famous hand and maybe making a formidable enemy of a former advocate. But to a fellow self-defeatist kamikaze like me, such anti-careerist craziness seemed utmost integrity.

* * *

Krim lived in a tiny ground floor studio in the same brownstone on East 10th Street where Sue lived and published *Changes* out of a much larger apartment that had once been the home and studio of Seymour’s friend and “once or twice lover” the famous freak photographer Diane Arbus. After I dropped off my copy upstairs I’d often knock on his door and we’d smoke some grass (I never went anywhere back then without a pocketful of home-rolled joints) and hang out in his cozy book-lined one-room hovel. He’d get out a bottle and a couple of glasses and we’d listen to his old moldy fig Bessie Smith records, argue about books and writers, and he’d regale me with riotous tales of his adventures among the hookers, particularly the funky black ones with blond wigs that were his special hang-up. If they were ladies of the night, we were gentlemen of the afternoon, literary reprobates with the leisure to while away the hours with dope, booze, and bullshit while the rest of the world punched a time clock. Once we were even joined by Robert DeNiro — no, not the actor of my generation, but his father, the painter of Seymour’s generation.

I would miss those good times, after we had our falling out over my review, in the publication we both wrote for, of his third collection of essays “You and Me,” its very title hinting at the honest, no-holds-barred intimacy he strove for with both readers and friends. Only after it was too late would I realize that I had gone beyond the honesty we had established in our friendship into flippant, gratuitous snottiness when I chastised him in print for forsaking in the new

book the energy and nerve so evident in both “Cannoneer” and “Smartass.”

Seymour responded to my review (written from a copy autographed “For Sue, Guess Who? — A Mystery Man”) with a letter to the editor, headlined “Family Quarrel with Knives.” After feinting with a compliment (“Although McCormack writes like an angel”) to set me up, he delivered a one-two punch, calling me a “sleek party panther” and a “cool narcissistic hit man.” This struck me as sour grapes, given Seymour’s frequent complaints about feeling too old and uncool by hippie standards to participate in the “swinging” youth culture raging right outside his East Village door. But I did detect honest hurt in his complaint about what, further belaboring the panther metaphor, he called my “unexpected pounce.”

“Ed knows perfectly well,” he went on to kvetch, “that in the last year and a half I have asked him at least a half dozen times, as one writer to the other with mutual respect ruling the room, if he thought my recent prose was slower, more ponderous, less pungent than the leaping sentences of years ago, which first turned him on and which I can no longer rocket with ... I think what pisses me off most about Ed’s piece is the condescending tone, which I have never heard in either his human or writing voice before, and caused a painter friend (woman) to ask if he was older than I was; McCormack, I said, is 21 years my junior! Why then should he patronize me in a superior voice that makes me feel like the local pervert caught in the act by the burly cop on the beat?”

In that last sentence, I take it Seymour was referring to a typically candid essay in which he extolled the solace of masturbation for a middle-aged man with diminishing sexual opportunities, which with a young man’s brassy insensitivity I had singled out as a metaphor for his recent writerly stance. At the time I must have felt justified in chiding him to stop jerking off — figuratively, if not literally — and finally deliver the “big orgiastic feast of a book that those of us who admired his early writings have every right to expect.”

Admittedly, there may have been an oedipal element in my review, given my actual father’s spectacular downward trajectory from trainer for the Brooklyn Dodgers to ordinary longshoreman. Add to this that I was more than a little put off by a particularly abject and self-lacerating (even for Krim) essay in “You & Me” called “For All My Brothers and Sisters in the Failure Business,” in which Seymour bemoans never having become “the marvelous novelist of my teenage ambition.” Since, along with Tom Wolfe and my first literary crush Kerouac (who called his books novels and changed names but wrote with such transparent

truthfulness about his friends that, strictly speaking, I never considered them fiction), Seymour had been one of my early nonfiction heroes, I probably saw all this mooning about his unwritten novels as a disavowal of the genre that I had put my artistic faith in. And although I probably wouldn't have admitted it back then, it may have shaken my belief in the entire enterprise, coming from the man who, only a few years earlier, wrote "The Newspaper As Literature / Literature As Leadership," an essay which, along with Tom Wolfe's introductory manifesto to the anthology of the same name, "The New Journalism," helped to convince me that, in an age when truth truly *had* far outstripped fiction for strangeness, there was no more relevant form of writing than the kind that I was doing.

* * *

Balking at the possibility of being counted among his unnamed "brother failures," I had probably already begun to draw away from "Sigh More Grim," as I began to think of him, by the time he made the first move to put aside the Fuck You Brutus hardware at a party at Sue's apartment. So I was civil but cool, shrugging it off when, as I sat chatting with Fran Lebowitz, he ambled over and actually thanked me without apparent irony for my harsh review, saying that once he got over its initial sting, it had goaded him into beginning a long prose poem called "Chaos," which he hoped would be the epic work I was waiting for. But since I was still too full of myself to meet him halfway, nothing was ever to be the same between us again.

* * *

Seymour and I did see each other briefly, though, during that dissolute period when Jeannie and I were separated and I ended up living for awhile on Thompson Street, on the Little Italy fringe of Soho, with Veronica, a dubious young benefactress first introduced to me as the Razorblade Heiress.

She came into my life when her roommate — who with her ivory complexion, fiery red hair, and raccoon eye make-up, resembled the littlest, youngest girl in a bordello scene by Toulouse Lautrec — picked me up on the way out of Max's one night as casually as a harried housewife might grab a last-minute head of lettuce in a supermarket.

"I'm Alice Alias," she said, lighting a cigarette in the cab uptown. "Who're you?" I told her my name.

"I recognized you tonight from the big picture with Lou Reed and whatzizname, that guy who directs the Andy Warhol movies, that was hanging in the front of Max's for awhile. My roommate and I really got off on that picture. You look so vain and languid, almost girly, with your pretty black hair."

"You don't say."

"So what are you, a musician?"

"No."

"So what do you do?"

"I'm a writer."

"For what?"

"Rolling Stone, mostly."

"Ah, I could tell you did something cool."

"And you, what do you do?"

"I dance."

"Ballet?"

She shot me a look, knowing now that I was full of shit.

"Topless," she said, blowing smoke in my face.

The cab stopped in front of the awning of a doorman building on the Upper West Side, and we took the elevator up to the 10th floor.

"While I jump in the shower you can hang with the Razorblade Heiress," Alice said, referring I would later learn, to her roommate's recent inheritance of Johnson & Johnson stocks.

She led me into a brightly lit room off the dark, narrow foyer. A slender blonde in a black jumpsuit with zippers all over it was sitting cross-legged behind one of those low tables like the ones in Japanese restaurants. She had on oversize work gloves that made her hands look like big Minnie Mouse paws. In one she was holding a soldering iron and in the other what appeared to be an aluminum athletic cup barnacled with clusters of multicolor Christmas tree lights.

"Hi, I'm Veronica," she said. "Knowing Alice, I'm sure she's already confessed that we're admirers of yours," she said in a voice that seemed modeled on the breathy whisper of a Marilyn Monroe or a Jackie Kennedy, into which she occasionally let slip that slight hint of a British accent which some girls in the Seventies caught like oral clap from fraternizing too intimately with limey rock musicians.

When I gestured mutely toward what she was holding, she giggled. "Oh, this? It's an electric codpiece I'm making for Bowie. At least I hope to sell it to him if I can work out the technical stuff. It'll have a belt with a little battery pack on it to make the lights go on and off onstage."

Besides designing costumes and stage gadgetry for Bowie, Mott the Hoople, and other glitter rockers, she confessed to being "something of a science fiction geek." Getting up from the low table, seeming inordinately tall in the stiltlike platform boots she apparently wore even while working, she rummaged in the cardboard boxes on some nearby shelves and showed me some glitzy wristbands and toy rayguns she had created. Then she demonstrated how she could make a little robot she had built strut stiffly around the room by means of a converted TV remote control.

"He's a real cutie, isn't he?" she said just before the robot crashed into a pile of mechanical junk on the floor and tipped over. "Ooops, but sometimes he doesn't watch where he's going!"

She had pasty white skin with acne scars that she distracted from by shaving off her eyebrows, extraterrestrial-style, like a lot of fans of David Bowie and The Rocky Horror Picture Show did back then, and wearing a lot of black and blue mascara. She was not beautiful or even pretty, but she was flashy in a tawdry, painted and tainted rock and roll groupie kind of way. But she was obviously intelligent and seemed sympathetic. So in the vulnerable way I had of treating anyone who would listen to me as a free shrink, I ended up telling her all about escorting 500 people with "severe developmental disabilities" to the Ringling Brothers circus earlier that evening with Geraldo Rivera, and the deflating suspicion the excursion had left me with, after years of feeling snidely superior to most of the celebrities I wrote about, that I might finally have met a journalistic subject who was not only engaged in more useful work than my own but who, for all his ludicrous TV showboating, might also be a morally better human being than myself. Since my best pieces were usually satirical, I told her, I wasn't sure how I could do this one without it stinking of sour grapes.

My angst-ridden monologue ended abruptly, however, when Alice Alias appeared fresh from the bath, wearing one of those satin Chinatown gift shop bathrobes decorated with flowers and dragons.

"Say ta-ta and nighty-night to the Razorblade Heiress," she said. "You have work to do, Superstar."

* * *

I ran into both roommates at Max's a few nights later. Alice was all dolled up in a tight chartreuse retro dress, black elbow gloves and matching feather boa; Veronica was sporting a sveltely tailored man's tuxedo and bowtie (worn with a vest but no shirt) and open-toed platform mules. They were sitting in a booth in the Back Room with two guys I took at first to be their dates. But when they spotted me (hard to miss, even in the Halloween atmosphere of Max's, in the bright red Edwardian frockcoat that Jeannie had bought me before the breakup), waved me over, and introduced them, it became clear that Randy and Tony were lovers. The conversation that I came into the middle of apparently centered around the minor domestic conflicts that every couple encounters.

"No matter how many times I ask this one not to, he insists on baking cookies with the same can of Crisco that we keep by the bedside for lube," Randy was complaining.

"Can you believe that he has to smell every

single chocolate chip before he'll eat it?" Tony countered, cracking everybody up.

After we all had another round of drinks and a few more laughs, the two young men left for Le Jardin, a trendy polysexual disco on the rooftop garden of the Hotel Diplomat where the New York Dolls sometimes played.

"Aren't those two adorable?" the Razorblade Heiress said. "Randy was one of the first people I met and stayed with when I first came to New York from Fort Lauderdale. I'm so happy he found Tony, they're so lovely together."

She asked how the piece I told her about that first night was coming along, and maybe because I had just done some coke in the men's room, courtesy of a solicitous record company press flack who was trying to sell me on another story idea for *Rolling Stone*, I launched into a long rant about how Saint Geraldo had not only tarnished his halo but faced me with a painful professional dilemma by introducing me on the same evening to his young wife and an older woman he boasted of sleeping with, who turned out to be the wife of a prominent politician. Since Geraldo had already confided his ambition to run for Mayor of New York in the future, it was such an incredibly reckless temptation for someone who should have known better to dangle in front of a fellow journalist who had already warned him "Nothing is ever off the record with me," that I had to wonder what his real motive might be. But I also had to wonder if it was simply because I was so demoralized by the mess I had made of my own marriage that I was now considering actually dropping the story altogether, rather than being the one to destroy the domestic happiness, however deluded, of Geraldo's sweet young wife.

Once again it was Alice Alias, clearly one with no patience for Woody Allen-ish moral introspection, who changed the subject. She leaned over and whispered something in the Razorblade Heiress' ear that made them both giggle in a way for which only the quaint old word "vixons" will do. Then the Razorblade Heiress tore a Max's wine list in half, carefully hand-lettered something on the back of it, and handed it to me:

"Ms. Alice Alias & The Razorblade Heiress Request the pleasure of your company For an evening of Carnal Excess... Kindly RSVP."

* * *

Always a tad obvious, the Razorblade Heiress, put Led Zeppelin's long playing heavy metal epic "Stairway to Heaven" on the stereo system just before we all ascended the ladder to the loftbed under the photomural of the Milky Way that covering the entire bedroom ceiling.

And for awhile afterward that spacious

apartment that the two roommates shared — so devoid of the sad "homey" touches that invariably made me melancholy in other places where I woke up, now that I no longer had a home of my own that I could bear to sleep in — felt like a safe haven from sentiment. Its thick curtains and dim track lighting created perennial twilight auras which, gleaming off the chrome of the black leather furniture and the shelves, offered all the cold comfort of a soulless sensorium. Over the next few weeks, I practically moved in, only returning to my own haunted and trashed place across town for a blast of harsh reality and to check the mailbox for my weekly retainer from *Rolling Stone*. Jann Wenner still had not cut me off, even as the Mail-O-Grams from my other editors there grew increasingly more frantic: CANT REACH YOU STOP PHONE COMPANY SEZ YR SERVICE TURNED OFF STOP PLEASE CALL SOONEST RE STATUS GERALDO RIVERA STY STOP...

I would crumble up the latest one and toss into the ever growing garbage garden all over the floor.

Meanwhile my menage with Alice and Veronica was hardly turning out to be the idyllic girl sandwich of my male chauvinist fantasies. For once the initial novelty wore off, the ongoing task of simultaneously tilting the tricky pinball machines of two rapacious female libidos and egos turned into a stunt almost as daunting as catching pies coming off a conveyor belt with one arm tied behind one's back on that old TV game show "Beat the Clock."

Surely I had no intention of pairing off with one or the other of the two roommates; but in such situations it is almost inevitable that someone will eventually feel slighted. And the fact that Alice often worked nights in the topless club and gobbled Valiums like M&Ms while Veronica and I preferred amphetamines probably contributed to the incompatible biorhythms that seemed to be turning Alice surly and mean.

Veronica claimed that in a fit of pique "over some imaginary betrayal," as she put it, Alice had once scissored an arm off all of her blouses and a leg off every pair of her jeans, necessitating the purchase of a whole new wardrobe.

"And now, since she was the one who brought you here that first time," she told me, "she's got it in for both of us... Believe me, when Alice's sleazy little Times Square stripper side starts coming out there's no telling what she'll resort to. What scares me most is that she might even decide to do something drastic to us while we're sleeping."

By that time I was already so familiar with the Razorblade Heiress' vulnerability act that I had come to think of her as the perfect

female impersonator, even though to the proper gender born, as many of the best of them often are. Brainwashed young by the old slogan "blondes have more fun" she was bottle blond top and bottom. As if to assure herself more than her share she even dyed her pubic patch the same color as her crowning glory. Not burnished gold as real blond bushes tend to be, it was Clairol platinum, a gaudy artificiality at the crux of her sex. (And later, toward the end, when she finally let it grow out mousy brown, I had to wonder if she was slipping, letting go some of the sweet spoils of living.)

I'm tempted to compare her to that other great dragqueen Blanche DuBois, although, as it happened, it was I, rather than she, who came to "depend on the kindness of strangers," or at least one veritable stranger in particular, when she asked outright, "How would you like to try being a kept man? My poor berserker of a father left me more money and stocks than I know what to do with anyway... Just think: you wouldn't have to do journalism any more. You'd be free to spend all your time writing the Great American Novel of the '70s or something. Wouldn't that be cool? Why not just let me pay up all your back rent, have your phone turned back on, and move in with you?"

I hesitated, assuming she had to be exaggerating the degree of danger we might be in, until I remembered a story going around Max's about how a jealous girlfriend of Arthur Kane, the big gangling bass player for the Dolls, had tried to sever his strumming thumb while he was passed out. And now I found myself wondering if Alice Alias would even be willing to settle for a mere thumb...

When I finally agreed I acted like I was doing her a favor. But I was on the verge of being evicted anyway, and in the back of my mind was that the lease would still be in my name. So if and when I could convince Jeannie to take me back, I'd at least still have a home to offer her, rather than moving into the very place she had taken to escape me, as in that classic codependency line, "If you leave me, can I come too?"

Thinking ahead to that happy day, I was counting on Veronica to make 89th Street habitable again, with the help of the same hired crew of burly bikers, hired through their classified ad in the *Village Voice*, who had trucked her stuff across town in their van. Taking a break from carrying it up the stairs of my building in the middle of the night, those oversize elves were still chuckling into their beers and ZZ Top beards about the scene poor Alice Alias had made, stumbling around somnambulantly drunk and downed-out in her scanty underwear, cursing and for some reason pelting them with Modess

sanitary napkins as they carried most of the decor out the door.

As it was happening, some catchy lines from a tape of his new solo album that my upper East side neighbor Lou Reed had played me as we drank Scotch in his living room — “You’re vicious, you hit me with a flower ... / Oh baby, you’re so vicious!” — kept running through my mind. And I had to wonder if Alice was really as dangerous as she was cracked up to be, or if her cunning roommate had been conning me all along.

* * *

A couple of days later, after the renovations at 89th Street were completed, I was freaked out to discover how many poems, photographs, drawings, and other keepsakes of Jeannie and me the Razorblade Heiress had thrown out with the tons of trash, as if to erase with her scorched earth approach to house cleaning every remaining vestige of my marriage. Of course, I had only myself to blame, having made my presence so scarce, hanging out at Doctor Generosity’s and Home, my two favorite neighborhood bars, while the work was going on to avoid pitching in.

“I’m so, so sorry, Ducks, but since you weren’t here most of the time, I really had no way of knowing what if anything you wanted to save,” she said, putting that little British lilt in her voice and playing innocent. “I just assumed you had given me carte blanche to do a super overhaul of the place.”

“Yeah, yeah,” I said. “I suppose I should have stuck around.”

What else could I say? Standing there with the maddening mechanical strains of “The Exorcist Theme,” from Mike Oldfield’s synthesizer album “Tubular Bells,” her newest musical enthusiasm, ringing in my ears; looking around in horror at the gleaming chrome shelves with her robot collection lined up on them, and the eye-boggling black and white zebra-striped linoleum that made me feel as woozy as that poor bedeviled bastard in Edvard Munch’s famous painting “The Scream” ... I already knew I had made a terrible mistake.

* * *

Everything changed at the end of the summer when Jeannie and Holden returned to the city and I began spending so much time courting my estranged wife all over again that Veronica complained, “Suddenly I feel as though Jeannie’s the mistress and I’m the wife.”

“You wish,” I said nastily, and not long after that, when I started staying away more than I was home, she found the place on Thompson Street and moved out.

But once Jeannie made clear that she was nowhere near ready to risk reconciling with me in any more permanent way, while I was still drinking and drugging so heavily



— habits I still had no idea how to break — and once the rent became due again, like the prodigal parasite I had become, I showed up with a bottle one night and without making any promises I wouldn’t be able to keep, sweet-talked myself back into Veronica’s good graces and into her new efficiency apartment.

She had already ingratiated herself to the gang of teenage guidos guarding the corner of Thompson and Broome.

“Hey, what’s happening, cakes? You guys are looking pretty cool today,” she would flirt playfully, flouncing by on her seven-inch platform Goody Two Shoes, maybe returning from her friends Randy and Tony’s loft with an ounce of good Colombian for me (the couple had a design studio but kept themselves in Crisco and Toll House cookie mix by dealing a bit of pot on the side); or from her speed connection with a fresh supply of “black beauties” and “white crosses” to keep us both chattering like magpies; or from Soho Liquors with a fifth of Smirnoff; or from Angelo’s Pizza around the corner with my daily tuna hero (for some reason the only solid sustenance I could tolerate on my amphetamine and alcohol diet). So aside from the occasional air-guitar gesture or wry peace sign as I nodded by, I had no hassles with the neighborhood goombahs.

It remains a mystery, though, how then skeletal Lou Reed (still a cult apparition of the decadent avant garde and surely not as recognizable as Mick or Keith or any member of Led Zep would have been to

greaser headbangers like them) managed to sashay past that crew of baby mafiosos with his big bug-eye shades, skimpy silver lame Jiminy Cricket jacket, and the black-dyed iron crosses he had skunked into the sides of his peroxidized cosmic crewcut at that moment in his chameleonlike existence. Sheer Attitude, I guess, of which the Godfather of Punk, as I once dubbed him in print, always had plenty to spare, along with an even more aggressive aversion than Norman Mailer’s to being mistaken for “a nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn.”

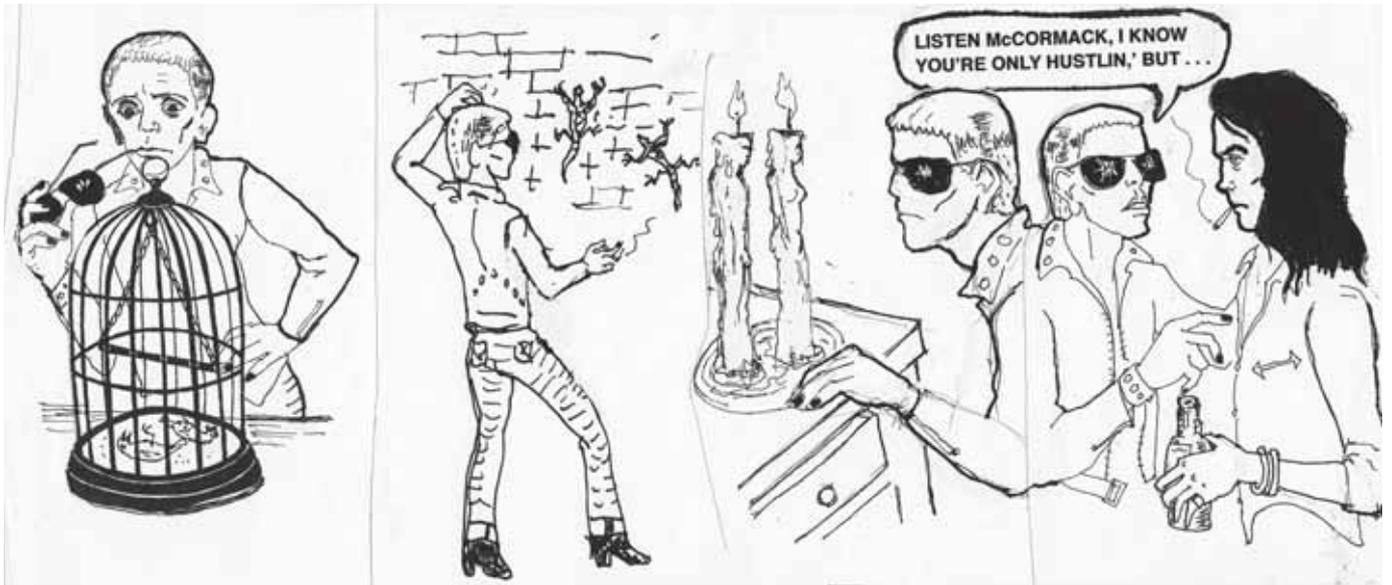
Upstairs in the apartment, however, Lou turned into the same Jewish mother who once came banging at my door on 89th Street at an ungodly hour of the morning shortly after Jeannie left me, when I was convinced that, like my uncle Charlie, I was dying of cirrhosis of the liver, ordering me to get dressed: he had a cab waiting downstairs and was taking me to his doctor. It turned out to be Dr. Robert Freymann, the same notorious Park Avenue speed quack rumored to have shot up everybody from JFK to the Beatles (who supposedly honored him with their song “Doctor Robert”). Lou made an honest physician of Dr. Feelgood that day, paying out of his own pocket for an X-ray and blood test to disabuse me of the notion that I was at death’s door.

Now, on Thompson Street, he took in the pair of dead finches lying stiffly on the bottom of the cage like whacked gangsters in tiny gray overcoats (I never paid any attention to her birds until they died, and even then I was too wiggled out on speed and booze and self-preoccupied to even ask why she didn’t bother to properly dispose of their poor little corpses); the pair of live-but-dead-still green lizards stuck like suction cups to the brick wall opposite the bed; and the two white candles shaped like male and female nudes, from a Santeria botanica on the Lower East Side, burning in a dish on the dresser-top.

As soon as she went into the other room to answer the phone, Lou pulled me aside and hissed through his teeth, “Listen, McCormack, I know you’re only hustlin’, but this chick is some kind of evil voodoo bitch, man, and if you’re smart, you’ll get the fuck outta here and do whatever it takes to get back with Jeannie.”

Seymour Krim, on the other hand, didn’t notice a thing out of the ordinary when he dropped by to pick up an ounce of grass he had asked me to score for him. (Being mistaken for an undercover narc by paranoid young dealers was just another of the indignities to which a grizzly gray-sideburned hepcat in a rakishly tilted yachting cap and too-short bellbottoms was routinely subjected.)

When The Razorblade Heiress went into the bathroom, all Krim had to say was, “Hey,



I wouldn't mind banging this broad you're shackled up with. She's got a nice kind of floozy style that turns me on. I've always had a thing for fake blonds with bad skin."

The very candor that was so refreshing in his prose could be appalling in person. All I could do was roll my eyes heavenward, touch a shushing finger to my lips, and hope that my "keeper" had not overheard him. (Or for that matter, recorded him, since lately she had been secretly bugging my stoned rants — one of which she even played for Jeannie, in an inexplicable attempt to either elicit her sisterly sympathy or to make her grateful to be rid of me, when she went up to my estranged wife's apartment on 73rd street, ostensibly to play the companionable aunt and take Holden on an outing to "a superfabulous comic book store" that she knew of in the East Village.)

But before I could change the subject, Seymour went on matter-of-factly: "I mean, as you know, I'm not gay by a long shot, but I'm not too proud to say I'll suck dick to get to pussy!"

Now I was mortified, not so much by what Krim was suggesting — from Seymour, after all, you could expect anything! — but by the cynical, opportunistic level to which our friendship had descended. Yet to squeamishly delete from this account the "juiciest quote," to use a Krimian phrase, of what turned out to be our last conversation before he died by his own hand would not only be to shortchange the man's existential daring, zanily unsettling and even infuriating as it could sometimes be. It would also be to commit an act of literary / journalistic cowardice that Seymour himself would be the first to call me on, as he did another writer friend in an essay called "The Copping-Out of Dotson Rader," taking him to task for "fictionalizing" clearly autobiographical

material in a novel about a male hustler, instead of daring to make "a cleaner and more gratefully received admission today when many of us have slept with our own sex and want that fact released from shame."

* * *

Sadly, I didn't see or hear anything more of Seymour until a mutual friend, the writer Marvin Cohen, told me some years later that he was unwell, holed up in his apartment with a severe heart condition, and would welcome a visit from me. But by that time I was struggling to stay clean and sober in A.A., and had become self-protectively reclusive. So that I never got back to that cozy book-lined cave on 10th Street before Seymour checked out adds a few more pounds of guilt to the shitload of it that I will carry to my own grave. The only thing I can feel dubiously grateful for is that I didn't have to receive one of the characteristically courageous suicide notes that I'm told he sent off to several more loyal friends, explaining quite reasonably and un-self-pityingly that he had no desire to continue living as an invalid and was moving on.

* * *

"I vividly recall walking out on the memorial for Sy at D'Lugoff's basement place because the succession of speakers just kept running on about themselves in boring, almost parodistic litanies from another decade," the veteran literary agent Knox Burger, who discovered Kurt Vonnegut and launched numerous other distinguished authors, confided in a letter to me. "Sy, as you probably know, was of the United Artists Krim family, with rich relatives, who bailed him out when he'd do something excessive or get a little too nuts. I never heard him admit to it, but he had an escape hatch not available to most."

I never knew about Seymour's rich

relatives or that, as Knox put it, "He was always sheepish about having his nose bobbed when he was 17" — interestingly innocuous areas of embarrassment for a man so willing to let everything else hang out!

But it strikes me as ironic in retrospect that Knox was always chiding me, as I had chided Seymour several years earlier, to get serious about the longer work I am only attempting now.

* * *

So far just a short excerpt from the book-length prose poem that Krim had mentioned to me so long ago at Sue Graham Mingus' party has appeared in print. Long familiar with most of the other pieces listed in the index of the posthumous collection "What's This Cat's Story? The Best of Seymour Krim," published in 1991, three years after his death, I turned immediately to the excerpt from "Chaos," hoping for some of the old energy and excitement. But too much of it reminded me of Krim's old "spadecat" pal, the espresso bongo rent-a-beatnik Ted Joans, playing up to the lily-white suburban statutory chicklets at Village tourist traps like the Cafe Bizarre in the late '50s; or the jive-talking monologues of the hipster comedian Lord Buckley. At its worst, the writing stoops to embarrassingly patronizing rap grammar, as in: "I'm not making no pitch for spontaneity at the expense of thought, I'm just trying for a different kind of thought, thought kicking off thought like a Chinese popping New Year's down on Pell Street."

Sadly, I had to concur with James Wolcott, who wrote the frank forward for the collection, and nailed "Chaos" most succinctly when he said: "Despite brilliant passages, its inner rhymes take on a finger-snappin' daddy-o syncopation that isn't sustainable for a longer stretch — symphonies require fuller orchestration."

* * *

Significantly, it was Jeannie's and my son Holden who made me a gift of Krim's last collection, two years before being taken from us by AIDS just days after his thirtieth birthday. For Holden, a fine writer who made a living turning out book jacket copy and publicity material for a publishing house, had a special childhood memory of the author.

It occurred one rowdy night in the early '70s, not long before our falling out, when Seymour and I had been cavorting at a square uptown gallery reception, pouring down the free champagne, tactlessly putting down the art. Afterward, I invited him back to my place to smoke some pot that I had there, and we burst loudly into our railroad flat on East 89th Street, pissing off my wife, waking up my son.

Rubbing his eyes, looking like a roused



prisoner in his striped flannel pajamas, Holden stared at the grizzled ogre in John Lennon granny specs, who suddenly spun around and bellowed at him, "GO BACK TO YOUR MUSHY SLEEP, KID!"

Young as he was, my son, who already had a keen love of language and a precocious sensitivity to the subtleties of sentences, grinned broadly, taking delight in the aptness of Krim's locution: a child's sleep is indeed "mushy."

For the rest of his all too short life Holden never forgot the funny man who woke him in the middle of the night, nor the gruff gift of language he so boisterously bestowed.

* * *

WCSU MFA THESIS EXHIBITION

Continued from page 5

impressive ability to meld various zany and disparate elements into a coherent whole.

Eunsoo Park, a painter from Korea now living in Connecticut, also prefers expanded scale, although her oil on canvas, "Biodiversity," appears to depict a microscopic array of colorful cell and seedlike patterns surrounding the petals of a hybrid plant species with diversely variegated petals, ranging in color from brilliant oranges to delicate pink and purple hues. The overall effect emphasizes the fantastic, exotic qualities that we often overlook in nature.

"Beauty is found almost anywhere in this world," Eunsoo Park states. "By working with a large scale, I will both create an expansive image that draws the viewer in, and accentuates the beauty of my subject."

The plein air landscape painter Linda Ann Rynkowski is the artist in the show most directly descended from the Connecticut Impressionist legacy of her state. Her oil "Autumnal Enchantment" is a large canvas fairly blazing with vibrant gold, ochre, and golden orange hues that evoke the spirit of the season with luminous freshness. Indeed, Rynkowski states, "When engaged in painting from observation, I seek to evoke the sense of atmospheric phenomenon found in nature, creating a dialogue in which the subject transcends the canvas, evoking a sense of

deep, intimate space, the perception of color as light." Like the previous painter, Rynkowski surrenders to her natural subjects completely, making her awe before them contagious for the viewer in a manner that renders meaningless much of the obscure jargon that muddies contemporary cultural dialogue.

Angeli Robinson is perhaps the most adamantly abstract painter in the show, the one who has made the most absolute commitment to nonobjective form. The muscularly interlocked shapes in Robinson's oil on canvas "Lyrical Abstraction," are bold in a manner that belies the painting's actually modest dimensions. The fleshy pink areas, encircled by blue and subdued red outlines appears to push against the edges of the canvas, projecting such a sense of exquisitely compressed energy that one can almost imagine the forms shattering the stretcher-bars that support the canvas itself.

That little distinction is made in Western Connecticut State's MFA exhibitions between painting and illustration graduates seems to make the democratic point that the same high standards should guide students of the fine and applied arts.

One such illustrator, Jennifer Wyzkowski exhibits a book, titled "Phoebe and the Moon," that she wrote and illustrated, in which the figure of a little girl moves through a realm of stars and colorful balloon-like cosmic sphere

in a fanciful style recalling aspects of Maurice Sendak's drawings for "In the Night Kitchen," albeit with a lighter line also recalling the early drawings of William Steig. (Her book will be available at the exhibition.)

Renee Bascetta, on the other hand, applies a more detailed yet lighthearted style to her meticulous watercolor illustrations on the theme of American holidays, as well as in a charming drawing of three ducklings recalling Beatrix Potter.

Then there is Christopher Donnelly, who says, "I see the world as an imaginable place where characters of all types live to overcome difficulties. As a character designer, it is my task to lend plausibility to the look and feel of a 'toon, in order for it to be believable." Donnelly's drawings, such as one of a Medieval warrior brandishing an ax are as fantastic in their own way as those of the 1960s comix draftsman Vaughn Bode or, going further back, the author and illustrator Mervyn Peake.

Indeed what is most impressive about the illustration graduates, as well as the painters in this 2012 WCSU MFA Thesis Exhibition, is their mastery of the mediums and techniques that they employ to express their still evolving visions.

— Byron Coleman

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Group Show Presents Multiple Remedies to Trendy Malaise

Painter and curator Basha Maryanska, has once again gathered a stylistically varied group of artistic colleagues in a lively group exhibition called “Antidote.” Among Maryanska’s own works in the exhibition, two standouts are “Welcome Home” and “Smile of the River.” The former is a magical cityscape centering on the facades of an urban skyline, its myriad windows glowing like decorations on a Christmas tree. The latter depicts fiery reflected sunlight melting like egg yolk on a body of water amid multicolored linear swirls and spatters that dazzle the eye like fireworks.

Like an antidote to the *sturm und drang* of Edvard Munch (since the show title leaves it to the viewer to decide what each artist is a remedy to), Stacie Flint puts a happy face on Expressionism. Her figures generally project a sense of merriment and inhabit interiors where the decor often swarms with patterns that recall the Nabis, while the bright colors hark back the Fauves. In Flint’s oil “Red Wine Goes With This Fish,” a couple (who may be as besotted by the cooking vino as Julia Child often appeared to be) prepares dinner while tuned into the Cooking Channel; in “Summer Sunday,” a sprightly young hipster in eyeglasses and a beret blisses out to the music on her plug-in transistor in the company of her purple cat and orange poodle.

Ed Vermehren, another painter with a relentlessly upbeat vision, lends his landscape forms a slanted sharpness that, along with his penchant for brilliant color, suggests stained glass. Particularly in the oil he calls “Kaleidoscopic Breeze,” triangular tree-leaves and crystal-sharp sunbeams converge dynamically at the shore of an art nouveau river where orange and blue waves flow like molten lava. Equally energetic is Vermehren’s “Walkway Over the Hudson, Poughkeepsie, NY,” in which black steel girders dissect the composition at a vertiginous diagonal angle while stylized clouds appear to do battle in a shocking pink sky.

Ewa Maslowska relies on a potent combination of vigorous gesture and luminous color to create compositions that can suggest a kinship with art historical ancestors as diverse as Duchamp’s “Nude Descending a Staircase” (her “Brown Ballet”) and the marine scenes of Turner (her “Boat” and “Canal” paintings). Maslowska, however, has her own unique brand of bravura brushwork, with which to lend all of her subjects an inimitable stylistic unity. Similar contrasts can be seen among the more abstract artists in the exhibition: Marcile Powers, for example, creates meticulously intricate tondos and mandala-like compositions featuring circular forms and repeated optical patterns. Within the perimeters that she establishes, Powers achieves a remarkable variety of effects,

ranging from the hypnotic intricacy of “Two Shoed Shuffle” to the Day-Glo psychedelic quality of “Prism,” with its graceful scalloped linear patterns swirling around a central yellow orb on a deeper golden yellow color field.

By contrast, Nancy Stella Galianos is a self-taught abstract expressionist with a freewheeling approach to form, line, and color that imbues her work with an energetic spontaneity, as though the painting is assembling itself before one’s very eyes. Although Galianos’ underlying color areas suggest amorphous explosions, her dancing line acts as a formal lasso, pulling them together and lending her compositions an impressive coherence and sense of barely contained energy.

Stephanie Joyce, on the other hand, creates haunting semiabstract works in which shadowy fragments of floral forms and other ghostly features and objects emerge like photo images in a developing pan from semi-translucent, roughly rectangular color areas and vertical stripes. Joyce’s painterly process seems to involve covering and obscuring her subjects as much as revealing them to create a sense of pentimento that teases the viewers’ consciousness and creates a tantalizing visual tension that brings her compositions alive in a unique manner all her own.

Extreme close-ups of the human face that fill the entire composition like endless terrains are the painterly arena in which Cindy Silvert creates powerful psychological portraits. The features appear veiled in flowing washes and layers of pigment, often somewhat blurred and mysterious like those likenesses of Christ that some devotees claim to see in the Shroud of Turin. Hovering between the abstract and the figurative, they compel our attention by sheer force of their presence, as seen in Silvert’s “Blue Eyes,” where the features of the title gaze with almost accusing force from a brown face cut off at the lips by the horizontal format of the canvas, as though to deprive the figure of speech. One is poignantly reminded of the fury that can build up in people whose freedom of expression is systematically denied.

Taking a herd of grazing cows and the jigsaw patterns of their hides as her subject in the group of paintings seen here, Barbara Walter integrates their bodies with the landscape in a manner that lends an abstract quality to her realist compositions. In “Under the Trees,” the shadows saturating the area of the meadow where the docile creatures cluster creates a strong contrast to the sunny field in the distance. Conversely, in another composition by Walter the white bovine and its calf standing on a low hill, set against, a cloudless blue sky, take on the monumental qualities of statues on a pedestal, in relation to the other members of the herd grazing and milling around in the meadow below.

Brian David Braun, a photographer who says “I see the world around me out of the corners of my eyes, preferring to catch the off moment in between moments over the staged,” succeeds splendidly in his goal in his black and white print “Cross Roads,” where the endless country road recedes into the distance of the harsh landscape like the end of a blues song. Even eerier in another way is Braun’s “After the Fire,” a color print of the blackened and limbless trees of a destroyed forest set against a dramatic sky like slender sticks of charcoal.

David Green, a sculptor who has been carving directly in stone for forty years, is represented here by pieces that flow easily between abstraction and figurative allusiveness by virtue of his command of organic form. His “Brown Fish” is almost totally nonobjective, yet projects a palpable sense of his subject through the sense of movement that the simple alabaster form projects in space. Almost as economical in purely formal terms, “Figure” and “Couple” reduce a female torso and a pair of lovers to their anatomical essences.

Beryl Brenner is quite another kind of sculptor, having worked primarily in the more traditional medium of wood sculpture through the 1970s, when she started experimenting with fused glass, the medium that preoccupies her to this day. Brenner’s pieces in the newer medium are filled with lively wit, as seen in “Mariposa Grove,” a work in fused glass and paper, in which the small figure of a tourist appears all but overwhelmed by mariposa fronds that surround and tower over him menacingly like an exotic man-eating plant. In another work in fused glass called “Heart Feeling Something Fishy,” Brenner presents the familiar symbol of love circled by stylized fish like an antidote to a Valentine card. Then there is “Glass Nation,” an abstract parody of a flag of no particular country. One could wonder if the artist is suggesting that nationalism of any kind is what ultimately divides rather than unites us all, but the fun of Brenner’s fanciful sculptures is that all the questions that it raises are open-ended, encouraging the viewer to think for himself or herself.

The question raised by the work of another artist named Andrzej Zynis is: can jewelry, when it is imaginative and exquisitely made, be considered sculpture for the body? For this particular viewer the answer can only be resoundingly affirmative, since many of Andrzej’s pieces are indeed limited editions, which is to say one of a kind works of art. Especially impressive among them are a series

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“Antidote,” New Century Artists Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, June 5th - 23rd, 2012.

A Dozen Artists Explore the Brighter Side of Nietzsche

One of the more thoughtful and imaginative curators in today's art world, Stefania Carrozzini, of I AM International Art Media, Milan and New York, paraphrases a concept from Nietzsche as the title and inspiration for her latest group exhibition: "You must have a chaos within you to give birth to a dancing star."

Of the twelve international artists to whom Carrozzini proposed this theme, New Orleans resident Patricia Muffin Bernstein who is featured in the Dublin Biennial this summer and was recently included in the Florence Biennial, seems to interpret it most literally. Of "The Sublime Birthing," her pigment print on canvas with stitching, depicting butterflies circling a flower within a spider's web, Bernstein says, "All around us nature is being attacked by mankind, especially the PetroChemical companies. My work showcases connections we are beginning to lose — mythological moments becoming archeological relics."

Another widely exhibited artist, Nelly Sanzi Juli, from Catanzaro, Italy, working in the décollage technique, also employs floral imagery, creating compositions as intricate as those of the late Joe Brainard, adding comely female nudes to further enliven the bouquet. In "The Princess," the décollage on canvas shown here, Juli places a sleeping Pre-Raphaelite figure at the center of a swirling whirlpool of bright blooms and pinup bodies as gaudily beautiful as a Calcutta film poster.

Stockholm painter Maj-Britt Niklasson, formerly of the Swedish folk-rock group Landslaget, appears to depict the transcendent flight the creative imagination must take to impose order on chaos in her oil on canvas "The Leap." Here, the heroine is a cartoon-like pear-shaped Alice in Wonderland type with braids like golden strings of beads, and her looking glass is an open window with blue sky beyond, through which she escapes the dark room of the mind.

Meanwhile maybe the only outlet for a lone wolf may be howling at the moon, as

Brooklyn-born artist Stephanie Bloom seems to imply in her phosphorescent-looking photograph of one such creature doing just that on what appears to be a frozen lake with red houses set against an impenetrable black sky in the background. Bloom, whose oeuvre also includes installation, sculpture, and painting as the spirit moves her, has stated that she sees herself as "a storyteller who never reveals the ending."

For others transcendence begins by going deep below the surface; or at least that's how Dutch ceramic artist Loeke Pam sees it in "Red-Eyed Coral," her sculptural interpretation of undersea vegetation.

Created with handbuilt stoneware, porcelain, black clay, pigments and glazes, hydrograins and glass, the piece suggests a writhing salad of exotic flora fully as sentient as the marina fauna that Pam also celebrates in other ceramic sculptures.

Joanna Coke brings her past media experience as a graphic designer/art director for a large computer firm, as well as a fashion designer/business manager for the Victoria's Secret stores, to bear in her present work as a mixed media painter, going about conceptualizing what she wishes to communicate as deliberately as she would for an advertising client. Apparently baroque abstract-morphing-into-figurative forms in the manner of a personal creation myth was the just the ticket for Coke's intricate and colorfully kaleidoscopic gridded composition of ten connected panels "From Dark to Light."

By contrast, Romanian artist Elena Diana Nistor simply calls her vigorous abstract composition in oil and acrylic on canvas "Landscape." Yet it appears to depict an inner rather than outer terrain of impulses transmitted directly from the nerve endings and the brain (whose visceral colors and convoluted coils its linear gestures could evoke) directly to the painter's hand. Pure energy, Nistor seems to suggest, is the most direct force through which the

transformation from chaos to order that Nietzsche espoused can be accomplished.

Spontaneity in the effort to break free from even the constraints of style itself is the approach of Austrian artist Gernot Schmerlaib, widely exhibited in Austria, Slovenia, and Italy. Schmerlaib's acrylic on canvas "Spring," with its bold, vibrantly translucent color areas and harmonious combination of sinuous line and geometric precision seems to symbolize the fresh sensation of renewal the artist experiences every time he embarks on the adventure of creating a new painting sans a stylistic roadmap.

Born in Carpi, Italy, former fashionista turned fine artist Susi Zucchi tackled the show theme head-on with a witty made-to-order sculpture / installation called "Dancing Star," combining elements of art informal and found object assemblage. The main form in Zucchi's piece resembles the top curve of a freestanding question-mark, propped up on a rag-covered pedestal with a smaller object (possibly representing its bottom dot) crucified to the wall behind it.

Sicilian artist Francesca Pettinato, on the other hand, is represented by a ceramic-bas-relief in which rhythmically interwoven forms share an intricate kinship with the late steel construct paintings of Frank Stella. Pettinato, however, replaces the funky machine shop quality of Stella's pieces with a formal elegance all her own which can only be achieved with the Raku medium.

Italian born installation artist, Sara Rossi who has made pieces for the theatre and film, contributed a mixed media work titled "The resting of the bear." It consists of odd unrelated images dispersed over a background of pale pink shafts emanating from a framed image of a resting bear and a half apple image within a circular shape. Superimposed over this spare arrangement are cryptic arrows and numbers, much like a blueprint, perhaps indicating an overall purpose to the apparent disparity of her imagery.

Then there is Annamaria Angelini Chiarvetto, born in Northern Italy, who employs a Nikon camera rather than a brush to create abstract compositions that convey not only a gestural quality but the sweeping sense of visual music, as indicated by the title, "Three Notes." Like the other artists that Stefania Carrozzini has gathered here, Chiarvetto appears intent on demonstrating that she can not only give birth to a star but make angels pirouette on the head of a pin. Or something like that.

— Ed McCormack

"You must have a chaos within you to give birth to a dancing star," curated by Stefania Carrozzini, Onishi Gallery, 521 West 26th Street, through June 6, 2012

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“The Judgement of Paris with a View of Amalfi”

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“Woodger’s “The Judgment of Paris with a View of Amalfi (2011),” where one can’t help but Rorschach sweeping Sistine ceiling imagery into the dramatic cloud formations and mists moving above and between the craggy, verdant mountain peaks that rise like notes from some heavenly pipe organ.

Rather than being nude, as in almost all other versions of the timeless theme down through the centuries, the three goddesses in Woodger’s painting preen fully clothed like models on a runway as they wait by the shore to be judged in that mythic beauty contest, almost as though reluctant to distract with their feminine charms from the artist’s spectacular depiction of the surrounding scenery.

“ANTIDOTE” GROUP SHOW

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of pendant necklaces featuring biomorphic forms that resemble miniature paintings by Miro, as well as a piece clustered with stones and pearls that evokes (for this viewer, anyway) both the symbol of a heart and its actual anatomical representation. Then again, I must admit that I don’t know much about jewelry but I do know art when I see it, in whatever form it may take.

Also included in this latest exhibition artfully curated by the ubiquitous Basha Maryanska are paintings by Kathryn Hart, whose work is reviewed at length elsewhere in this issue. — J. Sanders Eaton

For as with Lorrain — and in, fact, most Chinese and Japanese classical painting, in which the human image (usually a traveling monk or scholar), when it appears at all, is diminutive in proportion to the spaces it inhabits — the figures in Woodger’s compositions seem secondary to the landscape. Indeed, in his biographical materials, the artist reminds us that, while the Chinese and Japanese landscape tradition had already been underway for many centuries, before the 17th century “landscape painting in Europe did not exist as an independent genre.” He also reminds us that in the Renaissance nature served mainly as a background for religious figures, “primarily Jesus and the Madonna.”

As though to right that wrong belatedly, Woodger places greater emphasis in his own paintings — here, specifically, his interpretation of the Judgment of Paris theme — not only on Cinemascope natural panoramas but on such sublime details as the stucco architecture that spills down the mountain and is mirrored in the clear blue lake like fragments of beautifully broken crockery.

Something of a departure for Woodger, “A Woodland Scene” seems a species of Romanticism closer in character (if more meticulously realistic in execution) to that of the British artist Samuel Palmer, a contemporary of William Blake, zeroing in on a thick, rugged barked tree on the lawn

of an old house nestled cozily in shadows in the background. For if any allegory or myth is suggested here, it would have to be one involving nature nymphs and fairies minute enough to scurry and hide when the milkman comes around amid the nearby leaves and twigs that the artist delineates skillfully in such loving, sharply focused detail. Here again Woodger unearths the mystery of commonplace moments and things with a power also reminiscent of the twentieth century American artist Charles Burchfield, himself a lone romantic poet of lush organic growth and stately natural decrepitude.

In his biographical notes for his present New York solo show, Woodger laments that the style of 18th and 19th century Classical and Romantic landscape painting is “basically a lost art, unlike in Japan where sumi-e and suiboku-ga ink painting styles and techniques have been passed down for centuries as a cultural activity.”

One might like to remind him, however, that in an art world ruled by what his fellow countryman Robert Hughes once called “the shock of the new,” this could work to his advantage. For, on the strength of this exhibition, Jeff Woodger makes a convincing claim for ownership of the brand called “New Romantic Landscape.”

— Ed McCormack

Jeff Woodger, Noho Gallery,
530 West 25th St., May 29 - June 9, 2012.
Reception: June 2, 4 - 6 pm

Zarvin Swerbilov: Maestro of Baroque Abstract Arabesques

It is hardly surprising to learn that as a young man, before he found his true vocation as a visual artist, the painter Zarvin Swerbilov took trumpet lessons and hoped to become a jazz musician. Not that Swerbilov's paintings are in any way improvisational or tentative-looking, with fudged or smudged drawing, hints of pentimento and palimpsestic passages, like those of Larry Rivers, who actually started out as a saxophone player of the bebop persuasion. Quite the contrary, Swerbilov's compositions are at once sensual and precise with their pulsing acrylic colors and forms as impeccably tailored as the tuxedos of Duke Ellington or the sharp dress suits of the painter's old friend John Lewis, driving force of the Modern Jazz Quartet.

Born in 1927, Swerbilov says, "I grew up in the jazz age, and I collected records of Bix, Bunny, and Benny; and of the big band era, Dorsey's, Miller, James Barnet. . . . The point being that music of all kinds guides my pencil for shapes and colors and gestures — rhythms, etc."

A serious listener to jazz since his preteen years, at Queens College Swerbilov befriended fellow student Mal Waldron, who was destined to become a renowned avant garde jazz pianist in the tradition of Theolonius Monk, work with Charles Mingus, among many other great musicians, and be remembered as Billy Holiday's final accompanist.

In the summer of 1946, as a young sailor in uniform hanging around the backstage entrance to the Academy of Music, Swerbilov was invited in by a good-natured member of the board to see and hear Billy Holiday, Art Tatum, Sidney Bechet and other musicians on the bill. He fondly recalls a backstage conversation in which he confided to Bechet that he was studying the trumpet and hoped to become a musician.

"But although I produced a great tone, I lacked the musical coordination and gave it up," he says, choosing instead to study at the Art Students League with Robert Ward Johnson and Will Barnet class, and earned an MFA in painting and sculpture at Columbia University. But the connection to jazz continued. In the early 1970s Swerbilov and his wife, Sally Parker, became friends with John Lewis and his wife Mirjana, when they were all neighbors on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Having seen some of his bronze portraits in his and Sally's apartment, Lewis asked Swerbilov to do one of him. At the time the artist had a studio on West 24th Street.

"John came up the 72 steps to my top loft, where I began a clay head," Swerbilov recalls. "Because of his tight schedule he could never give me the time for me to complete it."

For someone like this writer, who first heard Thelonious Monk play live at the Jazz



"Flames"

Gallery on St. Marks Place while still in high school in the late 1950s; got to know the late Charles Mingus in the early '70s, and is still in touch with his son, the painter Charles Mingus III, it is clear that the spirit of jazz still informs the paintings of Zarvin Swerbilov to this day. Even before learning about the painter's musical connection, in fact, one compared his work in an earlier review to the vibrant late-career painted paper cutouts that Matisse created for the limited edition artist's book "Jazz." (Although the title was suggested by the publisher rather than the artist, it is said that Matisse "not only went along, but was taken with the idea, sensing a connection of the visual and the musical through improvisation on a theme.")

As he stated earlier, the improvisational part of Swerbilov's artmaking process takes place in the preliminary drawings for his paintings, in which he allows his pencil to wander as freely as the fingers of a pianist over

the keys in search of forms that will coalesce and then be meticulously orchestrated chromatically in the final composition.

What Swerbilov arrives at in this matter can only be called pure painting, in the same way that jazz is pure music. Indeed, the term "pure painting" was recently used by Jay Sanders, a co-curator of the Whitney Biennial in a *New York Times* article on Andrew Masullo, one of the participating artists. But while Masullo also employs clear shapes and solid bright colors, his approach, like that of the "Neo-Geo" painters of the mid-'80s is self-consciously conceptual, its so-called "purity" tainted by an element of Neo-Dada and Pop (before switching to his present style, he filled bottles with semen and grave dirt and practiced by spending a year "making dozens of paint-by-numbers portraits of dogs and cats"). Certainly the term applies more accurately to Swerbilov, whose work obviously springs from a deep

inner necessity, rather than from the novel and ironic gimmicks so dear to today's trendy museum curators, and whose forms are as fluid — and, yes, as musical — as the sibilant and sinuous syllables of his name.

"Jazz is a woman," someone once wrote, and certainly many of the abstract shapes in Zwerbilov's present and previous solo shows appear to allude to feminine curvaceousness. Especially evocative in this regard are the vertical swirls of red orange and red hues, set against various shades of blue, in the recent paintings respectively titled "At Rest," and "Harmony." In both, the upright forms evoke the influence of African sculpture on modern art, albeit more in the manner of the voluptuously elongated nudes of Modigliani than the angular figures in Picasso's "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)."

By contrast, the more jagged shapes, as sharp as shattered glass, and the darkly brooding nocturnal palette of "Blues in the Night" suggest the angst and grief of an artist who, in 2007, lost his wife of 45 years, Sally Parker, who shared his love of music and art, and suffered a stroke that affected his left leg and left hand only a month later.

But while human emotions seep into and invariably deepen the work of even an artist possessed of Zwerbilov's impressive formal control, the majority of his paintings come across as celebratory rather than elegiac. This seems especially true of a composition such as "Frozen Flight," with its undulating red on blue form suspended against a luminous yellow field, its title hinting at the obstacles that can hamper the heart's desire to soar.

And indeed for all its baroque form and coloristic brilliance even the painting Swerbilov calls "Halleluja" strikes a stately, sonorous note.

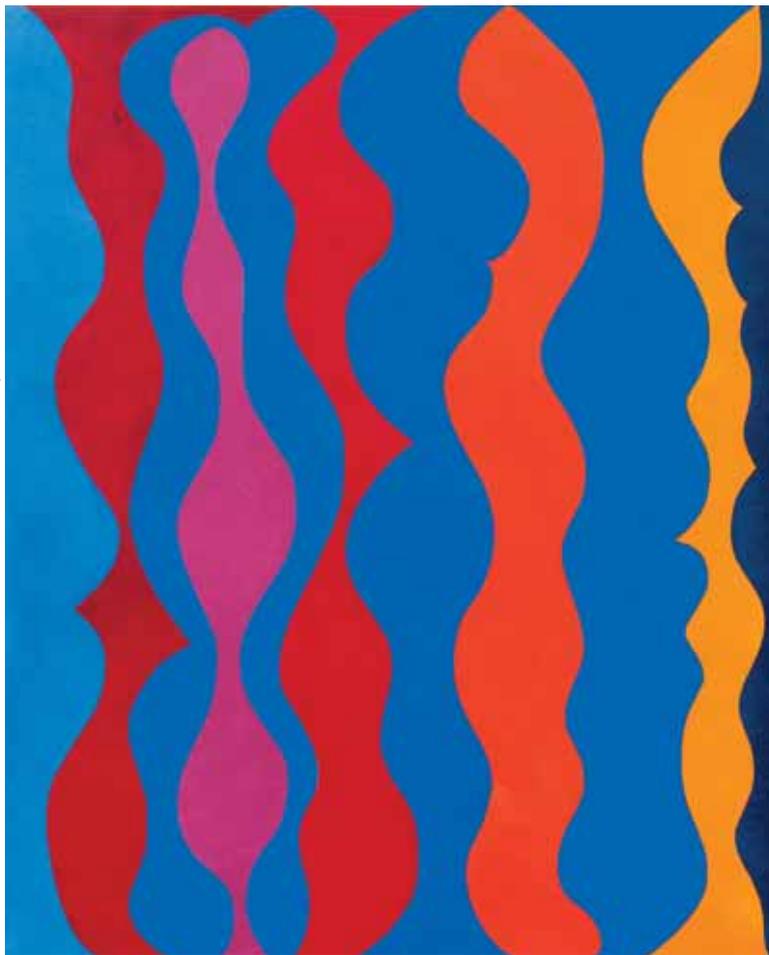
It is comprised of a large blue shape, alternately suggesting an exotic underwater plant with wiggling tendrils or a stylized asymmetrical eight-branched candelabra hovering on a blood-red field above a cursive dark form which, while ostensibly black is most likely composed of several mixed

colors, as is Swerbilov's practice to avoid "holes" in a composition.

One of the Swerbilov's major contributions to contemporary abstract painting, it would seem, is how he has unmoored and opened up forms in space, unlocking his shapes from the formal straightjacket of Cubism that has persisted over the ensuing centuries, in much the way that Norman Bluhm has done with a more

gestural style influenced by Zen ink painting and calligraphy. Swerbilov, however, has retained the classical solidity of Western aesthetics, even while setting biomorphically suggestive forms afloat like wiggling, undulating arabesques, as seen in paintings such as "Flames," "Splendor in the Grass," and "Oil Spill."

As precisely executed as they are, with nary a brushstroke in sight, so quirky, unexpected, boldly, asymmetrically graceful and finally expressively suggestive of a lush sensual softness that one cannot call them "hard-



"Harmony"

edged" (a term that automatically evokes a rigid geometry and that the artist abhors).

Now nearing 85 years of age, Zarvin Swerbilov has achieved a mastery of form, color, and composition that fulfills his youthful ambition to become a musician — albeit on an instrument of his own invention.

— Ed McCormack

Zarvin Swerbilov, Noho Gallery,
530 West 25th Street, June 12 - 30.
Reception: Saturday, June 16, 4 - 6 pm.



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WSAC "SPRING GEMS"

Continued from page 3

Robert Schultheis, an evocative painter of genre scenes, showed two evocative oils: one of chess players deeply engrossed in their game on an urban traffic island, the other of a solitary woman passing a bustling sidewalk cafe. In the latter composition, particularly, Schultheis revealed a Hopperesque ability to imbue contrasting areas of sunshine and shadow on the facade of the building above the cafe with emotional resonance.

— Byron Coleman

GABE TONG

Continued from page 4

the Uranus and the moons, which could be composed of different gases, ice crystals and rocks of multiple colors and texture."

Yet you couldn't get more classic in pure Cubist terms than Tong's "Nine to Five," which approaches "The Three Musicians" by Picasso or the darker earthiness of certain works by his contemporary Juan Gris for the solid stasis of its securely "locked in" forms and subdued yet strong color harmonies.

— Byron Coleman

WSAC "Ten Years After"

Continued from page 4

Jean Prytyskacz calls three numbered digital color prints "Reflection," not only because it shows the rebuilt site soaring skyward, mirrored in a grid of glass panels

that lends the decade-old memory a dreamlike quality; but also, one suspects, because the title suggests the meditation on the tragic event that led her to curate the exhibition. Another uplifting print by Prytyskacz, "A New Hope," places a couple of young lovers in the foreground of a busy scene with the construction cranes at the site in the background.

In a series called "Meat Packing District," Deena Weintraub appears to take an ironic view of a downtown district that has soared in real estate value and trendiness in the decade since the attacks, with a statue of Muhammad

Ali sparring outside a bar, a "Happy Hour" sign dangling from a chain around his muscular forearm; a display of dummies sporting gaudy hipster fashionista garb in the window of an undoubtedly overpriced boutique; and a billboard above a jam-packed parking lot saying "Stop praying ... God's too busy to find you a parking spot."

— Maureen Flynn

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Christie Devereaux: A Contemporary Visionary of the Sparkling Sea

Christie Devereaux never had herself clashed to the mast of a ship during a storm, as the great British painter J.M.W. Turner is said to have done in order to capture the full fury of the sea more intimately. But she came close enough, growing up on the South Shore of Long Island and spending summers surrounded by water on her parents' yawl, from which she often had to swim long distances to visit land. In 1984, she survived Hurricane Diana, the fiercest major hurricane to ever hit the East Coast, on a boat, and over the years she has experienced other storms firsthand at sea, both in the U.S. and abroad.

These experiences obviously inform and enrich the power of the paintings in Devereaux's exhibition "The Spirit of the Sea," which revives the tradition of Turner, John Constable, and Winslow Homer with a conviction to which no other contemporary painter of marine scenes whose name floats immediately to mind can lay claim.

The first reaction many viewers will have to this exhibition will be a feeling of disbelief that, although she has participated in numerous group shows in venues such as Lever House, Broome Street Gallery, the New World Art Center, and Chung-Cheng Art Gallery at St. John's University, it is the first solo exhibition in New York — or anywhere else for that matter — of an artist in possession of such a mature vision. Devereaux, however, has an interestingly eclectic history.

Born in Brooklyn, she studied modern dance at the Henry Settlement on the Lower East Side, while earning a degree in Industrial design from Pratt Institute. She then toured as a modern dancer for a year with the Electric Circus, moving in 1969 to Italy, where she worked as an industrial designer and graphic artist. In Italy she also painted commissions for the church and state, among the most notable being a portrait of Padre Pio, a Capuchin Catholic priest believed to have suffered the stigmata and venerated as a saint in Italy, now in the permanent collection of the Museum of Padre Pio, in Pietrelcina.

Upon returning to New York, she worked for over a decade with both teachers and students in the Freeport Public Schools, designing educational murals and facilitating school-wide art projects under a grant. In 1999, she was awarded a fellowship with the Long Island Educational Enterprise Zone to design a curriculum-based project in conjunction with the Museum of Modern Art.

Just as her childhood experiences around water influenced her choice of subject matter, Devereaux considers her diverse professional resume as valuable preparation for her preoccupation with painting full time from 1995 to the present, saying, "I am interested in creating a dramatic painting where the changing elements of the sea become the main idea."

To use a term such as "dramatic painting" is a daring, almost verboten notion in the contemporary art world, where irony so often rules and displays of honest passion may very well be the last taboo. Atmospheric effects (think Turner's "tinted steam") are also frowned upon by an avant garde still entirely smitten with the austere lessons of formalism. Yet on first discovering the marine paintings of Turner when very young, Devereaux will tell one, she was immediately aware of his being so ahead of his time as to almost have "appeared to be an Abstract Expressionist."

Wisely, in her own paintings, however, she eschews the fussily detailed depictions of figures or ships that stick out like incongruous little decals in some of Turner's compositions, interrupting the flow and hobbling the magnificence of the British master's storm-tossed organic forms. In this way she shares a certain aesthetic wisdom with Jon Schueler, an Abstract Expressionist who, rather than accepting the compromise between natural representation and abstraction that we encounter in the deadpan styles of artists such as Fairfield Porter and Alex Katz, broke with his colleagues in the New York School at the height of the movement to take inspiration from and focus his painterly energies on the roiling "cloudscapes" above the Sound of Sleat in the Scottish Highlands.

For Devereaux, too, is an artist who fuses realism and abstraction in a more natural manner that makes them inseparable. Indeed, the tumultuous rhythms that her vigorous depictions of sea and clouds often set in motion could suggest a spiritual kinship with the overall compositions of no less unlikely an aesthetic bedfellow than Jackson Pollock, while the deep nocturnal mood her paintings conjure up bears comparison to no less of a dark horse than his eccentric predecessor Albert Pinkham Ryder — particularly in Ryder's mysterious "Dark Cloud" and "Moonlight Marine."

"The Spirit of the sea represents an exploration of refracted light and the atmosphere that occurs when at sea or viewing the sea from the coast," she says in an artist's statement accompanying the series. Toward this end she has developed a unique technique of priming paper and canvas with either silver or copper acrylic pigments, then painting on this metallicallly-inflected ground primarily in grisaille. Shimmering through her "burnished" blacks and subtle gray tones the undercoat maximizes the abstract aspect of refracted light, picking up surrounding colors, including those in the clothing of viewers standing before the painting. As though with a brush dipped in liquid light, her intention is to "burnish" her brushstrokes like "micro mirrors," creating a painted surface that, like the reflections of sun or starlight or moonlight on water, produces sparkling sense of refraction resembling a



"Argento 22"

handful of diamonds scattered over the surface of the water.

These effects of transcendent illumination are especially dramatic in Devereaux's large acrylic on canvas "Argento 21," with its almost apocalyptic composition, suggesting that the sea is alive with leaping flames that cast their glow over the waves that fill the foreground of the composition. They also animate the slightly smaller but no less magnificent "Argento 22," in which beams of sunlight sweep over waves and ocean foam like the long gossamer gown of a towering angelic being whose haloed head and downy white wings are suggested by the fiery solar orb and two filmy clouds on either side of it.

Somewhat more subdued are the paintings in another numbered series called "Stormy Weather," where canvases primed with copper acrylic rather than silver acrylic imbue the compositions with a slightly more subdued but no less radiant sense of light, in which fluffy windswept cumuli, densely stacked cumulonimbi, and hazy cirrocumuli soar majestically over the churlish waves of moodier bodies of water, evoked in monochromes as grainy as graphite.

The paintings of Christie Devereaux are too filled with their own innate drama to be satisfactorily contained within the harshly lit, sterile "white cubes" that constitute so many contemporary art galleries. Thus it seems more than a little auspicious that this gifted artist's long overdue premiere solo exhibition should take place in the Treasure Room Gallery of The Interchurch Center, where the subtly muted lighting exquisitely complements the quiet radiance of her paintings.

— Ed McCormack

"The Spirit of the Sea," Treasure Room Gallery, The Interchurch Center, 475 Riverside Drive at 120th St., June 25 - August 27, 2012



Esther Barend



"Ray of Light"
24" x 20" - acrylics on canvas

The Ineffable Visions of Alberte Lemmens at Noho Gallery

The paintings of the Belgian artist Alberte Lemmens, who signs her works “Tita,” inhabit a mysterious plane where landscape, abstraction and metaphysics meet and meld to peculiarly poetic effect. Her earliest works were figurative and vestiges of the figure still appear in some of her compositions. Generally dwarfed by the vastness of the surrounding spaces, these figures are slender, featureless phantom presences akin to the wraith sculptures of Alberto Giacometti. They seem symbols of humankind’s existential isolation within the unforbearing scheme of the natural world. Isolation verges on desolation in the work in acrylic and mixed media that the artist calls “Terre et passion (Earth and passion).” Here the terrain that the clusters of diminutive personages traverse consists of horizontal bands of color, suggesting fragments of clay-red soil and blue and pale purple areas of sea and sky unsettlingly juxtaposed in random order. Despite its subdued colors, the painting emits an intense chromatic shimmer.

Ghostly white figures also appear in another composition entitled “Les uns, les autres (All and each other),” where they are in the process of either emerging from or receding into a field of similarly muted red pigment.

In any case, as evocative as it is, figurative imagery has all but been replaced in Lemmens’ most recent paintings by a wide variety of shapes evocative of geometric and organic forms, interspersed with fragments of natural imagery. In “Fragility of our planet,” for one powerful example, the composition is divided into two distinctly different sections. The left side of the picture is dominated by a combination of rectangular and circular shapes in burnished red and deep blue tones, evoking a nocturnal atmosphere. By contrast, the right side of the painting is limned with luminous pale peach daylight hues, as a mysterious blue orb, simultaneously suggesting aspects of the solar and the lunar forces, appears to careen across the picture and collide with the force of a cosmic bowling ball into a cluster of delicate green saplings.

The concept of ecological fragility inherent in the title, especially in view of the increasing number of natural disasters which have afflicted our planet in recent years, comes across in this composition in a manner that recalls the pioneering abstractions of Kandinsky at that moment in art history when he and very few others were first blasting off like aesthetic astronauts from the world of earthly representation into the realm of the ineffable. Lemmens’ faith in the ability of abstract painting to still tackle such large themes seems equally courageous — not to mention bracing — in the context of an era when so many of her contemporaries have succumbed to cynicism and fashionable irony.



“Cypress Trees”

In “Cypress Trees,” another abstract landscape, Lemmens makes a somewhat more serene but no less exciting statement. For here the emphasis is on the formal interpretation of a natural scene with colors — those deep, subtly rich clay-reds and muted smoky gray-blues that she favors over brighter hues — and shapes that may emanate from nature but do not imitate it. Here, too, the artist’s purely painterly attributes come to the forefront in the combination of thick impastos that lend some areas of the composition (particularly the cypresses of the title) a crusty texture which contrasts appealingly with areas in which she applies acrylic paints thinned to a consistency as translucent and fluid as watercolor.

Lemmens also often employs collage elements with burlap-like textures, among other materials that she sometimes paints over or seemingly immerses in her pigments to create wrinkles or crevices to enhance the tactile qualities of her canvases. The latter effect is especially prominent in “Cypress Trees,” where the wrinkles beneath the areas of blue sky along the border of the clay-red mountains take on an expressive function, suggesting waves of rebounding heat rising up from the earthy mounds.

Along with the conical shapes of the trees themselves, the picture also contains rounder forms, apparently created with actual leaves collaged into the composition, the veins of which make them resemble human hearts. Oversized in relation to the more proportionate landscape elements, these forms superimpose a surreal organic suggestiveness on the painting. The visceral

effect of this double image — simultaneously evoking a pastoral vista and the viscera of the human body, replete with red drips suggesting rivulets of the blood that the living heart pumps, seems to unite the landscape and figurative elements of Alberte Lemmens’ earlier paintings in a radically inventive new manner.

Then again, one of the pleasures of encountering a painter such as Alberte Lemmens is finding oneself in the presence of an artist who is still striving for ways to apprehend the ineffable. This is evident in “Early Morning Light,” a work in acrylic and mixed media on wood in which ordinary materials such as a strip of corrugated cardboard and other crudely down-to-earth materials are employed to transcendent effect, as well as a series of almost minimalist works in which limitless radiant horizon-lines are conjured up with paint and mere lengths of twine. It is also evident in “Reflets (Reflection),” in which precise geometric stripes of red white and blue as regular and rigid as the chrome grill of an automobile somehow evoke a sense of kinetic movement.

These and other works in this exhibition reveal an artist with an almost alchemical ability to transform whatever materials she has at hand into an elegant aesthetic statement.

— Ed McCormack

Alberte Lemmens, Noho Gallery,
530 West 25th St., July 3 - 21, 2012

Saritha Margon: Pioneer on a New Artistic Horizon

Aside from the medium employed, it would do Saritha Margon's "iPad works" an injustice to compare the series to other digital prints. For present here are none of the expected visual clichés that seduce lesser artists swept up in and carried away by the seemingly infinite possibilities of the new technology. All too often in such cases the artist is used by the computer rather than using it as merely a tool, much in the way others employ a brush, to achieve an aesthetic end.

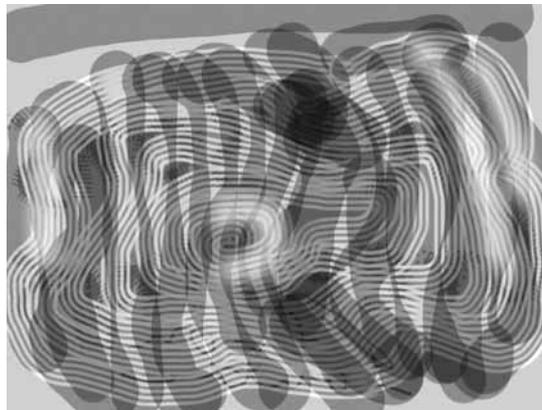
"Who wouldn't want one?" David Hockney recently exclaimed at the opening reception of his own exhibition of iPad floral studies in a gallery in Paris. "Picasso or Van Gogh would have snapped one up."

Like Hockney, and for that matter the past masters he is certain would have relished working with an iPad, Margon is first and foremost an artist who puts whatever medium she chooses to her own singular ends. And in her case, a more salient approach is to dispense at the very beginning with issues of technology and recall Paul Klee's simple notion of "taking a line for a little walk."

For like the Austrian painter and graphic artist Fritz Hundertwasser, Margon is one of our precious few contemporary masters of linear composition. But while the Austrian artist is still mired in the decorative arabesques of his fellow countryman Gustav Klimt and other predecessors in the Art Nouveau movement, Margon's oeuvre encompasses a far broader, more variegated visual vocabulary of line and color, and her artistic vision is considerably more subtle and sophisticated.

And although her themes are never as obvious, the innate allusiveness of her abstract compositions comes across especially well in the work entitled "Yellow," where horizontal

ribbons of that golden hue, interwoven with deeper stripes of ocher and bracketed at the top and bottom by bands of blue, suggest a body of land bordered by sky and sea. There are also hints of a terrain in



"Wavey Gray" 2011, Digital Print

another composition called "Gray Green." Here, however, they are shadowy, all but submerged in a tumultuous rhythmic linear miasma suggesting a windstorm with ethereal shafts of peach-colored light shining through.

A similar sense of contrast and visual tension animates "Wavey Gray," in which the white network of more or less regularly spaced lines at the center of the composition forms a mazelike mass set against a solid of field of green, intersected here and there by mysterious shadowy shapes which could suggest a crowd of figures. The viewer should be cautioned, however, against "Rorschaching" too specific meanings into Margon's pictures, the ultimate effectiveness of which springs from their "open-endedness" as autonomous abstract statements.

Consider, for example, the composition the artist calls "Lines # 6," where despite the

horizon composition which almost always evokes a sense of landscape, the vibrant stripes of orange, yellow, blue, and purple violet suggest nothing more physical than sound waves reverberating across planes of pure energy. (One thinks most immediately of the pioneering American abstractionist Arthur Dove, whose oil "Foghorns" evokes the mournful moans of ship signals calling out to each other at night on the Long Island Sound, albeit in a lighter register.)

In terms of the range of qualities that Margon conveys from work to work, consider the contrast of the ethereality of the previous composition with the physical palpability (almost impossible to carry off in a digital print) of Margon's nearly monochromatic "Relief # 2," with its intricate cross-hatchings overlaid by thicker serpentine lines that do indeed give the illusion of being rendered in tactile relief. Equally impressive for the artist's ability to evoke an illusion of almost topological tautness—here suggesting an aerial view of snaking highways—is Margon's "Gray # 5," where muted monochromes are intermittently enlivened at various intersections by touches of red as fine as spider veins.

It is such admirable restraint and delicacy that distinguish the art of Saritha Margon from that of others experimenting with the new technology. For what Margon's iPad works demonstrate most conclusively is that a true pioneer must remain ever mindful of previous art's eternal verities when approaching new horizons.

— Maurice Taplinger

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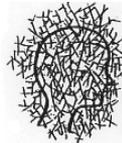
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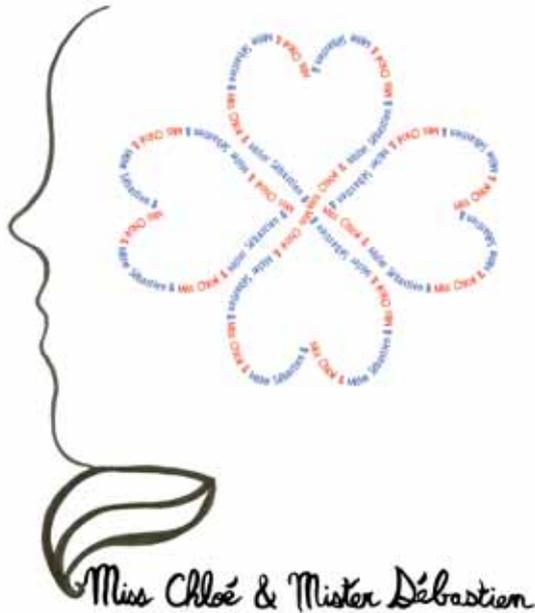
A hands-on redirecting of the mind and body that has been used successfully for over a century. Learn to use your body in a more efficient way which will have far reaching benefits. It involves changing old habits and learning new ones to last a lifetime.

Please call for a private consultation and introductory lesson.

Union Square studio, or house and office calls available.
Limited Introductory Offer: Consultation, intro lesson,
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Salon Show 2012

Painting, Photography, Crafts

Curator: Linda Lessner and Margo Mead

through July 1

Reception: June 9, 2:30 - 5:30 pm

Closing Reception: July 1, 2:30 - 5:30 pm

from 3-4pm there will be music by Judith Davidoff & Lesley Retzer and poetry by Riverside poets in celebration of the end of the season.

Artists:

Carole Barlowe • Marguerite Borchardt • Jack Cesareo
Gail Comes • Robert Eckel • Arlene Finge
Marvin Gettleman • Robin Goodstein • Barbara Hughes
George Jellinek • Linda Lessner • Marianne McNamara
Margo Mead • Michelle Ordynans • Lucinda Prince
Carolyn Reus • Gloria Rosenberg • Amy Rosenfeld
Beatrice Rubel • David Ruskin • Ava Schonberg
Robert N. Scott • Deborah Yaffe
Et al

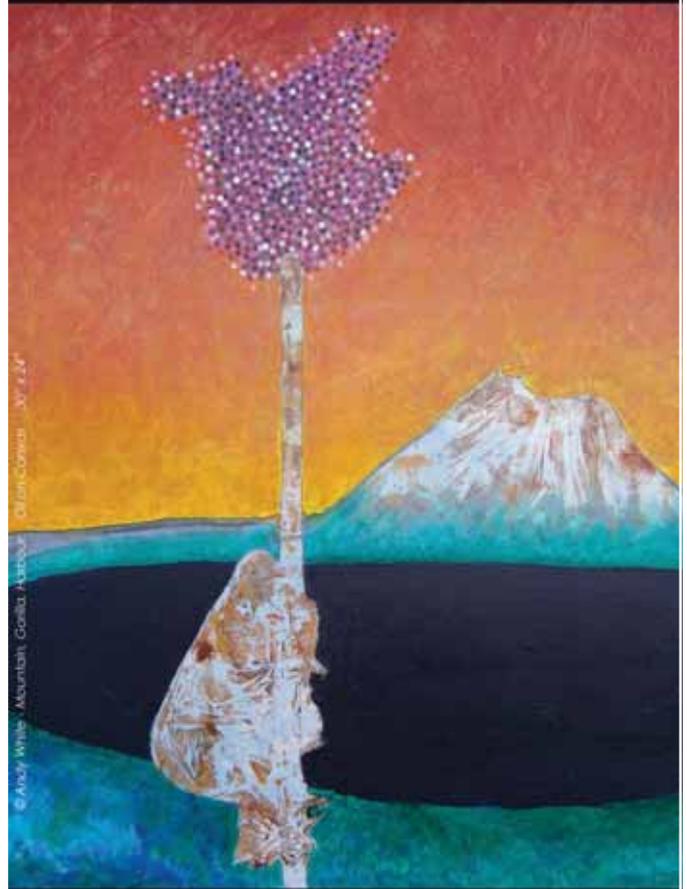
Broadway Mall Community Center

Broadway@96St. (NYC) Center Island

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

wsacny@wsacny.org 212-316-6024 www.wsacny.org

The Kaleidoscope of the Mind



August 24 - September 13, 2012

Reception: August 30, 2012 6-8 pm

Joan Benjamin
Marat Kharisov
Maria Magdalena Oosthuizen
Fred Mou
Sharon Ross
Douglas The Boogie Man
Andy White

530 West 25th Street, New York
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Photo: D. James Dee

"Halleluja", 2011, 47" x 35"

ZARVIN SWERBILOV

JUNE 12 - JUNE 30, 2012

**noho
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TUES - SAT 11 - 6PM 4th Fl.

Sun and Mon by appointment