



THE INTERIOR SELF

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No matter how you define Expressionism it means the artists are putting a maximum amount of “self” into their art, as much passion and emotion as it can hold. So, it ought to be simple enough — three generations of Expressionists, one group in their sixties and seventies, another in their forties and fifties, and the last in their twenties and thirties — each reflecting its time frame. But it isn’t simple at all.

Carmen Cicero, a member of the elder group, has much in common stylistically with Michael Robbins in the younger one, whereas Terry Rosenberg and Lesley Dill, the youngest artists in the show, share a dark, romanticized, 1940s and 1950s Expressionist style with Miriam Beerman from the upper end of the middle group. Irving Kriesberg, Robert Beauchamp, and George McNeil, who were mature painters with established reputations in the fifties, all paint with sun-bright, hot, “neo” hues. Then, as if the situation weren’t sufficiently complex, Bill Barrell’s work is related to theirs, but not to the others in his group. Frank Young and Barbara Smukler have aspects in common with the age groups on both sides of them, but not with the members of their own. All they seem to have in common is their passion.

Despite a forty-two year age difference between the youngest and oldest artist, all of the work is full of energy. All parts are in motion; all brushwork agitated. Whether actually improvised or only creating the semblance of improvisation, the paintings, and even the sculpture, carry a high emotional charge. There is nothing cool or restrained about any of it. For the older generation, a long and powerful commitment to the spirit and the tenets of Abstract Expressionism has been crucial to their esthetic. When they broke with abstraction to embrace the figure in the fifties, they remained obsessed with the physicality of the paint. As Kriesberg put it, they shared

a readiness to let the spontaneous action of the brush constitute the structure and the subject of the painting. George McNeil literally finds his image in the swirl and flood of paint which covers the canvas . . . [and] in another way, Robert Beauchamp does that too, imbedding his linear images into the matrix of swirling paint. My pastel drawings, done very sponta-

neously on paper flooded with turpentine, are triggered by an image seen as a mirage on the glistening surface.

This tradition was also maintained by Bill Barrell in his accident-based incorporation of collage and even assemblage in his paintings. It was honored by Frank Young, Terry Rosenberg and Barbara Smukler as well. Their imagery emerges in the process of painting; it is freewheeling and spontaneous. Interestingly, Dill and Beerman’s dark expressionist fervor, like the lighter version by Cicero and Robbins, belongs to a much older, pre-Abstract Expressionist and premeditated way of working. These artists generate energy through dynamic compositions, jarring colors and hyperactive surfaces. Their process seems highly conscious, though the actual start of an image might have been as accidental and spontaneous as the others.

They share a vibrancy, at times a near-demonic energy, but these eleven artists split into two schools of thought on the issue of humor — between the artists who let life’s more humorous aspects into their work, and those who don’t. Unexpectedly, this split occurs between the generations right in the middle. Aspects of humor, though admittedly often black, are present in the work of McNeil, Beauchamp, Cicero, Kriesberg and Barrell. They are almost totally absent in the work of Young, Smukler, Dill, Beerman, Robbins and Rosenberg, whose Expressionism sometimes approaches morbidity. The younger generation harks back to the very beginning of the century, to the somber German, Italian, and French Expressionism of Vlaminck, Kokoschka, Soutine, Rouault and beyond, to van Gogh. They are Romantics pouring out their souls into the work — as, of course, all Expressionists do — but their eyes aren’t jaundiced, their hearts aren’t steeled with irony. As Barbara Smukler puts it, “I deal with the “eternals” — life, death, the struggle. My intent is to force the painting upon the viewer — to make an impact.”²

The older generation wants the same effect, but they are necessarily dealing with accumulated complexities which demand equal time, and they want to express the humor in some of the contradictions which result. In 1983 John Russell assessed George McNeil at the age of 75 saying that it was “his particular achievement that he has mated a sense of the human comedy with a mode of painting that has

more often been associated with introspection." But when Russell added that "the dark night of the soul plays no part in these paintings," that "McNeil sees the world as a place in which people kick up their heels as often as they can," he was oversimplifying the artist's complex mentality. McNeil is trying to express both states of mind at once.

McNeil has been a practicing artist for more than fifty years, and during that time he has seen dozens of painting approaches and used many of them — from Stuart Davis' brand of Modernism to Hans Hofmann's, from geometric to the loosest, most expressionist forms of abstraction. He put together his own aggressive figurative style in the late fifties, and has practiced it ever since. One figure, usually female, fills the picture space, dynamically activating the negative units formed by its configuration. Paint is thick, often crusty; colors are intense, with clashing red-greens dominant. Hot yellows and sweet blues counterpoint these hues and black often lurks in the background. The paint is applied with brushes, palette knives, sticks and fingers. It is splattered on, scumbled, gouged, scraped and scratched on. Rarely is it smooth, and upon some recent occasions, it has been augmented by fibers (strands of mops, in fact) affixed to the surface.

McNeil is in constant dialogue with the great Expressionists of the past, such as Emil Nolde, Alexej von Jawlensky, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. He is also on speaking terms with practitioners of some of the most recent forms of direct expression as well — the graffiti artists of our subways and streets. A Picassoid face with its conflated profile, a Matissean bather, a demonic Nolde-like dancer, an outlined Salle-like "ghost" figure or a bit of subway-style bubble lettering — any and all might turn up in one of McNeil's paintings and blend right in. Since the mid-seventies his figures have "increasingly expressed negative states such as absurdity and anxiety," he has said, in order to deliberately provoke psychological effects in the viewer. "Expressionism seems to demand extremism: to distort, disturb, negate and agitate seems to be the name of its game."³

The head of the figure in *Waiting* is grossly enlarged and twisted 180 degrees out of normal alignment. Encircled by colored dots and dashes like an electric halo, the head stares heavenward, as if searching for signs of deliverance. Center left a large hand flattened against the picture plane



GEORGE McNEIL: *Immoderate Man*, 1985, Acrylic on canvas, 78 x 64"



IRVING KRIESBERG: *Red Dance*, 1983, Oil on canvas, 66 x 90"

seems to hold the world, perhaps reality, at bay, while the mind seeks salvation in the realm of the unearthly, of imagination. (Does the hand relate to ancient native American mica hands and the handprints in pre-historic rock sanctuaries?) The figure seems poised on the edge of infinity, starry blackness a huge void behind. *Immoderate Man* also seems to be perilously perched on the edge of an abyss, this time a fiery red one. All around the edges of this flame-orange pit small figures clamor for him, entreat him, and jeer at him as if to either seduce or coerce him into temptation. One blue-headed fellow at top gives him the "high-sign" to follow him into perdition, but the *Immoderate Man* knows death awaits him there for his head is already a skull, wide-eyed with terror. It seems he has seen what price he has to pay for the things he has grabbed with his gigantic swollen, grasping arm. That arm, a perfect fusion of formal

plasticity and what McNeil calls "ideational sensateness," is like the arm of the fisherman in Picasso's *Night Fishing at Antibes*. It is heavy with guilt.

Skulls and skeletons in a mad *danse macabre* also feature frequently in Irving Kriesberg's newest paintings. In *Red Dance*, four grinning, grimacing skeletons, their arms linked, wildly kick up their heel bones against a smoldering sky on a grassy sward between a few amputated tree stumps. Clearly we are meant to think of Matisse's ecstatic *Dance* in the Museum of Modern Art and to compare its clear blue sky with this charred brown one and those healthy pink bodies with these x-ray visions of the body's ultimate state. The completion curve made by the arms of the leftmost figure, the linkage across the shoulders of the three figures to its right point directly to the Matisse as well. But Kriesberg's dancing skeletons are also funny;

their manic glee is charming. They have the kind of “slapstick, folkish humor of the American cartoonist”⁴ which he shares with Red Grooms, Philip Guston and some of the Chicago School “graduates.”

Kriesberg was, in fact, born in Chicago and trained in art at the Art Institute, though that was long before the advent of the Chicago “monster school” and the Hairy Who. The Bentonesque style of his early years became more expressionist after he spent three years in Mexico, where the emotional violence of that country’s contemporary painting affected him strongly. Although he remained apart from the Abstract Expressionists after moving to New York, his work was exhibited along with theirs during the fifties. It was semi-abstract then and was presented in unusual multipartite, double-sided formats, which allowed the viewer to determine aspects of the composition. Religious themes were often present even before his year-long sojourn in India during the mid-sixties when he became intensely involved with mythology. He developed a panoply of humanoid, animal and bird personae which has remained basic to his pictorial world ever since. These creatures are both familiar and strange, funny and serious, real and fantastic. From canvas to canvas, they carry on a disjointed but continual dialogue with each other about life’s mysteries, and almost seem to exist independently of their creator.

End of a Dream is dominated by the large skull-head of a white-skinned simian creature who coldly and grimly surveys a brutal Crucifixion. Three vultures lurk in a tree at the left having finished picking the flesh off Christ’s purple bones — or waiting to do so. Kriesberg has said that “those dream images are meant to express some mystic order,”⁵ but the violence of this image seems relevant to a time when political tortures, hostage-taking, and terrorist bombings abound. The brilliant hues and marvelous passages of his painting enable one to see the lighter side of the situation to some extent, though the humor is decidedly black. George McNeil once wrote of Kriesberg that he “exacerbate[s] form and color into ideational significance . . . [and] exploit[s] ambiguity, absurdity, and other psychological negatives.”⁶ He might have been speaking of himself as well, of course, but he gets at the heart of Kriesberg’s acrid and penetrating style.



CARMEN CICERO: *Provincetown Princess*, 1984, Acrylic on canvas, 84 x 72"

When Carmen Cicero first returned to figurative painting after years of geometrical abstraction, he did so with a vengeance, and slashing paint conveyed violent imagery — racial and sexual confrontations, weapons and skeletons. The subject matter seemed appropriate for an artist who lived on the Bowery and saw inhumane dramas played out daily. But even the Bowery is beginning to be gentrified and Cicero’s life is less of a struggle than it was. His recent paintings reflect these changes. *Longing* and *Provincetown Princess* both express sexual desire — a desire that seems unfulfillable either in the daytime or the moonlight. The female is on the horizon of an uncrossable sea, being viewed from afar, by us from behind a large rock in one case, and by her lover in the other. But these are gentle, bittersweet emotions, and the paintings are lyrically elegiac.

Cicero's method of painting has changed recently too. His first, very expressionist paintings were literally painted over the hard-edged work of the previous years. He painted those stripes and planes out so vigorously it was as if he were wiping out his past. But working that way gave him something to work against; pre-givens to start a chain of actions and reactions. Currently he is working in acrylic from studies. The give-and-take Abstract Expressionist process whereby the image is discovered in the act of painting only happens in these studies. The final large painting has a more finished appearance as a result. Working in acrylic, which dries fast, necessitated this change; working in oils had been too slow a process for him on the large scale. Cicero's new way of painting goes hand in glove with his turn toward quieter subject matter. Interestingly the new semi-surreal imagery fits comfortably in the context of recent neo-Expressionist painting.

Robert Beauchamp also had a studio just off the Bowery when he moved to New York in the early fifties. He found the Bowery experience difficult to bear and it had a strong effect on his work.

I remember one day I'd been painting abstractly in my studio, being very pure. As I left my studio, I saw six bums, half-dressed and passed out on the sidewalk, their pink flesh exposed to the hot sun. It was disgusting. Living on the Bowery and seeing all that human pain, all that waste. I went back to the figure and have been painting it ever since. I wanted to paint the figure, flesh, heads, trees - things that meant something to me.⁷

Beauchamp had been a Hofmann student and was deeply committed to Hofmann's concept that spiritual experience could be transmitted by purely plastic means. He has since remained true to the Abstract Expressionist methodology. When he starts working he applies paint with as little conscious control as possible. In the process of reacting to what's there, imagery begins to assert its presence and to demand emphasis. A circle will turn into an eye or a breast; a line in one direction that demanded another pushing elsewhere will suddenly be a pointing hand; a large light-toned



ROBERT BEAUCHAMP: *Untitled*, 1986, Oil on canvas, 54 x 86"

area will seem appropriate when turned into a female form, and so on.

One can be fairly certain that when he began his 22nd painting of 1986 (untitled) he wasn't planning to make the left side into a dark, tragic-looking clown and the right side into a pink-fleshed nude female with red hair and sorrowful eyes. The child, unusual in his oeuvre, must have surprised him as much as it does the viewer. His goofy, Skee-zix hair and Mickey Mouse ears place him at the opposite emotional pole from the profoundly moving sadness of his parents. The clown-father is positively Rembrandtian and yet he has an animal-like quality as well – his mane, ruff, and bared teeth complicating his human qualities. Many narratives could be read into this picture, most of them without happy endings.

In the last decade Beauchamp has been obsessed with tragedy, particularly his brother's long illness and death, which has been the subject of canvas after canvas. He searches his own face in the picture-mirror for signs of decay, and he projects family members on the pictorial screen for scrutiny as well. Grandpa Snoozy with his oversized schnozz, hairs sprouting from every wen, is a particular favorite. He appears again in his 30th painting of 1986 (untitled), his nose a veritable rainbow of wavy colors. This time he is a wind-up toy in a hairy shirt sporting a giant orange bow tie. The perfect hemisphere of his bewhiskered cheek is echoed in the smooth full curves of the black girl on the right. Her geometry is so perfect she looks like an African woodcarving, and, in fact, his organization of the whole picture into rectilinear areas is uncharacteristically geometrical. A white-faced man who looks more dead than alive fills the left third of the canvas, seated in a red uniform, epaulettes in place, his bony blue hands crossed in his lap. The seriousness of his demeanor, especially his deeply sunken dark eyes, imply introspection and non-participation. This time narrative possibilities don't flood the mind. The painting is enigmatic on every level and one doesn't know whether to laugh or cry with it.

Bill Barrell was a junior member of an influential group of figurative Expressionists in Provincetown that included Beauchamp, Jan Müller, and Bob Thompson. They developed a primitivizing style there in the fifties, characterized by glowing stained-glass color. It featured fantastic ani-

mal-bird-human hybrids, witches and saints set somewhere in nature. Barrell's *Child Killer* 1984, still shows evidences of these influences. For example, the red color of the killer, the brown-red of the naked woman running from the rear, and the use of African tribal masks to configure some of the faces hark back to Thompson. Barrell's subject matter includes racial violence, a subject which would never find a place in the mythical dreamworlds of Müller and Thompson, no matter how haunting they might be. Müller would depict a *Walpurgis Nacht*, but not genocide.

Barrell has always been committed to the realities of life around him—street life, his family, political conditions. He went through a long period of incorporating actual trash from the city streets — dirt, flattened tin cans, papers and umbrella parts — into his paintings. In some paintings however, only a few passages of clotted pigment or streams of dripped paint corruscating over a tarry black surface remind us of this more urban-oriented side of him. *Night Garden* is full of dark mystery. It feels like the back gardens of Provincetown in the middle of a summer's night when shadows create a screen over reality and a woman's whispered voice can seem as compelling as a siren's call.

Though Frank Young is an artist from the generation after Abstract Expressionism, the generation that matured in the cool-tempered sixties, there is nothing cool about his paintings. They are furious, and cry out with pain. He can attack the canvas in dozens of painterly ways, creating an overload of sensations, or else, as he has been doing recently, he can force his emotions through such a narrow funnel that only a few stark lines and one color can sear the image into memory. The eight-foot high screaming heads, the falling figures, rapes and crucifixions of a few years ago have recently given way to paintings of the utmost restraint, but it is a restraint so repressive it seems suffocating. The two paintings in this exhibition occupy a place half-way between the explosive violence of the early eighties and the present work.

Painting is catharsis for Frank Young. The events behind his depiction of a bowl filled with soft grayish stuff can be too excruciatingly personal to write about here, but the viewer can sense the importance to the artist through his assertive drawing - presentation of the bowl, its size, and its placement. *I Didn't Want to Know* can also be titled "He



BILL BARRELL: *Child Killer*, 1984, Oil on canvas, 59 x 85"

Didn't Want to Know" if and when the artist wants to direct attention away from himself, but the bowl still looms large, overwhelming the I/he/she *personnage* to the left. Androgynous figures people many of Young's canvases, not, one suspects, in relation to his own sexuality, but as a statement in the Duchampian sense; acknowledging the duality present in us all. Legs extend downward from the torso, but no head protrudes above. Perhaps it is all head, like Magritte's torso-face, its breasts the eyes, its genitals the nose, and the space between its legs a gaping mouth. (It may be worth noting that the heart shape can be a sign for either male or female genitals, and is used that way by the artist.)

As a symbol, headlessness is rife with complex significance and one doesn't have to be as immersed in psychoanalysis as Frank Young to know that. As with a lack of arms,

it can indicate helplessness, but it also comments upon intelligence, or rather its absence. Brutality and amputation are surely implied in the *Diptych*. Meant, as he once said, to be the ugliest odalisque in art history, the female form in this painting is twice amputated - head and feet are stumps. Even the sure hold of the body on its breasts is challenged, yet the breasts are still there and are the obvious focus of attention. Only the swelling shape of the hip and buttock is lovingly handled.

In contrast, the cool languor of Ingres' *Odalisque* in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art with its grisaille coloration is a far cry from Young's reclining female which becomes the object of violent love/hate. The closest depictions to it were Picasso's, in the twenties, and then again late in life when he dealt with the full force of frustration at his inability to ever completely conquer or possess



FRANK YOUNG: *I Didn't Want To Know*, 1985, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 108"

the female.

Generic inhumanity of a less personal sort is the subject of Miriam Beerman's paintings. In fact, the canvases in her first one-person show in 1969 were cited as belonging "in the tradition which stretches back from Lovis Corinth through Goya to Rembrandt, the tradition of using face and figure painting as a kind of meditation on the deepest and not always most pleasant aspects of human nature and human destiny."⁸ Her images are as content-readable as those of such "humanists" of the forties and fifties as Abraham Rattner and Ben-Zion, but her painting methods are closer to those of the Abstract Expressionists. And unlike those particular "humanists" who symbolized the horrors of the holocaust with Biblical scenes, Beerman comes right out and depicts the beast with its prey. In *Holocaust II* the demented bird-insect-human monster tries to bury the little white heads of its victims while a terrible fire rages in the background.

For many years Beerman substituted animals for the human element in her pictures which at least one reviewer

said "gained [her] a broader view of humanity."⁹ The moving hopelessness of the plight of the fish in *Dutch Still Life* gives some indication of her enduring interest in animal forms and her abilities in handling this imagery despite her return to the figure. The flailing human-like arms of the crab, the pathetic eyes of the fish, the desperate attempt of the ray to escape through the tormentingly close window, all combine to create a metaphor of imprisonment and the necessity for liberty. Indeed, the red-nosed human seems dwarfed by the lively display on the table. All in all, it is a caustic comment on the whole tradition of the still life as economic indicator on the one hand, and as *memento mori* (reminder of death) on the other.

Barbara Smukler's loose facture and aggressive manner with the brush is not far distant from Beerman's style, but her subject matter is less specific in what it represents. The tumbling figures in the painting *In Utero* are supported in a matrix of pigment that stands in for the viscosity of amniotic fluid. Adrift in a field of forces they are helpless to control, the couple doesn't even appear to find much sol-

ace in each other's company. In *The Garden* "Everycouple" (clearly Adam and Eve) bow as far down as possible cowering in fear as they scurry away from the faceless force above them. But perhaps one shouldn't read these works so closely. The artist believes that:

The success of the paintings depends on their independence of the idea. They must evoke more feeling than thought. The painterly qualities of color, brush stroke, thickness of paint, all function to produce a continuum of vision. The paintings insist on your being with them over a period of time. Aiming at the emotional state, the paintings create something powerful that you can walk into and be engulfed by.¹⁰

Black and gray dominate these canvases which seem lit from within by an erratic, flickering fire. They are as much drawn as painted, but that is changing in some of her most recent paintings which are richer in color and less dependent on black to define forms.

In the seventies, Smukler had been working with pure color in high-key lyrical abstractions. They were hard-edged paintings, usually of vertically-oriented stripes, with color interacting across abutted edges. Her bipartite compositions developed into two figure-like forms after 1978, when she began to search for newer, more meaningful imagery. Between 1982 when she moved to New York and the spring of 1986 when she showed her work at the Kenkeleba House, Smukler went into self-imposed exile from the art scene. Away from the public eye, she felt free to experiment and to develop a personal world of images and content. Much of it seems to have come out of her background as a dancer. "I use the figure to create an emotional and physical dynamic," she has written. "Out of that dynamic springs an intuitive sense of the mysterious forces that propel us."¹¹

Terry Rosenberg's figure drawings are all about dynamism and motion. The bodies whirl and spin so fast they seem on the verge of flying apart into fragments. One is reminded of Boccioni's *Development of a Body Space* one minute, Rodin's *Iris* the next, and then the torsions of Michelangelo's *Sibyls* a little later. All these sculptural references are perfectly natural since Rosenberg is also a



MIRIAM BEERMAN: *Holocaust II*, 1986, Oil on canvas, 52 x 60"

sculptor. An early reviewer of his work said that his "dynamic sculptural approach" allowed him "to move far away from naturalistic representation while still retaining the character of the human figure."¹² But sculpture is inherently slower than paint or ink, and less tractable. Rosenberg's material is leather, cowhide in fact, but since he came out of a background in clay, the smooth surface, sharp edges and neutral color of the leather retain some of the qualities of clay.

Whether sculpted or drawn, Rosenberg's figures are heroic and rather frightening presences. They loom menacingly, draw back austerely, and dip their heads like judges denying recourse. Totally non-communicative, they nevertheless seem to be in control. One is put in mind of robots, gigantic and faceless, but massed powerfully against us. The surface of their bodies is both skin and armour; the



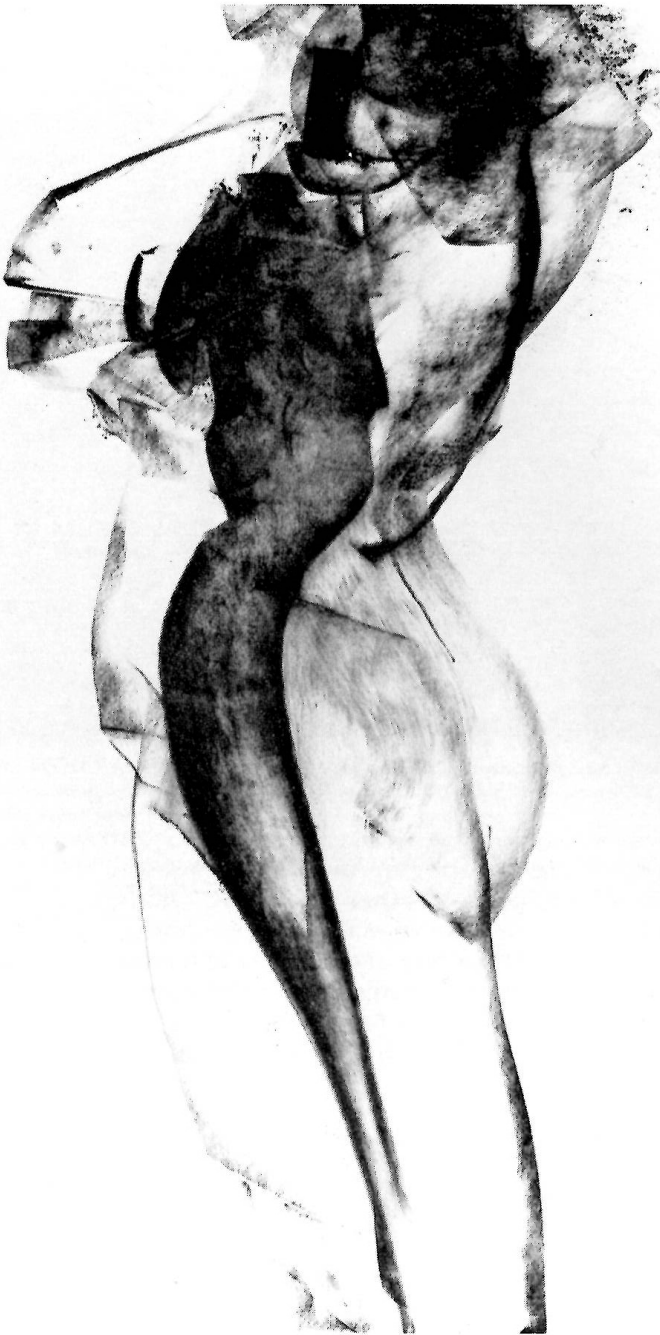
BARBARA SMUKLER: *Mind Shadows*, 1986, Oil on linen, 96 x 72"

shape of their heads both bone-structured and helmet-like. Usually no physiognomy is actually visible, but the wall-hung sculpture in this exhibition has two enormous hollow eyes which funnel back in the head to unfathomable depths. The creature is all head, the torso being tattered off into the air below the shoulders. It appears uncharacteristically vulnerable, like a wingless, legless insect. Unlike his curvilinear figure drawings which resemble battle scenes of some sort, his oil stick drawings of ranked "armoured" figures and their cowhide counterparts don't seem to have any source in art history and they are all the more effective as a result.

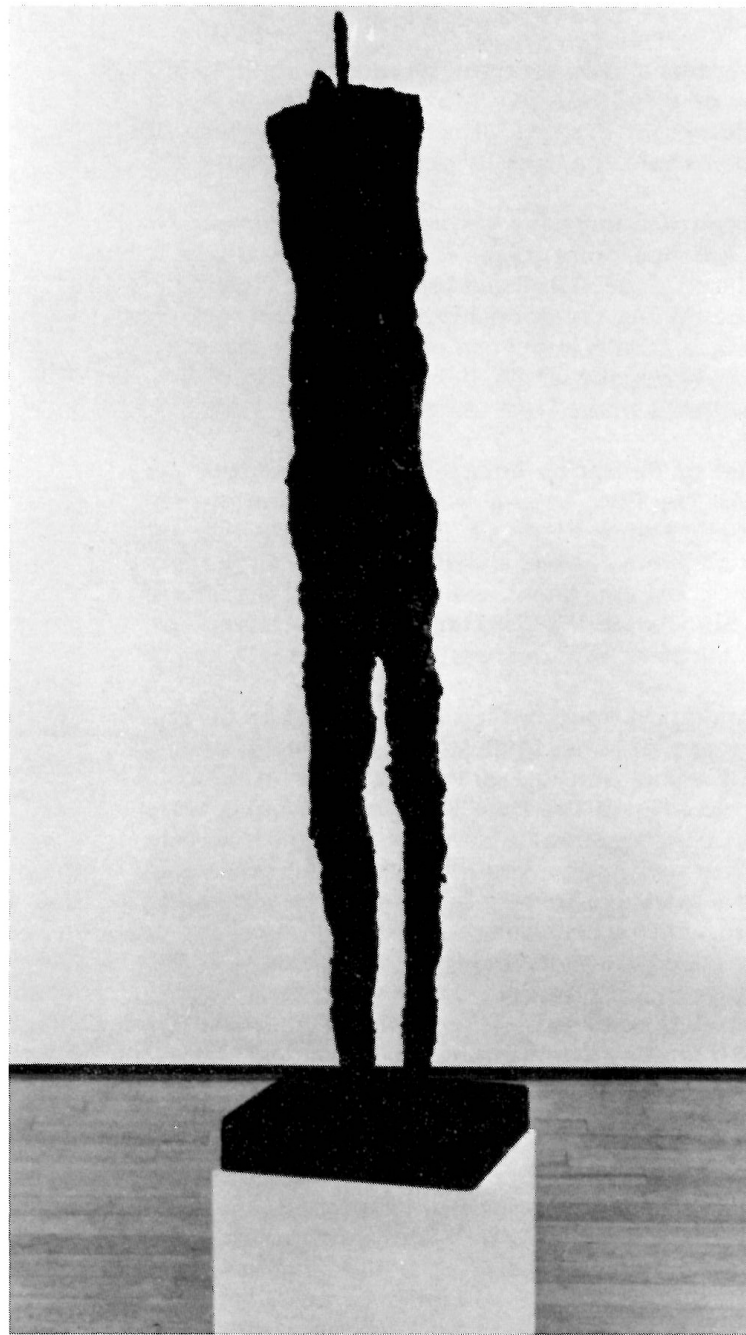
Calling himself a "Romantic Sensationalist" Michael Jed Robbins says he's "hoping to take the world of the futurists one step further."¹³ He is a moving observer, taking snapshots from bicycles, motorcycles, rooftops and sidewalks;

he later uses these photographs as the basis of paintings. His deep fascination with physical motion and change (even the movement of changing light intoxicates him), stems from childhood experiences in the family Pontiac which he thought of as a time machine. He felt most alive in the periods of transition between departure and arrival, and as an adult, he recaptured those epiphanous moments by racing bicycles, riding motorcycles and driving trucks.¹⁴

Shadow Street combines both kinds of sensation - motion and change - in four vertiginous images arranged in a checkerboard fashion. In the upper left panel one looks down at the shadow cast by the moving biker and the reflection of building tops and sky in a puddle by the curb; in the panel diagonally opposite the biker speeds uphill, apparently to his doom. The abrupt end of this biker's road creates a decidedly de Chiricoesque feel. The two other



TERRY ROSENBERG: *Untitled*, 1985, Charcoal on paper, 28 x 40"



LESLEY DILL: *Man with Fin*, 1986, Oil on concrete, 56 x 12 x 9"

panels, lower left and upper right, have a completely different point of view. Here we look up into the sky past golden buildings in the late afternoon, the moment of change Robbins calls the "zenith" and describes as:

Precise poetry, a lingering before the sky turns into night, a balance point, clear thin color amazingly encapsulated, especially in autumn's chill air, clearer, sharper, beginning a relationship, in elation and complete ecstasy, totally about romance, moving on perfect jewels like a fine watch, being in the center of a bridge, which is where I like to be."¹⁵

A Scientist of Sensation Looks To the Year 2000 . . . Steven Klein, *The Portrait* is a more static painting than Robbins usually paints. Klein is a "beatnik buddy" he met in 1976 when Klein ran an ahead-of-its-time art gallery from his 4th Street apartment while working at the Strand Bookstore. Somewhat of a visionary, Klein is pictured "on the edge of another consciousness" in the radiant light of a nuclear blast.¹⁶

While working on this painting, Robbins had on his studio wall a picture of James Dean strolling down Broadway, and next to it, a shot of a nuclear explosion test in Nevada. Both occurred around the time Klein and Robbins were born. James Dean, the ultimate romantic hero and martyr to speed, nuclear annihilation, and the end of all sensation, make natural partners in this hyper-energized painting field. Robbins may work from pre-selected imagery rather than finding the image in the paint the way so many of the other artists in this exhibition do, but when he is putting paint on canvas his ultimate art hero, van Gogh, definitely seems to be his main inspiration.

It is characteristic of this youngest generation of artists that they admire the heroes of modern art who have been out of fashion until lately, in part because of their frankly expressionist and figurative styles. Lesley Dill, for instance, seems strongly inspired by Giacometti and even perhaps by Lynn Chadwick and Leonard Baskin. Dill's extremely flattened and emaciated figures like *Man with Fin*, a work constructed of paint over cement, have the same roughly-worked, gouged and graven surfaces as Giacometti's bronzes. She exaggerates the attenuation or



MICHAEL JED ROBBINS: *Say You Saw Me on Shadow Street*, 1981, Oil on canvas, 72 x 72"

the protrusion (in the case of the fin) for the same reason that she multiplies body parts in other works - to create images with the force of primitive fetishes. The psychological effect of the distended fin is one of exposure, of having let something loose. The artist is "interested in the idea of exposed personal intensity and transformation [which] the figures embody through a rupturing or adding to of the centralized body form." The body changes are traumatic but also liberating.¹⁷

Because of their blackened, rough surfaces, Dill's sculptures have an anonymity of medium. They could be bronze or wax, wood or rock. She uses whatever material gives her a sympathetic underpinning for the image that seems to want to emerge. When she paints she uses wax mixed with oil, which, once spread on the canvas, is incised to create reverse drawings, light on dark. The procedure is similar to the reductive or subtractive one of sculpting. In this way,

air and light enter into the body of the sculpture or penetrate the canvas depths. Blackened surfaces also can seem burnt, implying some terrible ordeal. A sense of anxiety is conveyed; an existential trembling on the brink of disaster or death. Even the large head with its set jaw facing into the wind that has swept it into an extended, flattened plane is nothing more than a profile. Having no extension into depth, its hold on physical reality is tenuous at best.

These three generations of Expressionist artists all confront the existential dilemma daily. Giving form to inchoate matter, both physical and ideational is a matter of making decisions. George McNeil puts the situation this way: "Whether form is achieved by careful structuring or by spontaneous improvising, where does art value reside if not in the shaping of its elements...As Matisse stated at about 1908, art expression lies in the total organization of all pictorial elements and not in facial distortion."¹⁸ Because Expressionists boldly perform these acts of organization in front of the viewer, they give us access to their deepest feelings. Because we share those feelings, we have access to their art.

by April Kingsley

1. Excerpted from a letter Kriesberg sent to a friend which he copied for the author in October 1981.
2. Statement in press release for November 1986 exhibition, Jayne H. Baum Gallery, New York.
3. George McNeil, "One Painter's Expressionism," catalogue statement in *George McNeil, Expressionism 1954-1984*, Artist's Choice Museum, September 22 - November 10, 1984.
4. Kriesberg letter.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Robert Beauchamp, "Self-interview" *Robert Beauchamp: An American Expressionist*, (Syracuse, New York: Everson Museum of Art, 1984).
8. Gene Thornton in a radio review of her exhibition at the Chelsea Gallery.
9. Cindy Nemser, *Art News*, January 1972, p. 10.
10. Smukler statement.
11. Smukler statement.
12. Alan G. Artner, "Rosenberg's figures add up to a fine solo exhibition," *Chicago Tribune*, Friday, November 26, 1982, Section 3, p. 11.
13. Michael Jed Robbins, artists's statement, August 27, 1986.
14. Information from Desiree Koslin's unpublished article about Robbins' at Sragow Gallery 1986.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Lesley Dill, statement in press release for Paulo Salvador Gallery exhibition, 1986.
18. McNeil, Artists Choice Museum catalogue, p. 8.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Bill Barrell
Night Garden, 1984

oil on canvas
59 x 85

Lent by the artist, courtesy Ingber Gallery

Child Killer, 1984

oil on canvas
54 x 85

Lent by the artist, courtesy Ingber Gallery

Robert Beauchamp

untitled, 1986

oil on canvas
54 x 86

Lent by the artist

untitled, 1986

oil on canvas
50 x 46

Lent by the artist

Miriam Beerman

Holocaust II, 1986

oil on canvas
52 x 60

Lent by the artist

Dutch Still Life, 1985

oil on canvas
60 x 72

Lent by the artist

Carmen Cicero

Longing, 1985

acrylic on canvas
72 x 84

Lent by Graham Modern Gallery

Provincetown Princess, 1984

acrylic on canvas
84 x 72

Lent by Graham Modern Gallery

Lesley Dill

Man with Fin, 1986

oil on concrete with wooden pedestal
56 x 12 x 9

Courtesy of Carlo Lamagna Gallery

Man with Head Extension, 1986

oil and wood with wood base and pedestal
31 x 49 x 3

Lent by Barbara and Gary Brandt,
Courtesy of Carlo Lamagna Gallery

Irving Kriesberg

Red Dance, 1983

oil on canvas
66 x 90

Lent by Graham Modern Gallery

End of a Dream, 1982

oil on canvas
75 x 65

Lent by Graham Modern Gallery

George McNeil

Waiting, 1986

acrylic on canvas
78 x 64

Lent by the artist

Immoderate Man, 1985

acrylic on canvas
78 x 64

Lent by the artist

Michael Robbins

Shadow Street, 1981

oil on canvas
72 x 72

Courtesy of Sragow Gallery

A Scientist of Sensation

Looks To The Year 2000 . . .

Steven Klein, The Portrait, 1985

oil on canvas
75 x 75

Courtesy of Sragow Gallery

Terry Rosenberg

untitled, 1984

cowhide
102 x 36 x 19

Courtesy of Bette Stoler Gallery

untitled drawings, 1980

(nine pieces)
oilstick on paper

40 x 30 1/2 each
Courtesy of Bette Stoler Gallery

Barbara Smukler

The Garden, 1986

oil on linen
96 x 72

Lent by the artist

Mind Shadows, 1986

oil on linen
96 x 72

Lent by the artist

Frank Young

I Didn't Want to Know, 1985

acrylic on canvas
72 x 108

Lent by the artist

Personage, 1985

acrylic on canvas
72 x 96

Lent by the artist