

A chief feature of his art is its economy of means: he prefers flat, neutral surfaces; a restricted palette; and non-hierarchical structures. His elements tend to be modular and without interest in themselves. Hence the work has a monadic quality reminiscent of the Oregon crabs (Gauguin increasing as a chef boy).

The artist achieved his maturity in the period 1892-94, when he was almost exclusively a portraitist. The "Homage to Weyden" series (1893) shows him concerned not only with the face, but also with musical sources. Similarly, the "Flags" paintings of 1897 would seem to have a counterpart in the rapper's chore that barely audibly but constant reference point in their repeating color bars and near-total symmetry.

The exhibition is dominated by the "Grey on Grey" paintings of 1897-99. These are very closely spaced pictures with subtle gradations in hue and tone between, and even within, the elements. In too many of these, everything is so impenetrable that the work resists perception, much as Reinhardt's "black paintings" do. The intractability (a carry-over from Gauguin's mere "optical" crisis of 1905) is frustrating, indeed exhausting, for the viewer, and also brings the work dangerously close to the level of puzzle.

Since the gray paintings, Gauguin's acceleration has been hampered with increasingly rapid color and, from 1910, a concern with sweeping diagonals and their resultant impression of instability. At times he has some difficulty controlling the heightened effect, especially the white of the canvas, which falls away too readily from the warmer color areas.

His most recent work, seen concurrently at the Washington Gallery, falls with the dangers of temper-type painting, where the chief ingredients come from Italy, Norway and especially Newman. Surprisingly, Gauguin's "lancho" series (1978- ) owed not to the actual experience of Barneil Heaton's celebrated work of 1988-89, but to consideration within Newman's format, of various problems that came to mind after having seen the work in reproduction. As good as some of them are, the "lancho" do not take up the issue of how to set off their extensibility, nor do they consistently achieve an equilibrium for their different directional forces.

Throughout, Gauguin's creative processes have been highly constrained by intellect. His art is based on systematic research into color theory, particularly left-Weissen and Oriental, and so on. Each work seems to be a combination of some chosen constraints within a narrow permissible range, so that the end result is already highly specified in the initial conception of the work. Since 1959 he seems to have programmatically defined any place for what Ethenzweig, in *The Modern Order of Art* has called inevitable as opposed to scanning vision. Some of the work seems to be



Yves Gauguin: St-Archa, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 5 feet 2 inches by 15 feet, at Dia Art Gallery of Orange.



Katherine Pryor: Newton's Law, 1978, oil on canvas, 67 by 102 inches, at David McKee, Private Collection.

open to their capacity for inducing "a state of trance" that Gauguin found in Rothko's work in 1951. I doubt that he needs so much considered attention.

Gauguin then, is not an artist to buy, as Hans Hülsmann did. "I want not to know what I am doing," he more sober and cerebral bent places less equally with the dummed view of Mondrian painting. So does his prohibition for working in both high contrast and closely valued tones. Perhaps the Canadian critic, Marcel Greenwood was correct to tie Gauguin to the culture that produced Desportes and Pascoli, and to find in his quietist and apocryphal note the Jarrasal spirit of Piet Mondrian.

—Ken Calkover

## WASHINGTON

### John McIntosh at the Corcoran

The 54 color photographs that John

McIntosh presented posed some immediate problems: what among them to figure out what was going on. At first glance, it seemed like a portfolio of high-class magazine ads without text. Each photo features one or two ordinary objects—a cigarette package, a hair cream bottle and comb, a French horn in its open case—on a plain white ground. Centered, evenly lit, the objects glow with milky-fish color, unanchored to any context, apparently floating in space. Brand names pop out—Lucky Strike, Watford, Monogram, Vici Zoppo, L'Oréal—and even less familiar items like arrangements of dried outfish and handmade composite package labels as a kind of provenance.

Beautiful? Yes. Everything is carefully placed, lovingly observed, and the color is so intense it seems to surpass reality. But what else? Is this simply a daisy-crowd, neo-Pop, tongue-in-cheek pastiche of commercialism—or of a celebration of the elegant objectness of these items? Some of

the above appear, perhaps, but McIntosh is up to much more.

Having been of pain to establish a gravity-free existence—the luminous white ground seems to stretch dimensions between horizontal and vertical—he subtly takes it back in a number of ways. Sometimes it's barely visible shadows, tucked under various projections. That locates the objects as we see one or the other. Sometimes the cue is so subtle it almost isn't there: an open, waterborne gleaming shape and shadowless seems to be lying flat, until one realizes that the lip has punched through the ground, which curves up imperceptibly from horizontal to vertical, gradually pivoting down its orientation at that point. Instead of lying precisely horizontal, the vinyl is revealed in a nervous tension, vibrating with implied force.

McIntosh also has it both ways with color. Seduced by his saturated hues, we are puzzled by the incongruity of a few "black-and-white" prints: a monogrammed lightbulb glass, a white coffee pot, an old black telephone. But these images are in color too: the telephone bears a small, pale grid against the soft-lined top and hand with Glove, an arrangement of black, gray and white, crocheting minute small ladders of pink flesh (the only evidence of a living thing in the show) through the coarse weave of the glove.

The very identity of what is being photographed is called into question, too. After the initial impression of straightforwardness, it's the Apollo smile once more: what we see is not always what we get. In some cases, as Lucky Strike packages that advance (a tad) eye-in several stages toward the picture plane), a mechanical collage is also straight in others (a group of guitar picks, squares of dried seaweed). Identical objects are connected into enigmatic, geometric abstractions. With *Formless Curves* and *Form*, we need the title to discover the unending dispositions that ripple across the image surface. And in *Glass and Urpella*, all answers elude us: that a collage, if could be two objects on a sheet. Or is it a photo of those objects (or a photo of themselves)? Does point in several directions at once.

By constantly pulling the rug out from under our feet, McIntosh forces us to fasten on his photographs in an intensity of perception. Doing so, we get past our preconceptions and see more than we expect.

—David Tarnow

## LOS ANGELES

### Maria Nordman on Washington Boulevard

Maria Nordman has worked with natural light installations—generally temporary—for nine years. Her touch with light is sure: when she reaches for an effect she secures it. Though subtle and evanescent, her work is not ten-

tative. In her pieces you see a volume or situation afresh, and can examine your seeing as though it were not part of you. She has moved from using specially constructed rooms and grayish or subdued light to existing spaces and bright-seeming light—from building things to framing things.

This summer she had a piece at 12839 Washington Boulevard in Culver City, a neglected area of Los Angeles. Washington Boulevard is used as a throughway to the beach. You don't usually stop or walk along it. Her installation shared a battered stucco storefront with an awning manufacturer. The accompanying illustration would be truer to experience if it showed several cars whizzing past and the sidewalk deserted. The space was open gallery hours from mid-May to mid-June. At other times (the piece remained in existence through mid-September) the necessary key could be gotten at a nearby store.

Walking by Nordman's space cold, you wouldn't know how to get in. From the street her installation looked like a modish store or gallery preparing to open. A new, aluminum-framed glass wall was set about ten feet in from the front of the building; a light gray concrete floor inclined up toward the glass; the side walls and ceiling were sheetrocked and painted white. Two narrow doors were set in the center of the glass; one was covered with reflective film.

Unlocking a door I walked into an unmarked space about 15 feet deep by 11 wide by 10 high. Dots momentarily floated in front of my eyes. A narrow wall protruded from either side to demarcate a second room, longer and slightly narrower in this back zone the air was palpable, like radiant white smoke, like bad summer smog. Depth was hard to fix; the room felt cool, with seemingly curved walls. I knew the room was rectilinear but my eyes wouldn't see it that way. As my eyes adjusted to the uniform semibrightness, the back wall became flat and separate, like a giant white painting, and the upper junctures of wall and ceiling were discernible. Each surface now appeared to be a white or off-white of different value, with occasional fugitive sensations making them look pastel. My perception of the space changed depending on the light outside, and changed if the treated door were left ajar instead of being closed.

When my eyes had adjusted I began to hear street sounds again, began to come back to the neighborhood. My body relaxed. I had the piece to myself. The space felt secure, a personal turf from which I could stare out without being noticed. It was an urban cave, like a church "open daily for meditation, rest and prayer."

Everyone does real estate in California. The almost rich constantly displace the almost poor. The storefront became available to Nordman because Joe Harkey, the tenant for 32 years, had moved his barber shop



Maria Nordman: Installation at 12839 Washington Boulevard, Los Angeles, Calif., 1979.



Jud Fine: Wall/Aluminum Vase Heavy, Forms, 1972. (Antique Table, 1976-79; bamboo poles and floor-pole poles with wood medallions of Margo Leavin)

down the street rather than pay a more than doubled rent following the sale of the building. During Nordman's installation the building was sold a second time, and the rent is being raised for the next tenant.

—Wade Saunders

### Jud Fine at Margo Leavin

Jud Fine's latest drawings, shown in conjunction with his latest "sticks," are diagrams in navigational systems. Images illustrate the text in a rational

historical of *Scientific American* at its most best.

Fine's colored pencil and watercolor images are exquisitely made in light geometric configurations. His text explains that the "primary logic constructions" used in Polynesian navigational systems are based on direct observation. The "secondary logic constructions" of Western navigation, on the other hand, make it possible to acquire primary information without direct observation. Fine painstakingly pulls out several charts, diagrams, star compasses, Medea's clock charts

the Polynesian method of detecting swell patterns in relation to winds, rotations of stars, and wind directions as visual representations of these navigational concepts. He also includes literary commentary relating the systems to the dynamics of art and society.

Although the structure and sensibility of the drawings are superb, the text is strikingly boring. Read carefully, it makes sense, but nevertheless seems abstruse and pretentious. The drawings illuminate rather than rework it, and, as a part of the appeal of the images, Fine's captions read like drawing analysis prose. The text on one of Fine's drawings states, "We can make art out of the dynamics of beauty . . . [and] art that does nothing more than present personal images for the walking structure of the information around us . . . This is in the same tradition as landscape painting." Fine may be producing drawings in the tradition of landscape painting, but they don't have that rapportage.

Whereas the visual images of the drawings seem redundant in relation to the text, the "sticks" do not. The text of the "sticks" is nearly identical to that of the drawings, but placed on objects. Fine's text is informed rather than trivialized. Some "sticks" are real bamboo poles. Others are stainless steel or fiberglass replicas. Each section of each pole is treated differently; some are painted, wrapped with gold metal, scoured, carved or louvered, others unperforated with tiny metal or wooden rings. Each section also contains a word from a narrative or an idea from a complex visual thought. On the poles, the text provides clues to Fine's structure, form and creative process, working better as an adjunct than as the sole subject matter of a piece. One section of *Walls/Aluminum Vase Heavy* reveals the source of Fine's vertical arrangement of poles leaning against the wall, taking poles on department store racks. The legs hang from the lower portion of each piece just as table legs would.

The systematic and sensual beauty of the bamboo and bamboo-like forms, the density of Fine's treatment, the subordinated but informative text, and the power of a number of poles, together, are a formalistic combination.

—Barbara Noah

### Review Contributors

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