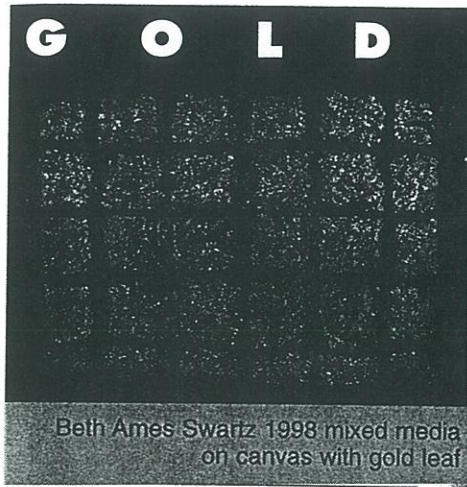


ignpeopled island to stare out to the ultimate space of the horizon...

G O L D S T A N D A R D



Beth Ames Swartz 1998 mixed media on canvas with gold leaf

Beth Ames Swartz Surrenders to Beauty

DONAHUE/SOSINSKI ART

Alchemy is a word used too often and too loosely today to describe the creative process. A found object or borrowed image recontextualized as an art commodity is, in current parlance, alchemy. Lead transmuted into gold. Few artists understand the term as Beth Ames Swartz does, however. The spiritual sublimation of the self through the act of making art has been a career-long pursuit of Swartz through years of studying Eastern philosophies and using this knowledge as the basis of her life's work. In the 1970s, with her *Fire Work* series, she combined the elemental forces of earth and fire as a metaphor for the eternal cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Later, in her painting suite, *A Story for the Eleventh Hour*, she conceived a life history to that of human development from origin to near-extinction and rebirth. In her latest body of work, the *Shen Qi Series*, derived from her growing discipline following a near-fatal illness, Swartz employs a range of imagery in symbols to Gabalistic pictograms, placed against monochromatic fields of gold or brilliant gold leaf. Objects can in an instant appear to float above the surface, then a moment later they are part of the tree of life or the concentric rings depicting the four worlds. Swartz's work is, as the ancient alchemists intended: as a metaphor for spiritual perfection, akin to enlightenment or total awareness. Unlike many Western artists who mine the wealth of the East, Swartz wholeheartedly believes in the wisdom of Eastern mysticism and surrenders to its beauty.

ROBERT COSTA

CHRIS COSTAN

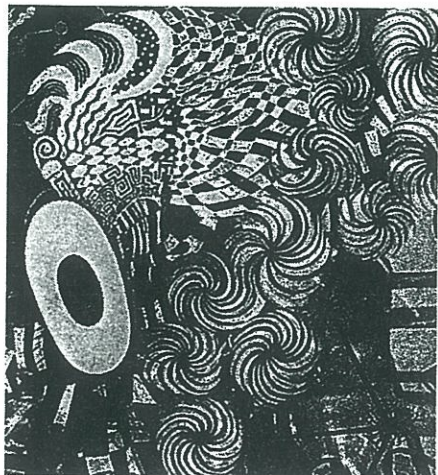
CHERYL PELAVAN FINE ART

Chris Costan began showing her work in the East Village during the 1980s. She's back in a very strong show at this Tribeca gallery. Despite ties to such artists as Terry Winters, Carroll Dunham and Beatriz Milhazes, Costan maintains a unique body of work, one flavored with nuance, edgy humor and duplicitous meaning.

Using the 80s technique of layering,

Costan employs visual material from complex decorative patterns, biological illustration and cartoons. What's mostly interesting and commendable in her work is how her sensibility turns on itself. Colors range from the limpid to the mushy. Forms are tears that become thought bubbles or exclamation points. Lines are ganglion or diagrams of neurological impairment. In paintings that are ostensibly abstract Costan is able to imply a palpably figurative subtext, one that points to the fractured nature of the contemporary psyche.

There is a probing intelligence here



Chris Costan *Twisted* 1996-7

held in check by good design sense, fun and more than a dose of Surrealist hysteria. It's as if the processes advocated by society: science, rationality, historicism and psychological integrity all unravel triumphantly before our eyes.

Costan's decorative is a place where things get caught. Be prepared. It's a slow burn that actually grows on you.

Joel Silverstein

ALEXANDER KALETSKI

DILLON GALLERY

In this time of trouble and tragedy, it is a relief to relax into the bold humor of satire, not as escape, but as wry knowing. Alexander Kaletski's mixed media paintings in his recent show entitled *Wallpaper Heroes*, shout out with the exuberant play of childhood and the courage of adult defiance.

Patterned fabric paper of lace over linen are the backgrounds on which are painted and collaged images of familiar people and gestures. A black swirling line of a microphone wire engulfing a white-suited Elvis Presley captures the energy, frenzy and self-obliviation of this iconic figure. President Clinton's back is to you as he is placed against a wallpaper of early American flags and eagles and hands with red fingernails.

Kaletski uses visually naive forms to make an ironic, sophisticated commentary on familiar archetypes and states of mind. A fiery red penetrates the flowered white face of the robes in "The Pope and the Fly." Surrounding his Holiness's blank stare is a dynamic abstract expressionist background. An emigre from Stalin and Brezhnev's Russia, Kaletski has been here since 1975, but to our benefit, the art of conveying multi-layered meanings polished during his formative years as an underground folk singer in Russia, are there for the seeing.

Marcia Newfield

UNRELATED

GALLERY X

Located in a charming Victorian row house in Harlem, Gallery X is one of the first in a new outcropping of galleries that are enthusiastically showing international and area talent. Director Gulsun Erbil has introduced five women artists in her summer show "Unrelated."

Elizabeth Agee's nighttime altars convey a mood of troubled history. Angels and old gate posts guard watertowers in scenes that evoke the melancholic flicker of urban noir combined with ancestral force. Her dryly scrubbed surfaces and somber hues further suggest a nostalgia

himself, "It's about loss, it's about loss."

A second man came in, obviously more in-the-know. He greeted the gallery people by name and said, "Love the shrine! Fun show! Witty!" They all smiled.

So, the exhibition is about loss, and it's witty.

Not only that, it's an enigma, as evidenced by the camouflaged puppet set up in the next room, by the cryptic marks on the blackboard entitled: *THE BLACKBOARD* ("NARRATIVE OF A CHILD ANALYSIS" BY MELANIE KLEIN). The press release notes that the exhibition is an "installation of often contradictory cultural 'evidence'" which perhaps explains the presence of the following objects: a TV playing Neil Diamond's *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother* along with a video of old snapshots of young boys; a fragment of someone's family room with a lamp knocked over (so different, so appealing, so original); and the door to a urinal with graffiti that says things like "Fuck me hard in my goat ass."

Whoa there!

The mystery deepens!

Well . . . something deepens.

But there's more! And certainly this is the exhibition to give symmetry to the modernist sentiment "less is more" by exemplifying how "more is less." The back room contains some quirky works on paper, not particularly memorable, but the viewer can't help but sense their profoundly bathetic connection to the blackboard imagery.

While there seems to be no visual or even conceptual core in this exhibition, perhaps the most illuminating work is a page from a calendar with numerous events marked on it, like "Mom died 1971" (June 18th); "Mary Ann died 1970" (June 22nd); "Sofa Reupholstered 1976, \$440" (June 26th). ***

No, wait, perhaps the visual center

is the large sketchpad shot through with a gun, an event which formed the core of this artist's intention as it left behind rather beautiful smoke patterns surrounding the blackened centrally placed bullet-hole.

When I left the gallery, a man stood peering at the flowers and snapshots piled under the gallery window. With a German accent and a worried look on his face he asked me, "What happened here?" "Nothing," I said. "Don't be concerned, it's just art. A sham."

I think that is the loss the artist was referring to.

**THE NEWSPAPER* ("TEENAGE TIME BOMB"), 2000, Roland Pigment prints on archival newsprint, Edition of 3.

***THE FORM* (SQUIRREL #A-46), 2000, mortician's wax, plaster, wood, carpet.

****THE CALENDAR* ("THE BOY CHRIST" BY WARNER SALLMAN), 1999, Fuji color print, Edition of 3.

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Elements 2000

Newhouse Center for Contemporary

Art through May 7

OIA Gallery through March 17

HEREart through April 8

The Cave through March 18

Silicon Gallery Fine Art through April 8

Ernest Rubinstein Gallery through

March 18

BY JOEL SILVERSTEIN

THE WOMEN'S CAUCUS FOR Art is offering a massive multi-venue exhibition, *Elements 2000*. It is mostly an installation

fest, mounted at seven participating venues in conjunction with the 88th Annual College Art Association conference.

Curated by Devorah Sperber and Jane Ingram Allen, the exhibition covers a lot of territory, but maintains a strong sense of itself. The exhibition's overriding conceit is that each artwork is composed of two thousand separate elements or more. The focus is on the concept of element in all its myriad permutations: as information, assemblage, building block, cell, conduit, iota, cubicle, point of obsession or repetition. It's related to every millennial fear or discontinuous fragment of consciousness you've ever had. It speaks to our simultaneous identity as organic beings within a scientifically based encoding system, as well as within an industrially designed society of modular interlocking units. The search for possible meanings and the puzzlement that these systems generate gives this exhibition its impetus.

The curators discussed the exhibition that would eventually total fifty-five artists. Finances were the first consideration. Installation could be made from cheap parts to fit any environment. Use garbage, low tech or industrial materials. For example, Marcia Widener's contribution, *TREE'S 1999*, is composed of organic shapes made from hand spun flax string. They extend from floor to ceiling, but when brought in for installation, they arrived in a five-pound box. "The whole show", says Sperber, "is a reaction against plop art. You know, you pick up the sculpture and you plop it here, or there. That's the context for traditional work, but we wanted to go beyond that."

The organizing aesthetic is that of Minimalism and Post-Minimalism. If we look at Donald Judd's metal and plywood boxes, there are certainly

of primary interaction. Ultimately, Judd wasn't creating an impersonal space, so much as a transpersonal one, articulating the values of society at large: reproducibility, absolute unflagging materiality and an Ur-text of experience provided by the industrial module. In this, a comparison has been struck to Andy Warhol's *Brillo* boxes of the same period. Commercial reproduction and industrial modular design are actually flip sides of the same coin.

In *Elements 2000*, Sperber and Ingram Allen have assembled a series of works using bits of detritus arranged at regular intervals. At times an obsessive-compulsive disorder, at times a scientific response to disconnection or an expression of neutrality. The analogy is to the language of scientific inquiry. The artistic process is likened to systems theory, where neither the parts nor the whole are of primary importance. It is the interaction of synthesis and analysis that achieves the required results.

Snug Harbor is tucked away in the foothills of Staten Island. Once an old sailor's home, it is now an art center comprised of many neoclassical buildings in various states of repair. Many Manhattanites have heard of it, but few have made the perilous journey across the river via Staten Island Ferry or car. It's a shame, because Snug Harbor has more space than it can use or pay for. The Newhouse Gallery has a sky-lit dome and extensive murals. It's a great exhibition in a unique space, a marriage that compliments and informs.

The starting pistol is sounded by Devorah Sperber's own *VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT I 1999*. Composed of thousands of spools of silk thread that glisten like the choicest of oil paint,

ENVIRONMENT I is installed in a niche that surrounds the viewer. An image of a rock wall coalesces, constantly shifting from concrete spool of thread, to color pixels within a larger format. Similar to Hans Holbein's *THE FRENCH AMBASSADORS, 1533*, where two courtiers stand between an abstract shape that snaps into an image of a skull, Sperber here plays with ideas of visual representation. She's dealing with how the eyes prioritize and define within the materiality of the abstract container. The installation has the weight of an Italian Fresco cycle. There are even bumper mirrors on the back wall to perceive the entire gestalt. They're not needed as it's an energetic environment without them.

The flip side of the exhibition's concept is derived from a long list of historic precedent: Neo-Dada, Alan Kaprow's *Happenings*, Fluxus, the early Feminist installations of Miriam Shapiro and Judy Chicago, even Arte Povera. There's an emphasis on the personal and political. It's framed by the use of discarded industrial materials that repeat in patterns. Kaprow for example, discussed installation's ability to resist commodification. The traditional arts were seen as bought and paid for by the art establishment and the Capitalist society at large. A happening, gesture or manipulated space was perceived by its very nature to be autonomous and transgressive. Jane Allen Ingram, an experienced artist curator, brings this line of reasoning into the exhibition. The balance of emotionalism/logic or even the distant echoes of personal pain resonate in some of the installations to enlarge the formalist vocabulary. It's as if she were playing Paul McCartney to Sperber's John Lennon, a mix that make them larger than their separate parts. It adds a complexity to a range of work that might have been phoned-in or

rhetorical.

There's Pam Cooper's hand-made paper constructions, *MOMENTOS 1999* that play out domestic dramas with transfers of family photographs. Pins are stuck in the image, rusting and creating intractable stains that mimic poisoned memories.

My favorites at this site are G. Jesse Sadia Jr.'s *SOCK MONKEY, 1999* and Jappie King Black's *COLLECTION OF PIECES OF 2000*. Sadia's piece is a wall-length tapestry of about eight feet, bravurely constructed using old glued envelopes. The image is then drawn with fire, controlled employing the utmost precision. The burns are rounded holes that miraculously don't shred. There is a slight distance between the tapestry and the wall, giving the holes a plastic three-dimensional quality. The holes form into the image of the title. I never really saw it as a specific reference, but it's not really necessary. A stunning pictorial and sculptural organization carried out with the barest ephemeral materials.

King Black's installation is made of kudzu and crocheted into organic figures: hands, masks, torsos, nooses, mummies, dolls, animals etc. It's a mutated steroid induced version of the *Blair Witch Project* demonstrating a primary power, a symbolic interpretation of symbol and nature. Echoes of diverse cultures: Egypt, Latin America, Afro-Caribbean Vodou, the historical witchcraft of Medieval Europe, resonate.

The next three sites are much less impressive than Snug Harbor and far more uneven. They may be enjoyed if you live locally or if you are making a point of seeing all seven participating institutions. P.S. 122 is presenting three small pieces by Katie Seiden.