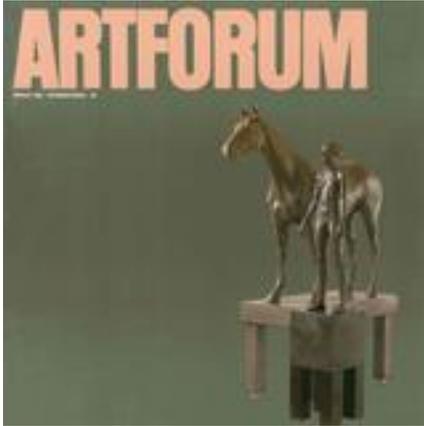


NEW YORK



PRINT MARCH 1983



Joan Fisher, Havana, 1982, acrylic and modeling paste on canvas, 4 x 5'



Joseph Hilton, Zeus and Semele, 1982, oil and acrylic on canvas, 41 x 59"



John Dunkley-Smith, Interiors 2-5 1982, site-specific slide installation, installation view

psychologized by the Surrealists. While different facets of the work of these artists are brought to mind by Fisher's pictures, their combined presence hardly deflects the viewer's recognition of the personal course that she has charted through the "loaded landscape"—which is, after all, a heavily trafficked terrain in 20th-century painting.

Last Leaf, 1982, like the other examples, is a rectangular canvas employing a unique dynamic format. The scene taking up the greater part of the surface is presented within an irregular frame outlined in white; this inner frame contrasts with the diagonal disposition of the shapes within it at the same time as it plays with the issue of illusionism. By overlaying shapes, in some places breaking through the inner frame by doing so, Fisher invites a reading of the composition in three-dimensional terms. Built up as it is with an appealing mixture of acrylic and modeling paste, the rich surface is outer-directed and confrontational; it forces the imagery out to the viewer rather than inviting the viewer in. The device of the inner frame also brings to mind a theatrical inset, which in turn imparts a narrative edge to the shapes and compositional structures. The sensation of story is reinforced as well by the titles; besides *Last Leaf*, these include *Havana* and *Goodbye to Rosewood Lane* (both 1982). In each painting the experience of colored space Fisher succeeds in providing is provocative.

JOSEPH HILTON

It is time to take a closer look at Joseph Hilton. Now, when figurative

painting is the trend, this Baltimore- and - Washington - based artist provides an engaging alternative to the current neo-Expressionist fare. Throughout the '70s and since, Hilton has cultivated a personal style that takes inspiration from pre-High Renaissance modes of rendering people and places. Its trademarks include deliberately, clumsily drawn anatomies, pictographic compositions, and abstract, shallow settings. For subjects Hilton rifles through art history and chooses grand mythological and religious themes, which, in his personal versions, allow him to pay homage to favorite artists such as Masaccio and Piero della Francesca. In many cases the figures are disguised portraits of people known to the artist.

Hilton's methods are strikingly revealed in the series called "Embarkation for Cythera," after the famous Watteau painting. It consists of depictions of famous mythological love affairs between Greek gods and ordinary mortals, which end in grief for the deity involved and with the transformation of his or her human partner. Hilton uses a frame-within-a-frame format; his rectangular panels bring to mind the pictographic scenes on Hellenistic and early Christian sarcophagi. The rendering of both the gods and their lovers is at once whimsical and strangely affective. In *Transformation of Daphne*, 1982, Apollo is shown as a statuelike figure who watches helplessly as Daphne changes from woman to tree; this scene, like the others, takes place against a shallow, abstract, but heavily textured surface. Hilton's vivid use of color gives these paintings the magical

intensity associated with precious ancient and primitive art objects.
—RONNY H. COHEN

"The Beast" and JOHN DUNKLEY-SMITH, P.S. 1; VICTOR ALZAMORA and JENNIFER BOLANDE, Artists Space:

"The Beast" and JOHN DUNKLEY-SMITH

With their decision to turn the big rambling shows at P.S.1 into thematic spectacles, the administrators of that space have taken something of a risk for what amount to little more than PR reasons. It is easier to promote large group shows if they are arranged around a grand theme, no matter how specious. But the problem with such a tactic lies in the selection of the theme: if that proves uninteresting or unworkable, there is no relief, or at least little relief, for the viewer, and less chance than usual of the kind of surprising discovery that has always been the reward for the trek out to Long Island City.

The first of these mega-shows was called "The Beast." Such a title sounded promising, but the promise was not kept. We were lead to expect something tough, the snarling wolf-head on the poster could mean no less—perhaps something surprisingly political, more likely an array of the psychological intensity of the "New Painting" (we will leave that question hanging this time). And indeed it was this last that was offered, but instead of anything remotely fearsome we were given a show calculated to delight pet-lovers and aficionados of art-school expressionism. Room after room, studio after studio was filled

with the same sloppily painted cats and dogs. Inevitably there was some good work on view—Walter Robinson's hilarious giant kitten and Robert Colescott's dumb buffalo remain highlights in the memory—but the overall effect was of a numbing, overly fashion-conscious mediocrity.

Against this muddy groundswell John Dunkley-Smith's rather old-fashioned room installation stood out in stark relief. This was the sort of site-specific work that used to be very familiar to visitors to P.S. 1, and it was perhaps that extra edge of nostalgia that made its particular clarity and intelligence so appealing in such a beastly context. The piece itself, of course, was all about context, a specific spatial context to be sure, but the wider ramifications were not to be missed. Drawing attention to the walls of a room within an institution inevitably draws attention to other walls in other rooms of that place.

Opening the door to Dunkley-Smith's room one was immediately assaulted by a bright light. Two steps in and it became apparent that the light came from a slide projector directed toward the door wall of a very small room. The room was dark, illuminated only by the slides, which changed with an even regularity. Aside from the projector there were few other objects in the room—a table, a chair, something on the table. After one had adjusted one's eyes to the light the pattern of the slide presentation became quickly evident: each wall of the room and the corridor outside had been photographed at systematically different exposures, so that the photographs ranged from too light to black. Thus, to the steady, metronomic beat of the projec-

"The Beast" And John Dunkley-Smith

P.S.1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

With their decision to turn the big rambling shows at P.S.1 into thematic spectacles, the administrators of that space have taken something of a risk for what amount to little more than PR reasons. It is easier to promote large group shows if they are arranged around a grand theme, no matter how specious. But the problem with such a tactic lies in the selection of the theme:

if that proves uninteresting or unworkable, there is no relief, or at least little relief, for the viewer, and less chance than usual of the kind of surprising discovery that has always been the reward for the trek out to Long Island City.

The first of these mega-shows was called “The Beast.” Such a title sounded promising, but the promise was not kept. We were lead to expect something tough, the snarling wolf-head on the poster could mean no less—perhaps something surprisingly political, more likely an array of the psychological intensity of the “New Painting” (we will leave that question hanging this time). And indeed it was this last that was offered, but instead of anything remotely fearsome we were given a show calculated to delight pet-lovers and aficionados of art-school expressionism. Room after room, studio after studio was filled with the same sloppily painted cats and dogs. Inevitably there was some good work on view—Walter Robinson’s hilarious giant kitten and Robert Colescott’s dumb buffalo remain highlights in the memory—but the overall effect was of a numbing, overly fashion-conscious mediocrity.

Against this muddy groundswell John Dunkley-Smith’s rather old-fashioned room installation stood out in stark relief. This was the sort of site-specific work that used to be very familiar to visitors to P.S.1, and it was perhaps that extra edge of nostalgia that made its particular clarity and intelligence so appealing in such a beastly context. The piece itself, of course, was all about context, a specific spatial context to be sure, but the wider ramifications were not to be missed. Drawing attention to the walls of a room within an institution inevitably draws attention to other walls in other rooms of that place.

Opening the door to Dunkley-Smith’s room one was immediately assaulted by a bright light. Two steps in and it became apparent that the light came from a slide projector directed toward the door wall of a very small room. The room was dark, illuminated only by the slides, which changed with an even regularity. Aside from the projector there were few other objects in the room—a table, a chair, something on the table. After one had adjusted one’s eyes to the light the pattern of the slide presentation became quickly evident: each wall of the room and the corridor outside had been photographed at systematically different exposures, so that the photographs ranged from too light to black. Thus, to the steady, metronomic beat of the projector, we examined each surface as it came to view and faded against the imperfect screen of a wall interrupted by an ever-opening and -closing door.

It is a commonplace by now that this type of highly ordered but non-narrative presentation allows the structure of the piece, so quickly understood, to become almost invisible. Rather than drawing attention to itself, it works

instead to generate a contemplative atmosphere. We are encouraged to relax and just look, and, in just looking, to reactivate our senses. A yearning for place was made manifest in the flaring and fading of the projected image. Strangely, in the midst of a tide of paintings supposedly involved in a recuperation of the sensual, the specific melancholy of this highly cerebral art was seen to have so much more body, so much more conviction. The animal paintings pastiche a yearning, a desire for identity; Dunkley Smith has found a way to express it.

Victor Alzamora And Jennifer Bolande

ARTISTS SPACE EXHIBITIONS

Unlike P.S.1 and the New Museum, Artists Space has tended to steer clear of big thematic shows, preferring a more low-keyed approach. Obviously curatorial decisions are apparent in the monthly selections presented, but the shows are of a fairly loose sort that allows the art itself to take up its own position. As a result the weaker work often fails to attract enough attention to be remembered, disappears almost on viewing, while the stronger material (and it must be remembered that the artists showing here are at the beginning of their careers and so inevitably showing work that is not fully resolved) is given the time and space to enter the viewer's eye and mind.

Over the past year we have begun to see evidence, not just at Artists Space but also at White Columns and, more occasionally, at the Kitchen and at the Drawing Center, of a different sensibility from the dominant one of neo-expressive, "personal" imagery. This other sensibility can be aligned to some extent with the practice of those artists (including myself) who show at Metro Pictures. Their practice has for the most part been taken as an aggressive argument on the intertwinings of elite and popular culture, of public and private representations—a meditation on the emptying-out of signification apparent as our society develops an ever more bland repressiveness and moves to stifle all possibility of dissent. But whereas their work tends to be big, loud, even strident, the newer activity is in a quieter vein. It is consciously tentative, consisting of small drawings and photographs which take a sidelong glance at peripheral information. The work has a stillness, one almost wants to say a refusal of focus, a quietude which is the modesty of intelligence. A partial listing of relevant artists might include John Miller, Mark Innerst, David Robbins, David Cabrera, Mike Ross, Victor Alzamora, Jennifer Bolande. . . . I'd best stop before the list becomes too important.

All this is as a prelude to the exhibition here, which included work by Alzamora and Bolande. Alzamora arranged 14 small paintings of different proportions in a line across the wall with one smaller painting of a target placed beneath them; in previous installations he has favored a more random, intuitive-looking arrangement. The individual paintings look as though they might be details of something else, murky corners and forgotten passages of other paintings. Styles and imagery (mostly abstract patterns, all-over lines, and biomorphic shapes in drab colors) are mismatched in a deliberately skewed semiotics, a phony cataloguing that quietly but insistently prods at the belief systems that give permission to make art, and particularly to make painting.

Getting a handle on Bolande's work is more difficult—the sensibility at work is fugitive. In a small room, the selection of small photographs and drawings seemed at first maybe to be about something. All the pictures are unframed but one, the largest. Is it a key to the rest? It is a fairly large blowup of a newsprint photograph of a park or golf course at night, and indeed most of the other pictures seem to be of golf and golf courses, mostly at night under the strange glow of huge floodlights. Maybe some of the images are not of golf courses but of parkland—the lights make it impossible to tell. The crowds are clearly spectators, and some are definitely watching golfers; others may not be. And what of the rather schematic rendering of a ranch-style house, or the color photograph of a similar house? The photographs carry very little information, offer few clues. They are actually all blown-up details of magazine and newspaper illustrations, obscure corners of obscure images inflated until they begin to disintegrate into the dot pattern. The drawings are quickly brushed renderings of bushes and lights, quick blobs and slashes; they offer even less information than the photographs. The image collapses into the texture of the surface, a pattern of light and dark that represents little but suggests a great deal.

—Thomas Lawson

tor, we examined each surface as it came to view and faded against the imperfect screen of a wall interrupted by an ever-opening and -closing door.

It is a commonplace by now that this type of highly ordered but non-narrative presentation allows the structure of the piece, so quickly understood, to become almost invisible. Rather than drawing attention to itself, it works instead to generate a contemplative atmosphere. We are encouraged to relax and just look, and, in just looking, to reactivate our senses. A yearning for place was made manifest in the flaring and fading of the projected image. Strangely, in the midst of a tide of paintings supposedly involved in a recuperation of the sensual, the specific melancholy of this highly cerebral art was seen to have so much more body, so much more conviction. The animal paintings pastiche a yearning, a desire for identity; Dunkley-Smith has found a way to express it.

VICTOR ALZAMORA and JENNIFER BOLANDE

Unlike P.S.1 and the New Museum, Artists Space has tended to steer clear of big thematic shows, preferring a more low-keyed approach. Obviously curatorial decisions are apparent in the monthly selections presented, but the shows are of a fairly loose sort that allows the art itself to take up its own position. As a result the weaker work often fails to attract enough attention to be remembered, disappears almost on viewing, while the stronger material (and it must be remembered that the artists showing here are at the beginning of their careers and so inevitably showing work that is not fully resolved) is given the time and space to enter the viewer's eye and mind.

Over the past year we have begun to see evidence, not just at Artists Space but also at White Columns and, more occasionally, at the Kitchen and at the Drawing Center, of a different sensibility from the dominant one of neo-expressive, "personal" imagery. This other sensibility can be aligned to some extent with the practice of those artists (including myself) who show at Metro Pictures. Their practice has for the most part been taken as an aggressive argument on the intertwinings of elite and popular culture, of public and private representations—a meditation on the emptying-out of signification apparent as our society develops an ever more bland representativeness and moves to stifle all possibility of dissent. But whereas their work

tends to be big, loud, even strident, the newer activity is in a quieter vein. It is consciously tentative, consisting of small drawings and photographs which take a sidelong glance at peripheral information. The work has a stillness, one almost wants to say a refusal of focus, a quietude which is the modesty of intelligence. A partial listing of relevant artists might include John Miller, Mark Innerst, David Robbins, David Cabrera, Mike Ross, Victor Alzamora, Jennifer Bolande. . . . I'd best stop before the list becomes too important.

All this is as a prelude to the exhibition here, which included work by Alzamora and Bolande. Alzamora arranged 14 small paintings of different proportions in a line across the wall with one smaller painting of a target placed beneath them; in previous installations he has favored a more random, intuitive-looking arrangement. The individual paintings look as though they might be details of something else, murky corners and forgotten passages of other paintings. Styles and imagery (mostly abstract patterns, allover lines, and biomorphic shapes in drab colors) are mismatched in a deliberately skewed semiotics, a phony cataloguing that quietly but insistently prods at the belief systems that give permission to make art, and particularly to make painting.

Getting a handle on Bolande's work is more difficult—the sensibility at work is fugitive. In a small room, the selection of small photographs and drawings seemed at first maybe to be about something. All the pictures are unframed but one, the largest. Is it a key to the rest? It is a fairly large blowup of a newsprint photograph of a park or golf course at night, and indeed most of the other pictures seem to be of golf and golf courses, mostly at night under the strange glow of huge floodlights. Maybe some of the images are not of golf courses but of parkland—the lights make it impossible to tell. The crowds are clearly spectators, and some are definitely watching golfers; others may not be. And what of the rather schematic rendering of a ranch-style house, or the color photograph of a similar house? The photographs carry very little information, offer few clues. They are actually all blown-up details of magazine and newspaper illustrations, obscure corners of obscure images inflated until they begin to disintegrate into the dot pattern. The drawings are quickly brushed renderings of bushes and lights, quick blobs and slashes, they offer even less information

than the photographs. The image collapses into the texture of the surface, a pattern of light and dark that represents little but suggests a great deal.
—THOMAS LAWSON

GENE DAVIS, Charles Cowles Gallery; RONNIE CUTRONE, Tony Shafrazi Gallery:

GENE DAVIS

Talking heads, even graphic ones, sometimes lose their cool; the number of screaming heads has proliferated lately. Not that they're everywhere, but they are frequent enough to be a presence these days. Joan Snyder's savagely drawn screamers and Italo Scanga's "singers" witnesses answer Edvard Munch's *The Scream* as it echoes down the years. Gene Davis' open-mouthed self-portrait is of a different ilk, too pantomimic to be a portal for anguish or pained protest. A black silhouette of a profile, it's repeated larger than life on 9 unprimed canvases and in miniature on 38 white rectangles. It's not a screamer—unless it's listened to contrapuntally, against the past tight-lipped silence of Davis' stripes. By contrast to that reticence, this head spits up its lungs.

Likewise, a minor incident elsewhere turns major in anomaly. Davis showed immaculately groomed canvases of small symbols dispersed on fields ruled with penciled horizontal lines—key-punch cards for a computerized interior monologue on death, love, sex, religion, politics, space, heritage, and who knows what else, the subjects converted into stylized emblems (skulls, hearts, circles and crosses, swastikas, astronomical markings, shamrocks); these pair off, separate, and balance randomly, but are bonded together compositionally with intervening bars of permuting dots and dashes. Amongst this precision there is a single "misjudged" pencil line. Corrected but not erased, it climaxes into two lines, the original "mistake" and the adjustment, a violation that stands out like the vertiginous peaks of guilty excitement in a lie detector's printout sheet. It is the one and only trace of touch, of ego. The significance of the configurations found at this juncture then seems outsized. Along this blip, a tiny whale/shark, featured in profile (and unique in not being a repeating glyph), approaches a wedge of dots. . . . its mouth slightly open. The startling correspondence with the portrait makes the encounter exemplary, a microcosm of the showdown between man/nature and

construct with which the entire series grapples: who eats whom? or which eats which?

It's a matter of doubt whether the ruled works function as graphs of the inside of Davis' skull, since in their first run the heads are large enough to dominate and accommodate the much smaller signs, to program the computer. Or maybe the heads in the second proliferation are shrunken to make microchip self-representations, the easier to be fed into the ascendant computer (you are what you eat). Or perhaps the self, like that curious misalignment of lines, becomes visible only at the moment of confrontation, so brief and so understated as to be easily missed.

RONNIE CUTRONE

Conflicts, cartoons, countries—Cutrone. Conflicts: overwhelmingly, there are pairs of opponents in Ronnie Cutrone's Manichaean world view, faltering in the act of distinguishing light from dark, however, is likely. The separation is clear when an angelic Felix the Cat fights for a soul against a pitchfork-toting Woody Woodpecker (b-t isn't it usually the cat who devours the bird?)—rarely otherwise. Elsewhere, coming across a panicked Yankee Woody chased by a Russian bear, this demonic taint prepares us for the *Paranoia* of the title. The bear is big, it is in angry pursuit; but even in his native, animated habitat Woody is a bit of a prevaricating flimflam man. Animosity between varieties within a species is a foregone conclusion; the real struggle in *R & B Ants* is between two black insects over the mutilated carcass of a red one.

Cartoons: not only the Saturday-morning familiars, like Caspar the Friendly Ghost, but a style as well: thick, dark outlines; broad, flat areas of primary color. It's Pop, but unlike the sardonic first generation, Cutrone doesn't work *au rebours* (against the grain). He believes in these cartoon characters, in their telegraphic punch and the fact of our affection for them, which he leaves uncriticized. He just reprograms them, aims them against enemies who would surprise them if they had any consciousness of their own history.

Countries: this cast acts out its reduced agon on the ground of actual national flags—Russian flags; Middle Eastern flags; Swiss, English, Chinese flags; and, above all, American flags. The Jasper Johnsian echo is probably not deliberate, but makes an interesting answer to questions that Johns' flags de-