

DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

548 W. 22nd St. (989-5566)—Bridget Riley's retrospective isn't easy on the eyes. Her abstract paintings are notoriously dizzying, employing a bag of optical tricks that turn abstract patterns of stripes, undulations, and dots into visual static faster than you can say Excedrin. Consider the virtuosity of a painting like "Paeon," from 1973. Close inspection reveals it to be a crisp series of red, green, and blue stripes on a white ground. But as you step back, the painting turns into a pulsing rainbow that breaks down into vibrating pixels. Riley is highly regarded in her native England, but she has been relegated to the narrow annals of Op-art history in this country. This show of nineteen works, all but four from the sixties and seventies, should help to reestablish her historical distinction. Through June 17. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

GROLIER CLUB

47 E. 60th St. (838-6690)—"The Fine Art of Letters: The Work of Hermann Zapf." A true man of letters, Zapf has designed more than two hundred typefaces, including such modern classics as Palatino (shipped with every Macintosh) and Optima (engraved on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial). His most recent design is the elegant Zapfino, a digital alphabet that replicates the cursive strokes of calligraphy, another of Zapf's passions. Examples of his calligraphic art, including a German translation of Lao-tzu silk-screened onto gold paper, lend an air of intimacy to the dust jackets, broadsides, page proofs, and other selected ephemera. Through Feb. 10. (Open daily, except Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (869-8089)—"Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World" brings together more than five hundred and fifty volumes, prints, broadsides, and first editions, including one of Thomas More's "Utopia," from which the concept and the show take their names. Proposed alternative worlds tend to reflect the problems of their era, but some suggestions appear timeless—Plato wonders if he can successfully banish lawsuits from his Republic, and Christine de Pisan dreams up a lavishly illustrated "Cité des Dames." The show's indisputable star is one of three known original copies of the Declaration of Independence, which appears at just the right place in the historical progression to counteract a roomful of woody accounts of early contact with the New World's noble savages. Jefferson's strong words about tyranny are still awe inspiring, particularly in the original handwriting. But after that the show pulls up short, closing with some faded Communist propaganda and a shelf of nonthreatening paperbacks. Through Jan. 27. (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

JOYCE KOZLOFF

The centerpiece of this veteran feminist's latest show is "Targets," a walk-in globe nine feet in diameter. Apart from superb acoustics, the interior offers wall-to-wall aerial maps, each of which depicts an area bombed by the U.S. since 1945 (by Kozloff's count, there are twenty-four). Despite being rendered in cheerfully bright color, it's a rather dour, earnest piece of agitprop. The other works here show Kozloff at play: smaller globes and paintings combine nautical charts, medical diagrams, and unreliable ancient maps of the Silk Route. Kozloff's scrambling of sources can sometimes feel a little blithe, but her cartographophilia is infectious. Through Feb. 3. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111.)

"HUE"

The theme of this choppy four-person show seems to be "light as color." Landscapes predominate, although the ghostly Zen abstractions of Mark

Tobey are a welcome exception. The selection of artists feels arbitrary—particularly the inclusion of photographer Paul Caponigro. The obdurate realists Peter Poskas and the late Joyce Treiman seem best suited to the theme. Poskas has a gift for capturing the harsh blue light of frigid weather, but his taste for rosy dawns and dusks is sometimes cloying. Treiman is more colorist than luminist, though one large canvas of floating ducks does achieve a watery translucence. Through Feb. 17. (Schmidt-Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. 888-1122.)

Short List

VITO ACCONCI

Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444.

Through Feb. 17.

CAROL K. BROWN

Haime, 41 E. 57th St. 888-7869.

Through Feb. 3.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

CLAUDE HEATH

To create the odd, linear tangles in his New York debut, this young Londoner starts off blindfolded. Heath runs one hand over an object—an African mask, a cast of his brother's head, a partially peeled orange. With the other hand, he translates his tactile impressions into layers of contour lines. The final canvases are slickly produced enlargements of these original drawings. They're big, puzzling, and elegant (Giacometti comes to mind, as does Ross Bleckner), but they feel removed from the quirky process that created the imagery itself. Heath should wear his blindfold more often. Through Feb. 10. (Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 563-4474.)

KAREN KILIMNIK

The weird kid strikes again. Kilimnik's new paintings, drawings, collages, and constructions—installed along with fake snow on black drapery, recordings of seasonal songs, a lit-up model of a giant snowflake, and other symbols of ensorcelled winter nights—convey the Philadelphian's current fixations on Russian ballet and snowbound adventure. Some works derive from photographs Kilimnik took of the Kirov in performance, others from her visions of Ernest Shackleton's ship trapped in a universe of ice. The artist is a poet of girlish adolescence. How does she manage to avoid being precious, much less cute? Desolate emotion darkens her charm. "Hellfire Club Episode of the Avengers," a reconstituted "scatter piece" from 1989, is also in the show, and it stands the test of time. Through Feb. 10. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-0024.)

LISA YUSKAVAGE

Many people profess dislike for Yuskavage's paintings of dreamy, cartoonish female nudes. One suspects these people judge by reproductions. A visit to the artist's new show of sweetly louche babes in decorous mansion interiors will set them straight. In fact, Yuskavage's work heralds a rebirth of classical eloquence in painting, albeit on notes of coarse fantasy. Her way with the brush and with incendiary color (magenta shadows!) generates intimate intensity and visual delights. Through Feb. 3. (Boesky, 535 W. 22nd St. 680-9889.)

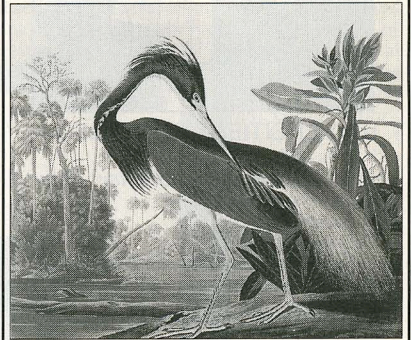
"SALAD DAYS"

"I wanted to do a really punk-ass show," says Michael St. John, the curator of this high-spirited, high-attitude roundup. The horde of participants, mostly twenty-somethings plucked out of art schools, responded with a giddy variety of works, from a giant red-plywood stegosaurus to a video hidden in a trash can. In this context, the most winning pieces are often the most delicate, especially Mary-Beth Gregg's small and eerie figurines on pedestals, one of which, a naked pear-shaped man in boots, wears a beautiful green fright mask. In the humor category, the winner is Holt Quentel's perfect Duchampian one-liner: a Saarinen chair neatly encased in a plastic slipcover, and titled "Courtesy of Mrs. Ruth Kaufmann." Through Feb. 3. (Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318.)

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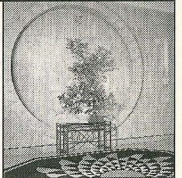
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