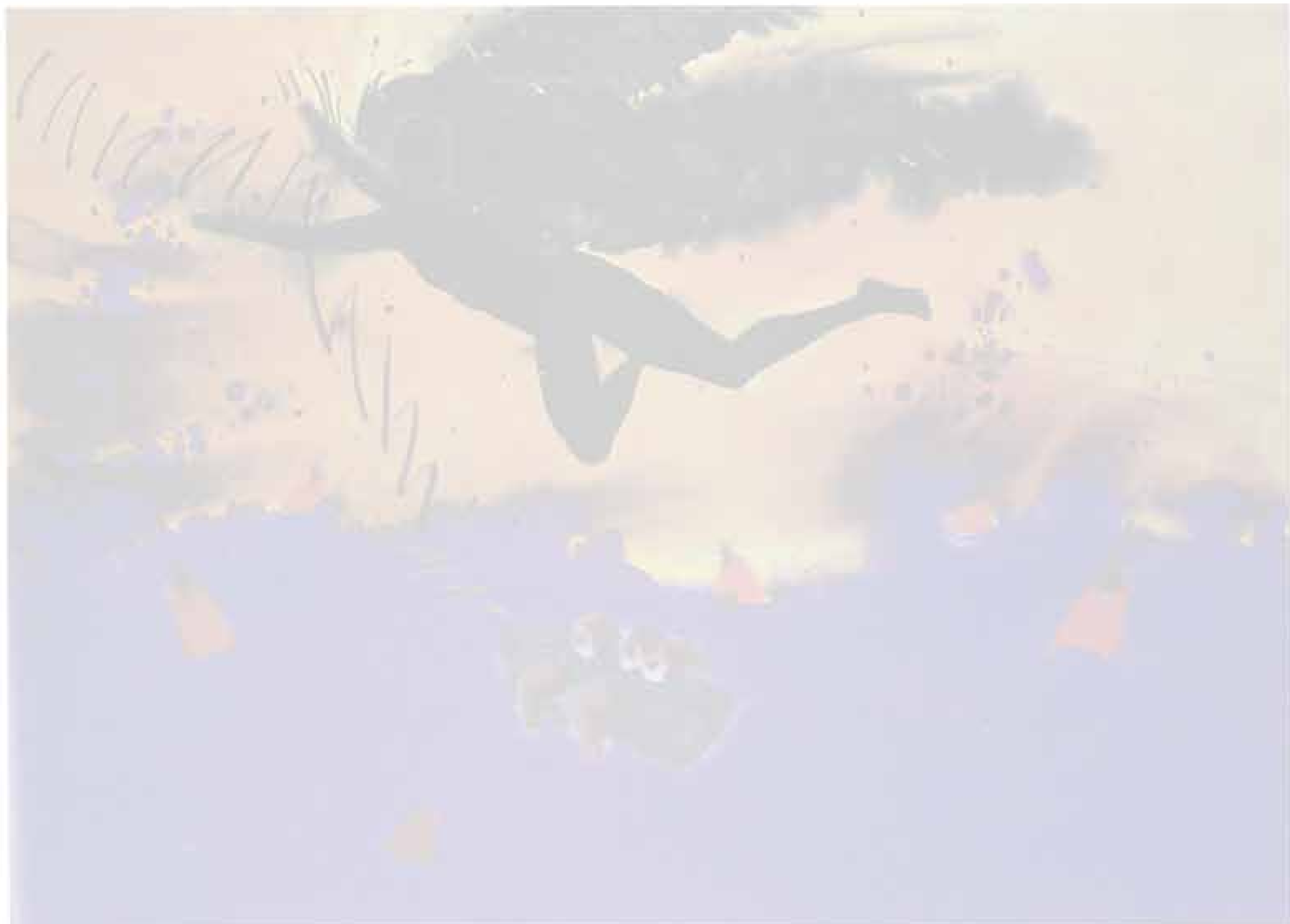
Review of Exhibitions



Jody Pinto, *Henri over an Occupied Sea*, 1983, watercolor, gouache, crayon, graphite on paper, 3 by 7 feet; at Hal Bromm.

NEW YORK

Jody Pinto at Hal Bromm

Jody Pinto has an alter ego: his name is Henri. While the viewer might think of Matisse or Rousseau, Pinto has another figure in mind: Henri Lamothe, a character from her childhood who used to fling himself across Central Park's Wollman Memorial Skating Rink on his stomach.

"I decided that Henri would be my flying saint," Pinto has said, and in her latest show there he was flying all over the place—an androgynous silhouette gripping a *Soft Meteor* in one painting, falling into a red sea full of blue tongues with whiskers in another. Henri's adventures are all exceeding strange. In *Henri in Serpentine Flight*, the silhouetted Henri, wings billowing, tangles with a green serpent, while the triptych *Henri in Three Movements* features black tongues in a green sea in the left panel, Henri covered with serpents over a blue, tongue-ridden sea in the center, and, in the right panel, more tongues, more snakes and more Henri. Pinto is nothing if not consistent.

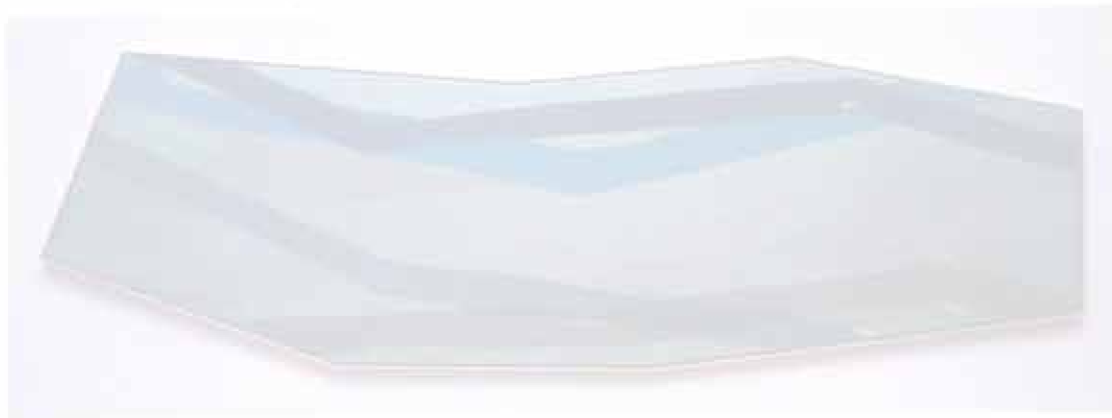
The challenge of this kind of highly personal art, of course, is to make one's obsession meaningful to the viewer. While Pinto leans a little toward the hermetic—mutilated human limbs clinging to a piece of driftwood in a purple sea dotted with waving tongues, for instance—her images can generally be read, if mostly on her own terms. Her purple seas, orange skies and "Saint" Henri might even have a popular religious significance. "I have always felt that the Bible & the story of Christ," writes Pinto, "have an element of drama and magic/sorcery about them." Though obviously surrealist, her paintings reach beyond an exclusively artistic label. Indeed, if the paintings are read as religious works, the question then becomes, Are we in heaven or hell?

Those orange skies are certainly infernal; but whoever heard of a hell with a sea? Heaven is surely a more pacific place, so perhaps this is purgatory, where Henri has gone to cool off after a libidinous life. In any event, Pinto's inner landscapes seem to represent a realm of the psyche where heaven and hell are one and the same. Her obsession with Henri is couched, tellingly, in dreamlike terms—and the unconscious, we know from our dreams, makes no sharp distinction between good and bad. These are concepts of the rational mind; to the unconscious, pain can be pleasure, and the ugly beautiful. Pinto projects these psychic truths onto her alter ego with good-hearted verve and nervy painterliness. Painting where angels fear to tread—out of the subconscious—Pinto achieves her own brand of saintly—i.e., esthetic—purity, alone with her alter ego and snakes in a paradise of fire.

—*Gerrit Henry*

Mel Kendrick at John Weber

Since 1974, Mel Kendrick's sculpture has moved from the mentally to the visually analytic, from being thought out to being seen through. For him ideas have increasingly come forward during the construction of the sculptures, and his new works don't give form to some acquired list of dos and don'ts. Kendrick belongs to the generation of sculptors, generally born after World War II and having exhibited for less than ten years,



Kenneth Noland: *Vestige*, 1985, acrylic on canvas, 51 by 105 inches. At André Emmerich.

[illegible] 1981, acrylic on canvas with collage, 92 by 23 by 2 inches. At [illegible]. (Review on p. 181.)

who are interested in making objects which emphasize invention and foster touch. These sculptors are as unimpressed by the concepts and rhetoric which propelled '60s sculpture as they are unmoved by the lure of architecture and scale which so controlled '70s practice. The extent of this shift in sculpture has been little remarked: critical interest has recently been directed at painting or has remained stuck on site-connected work.

Kendrick's pieces have grown progressively looser visually as they have become physically more compact. The earliest works (from 1974) were paired rectangles leaned up against the wall; later he canted horizontal planes upon supporting frames; the planes were next thinned to parallel wooden slats while the frames grew into lively, horizontally extensive ribs, yielding an ever more open structure. In these new vertical works the ribbing has seemingly contracted. The previous play of line against plane, or of straight against curved, has given way to the setting off of positive shape or mass against negative shape or void. Compositional rhythm or springiness has progressively replaced generative logic as the motive force in Kendrick's sculptures. Although we can still reconstruct the operations that gave certain works their form, we don't thereby elucidate their effect or meaning.

The sculptures—ranging in height from one to four feet, and in shape from boxlike to columnar—are made in a consistent fashion, partly carved, partly fabricated. Kendrick generally starts with a 4-by-4-inch post of rough-sawn poplar—a soft, close-grained wood, white or greenish white in hue. In the simplest pieces, he bandsaws into the post from the sides and corners to produce a carving whose surfaces—either planes or simple curves—aren't burdened with self-conscious marks. In the more complex sculptures he relocates parts he has cut out, or slides severed pieces partially through the block, creating a cavity on one side matched by an extension opposite. These constructional processes help Kendrick establish patterns: our eyes are led to connect parts with their sources. He sometimes inks cut surfaces (now porous) to distinguish them from original ones. Most of the wood from the posts remains in the finished sculptures.

The sculptures have a particular sort of presence: they are obviously reminiscent of early modern sculpture and painting—Boccioni, Brancusi, Picasso—as well as of African art, but their referentiality seems to be somewhat casual. Though suggestive of Cubist fragmentation, they are not analytically derived from the model. Pieces like *Split Bullet, Permission,* and Untitled do suggest portrait busts. In each a headlike mass rises from a sort of shoulder; each couples frontality with four-sidedness.

My favorite pieces in the show were the ones in which Kendrick considered the question of the monolith, even if at what amounted to maquette scale. For various reasons—size, material, context—we tend to perceive monolithic sculpture as compositionally predictable (boring), physically hollow (bombastic), and emotionally suspect (false). Kendrick's monoliths are visually aggressive. He has figured out that diagonals keep things moving, so he tilts parts—such as his staircase forms—or puts wedges under entire pieces to get them going. Since his working method affects opposing sides simultaneously, the pieces exist strongly in the round. Although partially hollow, the pieces convey a pleasing solidity; their surface does not read as a skin. The best sculptures are direct, clear about being three-dimensional objects: color comes from light and shadow, from the reddish glue seeping from the joints, and from pencil lines that didn't lead to bandsaw cuts; mass comes from Kendrick's peculiar and persuasive combination of forming and arranging. They're quick; they jump. —*Wade Saunders*

Steve Gianakos at Barbara Gladstone

The invitations to a benefit for Artists Space went out in late March, and suddenly the art world was inundated with Steve Gianakos's images of penguins. They recalled a happier time—a world of P.S. 1 sock hops, a world in which penguins stood for black tie. Those penguins were tinged with nostalgia for the '70s, for an art world that was just beginning to remember the meaning of "fun."

Before the current resurgence of youthquakers, before the fashion wars and endless apocalypses of the early '80s, Steve Gianakos was one of the primordial funsters. Now at 45, he has had his first New York show in almost four years. Don't think he was unheard of during this absence. The appearance of his artist's book in 1981 recapped his greatest hits of the '70s and in a sense educated a new audience that may have missed the original forays. But the book created problems for Gianakos's subsequent paintings and drawings. If his previous works had aspired to the state of cartoons, his images now were in fact cartoons in reproduction. And without that gap between genres his work no longer seemed as novel. The influx of younger artist-cartoonists only added to the pressures attending his debut with a new dealer in new headquarters.

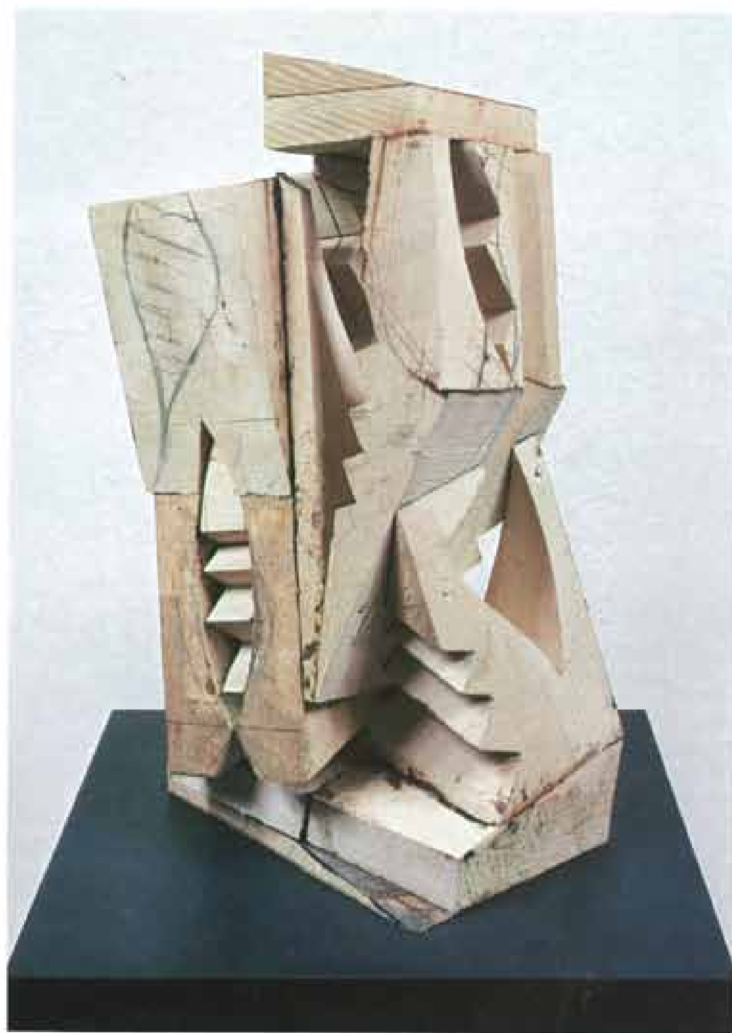
Yet with all this in mind, who would have thought that Gianakos's wild card would turn out to be expressionism? Next to all the endless double shows of heavy-handed, gorilla painting in SoHo, Gianakos's colored pencil-and-ink drawings of gorillas, expanding upon his original idea of doing gorillas in the Hamptons, came off as oddly refreshing. Their easygoing offensiveness, their economical size and essential modesty were

among the first signs of summer. Women may be offended by his gorilla girl scouts camping out and his gorilla matrons sipping martinis. Gay men may want to throw rocks at Gianakos's gorillas who live in glass houses. Blacks, especially residents of Bridgehampton (or, as one artist calls it, Lionel Hampton), may not cotton to Gianakos's images of gorilla schwarze serving the master. But then again the anecdotal virulence of Gianakos's imagery shouldn't be taken personally. If it isn't, you're missing the joke.

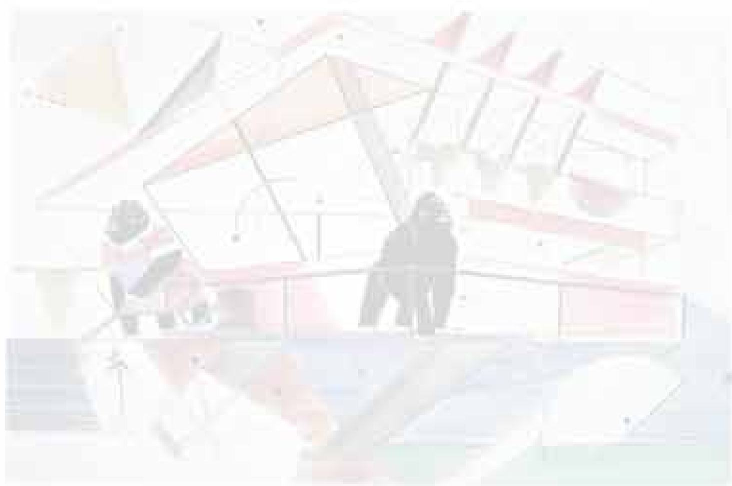
Beyond the subject matter, the style of Gianakos's drawings may prove offensive enough to induce deep belly laughs: his proliferation of meaningless drafting flourishes—the carefully plotted points that occasionally become constellations of stars, but otherwise seem as random as a Barry Le Va; the dotted lines that lead nowhere and look like diagrams of football scrimmages; the mysteriously dissolving walls that could never be built—all seem to lampoon the tricks of the architect's trade as well as the new market for architectural drawings. Moreover, the slight messiness of Gianakos's execution (not so visible in reproduction) causes the spectator to see the artist as a talented but sloppy student, implicitly begging to be corrected, or even as a gorilla who has almost but not quite mastered the human art of drafting.

The gorilla-as-artist belongs to the tradition of *singeries*, or monkey pictures, in which the animal sometimes literally wields a brush. Often as not, this satirical convention has some autobiographical significance. In Gianakos's case, is the graduate with the B.I.D. degree from Pratt alluding to some personal failure as an industrial designer? More generally, the panoramic painting of gorillas called *Class of '83* may be meant to suggest that such near misses and miscreants on the evolutionary ladder shall inherit the earth. On the other hand, they may be no more or less meaningful than the 50th anniversary celebration of King Kong.

Like Chicago imagist Roger Brown (who also has a bumptious sense of humor, an early training in industrial design and a slightly sloppy approach to painting-as-mockup), Gianakos chooses 1930s and '40s imagery seemingly to recapture the intensity of his childhood sensations. His "Chubby Girls" series of six paintings (1981) goes through sexist, classist and ethnic jokes to arrive at *Chubby Girl Tidal Wave*, which seems to summon up a boy's appalled response to menstruation.



Mel Kendrick: Untitled, 1983, wood, 17 ¼ by 9 by 7 ½ inches; at John Weber.



Steve Gianakos: Gorillas #10, 1983, ink and colored pencil on paper, 40 by 60 inches; at Barbara Gladstone.

When in the "Chubby Boys" series (1981) we encounter a canvas called *Chubby Boy Shell Portrait*, we can only wonder if this is not Gianakos's view of himself as a pudge with a slight lisp.

The latter image is probably as close as Gianakos comes to outright self-mockery, except that his own ethnicity may be at stake in the group of six paintings collectively called "Greek Mythology" (1983). There, in the recurring motif of two Greek boys dressed in national costume and viewed from the seat down, we may be seeing a kind of serial autobiography. The series seems to move from the artist's beginnings in *Two Greek Boys Stuck in New York* (in which the boys' legs are entwined in a fire hose) through his ambitions to be an artist in *Two Greek Boys Museum Piece* (in which the boys' legs become broken marbles in an exhibition case) through a puerile fixation stage in *Two Greek Boys with Small Cocks* (in which tiny roosters cluster around the boys' pom-pommed slippers) to his deliverance as a playboy in *Two Greek Boys on Water Skis*. So much for machismo, nationalism and ethnic pride. Gianakos has lampooned us all in the course of his comeback.

—*Brooks Adams*

Kenneth Noland at André Emmerich

The best-known of Kenneth Noland's work comes from an artistic golden age—the 1960s. Think of it: Louis, Kelly, Noland, Held and Stella, all together in the Jewish Museum's 1963 "Toward a New Abstraction," then in all the textbooks, and finally circling the globe with color-field and hard-edge painting—for a while, anyway. Will we look back at the early '80s as the time when Schnabel, Salle, Cucchi, Clemente and Chia emerged, with sudden brilliance, on the scene? Not quite the way we look at the color-field and hard-edge era, perhaps, mainly because Noland, Kelly and Stella all bespeak a classicism—a modern American classicism that, one suspects, we won't soon see again.

Classics or not, painters have to keep painting. Held and Stella certainly have adjusted to changing times. One question in approaching the new Nolands was: has he evolved too?

The answer is a qualified yes. Although Noland is still painting in translucent washes, and his works retain a geometric format, he has introduced subtleties in both. For one thing, he's using shaped canvases that look like big, lopsided rectangles. For another, he no longer has a horror of the painterly. The irregular purple, pink and green stripes of a work like *Push* are still near-translucent acrylics, but the gray haze of thick brushstrokes at the center of the painting can only be described as impasto. There's more impasto in the dark blues and grays of *Flame*, and in *In-Vital* the lime greens are delicious as well as sensual.

Noland can still be submitted to formalist scrutiny and walk away with all the prizes. His brushed stripes, for example, sometimes reinforce, sometimes contradict, the elegant irregularities of the