

that once again Kiki Smith is back in stride, and that her posture has taken on a much more contemplative note, one which focuses on her own psychology. In this body of work, Smith utilizes the body as a repository and metaphor for the wide range of human thoughts, fantasies and emotions.

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## Portraits By Ingres

Image of an Epoch

The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
through January 2

BY JOEL SILVERSTEIN

**Y**EARS AGO I HAD A teacher at Pratt who would say, "What makes art great is the difference between this and this." He would then move his finger one degree. Well, this one degree: specificity, acuity, the implication of delineation, recalls Ingres' old dictum that drawing, is the probity of art. Formally, psychologically and historically, the portraits at The Metropolitan cut through those Beaux Arts rooms like a blast of fresh air.

Ingres has never been an easy figure to assess. Even though the practice and memory of his draughtsmanship passed whole heartedly into Modernism and his example passed into Academic figure painting, Ingres himself remains distant. The flip side of Delacroix' Romanticism, Ingres is usually brushed off in a single word, Neoclassic. Seen through this prismatic lens, Ingres is old-fashioned, unable to see the changing world around him, one who narrowly clung

to the past.

Well, it's an unfair judgment that underestimates Ingres' influence and his achievements of innovation. This current exhibition spans 165 works of both painting and drawing. While Ingres practiced portraiture, his greatest emotional investment was in his history painting and odalisques. Yet, it was his portraiture that was universally praised by conservatives and radicals of every persuasion. Portraiture was a way for Ingres to garner patrons, commissions and prestige. His portraits flattered the powerful and put money in his pocket, even in hard times. It was never his favorite thing to do. But, like Michelangelo's forced commission of the Sistine Chapel, it was a fortuitous subject matter that brought together all of his interests within a contemporary framework. One at which he truly excelled.

When a sitter is envisioned by Ingres, he or she is a subject caught within a matrix. Two very different ways of seeing are at play. One, is a bourgeois Realism that was growing during the Nineteenth Century. It is the Positivist language of the middle class that would be the impetus for Fox Talbot and Daguerre to invent photography. On the other hand, we have Ingres' classical idealism, a language perceived to stretch back to the Greeks through Raphael. It is the tension of these languages that sometimes make Ingres' subjects look like flies trapped in amber. It is also this tension, the constant shifting back and forth which determines their radical nature and their uniqueness.

To see Ingres' true range and breadth, examine these two portraits. The subject of *FRANCOIS-MARIUS GRANET*, 1809 was a friend and fellow artist. Granet favored the Dutch and Flemish tradition and painted medieval church interiors. Ingres

paints him as a Romantic hero holding a book in front of a grand Roman landscape. The drawing, although still overtly outlined, is complimented by richly modeled tones, like a Gericault or Corot. The tactile qualities of the background landscape and the sitter's cloak are generally not associated with the artist.

Conversely, *MADAME DE SENONNES, NEE MARIE-GENEVIEVE-MARQUERITE MARCOZ, LATER VICOMTESSE DE SENONNES, 1804* is classic Ingres. Ingres always seemed to reserve his greatest formal innovations, as well as his strongest personal obsessions, for his paintings of women. The sitter, a vicomte's mistress, radiates charm and sensuality, yet she is sitting in the strangest Mannerist space imaginable. A green-gold pillow piles up against the picture plane and frames the sitter in angles that would give Cézanne competition. The folds of the dress and draperies are initially derived from Greek sculpture, but transformed via Parmigianino and Pontormo. The composition should focus on the face, which is decidedly soft, but the delineation of the folds keep on protruding at odd moments, like some subliminal ballet. Although Ingres is well known as a draughtsman, his color can be very acidic. The woman is framed by a charcoal gray purple that is ostensibly a mirror. It contains a reflection which certainly doesn't belong to the sitter. The turned head of the reflection, frozen in stillness, was an example not lost on the youthful Edward Degas.

The portrait of *LOUIS FRANCOIS BERTIN*, 1832 is yet another achievement for the artist. Bertin, a newspaper man buffeted around by political upheavals, represented the ascendancy of the middle class into French society. He is huge, corpulent, solid as a pyramid and posed like an old lion. There's a new gravity in this

work; minimal color, stolid, proto-photographic realism. Bertin is not a good-looking man. We like him because Ingres says he is heroic and has weathered life's travails as a fighter. When it comes to posing him, Ingres switches back to a Neoclassic flattening of the right arm instead of projecting it out into the viewer's space. When given the opportunity, Ingres always truncated and flattened, creating a compression and a sense of contained energy. This, juxtaposed against the roundness of the subject's belly, gives the composition its sense of monumentality.

The four portraits of women in the exhibition's last room constitute a unique grouping. They were executed in the artist's mature years, and they offer testimony to his powers of invention which did not flag or repeat. The paintings are both utterly conservative, reaching back to a rock-hard conception of the past, while, at the same time, appearing proto-modern, projecting far into the Twentieth Century. Leave it to Ingres to manage this constantly shifting territory.

Themes evolving over a period of thirty years are here stated with utter precision and a strange self-containment. They have a polish reminiscent of Piero della Francesca, but polish to this degree can only be recovered through academic nostalgia.

These are powerful women, nobles, wives of the heads of state. There's even a Rothschild in the bunch. The reification of the past is placed upon an always impermanent present, in order to give it validity. Who, after all, wouldn't want to be represented as a Renaissance princess, or a Greek statue oozing authority and radiating wisdom? Ingres' work at this time was well loved and respected. Ingres himself always sought higher official position. Yet Ingres, the artist, had a

power of formal innovation that was prophetic and in a sense probably subversive. These four paintings are structured rather than lit naturalistically. The most prominent features are the subjects' dresses, which are as hard and resilient as ivory, or else flattened heiratically like playing cards. The skin is modeled as perfect form without any high shadowing or reflected light. All the heads are vaporous and in soft focus, so again there's a perceptual shift between the women's faces and their bodies. Two of the women have personalities, while two are merely rapid symbols.

The motif of the reflection as disembodied alter-ego reasserts itself again. Paralleling the contemporary German Romantic doppelganger, it actually presupposes a twentieth-century fractured psyche and Freudian unconscious.

So while Ingres simultaneously uses sculptured and flattening effects for official reason, he is inventing a whole new vocabulary for the contemporary art of his time. This is why so many artists were drawn to him. Degas took his line and the way he positioned figures; Cézanne appropriated the way Ingres architecturally structured planes, and Seurat his silence. In the Twentieth Century, Matisse heightened the color of Ingres' odalisques; Ingres' influence on Picasso is obvious. If you squeezed MADAME PAUL-SIGISBERT MOITESSIER, 1856 by the throat, Dora Maar would pop out. Closer to our own time, when de Kooning drew the young Elaine Fried, it was Ingres who was on his mind, and even Pollock engaged with Ingres in a clumsy fashion.

Objectifying the figure, indeed extruding abstraction from figure drawing is part of Ingres' legacy. However in recent years, the male artist objectifying the female via his gaze has come under attack by Postmodern

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artists and Feminists. Ingres is particularly vulnerable to these charges as his depictions of grace and beauty often exude suppressed sexuality and a kind of unconscious violence. But he offers something else as well: Since he believed that sublimity could be contained within an enclosed form, he also believed that this sublimity superseded any particular ruling class. By making these powerful women into art objects he actually undermines their authority, putting the artist's stamp on the final means of expression.

Nineteenth Century consciousness incorporated nature, transcendence through art, Classicism and the cult of genius. We may say, "Poor era that held to such illusions." In point of fact, however, our own Postmodern age has been notoriously deadlocked regarding the language of power, the use of a serviceable past, or the

development of artistic uniqueness through something that could be called expressivity. Ingres was known to be a serious fellow, but in the end the last laugh is his.

## Chuck Connelly

Lennon, Weinberg, Inc. through  
November 27

BY JOEL SILVERSTEIN

I AM AN AVOWED FAN OF CHUCK Connelly. I say this at the onset, as anyone who is a fan of Chuck's must be in the camp of 80's narrative painting and a kind of cartoony expressionism. If you favor the ironic, polished or slick, if you favor an abstract or a mechanical image, then Chuck Connelly is not the guy for you. I am, however, guilty as charged.

Connelly became noticed during the 80's when Martin Scorsese featured Connelly's work in a segment of the film *New York Stories*. The film revolved around a Malcolm Morley-esque character played by Nick Nolte. Although you wouldn't think it relevant, Connelly has always seemed a bit trapped by this image. Romantic by nature, Chuck uses globs of paint, smears wet paint on wet surfaces until it turns gray or dirty brown, and employs a visual vocabulary of dizzying proportions evoking the highs and lows of a toy manic-depressive. He's like those aging Baby Boomers that constantly discuss their inner child whether you want to hear about it or not.

If you look at this work cynically, his visual language seems about ten years out of date, obsessed with loss

and more than a little solecistic. But that's when he's good. The fun begins precisely because he's painting against the grain. He's not afraid to show the chaos of his emotional life partly masked by the cartoony declarative statement *sans* the calculated neutrality of Pop Art. His silliness has an autobiographical purpose. It's a fully formed statement which is uniquely merged with a history of figure painting.

The current exhibition uses visual images mixed with words. This tendency was present at his last exhibition at Alexandre de Folin Gallery, but here it is carried to a more satisfying state of completion.

*STOP*, 1999 employs a photo from *Life* magazine from the early 60's. British Bobbies are holding back a crowd of mostly female Beatles fans. The word "stop" functions as a translucent barrier for the police, here hyped up as Keystone Cops. The word doubles as a conceptual prop, making you ponder on the nature of limits. The black-and-white photograph is interpreted in browns, dark blues, a shot of red on a seminally skirted figure, a green yellow on a arm. Dashes of pinks hold the heads together in check. It's like a hasty Robert Henry or George Luks meeting Wil Eisner's *The Spirit* from the Sunday funny papers.

*FLIGHT 111*, 1999 is a blue-gray plane crash, a specialty of Chuck's, paralleling Morley's boats and planes. The dappled sky is studded with question marks as evocative as the Riddler from Batman, but these marks also function in the spatial system of Romanticism, conceptual cipher receding within a metaphorical field. Plane crashes and question marks translate into "Why are we here?" and "What happened?" Again, the joke partly obscures the pain. Who is the Riddler if not Junior's introduction to

Epistemology and Metaphysics?

*ALL ALONE*, 1999 is a highly complex and impressive work evoking El Greco's *BURIAL OF COUNT ORGAZ*, 1588. It is a large rectangular painting with an arched top. The artist's composition uses figures to amass and cascade across the sky in a Baroque contrivance culminating in a God-the-father type. Dead center is a *memento mori*, a photograph of the artist's mother, obviously taken during the forties or fifties. For us dwellers of the millennium, these were archaic primordial times and her beauty has a frail poignancy. Such photos are a typical keepsake or object of retrieval. At the bottom of the painting is a dark blue void with a row boat and a tiny red figure straining at the oars. The words "All Alone" in off-white paint complete the piece. Taken directly it's powerful, but a little tawdry. The words function like the closing titles to *Rocky and Bullwinkle*: "Don't miss our next exciting adventure!" They comment on and counter the work's iconography rendering an initial layer of irony, but then he is able to deliver a type of brushwork few people can articulate.

There's more. A series of small paintings that spell out "F-You and You Too." A stunning portrait of his wife who's surrounded by a gooey juicy red. Two tiny paintings of the artist and his model (a woman turning the corner, perhaps his wife again?) In an era of contained, easily reproduced images, Connelly's paintings are sculpted out of paint, and just a little bit off kilter. They lull you into the sense that we know this world of childhood and can feel comfortable here. His strength is that the more we ponder them, the more we know we are mistaken.

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