Collecting in Cyberspace

- Navigating the Online Art Market
- What's Selling on the Net
- How to Bid and Buy
- The Pros and Pitfalls
- Whither the Web?

PLUS

Nam June Paik Takes Over the Guggenheim Museum Shows: Following the Money Anselm Kiefer's Satanic Reverses
1970s Western cult films, like Alejandro Jodorowsky’s El Topo.

Unfortunately, the last part of Cremaster 2 is overly occupied with Barney’s tenuous subplot; the unlikely theory that Houdini was Gilmore’s grandfather. The film’s most witless moments occur in one of its few passages of scripted dialogue—Mailer’s nonsensical speech to Gilmore’s grandmother.

Overall, with its central story line and high production values, Cremaster 2 moves Barney closer to film auteur than visual artist. For its effectiveness, much credit goes to Jonathan Bepler’s score and Peter Strietmann’s cinematography.

—Rex Weil

Richard Patterson
JAMES COHAN

Richard Patterson explores a strange territory between Abstract Expressionism and photorealism. Unlike Gerhard Richter, however, who balances abstraction and photorealism by simultaneously producing two separate bodies of work, Patterson manages to confute the categories, allowing both styles equal time on a single canvas.

Patterson begins by physically defacing a miniature action figure, adding globs of bright-colored paint to the posturing form. This mutant shape then becomes the focus of the ensuing meticulously rendered canvases, every drip and blob captured with the specificity of a photographic image.

In the large painting Male Nude, for example, a single figure on a tabletop shoots a weird appendage into the viewer’s face. The body is only partially in focus, as happens when miniatures are photographed within the limited depth of field of a standard camera lens. The effect is hallucinatory. Wild swirls of paint are captured with precision, while the figure itself remains fuzzy, slightly beyond our focal range.

Even more challenging is The Last Detail, in which Patterson poses the figure by a window looking out on a movie marquee. The mess in colors of smoke that makes up the figure are in sharp focus against the softer background of neon lights that appear in the distance. Patterson handles this composition effortlessly, turning what could have been a tangled junk pile into an intriguing labyrinth of color and light.

Patterson’s subject—the miniature men that boys transform into superheroes—could allude to the way art history has traditionally treated “heroic male artists.” Patterson has not given up on his own fascination with “greatness.” He rises to the challenge simply by aiming to outpaint everyone else, and to the degree that he succeeds, it’s a mighty heroic feat.

—Barbara Pollack

John Curran
ANDREA ROSEN

John Curran’s classically inspired nudes, with their high waists, distended bellies, attenuated limbs, and tapering fingers call to mind some familiar figures—Dürer’s Eve; Botticelli’s Venus; Cranach’s women, too, not to mention 17th-century Dutch painting, Mannerist muses like Parmigianino’s Madonna with the Long Neck, and an Ingres odalisque. The faces, however, are all Curran’s: blonde, fresh, American. It’s a look we associate with high-school cheerleaders and Malibu Barbie rather than timeless beauty.

In the elegantly rendered painting The Pink Tree, reaching over six feet tall, two female nudes pose before an overly pruned tree. Its shorn limbs contrast with the nudes’ gangly ones. Although one figure assumes the classical contrapposto stance, her friend crouches awkwardly. Drawing from different sources—20th-century faces seamlessly grafted onto mannered bodies and set against an ink-black background reminiscent of Dutch painting—Curran creates a gorgeous picture.

Curran gets more contemporary in The Hobo, where the Venus cum Valley Girl is clad in bra, panties, and a see-through top, a knapsack on her back and a walking stick in hand. (A companion piece, Sno-Bo, portrays a similar scene, plus snow.) Curran also digresses, with a couple of banal domestic scenes depicting such activities as two people in a kitchen making spaghetti.

The predominant effect is not one of cool irony. Rather, Curran’s figures can elicit empathy from the viewer. For here’s a talented and provocative artist caught, or so it seems, somewhere between resuscitating figurative painting and making it his own, even if that means dumbing it down. Whether they derive from ambivalence or irony, Curran’s paintings are quite impressive.

—Katie Clifford

David Row
VON LINTEL & NUSSEK

David Row’s signature oval forms broke deliciously loose in this elegant and animated show. Slaloming over the surface and off the edges of these eleven new paintings and works on paper, Row’s fat roller-coaster line takes the viewer on a trip through space. Underpinning it, though, is a complex, geometric framework. Each painting is a triptych, with a vertical seam joining the canvases or wood panels, which are painted different colors or in alternating bands of color running horizontally across both panels. In a sharply contrasting color, the elliptical line starts its journey, but
tracing its trajectory becomes mind-teasing, as it loops over and under itself or shifts tone as it weaves through different color fields.

In Sidewise, for instance, a white figure eight, evocative of the symbol of infinity, twines around angled poles on a black ground and continues off sides. The tones reverse themselves though, black on white, across the midsection, creating the effect of positive and negative photographic exposures suggesting alternating universes. This piece is lyrically reprised across the room in Ovalisque, a clever abstraction in both name and form. Its composition is a mirror image of Sidewise, but Row uses a more highly keyed palette—vibrant orange on deep blue, flipping to blue on a peachy pink-and-white plaid, and back again.

Less monumental but very playful is Chemistry of Desire, with two discreet lines—one pink, one white—snaking down each half of the black ground. While never touching, the white drips curve over the center seam, as if to swoon in the arc of the pink, and lower down, the pink moves across the center line to kiss or butt heads with the white. Beautifully, mathematically, almost musically, Row’s calculated abstractions let the infinite reign.

—Hilario M. Sheets

Wei Dong
JACK TILTON

In the works of Beijing-based painter Wei Dong, flabby women often in states of undress cavort in traditional Chinese landscape scenes or, in interiors, in front of paintings of such images. More than mere exercises in erotically charged absurdity, Wei’s pictures are both satiric, symbolic portrayals of China’s growing pains and expressions of his childhood fantasies.

In some pictures Wei’s women, wearing People’s Liberation Army uniforms and looking dissolute and unhealthy, bomp large against these strangely sexual dreamscapes, which are always lustily rendered with just paper, ink, and brush. Flesh is doughy and profuse; material falls in luxuriant folds.

Wei’s women give his pictures an up-to-the-moment, surrealistic edge. Clothing ensembles such as Mao jackets, Chinese opera costumes, and Western lingerie are completely incongruous. Jarring, too, are the beer bottles, lipstick tubes, and antique back scratchers that are strewn about. The women’s strangely sweet expressions are charming, almost disturbingly so.

Surely the most obvious—and provocative—feature of Wei's pictures is that the figures are never fully naked. A breast is bared here, a buttock revealed there; often no thought is given to trousers. The partial nudity conveys a heightened sensuality, even with blue veins bulging. In the two series “Outing in the Spring” and “Landscape as a Stage,” bacchanalian revelry consumes entire classical mountainscapes. These women, with their eccentric fashion sense, are full of surprises. What we don’t know, of course, is whether they represent the detritus of the Cultural