

ARTFORUM



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REVIEWS

USA

New York	
Lisa Liebmman on TERRY WINTERS	72
Thomas Lawson on GERRY MOREHEAD	72
LEON GOLUB	73
Ronny H. Cohen on JOHN WILLENBECHER	73
MIRIAM SCHAPIRO	74
"COLLAGES AND RELIEFS 1910 - 1945	74
Barbara Kruger on "STALKER"	75
Richard Armstrong on MARK TANSEY	75
KEN KIFF	76
Glenn O'Brien on DON VAN VLIET	76
Donald Kuspit on MILTON AVERY	77
"THE DESTROYED PRINT	77
BILL JENSEN	77
DAVID DEUTSCH	78
Charles Hagen on "FACES PHOTOGRAPHED"	78
Kate Linker on "PRECURSORS OF POSTMODERNISM	79
IDA APPLEBROOG	80
Jeanne Silverthorne on SYLVIA PLIMACK	
MANGOLD	81
FRANK STELLA	81
John Howell on ANN MAGNUSON	82
Edit deAk on BRUCE DAVIDSON	82
DONDI WHITE	83
Chicago	
Judith Russi Kirshner on EVA HESSE	84
San Francisco	
Hai Fischer on WRIGHT MORRIS	84
La Jolla	
Christopher Knight on "ITALIAN RE-EVOLUTION	85
Los Angeles	
Susan C. Larsen on MICHAEL C. McMILLEN	85
ENGLAND	
London	
Stuart Morgan on GEORG BASELITZ	86
HOLLAND	
Groningen	
Paul Groot on ENZO CUCCHI	87
WEST GERMANY	
Düsseldorf	
Annelie Pohlen on LOTHAR BAUMGARTEN	87
ITALY	
Rome	
Ida Panicelli on GIANNI DESSI	88

Illustrations within the review section are designed to be considered as references to (not reproductions of) original works. In the dimensions, height precedes width; performance, film, and video are represented by two images where possible; installation photos are indicated by a surrounding gray box.



Terry Winters, *Fruition*, 1982, oil on linen, 52 x 68"

New York

TERRY WINTERS, Sonnabend Gallery:

Terry Winters' organic forms are wanderers across and within the picture planes. They stop short only at moments of realization. The twenty or so works here, the produce of the last six months, reveal a diarist's frame of mind, and Winters' entries on botanical and mineral subjects, if indifferent from the naturalist's point of view, make a beautiful, studied account of the biology of painting.

In the small- and middle-sized paintings Winters presents his specimens in varied aspects, at various stages of maturation and dissection, in unpatterned groupings, on subtle but heavily worked grounds. His colors—the muddy pinks, clay and slate tones, dark umbers, and soft blacks of the earth—immediately dispel any suggestion of the laboratory microscope and root these subjects in their fields of association: not color fields, but landscape. The paintings, in other words, are pastorals, and these relics of nature are led to pictorial place according to the uneven richness of a painted loam.

Winters' very visible process is terrier-like. He digs for forms, worries them, hides them, pulls them out. His canvases are full of inchoate vegetation, of flowers partially or almost completely erased, scratched out, painted over, of plants slightly rendered and given half-life. The "unfinished" elements, though self-conscious, animate the work, while the fully realized shapes, in the foreground and in focus, give it substance. Certitude is set off against the traces of all manner

of altered or dangling decisions; a staunch corporeality pulls against the twitches of magnified nerve endings.

Though Winters' work seems hermetic, it is not without its apparent influences, or at least correlations. Winters is a more convincing naturalist than Susan Rothenberg, but like her he uses recognizable, reiterated forms as catalysts to procedure. More interesting because more dilute is the influence of Anselm Kiefer. Winters has been thickening, confounding, and giving increasing texture to his painted fields, for instance, and seems for the moment to have shifted toward darker, Kiefer-ish color schemes. In the four largest paintings, a series entitled "Theophrastus' Garden," Winters adopts and reformulates the swooping, topographical vista so thoroughly identified with Kiefer. The reformulation suggests both admiration and resistance. The field flowers in two of the paintings, for instance, are positioned like Kiefer's memorial slashes and flames of resurrection, only these hover serenely, almost childishly, above ground; the flowers in one piece are reduced to lollipop state, and the marsh plants in two of the others are virtual orientalisms. All four paintings allude to decoration and to the spirit of cultivation; they are indeed gardens, not landscapes. In these variations, Winters plays Thoreau to Kiefer's Nietzsche.

Despite their size, their implied strategy, and their placement in the gallery's sanctuary area, these paintings were the most frivolous shown. As their title denotes they have a peripatetic quality, and considerable grace, but finally their effect is more aimless than philosophical. The rest of the paintings

are grittier, forthright, and dogged. Winters is a reticulated, complex artist whose poetic language tends to be self-conscious and a little rarefied—there is a vague hint of complacency in his work. Nonetheless, his first New York exhibition was impressive.
LISA LIEBMANN

GERRY MOREHEAD, the Clocktower; LEON GOLUB, Susan Caldwell Gallery:

GERRY MOREHEAD

Two often contradictory tasks face any serious artist: to participate in a wide-ranging discourse that includes the formal concerns identified as the realm of the esthetic and the more topical concerns that tie art to contemporary life, and thus to history (these latter are often dismissed by formalists as merely "sociological"); and to hoist an array of baffles to disturb that discourse and to deflect the predations of those explainers who would too easily reduce the work to a package, a cipher of itself that can be used more conveniently as a token in the spectacle of cultural exchange. Gerry Morehead has always seemed highly conscious of this problem, producing a body of work which, over the years, has seemed apposite and yet oddly obscure. (As this review went to press a small exhibition of Morehead's older work opened at the Kitchen.) Morehead is of a generation that has found renewed interest in paint, not so much because of its material qualities as because of its role as a culturally laden medium of representation. His paintings abound in references to art and to the world beyond art, some of which are quite specific,

Gerry Morehead

THE CLOCKTOWER

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In this show Morehead exhibited seven smallish canvases. Each of five of these was dominated by a single image dissolving into many incidental details and rebuses, which often seem dictated as much by the interior logic of the work as by the originating image. The remaining two canvases were blank, white from an uninflected gesso surface. In a sense functioning as no more than a rhythmic device within the specifics of this installation, these two paintings nevertheless provided a key to the show as a whole, for their presence served as a sign of the artist's self-consciousness, a clue to the viewer that all decisions in the show were to be understood as intentional. These white paintings are the *tabula rasa* from which sprang the others, and as such represent a beginning, but also acknowledge the end.

While these two paintings, in context, indicate that Morehead intends to be understood as thinking about painting and representation in painting, the contextualization works both ways, with the five other canvases helping to suggest another, more sardonic reading. The imagery that animates these five is that of the marketplace, and in particular the exoticism of the Casbah. It is the market as spectacle in its crudest, most obvious form, the market that appeals to the tourist and the movie director. The imagery runs the gamut from rugs to drugs, from street urchins to old women, and it is presented as pastiche, referring not just to movies, but also to a range of art from Delacroix to Picasso to the formulaic products of Montmartre or Washington Square. Within this range of loaded information the blank paintings suddenly loom up again, unmistakable counters in another, equally spectacular, equally picturesque market—that of art.

There is a sense in which Morehead's work can be taken as being political, and it is the only sense in which art can be political and hope to succeed—and that is through the creation of a dialectic of meaning and the means by which

meaning is expressed. Morehead's art is political in the sense that it searches for the possibility of individual decision-making within a thoroughly conventionalized system, an unsystematic investigation of types of information, of imagery, and of codes. It is a discourse on limits and possibilities, an acknowledgement and celebration of uncertainty.



Gerry Morehead, *Untitled #7 (Stanza)*, 1982, oil on canvas, 40 x 30"



Leon Golub, *White Squads (II)*, 1982, acrylic on canvas, 10' x 15' 7"



John Willenbecher, *Apollo*, 1982, mixed media, 90 x 48"

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LEON GOLUB

Thinking of politics in relation to Gerry Morehead's work might seem unexpected, maybe even unwarranted, but the strength of the work lies in its ability to deflect one's attention in such a way. Leon Golub's work, on the other hand, insists that it be taken in only one way, as a political statement, and while that insistence is a source of charm, it is also the work's greatest weakness.

Golub's recent paintings have an undeniable grandeur, a convincing simplicity of conception and execution. Working on a large scale he places huge figures against a dull red ground, his dry, scraped paint working curiously against the heroic quality this scale gives the grotesque realism of his drawing. His characters are ugly, unpleasant

men and women, mostly lounging around, leering at each other and at us, only occasionally engaged in any identifiable activity. And even then, when they are clearly up to no good, there is an almost tangible detachment, a sense of boring old business as usual. Golub's characters are clearly villains, and yet he presents them with a neutral sort of sympathy which encourages us, the viewers, to identify with them. This is an interesting twist on the procedures of most political art, which usually asks us to identify with the victims of oppression, but it is a twist with a point. Golub wants to implicate us, to remind us that somewhere down the line our prosperity is ensured by such agents of oppression—not perhaps in this country, but in the satellite states that buttress our economy.

But if this were all Golub were doing his work would be no more than sophisticated posturing, and it is more than that. Golub makes it so by returning our attention to the esthetic context, for it is part of his intention to demonstrate that the discourse of culture can also become an agent of oppression. I believe this to be a healthy ambition, but it is one that must be addressed with more subtlety than Golub brings to bear. It is not sufficient to posit an identification of mercenaries and torturers with "American painting"—large scale, bold in color and design, informal (the paintings are unstretched), and thus somehow free. Golub wants us to acknowledge the connection between brute enforcement of ideological agreement and a subtler coercion, but by choosing the means of overstatement and oversimplification he repeats the error he would warn us of, browbeating us with his observations.

In the end Golub's convincing simplicity turns out to be too convincing, too straightforward. It is too much the textbook example, and as a result too easily dismissed as illustration. What has happened is that Golub has thought himself very carefully through an argument, but refused, or failed, to take it to its conclusion. The paintings thus have an expected look to them, the safety of well-applied logic. They betray too much faith in the conventions of painting, and are thus betrayed by them. Golub has come to understand that painting, or any part of cultural production, can be used repressively, but will not accept that he cannot therefore continue to use it in a straightforward manner without his meaning being distorted or dismissed. These paintings ultimately fail, then, but it is a grand and good-hearted failure.

—THOMAS LAWSON

JOHN WILLENBECHER, Hamilton Gallery; **MIRIAM SCHAPIRO**, Barbara Gladstone Gallery; "Collages and Reliefs 1910–1945," La Boetie Gallery;

JOHN WILLENBECHER

John Willenbecher continues to intensify the iconic dimension of his vision. This show develops to new expressive heights the insights into the symbiotic relationship between archetypal forms and contents found in the 1981 series "Laureate" (reviewed in *Artforum* in April 1982).

The majority of the works on view consisted of mixed-media relief paintings. Named after the persons and places of Greek mythology—*Apollo*, *Zeus*, and *Olympus* are examples—each boasts surfaces painted to simulate marble.

Leon Golub

SUSAN CALDWELL GALLERY

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