

ARTFORUM

“Lifelike”

BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

200 East Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

June 23, 2013–September 22, 2013



Peter Rostovsky, *Epiphany Model 5: Expedition*, 2004, mixed media, 52 x 72”.

Like an excellent summer blockbuster, this exhibition has a pedigreed producer (the Walker Art Center), an accessible theme (post-1960s realism), a large cast (over fifty artists), and many stars of its genre (Ron Bechtle, Vija Celmins, Chuck Close, Thomas Demand, Sam Taylor-Wood, and Robert Gober). Featuring seventy-two paintings, sculptures, drawings, photographs, and videos, the show is rich with arresting twists on the humdrum: a garbage bag made of marble (Jud Nelson), a bee crafted from clay (Tom Friedman), an eight-foot-tall bronze milk carton (Jonathan Seliger), and a miniature working elevator (Maurizio Cattelan).

The most compelling artworks move beyond questions of craft into more ominous territory. Leandro Erlich's *Subway*, 2010, features a heavy stainless-steel subway door set into a wall. It is fitted with a “window” that appears to lead into the next car, where three commuters sit dully staring ahead as the train rattles on. Since the window is actually a video on loop, we know the trio is trapped and has nowhere to go. Rudolf Stingel's ten-foot-tall greyscale portrait of himself as a young man, *Untitled*, 2010, is dark and monumental. Painted to look like a beloved, well-worn photograph, it is an elegy to youth and its brevity, as well as to the tradition of painting as a meaningful form of representation. Peter Rostovsky's two-part *Epiphany Model 5: Expedition*, 2004, includes a painting of a snow-covered mountain range rendered so faithfully it causes one to shiver. In front of this, atop a pedestal, sit two figurines—hikers—contemplating the sublime world dwarfing them. The scene is extraordinarily beautiful, yet the dissonance between man and nature is unnerving. The artwork, like many in “Lifelike,” makes the familiar strange.

— Kate Green



THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

MARC HANDELMAN / ARTHUR OU / PETER ROSTOVSKY

This unconventional vest-pocket space continues its six-month investigation into copying versus originality. A big, glittering painting by Handelman lacks any trace of the artist's hand—its cool, crystalline, ground-glass veneer suggests it was produced mechanically, although it was not. Rostovsky composed his paintings of flowers, and of a protester on fire (obscured by a large red rectangle), on a digital tablet and made the files available for free online: they are presented here as elegant light boxes. Ou is the show's lone photographer yet he contributes its most painterly works: two black-and-white images in which ribbons of graffiti, sprayed onto wood and paper, twitch like live wires. Through June 9.

P!

334 Broome St, New York, NY

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What's So Bad About Copying? An Art Gallery Scrutinizes Unoriginality

By Steven Heller

New York art space P! is devoting six months to imitations, rip-offs, and reproductions.



Peter Rostovsky's *Night Blossoms*, a Photoshop painting created on Wacom tablet

Is it possible to have an original conversation about copying these days? After all, it was Picasso who's thought to have said, "Good artists copy, great artists steal." And it was in the early 20th century that the influential typeface designer Frederic W. Goudy wrote that, "The old fellows stole all of our best ideas."

But as those quotes suggest, unoriginality can be valuable. That idea is part of what the new gallery P! (334 Broome Street, New York) will explore over the next six months, with a series of discussions and

exhibitions centered around the volatile theme of "copying." As a principal of the New York graphic design firm Project Projects, Prem Krishnamurthy started P! to address issues in art and design that are otherwise under-discussed by the mainstream art world. Like: What, exactly, is copying?

Legally, plagiarism is taking the creative ideas of another and selling and/or publishing them as one's own. But even this definition is subject to considerable room for interpretation. Krishnamurthy is using his gallery space, in part, to examine that copying not as a did-you-or-didn't-you act, but as a spectrum of gradients rooted in three questions: In what context? Through what means? To what end?

"What is labeled as a 'copy' depends very much on both cultural and political questions: who is doing the naming and what they gain from it," Krishnamurthy says in an email. "The boundaries are very fluid and are often determined personally—and in the case of the law, the edges of what is acceptable often follow the interests of those with the most cultural or economic power."

The first phase of Krishnamurthy's planned six-month cycle of exhibitions and programs will center on a reading room created by the designers [Rich Brilliant Willing](#). The space will host twice-weekly discussion groups that look at specific texts on copying from scientific, art-historical, legal, literary, and architectural points of view. Speakers on the schedule range from BuzzFeed editor-in-chief Ben Smith, who will talk about memes, to the curator of the Museum of Chinese in Americas and a researcher from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who will focus on historical and contemporary copying in China.

This discursive program lasts through February and sets the stage for P!'s second act, which kicks off in March and will consist of five one-month exhibitions. Again, art, design, architecture, music, and more will be juxtaposed and take into account copying and repetition in unconventional ways. "In addition to showing artworks and finished pieces," Krishnamurthy says, "there will be works that recur in different versions between exhibitions, a fragmentary copy of a recent show that took place in New York, the premiere of a proposed platform for distributing low-cost art, a monographic exhibition that will be footnoted—literally—with its very sources and appropriations, and more."

Why tackle these issues now? For one, the Internet has brought the question of copying to the fore more than ever before. It's now so easy for something that exists in one context can be easily remade elsewhere in the world either by accident or deliberately. And only recently have graphic designs been accepted as an individual's intellectual property.

But also, copying is timeless. "Some scholars, such as Marcus Boon, would argue that copying and imitation are essential characteristics of human life—that you cannot have creative action without it," Krishnamurthy says. "We never begin with a blank slate; there is always something before us. ... For most of our human history, the study of art consisted of learning from one's masters through copying. Only very recently do we think of originality and innovation—nevertheless contained within a carefully circumscribed discourse, tradition, and frame—as being the primary value."

Krishnamurthy is one of a growing number of design entrepreneurs who have pushed beyond the traditional boundaries of their field into alternative communication platforms. Rather than just inhabiting the online social media "space," he's retrofitting the old fashioned storefront "to start an ongoing dialogue about value—how we determine the economic and cultural worth of certain objects

and ideas," he says. "What is it about the unique, the iconic, the so-called original, that we still worship?" The name P!, he explains, stands for many things, and works on multiple levels, one of which is it's emotional: "Excited, enthusiastic, and ready-to-roll." The sentiment may be old, but it's in a very new place.

This article available online at:

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ARTFORUM

PROW

SARA MELTZER GALLERY/ART IN GENERAL

We all now know better than to believe in the myth of the artist working alone in her studio. But what of the supposed alternative, the idea of a collective happily plugging away on a shared project? PROW, a collaborative entity whose name is a combination of the initials of the group's primary constituents, Peter Rostovsky and Olav Westphalen, staged two separate exhibitions in New York this winter. Both shows were produced by, and dealt with, cooperative enterprise. But whether they were promoting or satirizing it remained intriguingly ambiguous.

PROW claim that they are modeled after a Hollywood production studio, but with one exception: They have no hierarchy. (To realize their projects, PROW are assisted by a large cast of helpers, all of whom get credit.) The show at Sara Meltzer Gallery was titled "The Prequel" and opened with light boxes of fake movie posters advertising sequels to nonexistent films, e.g., *Iceberg III: Evil From Below*, 2009. A hilarious send-up of hackneyed graphic design, the posters are also an obvious comment on Hollywood's proclivity for mindless seriality catering to the lowest common denominator. Yet the posters seemed to encourage viewers to revel in such forms of humor, condoning art as entertainment and setting the stage for the spectacle that followed. Behind a

white curtain, the main room held *Pyre*, 2010, a sculpture made of electric fans and polyester sheeting. Its apparent drabness was promptly reversed as a mechanically rigged violin and cello struck a triumphant chord (partly inspired by the Mac start-up tone), the room went suddenly dark, and the fans whirred to life, blowing the polyester flames, lit by orange and red spotlights, into the air. The convincingly lifelike instant bonfire resembled a funeral pyre, though who or what was dead (the author? Pure, unmediated experience?) remained unclear.

With the lights up, the drawings surrounding the fire seemed

PROW, *Pyre*, 2010,
aluminum, polyester,
theatrical lighting,
industrial fans,
electrical equipment,
cello, violin, various
technical parts.
Installation view,
Sara Meltzer Gallery.



more in keeping with the film-production concept. Watercolors depicting wire-frame models based on found images posted on the Internet by users of Google's 3-D modeling software often suggested movie premises: a plane crash, an obstacle course, a floating baby. The claims of the press release that the appropriation of these images means that PROW are celebrating "the utopian dream of an open source 'wiki-culture'" didn't quite hit home. The oblique meaning of the drawings and their generic look instead seemed to refer to the general descent into mediocre blandness for which we have the culture industry to blame.

Concurrently, PROW mounted a tighter show at the nonprofit institution Art in General in New York's Chinatown. In contrast to the work at the aforementioned commercial gallery in Chelsea, which took aim at a capitalistic, image-saturated society, this show, titled "Anti-Prow," tackled communistic ideals. Walls papered with manifestos here surrounded the central piece (*Monument*, 2010), which comprised several metal ladders painted bright orange and piled together in a mass that goofily riffed on Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International. Five exquisite-corpse drawings—Rostovsky and Westphalen each drew half—depicted actual famous corpses such as Kurt Cobain, Che Guevara, and victims of the Jonestown massacre. Framed by the manifestos, the drawings highlighted the futility of radical chic. A tenet of feature filmmaking is to keep the audience guessing, and in splitting the task of rendering these icons, a surprising third element emerges—the rough, rapid hand of Westphalen complements Rostovsky's cool dexterity, resulting in moving, strikingly human versions of the grim scenes we've all seen many times before.

With the work at Art in General alluding to failed leftist movements, and that at Sara Meltzer emanating an air of jaded fatigue with corporatized media, one might think the two shows would leave viewers in a state of pessimistic despair. Not so! By embracing art as entertainment but resolving not to underestimate their audience, PROW pulled off an enviable trick: Not only did they keep the audience guessing, they left them wanting more.

—Claire Barliant

PROW

Art in America
March 19, 2010

Prow and Anti-Prow

3/19/10
Sara Meltzer and Art in General
Jan 20 – Mar 20, 2010



By Aileen Burns

PROW refers to the collaboration of artists Peter Rostovsky and Olav Westphalen, modeled after the organization of film studios. Recognizing that contemporary art, like filmmaking, involves many hands and minds, they strive to publicly acknowledge this multiple authorship. Rostovsky and Westphalen propose that we recognize the contributions of people with specialized skills or ideas in less easily enumerated ways than regular wages, and everyone who helps make the installations is credited.

The pairing's two exhibitions in New York, *Prow: The Prequel* at Sara Meltzer and *Anti-Prow* at Art in General, draw on conventions of narrative film. In both, visitors to the show become the protagonist, led through time and space by a sequence of events. The drawings that line the walls of both galleries provide the subject matter of the shows' story. However, unlike typical narrative film, the ending of the story is not evident.

At Sara Meltzer, the show was set on a six-minute loop. Entering the space, a mechanically rigged cello and violin filled the gallery with a single minute-long note. The house lights dimmed, and a flickering fire of spotlights and fabric blowing in circulated air turned on for one minute. When the gallery lights came up, the audience had four minutes to view the exhibition's six ink and watercolor drawings, which took their imagery from a free online archive of 3D models. The original authors of the models are credited alongside the collaborators and assistants who contributed. The content of the pictures ranged from a plane crash to a planter filled with exotic flowers, to a man suspended by a crane in front of a green screen. The drawings resemble set designs and or prop diagrams for a movie, each an episode unto themselves.

The show at Art in General shares formal components with the Sara Meltzer gallery; a unifying wall treatment, a series of drawings produced by multiple authors; an eye-catching sculpture in the center of the space. Instead of a linear and controlled time-based experience for viewers, multiple temporalities and ideas are available at once. The artists wheat-pasted the back gallery with print-outs of manifestos from sources ranging the political canon: Marx and Engels' Communist Manifesto, to fashion news, "Karl Lagerfeld Delivers His Fashion Manifesto," and PROW's own manifesto, which highlights their inclusiveness: "interventionist without hubris, and entertainment without a laugh track."

A series of black drawings are layered over the historical documents and depict historic figures in very public death scenes. Lenin, Mao, and Che lay in state beside a represented Cobain's suicide. Drawings duties were divvied up by Rostovsky and Westphalen, who respectively have clean and sketchy styles. There's an interesting triangulation of public space, the artist's mediated but singular pronouncedly singular interpretation, and the romantic hero. The artists also resist a hierarchy of icons and ideas that tests the notions of meritocracy.

PROW

Artforum.com

February 3, 2010



PROW

02.03.10

Author: [Eva Díaz](#)

01.22.10-03.20.10 *Art in General*

PROW, *Pyre* (detail), 2010, aluminum, polyester, theatrical lighting, industrial fans, electric equipment, cello, violin, various technical parts, dimensions variable.

How might artists position themselves between entertainment culture and traditional techniques of representation such as drawing? How might those different possibilities map onto the display practices of commercial gallery venues or nonprofit art spaces? Peter Rostovsky and Olav Westphalen, collaborating under the name PROW, challenge conditions of spectacularization that entangle artistic practices, paradoxically by adopting elements of the most successful model of collective media production: cinema.

In “PROW: The Prequel,” the foyer of Sara Meltzer Gallery contains a series of light boxes displaying posters for sequels to nonexistent movies such as a slasher pic titled *Pet II* and the disaster flick *Iceberg III* (mischievously tagged MATTER HAS A MIND . . . ONCE MORE). Lining the main gallery’s walls are six watercolors appropriated from Google’s open-source 3-D modeling software. The drawings, each hand-rendered by one of the two artists, adopt an eclectic range of imagery conjured by wiki-culture’s anonymous users: a floating baby, a stunt actor hoisted aloft in a green-screen environment, a staged plane crash. The exhibition’s central kinetic sculpture, *Pyre*, 2010, is an agglomeration of B-movie gimmicks: As the lights dim, a dramatic chord is struck by a mechanized cello and violin, activating a phalanx of industrial fans that raise a curtain of theatrically lit fabric into a simulacral fire.

Replacing the gadgetry of *Pyre*, the central sculpture in the “Anti-Prow” exhibition at the nonprofit Art in General is a Tatlin-like monument consisting of an interlocking group of red ladders surrounded by walls papered with historic political and artistic manifestos. On each wall is a framed graphite drawing of an iconic public death scene (split along its vertical axis, with one side rendered by Rostovsky and the other by Westphalen): the bodies, lying in state, of Lenin and Mao, the corpses of Kurt Cobain and Che Guevara surrounded by police, and the victims of the Jonestown massacre. Like its Chelsea counterpart, “Anti-Prow” addresses a set of questions about the value of artistic labor—this time by taking up the legacy of political activism, and representations of politics, in the visual arts.

“Prow: The Prequel” is on view at [Sara Meltzer Gallery](#), 525–531 West Twenty-sixth Street, until February 27.



Man in Space 2008
Oil on linen, 83 x 61"

STILL

A single frame - of film or video, a photograph, or digital capture - is the most concise and expressive increment of our mediated lives. Possessing distinctly nuanced associations, video stills, photographs, and film stills function as forms of representation quite different than a moving image, because a still image is a still in contrast to and therefore defined by the moving image. *Peter Rostovsky: Still* is staged as a series of moments and slices of history - both personal and art historical - that allude, through the medium of painting, to tensions between man and nature. A gymnast caught in midair, a military airplane suspended above the sea, and a dog jumping through several rings of fire - these are a few of Rostovsky's painted stills that capture human power and vulnerability in contemporary life.

Still focuses on several recent bodies of Rostovsky's work, starting with *Epiphany Model: Photographer 2* (2008). This most recent piece from the artist's *Epiphany Models* series, presents a landscape painting in dialogue with a three-dimensional figure - a self-portrait of the artist as photographer. The landscape painting - 3-D model combo draws on the contrast between the figure and luminescent landscape typical of German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich. However, in a play on Friedrich, Rostovsky literally removes the figure from the ground by pulling the figure out of the picture plane and into the sculptural realm. In the case of *Photographer 2*, where the figure wields a camera, photography metaphorically becomes an extension of painting. Or one can pose, in Rostovsky's work, does painting instead become an extension of photography?

In Rostovsky's practice, images are mined from any source media from which still images can be captured, including his own photographs, found material from television, film, and the web. These images are then reworked digitally to produce a heightened representation of an object, landscape, or figure whose aura is emphasized through adjustments in tonality and colorization. For instance, *Floating Gymnast* (2010) is painted against a darkened background from which all detail has been removed creating the sense that our levitating man is backlit. In this way, Rostovsky makes these found images his own - adding a layer of poignancy to these balancing acts as they are caught in a still moment, before the fall. A second layer emerges in thinking about Rostovsky's care in reclaiming found images that risk being thrown away. Is it an act of collecting, an archeology, or a minor history culled from so many isolated stills?

Cat's Cradle (2008) hearkens back to an earlier, ongoing series called *Significant Objects*. All of the objects - a lava lamp, Rubik's cube, and a disco ball - can, with a longer gaze, take on more abstract qualities. *Cat's Cradle* is based on an image from a guide to making cat's cradles found on the web (where the original image is subtitled, "10. Keep pinching the X's and pull your hands apart"). In *Cat's Cradle*, the symbolic meaning is suggestive of the interdependencies of contemporary life, specifically in the realm of the economic relationships that contributed to the recent economic crisis that coincided with the making of the painting. Here then the artist alludes to the social as well as to the political but in the language of allegory and symbol. Painted in Caravagesque tones *Cat's Cradle* becomes as much a metaphor for collaboration as it does for total interdependence and mutual entrapment.

Rostovsky's *X-ray series* diverges from the approach of many of the paintings presented in *Still*, in that most of the works in the exhibition involve a broader palette, and function as realistic and generally resolved images. In the *X-ray* series however, Rostovsky has painted blue and black portraits of x-rays of paintings that reveal hidden, always invisible layers beneath the paintings as well as their physical understructure, like primer, stretcher bars, and nails. Rostovsky describes the impulse to make these x-ray paintings as a "futile search for the soul of traditional painting, as if searching for the soul of a person through an autopsy." This interest in the ephemeral, hidden qualities of painting is central to Rostovsky's practice, and makes visible the constantly shifting balance between power and vulnerability, even within an individual. While these tensions forecast loss of history, stability, and power over the natural world, they also generate beauty, just like Rostovsky's melancholy x-rays that search for the invisible, indeterminate and hidden that lurks behind the surface of every painting.

— Sara Reisman, Guest Curator



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Contemporary Art from the Dicke Collection
The Dayton Art Institute

catalog essays by Ellie Bronson

Swimmer with Goggles is part of the **Swimmers** series that occupied me from 2004 to 2006. This body of work marks my return to a more humanistic and painterly approach in my practice. Derived from photographs of swimmers taken in Nice and at local New York beaches, each painting simultaneously serves as a study of local light and color as well as an individual portrait of the swimmer. Here each person is caught in a moment of isolation, meditative repose, or concentrated effort. Each is adrift, the endless expanse of water acting as much as a metaphor for life as it is for the medium of paint itself.

Peter Rostovsky's talent for realism has presented itself in a number of subversively surreal ways. He has made quirky and complex installations involving painting, sculpture, and film. Some of his best-known series are *Utopian Portraits*, *Epiphany Models*, and *Swimmers*. In the *Utopian Portraits* he paints the models from behind, as though we were looking over their shoulders as they stare up into the middle distance. Across from the portraits he positions the objects of their gaze—small paintings of sunsets or the sun breaking through on a cloudy day. We can walk through the subjects' line of vision, but we cannot see their faces or eyes. The *Epiphany Models* are mixed media installations in which six-inch-high sculptural figures of hikers are positioned on pedestals from which they photograph full-scale paintings that echo the sublime landscapes of the Hudson River School. Rostovsky uses his facility with paint to ask questions about reality and perception and to nudge the viewer out of the comfort zone of easily categorized media.

With the series *Swimmers*, the artist shifted from depicting people observing nature (seeing, hiking, photographing) to showing people experiencing nature. The images record an actual reality for the first time. During a residency in Giverny, Rostovsky traveled through France and photographed swimmers in the Mediterranean resort of Nice,¹ and continued once he returned to New York. Transformed into oil, the ripples and waves—occasionally breaking—vary in color from gray to blue and green. While the subject of water

may recall Vija Celmins's² painstakingly realistic drawings and prints or Roni Horn's darkly forbidding lithographs of the Thames, Rostovsky's *Swimmers* is a jump ahead in evolution—there are people. They swim determinedly or float, alone or in groups, borne along as if held in utero by the ocean. The surface of *Swimmer with Goggles* shimmers between depth and flatness, mirroring the optically impenetrable sea. Here there is nothing of the irony or humor of the artist's previous work; this time he depicts real life, inviting us in to share a moment of contemplation with his swimming subjects.

1 Max Henry, "Peter Rostovsky," *Time Out New York*, no. 439, February 26–March 4, 2004, 66.


2 Ken Johnson, "Peter Rostovsky: Deluge," *New York Times*, March 12, 2004, Art in Review sec.

THE NEW YORKER, FEBRUARY 9 & 16, 2009

PETER ROSTOVSKY

The artist has spent a decade meditating on mediation in art. The oil-on-linen works in his début at the gallery are all based on photographs; some were shot by Rostovsky; others he scavenged online. Gymnasts hover, inverted, in space; a sports stadium is depicted from an abstracting aerial perspective; a gas burner glows, mandalalike, on a stove. Rostovsky's paintings owe much to Gerhard Richter (the hand that launched a thousand conceptual Photo-Realists), but they nonetheless offer insights into the mysteries of representation once-removed. Through Feb. 14. (Meltzer, 525-531 W. 26th St. 212-727-9330.)

Fareed Armaly Ruth Root
Erik Benson Peter Rostovsky
Janice Caswell
Michel François Chris Sauter
Luis Gispert Gary Sweeney
Jessica Halonen
Oliver Herring Milica Tomic
Alex Lopez Willie Varela
Yunhee Min Michael Velliquette
Wangechi Mutu Anne Wallace
Ulrike Ottinger Allison Wiese
Robert Pruitt



2004 Artpace Residencies
and Exhibitions



Hudson (Show)Room

April 29 – July 18, 2004

Peter Rostovsky

by Kathryn Kanjo

Lush and realistic, Peter Rostovsky's canvases straddle the realms of pure painterly experience and ironic mediation. Working from digital and composite photographs, he creates imagery that ranges from the sublime to the banal, questioning the point at which one might become the other.

In many of his works, Rostovsky describes a sweep of nature the naked eye could not possibly take in. *Transport Series: Star Trek I* (2000) features a star-studded galaxy exploding with colorful hot spots and points of light. The painting is an awe-inspiring portrayal of the universe, but its grandeur is deflated by the title's allusion to popular entertainment. Elsewhere, the artist inverts the process by elevating the ordinary. In *Carrie* (2002), blood drips down the face of the wide-eyed high-schooler in the cult classic. By insert-

ing a pop-culture image into the rarefied context of fine art, Rostovsky suggests that familiar emblems of our times might soon become the markers of history.

Rostovsky's paintings modernize and complicate traditional notions of artistic representations of the sublime. In the oval canvas in *Epiphany Model 4: The Meteor Shower* (2004), a night sky above a mountain valley is lit by streaking meteors. We are joined in viewing the painting by two diminutive but scale-appropriate hikers on a rocky perch depicted in a sculpture placed on a pedestal two feet from the canvas. In an ironic update of the German Romantic tradition, the viewers are literally removed from the scene that dwarfs them. Rostovsky's figures—viewers and viewed at once—contemplate both nature and culture simultaneously. In *Eclipse* (2004), the

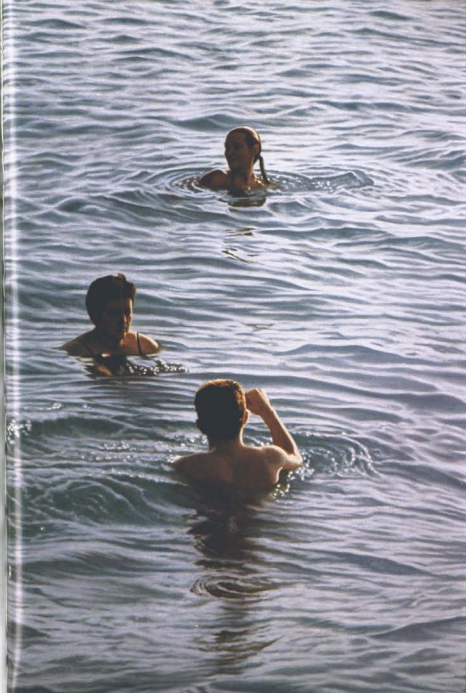
largest work in the exhibition, wispy flames peek out from behind a darkened moon, constituting a monumental ode to a natural phenomenon that, unassisted, we would never be able to see with such clarity.

Four canvases from a series inspired by a trip to Nice, France, feature isolated swimmers in rippling expanses of blue water. In *Large Swimmers* (2004; see detail on facing page), five figures dog paddle in a circle—serious, isolated, and detached, like the figures in *Epiphany Model 4: The Meteor Shower*. Suspended in the infinite ocean, they commune with nature as nature seems to consume them.

In *Rubik's Cube* (2004), Rostovsky treats the popular puzzle with the same reverence as the mountains, stars, and ocean. The cube's familiar colored squares loom against a hushed, hazy-white background, the presentation transforming it from the banal to the sublime and, once again, challenging the assumed distinction between the two.

Kathryn Kanjo is executive director of Artpace.

Born in St. Petersburg, USSR (now Russia), in 1970, **Peter Rostovsky** moved to the US in 1980. He received a BA and BFA from Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, in 1995. He participated in the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program in New York, NY, the following year. Solo exhibitions of his work have been held at The Project, New York, NY (2004); Galleria Maze, Turin, Italy (2002); and James Harris Gallery, Seattle, WA (2001). He participated in the *Prague Biennale*, Prague, Czech Republic, in 2003; and in exhibitions at SMAK, Ghent, Belgium (2001), and White Columns, New York, NY (1999).



An abstract artwork composed of numerous layers of light-colored paper cutouts. The pieces are arranged in a complex, overlapping fashion, creating a sense of depth and movement. The shapes are primarily organic and geometric, including circles, rectangles, and irregular, flowing forms. The overall effect is a dense, textured composition that changes as the viewer's perspective shifts.

**BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART
AMERICAN ART SINCE 1900**

PETER ROSTOVSKY

b. St. Petersburg, Russia, 1970

w. Ithaca, New York, 1991–1995; Brooklyn, New York, 1995–present

RUSSIAN-BORN, BROOKLYN-BASED artist Peter Rostovsky manufactures situations in which antediluvian and contemporary worldviews collide, effecting a sort of visual eulogy of the human condition. The artist studied at Cooper Union Art School, Parsons School of Design, and Cornell University and is an alumnus of the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program. His stiff, hyperrealistic works, such as those from the Epiphany Model series, function as a collective homage to, and a poignant deconstruction of, classical notions of the sublime, specifically modern man's intellectually irreconcilable relationship with the natural world. In this respect, the artist could be considered a slightly cynical postmodern illusionist.

Rostovsky produces consistently hallucinatory works, be they paintings, sculptures, or hybridized pendant objects. He places great emphasis on artificiality in hue, form, and perspective, enhancing the rift between human beings and nature. In the hybrid painting/sculpture *Epiphany Model 5: Expedition* (2004, plate 153), to date, the most recent work in the Epiphany Model series, Rostovsky finalizes this act of separation. He renders his human subjects, two climbers, as a discrete sculpture on a pedestal gazing at a picturesque landscape of stately, ice-capped blue mountains mounted on the wall a few feet away. Both figures wear climbing gear, and they appear atop what looks to be a mountain summit. The landscape before them is vast, generalized, and sweeping. The figures and mountaintop, amalgams of paint, Super-Sculpey, and other materials, are comparatively tiny and festooned in meticulous detail. This disparity in scale and specificity sets the stage for an existential drama played out in the empty space between the climbers' perch and the daunting mountain chain that spreads before them in the distance.

If *Epiphany Model 5* indeed depicts an attempt to confront nature, Rostovsky's subjects are faced with the truly celestial grandeur of their failure. Such an interpretation dovetails with traditional notions of the sublime as outlined by Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Burke portrayed encounters with the sublime as awe inspiring, even terrifying experiences, and if viewed from behind the pedestal, this reading of *Epiphany Model 5* is appropriate. The men appear miniscule, dwarfed by the landscape and frozen in the stance individuals might assume after having surrendered their free will.

When viewed from the side or in front of the pedestal, however, the work takes a decisive philosophical turn. From these perspectives, the spectator suddenly gains access to visual cues that complicate what once appeared to be a straightforward encounter with the sublime. Neither climber responds to the majestic landscape in ways that are characteristic of sublimity—that is, with some combination of wonder and trepidation, fright and acquiescence. One climber looks like he might be physically weary . . . or . . . is he just plain cocky? He is seated

casually, his legs dangling over the edge of the summit like he does this sort of thing every day. The other figure stands at firm attention, arms crossed over his avalanche pole, as if contemplating the task set before him—of bridging the physical gap between himself and the distant landscape. *Epiphany Model 5*, then, is not a manifestation either of romanticism in the classical sense of being mesmerized by the sublime or of the *naissance* of a postmodern “rugged individual.” On the contrary, the work is decidedly *unromantic*, despite the painting's affinity with the Romantic landscape tradition in terms of light, composition, and perspective.

The sculptural element of *Epiphany Model 5* speaks of a self-imposed distance on the part of the climbers—an intentional subjugation of nature that ultimately reduces its power. While the fractured physicality of the two-part piece could conceivably lament a dislocation between man and nature, relegating the climbers to the status of passive spectators, it also points to the innate and uniquely human arrogance that resides in any attempt to commune with or conquer something so obviously greater than ourselves.

Rostovsky uses a hybridized format and a similar mixed sentiment in several works with an equally high degree of success. For example, *Epiphany Model 4: The Meteor Shower* (2004) consists of a resin sculpture atop a pedestal—this time, a young man and woman on a hillside—placed directly in front of a painted landscape. Just as in *Epiphany Model 5*, the subjects reflect individuated responses. The couple seems disenchanted by the celestial spectacle before them; one could even surmise that they look downright bored.

The painted components of both *Epiphany Model 4* and *5* speak of a cinematic or photographic artificiality through the use of a hyper-realistic, almost garish palette. Shades of dreamy ultramarine and otherworldly cerulean blues dominate. These scenes, much like the physical



Epiphany Model 5: Expedition (full view and detail)



arrangement of the works, are very obviously mediated and constructed, almost synthetic. In actuality, the artist harvests his landscapes off the Internet, creating surreal panoramic impressions of locales that he himself has never seen firsthand. The conceptualization and process of Rostovsky's work has critical bearing on its impact: since his landscapes are illusory and, ultimately, unrepresentative, contemplation on the part of the viewer is all the more complex and potentially futile.

Rostovsky's image sourcing critiques the perceived immediacy of the landscape, a form of artistic expression traditionally considered spontaneous. This creates a parallel between painting and photography, which is, by its nature, more immediate than painting. Yet it is common knowledge that even in photography matters of framing, scale, angle, perspective, and format affect the end result, mediating subjectivity and experience. *Epiphany Model 5* is, to some extent, an indictment of the pervasiveness of the photographic in our society and the passive supplication with which images are received. We, like Rostovsky's climbers, no longer occupy the landscape much less participate in or interact with it. We simply consume it.¹

Anjali Gupta

NOTE

1. For additional information on Rostovsky, see Kelly Baum, “Peter Rostovsky,” *Artlines*, no. 43 (summer 2004): 108; Holland Cotter, “Glenn Brown, Julie Mehretu, Peter Rostovsky,” *New York Times*, June 23, 2000; and Michael Velliquette, “Notes on Peter Rostovsky,” available at http://www.glasstire.com/reviews/sa/ArtPace_Rostovsky.htm [May 5, 2005].

153.

Epiphany Model 5: Expedition [detail], 2004

Oil on canvas and Super-Sculpey, aluminum wire, wood, plastic, acrylic paint, and Styrofoam flakes with pigment
 Painting: 52 × 72 in. (132 × 182.8 cm)
 Sculpture and base: 62 × 7 × 7 in. (157.5 × 17.8 × 17.8 cm)
 Partial and pledged gift of Jeanne and Michael Klein
 T2005.6.1/2–2/2

Provenance: Commissioned and purchased at the request of the museum by Jeanne and Michael Klein from The Project, New York, 2004

Art in America

October 2006



Peter Rostovsky: *Landscape for Another (1)*, 2006, oil on linen, 42 by 56 inches; at The Project.

a dark day were out of luck. (In fairness, I should note that Marión offered to turn on the lights for me. I declined, and returned when the weather improved.)

Though these paintings are not properly monochrome (nor polychrome; Barbara Rose's "plurichrome" hits home), they dispense, as do monochrome paintings, with figure/ground relationships. But whereas in monochrome (and other manifestations of the "abstract sublime") the picture plane is read as all ground and no figure, these, in their relentless edge-to-edge forward pressure, come at you all at once: all figure. They commandeer the neutral white wall as ground. A cradle that locates each canvas a few inches forward of the wall heightens this effect. And the work's resulting deference to the gallery's architecture, even more than its humorlessness, is its greatest liability. —Stephen Maine

Peter Rostovsky at The Project

Over the past five years or so, Peter Rostovsky has produced "Epiphanies," an ironic, narrative-oriented series of works consisting of small, sculpted polymer-clay figures on pedestals facing wall-hung landscape paintings. In this recent exhibition, he included a single example, *Epiphany Model: The Photographer* (2006), whose eponymous, freestanding subject is dwarfed by a luminous oil-on-linen, 88-by-42-inch landscape depicting bands of mountains receding in the distance. The 6-inch-tall Sculpey figure holds his camera in the

ungainly posture associated with digital cameras—arms extended, the screen viewed at a distance. Here, Rostovsky represents the eclipse of the traditions of both landscape painting and landscape photography—the countdown at the end of the Kodak moment.

Several paintings from his cycle of "blind" landscapes recall the atmosphere of mid-19th-century American painting and seem to commemorate it with a record of its vanishing: the landscapes of this series fade into grisaille, as rivers, mountains and skylines are softened to a point near obliteration. Three 18-by-24-inch, oil-on-linen "Blind Landscapes" reveal mountainous terrain from different perspectives, the first focusing on a horizon defined by trees in the middle distance, the second on a view from a ridge overlooking a river, the third on mountains receding into the distance.

Rostovsky's 42-by-56-inch *Landscape for Another (1)* and (2), both 2006, iterate paintings of the Hudson River Valley as though the paintings had been mounted on a wall and photographed at an oblique angle. The first limns an expanse of still water from a rock-strewn cove in the foreground to a forest reflected in the water in the distance as the painting itself seems to recede. In the second, a wide river is seen from far above, a herbaceous border in the foreground along the base of the picture plane. Down below in the darkness is an interrupted line of minute incidents painted in reddish yellow—an offhand, photorealist representation of what may be the lights of houses or passing cars.

Selected from what appears to be an ongoing series depicting swimmers in generic, photogenic moments, two paintings dated 2006 show figures in endless expanses of water. The 56-by-126-inch *Frieze* depicts men and women at play in impossibly blue water, an abundant froth rushing onto some unseen shore. Closer in, the 57-by-87-inch *The Wave* locates four young women standing in shallow water as they turn away into the middle distance where a rolling wave forms, anticipating the possibility of a pictorial resolution of figures wholly subsumed.

—Edward Lefkowitz

Russell Crotty at CRG

In the tradition of the livre d'artiste, Russell Crotty obsessively annotates hand-drawn field books and charts useful for scaling boulders and tracking celestial phenomena. (The objects shown were dated 2006.) Relatively small in the context of this exhibition, Crotty's linen-bound, ink and watercolor on paper *Twilight in the West* opens to a span of 14½ by 31 inches on a shelf designed for its presentation. Regarding himself as an observer midway between earth and sky, Crotty prints in unaffected capital letters: "Winter Joshua Tree, Cold north wind howls out of the mountains. Sirius the brightest star rises above the huge boulder formations." Crotty writes of both the boulder and the night sky, a notation that introduces his interest in bouldering, a relatively safe, problem-solving sport useful as high-impact training for climbers. He leads the viewer on an expedition into sites ideal for

these adventurous pursuits.

The 40 pages of the somewhat larger *Nightfall* include images drawn in black ballpoint as well as text, and feature the silhouette of a trophy home—an emblem of the introduction of the vernacular to a coastal scrub of chaparral. Above is a full moon and a night sky that is a field of obsessive markings, with named stars like white holes burning in the darkness. Bound in rugged nylon, the 20 pages in the 126-by-56-by-33-inch work titled *Field Charts for Selected Boulder Problems* rest on a collapsible chart table reminiscent of campaign furnishings designed for use in the field. The pages feature large drawings of boulders to be scaled, interspersed with vellum overlays of routes marked in color, each posing solutions to the ascent problem. The paths of greatest difficulty are drawn in red. Such drawings are annotated with observations concerning tests of endurance, including "good problem at the lower camp ground—a freaky downclimb." Turned here by white-gloved gallery assistants, the pages can also be rolled up in purpose-built carrying tubes.

The roughly 68-by-124-by-68-inch apparatus of *Field Charts for Nocturnal Recreations* was designed for the transport, storage and display of 10 expansive drawings focusing on named and numbered stars, each paired with a related vellum overlay. The assistants offered each sheet in turn, lifting it carefully over a roll that cradled the pages previously viewed. Here were galactic clusters, numbered stars, the Milky Way writ large, followed by a short list of its spiral arms, familiar Orion, Cygnus and Perseus.

Russell Crotty: *Field Charts for Nocturnal Recreations*, 2006, ink and watercolor on paper and vellum, bound in nylon, on table, 68 by 124 by 67½ inches; at CRG.



Of the Painted Image

Miriam Cabessa | Seth Cohen | Peter Rostovsky

Though it has been said that Jews are a people of the book, not of the image, even a cursory glance at 20th and 21st century artists, art historians, critics, collectors and patrons, reveals the breadth and import of the contributions Jews have made to the history of modern art. Many Jewish artists have expanded their respective mediums, pushing the boundaries of conventions, expectations and worldviews. The recognition of these contributions of the recent past and those of living artists is essential to the health of cultural pluralism.

Of the Painted Image inaugurates the American Jewish Museum's investigation and celebration of paintings by young Jewish artists, at different stages of their careers, who contribute substantive works to the dialogue of 21st century artistic practices. The work of the selected artists does not often directly reference traditional iconographies or identities, nor is their program or motivation as artists directly pointed toward Judaism. *Of the Painted Image* provides a unique opportunity, for both the participating artists and the American Jewish Museum, to explore the implicit expression of Jewish identities.

The invitation for this exhibition has been extended to three New York City-based painters: Miriam Cabessa, Seth Cohen and Peter Rostovsky. They were invited because they make vital and meaningful paintings and because their connection to Judaism, as with many younger Jews in America today, is pregnant with questions that likely influence who they are as people and as artists.

The great historian of Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah), Gershom Scholem wrote, "There is a life of tradition that does not merely consist of conservative preservation, the constant continuation of the spiritual and cultural possessions of a community. There is such a thing as a treasure hunt within tradition, which creates a living relationship to tradition and to which much of what is best in current Jewish consciousness is indebted, even where it was—and is—expressed outside the framework of orthodoxy."

Mystics, as Scholem writes, are often on the fringe of the organized religion they are involved with. They are inherently engaged with history, while continually



Peter Restovsky
Freeze, 58" x 120", Oil on linen, 2006 (above)
House Fire, 44" x 54", Oil on linen, 2007 (right)



Of the Painted Image *continued*

searching for new dimensions of that very tradition. The question of meaning becomes paramount and that which claims the highest authority is opened up through new questions and investigations. To extend this model to artists working in the larger, secular society is to see that they are not positioned so differently from religious mystics. They too are individuals on the outside looking out. They are, in a word, visionaries.

Throughout history, artists have been wed to the development of the culture that they are a part of, progressively creating a world filled with images that hold meanings for those who read them. But cultural meanings are relative to the particular worldviews of individuals, and are developed from ongoing social interactions, negotiations and contexts. So that, when spoken about generally the differences between cultures and groups of people seem clearly defined (i.e. Jew, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, etc.), but when spoken about more specifically or directly, the notion of fixed individual and collective identities are exposed as constructions. Life events that shape individuals and groups are always more complex and nuanced than they appear at first glance. Contemporary artists, across the board, are exceedingly familiar with the idea that the purity or essence of cultural meanings and artifacts are always relative, and always a hybrid product.

The notion of relative meaning and the association of artifacts to general cultural categories are laid bare by the novelist Philip Roth. In a recent interview in the *Guardian*, Roth reacts against the definition of Jewish-American fiction assigned to his work, stating with a staunch refusal, "...I don't accept that I write Jewish-American fiction. I don't buy that nonsense about black literature or feminist literature. Those are labels made up to strengthen some political agenda. I don't read or perceive books in that way. I'm interested in the object, the thing, the story, the aesthetic jolt you get from being inside this thing." Roth makes apparent here

that writing—the process, the history, the convention, the expression of ideas through the form—is what is most crucial. As a writer, he is concerned with good writing, just as painters are concerned with good painting.

Of the Painted Image offers the experience of three vibrant and expansive approaches to contemporary painting. Cabessa, Cohen and Rostovsky have all developed specific processes, signs and methods of generating meaning through the painted image. Just as mystics are engaged with history while continually searching for new dimensions of that very tradition, Cabessa, Cohen and Rostovsky all have particular and refined relationships to the history of painting and markmaking. The work in this exhibition weaves in and out of concerns about painting as a viable contemporary medium, making alternating pleas for submersion and separation, for commitment and autonomy, for critical distance and emotive wanderings.

Holding a central position throughout the history of Judaism is the tendency to question the issue of identity itself. Allegiance to the Jewish people is often a different question than allegiance to Judaic religious practice; in fact many Jews in the world today would define themselves as ostensibly secular. The American Jewish experience is wide and varied, and the avenues of its expression are exponential.

Of the Painted Image was developed with the hope that through the encounter with the exceptional work of these artists, viewers can develop a greater and more expansive understanding of what it is to be a contemporary Jewish artist and what we envision when we say Jewish art.

David Stanger, Curator
Director, American Jewish Museum

GREATER

NEW

YORK

Peter Rostovsky

Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, 1970. Lives and works in Brooklyn.

In his search for an idiom to capture the contemporary sublime, Peter Rostovsky has sought to reinvigorate the language of painting by cross-referencing traditional genre models (i.e., landscape, still life, portraiture) with an appropriated iconography of cinematic effects, featuring awe-inspiring cosmic vistas that evoke seamless space-time continuums. Rostovsky's proficient blending of such codes has identified painting as a medium fraught with historical baggage, yet also as an effective, even eloquent mediator of distinct categories of perceptual experiences: most significantly, perhaps, the conditions of immersion-contemplation on the one hand and distraction-ambivalence on the other. For Rostovsky, painting seems to be something at once organic and artificial, an aesthetic confection that still may have the power to transport us, intellectually and experientially, to another place.

Operating on the boundary between sincerity and irony, engagement and dispassion, plugged into contemporary consciousness yet still revisiting the past, Rostovsky reconnects painting to its history. If artists such as J. M. W. Turner and Caspar David Friedrich have a certain retrospective currency for him, it is because their works indicate a genealogy of painting that not only situates us in relation to the natural world but also speaks to our contemplative condition as viewers.

For Greater New York 2005, Rostovsky has created a new work in his *Anamorphosis* series, which he began in 2001. This work

consists of a seven-foot-tall steel column positioned at the center of a circular digital print that is placed directly on the floor. When the viewer walks around and/or through the grounded digital image (itself a kind of hallucinatory distortion), the image reconstitutes itself, seemingly through some magical act of perception, upon the mirrored surface of the steel column. Reflecting upon an earlier work from 2003, *Anamorphosis: Castle*, Rostovsky scoured the Internet for an image, finally locating one on a website featuring an archive of pictures collected by firemen. The image, of a burning house used for training purposes, was the basis for an oil painting, which was then photographed and digitally altered to produce the circular print. Invoking the traditional amusement park or funhouse atmosphere while at the same time alluding to Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533), Rostovsky delights in his ability to fabricate a visual experience that becomes a metaphor for the simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of painting.

Lilian Tone

Selected Exhibitions:

- 2004 *Peter Rostovsky*, ArtSpace, San Antonio, Texas (solo).
- Deluge: *The Project*, New York (solo).
- 2003 *Intervention: Museum Artstiftung*, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.
- Größe: Schloss Dyck*, Düsseldorf, Germany.
- Prague Biennale 2*, Prague, The Czech Republic.

Selected Publications:

- 2002 Dominic Matt, *Peter Rostovsky, Vitamen P: New Perspectives in Painting*, London, Great Britain Praodon Press.



Right: installation view of *Anamorphosis: House*, installation, 2005
Left: detail of *Anamorphosis: House*, painting on photograph, 2005

Return to the Real?

A youth-oriented survey at P.S.1 presents work, much of it politically aware, by 160 New York City artists who have emerged since the millennium

BY ELEANOR HEARTNEY

Greater New York 2005 took up residence at P.S.1 just in time for the opening of a flurry of spring art fairs in New York City. The sprawling exhibition was preceded by a buildup of expectations based in part on the freshness of the first edition of this show in 2000. Once again, Greater New York was posed as a full-scale collaborative effort between the curators of P.S.1 and the Museum of Modern Art. It includes more than 160 artists selected from a pool of over 2,000 submissions generated by both professional recommendations and an open call for proposals. The curatorial team that selected the final show was composed of P.S.1 director Alanna Heiss, MOMA director Glenn Lowry, P.S.1 curatorial adviser Robert Nickas, P.S.1 curator Amy Smith-Stewart and MOMA curator Ann Temkin, and headed by Klaus Biesenbach, who is a curator at both museums.

Shows such as Greater New York, the Whitney and Corcoran Biennials, and so forth promise to provide a snapshot of our moment, yet their scope is inevitably limited. Greater New York's restrictions include the requirement that artists reside in the New York area (defined in the press release as New York City's five boroughs and "nearby towns in New Jersey") and that they be artists who have "emerged" since 2000. (In fact, there



Donvide McGill: Project for a New American Century, 2004, graphite on paper, approx. 6'6" by 27 feet. Private collection.

are a number of artists in the show, such as Christian Jankowski and Walid Raad/Atlas Group, who have been around a bit longer than that.)

But beyond their stated aims, large-scale survey shows like this also have various unspoken agendas. They are meant to flash out new talent, with the hope that some of those discoveries will become permanent (or at least semi-permanent) fixtures on the art scene. They seek to define the rising generation of artists, who, it is presumed, will shape the next chapter in contemporary art. And of course, they are demonstrations of the curators' acumen in creating a cogent picture of the ever-more-disorderly currents of the day.

Greater New York 2005 actually succeeds to a surprising degree in addressing these various missions. It is, as expected, a very youth-oriented show, including a number of artists still in art school. It is also heavily tilted toward males. (Opening day protesters pointed out that only 37 percent of the participants are women.) However, newcomers are balanced with some artists with more exposure, including Sue de Beer, Banks Violette and Amy Cadler, three stars of the last Whitney Biennial. More traditional approaches such as narrative painting and drawing are in generous supply, but so are videos, animations and installations. The rambling layout of the former schoolhouse allows for some wonderful juxtapositions, site-specific installations and dramatic placements, and clearly offers some of the less familiar artists the best presentation possibilities of their careers thus far.

In keeping with the post-election cloud that lingers over the exhibition's geographic arena, the mood of many pieces is anxious or apocalyptic—though apocalypse is often conceived in a campy vein. There are a surprising number of commentaries on political and social realities. In this, the show differs from the two exhibitions to which it has been inevitably compared—those being the 2000 incarnation of Greater New York, with its abundance of pro-9/11 insouciance, and last year's Whitney Biennial, which more inconspicuously exhibited a deliberate disregard for unpleasant truths. By contrast, the artists here frequently resort to political references and seek to deal somewhat aware of the dangerous currents unleashed nationally and internationally by the events of the last four years.

The most direct reference to the war in Iraq appears in Steve Mamber's "Drawings for Baghdad Journal," which presents watercolor of the current mayhem in Iraq based on the artist's eyewitness sketches. The first installment of this series was created in August 2003 and presented a relatively benign, embedded reporter's view of the invasion (see A.C.A., Feb. '04). These more recent drawings, of which a selection is on view, take us deeper into the subsequent chaos, with images of prisons and prisoners, explosions and bomb-ravaged city neighborhoods.

Upstairs on the museum's third floor, a cluster of video works presents further political commentary. Mathilde ter Heijne's faux-documentary video *Suicide Bomb* (2004) explores the phenomenon of the female suicide bomber by pairing images



Will Agmon: The Pill, 2003, paper-mâché, PVC tubing, wire mesh, acrylic paint, 16 1/2 feet high. Collection Perini Knorr, New York.



David Ellis Grayson: Dream Painting Project, Version 5.0, 2005, mixed-media installation, 13 feet wide.



Detail of Nevada Lopez's installation *A Promising Tomorrow*, 2004, ink, gouache and acrylic on paper, dimensions variable.

Peter Rastovsky: Anamorphic: House, 2005, stainless steel, wood, enamel, digital print on silk, 6'5" by 10'3" by 10'10".



David Aronson: Michael Gross got lost and found himself floating on the sea, affecting salination levels in the North Atlantic, 2001, gouache on nylon, 24 by 42 inches. Courtesy Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris, and Placemarker, Miami.

Jay Burns: The Epic Tone, 2005, mixed-media installation, 33 feet wide. Images this article, unless otherwise noted, courtesy P.S.1 Center for Contemporary Art, New York.



Ann Grayson/Jo Lo: The Fluffy Whitepout, 2004, plasma-cut steel brick and concrete, 22 feet high. Fabricated by Product Design, Brooklyn. Photo Eva Ryd.



ART IN REVIEW

Peter Rostovsky

'Deluge'

The Project

37 West 57th Street, Manhattan

Through March 20

At the start of Peter Rostovsky's third New York solo exhibition, a pair of miniature hikers, neatly sculptured and painted, stand on a pedestal in front of an oval painting that depicts a meteor shower over Yosemite Valley. Are the hikers gazing at the painting or at the scene represented by the painting? It's a philosophically catchy play on the Modernist tension between material fact and illusory fiction in painting.

In the main gallery there are medium-large paintings of expansive ocean surfaces, interrupted by small heads of swimmers. Derived from photographs, these, too, are made with unassumingly capable craft, and they toy cleverly with the tension between illusory depth and painterly flatness.

Echoes of Homer, Eakins and Vija Celmins quietly reverberate in the gallery. There is also a vaguely ominous and slightly melancholy mood, as if the swimmers were being menaced by unseen sharks (or, in Freudian terms, repressed psychosexual energy). Or they may just be drifting, like the rest of us, on the endlessly streaming existential flux of modern experience.

KEN JOHNSON

The New Yorker
March 15, 2004

PETER ROSTOVSKY

Rostovsky's paintings are jokes in the grand American tradition of landscape as a psychological proscenium framing human activity. In his "Swimmers" series, lone bathers are isolated in vast but tranquil seas, bobbing in compartmentalized leisure. The viewer feels lost in the same ocean, hailing friends who never turn to look. In "Epiphany Model 4: The Meteor Shower," a little pair of sculpted hikers gaze at a sublime painted view of Yosemite. Through March 20. (The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-4673.)

February 26–March 4, 2004

Issue 439

Peter Rostovsky

**The Project,
through Mar 20
(see 57th Street area).**

As this show illuminates, Peter Rostovsky skillfully distills painting genres past and present, with very little of the irony that such allusions typically imply. His impressively varied sources range from the 19th century's Hudson River School landscapes and Impressionism to contemporary photo-realism—from the influential Gerhard Richter to the mysterious seascapes of Vija Celmins. Although Rostovsky clearly refers to such sources (and more), the six paintings in this show are also based on photographs of swimmers in Nice, which he shot last summer during a residency at Monet's garden in Giverny.

Water is, unsurprisingly, the primary subject of these paintings. Bathers float singly, in pairs and, in the case of *Large Swimmers* (2003), in a group of five.

Viewed up close, the cool, shimmering blues give way to hot zones of gray abstraction. Step back and the imagery echoes the tonalities of Monet's renditions of the Rouen Cathedral. Dissonant brushwork forms a human face from patches of piquant flesh-colored paint.



Peter Rostovsky, *Large Swimmers*, 2003

In three dazzling paintings—*Woman Swimming*, *Swimmer with Goggles* and *Girl Swimming*—a golden-haired grand dame revels in sunlight like a plein air Sargent portrait, a game fortysomething athlete straight out of Fischl grimaces toward shore, and a nubile bathing beauty evokes the nudes of Boucher.

This is conceptual painting par excellence, transmuted the guilt associated with painting in the age of mechanical reproduction that's driven generations of artists to import the snapshot, and later the laptop, into the studio. In his third solo show Rostovsky proves that, like John Currin, he's a master manipulator of a plastic medium, reshuffling the deck of postmodern painting with scintillating results.—Max Henry

faris mc Reynolds

Roberts & Tilton
Los Angeles

An idiosyncratic cinematic sensibility pervades the new series of watercolors and small-scale, mixed-media paintings in Faris McReynolds's exhibition *It's a Rainy Day, Sunshine Girl*. Nature itself becomes a protagonist rather than merely a backdrop in these works. Here, McReynolds reduces the natural world to the Symbolist lexicon of autumn; dead leaves on trees and on the ground reveal a pervasive psychological subtext of conceptual counterpoints—decay/beauty, danger/comfort, personal/archetypal. These are not exactly dualities, more like twisted metaphorical pairings that accomplish exactly what establishing shots do in movies: they set the tone for the imminently unfolding narrative. But, in McReynolds's case, they also fulfill a double role as narrative itself. In works such as *Untitled (house)* McReynolds employs an array of painting techniques within a single image, the better to effectively relate the story on several levels at once. A reserved Fauvist chromatic sense is used in portraying the accumulation of florid autumn leaves on a house's roof; an impressionist impasto gives this mass a preternatural weightiness, thus registering the drama of physical threat. The wide brushstrokes, made with immediacy and drama, are individually discernible, yet are in no way antagonistic toward the cohesion of the image as a whole. The rest of the house has a smooth, luminous quality that one finds in Edward Hopper paintings; the walls are constructed of a sort of lonely, warm and seamless surface that tips the balance further toward allegory than representation. The partly cloudy sky is as Romantic and finely rendered as a Maxfield Parrish, registering a benevolent presence and sustaining the work's overall dynamic of psychological depth and complexity. McReynolds has developed through a medium and scale change from his previous oversize works on canvas without relinquishing any of the natural storyteller instincts that make him a strong voice for a return to allegorical figuration.



Faris McReynolds *Untitled (house)*, 2004, oil and ink on canvas / olio e inchiostro su tela, 76,2 x 91,4 cm.

Una peculiare sensibilità cinematografica pervale la nuova serie di acquerelli e dipinti di piccole dimensioni, eseguiti con materiali vari, che Faris McReynolds ha esposto nella mostra *It's a Rainy Day, Sunshine Girl*. In questi lavori la natura stessa, anziché fungere meramente da sfondo, diviene protagonista. Qui McReynolds riduce il mondo naturale al lessico simbolista dell'autunno; le foglie morte sugli alberi e sul terreno rivelano un diffuso significato psicologico nascosto basato su contrasti concettuali: decadimento/bellezza, pericolo/tranquillità, personale/archetipico. Non si tratta esattamente di dicotomie, ma di accostamenti metaforici contorti che adempiono la stessa funzione delle scene iniziali dei film: stabiliscono il tono per il racconto che sta per svilupparsi. Nel caso di McReynolds, però, rivestono anche un secondo ruolo narrativo. In opere come *Untitled (house)*, l'artista utilizza una vasta gamma di tecniche pittoriche all'interno di una singola immagine — la soluzione migliore per narrare efficacemente una storia su vari livelli contemporaneamente. Un senso cromatico alla *Van Gogh*, ma trattenuto, viene scelto per ritrarre il copioso accumularsi di foglie autunnali sul tetto di una casa; un impasto impressionista conferisce alla loro massa una pesantezza sovranaturale, indicando così il dramma di un pericolo fisico. Le ampie pennellate, realizzate con immediatezza e senso drammatico, sono singolarmente riconoscibili ma non contrastano in alcun modo con l'immagine nel suo insieme. Il resto della casa ha la qualità piatta e luminosa che si può trovare nei dipinti di Edward Hopper; la superficie dei muri ha un che di desolato, denso e uniforme, che orienta ulteriormente l'equilibrio verso l'allegoria anziché verso la rappresentazione. Il cielo parzialmente nuvoloso, romantico e realizzato con una sensibilità alla Maxfield Parrish, indica una presenza benevola e sostiene la dinamica d'insieme del lavoro, basata su profondità psicologica e complessità. Rispetto ai suoi precedenti enormi dipinti su tela l'artista è cresciuto, cambiando *media* e dimensioni, senza però rinunciare a quella naturale inclinazione a narrare che lo rende una voce autorevole nel ritorno alla figurazione allegorica.

Shana Nys Dambrot

peter rostovsky

ArtPace
San Antonio

Spalding Gray's monologue, *Swimming to Cambodia*, chronicles one human being's quest for the perfect moment—the transient point in which man feels unencumbered by the self-imposed futil drudgery of the modern world and released from the very real fear of death. For Gray, this moment could only be attained by shedding all intellectual cynicism, along with fear, by surrendering free will and submitting to the forces of nature. In a subtle way, the work of Peter Rostovsky communicates a similar sentiment.

Rostovsky captures moments in which antediluvian and modern worldviews collide without offering firm conclusions. His works are a homage to and deconstruction of classical notions of the sublime, offering a portrayal of man's intellectually irreconcilable detachment from the natural world. Rostovsky's work also draws attention to the notion of traditional landscape painting as "spontaneous." In this respect, a few of his pieces read as a bit cynical. He places great emphasis on a certain artificiality in hue, form and perspective, and distances the relationship between the human subject and the setting. This is most apparent in *Epiphany Model 4: The Meteor Shower* (2004), as Rostovsky renders his figures as sculptures who gaze at a painted picturesque landscape. Despite its hypermodern, almost cartoonish execution, the work's amplified artificiality reinforces antiquated concepts of sublimation. At other times, the relationship between subject and background is seamless. Rostovsky's "Swimming" series depicts lucid moments of communion with nature that border on transcendental. There is still a certain sense of fragility to the paintings, but the figures seem comfortable in both their isolation and submission. In these images, Rostovsky assumes an omniscient role, allowing his subjects brief moments of clarity—a reconciliation of sorts with nature, perhaps, but one further complicated (and a little cheapened) by repetition. Nonetheless, in this particular microcosm, it wouldn't be too far-fetched to imagine the subject in Rostovsky's *Girl Swimming* (2004) rounding the choppy Horn of Africa and entering the placid waters of the Indian Ocean—a solitary figure chasing the memory of Spalding Gray on a spiritual quest for the perfect moment.



Peter Rostovsky *Girl Swimming*, 2004, oil on linen / olio su lino, 96,5 x 142,2 cm.

Il monologo di Spalding Gray *A note in Cambodia* è la cronaca della ricerca, da parte di un essere umano, del momento perfetto — quell'attimo fuggente in cui egli si sente affrancato dalle autoimposte, incostanti fatiche del mondo moderno e dalla concreta paura della morte. Per Gray, questo attimo può essere colto solo liberandosi di qualsiasi cinismo razionale e della paura — rinunciando al proprio libero arbitrio e sottomettendosi alle forze della natura. In modo acuto, il lavoro di Peter Rostovsky comunica un sentimento analogo. L'artista cattura attimi in cui



Lewis & Clark Territory

Contemporary Artists Revisit Place, Race, and Memory

Rock Hushka

*With an essay by
Thomas Haukaas*

Tacoma Art Museum

*in association with University of Washington Press
Seattle and London*

Fig. 40

Peter Rostovsky
(U.S., born Russia 1970)
Epiphany Model 3, 2001
Oil, air-dry clay, plastic,
acrylic resin, and acrylic,
74 × 72 × 12 in., overall
Collection of the artist,
courtesy of James Harris
Gallery, Seattle



Friday, June 1, 1872

my direction led me directly to an animal that I at first supposed was a wolf, but as nearer approach or about sixty paces distant I discovered that it was not, its colour was a brownish yellow; it was standing near its barnow, and when I approached it thus nearly, it crouched itself down like a cat looking immediately at me as if it designed to spring on me. I took aim at it and fired, it instantly disappeared in it's barnow; I loaded my gun and examined the place which was dusty and saw the track from which I am still further convinced that it was of the tiger kind, whether I struck it or not I could not determine, but I am almost confident that I did, my gun is true and I had a steady rest by means of my epiphany, which I have found very serviceable to me in this way in the open plains. It now seemed to me that all the beasts of the neighbourhood had made a league to destroy me, or that some fortune was disposed to amuse herself at my expense, for I had not proceeded more than three hundred yards from the burrow

of this tiger cat, before three bull buffaloes, which were feeding with a large herd about half a mile from me on my left, (singled) separated from the herd and ran full speed towards me, I thought at least to give them some amusement and altered my direction to meet them; when they arrived within a hundred yards they read a halt, took a good

view of me and retreated with precipitation. I then continued my route however's passed the buffalo which I had killed, but did not think it prudent to remain all night at this place which really from the succession of curious adventures were the impression on my mind of inchantment; at sometimes for a moment I thought it might be

a dream, but the prickly pears which pierced my feet were severely sore in a while, particularly after it grew dark, convinced me that I was really awake, and that it was necessary to make the best of my way to camp.

Meriwether Lewis

defies all notions of what exactly should be there. Like the great nineteenth-century painters of the American landscape—Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran—Adams paints territory with enough room for the imagination to insert ideological notions of wildness, freedom, and unbridled opportunity. Missing from her image are any signs of human inhabitation. There are no rustic farmhouses or quaint villages; you cannot see fences or electric transmission lines; and there is no tangible evidence of cultivation. For all of the beauty, serenity, and spiritual presence that Adams packs into her canvases, the overwhelming sense that the core of the subject is wholly missing prompts a deep feeling of foreboding and regret. Regardless of our desires, Adams constructs images of places that simply cannot exist in the twenty-first century in which she paints.

The primary subject of Peter Rostovsky's *Epiphany Model 3* is the artificiality of the concepts that define our relationship with the landscape (fig. 40). Hinting at the splendor of isolation within Nature, Rostovsky impishly sets his figure at the very edge of a seemingly endless precipice. The blanket of fog and the low cloud ceiling limit the view to an infinite expanse of nothing. This concealment underscores the role of human desire in memories of the landscape: when there is nothing to see, the beautiful and sublime aspects of nature disappear. Rostovsky gives this work a final, stinging conceptual edge by the precarious placement of the figure. Is he about to step off the ledge into the chasm and fall to his death? Placing the human figure literally on the pedestal serves as a metaphor for human choices about their interaction with the landscape. The artist forces the issue by giving us "nothing" to see but our own uncertain situation within the natural environment.

The notion that the landscape cannot exist as our collective memories would insist is central to the painter Ken Moylan. His image *Mt. Moran and Thor Peak* (fig. 42) follows closely the bombastic and romantic versions of the nineteenth-century American images of the West: brilliant coloration and a towering peak that reaches beyond the clouds defying any regular sense of perspective or logic.



Fig. 41

Rostovsky, *Epiphany Model 3* (detail, fig. 40)

A particular peak in Wyoming was named Mount Moran because of the contributions by painter Thomas Moran in creating enormous interest in the region for the population of the East Coast. Congress purchased Moran's operatic *Great Falls of the Yellowstone* for the Rotunda of the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., for the princely sum of \$10,000 in 1872. His watercolor paintings helped convince key members of Congress to designate the Yellowstone area as the nation's first national park.

Moylan's image of *Mt. Moran and Thor Peak* literally reframes the subject. The skewed perspective of the artist's framing device (expertly inlaid hardwoods) is an integral part of the artwork. This tightly controlled and unconventional frame focuses attention on the constant pressure from cultural forces, which shape landscape imagery. The artist states sentiment to the effect that "it is not the landscape that appears tightly boxed but how people force and manipulate the land to fit their needs and desires." Moylan uses his unconventional composition to highlight the artificiality—the human constructs—of the American West. In the twenty decades that followed Lewis and Clark's first exploration of the American West, this complex,

VITAMIN
P

NEW PERSPECTIVES IN PAINTING



VLADIMIR DUBOSSARSKY & AL

PHALDON

GU

PETER ROSTOVSKY Consider, if you will, the fixating, van Manesque *W* in the stage set for the currently hot pop group *weezer*. As a knowing bit of mock critique to the vainglorious excess of hard-rock bands of the 1970s and 1980s, it becomes a humorously incongruous prop for a band of four nerdy guys. The gesture emerges from an assemblage common to many young people born in the wake of the *Beat*: of Love and regard on one side of cultural historians after another. From the mythical and esotericist *strangeness* between soul and soul in *Blax* *Blax*, to the revival of grand expressionist painting in the work of Julian Schnabel and Julian *Leifer*, and to the worshiped status of arena-rock bands like Led Zepplino and Stylo, the grandiose and romantic became instantly familiar and dear to a generation raised in the 1970s. The subsequent revolutions of punk and multiculturalism exposed these cultural forms as politically devalued and somewhat ridiculous and absurd. The recent ascendancy of *cinema* on the one side and aesthetic tone and tenor, however, has allowed for a tongue-in-cheek reappraisal and reappropriation of some of these forbidden (yet secretly treasured) retroscapes of the past. **001** Peter Rostovsky's paintings possess the same effect as *weezer*'s *W*, performing a sophisticated pleasure on transcendental abstraction, gestural portraiture, and romantic landscape. Having absorbed the celebrated legacies and histories of painting, he re-presents various styles and motifs with a deadpan attitude and an arch appreciation of pop-cultural influences. Rostovsky's "Transport Series" (1999) presents lustrous spirals and electric specks of light characteristic of images from scientific research or fine picture books for the astronomically inclined elementary-school child. The formations depicted, however, are actually culled from mainstream Hollywood science-fiction films such as 2001: A Space Odyssey, Contact, and Altered States, filling moments of transcendence from one place or over states of being to another. Flouting the allopge between the abstract appearance of the inquiry and the "representational" nature of his practice, Rostovsky questions the validity of abstract artists' picturesque claims for spiritual transformation through a reductive use of color, shape, and form. **002** His portraits are similarly informed by a sharply critical and satirical sensibility. The "Mosaic Portraits" (1998), for example, frustrate the classical function of the genre as a form of commemoration and, if nothing else, identification by presenting his subjects from behind. Their unseen eyes in shadow, one imagines, or a "utopian" object, a situation underscored by the soft light of a sunrise or sunset that seems to form the background of each painting. These images contrast sharply with the great frankness of the "Anonymous Portraits" (2001), in which the brittle sculptural relief of each face is again more disturbing by a starkly monochromatic background, a rather uncharacteristic portrait of Bob Dylan of the 1980s (his name and Bobley Cris is teasingly ambiguous in Rostovsky's sly and "various" portrait of a disposable pop hero in a store of ancient burials) or a easy take on the recent role of portraiture in the history of art's increasingly romantic series of landscape paintings, titled "Capitany Model" (2003), contains striking visual worthy of Caspar David Friedrich with meticulously mixed figures on a desolate landscape as wowed spectators, underwriting the sublime and sentimental affect of the paintings with a simple, banalous quotidian gesture. Rostovsky demonstrates his witty exploration, aesthetic and otherwise, are forever held in check by the bare realities of the human condition. **003** Domestic Motion

Born in St. Petersburg (Russia) in 1970, lives and works in New York **004**
005 **006** **007** **008** **009** **010** **011** **012** **013** **014** **015** **016** **017** **018** **019** **020** **021** **022** **023** **024** **025** **026** **027** **028** **029** **030** **031** **032** **033** **034** **035** **036** **037** **038** **039** **040** **041** **042** **043** **044** **045** **046** **047** **048** **049** **050** **051** **052** **053** **054** **055** **056** **057** **058** **059** **060** **061** **062** **063** **064** **065** **066** **067** **068** **069** **070** **071** **072** **073** **074** **075** **076** **077** **078** **079** **080** **081** **082** **083** **084** **085** **086** **087** **088** **089** **090** **091** **092** **093** **094** **095** **096** **097** **098** **099** **100** **101** **102** **103** **104** **105** **106** **107** **108** **109** **110** **111** **112** **113** **114** **115** **116** **117** **118** **119** **120** **121** **122** **123** **124** **125** **126** **127** **128** **129** **130** **131** **132** **133** **134** **135** **136** **137** **138** **139** **140** **141** **142** **143** **144** **145** **146** **147** **148** **149** **150** **151** **152** **153** **154** **155** **156** **157** **158** **159** **160** **161** **162** **163** **164** **165** **166** **167** **168** **169** **170** **171** **172** **173** **174** **175** **176** **177** **178** **179** **180** **181** **182** **183** **184** **185** **186** **187** **188** **189** **190** **191** **192** **193** **194** **195** **196** **197** **198** **199** **200** **201** **202** **203** **204** **205** **206** **207** **208** **209** **210** **211** **212** **213** **214** **215** **216** **217** **218** **219** **220** **221** **222** **223** **224** **225** **226** **227** **228** **229** **230** **231** **232** **233** **234** **235** **236** **237** **238** **239** **240** **241** **242** **243** **244** **245** **246** **247** **248** **249** **250** **251** **252** **253** **254** **255** **256** **257** **258** **259** **260** **261** **262** **263** **264** **265** **266** **267** **268** **269** **270** **271** **272** **273** **274** **275** **276** **277** **278** **279** **280** **281** **282** **283** **284** **285**

1. *Utopian Portraiture* (canvas), 1998, oil on canvas, 24 × 22 inches, 61 × 81 cm
2. *Transport Series* (2001), 1999, oil on canvas, 38 × 30 inches, 96.5 × 76.2 cm
3. *Transport Series* (Contact), 1999, oil on canvas, 38 × 55 inches, 96.5 × 139.7 cm
4. *Capitany Model* (2001), mixed media, painting, 17 inches, 17.3 cm (diameter), sculpture: 8 × 6 × 4 inches, 20.5 × 15.2 cm

1, 2, 3.



Nature Boy

**Elizabeth Dee Gallery, through Jul 31
(see Chelsea).**

Despite its title, this summer group show is surprisingly free of bare-assed boys behaving badly. Instead, gallery artist Doug Wada has curated an intriguing collection of landscape paintings (plus a few sculptures) by a bunch of guys who are mostly known for anything but nature studies.

Jason Middlebrook steals the spotlight with *The Beginning of the End*, turning Robert Indiana's *LOVE* monument into a Stone Age lawn ornament, complete with fake flora sprouting from its crevices. Nature versus artifice is also a theme in Peter Rostovsky's *Puddle*, a painted pseudo-reflection of towering redwoods reaching toward the night sky, installed on the gallery floor like a small pool of water, and in Lawrence Seward's fantasy snails scaling the gallery's walls. Alexis Rockman's paintings are perhaps a little too predictable in this show, which features so many artists for whom the natural world is new territory.

For instance, Sean Landers, who is usually identified by tirade-filled canvases, instead offers up *Reunited... (Summer)*, a picture of two apes loping toward each other at dusk, which is filled with a muted pathos worthy of the Hudson River School. Peter Krashes soars with an image of a swirling vortex called *Flight School* that evokes a view of land from the cockpit of a plane spinning out of control. Alex Ross (whose paintings of photographs of clay figurines are rarely associated with natural wonders) presents a lumpen form of a tree trunk, or perhaps it just looks like one, given the context. In this and many of the other selections, Wada suggests that artists, like everyone else, take summer vacations. But in this case, it is flights of imagination, not car trips or airplane jaunts, that free them from the daily grind.—*Barbara Pollack*

August 8, 2003, Friday

New York Times; Roberta Smith

LEISURE/WEEKEND DESK

ART REVIEW: A Seasonal Migration of Cultural Scope

City Hall Park

* * *

Next, City Hall Park, lunch time, the benches full of smooching lovers and office workers picking at salads from plastic take-out containers. Passing families of out-of-towners identified themselves by grappling with folded city maps on the way to ground zero or Century 21. Not too many people seemed to register the sculptures discreetly tucked into the greenery. It even took me a minute to spot Walter Martin and Paloma Munoz's "9 to 5" (1996): elegant bronze faucets strapped to trees with bronze pears appearing to drip into bronze buckets.

Nearby, less inconspicuous but still little noticed by the lunch crowd, Peter Rostovsky's "Monument" is an improbably steep and craggy mountain peak, about the height of a basketball hoop. On top of it stands a small man wearing a business suit. Unless he is Clark Kent, he is not going to get down from up there. I take that to be the comic message of the work, from 2000, but I also wonder whether it was selected for this site because it can bring to mind the people who died in the twin towers, or conversely, whether it was chosen despite that unpleasant association.

More conspicuous, "Witch Catcher" (1997) is Brian Tolle's sculpture of a chimney that twists into a spiral at the top. Mr. Tolle designed the Irish famine monument a few blocks away. He grasps the mordancy of ruins and memorials. I remember as a boy seeing a house burn down in the country. Only the chimney remained. "Witch Catcher," notwithstanding its surreal punch line, reminded me of that house poetically.

Grazie



Curated by Jan Hoet, Castle Schloss Dyck, Dusseldorf, Germany, 2003

Enzo Cucchi · Günther Förg · Katharina Grosse · Joseph Kosuth · **Ulrich Rücklinger** · Peter Rastovsky · **Ulrich Rücklinger** · Cheryl Steiger · **Hans Stubbach**





Anamorph: Castle 2003



In his window fillings transparency encounters mass, sequence encounters ornament, tradition encounters progress. "My intention is not to dig into the past out of archeological interests (...), but rather because the past contains a reality that still has a profound impact on us. And if you slowly bring it to the surface, many possibilities open up to you."⁷⁶ The artist uses relics from the past to build on what exists and to change what has occurred thus far. For Kounellis, this transformation process in culture and society is a prerequisite for renewal, progress, and development analogous to nature and its processes. This is apparent from the window barricades, which at the same time deal with the theme of light, which in the course of the day constantly produces light and dark zones and thus appears as a symbol of the force and movement of nature.

An anamorphosis is a distorted representation of an object. Since it adheres to rules of perspective, it appears to be independent of the viewing standpoint and, with the help of optical instruments, to look undistorted. Due to their surprising visual effects, anamorphoses were popular collector's items in princely art and miracle chambers. **Peter Rostovsky's** work picks up on this tradition (ill. pp. 116–117). He places a mirror column at the center of a round floor image in green, brown, and blue tones. From a bird's eye view, the space-encroaching anamorphosis shows a distorted view of Schloss Dyck, painted by the artist based on a photograph, amid its luxurious landscape gardens and surrounded by watercourses. Only the cylindrical reflection of the deformed painted image at the center of the circular installation provides a naturalistic representation of the palace setting.

Rostovsky portrays a process that has been used to deconstruct valid strategies of perspective since the Renaissance. He transformed a photo of the palace he found in an image brochure into a small oil painting which he exhibited on the wall next to the installation. The painting serves as a motif for a photograph whose perspective he distorted in a precisely calculated way. It is printed over-dimensionally on plastic and dissolved by the reflection on the surface of the mirrored column.

In the first place, the painting of the photo serves as a model which is intended to appear "more objective" and "more real" than the imagination. By giving visual form to a naturalistic view of Schloss Dyck as the result of a perfect artistic representation of a mirrored anamorphosis, Rostovsky attacks spatial perspective and presents it as an illusion. He reveals the illusionist level of the painting to be a trick of perspective and counteracts illusionism as the visual reality of the painting.

Günther Förg has inserted a six-part series of paintings into a stringently arranged decorative system of wooden panels (ill. pp. 44–45). Their color pattern consists of vertically arranged strips and structures in various shades of gray, lived up by contrasting bright colors—red and pink spots—and here and there bright traces of white. With the frugal choice of colors and shapes, which in rapid alternation give a rhythm to the surfaces of the pictures, the painting gestures are in evidence, as well as the different thicknesses of the paint and the movement of the brush. Light and dark, transparent and opaque, seemingly far and near zones follow one another, looking like fleeting openings and obstructions which neither attract nor repel one's view.

A tense, controversial dialogue develops between the installed paintings and the reality of the space. On the one hand, Förg translates memories of the space and its characteristics into the surface of the painted square. Thus, the elementary vertical brushstrokes correspond to the relief-like structure of the wall panels, to their systematic division into fields and the arrangement of the lattice window. On the other hand, however, Förg refrains from the illusion of spatiality. His paintings accentuate and liven up their carriers—the wood paneling—and make the viewer aware of their formal arrangement, the structure of the interior

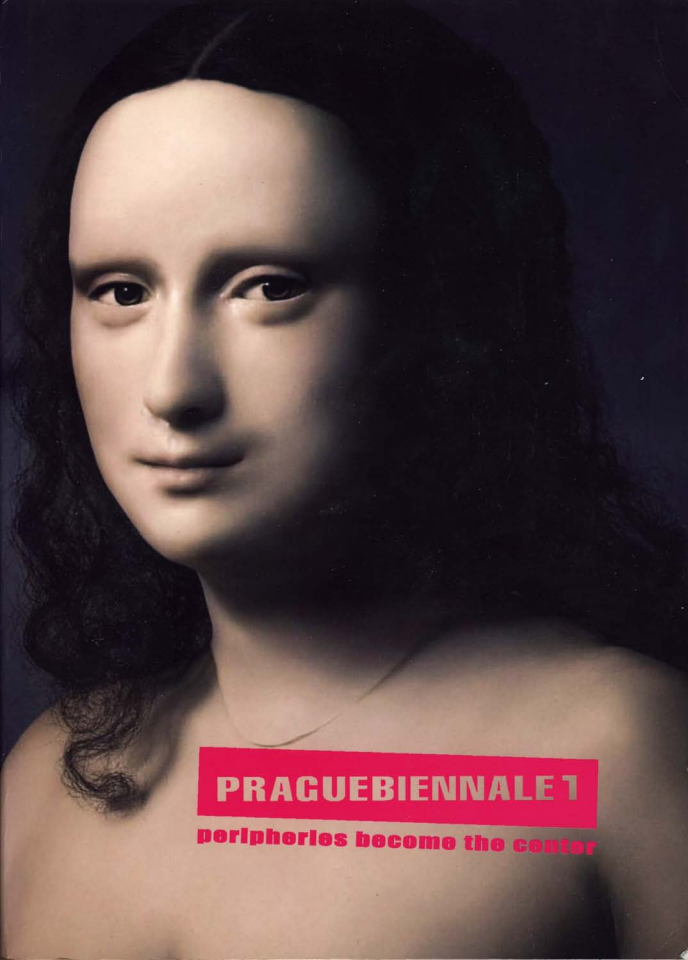
design. Devoid of a hierarchical order, the tone of the room corresponds to that of the paintings. Just as the architecture here gives one impetus to see and think in structural and content-related analogies, Förg reacts in his entire oeuvre to things that are already there. Transformation, thinking ahead, variation, and paraphrasing—those are his methods of finding his own distinctive images. Not without irony Förg counters the interior courtly architecture with motifs which, obtained from the immediate environment, suggest a fleeting meaningfulness. In the series, Förg plays with structural displacements and tense relationships between colors and shapes. The different paintings are repetitions which capture different states or phases of movement. They appear to be in fluctuating movement and latent transformation; there seems to be a change of state from one painting to the next. Förg confronts the metamorphosis of the surrounding nature with pictures of transition.

The fundamental aspect of **Katharina Grosse's** painting is the immediate sensory impact of the paint, which was sprayed directly on the wood-paneled walls and ceiling of the asymmetrical corner room (ill. pp. 54–57). Colored patterns consisting of cloud-like structures without outlines produced by aerosol sprays pour from the windows toward people entering the room. A yellow-blue layer turns in a violet section, which flows into a cloud-like mixture of red, blue, and brown shades, bordered by radial strips of strong green and light blue. In the opposite direction, yellow strips and green- and pink-colored zones meet different rust hues. Their intensification into light-containing gold suggests preciousness—a direct allusion to traditional courtly room decoration.

The structure of the interior architecture is not only counteracted but also emphasized by the application of paint on paneling and profiling, window niches, ceiling and doors. This is due to details of the painting installation: a faint shimmer reminiscent of pink powder settles on the heating element or the ornamental decorative molding is covered with paint dust. The genesis of the space-dominating installation is written in the paint. The quick physical movement of the artist when painting is evidenced by the horizontal orientation of the brushstrokes and the seemingly fleeting application of paint. The unquiet structures, characteristic of spray-paint application, set the entire room in visual motion. The interplay between very delicate clouds of color, bright saturated surfaces, and seeming blurriness is reminiscent of rapid film sequences. With whirlpools and vortices, moving sections trigger associations with wind and gales.

Viewed fleetingly, the bold combination of glowing bright hues does not call to mind natural color combinations. But a look out the window convinces one of the consistency of the choice of colors. Atmospheric blue, the dark blue-green of the treetops and their reflection on the surface of the water, yellow-green grass, and the earthy brownish red of the marshy riverbank area form an immaterial reference system for the rapidly moving, frozen-looking activity on the surface of the constantly fluctuating pictorial space. The coloring looks as though it is swept along by currents of air. Dynamic traces, spots, and shapes lie next to and on top of one another, condensing into veritable color explosions, only to lose one another again. In her installation Grosse lets forces become active, behaving like the uncontrollable energies of natural phenomena.

With the presentation of selected positions of contemporary art, the cultural history of Schloss Dyck has been continued up to the present. The artists' encounters with the extraordinary total work of art Dyck have initiated a creative dialogue giving rise to artworks which represent the state of society, make references to the place, and reflect and imitate nature. Despite differences in choice of media and strategies, intellectual links have been forged between the contemporary realm of experience of the artists and the event of building artistry and nature. The artists explore the phenomenon of "nature as landscape" in a conceptual way, and their representations pick up on the traditional topos. Illusion



PRAGUEBIENNALE 1

peripheries become the center

PETER ROSTOVSKY

10. St. Petersburg. Lives and works in New York

My work attempts to reconcile a deep interest in history with a personal, at times even sentimental, connoisseurship of popular culture. I am primarily interested in how the most accessible popular images can point to displaced cultural energies, ideological meanings, and historical structures generally deemed extinct. I begin each project with the question: how are the images, genres, and experiences of the past available today? What is for instance the contemporary image of heroism? How does one currently experience the sublime? Or, what does a contemporary image of utopia look like? The results are often surprising updates and pictures of the present revealed as at once clichéd, yet rich with repressed cultural meaning and transgressive possibility. *Carrie*, cites the signature shot from Brian De Palma's classic film of the same title. Caught within a moment of seeming transcendence, the teenage psychic is depicted as both a young virgin (her virginity literalized in the film) and a gruesome effigy. Examining the way religious tropes inform even the most conventional genres of popular culture, this painting and the series of which it is part explore the deeply traditional, even culturally orthodox, structures of horror film. In this manner my work often attempts to reconcile a kind of makeshift anthropology with an almost biographical interest in today's popular culture.

— Peter Rostovsky

Selected solo exhibitions: 2002: Maze, Turin; 2001: The Project, New York; 1999: The Project, New York.

Selected group exhibitions: 2001: Giò Marconi, Milan; Maze, Turin; 2000: The Project, New York; *Fauna Biennale Balticum*, Finland; *Summer Show*, Goldmar Tevis, Los Angeles; 1999: *Untold Stories*, De Chiara/ Stewart, New York; *Paradise 8*, Exit Art, New York; *Local Color*, The Henry Street Settlement, New York.



■ *Carrie*, 2002. Oil on canvas, 198 x 162 cm.

Supereal

CURATED BY

LAURI FIRSTENBERG

Marella Arte Contemporanea, Milan, Italy 2004

PETER ROSTOVSKY

1970 Born in St. Petersburg, Russia
1995 BFA, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2003 The Project, Los Angeles, CA
2002 "Thriller", Maze, Torino, Italy
2001 James Harris Gallery, Seattle, WA

Selected Group Exhibitions

2003 "Labor Day", Plus, Rate, New York, NY
2000 Rauma Biennale, Rauma, Finland
1996 "Message Please", Spot Gallery, New York, NY
2001 Louis Stern Fine Art, Los Angeles, CA
1992 Struve Gallery, Chicago, IL



Carrie
2002
Oil on linen
78x64 inches

SELECTED ARTISTS ON SUPEREAL AND HYPERREAL:

Ellen Harvey: Supereal is real only more so. Hyperreal is even more real - outerspace real. Actually art is never real. It's all just a big fake. That's why we love it.

Karel Funk: The terms hyperrealism and superrealism traditionally have origins in the first movement of "photorealism." Artists such as Chuck Close, Ralph Goings, Richard Estes, and many others, shared similarities in the surfaces of their paintings and in their ideas. They all tried to achieve an objective application of paint in a reaction to the "subjective" of modern abstraction through a photographic source. Their subjects were often vehicles for the process of painting. Process was primary. In the contemporary understanding of hyperrealism and superrealism, there is still, in many cases, a connection to a mechanical eye that allows the painter to see and mimetically transfer information from a photographic source to the painting surface. But one major difference is the subject of contemporary hyperreal or superreal paintings. The subject now appears to play a more celebrated role instead of fading into a banal backdrop and into process.

Ellen Harvey: Peter, how are you Superreal? Difficult to say, except that I think you're sort of reinventing history painting at times - the place where painting used to show the past or the impossible. Here you are stealing it right back from the movies.

Peter Rostovsky: My relation to the terms hyperreal or superreal is complicated and not without a touch of ambivalence. On the one hand, I certainly see the formal imperatives of hyperrealists like Chuck Close and Richard Estes reflected in some of my work, and in that of many artists of my generation choosing to paint from the photograph. Yet, hyperrealism's polemics - its obstinate rejection of Abstract Expressionism's interiority in favor of the literal photographic copy, its anti-authorial and anti-aesthetic procedures of mechanically rendering, often arbitrary subject matter, are very different, not only for me, but I also suspect for many other painters working now with the photographic or digital image. Of greater influence on my work has certainly been someone like Gerhard Richter, who, although using photography as a basis for painting, has deployed it in a simulationist manner alongside equally mechanical abstractions in order to collapse the distinction between the two and void the question of realism altogether.

For me, it is certainly never a question of "reality" that is at stake when choosing to paint a realistic looking image. Rather, it is a question of being faithful to this secondary reality represented by the mechanical image, this gross concreteness of the meditative filter, complete with its own codes of abstraction and stylization. It is this reality that intrigues me, and it is

SELECTED ARTISTS ON SUPEREAL AND HYPERREAL:

what I choose to treat "realistically," having already abandoned the question of the ontological status of the object. On a procedural level, this resembles the hyperrealist position, but its focus is quite different. However, it may be symbolized by digital or mechanical reproduction rather than the photograph. I try to capture this process of trying to see outside the screen of culture and representation, and never coming quite close. This frustration of seeing or trying to see outside the edges of the frame is what ultimately drives my work.

Of course, the photograph is no longer what it used to be either, and it is not the emblem of modernization or populism that it was for the original Pop artists or Photo-realists like Close, Estes, and early Morley. That is why it became increasingly important for me to work with filmic, and now with digital images - as if to insist on the most dominant incarnation of this meditative screen. My paintings now almost always start out with a digital study, the computer serving as the necessary step between me and the canvas. Call it Photoshop-realism, a kind of composite image sampling that I use, more in the service of allegory than of documentary. Unlike many photo-based painters, I often use low resolution images, bad copies treated like sufficient translations of an already flawed process of seeing. I use images ethnographically to highlight certain moments in contemporary culture in order to analyze and critique it, not just to dwell on the

spectacle.

Ideally, I feel that I like to work with images that are symptoms of deeper cultural patterns. They are hieroglyphs produced by an increasingly globalized visual culture, and allude to deeper currents, deeper structures. If images are the dreams of society, I believe they can be analyzed as such. This is what my paintings set out to do - to catalogue and process these dream-images. Sometimes they come in the form of kitsch, sometimes in the trappings of art history. But what they generally study is a truly novel form of culture, an exponentially expanding labyrinth of images where one only sees and refers to the outside through so many versions of a picture.

Pieter Schoolwerth: I am interested in making representational paintings that suggest what it feels like to be a human being in the world right now. It seems to me that each year the world becomes more affected by certain forces of abstraction. The way I see it, objects, relations between things, and therefore experiences, have become more abstract and are losing their substantial makeup. Shopping, for instance, used to be defined by the fact you had to leave your house and browse amongst the bodies of strangers. Now we can do it alone at a computer. The end result of this thingness, (what makes a thing or experience what it is), of an object or experience

dtv

Heinz Hüsser

Vom Anfang und den letzten Dingen

Eine Einführung in
philosophisches Denken



Franz Ackermann Germany, Haluk Akakçe Turkey, Ricci Albenda United States, Darren Almond England, Emmanuelle Antille Switzerland, Mike Bauchel United States, Andrea Bowers United States, Slater Bradley United States, Juan Céspedes Chile, Patty Chang United States, Minerva Cuevas Mexico, Jason Dodge United States, Keith Edmier & Farrah Fawcett United States, Ben Edwards United States, Jeroen Eisinga Netherlands, Inka Essenhigh United States, Angus Fairhurst England, Tom Friedman United States, Gajin Fujita United States, Kendell Geers South Africa, Katy Grannan United States, Katharina Grosse Germany, Nic Hess Switzerland, Michelle Hines United States, Noritoshi Hironaka Japan, Jonathan Horowitz United States, Cameron Jamie United States, Ann Veronica Janssens Belgium, Mika Kato Japan, Kurt Kauper United States, Andree Korpys & Markus Löffler Germany, Michael Lin Taiwan, Michel Majerus Germany, Margherita Manzelli Italy, Malerie Marder United States, Maria Marshall England, Julie Mehretu United States, Lucas Michael Argentina, Sarah Morris United States, Victoria Morton Scotland, David Musgrave England, Mie Nagai Japan, Csaba Nemes & Ágnes Szépláti Hungary, Olaf Nicolai Germany, Tim Noble & Sue Webster England, Richard Patterson England, Alix Pearlstein United States, Paul Pfeiffer United States, Hannelore Reuen Germany, Jeroen de Rijke & Willem de Rooij Netherlands, Gert Robijns Belgium, Peter Rostovsky Russia, Aida Rulova United States, Ricky Swallow Australia, Patrick Tuffuoco Italy, Piotr Ukiński Poland, Minnette Vári South Africa, Gary Webb England, Saskia Olde Wolbers Netherlands, Sislej Xhafa Kosovo

curated by Jeanna Greenberg Rahaflym

CASINO
2001

1st Quadriennale voor Hedendaagse Kunst
Gent - Belgium

28.10.2001 — 13.01.2002



«Бодибилдер» from Top Art
 French Painter, Study of a Nude Man, 1814
 Roland Emmerich, Independence Day, TV ad, 1996
 Dr. Spock, Actor of John
 Stone Cold Steve Austin, 2000
 Street Truck, August 2001
 Flame, artist found image
 Jerry Springer, FoxNetwork Sites, TV ad, 1999



Peter Rostovsky, Disco Ball, 2001, oil on paper, 24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm), Courtesy: Pir Jay Jopling and The Project, New York

Peter Rostovsky, Nude, 2001, oil on paper, 84 x 42 inches (213.4 x 106.7 cm), Courtesy: The Project, New York

Nauman's *Learned Helplessness in Rats* installations (1988), as the works of both artists portray rodents in a maze. In this piece, a mouse is nibbling a piece of cheese on a small screen on the floor. As the viewer draws close a motion detector is triggered and the mouse disappears into a series of cardboard tubes. Placing speakers inside these tubes creates the illusion that the mouse is traveling through a makeshift labyrinth.

In a recent video installation, Robijns plays with the philosophical chestnut, 'If a tree falls in the forest and nobody hears it, does it make a sound?' At the same time, he underscores the centrality of sound in his work. An image of a single tree is projected onto a freestanding screen, accompanied by the sound of a cutting saw. When the sound stops, the screen falls to the ground. It's a deadpan pratfall reminiscent of the life-threatening Buster Keaton stunt in which the actor stood still in an open doorway and allowed the façade of a building to crash to earth around him. Like both Keaton and Nauman, Robijns is 'fascinated by very minimal gestures that can become threatening.'

Gert Robijns was born in 1972 in Sint-Truiden, Belgium. He lives and works in New York City and Borgloon, Belgium.

De video-installaties van de Belgische kunstenaar Gert Robijns zijn het esthetische equivalent van de haiku. Ze confronteren ons met het spectaculaire van eenvoudige ervaringen, zoals een vallende boom, een zoemend insect, of een weghollende muis. Robijns hoopt dat 'het werk een accident kan worden, iets dat als het ware de toeschouwer overkomt, zonder zich aan hem of haar op te dringen.' De fenomenologische benadering van Robijns verraadt affiniteiten met het werk van Bruce Nauman. *Mice* (1998) is misschien wel een ironische verwijzing naar Naumans *Learned Helplessness in Rats* installaties (1988) – beide werken tonen knaagdieren in een labirint. In *Mice* zien we een muis die aan een stukje kaas op een klein scherm op de vloer knabbelt. Wanneer het publiek het werk nadert, klikt een bewegingsdetector, en de muis verdwijnt in een reeks kartonnen buizen. Luidsprekers in de buizen creëren de illusie dat de muis door een geïmproviseerd labirint rent.

In een recente video installatie speelt Robijns een spel met een filosofische kastanje. 'Als in een bos een boom omvervalt en niemand hoort het, maakt de boom dan een geluid?' Tegelijk benadrukt de kunstenaar het belang van geluiden in zijn werk. Het beeld van een individuele boom wordt geprojecteerd op een vrijstaand scherm terwijl we het geluid van een zaag horen. Wanneer het geluid van de zaag stopt, valt het scherm op de grond. Het werk lijkt een soort farce die doet denken aan de bekende, levensbedreigende stunt van Buster Keaton: zonder een spier te vertrekken sluit de acteur een voordeur en doet de gevel van het gebouw rondom zich instorten. Zoals Keaton en Nauman is ook Robijns 'gefascineerd door minimale gestes die een dreiging inhouden.'

Gert Robijns werd geboren in 1972 in Sint-Truiden, België. Hij woont en werkt in New York City en Borgloon, België.

PETER ROSTOVSKY

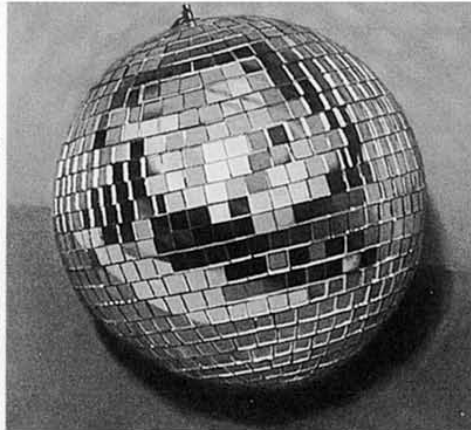
For Peter Rostovsky, there is no dichotomy between painting and conceptual art. In his paintings, the act of representation is already conceptual. It is an act of framing that demands to be seen as a complex gesture of choice and reinterpretation, not as naïve realism or modernist reductivism. Rostovsky's *Transport*, series, for instance, mines the imagery of science-fiction films like *Star Trek II* and Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* in search of cultural tropes. Each painting depicts one highly metaphoric image from each film in a sharp realist style. The portal Jodi Foster enters in *Contact*, for instance, or the final psychedelic destination of the astronaut in *2001* are meticulously painted postmodern icons or hieroglyphs that indicate the religious subtext implicit in the science fiction genre.

In recent works, such as *Solar Eclipse* (2000), Rostovsky explores the boundaries between social and natural meanings, or myth and religion. In *Casino 2001*, *Disco Ball*, (2001) dishes up a familiar icon and host of associations that come with it. However, the drab palette Rostovsky has chosen suggests anything but a disco atmosphere, instead suggesting the end of the ideals associated with it but which it nostalgically continues to represent. The sense of freedom and ease it invokes from the 70s is clearly not present today. *Nude* (2001), presents a nude male with head and groin pixelated, but otherwise classically rendered. It is a sly comment on the censorship to which images are subject in the popular media. It is this conceptual underlay that gives Rostovsky's paintings their subtle yet fully palpable edge.

Peter Rostovsky was born in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1970. He lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Voor Peter Rostovsky bestaat de tweedeling schilderij/conceptuele kunst eenvoudig niet. In zijn schilderijen is de daad van het afbeelden van dingen op zich reeds conceptueel. De handeling van het kiezen van een beeld is een complexe geste die keuzes en interpretaties inhoudt, en kan niet gebaseerd zijn op een naïef realisme of een modernistisch reductionisme. Rostovsky's reeks *Transport* bijvoorbeeld, ontgint de beeldenwereld van sciencefictionfilms als *Star Trek II* en Stanley Kubricks *2001: A Space Odyssey* in een zoektocht naar de stijlfiguren van onze cultuur. Elk schilderij uit de reeks is de afbeelding van een sterk metaforisch geladen filmbeeld, geschilderd in een zeer realistische stijl. De poort waar Jodi Foster doorstapt in *Contact*, of de uiteindelijke, psychedelische bestemming van de astronaut in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, worden pijnlijk nauwkeurig afgebeeld als postmoderne iconen – suggestieve hiërogliefen die verwijzen naar de religieuze onderstroom van het sciencefiction genre.

In recente werken als *Solar Eclipse* (2000) verkent Rostovsky de grens tussen maatschappelijke en natuurlijke betekenis, en het domein van de mythe en religie. Op *Casino 2001* toont *Disco Ball* (2001) de ons vertrouwde icoon van de disco en de associaties die deze oproept. Geschilderd op de vloer in doffe, vale kleuren doet het werk echter geenszins aan een discosfeertje denken, maar eerder aan de teloorgang



S P O T L I G H T

CASINO 2001

MELISSA DUNN AND CHARLES GUTE



MUCH HAS BEEN made of the fact that there are no clocks in casinos; they are self-contained, timeless, climatically controlled zones of sensory enthrallment. "Casino 2001," the 1st Quadrennial of contemporary art at S.M.A.K. (previously an actual casino), achieves a similar effect. Despite, or perhaps because of the exhibition's ultra-lightweight premise — Las Vegas as Spectacle — it is unencumbered by any real theoretical agenda aside from selecting sixty young artists working in a visually seductive mode worthy of The Strip. This is not necessarily a bad thing. While thin on concepts, what curator Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn has is an eye, which counts for a lot, and like Dave Hickey's "Beau Monde," the exhibition is really about what art brings her pleasure, resting more solidly on taste than argument. Invited by Jan Hoet, Rohatyn, a gallerist with no substantial curatorial credits under her belt, may seem a strange choice to inaugurate a major new international showcase, but she follows a trail blazed by Jeffrey Deitch, whose museum exhibitions were highpoints of the '90s. Unlike Hickey's Santa Fe exhibition, which attempted to bring sophisticated cosmopolitanism to America, Rohatyn's "Casino" brings unabashedly crass entertainment culture to the Old World, grouping international artists in a very American show.

The result is a refreshing antidote to overblown concept shows and burn-out exhibitions, like last summer's Venice Biennale, which leave viewers exhausted, understimulated, and looking for the exit. What "Casino" has is a buoyant energy that delivers a much needed pick-me-up to the art world. This is most evident on the main floor of SMAK — the nucleus of this far-flung exhibition spanning four locations — a visually tight, successful grouping that includes Olaf Nicolai, Angus Fairhurst, Katharina Grosse, and Ben Edwards, all unleashing bold, supersaturated hues. Like Vegas itself, the vibrant glitz can't mask an emotionally dark undercurrent, as in Tom Friedman's festive crime scene, Cameron Jamie's demented suburban violence, and Nic Hess's unusually somber wall work that subtly references the events of 9-11. The coherence breaks down on the second floor, where works from "Casino" are haphazardly installed among the permanent collection, with a few facile juxtapositions (an elegant alien carcass by Inka Essenhigh next to a Francis Bacon) that add little clarity overall.

Curatorially, the exhibition hits bottom in an off-site underground bunker where video works have been installed in raw, dank spaces that, while evocative, have little to do with the art. The "forced march" pace of the flashlight-

Clockwise from top left: KEITH EDMIER & FARRAH FAWCETT, *The Space between You and Me*, 2001. Courtesy Friedrich Petzel, New York; PETER ROSTOVSKY, *Disco Ball*, 2001. Courtesy Jay Jopling and The Project, New York. MARIA MARSHALL, *I Should Be Older Than All of You*, 2000. Courtesy Team Gallery, New York. KURT KAUPER, *Diva Fiction #8*, 1997. Courtesy Heidi Schneider/ACME, Los Angeles.

guided tour left no time to assimilate these time-based works — frustrating, since some works, notably Chilean artist Juan Céspedes' lo-tech mediations, seemed promising.

The exhibition redeems itself in the opulent 17th-century interior of the Bijlokekemuseum, where many works — such as Maria Marshall's unsettling, Caravaggio-like video tableaux — are well-integrated amidst grand fireplaces, parquet floors, and massive chandeliers — though Slater Bradley's trite video installation is unable to command the majestic space it occupies. Highlights here included celebrity cameo appearances by ex-Charlie's Angel Farrah Fawcett (one of the only artists in the show born before 1962) in collaboration with Keith Edmier, and Jan Hoet, who, in a photograph by Malerie Marder, once again upstages everyone — this time by appearing in the buff.

At SMAK, Ghent

Cabinet

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF ART
AND CULTURE AND SOME EVIL BITS
ISSUE 5 WINTER 2001
US \$8 CANADA \$13 UK £6



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Sincerely Yours,
The Portrait Connection



I'm a 32-year old Californian: Anglo/Spaniard mix, short dark straight hair, 5'10", musician (piano). Equal parts gin and coffee, ambition with thoughts toward others, impatience with stupidity, true brilliance in some areas, knowing lapses in others. Kind face, but not one to be taken advantage of. Cured romantic. Male. I guess that's important. Scorpio. I have a penis and am not afraid to use it, but know when not to. Or bring it up. Not sex or dick-obsessed, but sexuality gives birth to everything.

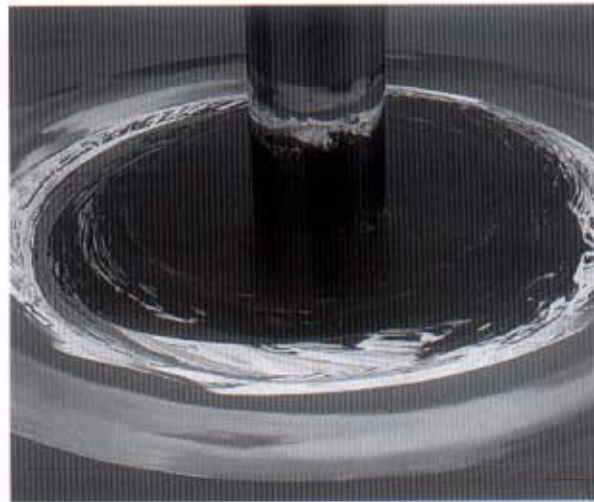
PETER ROSTOVSKY

THE PROJECT

The question at the heart of Peter Rostovsky's recent work is one that haunts many artists: To what extent must a contemporary painter confront the medium's long-running critical dismantling? On the surface, Rostovsky makes use of a now-familiar brand of humor to, in essence, apologize for carrying on with a practice that has routinely been written off over the past few decades; the knowing wit that infuses his work conveys the requisite degree of skepticism toward the discipline. Yet such qualifiers cannot hide a serious attachment to technique, the very emphasis on craft that the parodic gesture aims to undermine.

For Rostovsky, it's all a matter of where you stand—in terms of both history and the gallery space itself. In the middle of the room was *Anamorph*, 2001, a seven-foot-tall steel column placed on a circular digital print of distorted snow-covered mountains. Reflected in the column's shiny base, the majestic scene snapped into focus, looking not unlike the setting for a Coors commercial. Here the sublime was little more than a cheap gag, reduced as it was to a knee-high image that wobbled and stretched as you walked around the sculpture. Two paintings in the show, *Epiphany Model 2* and *Epiphany Model 3*, both 2001, also targeted the awe before nature expressed by nineteenth-century artists like Caspar David Friedrich and Albert Bierstadt. In front of each canvas, a small plastic doll (a slightly altered action figure of *X-Files* character Fox Mulder) stood on a pedestal facing the painting's sweeping view; one was a horizontal seascape, the other a seven-foot tondo painted in the uplifting style of Baroque church domes, giving the viewer's miniature stand-in a glimpse into a luxurious parting of the clouds.

The paintings are well executed and show off Rostovsky's considerable technical skills. And though the jokiness and anachronistic sentimentality help distance him from his historical predecessors (while



Peter Rostovsky, *Anamorph (detail)*, 2001, steel column, digital ink-jet print, column 84 x 13 1/2" diameter, print 90" diameter. Installation view.

also firmly establishing their influence), this show wasn't cynical. Its inherent skepticism seems more directed toward acknowledging the fact that a painter no longer has easy recourse to the unmediated expression of heartfelt desire. Such a sense of blocked access is metaphorically illustrated in the striking nine-by-six-foot painting *Eclipse*, 2000. A large brown-black blotch nearly fills the canvas, defining the space inside as a lacuna, a gap of monumental proportions. Yet it also holds up as a compelling image, without resorting to props like the dolls. Still, the painting was placed in a part of the gallery that prevented the viewer from stepping back and observing it from a distance; the silver funhouse column got in the way.

Rostovsky seems to have set aside his hesitations in *Bathers*, 2001, a quiet group of twelve small panels hung in a tight row. Each image presents one person swimming just offshore in a frothy ocean. The swimmers' heads are all in the same location relative to the frame, and the effect was one of cinematic repetition. The difference in tone and the lack of clumsy destabilizing devices made these works seem grounded, straightforward, even sincere. For a moment such an approach no longer felt so obsolete.

—Gregory Williams

Art in America

December 2001

on the romance of a better tomorrow bought by location—in this case an exciting urban getaway. Set behind a silhouette of a magnificent suspension bridge, radiating circles of gradually lighter shades of orange reduce the sun to a bright, beaming target.

If *Untitled (Sunset)* is reminiscent of those generic postcards that sucker tourists into buying a bit of vista, *Untitled (Housing Project with Falling Leaves)* is its antithesis: a rueful, low-income dwelling where one would not want to visit, let alone live. The prison-like, army-green building stretches across the 8-foot canvas, angled aggressively toward the viewer. A somber gray sky looms above and is reflected in the windows, while two spindly autumnal trees stand out front, trapped in the structure's gloomy shadow. Less ironically insouciant than the other works, this painting is foreboding and melancholic, and more psychologically resonant as a result. Without its presence among the other works, Alfred's subjects might conspire to truly seduce us.

—Jane Harris

Peter Rostovsky at The Project

Paintings that depict the beauty and immensity of nature and man's puniness within it were a specialty of Romantic painters. Peter Rostovsky's third solo show at The Project was at once a lampoon of and homage to Romantic landscape painting,

He literally took man out of the landscape by placing figurative sculptures on chest-high pedestals in front of both *Epiphany Model 3* (2001), a 2-by-6-foot canvas showing an ominous horizon of sky and sea



Peter Rostovsky: *Epiphany Model 2*, 2001, mixed mediums, painting, 7 feet in diameter; at The Project.

in gray and beige, and *Epiphany Model 2* (2001), a 7-foot-diameter tondo depicting a pink and blue sky. The small male figurines (about 6 inches high) were dressed like modern-day hikers and stood, à la Caspar David Friedrich, on rocky, mossy cliffs, looking onto the painted vistas. From a distance, one could experience perspectival tricks of the eye as the figures seemed to merge with the canvases.

In the center of the gallery was *Anamorph* (2001), a 7-foot-high column covered with mirrorlike material. Surrounding it on the floor was a doughnut-shaped digital print of a barely discernible image. In its reflection on the column, the print was transformed into a panorama of snowcapped peaks. Walking around this pleasantly strange object, you could see distorted reflections of the other works in the room.

As well as recuperating anamorphic strategies of the Baroque era, Rostovsky's art provides

fresh insights into the psyche of the Romantics, stripping away the maudlin aspects of their time. It also hints at new developments on the horizon—a future of artificial environments that may rival the natural world or, at least, distort our perception of it. Despite its engagement of seemingly antique genres, Rostovsky's blend of digital image-making, landscape painting, sculpture and installation is very much of the early 21st century.

—Max Henry

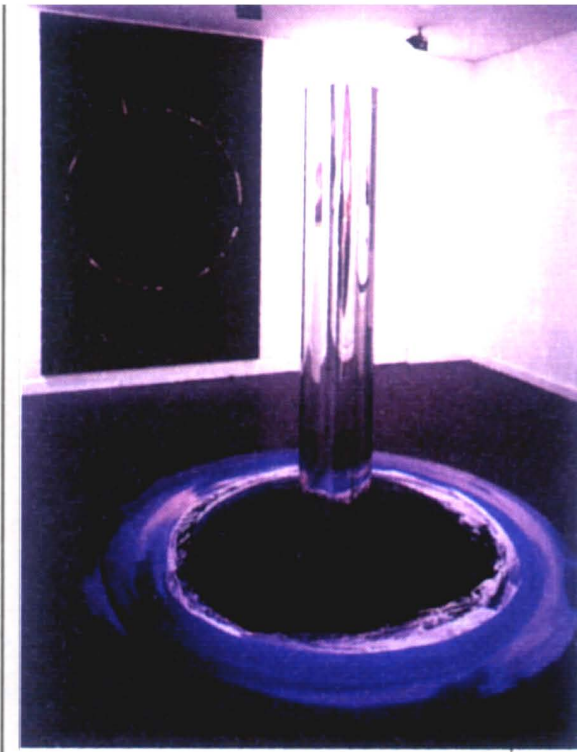
Laurence Hegarty at Cynthia Broan

Laurence Hegarty has enough occupations to keep three people busy. He's a practicing psychotherapist as well as a sculptor, filmmaker, studio-arts professor and critic. For his latest exhibition, he arranged an army of sculptures on a diagonal across a gallery floor, so that they were vaguely reminiscent of the terra-cotta soldiers that guard the tomb of third century B.C. Chinese emperor Qin Shihuang. But the members of Hegarty's battalion are misshapen and about 1½ feet tall. They're Snoopy and World Federation Wrestling dolls—disguised by gloopy red clay-colored wax dripped all over their bodies. In his press release, Hegarty states that the figures "appear to be covered in feces [and] connect the Freudian significance of childhood experience to . . . books and films that have affected us." Prior to reading what he wrote, I thought they were supposed to be covered with mud—from the trenches, perhaps.

Hegarty's messy soldiers carry penants; the majority of which bear portraits of poets and political leaders. One shows the visage of Charles Baudelaire; another, that of Emiliano Zapata. Mixed-medium sculptures of missiles and movie cameras line the army's path. More sculptures, one of an airplane and several of lightning bolts, hang from the ceiling. The words "Listen to me you normals," the title of the exhibition, trail behind the air-

100, acrylic on canvas, 70 by 95 inches;





Peter Rostovsky, installation view, 2001.

Peter Rostovsky
The Project, through Sun 6
(see Elsewhere).

Is the genre of 19th-century romantic naturalism ripe for contemporary satire? When Caspar David Friedrich painted the lonely figure of a monk standing against a bleak but majestic seaside, or a church graveyard crumbling under time and weather, he illustrated the puny size of humans and their creations against the vast, incomprehensible and all-powerful force of Nature (read: God). More than 100 years later, is there a place for humor in this view?

Peter Rostovsky thinks so. In two works here, *Epiphany Model 2* and *Epiphany Model 3*, Rostovsky pulls the human subject out of the painting,

placing man literally “before” the splendor of nature. In each, a small male figure, sculpted in detail and wearing hiking clothes, stands on a pedestal installed in front of a painted skyscape. One of these canvases, a tondo, simulates a pink-and-blue Tiepolo sky; a sense of awe is created by the colors of a spectacular sunrise filtered through the stylistic splendor of the late Roman Baroque. Rostovsky’s *Bathers* (another of several art-historical references) is a series of 12 small canvases hung horizontally, each with a single swimmer bobbing in foamy white-and-blue ocean water. The beach is a place where people can easily relate to nature; interestingly, these are the show’s better works, in which Rostovsky’s wit and approach feel more, well, natural.

Among other optical phenomena he explores are a total solar eclipse, rendered here in a nine-foot painting, and a disco ball that seems to absorb the greenish background of its small canvas more than reflect any dazzling light. *Anamorph* is Rostovsky’s own sublime creation. The piece consists of a seven-foot circular steel column standing in the middle of a circular print of snowy mountains laid on the floor. The printed image is expanded and nearly unreadable, but it is reflected almost perfectly on the column’s mirror-polished steel surface, on which the rest of the gallery appears totally distorted. Rostovsky might be gently mocking the discourse of the sublime, but his work still seems predicated on the age-old idea that art is the great mediator between humanity and nature.—*Meghan Dailey*

tendenze

LA SIGNORA IN VERDE
Elisa Sighicelli davanti a *Porsmark*, una delle sue foto di paesaggi retro-illuminata



TAPPETO MAGICO
L'artista cubana Maria Elena González con il suo *See Carpet*



IN ATTESA DI GIUDIZIO Il critico Alessandro Rabottini (a destra) con l'artista Vedova Mazzei

L'ULTIMA ECLISSI
Peter Rostovski, giovane artista russo che lavora a New York, davanti alla sua enorme tela, sulla quale è dipinta un'eclissi

OLTRE L'ORDINARIO

Visioni di giovani artisti e nuovi mezzi espressivi. La galleria milanese Giò Marconi (via Tadino 15) espone fino al 31 marzo una personale della fotografa Elisa Sighicelli, *Frost*, e una collettiva di tre artisti (Paul Pfeiffer, Peter Rostovski e Maria Elena González), provenienti dalla famosa galleria newyorchese The Project

Foto di R. Arcati/Contrasto



INTERESSATA Patrizia Brusarosco, dello spazio culturale di via Farini, a Milano



PROFESSIONALE
Emanuela Neri, della Galleria Laura Pecci



AVANGUARDIA *Long Count*, la video-scultura di Paul Pfeiffer, vincitore nel 2000 della Whitney Bienna



OCCHIO ESPERTO
Giorgio Marconi, della omonima galleria milanese



IL POPOLO DELLA GALLERIA
Visitatori e, sullo sfondo, il collezionista Ruben Levi



RECUPERO
Il gallerista parigino Gwénoùée Zürcher

New York Times, June 23, 2000.

**Glenn Brown, Julie Mehretu,
Peter Rostovsky**

The Project

427 West 126th Street, Harlem

Through June 30

A play of layered vision animates this clean, low-key, three-person show. The British artist Glenn Brown, short-listed for the next Turner Prize, is represented by photographs of paintings by Goya and Picasso that he shot from book reproductions, then blurred into soft focus. The new images are abstract but suggestively organic, different from but still attached to the paintings they came from.

The New York artist Peter Rostovsky also moves between media, but in the opposite direction. His oil-on-canvas paintings appear to be abstract but they actually depict special-effects scenes from science fiction films — a flood of light from “Star Trek II,” a starburst from

“2001” — that the artist photographs from a television screen. Here, abstract painting arrives filtered through two separate popular media to find its rarefied transcendentalist reputation both sullied and sustained.

If Mr. Rostovsky tackles the spiritual realm, Julie Mehretu seems intent on creating an elaborately stratified social cosmos in a diptych titled “Arcadia and Bushwick Burning.” Bars of modernist color float like continents against a neutral ground. Drawn over them in ink are webs of images: topographical maps snarled with architectural forms, sooty clouds of dots and dashes like aerial views of population centers. The results suggest a conceptual version of history painting, with hand-wrought depictions of loose data shifting and weaving through cyberspace.

HOLLAND COTTER

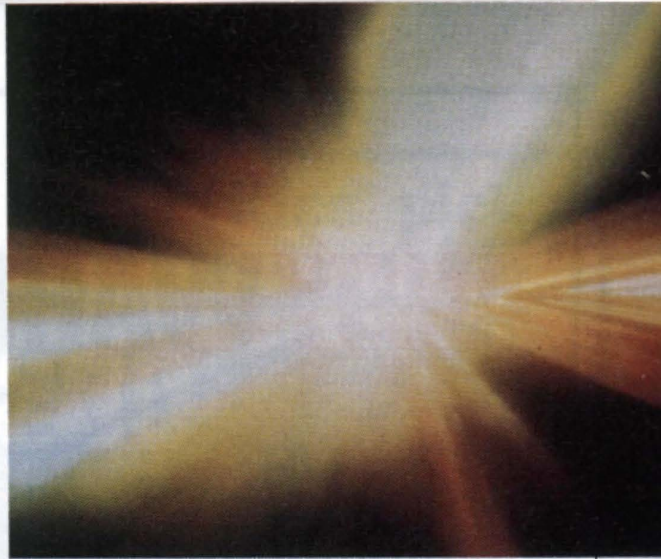
Glenn Brown, Julie Mehretu, Peter Rostovsky

The Project, through Jun 30 (see Elsewhere).

In the early '90s, critic Dave Hickey wrote that beauty was the defining question for contemporary art. Nearly a decade later, artists Glenn Brown, Peter Rostovsky and Julie Mehretu brush up against this claim without addressing it head-on. Each distrusts beauty but knows better than to dismiss it entirely.

Brown is a "Sensation" artist known for his fantasmagoric sci-fi paintings. His work here is more art-historical, consisting of small blurred photographs of famous paintings—so blurred, in fact, you can't identify the original works. The lime-green *Paranoiac-Critical Method* is based on a Dalí image, for example. More recognizable as a photograph of a painting is *Love*, a tangle of cavorting arms and legs that's reminiscent of a Michelangelo. Compared to Ruff's recent oversized blurs of porn images downloaded from the Web, these much smaller images pack less of a visual wallop, yet are more hermetic and insidious.

Peter Rostovsky's "Transport" paintings also mine already existing imagery—in this case, from sci-fi movies like *Star Trek II* and Kubrick's *2001*—but possess a psychological tenor. You could call these conceptual movie posters. Each painting depicts one powerful image in a sharp, realist style. The portal Jodie Foster enters in



Peter Rostovsky, *Transport Series (2001), 1999.*

Contact and the final psychedelic destination of the astronaut in *2001*, for instance, are meticulously painted as postmodern icons, evocative hieroglyphs that point out the religious subtext implicit in the science fiction genre.

Julie Mehretu's abstract paintings catalog different styles of rendering reality. Recalling Matthew Ritchie's paintings, her large canvases *Arcadia* and *Bushwick Burning* depict swirling, chaotic vortices that contain everything from pencil sketches and paintings to architectural plans and cartooning. While conceptually interesting, they're less visually compelling than they might have been.

At some level, both Rostovsky and Brown embrace aesthetic beauty as much as they do quotation. By doing so, they also risk being too pretty. But this lends their works a sense of danger—the danger of being just beautiful—that Mehretu's safer paintings lack. That, after all, was what Hickey was talking about: beauty that's not pretty.—*Saul Anton*

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biennale
Balticum
Rauma 2000

Viime vuosina olen työssäni keskittänyt historialliseen muistiin ja utopistiseen mielikuvitukseen sekä maalausten että käsitteellisyiden keinoin. Minulla on tapana hyödyntää loppuunkulutettuja taidesuuntauksia ja kitschmäistä ikonografiaa, joka on yleistä mainonnassa, ja olen jalostanut näistä aineksista eräänlaisen kriittisen vaikkakin mahdottoman historiallisuuden, joka sijaitsee jossakin saavuttamattoman menneen ja yhtäläillä tavoittamattoman tulevan välisessä tilassa. Esimerkiksi teos 'Venäläisen avantgarden muotokuva' on aiheensa utopististen päämäärien muistelo ja se on toteutettu kliseistä puupolttoa käyttäen. 'Utopia muotokuva' -sarja taas esittää katsojan jäsenenä kasvottomassa kollektiivissa, jota yhdistää määrittelemätön visio.

Yliä kuvattu lähestymistapa edellyttää sen tunnustamista, että on olemassa voimia, jotka radikaalilla tavalla monimutkaistavat suhteemme menneeseen ja määrittävät sitä, mihin olemme menossa. Juuri näiden voimien takia olen usein käyttänyt valokuvaa ja anamorfoosinkaltaisia menetelmiä osoittaakseni, että muisti ja havainnot ovat sattumanvaraisia. Toisaalta neuvostokokemuksen aaveisuus on ollut minulle yhtä tärkeää, sillä se epäilemättä määrittää monisyydestä suhdettani länsimaihın ja läntisen taiteen ominaispiirteisiin. Merkittävimmistä identiteettiä koskevista ongelmista huolimatta töitteni temaattinen sisältö ja hybridi muotokielit ovat tämän minulle hyvin tutun monisyyden kulttuurisen kohtaamisen välttämätön seuraus. >

Utilizing both painting and conceptual strategies, my work over the past several years has focused on issues of historical memory and utopian imagination. Often working with exhausted genres and the kitsch iconography that sometimes clads incorporated ideas, I have elaborated my practice as a kind of critical albeit impossible historicism — somewhere between the irretrievable past and equally inconceivable future. For instance, a piece like the 'Portrait of Russian Avant Garde', memorializes the utopian ambitions of its subject using the clichéd medium of wood-burning. While, the series entitled 'Utopian Portraits', positions the viewer as a member of a faceless collective unified by a single, yet indefinable vision.

Critical to this stance has been a necessary acknowledgement of the various forces that radically complicate one's relation to the past and inflect one's present orientation. It is for this reason that I have often used photography and such devices as anamorphosis to highlight the contingency of memory and perception. However, equally as relevant to my practice has been a spectral sense of Soviet experience, that no doubt conditions a complex relationship with the West as well as distinctively western artistic practices. Larger questions of identity notwithstanding, it is this broader cultural encounter that I feel often demands the thematic content and the hybridized formal aspect of my work.

Thus situated, somewhere between an indeterminate memory of the past and an equally phantasmatic vision of the future, my work attempts to negotiate a position that I feel to be recuperative and progressive at the same time. As such, it is a project that insists on its own contradictions. Yet, while this position may often focus on the limits of such a predicament, it also insists on revealing its critical and creative possibilities — accentuating that moment of epiphany that often lurks in the most familiar of places.



'Utopiamuotokuva: Katie',
1998. Öljy kankaalle, 60 x 90 cm
'Utopian Portraits: Katie',
1998. Oil on canvas, 60 x 90 cm

< Näin sijoittuneena jonkein määrittelemättömän menneen muiston ja yhtä mielukivutuksellisen tulevaisuudenvisio välille työni tavoittelee asemaa, jonka uskon yhtäaika parantavan sekä entiselleen että entisestään. Sellaisenaan se on hanke, joka edellyttää omaa ristiriitaisuuttaan. Toisaalta, vaikka se usein saattaa painottaa omaa rajallisuuttaan, se tuo välttämättä esiin kriittiset ja luovat mahdollisuutensa, korostaen sitä äkillisen ymmärtämisen hetkeä, joka usein piilee kaikkein tutuimissa paikoissa.

ART IN REVIEW

Daniel J. Martinez and Peter Rostovsky

The Project
421 West 126th Street
Harlem
Through April 18

This is the first Manhattan show in six years for the Los Angeles conceptual artist Daniel J. Martinez, who gained notoriety in 1993 for designing Whitney Biennial admission tags that read "I can't imagine ever wanting to be white."

His light-box photo diptychs here are far less confrontational, but politically charged nonetheless. In each, a portrait of a young woman is paired with an image of a tropical flower shot against a distant city view. The implied correspondence between sitter and flower is a touching one, though more complex than at first appears. The girls are residents of a Philadelphia reform school where Mr. Martinez taught photography as part of a public art project. The flawless-looking flowers, photographed in working class Los Angeles neighborhoods, are, in fact, artificial. Together they offer an open-ended image about the cost of survival in inhospitable environments.

Mr. Martinez's art of social commentary has, almost by definition, a dimension of idealism. The young Russian-born painter Peter Rostovsky calls a series of his paintings "Utopian Portraits." They are half-length realist style pictures of friends, seen from behind and looking upward.

On the opposite wall are smaller paintings of what they might be looking at, the sun breaking through clouds. Nearby these solar epiphanies, the artist has installed a pantheon of Russian avant-garde superstars of yesteryear — Malevich, Lissitzky, Popova — their iconic portraits executed in the kitsch medium of singed wood.

Mr. Rostovsky has more work downstairs, including an R-rated, mock-heroic, Komar-and-Melamid-style homage to Rococo painting. And Mr. Martinez offers two installations, one titled "A Death in Harlem," consisting of three extravagant Afro wigs, black, brown and blond, slowly spinning on a wall.

The exact meaning is opaque, but it's good to have this artist's restless, zany and acerbic eye back on the scene.

HOLLAND COTTER