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Little Women – Curator James Kalm

July / August 2006

Little Women

Curator James Kalm



Rachel Pascua, 3rd Grade, 2006. Ink on vellum, 20 x 24 inches. Courtesy of Dam, Stuhltagger. www.damstuhltrager.com

It all started with the "Big Bang." That was a big deal, and now we're all trying to see the "Big Picture." Seems whichever way we turn today we're confronted with "bigness." "Bigger is better" became the macho credo for artists in New York with the ascension of Abstract Expressionism. Sixty years later, what started as a profound risk and a courageous undertaking has in many cases degenerated to mere gambits, guaranteed attention grabbers, and colossal space fillers. We observers of the art world seem to equate largeness of scale with largeness of intellectual goals, unthinkingly granting undue critical privilege to the huge. This predisposition to the grand seems to overlook the fact that many of the greatest artifacts of 20th Century Modernism are on the small side, and some of our greatest and most seminal artists including A. P. Ryder, Paul Klee, Anne Ryan, Frieda Kahlo, Forrest Bess and Myron Stout produced predominantly small works that packed a punch.

Initially I proposed the title for this show of small-scaled works by female artists as a kind of ironic provocation, a new millennial tweak at those forces of political correctness that have run rampant for the last 20 years, seeking to replace Superman with Superwoman in man-drag and stifling serious discourse as well as humor. Once I began the process of selecting artists whose work fit the parameters of the exhibition, I was rewarded with the realization that these women are all extremely accomplished artists. Compiling the list of potential exhibitors, I began to think about shared sensibilities and contrasts, to see that perhaps there was a deeper more essential force that impelled these and other artists to challenge the notions of the "Big Picture." Instead of playing the "big boy's game" they found a personal more intimate and satisfying way of working. Though wishing to avoid political polemics, there does appear to be a confluence of feminist and formalist issues within the idea of "Little Women." Historically a small work of art was more easily transported, or hidden, and therefore had a greater chance of surviving. Among marginalized peoples this transportability also allowed the small works to be possessed, to be held near and to be preserved as precious objects. Formalistically, a small work is more easily taken-in all at once (one of the contentions of modernism), to be held by the viewer, to manifest its own "objecthood" rather than the viewer being engulfed and overwhelmed by a work of art. The focus required to observe and create small works demands great sensitivity and economy. Perhaps because of the intimacy and ease of hiding, there is also tendency for the eccentric or ultra personal to be rendered small.

One other aspect of "Little Women" that I would like to highlight, in contrast to the current trends in the New York art world, is the persistent and committed practice of these artists. With the recent spate of mega exhibitions and all-inclusive "overviews," we are treated to what the art media is promoting as the newest and youngest art stars, artists barely out of grad school whose careers have covered scarcely four or five years. Maybe our society's obsession with youth culture has warped our perceptions of who's out there making relevant art. With "Little Women" I endeavored to expose a cross section of artists of various ages, media and tendencies, to show works by mature artists like Regina Bogat, Barbara Westman Danto and Kathy Bradford working in their primes with decades of experience, with those in mid-career like Cecily Kahn, Cynthia Eardley and Leslie Roberts as well as up-and-comers like Cynthia Hartling and Kristen Jensen. Rather than featuring a single tendency or movement I was more impressed by an overarching attitude that these artists share in their commitment to continue working in their own chosen directions, to explore those ideas that present themselves, and to fulfill the needs of their creative callings with little attention paid to the fashions and trends that seem to monopolize the art institutions.

Eve Aschheim's paintings and drawings are perhaps the subtlest of any of these artists. Working with the reduced palette of black, dark blues and grays on scraped white grounds, using line, points and punctuation-like dashes, Aschheim accentuates visual incident causing optical quirks to appear. The intense scrutiny required of the viewer is repaid with unique visual sensations.

In a career that has spanned over 40 years, Regina Bogat has produced a diverse body of work that includes sculptural boxes, geometric abstraction and pieces employing colored cords. Having worked in various scales, these small paintings epitomize her juxtaposing of the logical and the whimsical and represent a thoughtful playfulness.

Barbara Westman Danto has worked as an illustrator and collagist at the highest levels of New York's publishing industry having designed numerous covers for The New Yorker magazine among other projects. Through her bold simplification and intuitive color

Exhibitions & Events

- Valerie Margolis, OK Harris Works of Art, NYC, Oct. 29
- Phillip Stearns, Subliminal Machines, RabbitHoleStudio, NYC, Nov. 3
- Seven, Nicole Klagsbrun Project, NYC, Nov. 3
- Martin Kalanda, Chashama 217 Art Space, NYC, Nov. 5
- Suzanne McClelland: Left, Sue Scott Gallery, NYC, Nov. 4
- Identity, Artists Space, NYC, Oct. 29
- Full Fathom Five, Jenkins Johnson Gallery, NYC, Nov. 3
- Leslie Hewitt, Blue Skies, Warm Sunlight, D'Amelio Terras, NYC, Oct. 29
- Asia Unspecific
- Tommy Hartung: On Stellar Rays

Sponsors Links

- 2011 Governors Island Art Fair
- Art Asia Fair
- Art Elysses
- Art Fair Zurich
- Art Fairs International
- Art Forum Berlin
- Art Market Budapest October 27-30
- Art Now Fair
- Art Space Beijing
- Art Toronto
- Arts in Bushwick
- Asia Triennial Manchester 2011
- Broadway Gallery NYC Contemporary Istanbul November 24-27
- Docks Art Fair 2011
- Fine Art Asia
- Frieze Art Fair
- HanseArt, Bremen Germany November 11-13
- Momenta Art
- Nada Art Fair, Miami Dec 1-4
- NY Arts Beijing Collection
- Pink Art Fair Seoul
- Scope Miami Dec 1-4
- SH Contemporary
- Texas Contemporary Art Fair October 20-23
- The Habitat Brooklyn

Web Catalogue Preview

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- Aase-Hilde Brekke
- Adrienne Yorinks
- Al Wildey
- Alessandro Sansoni
- Alexander Dimitrov
- Alexandra Spyratos
- Alicia H. Torres
- Ana Bikic
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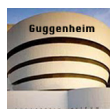
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North Carolina Arts Association
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College Art Association
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Galleries / Museums



MoMA



selections she transforms quotidian scenes of city life into near abstractions that still leave room for humor.

As a long-time presence on the Williamsburg scene Kathy Bradford has exerted an influence that extends beyond the world of her painting to her position as a mentor and guide to younger artists. In a recent show she displayed paintings of clusters of swimmers clinging together in deep dark waters, a fitting metaphor for the artistic community's status within our cynical world.

The sculptures of Cynthia Eardly depict young women at a very intimate scale. Her naturalism captures not only the external appearance of the subjects but, through her attention to minute gestures and expressions, the conflicting and complex emotional states experienced by today's youth.

With sources of inspiration ranging from Romanesque murals, to Action Painting, to illuminated manuscripts, Cynthia Hartling has produced some of the most evocative small abstractions being shown today. It was the ability to hold the paintings in her hands, to contemplate them with the same intimacy as one might a book that attracted her to small-scale painting.

Repetitive actions, like the passage of a needle through fabric or the completion of daily chores are part of what has been considered "women's work." Kristen Jensen explores this notion with works that investigate the parallels between performance and meditation, a challenge to the interpretation of domestic busy work and its place in women's lives.

As the daughter and granddaughter of artists, Cecily Kahn carries on a tradition of abstraction with her own individual vision. Growing up surrounded by artwork and the artistic community, Kahn has a fine-tuned, almost innate sense of historic and contemporary precedent, and performs adroitly in the selection, manipulation and invention of modes and devices that result in a fluent expression of her broad vocabulary of abstract pictorial strategies.

Translucency is a quality that intrigues Rachel Pascua—the translucency of velum as well as the translucency of time. Through layers of tracing, Pascua's drawings seem to have taken a wrong turn. Pictures of friends seem to have morphed into monsters' schoolmates have changed over time into unexpected beings; reality is not so different.

Leslie Roberts has been dealing with the puzzles and codes of pictorial representation for years. Her latest series of gridded works are based on text derived from e-mails, to-do lists or a roster of the contents of her drafting table. Once she chooses her colors and symbols, the patterns and compositions appear as the grids are filled in, without conscious references to their visual logic. The beauty of the results relays on a kind of extra-aesthetic energy, some kind of ghost in the system.

With several prestigious exhibitions under her belt in both Europe and New York, Kerstin Roofls paints what might appear as straight ahead realism, albeit grisaille. These deadpan depictions function as decoys for her investigation into the semiotics of imagery, the tools used by media and political powers to manipulate the masses through advertising or propaganda.

Leah Stuhltrager is a draftsman (draftsperson, draftswoman) who employs a plethora of implements like pencils, pens, sharpies and just about anything she can get her hands on that will make a line. Stuhltrager uses these various lines and colors to draw her personal world of domestic hometown quietude. Yet beneath the stillness is the constant scratching of pencil or pen on paper.

The constructions of Kathleen Vance hold a unique position in contemporary sculpture, somewhere between site-specific works and architectural models. Her miniature landscapes, some constructed within suitcases or trunks, contain streams of running water and growing moss and grass. They comment on the fragility of our environment and imply that if we don't protect it that only by recreating it in a protective transportable ways will we save the vestiges of our natural world.

Not all the forces that shape the universe are massive. Astrophysics tells us that some are subtle and imperceptible yet over eons they exert energy that ultimately dictates the nature of space, not unlike the persistent might of "Little Women."

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