April/May 2014 www.galleryandstudiomagazine.com Vol. 16 No. 4 New York

GALLERY&STUDIO

THE SELFIE BEFORE FACEBOOK!

James Hall's Brilliant New History "The Self-Portrait" p.4

Photo James Bevins, 2014

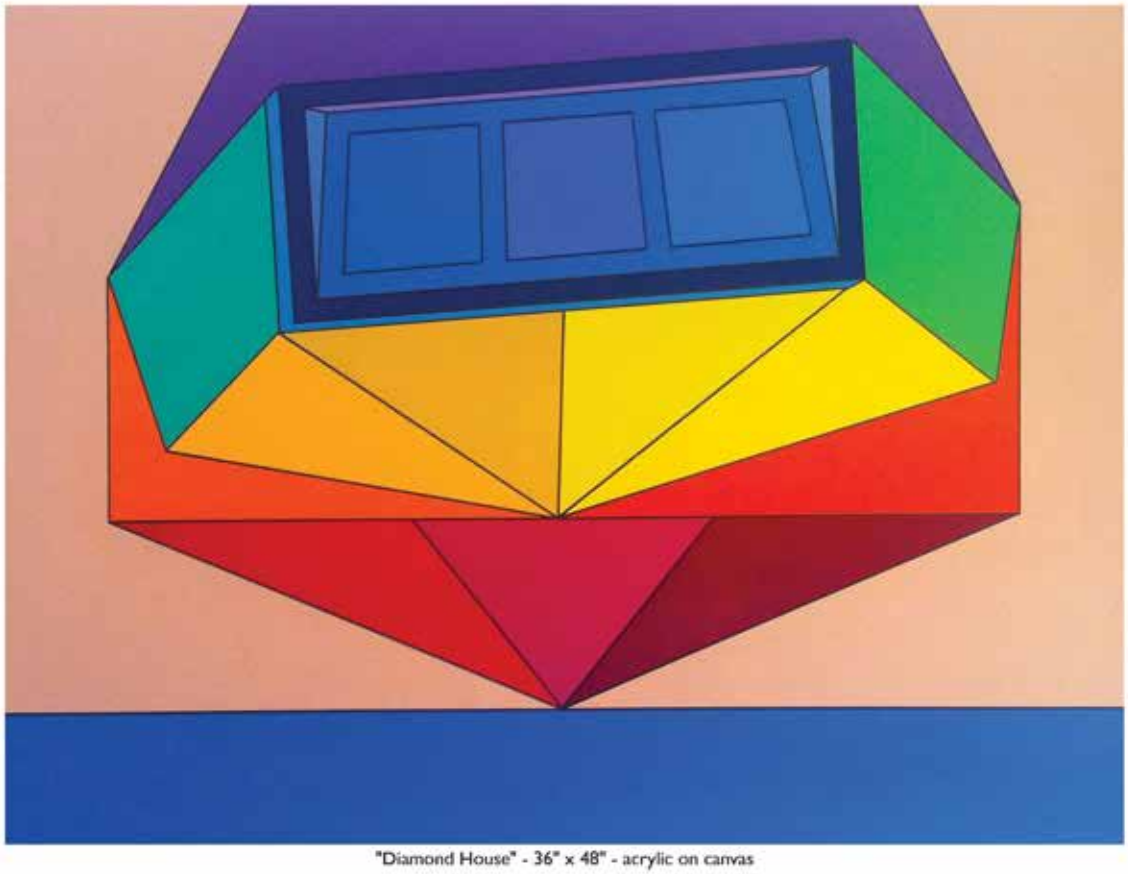
Jeff Tocci, Cenedella Studio (in progress), 50"x34", oil on canvas

MEN AT WORK!

Jeff Tocci's Renaissance-Style Self-Portrait with His Teacher Bob Cenedella p.2

Sebastien Aurillon

aurillon.com



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On Encountering the Mysterious Primal Symbols of Marie Gailland

The work of the French artist Marie Gailland is full of surprises, due to her ability to combine the gestural energy of Neo-Expressionism with subject matter as unexpected as that of the most imaginative talents among the New Image School painters who emerged in the 1980s.

What sets Gailland apart from either group, however, is her stated goal of "combining the spiritual and the sensual," with blue hues representing the former and reds the latter. One has the feeling, that the forms in her paintings must arrive intuitively, since nothing in her compositions appears calculated for effect. Rather her imagery has the look of having sprung up subconsciously during the act of painting. Indeed, confronting Gailland's bold, almost primitively powerful compositions in acrylic or mixed media on canvas, the viewer is hard put to determine what came first, image or gesture. One sterling example is her acrylic on canvas "Lapin et Violette," in which a long-eared creature resembling a uniquely feral rabbit, delineated in a broad black brushstrokes, peers almost guiltily over its shoulder as though surprised while preparing to devour a roughly brushed-in purple flower. It is a mysterious image, obscure yet evocative of an emotion, rather than of a specific creature, as though the artist is endeavoring to open some submerged psychic channel between herself and the viewer. In fact Gailland has confessed to having "an almost symbiotic empathy for animals," and adds that she feels "the whole of nature as a great body to which it belongs organically."

"Lapin et Violette"

In another large work in acrylic on canvas "Animal, 1" a lean black simplified creature with blue and pink liquid rivulets dripping down from its underbelly — almost the four-legged equivalent of a human stick-figure — suggests a baby critter of some undetermined species. It is cropped so that the tip of its snout is cut off at the left top corner of the otherwise bare canvas, as though either suckling on or seeking an unseen teat. In either case, it is an oddly poignant image of helpless dependance, or needy longing.

Horses, also boldly painted in tar-black pigment that created the silhouetted effect of ghosts or shadows, are among the most frequently recurring animals in Gailland's compositions. In "Cheval aux Oreilles Rouges," a mythic galloping steed with ears suggesting orange flames is partially obscured by a more precise black and yellow spiral. And in "Cheval à la Coupe avec Fleurs," a tamer equine figure gazes down at a vessel containing two large violet flowers.

In yet another mixed media work on canvas, titled "Poème Sauvage à la Couronne Rouge," Gailland summons up a form resembling a floating stogie, seemingly nuzzling a mask-like, mostly disembodied (except for the linear suggestion of one hand and sloping shoulder) delicate white face with its red lighted tip. Enmeshed in vigorously brushed mass of white pigment that could suggest a cloud of smoke, this mask-like visage wears a serene expression. One might think of Freud's famous Groucho Marxian one-liner "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar." However, it would seem no less frivolous to append too-obvious meanings to the symbols in Marie Gailland's paintings than to those in the mature works of Philip Guston. Which is to say: Gailland, like that older artist, who turned his back on an established career as an esteemed abstract expressionist, to pursue cartoon-like images deep within his subconscious, is creating imagery with a primal force that is impossible to ignore. Nor would one wish to do so, given the pleasure that her paintings provide for their purely aesthetic attributes, as well as for their intriguing subject matter.

— Maurice Taplinger

Marie Gailland, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, through April 17, 2014
Reception: Thursday, April 3, 6 -8 pm

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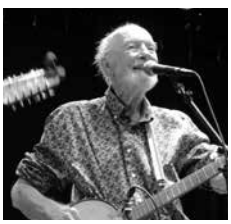

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Jeff Tocci: Heir to Two Generations of Acidly Satirical Social Realism

"Holy Cow"

On encountering Jeff Tocci's work for the first time one is tempted to say that this talented young artist from Brooklyn paints and draws like the bastard offspring of some unthinkable union between the great German social realist George Grosz and the contemporary gonzo British pen and ink satirist Ralph Steadman.

Tocci's artistic pedigree, after all, is impeccable for the role, being the studio assistant and prize student of Robert Cenedella, the one-time protégé of Grosz and monitor of his class at The Art Students League in the 1950s. Cenedella who carries on Grosz's tradition as both a painter and a teacher, is one of the League's most fearless and iconoclastic instructors, as well as our most passionate "Here's mud in your eye!" art world gadfly.

Because rebellious youth loves an old rebel, to a small but very vocal cult of angry art students today, Cenedella is a charismatic figure comparable to William Burroughs Jr., back in the late 1970s when that notoriously cranky Beat Generation novelist was the inspirational Big Daddy-O to a rising generation of East Village punk rock musicians.

In fact, James Bevin, a photographer whose work has appeared in both The New York Times and Time magazine, is working on a long photo essay documenting the Renaissance-like relationship between Cenedella and Tocci in their roles of embattled master and apprentice, in an elitist art world that turns its nose up at social commentary.

One of the paintings that will be featured in "Mother Nature's Bastards," Tocci's upcoming exhibition at Brooklyn's Jalopy Theater, touches upon this issue with his customary meat cleaver. It depicts a gallery (suspiciously resembling the one in The Art Students League) where exhibition jurors dodder around groping at figurative paintings and sculptures they can't see, since they are wearing blindfolds along with their artsy fartsy berets.

Tocci makes a somewhat subtler case for the degree of wry mastery he has achieved under the guidance of his artistic mentor Cenedella (whose own painting of awestruck culture vultures, drawn like flies to a monumental pile of steaming shit on a pedestal in a museum, drew indignant gasps and protests from passing pedestrians when it was exhibited in one of the display windows of The League) in his oil "Peanuts Carnavale and His mother."

Here was a picture and a name to send one straight to the computer to see if there was a Mafioso with that moniker. The closest Google could come was a page advertising peanuts and other snacks for "circus and carnival concessions."

But it turned out that Peanuts Carnavale was the real name of a low-level wiseguy who attempted to torch the Brooklyn housing project where Tocci's grandmother still lived, after his own mother was evicted from it.

Tocci's oil shows a tender, sentimental embrace between a hulking human monster in a bulging vested suit and his Mama, one of those sweet old darlings in a babushka who has religious pictures on the wall and whose sly, thin-lipped little gash of a smile hints that she knows where all the bodies are buried.

There's something the late actor James Gandolfini used to do with his eyes in his

immortal role as Tony Soprano. He would usually do this thing with his eyes, in the moment or two before he whacked someone or ordered Paulie Walnuts or some other member of his crew to do so. It was a look of cold, dead-fish-eye malice, combined with just a trace of "sorry it had to come to this" remorse. It would have seemed that minute, misty flutter of the lids was something that only a great actor like Gandolfini could carry off; something so subtle as to be literally impossible in the less kinetic medium of painting. But Jeff Tocci actually accomplishes it with the two nasty little slits of nature's bastard inhumanity between Peanuts Carnavale's caterpillar eyebrows and his Durante schnozzola, as he circles his Mama Mia's frail old shoulders with one arm, and with his other hammy fist, grasps her bony forearm like a breadstick.

The Steadman influence is all over Tocci's drawing "It's Syphillis," in which we a see a doctor and two nurses swarming all over a bed with a crucifix on the wall behind it. The doctor is down at the end of the bed, gripping a sleazy-looking geezer under the sheet by his ankles to peer between his legs, while one of the hefty nurses scribbles on clipboard, and the other one looks pityingly at the obviously underage girl cowering under the sheet with the dirty old bastard.

But while Steadman would have fudged the details of such a scene with the sketchy lines and Ab-Ex India Ink splashes that are his stylistic trademark, under Cenedella's tutelage, by way of his old teacher Grosz, Tocci has learned to put a finer finish on the picture, evoking all the stark details of its atmospheric squalor with a precise pen-line and skillfully modulated gray tonal washes.

A similar tonal skill, this one in brown ink washes, also can be seen in "Tommy the First Mate," Tocci's portrait of a seaman in a bloody apron slicing shrimp down in the galley with a cigarette dangling from his lips under a Hitleresque mustache.

Like Cenedella, too, in some of his earlier less acidly satirical work, as well as Grosz before him, Tocci is also capable of evoking an idyllic poetic pastoral vision in oils, as seen in his large, idyllic landscape "Holy Cows," where wild daisies dot a grassy hill and an old fashioned tire-swing hangs from a tree-limb, while way off in the distance, cows as tiny as baby ants can be glimpsed through golden twilight mists, grazing under a church steeple. It's a lusciously painted bucolic panorama, a Romantic tour de force in the luminous tradition of the Hudson River School. And since we're all hostages to fate anyway, does it really matter that — like the breathtakingly beautiful young skinny dipper, innocently unaware that she is being spied on by lecherous hillbillies (who will later threaten to scandalize her if she doesn't have sex with them), in Thomas Hart Benton's painting based on the biblical tale of "Susanna and the Elders" — Tocci's blissfully ignorant bovines, grazing under that distant church steeple, have no inkling that they may eventually end up on Tommy the First Mate's butcher block?

"It's Syphillis"

Also included in "Nature's Bastards" are pen and ink drawings such as "The Squirrel" and "The Pheasant," which prove Jeff Tocci to be every bit as accomplished at imbuing animal portraits with symbolic human characteristics as that other happy outlaw from art world trends, Leonard Baskin, in his "Raptors" series.

Perhaps the most technically spectacular and autobiographical oil in the show, however, is Tocci's a double portrait of Cenedella and himself in the Tribecca studio in which they both work. The white bearded artist stands at his easel in the middle of the light-filled loft, wearing his paint-smeared smock, holding a handful of brushes like a bouquet to the muse, as he intently studies a large canvas in progress on his easel. Meanwhile, in a full-length mirror propped up against a table across the studio, the black bearded young artist glances over at his mentor (and out at the viewer), his brush-wielding hand raised to his own large canvas, busy painting the composition at which we are looking.

It's a timeless moment in real time, capturing different stages of a vanishing way of life, an endangered painterly vocation, in an era in which so many others have become infatuated with so-called "new media" and work in spaces that look, and even smell more like "state of the art" offices, laboratories, or manufacturing plants than artist's studios. Tocci's picture pays tribute to a historical tradition that must remain unbroken if the art of painting, as we have known it for so many centuries, is to continue.

Thus every detail of the cluttered, atmospherically evocative studio is scrupulously depicted in Tocci's tribute to his revered teacher: stacks of finished canvases (including a mirror image of Cenedella's notorious painting of a crucified Santa — as redolent of the rampant commercialism that he rails against in the art world — which raised just as big a stink among indignant holiday shoppers on 57th Street when it appeared one holiday season in one of The League's display windows); a work table covered with scattered paint tubes, its porcelain top serving as a palette piled with miniature mountains of viscously gleaming, brilliant primary oil colors; windowsills lined with metal coffee cans full of various-sized brushes; many bottles of turpentine, linseed oil, wine, whiskey, and other creative necessities lined up on shelves within easy reach... It's all there!

In an introduction to a bibliography of George Grosz's portfolios, illustrated books, book covers, drawings for magazines, and original prints published in 1993, Cenedella expressed his indebtedness to the man he called "the first Adult I ever respected": "I only knew George Grosz as a student. I studied with him at the Art Students League for several great years. Years that I will never forget. Years that helped me mold my own artistic development in a way that could never have been if I had not met him."

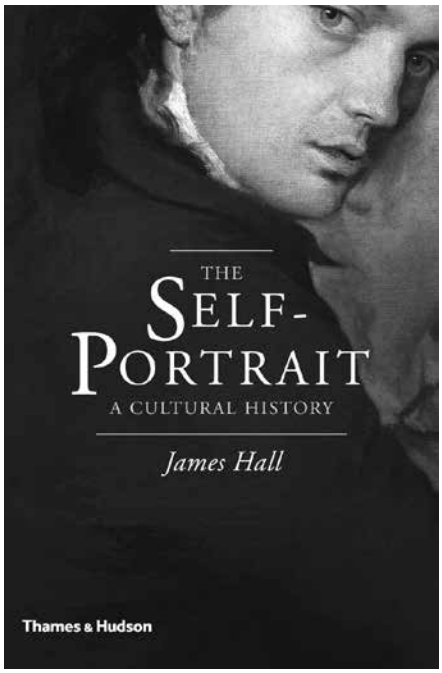
With the gifted young painter named Jeff Tocci, Robert Cenedella has obviously found a way to pay it forward.

— Ed McCormack

Jeff Tocci, Mother Nature's Bastards, The Jalopy Theatre, 315 Columbia Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. April 26h - June 7th, 2014

The "Selfie" Before Facebook: The Evolution of the Self-Portraiture Over the Ages

by Ed McCormack



Given the popularity of the memoir (as regular readers of this publication know all too well, I'm perpetrating one myself), so-called reality TV and social media, it is clear that we are living in an era when narcissism and outright exhibitionism run rampant.

In his introduction to "The Self-Portrait: A Cultural History," published this month by Thames & Hudson, Inc., the British art historian and critic James Hall asserts "Self-portraiture has become the defining visual genre of our confessional age."

Ranging in scope from antiquity to the 21st century, the book takes us from the Narcissus myth itself, through the Renaissance and Modernism (with no short shrift given to obvious masters of serial self-portraiture such as Rembrandt, Van Gogh, and Munch), to contemporary practitioners of the genre like Cindy Sherman, Jeff Koons and John Coplans. And if the contemporary works are not the most noble in the book, don't blame the author: owe it instead to the cult of ugliness, irony and vulgarity endemic to the art scene of our present century and the latter part of the preceding one.

Much of it is traceable to that genius of publicity, Andy Warhol, whose casual manipulation of the media, as well as of his so-called Superstars and other serfs and acolytes I had ample opportunity to observe when I was a contributing editor of his film and gossip journal Interview. In the early to mid '70s, I watched Andy play passive-agressive Svengali at The Factory, during film shoots, over lunch breaks at Brownie's Health Food Restaurant (which had replaced Max's Kansas City as the Factory's daytime commissary after he was shot), at dinner in the dining room of the Algonquin Hotel, and at various of his own gallery and museum receptions.

Hall includes a full page, full color, close-up, pores-and-all dye diffusion print selfie of Andy from 1979, annotated with a dialogue from Christopher Lasch's best-selling book of the same year, "The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations," in which the artist conducts a dialogue with his mirror. Since it sounds more articulate and less marble-mouthed than the Andy I knew, it's probably imaginary. Nevertheless, since I've always considered truth deeper than fact, it rings true, if not stammeringly accurate:

"Day after day I look in the mirror and I still see something — a new pimple .... I dunk a Johnson and Johnson cotton ball into Johnson and Johnson rubbing alcohol and rub the cotton ball against the pimple .... And while the pimple is drying I think about nothing."

After the alcohol has dried, Andy covers the pimple with "flesh-colored acne-pimple medication," then checks the mirror again to see if his mask is complete to meet the masks that he meets: "It's all there. The affectless gaze .... The bored languor, the wasted pallor .... The graying lips. The shaggy silver-white hair, soft and metallic .... Nothing is missing. I'm everything my scrapbook says I am."

If I'm not incorrect it might have been Jeff Koons who once said that he wanted to grow up to be Andy Warhol. Or was it someone else? (It doesn't really matter, since so many ambitious young art yuppies today seem to want to be Andy anyway.)

Koons is represented in this book with a color photo of his much larger than life polychromed wood sculpture, "Jeff and Ilona (Made in Heaven), 1990." Custom carved for the artist by Italian craftsmen, it features a rosy cheeked, boyishly idealized nude effigy of Koons embracing his former wife, the just-as-garishly rouged Italian porn star Ilona Staller ("La Cicciolina"). Platinum blonde, adorned by only cherry-red lipstick and the scantiest of Victoria's Secret fetish gear, she sprawls languorously beneath him on a bed encircled by the coils of a huge golden serpent.

Hall confides in his text that he chose this piece over Koons' more explicit "photo-paintings" of the couple having sex because the latter "are just too literal minded — and pornographic — to be interesting."

Also included among the contemporary examples of self-portraiture is a photo-based mixed media piece called "Are you Angry or Are You Boring" by the British gay visual Vaudeville team, Gilbert & George, who sport identical banker's gray flannel when they aren't looning out and mooning the viewer; Tracey Emin's "Everyone I Have Ever Slept With, 1963-95,1995" a tent for two, its interior embroidered with seventy-five male and female names; John Coplans' black and white photograph "Self-Portrait (Back with Arms Above)," 1984, which suggests some grotesque anatomical anomaly, until it dawns on one that the artist simply has his head hidden and is holding his hairy-fingered fists above the broad, flat expanse of his hairy back; and Zhang Huan's "Foam," a triptych of the artist's face and head engulfed by soapy bubbles, with photo-booth size family portraits in his open mouth, of which Hall writes, "He is like a drowning man whose whole life passes before him, but in this case he only retains his memories of his family.

In this section, "Beyond the Face: Modern and Contemporary Self-Portraits," the author mercifully omits George W. Bush's newsmaking oil of himself in the bathtub. He does, however, include "What I Saw in the Water," a 1938 Frida Kahlo painting of herself in the tub, from which the former president turned Sunday painter obviously "appropriated" (to give him the benefit of a respectable-sounding art world euphemism for simple theft) his entire composition. The main difference is that, between her knees and her toes, Kahlo created a surreal tableau of lilliputian imagery — a formal portrait of her parents; two young female nudes snuggling on a bed; a phallic skyscraper rising from the mouth of a volcano — while the same space in Bush's copy is empty of even the rubber duckies one might expect would float in his bathwater.

In the chapter Hall calls "The Renaissance Artist as Hero, he cites Parmigianino's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," c. 1524, as "the most famous of all Italian self-portraits" and extols this small tondo in oil on panel as "a tour de force of technical and conceptual ingenuity." Obviously inspired by the artist glimpsing a likeness in his barber's looking glass as enchanting as that of a pretty young girl, centuries later the painting inspired John Ashbery to write a long poem of the same title, for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1975.

"The room in which the artist sits has the voided austerity of a monk's cell," Hall writes of the picture in his best ekphrastic mode. "The optical distortion turns the single window on the left into a roof light, suggesting an attic designed for thoughts of higher things. But this artist is no monk. Rather he belongs to the physical and intellectual aristocracy, an ideal of the

Albrecht Dürer, Self-Portrait, 1498, Image credit: Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

cultivated and elegantly dressed painter put forward by Leonardo . . . He is a priceless work of art, with his flawlessly pale skin, flowing chestnut hair, chestnut eyes and cushion lips fractionally parted. His oval face is miraculously immune to optical distortion."

Hall's expository passages are equally evocative, as when, he muses in the Introduction, "One of the wonders of self-portraits is their capacity to induce unique levels of uncertainty in the viewer. Is the artist looking at us with a view of portraying or judging us? Is the artist looking at a mirror with a view to portraying or judging themselves? Is the artist creating a persona to serve specific ends? Or have they delved into the book of memory, myth and imagination to create a work personal in its meaning?"

In the case of Parmigianino's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," however, there is no question that what we are encountering is a case of narcissism triumphant. And in the same chapter, Hall writes of yet another idealized self-presentation: "The only pain this man might have experienced is the pressure of being a living work of art." He is referring to an oil on panel of an elegantly clad young man with flowing golden ringlets that make him look like a northern Renaissance ancestor of Robert Plant, the preening lead singer of the British heavy metal band Led Zeppelin, inscribed, "In 1498 I painted this from my own form. I was twenty-six years old. Albrecht Durer."

The next chapter,"Mock-heroic Self-Portraits," explores a sixteenth century sub-genre "in which self-abnegation and self-mockery reach unprecedented extremes. A de-idealization process takes place, for both comic and tragic effect."

One of the most blatant examples of this turn toward caricature and self-satire is Giovanni Caroto's "Portrait of a Red-Headed Youth Holding a Drawing," c.1515, in which the kid with the goofy grin displaying an inept figure drawing bears a striking resemblance to Mad magazine cover boy Alfred E. Neuman!

"The drawing must be the child's first self-portrait," Hall surmises. "Caroto is very similar to the Italian for carrot (*carota*), so it may be that the family name derived from their orange hair ... or that Caroto is using orange hair as a comic trademark. Vasari says that Caroto had a son, but a mocking portrait of his young son would hardly be witty. It is more likely to be an imaginary or fake self-portrait of himself as a would-be child prodigy: 'This is me as an eight-year-old — and already a genius!'" In any case, can one blame Hall for second-guessing to justify the use of such a delightfully zany example?

No such verbal gymnastics on the author's part are necessary, in the case of Caravaggio's "Self-Portrait as Sick Bacchus," 1594. For here the Roman god of wine appears on that queasy brink between drunkenness and hangover — perfect self-typecasting for one of art history's most dissolute characters. Given the antithetical aesthetic stances of the great formalist and the great sensualist, it is not difficult to understand why Poussin declared, "Caravaggio came into the world to be the ruin of painting." But perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Caravaggio, the artist-criminal-alcoholic, who once killed a man in a dispute over a tennis match, came into the world to depict Bacchus as both artist and model. Leering bleary and sallow-complected over a bare shoulder from his own canvas, clutching a bunch of grapes, even his laurel looking tawdry, so convincing is his portrayal in both roles that one is reminded how another writer once said, "The miracle of Caravaggio is that a man personally so out of control ever mastered the discipline to make paintings, much less produce masterpieces."

Caravaggio's arch nemesis Poussin, on the other hand, was reportedly as formal and sober in his life-style as in his art. Thus two self-portraits, painted consecutively in the same year, show him in the industrious setting of the studio, cloaked in a black smock resembling a judicial robe. Indeed in both, with his jowly, mature countenance and neatly trimmed mustache, he actually resembles a judge. In the first ("Self-Portrait," 1649), his gaze is somewhat sidelong, distracted — as though contemplating what punishment might fit the crime. In the second ("Self-Portrait," 1649-50), he stares sternly out, as though passing sentence — perhaps on Caravaggio!

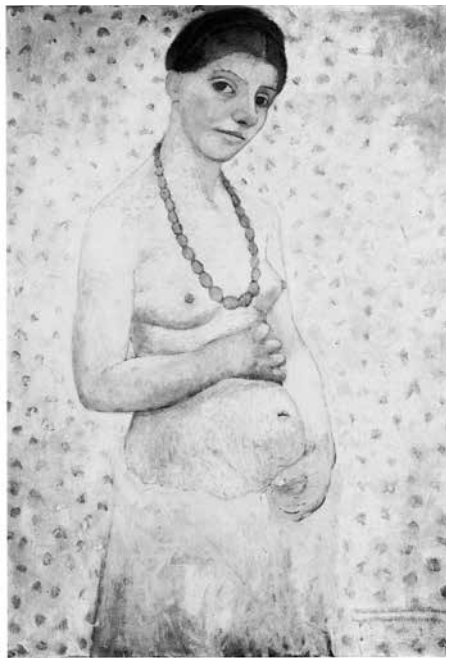
Having researched the history of both paintings, rather than merely interpreted them at face value, as I have here, James Hall tells an interesting tale of a painter's duplicitous attempt to mollify, Monsieur Chantelou and Monsieur Pointel, two competing patrons: "Poussin claimed to be dissatisfied with his first effort for Chantelou, so he immediately painted another. He then sent the first self-portrait to Pointel, and the second to Chantelou, assuring him that it was 'the better painting and the better likeness' so he had no need to be jealous of Pointel."

Such were the triangular sensitivities between both regular patrons and the painter, Hall tells, that in an incident a couple of years earlier, when Chantelou complained that a painting he purchased from Poussin's "Seven Sacraments" series was "too austere, and inferior to a more charming work sent to Pointel," the painter replied, "I am not a fickle person, given to switching my affections. when once I have committed myself. If the picture of 'Moses Discovered in the waters of the Nile' in Monsieur Pointel's collection generates feelings of love in you, is that proof that I painted it with more love than I did the pictures I painted for you?"

Clearly, Hall's description of Poussin's back-and-forth with his collectors offers as insightful a picture of the man as either of the painter's own self-portraits.

The provocatively titled chapter "Sex and Genius," calls to mind Norman Mailer's "Genius and Lust: A Journey Through the Major Writings of Henry Miller." As we all know, however, Miller was a writer who reveled in sex with an almost infantile innocence, if one may apply that term to him in its very best sense.

Continued on page 8

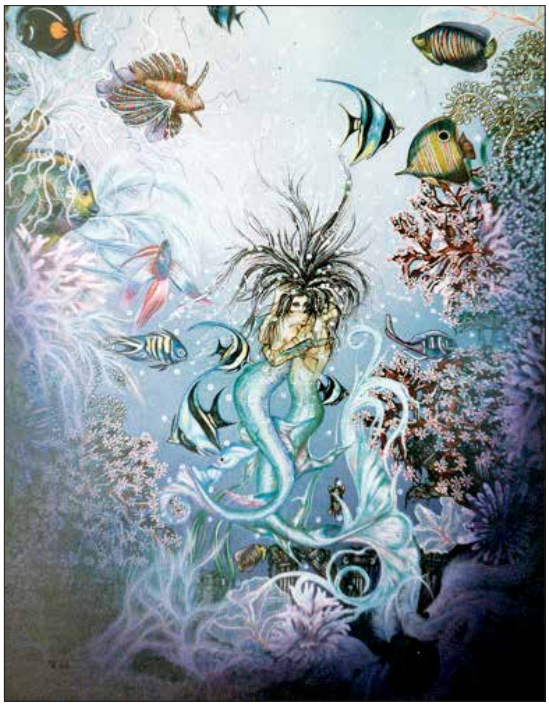


Paula Modersohn-Becker, Self-Portrait, 1906, oil on card Image credit: Kunstsammlungen Böttcherstrasse/Paul Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen

Imagination Untrammeled: The Artistic Legacy of Michèle Vincent (1952-2013)

With the death of a highly imaginative artist we lose an entire world. Surely this is true of the French artist Michèle Vincent, a Surrealist in the tradition of Salvador Dali, Leonor Fini, and Leonora Carrington, whose untimely demise late last year deprived contemporary painting of a unique vision.

Besides being a critically acclaimed painter whose works in acrylic, watercolor, and oil have been exhibited internationally over the past four decades, Vincent was also an innovative jewelry and clothing designer. But it is for her paintings that she should be best remembered.



"Mermaid Couple In The Ocean"

"Embraced Couple Off The Shell"

"Nature, beautiful and wild, birds, have inspired me to draw and paint," she once stated. "I scribbled and drew my first flowers and later my first horse. I visited museums and galleries. I never studied painting. I learned on my own. During my studies at the Fine Arts, I was oriented toward advertising and illustration . . . Over the years I took up my paint brushes."

Her earliest period, from 1970 to 1975, consisted for the most part of fauna and floral studies. During her middle period, from 1975 to 1990, she created fantastic compositions in acrylics. In her final period, from 1990 to 2013, she continued to paint fantastic imagery, but switched to the more classical medium of oil on canvas, evolving a painstaking technique.

"The paintings evolved slowly," recalls Didier Thuillier, the artist's devoted husband of forty years, who speaks with reverence of his wife's creative process; of the shrine that was her studio, with its light pouring through a double window, the drawing table, the easel, the music to which she listened while she worked. He sounds as though speaking of an alchemist's laboratory when, with the awe of an admiring layman, he elaborates on how she studied her work in progress "with the critical eye of the artist," which might "suggest some changes," and of her "complete respect for the drying time of the paint," and adds, "Varnish follows the same requirement: drying will take a year."

Finally, the sigh almost audible, even in an e-mail, he says, "And then there is the woman, my wife, loving, generous, demanding, meticulous, dreamy. Michèle was struck down by cancer while there was still so much to do, to imagine ..."

Vincent's imagery often explores that unique terrain where the Jungian subconscious meets an alternate reality. Her paintings invariably strove, in the manner of great fantasists everywhere, to enter a realm beyond the limitations of physical reality. And now, in her own physical transcendence, her oeuvre continues to unfold, fabricating a narrative in which the things of ordinary life are made mythic. Indeed, one likes to think that at her death, she ascended to that magical realm in which her imagination took flight in life.

Paradoxically, her early botanical and aquatic paintings, while meticulously detailed and faithful to her subjects, are among her most abstract compositions. Radically cropped close-ups of specific floral and oceanic brilliant species, are coloristically heightened; their petals, stamens, and leaves are transformed into pure organic forms as original as those pioneering American modernists such as Georgia O'Keeffe and semiabstract postmodern "New Nature" painters like Gregory Amenoff.

In Vincent's exquisite composition "Bean Flower," the sensuous pink petals of the plant and the flowing contours of its green leaves, contrasted with the intricately textured dark brown background, project a dynamically emblematic formal presence. In her chromatically brilliant "Scorpion Fish," the exotic undersea creature glows like neon-lit stained glass with an entire rainbow of luminous hues. The surrounding swirls of eddying waves and subterranean vegetation lend the composition an almost psychedelic intensity.

Most typically, Vincent centered her fantastic figurative compositions on romantically idealized male and female figures, in a manner at once innocent and sophisticated. Although she was an autodidact, she mastered classical anatomy and developed a sublimely refined painting technique, combining translucent acrylic or oil glazes built up in successive layers with thicker areas of opaque pigment that lend a sense of volume and solidity to her figures, as well as to the landscapes or interiors that they inhabit.

She taught herself the alchemy of transforming the material substance of pigment into the ethereal element of light in the manner of the Impressionists, and learned to employ chiaroscuro, the dance of light and shadow, with a subtlety reminiscent of the Old Masters. She evoked ancient architecture and its subsequent ruins with sinuous line that suggested a close study of Piranesi, and cloaked them in veils of mist with a poetic finesse akin to Romantic painters such as Claude Vernet and Delacroix.

From the very beginnings of her first fantastic period in the middle 1970s through her final works in 2013, she steered clear of the trendy irony that hobbles so much art of our time, and she strove heroically to restore a sense of passion and of the picturesque to contemporary painting. While classifying certain of her works as belonging to her "erotic" mode, like those of Fini, whom she greatly admired, all of her figurative works are

"Rebirth"

"The Staircase And The Horse"

"Bean Flower"

enlivened by an undercurrent of eroticism.

Yet her compositions are hardly languorous; rather, many are driven by uniquely energetic metaphysical phenomena, as seen in works such as "Embraced Couple Off the Shell," in which two lithe nude bodies merge amid gossamer semitransparent veils that form a large ecstatic face at the center of a huge seashell floating over rhythmic ocean waves. In another work, called "Mermaids Couple in the Ocean," the two shapely graceful creatures cling together in the deep, as all manner of equally fanciful subterranean species float by.

In other fantastic paintings, lithe male and graceful female figures, with or without wings, often appear as effortlessly airborne as angels or exotic avians, as they soar in stratospheric settings, at once ethereal and palpably sensual. Vincent was a quintessentially postmodern artist, not at all hesitant to cite comic strips and rock 'n' roll, along with Dali, Lautreamont, Edgar Allen Poe, Baudelaire, and Verlaine, as visual and literary influences on her action-packed compositions. And although his was not a name that she mentioned in any of the artist statements that one has read, a certain kinship with René Magritte is also suggested in a painting such as "Door to the Ocean," in which a mysterious portal opens up in thin air for stylized blue torrents to pour through, while three blue stick figures stroll in formation along a shore littered with shipwreck debris.

"Scorpion Fish"

Indeed, no spectacle was too exotic or too elaborate for Michèle Vincent's brush, in paintings that often appear to depict an ongoing love story, co-starring "The Couple," figures straight out of a fairy tale. In "Perched on a Tree," the handsome blond hero and the beautiful brunette heroine convene happily out on a gnarled limb set against a brick wall plastered with a map-like melange of weathered posters, apparently suggesting significant sites in their personal journey together.

In another work called "The Unfinished City and The Tree," they are depicted in a more stylized form, cloaked in garments with triangular yellow and red patterns that, in the manner of camouflage, cause them to merge with the equally stylized bark of the tree under which they embrace. The tree grows from the brink of a cliff overlooking the spires and skeletal beams of a phantom city, which pierce the fog rising from the valley below to merge with the clouds above.

Here, Vincent employs a technique similar to the combination of classical precision and modernist fragmentation that Dali employed in certain paintings (and that Roy Lichtenstein later copied for his hard-eged, static renderings of large, "loose" action painting brushstrokes). Here, too, the artist Vincent creates an irregularly-shaped painted "frame" surrounding the central image. Indeed, among other advanced painterly attributes, it is her conscious use of such devices, despite her autodidactic beginnings, that makes Michèle Vincent far too sophisticated a painter to be diminuated by so-called "outsider" status.

In another painting titled "The Staircase and the Horse," the couple appears in a more ethereal realm. The vine-covered bannister and the steps of the spiral staircase on which they approach each other, clad in identical silken purple robes, are engulfed and erased by mists and wisps of cloud. Here, an eerily prophetic touch is that while he is a full length figure, she appears to float above the stairs, and like the staircase, to partially disperse in the mist.

Then there are paintings, such as "The Flight of the Couple," in which the long blonde tresses of a voluptuous beauty blend with the leonine mane of her handsome lover, as he reaches around to embrace her seminude torso from behind, and the ends of her deep blue cloak flare up around her like large wings. The fluffy, shadowed clouds, and soaring birds behind the couple, as well as the geometric shapes and slender crossing lines superimposed over the composition here and there, complete the effect of an early Christian icon — albeit for a decidedly secular and sensual era!

Another example of Vincent's dreamlike transformative gift, even when painting inanimate objects in an interior that can only be classified as a species of still-life, is seen in her complex picture "The Engine in Nature," where a metallic form that appears to be a rusted, old-fashioned steam locomotive is encrusted with an intricate array of bucolic organic matter and greenery in a setting simultaneously suggesting a light-filled greenhouse and a vaunted, high ceilinged railroad station. It is an imagistic coalescence of mechanistic and living matter, creating a seamless synthesis of growth and decay akin, in Vincent's own inimitable manner, to the Magic Realism of Ivan Albright.

"Her paintings tell a story," says Didier Thullier, who vows in her absence to devote himself to seeing that indeed, his wife's work gets the recognition that it rightfully deserves. "This is why we find recurring characters and animals in her paintings. They are never here by chance. They live their lives as Michèle lived hers."

Indeed, one can be confident that Michèle Vincent's story will endure, along with the vital essence of the living artist that she leaves us in her work. — Byron Coleman

Michèle Vincent (1952 - 2013)
Her work can be seen in the year-round salon at Montserrat Contemporary Art, 547 West 27th Street. Montserratgallery.com

SELF-PORTRAITURE

Continued from page 5

Conversely, the painters that Hall writes about agonize about how "to find an accommodation between sexual desire and genius, between human and artistic needs." He paraphrases Vasari, who "claimed that Raphael had died young as a result of his debaucheries, and that his art had declined as a result." He quotes Nietzche "the great exponent of art-making as a sublimated sexual act," who believed "Great artists have to be physically strong with lots of surplus sexual energy — for "without a certain overheating of the sexual system a Raphael is unthinkable ."

On the other hand — and here one must resist making an obvious and odious pun — the author suggests that Nietzche himself may have overdone relieving his own "overheating," when he tells us, in another context in the same chapter, that "Wagner had warned Nietzche's doctor that the philosopher masturbated too much."

Egon Schiele probably would not have been quite so judgmental, having made "wanking" the subject of more than one of his self-portraits. In "Self-Portrait in Black Cloak Masturbating," 1911, a work in gouache, watercolor and pencil on paper, the act appears less than pleasurable, the emaciated artist gazing out with the lowered head and dark, doleful eyes of concentration camp inmate, while fondling his huge tumescent penis with both hands.

The Prussian-born Expressionist Lovis Corinth also has his hands full in his 1903 oil on canvas, "Self-Portrait with his Wife," as his nude raven-haired young bride, Charlotte, her back glowing whitely with rude health, buries face in the breast of his peasant blouse. The middle aged painter appears strangely stiff and unresponsive even a bit besieged. As though nibbling the ends of his mustache with tension, he stands with his thumb through the hole of his palette, a bunch of brushes clutched in the same fist, a single brush in the other hand, its tip cut off by the edge of the canvas, staring over her creamy shoulder as if to ask the viewer, "What am I to do?"

"The voluptuous young Charlotte is preventing him from painting, even if only momentarily," is Hall's interpretation. "At the base of Corinth's picture is an Egyptian-style gold border, decorated with winged figures, whose colour matches the golden background. The implication is that Charlotte will determine whether he will ever again take flight. Or are they both already trapped inside an Egyptian tomb of their own making? In Henrik Ibsen's last play, "When We Dead Wake (1899), the sculptor Professor Rubek believes if he touches his model, or even desires her sensually, his artistic vision will be lost. Corinth tries not to touch or even look at Charlotte; but she is already too close for comfort."

Reading those words while remembering my own feelings as a young artist, when painting my beautiful young bride naked was, as I put it in my memoir, "invariably foreplay to the foreplay," I can only assume that, while I obviously possessed the passion, I must have been lacking in the dedication that long-term practice of the vocation requires!

By contrast, the German artist Paula Modersohn-Becker, a former student of Lovis Corinth and a member of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke's circle, had dedication to spare, an absolute necessity for a woman artist in her lifetime (1876-1907). Seeking as she wrote to Rilke "to become myself more and more," she left her husband, the painter Otto Modersohn, on the evening after his birthday.

Although already pregnant, she wrote him from Paris that she did not want to have his child. She then set to work on the life-size, three quarter length "Self-Portrait," 1906, which she inscribed, "This I painted at the age of 30 on my sixth wedding anniversary "P.B."

John Coplans, Self-Portrait (Back with Arms Above), 1984 Image credit: Tate, London. © The John Coplans Trust

Standing bare-breasted, against a yellow wall flecked with green strokes, wearing only an orange necklace and a white slip, the painter cradles her pregnant stomach between her hands, as if imagining what it would feel like to suckle a child.

Although Modersohn-Becker acknowledged the influences of Cezanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh for its linear clarity and vibrant color her work most resembles that of her French contemporary, Suzanne Valadon. Valadon was such a free spirit that, according to "The Obstacle Race," Germaine Greer's definitive history of women in art, even her son, the emotionally needy alcoholic painter of Paris street scenes Maurice Utrillo, "was the unsuccessful rival of her lovers."

Modersohn-Backer, whose subjects frequently included warm domestic and maternal scenes, was finally so divided by familial sentiment that she gave up her hope of escape, letting her husband lure her back from Paris.

She died of an embolism three weeks after giving birth to a daughter in 1907, making her "Self-Portrait, 1906," perhaps the most fateful picture in James Hall's splendidly written and valuable study of one of the most psychologically revealing genres in art history.

Body and Soul: The Art of Gail Comes

"TriHead"

Gail Comes brings to her interpretation of the human head and body a monumental quality more often encountered in sculpture than in her own chosen medium, painting. It has partly to do with lending a prominence to the anatomical volumes in the figures that she draws and paints, which few other artists can evoke on a two dimensional surface, and gives her compositions an unusual substance and power.

Although growing up on the Upper West Side "in a house filled with jazz musicians, dancers, actors, writers, and painters" whetted her interest in the arts, it was only after she discovered the music of John Coltrane, the paintings of Michelangelo, Van Gogh, and Francis Bacon — as well as the drawings of the 1960s underground cartoonist Robert Crumb, curiously enough, that she found her own vocation.

On second thought, perhaps not so curiously, since Crumb, although best known for defying taboos with outrageous subject matter new to comic strips, is an outstanding draftsman, and strong drawing is the armature on which Comes' own compositions are built. Indeed, she integrates drawing into her work in a unique manner, employing a sinuous line, which often anchors and bolsters her forms, along with generally spare areas of tone or color, to lend her paintings a quite distinctive formal presence.

In her present solo exhibition, Comes' large pencil drawing on board of Francis Bacon reveals the strength of her draftspersonship at its least adorned. Like that of a decapitated Roman emperor, the British painter's head, crowned by the ever-present pompadour that was the laurel of his vanity, is isolated at a haughty angle on the bare white ground. His bulging eyes still stare out defiantly from a face bloated by years of heavy alcoholic dissipation. His lips are those of a smirking cupid, reminding one that this is the man who, according to one witness-biographer, booed a tipsy Princess Margaret off the stage when she got up to sing at a private party; and when he was hissed at by some of the other guests, sneered back, "It was perfectly awful! Someone had to stop her!"

Comes' drawing of Bacon is not only a bold graphic statement but a character study capturing both the noble and demonic aspects of a complex personality.

Her prodigious drawing talent began to flourish in her teenage years. She studied anatomy and life drawing with Gustav Rehberger at the Art Students League; received an award from the Society of Arts and Letters; was admitted to the High School of Music and Art, and went on to further study at The Studio School, and Pratt Institute.

Comes' emblematic manner of merging abstract and figurative forms in a seamless synthesis is especially striking in her large, mainly monochromatic oil "Tri Head." Here, a monumental head with strong African features delineated by sinuously outlined biomorphic shapes, gray-shadowed in grissaille, is set against a solid metallic gold background. Contained within one of its ears is a smaller, more realistic face, while its hair is made up of stylized tubular coils, like the pipes in a church organ, calling to mind the pacifist poet Robert Lowell's memorable lines about being "a fire-breathing C.O . . . waiting sentence in a bull pen / beside a Negro boy with / curlicues of marijuana in his hair."

In Comes' "First Man," another large oil in a broader range of colors, a crouching Adam-like male with wise, accusing eyes and muscular arms crossed self-protectively across his bare chest, is set against a black rectangle suggesting a void. By contrast, in yet another large oil that Comes calls "Reclining Nude," the voluptuously beautiful female figure (who could be Adam's Eve), appears to transcend gravity, as she hovers in midair above a horizon dividing large areas of black and white.

Taken together, these two paintings could appear to symbolize the different positions of minority men and women in relation to being fully accepted into American society. But that's merely a subjective interpretation. What's finally inarguable, however, is the monumental dignity that Gail Comes imparts to every human image that she draws or paints. — Ed McCormack

Gail Comes, WSAC, Broadway Mall Community Center, 96th Street (center island). May 7 - 18, 2014

GALLERY&STUDIO
An International Art Journal
PUBLISHED BY

217 East 85th Street, PMB 228, New York, NY 10028
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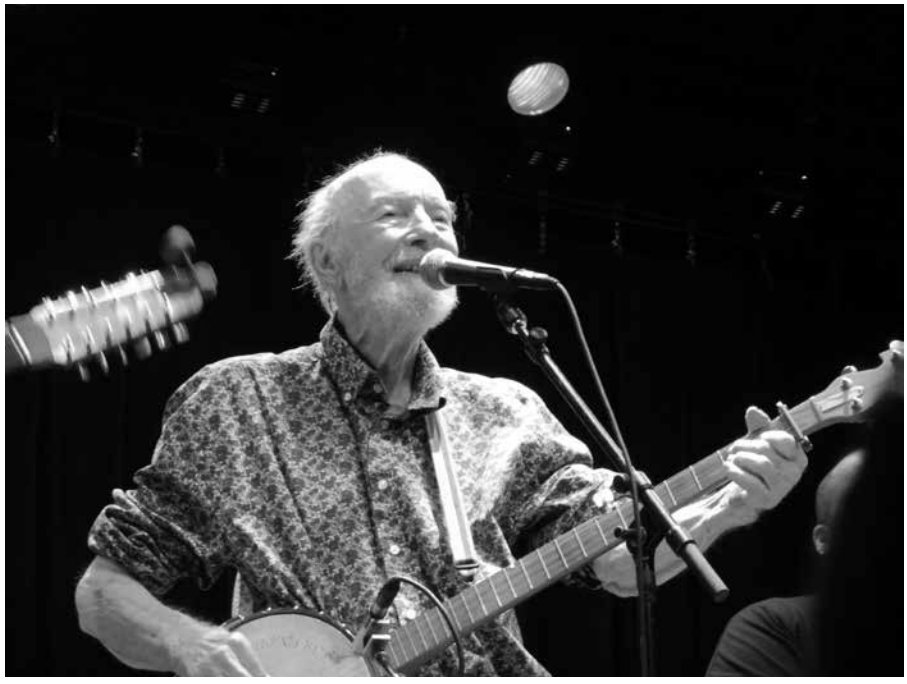
www.galleryandstudiomagazine.com

Remembering Pete

by Norman A. Ross



Pete Seeger Photo Norman Ross

There was suddenly a hand on my shoulder. When I turned around I saw it was Pete Seeger. He said "Norman, you have to get that song for *Broadside*!" I had been standing at the Broadside table at the 1982 "Great Hudson River Revival" sponsored by the sloop Clearwater, shortly after I had become the publisher of *Broadside—The Topical Song Magazine*. The song was "Harriet Tubman" (by Walter H. Robinson), about the brave lady who led slaves out of the south via the Underground Railroad. A group of women were standing opposite us, singing in harmony. It's a fabulous song.

Pete and his wife Toshi had launched the construction of the Clearwater in the mid '60s, in the days of the nascent environmental movement, with the hope that the boat could become a teaching tool. As always, Pete was ahead of his time. The Clearwater not only spearheaded the cleanup of the Hudson River, it set an example for millions of people around the world concerned with the quality of life in their local domains: "Think globally, act locally," said Pete, echoing Mao. Similar groups, with and without boats, were launched in myriad places.

One of the first times I saw Pete perform was on another boat—the Circle Line around Manhattan. In 1958 Pete was the main attraction for an annual fundraiser for the leftwing newspaper, *The National Guardian*. I had just started buying his records and had seen him in Carnegie Hall—and there he was, standing next to me, head raised, banjo pointing to the stars, and singing songs I had just started learning to sing and play on guitar. (Pete was probably the most accessible famous person in the world.)

Because of his politics and the 1950s 'red scare,' Pete was blacklisted from the radio and television—and even from concert halls and clubs. He built a sort of career singing at children's camps, in college auditoriums and for labor and progressive organizations, eking out a living while living in a log cabin he had built himself, hoping someday to have running water and electricity! By 1963 he was able to take a trip around the world with his wife Toshi and their three children, singing in one country after another and learning more songs along the way.

Norman Ross and Pete Seeger Photo Leslie Ross

Called before the House Un-American Activities Committee in the '50s, he took what was probably the bravest position of any of the hundreds of people attacked by the notorious committee, telling them that he "wasn't interested" in their questions, and that he refused to answer them—not invoking either the First or Fifth Amendment, but simply because what the Committee wanted to know was none of their business! (Many other progressives who were called to testify invoked the Fifth, or, like Burl Ives, 'named names,' which was, of course, far worse. More than one committed suicide afterward!) When they asked Pete if he had "been singing for other people" prior to World War II, he replied that he had begun in 1925—that is, when he was six years old! One might say that he held the committee in disdain. Although he was sentenced to a year in prison for contempt (of the contemptible), he never had to serve.

Pointing his head high while singing unfortunately stretched Pete's vocal chords, resulting in the sad early loss of his voice. But Pete never stopped singing and only slowed down until well after his 94th birthday, and shortly after his wife Toshi had passed away at the age of 91 after a marriage that lasted 70 years. In his early 90s he was still picketing, marching down Broadway on crutches and performing at Carnegie Hall, where I last saw him this past November. He was scheduled to appear at yet another concert on January 17th, but by then he was 'under the weather' and fading.

Because of my having taken over the nearly defunct *Broadside*, and because I published 39 hour-long TV shows ("Rainbow Quest"), starring Pete that he produced himself in the '60s I got to know both Pete and Toshi. She was an incredible lady with a fantastic memory. A few years ago I was on my way to a small benefit Pete was doing for the War Resisters' League—maybe 50 people in a little room. A block from the venue I came upon Toshi walking alone and asked if I could walk with her. "Hi Norman," she said. "Fine, if you don't mind walking slowly." We eventually sat down not far from each other, me saving a seat for my wife, she saving a seat for Pete. When Leslie arrived I pointed out Toshi. When Pete arrived, Toshi said to him in a voice quite audible to me, "Pete, Norman Ross is here!" What an honor—that Toshi thought it was important to mention my presence to Pete.

My granddaughter has been going to sleep listening to a Pete CD every night for the past year. It plays all night long. And there's hardly a day that I don't listen to Pete myself on my iPod—Pete solo, Pete with the Weavers, Pete with Woody Guthrie, etc.—at least a thousand songs! And I'm still listening every day, and as in the past, waiting for the next concert.

Norman Ross and Ed McCormack have been friends since the late 1950s, when they were both 16-year-old aspiring beatniks. Norman went on to bigger and better things. To read his lengthly interview with Pete about 10 years ago, go to http://rosspub.com/norman_ross_march.htm

Alex Braverman's Brave New World

The richly layered simultaneity of urban streets is dramatically evoked in the Lithuanian-American photographer Alex Braverman's series "New York City 2014: Synchronicity."

"Photography is about what doesn't meet the eye," says Braverman, born in Lithuania, who has lived and worked for long periods in Israel and South Africa, and made another speciality of capturing dancers in motion, a subject he sometimes merges with his cityscapes in a striking synthesis of frenetic motion and grace.

Braverman's artistic credo comes alive in his present series, particularly in pictures in which he superimposes bustling crowds over the cubistically fractured planes of looming architecture with a kinetic energy and fiery colors akin to Futurism. For all their fascination with machine age dynamism, however, neither Italian Futurists such as Balla, Boccioni, and Carra, nor Russian Cubo-futurists like Malevich and Company could have envisioned the contemporary sense of movement and chromatic vibrancy that Braverman brings to images such as "Michigan Avenue # 59."

Like many of his major pieces, this dazzling color photographic print on metal measures sixty by forty inches, a scale that lends it a physical presence and an impact more often associated with painting than photography. The staggered and layered effects that Braverman achieves through the superimposition and visual interweaving of buildings, pedestrians, and mechanical elements such as traffic and stoplights, as well through the multiplying reflections in glass department store display windows on that much traveled Chicago thoroughfare, creates a composition of unusually kaleidoscopic complexity.

Yet despite being filtered through the visual shredding machine of Alex Braverman's twenty-first century sensibility, the underlying sense of order that the artist imposes on the seeming chaos of the city life by virtue of his skillful manipulation of shapes and colors results in an image as visually coherent as any classical composition. Indeed "Michigan Avenue # 59" captures the frantic zeitgeist of our time as authentically as the Old Masters captured the more placid pace of people in the plazas and public squares of an earlier time.

But even in the fast-paced modern city, Braverman can find elements of eternal calm by focusing his gaze upward, as seen in another color print titled "Chicago Loop Landmarks # 43-46," in which metallically streamlined futuristic skyscrapers and ornately-carved classical stone domes are artfully juxtaposed. By contrast, another composition called "Merchandise Mart # 104–30–61–87," captures the complex imagistic melange of the modern mercantile mall, with its layered stalls and kiosks, neon signage, and overlapping shadows and mirror images of dreamy shoppers, such as the svelte young fashionista in dark glasses at the center of the composition, who appears, like some of Braverman's leaping dancers, to be strolling along in midair, as she gazes around at all the surrounding consumer treasures on offer.

Michigan Avenue # 59

In a another another large print called "Yin Wall City," comprised of images of a famous shopping center in Chicago's Chinatown,

Continued on page 24

Alex Braverman, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, April 22 - May 13, 2014
Reception: Thursday, May 1, 6 -8 pm

Flora Jacobson: Not Your Latest Art World "Twinkie"

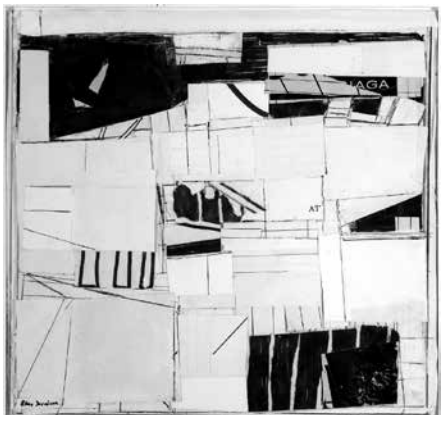
Art that is intimate, intelligent, humane, and has an unassuming wit about it has a way of surviving its context and standing out, even in an era when hype is high, surprises are few, and the thrill of discovery is practically nonexistent.

Last issue we ran a piece about viewing a show of small, gemlike mixed media collages by an artist named Flora Jacobson in a crowded and kinetic unisex hair salon, where in order to take notes, one had to avoid colliding with lithe fashionistas waving lethal-looking scissors, as they wiggled around to a disco beat.

Weeks later, we were pleased to learn, in a gracious thank you note from the artist, that Michael Lucas, director of Phyllis Lucas Gallery / Old Print Center, read our review, contacted her, and Flora Jacobson now has another solo exhibition coming up in a more suitably serene venue.

After all, unlike a young man named Oscar Murillo, recently featured in a front page feature in the Arts & Leisure section of The New York Times headlined "Art World Places Its Bet," who is being hailed as "the 21st-century Basquiat," Jacobson is no "Twinkie" (a term coined by my wife and editor, Jeannie McCormack, for brand new art world product with a long shelf life).

Far from it: she has a Masters in Social Work from Boston University and has been a practicing psychotherapy for 35 years. And although she escaped our attention until we caught her show at the hair salon, she has exhibited her art in various venues in Manhattan and Provincetown for almost as long. It is doubtful, however, that any of them could have been as venerable or as well suited to the blithe spirit and intimate scale of her work as Phyllis Lucas, an Upper East Side landmark since 1928 with an atmosphere more like Dickens' Old Curiosity Shop than your usual sterile white cube in Chelsea.



"A View from the Bridge in Shelter Island"

The congenial director, Michael Lucas, who professionally reframed the 35 or so works he selected, had them laid out on two large tables when we stopped by one

Continued on page 24

"Separation"

Flora Jacobson, Phyllis Lucas Gallery/Old Print Center, 235 East 60th Street, May 1 - 31, 2014

"Expressions 2014": In Praise of Cool Artists Not Trying to Be Hot

In an art world era when hordes of ambitious but unimaginative art yuppies, brand new BFA's from the more trendy Academies clutched firmly in hand, are tripping over each other to jump on the passing bandwagon of The Next Hot Thing, one can only be grateful for artists who go their own way, with little regard for current trends and fashions.

Mark Lerer

One such cool character is a graphic artist named Mark Lerer, who makes generally modest-sized pen and ink in a style that pays tribute to, rather than parodying, those of the classic comicstrip and comicbook artists. Lerer could add a little irony to the mix, switch from pen and ink on paper to acrylics on large canvases à la Roy Lichtenstein, and promote himself as The Next Hot Superhero of Neo-Political Post-Pop Chic. Or, obviously being an accomplished enough draftsman, he could be illustrating graphic novels. However, he prefers to create independent images such as a drawing he is showing in "Expressions 2014," the 10th anniversary exhibition of a loosely associated group of independent artistic spirits who periodically show together in Chelsea.

In a style combining a nervous line with atmospheric patches of black India ink shadow à la Joe Kubert, it depicts Batman. Crouched on a rooftop adorned with one of those bronze Art Deco eagle's beaks that are classic comicbook props, with the gothic skyscraper spires of Gotham City receding in the background, the "Dark Knight" appears to be peering down. He must be surveilling The Joker or some other arch villain, one thinks as first glance, before realizing that Batman, like probably everybody else in Gotham, is checking text messages on his smart phone!

Barbara Cuthel is another gifted artist who does not appear eager to jump on any bandwagons. Defying the cult of ugliness so popular in many pseudo-sophisticated circles today, her work is beautiful, upbeat, and life-affirming. Two of the most direct examples of these laudable qualities in Cuthel's work can be seen in the pair of pastels that she calls, respectively, "February Sunset" and "Evening Clouds." The former is a vibrant vision of "color as light," to borrow a phrase from J.M.W. Turner, whose own "Sunset," c. 1830-5," in the collection of Tate London, is widely considered to be one of the finest depictions of its subject ever put to canvas.

While it would be puffery to compare Cuthel's small picture in soft pastels to that British master's large oil, her luminous evocation of ethereal blue, pink, and golden yellow hues descending behind silhouetted hills nonetheless made me remember Rimbaud's lovely line "I have seen the sunset stained with mystic wonders." And "Evening Clouds," a companion work in the same medium, of shapely, almost Day-Glo pink clouds floating across a cerulean sky, is every bit as chromatically vibrant.

Cuthel transforms simple subjects in a manner as magical and poetic as that of

Barbara Cuthel

the recently rediscovered 1950s visual poet Loren McIver. One the most appealing of these is "Lantern Bird House," a mixed media composition depicting a blue bird nesting in one of those quaint decorative lanterns that developers attach to a brick house, presumably to lend it a sense of "homeyness." But like all of Cuthel's images this simple little picture speaks of larger ideas; here, particularly, the universal need to find a safe haven in a complex, often hostile environment.

Like the South African draftsman, video animator and filmmaker William Kentridge, Linda Ganus Albulescu is a creator of nonlinear postmodern narratives who often finds inspiration for her work in topical subjects gleaned from headlines and the evening news, interpreting them with a subtle, thoughtful obliqueness that can affect us more deeply and subliminally than the head-on tragedy with which mass media force-feeds us daily.

Last year Ganus Albulescu created a series of powerful paintings, in response to Superstorm Sandy, of waves rolling into shore, skillfully spun to suggest impending split second menace rather than the natural lyricism such a subject normally suggests. Here, she focuses in on the "New Cold War" in a series of various sized paintings in acrylic on panel or canvas — which she suggests "may be connected like rebuses or exquisite corpses" — on the lurking possibility of New Cold War that began when Moscow granted asylum to Edward Snowdon and is now threatening to heat up over the situation in Ukraine.

Ganus Albulescu relates these developments to the 50th anniversary of two major Hollywood films, the thriller-drama "Fail Safe" and the black comedy "Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and love the Bomb," both based on the same novel about a Cold War nuclear crisis and released in 1964.

A close-up grisaille portrait of Henry Fonda as the anxious U.S. president in "Fail Safe" faced with fielding the crisis is played off against a pale, strained and stressed "Russian Ballerina" rehearsing in one of Moscow's notoriously rigorous ballet schools with her arms outstretched as if for a crucifixion.

As with her portraits, the agitated energy of Linda Ganus Albulescu's fluent brushwork adds further tension to related paintings such as "Mantabot," depicting an underwater drone resembling a robotic shark currently being developed by the U.S. navy, and "Mines," explosives with chains attached to spike-studded steels ball that resemble 21st century mass destructive updates of the medieval mace.

By contrast, Linda Dujack, the painter and printmaker who has also been serving as the curator of the "Expressions" group's exhibitions for the past ten years, employs the basic shape of a simple A-frame structure as a recurring staple of her hermetic miniaturist aesthetic.

Along with delicate two-dimensional mixed media composition— in which strategically placed bits of color, the cut edges of paper collage elements, and fragments of print typography, such as the potent word "Kiss" in one piece, project a compelling visual poetry—Dujack has introduced a new

Linda Ganus Albulescu

physical ruggedness to her oeuvre in recent found wood constructions. Most surprising of these is "Fifty Shades," a small, unpainted structure of weathered, unpainted wood, wrapped with wire, suggesting a condemned and boarded up bird house.

It seems a stark departure for an artist who refers to her studio as "a house that shelters daydreams." Still, Linda Dujack's art remains a fanciful refuge, as seen in another new construction she calls "Red," comprised of three well-weathered scraps of found wood, stacked one atop the other. The shape of the top piece is pyramidal providing the peak at the apex of her favored A-frame house structure. But three same-length nails sticking out on its side like feathers on a conical hat also imbue it with the suggestion of a jaunty figurative presence. The middle piece of wood is painted a sublimely matte shade of red, with some of the color chipped off, revealing bits of the raw wood underneath. Two drilled holes, though vertically placed one above the other, nonetheless create the impression of eyes, perhaps as in one of Picasso's faces with displaced features. The lower piece, pointed at one end, rounded at the other, is longer, narrower, and splintery, streaked here and there with powdery white spots of white paint. Such almost accidental-seeming details lend Dujack's their peculiarly exquisite aesthetic frisson.

— Ed McCormack

Linda Dujack

Expressions 2014, New Century Artists, 530 West 25th Street, Suite 406, April 1 - 19, 2014. Receptions: Thursday, April 3, 6 - 8 pm and Saturday, April 5, 3 - 6 pm.

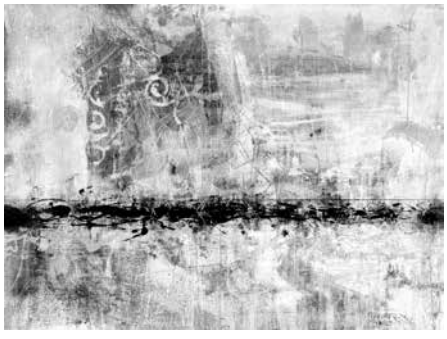
Charles Conrardy is Adamant About Abstraction

While a conservative artist once dismissed painting abstractly as being "like playing tennis without a net," Charles Conrardy, a former painter of realistic landscapes regards nonobjective art as liberating and exhilarating. And maintains that an absence of obstruction is what it's actually all about!

"A sunrise is already perfect, cannot be replicated, so why try to improve on it?" he asks, and adds: "Abstract paintings permit me the freedom to try whatever I can think of without violating rules, because there are no rules. In the past twenty years I have noticed, however, that Color, Design, Line and Texture have become mainstays of my work. It's become my habit to incorporate these four elements into my paintings, and I hope my artwork is something you have never seen before."

There is no conviction quite so strong as that of a convert! Conrardy is every bit as adamant about his belief in pure painting as some New York School painters were about the power of pure gesture and art for its own sake, back in the heyday of Abstract Expressionism. It's a refreshing stance in the postmodern era, when so many painters are in the habit of hedging their bets and it has become the habit of so many viewers to Rorschach simply nonexistent "found" imagery into nonobjective compositions.

Indeed Conrardy takes greater pains than most to avoid titles that allude to specific imagery. "Tarnished Brass," for example, is what he calls one mixed media work on canvas. But the title refers only to the rusty reddish hues that dominate a surface in which the primary elements are a subtle range of sensuously distressed scored, rubbed, and scoured textural effects. These are interspersed with energetic splashes of liquified black pigment, which also energize and enhance a composition in which the primary form is a single vertical black line that appears as though laid down the center of the canvas with a single, precise swipe of a thick charcoal stick.



"Equatic Cross"

Intersecting this line are phantom cursive shapes, as though naturally "photographed" by sunlight or stenciled over time by fallen fragments of metal scrollwork, further enhancing the effect of a work, like those of Antoni Tapies, born of mystery rather than method, whose only subject is the inner, metaphysical substance of material reality.

Equally evocative among Conrardy's compositions are a monochromatic mixed-media work called "Frozen Waste II," in which rectangular shapes as shot through with glimmerings of light, as those in Mark Rothko's darkest veils of black, are overlaid by a maze of scored lines suggesting some primitive cosmic map; and "Equatic Cross," a contrastingly lyrical coloristic tour de force of subdued dirty pink hues enlivened by bursts of orange and a roughly brushed thick black stripe spanning the composition three quarters of the way down the canvas that, respecting Conrardy's vehement dismissal of recognizable subject matter, one must struggle not to read as a horizon line. Although despite its title, no cruciform was visible in the previous work, a cross is clearly delineated in the golden yellow area at the center of the mixed media painting on canvas called "Circles, Squares, and Rectangles," where the four dominant squares of the composition converge.

Here again, one is tempted to call attention to the sense of shadowy gray figures and elements of landscape, partially submerged in the manner of palimpsests or pentimento beneath the earthy semitranslucent sienna. But the subtle coloristic and textural nuances, combined with the indomitable strength of Charles Conrardy's composition, after all, give one more than enough to contemplate and savor.

— Wilson Wong

Charles Conrardy, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, April 22 - May 13, 2014 Reception: Thursday, May 1, 6 -8 pm

Wendy Shalen: Domestic Art in a Great Tradition

When I learned that Wendy Shalen had exhibited at Allan Stone Gallery, it made perfect sense to me. I knew Allan Stone from the late 1960s, until shortly before his death in 2006. When I first met him I still considered myself a visual artist and was showing my work downtown in the 10th Street scene. But like most of my friends, I was hoping to graduate to an uptown venue. And the Allan Stone Gallery, then on 86th Street, just off Madison, was the one I had in mind.

For while Allan had made his reputation as one of the early champions of the Abstract Expressionists (his purchase of a de Kooning drawing on the allowance his father gave him when he was still in Harvard Law School almost got him disinherited!), he had incredibly catholic taste, and along with de Kooning, Gorky, and Kline, collected and exhibited figurative artists like Wayne Thiebaud, Richard Estes, and Gregory Gillespie.

It was all about the quality of the work itself, regardless of "school" or style. And, unlike the other uptown dealers, who hid behind receptionists and glass partitions, Allan was willing to at least look at the work of a wild-eyed, longhaired hippie kid who walked in off the street without an appointment. I wasn't quite ready, but the important thing was that he did not discourage me. He told me to come back and show him new work whenever I had some. Neither of us could have imagined then that I would end up a writer, rather than a painter, and would eventually write occasional catalog essays for exhibitions at Allan Stone Gallery. In fact, I wrote all kinds of other things as well, but one of the professional compliments I prized most was when, in his unpretentious, plainspoken way, Allan introduced me to someone in the gallery as "a no bullshit art writer."

"Sophie's Crocheted Pearl Collar"

So it pleases me now to know that Allan Stone shared my high estimation of the drawings and paintings of Wendy Shalen, a realist who has been teaching Drawing and Painting from Life for more than 30 years at The Art Students League.

"One of my principle goals as an artist," Shalen says in the League's catalog, "is to capture and communicate intuitive responses to a subject, carefully and sensitively, whether I am working from a model, landscape or still life."

One of the most affecting images scheduled for inclusion in Shalen's upcoming solo exhibition, "Family Matters," at Prince Street Gallery, is "Mom at 101." This beautifully delineated and emotionally-laden likeness in charcoal on Rives which depicts the artist's bedridden centenarian mother reclining on her back in one of those patterned hospital gowns that tend to depersonalize the elderly and the ailing. Shalen, however, shows us an individual rather than a stereotypical image of old-age.

"Mom at 101"

The woman dozes in profile. Her slack arms and gnarled hands are as distinctly rendered and expressive as her lined face, still poignantly possessed of a strong sense of character and personality, however still or mute ("...in bed, unable to walk or speak," is how her daughter describes her, "yet free of pain and with a strong heart..."). The drawing is filled with deep emotional sentiment; yet it is not at all sentimental (an important distinction).

"Mom at 101" is just one work among a remarkable autobiographical series of drawings, paintings, watercolors, drypoint etchings, monoprints, and an innovative series of self-portraits incorporating embossments of Shalen's grandmother Sophie's lacework.

"In this exhibition, I put aside my recent environmental art and draw inspiration from my 101-year-old mother, baby granddaughter, other relatives, and our family dog," the artist explains. "The show focuses on contrasts — between generations, sensibilities, materials and techniques. I hope to capture and communicate emotions that we share — watching my late grandmother struggle with dementia and the fear of death at 90 . . . At the same time, I celebrate my daughter's excitement and exhaustion in caring for a newborn, the formal joy of my parents' wedding day, and the amazing gift of having twins. The work, comprising watercolor, charcoal, graphite and silverpoint drawings, and monoprints done with drypoint, is in part from life and in part inspired by a recently discovered, 70-year old album of family photographs."

The family photos, under Shalen's hand, live and breathe with an immediacy akin to her drawings from life. Suddenly in her graphite drawing on paper, "Mom Wedding Day" the elderly woman in the hospital gown is restored to youthful dark-haired dark-eyed beauty, as she fixes the viewer in an intelligent formal gaze, betraying only the slightest hint of a brand new bride's nervous timidity, just as only her old fashioned bobbed and waved hairdo gives away the period of the picture. The same goes for the clean-cut good-looking young man in the companion graphite drawing,"Dad Wedding Day," gazing out with glittering eyes and a more slightly confident smile; only the too high collar of his white shirt, the too wide silken lapels of his tuxedo, and the Gatsby center-part in his slickly pomaded head tip you off that he is not a 21st century bridegroom.

Shalen's family narrative again moves jarringly closer to the present in her powerful portraits of her grandmother, Sophie. In the charcoal drawing, "Sophie at Ninety," the old woman raises a hand to her furrowed brow in

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Scott Forsyth: Capturing the Land's Grandeur

As Ansel Adams felt about the American landscape particularly, Yosemite Valley, the Canadian Photographer Scott Forsyth seems to feel about the entire terrain of his own native county.

"I was born and raised in southern Ontario," Forsyth, a family doctor / artist in the tradition of poet / physician William Carlos Williams, states, "along the shoreline of the Great Lakes — remnants of the last Ice Age containing one fifth of the world's fresh water. I grew up with the rhythmic pulse of waves lapping on a stony beach, and falling asleep to the sound of a fog horn aiding cargo ships in the thick darkness."

Forsyth is even more articulate with his camera, depicting what he describes as "the sheer magnitude and diversity of Canada's geographical regions, which captured his imagination at an early age. That he drew and painted as a child beside his grandmother, a landscape painter, has obviously influenced his approach to his current medium, which he discovered during his internship. Although drawn to photography by what he refers to as "it's physical connection to reality, through the camera's literal translation of light energy into raw electronic data," unlike photographic purists who adhere to older methods, he takes a painterly approach, shooting digitally and

"Timeless Reflection"

never hesitating to use Photoshop to edit and tweak his "digital negatives" in the process of creating his large-scale giclee prints on paper.

He also employs techniques such as multiple exposures, elapsed time, variations of shutter speed and exposure duration, to create images ranging stylistically from sharp-focus realism to Impressionism.

At times his coloristic enhancement of his pictures results in a chromatic heightening reminiscent of the Fauvist painters. In his glicee print "Symmetrical Serenity," for one glowing example, an image of a lone silhouetted sailor in a canoe traverses a vast purple lake, further enlivened by the golden curving of a flowing wave, under a pale purple sky and a deeper purple mountain range, the hues are as intense as those in a Fauvist canvas by Matisse, Derain, or Vlaminck.

Also vibrant, in a somewhat more subdued nocturnal manner perhaps closer in spirit to Symbolists and Romantics such as Redon and Turner, Forsyth's "Lava Light Meets the Milky Way," shows a multitude of stars, sprinkled like diamond dust over blue velvet, across an endless night sky hovering over black hills and a body of water lit by a brilliant burst of fiery gold.

Indeed, the painterly effects that Forsyth achieves with his medium appear endlessly varied. "Timeless Reflection." in which an entire pine forest hovering over, and partially engulfing, four tiny cabins on the opposite shore with craggy rocks and boulders in the foreground evokes one of Marsden Hartley's rugged Maine marine scenes. "Beacon of the Past" is a vision of a lighthouse jutting over rocks, which melds Hopper-esque desolation with a hint of Surrealism, while "Circle of Time," is a metaphysical fantasy verging on total abstraction, in which a huge blue and white spiral suggesting amplified moonlight

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Scott Forsyth, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, March 28 - April 17, 2014. Reception: Thursday, April 3, 6 - 8pm

African-American History in the Present Tense

As befits an exhibition celebrating Black History Month, narrative played a prominent role in "Black Renaissance 2014," a recent group show curated by participating artist Sonia Barnett. Monique Serres a talented and gutsy realist painter depicted that harrowing historical history most graphically in her dramatic oil on canvas "Dismembered Body of Emperor," in which a frightened slave woman hides furtively in the shadows, near the body of a slain loved one and fallen horse, while shadowy mounted figures cross a small bridge against a fiery orange sky.

In his composition, "Hide and Seek," another gifted realist, Nate Ladson, depicts small boys with cap pistols on an urban stoop engaged in an imaginary gun battle, while a little girl huddles against the doorway in the background, playing at being frightened. One of the kids in Ladson's beautifully organized neoclassical composition wears an old-fashioned newsboy's cap and knickers, suggesting the artist's possible nostalgia for a bygone era, when the guns of youths forced to grow up in the ghetto were still toys, rather than real.

Nostalgia is also present in two evocative photo collages by Sandra Brannon, each with its distinct own mood. "Harlem on My Mind" depicts the style and culture of a community in a mellow composition, featuring a youthful jazz band, a fashionable young woman in a fur coat, and a thriving verdant tree set against a row of well kept brownstones, suggesting "Sugar Hill." By contrast, Brannon's "Remembering 1965" is a more tumultuous, yet exhilarating, homage to the Civil Rights struggle, juxtaposing a fragment of the Emancipation Proclamation with charred edges, with images of Medgar Evers and Dr. King with freedom marchers and maps of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia.

Margot Mead, an artist who keeps growing and expanding her range of expression, surprised us once again. Mead's brilliantly colorful mixed-media work on canvas, "The Unforgettable," combined abstract elements — varying from stratospheric strips of sky and cloud, to stripes in the hues of both the African and American flags, to nocturnal stars — juxtaposed in a grid with photographic images of African-American Jazz Divas such as Nina Simone, Billy Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan.

Carole Barlowe is an artist with a distinctive collage style, combining relief-like cutout figures created from foam board with architectural backgrounds and interiors brightly painted in flat, clean acrylics that also function as geometric abstractions. Here, Barlowe was represented by "NYC Jazz Concert," in which three black spectators, one dressed in Afrocentric style are seen watching a lone saxophonist in an otherwise almost empty theater, suggesting how a great American art form is sadly ignored by a public infatuated by more superficial, commercial musical modes. Equally poignant in another manner, Barlowe's "Memories" depicts a lonely-looking elderly woman clutching a tote bag in her lap in a subway car in which the artist's colors are as subtly harmonized as those of Milton Avery.

Dammika D. Ranasinghe's monochromatic work in crayon on canvas paper, "Cultural Expressions," a bold profile of a man with strong features accented by a pencil-thin mustache, has an art brut directness, coupled with the semiabstract solidity of Ivory Coast masks and sculptures. By contrast, Ranasinghe's abstract works in watercolor and acrylic on canvas paper tend toward overall compositions energized by vibrant daubs of shimmering color.

Working in watercolor on paper, Dorethea T. Scott favors forms evocative of landscape, if

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WSAC, Black Renaissance 2014, recently seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, 96th St. (center island)

Photographic Purist Nadine Levin's Naked Eye

One thinks first of Andrew Wyeth, on seeing Nadine Levin's Giclee print on canvas "Cottonwood Church." What grabs you is the deadpan American gothic plainness of this image of a weathered wooden colonial structure, standing along a desolate country road, beside a gnarled tree, its bare black limbs clawing like arthritic fingers at a bare white sky. It is a picture whose beauty lies in its utter starkness.

Just as memorable is Levin's "Forgotten," in which an old barn and a grain elevator stand side by side like two generations of sharecroppers on a flat, dusty plain that appears to define the term "scorched earth." The unforgiving starkness of these pictures harks back to Walker Evens and other photographic purists. Indeed, Levin eschews all the special effects, chromatic razzle dazzle, visual manipulation of the digital revolution, and other forms of image manipulation. Relying on light filters, and light alone, she states, "I try to capture simple images from everyday life that we so often overlook and present them as art."

In the West, the adventurous artist — who has loved photography ever since childhood, but dedicated herself to it more wholeheartedly after surviving a life-threatening brain aneurism, often pursues

"Cottonwood Church"

images on horseback. She also employs infrared photography to call upon frequencies of light below the visible spectrum and imbue certain images with a rarefied phosphorescence.

"My inspiration is nature," Levin says. "To be able to photograph nature in an altered form solely through the use of infrared light, allows me to be true to my love of traditional photography and yet present it in a more contemporary and thought provoking manner."

One of the most lyrical examples of the infrared technique can be seen in "Twinkling," a close-up of leaves sprinkled with buds that glow and sparkle like stars. Others are "Nice Curves," in which a plant form exudes a sensuality akin to Robert Mapplethorpe, and "Aging Gracefully 2," where the spreading limbs delicate pink leaves of a magnificent old tree spread out swelteringly, as though embracing the entire surrounding landscape.

This rarefied radiance also enlivens "Clouds Over Paradise," in which high-stacked cumulonimbi fill an enormous sky above a lone palm tree in the lower right hand corner of the composition. Its leafy limbs are in perfect visual harmony with the soft cloud shapes above. Yes another magnificent cloud formation of longer and flatter dimensions fans out over a row of trees along the higher horizon-line of the yet another panoramic print that Levin calls "Movin' Along."

In contrast to her expansive vistas, Capturing close-ups of plant life set against either dark or light contrasting backgrounds is another area of nature photography in which Levin excels, as seen in the compositions she has titled "Umbrella Plant 1," "Outstretched Hands," and "Reaching

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Nadine Levin, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, May 16 - June 5, 2014. Reception: Thursday, May 22, 6 - 8pm

Mapping the Elusive Nature of Specific Locales

Exactly what do we mean when we speak of " sense of place?" "Everywhere," a recent group survey curated by the photographer Jack Cesareo, stopped short of giving us a definitive answer, but presented several approaches to asking this eternal question.

"Caribbean Sunset," a gorgeous color print by G.H. Strauss captured an almost unearthly beauty with luminous rays, emanating from the fiery orb on the horizon line, gilding the edges of shadowy clouds scattered over dramatically silhouetted palm trees. Yet Calvin Eagle made a good case for Coney Island as an alternate destination for those seeking paradise on a tighter budget, with his digital prints of festive crowds on the boardwalk. And Jean Prytyskacz's pictures of grafitti-covered walls in Soho, framed by the artist's eye as artfully as miniature abstract expressionist paintings, evoked a past era when eye-boggling spray-can art was everywhere in New York City.

Arthur Caligas apparently shows us an Asian suburb in his digital print of a charmingly house combining aspects of a pagoda and a Victorian mansion; but even this eclectic architectural curiosity is blazingly upstaged by "The Yellow Tree" in his digital print of that title. In Herbert Fogelson's visually witty "Ulster County N.Y. Cows," on the other hand, the four bovines in a verdant field make clear with their blasé yet proprietary gaze that we are intruding into their private place.

When it comes to strange geological formations no other place can match "Bryce Canyon, Utah," named for Mormon Ebenezer Bryce, who came there in 1875 with his wife (wives?) to settle the place. Cornelius Mead's digital photos explore the canyon's uniquely shaped red rocks and brilliant blue sky for both their abstract possibilities and heightened colors. JD Morrison, often something of a chromatic magician in his use of archival pigment ink on Canson gloss photo paper to lend a surreal quality to his pictures, applies glowing red and green hues to make the chandeliers dangling from the majestic vaulted ceiling of "Peter and Paul Cathedral, St. Petersburg, Russia," suggest bunches of cherries on a tree.

Steven Weintraub is another digital whiz who makes state of the art technology an integral element of his aesthetic, in his series "Faroe Islands." By printing these images of islands in the Gulf Coast, halfway between Norway and Denmark, boasting the highest seacliffs in Europe, on metallic paper, Weintraub makes them look like some desolate terrain in "The Twilight Zone."

While we're talking television, classic and new wave, one can't resist noting that Deena Weintraub's "New Mexico Byroads" series evokes some funky location in "Breaking Bad." Deena Weintraub, however, employs the elegant monotones of the black and white silver gelatin print to imbue her overgrown grass and feral looking stray dogs in an automobile graveyard with an incongruous elegance.

By contrast Thom Taylor employs the medium of the digital metallic print, in both color and black and white, to create architectural studies of houses in Philadelphia and Massachusetts with the pristine precision of early American primitive paintings.

George Cavalletto's color pictures of a woman with a deadpan expression talking on a telephone, a stealthy looking man exiting a neon-glowing Asian diner, and a deserted public park in the rain, project all the atmospheric drama of film noir stills.

By now, "Everywhere" exhibition curator Jack Cesareo's bicycle-hauled giant pink-iced cupcake, which has probably been photographed in more locations than Lady Gaga, upstages one of the U.S. government's most recognizable landmarks in "The Capital, Washington D.C." One has to wonder what the conceptualist / photographer and his monumental traveling confection could possibly do for an encore!

— Peter Wiley

"Everywhere," recently seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, 96th St. (center island)

Clicking the Moment on That Which Vanishes

Flying in the face of Fran Lebowitz's quip about modern poetry, "It is generally inhumane to detain a fleeting insight," it would appear that the resourceful Italian artist/curator Stefania Carrozzini creates a group show by hoarding whatever such musings occur to her, then presenting them to select artists like a Zen master dispensing koans — the paradoxical, sometimes even non-sensical, sayings such spiritual teachers dispense to students to inspire meditation.

Her most recent such venture, "Clicking the moment: The Ephemeral and its Opposite," evolved from questions such as "How can you determine if the ephemeral by its very nature defies definition? What is Ephemeral? Ephemeral means that which is transient; but hasn't art always wanted to challenge time to look to the eternal?"

Ask a Zen question and you'll get a Zen painting, seemed to be the attitude of Donata Deflorian, an avant garde saxophonist and visual artist, with a penchant for mixing her two forms of expression, who responded with scroll-like abstraction in the swift gestural tradition of literati ink painting, albeit with vibrant veils of translucent color in place of the usual monochromatic gray washes.

Marea Atkinson, an adjunct lecturer, researcher, and former head of printmaking at the University of South Australia, who recently presented her installation, The City of Stars at the Hayden Planetarium in New York City, responded with a work called "Labyrinth XVI," featuring a solar sphere glowing out of a square void set against a burnt orange border embellished with traces of delicate plant forms resembling tiny details in an ancient Chinese landscape painting.

Digital photographic artist Cristina Madeyski created a fanciful tableaux centered on two fairylike female beings, gracefully dancing hand-in-hand amid floating bubbles and garishly colored abstract forms resembling undersea flora in some lost Atlantis of the Jungian collective unconscious — or else in some equally ephemeral kitschy Las Vegas production number on the same theme!

Tina Parotti, best known for her "Dying Nature' series of mostly figurative ecological protest paintings, showed two recent abstractions based on irregularly spherical forms set afloat on subtle color fields, receptively titled "la foto" and "Allegato di Posta electronica," that Carrozzini refers to in her catalog essay as "a new aesthetic sensibility based not on the more egocentric vision of the inner world of the artist, but the sensitivity that transcends the immanence of reality."

Cristina Madeyski

Clara Scarampella Lombardi known since the '70s for a poetic take on nature praised by Pierre Restany, the French art critic, cultural philosopher and champion of Nouveau Realisme, expresses the paradox of the ethereal turning into its opposite with a work in which the delicate pastel-colored wings of butterflies appear embossed in thick silvery blue waves of impasto, as if their usual element of thin air has turned into thick, viscous matter.

For Don Lisy born and raised in Cleveland, O hio, now living in Brooklyn, the creative process is itself an ethereal event, taking an emotional form that he must seize before the feeling dissipates, shows an untitled "action" painting, in which even drips of yellow that flow sideways, instead of down, record his act of turning the canvas, giving permanent form to a momentary creative impulse.

Another artist who entrusts his creative process to the mood of the moment, Giovanni Battista Sciello, also know - Veil (Dea Mater Red)," projecting a visceral feeling that is anything but ephemeral. So it must refer to its opposite: the bodily mortality that holds us all hostage to fate.

Fiorenza Milanesi, who specializes in architectural design but also paints and creates sculpture jewelry from recyclable materials, contributes a truly bizarre sculptural installation comprised of what appears to be plates of fast food displayed on tall translucent poles rising out of holes in a platforms covered in Astroturf, suggesting an elemental truth: take sustenance to avoid becoming ephemeral yourself!

Nothing appears ephemeral in the intricate, meticulously crafted hard-edge paintings of Pino Chimenti, made up of an entire alphabet of cartoonlike figurative and abstract shapes and symbols that interlock like pieces in a puzzle, suggesting a strong stand in favor of the polar opposite of the ephemeral: that which is determinedly solid and enduring.

By contrast, Tiril, born in London, now a U.S. citizen, professes "a lifelong affinity with the manifestation of the spirit within the physical vehicle," expressed in bold, energetically brushed painterly gestures, which give form to the ephemeral without attempting to arrest its vitality.

Susi Lamarca, known for exploring the sign in drawing, photography, and graphic design, exhibits a composition based on the spiral, a symbol in Eastern spirituality of infinity, possibly positing it as the receptacle capable of capturing and containing that which we think of as ephemeral.

Like any enlightened Zen master, Carrozzini does not expect linear answers to metaphysical questions — especially in the subjective precincts of contemporary art. But the aesthetic solutions these artists supplied to an existential puzzle offer their own rewards.

— Marie R. Pagano

"Clicking the Moment: The Ephemeral and its Opposite," Onishi Project, 521 West 26th Street, April 15 - 26, 2014

NADINE LEVIN

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Out." While the first envelopes the viewer in graceful leaves that fan out around a central stem, in the latter two pictures, the long, slender, light-toned fronds stretch out horizontally, as though trying to grasp the surrounding darkness.

"Every moment that passes is one that will never come again," says Nadine Levin, a native of Washington D.C., now residing in Poolesville, Maryland. "Some of the images associated with those moments are worthy of preserving for all time."

— Thomas Rafferty

"Bedtime'

"Mom - Wedding Day'

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a gesture of oy vey dismay. Her long, delicate, seamstress' fingers hide one eye in a manner that makes the other eye appear more haunted, deep in its hollow socket. This drawing obviously served as a study for a smaller solarplate print simply titled "Sophie." For the gesture of tormented self-pity, of woe-is-me world-weariness, is identical; only, here, the grainy black shadows of the print medium simplify the image, endowing it with an emotional force equal to that in the most memorable images of the great German graphic artist and sculptor Kathe Kollwitz.

Indeed, Shalen herself employs form like a sculptor in yet another image of Sophie, this one in silverpoint. Its fine lines, delicate crosshatching, and the proud, almost defiant, angle of her upraised chin (making even the cords in her neck appear as solid as stone), create the impression of a heroic head carved in white marble. Here, too, we see vestiges of the pretty young woman with lustrous black hair pinned up above a high Victorian lace collar, limned within a cameo-like oval in sepia watercolor in the mixed media assemblage "Sophie's Crocheted Pearl Collar."

"My strongest memories of Sophie were the conversations we had while she was knitting or crocheting, or sewing," says the artist, who also incorporates impressions of her grandmother's vintage lace embossed in wet pulp in a series of self-portraits that unite them, while honoring Sophie's creative spirit.

Fortunately for all of us, not all family matters are elegiac. Shalen honors and celebrates the joyful continuity of the generations in luminous watercolors, such "The Gaze," and "Bedtime," in which she immortalizes the ever-evolving day-to-day relationship between her daughter, Samantha, and her baby granddaughter, Mia. Shalen's sublime maternal double-portraits may be among the finest examples of their genre since the heyday of domestic Impressionists such as Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot, whose paintings transcended the innate limitations of the so-called "Male Gaze"— all those centuries of Madonnas, odalisques, and bordello scenes — to give us the first truly intimate depictions of the women's daily lives.

Much in this tradition are Shalen's vibrant watercolors of mutual rapport between mother and child such as "The Gaze," in which Samantha, elegant in a long blue robe and dangling earrings, cradles Mia, cozy in pink flannel "footed" pajamas, in her arms; and "Bedtime," in which, presumably having worn each other out at "playtime" — mother and daughter lie down together.

Then there is "Samantha Focused," an exquisite silverpoint portrait of Durer-like linear sensitivity, depicting the young mother, her hair up, wearing an ornate but casual hoody, its zipper slightly undone, like that of a careless high school girl. Contrary to her own Mother's title for the picture, her large, long-lashed eyes look a bit dreamy, her fine features slightly peaked with exhaustion, as she savors one of those precious idle moments that come all too infrequently to a new mother.

— Ed McCormack

Wendy Shalen, Prince Street Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, April 22 - May 17, 2014

Gazing Into Marilyn Henrion's Windows

Walt Whitman's immortal line "When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd" has never been more poignantly brought to mind than in Marilyn Henrion's mixed media fiber work "Auschwitz Windows," in which the pale purple flowers flare like ghostly furnace flames against an old stone wall, and the panes within the cruciform frame of the small window above swirl with the concentric circles that the artist painstakingly sews by hand to "represent the echoes of millions of silenced voices of concentration camp victims."

Windows take on multiple meanings in Henrion's compositions of the last few years, from that lone haunting window at Auschwitz to her "Chicago Windows" and "New York Windows" series, which one either sees as celebration of the glass and steel majesty of contemporary urban architecture, or a less phantasmagorical take on her old Beat Generation acquaintance Allen Ginsberg's harrowing vision, in his epic poem "Howl," of a tall building turning into the false god Moloch "whose eyes are a thousand blind windows."

"Auschwitz Windows"

One first saw the radical change that governs these works coming when Henrion first exhibited her "Soft City" series in 2010. The urban architecture, which had long provided the underlying armature of this Brooklyn-born quintessential New York artist's earlier abstract quilted compositions, finally came to the forefront when she started printing her own digitally manipulated photographs on cotton fabric and embellishing their tactile qualities with hand-quilting. Suddenly gone were the printed fabric references to Matisse's odalisques; the hard-edged color areas reminiscent of Elsworth Kelly; an invasion of the two dimensional modernist picture plane by vestiges of traditional perspective akin to the spatial ambiguity in the late work of Al Held (which were especially intricate and baroquely configured in Henrion's "Innerspace" and "Byzantium" series of the late 1990s).

Gone, too, was the "unmoored geometry" one saw in her "Disturbances" series, created in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, in which semiabstract representations of tall towers (containing rectangular forms that appear to be her first literal allusions to windows) sway and bend woozily.

In "Soft City," Henrion's first full-fledged foray into a new species of fiber-based photorealism the imagery often focused on the familiar architecture around the artist's studio in Soho, some of the sturdy stone and cast iron facades peculiar to the area appearing to blur and melt like icing on a cake.

In later works from Henrion's "New York Windows" series, however (all of which are created with digitally manipulated photography pigment printed, texturally enriched with hand quilting, and mounted on stretched canvas to emphasize their painterly qualities), the focus sharpens, as seen in "New York Windows 1336," a view from the artist's windows of an apartment building across the street. Fleeting glimpses of figures — a woman in a white nightgown half-hidden by a white curtain; a young man in a white tee-shirt a few windows over on the same floor — remind the viewer of how the vertically stacked nature of urban life often makes casual voyeurs of us all.

Like Jimmy Stewart as the journalist with a broken leg, housebound and peering through binoculars in Hitchcock's "Rear Window," or David Hemmings as the London mod fashion photographer in Antonioni's "Blowup" trying to solve a mystery in his darkroom, the viewer could become utterly absorbed in decoding such details, if not for the overriding abstract power of Henrion's gridded composition.

The strong abstract attributes underlying even the most representational examples of Marilyn Henrion's oeuvre also reassert themselves in "Chicago Windows 1303." This is an overall composition focusing on a grid of glass skyscraper windows, ostensibly as Minimalist as any work by Agnes Martin. Henrion, however, plays with the reflections on the glass panes, where the blue shadow of a building across the street throws them into relief, emphasizing their expressive shapes until they resemble an entire alphabet of an unknown language simultaneously suggesting Asian, Hebrew, and Cyrillic script, as well as the freeform "white writing" of Mark Tobey.

Such formal metamorphosis is entirely characteristic of Marilyn Henrion, who recently entered her eighth decade, and whose innovative contribution has been instrumental in elevating fiber art to a status on a par with the most advanced contemporary painting and sculpture, making her an artist long overdue for a major museum retrospective.

— Ed McCormack

To view Marilyn Henrion's work go to www.marilynhenrion.com
A full color catalog can be ordered at amazon.com

Wei Xiong's Agile Aesthetic Spans East and West

The defining aesthetic feature of the Chinese painter Wei Xiong, who divides her time between Los Angeles — where she worked for twenty years as a fashion designer before turning to painting full-time, and Chengdu, China, where she was born — is how seamlessly she has merged both her adopted and original cultural identities in her paintings.

Inspired by a potent combination of Zen Buddhism, Chinese Philosophy and Western philosophy, Xiong has evolved a distinctive painterly perspective in works that adapt the ethereal elements and nature-inspired (albeit abstract, in her case) subject matter of traditional Asian ink painting on gossamer rice paper to the material presence of Western oil painting on canvas or linen without sacrificing the most distinctive features of either mode of expression. What she has retained from the former is a certain poetry of expression and coloristic restraint, which she bolsters with the textural substance of the latter in a manner that lends her compositions a unique flavor.

What Xiong has obviously learned from her study of Zen is how to approach the things of this world from within, to absorb them and be absorbed by them, as opposed to experiencing them externally. It is an approach that lends itself quite naturally to the tranquil style of lyrical abstraction that she practices. And in this way, painting itself takes on the aspect of a spiritual practice. (The inner peace that she derives from taking a spiritual, rather than mercenary, approach to both art and life, also manifests in her refusal to accept a salary for her role as the executive director of a museum of contemporary art in China.)

While her immortal eighth century poet-painter partial namesake Wang Wei also derived inspiration from religious meditation and communion with nature, being a quintessentially postmodern artist, Wei Xiong is closer in style, if not in spirit, to the graffiti-like ecriture of the late American painter Cy Twombley. This is especially evident in her series of buoyant near-monochromatic oils on canvas "Bring Into," (hardly a descriptive title!), numbers 1, 3, and 4, in which she explodes both Eastern and Western ideas of compositional anchoring with airborne shapes that are at once buoyant and graphically insistent, as well as ingeniously dispersed. Scrawled lines in mostly gray tones, variegated with tiny touches of pale yellow, blue, or red hues, comprise vigorously sketchy shapes that float freely over the picture space, which remains mostly white with only pale, tentative marks here and there. The expansive sense of space in these compositions, while suggesting Zen notions of "emptiness," conveys a sense of spontaneous energy obviously influenced by Chinese calligraphy yet possessed of a funkier energy which locates it firmly in the international postmodern mainstream.

And while one is inclined to surmise that she arrived at such kinships intuitively, more by osmosis than by design, in another mode of her oeuvre, Xiong shares qualities in common with the early lyrical "Abstract Impressionist" paintings of Philip Guston. These untitled works are among Xiong's most colorful and tactile, as well as the ones in which she avails herself most fully

"Bring Into No. 3"

of Western oil painting techniques, with centrally concentrated strokes and patches of jewel-like hues interacting and overlapping on subtly modulated pale blue or green grounds.

Although many Asian painters have adopted Western mediums and methods in recent years, Wei Xiong is among those who have achieved the most successful synthesis.

— Marie R. Pagano

Wei Xiong, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, through April 17, 2014
Reception: Thursday, April 3, 6 -8 pm

Meyer Tannenbaum 1918 – 2014

We knew he was a small, quiet man who always wore a black beret, and when he called on the telephone to tell us about a new group exhibition that he had paintings in or was curating, he always said his first name twice: "Hi, this is Meyer. Meyer Tannenbaum."

We knew, because we had gone there once or twice to look at new series of his paintings, that he lived alone in a decent sized apartment on the ground floor of the kind of prewar apartment building on the Upper West Side that a man of his modest means could not have afforded to live in unless he had lived there long enough for his rent to be frozen.

We knew the entire apartment, not just one room, served as his studio because there were smears of paint on the few pieces of furniture that he owned, as well as on the curtains in the living room, which he kept closed because he did not need natural light to paint by and did not need to know whether it was day or night, since he painted all the time.

We knew that it was a point of pride with

him that he never painted with a brush, only with sticks, rags, a sponge, or whatever else was at hand; or with his fingers, or by squeezing paint straight from the tube, or pouring it from jars directly onto the canvas.

We knew that the only other places where we might run into him were at the gallery on the traffic island on Broadway and 96th Street where The West Side Arts Coalition held its art exhibitions; or in a now gone little kosher deli a couple of blocks further west on the same street where we sometimes stopped in for a bite when we happened to be on that side of town; or in our own apartment where he stopped by once to drop off an ad for our magazine that he had pasted up, and where the only thing he seemed interested in was all the art on the walls. (We knew that he had made a living and supported his art by doing paste-up for an ad agency, until the computer came in and put him out of work, but that he still thought the hand and eye did it better than a machine.)

We did not know, until we read an affectingly affectionate memorial tribute by Rabbi Miriam T. Spitzer, his grandniece, that there was a whole family of people to whom he was known as "Uncle Itsy." We did not know that he had wanted to be an artist ever since he was a little boy, and that he left home soon after high school "to pursue that dream."

Continued on page 24

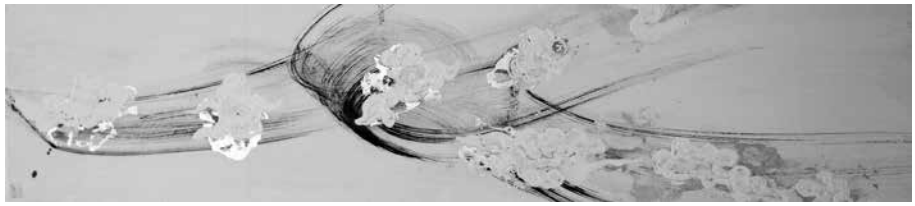
Rieko Karrer: Zen in the Abstract

Born in 1952, Rieko Karrer grew up in a very traditional Japanese household. She fondly remembers the fragrance of incense in a Buddhist temple and taking lessons in calligraphy that, although she may not have predicted it at the time, would later prepare her for the fluid brushwork that distinguishes her art.

She learned something of the ephemeral nature of life when her father died while she was still quite young. This experience of loss at an early age awakened her profound interest in philosophy and Zen Buddhism in particular.

In his seminal text, "Zen in the Art of Painting," Helmut Brinker, a professor of East Asian Art at Zurich University and an internationally renowned authority on the art of Zen, asserts: "Characteristic of Zen — and, in a sense, characteristic indeed of the oriental mind in general — is the attempt to understand and experience the things of this world, whether animate or inanimate from within: to let oneself be seized and taken by them instead of trying to comprehend them, as we in the West do, from a point of view external to them. Thus, to a degree unparalleled in any other form of art, Zen art requires of the beholder tranquil and patient absorption, a pure and composed hearkening to that inaudible utterance which yet subsumes in itself all things, and which points to the absolute *Nothingness* lying beyond all form and colour."

Indeed the subtlety of Rieko Karrer's



"Tender Cloud 2"

mixed media compositions in Sumi ink and Japanese tempera on hemp paper requires deep absorption from the viewer but rewards him or her with what the artist refers to as the feeling "of part of the Cosmic Process of blessing."

In one such work, "Spring Storm," long horizontal hand-scroll, semi-abstract floral forms, delineated by her graceful brushstrokes in gray tones of diluted Sumi ink, and accented here and there by delicate touches of pale green, pink, and yellow tempera, sweep as though blown by warm winds across the full length of otherwise untouched hemp paper.

In the great tradition of Zen, Rieko Karrer also approaches the concept of Nothingness of which professor Brinker spoke with the composition she calls "Morning Mist." Here, the faintest touches of white tempera pigments, combined with bits of darker ink and the merest touches and stains of yellow tempera evoke one of the most subtle aspects of nature. In attempting to paint what is nearly invisible, she achieves the "natural luminosity," for which she states that she strives in all of her compositions.

She succeeds in this goal just as evocatively in the "Tender Cloud 1" and "Tender Cloud 2," both in the long horizontal scroll format that she favors. In the former cumulous shapes are gathered on the left side of the composition and defined by underlying shadows, with wisps flying free and tinted slightly pink, as though backlit by sunlight; while in the latter the white cloud fragments appear more dispersed, like puffs of cotton blown along the full length of the composition and beyond by a frisky breeze.

In these and other works in this inspiring exhibition, Rieko Karrer is forever attempting to apprehend the most elusive phenomena in nature, things that are nearly unpaintable. To attempt a zen koan (paradox to provoke meditation) of one's own, it is when she fails that she succeeds most splendidly.

— Maureen Flynn

Rieko Karrer, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, May 16 - June 5, 2014.
Reception: Thursday, May 22, 6 - 8pm.

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The Paintings of Max Werner are Filled with Natural Imagery

Realism, Minimalism, and Surrealism may seem miles apart; but Max Werner, a painter and printmaker born in Belgium and currently living in the United States, is an artist who professes an interest in René Magritte, yet paints mostly landscapes. What aligns him with Minimalism is the spareness of his compositions, and as literally down to earth as the subject matter of his acrylic paintings may be, they often evoke an undertone of the otherworldly.

It probably has much to do with the sense of great stillness in wide open spaces which strikes one most immediately in Werner's compositions. Take "Snow over the Pass," for example. This black and white acrylic on canvas is one of his sparest pictures of all: a great expanse of virgin snow, spotted here and there with minute footprints, a row of three bare trees in the middle distance, and a process of tiny silhouetted riders on horseback way off yonder . . . Altogether as abstract as the three dots preceding this fragment of a sentence, yet totally realistic!

Another example of Max Werner's ability to create an engaging composition out of near microscopic elements is "Wasp and Bug," in which the central figures are the tiny insects that the title describes. What looks like a single silvery bar runs vertically from the top to the bottom on the left side of the canvas. It suggests an aluminum frame dividing two panes of glass on either a window or patio door. On the right pane, the bug perches, apparently unaware of the predatory wasp circulating in the air nearby. Although insects often play a significant role in traditional Chinese painting, symbolizing any number of things depending on the particular dynasty, and are sometimes employed as markers of balance, an important element of the Asian aesthetic, they rarely appear in Western art. Here, Werner does indeed create an exquisite sense of balance in the composition by virtue of his precise placement of the two tiny creatures, and since a wasp's daily diet consists of insects this composition sets up a dramatic tension reminiscent of the old rhyme about the spider and the fly.

Such subtle drama, also seen in "Untitled," another insect painting of what appear to be two gray displaced dragonflies (at least to a layman with no knowledge of entomology) circling in an off-white room where the only other touch of color is a red EXIT sign above a gray door in an adjoining room.

Color, however, while always employed with an admirable restraint in the paintings of Max Werner, is by no means absent from most of Werner's landscapes. In fact, it is quite vibrant in "Yellowstone Meadows" and "Over the Pass," the latter in which the

"Waiting for the Fishermen"

artist revisits the site of the aforementioned monochromatic snow scene in a season where the white of both the sky and the land has taken on a wide range of natural hues. By the same token, the sense of an unfolding story is frequently present, as seen in "Waiting for the Fishermen," in which two seagulls perch on a low wall in the foreground, gazing out over the water as eagerly as fishermen's wives waiting for the boats to come in, while a big overcast sky broods above distant blue mountains.

— Peter Wiley

Max Werner, Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, May 16 - June 5, 2014
Reception: Thursday, May 22, 6 -8 pm

Potluck: A Photo Show Belies It's Self-Effacing Title

Arthur Cajigas got it started with a series of digital prints focused on Chinese families, capturing the strong ties between parents and children, brothers and sisters. Each family came across as a little dynasty unto itself, as they posed joyfully in front of simple dwellings in what appeared to be a small remote village. Direct and humanistic, Cajigas's pictures have the deceptive unpretentiousness of snapshots, yet are informed by an exquisitely artful eye.

David Reibman, on the other hand, tracks his subjects like a stalker, following a jogger, a dog walker, and other prey through city streets and overlapping three separate prints in various configurations to achieve a cinematic effect of poetry in motion. One of his most dynamic sequences captured pedestrians passing the weathered red and yellow entrance of historic Nom Wah Tea Parlor, "the oldest restaurant in New York's Chinatown."

Silvia Soares Boyer and Chevalier Daniel C. Boyer, a married couple heretofore known primarily as painters, made their photographic debut in this show: Silvia with street scenes of London and her native Portugal; Daniel with architectural studies of Rochester New York. As with their painting styles, eccentric baroqueness and subtle surrealism create complementary contrasts.

JD Morrison, an artist who dislikes periods between his initials, captures the quiet tension of the lull before the storm in his Canson gloss photo paper, archival pigment print, "Preparing for Hurricane Irene," offering a bird's eye-view of a Manhattan Street corner where people huddle outside a Bank of America branch for a crack at the cash machine in a city where one always wants to be financially prepared for the latest media-hyped apocalypse. One can almost hear the click click of the traffic light and the tsk tsk of the last on line as someone takes too long at the trough. Morrison's images are invariably enlivened by a sharp visual wit.

Celia Aquiar Cruzado contrasts distinctly different approaches to the creative process in two pictures of artists at work. In one, a young woman copies a painting by an old master at a traditional portable folding easel neatly set up on a drop-clothe in a museum. In another, a more avant garde oriented aspiring genius hangs precariously on his belly on an elaborate Rube Goldberg contraption so he can splash paint on a large canvas spread out on the floor without getting down and dirty like Jack The Dripper.

Then there is "Preservation of Horse and Buggy," in which Ronald Howe presents us with the lose-lose dilemma of those poor beasts around the Plaza Hotel: should our humane new mayor let them continue trotting tourists through the midtown traffic or retire them straight to the glue factory? Howe's less problematical pictures, such as "City Life at Dawn" and "View from the Window" revel unabashedly in poetic moods of the sort that inspired Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue."

In her "Randell's Island" series, Jean Prytyskacz, another photo artist with a uniquely varied angle of vision, contrasts the two faces of her subject: One view through tree limbs and dangling leaves suggests the postcard picturesqueness of today's golf greens and municipal concerts. Another, however, of detritus and sludge washed up on "Dead Horse Bay," evokes the island's haunted history of mental asylums, cemeteries, homeless shelters, and other things we prefer hidden away.

In "Shroud of Taurus," Harold Serban creates a Magritte-like surreal image in a digital color print of an unmade bed, on the rumpled folds of which we seem to discern the shadow of an embracing couple, as though burned there by their passion of the night before.

Curator Carolyn Reus has a particular gift for discovering pockets of pastoral repose in the hectic urban environment, judging from her digital color prints of a pair of snow-white swans preening between a public pond and a

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WSAC, "Potluck," recently seen at Broadway Mall Community Center, 96th St. (center island)

The Transience of All Living Things is Tenderly Detained in the Paintings of the Artist called Ten

"I have always been interested in exploring the scientific miracles of the natural universe, especially within the fragile biosphere that envelopes Earth," declares the painter who prefers to be known as "Ten," because he feels it is easier to remember than his full Dutch name, Jan ten Broeke.

Ten works in the time-honored medium of oil on panel, in a style as luminous as that of the Netherlandish masters from whom he is descended and to whom he appears stylistically related for the translucence of his glistening oil glazes. His compositions are executed on an easel scale, which lends them an intimacy that makes them relatively rare and distinguishes them from the overblown productions of many other modern painters. Unlike his great predecessors in 17th century Holland, however, who specialized in still life, Ten is an abstract painter. But at the same time there is invariably a sense of "nature morte" in many of his pictures, a visceral quality, that relates them to "vanitas," the specific variety of Dutch still life painting in which skulls often appear as reminders of the transitory quality of human life.

Perhaps it is this quality which makes Ten speak of the existence within earth's biosphere as "fragile." For although no actual skulls are visible in his paintings as obvious symbols of mortality, in a more subtle manner the forms that Ten depicts often suggest, not only human anatomy, but our even more perishable inner organs. Thus they are at once sensual and mortally allusive, reminding the viewer of both the pleasures of life and its brevity.

Could it be the artist, whose adopted name is itself numerical, chooses to identify his paintings with personal codes containing dates, rather than descriptive titles, due to an intense awareness of passing time? One can only venture a guess, even while contemplating the evidence at hand in the composition "2009-6-29," with its fleshy colors, sensuous surfaces, softly modeled organic curves, and details suggesting nipples, dimples, navels, and gaping orifices. In yet another oil on panel, identified as "2002-10-15," other curvaceous forms hint, not only at languid limbs and livid pink labial lips, often putting the viewer in mind of an earlier Flemish master, Hieronymous Bosch, as well as of modern masters of grotesque anatomical anomalies, such as the English iconoclast Francis Bacon and the German fantasist Hans Bellmer, by the combination of seductiveness and repulsion that characterizes some of Ten's strongest paintings.

Other compositions, however, such as "2006-5-10," in which the artist's palette moves toward translucent blue and cool green hues, shaded with soft touches of pink or violet are more coloristically lyrical and appear to evoke botanical forms.

"Ultimately, my mind, my eyes, and my hands are merely instrumental in producing this work," Ten says. "In spite of knowing better, I do frequently experience the sensation that the work is not created by me, but *through* me. My art has a chance for limited survival, but I know my body does not."

Here, again, the artist appears to make reference to the innate fragility and final decomposition of all living things, which his paintings capture, while they can, and so poignantly preserve for the ages.

— Maurice Taplinger

TEN, Caelum Gallery, 526 West 26th Street,
May 20 - 31, 2014.
Reception: May 22, 6 - 8 pm.

ALEX BRAVERMAN

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Braverman creates a more abstract gridded composition suggesting neon-lit graffiti, with shapely Asian calligraphic characters vying for attention with classic Coca-Cola logos, enticing red lips, and other superimposed images as fantastic as those in one of the famous Chinese-American artist Dong Kingman's atmospherically dreamlike watercolors.

Indeed, Alex Braverman deconstructs and reconstructs the modern city with a richly imaginative vision more like that of a painter than a photographer, capturing "what does not meet the eye," as he so accurately puts it, and tweaking it imaginatively to "make it new," as Ezra Pound once exhorted all ambitious modern artists to do.

— Thomas Rafferty

FLORA JACOBSON

Continued from page 11

evening to preview the upcoming exhibition. It was exciting to see several more of Flora Jacobson's works than were in the previous show and to confirm our initial impression of discovering an artist who, with the simplest of means — ink, glue, watercolors, various felt markers, and snippets of collage — can create compositions that simultaneously amount to bright slices of life and enormously engaging abstract designs.

We still saw vital kinships in her work with that of other great miniaturists like Paul Klee and Saul Steinberg. But we also noticed vibrant color combinations that reminded us of certain interiors by Matisse and stunning spatial apportionments that called to mind Richard Diebenkorn. (The former in Jacobson's "Separation," with its flatly stylized couple occupying opposite sides of a bed in an ornately patterned Nabi boudoir as stiffly as a king and queen on playing cards; the latter in the nearly abstract black and white ink and collage composition "A View from the Bridge in Shelter Island.")

Indeed, Jacobson moves effortlessly from figuration with a strong hint of narrative (in any number of her pictures of elegantly done-up women daydreaming or pondering their next move amid Art Deco decor like leading ladies in old movies); to jazzy semi-abstraction à la Stuart Davis (particularly, in a mixed media collage she calls "In the Kitchen.")

Yet for all such allusions, indicating a healthy awareness of art history, Jacobson's work remains fresh, original, untainted by trendy aesthetic cliches, and above all, thankfully free of jaded postmodern irony. At once possessed of childlike directness and a wise and wicked sophistication, the art of Flora Jacobson is altogether unique.

— Ed McCormack

BLACK RENAISSANCE

Continued from page 15

not literally descriptive of it. Like pioneering American modernists, such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Arthur Dove, and Marsden Hartley, Dorethea T. Scott seeks to evoke the mysterious forces and energies underlying nature, rather than the lay of the land in "Purple Rain," which shares its poetic title with a song by "the artist known as Prince."

Robert N. Scott, on the other hand is very much involved with the particulars of nature, on which he puts his own lyrical spin in his ethereally atmospheric pastel on paper, "Evening Mist," as well as in his acrylic composition on canvas, "The Question." The latter work is especially impressive for Scott's freewheeling use of dripped paint in the manner of Pollock to suggest the grass and underbrush in an otherwise earthbound beachscape.

Sonia Barnett, the show's curator reverses the process, employing an essentially calligraphy style to make her dancing lines and strokes the pièce de resistance of each painting, even while suggesting quite specific subjects in her acrylics on canvas. Thus Barnett's "Jazz Ensemble," for one splendid example, with its sonorous blues, visceral red hues, and a single strident blast of brassy yellow at the very heart of things, is literally one of her most musical compositions. Then there is "Carefree," in which her brush takes joyous flight in a swirling red line, magically variegated by touches of black, which twists and turns upon itself on the white primed ground of the canvas with swift Zen masterish fluidity. — Peter Wiley

SCOTT FORSYTH

Continued from page 18

upstages craggy mountain peaks.

And in his poetically titled digital print on fine art paper "Evening's Fleeting Palette," a sunset landscape affords Forsyth the opportunity to exercise his subtlest coloristic skills with an exquisitely plethora of delicate, pink, gold, blue, and verdant green hues.

"Given the immense scale of the world's second largest nation," Scott Forsyth states, "I have chosen to approach the Canadian landscape from its seven natural (physiographic) regions. I will travel to places of particular significance within each of these regions over my lifetime, to create a balanced portrait of the country."

Judging from this striking exhibition, it would appear that he is well on his way.

— Maureen Flynn

POTLUCK

Continued from page 22

patch of verdant foliage; silhouetted figures watching a luminous sunset from the shore of Riverside Park; and a young woman napping on a stone ledge bordering the steps of Grand Army Plaza. Reus' pictures suggest that Joycean epiphanies are plentiful in the city, if one knows where and how to look.

Humor and magic are both present in the photographs of G.H. Strauss, whose color print "Moos Schmooz" shows nuzzling bovines rubbing noses in an idyllic meadow. Another good-humored color print shows a smiling Jack O' Lantern propped on a bench in a pocket park brilliant with autumn leaves. But all Stauss needs is a couple under a blue umbrella on a city street submerged in whiteness to turn the "Great Snowfall of 2000" into a vision as lovely as a classical Japanese print. —Wilson Wong

MEYER TANNENBAUM

Continued from page 20

We did not know that he had studied at both the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art and the Barnes Institute in Philadelphia, probably because, according to his grandniece, "he used to say that it took him years to unteach himself what they taught him..." We did not know that, according to family legend "the first time Uncle Itsy sold a painting, he could not stand it. He ran after the purchaser and bought it back for more than the guy had paid in the first place," later explaining to his flummoxed relatives, "It is part of me. It is like selling a piece of myself."

We did not know that the first few decades that Uncle Itsy lived in New York, when most of the family still lived in Erie, Pennsylvania, he came bearing gifts "for every one of his myriad nieces and nephews." We did not know that "when he would come in for Erie seders he would eat his meal in the early shift with the children and spend the rest of the night roughhousing and playing."

We knew that we admired Meyer Tannenbaum as an artist and a man, but we had no way of knowing what a mensch he was to those who knew him as "Uncle Itsy."

— The Editors

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Basha Maryanska. "Ocean Meditation". Acrylic on canvas 24"x24"

ART IN RESIDENCY

Sandra Benhaim, Russell Cusick, Virginia Donovan, Maria Angeles Hegglin, Daniel Lai, Bojana Leznicki, Basha Maryanska, Neela Pushparaj, Helga Santel, Esther Sternberg, Anita Wexler, Maryla Wierzbowska.

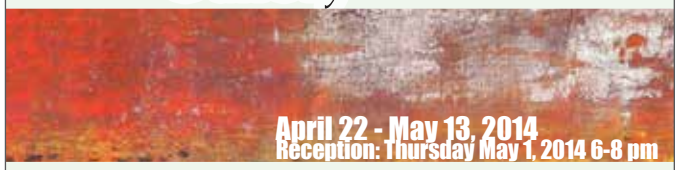
Curated by Basha Maryanska

May 20th-June 7th 2014, Tue-Sa 11:00AM-6:00PM
530 West 25th Street, Suite 406, (212) 367-7072

OPENING RECEPTION - Saturday, May 24th 2014 from 3-6PM

Agora Gallery

530 West 25th Street, New York
Tel: 212-226-4151
www.Agora-Gallery.com
info@Agora-Gallery.com



E D G Y : Charles Conrardy / a Solo Exhibition

New York City 2014: Synchronicity - *Agora Gallery Suite 301*
Alex Braverman | Eric Degos | Denyse Gibbs | Ann-Greth Hilding
Cathrine Oberg | Carolyn Rogers | Jane Sandes

Illumination: An Exhibition of Fine Art Photography

Lorenza Aranguren | Michael Berry | Stephen Best | Steven Blandin
Emily Calkin | Sophie Chemla | Violette Cici | Louis Cotto | Michele Davino
Kat Dennis | Gökçe Erenmemişoğlu | Liz Hernandez | Heather Hummel
Jim Irwin | Courtney Kinnander | Ela Kurowska | Shokoufeh Malekkiani
Pablo Fernández Márquez | Jane Olin | Kyleigh Pitcher | Boyd Prestidge
Francisco Pulido | David Reinfeld | Shifra | Wendy Smith | Tim Stani
Makoto Takami | Andrew Thomas | Richard A. Usanis | Alex Wright

Out From Down Under & Beyond: Fine Art From Australia and New Zealand
Betty Anderson | Antonio Clemente | Wendy Hope | Jude Murray | Bob Williams

Portal of Enigma
Petra Aichholz | Lawrence R. Armstrong | Danny Campbell | Mona Hoel | Methec
Reija Karjalainen | Rieko Karrer | Nadine Levin | Jim Otis | Nancy St-Onge

Contemporary Perspectives
Pouneh Asli | Liedeke Bulder | Ouni Mam | Stéphane Delaprée | Julia Ennis
Semen Eruntsov | Olga Fedorova | Brenda F. Jackson | Ju Jian | Monica Manfroi
Nathalie Natso | Susan Marx | Paula Montgomery | Teresa Ramon

Beyond the Horizon: Max Werner / a Solo Exhibition
Agora Gallery Suite 301

(from top to bottom)
CHARLES CONRARDY *SF Shaken* Mixed Media on Canvas 48" x 36"
GÖKÇE ERENMEMIŞOĞLU *Dolls 1* Photographic Print on Aluminum 16" x 20"
BETTY ANDERSON *Into the Sunset* Oil on Canvas 30" x 40"
REIJA KARJALAINEN *Cocktail* Oil & Charcoal on Canvas 28" x 28"
MAX WERNER *Looking for a Trail* Acrylic on Canvas 37" x 49.5"

Mother Nature's Bastards

A Collection of Inks and Oils by

JEFF TOCCI

April 26TH–June 7TH, 2014

Presented by THE JALOPY THEATRE

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