PRINT SUMMER 2007

gray "became" a dirty snowbank in which a van—reminiscent of the Mystery Machine from *Scooby-Doo*—painted with a tropical vista on its body, appears to be stuck, providing a humorous metaphor for one artist's arduous attempt to cruise through another's "paradise."

The biggest surprise in the show—especially given the parameters of Gerber's project thus far—was *Support*, 2006, a "souvenir" salvaged from Buren's 2006 exhibition "Crossing Through the Colors" at the Arts Club of Chicago and painted over in Gerber gray. The thin Plexiglas sheet was mounted flush against the wall; Buren's signature stripes were visible—texturally—through the gray covering only when one was standing to the side of the work. Gerber pays tribute to his forebear, for whom painting has always been defined as an act of negotiation with its context, while also positioning him as an unwitting accomplice. Buren never considered this installation relic as an actual work of art, so with this "unspeakable compromise," in which the relic becomes a "work"—and a commodity—Gerber aggressively ups the ante and marks a strategic shift away from subletting toward squatting.

—Michael Ned Holte

Nicola Tyson
MARC FOXX GALLERY

Nicola Tyson's large-scale paintings, which hover between abstraction and figuration, have often been compared to those of Francis Bacon. Bacon was famously influenced by Eadweard Muybridge's sequential photographic studies of human and animal movement, and the creatures that appear in Tyson's canvases possess something of the same kinetic energy. Yet Tyson's sensibility ultimately differs from Bacon's in that she manages to infuse imagery that may at first glance appear horrific with a degree of romantic optimism.

Nicola Tyson, *Tiptoe*, 2006–2007, oil and charcoal on canvas, 72 x 54".

A Walk in the Woods, 2006–2007, depicts a pair of colorful androgynous figures walking side by side through a grove of leafless trees. The minimal treatment of the background is reminiscent of Edvard Munch's, but Tyson's use of color is rather different from the Norwegian artist's; the translucency of her oils often allows for underpainting to show through—here a layer of black beneath the sky's bright blue. The figures in other works are less readily identifiable as male or female, or even as entirely human. In *Dog*, 2006–2007, for example, Tyson imagines a bald baby head attached to a brown canine body, resulting in an unsettling hybrid. *Bouquet*, 2007, on the other hand, approaches total abstraction: A form that looks rather like a fatty leg of lamb is adorned with several budlike shapes as it emerges from a bright orange ground underpinned by royal purple.

Tyson's graphite-on-paper drawings, a selection of which were shown in an adjacent gallery, reflect a straightforward process that also underpins her paintings. There is something visceral and immediate about both bodies of work, as if they were born directly from her unconscious. Yet while the paintings have moments of lightness, the drawings—all the examples shown here were taken from sketchbooks completed between 2003 and 2006—recede into a rather darker realm arranged around mutated figures in shades of black and gray. In one, an armless girl stares down at her waving hand, which lies detached on the floor beside her. In others, human heads grow birdlike beaks, appendages spring from unlikely places, and feet replace hands.

In spite of her immersion in sometimes nightmarish phantasmagoria, Tyson manages—largely owing to her palette, which ensures that dark imagery is always tempered by bright tones—to communicate a certain joy. And her use of underpainting conveys a sense of impermanence, buried color pushing through to create an atmosphere of dreamlike mutability. Tyson's vision is refreshingly open-ended, and she gives the impression of knowing her subjects so intimately that every brushstroke and color choice becomes a way to visualize and render less fearful a different aspect of the unconscious.

—Amra Brooks

Thomas Lawson
LA><ART

As an artist and critic, Thomas Lawson (now dean of the School of Art at CalArts) was central to debates about the viability of painting at the turn of the 1980s. Yet his work has seldom been shown on the West Coast, making this recent exhibition of paintings, most of which were produced over the past two years, a rare opportunity to see how his practice and its politics have held up.

Lawson's new canvases are characterized by deadpan mottled surfaces and muted, at times grating, color combinations. Often based on maps, they render seas and continents as abstract patches of texture and tone. Still, echoes of flaglike shapes allude to a territorial world and offer an unsettling hint of its continuing, unpredictable environmental and political changeability. Several canvases make use of cartographic conventions such as the Mercator projection, a method of flattening the globe onto a two-dimensional picture plane. One, in maroons and deep blues with flashes of beige, resembles a geopolitical Clyfford Still. Elsewhere, Lawson reapplies distorted maps, or derivations of them, back onto representations of the globe, realigning the continents to reference a range of concerns, including the specter of environmental catastrophe and problems associated with globalization.

Also on show was a selection of small canvases focusing on the politicized face of death. One, a diptych, *Zarqawi–Goliath (Caravaggio)*, 2006, pairs the postmortem face of the Al-Qaeda-in-Iraq leader with the biblical giant's severed head sketchily quoted from a Caravaggio painting. Another, *Hangman*, 2006, slightly blurs the image of a noose and a newly dead face glowing in darkness—the hanged Saddam Hussein as captured on a cell-phone camera. This was one of the most resonant works in the show. All the paintings followed through with Lawson's long-established strategy of using traditional painterly means to deliver topically loaded content, thus exploiting an apparent contrast between expectations of the medium and the message. But this one also, unusually for the artist, capitalized on painting's ability to convey atmosphere.

Thomas Lawson, *Big Pink*, 2002, oil on canvas, 60 x 100".

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Lawson's engagement with the material richness and pictorial traditions of painting is particularly evident in *Dogs of War*, 2006. Easily missed here because of its obscure placement at the rear of the gallery, this complex chain of four mug-shot-like caricature portraits of the architects of America's current foreign and military policies was nonetheless the treasure of the show. Though Lawson's selective critical defense of painting in the '80s incorporated a dismissal of neo-expressionism, the artist here offers up his own (anti-heroic) expressionist revival. Sidestepping the steroidal theatrics of the movement, he manages to avoid what he once argued was a kind of cashing in on the aura of an inspirational model. Instead, *Dogs of War* takes its cues from predecessors and colors their precedents with a skewed pop sensibility. Dick Cheney becomes a Beckmannesque iceman slapped down in crimson strokes; Donald Rumsfeld has been turned upside down. Between these two, Condoleezza Rice morphs into a bloated yellow visage suggesting a collaboration between Emil Nolde and Matt Groening. George W. Bush, with

his nose hooked, his skin toned green, and one eye X-ed out, appears something of a Wicked Witch of the West as rendered by George Grosz. Lawson once argued that the best strategy for the painter was to embrace his tradition's "dead" status; this painting, as strategic as any, asserts an unexpected faith in painting's pulse.

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—*Christopher Miles*

TORONTO

Liz Magor

SUSAN HOBBS GALLERY

Liz Magor's recent exhibition of sculpture was one of her best to date, combining—with the formal refinement we have come to expect from her—a nuanced mixture of references to domesticity and wildlife, still life, religious art, and Minimalism.

A pair of sculptures, *Bedside* and *Dresser* (all works 2007), installed on the ground floor of the gallery, address the tensions that exist between private and public contexts for the display of artworks and other objects. Each work features a cast of a deer's head, occupying a shelving unit attached to the wall with large triangular brackets so that it projects forward toward the viewer. Each is illuminated by a high-end halogen lighting fixture that looks to have been taken straight from an architect's drafting table.

This installation allowed the two works to waver between the traditions of domestic decor and the institutional and professional associations of more contrived or physically complex methods of display. While alluding to a lodge full of hunting trophies, the unlucky specimens are cut too high on the neck and look too young and too diminutive to serve the demands of machismo.

Stag and doe are both rendered in white, with irresistibly illusionistic details that extend to an unevenness of the cartilage in their ears and the presence of little bumps at the bases of the stag's antlers. This eerie verisimilitude is made yet more strange by the morbid surprise of real hairs creeping out from the sculptural material (a polymerized gypsum). The abrupt realization that one is looking at casts of the dead is tempered by art-historical associations with the painterly tradition of the study of animal corpses. A studio context is further signaled by the artful spattering of wine stains and paint drips on the shelves. But the unnatural blankness of the heads—and the absence of other connections to still-life convention—served to broaden and diversify their semiotic resonance. Their coldly lit white surfaces brought to mind marble statues of the decapitated John the Baptist. This feature also contributed to the anthropomorphizing of the forms and further evoked Christian iconography: Before being cast, woven material was inserted into the animals' necks, and this protruded in a way that recalls the seductive folds of drapery that adorn canonical *Pietà* statues.

Liz Magor, *Dresser*, (detail), 2007, polymerized gypsum, hardware, lighting fixture, 84 x 23 x 10".

Subtle references to the Crucifixion continued in the upstairs gallery with a third work, *Hallway*, featuring the death mask of a pygmy owl whose claws had been pressed together and wrapped around a piece of electrical wire. Like the deer, it had a mostly monochrome surface, with isolated pink and purple details perhaps signifying blood. However, as with *Bedside* and *Dresser*, the spiritual resonance of the work is complicated by its juxtaposition with a domestic appliance—another expensive-looking lighting fixture—and the anonymous industrial surfaces of the shelf, cast in polymerized gypsum, on which the creature lies. Here, as elsewhere in the show, Magor demonstrated a masterful ability to produce formally austere works that still pack a powerful emotional wallop.

—*Dan Adler*

SÃO PAULO

Nicolás Robbio

GALERIA VERMELHO

Nicolás Robbio's drawings—whether on paper or on other surfaces such as glass, wood, or walls—can be beautiful, delicate, intricate, or funny, but they are always smart. Seldom does one see such a sharp and fresh approach to an age-old medium, an investigation of formal qualities that isn't primly formal. Robbio, who was born in Mar de Plata, Argentina, but is based in São Paulo, has been perfecting his craft and rendering it more and more complex as time goes on, and this exhibition, "*Quase como Ontem*" (Almost like Yesterday), was his most accomplished yet.

A video, *1P*, 2004–2007, was shown on the gallery's ground floor: In a static shot, a hand—the artist's—uses a small brush to insistently sweep a seemingly clean surface that takes up the entire screen. But during the four minutes of the video the invisible becomes visible as more and more dust is gathered. No resident of polluted São Paulo is unfamiliar with the dust that collects on all surfaces, at street level or in high-rises, indoors and outdoors, at all times. *1P* uses this phenomenon to play on surface and medium, appearance and reality, and to reflect on drawing (the white background) and painting (the brush), although the work is clearly neither.

Upstairs was a roomful of disparate untitled works, large and small, two- and three-dimensional, on the floor and on the walls. Across two walls, Robbio created a site-specific work incorporating an existing water stain, turning it into a kind of watercolor; a geometric drawing below it resembled the facade of the gallery itself. But was it abstract or figurative? Real or representational? This kind of questioning was the leitmotif of the show. Two rectangular glass vitrines mounted on wood tables held about twenty small items each; bits and pieces of paper, both drawn on and cut, rested on the table and were attached to the glass, the surface of which also featured incisions and