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## Art in Review

By THE NEW YORK TIMES

GENESIS, I'M SORRY

Greene Naftali

508 West 26th Street, Chelsea

Through Aug. 10

“Genesis, I’m Sorry” is a group show in flux. Since opening, it has been the site of dance performances and a concert by the No-Neck Blues Band. Artworks have been added and subtracted. And last week, the coup de grâce: works by at least 45 artists were added to the show’s original dozen, and the space was strung with a web of white twine. This final transformation was orchestrated by the painter Josh Smith in tribute to one of modern art’s most famous exhibitions, the 1942 “First Papers of Surrealism” in New York, which Marcel Duchamp turned into a supersize cat’s cradle with a piece called “Mile of String.”

The famous photograph of this webbed installation is persistently startling, so it is no surprise that a version of the real thing is deeply weird and disorienting — especially as Mr. Smith seems to have doubled the amount of string. The space is navigable, empty yet almost full, and very spatial. Every molecule seems linked, and the act of looking is stretched and splintered in all directions at once.

The art on the walls is visible, as if through some kind of weather or natural vegetation. Getting close enough to see the works — mostly small paintings and works on paper — requires much stooping, lifting, stepping over and tacking this way and that. In other words, it is a kind of test. The string renders literal both the challenging nature of art and the fear of not being able to meet the challenge, and so remaining cut off from aesthetic experience.

The selection of works, made by the artists themselves, is wildly varied. A slacker abstraction by Michael Saint John hangs near a still life by Anne Craven. Megan Lang’s tough little circular canvas (five black stripes on white) looks down on Tiffany Pollock’s painting of lounging teenagers, one examining the back of her thigh. One of David Scher’s fine-lined drawings hangs next to a messy abstraction said to be by Mr. Smith’s godson (if so, greatly influenced by his godfather).

Sam Pulitzer’s shadowy but precise collage is one of the show’s finds, as is Rebecca Rainey’s

lavishly embroidered fur sphere and Kerstin Brätsch's handmade but infinitely reproducible book of fruit and vegetable images. Nearby, Jackie Saccaccio contributes two uncharacteristically compact and vibrant abstract paintings, while the art historian Bettina Funke exhibits a photograph of the original "Mile of String" installation and a copy of Mr. Smith's e-mail message inviting artists to be in the show.

In the two galleries without string, work from the original exhibition is on view: beautiful, nearly abstract color photographs by Patterson Beckwith; slightly squeamish-making ones by Rudolf Schwarzkogler; and a particularly subtle (color-wise) example of Gedi Sibony's formalist recyclings. But the real star in this area is the riveting nine-minute video by the German painter and musician Kai Althoff, titled "Kolten Flynn's," which adds to his list of skills dancing, miming and just making extraordinary faces and gestures.

ROBERTA SMITH

DUSTIN YELLIN

Robert Miller

524 West 26th Street, Chelsea

Through Aug. 10

If one definition of artistic success is that a work makes you look at it intensely, Dustin Yellin's art succeeds. But exactly what you look at in his work — a certain freakish and dumbfounding skill — qualifies its achievement to the point of failure.

On first glance, Mr. Yellin's pieces look like various natural specimens suspended in chunks of almost clear resin, like flies in amber. Tall columns seem to contain long, twisting spirals of different kinds of colorful algae, curling and floating like feather boas. Smaller pieces seem to contain snakes, a starfish and other reptiles or insects.

But look more closely and everything starts to come apart, especially if you examine the pieces from the side. This angle confirms that the specimens are nothing but paint (or ink) — that is, a series of delicate strokes applied at different levels in the resin, which is poured layer by layer until everything adds up to the illusion of a three-dimensional plant, animal or bug. The layers of acrylic resemble stacks of glass slides, each contributing a thin cross-sectional slice to a whole that remains dissected.

In a sense Mr. Yellin's work has to be seen to be believed; but once seen, it needn't be seen again. There is a superhuman aspect to the actual making of these pieces, but extreme skill is no guarantee of profundity. Mr. Yellin's work may appear to blur the boundaries between art and science, but in fact it reinforces them and makes you feel the absence of both, keenly. His work is highbrow kitsch. ROBERTA SMITH

CECI N'EST PAS ...

(This is not)

Sara Meltzer Gallery

525-531 West 26th Street, Chelsea

Through Aug. 17

Is the art world your whole world? This cleverly conceived group show, organized by Rachel Gugelberger and Jeffrey Walkowiak, assumes that it is and holds a mirror up to it. Everywhere you turn someone is either selling something, talking about how to sell or worrying about not selling.

The come-ons start with a sign by Alejandro Diaz on the gallery door reading “Naked Artist Inside,” which, like most promotional promises, doesn’t deliver. Sales are already in progress in the gallery’s first room, where David Kramer is hawking his own handwritten posters, individually priced at \$18.95 plus tax, with a complete set of 30 going for \$500. And the rest of the show is a sort of extended career how-to workshop.

Pablo Helguera walks us through the dos and don’ts of productively navigating a gallery opening. (A drawing by Peter Coffin suggests that when in doubt conversationally, you should just keep saying yes.) Laura Parnes, in a short film titled “The Real Art World, Episode 3,” dramatizes the studio visit as a klutzy back-lot seduction. On the assumption that your career is now in place, Michael Smith gives lessons in organizing group exhibitions of your own work, while Tamy Bendor offers a portrait of the artist-in-residence as a sinecured Someone from hell.

If nothing else works, flattery might get you somewhere. Jude Tallichet sends out passive-aggressive valentines to art-world heartthrobs — John Currin, Richard Prince, Jeff Koons — in the form of small wool rugs. Jennifer Dalton turns images of high-rolling collectors into high-ish art. Then there is flattery through imitation, though timing is important. Terence Gower butters up Barbara Hepworth and Reynard Loki bows to Jean-Michel Basquiat. But, alas, neither object of adulation is around to return the favor.

Inevitably, one hears disappointed mutterings. Neil Goldberg gives a slide show of masterpieces, his own, never finished because — well, who knows? Cary Leibowitz, a seasoned whiz at professional self-defeat, indulges in some brazen name-dropping, but the names are either obscure or a little off in an art context ([Liza Minnelli?](#)), and lose what cachet they have by being printed on giveaway coffee mugs. Finally, abandoning any pretense of subtlety, Michael Lindeman gets back to basics, making paintings entirely from self-advertisements.

Is there no escape from this scrambling insiderness? Christopher K. Ho and Troy Richards sell getaway vacations, but they are all customized to appeal to art stars. So you’re stuck, which no doubt art-world lifers like just fine. If you are one, or just want to study the species from a safe

distance, this is a show for you. HOLLAND COTTER

## PALISADENPARENCHYM

Danese

535 West 24th Street, Chelsea

Through Aug. 17

Like many things academic or art-related, palisade mesophyll sounds more imposing in German, where it becomes the protractedly compound (and capitalized) Palisadenparenchym. The term refers to the tissue layer in plant leaves where photosynthesis takes place. Plants appear here as both motifs and metaphors. Matthias Meyer's painting looks like an eerily lighted version of Monet's lilies. Chris Lipomi's wall assemblage with a carnival mask nestled in a wooden bowl bordered with ivy is a provocative attempt to blend art and kitsch. Marcel Odenbach's two collages on paper look from a distance like blown-up wood grain or plant cells; up close they register like Dada photomontages packed with possibly important (but mostly unrecognizable) historical figures.

In Peter Coffin's "Untitled (Shared Refraction/Reflection)" a potted plant is read a list of colors from a CD titled "Music for Plants." Christian Holstad's knitted blob of a sculpture, "Organic Soil (We'll Make Great Mud)," employs both wool and hand-dyed human hair.

A small room off the main gallery is lined with drawings and diminutive paintings by emerging artists, including Markus Knupp, Delia R. Gonzalez, Isa Melsheimer, Jeff Davis, John Kleckner, Scoli Acosta, Lutz Braun, Nico Ihlein, Andreas Hirsch and Christain Weihrauch, in which the plants are more phantasmagoric, yet pointedly conjure up human society and weed-choked dystopias.

So why is the show titled in German rather than English? Perhaps because it was organized by the gallery's associate director, Daniel Schmidt, a native of Cologne, and includes a high quotient of German artists. Or maybe it just sounds more impressive.

## MARTHA SCHWENDENER

JIM SHAW

The Donner Party

P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center

22-25 Jackson Avenue, at 46th Avenue, Long Island City, Queens

Through Sept. 24

Given enough historical distance, even gruesome tales of survival, starvation and cannibalism can be refashioned into arch comedy. Such is the case with Jim Shaw's "Donner Party" from 2003, which is being shown for the first time in an American museum. The work merges the saga of the ill-fated Donner-Reed Party, westbound settlers trapped in the High Sierras in the winter of 1846-47, with Judy Chicago's benchmark feminist installation "The Dinner Party."

The central element is a ring of miniature covered wagons that mimics the dining table in Ms. Chicago's work. Dozens of women collaborated on the place settings in "The Dinner Party," and Mr. Shaw has recruited artists to make 27 assemblage sculptures with items purchased in thrift stores: outmoded hair dryers, hand-mixers, answering machines, foot massagers, toy sewing machines and Barbie dolls. Some are fancifully retrospective, like a "Spiral Jetty" made with Cheerios or an electric iron that recalls Man Ray's "Gift" but is adorned with fur appliqués.

Curving around one wall is a painted landscape panorama that takes into consideration how much the American West has changed in the last 160 years; an Arby's restaurant, Circle K store and Best Western motel are in the foreground.

Adjacent galleries display paintings, photographs and a video that relate to Mr. Shaw's invented religion, Oism. Some of the photographs look like absurd dramatic stills from 1940s productions of Greek tragedies; the video is a deadpan sendup of initiation rites that implicates everything from organized religion to fraternal lodges.

"The Donner Party" is the main draw, however. And although it may seem like a work based on sick, twisted, juvenile humor (all right, it is, but that's Mr. Shaw's allure), the work also contemplates how myths — national or, in the case of Ms. Chicago, individual — are forged and perpetuated. It serves as a cautionary tale for taking the myths too seriously. MARTHA SCHWENDENER

## LATE LIBERTIES

John Connelly Presents

625 West 27th Street, Chelsea

Through Aug. 24

One can't help but agree with Augusto Arbizo, a curator of "Late Liberties," that it's hard to find a place for abstract painting in today's art world, driven as it is by a market enthralled primarily with the new and the blue chip. The artists selected for this show, all of whom deploy abstraction, have thus positioned themselves between a rock and a hard place. Exploring the tried and true is risky business.

Some of the pictures nonetheless push abstraction's envelope. Although Tauba Auerbach reaches back to the arabesque patterns of William Morris wallpaper in her ink drawing, she also inserts

refreshing forms that look something like futuristic camera lenses. Carrie Moyer's blobs made from washes of rainbow color and glitter grew on me. And Michael Zahn's "in and out (not up and down)," a grouping of pastel canvases in a Minimalist vein, has a reduced Super Mario Brothers aesthetic à la Cory Arcangel.

A number of the works, however, look back rather than forward. Alex Kwartler's Constructivist studies in black rehash, or rather remix, Constructivism. Mr. Arbizo's Rorschach paintings, while dreamy in a 1970s kind of way, don't add much to the long conversation about this image type. Dana Frankfort's "GUTS (yellow/gold)" is indebted to [Julian Schnabel](#) but lacks his exuberant brushwork and compositional skills.

It isn't the quality of the art, however, that holds this show back. It's the curatorial premise of putting abstraction back into a formalist box. There will always be a place for great painting (abstract, figurative or otherwise), but the days of the abstract avant-garde are gone. BRIDGET L. GOODBODY

ASHER B. DURAND

(1796-1886)

Dean of American Landscape

National Academy Museum

1083 Fifth Avenue, at 89th Street

Through Jan. 6

For this exhibition, a handy coda to shows of Asher B. Durand's works at the [Brooklyn Museum](#) and the [New-York Historical Society](#), the National Academy has borrowed eight major 19th-century American landscape paintings from the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield, Mass., most of them never before shown in New York.

The first part of the show couples those works with a pair of large early allegorical Durand canvases from the collection of the academy, of which he was a founding member. The paintings, by artists like Rembrandt Peale, Thomas Hotchkiss, Frederic Edwin Church and Albert Bierstadt, emulate Durand's pastoral subjects, botanical detail and balanced compositional style, demonstrating his widespread influence. The Church work, "Valley of the Santa Ysabel" (1875), pretty much rocks this room.

The second part of the show combines paintings and graphic works by Durand from the academy's collection and archives summarizing his career and diverse accomplishments: he began as an engraver, became a portraitist and then turned to landscape art. The highlights here are early paintings of woodland scenes, a theme that Durand pioneered in American art but that was later

adopted by Bierstadt as his own. There are also portraits and some fine etchings, interesting for what they show of Durand's early career and ambitions. But for real insight into his importance in American art, you have to go to the Brooklyn Museum, where "Kindred Spirits: Asher B. Durand and the American Landscape" is open through Sunday. BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

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