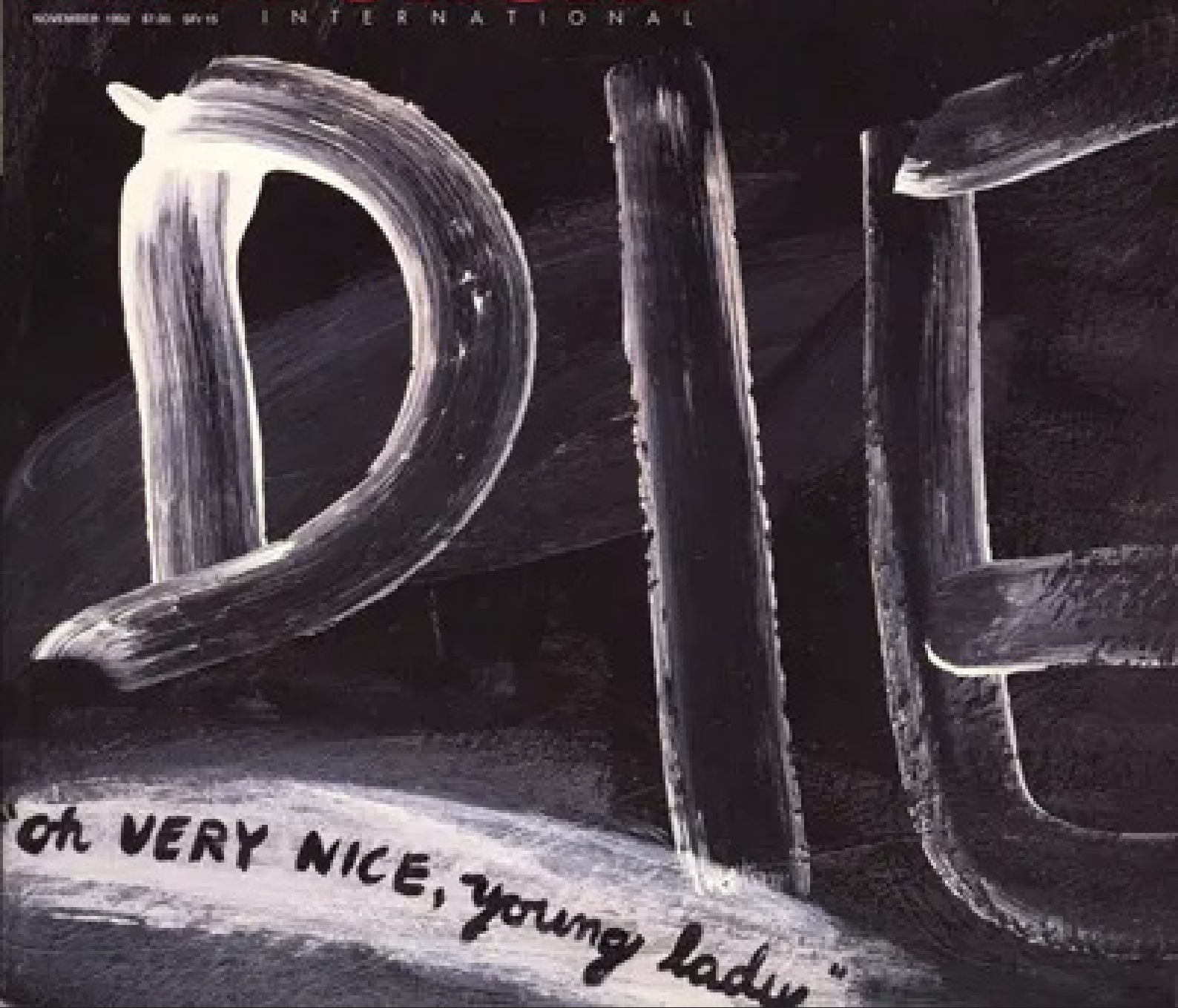


ARTFORUM

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are presented in such a way that art engages the prevailing discourse of any given time, disrupting the linear construction of history and its subdivision into movements that are often defined in reaction, if not wholly antithetically, to one another, which is a long way of saying, "Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees."

—Jan Avgikos

EUGÈNE LEROY

MICHAEL WERNER GALLERY
EDWARD THORP GALLERY

The surface of Eugène Leroy's paintings is dense but far from sluggish, claustrophobic and epic in its painterliness, yet peculiarly spacious and lyrical in effect. Overloaded to the point of chaos, it remains uncannily, indeed sublimely harmonious as if it had a powerful life of its own. This surface not only "breathes," in Clement Greenberg's famous sense of the word, but breathes vigorously. Indeed, Leroy's paintings give the lie to Greenberg's partisan belief that American Abstract Expressionist painting is more spontaneously alive than French Tachism.

And yet, Leroy's paintings are not exactly "informal," for all their apparently chance gestures. These gestures may seem illogical, but they ritualistically pile up in layers that inwardly uphold the surface. In a sense, Leroy reverses Anton Ehrenzweig's prioritization of the basic elements in painting. Whereas for Ehrenzweig the surface is conventionally formed of *Gestalt*, with an underlying *Gestalt*-free intensity, Leroy's works indicate that when *Gestalt*-free intensity becomes the norm of painting, the sense of control and conscious purpose necessary to an inwardly balanced work must nevertheless be apparent, however elusive the *Gestalt* that suggests this sense seems to be. Indeed, there is a latent, but clearly visible, figural *Gestalt* in the manifest field of Leroy's paintings, a "thing" that seems to grow out of its surface of immanent gestures. Leroy gives it many names in his titles—the abstract *Gestalt* is supposedly a human figure or landscape, a head or a flower—but all of these evoke the same meaning, the same enigmatic density of being that spontaneously springs or "superejects," to use Alfred North Whitehead's concept, from the fluid paint. This illusion of spontaneous generation—this vision of mad, chance actions that build up to a peculiarly "methodical" climax, centering the painting despite itself—is the crux of Leroy's painting.

Leroy seems to self-consciously cultivate irrational painterliness, reflected in his choice of titles like *Tête en folie* (Head in



Eugène Leroy, *Lumières Sur Marina* (Light on marina), 1991, oil on canvas, 63 1/4 x 51 1/2".

madness, 1991) and *L'autre terrible* (The terrible other, 1991). Is he yet another European master who finds, in the fetishization of painterly madness—"pandemonium," to cite Georg Baselitz—the only, last-ditch hope for painting? In a sense yes, but in another sense Leroy is simply doing something we have been familiar with since French Impressionism, namely, suggesting that no amount of random, seemingly materially raw and fragmentary actions can destroy the preconceived unity usually attributed to a work of art. But the expressionist edge Leroy gives his "impressionism" suggests that, if the analogy of abstract painting to music holds, he is able to live at that narcissistic depth where, according to Heinz Kohut, every impulse is experienced as a nuance of the nuclear self. Leroy's richly nuanced painterly music is an optimal expression of the deep sense of creative flow, which, according to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, is necessary for us to have conviction in ourselves. One of the ways such expression integrates us is by restoring our sense of the innocence of all impulses, however, "dark" they may seem. In the end, Leroy's impulsiveness leaves us with this sense of inviolable innocence.

—Donald Kuspit

JAMES ROSENQUIST GAGOSIAN GALLERY

James Rosenquist has always been in a class of his own within Pop art, never quite boarding the Warholian media-imagery bandwagon. While appropriating banal all-American imagery, he combines it in an incongruous way suggestive of a Surrealist esthetic that is particularly reminiscent of René Magritte. That is, Rosenquist's early pictures—which this exhibition justifiably



James Rosenquist, *Untitled (Two Chairs)*, 1963, oil on canvas, 77 x 77".

suggests have become "classic"—reflect neither the slick irony, inadvertent black humor, nor obsession with fame-seeking associated with Pop art; rather, they seem mysterious and unfathomable, even thirty years after they were made. Not only do they continue to look ingeniously unintelligible, but their nightmarish character has become clear.

In *A Lot to Like*, 1962, erratic shards of commonplace imagery—a football player, a man's suit jacket, a single-edged razor blade, a black umbrella, a hand combing hair, a man's naked back, etc.—are combined in a montage-like manner suggestive of a B-movie, despite all the technical niceties that bring them together in the same frame. The virtue of a B-movie, as of all kitsch entertainment, lies in the superficiality of action and emotion, allowing one to enter mindlessly into the fantasy it constructs. But it requires a great effort to figure out the fantasy in a typical Rosenquist spectacle, even when, as in *For Young Revolutionaries*, 1962, it seems to have to do with assassination, or, as in *Morning Sun*, 1963, it seems like a satiric rejoinder to the American version of the beautiful face that launched a thousand ships. In other words, Rosenquist takes fragments of an already given collective fantasy and uses them to unnameable, even ineffable effect, suggesting that there is something beyond what its manufactured surface reveals.

Through his cunning manipulation of its details, Rosenquist both mimics and mocks the seductiveness and unconscious power of this fantasy. He seems to dissect it anatomically and, by shattering it, distances himself from it. At the same time, he telescopically enlarges each detail so that it feels as if each is bearing down on us, becoming hypnotically gross. Taken together, they seem to belong to an unspecifiable magical whole big-



David Rabinowitch, *Construction of Vision 2 Orders*, 1969, pencil on paper, 43 1/2 x 30".

ger than any of them, however spectacular they are in themselves. Indeed, Rosenquist creates the effect of some grand, consummate, engulfing, incomprehensible collective fantasy, emblematic of the society that grips us all in its monstrous maw. A society all the more horrific and engrossing because the details sometimes seem like synecdoches of different fantasies: combined in the same frame, these details suggest that whatever way we turn we cannot escape this manipulation of our deepest desires, its control of our fantasy life. Thus, in shattering the prosaic whole of a social fantasy, Rosenquist brings it into critical question, but in enlarging its fragments he suggests its "poetic" domination. The brilliance of Rosenquist is that he has made concrete poetry out of banal imagery derived from a dumb social fantasy and, in doing so, disclosed its absolute power over our inner and outer lives.

—DK

DAVID RABINOWITCH FLYNN

One cannot help but be awed by David Rabinowitch's seven "Construction of Vision Drawings," 1969–1978, when they are viewed in the context of Barbara Flynn's high, narrow, geometrically exquisite gallery. Geometry speaks to geometry, suggesting a new peak of purity, and a fresh sophistication of the void. These drawings look as if it took a long time to ponder each of their few details, from the size of the paper to the placement of the geometrical elements. Rabinowitch's drawings demonstrate the continued viability—the infinite renewability—of the perfectionist less-is-more esthetic: the less visible and simpler it is, the more deeply it is seen and the more profound its simplicity. Above all, the more



Robert Greene, *Wanderlust*, 1991, oil on board, 43 x 76\"/>

readily the space of seeing becomes a kind of inner sanctum—a hushed monastic cell. Indeed, Rabinowitch's drawings have an ascetic restraint that suggests a devotional intensity.

Geometry once again seems a contemplative, all-absorbing end in itself, all the more so because of Rabinowitch's "ironic" doubling and "tactile" rendering of it: outlined circle stands across from vaporous circle; big, dark ellipse is at odds with big, lightly drawn, almost invisible ellipse; small dark ellipse stands diagonally opposed to, but not precisely aligned with, small dark ellipse, and so on. Rabinowitch repeats each simple geometrical element with a "twist," so that the drawing as a whole becomes unexpectedly complex and subliminally tense. The elements seem to move in and out of visibility, appearing spatially at odds, however formally alike. This perverse mirroring renders intelligibility at once peculiarly vital and elusive. Simple geometry tends to become self-stereotyping and inert, but Rabinowitch's "differentiation" of it, through a strategy of touch and placement, makes it strangely self-conscious.

And also peculiarly insecure and unstable, for all the "harmony" each geometrical form has in itself. From Kasimir Malevich through Piet Mondrian to early Frank Stella, we see that perhaps the most enduring issue in the history of geometrical abstraction is how to breathe mystical life—a life that becomes a kind of taking stock and self-gathering—into the waxworkslike conventionality of simple geometrical form. The problem is how to make the self-evident seem to hide and simultaneously convey something that is far from self-evident. This is accomplished by placing self-same geometrical entities in asymmetrical rela-

tionship, destabilizing them, and thus making them seem inwardly alive—mystically vibrant. Rabinowitch, by creating an effect of displacement within a basically unified work—not unlike what Malevich did with his white-on-white square, but subtler, in that it also creates an effect of tactile displacement—has found a new way of doing this. This is no mean feat at a time when geometry seems to have become an entropic endgame for many artists, who use it to invalidate rather than revalidate the visionary purpose of geometrical abstraction. This may testify to their own lack of geometric imagination, which, as Rabinowitch demonstrates, still has subtle possibilities. —DK

ROBERT GREENE

ROBERT MILLER GALLERY

Diana Vreeland and the postwar glory-days of *Bazaar* and *Vogue* are to Robert Greene roughly what the court and the commedia dell'arte have become since Watteau—a *paradis perdu*. Greene's *fêtes galantes* are usually full of nimble, affectionate portraits of fashion icons, fellow artists, and friends. In these melancholic romances, a white standard poodle always plays the part of Scapino, while a shifting cast of characters makes cameo appearances, and sets of faintly incestuous twins or even triplets of both sexes stroll about, narcissistically, in supporting roles. Gamine protagonists who suggest Audrey Hepburn or Brigitte Bardot, sometimes modeled on the artists' aunt and mother, enhance this air of ingenuous decadence. Greene's *louche* and winsome little theater owes something to Federico Fellini, as well as to Billy Wilder, whose films, such as the Hepburn duo—*Sabrina*, 1954, and *Love in*



Fred Wilson, *Untitled (Atlas)*, 1992, plaster, pedestal, and books, 66 x 30 x 30\"/>

the Afternoon, 1957—set many a housewife weeping.

Greene's sense of the tragic—his many interpretations, for example, of the Pierrot motif—further denotes the mores of some earlier, distinctly maternal age d'or. Far from mythic, Greene's emotional depths are perhaps best reflected by the song "The Party's Over." Greene is indeed blessed, and cursed as well, with a magpie's taste for glamour of the unmaternal kind, and with a decidedly unencumbering education.

Like Jack Pierson, Greene has the canny instincts of a born stylist to rely on for spice, and he has gravitated to such relevant predecessors as Jean Cocteau, Florine Stettinheimer, and Christian ("Bébé") Bérard. And happily enough, these illustrious figures could be taken in on Greene's own terms—by leafing through '40s fashion pages, and by attending screenings in present-day revival houses. Greene lives in a world of fast takes, but he's no mere pasticheur. Everything is put through a Greene-ing as precise as the poodles' modified-topiary cuts.

Actually, the artist seems to be experiencing some interesting new growing pains. A stormier and more Romantic scale, for instance, determines the outcome of several of his recent efforts. In the uncharacteristically unpopulous *He Showed Me*, 1990, a detached and implicitly paternal figure sits on a boardwalk bench, on the coast of what appears to be Holland. With him is Greene's first poodle, long deceased. Ghostlier doubles of the dog are figured loitering on a contiguous area of a sandy-colored field. Deep blue waves inspired by Albert Pinkham Ryder crash against the fortified shore.

In another large painting, entitled *Whirling an Echo*, 1991, Greene addresses postindustrial landscape genres of the 19th

and early 20th centuries, before they were overwhelmed by an avalanche of painterly urbanisms. In this well-aerated, celery-and-unripe-tomato-colored scene, a Gigi-esque girl walks her Belle Époque bicycle across some railroad tracks, while *le chien Scapin* tugs at the hem of her blue dress. Other poodle sprites and wee winsome figures are scattered in the foreground. A giant factory with pharaonic smokestacks looms from behind. At midsection, a meadowy, English-looking expanse fades out into the distance, and the rest is cloud-streaked sky. The look, of course, is Constable.

In *Full Cry*, 1991, a "cameo" line-up of fellow artists, set along the edge of a forest *allée*, creates a group portrait of some of the Robert Miller gallery stable that is only slightly diluted by the usual Greene retinue of heartthrobs and friends. But transparent flattery, too, is part of an honorable tradition that predates Versailles, has survived countless wars and revolutions, and will no doubt outlive Fifth Avenue.

—Lisa Liebmann

FRED WILSON

METRO PICTURES

In "Panta Rhei. (A Gallery of Ancient Classical Art)," 1992, a plaster cast of Atlas bent under the weight of a stack of Western art history books. Barely visible beneath the base on which the figure stood was a single volume devoted to African art. As with Fred Wilson's best work, this seemingly simple, shamelessly didactic sculpture resonates with subtler messages. We all know by now that European and American art historians have stacked the cards heavily in favor of the classical tradition, at the expense of African and Far Eastern cultures. H. W. Janson's *History of Art* tops Wilson's pile—in Wilson's sculpture, the Western tomes supplant the globe: they *are* the world we have been taught.

By juxtaposing dense scholarly books and the graceful white figure, Wilson reminds us how much we "see" with our minds, how our notions of beauty and indeed of art are shaped by what books tell us. *Untitled (Atlas)* (all works 1992) formed part of a *mise-en-scène* mimicking, as have Wilson's earlier installations, the conspicuously corrupt forms of cultural and ethnological packaging found in traditional museums—museums before historical revisionism arrived under the banner of multiculturalism. Throughout this show Wilson redressed the denial of the Egyptian connection by literally reuniting what was severed: heads from Egyptian statues were poised on the necks of decapitated classical figures. The titles informed us that the two parts, discordant in their scale, use of mate-

David Rabinowitch

Flynn

By [Donald Kuspit](#)

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Cover: Sue Williams, *Die*, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 15 x 18".

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