

Art in Review



Francis M. Naumann Fine Art
of Duchamp's 1920 work "L.H.O.O.Q."

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WENDENER

sured pencil-and-crayon study on poster board from 1945 (the year Mr. Levy finally gave Mr. Gorky a show). The wiry, graceful composition is anchored in the center by a seductive slash of orange, a welcome, colorful note in a show of minor works by a major 20th-century artist.

ANDREA K. SCOTT

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Stanley Whitney

Breathing Sound

Esso
531 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through tomorrow

Technically, I guess, Stanley Whitney's painting belongs in a Modernist tradition of geometric abstraction, one that would include scientists like Josef Albers and atheist-mystics like Ad Reinhardt. But where their art is based on balance and regularity, Mr. Whitney's is about imbalance within a paradigm of balance, irregularity that invokes regularity to depart from it.

In his compositions of high-color squares and rectangles set edge-to-edge between horizontal bands, the geometric elements vary in size; the supporting bands are unevenly spaced; some surfaces are matte, others brushy. There may well be a mathematics to the variations, but it isn't an obvious one.

Also, in this geometric abstraction, the geometry is notably pliant, casual even. The bands tilt a little, or sag; the sides of squares and rectangles lean and bulge, sometimes bleed into each other. As a result, everything has the softness and yieldingness of cloth without evoking specific kinds of textiles. For one thing, no textiles have colors quite so sharp and complicated. And it is in color that Mr.

Whitney picks up the Modernist connection again, linking to Albers, or Albers plus Matisse, and does his own thing with it, makes a sensuous science.

HOLLAND COTTER

Marisa Merz

Gladstone Gallery
515 West 24th Street, Chelsea
Through tomorrow

Marisa Merz, an important figure in the Arte Povera movement, has a small, chapel-like installation of new work on Gladstone's second floor. The seven pieces are drawings of heads and faces, done in smudgy graphite and washy colors, in a light-touch style that brings to mind Odilon Redon, Medardo Rosso, wispy fashion illustration and Ms. Merz's delicate knitted copper wire work from the 1960s.

Some of the heads evoke African sculptures: one has the bulbous head, arching eyes and curve-patterned surface of Songye dance masks. Others recall Byzantine icons in which the veiled Virgin has the rounded head of a great dove or owl. Ms. Merz enhances the sacerdotal atmosphere by using gold paint in several pieces; by framing one drawing like an altarpiece; and by attaching a small, shattered plaster hand to another, turning it into a kind of reliquary.

It would take very little further pressure in a quasi-religious direction to spoil everything. But this doesn't happen. The private, sequestered, interrupted feeling of the drawing, as if it were done within moments after waking from a dream-filled sleep, makes it persuasive.

HOLLAND COTTER

Lisa Yuskavage

David Zwirner Gallery
525 West 19th Street, Chelsea
Zwirner & Wirth
32 East 69th Street, Manhattan
Both through Nov. 18

Ripeness is all in this sprawling, two-location exhibition of new works by Lisa Yuskavage, the painter's debut as a member of the Zwirner roster and her first New York solo in three years.

Featuring nearly 30 pieces — large oils downtown and smaller, related paintings and drawings on the Upper East Side — the shows again star the dreamily rendered, improbably cantilevered women with whom Ms. Yuskavage has made her reputation. At first glance, these new works seem as dominated as ever by their subjects' cartoonish physical attributes: wistful, pneumatic nudes set in sumptuous jewel-toned environments, their louche fecundity echoed in sexualized scatterings of globular fruit and bursting floral arrangements.

Yet these paintings also hold clues to the evolution of Ms. Yuskavage's program. Her transgressive tight-rope act between feeding and interrogating the male gaze is now more rewarding because she has endowed her characters not simply with dramatic curves, but also with an increasingly vivid inner life.

This new consciousness is most explicit where two figures interact. Inspired, the artist has said, by the vigorously physical, emotionally charged forms of Italian Baroque sculpture, their postures run the gamut from tender — as in "King-

dom" (2005), in which a kneeling woman is caressed by her standing partner — to fraught and needy, as in "Imprint" (2006), in which an older woman holds a younger partner at bay on her lap, her grasping fingers recalling the famous hands of the underworld god as he seizes the daughter of Ceres in Bernini's "Pluto and Proserpina."

These poignant pas de deux reach their apotheosis in works like "Ledge" (2005) and "Painted Things" (2006), in which one half of the pair becomes swollen and slumped in a fairy-tale landscape, a melancholy puppet to which the other figure is attached in a gesture that simultaneously suggests dependence and ministrations.

The complex symbiosis proposed by these works, often evoking warring elements of a single self, is brought full circle in "Brood" (2005-06), in which the subject is plainly with child. Here what has previously read as sexual is now conflated with the maternal: an interweaving of desire and its upshot that is as pregnant with possibility as anything the artist has produced.

JEFFREY KASTNER

Jennifer Bornstein

Gavin Brown's Enterprise
620 Greenwich Street, at Leroy Street
South Village
Through Nov. 18

You are an anthropologist studying your own tribe without benefit of camera. What to do? Try etching. In her first New York exhibition since her 1998 debut, the neo-Conceptualist Jennifer Bornstein does exactly this, very exactly.

Known for straightforward photographs and films of awkward teenagers, Ms. Bornstein now excels at small, meticulous, slightly naïve etched portraits of her subjects, starting with her teenage roommate, who is observed foraging in the refrigerator, practicing kung fu, reading National Geographic (!) and doing his laundry.

Librarians who Ms. Bornstein gets to know doing research appear, as do her friends, her students and someone identified only as Scruffy Guy. Hair on heads, bodies and faces, along with tattoos, shag rugs and even bushes, are accounted for with particular zeal, sometimes in the tight snail-shell curls familiar from ancient Buddha sculptures. These images evoke the early work of Andy Warhol, Lucian Freud and David Hockney, as well as recent paintings by Sarah McEneaney, who records her own life with similar awkward tenderness.

Ms. Bornstein's prints, apparently drawn "in the field" on prepared plates, emphasize the purity and empathy present in all her work. But hers is not an innocent eye. Among the 55 images are depictions of the anthropologist Margaret Mead in Samoan dress, Mead's lover and Mead's husband's Jungian analyst. The rituals of female performance artists, including Ana Mendieta in her bird outfit, are recorded. And Ms. Bornstein depicts film installations, small puzzlelike sculptures and personal fantasies, as in "Fatty Arbuckle Showing My Film." Ultimately, the show diagrams a complex network of emotional and intellectual ties, forming a portrait of the artist, living and working.

ROBERTA SMITH