# N·O·A·R

## THE NEW ORLEANS ART REVIEW

A JOURNAL OF ANALYSIS

MARCH / APRIL / MAY 2010

*Late Spring:*
*Luis Cruz Azaceta - Jose Bedia - Joan Mitchell*

# PINKNEY HEBERT

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# N·O·A·R

THE NEW ORLEANS ART REVIEW

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## Contents



***Cover*** — Joan Mitchell: *Minnesota*, 1980 (detail). Oil on canvas, 102" high. Courtesy Joan Mitchell Foundation and Cheim & Read Gallery, New York.


LOUISIANA ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

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Joan Mitchell: *Minnesota,* 1980. O/C, 102" high. Courtesy Joan Mitchell Foundation and Cheim & Read Gallery, New York.

# *Joan Mitchell: Passion & Grace*

BY TERRINGTON CALAS

JOAN MITCHELL IN NEW ORLEANS
Contemporary Arts Center
Newcomb Art Gallery
New Orleans Museum of Art
New Orleans, LA
—

SOMEHOW, ULTIMATELY, Joan Mitchell's work reads as finesse. Despite moments when her technique seems almost violent, almost chaotic, the paintings are relieved by a certain abiding grace. You can see this in "Joan Mitchell in New Orleans," a glorious three-part exhibition that affirms her status as the strongest of the so-called second-generation Abstract Expressionists. (The event features paintings at the New Orleans Museum of Art, works on paper at Newcomb Art Gallery, and prints at the Contemporary Art Center.)

Mitchell's surprising grace may be the result of an uncanny chromatic sense – the way she could salvage complex paintings with a single, well-chosen color. At NOMA, for example, in a large untitled 1961 canvas, she created a turmoil of murky green and orange, then managed to soothe the whole with strategic smears of an unlikely wood-rose. In other instances, her mitigating tool is line – an insistent, vaguely lyrical line that weaves through much of her later pieces. The consequence is some of the most startlingly beautiful works in American abstraction. Examples: the enormous, calligraphic *Minnesota* from 1980, and, at Newcomb, the lush primary-colored tangles of an untitled pastel and watercolor from 1986.

It's tempting to speak of this refined quality in Mitchell's oeuvre as something akin to Parisian aesthetics. She was greatly admired by the French, and lived almost entirely in France from 1955 until her death in 1992. And yet, nothing could be more American than her audacious work. Her vigorous approach, however engaging, borders on sheer abandon. And, more important, there is a palpable sense of her kinship to the New York School – a sense that her technical grace might betray an emotional core. A passion. And this decidedly un-French element was crucial to Abstract Expressionism. In Mitchell's art, that element may be, finally, what counts.

HER embrace of New York School tenets is hardly surprising. She was there, in New York, at the start of her career. She knew the older Ab Exers, especially Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline. Even after her move to Europe, she exhibitied in the U.S. and maintained a New York apartment.

But the art arena of the period was not an easy one, not for women. Abstract Expressionism, the celebrated "triumph of American painting," was essentially a man's game. It was mid-twentieth century New York, and, to be sure, men fairly dominated most fields. But it was more than that. What also mattered was the tough, hard-drinking "men's club" that the art scene actually was:

Joan Mitchell: *Untitled*, 1957. Oil on paper, 19.5" high. Courtesy Joan Mitchell Foundation and Cheim & Read Gallery, New York.

aggressive types producing aggressive paintings. The work was characterized by enormous scale or fierce technique, or both. A suitable emblem might be a signature Kline or Jackson Pollock – an image with the robust sensibility to match the milieu. When a woman did gain entrée to that milieu, she was usually married to or linked to an insider male. To wit: Lee Krasner and Helen Frankenthaler.

Mitchell was an exception, the significant exception, and, it would seem, she managed the harsh atmosphere with considerable strength. Stories of her own harshness are legendary. Former acquaintances of hers, including two who now live in the New Orleans area, have recounted her sharp-witted but disdainful interchanges. Feisty, apparently, would be an understatement. The interesting point, however, is how much her art is at variance with her notorious personality. What we see in these three exhibitions is, as I say, a surpassing grace that feels quite apart from the work of de Kooning, her oft-mentioned influence.

This is because she was able to conjoin expressionist emotion with lyricism, perhaps unwittingly. It is true, certain aspects of her approach do signal the de Kooning connection – her recurring employ of buttery, umbered yellows; certain strong colors semi-submerged by dense, pale pigment; and, at key moments, jarringly angular forms. All these maneuvers amount to an exercise in intense feeling, not unlike the drama in de Kooning's most characteristic work. But Mitchell grasped the idea and protracted it, personalized it. She did this with a singular brush technique. Her method was about contrast and surprise. Often she would take a tense, weighty shape and force it to trail off, or, sometimes, to drip, producing a fortuitous but true elegance. In other instances, her brush would sputter frenziedly, then manage to transform a blunt stroke into suave and fluent ripples. She retained the aura of passion; she added musicality.

Several works suggest nature as a basis. In *Minnesota,* the putative sky, an icy blue, is overlapped by bare insinuations of landscape: a scrubby dark earth sitting under spectacular dashes and arcs of sunlight. The picture somehow articulates someone's delight – no, startled delight – in beholding the natural phenomenon, as though that delight may have been unexpected. And perhaps a benison. As though nature's splendor may have

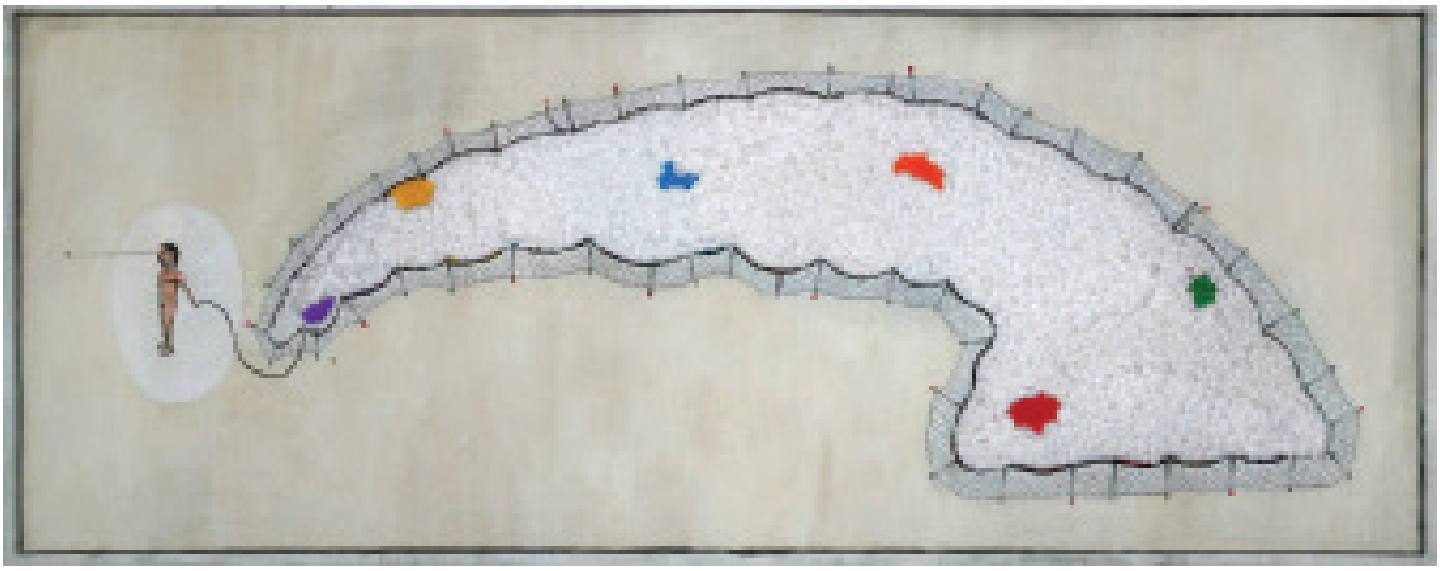
Joan Mitchell: *Untitled,* 1986. Pastel, watercolor on paper, 10,75" high. Courtesy Joan Mitchell Foundation and Cheim & Read Gallery, New York.

ameliorated some personal distress. No de Kooning "landscape" ever felt so vulnerable. Or so redolent of ease and poise.

From the uplifting delight of this painting, one can consider the mad fury of another, the wary agitation of another. Every emotion is spearheaded by a gestural brush mark. The artist's heart is revealed via gesture. From our present vantage point, we see and can accept this. But, when Mitchell was merely a decade or so into serious production, this very concept was effectively assailed – almost officially. The pithiest declaration was by formalist critic Michael Fried: "painterliness from the Venetians to de Kooning is renounced." This anti-bravura dictum was widely acknowledged. It meant, among other things, that contemporary painting, henceforth, must be autonomous, pure – no allusions. Gesture and painterliness, the enemies, were loaded ploys. They posed the danger of implying human feeling.

Today, it's difficult to conceive the number of artists who followed that doctrinaire lead, seeking, willy-nilly, the wonders of the uninflected canvas. Mitchell, happily, was not among them. And, indeed, she reportedly withstood slights because she stuck to her course. The result is what we see in these three handsome displays -- a testament to the enduring notion of abstract painting as a conduit for inner reality. In Mitchell's most compelling work, sweeps of the brush might move us to excitement, to fear, to melancholy, to delirium, to sweet calm. Such evocations register doubly as a consequence of her graceful manner. You think immediately of the metaphorical capacity of certain music. Perhaps Mitchell was more French than we care to admit. When I see *Minnesota*, I can hear Fauré. ❑

Joan Mitchell: *Untitled,* 1967. Watercolor on paper, 16.25" high. Courtesy Joan Mitchell Foundation and Cheim & Read Gallery, New York.



Luis Cruz Azaceta: *Exiled 50,* 2009.

# *The Art of Allusion and Illusion*

BY KARL F. VOLKMAR

LUIS CRUZ AZACETA:
*Exile 50*

JAMES DRAKE:
*When the Swan is in the Sky*

Arthur Roger Gallery
New Orleans, LA

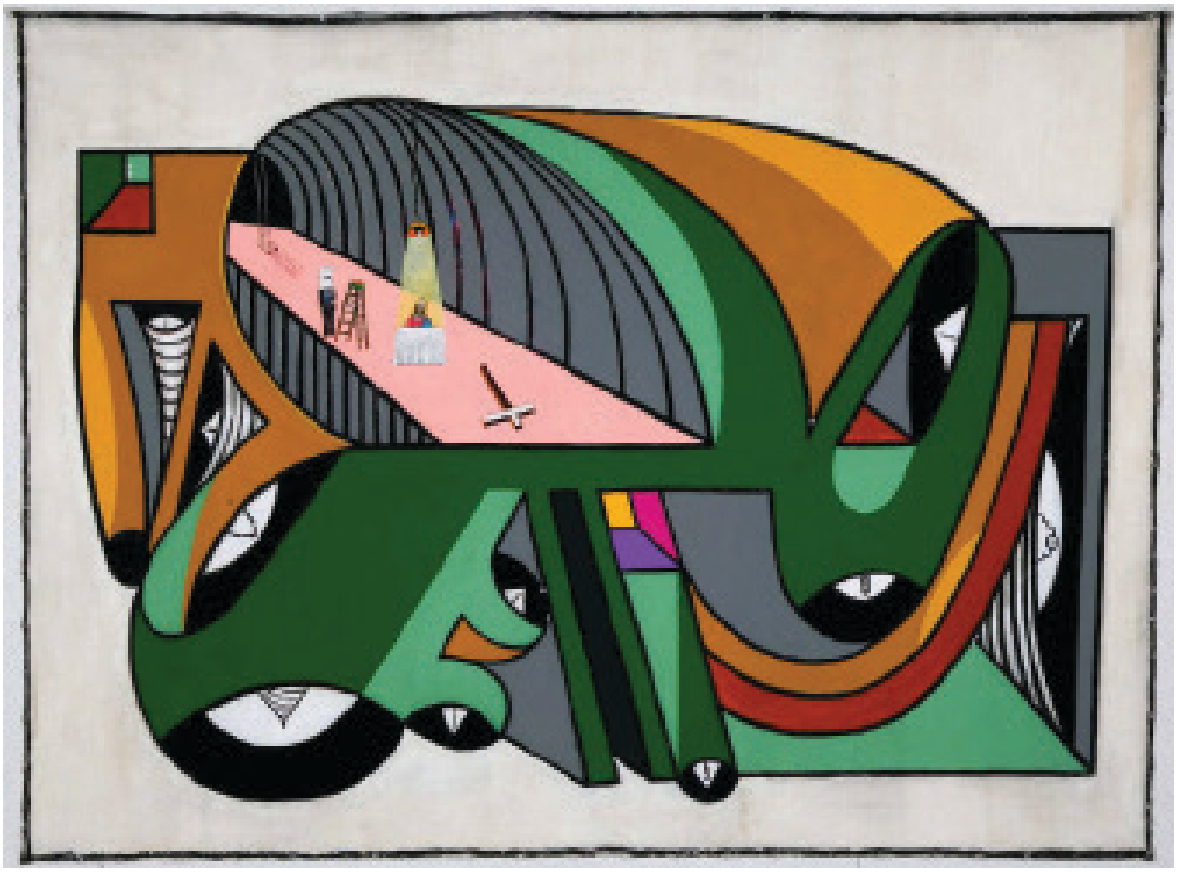
—

AS AN IMMIGRANT to the United States living in *de facto* exile from Cuba, Luis Cruz Azaceta found himself an outsider on two fronts: separated from his country of birth and a new resident in a new land. Azaceta's work matured as America evolved into a multicultural, late capitalist society in which the previously marginalized became the many centers of a polyvalent world where the very notion of the expatriate is subverted. In the simplistic economic dualism of capitalism versus communism that dominated the world's politico-economic stage, the individual existed in a state of existential alienation that mirrored the experience of the immigrant/emigrant cast adrift in amorphous cultural seas. In the postmodern, or, perhaps, more accurately, post-postmodern world, the unique value of creative freedom has become dispersed among infinite centers in the artistic universe.

Azaceta's *Exiled* works have evolved out of the artist's ongoing investigations into his complex and problematic relationship with the island nation from which he emigrated in 1960. Through conflations of bits of dark humor and political caricature combined with literal and allusive images and styles, conscientious viewers participate in the dynamic ambiguity of the artist's love and hate relationship with the land of his birth. Inspired by the ménage-a-trois among colonial capitalist Cuba, communist Cuba, and the United States, Azaceta develops themes that reappear in the artist's work over the years. Azaceta's history is less one of personal stylistic development within pre-postmodern modernism's notion of a grand historical narrative and more one of an ongoing expression employing a wide range of media.

The *Exiled* works, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of artist's emigration, are fueled by the artist's ambivalent relationship with his homeland. In *Exhiled 50*, the lean, naked figure of a small man surrounded by an ovoid shape vaguely suggestive of an amniotic sac holds onto a long cord attached to the placental form of the island where he was born. Whether likened to an umbilical cord, chain, or leash that tethers/chains the naked figure to the land or the land to the figure, one cannot be sure whether it is literally or figuratively either/or, neither, or both and that ambiguity contributes to making the work interesting. In the similar marker on paper drawing, the spidery *Isla de la Juventad* in its web hanging by a thread suggests an aging world that has passed its prime.

The fence, a theme that Azaceta has represented in earlier work, which surrounds the island can be read in multiple ways: the fence as defensive barrier that protects the within from the without, the prison-like fence that restrains and contains, the enclosing fence that protects private property and the metaphorical fence representing the historical transition from what had been before to what had come to be, the psychological fence that separates the



Luis Cruz Azaceta: *Industrial Complex,* Courtesy Arthur Roger Gallery.

artist from his [imagined?] nurturing past land, and the political fences that stand in the way of the artist returning home. One of the ironies of the idea of home is that that to which one desires to return may never have been as one imagines it to have been.

In another sense the artist never left the island for it survives in the form of memories and the imprint that shaped his sense of identity and his art. Emerging from the nurturing island womb in the violent rupturing of emigration/exile, of bursting free from social repression, the memory of the expulsion from his personal Eden lingers in the expression of a desire to regain what has been, or believed to have been, lost. Desire, however, as Siddharta Guatama taught, is the cause of suffering, a longing for what cannot be, for the negative that is positive, absence, and Azaceta, unable to free himself from desire, is bidden like Sisyphus to be forever drawn back into the whirlwind of artistic expression. The result is an art of layered meanings, symbols, and nuances found in the work of some of the most revered of Latin American poets like Ruben Dario.

In the love-hate relationship between the artist as immigrant/emigrant country of exile and residence, the very contrast of the two underscores the ambiguous anxiety of the relationship between his land of origin and present country of residence. As an expatriate, there is an implicit, often bitter, irony in the anomaly of that name, expatriate, literally meaning one who was a patriot, i.e., one who loved his country, but now does not. There are two, and different, possible usages for expatriate, the first representing the geographic situation of one living outside her country of birth, and the second, referring to one who is not longer a patriot. One can readily identify the first as true about Azaceta. He does live outside Cuba. But the second is no less true. Azaceta has never given up caring deeply about his homeland. This is implicit in his referring to himself as exile. There is a world of difference between the volunteer expatriate, more conventionally shortened to expat, vis-à-vis the exiled. The first in familiar usage is by choice and the second by command or necessity.

Azaceta employs materials as the physical substrate for the expression of his thoughts and feelings with respect to the phenomena that are Cuba past, present, and imagined. He is the naked man who has stripped away all pretence in, literally, laying bare his deepest feelings, his soul. Yet there is also not a little humor in these works however dark it may be. The "leash" may also be read as alluding to a submissive relationship between the man and the island as if the island were an unruly puppy suddenly quieted as he sits back on his hind legs and bows his body forward in pseudo-guilty supplication to his owner. Cuba has served Azaceta well as the theme of the personal art that has enabled his successful artistic career in the often harsh and unforgiving art world.

In the work of a complex creative personality such as Azaceta, one may find oneself imagining multiple associations and allusions that may or may not have been intended by the artist but would be allowable based on various theories of mind. One cannot exclude the possibility of complex relationships arising [maybe pun intended? don't know] from the Latin root of expatriate, ex and pater, meaning from or out of the father, and a shape suggestive of a flaccid uncircumcised penis and/or an alchemist's alembic. In the comic book/caricature mode of expression, the notions of the patriarch-patriarchal, paternal-paternalistic, and mindless devotion to authority, hierarchy and fatherland that are the anti-christs of creativity and creative freedom, were also seminal [yes, this pun is intended] to Azaceta's development and evolution as an

James Drake: *Dancing in the Louvre*, 2005. Charcoal on paper mounted on canvas, 144 high.

artist.

With his virtuoso facility in drawing from whatever historical and popular styles are needed for the expressive task at hand, Azaceta assimilates influences from multiple sources for *Industrial Complex* and *Subterranean.* Quite different in tone from the *Exiled* works, *Industrial Complex* and *Subterranean* express the anxious states of alienation and betrayal that are the dry rot in the Edenic promises of a consumption driven society posing as the aegis of progress.

Echoes of Piranesi's subluminal prisons from the century that simultaneously gave birth to both the industrial and political revolutions meld with the angst-laden fantasies of Klee and the biting humor of *Mad Magazine* from the century that saw the culmination of modernism and political revolution to create a bizarrely Byzantine space reminiscent of the *horror vacui* of the outsider artist and medieval manuscripts. This convoluted postmodernist maze is as much alive as a theatrical confection for angst-driven dramas in which a Saul Steinberg reworks Giacometti's *Palace at 4 A.M.* to create the set for the yet-to-be written *Nine and One Half.* Azaceta's syntheses of elements from the almost three centuries since the beginning of the industrial revolution create fantastic stages where ambivalent relationships and latent tensions are expressed in depersonalized geometries and organic form.

The traditional moral hierarchies represented by ecclesiastical authority become the industrial revolution's reinvention of the inquisition rooting out heresies, and political assassination the new *auto-de-fe*. Here the modernistic that emerged hand in hand with messianic utopianism from the economic Jacob and Esau of progress and revolution, products of the consuming social, reflects the post-postmodern depletion of the idea of revolution and problematic existential alienation and isolation. Yet who is to say whether the religious references allude to the role of the Church in seeming to support the abuses that led to revolution, to the masochistic brutality of pseudo-Christian American Neo-Con irrationality, or to empathy for the sufferings of the revolutionary rabbi whose social message had been so grievously subverted?

Water, which Azaceta employs as symbol and metaphor in several other works, has determined the fate and [mis?] fortune of Cuba as well as that of the artist. Water has a rich symbolic history that transcends historical, cultural, and geographic boundaries, and can signify passage, transition, and translation from one world, from one state of being, to another, whether in the form of the Nile, the Styx, or the Jordan River, leaving what was left behind and gaining what lay ahead as triumph or tribulation. As fact in the artist's life, and fantasy in his art, swimming serves as rite of passage through a medium that simultaneously isolates, protects, and connects.

Combining remnants of folk art, modernism, and a Hairy Who wry humor, Azaceta represents the loneliness of the swimmer, a bathtub marine battle, and a band on a tub that, tongue-in-cheek plays the [Caribbean] *Basin Blues*. *Swimming to Havana II* shares the sense of the absurd of Philip Guston's later work in which the latter lampoons the evil stupidity of the Klan. With the delicate balance characteristic of the best political satire, the politi-

James Drake: *When the Swan is in the Sky, 2009.* Courtesy Arthur Roger Gallery.

cal is elided in the wry humor of art and the struggle of the individual to make his way to a better life as metaphor for Azaceta's creative efforts.

SHIFTING GEARS, in James Drake's grand baroque theater drawing, *Dancing in the Louvre,* the elegantly simulated moldings mediate the viewer's imaginative transgression of the proscenium plane. The gown that overflows into the foreground space, the dynamic diagonal and counterpoint of the dancers' elegantly dressed forms, and the two point perspective defined by the pedestal at the left and the voyeur couple on the right serves to establish a continuum from the viewer's real world space through the fore, middle, and implied distance.

Drake's bold, grisaille *trompe l'oeil*, created through the agency of virtuoso handling of the charcoal medium, deploys witty allusions to Renaissance and Baroque *quadro riportato* paintings that will delight the historically conscious. The nuanced range of values, sweeping gestures and movement, and intuitive mastery of the algorithms of perspective and foreshortening produces a dreamlike world in which the relationship between subject and objective dissolves in a delightful mixture of fantasy, illusion, and realism in the tradition of Mantegna, da Cortona and Gaulli, and twentieth century film fantasies featuring Fred Astaire. With the consummate intuitive knowledge of what medium to use to create the most desired effect, Drake's decision to work with black and white and gray seems to have been the most effective choice.

In *Barca de Oro*, the mysterious man and boy child playing in the waves exudes a bizarre, even malevolent, character when one notices the deteriorating corpse drifting ashore. Detritus from Gericault's *Raft of la Meduse*? Wraithlike figures of scarcely discernable forms float in the air as ambiguously as the daemons in Schoengauer's late medieval *Temptation of Saint Anthony*. Such comparisons become even more interesting to cultural historians in that both Schoengauer and Drake created their work on the verge of major shifts in cultural paradigms. The viewer, by virtue of drawing's heroic scale, is both observer of, and participant in, the illusion.

*When the Swan is in the Sky* references the mythological story of Leda and the Swan so sensuously represented in the Renaissance. Stylistically, and conceptually, Drake's drawings embody empathies with multiple sources -- elements of Titian combined with the sensibility of Philip Pearlstein, a smidgen of Rauschenberg and the expressive energy of De Kooning. In *Fat Boy,* the artist's pastiche and palimpsest of images and media is kinfolk twice or thrice removed of the Starn Twins.

Drake's drawings appeal to a wide range of potential viewers depending on their education and interests at the moment. Like the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers fantasies that fascinate as romantic narrative and have influenced some of the most able artists in twentieth century dance with their consummate and immaculate artistry, artists like Kelly, Nureyev, and Baryshikov, so does one delight in the fantasy and illusion and the multiple art historical allusions. For the intellectual, typically university trained, mind, the plethora of historical references can be as exhilarating as standing on Saint Charles Avenue amid cascades of beads thrown by intoxicated riders on a stalled Krewe of Bacchus Alligator Superfloat. Drake takes full advantage of the postmodern license to meld popular culture, high art and kitsch, and esthetic delight and intellectual satisfaction into one art experience. ❑


José Bedia: *Maestro y Discipulo.* Courtesy Heriard-Cimino Gallery.

# *Bedia*

BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

JOSE BEDIA
Heriard-Cimino Gallery
New Orleans, LA
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THE PAINTING *Maestro y Discipulo*, or *Master and Student,* confronts the street through the glass doors of Heriard-Cimino gallery. The exhibit in which this piece is housed, titled "Fragment of Journeys," is part of a two-venue show including the Ogden Museum of Art of the work of José Bedia during ¡Si Cuba!, a city-wide celebration of Cuban artwork. The title suggests the nature of the design of the exhibit; it gives a sampling of Bedia's travels and experiences with different cultures, which range from Cuba to Africa and the Americas. In the painting, the words of the title are inscribed on a gray washed wall of paint close behind two figures. A deer on the left faces the viewer frontally, its lithe body energetically painted with monochromatic slashes of brown and black. Its hooves disappear into a mound of dark matter, blurring the boundary between ground and feet. On the right kneels a stylized human figure formed with similarly colored strikes of paint. The human figure's head is raised in attention to his master, back lowered and tense in a moment before prostration. The dark value of the piece implies evening, further implied by a low, cool, raking light in the color of the moon. The austere and symmetrical composition suggests balance, a continuing exchange of dialogue and information. The deer, turned towards the viewer, communicates outward from the picture plane, about to teach us too.

In its concise but powerful visual language, it seems to sum the biography and the intent of the artist. In the 1980s, Bedia became an initiate of the Palo Monte religion, derived from central African religious practices. Its name refers to mystical forests, where spirits reside in the trees; "palo" refers to a segment of wood, and "monte" to a rural area or forest ruled by local power. The initiation is performed by a *tata*, or one who has attained the highest level of initiation; Bedia himself was initiated at this level. The initiation process requires body mark-


Jose Bedia: *Progression de la Liebre.* Courtesy Heriard-Cimino Gallery.

ings and scarification. The paint is active but deliberate, and its severity suggests the deliberate process of drawing and cutting. The palette indicates night, appropriate to the time of day the initiation would occur. The deer is important to Cuban mythology – it is an animal spirit that symbolizes acute awareness, so much so that it "listens through his hooves;" in this case, it is so intently listening that its hooves have become ground. The deer is both listening student and communicating teacher; a kind of self-portrait. The human figure could also be student and self. This painting in particular speaks of the ongoing exchange Bedia creates with his viewer and himself through his didactic art.

Bedia teaches about specific mythology in *Progression de la Liebre,* which gives a version of the African story of the tortoise and the hare. Bedia tends to use formal elements that have immediate impact, emphasizing content over form. The content is based in rich cultural traditions, but Bedia seems to welcome the subjective interpretation by his economy of form and his transcultural intent. The semicircular format of this piece suggests the formally trained Bedia's "dissatisfaction with the conventional format of Western painting," which could not accommodate the transcultural nature of his work. The shape of the picture plane could suggest a cape, or if brought upon itself a shelter. Numbers charted right to left along the curved perimeter of the piece indicates time, or a calendar. The figure of the hare is blue and looming against a flat black background; lined with the points of a constellation, it inevitably conjures images of the night sky and astrological maps. The outline of a tortoise paces repetitively along the perimeter of the piece, as land animals, including humans, plod muleishly and deliberately beneath overpowering presences. This piece intimates the sublime, as the hare and sky tower over the comparably minute landscape. There is a push and pull between forces, knowing the success of the tortoise despite the deception and speed associated with the hare. There seems to be a sense of accomplishment in earthly endeavors, even beneath the threat of trickery.

Bedia's exchange with the viewer is rooted in a desire to communicate and commune "between the material and spiritual universe of 'modern' man and 'primitive' man," as stated in the wall text at the Ogden. In the museum, Bedia created an installation piece using a central element of the *Palo Monte* initiation process, the *nganga*. This is a cast iron or clay pot filled


Jose Bedia: *Algun Orden Habra Alli.* Courtesy Heriard-Cimino Gallery.

with materials objects intended to help the initiate accumulate power through the objects' associations with spirits, called mpungus. In the installation at the museum, the nganga is filled with cigars, wood, rusted horseshoes, tied with beads and string, and decorated with cross shapes. It is situated at the waist of a figure hand-painted in black acrylic on the wall. The paint itself is scratched with symbols of crosses and curvilinear arrow shapes, suggesting firmas or "signatures, a composite name, a cosmogram." The figure appears to rise out of the *nganga*, as though the mpungus were manifesting themselves. Chains emerge from its hands and attach to a small boat holding an animal figure wrapped in cloth. Purple satin trimmed in lace trails from the rear of the boat. The materials in the nganga, the chains, and the boat suggest linkage to Cuba, but it is unclear whether the chains are pulling or being pulled. The orientation of the trail of purple cloth suggests forward motion, as though signs of Cuban culture are being taken forth. And though linked to Cuba, it is dubious whether Cuban refugees, who arrive by boat, can return to the island. The iconography of the materials seems to emphasize the energy of the push and pull and the solidity of the connection most.

Bedia is clearly connected to his home, but has ties to other cultures as well. His work is best described as "transcultural," appropriate to post-modern diversity, but more importantly as a kind of ambassador of cultures. He sees it as "having the potential to cut through national, class, and religious boundaries," which is not only significant for contemporary art, but for the city of New Orleans, a melting pot of culture and persons. The two exhibits summarize a "fragment" of Bedia's journey. That his work is spread throughout two venues signifies the breadth of the work from which this sampling comes. As part of ¡Si Cuba!, these shows are still but a smaller part of a city-wide showing of a variety of artistic voices hailing from Cuba. New Orleans has clear ties to the work and the region, and Bedia seems to make those ties as explicit as his imagery.

❑

James Surls: *Me, Tree, Black Flower, and Knot*, 2006. Steel, pine,bass, 123" high.

# Gallery Walk

BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

Arthur Roger Gallery
Cole Pratt Gallery
d.o.c.s. Gallery
Le Miedux Galleries
New Orleans, LA
-

## James Surls at Arthur Roger

The organic, monumental wood and steel sculptures of James Surls dominate the main gallery at Arthur Roger. Their massiveness is contrasted with weightlessness by their vertical suspension from the ceiling; even mounted on stands on the floor, they seem impossibly balanced. This defiance of gravity overcomes the heftiness and industry suggested by his use of chunks of mahogany and welded metal; they are simultaneously heavy and feather-light. In a video walk-through available on the gallery website, Surls further describes the duality of his sculptural forms. His shapes are connections of masculine and feminine, nature and industry, seed and growth.

In *Standing Knife, Pinion, Morning Glory*, from 2009, a steel skeleton of the morning glory blossom emerges from the handle of a giant wooden knife, poised on its tip. Root-like wires sprout from the opposite side of the knife handle, growing upward. In his walk-through, Surls uses this as an example of the union of the archetypal female vessel and the male phallus in his work.

Paul Tarver: *Wait and See*. Courtesy Cole Pratt Gallery.

Derek Cracco: *Dangerous Encounter*. Courtesy d.o.c.s. gallery.

Strangely, one does not penetrate the other; rather, they grow from each other while creating new growth. This seems odder due to the violence that can be associated with his chosen images. The seeming violence of the sexual act is tempered with objects such as *Me, Tree, Black Flower, and Knot,* as well as other gigantic sculptures in the exhibition. They follow a similar formal pattern, but their shapes are more gently organic.

*Slab Block with House, Shape, and Five Sticks* creates a visual link to a series of graphite line drawings in the adjacent gallery. *Slab Block* is a smaller, horizontal wooden assemblage that forces the viewer to change his or her view and therefore interaction with the work. Situated on a small pedestal, the gaze is cast downward rather than up and around, and then face-to-face with intimately scaled, framed works on paper. With titles like *Finding Time* and compositions dominated by organic line and curvilinear shape, these seem like existential explorations inspired by Kandinsky. They are minimal in their means and phenomenological in their depictions of human forms and varying perceptions of essences. Despite the contrast between medium and scale between the sculptures and drawings, they relate to each other by the forms of their compositions.

## Paul Tarver at Cole Pratt

Encaustic and oil paintings on canvas by New Orleanian Paul Tarver hang from the walls of Cole Pratt. Tarver intends his wax medium, his palette, and geometric patterning combined with organic forms to evoke ancient Roman frescoes. Earthy reds and oranges are optically mixed with drips and drops of cerulean blue. Transparent layers of wax create a visual softness, like images viewed through a frosted lens coated with the patina of history. The meditative nature of the work, created through the softness of the material and the visible trace of the artist's brush through the impasto of media, is not compromised by the intensity of their colors. Though inspired by ancient cultures, the resulting images are

Carolyn Zacharias Mc Adams: *Benevolent King*. Courtesy Le Mieux Galleries.

also contemporary New Orleans, integrating familiar iron scrollwork with grid-like formats that at times seem harlequinesque in both their diamond shapes and bright color. Tarver creates a present linked with the past in his paintings, much like the culture of New Orleans itself.

## Derek Cracco at d.o.c.s.

Stretched and resin-coated digital prints by Derek Cracco pop from the walls of d.o.c.s gallery. In his statement and in the work, Cracco defies Maslow's hierarchy, which describes romantic love as "frivolous." Dotted with images of pin ups and cropped romance novel covers, these shiny objects are like an arrangement of pornographic family photos. The circular shapes that isolate and create the compositions are also elemental; they reference atomic forms and elements of human being, suggesting that humans have a need for erotica at their very basic level. In one, he obliterates the features of the figures that decorate novel covers, asking viewers to impose themselves in those roles. Fantasy becomes a viable reality, and necessary to human existence.

## Carolyn Zacharias McAdams at Le Mieux

At Le Mieux, oil paintings by Carolyn Zacharias McAdams present Magritte-like dreamscapes using motifs of crows, black cats, broken eggs, and fire in dark landscapes dotted with open-faced houses. *Beyond the Window*, the title of her show, further enforces a surrealist reading of her work, which seems founded in the strange twists of the unconscious made visible through the use of personal iconography. In her statement, McAdams describes her landscapes as "places of escape" that allow her to remove herself from the anxieties of the day-to-day and "play out" in a carnivalesque absurdity. The paintings are sets with rules established by the presence of recurring imagery and the roles played by each character in her theater, though the rules are the reverse of the expected. In *Benevolent King*, a house shaped like a cuckoo clock begins to burn as time ticks from a pocket watch held in the mouth of a crow wearing a crown. The bird has escaped the clock, and is no longer controlled by man-made time; rather, time is now under his dominion. ❑

Georgina Berkeley: Photocollage from the Berkeley Album. Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago.

# *Playing with Reality*

BY STEPHEN R. BACHMANN

PLAYING WITH PICTURES:
THE ART OF VICTORIAN PHOTOCOLLAGE
Art Institute of Chicago
Chicago, IL
-

ONE OF THE definitive textbooks for modern art is H. H. Arnason's *History of Modern Art.* In the first (1968) edition, he has the following to say about collage:

> As early as 1908, Picasso had pasted a small piece of paper on the center of a drawing to make what is probably the first *papier collé* [glued paper], or collage . . . Picasso's *Still Life with Chair Caning*, 1911-12, is his earliest integrated collage . . . In the *Still Life with Chair Caning*, Picasso used a piece of common oilcloth with a design of simulated chair caning, and then worked over it a particularly free and old pattern of still-life shapes. (127,129)

The exhibition *Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage,* recently at the Art Institute of Chicago, will travel to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto. Its catalogue provides a good description/summary of what is involved (and I clip and paste an excerpt from it, in counter juxtaposition to the excerpt from Arnason):

> Human heads on animal bodies, people in fanciful landscapes, faces that are deftly morphed into common household objects—these are among the Victorian experiments in photocollage explored in this marvelous book. With sharp wit and dramatic shifts of scale, these images flouted the serious conventions of photography in the 1860s and 1870s. Often made by women for albums, they reveal the educated minds and accomplished hands of their makers. Although these photocollages may seem wonderfully odd to us now, they are perfectly in keeping with a Victorian sensibility that embraced juxtaposition and variety

In other words, the exhibition suggests that Arnason's focus on the innovative nature of Picasso's collage technique is misplaced. Perhaps one might argue that these Victorian ladies cannot be considered artists; or more charitably, that the productions in their private homes did not enjoy the impact that a practicing, public, and self-proclaimed "artist" like Picasso would produce. Yet the importance of this exhibition would relate less to the question of "who came first" as opposed to the phenomenon of collage itself. *Playing with Pictures* suggests that one "natural" response to mass culture is collage; and it is the implications of this suggestion that are worth investigating. I will investigate them in disjunctive fashion, which leads to the first point.

- 1 -

THE JUXTAPOSITION OF disjunctive pieces constitutes a metaphor for human perception. Arnason's discussion of Picasso is done in the context of Picasso's invention of cubism, which is

Kate Edith Gough.: Photocollage. Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago.

entirely sensible and appropriate because collage and cubism are, at bottom, the same phenomenon. They take disparate views and combine them together into some new composition. Cubism (and collage, by implication) has been vindicated by investigations in human perception; because, as more than one observer by now has pointed out, the human eye darts about during perception, and takes multiple finite perceptions and in the brain combines them into a coherent whole This phenomenon is so basic it apparently occurs at the level of color perception—or, perhaps to be more accurate, color construction, see, e.g., Humphrey's *Seeing Red*.

- 2 -

The juxtaposition of disjunctive pieces constitutes a metaphor for human consciousness. The human brain constructs consciousness not only through "perception" of and from "outside" sources. The human brain also constructs consciousness through confabulation:

> The creation of coherent narratives in the brain is not limited to manipulation of low-level perception, as occurs with visual saccades, but extends to higher perceptual and cognitive levels. . . . Confabulation . . . is not a process under voluntary control. Rather, it's what the brain does when confronted with a problem it cannot begin to solve: it makes a story from whatever bits of experience it can dredge up, in much in the same way that narrative dreams are created from scraps of memory. (Linden, *The Accidental Mind*, 225-226)

What is important to note here is that not only do dreams provide examples of confabulation. Memory too can include its own "alterations or additions." If Proust can be criticized for his celebration of his experience with the madeleine, it would be in his assumption that the associations connected with it were all factual. At another juncture Proust does say it is better to dream your life than live it. In any case, the point is that not only is perception something of a cut and paste operation. The same can be said for consciousness, dreaming and memory. They too employ the tactics of collage.

- 3 -

For the past couple hundred years, much German philosophy has focused on the contrast between the IS and the NOT-IS, i.e., between the "positive" and the "negative." By taking particular citations from the "positive" (i.e., that which is) and re-arranging them, the collage artist creates a new negative (i.e., something which now is, but was not).

Perhaps a new negative might ameliorate one's response to the positive, if the contrast of the negative is horrible and makes the present look lovely or endurable. New negatives created by collage, however usually assume some sort of role in critiquing the positive. Sometimes it can be clear and biting, as in the works of Hannah Hoch and John Heartfield. Sometimes the critique is more implicit, working through (often comical) senses of disorientation, as opposed to a clear political agenda. Max Ernst's *A Week of Kindness* would constitute an instance of the latter. So would the work credited with the founding of pop art, *Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*, by Richard Hamilton.

Negation of the positive can be achieved through savage critique and light satire. As Bloch has argued, Utopian visions also constitute negations. The Victorians intimate some-

thing of this when they place photographs of themselves against romantic backdrops (plates 69 f.) One problem with these essays at utopia, though, involves the degree to which their constituents derive from the positive world. The weight of the world literally drags these dreams back down to earth.

- 4 -

The principles of collage have moved easily from two to three dimensions, e.g., in the assemblages of Duchamp and Schwitters, and the combines of Robert Rauschenberg.

- 5 -

Similarly, the principles of collage have been used in literature. In one sense such can be traced back to the second and third centuries, if, as Grafton and Williams argue in Christianity and the Transformation of the Book, due consideration is accorded Origen and Eusebius. To move forward to the 20th century, some writers all but contemporaneous with Picasso employed the technique, using direct citation, parody, and/or disjunctive tactics to break narrative flow and force the reader to adjust. T. S Eliot did it with poetry in his *Wasteland* (1922). John Reed did it with nonfictional narrative in *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919), and John Dos Passos employed it in his USA TRILOGY, *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *1919* (1932), and *The Big Money* (1936). Perhaps the classic example is provided by Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (Howard Eiland & Kevin McLaughlin trans., 1999), where he intended to create a book made solely of quotations from external sources. In 1973 with *Breakfast of Champions*, Kurt Vonnegut brought images back into the novel to aid his collage technique. In the recently published *Reality Hunger*, David Shields revives the technique, justifying it in part upon the new internet culture. The collage principle was used in song by Bob Dylan in the 1960s, particularly in his albums *Bringing It All Back Home* and *Highway 61,* where he combined an array of disparate images and allusions.

- 6 -

The collage principle has proven particularly conducive to internet culture. Internet culture, of course, goes past the appropriation of mere words. A number of media can and have been combined in "mash ups," with every person becoming his or her own artist—or collage practitioner. Perhaps the Beatles can be cited as a forerunner to this form, e.g., "For the Benefit of Mr. Kite" (taking circus poster words and setting it to music), "I Am the Walrus" (combining sounds from various "outside" sources, e.g., radio drama), etc. T S Eliot may deserve even more credit with his observation that good artists create while great artists steal.

- 7 -

One can argue how much credit Picasso should be given for originating collage when one considers the work of the Victorians. Perhaps their stuff was simply too private. However, one version of the collage principle had become quite public by the time Picasso started pasting together his pieces around 1911. This was the cinema. Initially, during the 1890s, "moving pictures" involved only the filming of one particular scene from one set perspective. Movie makers did work with double exposure and putting the film in reverse, but these were still grounded in one viewpoint. The collage principle began to emerge at the turn of the century, e.g., in Robert Paul's *Come Along, Do!* (1898) which begins with an old couple outside an exhibition, and then shifts to their activities inside the exhibition. The couple are not shown entering the exhibition's doors—that leap is left for the viewer to construct. Since then, the development of "film grammar" has placed more and more "demands" on the viewer: e.g., if one sees a building and then people talking in an office, one is generally expected to assume that the people talking in the office are in the building initially depicted. Similarly, the camera can focus on Jane talking, then Jim talking, or looking—but the viewer must assume they are interacting, even though Jane might have been filmed talking on March 16, and Jim might have been filmed talking on March 20.

- 8 -

While we think of collage as involving the juxtaposition and connecting of images or phrases, in a way it begins in language itself. If I write "one eats" the phenomenological experience of the sentence is hearing or reading "one" first, and then "eats;" and the reader or hearer must put those two disparate words together to make something of them.

- 9 -

An artist who resorts to collage may do so for political or didactic purposes. In other words, she may believe that coherent narratives are constructions, artificial, and possibly false. Collage calls attention to such issues by forcing the consumer to "fill in the gaps." As the consumer becomes more and more conscious of the gaps he is being asked to fill, he begins to think about these issues, why the artist is raising them, and so on.

- 10 -

Collage is imbued with legal issues. When one pieces disparate things together, where does thievery begin? Assume my earlier sentence read: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that collage is imbued with legal issues." Aside from evaluating the truth content of that sentence, a Jane Austen fan would know that the initial phrase was taken from the opening lines of *Pride and Prejudice*. And she would wonder why it was used in conjunction with the main allegation. There might be any number of reasons, but the most political have already been conceptualized by the French Situationists, and their notion of *detournement* (i.e., detouring a body from its habitual course, 25). As remarked by Tom McDonough in his *The Beautiful Language of My Century*,

> One would not "storm" language as one had stormed the Bastille; rather, it would be a matter of developing a counterdiscourse through stealing, plagiarizing, and expropriating speech, through reversing dominant meanings and accepted usages. At its most trenchant, the politics of language (understood in its broadest sense) in 1968 consisted of a diversion of, a resignifying of, elements from the dominant discourse; from advertising, from literature, from the visual arts, and so on. In other words, it was a reinvested conception of montage... Detournement was the Situationist recognition of the need to struggle for control of the sign's use, its range of reference, and the meaning it would assume in specific, conjunctural instances. (5, 44)

Hence, when intellectual property lawyers try to assert ownership over words and images, they participate in a project of hegemony maintenance. Through appropriation and re-configuration, the Situationist hopes to break the false and facile harmony of an economy based on the notion of happy but passive consumers; and to encourage the creation of a more liberated and autonmous subject. (44, 185, 191)

-11-

Nietzsche has written that the will to a system reveals a lack of integrity. At the very least, this reveals his philosophical position, viz., that experience cannot be reduced to a logical system. As Dostoevsky wrote, "Reality is infinitely various when compared to the deductions of abstract thought, even those that are most cunning, and it will not tolerate rigid, hard-and-fast distinctions." Human experience is sporadic and disjunctive. As Nietzsche developed this philosophical stance through his career, he also develops and reveals his philosophical content through his forms of presentation. Nietzsche's earlier works are presented in essay form—as if thought and experience can be tamed into convenient, rational, and comprehensible narrative. As his work progresses, however, Nietzsche relies more and more on aphorism, and short paragraphs, that shift from thought to thought. Again, this is a matter where form constitutes content and content is expressed in form. It should surprise no one that Wittgenstein resorted to this form, given the degree to which Wittgenstein disbelieved in language's ability to contain or describe much of anything. Marcel Proust, whose life fell between Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, also entertained skepticism about language's capacity to articulate any realty that truly mattered:

> . . . we have to rediscover, to reapprehend, to make ourselves fully aware of that reality, remote from our daily preoccupations, from which we separate ourselves by an even greater gulf as the conventional knowledge which we substitute for it grows thicker and more impermeable, that reality which it is very easy for us to die without ever having known and which is, quite simply, our life. [298] ... This work of the artist, this struggle to discern beneath matter, beneath experience, beneath words, something that is different from them, is a process exactly the reverse of that which, in those everyday lives which we live with our gaze averted from ourselves, is at every moment being accomplished by vanity and passion and the intellect, and habit too, when they smother our true impressions, so as entirely to conceal them from us, beneath a whole heap of verbal concepts and practical goals which we falsely call life. … Our vanity, our passions, our spirit of imitation, our abstract intelligence, our habits have long been at work, and it is the task of art to undo this work of theirs…(vi, 298, 299-300 )

-12-

In his essay "Education of Children," Montaigne wrote that "it is no more according to Plato than according to me, since he and I understand and see it in the same way." This argument holds relevance in the context of the appropriation employed by collage. On the one hand, a collage appropriate by its very nature acknowledges that the source IS Plato, and not the subsequent requisition. On the other hand, once an item is placed into a new context, that new constellation can and should be considered original—i.e., according to the artist, not to Plato, because Plato has become revised into something new in his new setting. Again, Montaigne: "The bees plunder the flowers here and there, but afterward they make of them honey, which is all theirs..." Whatever this analysis may have to say concerning plagiarism or rights of intellectual property, another feature should also be acknowledged, viz., the right of a human to enjoy and employ treasures from culture. University of New Orleans art professor Calvin Harlan once observed that culture was a banquet proffered to us by our forebears. To the degree that the plagiarism police or intellectual property hounds harass Montaigne, to that degree they steal from the banquet and impoverish everyone.

CONCLUSION

So at one level, *Playing with Pictures* presents the cut and paste pastimes of some upper middle class English women in the 19th century. At another level it shows the inauguration of the articulation of many of the issues noted above. However conscious (or not) were the efforts of these women, that such should arise from this group of persons is no accident. In terms of historical conditions, it was almost unavoidable for this group of privileged women to play the role of avatar for collage, given the way in which material conditions intersected with leisure. This group was possibly one of the first to experience middle class abundance—i.e., a surfeit of non-luxurious physical goods. Equally important, a surfeit of leisure time was "forced" onto this group so its members could serve as status symbols for their hard-working, high achieving husbands. While many of these upper middle class wives might have embraced their positions as prize display cows, statistically speaking there existed enough of them so that some of them, at least, might begin to react to their condition of material surfeit with creativity, involving the negating perspectives of humor, irony, satire, dream—and, eventually, protest. They developed their own answers to Hamilton's question *Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* And they anticipated him. ❑

*This essay is dedicated to the memory of Professor Calvin H. Harlan, whom the author cites above. Harlan was a founder of this journal. He taught at institutions in England and the American South — including Loyola University and the University of New Orleans, where the author studied with him.*
*— Editors*

Rachel Jones: *Past the Breakers*, 2010. Oil on plastic, 5" high. The Front Gallery.

# *Gallery Walk II*

BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

The Front
Louisiana Artworks
Le Mieux Galleries
Gallery Bienvenu

-

## *Rachel Jones at The Front*

Rachel Jones' solo show, "All My Love (To You My Love)," at the Front gallery on St. Claude, consists mainly of her trademark oil paintings on plastic. However, this presentation of work marks a departure from the large-scale installation typical of her exhibitions. The paintings have shrunk in size, though not potency, and are paired with contour drawings in graphite on white paper. Unframed, pinned up, and grouped together in what results in a large overall composition resembling an idea cloud, the drawings complement the familiar linear design of paintings placed flat against the wall. Though the layout and inclusion of different media are new for Jones, the paintings and drawings together tell a story of process, a continuing theme in her work, and create a new sense of intimacy.

The thirty or so drawings originate in Jones' regular sources: images culled from magazines such as National Geographic and pictures from internet sites like facebook, or other typically taboo reference material. Jones literally draws from these images figures and animals in organic and frank contour. More narrative compositions, including interior spaces and the figures that inhabit them, are balanced by portraits of disembodied heads in similar drawing style. It seems that Jones has changed her process from using photocopies of journalistic (and at times voyeuristic) images from published sources to drawing them in graphite, a more accessible and intimate medium than Xerox. Jones has never revealed this much of her process before.

Jones has also begun to incorporate text into her paintings. Text written in cut and painted letters appears as captions underneath the images or within the compositions themselves. The phrase "Dark Energy," written backwards and upside down, subtly emerges from a black hole of a composition created with unctuous swaths of impasto. The night sky is a motif in these works; repetition of stars and astronomical phenomena creates patterns in the paint. Wood grain and wallpaper also appear as subject matter, in addition to the expected figural compositions. As happens

Kate Samworth: *Calling Out,* O/C, 40" highl

with her use of drawing, the smaller scale of these works creates intimacy with the images, and the incorporated text seems like a private message between Jones and the viewer. Rather than distract, the text increases a sense of closeness and relationship with the work, intimated by the title of the exhibition.

## *Printmaking at Lousiana ArtWorks*

Louisiana Artworks on Lee Circle introduces its burgeoning printmaking enterprise with a survey of prints. The exhibit successfully gave a taste of different print processes – relief, intaglio, photographic, and screen – and styles from under-represented locals like Amanda Turpen, Gabriel Flores, and Grissel Giuliano. Turpen's intensely hued reliefs substitute dinosaurs for models in images derived from fashion pages, already a form of print. Flores' serigraphs on panel feature decorative bird motifs, suggesting the nature and appeal of advertising imagery. Giuliano's photographs explore death and decay through images of garbage and animal carcasses, relating a journalistic sense of inquiry and dissemination of information. Misaligned and sometimes missing labels and a puzzling organization in the design of the show belie the good quality of the images. But, the presentation of the images themselves is the initial attempt to show the prowess of print in New Orleans.

## *Kate Samworth at Le Mieux*

On Julia Street, Le Mieux and Galerie Bienvenu feature paintings about the figure in landscape. Kate Samworth's solo exhibition at Le Mieux, titled The Outskirts of Catatonia, consists of narrative drawings, lithographs, and oil paintings on canvas, relating imagined landscapes inhabited by somber individuals in dark moments. These surreal swampscapes are intentionally ambiguous, but the iconography plants them squarely in the realm of the sublime. Samworth creates atmospheric effects in a palette of deep blues, evoking the psychology of Goya and Caspar David Friedrich. In *Calling Out*, one small figure isolated with two others on a plateau that plunges infinitely into a chasm raises her hand to her mouth to send her voice unanswered into empty space over dim lamplight. Their clothing is unrelated to any specific time period, as though they are completely lost. Figures are only self-aware in each work, disconnected from the world outside their picture plane. The world within threatens to swallow them.

Arturo Mallmann: *Perdidos,* 2010. Acrylic and resin on panel.

## *Arturo Mallman at Bienvenu*

Even more infinitesimal figures inhabit the large-scale acrylic and resin works of Arturo Mallman in *Caminando sin Destino (Walking Aimlessly)* at Galerie Bienvenu. Mallman seems intent on revealing process, much like Jones, but by a different method. Layers of acrylic color are sanded and sandwiched within coats of clear archival resin, resulting in three-dimensional washes through which the screws holding the panel to its frame emerge. In a sense, these could be paintings about painting, from the construction of the substrate to the accumulation of layers of color that create illusion and mystery in two-dimensional paint. Tiny, abstractly painted, single figures or family groups stroll through the vast, sprawling washy landscapes, which show no other evidence of human inhabitation.

They are free of architecture, but also of much life, suggesting complete and naked openness. Skies fade from wide horizontal spans of deep indigo to foggy white, recalling the awesome terribleness of Friedrich's *Monk By the Sea.* Strangely, though, these figures seem confident and in control, perhaps because of Mallman's use of bright color to paint them. Mallman seems to ask his viewer to walk visually through the layers of his paintings, in which he offers as an opportunity for reflection, both on process and within the shiny reflective surfaces of his images, without the hindrance of the clutter of the physical world.

❑

Sandy Chism: *Tending*, 2010. Oil on panel, 80" high.

# *Three Exhibitions*

BY TERRINGTON CALAS

SANDY CHISM
Jonathan Ferrara Gallery
WILLIAM GREINER
New Orleans Museum of Art
SANDRA BURSHELL
Carol Robinson Gallery
New Orleans, LA
-

SANDY CHISM'S *SLIVER* seems to be a meditation on environment, chiefly the natural environment. But this suite of paintings (recently at the Jonathan Ferrara Gallery) hardly renders a conventional sense of landscape or seascape. Her pictorial tactic allows her to bypass that. The larger, key works here are actually implied collages – in a way, they evoke the aleatory, fragmented look of James Rosenquist's pop canvases from the 1960s. Certainly, Chism has none of Rosenquist's formal radicality, none of the fierce color or in-your-face compositions. But, for her, this sort of "collaging" is the perfect device for isolating and grouping subjects without the risk of preciousness.

In *Tending*, elements from nature and man-made spaces appear to be placed arbitrarily – in three distinct vertical planes. A conspicuously patterned honeycomb in the left section is rhymed with the related shapes, at far right, of a prosaic chain-link garden gate. In the center section, distant urban buildings are nearly dissolved by painterly brushwork. A pale hint of the honeycomb pattern floats in the warm-hued sky above. The whole seems somehow uneasy. Perhaps, it is simply a result of the montage-like disjunction. Or, more likely, we read something menacing in the honeycomb's nestled bees and its shaded twisting form. And then, there is Chism's chromatic sense. Her colors are rich, muted, gratifyingly complex, but, at the same time, they tend to slip into brooding darkness. The consequence is an inauspicious air, and perhaps a certain urgency. This might relate to any of several nature-man contingencies. *Tending,* beyond doubt, suggests more than a study of correlated motifs found in our surroundings.

In another three-part work, *Out of Stillness*, the juxtaposition of images is subtler, but the edgy tenor is undiminished. The picture is disarmingly beautiful, and, initially, you feel Chism inserting a measure of old-line traditional charge. The center section does precisely what a romantic seascape must: it draws you into a realm where nature both overwhelms and mystifies. And yet, as glowing and as persuasive as this image is, its bracketing sections create a richer, more profound experience.

First, Chism's format suggests a kind of mini-ritual, a meditation ritual: you're led to consider the painting in separate parts, and then as a whole. This slows you down. At left is a ship venturing toward a blindingly turbid horizon. Next, there is the sublime center seascape. At right, you gaze directly down onto the plain, vast, uneventful sea. Then, finally, the total work.

Sandy Chism: *Out of Stillness*, 2010. Oil on panel, 80" high.

The ritual is hypnotic and troubling, not least because each section of *Out of Stillness* is shown in a different scale and from a different vantage point. But also because it's obvious that everything you see is related. And, more important, that this painting is not about the timeless grandeur of nature. You feel fairly sure that Chism sought to supplant nature's "sublime" with something about "the here and now," something contextual, something that says the meaning of art is historically indexed. There is no need to attempt specifics, but this work can prompt long thoughts about our region in the past several years.

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IN WILLIAM GREINER'S photograph *Sport Palace*, a red reflection, a simple phenomenon of physics, seems magical. The ostensible subject is banality itself – the façade and parking lot of a suburban sports bar. But, as in much of his work, Greiner elevates it to a strange and dazzling brand of poetry.

His exhibition, "Fallen Paradise and Land's End," on view at the New Orleans Museum of Art, features two series: the former, pre-Katrina images of New Orleans; the latter, photographs taken recently in the Baton Rouge area. In both instances, Greiner wields his signature approach. Essentially, it consists of saturated color and palpable composition. But that is an understatement. For Greiner, color all but dominates the incidental imagery. It becomes the subject. And composition assumes the "make or break" role it had in classic late-modern abstract painting. Again and again, Greiner plies conspicuous design maneuvers – overt asymmetry, startling diagonals. Immediately, one thinks of William Eggleston and his one-time mentor Tom Young. Their posture was similar. They saw camera art through a painter's eye, an abstract painter's eye: nature and the built environment distilled and rendered as vectors or near-silhouettes – but with color as the abiding counterpoint.

Greiner takes this further. To be sure, he is a painter's photographer. Everything he does declares it. But whereas Eggleston's best-known work discloses a cultural aura, often a patent "Southerness," Greiner seems more intent on the rational process of pictorial structure. His New Orleans pieces are less cultural markers than artful transformations. He is especially taken with the force of angular motifs – the way they can affect perception. In his strongest pieces at NOMA, long jutting slopes, always in contrasting color, fairly govern the compositions.

In *Cinema 123*, for example, strong yellow bands trigger a staggering expansiveness, a leaping into and out of the rectangular format. *Lounge Chairs* is much like it. Two pale blue chairs-as-vectors pull your eye into the space, almost refuting the powerful red of the tile flooring. The corollary of this is a singular tension between form and content. Most of these pictures relate, if obliquely, to human activity. But Greiner's take on them is such that one can scarcely imagine patrons inside his sports bar or sunbathers on his rooftop chaise-longues. What we see here is an artist's minded view of his surroundings – minded and carefully re-registered. This is among the most intelligent photography in New Orleans. And a welcome alternate to the nostalgia we see too often.

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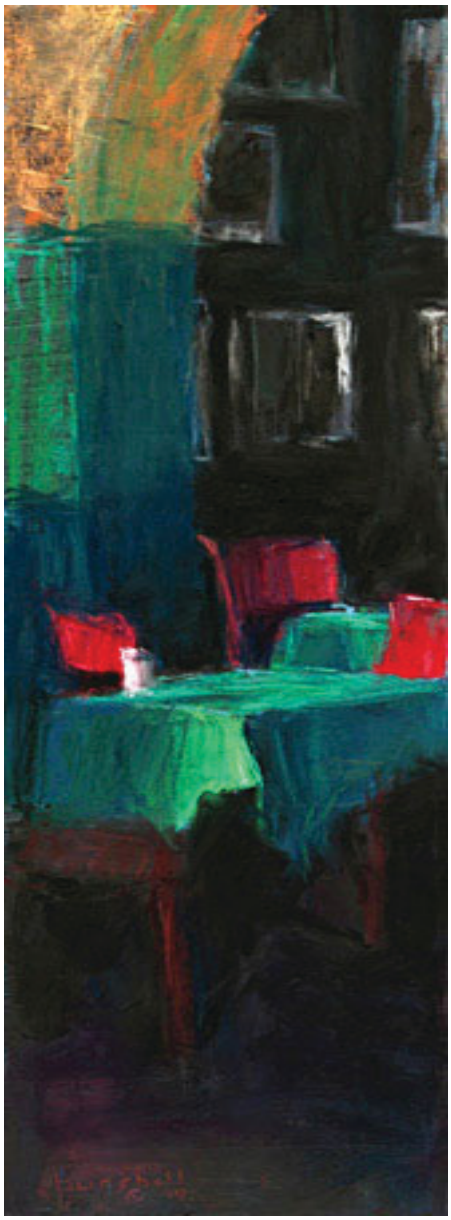
SOME OF SANDRA Burshell's pastel interiors (recently on view at Carol Robinson) read as ideal objects for the pictorial hedonist.



Sandra Burshell: *Cafe in Umbria.* Courtesy Carol Robinson Gallery.

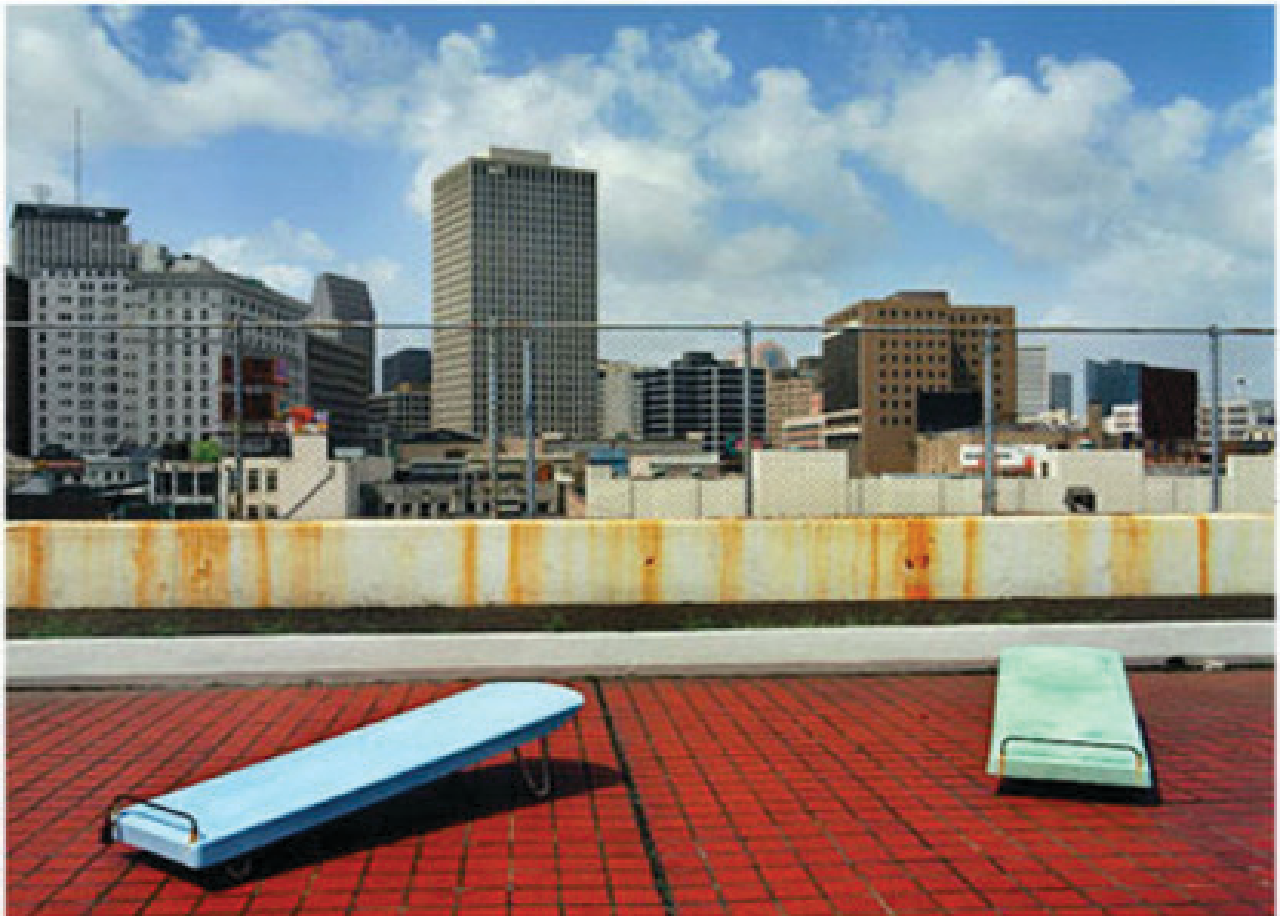
*Coffee Table* is a small gem of chromatic pleasure – lush, complex color taken almost to guilty extreme. *Napoleon House at Dusk* is an exercise in tonal painting achieved insouciantly, with exaggerated technique. The joy here is Burshell's undisguised technique. She conveys strong value shifts by means of chalk strokes that seem to interweave heedlessly. In *Mystical Light*, she opts for sheer drama, but controls it shrewdly. What might have been a kitschy-pretty play on one-point perspective is actually an intriguing pattern of deep tones and barely intimated architectural detail.

*Domestic Still Life* and *Café in Umbria* are flawless examples of compositional structure for its own sake. In fact, this is Burshell's forté. On a relatively modest scale, she manages to organize a format as few traditional artists can. She understands balance – every kind of balance, from the most obvious symmetry or near-symmetry to the unconventional off-grid in a piece like *Café in Umbria*.

At her best, Burshell overlays such compositions with the pastel equivalent of gestural painting – a seeming endless over-layering of color and line. She seems fully aware that pastels are a linear medium, but also an expansive one. The rich density of her technique is a testament of that.

Burshell's skill with her medium is best seen in the works that approach formal abstraction. I have noted the formal proficiency of *Domestic Still Life* and *Café in Umbria.* In certain other works, that formality is mitigated and, indeed, strengthened by mood. This happens in both *Coffee Table* and *Napoleon House.* Despite the complexity of these pieces – most notably the layering of line and color mass – they also express a humanizing aura, a psychological aura. Burshell manages this with shadow and with judiciously allocated negative spaces. In *Napoleon House*, it is a question of the darks that surround objects and a single warm light that bathes a portion of a wall. In *Coffee Table*, it is a modulated, expansive red – all that incendiary color surrounding a dark, opened door.

Bushell's conjoining of adroit technique and implied psychology is what matters in her work. It is most compelling when the human element – the emotional dimension – is oblique. ❑



William Greiner: *Lounge Chairs, NOAC Rooftop, New Orleans, LA.,* 1995. Lambda Lightjet print, 25" high.

Jonathan Pellitteri: *Sleep Tight (Under a Microscope)*, 2008. M/M, 27" high.

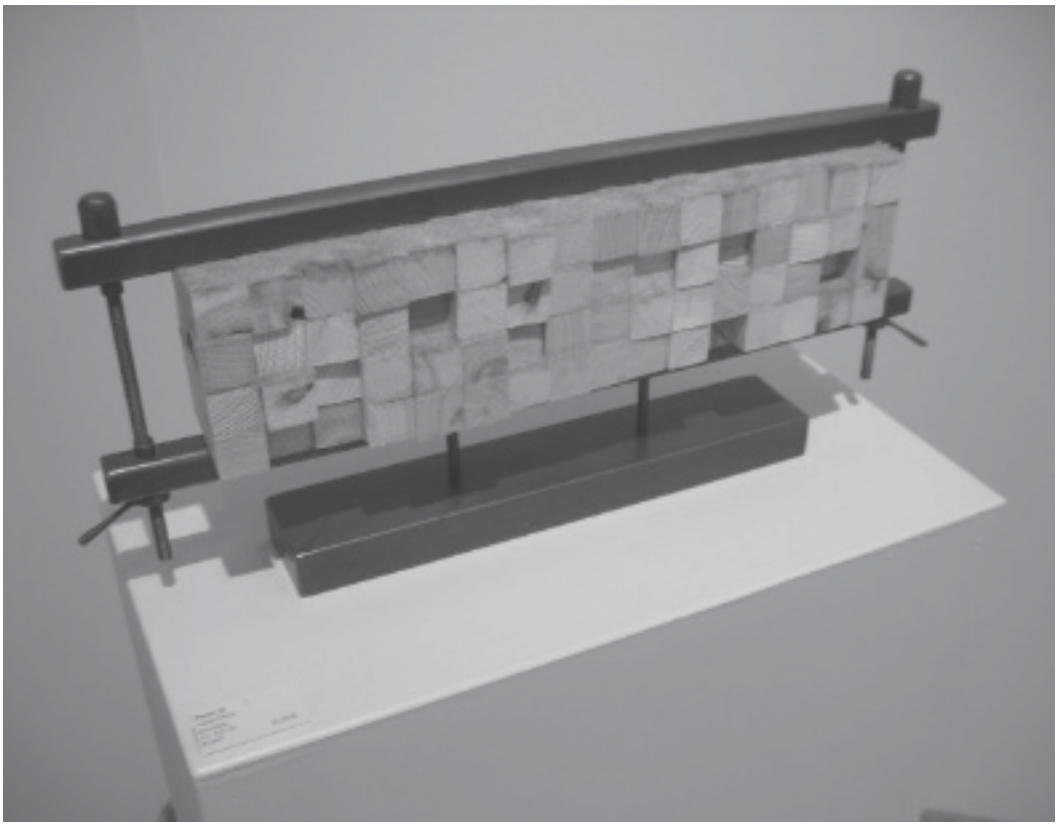
# *Pellitteri & Communication*

BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

JONATHAN PELLITTERI
New Works.
Brunner Gallery
Covington, LA
-

WALKING INTO THE exhibit of mixed media sculpture by Jonathan Pellitteri at the Brunner Gallery is like finding oneself in Antony van Leeuwenhoek's workshop if it had been placed in the well-lit studio of Vermeer. The space is populated by fantastic machines meticulously constructed with wood and cast iron hardware resembling archaic microscopes, balances, and devices for otherwise measuring, recording, and communicating about the world. Pellitteri's biography suggests an intellect and imagination geared for these kinds of constructions. He is the self-described son of an architect and grandson of masons; this lineage, and the interest in craftsmanship and design it engenders, predisposes him toward the clean aesthetic of architectural models that characterizes his work. Though seemingly functional, his machines are anachronistic. Their bulky construction and hand-made form are not viable in the current culture of fast-paced technology and small, sleek doo-dads and gewgaws. But, this might be the exact contrast that Pellitteri seeks. His work is a meditation on the culture of communication, and by its form, suggests that the contemporary issues he considers are age-old.

The most evident example of this is *Sleep Tight (Under a Microscope)*, a construction of cast metal and lenses of just slightly larger scale than this device would have in reality. In place of the expected slide, an infinitesimal wood frame bed with cast metal mattress and sheets rests on the stage, or platform, of the microscope. The "stage" suggests performance, and the multiple and piercing views of the five lenses pointed at it evoke anxiety. Pellitteri made this during a time when he was distanced from his then fiancée during a residency in North Dakota. According to an article from his solo exhibition at the Masur Museum, Pellitteri



Jonathan Pellitteri: *Pressure III*. M/M, 10" high.

and Nicole, now his wife, communicated via web cam. Eventually, Pellitteri left the cameras on constantly, streaming his life as he worked and slept. This constant watch created paranoia, and this is what is immediately communicated by the sculpture. The microscope is said to have been invented in the late sixteenth century, and of course, technology has charged forth since then. Since at least modernity, art has tried to capture the fast pace of the changing world through continued observation. But, the issue of constant exposure and the voyeurism it entails is especially current. Sleep Tight suggests Pellitteri's personal experience, but his iconography opens wide the subject of being watched.

Pellitteri hails from Massachusetts, where he received his B.F.A from Dartmouth College after a semester abroad in Italy studying casting. His vita, available on his website, says that, seeking new landscape and environment to influence his work, he moved to Louisiana to work toward a master of fine arts degree in sculpture at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. Water became a key concern in his work. Local industry depends on water, and the survival of the landscape continues to be an issue; these influences are evident in *Water Filter*. This assemblage is constructed of lined bags which drip water into live plants suspended from a warm wood framework. Clay pots are situated underneath to catch any errant drips. The doable conservation and recycling suggested by this piece is a stark contrast to the reality of the multitude of discarded cell phones, computers, recording devices, and other plastic trash created by planned obsolescence that fills our homes and landscape. The ease of watching has grown proportionately with the amount of devices used to link individuals. Pellitteri suggests a balance and simplicity, echoed in the pagoda-shape of the sculpture, that can be easily recaptured and implemented.

Pellitteri suggests his concern with sustainability in several models closely spaced in the second room of the gallery. These resemble architectural models and cross-sections of landscape. *Pressure III* is a stack of wood blocks flocked with green moss set between the tense grip of a cast iron vise. The horizontality and color of this piece immediately recalls landscape, and with changing vantage points, the sculpture offers visual surprises. Viewed frontally, it is a monochromatic and geometric assembly of wood common to architectural models. The pressure of the vise on the wood blocks causes a kinesthetic response, and the uncomfortable stooping position required to view it at this angle heightens the tension. But, viewed from above, the sculpture offers a calming expanse of green, which peeks from between the layers of wood. This overlooking view seems more rounded, and is the most immediate one. Pellitteri has given the viewer the whole of the work from the most comfortable vantage point, suggesting the benefits an overarching view, different from the myopia of keen and minute observation.

Pellitteri is a genius at making his viewer peer. His sculptures offer tiny spaces filled with surprises. He forces his audience to look closely by his intense craftsmanship and arrangement of materials and forms, but the craft and skill of his work simultaneously encourages a panoramic view. The viewer is compelled to both scrutinize and take in the general whole, in an effort to balance the tiny details with the entirety of the work and the exhibition. It is the same with daily communication, focusing on minutiae and editing for the sake of speed and convenience. Still, Pellitteri asks us to stop and consider, giving a needed moment of reflection about how we have and continue to engage in the world. ❑

Margaret Evangeline: *Bring Ribbons, Songs and a Good Red Wine,* 2010. O?C, 72" high.

# *Reason Knows Not the Reasons of the Heart*

BY KARL F. VOLKMAR

MARGARET EVANGELINE
"Writing to Alexandrie"
Heriard-Cimino Gallery
New Orleans, LA

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SENSUOUS LAYERS OF oil on canvas, juicy pigments running down the picture plane, ganglia of meandering lines, iterated and reiterated arcing brushwork accumulating as radially symmetrical forms expand outwards and upwards, ambiguous titles suggesting intimate narrative contexts, colors ranging from pale blue to fields of gold, textured earthen planes, intense reds the color of blood, of menstrual flow, of rose blossoms desiccating in the air are only some of the elements artist Margaret Evangeline employs in the artist's explorations into erotic intimacy displayed in the exhibition "Writing to Alexandrie" at the Heriard-Cimino Gallery.

Margaret Evangeline's new work affirms the direction her ongoing explorations have taken these past several years. A new involvement with the traditional medium of oil on canvas represents both a return to familiar ground and a turning away from the artist's flirtations with the cool, erotic sensuousness of steel and aluminum. Unforgiving metal planes now share the stage with the resilient elasticity of stretched canvas as the artist alternates between more conceptual and public installations and a more expressive and personal art. The explosive rupturing of steel and aluminum has yielded to the voluptuous flexibility inherent in the painter's brush. Glistening surfaces reflecting the ambient environment have been succeeded by the flow of paint from loaded brush with its many possibilities for nuanced expression.

Evangeline's redirection was catalyzed by the drama of Katrina. The artist's experiments with industrial materials and artificial forces were interrupted by a feeling of helplessness as she watched the tragedy in her homeland unfold from over a thousand miles away. The artist's response was a dance performance recorded in an impressionistic series of post-catastrophe works. The soft, literally impressionable sheets of building materials effected a transition between the unforgiving hardness of industrial materials to the soft vulnerability and inherent malleability of organic material through which the artist could express what was most deeply felt.

Margaret Evangeline: *Uncompromising Lyricist*, 2010. O/C, 72" high.

The immediate agency of real-time video (Stiletto) recorded the syncopated rhythms of an ecstatic dance in the tradition of that most passionate of dances of the dispersed, the tango. The movements of the artist's body, transmitted directly into the soft material ground, created patterns of puncture wounds like the spoor of wild animals in nature. It was as if the violence of the storm had effected a release of pent-up emotional energies that required direct interaction with materials for their expression. The moment is of such significance that a still from the video is the opening image for the artist's website. (The video itself can be seen on the site.)

The works in "Writing to Alexandrie" group themselves into four general categories for the purpose of discussion. One, represented by *Uncompromising Lyricist*, and *Bring Ribbons, Songs and a Good Red Wine*, is characterized by broadly brushed fields of red laid over a bright yellow ground and populated by nodules of interlacing gestures that form rudimentary camellia blossoms.

In *Uncompromising Lyricist*, a large six-foot square oil on canvas essay, reds ranging from the bright red of fresh blood to concentrations of a darker red the color of dried red camellias is brushed over the yellow ground to create amorphous, magma-like masses of color. Along the lower edge, where red meets yellow like the ragged edge of a well-used guillotine blade, juicy red

Margaret Evangeline: *Marguerite, Marie, Camille II*, 2010. Serigraph, oil on canvas, 48" high.

paint drips over yellow like the fringed edges of a hand-knotted carpet. The visual effect shifts from red over yellow, to yellow over red, to red and yellow butting edges that (unintentionally?) mimic the axe-cut stroke of Chinese painting. Here and there shapes of yellow and blue appear in the variegated red field like wildflowers' joyous celebration of life in a High Sierra meadow.

In *Bring Ribbons*, *Songs and a Good Red Wine*, multiple nodes within the red field the color of menstrual flow expand into more and more complex forms like blossoming buds pulsing with visceral life. Brushes loaded with the seminal substance of paint interact with elastic canvas to create pullulating zygotic nuclei drawing nutrients from the fluid substance of paint. In a phenomenon of aesthetic genesis emulating that of embryogenesis, these nuclei develop into more and more complex webs of interlacing lines pulsing with the possibilities of life. One is invited to celebrate this burgeoning growth with mental ribbons (note the vertically banded ground of alternating stripes of red and yellow) and singing and good drink. Yet there is an anxious, perhaps even ominous, feeling too conveyed by dark red, black lines that cancel out as much as create, blue lines struggling against the forces of disinte-

gration, and shapes that suggest nascent hearts as well as blossoms.

The glistening surfaces of Evangeline's metal work in which the viewer finds the reflection of self an integral element of the work have been replaced by the deep, inner reflection of expressive painting. The punctuated rupturing of surfaces is reconceived as openings in surface layers of paint through which the ground appears. Explosive perpendicular penetration has yielded to the gentler strokes of bristles across the canvas plane, violence to the anxious and erotic, raw irregular edges to variegated textures of paint, blatantly industrial materials to the organic and fluid. These differences may at first seem to suggest two fundamentally distinct orders of thinking yet there is, too, a sense, and the fact, that both are the expressions of one mind, and that the form in which those expressions manifest themselves are a product of the dynamic relationship between personal necessity and the changing ambient cultural environment.

*A Geography of Time* is quite different in color and technique from the above two paintings with their dominant red palettes. Ochre and earth tones are intermixed with a range of metallic grays reminding one of George Dunbar's meticulously crafted surfaces. The effect is one of western landscapes where ancient ocean beds have been lifted thousands of feet above their original home, of great clouds of dust storms illuminated by the fiery light of an occluded sun, of geological strata laid bare in eroded canyon walls suggested by coarse textured, tachiste impastos. A huge blossom drawn with looping lines, whose radial symmetry iterates Buddhism loti symbol of the universe, fulfills the promise of the buds of *Uncompromising Lyricist* and *Bring Ribbons, Songs and a Good Red Wine*. As one's eye carefully wanders through the landscape one discovers traces of experience embedded in the substrate of painterly substance.

*A Red Maze*, with its dominant blossom motif, reads as counterpoint to the richly textured memories of *A Geography of Time.* A frenzied accumulation of red arcs is brushed over the gold ground with such élan that particles have spun off into the interstices like sparks along the ionized path of high energy particles passing through a spark chamber. The centrifugal blossoming energy is cropped and framed but not contained by the square boundaries of the canvas. The drips and spatters of red express the tension between the acceleration of the arcing lines and the downward pull of gravity. Multiple vectors suggest a complex dynamic. It would be interesting to learn how the artist developed *A Red Maze,* and whether some lines were drawn in the manner of a Japanese calligrapher with the canvas horizontal and others in the conventional manner of easel painting.

*The Psychic Blossoming of a Well-Tended Wound* with its pale blue ground makes for an interesting comparison with the dark matter of *Another Kingdom, Another Compass*. The oval shapes drift in an ambiguous atmosphere over which floats a great blossom flecked with bits of red. Ghosts of earlier layers of color quietly intrude into one's consciousness like the healed lesions of a wound. The scarlet petals of *Another Kingdom, Another Compass* drawn over the heavily worked pigments of the dark ground enclose crescent shapes of lighter blue as if absorbing nutrients from the dark earth below. Here too are the thin, dripping streams and splatters of red such as one might envision in "dashing the blood [of the sacrifice] against all sides of the altar" before "an offering by fire of pleasing odor…" or "a sacrifice of well-being." The coincidence is intriguing as the exhibition coincides with the time of year for readings from the literature to which the preceding references refer.

Evangeline is adept at exploring the expressive and suggestive possibilities of technique just as a writer employs grammar and syntax to tell her story. In the distinct group of *This is Just to Say* and *Honey, Blue, Blue, Blue, Blue*, gold acrylic provides an impermeable ground for oil drawings. The white calligraphy of *This is Just to Say*, vaguely recalling Mark Tobey's delicate webs of paint, seem to appear in a pristine void as if by parthenogenesis. The streams and drips suggest the enthusiastic élan with which the artist wielded the loaded brush to bring the blossoms into being as order emerges out of chaos. In *Honey, Blue, Blue, Blue, Blue*, four multicolored blossoms dance their quadrille across a field of gold.

The series of serigraph and oil on canvas works, *Marguerite, Marie, Camille I and II*, is markedly different from the other pieces in the exhibition with the inclusion of the figure with its implicit narrative allusions. The sleeping woman, reproduced from an eighteenth century image, lies unaware, right arm raised over her head in an iteration of the classical pose representing both sleep and death, a pose which became one of the conventions for female nudes. Reproduced on the canvas as the ground for the artist's gestures, spatters, and shapes, the viewer becomes voyeur in relation the vulnerable form as one invades her intimate space. Traces of paint seem as the constellations of her dreams. Painting substance becomes vision, dream, world of being and becoming, the exhalations and inhalations of the ein sof that is one's self.

The inclusion of the woman and the French form of the artist's name in the title suggest deeper connections between artist and work not immediately, if at all, accessible to a male writer. This was suggested by a dance teaching artist colleague who brings the sensibility and intuition of a woman to the experience of Evangeline's art, the art of a woman responding to stories about women and using images of women. It was this colleague who recognized the color of menstrual flow and the significance of woman's body. Blood is the fluid of life and of sacrifice and menstrual flow the measure of a woman's harmony with the rhythms of nature and the gradual ending of possibilities for new life. Exuded from the most intimate areas of woman's body as the artist's expression comes from the deepest levels of consciousness, the vital fluids of the erotic, reproductive body are sublimated in the fluid substance and colors of the oil medium. ❑

Shawne Major: *Lamb,* 2010. M/M, 30" high.

# *Shawne Major: Sweet & Sour*

BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

SHAWNE MAJOR
"Tickle"
New Work
Heriard-Cimino Gallery
New Orleans, LA

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"TICKLE," an exhibit at Heriard-Cimino Gallery, features new work by Louisiana artist Shawne Major. Typical of her oeuvre, she amalgamates kitschy flotsam in large scale tapestries and sculpture. She meticulously sews plastic toys, carnival throws, pantyhose, computer innards, plastic snakes, colored lights, funky dolls, fake flowers, fur lining, chains, what appear to be bracelets or curtain rings, and other materials of a pack-rat or hoarding-grandma aesthetic into layered and textured compositions that are astounding from a distance, but beg a close look. While definitely rewarding, that look is somewhat dangerous; it can dispel, and even destroy, the original aesthetic response to the beauty of the object via the debasement of the materials used to make it.

Major began her career as a painter, and this influence is evident in the evolution of her work. Her tapestries begin with a traditional, rectangular white ground to which Major methodically adds layers of material, using a threaded needle as her brush. Transparent and rich opaque cloths combined with chunky detritus, all carefully organized by color, successively layer upon each other as passages of glaze and impasto. Up close, that heavy texture is really yarn and cloth flowers intricately knotted together with thread, and that transparency is actually gauzy tulle overlapping plastic circles that collectively create an under painting.

*Hundredth Monkey* is a prime example of the impact of painting in her work. Repetition of circles dominates the composition and evokes Kandinsky's *Sketch for Several Circles*, suggesting her art-school awareness. She utilizes the transparent/opaque relationship of materials that recall painting, but to a different effect. Objects are literally trapped underneath skins of gauze that create the circular shapes, peeking out with color but encased in an overarching and possibly formative event suggested by the tulle. Major regards her work as "screens" which are metaphors for our perception of reality. Information, memories, and experiences accumulate throughout time in the originally bare expanse of our

Shawne Major: *Elysian Fields,* 2010. M/M, 51" high.

consciousness. It is easier to associate the "psycho-emotional" that Major states is suggested by the messiness and disparity of the materials she uses. By linking them with exposed thread, she reveals the connections humans make with the lot of their experiences in order to survive the emotional and physical trials of living.

The method and the circular patterning that organize *Hundredth Monkey* immediately evoke the practice of Mardi Gras Indians, who regularly visit bead shops and art stores to obtain the miniscule seed beads which they individually sew to canvas and chipboard. Year after year, they create impossibly intricate costumes, using their hands and an obsessive drive to outdo their competition. While not necessarily competitive, Major shares a similar obsessive tendency, collecting and composing with tiny bits and pieces of things, from the stringing of gold piping in zig-zag pattern to dots of larger, splayed cloth chrysanthemums. The diagonal repetition of four circles in this context suggests the picture planes the Indians use to organize the imagery that forms narratives within the intricate designs of their costumes.

Mardi Gras Indians are legendary, and have developed a kind of modern mythology. Major refers to ancient mythology in her new work, and uses narrative to further explore the effects of formative events on human consciousness and identity. Other tapestries in the exhibit depart from the traditional painterly rectangle and morph into shaped "canvases" named after sirens, those alluring ladies who bring sailors to their fates. The shapes of the tapestries suggest the female form; Major herself states that clothing and especially wedding dresses inform this progression. These pieces share a human scale, and seem as though if fitted they could be worn. Though two-dimensional in overall format, the contours of the picture planes suggest volume. In *Parthenope*, a tiny bodice swells into a full skirt. The whole is a sexy red patterned with fur-lined oyster shapes that may refer to Meret Oppenheim's teacup,

Shawne Major: *Parthenope*, 2010, M/M, 89" high.

struck through with decorative blue stripes. It is tantalizing from a distance, but up close, that hotness is revealed to be more curtain rings and plastic detritus. *Lorelei* is sheath-shaped and created with gold glittering materials that, under deft gallery lighting, reflect disco-ball sparks onto the floor. In fact, the seductive surface is nothing but cheap carnival throws and sequins. *Leucosia* and *Ligeia* share zigging star-shaped patterning that may symbolize the attraction of shiny light, as is demonstrated by their counterpart *Lorelei.* But, their almost tongue-shaped silhouettes create a sense of a gaping maw against the gallery walls. Each succeeds in Major's ambition to create work that reads as attractive and beautiful from afar, but up close reveals the mundane and sometimes appalling, sharply broken, and fluid-coated debris that might crowd a New Orleans street the morning of Mardi Gras. This fits with the idea of the siren; from afar, they are irresistible; up close, dangerous.

Each dress-tapestry surrounds a central sculptural piece, *Elysian Fields*. The title again suggests mythology and the final resting place of the heroic. Major envisions this heaven as a giant, eight-tiered cake dripping with "icing" created by the most desirous strands of long, pearl beads. Small, bright yellow rubber ducks float over the cake, accenting the blue piping that highlights the edges of the tiers. The ducks smile sweetly though their chests are pierced with the black thread that holds them to the piece, creating a conflict of warm childhood memory and sharp empathetic pain. *Lamb,* another tapestry, hangs on a wall near the cake. This is a child-sized party dress form created entirely from pink materials, including crushed fabric flowers and a buck-toothed rabbit head. The piece could suggest the ethical debate of children's beauty pageants; again an idea of beauty is beheld from afar, but the attraction of the materials used to create that beauty is questionable. In the context of mythology, *Lamb* also suggests the Golden Fleece, and Medea's ultimate treachery as a result of its capture. It seems that no deed, done for the intention of love or happiness, can go unpunished.

"Tickle," the title of the show, indicates a prodding that has both intensely pleasurable and extremely unbearable qualities. This is also the dichotomy of Major's work. Her content generally concerns the way personal experience builds individual views of the world. It is not uncommon to see identities resulting from experiences manifest themselves in clothing. More specifically, those experiences, while always formative, can be dually sweet and sour, like the plastic candy-textured surfaces she creates. Major seems now to also focus on issues of gender. She uses the framework of mythology to explore archetypal female roles that have a dual nature, in a medium based in women's work. As "skins," or clothing, they are roles that can be assumed and discarded, much like the objects used to create them. To create these skins, Major weaves a complex psychological design that becomes more intricate with each pass of her needle. ❑

Whitfield Lovell: *Cada Dia*, 2004. Charcoal on wood, 46" high.

# *Prestidigitations & Permutations*

BY KARL F. VOLKMAR

WHITFIELD LOVELL
GREGORY SCOTT
Arthur Roger Gallery
New Orleans, LA

—

IN ONE OF the more curious moments in nineteenth century Europe's fascination with spiritual phenomena and the occult, Alphonse Louis Constant, under the pen name Eliphas Levi, wrote books on the history and practice of transcendental magic in one of which he explains how to communicate with the deceased. After first warning that this should not be done for trivial reason or out of simple curiosity, Levi instructs the initiate to gather together a veiled portrait and relevant artifacts, and share food and conversation as if the deceased were present.

In the work of Whitfield Lovell, the artist conjures images of the deceased with charcoal and conte crayon drawings on weathered wood combined with various found objects. Exuding an aura of time passed that may remind one of rummaging through an attic in an old house or barn, Lovell's drawings, which are based on antique photographs, with their suggestive, deliberately imprecise titles kindle associations with earlier generations. These portraits of men and women hovering in their ambiguous spaces, presented singly and in pairs, evoke associations with a underworld inhabited by the shades of departed souls.

Ancestor portraits have a rich history that arose among the Paleolithic roots of *homo sapiens*. From the more recent Neolithic, the plastered skull from Jericho speaks to one of reverence for those have gone before. Maori ancestor spirits inhabiting community meeting houses known as *warenui* participate in important decision-making in a communion of past and present. Modern photographs, like Republican Roman portrait busts as artifact and evidence reflection on which brings ancestors into present tense, Lovell's figures wait patiently, waiting to hear what questions a viewer might ask.

What questions would we ask? Who are these individuals? What were their lives like? What did they do for their livelihoods? Did they have children and, if so, how many, and what happened to them? What made them laugh? What made them sigh? What made them weep? Would they respond? What lessons do they have to teach the living? These are the some of the questions one might ask these men and women who look at us with measured gaze.

In order to discover what these men and women might have to say, I invited a colleague from Massachusetts, dance teaching artist Erica Sigal, to meet Lovell's characters. As a dancer and

Whitfeild Lovell: *Ansermar,* 1999. Charcoal on wood, 115" high.

teacher Sigal brings a highly developed intuitive understanding of bodies and movement and nonverbal communication to the art of interpretation that would be invaluable to understanding what Lovell's men and women might have to say. As we moved from work to work, she listened attentively to those who seemed to speak to her most clearly. What she experienced is transcribed below:

*I was first attracted to* Ansermar. *Two figures are drawn with charcoal on a large wooden panel made of naturally aged and stained planks cut from what appeared to be the wall of an old building. Before I could approach the figures more closely a seemingly haphazard array of single planks propped against the main panel distracted my attention by their vicarious angles and edges. Then, as my eyes began to wander among this seemingly casual arrangement, my attention was drawn into the ambiguous space where the man and the woman waited quietly. My eyes continued to follow their bodies upwards. The panel with its gabled top edge was like a miniature house like those one sees in medieval illuminated manuscript paintings. Indeed the contrast between the active foreground and static plane of the panel drew attention to the assured drawing of the prim and proper figures as difference yielded to the pleasing and restful earth tones that infuses the work as a whole. The apparent random arrangement and dilapidated condition of the weathered wood directed my attention to the couple watching and waiting as if to catch my eye as if I were strolling along the sidewalks of a small town, greeting neighbors as they sat on their front porches after the evening meal.*

*The prim and properly dressed, according to the standards of the late nineteenth century, couple consists of a middle-aged man seated in a woven wicker chair, his left hand holding what may be a straw boater hat and resting on his knee and a woman standing beside him. It seems curious to me that the woman is dutifully standing as if prepared to attend to the man's needs rather than her own. What were they doing that day when they halted to pose for the photographer? Relaxing after going to church? If we were walking along a residential sidewalk of a small town, everyone would know everyone else's business and no one would have to ask. Comfortable, even casual, in their non-confrontational poses, they could be exemplars representing a slice of upper middle class life a la* The Ladies of the Club. *Perhaps it is they who are watching us with guarded gaze, wondering who are these strangers and what are they about? They continued their silent watching we passed by.*

As we turned away from our meeting with *Ansemar* and considered whom to visit next, I began to think about the weathered wood panels in the context of the symbolism of trees and time

in world cultures. How might Lovell have incorporated such associations into his work? The wood speaks to us of the trees from which the lumber was cut, the grain of growth marking the passage of time like generations evolving outwards and upwards from the center, the knots expressing the dynamic energy of erupting growth, the traces of the history of the tree whose wood forms the houses that shelter the generations of the family tree. On this allegorical ground the artist has traced images of men and women that seems to emerge from and dissolve into an amorphous space akin to the dream time of the Australian Aborigines and the Navaho pool of time. Indeed the very notion of traditional wisdom elides the notion/fact of linear time, of nature and of nurture, of a truth whose value transcends the limitations of circumstances.

We passed by several works before pausing in front of *Patience* for our next visit. As my colleague began, I wrote down what she said:

Patience *is a larger than life, knee-length portrait of a young adult woman wearing a high-collared blouse, jacket, and skirt with a bustle rises above an old-fashioned wooden radio resting on a short plank at the base of the vertical panel. It is curious that the bustle, a fashion that ended by the late nineteenth century, should be juxtaposed with a radio that that came into use afterwards. Her quietly intense expression is neither happy nor sad and she seems to have paused just long enough for the source photograph to be taken before continuing on with important work. Intense formal relationships unite radio and woman in an ongoing conversation of shapes and lines and forms. They communicate with each other with an eloquence made more so in their silence. The curving form of the radio case echoes the curves and inverse curves of the woman, her eyes and brows, the top of her head, breasts, and shoulders. The diagonals mirror her shoulders, hips, and head, the vertical mullions the folds of her skirt. The three knobs of the radio are iterated in the two dark knots in the panel on either side of her head, the center knob the shape of her mouth. The radio mirrors the torso from shoulder to waist. Rich, warm earth tones in the medium value range of sepia photographs suffuse the whole miming the patina of age.*

Intuitively following Levi's dictum to use objects associated with the deceased with whom one wishes to converse, Lovell includes various artifacts, each with its own history and role in the lives of those who used them, and which await decoding by the aesthetic ethnographer. The 1999 works includes full length figures on large seven by eight feet plus painted or stained wood grounds with boxes (*Workings*), corroded cookware (*Still*), stands with potted plants like one might find in a funeral home (*My Sin*), old boards (*Ansemar*), banister posts (*Eight Rock*), and an old wooden ladder (*Canaan*) in front. The works from 2004 include partial figures on plain boards with single objects (radio, chair, drum, rifle). In the 2006 and 2008 works, Lovell includes objects such as an unpainted sideboard, enamel cups, silver sets and ware, and radios. The artist's precise spacing of these various objects creates intervals as significant as the things in themselves, and which contrast with the ephemeral presence of the figures. Lovell's apparitions, existing in their indeterminate, are as elusive as Mu Chi's *Six Persimmons* or a *hatsuboku* landscape by Sesshu, yet are just as assuredly something even if not of tangible substance. The artist's careful juxtaposition of form and interval is as poignant as the sound of a single note whose duration serves to emphasize the tangible quality of the ephemeral. If persistence of vision accounts for the simulation of continuous movement in film perhaps one might posit a persistence of artifact and interval as that which makes Lovell's figures seem alive.

As I was musing on the above, we had moved away from *Patience* and were now standing in front of *Cada Dia* to which we now turned our attention:

*The young man wears a large, wide-brimmed hat and coat with fur collar. The formal dialogue between woman and radio in Patience is iterated in that between the man and the chair positioned in front of the panel. The arcs of chair arms and back are mimicked in the shoulders and wide brimmed hat. The roundness of shapes stained into the panel from cans left standing on the floor mirror those of face, head, and hands. The empty chair mirrors the emptiness in the young man's eyes. His serious expression, as if he were on his way somewhere, seems interrupted in mid-action, and is enigmatic in that there is scarcely any hint of what he was doing or what he does for a living. Yet he wears a macho hat in the style of the Boss of the Plains created by Stetson. Is this merely a chance coincidence or might the macho hat and the title, Spanish for "each day," indicate that he may have been living and working in the American West? The assertive pose generates the space in which he exists as if saying "I make my own way."*

Deuce, *from 2008, represents a middle class, twenty-something African American couple whose superficial poses mask an uneasiness. What does the title deuce allude to: the number two in gambling with dice, a pair or two of anything, the element of chance? They appear to be economically comfortable, well dressed, the man wearing a coat of fine fabric and a tie, the woman a sailor collar top. Yet the woman's face, blank, quietly serious, with a pleading look in her eyes, looks out at us with a mixture of sadness, of resignation. The man stares into space. The two are not communicating. What were their lives really like?*

*Life seems to be going well, at least in terms of material conditions: an a la mode high-backed chair, a silver tea set resting on lace covered shelf, the tray dysfunctionally attached to the panel in upper right. Do the curvilinear forms of the objects that echo the shapes of figures, the continuation of the arabesque of the handle of the teapot along the curve of the man's right arm, do they imply that he too is an object?*

*A heart-like sugar bowl is suspended close to the man's heart, an empty bowl, meant to echo the man's empty expression? Are the woman's eyes pleading from the empty feeling in her heart? Yes, they seem comfortable in material terms, successful, but is theirs a loving relationship between a man and a woman?*

What have we learned from our visits with these shades from the past? Their voices seem silent to we who watch and wait attentively. It is we who must eke out meaning from the quiet dialog between shadows, surfaces, and artifacts. Are their messages like those of *Hegeso* or *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi* the meanings of whose mute testimony are self evident? The things of this world, this everyday world, may have been of value to Shih Huang Di and Mycerinus, but they are of no value to one who lives in a world of shadows and memories. The one known as Koheleth has written of this matter so eloquently. Yet it is those same things

Gregory Scott: *Attemptuous*, 2008. M/M, 38.5” high.

Gregory Scott: *Escher-esque*, 2009. M/M, 27" high.

with which one seems to be most concerned while alive for the nature of existence is to be. It is as if Lovell's characters are saying "We have lived our lives. All that remains are photographic memories, and the things around which we lived our lives. Now you will have to live your lives as we did, each on your own."

GREGORY SCOTT'S *Outside the Frame* mixed media work is more fun than walking through one of the old fun houses at the state fair or a mystery spot along the highway leading to a popular vacation site. In his updating of American nineteenth century *trompe l'oeil* illusionist painting, Scott employs modern representational technologies to create works that delight the mind as well as fool the eye. Combinations of flat screen HD video, oil paint on panel, and archival digital printing create layers of illusion that confound the viewer's ability to distinguish between static and time-based representational media. One delights in being deceived by virtual reality without any necessity for suspending disbelief.

If Scott had worked as an artist during the first century before and after the Common Era, one would have found him authoring fresco painting at Pompeii or Herculaneum in what has been described as the fourth style in which faux design, pictorial illusionism, and the illusion of illusion are integrated into a whole interior design. In referencing individual works to specific artists and forms of kitsch, Scott succeeds in expanding the conceptual dimensions of his work beyond the simple fun and delight in media manipulation.

With a display of wit shared with Hairy Who?'s H. C. Westermann and Jim Nutt, Scott can make biting commentary while making one laugh and say "Wow!"Appreciation of *Color Grid* is increased if one is familiar with the sardonic and ironic academic realism of surrealist Rene Magritte. *Fridge* parodies both banal refrigerator art as well as Rauschenberg's sophisticated combines of the fifties. *Attemptuous* spoofs Manet's Olympia with the humor of Benny Hill comedies or a *Saturday Night Live* skit. The saccharine shopping mall confections of Thomas Kincaid are the inspiration for a Rowan and Martin skit a la old television's *Laugh-In* and *Hee Haw* in *Tossed*. *Escher-esque* accepts the challenge of the popular work of M.C. Escher by animating the earlier artist's perceptual conundrums.

While it is necessary to see Scott's work in the gallery to comprehend it as a whole, one can spice up the experience by first visiting the gallery website where the artist's works are presented as isolated images with the even texture of a digital image. One cannot be certain whether the image represents the work itself or a photograph of the work in the ambient environment in which it is exhibited. The digital homogenization of the different media creates a situation in which video, painting, and digital print are indistinguishable one from another. One does not know what is art and what is accident. The fun comes in trying to guess which area is which media before visiting the gallery exhibition.

Even when one knows how it is done, it is still fascinating. I invited several techies where I work to visit both the gallery's and the artist's sites. Even they, with their jaded ability to be impressed, were challenged, and delighted, by the seamless viewing experience of Scott's work. ❑

Joaquín Oristrell's *Inconscientes*

# Comedy and Consciousness in Catalonia

BY JOHN MOSIER

INCONSCIENTES
Director: Joaquín Oristrell

*INCONSCIENTES*, DIRECTED BY the unknown Spanish director Joaquín Oristrell, begins with a fake newsreel purporting to show current events in the year 1913. The black and white footage slowly morphs into sepia and then color: we're at a mens' boxing club, watching a ferociously mustached man deliver blow after blow to a trainer's outstretched hands. A young, beautiful, and conspicuously pregnant woman bursts in, demands for him to tell her: Salvador! Does León have a mistress?

Startled to the extent that he gets knocked down by a punch from the trainer, Salvador (Luis Tosar), flat on the canvas, looks at her in shock, assures her of her husband's fidelity. Do you swear to God? Alma, you're an atheist. An agnostic, Alma (Leonor Watling) retorts, and the audience is off on a one hundred minute romp where the surprises of the plot are only matched by the wit of the dialogue, and, if anything, exceeded by the gorgeous sets and costumes.

Oristrell is one of those talented directors no one in the Anglosphere has ever heard of, even though he's made half a dozen films. No one's ever heard of Llorenç Miquel, who did the production design, or Deborah Chambers and Bina Daigeler, responsible for the art and costumes, respectively. But the level of artistry in this film would put any French or American work to shame. So would the script (Dominic Harari and Teresa Pelegri) and the camerawork (Jaume Peracaula). *Unconscious*, the English title, is tightly constructed, totally outrageous, and ultimately quite serious.

At first the story seems simple enough. León has abruptly rushed off, has disappeared, and Alma wants her brother-in-law

Joaquín Oristrell's *Inconscientes*

to find him. But immediately there are complications and distractions. When Alma's housekeeper, Señora Mingarro (Mercedes Sampietro), opens the door, she's clearly drunk as a skunk. When Olivia (Núria Prims), Salvador's wife, promptly shows up bringing baby clothes for her pregnant sister, they get into a wildly comic interchange about sex. Alma is definitely enjoying it, but Olivia isn't. She confesses the problem, which has to do with Salvador's anatomy, while he spies through a keyhole.

Ten minutes into the film and one has no idea where the story is going, or if indeed it's going anywhere. It seems as though the director simply got lost in a series of diverting but inconsequential scenes. They're definitely diverting. Alma and Olivia are huddled together on the couch. Olivia's whining about her sex life with Salvador, and how it hurts! Alma, a smirk playing round her lips, begins whispering to her an explanation of how you can please a man without actually, you know, doing it. It's not clear exactly what she's telling her sister, as she's whispering. But when Olivia, who's been smoking a cigarette, starts to put it to her lips, and then recoils delicately, the secret is clearly and comically obvious.

Watching Alma rapidly becomes an end in itself. Not only is she pretty, but she has a remarkably expressive face, is able to convey all sorts of emotions and reactions with just the right degree of nuance, is the perfect foil to Salvador and Olivia. The opening scenes come dangerously close to being nothing but theatrical comedy, perfectly acted and expertly paced, but so meandering it's hard to see the movie as anything but a farce.

Then the film begins to take yet more unexpected twists and turns. The sisters have a father, and it turns out that Doctor Mira (Juanjo Puigcorbé ) is a psychiatrist—as indeed is Alma's missing husband León (Àlex Brendemühl). We see the father preening and strutting, waving a cigar, introducing a famous German medical authority to a gathering. A parody of a self important and self centered big shot, he proceeds to introduce no less a specialist than Doctor Alois Alzheimer. The good doctor is sitting with Alma, who turns out to be rather fluent in German, as she provides the translation for his speech.

But after a few sentences, the good doctor can't remember exactly what it was he was going to talk about, is standing there, bemused, searching his pockets for his notes. Eventually he finds a tiny piece of paper, looks at it blankly. Oh yes, memory.

The result is a totally outrageous moment in comedy, utterly ridiculous, and yet slipped into the film so neatly, that it takes a moment to realize the joke, the sheer preposterousness of Herr Doktor Alzheimer forgetting what it was he was going to talk to his fellow psychiatrists about. But it's a measure of the film's cleverness that any serious student of psychiatry would probably recognize the character: the actor playing Alzheimer is a dead ringer for the standard portrait that hangs today in the Max Planck Institute, a picture in which Alois Alzheimer looks like every foreigner's

stereotype of a Bavarian hick, just as he does in the movie.

But if the audience thinks that the rest of the film is going to be nothing but a series of outrageous jokes, they're quite wrong. *Unconscious* is definitely a comedy, but it's also a startlingly brilliant film with a serious subject that emerges from the wildly melodramatic plot, a story so full of bizarre twists and turns that it's doubtful that even the most expert film buff could predict where the action is going and how it will be resolved. Envision a really world class performance of a Moliere comedy, by turns preposterous, cheerfully vulgar, always witty—and expertly crafted. *Unconscious* is one of those rare works where a good deal of the pleasure comes from the surprises that keep popping out. Like *The Sixth Sense,* it should be seen without knowing the ending, or in this case, the multiple endings.

The serious subject is the impact that the new science of psychiatry, as championed by Sigmund Freud, had on the lives of those who were familiar with it. The Viennese doctor even makes an appearance towards the end of the film. However, without giving anything away, it can safely be said that Freud's appearance is not simply a cameo, and that the subject of his lecture, an abstract of the opening of his essay on "The Savage's Dread of Incest" in *Totem and Taboo,* is definitely relevant to the story, as is the fact that Alma is translating it in front of the audience. The words coming out of Freud's mouth are really Freud's, even though at the moment Alma's translating them, the coincidence seems too stupendous to be true.

It's worth pausing for a moment. Using Freud's dry-as-dust words to trigger a dramatic and highly emotional scene towards the climactic point of the film is a high risk endeavor. There aren't many people in movie theaters familiar enough with Freud to recognize that this is indeed lifted right out of his essay, that the lines he's quoting are indeed the tip of the psychoanalytic iceberg, not to mention this is a rather peculiar lurch for a comedy to take.

But with high risks come high rewards. Every detail in the film, no matter how irrelevant it seems at the moment, is carefully planned. It takes a while to figure the careful planning out. But for the story to work seamlessly, not lurch from improbability to improbability, it is definitely important that Salvador is no mean boxer, can defend himself with his fists (but gets flattened whenever his attention is diverted by his sister-in-law), that Señora Mingarro is a drunken and insubordinate housekeeper, that Olivia is terrified of Salvador's virility, and that Alma's husband has up and disappeared in a strange and teary outburst.

Now it's a measure of just how confident Oristrell is that he doesn't mind the risk of losing his audience in all these entertaining distractions. He's confident, and he thinks his viewers are educated and observant (whether they are or not is subject for a different day). Given the tendency of filmmakers to dumb down nowadays (if in fact they're not actually dumb themselves), so that the most wretched and asinine stories are slapped onto the screen with thinly disguised condescension, *Inconscientes* is a welcome change.

But Oristrell is confident in another way as well. He doesn't mind repetition. As James Agee famously remarked, a certain sort of repetition defines great comedy, separates it from slapstick and one liners. This film is practically a textbook in all the ways to use repetitions, because not only do they develop the humor, but they fit seamlessly into the plot, advance the action, even when we don't realize it.

Now it's quite true that all of the basic elements of this story are found in the great comedies of the theater, from *As You Like It* to Wycherly's *The Country Wife* and Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband.* To the extent that it can almost be said that the complex double plot involving multiple male-female pairings is almost their signature. But when we turn to the cinema, we rarely find all of these elements to be present. Generally speaking we either have the developing romance of two couples, a double plot with only one romantic strand, or, most of the time, nothing more than slapstick with an occasional verbal sally.

Moreover, when filmmakers adapt a period comedy to the screen, the result invariably ends up looking like a filmed play. It's as though the magic of the cinema has been stripped out, which goes a long way to explaining why the best literary adaptations of comedies come not from the theater but from the novel. In the Anglosphere, that leads to yet another problem. The Victorians denigrated the idea of the comic, just as they did the absurd. The only serious art was really Serious, which in practice meant that sentimentality substituted for humor.

Although there have been occasional exceptions, by and large, they haven't fared particularly well as sources for directors, and this is particularly true for the handful of modern novelists who've tried to make use of laughter to make a serious point. Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim,* still one of the funniest novels ever written about higher education, didn't survive the process, and no one has even bothered with Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall*, the other hysterically funny take on the subject. When we see a genuinely witty film that makes us think, it's almost always either an original work (Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*) or it turns out that the source wasn't all that amusing, as is the case with Alan Parker's *Road to Wellville.*

On the continent—and in South America—the idea that an author can be serious without falling into a coma of high seriousness has never died out. Even the greatest and most philosophical of novelists aren't above making us laugh. Although the tradition of learned wit exemplified by Voltaire in Candide pretty much died out with his English contemporaries, with Sterne and Fielding and Smollett, it survived in novelists no one has ever accused of being frivolous. There are unexpectedly comic moments in *War and Peace*, passages in Proust that can hardly be read without laughing; Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* definitely has its moments, and even a writer as grim as Dostoevsky can slip in a few outrageous quips, as he does in *The Devils.*

*Unconscious* is squarely in that tradition, and to be perfectly honest, although it's a highly amusing work, the subject matter is no less profound for being funny. In a sense, it fits perfectly: it was after all Freud himself who wrote the first and most significant essay about the relationship between jokes and the unconscious, just as he carefully analyzed the psychopathology of everyday living.

In his bitter and bitterly funny work, *The Stupid XIXth Century*, Léon Daudet, who was among other accomplishments a medical doctor, pointed out interesting examples of how diagnostics in medicine seemed to follow the alleged discovery of a new ailment. Before the ailment had a name, no one was ever diagnosed with it, but then, miraculously, dozens of cases appeared. As Daudet observed, this insight leads to an intriguing philosophi-

Joaquín Oristrell's *Inconscientes*

cal question: to what extent did the ailment exist before it was named?

So the serious part of the film is its analysis of the impact of this new discipline on the lives of educated men and women who were aware of its insights, who suddenly felt as though the keys to the deepest human drives and needs had suddenly been revealed to them. But since those insights were, by definition, highly personal, the effect was to move the person not only to a new level of self-consciousness, but to be suddenly flooded by a whole set of new and disturbing feelings—simply because now they had names, could not be easily dismissed, since Freud had claimed they were of vital significance.

The result—which Oristrell captures perfectly—is paradoxical. On the one hand, there is the possession of these new insights. Not only Freud's: Alma is very much a first generation feminist, Salvador the perfect stereotype of the Man of Science at the dawn of the century. The result is to imbue the elect with precisely that sense of *übermenschlichkeit* that Nietzsche had described. But at the same time, these new insights, in which the most highly educated and civilized European was compared not only with the hopelessly neurotic, but with the naked savages of Australia and Polynesia (as Freud did in *Totem and Taboo*) were truly frightening.

And of course there's a certain melancholy undercurrent here when one sees all the opulence of Catalonia in 1913: Spain's descent into the abyss of the century had not yet begun. But it would, and the desire of some of the main characters to leave, to go to Argentina (a grimly ironic but historically accurate choice), is a reminder of the country's unhappy fate. Like much else in the film the premonition is understated, but it's definitely there. Karl Kraus famously called fin-de-siecle Vienna a "Laboratory for the Apocalypse." So was Barcelona in 1913. The only difference was that in Spain it took another decade or so to arrive. A film as impressive as it is hugely entertaining. ❑


David Bates at the Arthur Roger Gallery.

# Calendar

COMPILED BY KATHY RODRIGUEZ

A GALLERY FOR FINE PHOTOGRAPHY – 241 Chartres St. 568-1313. www.agallery.com - Lynn Goldsmith: Rock and Roll (photography), thru July 5

ACADEMY GALLERY– 5256 Magazine Street. 899-8111. Student exhibition, June-July; Faculty exhibition, September.

ARIODANTE GALLERY– 535 Julia St., 524-3233. www.ariodantegallery.com - Shared Summer Show (various media) June 5 - July 2; Whitney White Linen Night featuring Myra Williamson-Wirtz and Daniel Bonnot (painting) with Belle Bijoux (jewelry) and Paul Troyano (wood work), August 7-September 4; Amy Archinal and Julie Breaux (painting) and Debra Villa (jewelry), September 4-October 3.

ARTHUR ROGER GALLERY – 432 Julia St. 522-1999. www.arthurrogergallery.com - James Surls (sculpture), thru June 27; The Gulf: Works Completed Before the BP Spill (various media), June; Lin Emery (sculpture), August.

BECA GALLERY– 527 St. Joseph St., 566-8999. www.becagallery.com. New Works benefit for BECA, ongoing.

BARRISTER'S GALLERY – 2331 St. Claude Ave. 525-2767. www.barristersgallery.com - Silent Art Auction to benefit Haitian Artists, June 6; Hurricanes, Hand Grenades, and Other Delights: Scott Guion (painting), June 12-July 17

BRUNNER GALLERY– 215 N. Columbia St. Covington, 985-893-0444. www.brunnergallery.com - Group Exhibition featuring Rick Brunner (sculpture), Paulo Dufour and Scott Amrhein (glass), Edwin Pinkston, Linda T. Dautreuil, Diane Hanson, and Kat Fullilove (painting), thru June 15; Group exhibition including new work by George Dunbar from the Multiples Series, Rick Brunner, Paulo Dufour and Steven Durow, June 12 - July 10, 2010; Arless Day (painting), ongoing; Art Chaud: The Bastille Day Celebration, July 17 - September 4; New Directions by Louisiana Artists, September 11 - October 9.

CAROL ROBINSON GALLERY – 840 Napoleon Ave. at Magazine. 895-6130. www.carolrobinsongallery.com - 30th Anniversary Exhibition, June 5 - July 31; ongoing virtual exhibition

Stephen Hoskins at Jonathan Ferrara.

COLE PRATT GALLERY – 3800 Magazine St. 891-6789. www.coleprattgallery.com - Andrew Bucci (painting), thru June 27; Robert Lansden, Dale Newkirk, and Robert Ferguson (works on paper), thru August 15; Group Show, August-September.

COLLINS DIBOLL ART GALLERY – Loyola University. 861-5456. http://www.loyno.edu/dibollgallery/ - Delta: Sandra Murchison and Found: Christian Van Caampen (paintings and sculpture), thru September 9.

CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER – 900 Camp St. 210-0224. www. cacno.org - Saints and Spirits: Art of Haiti, thru June 6; Harry Shearer: The Silent Echo Chamber (video), thru June 6; Joan Mitchell in New Orleans (prints), thru June 30.

d.o.c.s. gallery – 709 Camp St. 524-3936. www.docsgallery.com - Group Show, June 5 - August 6; Beverly Morris (sculpture), August 7 - September 30.

GALLERY BIENVENU – 518 Julia St. 525-0518. www.gallerybienvenu.com - Transfer: Teresa Cole (print and installation), June 5 - July 22.

HERIARD CIMINO GALLERY – 440 Julia St. 525-7300. www.heriardcimino.com - Field Studies: Courtney Egan (video), thru July; Floating Worlds: Pinkney Herbert (painting), August-September.

HISTORIC NEW ORLEANS COLLECTION – 533 Royal St. 523-4662. www.hnoc.org -
Katrina + 5: Documenting Disaster (photography), thru September 12

ISAAC DELGADO FINE ARTS GALLERY – 615 City Park Ave. 361-6620.
JONATHAN FERRARA GALLERY – 841 Carondelet St. 522-5471. www.jonathanferraragallery.com - Reconsidered: Stephen Hoskins (painting), June 1 - July 28; Group Show, June 1 - July 1; New Works: Kathleen Ariatti Banton, August 4 - September 1; 14th Annual NO Dead Artists Juried Exhibition, September 4 -25.

LeMIEUX GALLERIES – 332 Julia St. 522-5988. www.lemieux-galleries.com - Gallery Group Show, June 5 - July 31; Paintings: Jesse Poimboeuf (painting), August 7 - September 25


Sandra Murchison at Loyola's Diboll Gallery..

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NEWCOMB ART GALLERY – Tulane University. 865-5328. http://www.newcombartgallery.tulane.edu/ - Joan Mitchell in New Orleans (painting), thru June 30

NEW ORLEANS MUSEUM OF ART – City Park. 606-4712. www.noma.org - Beyond the Blues: Reflections of African America In the Fine Arts Collection of the Amistad Research Center (various media), thru July 11; Feathers, Fur, and Flowers: The Natural World in Edo-period Painting, thru June 20; Joan Mitchell in New Orleans (paintings), thru June 27; Fallen Paradise & Land's End: William Greiner (photography), thru July 3; SWEET Suite Louisiana: Warrington Colescott (prints), thru July 3; The Therapist: Donald Woodman (photography), thru July 11; A Donation to NOMA: Patti Smith (photography), thru July 25; Swamp Tours: Exploring the Louisiana Contemporary Collection (various media), thru August 29; Women Artists in Louisiana, 1965-2010, thru September 12

OGDEN MUSEUM OF SOUTHERN ART – 925 Camp St. 539-9650. www.ogdenmuseum.org - Where They At: New Orleans Bounce and Hip-Hop in Words and Pictures (photography), thru August 1; Works: George Andrews, Benny Andrews, and Nene Humphrey (painting), ongoing;

SOREN CHRISTENSEN GALLERY – 400 Julia St. 569-9501. www.sorenchristensen.com - Karen Humphrey (paintings), June; Group Work, July; Tony Hernandez (painting), August

TAYLOR BERCIER FINE ARTS – 233 Chartres St. 527-0072. www.taylorbercier.com - Vessels: Gary Komarin (painting); Small Works: John Randall Nelson (painting), thru June 28.

STELLA JONES GALLERY – Place St. Charles, 201 St. Charles Ave. 568-9050. The Talented Tenth: African American Artists of the Harlem Renaissance, the W.P.A., and Beyond; June 1 - July 31.

STEVE MARTIN GALLERY– 624 Julia St. http://www.stevemartinfineart.com/ 566-1390. Timo Solin, Steve Martin, and Jamali (sculpture), July 7 - 30; New Work: Jamali, August 1 - 31

3 RING CIRCUS GALLERY – 1638 Clio St. 569-2700. www.3ringcircusproductions.com - B-Movie Double Feature: Heather Weathers (video and photography), thru July; Disburbance: Kathy Rodriguez (painting and drawing), August.

UNO ST. CLAUDE GALLERY - 2429 St. Claude Ave. 280-6493. ❑

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