

One Building, One Show, 150 Definitions of Contemporary New York Art

Continued From First Arts Page

Julie Mehretu take a place in the spotlight.

The formal range is, to say the least, eclectic, the way things are these days. A painting by Diana Cooper comes out from the wall to form a fragile 3-D cubicle festooned with ink pompoms. Jeremy Blake revisits the standard modernist painting vocabulary of color and geometry, but does so through a series of slide projections, which dissolve into and reappear at the end. Ruth Root makes organic jointed paper collages the size and shape of pastries.

Organic abstraction is the theme of one of the more resolved gallery groupings. It brings together David Dupuis's drawings of spoorlike forms, the pattern-rich gouaches of Bruce Pearson and a rainbow-hued set made of pipe cleaners by Lucky deBellevue. Lisa Ruyter's wiry narrative, "Sunset Boulevard," adds just the right astringent touch. The ways when decorative was anathema are behind us once again.

Broader themes are spun out elsewhere, with varying success. One first-floor ensemble tries to get something going with the overlap of infantilism and glamour, a promising idea that some editing might have sharpened. A neat trio of Rob Pruitt's glitter-encrusted pandas, J. Wilcox's mesmerizing, noirish video fantasy of the Marlene Dietrich funeral that never was and Elizabeth Peyton's man-child portrait would have done the trick.

Childhood shading into adolescence has been a driving metaphor in contemporary work for years; recently it has taken the form of a

hard-to-pinpoint blend of sweetness and scariness. So it makes sense that one of P.S. 1's second floor galleries seems to have reverted to the public school classroom it once was.

Much of it is given over to a Mick O'Shea installation "Artworld," a toy town with tulips for trees, houses made of folded-up gallery invitations and an electric train that transports gobs of paint out to the hall and back. Sharing the space are the sinister-looking (though actually quite poetic) contraptions of Paul Etienne Lincoln. They suggest the work of a brainy, off-center eighth grader who spends Saturdays in the basement with his chemistry set trying to conjure up alien life.

What could easily be the products of such experiments fill a gallery across the hall. Here one finds Keith Edmier's scalded-pink mutant waterlily, Rob de Mar's long-stemmed biospheres and a Seth Kelly sculpture that looks like a moon rock in meltdown. Similar rocks, which appear to be aquarium accessories, are on view in a fish tank installation by Michael Phelan, who enlivens the weird science around him by having real goldfish flitting through his work.

Science is about systematic thinking. And systems of all kinds, the more elaborate and labor-intensive the better, recur. Mark Lombardi draws dense fields of multidirectional arrows to explicate economic history. Elizabeth Campbell applies the same obsessive flow-chart analysis to her personal life.

A gorgeous, light-glinting painting by Sam Gordon looks like a data bank for esoteric spiritual matter. Olu Oguibe, in one of the few uses of

interactive computing (yet another art world, and one that the Whitney Biennial will explore), offers a multimedia work station dedicated to the myths of ethnology. Dylan Stone, in the guise of urban archaeologist, is in the process of photographing every architectural facade in Manhattan; his archive-in-progress is here.

Architecture and, by extension, design have an important place. Mark Dean Veca, a kind of pop Tiepolo, has turned the interior of P.S. 1's cafe into a roiling vortex of cartoon clouds, while Ricci Albenda transforms a remote basement room into an immaculate, milky-white sculptural environment, illuminated through overhead sidewalk grates: sunshine by day, street-lamp light by

night. Wonderful.

There are even some houses on hand. A many-layered installation by Javier Tellez, who is, like Mr. Oguibe, an interesting thinker and one of the show's finds, consists of a giant, walk-in birdhouse filled with real birdhouses made by psychiatric patients in London's infamous Bedlam hospital, where Mr. Tellez once worked.

And P.S. 1's vast third-floor gallery is dominated by a full-size house stitched from turquoise silk by Do-Ho Suh. Titled "Seoul Home/L.A. Home/New York Home," it is modeled on the one-room house in Korea that this artist grew up in and is named for the cities where she has lived since. It floats on high like the

set for a fairy tale ballet about to descend from the flies.

Ms. Suh is one of 49 artists in "Greater New York" born outside the United States. Their presence gives a clear picture of how the demographics of art in New York are being reconfigured. (Institutions like the Bronx Museum of the Arts and the Queens Museum of Art have of course been presenting and actively creating this picture for years.)

The show also reflects developments less easy to tabulate. The body, that endlessly scrutinized and dissected emblem of the 1990's, radically shaped, like the era itself, by AIDS, now has a subtler, less emphatic presence. It is back to being "the figure," but often as an actor in uneasy, dreamlike narratives of a kind seen in the photographs of Adam Baer and Justine Kurland and a rapid-fire, paranoid video by Jordan Crandall.

Neither beauty nor style as subjects get much attention. Political ideas are muted and oblique; they have a tone of earnest, repressed worrying rather than protest. The insistent, extroverted glamour and aggression of British art recently seen in the city is little in evidence.

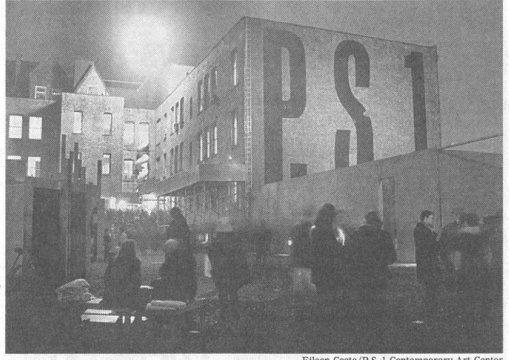
In place of Damien Hirst's dead shark there are Mr. Phelan's living goldfish. Instead of the Chapman brothers' naughty tableaux there is Lawrence Seward's little cabinet of sculptural wonders, ghostly but cute. The pretentious historical references have been replaced by far more modest homages. Near the fuse box powering his art-world Lilliput, Mr. O'Shea has hidden a tiny version of Giotto's Padua chapel, from whose

murals, he implies, the energy of a grand art tradition flows.

Over all an air of grandeur, of the big, thrown-open gesture, is missing in the show itself, and when it comes it tends to be directed at the ear rather than the eye. Military marches blast from Nadine Robinson's room-size boombox, passionate Colombian folk songs soar through a lovely video piece by Adriana Arenas, and a throbbing, addictive technopulse (music by Wolfgang Voigt) emanates from Julian Laverdiere's dark, beetling installation, a romantic monument to failed ambition that is also, appropriately, one of the largest pieces on view.

Also appropriately, some of the physically most attenuated works come with expansive ideas. Nina Khatchadourian performs ambitious feats of restorative microsurgery on broken spider webs. Manuel Acevedo, in hand-altered photos, erects sculptures resembling Tatlin's utopian monument in desolate urban lots as perches for birds. And then there is Mr. Stone's project, a truly Sisyphean task given the rate at which things in this city rise and fall.

"Greater New York," on view until May 16, is in the category of "things that rise." It doesn't rise sky-high, but it forms a core of information to which stories, wings, even foundations can be added, as they will be, mentally, by every critically alert visitor to the show. As everybody knows, there is no "New York art." But there is a ton of art in New York, with distinctive looks and concerns shaping up at the beginning of the decade. However that message is delivered, and it is delivered with care and intelligence here, it's good news.



The opening of "Greater New York" at P.S. 1 last week drew a crowd.

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