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GALLERY&STUDIO

At The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Balthus in the Age of Political Correctness

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Balthus (Balthasar Klossowski) (French, 1908–2001) The Golden Days *1944-1946 Oil on canvas 58 1/4 x 78 3/8 in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC, Gift of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, 1966 ©Balthus*

A Prototypical Punk Prodigy's Progress

an excerpt from Ed McCormack's HOODLUM HEART

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Ed Brodkin

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Balthus in the Age of Political Correctness at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

by Ed McCormack

The cheapest shot among the advance publicity for the Balthus exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art was an anonymous blurb on the "Fall Picks" page of the once-hip *Village Voice*, which began: "Balthus (ne Balthasar Klossowski, 1908—2001) takes the prize for the perviest European painter of the 20th century...."

Then as soon as the show opened, there was Roberta Smith sniffing from the make-it-or-break-it bully pulpit of *The New York Times* that many of the paintings were "interesting in one way or another but not especially original or even very convincing as totalities" before concluding "The show is, in some ways, a study in kinds and degrees of failure."

She could not have been more wrong. Balthus's paintings of pubescent girls — whether with feline companions, like most in this show, or without — provide an easy target for both the ideological descendants of those moral police who tried to snuff Nobokov's great novel "Lolita" in the Eisenhower era; as well as their opposites: those hipper-than-thou art wordlings who applaud novelty for its own sake and shrug off as "unoriginal" paintings that, like the best ones in this show, eschew trends and "isms" for "Timeless Realism," as the painter himself defined his style, with its echoes of Piero della Francesca, Courbet, and above all Poussin, whom he admired above all for his classical purity.

As for the content of his work, it is difficult to know if Balthus was being disingenuous in 1996, when the then eighty-eight year old artist told a reporter, "I really don't understand why people see the paintings of girls as Lolitas .... You know why I paint little girls? Because women, even my own daughter, already belong to this present world, to fashion. Little girls are the only creatures today who can be little Poussins."

By the same token, Balthus did not go out of his way to discourage salacious interpretations of his subject matter, in compositions such as the 1938 oil "Thérèse Dreaming." Yet this exquisitely limned study of adolescent insolence offers persons of sensibility far subtler delectation than a forbidden glimpse of white cotton panties under a bunched-up schoolgirl skirt, or the not-so-subtle erotic symbolism of the cat lapping milk from a saucer near the hassock upon which one of the girl's bare, carelessly akimbo legs is propped. The controversy such pictures are apt to invite is anticipated in the exhibition's defensive title "Balthus: Cats and Girls — Paintings and Provocations."

"Originally I was just going to call it 'Cats and Girls," Sabine Rewald, the show's curator, remarked at the press preview with a wry little shrug of acquiescence to institutional jitters.

Yet, although it is reproduced in the catalogue for historical reasons, not even the qualifying noun added to the end of the show's subtitle allowed for the inclusion of "The Guitar Lesson," which Rewald refers to as "the artist's most notorious picture."

This large 1934 oil depicts a seated female musical instructor (curiously modeled on Balthus' mother, Elizabeth, a seductive painter manqué better known in Parisian bohemian circles as Baladine) with a wispy young girl sprawled limply across her lap. From the waist up, the student is modestly garbed in a red cardigan sweater and a high collared blouse. But with her dark skirt bundled above her waist, she is naked from her navel down to her white knee-socks. With one hand, the teacher restrains the student by her long brown hair, adorned with a large pink bow to crown her innocence. With her other hand, the molester — one of whose

Balthus (Balthasar Klossowski) (French, 1908–2001) Thérèse Dreaming ***1938*** ***Oil on canvas 59 x 51 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection, 1998 ©Balthus***

full womanly breasts is bared by the helpless child's hand, as it grasps in ineffectual self-defense at the bodice of her aggressor's gray dress — fondles the girl's pale, slender upper thigh almost to her hairless pubes, as one might strum a guitar, while an actual guitar lies nearby on the floor.

After being unveiled in Balthus's first solo exhibition in 1934 at Galerie Pierre in Paris, and causing a small scandal, it had one more showing at Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York in 1977. When the dealer tried to donate the painting to the Museum of Modern Art, it was returned with a polite "thanks but no thanks." And it hasn't been seen in public since. In 1977, after viewing it in New York, the noted art Australian critic and "Shock of the New" TV commentator Robert Hughes hailed "The Guitar Lesson" as "one of the few masterpieces among erotic paintings by Western artists in the last fifty years."

Balthus (Balthasar Klossowski) (French, 1908–2001) The King of Cats ***1935***
Oil on canvas 30 11/16 x 16 5/16 in. Fondation Balthus, Switzerland ©Balthus

The accuracy of his assessment makes the picture all the more disturbingly fascinating. Which was obviously the effect the Balthus intended when, according to Rewald, he wrote to a friend that he hoped his first exhibition would " shake up and disturb [the] viewer's conscience."

* * *

Born in Paris, into an artistic and intellectual milieu, to a German Jewish refugee painter and art historian named Erich Klossowski and Baladine, the talent of Balthasar Klossowski (1908-2001) was recognized early. At age eleven, he created a sequence of 40 poignant India ink drawings narrating the heartbreaking loss of a beloved stray cat he had adopted and named "Mitzou," which foreshadowed his lifelong love of felines.

Once thought to be lost but recently recovered and included in the show at the Met, these drawings, with their bold outlines and impressive graphic dynamism, are clearly influenced by the wordless woodcut "novels" of Franz Masereel. Yet they surpass juvenilia and impressed Rainier Maria sufficiently for the poet to declare the boy "a near genius" and "already a great artist."

A family friend, Rilke became Baladine's lover after she and her husband, the painter and art historian Erich Klossowski separated, as well as a surrogate father to Balthasar and his brother Pierre, three years older. It was he who arranged for the publication of the drawings in a book, titled "Mitsou," after the lost pet. He also wrote a preface for the book and suggested that, rather than the child's given name, his nickname, "Baltusz," appear on its cover.

"Then I did not dare to contradict the great poet," Balthus confessed years later, and continued to sign this name to all his future work (with only a slight change in spelling over the years).

After such a promising start, it had to be disheartening for Balthus to find himself, several years later in his late twenties, still poor and obscure, with all of the glow of the one-time prodigy gone. Not only had his first one-man exhibition been

trounced by the French critics as "morbid," "crude," "contrived and naive." He was also recovering from a nervous breakdown and a suicide attempt brought on by a failed love affair.

After a period of idleness, he completed a series of pen and ink illustrations for "Wuthering Heights" begun some years earlier, designed sets and costumes for a production by the avant garde playwright and actor Antonin Artaud. And in 1935, presumably to elevate his spirits after enduring the most disastrous year in his life, he painted "The King of Cats," the regal 1935 full-length self-portrait with a large tiger-cat nuzzling one of his trouser-legs, that graces the present exhibition.

For a while afterward, the only other easel paintings he attempted, primarily because they provided his only source of income at the time, were commissioned portraits. These he looked upon as mere drudgery and referred to as "my monsters." From another point of view, however, the practice the portraits must have given him in capturing a likeness probably enhanced the indivuality of the more inspired pictures of adolescent girls that were to preoccupy him later in the decade, after Thérèse Blanchard became his first important model. (As later compositions from the 1950s at the Met demonstrate, his pictures became less successful, losing their subtle erotic danger when the figures became more generalized formal props in emultation of Poussin.)

Two early commisioned portraits of elegant women considerably older than his later models, appear less than enthusiastic. One can only wonder, however, if Balthus thought of his insightful portraits of artistic colleagues in the same terms: the dissolute 1936 likeness of André Derain, belly bulging against an ocher bathrobe, standing like an arrogant King Farouk, with a disheveled, wild haired blond teenage waif slumped like a used paint-rag in a chair in the background; "Joan Miro and His Daughter Delores" (1937 — 38), in which the diminutive Catalan painter poses stiffly in a straight-backed chair, poker faced, blue jowelled, looking slightly seedy in the manner of the French singer Charles Aznavour, with one hand on his knee and the other around the little girl's waist, as though attempting to keep the restless seven-year-old from squirming out of the picture.

In any case, the desire to create more independent works was only revived when Balthus met a girl named Thérèse (whether playing with her brother on a street near his studio, or in a local cafe where her father worked as a waiter, Rewald was not able to learn). Perhaps because she was eleven, the very age at which the artist had his biggest triumph, Thérèse may have touched off an epiphany for the painter, transporting him back to "the golden days" (to appropriate a phrase he used to title one of his paintings) when his mother, in one of her many letters to Rilke, wrote, "Pierre lies on the sofa reading a book and looking like a young Russian from about 1830; Balthus chases little girls in the garden ..."

For although Balthus cast his mother as an adult predator in "The Guitar Lesson," by all accounts the impulsive Baladine was childlike herself; perhaps even a bit feline, spending most of her days reading, writing letters, and catnapping. According to some who knew her, Rewald tells us in her catalogue essay, she "looked much younger than her age" and often referred to herself and her sons as "we three children." Rewald also writes that Baladine "created an unusual environment for her two sons to grow up in .... its remove from the conventions of ordinary life" bringing to mind the atmosphere of youthful fantasy permeating the novel "Les Enfants terribles" by Jean Cocteau (another family friend), and speculates that household's cloistered permissiveness may have inspired Balthus's depictions of children in "rooms closed off from the outside world."

* * *

A companion piece to the aforementioned "Thérèse Dreaming," in "Thérèse with Cat, 1938," even while assuming an immodest position that suggests a younger child's lack of self-consciousness, the preadolescent model gazes out with remarkable self-possession for a twelve-year-old. Thérèse who may not have been Balthus's prettiest young model over the years, but from the beginning she personified more than any of the others the moody rebelliousness of preteen and teenage girls, of which Balthus was to become one of art history's premier maestros.

Thus she is the subject of several of the most engaging works in this exhibition, including "Therese on a Bench Seat, 1939." Uncharacteristically playful for Thérèse, whose precocious seriousness was one of the qualities that initially attracted Balthus to her, this major oil evolved from a smaller but more complex oil sketch over graphite on cardboard from the same year. Called "Study of Three Figures," it depicted the now fourteen year old model balanced on the bench seat teasing a kitten with a little ball on a string while her sixteen year old brother gazes out a window in the background. In this larger oil, the kitten as well as the boy in the background have both disappeared and the central figure of the girl has been greatly enlarged, and set against a vigorously brushed plain brown ground. The now slender adolescent, in her short plaid skirt, white knee socks and red sweater, sprawls across the bench seat, holding just a length of string

Balthus (Balthasar Klossowski) (French, 1908–2001) Thérèse on a Bench Seat ***1939***
Oil on canvas 27 7/8 x 36 in. Dorothy R. and Richard E. Sherwood Family Collection ©Balthus

aloft, while balancing with the other hand on the floor, with that coltish combination of awkwardness and slightly gawky grace peculiar to that stage between childhood and womanhood, for which Nabokov coined the apt term "nymphet."

As far as anyone knows, Thérèse never posed nude for Balthus and was twenty-one years old and already married by the time Balthus completed "The Victim, 1939 — 46." Yet, as Rewald points out in her notes on the picture, "the oval shape of the young woman's face and her short brown hair match those of Thérèse Blanchard ... Perhaps without her participation or even her knowledge, Balthus painted her onto this final, imaginary evocation of her."

The life-size nubile nude body of the slender girl in the large oil appears almost as pale as the white sheet upon which she lies. Since the title seems to derive from the novella "La Victime" (dedicated to Balthus by its author Pierre Jean Jouve), about a young girl "drained of life," as Rewald puts it, after being seduced and abandoned. Or, since the picture was begun and completed between the time Balthus was drafted and completed his military service, the curator speculates, perhaps it is a reaction to the horrors of war. "Balthus leaves the viewer in doubt, however, about whether the 'victim' is dead or in a trance," Rewald concludes.

Given the grief the artist must have felt over losing his favorite model to adulthood and marriage, it is just as easy to imagine that he might have painted the picture in the hope of finally burying Thérèse's memory.

Even in adolescence, Balthus was already nostalgic for childhood. When he was fourteen years old, in a letter to a friend of his father, he declared, "God knows how happy I could be if I could remain a child forever."

If not forever, for most of his long life, in his "closed off from the outside world" in his studio with Thérèse, and then a succession of other youthful models, perhaps he did.

"Balthus: Cats and Girls — Paintings and Provocations," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Ave. through Jan. 12, 2014.

A Retrospective Survey of Gadfly Barfly Wiseguy Robert Cenedella's Conceptual Conceits and Deadpan Appropriations of Art World Pretension

Although he's best known as a satirical social realist and our most pugnacious advocate of figurative painting in general, Robert Cenedella also pioneered "Appropriation" at least a decade or more before witless full-time image appropriators like Mike Bidlo and Richard Long (who, in a more honest era, would have called themselves art forgers) caught on and caught up in the 1980s.

"As you know, I did my own four-letter word as art back in 1965, right after the Museum of Modern Art made a card of Robert Indiana's 'LOVE,' Cenedella said recently in that plainspoken but smart New

York wiseguy barfly style that always reminds us of a character out of Jimmy Breslin or Damon Runyon. "All these years later, I get a call from an art buff with loads of credentials about my "SHIT" print. This is because of the Robert Indiana retrospective at the Whitney Museum. This woman was intent on getting an interview with me about how I was influenced by Indiana. I didn't take it seriously. I thought it was either a put on or that she was simply stupid..."

After giving it some thought, Cenedella decided to do the interview anyway, just for the hell of it. His only condition was that the magazine the interview was going to appear in, the American Express *Departures Magazine*, had to guarantee that the image would also be published. This was because, like so much of Cenedella's work, his "SHIT" poster became a popular underground classic, selling steadily for many years, but was rarely reproduced in the mass media.

Probably because Cenedella insisted that the director of photography for Departures sign a legal agreement to that effect, the poster appeared (just a little larger than postage stamp size) in the magazine, but the interview with him did not. It isn't surprising:

"At some point someone must have realized that the influence on me was not what he or she thought," the artist understates. "I did a very deadpan interview. My point was that I never realized a word could be a painting. I was a bit jealous of Indiana for choosing LOVE for his painting, the greatest possible word. But after doing some research, I realized that more people said SHIT in a day than LOVE... I thought this would have been great copy for the article, along with the image ... SHIT lives! I always think that when the LOVE image is placed next to the SHIT image, SHIT WINS!"

One can't help but agreeing, perhaps because "SHIT" (ART-SHIT, to call it by its full title, which nails its message more fully) was not only an early act of appropriation but also a very conscious work of conceptual art by the same charismatically witty art world curmudgeon and cultishly popular teacher who, in the catalog for the 2011 Robert Cenedella Class Show at The Art Students League, reprinted his own article, originally published in the Manhattan Tribune in 1969.

Written in his characteristically "deadpan" (to appropriate his own word) style, it paid tribute to a fellow artist: "The name James Harvey probably means as little to the Art World as it does to the world of soap-box-packaging design. Yet if present standards for judging American art have any validity at all, James Harvey should be considered the most important and influential figure in Pop Art sculpture. It was James Harvey who created one of the most widely publicized works of art in this century, the Brillo Shipping Carton, and still in spite of this, he remains virtually unknown. What is even more curious about him is that he made his living designing shipping cartons from nine to five every day, while with a much greater devotion he continued to pursue a second career as an abstract artist. He never gained recognition for either. It would be too easy to dismiss James Harvey as simply a loser. The real problem with Harvey is that he was just a painter trying to make a go of it without any understanding of the art of publicity, promotion, or possibly, the great merit of his own commercial package design. He died at the age of 36 before he could come to terms with a confusing world that overlooked him in favor of Andy Warhol, who was blithely referring to the Brillo box as his own masterpiece ..."

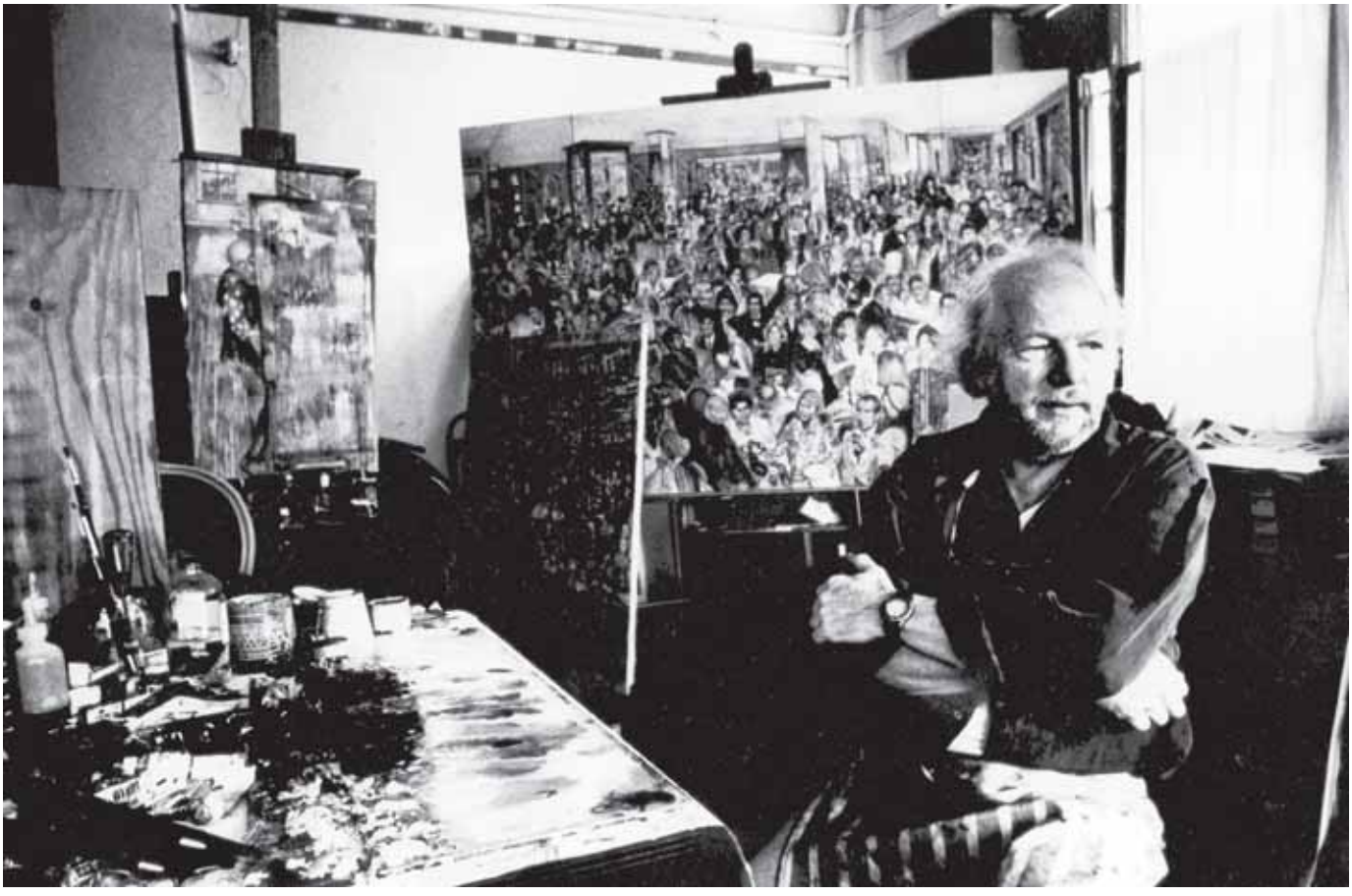
Asked why he labeled his own serigraph of a can of tomato soup in the manner of Warhol "Heinz," instead of "Campbell's," Cenedella said (deadpan) "Because it's better soup."

He's been pushing people's buttons that way ever since he got himself expelled from the High School of Music and Art for writing a satirical article on the school's atom bomb drill policy.

"Although I got into the The High School of Music and Art for the art, I spent most of my time writing because, in my opinion, they never really taught art," he says. "In the mid-fifties, we were in the midst of art for art's sake. Drawing was no longer deemed necessary for the development of one's 'creativity.' It was all about 'self-expression, experimentation, letting it all hang out. Pollock was king. Any form of representation was out. Anyone could fake his or her art, because, like today, there were absolutely no standards."

At the Art Students League, where the first thing that greets one inside the door is the intoxicatingly eternal eau de oil paint, Cenedella was able to practice the basic skills that struck him as lacking at Music and Art. George Grosz was his favorite teacher and became his mentor. Not only did the German émigré Social Realist sharpen the blade of his student's natural sense of satire; he also must have passed on some of the political outrage and Dada Attitude that got the older man ousted from Germany by Nazis, to add to the American's youthful rebelliousness.

But after leaving the League in 1959, Cenedella still had to figure out how to make a living as an artist. "The total lack of interest or even acknowledgment of my 'serious work' was very frustrating and completely infuriated me," he recalls, "given what the art establishment was promoting at the time: soup cans and the endless onslaught of isms and other art movements such as Conceptualism, Op-art, Minimalism, Pop Art, Neo-Expressionism, and Post-Modernism. To some extent I had completely given up the idea of surviving as an artist. But I wanted to go out swinging, so I decided to beat the Art Establishment at its own game by creating my own Art Movement. I called it YES ART, the Cultural Miracle ...Yessism, if you will. My aim was to outdo the 'enemy' at every turn — the enemy being the Gallery, the Museum, the Dealer, the Critic, the Auction house — and now, even the artists themselves who were selling out,



in my opinion, to the marketplace by the thousands. I wanted to put on the most widely reviewed exhibition of the 1965 season, by employing all the same shock tactics that the art establishment was using — and it worked!"

Like a fledgeling P.T. Barnum, Cenedella took over a Madison Avenue gallery for six weeks, and hired other artists to produce some of the "detritus" he would show, a move that was considered almost scandalous at the time but has become standard practice today by, as he puts it "our current 'art heroes' today who can neither draw nor paint, a la Damien Hirst and others of his ilk. YES ART would signal the end of my full time painting career for the next 10 years, so I wanted to 'go out with a bang not a whimper,' emphasizing that YES ART was a positive movement. It was a seething comment on the state of contemporary art as I saw it but I have always found humor to be the best weapon to combat the Establishment in any form. With a straight face, I managed to convince some of the largest corporations in America to participate in my movement —– Brillo was just one willing victim. They provided me with their original cardboard boxes, which I signed and numbered, selling them for a fraction of what the Warhol wooden copies were going for. In an attempt to make Great Art accessible to the masses, I charged $5.75 for a flat box, and $6.75 if assembled. At the time S&H stamps were highly popular. A sales gimmick to buy things they didn't need, S&H would contract with any retailer to offer stamps that could later be redeemed for more useless merchandise (much like today's credit card incentives). While the Pop artists did renderings of S&H green stamps, I actually signed a contract with the company offering actual stamps with the sale of a work of art. I also sold art by the pound and featured a live sculpture. Sophia Lickman sat nude, unclothed, on a pedestal for six weeks and I was offered $2,300,000 to match the price the Metropolitan Museum of Art paid for "Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer" by Rembrandt. (This was the very first time that a museum used the 'price' of a work of art to promote itself!) ... And thus began the commoditization and decline of Art. My apparent 'jokes' went on to be capitalized upon by even Warhol himself, more than ten years later, when he exhibited three live people as sculpture."

In an article in the October 20, 1965 edition of the Herald Tribune, headlined "ART, BUT IS IT YES?" the well known journalist Dick Schaap quoted Cenedella deadpanning, "Before I became a Yes Artist, I did still lifes and social commentary, which I've outgrown as all serious artists must." And in the following day's edition of the New York Post, then still a liberal and literate tabloid, incomparable columnist Murray Kempton wrote, "Yes Art, which will burst upon us all at the Fitzgerald Gallery tomorrow is one of the most serious expressions possible to the aesthetic impulse, that is, a joke," and cited Robert Cenedella Jr., as "the YES school's master painter."

Cenedella's sensational, much publicized debut was both his hello and goodbye to the New York art world, which he has largely snubbed for the past four decades. Why would he need it? He likes to quote one of his early artistic influences, Thomas Hart Benton, saying, "I'd rather show my work in any bar than a museum."

And over the years, Robert Cenedella's work has graced many of the best of them, leading to multiple sales and commissions, ranging from artist's hangouts like the Broome Street bar in Soho, to upscale uptown Irish pubs like P.J. Carney's, to posh society and celebrity joints like the LeCirque, where his six-by-ten-foot mural of 142 of its famous patrons is one of the main attractions.

— Ed McCormack

"Beyond Shit" and other works by Robert Cenedella, can be seen at Central Park Fine Arts, 211 West 57th Street. For information call 212.956.9395 or email centralparkfinearts@yahoo.com.

Peggy Zehring and her "Inner Idea" Group are Featured in Two New Exhibitions in Chelsea

"Reiki Zero Point 5," Peggy Zehring

As Hans Hofmann was to second-generation Abstract Expressionists during the postwar years, so the painter and teacher Peggy Zehring is to a circle of postmodern painters who have studied with her in Washington State and Colorado, known as the "Inner Idea Artists." Zehring is a charismatic painter, teacher, and mentor whose own work serves as an inspiration and a guidepost for their explorations of nonobjective form and color.

"All methods are sacred if they're internally necessary," stated the great Russian abstract pioneer Wassily Kandinsky, and Zehring, who has taught art for more than thirty years and co-founded The La Veta School of the Arts, has adopted that motto as her own guidepost. How Zehring herself applies this principle is dynamically demonstrated in her majestic large triptych, "Reiki Zero Point 5," Her work is seen in both of two successive exhibitions with several of her former students from the "Inner Idea" movement (the second of which continues through November 9).

To begin with, Zehring's freewheeling and painterly practice observes no self-conscious distinction between illusory "deep space" and the shallowness of the two-dimensional picture plane so sacred to standard modernist dogma. Apparently proceeding on the theory that all such rules are made to be broken, Zehring introduces a sense of depth on the right sides of both outer panels of the long, horizontal three-panel composition with perspective lines that direct the eye inward, toward the heart of the composition.

Not only do these visual pointers create an illusion of depth, but the thickly pigmented impasto that the artist applies to her surfaces (often texturally augmented with acrylic-based modeling pastes, marble dust, spackle, weathered wood and other mixed media and found materials) here has a rugged physical palpability that appears to allude to the logs of a rustic cabin. This is perhaps a natural enough assumption to make about the work of an artist based in Colorado; however, like all of the references that one can read into Zehring's paintings, this impression remains an allusion, rather than a literal representation, thus preserving the abstract autonomy so central to her vision.

The central feature of the triptych, however, which spans all three panels, defies specific interpretation. One can only describe it as resembling a huge arabesque-like calligraphic character composed of connected serpentine curves, gracefully linear, yet sculpturally substantial. Set, as though floating in midair against a vibrantly blue nocturnal sky, with five mysterious orbs glowing through its curves, this seems a symbol of transcendence over the limitations of the material world, albeit arrived at through paradoxically physical means — a theme very much at the heart of Peggy Zehring's art.

Zehring's ability to help her students discover their own artistic solutions without influencing them unduly comes across in both exhibitions.

Ironically, Zehring became a teacher after becoming disillusioned by her own experience as a student at the University of IIinois-Chicago Circle, where the curriculum struck her as being inflexibly locked into "carrying the principles of the Bauhaus forward in architecture, design and fine art."

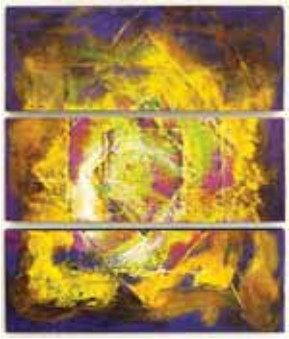
"Several of my teachers were so excited about it that it felt like a religious fervor had taken over the school," she says, but: "Even with the hype, I wasn't sure how these new ideas would look in the years to come or how my teachers' philosophical excitement could translate into actual art pieces."

Shortly after graduation, she moved to Seattle with her family. But: "When I tried to further my education and understanding of what I had experienced in Chicago, I was met with artists and teachers who were mystified by most of what I was saying and doing with my art. Since I was unable to find anyone who was willing to take me on as a student, I decided to teach with the hope that my students could further my undrerstandinng of my Chicago experience. I had no trouble finding a job. Everyone I took my proposal to wanted to hire me because they had never heard of the kind of approach to art education I was suggesting. . . I've now been teaching for over 30 years, and, indeed, my students have taught me more than I had ever hoped or dreamed they would. Their work, like mine, has blossomed under the Kandinsky approach, which emphasizes Truth over Beauty and creativity and experimentation over skill-building. . . . It now seems like the right time to put our work out into the world.

First exhibition of Inner Idea Artists was recently seen at Montserrat Contemporary Art Gallery, 547 West 27th St.; the second exhibition can be seen at the same venue through November 9, 2013.
Works by Peggy Zehring are in the gallery's year-round salon.

Cheryl Ann Richey

Linda Frederick



Maggie MacIndoe

Kathy Kimball

Cheryl Telford

Lana Thomas

Jill Whitmore

Mary Jane Rivers

Fred Bender

Lavone Newell-Reim

Carolyn Wayland

Georgia Quick

Margo Spellman

David Zehring

In the first show, Fred Bender's composition of flowing vertical skeins of brilliant red, blue, and green pigment suggests a waterfall of rainbow-colored molten lava. For while Bender displays a liquid fluidity akin to that of the pioneering Washington State color field painter Morris Louis, his meaty pigmentations lend his work a more physical presence.

Donna Graham combines an earthy, tactile relief-like ground, with buoyant areas of sunny yellow and verdant green, further enlivened by wiggly lines, and biomorphic forms vaguely suggesting scurrying insect life. These diverse elements are especially effective in Graham's fanciful triptych in which an abstract form calling to mind a thrice-dissected caterpillar makes its way across the slightly separated panels.

Kathy Kimball's consummately refined painterly style resembles a species of sensitively deconstructed Cubism — only, with a more subtly seductive palette of soft pastel pinks and blues juxtaposed with luminous orange and yellow hues. Indeed, Kimball has an exquisite "touch" reminiscent of Philip Guston's early lyrical abstractions.

By contrast, Maggie Macindoe composes with the broad strokes of classic Abstract Expressionism in colors that burn and glow like neon. Mixed within the frothy surface of her triptych made up of three horizontal canvases are several paint brushes that, rather than being intentionally placed, gives the impression of having been randomly caught up in the churning energy of her impetuous painterly maelstrom.

Mary Jane Rivers combines a whiplash black calligraphic line with solid areas of matte red, powder blue, and yellow ocher to create a strong visual tension between the active and stable elements of her composition. Rivers's line has a life of its own, a jotted urgency like that of the India ink line with which George Herriman drew the antic action of his classic comic strip "Krazy Kat," much admired by Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, e.e. cummings, among other fine artists and poets.

Lana Thomas employs a vigorous graphic technique of her own in a diptych with a collage-like effect, as its black-outlined

Donna Graham

main form, partially filled in with translucent washes of pale primary colors, and interestingly skips over the empty space between the two vertically placed canvases. The tension in Thomas's composition is enhanced by the mysteriously fragmented quality of the form, which with its linear "folds" suggests a detail of a more figurative image, yet remains mysteriously abstract by virtue of its "interruption" (both graphically and actually).

Jill Whitmore's work in a long, narrow scroll-like format appears monochromatic and almost minimalist. But on closer study of Whitmore's brush-caressed surface, subtle graffiti-like symbols, painterly strokes, tactile

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Some Highlights of The ASCA's 96th Annual at High Line Loft

Sondra Gold

Jo-Anna Melrose

Rose Sigal-Ibsen

María de Echevarría

Estelle Levy

Barbara Browner Schiller

Santina Semadar Panetta

Erin Stuckey Johnson

Lubomir Tomaszewski

Dario Puccini

Olfa Kitt

Harriet FeBland

Basha Maryanska

"Diverse Impressions," The 96th Annual Exhibition of the American Society of Contemporary Artists, lives up to its name. Although the ASCA was originally called the Brooklyn Society of Artists and limited to artists from that borough when it was founded in 1917, in 1963 its members voted to change its name to the current one, extending its membership and, consequently, its stylistic variety. Now comprising close to a hundred members, its group exhibitions are huge affairs, next to impossible to do full justice in the space allotted her. Rather than turning this review into an exhaustive — as well as exhausting! — list of names, it is preferable to suggest the show's quality and diversity by selecting a few works to describe and reproducing images of others, in the hope that the reader will be inspiring viewers to visit the exhibition and discover other worthy works and artists as well.

Marilyn A. Weiss's mixed-media assemblage, a life-size dress fashioned from fabric, and gauze on a wooden hanger, has an affect at once nostalgic and eerie. For although it is formal in design, it is made from raw strips of denim and gauze, and as its title, "Denim Dahlin" suggests a poignant Cinderella story by a writer like Stephen King with perhaps gruesome outcome. Could this, by any chance, be the dress "Carrie" wore to her high school prom, transfigured by time? Or an attempt to fit in with a posher set of teenagers by Loretta Lynn's "Coal Miner's Daughter?" Like Claes Oldenburg, Marilyn Weiss has an aesthetic alchemist's ability to transform incongruous materials into poignant — and, in their own way, elegant — artistic statements.

Anita Adelman takes a more realist view, in her watercolor "Abandoned Store," an atmospheric rendering of an isolated country business gone to seed. The artist's sparkling approach to transparent aquarelle elevates her simple subject, bringing the contrast between the weathered surface of the ramshackle structure and the eternal freshness of the surrounding landscape to vibrant life by virtue of her luminous evocation of light and subtle sense of color, lending the painting a Hopperesque dignity.

Lea Weinberg makes the rigid industrial material of wire mesh, set against backdrop of black Plexiglas, flow like drifting smoke, forming vaguely anthropomorphic abstract permutations, in her relief sculpture "Entwined." Weinberg's sensually fluid shapes take on a paradoxical quality that can only be compared to Katsuyo Aoki's intricately interwoven porcelain pieces, in which configured shapes invariably suggest melting wax skulls. For like that esteemed Japanese contemporary sculptor, Lea Weinberg is a skillful exponent of the Neo-Baroque.

Mara Szalajda, on the other hand, translates specific elements of nature into a private language of shapes and signs in her work in gouache on paper, "Clouds Through Trees in a Storm." Through just the slightest, most subtle, and gradual chromatic and tonal variations, as the viewer's gaze moves

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ASCA's 96th Annual Exhibition, "Diverse Impressions" the High Line Loft, 508 W. 26th St., November 5–17, 2013

Fame is the New Immortality: Lady Gioconda's Star-Studded Contemporary Icons

Contemporary celebrity portraiture takes many forms, usually photographic, ranging from the hit-and-run methods of paparazzi like Ron Galella to the elaborate and painstaking setup preparations of Annie Leibovitz, the diva of the genre, who lights and poses her subjects as though filming scene in a feature-length film.

Few photographers, however, achieve anything like the poetic perfection of the painter Lucien Stilss, known professionally as Lady Gioconda, whose oils on canvas are as close as we come in an increasingly secular age to having our own religious icons.

Let's face it, for better or for worse, celebrities, for many today, are the only gods and goddesses in town (forget the capitol "G"), larger than life, lording over the Mount Olympus of the mass media.

No other artist seems to know or accept their status more readily as Lady Gioconda who works in a studio near Rapallo, Italy. Be they saints, sinners, or in rehab, the artist, who seems to love them, states without apparent irony, that she seeks to "depict every model in the sweetest most loving expression."

Although she also admires Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, trained at the Academy in Florence, she looks primarily to the masters of the Italian Renaissance for inspiration, both technical and spiritual. Indeed, unlike Andy Warhol, perhaps her most star struck artistic predecessor (for whom the closest thing to a halo was DayGlo hues), Lady Gioconda often goes so far as to surround the subjects of her portraits with an honorary nimbus, such as the gold medallion she places strategically behind the head of bonnie Prince William — on whom she also benevolently bestows a full head that makes the hirsuitely challenged young royal appear all the more mythically regal.

In her likeness of Scarlett Johansson, the golden-locked film ingenue is crowned with a laurel of flowers and surrounded by fluttering putti. Her peaches and cream complexion is complemented by Lady Gioconda's unique ability to make oil on canvas glow like sunlight streaming through a stained glass window. On the more fetchingly devilish side, Sharon Stone is depicted slumping in a throne-like gold chair, smiling seductively with one bare-to-the-thigh leg raised in a pose recalling the famous scene in "Basic Instinct," in which she teasingly distracts the detectives questioning her about a murder mystery.

The artist's namesake Lady Gaga appears in the guise of the Botticelli Venus in another picture, albeit not entirely nude but striking a more bodacious pose and having stepped off her seashell pedestal as if to sashay to the front of the stage. Here, too, the artist has skillfully copied and doubled the subsidiary figure in the long floral gown from the original picture to create a more formally symmetrical composition. And naturally, in "Madonna with Angels," the heavenly beings behind the singer look more like voluptuous Vegas showgirls.

Prince William

For all her Dali-esque posturing for publicity, including her theatrical pseudonym, Lucien Stilss is an enormously gifted portrait artist in possession of a flawless classical technique and an impeccable conceptual wit. (Both are especially evident in her vision of a radiant Nicole Kidman in a shawl and Elizabethan costume standing in front of a slot machine holding a silver vase filled with pink roses.)

Long live Lady Gioconda!

— Maureen Flynn

Lady Gioconda, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th St., Nov. 22 - Dec. 13, 2013. Reception: Thurs., Dec. 5, 6 - 8 pm

Different Strokes for Different Artists in WSAC Show

MultiMedia MashUp curated for the West Side Arts Coalition by participating artist Anne Rudder is indeed the grab bag of painters and photographers that its title promises. But it is more coherent than one might expect, due to Rudder's unfailing instinct for putting together works that complement each other.

Still life, for one example, is at its lyrical best in Marie Robison's painterly acrylic composition "Glass Pitcher with White Floral Sprays," where the transparent vessel almost vanishes into the pale purple impasto background, allowing the delicate white flowers accented with tiny flecks of yellow to dominate the picture in the subtlest way. Three exquisitely refined color pencil drawings by Pauline Roony Yeargans — "Summer Peaches," "Summer Corn," and "New Leaves" are every bit as striking for their quiet poetry and the artist's ability to create strong abstract compositions from everyday subjects closely observed and sensitively delineated.

Landscape and urban subjects are also contrasted, yet complementary. Rosa Alfaro Carozzi, for example, contributes a luminous oil on canvas called "Landscape Autumn," in which golden fields, tinged by touches of purple light, flow in rivulets toward the horizon line. Lynn Lieberman paints detailed vignettes of Upper West Side shop facades in sparkling transparent watercolor washes, arranged within a grid on pebbly-textured paper, in a format reminiscent of the Pop painter Oyvind Fahlstrom's colorful diagrammatic comicstrip deconstructions.

Versatile image-maker Michelle Ordynans showed a group of works that included "Mountaintop," a colorful, tactile wall relief of crumpled paper and enamel paint; a surreal collage, called "Dream," and "Happy Face," a bizarre white papier mache head with streamers of typed technobabble streaming from its crown as if from a computer printer.

Coincidentally (one can only assume), Amy Rosenfeld presented a mixed media assemblage called "The Happy Face Thingamabob," featuring a brightly colored wittily cobbled-together puppet-like figure with candy hearts for eye-pupils and nostrils (you just had to be there!).

Photography was represented in the black and white prints of Herb Fogelson: not only the natural symmetry of a procession of ducks on a lake; but the human interest of a flummoxed cop discovering his patrol car stuck in soft mud; and "Rowboats in Central Park," their convergence in dry-dock creating intriguing chance patterns, caught by virtue of the artist's selective eye. Cutting edge computer art was represented by Sonia Barnett in a color print called "Capillaries," where a bold blood red linear maze was laid over more intricate digital forms, as well as in a black and white calligraphic composition titled "A-Z."

Departing from her characteristically meticulous mystical mode, Silvia Soares Boyer showed an intriguing group of miniature gestural canvases called "Path to the Abstract," as well as a witty semiabstract reworking of a familiar cafe couple from Picasso's blue period in much more brilliant colors called "The Fauvist Couple."

"The Monarch with No Gumption Attends the Funeral of the Frisbee" is a title that could only have been drummed up by the offbeat imagination of Daniel C. Boyer, who also exhibited a work in acrylic on canvas called "The Memory of Sleeping Cheshire." Both paintings were energetic examples of Boyers' unique brand of semi-surreal abstract Dadaism, and even the medium of the former was poetically evocative: "gouache diluted with rainfall."

Nathaniel Ladson merged abstraction and fragmented figuration seamlessly in his

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MultiMedia MashUp recently seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, 96th Street (center island).

CLWAC's 117th Open Annual Pays Tribute to the Eternal Verities

Claudia Seymour

Alicia Ponzio

Jill Banks

Andrea Stanley

Eun Joo Lee Seward

Florence Kaplan

Linda Wesner

Jean T. Kroeber

Maryann Burton

Viasta Smola

Lucille Berrill Paulsen

Flo Kemp

Each year at its Open Exhibition, the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club, named for a prominent 19th century philanthropist who was the first woman on the board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, presents a selection of works by an Honored Member.

For its 117th such show this past October, the club chose to honor Claudia Seymour. A recently retired president of the Salmagundi Club, Seymour paints still lifes in oil in the tradition of the 17th century Dutch masters, albeit with a coloristic brilliance that marks her work as refreshingly contemporary.

Although of generally modest size, Seymour's chromatic cornucopia of fruits, flowers, antique ceramics, and other objects in elegant tabletop arrangements immediately cast a warm, welcoming glow, far exceeding their actual dimensions, just inside the main gallery of The National Arts Club as one entered the exhibition.

Almost 250 other works were on view as well; far too many, obviously, to be comprehensively covered here. Mentioning few in each category, however, may whet the reader's appetite for future CLWAC exhibitions, all of which, for their sheer abundance and variety, are invariably worthy of attention.

Andrea Placer employs color pencil with a fluidity that makes it possible to mistake her composition "Nature in the Abstract," with its natural imagery playing a kind of hide-and-seek within flowing forms for a watercolor from a few feet away. By contrast, Linda Wesner lends to the the same medium a detailed realist meticulousness akin to Andrew Wyeth's tempera technique, in her woodsy scene, "Birch Serenade," where the pale trees appear to soar skyward like arches or organ notes in a cathedral.

In her large oil, "Self-Portrait as the Mother of Yi Sun-Shin," Nam Soon Kim achieves a tour de force of contemporary history painting imaginative projection, donning a silken kimono and employing old master chiaroscuro in the manner of Rembrandt to add drama to the legend of a 14th century Korean navel hero famous for repelling an invasion by the Japanese.

A more modern military subject is depicted in Renee Bemis's "S.C. War Dog Memorial Maquette," in which a soldier bearing a machine gun and his stalwart canine companion are heroically preserved in

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The CLWAC 117th Annual Open Exhibition was seen recently at the National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South

Henri Guéguen: Pop with a Noble Purpose

While Don Flavin, Forrest Myers and other artists have employed neon tubes to create light sculptures, the French painter Henri Guéguen may be the first to use their unlikely surface as one would a canvas.

Guéguen's enamel portrait tribute to the late Lady Diana on a row of nineteen such tubes mounted close together is not only a technical triumph but a conceptual tour de force. For encountering it is to be reminded how the star-crossed Princess was pursued to her death by car crash through a dark tunnel in Paris by a horde of paparazzi.

The unusual medium, by its very purpose, makes one immediately wonder how many ignored traffic lights the chase must have heedlessly raced through, and imagine all the flashbulbs of the rabid photographers popping along the way, and picture the people from the police coroner's office and the newspaper photographers later documenting the crumpled car in the aftermath of the terrible wreck. Some will also think of Elton John's famous Pop elegy to his friend, Diana, "Candle in the Wind."

Whether this was the artist's original intention, or whether he chose the neon tubing simply because of the challenge of painting on its rounded surface rather than the more conducive flat surface of a standard artist's canvas, is really immaterial, so to speak. A work of art, once it is completed, has a logic and a life of its own. And here the unusual material adds to the resonance of the tragic fairy tale legend of the young princess who attempted to escape from the castle and live like a normal person and was hounded to an early death by the blinding glare of her own celebrity.

The other unusual material that Guéguen chose to paint on in enamels for his portrait of the adolescent Holocaust martyr Anne Frank is just as resonant in another way: lacquer on the white plastic interior refills of Bic Pens; many of them lined up in half a dozen rows to create a slightly ridged but more or less flat textured surface on which to reproduce by hand in monochrome grisaille the familiar photograph of this courageous young woman, who, confined in an attic with her family hiding from the Nazis — like Princess Diana, confined with her royal in-laws in Buckingham Palace — wrote (presumably in similarly simple schoolgirl pens) a diary that, after their tragic deaths, became a world classic of Holocaust literature.

Here, again, the artist's original intention in choosing his materials is quite beside the point: the work he created, in part because of the poetic appropriateness of those materials, has a life of its own.

Henri Guéguen chose the interiors of Bic Pens once again, lined up in the same manner, on which to paint his enamel portrait of the famous film actress Angelina Jolie. Here too, they seem just as appropriate as in the previous painting, also being the sort of instrument, a simple ballpoint pen, that a person might use to compose a letter confiding very personal news to a close friend; news that the movie star chose to make public: about her recent double-mastectomy, which she courageously shared with the world in the hope that it might influence other women with a genetic predisposition toward breast cancer to make a similar decision to save their own lives.

"Lady Diana"

Indeed, Guéguen's entire solo exhibition, which is titled "Femmes a l'honneur," and which was inspired by his grandmother, and includes portraits of several other outstanding women, is a moving tribute to the feminine spirit in materials that transcend mere novelty to lend their own unique relevance to the work.

— Maureen Flynn

Henri Guéguen, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th St., through November 19, 2013. Reception: Thursday, November 7, 6 - 8 pm.

New DVD Documents the Creative Journey of Fiber Art Innovator Marilyn Henrion

For those of us who have long been admirers of her work, the 24-minute DVD, "Marilyn Henrion: The Evolution of a Fiber Artist," offers a valuable autobiographical overview of the life and career of one of the most innovative artists in her field since whatever medieval genius conceived the Unicorn Tapestries.

Narrated by the artist, now 80 and at the top of her form, the DVD takes us from her childhood in Brooklyn, where she learned to sew from her mother, the daughter of an immigrant tailor; to her college days, when she met and married Ed Henrion, a fellow student at Cooper Union and a gifted painter and graphic artist in his own right.

The couple wasted no time in producing four hungry offspring; thus were largely compelled to curtail their other creative drives for a number of years, while earning a living teaching. All through the 1950s and '60s, however, they remained part of the vibrant downtown art scene, attending lectures and parties with the Abstract Expressionists at the Cedar Bar and the legendary "Club," and hosting a regular salon in their Village apartment, attended

by Claes Oldenburg, Tom Wesselman, among other second-generation New York School painters, as well Allen Ginsberg, Ray Bremser, and other Beat Generation poets. (Often they spent Sundays with their more retiring artist friend Joseph Cornell at his family home in Queens, where his mother would bake them homemade apple pies.)

Marilyn Henrion's own career as an artist, known internationally for putting fiber art on a par with the most avant garde contemporary painting, took off when her children were grown and she was able to retire from her position at the Fashion Institute of Technology and work in her studio full time.

As images of her vibrant fiber pieces from various periods appear on the screen, the artist — who is represented in many museum, corporate, and private collections worldwide, as well as in the Smithsonian Institute's Archives of American Art in Washington, D.C. — discusses influences ranging from Amish quilts to the poetry of T.S. Eliot, and offers enlightening philosophical insights into the creative process.

—The Editors

For more information, visit www.marilynhenrion.com.

A Prototypical Punk Prodigy's Progress

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

a memoir by Ed McCormack

Ed McCormack, Lower East Side, 1957

"He's been drawing ever since he was just a little thing," my mother would say when she bragged — or kvelled, as our next door neighbor Esther Goldfein put it in Yiddish — to her friends on the Lower East Side about her son the artist.

"He was born with a pencil in his hand."

By then, a pretentious juvenile delinquent with no better ambition than to become a Greenwich Village beatnik, I had a snotty answer when she embarrassed me in front of people with that line, as she did repeatedly after I was accepted into the High School of Music and Art.

"She remembers," I would say, "because the pencil made it an especially painful birth."

"Oh stop! Don't be such a smartass, Chumley," Mama would say, embarrassing me further by using my family nickname, which made me sound like a British butler in some old black and white movie. "You know you drew constantly from a very young age."

Years before puberty and before I learned to use sarcasm as a self-conscious adolescent defense mechanism against infantalizing maternal pride, the power as well as the danger, of language was brought rudely home to me. I was sitting on a stoop on Henry Street on a sweltering summer afternoon with some other little snots, when one of them described an especially gory picture he had seen in a comic book called "The Crypt of Terror."

"Jesus!" I said, laughing queasily. "That's awful!"

"Awful?" a kid named Tommy Grassi said. "You can't say awful — that's a girl word!"

The other boys sniggered, and it occurred to me that "awful" really was a girl's word — at least on the mean streets of the Lower East Side, where male expression of revulsion demanded something less prissy, more on the order of " Oh shit, that's fucked up, man!"

This was around the time an American man went to Denmark and became Christine Jorgensen, the first highly publicized sex change. I remember seeing, and initially being puzzled by, a headline about it on the front page of the *New York Daily News*: "EX-GI BECOMES BLOND BEAUTY."

It was almost as if this unthinkable thing had happened to Frankie Falco, the badass president of the heroic white gang called the Mayrose that we all wanted to join when we became teenagers, a neighborhood hero who told everybody, don't worry, he had an arsenal of rifles stashed away to defend our turf in the coming "spic war." I figured if it could happen to an Ex-GI, it could happen to anybody, right? Not only did I use girl words, I was probably the worst stickball player on the block, the last guy to be picked for any game. Could it be that, somehow against my will, I could grow up to be a girl?

Nobody ever tells a nine-year-old the whole story about anything, after all. He is forced to construct a reality from fragments of hearsay: Didn't it get back to my mother from one of the neighborhood yentas that the former Dolly Giordano, estranged wife of Charlie Coleman, my favorite uncle, was going around telling people that we were "sort of an artsy, queer family?"

I was the only one in the family who drew; so when she said "artsy," she must have meant me. But who was she referring to when she said "queer?" Did she mean queer like Usher, a

stereotypically effeminate male sob-sister of a neighborhood character, who showed up to weep at every wake at Vanella's Funeral Home on Madison Street, as well as every wedding at St. Mary's Roman Church on Grand Street?

One day soon after my uncle Charlie's wedding, when my mother was talking outside our tenement with a couple of other ladies, Usher came over and cracked them all up by saying, "Oh Mabel, I must tell you, I couldn't get over how gorgeous your brother Charlie looked coming down the aisle at Saint Mary's in his tux last week."

(Gorgeous! Now there was a girl's word if anybody ever heard one!)

"That's funny," my Aunt Emmy, the oldest of my mother's two younger sisters, said when Mama repeated Usher's remark to her. "I guess he thought that little bitch Dolly looked only so-so, in her frilly wop wedding gown and veil!"

I couldn't help wondering what Usher would have thought about that snapshot in our family album of my big badass uncle Charlie drunkenly clowning around in my mother's underwear and Easter hat at one of the Saturday night card parties at our kitchen table. Of course my uncle Charlie was no queer; he was just fooling around. Didn't I once see him punch out my Aunt Emmy's big Polack bully of a husband, Elmo, while we were ordering our pastrami sandwiches at the takeout counter in Katz's Delicatessen?

Charlie had just finished warning Elmo that he didn't want to hear that he ever raised his hands to his sister again, while the big cowardly bum yessed him to death, gentle as a lamb, with actual tears in his eyes, saying, "Yeah, yeah, I'm sorry, Cholly, I swear on my mother, I'll never hit her again."

Now Charlie had his back turned, talking to the old Jewish guy behind the counter, whose eyes must have widened as he noticed Elmo grabbing a ketchup bottle off one of the tables. Because before I even had a chance to yell and tip him off, my uncle spun around on his heel and caught Elmer right on the button with a beautiful right hand that laid him out flat on the floor of Katz's, with his big beer belly sticking up, like the proverbial beached whale.

It was just like a scene out of "The Quiet Man," one of the John Wayne movies Charlie used to take me to at the Leow's Delancey after his marriage to Dolly broke up and he came to live with us for awhile, Mama assigning her "baby brother" to move into my room and share my bed because our apartment was so small and crowded already.

* * *

Years later, at P.S. 12, also called Corlears Junior High School, I was proud to be the only whiteguy in a rhythm and blues quartet with three coloredguys. I first heard them singing in the 3rd floor Boy's Room where they harmonized on lunch hour because the tiles and the high ceiling gave it great acoustics. When I joined in uninvited on the chorus of "Earth Angel," rather than "jumping stink," as we used to say, at the intrusion, they seemed surprised that a white boy had the harmony down so tight and invited me to smoke a bit of reefer.

It was the first time for me, but naturally I wasn't about to admit it. We stood around one of the stalls and when the reefer came around I took a toke, then tossed it suavely into the toilet bowl, as if it were a burnt-down Marlboro butt. They stood, stunned, staring down at the still smokable roach floating around in the yellow froth and the floating turds that nobody ever bothered to flush. Then I got called every kind of lame dumb whiteboy ofay motherfucker in the book.

But once we got past that rough start — maybe because vocal trios were not as popular as quartets in the music scene of the '50s and they needed a fourth guy with the right kind of voice — they invited me to sing with them after school.

Two of them, James and Earl Davis, were brothers. James, who usually sang lead, was skinny and easy going with a smooth tenor voice like Johnny Ace, the great rhythm and blues singer who had a hit single with his ballad "Pledging My Love" before he got unlucky playing Russian roulette in his dressing room and blew his brains out.

Earl, who was 14, a year older than the rest of us, but in the same grade, because he got left back the year before, was pudgy, with a touchy personality and a falsetto that could hit the high notes on the Cadillacs song "Gloria."

The third guy, Tyrone, had just the wispy beginnings of a goatee and a very deep voice, so he sang bass. Tyrone could be very sarcastic when he wanted to. Sometimes they called him "Country," because he was born in Georgia and his family had only moved up North three or four years earlier. My voice was somewhere in between (I guess you could call it second tenor), and we sounded Boss together. Especially when we sang in the hall stairwell leading to the basement of the Alfred E. Smith projects, all the way down on their own turf, near Chinatown, where Madison Street begins in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge.

The acoustics in the hallway were even better than in the Boy's Room at P.S. 12, reverberating up the whole fifteen or so floors of the building, creating a kind of echo chamber effect when we harmonized to "Silhouettes on the Shade," "In the Still of the Night," "Earth Angel," and all the other great R&B standards.

But I thought we could go further. After all, Frankie Lymon wrote his hit song, "Why Do Fools Fall in Love?," for his group the Teenagers when he was only 13. Maybe we should try coming up with some songs of our own that nobody else had recorded yet.

"You the fool, chump," Earl said in his cynical, sneering way. "Where the fuck we gon' get new songs from?"

"It just so happens, chump, that I got one right here," I said, taking a folded piece of loose-leaf paper, on which I had scribbled some lyrics in ballpoint, out of the pocket of my Wrangler jeans.

Since it was my own composition, the others agreed to supply the background doo-wops and shoobie-doos while I sang lead this time. It was meant to be one of those list-songs along the lines of "My Favorite Things," only with less girl words and a syrupy-slow R&B melody, in which the singer takes a sentimental inventory of his various enthusiasms, always ending with how he loves the girl even more.

But when I got to the part that went, "And I love the flowers, the flowers that grow/ But most of all darlin,' I love you so-o-o," the doo-wops and the shoobie-doos from the background singers abruptly stopped, and all that resounded and echoed in the stairwell were those raucously mocking Heckle and Jeckle chuckles, guffaws, and "oh shee-its!" at which coloredguys excelled when a whiteguy did or said something particularly lame.

In the general hilarity, we never finished running through my song. Still, every once in awhile afterward, one of my fellow singers — usually Earl or Tyrone — would crack a sly smile and say, "Hey Eddie, hows about we try that one about how you love the flowers that grow again?"

Knowing it would only open the door to more ridicule, I'd refuse outright, of course, and insist that we stick to the standards instead. But the Heckle and Jeckle guffawing and the "oh shee-it" shit would would start up all over again anyway, at the mere memory of my lame refrain. Admittedly, my song was corny; but no more so, I thought, than some of the sentimental R&B ballads I had modeled it on. And I didn't doubt that had it already been recorded by one of the famous R&B groups like the Cleftones, the Flamingos, or the Moonglows, my friends would have been more than happy to add it to our repertoire.

Just another lesson, I suppose, in the double-edged power of language to either make or break a man — especially on the pre-gentrified Lower East Side of the

1950s, where any hint of sensitivity was invariably equated with vulnerability and weakness.

After we got tired of singing in the hallway, we would sometimes hang out, listen to records and bullshit for awhile in James and Earl's room in another building of the Smith Houses. (All the buildings in the projects were the same, but they didn't want to sing in the hall of their own building in case the neighbors didn't agree with us about how Boss we sounded, and decided to jump stink about the noise with their Moms.) Their Moms, a very quiet woman who looked old enough to be their Grandma and hardly ever spoke, gave me a suspicious look the first time they brought me in with them; probably because she wasn't used to seeing a white boy in the apartment. But after she got used to it, she ignored me just like she did her two sons and Tyrone when we came in and headed straight for the bedroom.

One night when we were in there smoking some reefer, Tyrone started fucking around with his Zippo lighter, holding it under his chin to give his face an eerie effect with that stringy little Fu Manchu goatee hanging down, and telling a creepy story in his deep bass voice about this weird character down South called Father Muthi. I pictured him in my mind looking something like the r&b singer Screamin' Jay Hawkins (only much older, almost ancient) when they would wheel him in a coffin out onto the stage at the Apollo and he would climb out in his Count Dracula cape holding a cane with a skull on the end to stalk around singing his hit song "I Put a Spell on You."

In Tyrone's story, Father Muthi lived in a shack near a swamp in Georgia and would slip "silent as a snake" into people's houses after midnight, hypnotize their children with his whispery voice and lead them out into the swamp, never again to be seen.

Many years later, remembering the story, I typed "Father Muthi" into my computer and the closest I could come were references to "Muthi Killings" committed by devotees of a voodoo-like traditional African religious sect whose members have been known to sacrifice children to use their body parts in rites to make "muthi" (traditional magic). Possibly, Father Mufti was a vague folkloric legend, passed down and embellished by generations of black Americans in the south with no idea of its African origins, to entertain their kids or, possibly, to scare them into behaving — as Tyrone told us he did with his little cousin Levon, "who came out his Moms's pussy already badass."

"I tellin you, man, that bad boy eyes bugged out like Buckwheat!" he chuckled. "Ol' Fatha Muthi scared shit out that little boot."

"What's a boot?" I asked.

All three of the other guys looked back and forth at each other with evil smiles.

"You never heard that of a 'boot' before?" Tyrone, asked, all three of them now looking at me, smiling slyly. "Where the fuck you been, whiteboy? It mean cullid — like us!"

Up until then, because we had been singing together for some time, I had forgotten there was any difference between them and me. Suddenly now I was made very much aware of it and would continue to be until, in the natural course of growing up, the four of us drifted apart.

But I remembered my old friends vividly one day many years later when my wife and I were having lunch in a Smiler's deli on 5th Avenue in midtown. Three African American meter maids at the next table started harmonizing on those familiar lead notes : Doo-wah, doo-wah, Doo-oo- wha, doo-wha..." I jumped right in with : "Why Do Foo-ools fall in love ? / Why do birds sing so gay / And lovers await/ The break of day ? / Why do they fall in love..."

While I sang lead, they backed me up on background vocals for a full couple of choruses, until we all cracked up laughing.

"Nice work ladies," I said, when Jeannie and I got up to go. "But don't quit your day job," and we all cracked up again.

"I swear, I can't take you anywhere!" my wife said, still laughing, as we strolled out into the bright sunlight and dense crowds of Fifth Avenue.

* * *

It must have been a day for time travel, because later in the afternoon, still in midtown, when we stopped into the public atrium at Citicorp Center for a cup of tea, I became aware of an elderly woman at a nearby table studying me intently as she drew in a large spiral sketchbook.

"Please stay still, young man," she instructed, when I moved, "I'm trying to capture a likeness of you."

It had been a long time since anyone had flattered me with the term "young man"; but still: "I'm an antsy person," I told her. "I find it hard to sit in one place. Besides, we've almost finished out tea and we have somewhere to go."

There was something vaguely

familiar about her. Then I looked at her more closely for the first time: "Mrs. Braverman!?"

And squinting at me even more closely than when she drew, she said, "Eddie?! For God's sake, Eddie McCormack!? I had no idea it was you hiding under all that hair and that awful beard! But I'm glad to see that you haven't really changed personality-wise — you're still as uncooperative as ever!"

My old art teacher from Seward Park High School and I both got up and hugged each other heartily. And when I introduced her to my wife, Mrs. Braverman told her, "Eddie was the most gifted student I ever had. I still have one of his paintings of a jazz musician hanging on my wall at home. But he was so difficult — just impossible!"

"I know," said my wife, smiling sympathetically, "he still is."

"He wouldn't go to any classes except art and English," Mrs. Braverman went on. "Mr. Nanes, the principal was always threatening to suspend him. At the end of every term, his English teacher and I had to go around to all his other teachers and beg them to please pass him on the basis of all the drawing and writing that he did for the school year book. 'Who is this, kid?' his math teacher asked me, 'I never even met him!'"

Apart from Mrs. Braverman, who coddled me and encouraged my artistic talents, I saw Seward, a block-long, six-story gray cement fortress on the corner of Grand and Essex Streets, as a gulag-like penal colony thinly disguised as a legitimate institution of lower learning. Most days, after checking into home room just long enough to be counted present, instead of going to classes, I'd slip out one of the side exits and spend a couple of hours at the Seward Park Branch of the The New York Public Library, right around the corner on East Broadway. At first I was mainly interested in books on fine art and cartooning. Then one night I saw Jack Kerouac interviewed on John Wingate's TV show "Nightbeat," and borrowed his novel "On the Road" as soon as the first copy showed up on the New Books shelf. Kerouac led to Allen Ginsberg, whose epic poem "Howl," I couldn't yet find at the library, probably because it had recently been embroiled in a much publicized obscenity trial. But I finally boosted a copy at the Eighth Street Book Shop, the most avant garde literary shrine in the Village, where I also discovered books by other Beat Generation personalities such as Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and the truly outlaw poet and armed robber Ray Bremser (Bob Dylan's favorite, I would later learn, when he first came to New York and started hanging out in the Village around the same time as me) — all of whose slim paperback volumes slid easily into my leather bomber jacket.

Suddenly literature came alive for me in a way it never had in my high school English classes (along with Mrs. Braverman's art class, the only other classes I even bothered to attend). Soon, besides the Beats, I was reading the older writers who had influenced them: Dostoevsky, Whitman, Kafka, Proust, Rimbaud, Baudelaire — and especially the doubly gifted British genius William Blake, whose fantastic illuminated manuscripts I tried to emulate as a natural outgrowth of my childhood interest in drawing and writing comic strips. When I couldn't find the books I wanted at the Seward Park Branch, I hunted them down in branches all over the city.

Thus began the long process of my self-education — or if you prefer, my "library delinquency," as the NYPL investigators who periodically showed up to interrogate my mother about my unreturned books and unpaid fines referred to it. For by a certain point, I had borrowed dozens upon dozens of books that I could not bring myself to return, feeling that I needed them around to inspire the poetry I had begun to write under the influence of the Beats.

Fortunately, the investigators who showed up at my mother's door didn't arrive with search warrants, since piles of unreturned books cluttered the floor, the radiators, the windowsills, the dresser top, and almost every other surface of my small hovel of a bedroom at the back of our railroad flat. The library dicks had badges, however, that they flashed whenever they showed up, and Mama was petrified that I was going to end up in jail, and that she might also, for being an accessory to all the stolen property, its value estimated at an astronomical several thousand dollars, one of the investigators told her, that I had her harboring in our apartment.

That all our towels, blankets, silverware and other dry goods had the logo "Grace Line" on them, didn't count. That was just "swag" from the docks, and everyone knew that, in the 1950s, before everything arrived in the Port of New York in trailor-size containers that were impossible to boost without a truck chassis to haul them away, longshoremen stole as much of the ships' cargo as they could, and ransacked the ocean liners of whatever supplies and fixtures were portable as well.

When poor Mama finally wearied of having to claim that I had left home and she had no idea where I was, she ordered me to get all those books out of her house on threat of eviction. At first I considered taking them out to one of the vacant lots in the neighborhood and burning them. But then I thought better of it, not only because of the repellent associations of book burning by Nazis and blue nosed clergy down through history, but also because of the unwanted official attention that a big smoky bonfire of municipal property might attract. So I packed them all in boxes, then got a few friends to help me schlep them down to East Broadway, where we left them in the inner vestibule of the library just before closing time, then ran like hell.

What I didn't tell Mama, though, was that after disguising them in some of those plain brown paper jackets that she had bought at the beginning of each school term to wrap all the textbooks I never used, I kept "On the Road" and several other essential volumes that I didn't feel I could live without.

From then on, although I didn't think it prudent to reveal my identity by trying to use my card to borrow books, I sometimes stopped into the library to read, and to occasionally boost a volume or two. Just as often, after checking into homeroom to get counted present, then slipping out a side exit, I would hide out in plain sight, at the Grand Dairy Restaurant right across the street from the school. I would usually take the same seat, down at the end of the counter as far as possible from the big plate glass window and the door. And there I would sit for hours, drinking Cokes, smoking Marlboros, already the most popular teenage cigarette brand, and writing and sketching on the lined pages of my virgin loose-leaf binder, otherwise unsullied by anything so mundane and tedious as class notes.

Eventually on the strength of a haphazardly assembled portfolio of some of my more finished drawings on actual art paper and a glowing recommendation from Mrs. Braverman, I was accepted into the High School of Music and Art. From what I could gather in an essay I only read recently by Erica Jong, who was there around the same time, I should have been ecstatic. Only, Erica apparently found the school to be an entirely different place than I did. I'm tempted to owe it off to our very different backgrounds: mine, Lower East Side workingclass Irish; hers, Upper West Side upper middleclass Jewish. But in her essay she dismisses such differences, saying "It was in high school that I began to find my true class. Here the competition was not about money or color or neighborhood but how well you drew or played. At Music and Art, new hierarchies were created, hierarchies of virtuosity. Was your painting in the semiannual exhibition? Were you tapped to perform in the orchestra or on

WQXR? By now, we all knew we didn't belong in televisionland America — and we were proud of it."

She goes on to describe a school that should have seemed like heaven to me in the late fifties, where, "Being outsiders was a badge of merit. We had no teams, no cheerleaders, and the cool class uniform was early beatnik: black stockings, hand made sandals, and black lipstick for the girls; black turtlenecks, black jeans, black leather jackets for the boys. Stringy hair was requisite for both sexes. We experimented with dope. We cruised the Village hoping to be mistaken for hipsters. We carried books by Kafka, Genet, Sartre, Allen Ginsberg. We stared existentially into our cappuccino at Rienzi's or the Peacock. We wanted to seduce black jazz musicians, but were afraid to. We had found our true class at last."

How did I miss all that? Especially all the other girls done up like my 14-year-old sexual prodigy of a statutory chicklet modern dance student girlfriend, Helen Aronson? (Erica's memory, however, may be a bit off about the "black lipstick," a Goth chic touch I never saw in the Village — or anywhere else — in the late '50s; could she be thinking of her daughter or granddaughter, maybe?)

Anyway, the answer to why I only attended Music and Art for a few days before showing up at the Board of Education and demanding to be transferred back to Seward may lie in the following of Erica's sentences: "Chosen for their talent to draw or sing or play an instrument, these kids were the most diverse group I'd ever met. Their class was talent. And like all insecure people, they shoved it in your face."

Naturally, If you'd asked me at the time, I would have said I found Music and Art academically stifling — the very idea that they actually expected me to attend classes! Contrary to Erica's memory of them, I also would have said that I found my fellow students there insufferably square, like the handful of honors kids at Seward who belonged to the Arista Society, rather than the Blackboard Jungle rabble with whom I was prouder to be associated— even while smugly aware that my artistic talent set me apart. Besides, I would have told you, getting to school in the morning was a pain in the ass, involving the arduous ordeal of waking up a full hour earlier, taking the subway all the way up to 135th Street and Convent Avenue, then climbing an interminable number of concrete steps, still half asleep, to a huge stone structure, encrusted like a medieval castle with gargoyles, at the top of a steep hill in a park in Harlem. This was what I told myself, rather than admitting that I couldn't take the competition of finding myself in a school lousy with other gifted kids who "shoved it in your face," and losing the unique status I enjoyed at Seward as resident beatnik and unofficial school pornographer.

What I told the clerks at the Board of Education was even simpler: "If you don't give me my transfer, I'll quit school the minute I turn sixteen."

In fact that was what Sidney Nanes, the principal of Seward Park High had been recommending that I do for some time, saying, "Since you consistently cut all your classes except Art and English, why not stop wasting my time and your own?"

His welcome back speech was equally to the point: "Do you want to know what I call a boy like you, a boy who has talent and is given the wonderful opportunity of attending a school like Music and Art, but who turns his back on it to come back here? I call such a boy a meshugener."

I got a more affectionate greeting from Moishe, the amiable alter cocker of a counterman and waiter at the Grand Dairy Restaurant. Moishe would have chased any other kid who sat for hours smoking, nursing one Coke, and drawing in his notebook. But he was impressed with my drawing ability and would raise his bushy white eyebrows approvingly, as though I were some goyische equivalent of a brilliant Yeshiva student — especially when he peeked over my shoulder at the zaftig female nudes magically forming under my pencil around the borders of one of my Blakean poem illuminations.

Now, he welcomed me back warmly with, "Hey Pick-ass-io, we missed you! Where you been? Come. Sit. Right here at the counter. Ve saved your seat!"

And what of my poor sainted mother who finally had to give in and sign the papers giving her permission for my transfer back to Seward?

"The apple don't fall far from the tree," Mama ruefully concluded, when I finally took Mr. Nanes' advice and dropped out of high school altogether only a short while later, likening me to my father who, after losing the best job he ever had, as a trainer for the Brooklyn Dodgers, spent the rest of his working life shaping the docks, an ordinary longshoreman.

* * *

Next Stop Greenwich Village: From Doo-Wop to Cool Beatnik Jazz
photo by Norman Ross

Lauren Purje's Fertile Graphomania

Not too long ago, at least in the gallery scene, the kind of drawing that originated in cartoons and comic strips, was merely something for Pop artists, particularly early Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Ronnie Cutrone, to parody for some supposedly higher artistic purpose. That kind of work was invariably an object of, if not naked scorn, the mere irony that has run rampant since Andy painted his first soup can. But in recent seasons, a younger generation of artists who take cartoon style seriously for its honest expressive possibilities has begun breaking down the barriers between so called "High" and "low" art and showing up not only in galleries but in museum surveys as well: Richard Pettibon, who worked his way up from concert poster graphics and album cover illustrations for the punk band Black Flag to international Art Star without significantly changing his style; Zak Smith, whose graphic novel-influenced drawings inspired by Thomas Pynchon's "Gravity's Rainbow" have made their way into shows at both the Whitney and MoMA; and Dame Darcy, widely known here and abroad for both her comic books and her paintings — to name just four.

Now we can add to that short list of crossover talents the name of Lauren Purje. A former student and protégé of leading contemporary Social Realist Robert Cenedella, she recently had a splendid solo gallery exhibition at Emoa Space in Chelsea. Purje's work, however, both her drawings and her paintings, first caught the public eye on her website series "End of the Line" (laurenpurje.com), to which she has committed herself to contributing "a drawing a day."

Some of Purje's work features cute cartoon characters that strike one as "Peanuts with an edge," as seen in one macabre drawing of a skeleton holding out an hour glass with sand trickling down to a grim-faced little boy in a coonskin cap, captioned "HAPPY BIRTHDAY JOHN, Enjoy Every Second, Love, Lauren." (This was a birthday greeting to a friend, but obviously too good not to be shared!) Another is an uncaptioned drawing of a little boy drawn in the same simple linear style, but beset by giant insects in a more realistic, detailed manner as beautifully delineated as an etching by Durer. Yet another (perhaps a comment on abstract art with which her mentor Cenedella would no doubt agree!) depicts three monkeys collaborating on the same large abstract painting.

The figures in Lauren Purje's paintings are similar to those in her line drawings, but more worked up in color in a manner that can be compared to the Japanese Pop painting style "kawaii" or "supercute," influenced by cuddly, big-eyed anime characters, which has made its way from Tokyo to the New York punk scene by way of the East Village's sizeable Japanese

youth population. In Purje's paintings, however, these cute cartoon figures are often placed in atmospheric landscape settings with dramatic, almost Turneresque cloud formations, as seen in her scene showing a little girl solemnly watching a flock of crows picking over the bones of a skeleton half

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Lauren Purje
www.laurenpurje.com

Bill Dixon: Versatility in the Abstract

"He's all over the place," some might say of Bill Dixon's art, and not realize that they would be paying this artist, who moves easily between painting by hand in the traditional manner and working on a computer, a compliment. Yes, Dixon is, indeed, all over the place in the best possible way.

For whether working with a brush on canvas or creating digital abstractions on the computer, Dixon refuses to settle for what is often referred to as a "signature style." Which is to say, he will not settle comfortably into a particular way of working or repeat a certain stylistic formula over and over again, turning his work into what almost amounts to a corporate logo, as all too many contemporary artists have a tendency to do, in their haste to market what collectors expect from them. Rather, he continues to explore new possibilities, always starting out with freehand drawings in pencil, color markers, and acrylics that he will later convert via the giclee process into works on paper or canvas.

The one constant in all of Dixon's work, however, is his unique sense of culture, which permeates and enlivens both his abstract and figurative compositions. One such "digital handmade painting on canvas," as he calls them, is the composition he calls "Time," with its almost fluorescently brilliant, translucent rainbow shades of red, yellow, blue, and purple-violet resounding in infinite interconnected circles, interspersed with sharp straight lines that crisscross within like luminous rays of cosmic sunlight.

Another, somewhat more complicated and formally varied composition in the same medium, "Square One," is a buoyant vision of strategically placed opaque yellow, red and blue squares that establish the primacy of the picture plane in a layered field of multicolored strokes that streak like comets within a self contained universe of lively shapes and vibrant hues.

In another composition called "Dreams," big transparent orbs float tither and yon, suggesting crystal balls filled with luminous hues. Casting metaphysical shadows on thin air, these circular shapes carom around like billiard balls within a sun-drenched abstract landscape further enlivened by vigorous verdant freehand strokes. Yet another oddly titled work, "Hair" (unless it refers to the universe of imagination each of us carries under the follicles in his or her head!) sets two such cosmic orbs afloat within the wavering rhythms of elongated forms flowing like rainbow-colored ribbons that graduate from deep blues and purples into luscious light-filled pinks and yellows with a drama suggesting the miraculous transition from darkest night to brightest dawn that heralds the break of each new day.

By contrast, a surprising figurative composition that Dixon calls "Riding

"Hair"

in the Sun" depicts huge bright yellow sunflowers, reminiscent of van Gogh or Charles Burchfield, in the foreground of the composition. Their scale gradually diminishes in vanishing perspective to reveal a precisely delineated procession of bicyclists peddling past the field under a pale blue sky, streaked with white linear clouds that emphasize their forward motion. Along with the others described above, this work could be said to demonstrate Bill Dixon's own forward motion as a developing artist who seems never to look back as he continues to, as he puts it, "stay true to myself and the way I look at things in my mind's eye."

And if that means being all over the place, so be it. — Wilson Wong

Bill Dixon, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th St.,
January 14 - February 4, 2014.
Reception: Thursday, January 16, 6 - 8 pm.

Cross-cultural Currents Meet and Meld in "El Barrio"

"Flights of Fancy," one of the more lively and varied group shows this season, came to us by virtue of a curatorial collaboration between Taller Boricua, a nonprofit artist workshop, event space and gallery at the Julia de Burgos Latino Cultural Center in East Harlem and The National League of American Pen Women.

Yoon Cho presented two digital C prints from her "Desert Walk Series," combining photographic images of the desert with intricate fine line drawing of human babies, lizards, and other creatures gradually morphing into skeletons as the natural cycles of life and death progressed. Equally full of life and mortality were Tania Alvarez's ingenious mixed media combine painting of a bird morphing into a human skeleton with an actual working clock ticking like a heart within its ribcage.

Photo artist Myrna Harrison Changar was represented by digital prints from her "Through a Glass" series: a reaching hand, a landscape and other evocatively distorted imagery that, for one viewer, brought to mind the haunting melody of the song "The Days of Wine and Roses."

Different postmodern approaches to the timeless art of landscape also made a strong impression: Anna Soave's sensitive oils on canvas in a softly poetic neo-impressionistic style. Julia A. Rogge's picturesque, crystal clear realist Central Park panoramas of Bethesda Fountain with autumn trees blazing above; miniature sailboats floating along on the Conservatory pond with tiny tourists crowding around the outdoor cafe in the distance; lovers in the shade of a bower on the rowboat lake. And Maria Lipkin's vibrant views "Dusk" and "Twilight on the Marsh," in which pinkly gleaming light on water and sublimely spacious bodies of water have a chromatic exquisiteness to rival color field painting.

Sculpture was also well represented in "Chair People" and "Corner Table," Sybil Maimin's squared-off semiabstract figures in fired clay, which, with their earthy patinas suggest the flat cubist planes of Juan Gris restored to three dimensions. Eleanore Capogrosso's contrastingly realistic untitled bronze figure of a nude middle-aged man with a strategically draped cloth flowing from his shoulders down over his groin could be either a Roman Senator half out of his toga or a modern businessman in a Turkish bath, while her hooded head and shoulders bronze suits her title "Saint." The expressive lines in the faces of both, however, reveal the shared strain and pain of being human.

Then there is Marcia Bernstein, who combines the ancient and the modern in "Aztec #1" and "Aztec #2, a pair of ruggedly tactile mixed media wall reliefs in which angular designs and shapes suggestive of pre-Columbian symbols jut out from semi-tubular forms.

Of special interest, both for its cultural significance in relation to "El Barrio," where the exhibition took place, as well as its own artistic impact was a monumental portrait in oil on canvas by Nitza Tufino titled "Rafael Tufino Way," honoring her father, a celebrated Puerto Rican artist who passed away in 2008 and for whom an area of the neighborhood was recently renamed. As faithful to his subject as Rafael Tufino's own best-known portrait "Goyita," a dignified and soulful portrait of a woman representing Puerto Rico's impoverished rural class, it depicts the artist from the shoulders up, smiling broadly under his distinctive gray mustache, with the river and the Brooklyn Bridge and skyline in the background. NitzaTufino, a distinguished artist in her own right, known particularly for her many public murals, as well as for her paintings and prints, was El Taller Boriqua's first woman artist in 1970, and has been involved with the organization since that time.

Claudia Miranda, another fine portrait artist is represented by two large drawings, "Marilu," a young woman with a vivacious smile, and "Angel," an older man with a pensive expression. Both are executed in ink, marker, and paint in a technique which, like that of Chuck Close, employs intricate yet freely configured abstract strokes to create an almost photorealist likeness.

Michele Bonelli merges elements of abstraction and the figurative in two large oils on linen from her dynamic yet meticulously hard-edged "Urban Abstract Series." In both Bonelli's "City Concerto" and "Symphony in Steel," the artist fragments and shuffles layered elements of urban architecture and rushing traffic like a bright new deck of cards.

Miriam Wills also echoes the shifting planes of Cubism in sharply fragmented compositions, albeit in a gestural manner, embellished by the spontaneous flourishes of Abstract Expressionism. Many colors and patterns converge in Wills's acrylics on canvas like Schnabel's shards of smashed crockery, verging on a chaos that is skillfully averted by the artist's swift brush.

Elinore Bucholtz employs a repertoire of different strokes and gestures made with either a brush or palette knife that ranges from warm, fleshy de Kooning pinks to cool Cezanne greens and blues, in abstract compositions such as her acrylics on canvas "Monument" and "Destabilization." She also often melds crumpled paper with her pigments to create the textural effects that are especially seductive in the latter work.

Leanne Martinson, on the other hand, combines vigorously brushed color areas with fluid calligraphic gestures in a series titled "Homage to John Chamberlain." Martinson's muscular paint-handling suggests an abstract tribute to the artist known for his rugged sculptures created with crumpled car bodies, celebrating and approximating their demolition derby excitement with an equally rugged approach to painted form.

Then there is Janya Barlow, whose large acrylics on canvas project an almost antic energy, with their brilliant carnival of colors and bulbous abstract shapes that hover on the edge of morphing into recognizable, cartoon-like imagery or weird biological matter. Here Barlow's "Upward Spiral," where one of the main forms suggests a slightly lopsided target, while others evoke manic Rorschach blots outlined by a white pen-line, is particularly engaging.

Rock and roll excess appears to be the subject of Anastasia Teper's intriguing oil on canvas, "The End," the title of which alludes to Jim Morrison's apocalyptic Oedipus and incest epic, while the imagery — a skinny blond musician and his guitar lying on the stage floor behind a trashed drum set seems to symbolize both the semi-comatose performance style and ultimate suicide of Kurt Cobain. Teper's "Jimi," seems a tribute to Hendrix, even while the flame patterns on his shirt as he bends solemnly over his instrument suggest his ultimate consumption by the drugs he consumed to fuel his genius.

"Cat in a Box" is a work in acrylic, painted on the inside of a shallow box by Hannah Rogge, in which the black and white patterns of a sleeping feline's coat, placed against an expanse of smooth, cream-colored pigment, creates an overall effect simultaneously literal and abstract. "Astoria Park," another work by Rogge in paper and ink, presenting a scenic view of two bridges, set between an orange-ocher sky and a solid blue body of water, with silhouetted foliage along the shore, is yet another tour de force of uninflected imagery.

"Untitled," a large, semiabstract diptych in acrylic on canvas by Nancy Miller, takes poetic liberties with natural forms in a manner suggesting that nothing may be quite what it appears to be. Craggy boulders crowding along a shoreline take on doughy softness, as bare tree limbs reach down, seemingly from, nowhere like sinuous claws. With strong outlines weaving among patchy areas of color, Miller seems to tell us, quite convincingly, that it's all about the sensuous nature of paint itself.

Like Joseph Cornell, who would appear to be one of her kindred spirits, Arlene Egelberg fashions her own surreal realm from disparate snippets of mixed media imagery, layered with exquisite complexity. Peacocks are summoned by Egelberg to preen at fountains amid lush many-shaped palm fronds at which smaller avians nibble as they flit and frolic in Edenic tropical gardens of the artist's fertile imagining. — Maurice Taplinger

"Flights of Fancy," recently seen at Taller Boricua, 1680 Lexington Avenue.

Color and Emotion in the Visual Music of Francesco Ruspoli

Some of our most memorable and enduring artists are those who evolve succinct symbols for our common humanity: Jean Dubuffet's art brut Everymen; Willem de Kooning's monstrous amazons; Leger's robotic steel workers; Francis Bacon's cold meat couplers merging in protoplasmic blobs on beds as desolate of love as morgue slabs...

The contemporary painter Francesco Ruspoli appears destined to join their company, with his crowds in whose anxious faces "The Scream" of Edvard Munch echoes silently in living color. In past series Ruspoli has painted faceless lovers, their simplified anatomies entwined, the primary colors of their flesh reflecting primate heat. In public, the painter arms his personages with faces "to face the faces that you meet," as Eliot put it in "Prufrock." But these masklike faces rarely meet, as they mill among other alienated souls in city streets where neon signs swirl like van Gogh's schizoid stars or form cathedral-like spires suggesting the ornate Towers of Mammon in Las Vegas.

Color, in Ruspoli's paintings may signify raw emotion: "red with rage"; "green with envy"; blue as can be"; or, it may symbolize a universal desire to transcend all limitations and fly over the rainbow into a new world of boundless aspiration and possibility. Ruspoli himself, concentrating, as all serious painters must, on the painterly process, rather than consciously plotting the possible meaning of his imagery, describes the experience of creating these compositions as feeling on "the dynamic frontier between abstraction and figuration," while awash in what he calls "a music of colour."

On a strictly visual level, similar sensations are conveyed to the responsive viewer as well. Along with the considerable aesthetic appeal of Ruspoli's sensuous surfaces, however, and his bold colors, often emphasized, like those of Georges Rouault, with thick black outlines, his work has a raw emotional impact which comes across intensely in the painting he calls "Divine Destiny."

In this vibrant oil on canvas the same cadmium red light hue that projects a sense of livid rage in the large, heavy-browed, glowering profile on the left foreground of the picture, reflects the warm glow of motherly love in the child cradled in the protective arms of the gently curved golden yellow maternal figure on the right side of the composition, as other, smaller simplified figures rush about behind them with the scurrying obliviousness of the harried urban citizen, against the swiftly brushed impressionistic cityscape. Meanwhile, the timid, skeletal blue-faced figure caught in the middle, between the hugely glowering red profile and the mother protectively cradling her child, wears a woeful expression, as though like the character in Munch's famous painting, he is on the verge of letting out a primal scream.

"Divine Destiny"

Indeed, like his famous Expressionist predecessor, Francesco Ruspoli comes across in this series as a maestro of human angst. Witness in yet another powerful oil on canvas in which a crowd of huddled figures — some with their heads lowered so that their features are hidden, others cloaked in blue veils through which only their eyes can be seen — walk warily toward the viewer against a backdrop of brightly brushed domes and arches suggesting churches and mosques.

In every respect, it is a painting as ominous as its title: "Unsettled Times."

— Marie R. Pagano

Francesco Ruspoli, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, through Nov. 19, 2013. Reception: Thursday, Nov. 7, 2013 6 - 9 pm

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Italian Curator Stefania Carrozzini Presents the Artist as "Wounded Healer"

"The Artist is the Greatest Healer," is a title that might lead one to expect some sort of "New Age" exhibition, if its curator Stefania Carrozzini did not point out that it's actually a quote from Joseph Beuys.

"For this exhibition I chose artists that have something to do with healing," she told us. "Either by profession or personal artistic inclination."

Dr. Enzo Trapani, for example, is a former general practitioner born in Argentina, now specializing in neurology. He is represented by "Deep," a dynamic undersea scene in acrylic on canvas, employing an abstract expressionist technique to capture the the liquidic explosion of a dive.

Michela Valenti, on the other hand, went through a period of self healing when she lost her eyesight after a cerebral accident in 1992. After several months of introspective reflection in darkness, Valenti regained the ability to capture the basic nature of objects expressed through tactile mixed media works such "L'Aquilone," with its subtle chromatic modulations, tactile swatches of fabric collage, suggesting the movement of kites twirling in the air, and the single word "Respira" scratched into the paint surface near the top of the composition.

Mexico City-born sculptor Josefina Temin expresses both the dynamic of the feminine and masculine eternal beauty of nature and the beauty as well as the fragile transience of all living things with her works in paper and steel. Here she is represented by "Trompetas" an especially poignant work in paper and eucalito wood, in which delicate floral forms perch like albino butterflies on what appears to be the sawed up stump of a tree.

Milanese painter Silva Pisani is a co-founder of Neo-Relationist art movement which, as one understands it, encourages a personal transformation through art rather than the distancing encounter of an "object" and a "viewer". Pisani's acrylic painting, "Past, Present, and Future," depicting a symmetrical pyramidal form within a circularly swirling painterly whirlwind, also appears related to the "new naturist" works of artists such as Gregory Amenoff.

Serbian painter Darko Malenica, who sees art as "medicine for the soul," shows a neosurrealist oil on canvas titled "Liberation," in which rusty broken chains dance triumphantly in the air, while the silhouetted figures rejoice and floral bulbs shower down like benign bombs.

Silva Pisani

Susi Lamarca, born in Italy, focused in her collage studies on the potential use of imagery to enhance learning. She continues those interests in her artistic practice with works such as her digital photo "Untitled," in which a peach-colored circular shape set against a plain white background possesses a sensual vertical portal.

Earlier in her career, another Italian artist,

Continued on page 25

"The Greatest Artist is the Healer," curated by Stefania Carrozzini, Onishi Project, 521 West 26th St., Nov. 27 - Dec. 11, 2013

Felix Semper's Dynamic Humanist Vision

Felix Semper, who was born in Havana Cuba, has lived in both Spain and the United States, and now resides in north Carolina, is an artist with remarkably fluid draftsmanly abilities, which shine through his paintings as well as his drawings. Line is his natural instrument, regardless of what medium he may be employing in any given work. Yet he is also a fine painter, with an oil on canvas technique that at its most richly embellished can recall the Art Nouveau of Gustav Klimpt by way of the Abstract Expressionists.

Although this could sound like a contraction in terms, the combination comes across elegantly in "Into the Mist," with its sense of figures partially concealed and fragmented within a veritable forest of jewel-like hues, and "Arbol de Vine," where slightly less obscured female nudes play hide and seek amid a show of pale blue rivulets.

By contrast, in "Eleven," a large monochromatic composition in acrylic and oil on canvas, the Abstract Expressionist element in Semper's work comes across most forcefully. For from a distance, this jam-packed painting has an intricacy and an energy comparable to Jackson Pollock's compositions in black and white enamel. On closer viewing, however, rather than abstract swirls a multitude of slightly distorted figures comes into focus, each one with individually delineated features. They are all crammed together in a manner that can also remind one of Jean Dubuffet's art brut compositions, as well as the Berlin Street scenes of George Grosz.

One can only venture a guess that the large numeral "11" near the top of the canvas may refer to September eleven, which makes one flash back to films and photos one has seen of the crowds in downtown New York fleeing through the streets in the wake of the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. Thus this composition can be interpreted as a powerful contemporary history painting.

Another large work in acrylic and oil on canvas by Semper called "Seventeen" does not lend itself as easily to historical interpretation. This one is nearly monochromatic, except for the addition of blue accents to the black and white palette. It features many smaller figures swirling around a large head at the center of the composition. The head looks agonized, Christlike, albeit with more ethnic features than the images of a Waspish Caucasian Jesus that one is accustomed to encountering in most official Christian representations of The Savior. This head is boldly outlined in a drippy Abstract Expressionist manner, in contrast to the smaller surrounding figures and heads, which are all nude and comporting themselves in various ways, albeit not quite orgiastically — since each appears set apart in its nakedness from the others. Yet all seen aware of the monolithic power, of this large central head which, in its grimacing agony, could appear to be suffering for all of humanity.

"Eleven"

Another strong large monochromatic painting in a perfectly square 50" X 50" format, simply titled "Heads" consists mainly of nude figures set against a black ground. Some stand, others recline. Some have additional heads looking out from where their genitals would normally be. The most obvious, (if not necessarily most correct) interpretation of this image might be that so much that occurs in sex resonates more in the head than in the body.

At the same time, Felix Semper does the beauty of the human female body much justice in his Egon Schiele-like ink drawing "Mascara," as well as "Four," a large acrylic and oil on canvas, in which a contemporary Lady Godiva on a suitably comely white steed gathers an admiring crowd (one of whom stands out for being a dead ringer for Che Guevara in his iconic beard and beret), even though she is wearing black rimmed glasses and holding a briefcase. — Peter Wiley

Felix Semper, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th St., November 22 - December 13, 2013. Reception: Thursday, December 5, 6 -8 pm.

Open 2013 photography exhibit

Curator: Robyn Gecht

Oct. 30, - Nov. 17, 2013

Opening reception: **Nov. 2, 2013, 2:30 pm- 5:30 pm**
Closing reception: **Nov. 17, 2013, 2:30- 5:30 pm**

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Paul Margolis • JD Morrison • Jean Prytyskacz
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FREE EXPRESSION 2013

Curator: Sonia Barnett

November 20 - December 8, 2013

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Nancy Johnson • Valerie Kirk • Lula Ladson
Nate Ladson • Lynn Lieberman • Pilar Malley
Amy Rosenfeld • Emily Rich • Anne Rudder
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A Gift of Art 2013

Curator: Linda Lessner

December 11 - 29, 2013
Reception: Dec. 14, 2:30 - 5:30pm

Jutta Filippelli • Jennifer Lenn
Linda Lessner • Lynn Lieberman
Danguole Raudonikiene
et al.

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New Year, New Art 2014

Curator: Margo Mead

January 1-19, 2014
Reception: January 4, 2:30 - 5:30pm

Lynne Lieberman • Margo Mead
et al.

Broadway Mall Community Center
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Michèle Vincent: Surrealism for a New Age

Few true innovators in the rarified realm of surrealism remain, although many still rummage in the movement's dusty attic for timeworn props. One of the most gifted exceptions is the contemporary French painter Michèle Vincent, who not only keeps the faith but continues to command our attention with her dreamy visions of an alternate universe in which the most incongruous imaginative elements are evoked and merged with a fresh and startling verisimilitude.

Perhaps the secret of Vincent's success lies in her ability to bring into play a variety of qualities that hark back several centuries further than the movement in question, to the gothic tradition, as well as to the great-great grandfather of surrealism, Hieronymus Bosch. For Vincent's technique has a flawless clarity reminiscent of that Netherlandish master of fantasy, even while being informed by a refreshingly contemporary New Age sensibility free from the superstitious moral residue of the medieval church, which still held sway in Bosch's 15th century milieu.

Especially fantastic among Vincent's recent paintings is the work entitled "The Human Islet." Although the term "islet" usually refers to a small, rocky island off the coat of a larger land mass, here it takes an anthropomorphic form. The upper torso of a youthful yet godly being with his eyes closed blissfully and his head thrown back in apparent ecstasy emerges from the surrounding mass of water. His bare chest opens into three portals, within which stone steps suggesting the winding staircases in a flesh-colored castle, can be seen. His long heavy metal mane merges with the white rivulets of cloud enlivening a clear blue sky above, while in the equally luminous blue water below, a mermaid and a mermale are locked in a romantic embrace, their long fishtails entwined in ornate arabesque, suggesting some unearthly erotic coupling or heretofore unseen exotic subterranean species.

Such mixed visual metaphors enhance the complexity of Vincent's paintings, which pile symbol upon symbol, one visual metaphor upon another, with rich suggestive abundance, providing the closest perceptual equivalent to an actual psychedelic experience in recent art.

A consciousness expanding quality is also immediately apparent in "The Cabbage Which Gives Again the Life," another intricate composition where an equally fertile plethora of imagery appears. In this airy picture, Vincent most closely approaches Salvador Dali for her ability to create a magical terrain with its own peculiar logic, where metaphysical phenomena take on the nature of everyday events. At the veiny heart of a huge cabbage on the left-hand side of the composition, which resembles the opening in a cave on the shore of an island on left-hand side of the composition, an ethereal being of the title inhabits what appears to be a decidedly phallic-shaped sheath of light that also doubles as her

"The Cabbage Which Gives Again the Life"

long white gown.

Another cavity, this one most obviously resembling the outer opening of a vagina, interrupts a sky flecked with dense flocks of birds in flight, even its vertically elongated shape serves as the baroque, brass-colored frame around a cameo portrait of a figure in a silken blue robe. Here, as in all of Vincent's paintings, natural anomalies abound: watery blue waves, stylized as in chinoiserie, pour out of a kind of porthole in an object that resembles a magic carpet transporting a handsome young couple bearing gift bouquets. (To whom or what they make these offerings remains unknown; but what British artist David Harrison said of the similarly elusive meanings in the paintings of his Scottish colleague Peter Doig on the occasion of Doig's exhibition at the Scottish National Galleries, can just as easily apply to Michelle Vincent: "There is always a narrative, and that fact is good enough. You don't have to know what the narrative is.") While some of the blue waves behave like gas-tinted pilot-light flames, rising in low triangular shapes, one flares far higher, like a waterfall that has reversed direction and now appears to trickle down in a narrow stream that widens toward the bottom from the silken blue robe of the figure in the cameo portrait within the airborne, vulva-shaped frame. Apart from these blue ripples, the water surrounding the mysterious island of "The Cabbage Which Gives Again the Life" is as pink and translucent as mists at twilight, enhancing the atmospheric subtlety that is yet another aspect of Vincent's alternate universe.

Yet that she is an artist who can also evoke contrastingly solid matter convincingly, and add a hint of humor to the bargain, also comes across in another painting called "The Insane Bed and Street." In this antic scene picturesque buildings, as intricately delineated as the architectural elements of the mazes in the etchings of M.C. Escher, appear to be collapsing or molecularly decomposing all around a couple in a bed whose calm — indeed, blissfully smug — smiles seem to suggest that the apparent earthquake may have been brought about by seismic shocks and vibrations emanating from the strenuousness of their very own honeymoon exertions!

Also spotlighting the artist's classic canvas "Rebirth" (a highlight of a previous exhibition at Montserrat), comprised of multiple square panels of luminous nature imagery surrounding a characteristically mysterious romantic scene like a Tiffany window-vista of a fairy tale realm; and introducing a dramatic new work called "The Ship and the Sea," this solo show promises to be the most comprehensive survey of Michelle Vincent's oeûvre to date. — Peter Wiley

Michèle Vincent, whose solo show will run from November 12 -30, 2013, can be seen in the year-round salon at Montserrat Contemporary Art, 547 West 27th Street. Montserratgallery.com

EDITOR'S NOTE:
We were saddened to learn just before going to press with this issue that Michèle Vincent (1952 - 2013) had passed away of a long illness, as she completed her recent paintings. A memorial article will appear in an upcoming issue.

Sheila Finnigan Bursts Forth in Living Color

Once the paintings of Sheila Finnigan, a former student of Ed Paschke and heir apparent to the mantle of "Chicago Imagism," were nearly monochromatic, with scraped and scratched textures as bone-dry as Leon Golub's heroic images of warriors from antiquity inspired by eroded classical sculpture. To those of us who admired her work, her raison d'être was expressive draftspersonship, coupled with an equal gift for line and tone, which she employed to create intriguing, sometimes surreal, commentary on human existence.

In her most recent New York solo show in Chelsea, however, which addressed a variety of subjects ranging from The Unicorn Tapestry to contemporary art and film (with a special emphasis on Andy Warhol, a recurring figure in her paintings), Finnigan unexpectedly flowered into a sublime colorist. Indeed, even before the exhibition opened, one savvy collector seized this seminal moment in the artist's career, snatching up a large (48" X 60") gouache called "Drum Beat."

It features a stately figure in a blue, gold-buttoned drum major uniform, standing at attention with drumsticks crossed over its groin. Instead of a head, a Campbell's Tomato Soup can emerges from the uniform's stiff blue collar. Another, much larger Campbell's can, garlanded with coils of celluloid, serves as a drum. Emerging from the smoky red background, the disembodied, straw-wigged head of Warhol, looking as ghostly as it did when he was still alive, hovers over the drum like one of the spirits that haunted Ebenezer Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol." Here, as always, Finnigan's symbols and allusions are many-layered, challenging the viewer to interpret her complex visual conundrums.

Andy also appears in yet another guise in a companion piece the same size as the picture just described, that fortunately for the rest of us, escaped acquisition prior to the exhibition. Here, even though his famous face is hidden beneath the ubiquitous soup can like that of The Unknown Comic masked by his paper bag, it seems obvious that Andy is the one wearing the drum major uniform. For Finnigan has pointedly titled this painting, in which the sumptuous red, orange, yellow, and blue hues temper the gaudy fluorescence of Warholian DayGlos with a Matisse-like chromatic elegance, "Divining the Future of Art."

So happy is Finnigan with her recently developed, or perhaps one should say recently discovered, coloristic capabilities that she has taken to "remastering" (her term for painting over) some of her earlier compositions. One brilliant example is "The Lives of Kings," a large horizontal composition in which the King of Pop (again with a Campbell's can covering his head) is seen reclining on an old-fashioned divan of the type Sigmund Freud used to "shrink" his patients, suggesting a world of hidden turmoil and torment behind the deadpan facade of the man Truman Capote once called "a Sphinx without a secret." In this case, the painting that Finnigan sacrificed to the new one was itself a splendid work from her 2005 solo show called "American Dream: Marilyn Monroe," depicting the actress (one of Andy's favorite subjects) lounging somewhat more languorously on the same divan as Andy in the later work.

"The Death of Warhol (after David's 'Death of Marat')"

An act as existentially anarchic, albeit more aesthetically appealing, as Robert Rauschenberg's destruction of a drawing that Willem de Kooning had given him to create a work of his own called "Erased de Kooning," Finnigan's "remastering" of some of her own paintings is altogether in keeping with her adventurous belief in art as being more about process and flux than the safe manufacture of a "product." In this way she differs radically from the man who referred to his studio as The Factory and hired silkscreen assistants to handle the "messy and boring" part of painting, before he added a few freehand flourishes to complete the assembly-line procedure.

Like Larry Rivers, another artist who at times flirted with Pop ideas but always maintained that the Old Masters were his primary inspiration, Finnigan, who obviously relishes the "messy" act of painting, again makes her own allegiances clear in "The Death of Warhol (after David's 'Death of Marat')." In this work, "remastered" from a 2004 composition called "Homage," Warhol with his face partially erased by textural streaks and his head surrounded by a vigorously gestural yellow halo, slumps at a soup can cum desk, holding a paint brush limply in one hand, just as the murdered French Revolution martyr and crusading journalist still holds his pen in David's masterpiece. Despite its elegiac title, with its boldly brushed visceral red and orange background further enlivened by sinuous drips of thinned pigment, this is one of most coloristically dazzling works in the show, suggesting that Sheila Finnigan has finally shaken Andy Warhol's ghost and is ready to move on.

It seems a logical move, since despite her tempestuous on and off again love-hate relationship with Pop over the years, Finnigan's heart clearly belongs to Dada, the wiser, more pugnaciously provocative great grandfather of Conceptualism. Witness her ruefully satirical brand new painting of the mythical beast from "The Unicorn Tapestry" being overcome, as if by a bloated boa constrictor, by Jeff Koons' banal artistic travesty "Balloon Dog," estimated at $55 million in today's art market. Finnigan calls her painting "The History of Art." Could any title deliver a more succinct pinprick to our century's cynical, self-promoting cultural pretensions?

Conversely, in a pair of large works on appropriately unstretched canvas she presents more victorious visions of the Unicorn. Although legend makes the beast a magical vehicle of male power that can only be tamed by a virgin woman, in "Tapestry Deconstruction I," the artist endows the Unicorn with an impressive set of udders, rendering it female — thus presumably altogether unconquerable! In "Tapestry Deconstruction II," an exhausted-looking male knight who made the attempt to tame the creature and failed, slumps impotently in a bed of flowers as the rambunctious animal triumphantly kicks up its its rear hooves. To approximate, the textural opulence of the original tapestry, the artist decorates her versions with snippets of colorful twine, coils of filmic celluloid, and artificial flowers.

Along with painting, Finnigan often includes sculpture and elements of mixed media installation in her exhibitions. This one featured an especially witty neo-dadaistic found object piece called "Don Quixote and Sancho Panza," in which rusted iron detritus, old film projector spools, and discarded garden tools, among other orphaned objects, morph into robotic representations of the romantic hidalgo knight and his rotund sidekick.

But they could have tilted their lances at balloon dogs instead of windmills!

— Ed McCormack

Sheila Finnigan, "Post-Constructions," was recently seen at Pleiades Gallery, 530 West 25th Street. Sheila.arts@gmail.com. sheilafinnigan.com

ZEHRING

Continued from page 7

textures, and glimmering gem-bright colors emerge, along with a bas relief bulge near the bottom of the composition that imbues it with an intriguing pregnancy.

Georgia Quick's painting has the opposite appeal of spontaneity and immediacy. With its splashy yellow, blue, and white brushstrokes dancing over a plush bubblegum pink ground, Rorschach-Black blots, and contrastingly precise staccato vertical white lines like stylized symbols for raindrops, it suggests a Zen literati ink painter's response upon descending from his mountain retreat and encountering the sensory overload of the modern world.

By contrast, David Zehring builds a composition with bold, irregularly shaped and spaced blocks of color as definite and authoritative as the Irish painter Sean Scully's famous stripes. Zehring superimposes these forms on the armature of networks of narrower horizontal lines that function like a grid, fastening them securely to the picture-plane to introduce a personal note of modernist formalism to the postmodern mix.

Then there is Linda Frederick, who practices what one might term a neo-baroque mode of abstract expression in two adjoining canvases filled with energetic multicolored shapes set against a creamy white ground. Like sections of a jigsaw puzzle in the process of being assembled, Frederick's forms suggest a plethora of lively imagery ranging from flora and fauna to details of human anatomy while remaining nonobjective, and therefore open-ended.

In the second exhibition in the same venue by the "Inner Idea Artists," Lavone Newell-Reim shows works featuring sensually rounded, clustered forms and fiery hues. Newell-Reim's work, although adamantly abstract, is richly allusive, in that a single composition can evoke multiple associations — in this case: fruits on a vine and entangled emotional relationships.

Asian philosophy, art, and calligraphy appear to have an important influence on Inner Idea artists as seen in the sinuously fluent brushwork of Margo Spellman, where a black calligraphic form merges with abstract expressionist atmospheric paint handling. In Spellman's work, as well as that of some of her colleagues in the group, a splendid Synthesis of Western and Eastern techniques results.

Cheryl Telford, for example, who in a previous exhibition, displayed brushwork akin to Mark Tobey's "white writing," has incorporated elements of Color Field painting into her work this time out. Telford's imagistic spareness evokes cosmic spaces in her composition of spattered ethereal forms set within a brilliant red expanse.

Then there is Carolyn Wayland, whose painting in which a semicircular shape, laid down as if by a single stroke of a paint-loaded brush emerges from luminous orange and red color, suggests the Zen symbol for infinity. Wayland, however, combines it with a chromatic intensity reminiscent of Emil Nolde's German Expressionist watercolors.

Cheryl A. Richey also merges elements of East and West in her paintings, here with a composition in which forms seemingly derived from Asian characters take on a painterly quality not unlike the craggy, thickly trowled-on shapes in the paintings of Clyfford Still. Richey, like others artists in this exhibition, appears to unite cultural twains once believed to be irreconcilable.

(Also included here are the following artists also featured in the first exhibition: Linda Frederick, Georgia Quick, Peggy Zehring, and David Zehring.)

— Marie R. Pagano

ASCA

Continued from page 8

down an intricate hard-edged composition made up of tiny yellow, pink, blue, and green rectangular and triangular shapes, Szalajda evokes the subtle atmospheric changes of light, color, and mood (if not the literal subject), that her title describes.

Neva Setlow takes a more decorative approach, akin to the cut-paper series of Matisse's "Jazz," in her colorful and upbeat collage "Summer Garden." Setting semiabstract floral-influenced shapes in yellow, red, blue, and green forms afloat on a solid deep pink ground, Setlow creates her own graceful visual music — perhaps more in tune with Ravel than Louis Armstrong for its lively evocation of nature transformed.

Hank Rondina's composition in acrylic and cut mat board, "Monk's Dream," however, seemed less evocative of a Zen monk than of the great jazz pianist Theolonius Monk. For not only does the title echo that of one of the musician's best known record albums, but the forms, at once sprightly and architectonic, in the manner of imaginary hieroglyphics, suggest Monk's rhythmic approach. Rondina's intimate formal inventiveness, in the modernist tradition but refreshingly contemporary, makes him seem a kindred spirit of Kandinsky and Klee.

Linda Butti walks a fine line between realism and abstraction. In her oil "Cherry Tree," the subject takes on a fiery energy with gestural brushstrokes that carry the energy of Expressionism and a light-evoking palette apparently inspired by Impressionism. It makes for a happy marriage in this composition, where both the trunk of the tree and the leaves above writhe rhythmically, as the yellow grass below and the body of water glow like mirrors filled with sunlight.

Then there is Roberta Millman-Ide's meticulous oil, "Ide Destiny," in which a delicate, graceful female figure emerges from the center of a large flower with sinuous petals in nocturnal blues, greens and other hues that gleam like stained glass. With its central image surrounded by a lunar orb, lined by light, and set against a dark blue ground, this painting positions Millman as a latter-day Symbolist.

Georgiana Cray Bart is represented by a classical still-life composition in pastel, titled, "Arrangement with Napkins and Pears." While Bart's style is realistic, with surfaces modeled by light and shadow and the folds in classical draperies and shadows faithfully delineated, her heightened, near Fauvist, color sense, lends her pictures an almost metaphysical intensity. Here, the vibrant blue napkin and the red cloth that extends from the paler blue wall creates a perfect chromatic backdrop for the brown liquor bottle, the transparent wine glasses, and above all, the brilliant green and yellows of the pears.

All too often sculpture gets short shrift in many group shows; but not here, where several innovative approaches to three dimensional art come boldly to the forefront: in Marcia Bernstein's black and white mixed media piece "Unnamed 40," several tubular protrusions, white on the outside, black on the inside, jut up from a pure white base like a grove phallic mushrooms. Sachie Hayashi's flowing form in aqua resin "Spirit," does indeed possess a unique grace, suggesting an ethereal being in flight, albeit in a solid material that lends it an interestingly contradictory tension between the tactile and the visual. Bonnie Rothchild's piece in terra-cotta with a gold and jade green patina suggests an archaeological symbol, perhaps a religious amulet or other sacred object from a lost culture. Raymond Shanfeld's sculpture in white marble veined with delicate pink, "Pink Lady," melds a gracefully simplified classical profile with a freestanding abstract form in harmonious synthesis. Sally Pitt's piece in Bronze and Steel, "Arc Dejoueurs," presents a delicate acrobatic balance act between two exquisitely simplified female and male figures that suggests both the delicate physical and psychological acrobatics required of any couple in a relationship. — Marie R. Pagano

WSAC

Continued from page 9

moody, glowing composition, "Mystical," while succeeding in capturing the nearly invisible in a mixed media composition called "Chasing the Wind." Beatrice Rubell applied the vibrant palette and flowing rhythms of Cubism's more chromatically luminous distant cousin Orphism to a contemporary abstraction alluding to landscape, in a composition in color pencil and graphite called "Color Swells."

Just as colorful in its own more figurative manner is Joseph Healy's "Bird #1,"in

which the colorful creature is surrounded by semiabstract foliage forms reminiscent of both Art Nouveau and the 1970s Pattern Painting of artists like Robert Kushner.

Anne Rudder the shows doubly gifted painter-poet curator revealed a less familiar aspect of her art than her vibrantly colorful watercolor illuminations: A detailed drawing of a tiny embracing couple set against a detailed computer keyboard with a verse handwritten on the screen celebrating the warmth of romantic love after a tedious day of cold technical texting. — Peter Wylie

CLWAC

Continued from page 10

bronze. Another skillfully realized work in bronze, conceived as a study for a monument, is "Freedom Crossing Concept Maquette" by Susan Geissler, depicting the figures of several refugees debarking from a small boat onto a rocky shore. Then there is Alicia Ponzio's bronze sculpture, "The Lingering Shadows," in which three symbolic female nudes as comely as The Three Graces, yet clearly involved in a divisive emotional conflict, rather than harmoniously dancing together, appear to be out on a literal limb of some sort. Yet another beautiful realist depiction of the feminine form is "Early Morning," a single standing figure in bronze by Gwen Marcus, of a lithe young woman, nude under an open robe, which has a green patina that contrasts with the tan tone of her skin, as she raises her arms, throws back her head, and stretches languorously to "shake the sleep off."

Abstract and semiabstract sculpture is also well represented here as well in pieces such as "Euclidian," a minimalist composition of melding circular and rectangular forms in white stone by Jinx Lindenauer; Lee Apt's contrastingly complex mixed media sculpture "A Lot of White," suggesting a futuristic amusement park of shifting planes ; Georgene McGonagle's Halcyon II," a gracefully simplified avian figure in bronze; and "Origins," a stylized black marble Venus by Jean T. Kroeber. Then there are Jacqueline Lorieo's "Layla," a voluptuous bronze Earth Mother literally rising out of the roughly textured firmament, and "Cybéle: Déesse of Fertility," a rotundly pregnant torso in yellow limestone by Jocelyne Dodier.

Intimate moments between mothers and children come alive in two oils. In "Summer at Paradise Cove," Andrea Stanley depicts in a slightly idealized style, as though through mists of memory, a woman in a long white shift with folds like the drapery in classical sculpture, holding a little girl in her arms on the shoreline of a beach where the blue-green surf rolling in rhymes visually with the golden waves of the woman's hair. In another realist oil by Anna Bain, the currents of love flow through three figures: that of a mother nursing a baby whose head a little girl leans over the arm of her rocker to kiss as daylight floods in through a nearby window, further illuminating the warm trinity. The sculptor Priscilla Heep-Coll appears to convey the spirit of maternal love in another manner with two cartoon-like cuddling creatures that resemble prehistoric birds in her work in stoneware clay, "Touching Your Heart."

Landscapes and cityscapes also make a strong showing in the work of several artists: One is Rae Smith, whose misty pastel, "After the Storm," sets somewhat ravished looking trees against a dark, moodily atmospheric sky. Another is Florence Kaplan, whose "Weber Farm" is an evocation of a perfect day in a rustic setting, where the leaves are turning from green to gold, vividly captured in juicy oil pigments. Another is Johanna McKenzie, whose oil "Sunset, Almy's Marsh" is a sublimely limned panorama of grassy wetlands stretching out over several acres to a flat mirror-clear body of water under a luminous early evening sky tinged with pink and violet light. Equally atmospheric in another manner, Maryann Burton's watercolor, "Flatiron Building" presents a vision of that New York City landmark, viewed through budding tree limbs, its distinctive thin wedge of a facade hovering like the prow of a huge ship, dwarfing silhouetted pedestrians and passing traffic. An evocative etching, "Lantern Hill Pond," by Flo Kemp, preserves a view of pine trees, mountains, and water with the graceful brevity of a tonal haiku. In her oil "Seat by the Window — Montmarte," Jill Banks eschews the bohemian image of that storied area of Paris for an elegant interior suggesting gentrification of its legend (a vestige of which only survives in the view through the window of the sidewalk cafe).

Portraiture is always plentiful in CLWAC group shows. This one includes Eun Joo Lee Seward's portrait "Holstein," a lifelike oil of a placid cow posed in profile; as well as the Gail Snow Gibbs's affectionate shaggy dog picture, "Where's Caleb's Cookie?" — to which the real dog biscuit affixed like an exclamation point to the bottom of the picture's frame provides the answer. Animal and human portraits are combined in "Barnevelder," Vlasta Smola's acrylic painting of an elegant blond fashionista posing with a much less self-conscious looking rooster. The title of Luciille Berrill Paulsen's oil "St. Lu," in which a woman stares straight out at the viewer with both a pair of eyeglasses propped up on her graying bangs and a not-quite-halo decorated with Roman numerals apparently suspended in thin air just below them appears from its title to be an ironic self portrait.

Other excellent portrait subjects far too numerous to mention are also included in an exhibition that reminds us to value certain eternal verities of skill, technique, and individual vision all too often overlooked in the novelty-hungry commercial gallery scene.

— Maurice Taplinger

LAUREN PURJE

Continued from page 17

buried in the sand on a desert. In another painting by Purje, several children riding merry-go-round horses and sleds are awash in a thickly painted sea, suggesting a vibrant contemporary synthesis of Hokasai's ukiyo-e masterpiece "The Wave" and Turner's most tumultuous marine scenes. In yet another, a little girl sits on a boulder wistfully watching while other children appear to be drowning in churlish waters amid large, fang-baring fish.

Combining a graphic vision as macabre as that of Edward Gorey with formidable painterly gifts, Lauren Purje is a uniquely gifted young contender in the contemporary art scene whose progress will be well worth following, not only in future gallery exhibitions, but on her constantly evolving web site as well. — Ed McCormack

CARROZZINI

Continued from page 20

Tina Parotti, was a painter of figurative protests on themes such as Dying Nature. More recently, however, she has turned to more abstract style merging elements of minimal and color field painting, as seen in her oil on canvas "Moon nr. 50," which appears more in keeping with her present feeling that "Art is nourishment for the spirit" and "like good food for the physical body, also becomes healing" and can "lift us above pain and human mediocrity."

London based Turkish artist Yonca Yucemen believes that "art heals by Maximizing its 'semiotic freedom.' " Yucemen demonstrates the freedom of her own personal sign-language with a mixed media composition called "Chance and Continuity," in which a fanciful giraffe-like creature with sawhorses and ladders for legs, completely covered with semi-translucent paper "bandages," ambles past what appears to be a misty stage-set depicting a jungle.

Yet another Italian artist, Fiorenza Bertelli sees painting as "vis medicatrix" and shows a large oil on wood titled "Goal achieved/ obiettivo raggiunjto," in which authoritatively laid down black vertical gestural strokes are laid over swirling whiplash lines and rugged areas of white and blue.

Then there is the much exhibited American artist Amy Cohen Banker, one of the most energetic practitioners of New York School aesthetics, whose mixed media composition, "Twerking," like the transformed figuration of her predecessor Grace Hartigan, offers a rugged home remedy to contemporary art's trendy doldrums.

— Peter Wiley

María de Echevarría Seeks Sublimity in Nature

Curated by Frank DeGregorie for The Interchurch Center, "Impressions from Nature," María de Echevarría 's sixteenth solo exhibition, features the most recent oil and acrylic paintings of an artist whose work is constantly evolving. "Impressions" is the key word here, for over the years, the compositions of this gifted Argentinean-born painter, who has made her home in the United States since 1969, have progressed from atmospheric metaphysical landscapes to a more abstract style in which the impression, as well as the inspiration, of nature is still very much present.

In conversation with a writer, Willem de Kooning once said that all abstract painting begins from landscape, and while that blanket statement may not be true of some of the more geometric styles of abstraction, it is certainly true of de Echevarría 's present show. In fact, some of the paintings still retain more than a mere impression or suggestion of natural elements, as seen in the work that the artist calls "Lyrical Landscape," where a line of trees is set against a backdrop of blue-green mountains under a vibrant golden orange, red, and yellow sky, in which the forms of the hills are mirrored in the slightly lighter blue hue of a passing cloud. Here, the landscape shapes are as clearly defined as those in a canvas by Matisse or his main American disciple Milton Avery; they are suffused by a luminosity that owes more of its glow to nature than to Fauvism.

"Source #2," acrylic and oil on canvas, 60 x 48 inches

"Summer Storm" is another of de Echevarría's more literal images, with its dramatic definition of light and shadow on moody clouds in a vibrant cerulean blue sky. Here the artist's masterful use of chiaroscuro is combined with a strong, almost sculptural, sense of form to create one of the most literal transcriptions of a natural phenomenon in the exhibition. Her less specifically allusive pictures, however, are no less evocative, even when they combine the compositional reductiveness of Minimalism and the heightened chromatic intensity of Color Field painting, as seen in her numbered series of "Field" paintings.

In "Fields #7," for example, a sense of a very particular landscape location is conjured up with a mere three color areas of color: a luminous blue expanse interrupted by just a wisp of white strokes at the top of the composition are all the artist requires to evoke a vibrant summer sky. A mass of golden ocher interpolated with subtle hints of red and yellow at the center of the composition conjures up a vast wheat field as tangible, if less delineated, than one in a van Gogh landscape. And an irregular stripe of green along the bottom of the canvas adds foliage in the foreground to complete the composition.

Then there is "Fields #14,"in which only a blurrily defined whitish horizontal line separates a large expanse of an olive green (actually quite unlike any sky one has ever gazed upon!) from an even larger area, saturated with a rusty red hue, covering the entire lower part of the composition. Yet through some peculiar coloristic alchemy known only to the artist, these three simple components suffice to make the composition cohere as a concrete representation of light glowing on the horizon in an arid, perhaps southwestern landscape, such as that of New Mexico, where de Echevarría keeps a studio. Here, the painter appears to transcend optical actuality to trigger a kind of chromatic synesthesia in the viewer, an almost unsettling cognitive state in which totally dissimilar colors approximate the effect of the more expected ones!

Along with the inspiration of nature, de Echevarría has always acknowledged the spiritual inspiration in her work, culminating in "Toward Another Dimension" her solo at the Consulate General of Argentina Art Gallery in 2004, when she included spectral figures in some of her most ethereal landscapes to date.

In the present exhibition, however, the suggestion of the metaphysical forces and essences underlying the lay of the land take more subtle form in paintings such as one titled "Source #2." In this large (60" by 48") work in oil and acrylic on canvas, the only metaphysically suggestive element is a large deep orange rectangular shape suspended like an enormous monolithic gold bar against an area of lighter orange near the top of the composition. From there down (although incongruously colored in graduating shades of green), the horizontal divisions below can be read as strata of sky, descending logically to a more loosely brushed blue-green strip of cloud-cover hovering over the horizon of a deeper blue body of water near the bottom of the composition.

For all its imagistic and coloristic inventiveness, however, "The Source #2" is a masterful panoramic evocation of natural beauty as convincing in its own manner as the Hudson River School painter Frederick Edwin Church's monumental 1860 canvas "Twilight in the Wilderness." For like that group of painters and their successors in the Luminist movement, María de Echevarría is an artist forever in search of sublimity. For her, as for them, the sublime most often manifests most clearly in observing and apprehending what the great Englishman Turner termed "light as color"; which is to say: trapping one of nature's most ethereal and elusive elements in the contradictory materiality of pigment.

For all the liberties that she takes with both form and color as a quintessentially postmodern artist interested in achieving the perfect balance between the representational and abstract elements in her work, Echevarría obviously has made a close study of how light creates color and how color can create the illusion of light. In this regard, she may well be one of the few contemporary painters working today who still, in her own unique manner, heeds John Ruskin's axiom "To observe nature closely is to follow the finger of God."

— J. Sanders Eaton

María de Echevarría, The Interchurch Center, Treasure Room Gallery, 475 Riverside Drive (at 120th Street), through Nov. 22, 2013

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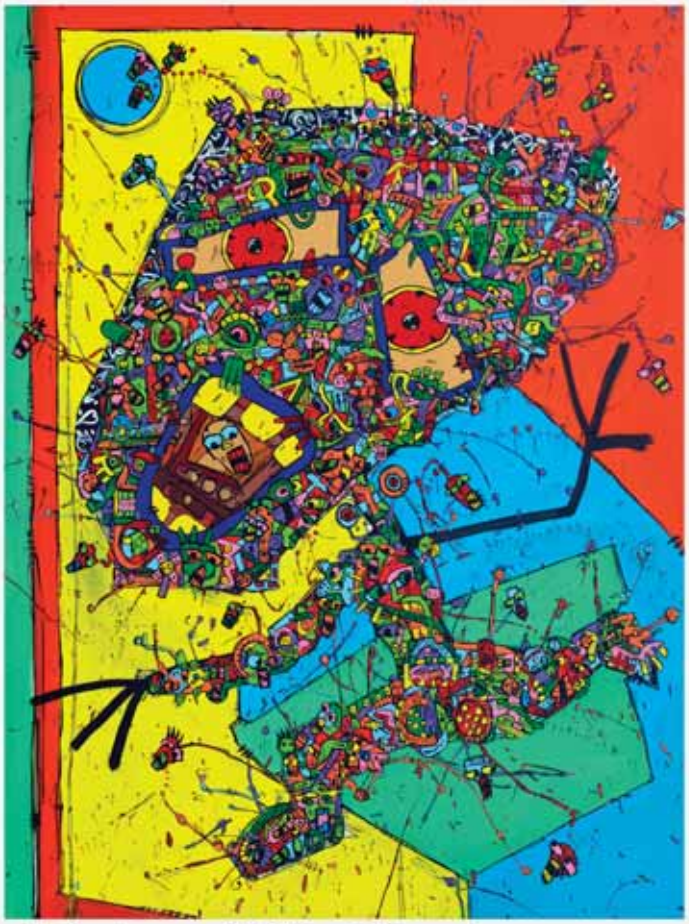

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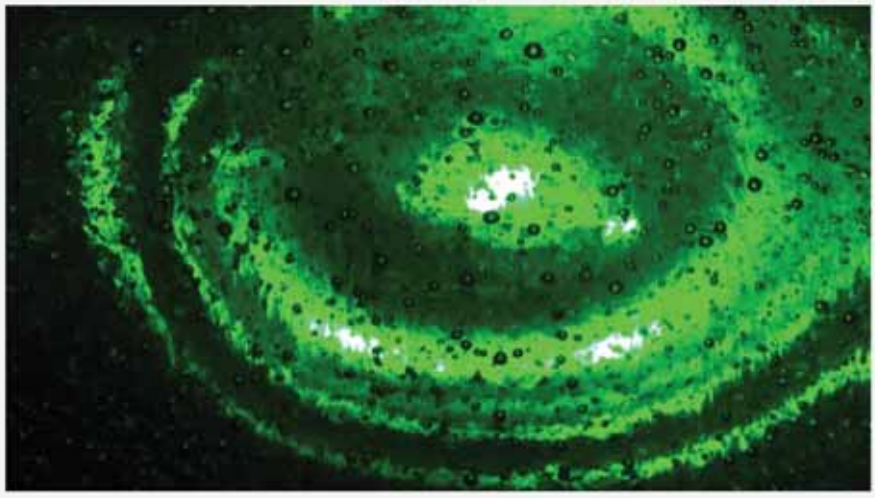

The Boyers: Intimate Conversations in Art

Artist couples often influence and mirror each other's styles; think Pollock-Krasner and Willem and Elaine de Kooning, among numerous other examples. Daniel C. Boyer and Silvia Soares Boyer, presented striking contrasts in just about every aspect of technique and imagery, in their recent two-artist exhibition "Ex Superrealismus ad Mystica."

Michigan-born Daniel C. Boyer's work is a very personal species of Surrealism, not of the Dali or Magritte variety, but in the manner that it was defined by Andre Breton "as pure psychic automatism" and exemplified in Andre Masson's "automatic writing." Boyer's version combines subconscious imagery, elements of memory, visual puns, and graphic spontaneity to create his own distinctive semiabstract ecriture.

Working in a precise, often hard-edged style, his wife Silvia Soares Boyer, born in Portugal, combines the formal and the mystical with occasional forays into fragments of figuration to translate occult symbols and other esoteric elements of ancient belief systems into a private iconography comparable to Alfred Jensen's chartlike paintings inspired by Mayan hieroglyphics, Pythagorean numerology and other such subjects.

Both artists are also poets and prose writers, and their literary side is perhaps most evident in their use of pens (albeit in distinctly different ways) in their paintings. It also manifests in Daniel's preference for long titles that almost amount to autonomous unpunctuated avant garde poems, such as: "The Arched Horizon for the Antique Marquis Deflects the Suicide of the Damsel Like the Bullied Diamond the Authentic History of the Kosovars," or "The Course in Pre-Columbian Basketry (in Kalamazoo and Latin America) Confounds the Relict Nautilus Shell of the Ambulatory Prince." Both are works in acrylic with and mixed media on canvas in which linear forms and areas of color interact and overlap, filling the entire composition with an antic Art Brut energy counterbalanced by a conceptual sophistication that transcends the obsessive graphomania of so-called "outsider" art.

Silvia Soares Boyer

Daniel C. Boyer

On the other hand, Daniel C. Boyer's paintings defy facile rational annotation by virtue of the deliberately dissociative nature of his exuberant drawing style, which takes Paul Klee's idea of "taking a line for a little walk" for a breathtaking marathon run. Consider his intricately convoluted and wittily titled work in pen and ink on paper "The Orientalizing Influence of Ice Hockey on Winnipeg." Here, as in another complex ink drawing called "Lennon Arrives at Grand Central Station," the line flows endlessly, lassoing in its course ghostly faces, simplified figurative silhouettes, floral shapes, birds, insects biomorphic abstract arabesques, black serpentine spirals and a richly animated plethora of tiny other freely associated images amounting to a richly fertile personal cosmos that inexhaustibly reinvents itself in each new picture.

By contrast, Silvia Soares Boyer's paintings in acrylic and metallic gold and silver pen are exquisitely refined meditations on form, line, Borgesian metaphysics, and mandala-like geometry, accented by spare areas of meticulously applied color. One of her most compelling compositions is the work in acrylic and gold pen with the evocatively poetic title, "Underneath the Rose." Boyer's painting, in which a single red rose hovers in a solid black stratospheric expanse, beautifully balanced and partially fragmented by an angular spiderweb of precise gold lines, against a large area of red area dominating the bottom of the canvas is, in its own emblematic way, as dynamic a feminine symbol as the legendary Beat Generation painter Jay DeFeo's massive 2,500 pound oil, the latter's sole project for eight years. (In fact, the title of Boyer's painting adds yet another dimension of meaning to the symbol, if one interprets it to mean that underneath the "rose" is the womb, from which all human life springs.)

In two more intricate but no less precisely rendered compositions in golden pen and crystals on black canvas called "On the Science of Pentagrams" and "On the science of Pentagrams II," Silvia Soares Boyer pays tribute to a magic symbol dating back to the Babylonians and the Pythagoreans, transforming its squares, triangles, and weblike networks of lines into a striking postmodern abstraction in black, white, and gold, even while adorning the tips of its five-pointed stars with tiny crystals that suggest their spiritual origin.

In yet another series of three paintings in acrylic, gold pen, and crystals on canvas, Silvia Soares Boyer celebrates the legend of Pandora, the goddess who according to Classic Greek mythology "bestowed bounteous gifts" and to Hesoid mythology was the opener of the box (again the womb, since "box" is but one of the crude male slang words for the vessel of our birth?) that unleashed every known evil on the world. The artist's playful interpretation of this typically ambivalent way in which the female sex seems to be viewed down through history is hinted at in the more luridly-colored female faces, with alternately angelic and demonic expressions, that appear within square areas amid her more subdued shapes, symbols, five pointed stars, and golden linear spiderwebs in her Pandora paintings.

Anyone who as ever observed the always artfully dressed Boyers in public may have noticed that, like most harmonious intellectual and artistic couples, they constantly amuse themselves and each other, even among others, with lively conversation. In this fascinating dual exhibition, they let the rest of us in on their intimate discourse.

— Ed McCormack

Dual exhibition:
Silvia Soares Boyer and Daniel C. Boyer
recently seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, 96th St. (center island).

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