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Art in Review

Published: August 10, 2007

Correction Appended

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This is a cool, materially buoyant summer show with a dark chaser. About half the work is sculptural, in the way sculpture is now defined, as all but inseparable from other forms. A hinged panel piece by Shane Aslan Selzer adheres to a traditional free-standing folding-screen model, though its decorative implications are belied by its materials: a stainless-steel framework filled with stretched sheets of fire-repellent "emergency foil."

Kerstin Brätsch's stacks of plexiglass sheets serve as display shelves for handmade books, themselves mini-sculptures with perforated pages pierced by metal rings.

Amy Yao's approach is also accumulative. She lines up several spare sculptural elements, sometimes paired, along a wall: a half-painted dowel, a broken clock, a hank of fake hair, sheets of glass pinning a torn piece of newspaper in place. The results are like a free-associative poem that can be read in either direction.

Sam Moyer's sculptures exist in photographs of industrial lighting fixtures arranged in fields at night. Beautiful. And her pictures complement the folding abstract forms in Patricia Treib's oil paintings.

The back gallery is entirely given over to David Benjamin Sherry's tenebrous photographs, some Goth-spooky; others with luminous splintered patterns, like mandalas; still others dramatizing a twilight-zone eroticism. We've seen work like this before, but not quite like it, a huge distinction these days. HOLLAND COTTER

OLD SCHOOL

Zwirner & Wirth

32 East 69th Street, Manhattan

Through Aug. 31

In a city of museums fully stocked with old master paintings, why should anyone care to see lesser ones in a contemporary-art gallery? Because viewing a Brueghel next to a Holbein is one thing; alongside a Karen Kilimnik and a John Currin, something else.

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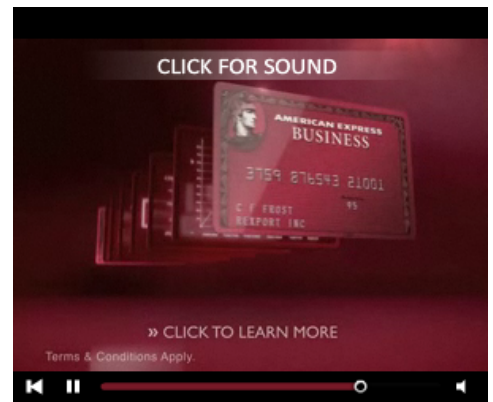
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This is hardly the first generation of figurative painters to “discover” the old masters. But where [Picasso](#) mined Velázquez, and de Kooning looked to Rembrandt and Rubens — mostly to resolve issues of space and composition — the contemporary painters in “Old School” are interested in what might be called the proto-Surrealist sensibility of art that explored fear, desire and fantasy centuries before Freud.

Anj Smith’s dark miniature with sinister monkeys, Jakub Julian Ziolkowski’s figure-packed battle scene enacted under a table and Hilary Harkness’s leggy vixens shipwrecked on a tropical beach all work alongside the Brueghels. (Jan Brueghel the Elder’s “Panoramic Landscape With Travelers,” with a large animal skeleton dominating its foreground, and Pieter Brueghel the Younger’s more sedate “Peasant Wedding Procession.”)

In the landscape arena, Djordje Ozbolt’s tooth-achingly bright vista pairs well with a hallucinatory version of “The Temptation of St. Anthony in a Landscape” by Jacob van Swanenburgh, as do anesthetized pastorals by Christopher Orr and the 16th-century painter Battista Dossi.

A painting attributed to the School of Caravaggio serves as a reasonable springboard for grotesque still-life reinterpretations by Glenn Brown and Mr. Currin. Portraits by Elizabeth Peyton, Wilhelm Sasnal, Michaël Borremans and Julie Heffernan complement Lucas Cranach, Caesar Boëtius van Everdingen and Jan van Noordt. (Ms. Kilminik’s “Satan as a Knight” doesn’t really count as a “portrait.” Its homage-to-irony ratio is consistent, however, with the tenor of this show.)

What is missing from “Old School” is the art history. Old master paintings aren’t just pictures, after all. They are religious tracts, sermons on morality and proofs of social status. In this context they are valued more for their wealth of weirdness and what they can teach a painter about creating mood, aura and ambience. But if you want art history, the Frick is only a block away.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER

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Correction: August 23, 2007

An art review on Aug. 10 of “A Vicious Undertow,” a film by Jesper Just at the Perry Rubenstein Gallery, referred incorrectly to another filmmaker whose camera work was similar. He is Max Ophuls, not his son, Marcel Ophuls, a documentary maker.

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