

# GALLERY & STUDIO

## Yayoi Kusama at the Whitney



*Kusama with latest paintings at Tokyo 2011, Musashi University, Tokyo. Collection Yayoi Kusama. Image courtesy Yayoi Kusama Studio Inc.; Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo; Victoria Miro Gallery, London; and Gagolian Gallery New York*

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## Sudnya Shroff and the Silent Language of Pure Feeling

India has recently emerged as a major player on the world art map, with modern Indian masters such as F.N. Souza and M.F. Husain commanding prime prices on the international auction circuit. Something of their vivid colors and high spirit can be seen in the paintings Sudnya Shroff, a recently naturalized (2006) American citizen born in Pune, India, now living and working in Los Altos and San Francisco, California. After experimenting freely with various mediums and techniques, including brushes, palette knives and other tools, Shroff discovered that she expresses herself best by manipulating acrylic paint on canvas with her bare hands. As opposed to standard artist pigments, her preferred medium is Sherwin Williams acrylic wall paint and what she calls “controlled physical movement of the canvas” to produce certain effects. In this regard she seems a spiritual ancestor of Jackson Pollock, who also often favored house paints over the usual art materials, possibly for their more freely flowing quality.

Certainly Shroff’s literally “hands on” technique produces dynamically visceral effects that enhance the drama and power of her work, lending her compositions a directness that she describes as “snapshots of my internal emotional state at the time that I make them.” In an art world often dominated by deliberately contrived methods, she just may be one of the very last true “action painters,” to borrow the great art critic Harold Rosenberg’s term for the early innovators of the Abstract Expressionist movement.

Although Shroff’s aggressive forms are as adamantly abstract and filled with conviction and movement as those of any of the New York School pioneers, her compositions often contain



“Surf Boards”

allusions to natural forms, such as floral contours that flow and swell to the very edges of the canvas in graceful curves. In other works, such as “My Field,” and “Renewal,” the flowers become more specific without, however, sacrificing the formal integrity that underlies all of Shroff’s compositions.

The floral imagery ranging over several joined panels in “My Field” is painted in soft yet vibrant pastel pinks, blues, and greens that, although less harsh, could almost remind one of the Day-glo silkscreens of Andy Warhol, while the more delicately delineated green stems and yellow blooms set against a subtle blue ground in “Renewal” show an consummate sensitivity.

Indeed, here the artist’s exquisite sense of spatial apportionment and use of strategic “emptiness” is splendidly reminiscent of that in Chinese classical scroll painting, albeit skillfully translated into the more physical conventions of Western painting.

Shroff pulls out all the stops both coloristically and in tactile terms in “Surf Boards,” a magnificently sumptuous work consisting solely of vertical stripes of juicy color. Then there is “Smitten,” another large canvas in slightly more muted and milky, red, green, and pale blues. Here, the mellow hues are contained within a composition in which the central shape flows out from the center like Fourth of July fireworks or a huge blowup of the stamens in a flower. It is difficult to remember any painter in the past who gave such warm resonance to the emotion of infatuation without stooping to sentimental allegory.

Sudnya Shroff is a marvelously uninhibited, yet consummately disciplined self-taught talent. Which is to say: She obviously gained a great deal of expert knowledge regarding the qualities of paint and how they can be exploited most effectively in the long apprenticeship to which she subjected herself. And now she employs them with perfect control within her energetically extemporaneous approach to visual composition to share innermost feelings with which any person of refined sensibility should be able to identify. Her viewers will be all the richer for it. — Maurice Taplinger

Sudnya Shroff, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th St.,  
September 15 - October 5, 2012.  
Reception: Thursday, September 20, 6 - 8 pm.

## Inspiration and Process Meld in the Paintings of Roberta Dixon

Roberta Dixon says that she imagined the very first brushstroke of her very first painting for almost thirty-five years before she actually began work on it. With that first stroke, however, it would appear she opened a floodgate of spontaneous creativity in which, as she puts it, “With each painting comes a new beginning, infused with possibility.”

Indeed, rather than striving for the superficial appearance of what is commonly called a “signature style,” Dixon employs a wide variety of markmaking techniques to make every new beginning a departure as well. Swirls and skeins of painting that convey an all pervasive sense of movement and energy figure prominently as the dominant forms in compositions such as “Haiku” and “Coney Island.” In the former acrylic on a vertical canvas, the gracefully intermingled black, white, and yellow linear shapes, in keeping with the title, suggest Asian calligraphy. In the latter painting, a horizontal composition, the rhythmically flowing lines and neon-like colors evoke the serpentine curves of the rollercoaster ride at Steeplechase Park. Indeed this painting, reminiscent for its dynamic energy of Futurism, is as close as Dixon ever comes to depicting specific subject matter.

More characteristic of Dixon’s generally abstract direction are paintings such as “Lost in Time” and “Breaking Free,” with their densely knit all-over strokes and freely floating forms seemingly as schooled in the intimate Impressionism of Bonnard as in the “push and pull” of Hans Hofmann. For although she is apparently self-taught and speaks of her paintings as a way of “embracing chaos with a

seemingly disparate focus on balance and control” and claims to paint “with abandon, as if I have erased time and gone back to true innocence,” Dixon is a sophisticated artist who has assimilated varying traditions. Unlike more conservative painters, however, she does not show a nostalgic desire to “return” to tradition, but rather to employ it as a springboard to discovery. The sense of adventure, of journeying into new territory, that animates her paintings comes across in the contrasts between two of her most diverse compositions: “Molecular Dynamics” and “Dragon Day.”

“Molecular Dynamics” is a coloristic and tactile tour de force, comprised of many thick circular gobs of acrylic impasto build up to an almost relief-like texture in an all-over composition. That all of these elements are approximately the same size does not create a sense of monotony, however, given the brilliant harmonic spectrum the artist employs in this veritable cosmos of hues. “Dragon Day,” on the other hand again suggests an Asian influence, particular of one of those dancing dragons that, amid a rain of firecrackers, adds to the festivity to Chinatown New Year’s celebrations. However, as with the aforementioned “Haiku,” Dixon makes a fresh painterly statement with this composition, employing it to make a vigorous gestural statement with a variegated and vigorously executed central form set monolithically against a dramatic black ground.

Here, as in all of her paintings, the interplay of gesture, movement, and color transcends subject matter. For while she states that she often begins “with a seed of an idea — “an obscure image or phrase, or fleeting memory” — her true motor is



“Breaking Free”

the mood of the moment translated into a fresh aesthetic statement about the act of painting itself. Process is the final truth in the paintings of Roberta Dixon and sufficient of itself to imbue her work with its own unique life and value.

— Byron Coleman

Roberta Dixon, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th St.,  
October 9 - 30, 2012.  
Reception: Thursday, October 11, 6 - 8 pm.

## Jessica Fromm Gets Where She Wants to Go

Through all shifts of style, technique, and subject matter, the concerns of serious artists remain more or less constant. Like Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, Alfred Leslie and others before her, Jessica Fromm does not see her recent turn from abstract to figurative compositions as a defection from or disavowal of her earlier work. Rather, Fromm's newest series of drawings and monoprints is a further exploration and extension of this vigorous painter's graphic side, in which the human figure is often stretched to its formal limits by virtue of the muscular plasticity of her forms and the fluid movement of her whiplash line.

That said, the most noticeable difference between the works in Fromm's present exhibition and those in her previous foray into figuration, featured in her January 2011 exhibition (both shows curated by Judith Landsman), is the absence of an implied narrative. Among those earlier works, one recalls her haunting image, inscribed roughly in charcoal, of an emaciated, gape-mouthed figure in a hospital bed, flanked on one side by a tall, authoritative figure in a long white physician's coat, and on the other by a huddled couple, clinging in an area of shadow, who appear literally naked — or at very least emotionally denuded by their angst over the fate of their ailing loved one. As darkly delineated as an etching by Goya, the humanistic content of these drawings in no way distracted from the formal qualities that Fromm has always insisted are first and foremost among her concerns.

As early as her solo exhibition in 2004, however, Fromm titled an adamantly Abstract Expressionist canvas "Thoughts of Siquieros," in honor of the Mexican muralist, who along with Orozco, influenced Jackson Pollock. And of the semiabstract works in her present exhibition she states, tellingly, "I am here employing the human body as a springboard to probe at primal forces of energy, of chaos and of their underlying structure."

Tellingly, one points out, because the curved strokes of the black or red striped stockings circling some of her freely drawn figures' legs do indeed suggest tightly coiled springs, lending the compositions dynamic visual tension, even while simultaneously evoking the feminine frippery and fetishism of a Toulouse Lautrec cancan. At the same time, however — particularly in the black and white works in the series — they also conjure up subliminal visions of skeletal rib-bones that add a hint of mortality to the fleshy sensual mix in a manner less literal, yet just as disconcerting, as Egon Schiele's nude self-portraits and drawings of hollow-eyed lovers.

For Fromm is a consummately sophisticated

draftsperson and her figurative drawings, every bit as much as her abstract paintings, are invariably richly informed by what de Kooning referred to as "slippery glimpses" of art historical references. But if her previous figures seemed almost devoid of eroticism for their emphasis on the mortal frailty of the human body, the grain of the very charcoal itself suggesting the phrase "dust to dust," the opposite is true of her newest ones.

Despite their relatively modest scale, a group of

of its bare arms and striped legs. In both, Fromm toys playfully with the viewers' perceptual facility, seeming to make the point that seeing requires extra effort when things are not always what they initially appear to be. Less ambiguous, however, are the monoprints designated "Untitled 4" and "Untitled 5," in which more voluptuously defined female forms suggest, respectively, aggressive woman-above coitus and wildly abandoned rear-entry sexual surrender. Indeed, compared to the

previously discussed images, the latter two demonstrate the not so subtle difference between sensuousness, with its predominantly aesthetic connotations, and down to earth sensuality.

By contrast in another series of untitled monoprints on rice paper to which Fromm has added acrylic and pastel colors, the surfaces are worked up in a manner that approaches mixed media painting more than drawing. Here, too, the imagery is alternately clearer and more obfuscated by complex mark-making, palimpsests, pentimento, and frenetic gestural activity.

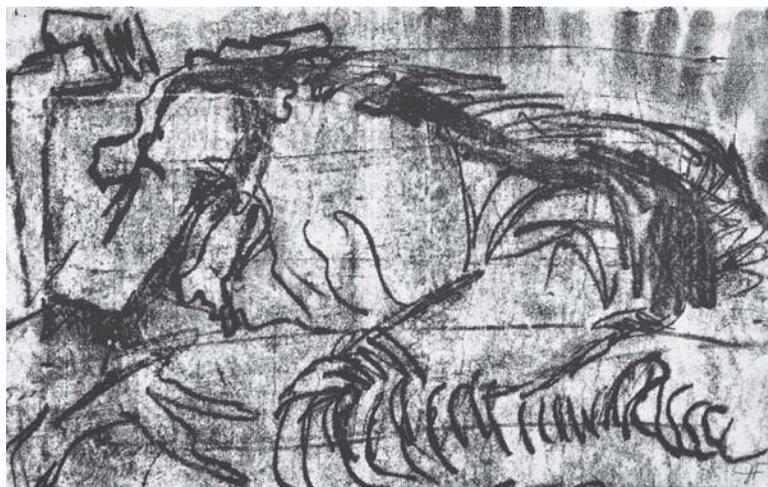
In a review of the drawings she exhibited in 2011, Fromm made a statement that I felt was significant to quote at the time and believe bears repeating here: "For perhaps the first time in my career I walked into my studio with some images half formed in my mind. In a very short while I backed away from the easel, convinced that I would not get where I wanted to go in paint..."

It would appear that she has finally arrived at that point in this latter series of monoprints, which hover so tantalizingly between specific graphic representation and painterly abstraction. Particularly intriguing is "Untitled 10," where the areas of bare flesh and red and white candystripes are so complexly convoluted that one is at a loss to determine whether the composition contains a single figure in contorted

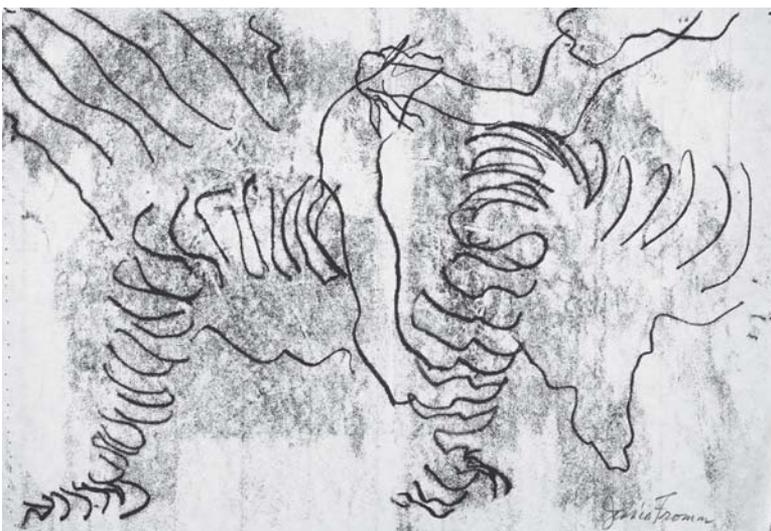
motion (ala Duchamp's descending nude) or two figures merged in a manner suggesting the multiple limbs of a centipede.

Either way, Jessica Fromm's recent drawings and monoprints suggest several directions in which her work might go from here. And one can be certain that whichever she chooses will provide her next exhibition with yet another embarrassment of riches.

— Ed McCormack



"Untitled 5"



"Untitled 8"

voluptuous rear views of female nudes in ink on paper achieve a sense of the monumental, calling to mind the bronze amazons of Aristide Maillol or Gaston Lachaise. Even more erotically evocative, however, are Fromm's monoprints on rice paper — some monochromatic and linear, others incorporating areas of acrylic colors and pastel — in which the aforementioned striped stockings are prominent motif. In one such work, "Untitled 6," a female figure, decapitated by the top edge of the paper, could resemble an exotic plant, given the sensuous contours of its frilly negligee and the sinuous patterns and the stamen-like repetitions of the stripes encircling the figure's splayed legs. In another black and white monoprint on rice paper, "Untitled 8," the figure deconstructs in a manner that initially appears altogether abstract, until the viewer pieces it together by noting the location

Jessica Fromm, Noho Gallery,  
530 West 25th Street,  
September 4 - 29, 2012

# The “Ties” That Bind Pure Aesthetic Pleasure to Meaning are Plentiful in the Mixed Media Works of Suzanne Blaustein

To a viewer encountering her work for the first time, a gallery filled with the fabric sculptures on canvas of Suzanne Blaustein could suggest the den of a female hunter. Only here, rather than stuffed animal heads, the trophies lining the walls are neckties, the most phallic (and nonfunctional!) item of all male attire.

In the ‘60s, when the Pop artist Jim Dine made a series of collage paintings in which paper neckties were presented hanging straight down, like impotent penises, it was difficult not to interpret them as a bohemian male artist’s sly putdown of businessmen as limp dicks, given how the art world was so rife at that time with cynical fly-by-night entrepreneurs eager to cash in on the spanking new movement of which he was a part. Today, if a female artist were to present neckties the same way it would be seen as a not so covert feminist statement. Suzanne Blaustein, however, has no political axe to grind; her use of neckties is simply a means to a purely expressive end. She can’t help smiling wryly when a critic suggests a symbolic, not to mention feminist, angle in her work.

“I create fabric sculptures on painted canvas,” Blaustein says in an artist’s statement regarding her most recent exhibition at Montserrat Contemporary Art Gallery in Chelsea. “My fingers move the fabrics around the canvas, arranging them side by side and layering them. I twist them and paint them to create a celebration of colors, textures and patterns. I imagine something and go after it until I see it materialize. In essence, it is a dialogue between my thoughts, the fabric, and the painted canvas.”

In fact, Blaustein sees her work as “Art Informal” and is pleased when a critic compares her to Antoni Tàpies, the contemporary Spanish master of that style, who felt that art should be made from simple things and made a sculpture in his native Spain of a monumental sock with a hole in its heel. Like Tàpies, one of the true pioneers of mixed media who not only mixed clay and marble dust into his paints but incorporated detritus such as discarded paper, string, rags and (in his later work) substantial 3-D objects such as furniture parts in his compositions, Blaustein uses whatever comes to hand and strikes her fancy.

In an older work wittily titled “Spaghetti” (she is one of those artists who sees no reason that titles should be pretentious or pseudo-profound) she employed rough shards of wood along with softly shredded materials to create dynamic tactile contrasts. In this work, too, the colors tended toward earthy hues reminiscent of early forays into



*“Le sang est rouge”*



*“Uninhibited Orange”*



*“Lemons and Lemonade”*

cubist construction of Picasso and Braque. Texture continues to be an important element in her latest assemblages, although color is now heightened and along with those in the sinuously curving, sometimes almost serpentine permutations of the ties. Additional tactile appeal is added by coarse pumice grain crumpled and mixed into

her paints, as seen in one especially striking work where it is mixed in with silver metallic pigment, the rough granules suggesting trampled diamonds.

Like Ad Reinhardt — and sometimes Jasper Johns — Blaustein favors a single overall color for many of her most recent works, such as the one she calls

“Uninhibited Orange,” a diptych of two connected square-shaped canvases in which only the fine paisley-like patterns in the ties saturated in this brilliant, semi-transparent hue, interrupted the color scheme. Here, too, the pointed tips of the painted and folded ties protrude off the edges of the canvases — albeit at different parts of each square to avoid the kind of monotony that a perfectly symmetrical arrangement might cause.

This “shaped-canvas” effect that Blaustein’s use of the ties as 3-D elements can create is especially dynamic in the single canvas called “Purpura Purple,” where ties and scarves are draped in a manner suggesting a hanging shroud, its hem running off the lower edges of the composition. Here, too, a greatly diluted purple hue washes semi-transparently over the ties and scarves covered with an intricate filigree of fabric patterns and further dotted with strategically placed black-headed pins. The background hue is also expressively streaked with variegated pale and darker shades and unevenly spaced lengths of fine string running vertically from the top to the bottom of the canvas in a manner suggesting thin rivulets of dripped paint, creating a trompe-l’oeil illusion of the “stain painting” style of Abstract Expressionism in the manner of Helen Frankenthaler or Norman Bluhm. And if this painting gives the appearance of being among Blaustein’s most viscerally affecting, perhaps it is because in this work, the ties and scarves not only evoke a feeling of the aforementioned shrouds but also of the ventricles of the heart. It is instructive to consider, in terms of comprehending the multiple, subtle meanings that can be read into this artist’s work (even as she insists on purely plastic intentions) that the term “purpura” refers in medical jargon to hemorrhaging (or bleeding) into the skin in a manner that results in the purplish — or what lay people call “black and blue” — marks on the outer surface of the skin.

Although ties also play a role in another intriguing mixed media work by Suzanne Blaustein called “Nesting,” they are all but engulfed by a thick and intricate configured network of interwoven orange and beige strings that cover almost the entire canvas, accented by multicolored round-headed pins that suggested stations on a subway map, targets on a war map, or any number of other diagrammatic charts. Here again, an attentive viewer can not only appreciate this artist’s compositions for their linear, tactile, coloristic, and other aesthetic attributes but also for their infinite and, even often poetic, suggestiveness.

Other works, however, suggest an



“Nesting”

opposite affinity for the spare, austere purity of Minimalism. In “Lemons and Lemonade,” *Le sang est rouge* and “Indigo Mood” yellow, red, and blue overall color schemes, respectively, pay tribute to the power of the primaries as they completely cover the composition, submerging the undulating waves of neckwear, lending pinheads the opacity of buried paint-coated rivets, and giving areas of coarse grain pumice dust the tactile palpability of raised islands on a topological map.

The diptych “Indigo Mood” is particularly evocative in this manner, with its two adjoining canvases covered in a hue every bit as sumptuous as “Yves Klein Blue,” that color with which that showy French artist used to cover his nude models before employing them as human paint rollers on huge unstretched canvases laid out on the gallery floor for his Happenings.

Remarkably, Blaustein makes the color just as seductive in her own way, producing an effect as lyrical as the Duke Ellington jazz symphony for which her diptych is presumably named.

In this exhibition Suzanne Blaustein emerges as an artist who can move easily between contrasting modes of expression, uniting them by virtue of a strong overriding aesthetic vision that is probably attributable to her primary concentration on the purely visual and tactile components of her paintings. If, at the same time, her compositions also evoke a multitude of other, more submerged subjects for the rest of us, this is cause for even further celebration. — Byron Coleman

Suzanne Blaustein, Solo Show, Montserrat Contemporary Art Gallery, 547 West 27th Street, October 23 - November 10, 2012

# Future Art Stars in the N.A.W.A's Latest Annual

The 123rd Annual Exhibition of the historic National Association of Women Artists, Inc. is a huge survey, including work in a variety of media, awarding over ten thousand dollars in prizes and including far too many exhibitors to do true justice here. The most one can hope to do is present a sampling of works in several categories and encourage the reader to experience this major art season event for her or himself.

Mixed media and collage, always a lively area of experimentation in the contemporary art scene is represented in works by Debbie Lee Mostel, Erin Stukey Johnson, and Ruth Terrill.

Debbie Lee Mostel shows an assemblage called "Nobel in Oslo," juxtaposing dynamic blue painterly swirls with a photo image of the head of the Statue of Liberty with 3-D elements including what appear to be computer parts, as well as a statuette of a heroic male figure in a loincloth holding aloft a laurel in one hand and a scroll in the other. Erin Stukey Johnson also makes a strong statement with "Gender Dance," a boldly tactile figure in an Expressionist landscape given



*Jacqueline Lorio*

palpable weight with thick earthy impasto scored with textures resembling corrugated cardboard. In a collage entitled "Eternity at Work," Ruth Terrill puts a surreal spin on the majesty of antiquity with a sweeping vista of a dreamlike atmospheric landscape in which radiant mountains and clouds take on strange shapes and huge flowers sprout from classic columns and stems emerging from piles of rock.

Sculpture, all too often slighted in major group exhibitions, is also given proper prominence here. Amy Puccio counterbalances rugged textures with light pastel hues and sprightly abstract forms in her abstract piece in wood mosaic "We Meet Again." Gracefully furled forms stained with translucent pinks, yellows, and blues appear to float like colored smoke in "Venus's Shell," a wall relief by Jane Notides-Benzig. A lovely, quirky, oddity distinguishes Elizabeth Miller McCue's "Nesting," a delicate yet funky concoction of patinated bronze wire perched on a bark-textured pedestal. By contrast, Jacqueline Lorio finds smooth, immaculate white marble the perfect medium for two totem-like sculptures featuring tiny human nudes merging fantastically with eggplants. Then there is "Now Voyager," a witty stoneware clay camel by Priscilla Heep-Coll who invariably has a wild and woolly way of integrating unexpected negative spaces into the anatomy of her whimsical animal figures to lend them semiabstract originality. Another fine sculptor, Phillis Rosser, displays an exquisite ability to suggest an entire nocturnal scenario with a few skillfully gathered, combined, and finely sanded natural wood forms in her poetically titled piece "Low Hanging Moon."

Landscape imagery, ranging from realism to stylized visions of nature transformed, also makes a strong showing among several painters in the show. Belonging to the first category, Mary Bell Steffen demonstrates how scenic wonders will never go out of style with her oil — intriguingly named "Don't Angels Fall?" — of winding mountain streams, pristine trees, and violet flowers in a style of idealized magic realism reminiscent of masters of Americana such as Grant Wood and Thomas

Hart Benton. Likewise, Pea Wright demonstrates the eternal freshness of the watercolor medium as a vehicle for landscape in "The Other Side," the heavenly allusion in that title justified in her poetic vision of wet-into-wet clouds hovering over golden fields, verdant foliage, and distant blue mountains.

Sheila Cappelletti also employs a wet-into-wet technique, albeit in a more Impressionistic manner, in her buoyant aquarelle "Cherry Blossoms," an ethereal explosion of pink-spattered buds and slender limbs enlivening a misty grove of saplings like youthful ballerinas in tutus. Equally lyrical in its own manner is "Birch Tree Quilt," another highly original arboreal interpretation by Jean Goddeau, intricately wrought in the unusual medium of batik on rice paper and embroidery in a manner that makes the distinctive patterns of the bark strike the eye like a herd of palomino ponies galloping by.

A fine representation of the contemporary tendency called painterly photography is Danielle Austen's "Daisy Dome," in which the yellow flowers, blurred like flying saucers, seem to sail through a forest scene, the trees and tall grasses creating textures one feels it would be almost possible for a viewer to reach out and touch. The opposite tendency, photorealism, comes to the forefront in Corin Wagner-Brown's technically meticulous oil on canvas "Dead Trees Grow No New Leaves II," with its dead-on depiction of one such leaf turning from green to blue on a blackened bough, as stark an image of mortality in its own way as Ivan Albright's painting of a dark funeral wreath on a dark door, "That Which I Should Have Done I Did Not Do."

Almost psychedelic in its intensity, Callie Hirsch's acrylic on board "Nature's Pulse" does indeed seem to evoke the vital signs and essences of nature, with its vibrant colors, jewel-like auras, and intricate patterns of sinuous green fronds flowing as though in a night wind against a black background. Then there is Leah K. Tomaino whose "Climbing Mt. Rainer" evokes a glorious vista of snow capped peaks from here to tomorrow with such stunning verisimilitude that one must check the medium several times: collage with recycled bags!

Figurative painting in this show ranges from the fantasy to gritty realism. A delightful example of the former is Lolita Bronzini's oil on linen "Strange Rain," a detailed image of two anthropomorphic bird-people in striped period outfits resembling especially dapper jester suits standing under a shared yellow umbrella in what appears to be a storm of mothballs. Just as compelling in the opposite direction is "Love Act" by Linda Lippa, a neon-lit oil on canvas capturing an impassive transaction between a furtive male customer and a somewhat younger woman cashier at the ticket window of a Times Square porno theater, the picture's title (also glowing in neon on the window) taking on an almost poignant irony in context.

A more historically distanced but no less engaging image, rendered in pen and ink by Ethel Kipnes, "The Russian Ghetto — The Sky is Falling Down" is pregnant with ominous portents, even as it depicts a pleasant enough peasant scene in a rural hamlet. By contrast, "Joy," a bold, luminous colorful abstraction by Edith Rae Brown takes skillful advantage of that ancient medium's capacity



*Mary Bell Steffen*



*Lolita Bronzini*



*Ruth Terrill*

for uniquely layered chromatic effects to simply spread the emotion for which it is named.

Over the years important woman artists have been associated with the N.A.W.A., among them Mary Cassatt, Isabel Bishop, Alice Neel, Audrey Flack, Faith Ringold, and many others. One would not be surprised if some of the contemporary artists in the present exhibition joined that exalted company in the future. — J. Sanders Eaton

National Association of Women Artists, Inc.,  
123rd Annual Member's Exhibition,  
Sylvia Wald and Po Kim Gallery, 417 Lafayette St.,  
September 4 - 29, 2012.

# Two Exhibition Spaces Bring Art to the Cultural Desert of Upper York Avenue

In an economy where both artists and high profile galleries must struggle harder than usual to survive, alternative and more intimate exhibition spaces are especially important. Owned and curated by bow-tie sporting former seminarian H. Harris Healy III, Logos Bookstore, at 1575 York Avenue, between 83rd and 84th Streets, is one of the best known of such venues on the Upper East Side.

Although Logos offers perhaps the most comprehensive selection of religious texts in town, it also stocks current bestsellers, literary fiction and poetry, nonfiction, history, psychology, and books for children and young adults, as well as greeting cards and music CDs. As open-minded and diverse in his artistic tastes as he is as a bookseller, Healy recently featured a two-person show by New York abstract painter Paul Morin and Russian born neoimpressionist Sonia Grineva.

Perhaps it is because Paul Morin is a composer as well as a painter and calls one numbered series "Movements," that his compositions, comprised of soft, variegated vertical strokes and streaks of vibrant color, strike one as notes in a kind of visual music. By contrast, Grineva's Manhattan cityscapes capture brownstones in a blizzard and verdant, sun-splashed Central Park views with a breezy painterly vivacity. Although their approaches to subject matter differ greatly, both painters share a vigorous and exhilarating gestural brio.

In past exhibitions at Logos, we were especially impressed with works by Upper East Side artists Peter G. Pereira and Judith Gwyn Brown.

Also a painter and graphic artist with a raunchy take on mythological subjects that harks back to Picasso's Minotaur series, albeit with a clean supple line more in the manner of Matisse, Pereira most recently showed a group of computer art pieces inspired by the wide variety of botanical species in nearby Carl Schurz Park. Multiplying the floral forms in repeated patterns, Pereira transformed them into compositions suggesting psychedelic mandalas.

Brown, an illustrator of more than forty books for major publishers as well as a painter, is best known for her moodily atmospheric figurative ink



*Judith Gwyn Brown*

drawings and large oils on canvas. Her favorite subject appears to be rendezvous between romantic couples in dim restaurants or outdoor urban settings, such as Bethesda Fountain on an overcast winter day under the stone angel and naked trees.

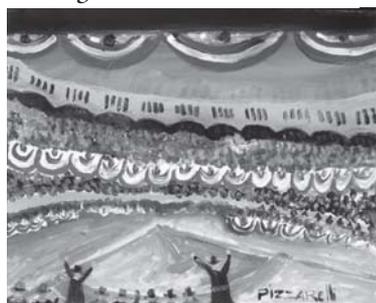
In contrast to the genteel patrician demeanor of H. Harris Healy III, his neighbor down the street, big bearded Jim Horton roars in from his home in northern New Jersey to Gallery of Graphic Arts Ltd, 1601 York Avenue, like a civilized Hell's Angel on a BMW motorcycle. Horton, who took over as director of GoGA, as it is sometimes known, from Eleanor (Ellie) Seibold, who opened the gallery in 1963. Although no exhibition space so venerable could be accurately termed "alternative," Horton supports the gallery by offering custom archival picture framing for both private collectors and organizations such as prestigious as The Whitney Museum.

Although formally a limited edition print gallery, in recent years Horton has extended GoGA's scope to include oils, acrylics, and other one of a kind original works of art. One of our favorite

frequent exhibitors is Joe Chierchio, whose meticulously executed



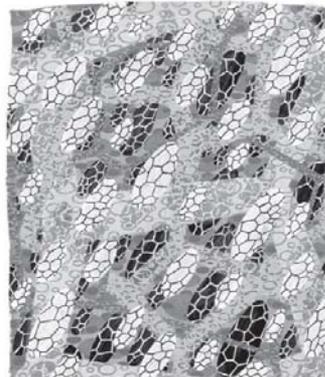
*Yin Yong Chun*



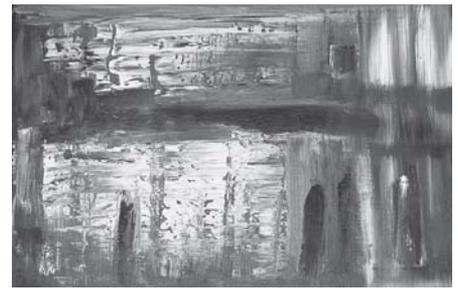
*Bucky Pizzarelli*



*Joe Chierchio*



*Warren Kloner*



*Paul Morin*



*Sonia Grineva*



*Peter G. Pereira*

color pencil drawings combine a nostalgic social realism reminiscent of Edward Hopper and Reginald Marsh with brilliant comic strip colors and a Pop pizzazz reminiscent of Roy Lichtenstein.

We are also fans of Bucky Pizzarelli, who besides being a well known jazz guitarist (featured along with his cabaret star son, John Pizzarelli, on Paul McCartney's wryly named new album of old standards "Kisses on the Bottom") is also one of our liveliest self-taught painters. Pizzarelli's "World Series," with its red white and blue banners draped over the stands and multitude of cheering fans, is a veritable classic of sophisticated primitivism.

Equally impressive in their own manner are the crystalline realist still life paintings of the Chinese artist Yin Yong Chun, with their exquisite mastery of light and shadow on various surfaces; and the abstractions of Warren Kloner, whose many circular forms within interlocked linear structures as muscularly sinuous as those of Brice Marden, suggest a veritable universe of swarming cellular activity.

Sandwiched in among the laundromats, delis, hardware stores, and hair salons of the Upper East Side, Gallery of Graphic Arts, like Logos Book Store, is a welcome oasis for neighborhood aesthetes.

— The Editors

# Marie-Hélène Beaudry's New Solo Show Signals a Bold New Departure

It takes great courage and conviction for an artist to drastically simplify his or her iconography (especially when the earlier, more complexly configured subject matter has been favorably received by critics and collectors), although it is almost always a sign of growing aesthetic authority and what we generally refer to as a “mature style.” There is, after all, the danger of throwing the baby out with the bath water, to use a well worn cliché that may apply a little more aptly than usual here, since the first works that I ever saw and reviewed by the celebrated Quebec artist Marie-Hélène Beaudry, in her solo show at Caelum Gallery in Chelsea in 2007, depicted a bad little girl who dangles her “mini me” doll into the waves of the sea in a series that could, according to one’s mindset, suggest either a baptism or a drowning.

That first series, with its nonlinear narrative immediately captivated me, as did the second exhibition by Beaudry that I saw in the same venue, entitled “Impulse to Run,” which revolved around the allegory of a sprinting schoolboy set against the apparent map of a city that transformed with closer inspection into home tailoring patterns of the type women use to make clothes for themselves and their children. Here again, there was a story, however submerged; just as there also was in Beaudry’s 2010 New York solo show at Caelum, this time in which the different stages of life from early childhood were depicted in a gender-blending procession (again set against patterns for home-tailoring) much in the manner of an evolutionary chart.

What all three shows shared in common was that not only was the narrative partially submerged under a array of intriguing symbols and subtexts, but the imagery was as well, under Marie-Hélène Beaudry’s characteristically succulent washes, and drips of semitransparent veils of diluted oil pigment, which lent each series a layered complexity, a depth of tone and color that greatly enriched her compositions with qualities as subtle as those in any abstraction.

Indeed, Beaudry’s combination of intriguing imagery and semitranslucent color areas (predominantly pale earth tones and grays interspersed with bursts of brighter hues) reminded one of the contrasts between image and palette in the paintings of Robert Rauschenberg, although Beaudry’s manner of melding those elements was, from the start, considerably more enigmatic, verging as it always was, on a staggered narrative that could seem influenced by the sequential flow of cinematography.

Aside from Beaudry’s characteristic painterly panache, which is still very much present, all of this has changed in her most recent series of tondos. The round shape of the canvases is not only evocative of the shape of the planet earth but projects an impression instantly more boundless and infinite-seeming than even a perfectly symmetrical square. The new works, although suggestive of a multitude of things, appear at first glance adamantly abstract. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that the large, gracefully configured white forms floating weightlessly yet prominently amid the intersecting areas and linear strokes of pale blue, deeper blue, green, pink, actually represent giant white feathers.

Feathers, after all, have long been universally potent images in many cultures. The ancient Greeks saw them as symbols for the wisdom of



the gods and the heavens; in Hindu mythology they refer to the qualities of kindness, patience, and good fortune; the Buddhists associate them with openness, and regard feathers of the peacock — a bird capable of subsisting on poisonous plants — as symbols of the ability to thrive in the face of suffering. In Christianity white feathers, in particular indicate ascension and purity of the soul. And in dream analysis, they indicate innocence and a fresh start in spiritual terms.

Beaudry brings the resonance inherent in all of these various meanings combined in the suite of seven large (5 feet and 7 inches in diameter) oil paintings on circular canvases which she calls “Handle with Care,” after the stickers that are routinely placed on fragile packages for shipping. The hardly arguable implication is that our world is presently in an endangered state of fragility and must be handled with the greatest care to assure its survival and that of our species and all the other life forms familiar to us. This simple yet profound message takes on a striking impact in Beaudry’s compositions, which possess a presence both imposing and serene. Although enlivened here and there by dripped rivulets that flow somewhat unsettlingly upward rather than down, the artist has provided rectangular spaces within the outer circles of some of the paintings in a neutral value that, as she puts it, “invites one to stop and reflect.”

In a much different mood but with a similarly sacred feeling as the large stately canvases that Mark Rothko created for a nondenominational chapel in Houston, Texas, Beaudry’s newest works project a sense of secular spirituality. The feathery forms take

on the significance of an amulet on an improvised altar, suggesting one of those rituals that artists, like latter-day shamans, create spontaneously.

The subdued palette of pastel blues and greens that Beaudry here employs also suggests a deconstructed pastoral realm, as if the blue skies and verdant green foliage of Impressionism had been shattered into Cubist planes, softened by the forms of the virginal white feathers with their serrated edges.

The exhibition also includes two majestic installations that the artist refers to as “mosaics,” each comprised of some twenty-eight smaller circular oil paintings mounted within a grid and covering two gallery walls. As with the larger paintings, each circle contains a discrete composition filled with a remarkable variety of colors, tones, and forms with their own distinct character.

This exhibition amounts to a giant step for Marie-Hélène Beaudry, who has turned away from the entertainment value of the narrative mode and all the movement that it implies to make emblematic statements of enduring and iconic stillness.

— Ed McCormack

Marie-Hélène Beaudry, Caelum Gallery,  
508-526 West 26th Street,  
October 9 - 20, 2012  
Reception: October 11, 6 - 8pm

## “Freedom” Personified: The Paintings of Nélide Diaz de D’Amato

In the series of paintings that she titles “The Drama of Being Free,” the Latin American artist Nélide Diaz de D’Amato takes inspiration from the writings of the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling. But rather than slavishly following Schelling’s themes, she demonstrates the principle of freedom in art by virtue of her creative interpretation of them.

“I think art is the culminating point of Schelling’s philosophy,” she writes in an artist’s statement. “It is the highest manifestation of the absolute. Between human nature and art lies a subconscious creative force. I take art as an active principle, capable of engendering unconscious spiritual life. Human beings strive for freedom and it is in esthetic activity where unity occurs.”

Like Schelling’s eclectic theories, de D’Amato’s style ranges over a wide gamut of expression. In a painting she calls “Identity,” primarily in tones of pale blue and gray, two angular figures that look carved out of stone pose as though for a formal portrait in a photographer’s studio. Ironically, as much as they obviously wish to project an individual persona, their faces are featureless.

By contrast, in de D’Amato’s “Human Nature,” three almost ghostly white figures emerge from a luminous blue ground, enacting what appears to be a triangular drama in a manner as fluidly ethereal as rain running down a windowpane. Then there is “Ideal,” in which de D’Amato turns up the chromatic frequency in a more complex and detailed image of a humble lady and her dog, both seen outside their respective abodes — the canine’s little A-frame kennel, and woman’s brightly-lit and

immaculate home.

Here, de D’Amato emerges as an especially vibrant colorist in the harmonies she achieves with brilliant yellow and orange hues set against purple-violets and blues in her evocation of this optimistic woman’s orderly little domestic realm. Yet, notice those glowing yellow liquidic areas on the neat cement walkway: Are they puddles of piddle left by the dog that appears to be slinking somewhat sheepishly away in the direction of its little house? And if so, do they slightly sully the woman’s notion of the ideal? And also look closely at the folds in this mild, dowdy little lady’s bright orange skirt: Do you see the slender, graceful tilted outline of the lower torso of a youthful nude that does not connect to the actual inelegantly stocky calves emerging from under her hem? Could this anatomical detail, comely as a sculpted fragment from antiquity, be a vestige of the matron’s Venus-like youth?

Like any good artist (or philosopher for that matter), de D’Amato poses questions rather than attempting to provide pat answers to them. Indeed, as close as this gifted painter comes to editorializing is in the oil and acrylic on canvas that she calls “Hollow,” the title itself a kind of indictment. This stringently organized composition depicts a rigidly stylized figure, drawn in a style that parodies certain early modernist clichés (a nose that tilts in two directions at once, etc.) and posed beside geometric rectangles in primary reds and blues, as well as more muted secondary hues.

Like the American artist George Condo, Nélide Diaz de D’Amato has that rare ability to make a



“Identity”

brilliant formal statement even while introducing a note of satire into a picture. It’s all about “Freedom,” after all, a subject she personifies in a painting of that title, depicting a rear view of a beautiful blond nude stretching her arms above her head in a gesture of exhilaration, that just may be the signature image of this splendid series.

— Peter Wiley

Nélide Diaz de D’Amato, Agora Gallery,  
530 West 25th St.,  
September 15 - October 5, 2012.  
Reception: Thursday September 20, 6 - 8 pm

## The Concrete Epiphanies of Kozo Takano

As the delightfully ironic poems of Billy Collins make clear, verse that makes us smile is not always “light.” This point is also well demonstrated in visual terms in the paintings of Kozo Takano, an artist who currently lives and works in Yokohama, Japan, and states, “I am particularly influenced by the works of Picasso and Klee, and also by the Japanese painter Morikazu Kumagai. What unites these greats of art history, I think, is the witty humor which is expressed in their paintings. This extra element enlivens the works and makes them instantly relatable as well as engaging.”

The epiphany that made Takano himself a painter occurred when he was 17 years old. Walking along a gravel road, he was inspired to draw, and was amused when one of the pieces of gravel that he drew appeared as if it had floated up from the ground. Thus, apparently, began his fascination with the slightly off-center elements by which the every day world takes on a kind of unexpected magic.

Even now, Takano says, much of his inspiration comes when he is walking or relaxing in some way, and a “concrete impression of the external world passes [through] the ideological process of the heart.”

What makes his work most remarkable is how much wit he manages to convey within the context of a relatively austere abstract style. One acrylic on board by Takano, for example, consists simply of a thick black bar running along the bottom edge of the composition, with a dark gray rectangle resting on it at a slightly askew angle to the right of center. Entitled “Square Wave,” this painting is as pared down in both its monochromatic palette



“Square Wave”

and the simplicity of its composition as any ancient Japanese Zen literati ink on rice paper scroll. Yet Takano translates it into the incongruous idiom of contemporary geometric abstraction with a jocular flair worthy of the great humorous draftsman Saul Steinberg.

Equally succinct in conception is another acrylic on board that Takano calls “The Sun and the Moon.” It consists of two more or less equally spaced black squares not exactly centered against a tan ground as smoothly and even as a freshly painted wall. The only difference between the two squares, when one inspects them closely, is the thin line of red emerging from the top of the one on the left, which, given the title of the painting,

projects a strong sense of heat.

A similar theme is evoked just as economically in another painting by Takano called “Sunrise,” comprised of a thick stripe of black acrylic running across an off-white background. The stripe bends slightly toward the left side of the composition to form an angular pocket containing just a hint of brilliant cadmium red light. Filling in the blank spaces in his or her mind, the receptive viewer visualizes the sun rising over the brackish black water of a vast panoramic landscape.

Considerably more complex, however, is another composition by Takano called “Zebras are Running.” Here, a welter of dark horizontal dashes bordered at the top and bottom by an earthy brown terrain, suggests a wide road along which the

animals of the title (or perhaps just their detached black stripes!) race in a wild kinetic flurry.

In a way that words rarely do for abstract paintings, their fanciful titles add an imaginative dimension — an element of concrete poetry, if you will — to the formidable formal configurations of Kozo Takano.

— J. Sanders Eaton

Kozo Takano, Agora Gallery,  
530 West 25th St., October 9 - 30, 2012  
Reception: Thursday October 11, 6 - 8 pm

# Huntington Hartford and Me: Brothers in Profligacy

an excerpt from

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

a memoir by Ed McCormack

“Could you get that, luv?” the Razorblade Heiress called out from the bathroom on Thompson Street, after the phone rang several times.

Like the hygiene-obsessed wife of the Impressionist painter Bonnard, whose perennial bathing became her husband’s favorite subject, she would soak for hours — especially when she was crashing from speed — reading and smoking in the tub.

“Could you please pick up the phone, ducks?”

As much as I resented being interrupted when I was working on my long-overdue book project “New York Satyricon” — or at least leafing through the manuscript, thinking about maybe starting work on it again — I finally reached across the glass-topped table in the kitchenette for the receiver.

“Hello, is Ronny there?” said a nasal male voice on the other end of the line.

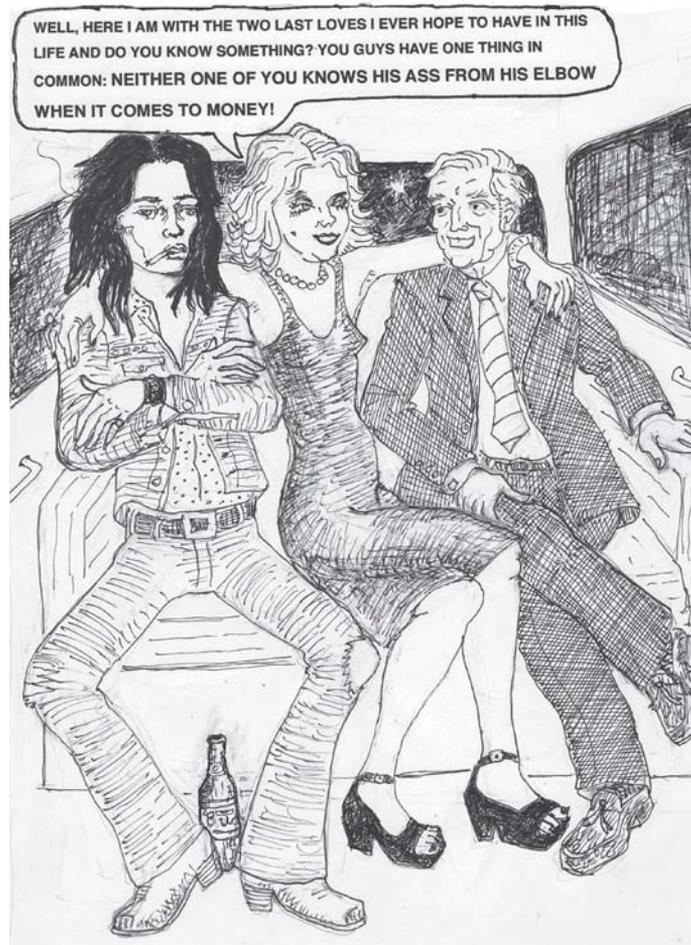
“She’s in the bath. Can she call you back?”

“Yes, of course, would you tell her, please, that Hunt called?”

“Hunt” turned out to be Huntington Hartford, a name I had not heard spoken aloud since my childhood in the 1950s, when it was almost interchangeable with that of another society playboy, Conrad “Nicky” Hilton. Like Hilton, the hotel heir, Hartford, scion to the A&P supermarket fortune, was famous mainly for “squirring starlets,” to use a tabloid columnist’s term of that time, to posh nightclubs like Delmonico’s or El Morocco. Except as someone I occasionally heard my parents mention in relation to some gossip newspaper item of a type that enables working people to feel momentary sour-grapes scorn for those born with far greater means than themselves, his name meant nothing to me.

I didn’t know, for example, that besides girls Hunt collected art, until the late Sixties when I read an uncharacteristically flattering — almost fawning — profile of him by Tom Wolfe. But it made sense because, while Wolfe was one of my early New Journalism heroes, his anti-abstract art diatribe “The Painted Word” was as rabidly reactionary, if not as witless, as Hartford’s own philistine tract, “Art or Anarchy?”

I once picked up a used copy of the latter book at one of the dollar stalls outside the Strand Book Store (autographed “For Laura



— with love from the very intellectual author, Huntington” and dedicated: “To Diane, who refuses to read it”), but couldn’t get past its simplistic “Emperor’s New Clothes” blanket dismissal of modernism and banal lines like, “In the busy world of contemporary art, what has happened to the old-fashioned belief in the existence of beauty?”

I wasn’t even sure if Hartford was still alive; but now here was Veronica, as she brushed her hair after her bath, referring to him in the present tense as “an old sweetie who, unfortunately, is easy prey for a constant parade of bimbos who take financial advantage of the poor dear.”

“One of them was Alice, who actually introduced me to him,” she added with a wicked little grin, referring to her former roommate Alice Alias. “I eventually warned him about her wily topless dancer ways, and now he calls me instead of her. Like you, he’s one of the people who, in her paranoid little mind, she blames me for ‘stealing away’ from her...Of course with Hunt and me it’s a purely platonic friendship. He just got married, after all.”

Given her superior cunning it would not have surprised me to learn that Veronica was taking Hunt for more than Alice ever had. In fact, for all I knew it could have been him, rather than her dead father, who had been footing the bill for me all along. Either way, it was all the same to yours truly.

Still, I balked when she got off the phone after returning his call and asked me to accompany her to “an intimate Memorial Day weekend celebration” of the then sixty-three-year-old multimillionaire’s recent marriage to his fourth wife, Elaine Kay, a twenty-two year old ex-beautician from Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Since Fort Lauderdale was also where Veronica herself had grown up, and since she was clearly even more “wily” than she claimed Alice was, I wondered what the connection between Veronica and Elaine, both of whom were around the same age, might be. Perhaps it was my curiosity to see if they were involved in some conspiring vixen con together (as well as the opportunity to strut around in the white linen suit that Veronica had recently designed for me), that made me finally give in and agree to be her date that

weekend.

\* \* \*

Although the celebration would take place at Hartford’s farm in New Jersey, where he and his new bride were honeymooning, some of the guests assembled beforehand in his sun-drenched penthouse at Number One Beekman Place, a veritable museum of contemporary realist paintings, including some excellent Dalis, photographs of Hunt with an eclectic collection of luminaries ranging from Dwight D. Eisenhower and Richard Nixon to the Beatles, and sundry other memorabilia of a fortune well squandered.

“Did any of you see yesterday’s *Daily News*?” a post-deb type in a little black minidress asked. “There was the wedding picture of Hunt and Elaine — the smiling newlyweds you know — and the caption said: A&P Heir and His Bride — ‘Did they say Wee-oo!’...You know, like in those A&P TV ads?”

“I liked the caption in *People* magazine,” said her preppy-looking date: “‘Huntington Hartford and his A&P Tomato!’”

Hartford’s daughter, Cathy, who

was around the same age as her newest stepmother, was leaning over a coffee table rolling joints for everybody.

“Do you think Elaine will change Hunt’s ways?” someone asked her.

“Are you kidding?” she said, licking the gummed edge of a Bambu paper. “Daddy considers a party a disaster if he doesn’t get the phone numbers of at least three new girls.”

A noisy welcoming committee of Muscovy ducks surrounded the stretch limo when it rolled into the driveway of the neocolonial mansion that someone joked had probably been in the family since Hunt’s people arrived on the Mayflower. We all piled out and were led by Hartford’s Man Friday, Mark, a dapper young guy in a silk shirt decorated with tennis rackets, through a big country kitchen and into a wood-paneled den to meet the other guests, among them a pair of wan, Quaalude-eyed girls who looked like refugees from an East Village crash pad and a young black dude with a huge Afro, lounging in an armchair in a dashiki-styled dressing gown, as though he had moved in permanently.

“Wha’s happenin’?” he said, pulling his glazed gaze away from the TV screen.

“What are we all drinking?” asked Mark, rubbing his hands together.

“I’ve got some boss blotter acid, too, if anyone wants to get really fucked up,” offered the dude in the dashiki, before gluing his attention back to the adventures of “Ozzie’s Girls.”

Presently our host, his thatchy white hair in disarray, shuffled into the den in a plaid shirt, baggy khaki slacks, and bedroom slippers. It was difficult to reconcile this shambling figure with the legendary tabloid playboy famous for his affairs with Elizabeth Taylor, Lana Turner, Ava Gardner, and scores of other Hollywood glamour girls.

“Well, I really must congratulate myself,” he said in that “Eastern boarding school honk,” as Tom Wolfe described his accent, “on being able to put together such an attractive, congenial group of people on such short notice — especially on a holiday weekend.”

“Right on,” chimed the dude with the Afro, without looking away from the television screen.

“I’ll have you know,” added Hartford, “that I finally managed to talk Elaine into coming down from the apple tree.”

He launched into a long story about how Elaine had disappeared earlier in the afternoon and was gone so long that he began to get concerned and organized a search party to comb the property. Here was Hunt and his ragtag band spread out all over the whole damned one-hundred-and-sixty acre spread, searching the stables, beating the bushes, yelling like banshees...and Elaine doesn’t answer. By now Hunt is beginning to

get frantic with worry, and then — it was the damndest thing! — someone spots her pants up at the top of the big apple tree down by the lake! So they run to tell Hunt and right away he says, “Her pants! Oh, my God!”

“No relax, Hunt,” they tell him, “Elaine is still in them!”

Hunt goes running down to the lake and, sure enough, there’s his impish young bride sitting up at the very top of this huge apple tree, calmly reading a movie magazine ... the damndest thing!

“I couldn’t get her to come down for anything in the world,” he said, chuckling and scratching his shaggy gray thatches like Ozzie Nelson in “Ozzie’s Girls” befuddled over some nutty thing one of his adopted daughters did.

“I’m standing down there at the bottom of the apple tree, saying, ‘But Elaine, you must come down! What will my guests think? I’ve invited a whole bunch of people down from New York!’ But she wouldn’t budge... the damndest thing! It was like she was...a cat or something!”

Mrs. Huntington Hartford the Fourth did not put in an appearance until several hours later, after all the rest of us had been seated at the long table in the dining room for a late dinner. A slender, kittenish blond, she stormed in wearing a semitransparent Frederick’s of Hollywood-style nightgown over a pair of bikini panties, her disconcerting combination of physical comeliness and mental imbalance reminding me of Andrea Warhol Whipps going into one of her “Show Time” routines in the Back Room at Max’s Kansas City.

“Is everyone here happy?” she demanded. “Is there enough wine? Are all my guests amused? Well, if you’re not, wait until you see the sleeping arrangements we’ve made!”

After dropping this little bon mot on the table like one of the soggy meatballs that were being passed around to go with the vast platter of overcooked pasta that Mark, the all-around man, had whipped up, the mistress of the house broke into a fit of giggles and took her place beside her husband, who was bent over his plate shoveling food into his face with the oblivious concentration of an inmate in a nursing home.

The dude with the Afro (whom Veronica had whispered to me was Elaine’s latest boyfriend) had seated himself at the head of the table. He picked up his wine

goblet and waved it toward his host.

“I wish to propose a toast,” he announced. “To Hunt ... if you live...”

Hartford choked momentarily on a mouthful of spaghetti, and the toastmaster leaned over and started pounding him on the back. Someone giggled nervously, and all the goblets suspended in midair dropped back down onto the table.

“I think I’ll just think the rest of it,” chuckled the dude with the Afro, draining his glass and reaching across the table for one of the crystal wine decanters.

“This reminds me of the dinner scene in Andy Warhol’s ‘Frankenstein,’” a guest with slicked back black hair who claimed to be an actor and called himself Dorrian Laser Beam said, breaking the silence. “We need some rock and roll in here to liven things up.”

He jumped up from the table and went into the den to turn on the stereo. A heavy metal machine shop wail vibrated the silverware on the dining room table. Huntington Hartford put down his fork. He knitted his bushy brows like he was coming down with a terrific Excedrin headache.

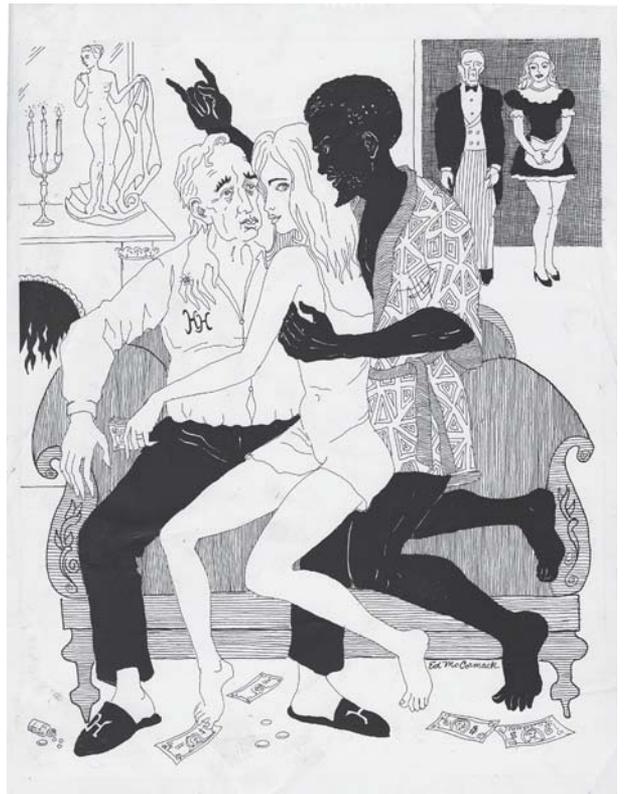
“Dorrian,” Hunt honked, “that’s loud enough.”

The heavy metal screech accelerated its pitch.

“Dorr-i-an!”

“Hey Hunt, he heard you already, man,” snapped the dude with the Afro.

“Just think,” Veronica leaned over and whispered in my ear, “once upon a time, people must have lived with a certain



semblance of elegance and grace in this lovely old house.”

\* \* \*

When I first started staying with the two roommates in the apartment they shared then on the Upper West Side, and our ménage à trois was still more or less harmonious, some nights while Alice Alias was dancing in the topless club in Times Square, Veronica and I would sit up late in her workroom. We'd wash white crosses or black beauties down with a bottle of Smirnoff that we'd pass back and forth; I would smoke grass, and she would regale me like a latter-day Scheherazade with tales of her teenage years, before she arrived in New York.

Growing up in an affluent suburb of Fort Lauderdale, the daughter of a successful used car dealer who had become a local celebrity by doing his own manic TV commercials (much like those of the goofy New York home appliance king Jerry Rosenberg, I imagined), speed had been a significant part of her family legacy. Her mother, a beautician — yes, just like Hunt's new bride Elaine (another too neat coincidence, it would later seem to me) dispensed amphetamines to Veronica and her younger sister Samantha on a daily basis, both for weight control and so they'd excel in school.

As a consequence of her mom being “a firm believer in *The Breakfast of Champions*,” as Veronica put it, she and Samantha became, “the best students, the most spastic cheerleaders, the most popular girls in the whole motherfucking school! We got the best grades, dated the coolest guys, gave the best head, beat the other girls at just about everything that mattered. I guess you could say we were your quintessential prom queens, even though we wouldn't be caught dead at anything as corny as a prom!”

It was her mom, too, who, while dyeing their long tresses, drummed into both girls the old advertising slogan “Blonds have more fun.” But the amphetamines that fueled the family's American dream began to take their toll when their dad freaked out and turned into a “religious berserker,” as Veronica characterized him, going into restaurants with a toy gun and ordering sinners down on their knees to pray for salvation, even as his car business boomed and he opened more lots around the state.

Veronica was in her senior year of high school and Samantha was a sophomore when their mom finally divorced him and married her diet doctor. They both hated their new stepfather, with his mustard or burgundy-colored sport jackets, his loud plaid “wild and crazy guy” slacks, and that grotesque moth-eaten toupee that he plopped on his head every morning. Compared to Doctor Rug, as they called him, their real dad was “a cool gun-totin' cowboy.” Behind their mom's back, they'd parade around in front of their

new stepfather “in nothing but our cute little candy-colored panties, streaking back and forth from our bedrooms to the bathroom the minute we heard his plodding footsteps coming up the stairs,” then claim he was coming on to them like Humbert Humbert, the pedophile protagonist of “*Lolita*.”

They'd hoped to turn their mom against him, “but the bitch was so hooked on Doctor Rug's magic vitamins” that she stood behind her second husband when he wearied of their constant cock-teasing and ordered the older sister out of the house.

That whole summer after graduation, Veronica slept on her real father's old army cot out in the garage. During the day she dealt nickel and dime bags of smoke that the family's hip young maid Pilar scored by the pound in Fort Lauderdale's Panamanian ghetto. Her mom knew that she was slipping into the house to raid the refrigerator during the day and made sure to replace whatever she ate — lunch meat, yogurt or whatever — by the next day. She and Pilar would sit around in the afternoon smoking these big fat bombers of dope, listening to music, and sometimes dancing together between greeting customers.

By the end of summer, even after splitting half the proceeds from the grass sales fifty-fifty with Pilar, Veronica was ready to leave Fort Lauderdale. She fled first to Aspen, Colorado, where she knew some people who found her a job tending bar in a ski lodge. In Aspen, just when she was getting tired of making drinks for customers who were obviously having a much better time than she was, she met a moderately successful rock guitarist who took her on the road with him. She traveled and partied on his band's tour bus for about a month, before he took up with some scuzzy groupie who came backstage in this funky country and blues club where they played a gig and left her stranded in El Paso, Texas.

“I was so fed up with men at that point,” she told me, “that I stopped the first butch-looking woman in a Stetson that I saw and asked her where the local dyke bars were.”

She lucked out and got hired as a waitress at a place called The Alamo, where the women all swaggered around in ten gallon hats and cowgirl boots, slapped her on the butt, treated her like a piece of fluff, and sometimes even got into barroom brawls. They were a real hoot and made her feel like Miss Kitty on “*Gunsmoke*.” She really liked them and almost began to feel like she was cut out to be a full-time lesbian herself — especially after she fell for this tough little girl called Sandy.

Sandy tried to act as butch as she could but she came off delicate and feminine despite herself. In fact, Sandy was so femme and pretty that in the beginning, before they agreed to do away with role-playing

altogether, Veronica was confused: In her one or two previous experiences with girls, she had been the passive partner; but Sandy was the first girl she really wanted to go down on, which convinced her even more that she must be gay herself.

Then she met this beautiful boy who worked on a truck delivering Lone Star Beer to The Alamo. His name was Lyle and he was having the same kind of doubts about himself, until they humped each other insensibly in the back of his delivery truck.

“It was mutual tea and sympathy more than anything else,” Veronica said. “But somehow Sandy, who had a reputation for being hotheaded found out about it. And when one of the girls from The Alamo told me she was looking for me with a god-actual six-gun, I knew it was time to make one of my famous fast getaways!”

This time she split for New York City, where she resolved to stop being a fugitive and continue her education. She waitressed nights at Phoebe's, the off-off Broadway theater hangout on the Bowery, and The Bottom Line, the popular music venue on West 4th Street, while studying design and illustration at the School of Visual Arts. She lived in a funky S.R.O hotel in the East 20's, near the school, until she met her gay friend Randy in one of her classes and he invited her to stay with him in the Village.

“Randy had a lot of friends, so it was lovely to wake up on a Sunday morning to the smell of fresh coffee and bacon and find the kitchen crowded with naked boys cooking breakfast,” she recalled. “For awhile, it was like being May West! But as gracious a host as Randy was, I started feeling like I might be impinging on his social life, so I found a cheap little studio apartment down on Avenue B.”

She had always drawn well anyway and in less than a year she was making enough as a freelance illustrator to quit waitressing even before her real father passed away and left her a fortune in Johnson & Johnson stocks, inspiring her new friend Alice Alias to nickname her the Razorblade Heiress.

“I was fascinated with Alice,” she said. “She was the first topless dancer and real rock and roll groupie I ever met — not a rank amateur like me, who gets herself dumped in a distant state on her first try! She had all these great music business connections — people I got to know after I moved into this apartment with her. That's how I first got into designing costumes and stage stuff for bands.”

Veronica's whole history struck me as your more or less classic all-American neo-decadant teenybopper's mutant coming of age story — until she claimed to have once made love to her own sister — and on Christmas Eve yet!

Neither she nor Samantha, who had

moved with a boyfriend to Seattle after graduating from high school, had been home for the holidays in years. But when Samantha who had stayed more in touch via long distance with both parents, called with the news that their real father had recently been diagnosed with a terminal illness, they agreed to meet for the holidays in Fort Lauderdale, at the house where he now lived with his second wife, Liz.

“Our dad and Liz were upstairs sleeping and Sam and I were sitting by the Christmas tree in our pajamas wrapping the presents we had bought for them, just like when we were innocent little girls — before I, the evil older sibling, turned her on to the libertine writings of the Marquis de Sade and all kinds of other bad things,” Veronica said. “It was so nice to see my baby sister again and she looked so fresh and pretty that it just made me feel warm all over. Without even thinking about it, I reached over, put my arms around her and kissed her on the lips. And she must have felt the same way, because she kissed me back just as hard, and before we knew it, well...one thing just led to another...”

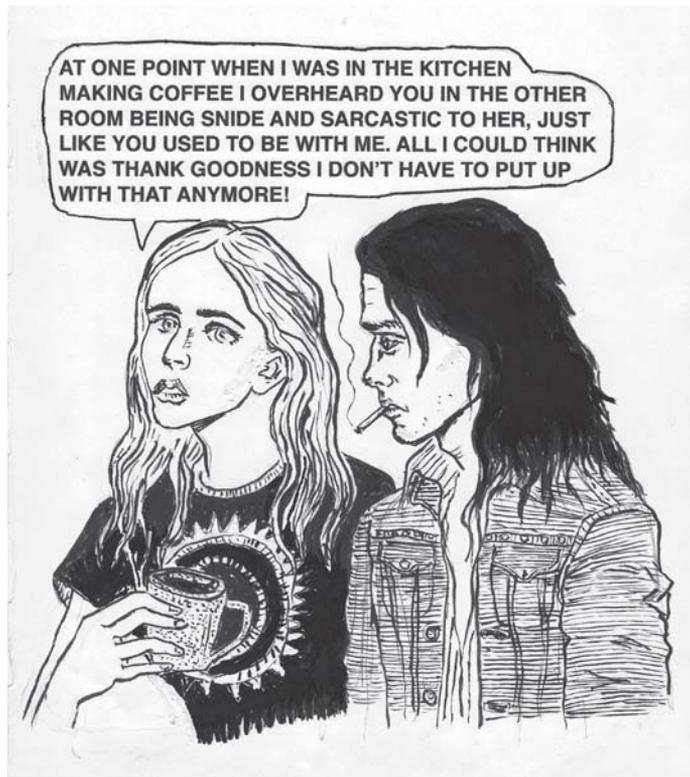
Visions of sugarplums dancing over their heads, I thought; but only said, “It had to be weird, though, right? I mean, with your own sister... wasn’t it?”

“You’d think so, wouldn’t you?” she said. “Before it happened I would have thought, ‘Ugh incest, how really repulsive, like a snake eating its own tail or something!’ I would have thought that was a bridge that not even an intrepid adventurer like me would ever cross. But believe it or not, with Sam it felt completely natural — like, just sweet and ... sisterly, you know?”

This was the first thing she told me that I found almost impossible to believe. But in another way, it might be even worse if she had made the whole story it up. For what would it say about me, I wondered, if she felt obliged to fabricate such a perverse fantasy strictly for my entertainment?

\* \* \*

Some time later, during that period in our separation when my wife and I were trying, perhaps a little too hard, to be super sophisticated — or perhaps I should say when I was trying, since Jeannie always claimed that I presumed to know what she was thinking when I really didn’t have a clue — I once brought Veronica over to my wife’s apartment for a Saturday afternoon visit on the spur of the moment. Since it was one of those weekends when our son Holden was away visiting my parents on Staten Island



and Jeannie could have been anywhere, I was happy to find her at home when I called from the pay phone at Doctor Generosity’s, my favorite uptown bar, right across Second Avenue and down the block from the tenement to which she moved after she left me.

“I’m right here with Veronica at Dr. G’s,” I said casually when she picked up, “and I thought it would be nice if we could stop over for a bit.”

There was a long silence on the end of the line and I panicked, saying, “Say hello, Veronica.”

“Hi Jeannie!” said the Razorblade Heiress into the receiver.

My wife had been raised on the manners of the Virginia horse country where you turn someone away socially, even on short notice, only at risk of mortally offending them. Add the contradictory but equally strict etiquette against acting “uptight,” even about the most perversely inappropriate social situations, by the freewheeling mores of hip New York in the early ‘70s, and I don’t suppose I left her much choice.

It wasn’t until the next time I visited her alone that Jeannie said, “Why did you put me on the spot like that? It was very inconsiderate, you know.”

“If you want the honest truth I just wanted to see you, like I always do now that I can’t be with you any time I want to. And I guess I hoped seeing me with someone else would make you wish we were together again.”

“Actually, it had exactly the opposite effect.” “What do you mean? I thought it was all quite civilized.”

“I’m glad you did. For me, it brought

back really unpleasant memories. At one point when I was in the kitchen making coffee I overheard you in the other room being snide and sarcastic to her, just like you used to be with me. All I could think was: thank goodness I don’t have to put up with that any more!”

“She must have been provoking me in some way,” I said. “Believe me, she’s very clever at it ... Besides, you never had to put up with anything. You were always good at defending yourself.”

She laughed again. “Is that what a relationship with you is all about: knowing how to defend oneself?”

“Not at all,” I protested. “But listen, the only reason I even bother bickering with Veronica is to create the illusion of some kind of involvement, other than, like, you know, she’s just ... supporting me... With you it was always real.”

“Am I supposed to feel flattered by that? What was real — the nastiness?”

“No, the love.”

If that’s what you call love, all I can say is it’s truly fucked up!”

(Well, at least, I thought, we’re communicating again.)

Meanwhile, Veronica claimed that the way I had been courting Jeannie since she got back from her stay in San Francisco made her feel “superfluous,” repeating her increasingly frequent mantra, “You treat her like a mistress and me like a wife.”

And once again, I had no answer because I knew she had a point. Off and on, for almost a year, for better or for worse, she had been the dubious young wet-nurse who bore my breakfast beer to the bedside; who fluffed fragrant pillows of expensive pot smoke about my whacked out head, and propped me up with coke and a rainbow array of pills. She had even gone so far as to hint that she would be willing to support a heroin habit should I see fit to add smack to my already exorbitant menu of vices. Having already rendered me idle by asking outright if I would like to try being “a kept man” at a time when I had all but stopped writing anyway, it seemed she was now ready to render me helpless as well. Just so masochistically eager was she, apparently, to claim what was left of me, even if further demoralization of said carcass proved necessary.

But it wasn’t until months later, when we were holed up in the little apartment on Thompson Street and I felt myself sinking deeper and deeper into my destructively subsidized addictions, that I finally realized

my very life was in danger as long as I remained in the crippling care of a classic “enabler” like the Razorblade Heiress. From where I stood, on the trapdoor threshold of my thirtieth year, it seemed suddenly clear that I had to “publish or perish” in a much more literal way than what tenure-track academics meant when they embraced that slogan.

So I cut back on the beer and vodka, amped up my amphetamine intake; and typing away nonstop on the glass-topped dinette table for several weeks, I completed the first half of “New York Satyricon,” and was able to collect the second installment of the advance from The Viking Press. It wasn’t a huge sum and I had to share it with my collaborator, the photographer and video artist Anton Perich, many of whose outrageous pictures of Warhol “superstars,” regulars at Max’s Kansas City, and other outrageous downtown scenemakers complemented my text.

But at least it was escape money, and since I had never hidden my desire to eventually reunite with Jeannie from Veronica, our parting — even while affording her an occasion for sighs of self-pity and minor histrionics of a type no true drama queen could resist — was relatively amicable. Much to her credit, she was nothing if not a realist and a survivor — of even worse than me, it was comforting to tell myself — and I was sure she would be better off in the long run.

\* \* \*

Hoping to impress Jeannie once and for all that I was ready to stop catting around and get back to work, I had retreated to the modest house on Staten Island that my parents had recently mortgaged after years of living upstairs from my uncle Georgie and aunt Delores in the two-family rental nearby, where almost ten years earlier Jeannie and I had begun our marriage in the attic. The next thing I did was got back in touch with Jann

Wenner at *Rolling Stone*.

One thing about Jann: Tough as he could be with mild mannered reporters who copped out for the reasons he considered wimpy (“See you around the daycare center, schmuck!” was how he famously dismissed one writer who requested a leave of absence to get acquainted with a newborn offspring), he understood freakouts and flameouts as only an editor of our generation could. Having occasion to drop out and check himself into rehab from time to time, he discreetly refrained from mentioning the Geraldo Rivera fiasco, and resumed assigning me pieces to write as though nothing had happened.

Suddenly I had all the work I could handle. Sequestered down in my parents’ basement, clacking away through the quiet suburban nights on the huge black antique Remington manual typewriter I bought in a pawnshop on the Bowery when I was still in high school and living at home on the Lower East Side, surrounded by old books, sleds, boxing gloves, a Jon Gnagy TV art instruction kit, and other resonant remnants of earlier enthusiasms, I felt like that other wandering Catholic mama’s boy Kerouac, when he would come off the road and recuperate on his dear “Memere’s” hearty Canuck cooking in old Lowell.

True, I was still running on speed that I scored from one of Veronica’s diet quacks on my trips into the city and, to take the edge off, washing Valium down with beer I kept in a little extra refrigerator my mother had down there. But at least I was psychologically more capable of writing, now that my attempt to impress my wife with how I had changed seemed to be succeeding and we seemed to be cautiously feeling our way toward a reconciliation. Even though she still insisted that she needed her “own space” — that irksome Chick Lib term! — and was not quite ready to live with me again, we occasionally spent the night together, either in her place on 73rd Street or in a summer bungalow I eventually rented in a leafy cul-de-sac down at the end of my parents’ block, when being back under their roof began to feel depressingly regressive.

Although Jeannie, a longtime meditator who knew more of solitude than I ever would, was amused when I said that being alone in this bungalow made me feel like Thoreau, she had to admit that our being there together reminded her, as it did me, of those innocent and carefree days before anything bad had ever come between us, when our son was newborn and a similar little house on Staten Island was our first real home after spending the first year or so of our marriage living like incestuous siblings in my family’s attic.

Back then, for one enchanted summer, I felt we were like Mr. and Mrs. William Blake

in their little pastoral cottage in the English countryside where, I read somewhere, they made their own little Eden and people sometimes glimpsed them through the foliage romping as naked as Adam and Eve. We had too many nearby neighbors in the cramped little streets of our blue collar beach community for that, but still we were as happy as we would ever be again.

Kerouac! Blake! It was so like me to always be impressively likening myself to my artistic heroes! But my wife was right: I had nothing in common with this newest member of my pantheon, Thoreau. With little capacity for true solitude, when I wasn’t either frantically racing a deadline or on the road with Alice Cooper, Aerosmith, or any number of other rock and roll bands for *Rolling Stone*, I was still staying here and there in Manhattan and still spending most nights at Max’s Kansas City.

It didn’t surprise me in the least on one of those nights in the rear dining room when I ran into Pearl, a glitter tot and part-time seamstress who used to come over to Thompson Street to help out when Veronica had a lot of extra sewing to do on deadline, and she latched onto me and said, “Did you hear? Ronny moved in with Hunt; Elaine moved out and she moved in! A few nights ago, I ran into her and she invited me over to that fabulous apartment on Beekman Place — what a palace! She even showed me a clipping from the *Daily News* by some famous old gossip columnist, she said he was. I don’t remember it exactly, but it said something like, ‘A little birdie whispered to us that as soon as the A&P heir’s divorce from Number Four goes through, a statuesque blond bombshell named Veronica is slated to become the fifth Mrs. Huntington Hartford...’”

It was at Max’s, too, not long after, that I finally saw her again, when she made an entrance on Hunt’s arm, looking very much the sudden socialite in pearls and an elegant black dress. When she spotted me, she ran over, greeted me with a big demonstrative hug, and insisted I accompany them to the opening reception for something called The Erotic Circus, where the porn star Marilyn Chambers, of “Behind the Green Door” fame was supposed to be featured in “a special live performance. Still having “no direction or home,” to quote the Dylan line that had most resonance for me at the time, I agreed to tag along.

“Well here I am with the two last loves I ever hope to have in this life,” the Razorblade Heiress declared, squeezing in between Hunt and me in the back seat of the limo, “and do you know something? You guys have one thing in common: Neither one of you knows his ass from his elbow when it comes to money!”

A sexagenarian billionaire and an

## GALLERY&STUDIO

An International Art Journal

PUBLISHED BY

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www.galleryandstudiomagazine.com

impoverished thirty-year-old writer looked across her at each other and both grinned wryly — whether at her drama queen audacity or 21-year-old wisdom neither may have been sure.

As the chauffeur cruised around looking for a parking spot, Veronica explained that she had put Hunt on a serious austerity program, and parking lots were now out of the question. (Not only that; she had convinced him to sell one of his cars to a former chauffeur.) To hear her tell it the man was down to his last paltry few million after sinking a fortune into bad investments and ill-fated projects: Paradise Island, his resort in the Bahamas, was failing; his former Gallery of Modern Art in that strange sliver of a building on Columbus Circle now housed the New York Cultural Center; his *Show* magazine had recently gone belly up. On top of all this, unwanted boarders and hangers on were raiding his refrigerator for years before she evicted them. Various business associates had been losing boodles every year and pocketing the rest. His lawyers and accountants were robbing him blind before she stepped in to purge some advisors, evict a few boarders, derail some schemers, and work Kissinger-like miracles of diplomacy between ex-wives and girlfriends.

“Now I’m trying to get him interested in reading the *Wall Street Journal* and *Business Week*, but he still prefers *Playboy* and *Penthouse* — don’t you, ducks?” she said, elbowing him in the ribs, making him chuckle.

After we finally had found a spot (having circled so long that I was tempted to reach into my own tattered pocket for a lot) and slummed through the Erotic Circus only long enough to see that it was just another dark, crowded, sweaty, noisy disco with perhaps more nudity and partial nudity than usual, Veronica suggested we go back to

Beekman Place, “where we can relax in more conducive surroundings.”

\* \* \*

“See, Ronny, I can dress like him, too,” said Hunt, having just changed from his suit pants into a spanking new pair of designer jeans, pointing to me, where I sprawled on the sofa in his den in my studded denim jacket and faded Landlubber bellbottoms. “How do I look?”

“Cool, Hunt,” Veronica cooed, placing a tray with a tall tumbler of Southern Comfort on the rocks for me and a glass of milk and a plate of cookies for him on the low coffee table.

When the old William Bendix movie we had been watching was over, Hunt, who had written a book on graphology called “You Are What You Write” offered to analyze my handwriting.

He handed me a pen and pad and asked me to write a simple sentence, so I wrote, “Neither one of us knows his ass from his elbow when it comes to money.” He studied and squinted at it for awhile, scratching his thatchy white head. Then he told me that my handwriting confirmed an impression he got right away when he first met me: that I should be an actor. I told him acting had never interested me — as a little kid the first thing I wanted to be was a cowboy; as an older child, a newspaper cartoonist; as an adolescence, a Beat poet; then a painter, then a prose writer; and now I knew Truman Capote was right when he said “Beware of answered prayers.”

Still Hunt insisted that first his intuition, then my handwriting, told him I should be an actor. He had eye for talent, he said, having in fact produced some films many years ago, starring actors such as Robert Preston, Frederic March, and one of his former wives, the actress Marjorie Steele. He said he would like to introduce me to a friend

of his who wrote “The French Connection,” and if he agreed about my potential, he would even consider sending me to London, where they still had the best drama coaches, to study.

I couldn’t decide if he was simply putting me on, or if he was eager to get me out of the country because he was paranoid and saw me as a possible rival for Veronica’s affections. I wanted to tell him that he had nothing to worry about in that regard; I had never thought of her as anything more than a temporary benefactress and, as she herself always knew, I was still very much in love with my wife. But of course I could not; it would have been anything but gallant with her right there in the room.

Anyway, he kept insisting that I should at least give acting a try. And just when I was beginning to get annoyed with the inference that my talent lay elsewhere than in writing, and to wonder if Veronica had ever actually showed him any of my work, Hunt seemed to get suddenly drowsy and his head dropped onto his chest. Poor old bastard, I thought, when he began to snore loudly.

“I crushed a quaalude in his milk,” Veronica whispered. “He likes them at night anyway. Most people they make horny, right? but for him they work like knockout drops! He’ll be out like a light for the rest of the night.”

She extended a hand to me. “There are about nineteen more rooms here. Come, let me give you the Grand Tour.”

“You’ve already given me the Grand Tour,” I joked, meaning it in more ways than one. “Don’t you remember?”

“Yes, I do indeed, ducks,” she said, reverting to the Brit accent she sometimes liked to affect. “How could I ever forget? But let me give it to you again. Just for old times’ sake.”

\* \* \*



## Hey Ho—The Wind And The Rain

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## “The Cauldron” Bubbles Effervescently at New Century Artists Gallery

Curated by participating artist Basha Maryanska, the group exhibition “The Cauldron,” amounts to a celebratory gathering of aesthetic kindred spirits. Maryanska herself obviously values evocative subject matter over all else, painting poetic visions of landscapes and cityscapes that are every bit as magical as those of Loren McIver. In her acrylic on canvas “Connected,” a bridge spans a luminously reflective river like a golden necklace stretching to a skyline shrouded in mists. By contrast the skyscrapers, billboards, pedestrians, and traffic in Maryanska’s delightful “Times Square” are evoked in a colorful shorthand as succinct as that in an abstraction by Paul Klee or a watercolor by John Marin.

Howard Miller is a painter who employs color with a special power reminiscent of Expressionists such as Emil Nolde. However, his sensibility appears more serene, replacing violence with serenity, as seen in his brilliantly colorful yet peaceful landscape featuring a simple red house and lush verdant trees set against a vibrant orange sky. But Miller also demonstrates an ability to evoke nocturnal scenes atmospherically in a manner reminiscent of Albert Pinkham Ryder in another composition featuring sailboat emerging from between two darkly looming hills by the light of a big fat full moon.

The human face becomes a symbol for deep emotive states of being for Cindy Silvert, looming mountainously to fill her compositions to the brim. In Silvert’s “Whisper,” a pink visage appears to be literally deconstructing in an etheric blue haze; while only the brow, aquiline nose and deep cave-like eye sockets emerge from the surrounding darkness, delineated by light, in the portrait head called “Rosemary,” a tour de force of chiaroscuro.

By contrast, the sculptor Bonnie Shanas depicts the full-length human figure in her familiar nudes in wire mesh, anatomically accurate even when partial; classically beautiful when entire, as in the seated nude she calls “On Thoughts,” in which the soft curve of the model’s hair is as graceful as that of her back and buttocks.

Another gifted sculptor Renée Weiss Chase is also a fashion designer who made a smooth transition from cloth to clay. Her pieces take the form of freestanding gowns and dresses from which the actual figure is absent. It’s flowing contours, however, are very much present, which lends her sculptures a palpable phantom sensuality that is complemented by their elegant ceramic surfaces, often embellished with floral or abstract motifs suggesting fabric design. Peggy Landrum is a ceramic artist as well as a potter partial to matriarchal and Goddess themes through which she shares the wisdom gained through her spiritual sojourns to an ashram in the Himalayas. Eggs are primary forms symbolic of fertility in her deeply reverent wall pieces alluding to shamanic symbolism.

Ellen Mandelbaum is another artist

who combines aspects of East and West in her paintings on “antique” glass, where exquisitely delicate blades of grass and other images of nature worthy of an Asian master emerge from an abstract context. In Mandelbaum’s “Martinique,” an entire Caribbean beachscape is evoked with swift strokes that combine Eastern lyricism with Abstract Expressionist brio.

Painting approaches the heft, weight and depth of sculpture by sheer virtue of the amount of pigment that Kathryn Hart piles onto the rugged, thickly encrusted surfaces of her compositions, along with roughly ripped pieces of corrugated cardboard, bits of wire and other elements that lend further textural interest. But even their considerable tactile appeal is upstaged by the imagery that Hart conjures up, with universally generalized neoprimitive figures that have been likened by more than one critic for the raw emotional power to the existential Everymen of Alberto Giacometti.

Widely exhibited in Sweden, Helena Blomljus also employs texture, albeit of a more whimsical variety, adding strings of beads, frilly bits of fabric or lace, and other feminine accouterments to compositions, dominated by red, pink, and baby blue impasto that come across as loving Valentines to all humanity. Indeed, it is their combination of delicacy and vigorous painterliness that makes Blomljus’ mixed media abstractions so engaging.

Recycled glass is the medium that another inventive mixed media artist, Renee Radenberg employs, along with bangles, pieces of metal, and other found materials and trinkets, to create sculptures, assemblages, and mobiles with their own unique charm. Like her great kindred spirit Alexander Calder, Radenberg combines an intuitive formal sense with a fanciful imagination in sculptures such as “Dragon,” a fanciful creature covered with blue scales fashioned from found stained glass and a dazzling abstract mobile called “Clear Essence.”

There is also a decidedly lighthearted touch to the floral watercolors of Neela Pushparaj, a retired hospital pathologist turned watercolorist. Featured in this show are buoyant compositions of colorful blooms and graceful stems and branches that have been digitally transferred from Pushparaj’s original watercolors to silky, gossamer fabrics to be worn as scarves, making a strong case for combining fine art and applied crafts in utilitarian objects of surpassing aesthetic beauty.

“Romantic Surrealist” Mildred Kaye wittily updates Grant Wood’s folksy classic for a new era in “American Goth,” substituting contemporary hipsters with piercings and tattoos sporting black leather for the familiar farm couple of yore. Kaye transforms the rustic setting as well, endowing the church like structure in the background with angelic wings rather than a steeple and the sky with brilliant psychedelic swirls.

Bonnie Goodman, on the other hand,

favors subtly scumbled earthy acrylic hues in her strongly composed compositions informed by a wide range of art historical sources. A consummately sophisticated painter, Goodman, who also draws from mythology and images from our collective unconscious, gives us an especially haunting image in her composition “They’re Not There Anymore,” depicting figures from antiquity lined up on pedestals.

Employing techniques reminiscent of the Old Masters, Elizabeth Castonquay evokes an interior realm as eerily imaginative as that of the modern Norwegian symbolist Odd Nerdrum. While, in an artist’s statement, Castonquay cites humanistic and ecological concerns, her symbolism is anything but obvious. Her painting “Beyond Time,” combines, shadowy figures, and what appears to be a burning skeleton of a teepee; while another work juxtaposes a kneeling male nude, a tiny human and butterfly hybrid, and a procession of white polar bears.

Mysterious imagery also figures prominently in the paintings of Linda Richichi, who often merges the phantom outline of a vase with expressionistic landscapes in a strikingly successful synthesis. Richichi regards painting as “a pilgrimage — a journey into the mystery of creation,” and her vibrant colors laid down with energetic strokes do indeed come across as gestures of reverence within the sacred context of a spiritual path.

In Cynthia McCusker’s paintings and mixed media works, the dominant forces appear to be luminous color and sweeping formal rhythms. In some of her more abstract compositions, baroque shapes swirl like animated arabesques, while in one misty landscape in soft pink and yellow hues what appears at first to be a sandy stretch of land bordered by dry grasses suddenly metamorphoses before one eye’s into the distinct outline of a human profile.

The final artist, Patricia Winsong, also includes figurative imagery within an abstract context in paintings such as “Angel of Light,” where a kind of Neo-Art Nouveau ornateness is combined with precise rendering and detailed design akin to Eastern mandalas. By contrast, Winsong adopts a looser technique for the vibrant whirlpool of forms swirling around a pretty female profile in another painting called “Goddess of the Moonlight.”

Once again Basha Maryanska has curated an exhibition in which highly original individual visions transcend art world fashions.

— Byron Coleman

The Cauldron, New Century Artists Gallery,  
530 West 25th Street, September 11 - 29, 2012.

## A Visionary Vitality Animates the “Pulse” Series of Chicago Artist Carol Brookes

Like Josef Albers’ “Homage to the Square,” Carol Brookes’ “Pulse” series explores a single geometric form. In Brookes’ case, however, the primal shape is the hemisphere, constructed in contoured relief within mixed-media wall sculptures inspired by what the artist calls “ordinary forms we see each day in their many incarnations, such as an egg, a pod, an eye, the earth, planets, and domes.”

In other words, unlike Albers, a former Bauhaus student and teacher who chose the square as his prime motif because he believed that among the geometric shapes it best distances a work of art from nature, emphasizing rational and “man made” qualities of design, Brookes embraces this natural form in all its diversity. Indeed, she also differs from Albers in that she obviously regards the constructions and handiwork of human beings as much a part of nature as the hives of bees. Growing up, first in Newark, New Jersey, and then in Miami, Florida, in the late 1940s, as the daughter of a real estate developer who built housing subdivisions,

she has vivid childhood memories of “walking with my father up a plywood ramp into the skeleton of a half built home, and seeing giants — men on stilts with trowels, slathering plaster on walls. This was the most amazing thing I had ever seen. I wanted to run up to those mud covered walls and squeeze the plaster in my hands. It was a totally visceral reaction.”

The residue of that primal experience can be seen in the tactile qualities so present in her work today, often achieved not only with thick paint, modeling paste, and sculpting epoxy, but also with ruggedly textured and layered found materials, including nails, washers, rope, tubing, wire, and rubber mats among other industrial objects that magically metamorphose into the natural elements of “imaginary worlds” like the ones she created in her bedroom as a child. Although her pieces, in which the protruding central hemisphere is invariably framed by

square canvas and wood boxes of identical dimensions arranged in rows or grids, show the influence of Minimalism, they are actually “maximalist” in a manner more likely to remind one of Joseph Cornell or Louise Nevelson (whom she acknowledges as an important inspiration) than of Carl Andre.



“Pearl Iridescence”

A resident of Chicago for close to thirty years her work also shows an individualistic vitality suggesting a spiritual kinship with the eccentric Hairy Who School and the consummate craftsmanship of the windy city’s most revered sculptor, William T. Wiley.

The “Pulse” series, however, featured in Brookes’ New York solo exhibition in Chelsea, was inspired by a recent trip to Hawaii with her archeologist husband, of which she recalls, “I was awed by the raw, untamable power emanating from the earth. It was both powerful and serene, a spiritual energy. The spherical cinder mounds and volcanic forms gave a sense that the earth was pulsing and pushing to form new life.”

This sense of profound pregnancy, so auspiciously suited to the shapes with which Brookes works, is especially powerful in the work she calls “Pulse Iridescence.” For here the flowing, furling forms folding out of the circular center of the composition

suggest the folds of the outer labia, while the tiny ballbearing-like objects deep within the interior darkness simultaneously evoke glittering silver stars afloat in a miniature cosmos and seeds nestled in a pod.

By contrast, each same-size panel in Brookes’ triptych “Pulse Trinity” consists

of three regularly spaced spheres in hues of copper, silver and brass surrounded by intricate configurations of epoxy, cut nails, and washers that appear to take on a wiggling organic life with prolonged contemplation. Conversely, the forms within the identical squares that make up Brookes’ four-panel undersea fantasy “Pulse Hydra” are of irregular sizes and shapes, their billowing, undulating organic forms bathed in a palette that shimmers with a chromatic radiance as complex and subtly modulated as one of Jules Olitski’s celebrated Color Field canvases.

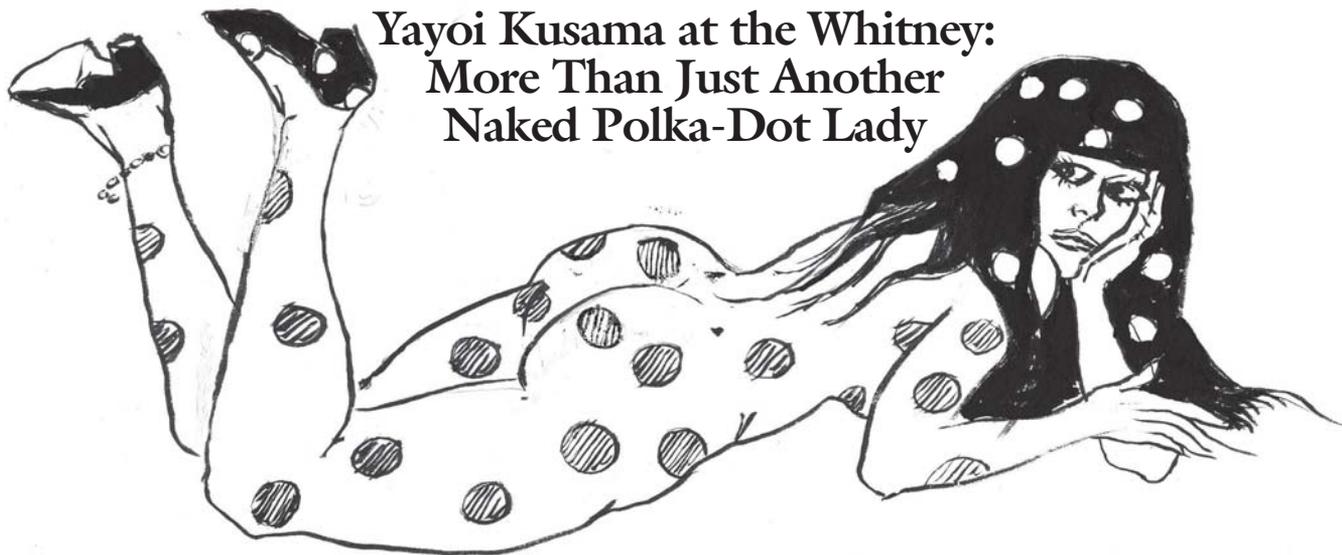
Also including among other works in this exhibition are “Hive Genesis,” in which four hemispheres tightly bound in cotton rope appear to be

in a process of unraveling to merge with a “honeycomb” ingeniously fashioned from industrial insulation materials and rubber bath mats; and a major nine panel grid entitled “Pearl Synergy” (still a work in progress when the show was previewed). All prove Carol Brookes, whose work has been widely exhibited in numerous group and solo shows, an artist possessed of a unique aesthetic vision and an almost alchemical ability to transform commonplace materials and familiar objects into beautifully crafted and highly imaginative formal statements.

— Ed McCormack

Carol Brookes, “Pulse,”  
Viridian Artists, Inc., 548 West 28th St.,  
September 25 - October 13, 2012.

## Yayoi Kusama at the Whitney: More Than Just Another Naked Polka-Dot Lady



I didn't know until I started flipping through the catalogue of her retrospective at The Whitney, that Yayoi Kusama had her first New York solo exhibition in 1959 at The Brata Gallery, the same cooperative on East Tenth Street where I would have mine some five years later. The difference was that, from the very beginning of her artistic career, Kusama had a sense of destiny. While I would send out a few invitations to family and friends, most of whom would show up out of obligation or for the free wine, she wrote to a magazine back in her native Japan: "I am planning to create a revolutionary new work that will stun the international art world ... [and will show] the New York art world a decisive new direction for the future." (In retrospect, it reminds me of a then struggling writer named Patti Smith who, in the early '70s, when I wrote for *Rolling Stone* and complimented her on a record review she had published in the same magazine, answered, "Ackshully, I'm a poet.")

And while it may not have been the profound response Kusama had hoped for, at least Donald Judd, then an art critic rather than a visual artist, had high praise for the huge "Infinity Net" paintings she showed at the Brata.

The first time I personally became aware of Kusama, however, was in 1963 when she had a show of her "Accumulations," real furniture covered with stuffed cloth phallic forms, at the Gertrude Stein Gallery uptown. I never saw the show, but the gallery was much on my mind, since Gertrude Stein (her real name!) had recently bought a small collage called "Not at the Drake" that I had made by gluing and doodling on one of the envelopes I was supposed to pass on with a returned letter in my "day job" as a copy boy for *Women's Wear Daily*.

While I was in the gallery to bring her the picture and pick up my check, I overheard her telling someone that she needed her apartment painted. By then, having deliberately got myself fired from *WWD* and needing extra money to supplement my unemployment insurance (a "government grant" we 10th Street artists called it), I told the gallery owner it just happened that I did that kind of work. Ackshully, I never had, but having read that de Kooning once painted walls for a living, I was inspired and enlisted the help of a close friend and fellow artist named Jim Hans.

Unfortunately, Ms. Stein came home late from an evening out to find dead beer cans all over her

living room and almost as much paint on the carpet as on the walls.

I never had the nerve to set foot in the Gertrude Stein Gallery after that. But soon Kusama was so ubiquitous that you didn't have to go looking for her; she'd come to you — usually with a bunch of naked, polka-dot covered hippies in tow. In 1968, light years before it became a movement, they even "occupied" Wall Street in a Happening called "Anatomic Explosion on Wall Street."

When I stopped painting and started writing, one of the other publications I wrote for was *Andy Warhol's Interview*. If you were hanging around The Factory and asked Andy what he thought of Kusama, he probably would have said, "Uh, she's ... uh ... grrreat..."

That was what Andy said about everything. Still, there was no question that the petite Japanese lady who had posed for a poster as adorably naked as the New Year baby, covered in polka dots and sprawling on her belly on a mattress of soft-sculpture phalli, was gaining on him...

If Andy had his court designer Tiger Morse, Kusama had a whole boutique selling polka dot dresses with peepholes to bare breasts, buttocks, and genitals, which were also sold in chic department stores, including Bloomingdale's. She even got on the front page of the *Daily News* by staging an avant-garde guerilla action called "Grand Orgy to Awaken the Dead at MoMA," in which her troupe of hippie acolytes stripped naked and invaded the fountain in the garden of the Museum of Modern Art. And long before Andy started a relatively tame film and gossip journal called *Interview*, Kusama published an all-out porn tabloid called *Kusama's Orgy*.

Then came 1973 — and poof! — like Peter Pan's muse, Tinkerbell, she vanished.

One thought of Kusama as being so inseparable from the Sixties that it was hardly surprising when she seemed to go the way of Flower Power. But what her present show makes clear is that she actually did some of her best work before the mere decade or so in New York that made her famous, as well as after she went back home to Japan to stay.

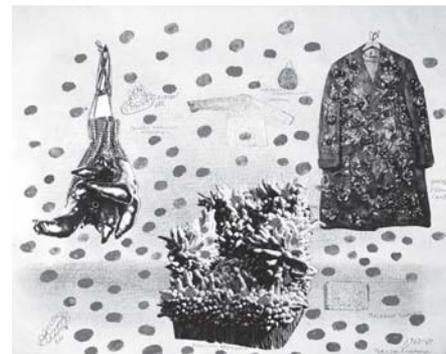
One never would have guessed. In fact, that we ended up reviewing this show was initially a case of mistaken artistic identity promptly followed by unexpectedly arrested attention. When, after drawing a blank with two (!) museum guards, Sleepy and Dopey, who seemed never to have

heard of the exhibition we were actually looking for, Jeannie and I took pity on their cluelessness, told them not worry about it, and bumbled unguided into the first gallery at the Whitney.

Convinced we knew all there was to know about Kusama and not being all that keen to review another Pop novelty act — especially such a blast from the past as the naked polka dot lady that the tabloids sometimes called "Queen of the Hippies" — we had come to check out "Signs & Symbols," a group survey of early works by Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Adolph Gottlieb, and other artists, created during the period immediately predating Abstract Expressionism.

"Finally — this must be it!" I said, leading my wife by the elbow over to the largest, most striking oil in the gallery, a surreal vision of monstrous wilted and twisted sunflowers with visceral red tangled stems set against a horizon like a "flatlining" medical monitor showing no vital signs. Then I noticed the signature and date in the lower right corner of the canvas: Y. Kusama, 1949.

We went from this painting, "Lingering Dream, to another more abstract composition, "On the Table, 1950," with dark slashing strokes converging with violently swirling energy on a ruggedly impastoed ground; and on to yet another striking oil called "Earth of Accumulation," from the same year. In 1963, at the very onset of her fame, Kusama would title some of her furniture



**Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), *Self-Obliteration No. 1, 1962–7*. Watercolor, ink, graphite, and photocollage on paper, 15 7/8 x 19 13/16 in. (40.4 x 50.4 cm). Collection of the artist. © Yayoi Kusama. Image courtesy Yayoi Kusama Studio Inc.; Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo; Victoria Miro Gallery, London; and Gagosian Gallery, New York**



*Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), An Encounter with a Flowering Season, 2009. Synthetic polymer on canvas, 51 5/16 x 63 3/4 in. (130.3 x 162 cm). Collection of the artist. © Yayoi Kusama. Image courtesy Yayoi Kusama Studio Inc.; Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo; Victoria Miro Gallery, London; and Gagosian Gallery, New York*

with penises pieces “accumulations.” But this modest-sized early oil of the same name, painted while she was still in Japan, teaching herself about avant-garde European and American art from images and information in foreign magazines was an abstract landscape with scythe-shaped forms reminiscent of those in Tamguy’s surreal boneyards swaying like stalks of wheat under a sky as tawny as the earth below. In a hybrid style also suggesting Jean Dubuffet’s tactile Art Informal works, like Kusama’s other early oils it showed the influence of diverse modernist masters incongruously yet ambitiously merged.

The second gallery, however, was filled with small gemlike mixed media works on paper, also from the 1950s. In these intimate compositions in ink, pastel, watercolor, gouache and tempera, while favorable comparisons could still be made to European and American predecessors ranging from Paul Klee to Arthur Dove (perhaps filtered through Miro and Georgia O’Keeffe), the young Japanese artist came truly into her own. Abstract yet filled with allusions to plants, planets, and a plethora of organic elements, compositions such as “Phosphoresce in the Daytime, 1950,” “Rain in a City, 1952,” and “An Eye, 1953” lit up the gallery with a unique visionary vibrancy.

\* \* \*

“Staying in Japan was out of the question,” Kusama writes of her decision, in 1957, to come to the U.S. in her autobiography, “Infinity Net,” named for that first series of paintings she showed at the Brata Gallery and published this year by the University of Chicago Press. “My parents, the house, the land, the shackles, the conventions, the prejudice...For art like mine — art that does battle at the boundary between life and death, questioning what we are and what it means to live and die — this country was too small, too servile, too feudalistic, and too scornful of women. My art needed a more unlimited freedom and a wider world.”

Born in 1929 in Matsumoto, her life in Japan had been unbearable since childhood, growing up in a dysfunctional home with a father who was a womanizer and an abusive mother who sent the child out to spy on him when he was with his mistresses, then beat her when she came back in a classic “kill the messenger” scenario. She speculates in the book that her “mental illness” and morbid fascination with sex (in childhood she drew pictures of “dog-chewed vaginas and dung-smear’d penises”) may stem from such punishment.



*Yayoi Kusama, b. 1929, Accumulation, c. 1963. Sewn and stuffed fabric, wood chair frame, paint, 35 1/2 x 38 1/2 x 35 in. (90.2 x 97.8 x 88.9 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase 2001.342. © Yayoi Kusama. Photograph by Tom Powel*

Hoping for a better life in the U.S., instead she encountered anti-Japanese prejudice left over from the war years, and in the New York art world in particular, a male chauvinism to rival anything in the country she had left behind. She describes her first years here — freezing in an unheated loft with broken windows, barely having enough money to eat, feeling alienated by her sex and race even among other artists — as “a living hell.”

Alone in her studio, she was plagued by hallucinatory episodes of “self-obliteration,” in which she imagined her entire environment being “enveloped in an infinite web of polka dots” and felt her individual identity “dissolving and accumulating, proliferating and separating.” Such episodes, as she describes them, vindicate her most familiar artistic motif as something more than frivolous, arbitrary flower power confetti; especially when she describes compulsively painting the dots not only on the canvases of her “Infinity Net” series but all over the floor and furniture in her studio, as well as on her body.

It was not the first or the last time she had been overwhelmed by dots. She attempted more than once over the years to replicate the creepy sensation of such an obsession for the viewer in large scale room environments. In “Infinity Mirror Room — Phalli’s Field, 1965” myriad soft sculpture penises covered with venerable-looking red polka dots are infinitely multiplied by mirrors. In “Dots Obsession, 1998” large red vinyl balloons covered with white dots are rendered almost invisible by identical backgrounds suggests naked human bodies when you apply protective camouflage to them that blends with the surrounding psychic swarm...

(The theme of relentless proliferation is also explored in works such as “Accumulation of Stamps,” a familiar large collage canvas from 1962 consisting of scores of airmail stickers, as well as in a series of much smaller collages on paper from 1967, in which the artist surrounds photographic images of herself with multicolored painted polka dots.)

Among Kusama’s few happy memories of those first years in the U.S. are a supportive friendship with Georgia O’Keeffe, who inspired her to persist as an independent woman artist, and a sustained romance with Joseph Cornell that she remembers as passionate but platonic.

Indeed, although some of her nude group performances turned into public orgies, she usually remained clothed and did not participate, her



*Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), Late-night Chat is Filled with Dreams, 2009. Synthetic polymer on canvas, 63 3/4 x 63 3/4 in. (162 x 162 cm). Collection of the artist. © Yayoi Kusama. Image courtesy Yayoi Kusama Studio Inc.; Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo; Victoria Miro Gallery, London; and Gagosian Gallery, N.Y.*

interest in sex (like that of Andy Warhol, come to think of it) apparently being primarily voyeuristic.

\* \* \*

One can only speculate that it was less a matter of burnout from media overexposure, or of her art going out of fashion when the mood of her adopted country darkened, than of her own inner demons, that caused Kusama to abruptly flee back to Japan in 1973. But if she hoped to duplicate her American success on the home front, she was disappointed when her attempt at staging a naked Happening scandalized a conservative Tokyo audience and she was denounced in the press as a “national disgrace.”



*Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), Self-Obliteration (original design for poster), 1968. Collage with gouache and ink on paper, 18 1/8 x 11 in. (46 x 28 cm). Collection of the artist. © Yayoi Kusama. Image courtesy Yayoi Kusama Studio Inc.; Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo; Victoria Miro Gallery, London; and Gagosian Gallery, New York*



*Yayoi Kusama, b. 1929, Fireflies on the Water, 2002. Mirror, plexiglass, 150 lights and water, Overall: 111 x 144 1/2 x 144 1/2 in. (281.9 x 367 x 367 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from the Postwar Committee and the Contemporary Painting and Sculpture Committee and partial gift of Betsy Wittenborn Miller 2003.322. © Yayoi Kusama. Photograph courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery*

Considering how disorienting “Kusama’s Self-Obliteration” (the apt title she chose for a disjointed 1967 film included in the survey at the Whitney) episodes had to be, it seems no wonder that in 1977 she finally checked herself into a psychiatric hospital in Tokyo, where she has lived ever since.

As a voluntary in-patient, limited at first to a studio she set up within the institution, Kusama was obliged once again to adapt to a smaller scale. Perhaps influenced by her close relationship to Joseph Cornell she created surreal diaristic

compositions combining figurative fragments with landscape elements, such as “I Who Committed Suicide.” Since this work was created the very year she committed herself to the psychiatric asylum, it’s difficult not to apply a perhaps too literal interpretation to its doleful title and image of big sorrowful eyes peering over stylized mountains (reminiscent of those in traditional Japanese landscapes) that cut off the lower portion of a face like those veils worn by devout Muslim women.

In time, however, Kusama had a proper studio built right across the road from her hospital home,

where she has resumed the daily production of ambitious artworks that has preoccupied her since the 1940s. There she returned to large scale painting in acrylics, creating intricate, precise abstract compositions with clear, pure colors and repetitive patterns suggesting the rhythms of nature, such as “Sprouting (The Transmigration of the Soul), 1987,” where white forms suggesting eggs and traveling spermatozoa are set against a verdant green ground; “Gentle are the Stairs to Heaven,” with its bright red and green hues intertwined like leaves and flames; and “Weeds, 1996,” a majestic green triptych, its all-over composition as dizzyingly busy as the “Infinity Nets” she showed all those years ago at the Brata Gallery.

Then there is “Fireflies on the Water, 2002,” a glittering, glowing room installation, created with mirrors, plexiglass, lights and water, which is clearly the show’s ethereal oooing and ahhhing crowd pleaser. But perhaps the biggest surprise of all are Kusama’s most recent series of large acrylic paintings from 2009 and 2010.

For hanging salon style all over the walls in their own spacious gallery at the Whitney, these buoyant compositions, with their brilliantly colorful mixture of playful figurative and abstract forms, simultaneously call to mind the Jazz series of Matisse, certain works by Alexander Calder and the gaily colored “Nanas” of the eternally upbeat French sculptor Niki de Saint Phalle. Indeed, if titles such as “Joy I Feel when Love has Blossomed” and “Once the Abominable War is Over, Happiness Fills our Hearts” can be believed, Yayoi Kusama may be making peace with her polka dot demons at long last.

— Ed McCormack

Yayoi Kusama, Whitney Museum of American Art, 945 Madison Ave at 75th Street, Through September 30, 2012.

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# Joy Saville Transports Contemporary Abstraction Back to Its Origins in the Spirit

The influence of formalist critics — particularly Clement Greenberg, the most vociferous of all when it came to programatically condemning meaningful subject matter as old hat — has caused us to all but forget that abstract art had its origins in spirituality. When pioneering modernists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Frantisek Kupka, Kazimer Malevich, and Piet Mondrian began, over a hundred years ago, eliminating the familiar world from their work, they were attempting to embody spiritual notions from Theosophy, Rosicrucianism and other esoteric disciplines of their time in visual form. Yet as the twentieth century continued, critics tended to concentrate more and more on the formal aspects of color and composition as opposed to a work of art's underlying meanings, ignoring even the protests of a prominent abstract artist like Mark Rothko, who disliked having his work discussed in formal terms, saying, "I'm not interested in the relationship of color to forms or anything else. I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions — tragedy, ecstasy, doom and so on. And the fact that a lot of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I can communicate those basic human emotions. The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience as I had when I painted them."

Confronting the majestic, opulent works in cotton, linen, and silk by the contemporary textile artist, Joy Saville, one cannot imagine her concurring with Rothko's disinterest in relationships of color and form, given how agreeably these elements are arranged in her compositions. On the other hand, unlike many contemporary abstract artists who have been cowed by the prevailing critical prejudice, Saville is not reluctant to acknowledge the spiritual component in her aesthetic when she says, "My work allows me to live creatively within the tension of yin and yang and in that place of stillness where the presence of God is most easily felt."

Indeed, Saville elaborates on "that place" in an artist's statement issued in connection with her newest exhibition "Still," saying: "The new work expresses the feelings of connection, interaction and recognition that happen in moments when time stands still, moments that often occur when I am focused on my work; I am centered, but very much aware, as if in meditation. The energy of this stillness encircles me."

It seems relevant in this regard that "Beside Still Water," one of the more powerful works in the exhibition was created soon after the death of the artist's brother.

A vertical composition over six feet tall, it's contrasts of rich, verdant greens and pale, icy blue hues seem simultaneously to express the miracle of life and the mystery of death. Here, Saville's personal iconography of richly layered triangular shard-like forms (surging upward) are at once elegiac and transcendent. Unlike the darkly somber



"Celebration"

canvases that make up the nondenominational chapel in Houston, Texas (now known as the Rothko Chapel), completed just before Mark Rothko's suicide, Saville's "Beside Still Water" is an uplifting rather than morbid tribute to a lost sibling, a fond, faith-filled farewell rather than a veil of tears.

Although created in 2009, two years earlier, "Regeneration," another major textile work by Joy Saville, appears in context symbolic of the optimistic philosophical stance projected in most of her compositions. Very much like another brilliant large piece called "October Sun," (which was originally intended for this show but was purchased for the collection of The University Medical Center of Princeton, where it was installed in April), "Regeneration" is an exhilarating composition in which myriad fragments of silken yellow, red, and blue fabric burst upon one's vision like Impressionist strokes of gleaming pigment, evoking a sense of shimmering chiaroscuro; of the dance of sunlight and shadow over foliage and fresh blooms.

Here, especially, Saville demonstrates her

memorable statement "Light is color and color is light." By contrast, more subdued in hue and structured along the lines of neo-cubism, Saville's "Celebration, 2012," a work commissioned by Rosanne Jacks, is possessed of a subtle stateliness, with shard-like triangular maroon, violet, yellow, orange, and blue shapes converging in a manner that

tells us that to celebrate can be a deeply reverent act, rather than merely an occasion for frivolous self-indulgence.

To paraphrase what the late poet, critic, and MoMA curator Frank O'Hara once wrote about the painter Helen Frankenthaler, the beauties of Joy Saville's work are "various and dramatic." Frankenthaler's stain paintings, however, with their swirling linearity and generous expanses of unprimed canvas, seem influenced by the sparseness of Asian ink painting and watercolor. Saville's pieces, on the other hand, come to us by way of a quintessentially Western tradition of compositional intricacy and coloristic lushness that dates from the Unicorn Tapestry through the chromatic saturations of Joan Mitchell, arguably the greatest among the second-generation of Abstract Expressionist painters.

Although the textile masterpiece cited in the last sentence may seem a more apt reference (give or take the changing aesthetic fashions of several centuries), the atmospheric fluidity that Saville achieves in the non-liquid medium of cotton, linen and silk pieced, stitched and constructed on a hidden frame approaches Mitchell's own in pigment.

Witness works such as "Spring Moss," with its sense of verdant moisture, and "Evening Poppies" with its brilliant reds bleeding through nocturnal blues, both from 2011 and both giving a splendid sense of how energy can flow through stillness.

Then there is "Fragments of Time, 2012" which incorporates print fabrics from the 1940s and '50's that, mingled with the immediacy of her characteristic palette of silken hues, contribute to what the artist refers to as "a sense of 'even now, even then, yet,' a sense of continuation and remaining."

Amid the cacophony of an often raucous art world, these lyrical new works by Joy Saville sing in a hushed whisper that rises eloquently above the general din.

— Ed McCormack

Joy Saville, Noho Gallery, 530 West 25th St.,  
October 2 - 27, 2012.  
Reception: Saturday, October 6th, 4 - 7pm

# Bruno Palmer-Poroner: Poet, Gallerist, Art Critic, Editor: 1921 - 2012

Bruno Palmer-Poroner, who passed away this August after a long illness, was my mentor when it came to art writing.

"If you're going to make up a word, you should at least try to spell it correctly," I remember him commenting drily one day as he edited my copy.

When I wrote for *ArtSpeak*, the magazine he published with his wife Margot (out of which *Gallery&Studio*, the magazine my wife Jeannie and I publish, grew), I often felt like I was Eliza Doolittle and Bruno was Professor Harry Higgins in a peculiar remake of "My Fair Lady."

What we had in common was that we were both dropouts: me from Seward Park, a notorious penal institution thinly disguised as a high school on the Lower East Side; Bruno from Harvard, where he earned a Masters Degree in American History, before deciding that he didn't fit in with that elite institution's snob-set and taking off for Paris to experience the bohemian expatriate life for five years while studying French Civilization and Literature at the Université de Paris and writing art criticism for the Paris American Kiosk.

Back in the U.S., in Provincetown, where the art crowd summered, Bruno met and became immediately besotted with the charms and charming accent of a petite, pretty French Canadian art student named Margot Sylvestre. The courtship continued in Manhattan, where he took her to art openings on 10th Street and the Brata Gallery, on Third Avenue. The evening often ended with the couple sharing a single glass of beer at fashionable Village ginmills like Dillon's or the Chuck Wagon, or else attending a party in

an artist's loft.

The romance led to marriage and Margot gave birth to twin boys. Many years later, when he spoke proudly of his grown sons, Bruno always seemed greatly relieved that Daniel and Michael opted for careers in business rather than the arts.

For while Bruno's own career gave him status in the New York art world, as well as aesthetic and intellectual gratification, it hardly resulted in material riches. From 1958 to 1959, he was Director of the Camino and Nonagon galleries. In 1959, already a published poet, he also became Art Critic for the *Village Voice*. From 1961 to 1971, he owned and directed the East Hampton Gallery on 56th Street and later served as Director of the Phoenix Gallery, on Madison Avenue, until 1975.

Bruno was also invited to give talks on art at the Museum of the City of New York, Kutztown University, the Pen and Brush Club, the Salon National des Galeries d'Art, Montreal, Quebec, (where he lectured in French), and was a juror for several arts competitions. His long correspondence with the abstract painter, William Baziotés (their friendship began when they hiked together in their teens) provided important reference material for a biographer of the artist.

"Sometimes I thought Bruno was a frustrated artist," says Margot, "but somehow he could not give up the writing."

I met Bruno briefly in the mid '60s when I was still a visual artist, showing in a gallery on 10th Street, and got my first uptown exposure in a group exhibition at his East Hampton Gallery. But I didn't really get to know him until almost a couple of decades later, when I was rebounding



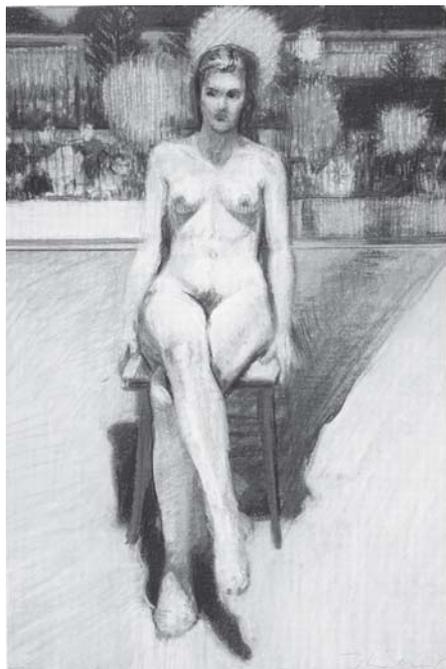
from a hectic, sometimes self-destructive, few years covering popular music and popular culture for *Rolling Stone*.

I wanted to start over. Bruno and Margot Palmer-Poroner, his partner in life and in *Artspeak*, the magazine that they co-published from 1979 to 1997, gave me that opportunity. From the beginning *ArtSpeak* struck me as an important publication, since it not only covered established artists but also emerging artists who weren't getting attention anywhere else.

I enjoyed Bruno's sharp wit and learned a lot about art writing during those rigorous editing workouts that he put me through like both Strunk and White rolled into one. Like a lot of other people in the New York art world I will miss him. But I'm glad he finished his book, "The History of the United States: American Grand Strategy," before leaving this earthly plane. That year at Harvard didn't go to waste after all.

— Ed McCormack

*There will be a memorial celebration of his life on Saturday, October 6, 2012. For info call: 212-924-6531.*



Wayne Thiebaud, *Nude and Tapestry*, 1981

Previous excerpts from HOODLUM HEART, a memoir by Ed McCormack can be read on [galleryandstudio.com](http://galleryandstudio.com).

While the late gallerist and collector Allan Stone was best known as an early champion of Abstract Expressionism, his taste was at once impeccable and eclectic. So it makes perfect sense that the Allan Stone Gallery's great summer group exhibition "Disrobed," featuring nudes by Gaston LaChaise, Richard Estes, Wayne Thiebaud (left) and others, will be followed in September by a survey called "MiniMax: Minimalist Themes in a Maximalist Collection." That show, featuring works in

minimal, reductive, and geometric styles by Dan Basen, Derrick Guild, Hans Haacke and others, will be followed in October by "Robert Mallary, Sculptor, a solo exhibition of works from the late 1950s and early 1960s by one of the most important proponents of the "junk aesthetic."

MinMax: September 13 – October 20, 2012.  
Robert Mallary October 25 – December 21, 2012. Allan Stone Gallery, 5 East 82nd Street

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## When Craft Approaches Art, Magic Occurs

Founded in 1958, the organization known as the Artist Craftsmen of New York (ACNY) includes in its exhibitions beadwork, ceramics, collage, jewelry, sculpture, fiber art and mixed media of many kinds. It would appear that the organization's main criteria is to show work by artists who push against the boundaries which normally separate craft from high art.

The varied educational experience of Dongjune Lee, who studied industrial crafts in his native Korea and painting at the National Academy School and Museum in New York is an excellent example of such a crossover artist. Lee's "Sinaburo 2012R" is a work in the craft medium of disperse dye which has the fluidity that we associate with abstract "poured paint" of artists such as Morris Louis combined with a kind of lyrical poetic subject matter akin to the poetic realist Loren McIver.

Alice Sprintzen, on the other hand, who has been teaching jewelry making for over 20 years, elevates her craft by creating wearable items, as inventive as the sculpture of Alexander Calder, who also created jewelry design for family and friends in his spare time. Indeed, Sprintzen's piece "Musical Instruments," in which instruments are arranged in the form of a face, is every bit as fanciful as some of Calder's designs.

Laura Godler, an award winning polymer clay artist who also creates wearable art jewelry shows an exotic and complex necklace called "Dragon Fly," combining metal with stones, beads and a pendant containing a graceful drawn image of a Japanese geisha or courtesan suggesting the Edo period.

Trudy Jeremias, who came to the United States from Vienna, Austria in 1939, is a jewelry maker turned photographer who has been showing her jewelry designs in ACNY exhibits since 1970. Recently, she has been exhibiting her close-up color photographs, such as the abstracted images of leaves and an ornate plant seen here, which reflect her past as a jewelry artist by being gemlike in their beauty.

After studying jewelry making in the United States and Mexico, and learning to construct her pieces directly from metal, Pearl Brody mastered the wax carving technique which she mostly uses now for jewelry making. An exquisitely detailed leaf motif is the subject of a pin in 18 karat green gold and opal. She also shows a stunning amethyst and sterling silver bracelet of six stones.

Lillian Cozzarelli, another innovative Jewelry designer, focuses primarily on wax carved rings cast in silver with touches of 14, 18, or 24 karat gold combined with gemstones. One of her most striking pieces in

this show, however, is an elaborate necklace featuring a bulbous cloisonné vitreous enamel pendant on a 14k gold-filled woven chain which is at once baroque and exquisitely tasteful.

A graduate of St. Martins School in London who has been living and working in the U.S. since 1977, Shula Mustacchi, works with a variety of textile materials and employs photographs of her own work in those materials to create collages that also include her own hand-painted papers. Mustacchi's "Crafty Birds" is a glorious arboreal/avian vision of a tree with many branches bearing a colorful multitude of boldly patterned birds.

Weaver Sally Shore, who learned to sew and knit as a child in Wisconsin and studied

sculptures comes across in "Tension," a pas de deux between stylized semi-abstract couple, as well as in "In Out," where a single figure swings acrobatically through the portal-like opening in a geometric structure.

Joan Israel works with polymer clay in both two dimensional paintings and three-dimensional sculptures. Most recently, she has been combining this material with mirrors to create relief-like floral forms in vibrantly colorful hues that make the viewer behave like a modern day Narcissus, gazing at his or her image as though in a crystal clear lake in a bucolic setting.

Fran Medoff's painted wood reliefs, such as one featuring a Klezmer band, each stringed instrument supplied with real strings, have a lively visual humor akin to the assemblage paintings of Red Grooms. Equally appealing in its own manner is Medoff's "Vertical Flowers," in which the carved and painted blooms have an almost cartoon-like sensuousness combined with formal grace.

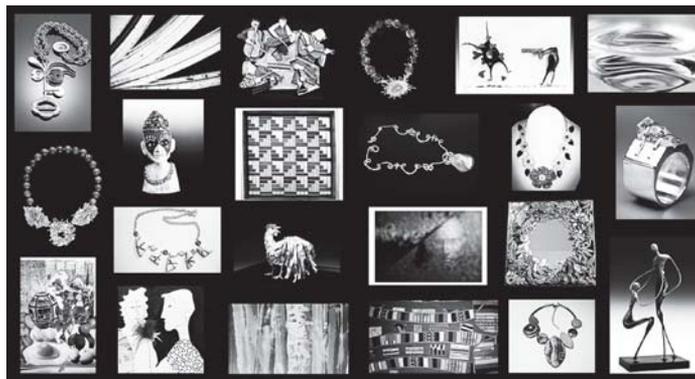
Former wildlife photographer Evelyn Letfuss now expresses her love of nature and its creatures in one-of-a-kind jewelry and three-dimensional bead art and mixed media works. Recycling porcupine quills, fish vertebrae, birch bark, and other unusual natural materials, she is represented here with a witty box assemblage called "Fish Gotta Swim," and "Global Warming," a necklace fashioned from beads that drip like melting snow from a semicircle of broken safety glass.

Dorothy Hall, a professional jewelry designer for many years who has also turned to collage art creates intricate compositions combining faded old photographs with fragments of typography and elegant calligraphy in a poetically evocative manner. She often adds scroll relief elements that lend them a delicate tactile appeal, as seen in "Meditation," and "Music is Everything."

Then there is Karen Strauss, a professional harpist who also creates one of a kind jewelry from gold, silver, copper, precious stones and even vintage bottle caps, often combining elegance and a funky Pop quality. In Strauss' "Always Lurking," a beaded serpent with gems for eyes and a gold forked tongue winds sinuously around a delicate gold vine festooned with Edenic floral forms.

Like all the participants in the ACNY's group exhibitions, she also exemplifies the magical combination of technical skill and personal vision required to elevate craft to the level of fine art.

— Byron Coleman



fine art at Kent State University in the late 1960s creates fabric works such as "Amaze Me 1," and "High Rise," both powerful abstract designs, particularly the latter, where the precise geometrical forms suggest urban architectural towers rising skyward.

New York photographer Philip Maier is represented by two vibrant street scenes in which the digitally shifted register of the forms and colors transforms city subjects in a manner that recalls Andy Warhol portraits. In Maier's "Flatironmerge," brightly colored flowers and trees frame the landmark building in a softly Impressionist manner, while his "Timesquaremerge" is a neon-lit nocturnal vision of crowds and traffic streaming in jazz rhythms under a plethora of gigantic kinetically flashing billboards.

By contrast, Lauren Golden, an endocrinologist at the Naomi Berrie Diabetes Center in New York City when she isn't taking photographs, chooses subjects that recall Andrew Wyeth for their weathered outdoorsy quality. Particularly striking is Golden's ability to find poetry in a desolate subject "Baker's Brook Fishing Shack," where clouds hang low over the beat-up structure of the title in a weedy lot near a murky body of water.

Dance loving Argentine-born artist Lila Turjanski-Villiard creates mixed media figures as slender as those of Giacometti, albeit always in graceful motion. The terpsichorean dynamic that animates Turjanski-Villiard's

AC / NY Member Exhibition,  
New Century Artists Gallery,  
530 West 25th St., October 2 - 13, 2012.

## WSAC 2012 Salon: A Mixed Bag of Aesthetic Pleasure

Particularly prominent in the West Side Arts Coalition's Salon Show 2012, were semiabstract works in which the real world was altered by the individual visions of various artists. One example was Beatrice Rubel's exquisitely ethereal colored pencil drawing, "Ethoria" with its delicate forms floating like rainbow-tinted cloud fragments. Richard Carlson's mixed media composition combined geometry and poetry in a work in cool blues and grays, where skyscrapers rose like cathedral spires from a hard-edged abstract grid. Arlene Finger, on the other hand, channeled Matisse in a predominantly red room interior charmingly evoked in pastel, white chalk, and pencil on paper.

Total abstraction also made a strong showing: Todd Miguel's oil on linen "The Cosmic Guru," reminded us of how the earliest abstract painters like Kandinsky strove to paint the unseen with its vision of a graceful red phantom suspended among glowing heavenly forms. By contrast, Gloria Rosenberg bolstered pastel colored shapes with bold black outlines in her dynamic acrylic painting, simply titled "Abstract." In his acrylic on canvas "The Order of Things," Robert N. Scott combined geometric forms and painterly brushwork in a harmonious manner to achieve an aesthetically successful marriage of opposites. Daniel Boyer combined vigorous calligraphic energy with wry beatnik irony in "The Death of Espresso," a work in the unusual medium of gouache diluted with Coca-Cola. Then there was Robin Goodstein, an artist whose jagged forms and flat matte color areas add up to more than the sum of their parts in an untitled oil on canvas that harks back to Pop abstraction of '60s art star Nicholas Kruschenick.

Other artists caught our attention with the juxtaposing of real things in symbolic environments: Deborah Yaffe, for example, with her whimsical composition, "Balloons Rising," where the objects of the title ascend like buoyant Easter eggs floating against a sky too blue to be true. Marianne V. McNamara made an especially poignant statement with a deadpan faux primitive oil on canvas of a chubby, overdressed matron marooned in a make believe ballroom where a svelte former self dances a dream tango with a suave gigolo in a tuxedo. Jack Cesareo, best known for his photographs of a giant pink frosted cupcake, went 3-D with an equally amusing box construction of a two regulation-size cupcakes

lorded over by a typically bug-eyed extraterrestrial. Margo Mead showed an antic yet ecologically concerned mixed media composition called "After the Forests, After the Oceans," depicting human figures and colorful toy automobiles floating without gravity in a fiery universe where the sun is represented by a red rubber ball. And M.C. Escher has nothing on Dammika D. Ranasinghe, whose acrylic on paper "Fish in the Blue Water" was an intricate gridded composition in which the same small goldfish was repeated ad infinitum.

People in their natural environment, a timeless subject that never goes out of style, was also interpreted by several artists. Robert Eckel evoked a poetically melancholy mood with an atmospheric oil on linen entitled "Early Winter," depicting a lone figure strolling between the tall shadows of bare trees forming a tunnel in a public park. By contrast Michelle Ordynans made a starker statement with her oil on canvas "Gray Street," in which possibly unemployed men with too much time on their hands stroll as listlessly as George Tooker's subway zombies amid coffee shop signs and other oases for the idle. In "Nite/Meet," another street scene by Carole Barlowe, although they are raised from the canvas in low relief, the two colorless human figures occupy the forefront of the composition but do not dominate it, being brilliantly upstaged by the luminous sky, rooftops, and water tower in the background, as if to remind one how little effect we have on the impregnable urban landscape.

Two artists approached the portrait in vastly different manners: Gail Comes showed "Grace," a pristine and vibrant oil on canvas of a beautiful African woman with big haunting eyes that cut the viewer down to size. By contrast, Jutta Filippelli's acrylic painting, a head and shoulders view of a black-haired woman in a blue turtleneck posed against a tomato soup red background was pointedly titled "Portrait," although the figure lacked a face.

Two other artists chose feline subjects: Nate Ladson's oil "The Lions" captured the terrible tense stillness that the sight of a male and female lion relaxing (she suddenly more alert than he) can provoke in the human psyche. By contrast "Ty-Ty" by Lucinda Prince was an affectionate oil of a slender Siamese cat poised as gracefully as an Egyptian glyph atop a ladder in front of a window, its panes enhancing the formal effect of the skillful animal portrait.

Various approaches to landscape were also featured. Marvin Gettleman's ink drawing of a ramshackle beach on stilts in Far Rockaway, New York, "Mitchell's Hideaway," was notable for the artist's spontaneous yet relatively detailed handling of gray washes. Marguerite Borchardt's oil "Lily Pond" wisely sidestepped the manner of Monet to present a crystal clear panorama of a petal speckled pond and a pine forest on the opposite shore. Linda Lessner's "Summer Clouds" was at once a realist tour de force and a lyrical abstraction. Monique Serres' tondo in oil on linen "Lighthouse" imbued a potentially hackneyed subject with new life by virtue of the artist's skill in rendering the contrast between the wispy clouds above and craggy rocks below, as well as her witty presentation of the round canvas in a rugged rope frame. Ava Schonberg also risked unabashed beauty, often a big taboo in contemporary art, with "Provence — Eze," her acrylic painting of a rugged portal framed by delicate foliage. And Pilar Malley also made a memorable statement with "Palms," a strong oil pastel of a simple subject laid down with considerable conviction.

In recent decades photography has come into its own as a medium to be shown alongside painting, rather than segregated in an aesthetic ghetto and the photo artists in this show prove the wisdom of that tendency, starting with Amy Rosenfield, whose "Nature's Red," two glossy digital prints on glossy paper had a Warhol-like iconic quality. David Ruskin, who combines qualities of painting and photography in his hand-colored prints also made a strong showing with his moody vista "Mendenhall Glacier, Alaska." And Carolyn Reus gave an unexpected bucolic lyricism to a familiar subject in her digital color photograph "East River."

Two final artists rounded off the enjoyable variety of this fine salon exhibition with that most unassuming yet frequently surprising genre: watercolors of floral still life. "Love" by Barbara Hughes was a delicate Valentine to the viewer. "Peonies" by George Jellinek was a modest yet vibrant expressionist composition reminiscent of Emil Nolde.

—Maurice Taplinger

WSAC 2012 Salon, recently seen at  
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