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"SELKIE," 2010, **Seth Koen**
Wood, 5¼" x 11" x 37"
PHOTO: COURTESY GREGORY LIND GALLERY

Francisco's Gregory Lind Gallery in a show titled "Narwhellian," has evolved from working with the medium of textiles, specifically crochet, into a sculptor working primarily with carved wood. The title, evoking both the worlds of George Orwell, and the unusual, horned whale, the narwhal, sets up expectations of quirky work with underpinnings in both philosophy and biology. Growing up in Maine, the artist lived near the sea, and there is a nautical side to the work, as well.

Selkie sits on a pedestal, a vaguely oven-mitt shaped piece of wood curving up with a slender, antennae-like protrusion about a yard long. "Selkie" refers to a mythical creature—a seal that may shed its skin to assume human form; we may envision this slippery form shifting into something else. *Medusa* and *Arachne* seem like twins—both similar in shape to *Selkie*. Aptly enough, drawing on the legend of a gifted weaver turned into a spider by a vengeful goddess, *Arachne* is sheathed in red yarn; a lengthy crocheted strand suspended and ending in an enlarged droplet. In each, a dangling portion concludes slightly off of the floor—lending them a certain tension and sense of expectancy. *Tusk* has perhaps the most personality of the bunch: the ledge-like shape curves down, but remains flat across the bottom, except for two short rods which point downward. While the title suggests a walrus, this very odd shape suggests an udder, but also, oddly, an almost a human presence.

Koen's earlier work seemed, in its flaccid, softer forms, to offer an experience of responding to one's suggestions. These works, while still yielding and appealing, seem more assertive, unwilling to bend as much to our whim. His statement

says "Sometimes I feel my studio tossing on the waves," and one can, indeed, imagine the artist, swaying from stem to stern, battening down hatches and getting things ship-shape, in expectation of encounters of an unknown nature.

—BARBARA MORRIS

SAN FRANCISCO
John Yoyogi Fortes:
"Parallel Boondocks"
at Jack Fischer Gallery

Eclecticism and hybridity may be common practice these days, but who would have thought that graffiti art, pop surrealism, and identity art (loosely defined) could combine as exuberantly as they do in John Yoyogi Fortes' paintings? Like his postcolonial colleagues Enrique Chagoya and Manuel Ocampo, Fortes employs cultural mash-ups to put a humorous and absurd face on the darker truths of imperialist history: his 2002 Triton Museum show, "Awakening the Sleeping Monkey," dealt



"IT SOUNDED A LOT BETTER BEFORE I SAID IT," 2010
John Yoyogi Fortes
ACRYLIC, ENAMEL AND COLLAGE ON CANVAS, 12" x 9"
PHOTO: COURTESY JACK FISCHER GALLERY

with the 1904 exhibition of 1200 captured (aka liberated) Filipinos, at the St. Louis World's Fair, as cannibals. Fortes has also, however, explored how family, memory and identity persist or change in the tumultuous modern world. In "Parallel Boondocks," he continues mining low-brow/comic imagery from newly met East and West for insights into the funhouse of modern consciousness. Fortes: "It's between the materials and me. It's about aligning that inner space where ideas flow freely and reveling in that moment where actions transcend language." The resultant paintings, with their layers of images and ricocheting meanings, are "map[s] to various levels of consciousness."

"ACROBATICS," 2010, William Harsh
MONOTYPE, 26¼" x 18¾"

PHOTO: COURTESY OF VESSEL GALLERY, OAKLAND

These maps are complex and ambiguous. *Runt*, a large diptych, combines beige, red and gray patches and swatches, some brushy and diffuse, others defined by hard edges, straight or scalloped, with loops, stripes, patterning and writing (manchica, or blot), and a bizarre cast of "actors": a naked, blob-headed muscleman posing atop a pedestal lying between female legs; a wooden duck's head, bearing a bird photo in its eye and sporting a brick-patterned frying-pan hat; a snake-necked woman's head emerging from an ovoid picture frame; and a cartoon dog head, scowling, with its eyes transformed into probing bloodshot pseudopods. Cartoon animals reappear in the non-rectangular diptych, *Repetition, Redemption, Relapse*, joined by figure studies reminiscent of David Salle's, but collaged here rather than painted. Smaller works (*Art is Evil, Punk, It Sounded a Lot Better Before I Said It*) function as funny (in both senses) cartoon portraits reminiscent of Jim Nutt and Roy De Forest.

—DEWITT CHENG

OAKLAND
William Harsh: "Morphologies"
at Vessel Gallery

In *Oration*, a ramshackle speaker's rostrum at water's edge heaves itself toward the viewer. The torqued perspective and inconsistent horizons, borrowings from Cézanne, along with the ambiguous day/night lighting lend the scene—panels, poles, scaffolding, and steps all rising and falling—an unearthly vitality, with the absent orator replaced by a serpentine bolt of cloth coiled around the stairway. In *Ice Age*, a similarly weird aggregation, here of ovoid wooden wheel, bristling intestinal or tentacular tarpaulin, stretched canvas, and stout tow rope, exudes a similar, disconcerting intensity and absurdity. Another oil painting, *End of the Line*, features a compacted wedge of ambivalent artifacts—door/drawer/armoire, mirror/window/painting, and plush armchair





"INCLINE #2," 2010

Mel Douglas

BLOWN, COIDWORKED AND ENGRAVED GLASS

13⁵/₈" x 14⁷/₈" x 14⁵/₈"

PHOTO: STUART HAY

COURTESY: BULLSEYE GALLERY

(or voluted Ionic column) that hunkers down on its sidewalk/plain like a battleship anchored just offshore.

Bay Area painter William Harsh describes the recurrent imagined structures in his paintings, monotypes and drawings as "jerry-rigged assemblies, sometimes fortress-like in appearance," speculating that they derive from childhood memories of repeated family relocations; indeed, the title of the show, "Morphologies," with its echoes of the surrealist Roberto Matta, suggests a similar pre-occupation with the mental states and metamorphosis. These works, however, have even deeper roots in modernist painting. Harsh, a former student of Philip Guston, has also studied Picasso, de Chirico, and Beckmann, and he synthesizes Cubism, Expressionism, Metaphysical Art and Surrealism in his depictions of collapsed ruins continually seeking to regroup and recover—not a bad metaphor for artmaking as psychic integration, an idea somewhat out of fashion these days. The Romantic ruin (Turner, Friedrich, Cole, and Ernst) is also, of course, a melancholy meditation on human limits and the power of nature, and thus perhaps relevant in the current ecological crisis. Other works exalt artmaking: some of the monotypes and drawings (*Acrobatics*, *Muffled*, *Cabana*) depict head-like or pillar-like structures resembling Chinese scholar stones, replete with picturesque piercings, mountain microcosms perfectly wrought by wind and water for the contemplation of the wise and philosophic mind.

—DEWITT CHENG

"ANCIENT AND LOST RIVERS: SHEBA," 2003

Terence La Noue

MIXED MEDIA ON CANVAS

66³/₄" x 79¹/₂"

PHOTO: COURTESY BUTTERS GALLERY

PORTLAND

Mel Douglas: "Eventide" at Bullseye Gallery

With a mark-making as fine-grained as the silica from which the glass is made, Mel Douglas inscribes the surfaces of her powerful if understated fused- and blown-glass works. Douglas sands the black surfaces of her panels and vessels to a matte grey, then engraves them with hundreds (sometimes thousands) of lines the width of a pinhead. On landscape works like *Open Field #6*, the marks are continuous parallel lines that when massed, create a curved shape that bleeds across three of the square panel's edges. On works like the giant egg-shaped *Unfurl*, Douglas inscribes the entire, sanded surface with marks that follow the elegant shape's simple contours, as if she were drawing the three-dimensional into two dimensions or recording a conversation between the artist's hand and the curves of the form. It's anti-bravado art in the vein of Agnes Martin who once said of one of her own works, "This painting I like because you can get in there and rest... the absolute trick in life is to find rest."

Because Douglas' works have a visual weight, a gravitas to them, they avoid some of the aesthetic hazards of work made with meticulous, repetitive mark-making; it's not obsession that's on display here, but a peaceful meditateness embodied in the works. They are, in fact, akin to stones that nature has smoothed by turning and turning them against one another in the surf, grinding their surfaces smooth. Yet, all is not stasis and quiet. *Incline #3* and its sister *Incline #2* imply action: these vase-like vessels, tilted at precarious angles, suggest with their curved bases impending swings in the opposite direction. With this show we catch Douglas not at "Eventide," as indicated by its title, but at dawn, as she too moves in a new direction with works of fused white glass. *Delineate*, which offers ghosted circles on three square panels, is notable for employing the intrinsic properties of white glass to minimalist ends that invoke both Martin and perceptual works of artists like Robert Irwin.

—LISA RADON



PORTLAND

Terence La Noue: "Recent Works" at Butters Gallery

As a much-anticipated follow-up to his memorable 2003 exhibition at Butters, Terence La Noue trooped out recent works on panel, providing a kind of missing link between the intimacy of his collaged drawings on paper and the ravaged, *Mad Max* grandiosity of his large works on unstretched canvas. As ever, the artist displays a knack for marrying scrawly representational and semi-abstract imagery with dots, chunks, swirls, squiggles, and Greek-key mazes in compositions that, for all their unrepentant maximalism, are counter-intuitively elegant in aggregate. In the droll *Paul Klee's First Mushroom* (2009), dense detail atop a largely black background contributes to a distilled richness verging on the claustrophobic. In *Cleopatra's Bath: Anatolia* (2009), garish teals and purples jostle with reds and van Gogh-like yellows in planks of solid color and heavily worked swaths that echo the grain of the wood underneath.

These works, which hover around 19"x 16", benefit from the contrast of being exhibited alongside two larger mixed-media paintings in the artist's more typical configuration: sprawling, unstretched canvases, irregularly shaped and strung up like tanned animal hides or Chinese robes. One piece, *Foraging for Truffles in Gubbio* (2010), is fresh from the studio, while the other, *Ancient and Lost Rivers: Sheba* (2003), is representative of work La Noue made at the beginning of the millennium. While the former deploys a darker palette and the latter a sunnier chromatic disposition, both are mash-ups of obsessively worked slices and tatters, borrowing liberally from the visual vocabularies of modernism and postmodernism. Art Brut? Check. Abstract Expressionism? Here. Splatter painting, Neo-Expressionism, "termite art" à la Farber and Saltz? They're all part of the arsenal, cobbled together in ways that in less assured hands might come across as hodgepodge but in La Noue's métier coalesce with just the right ratio of intuition to polish. To see this caliber of stylistic integration demonstrated in works of radically dichotomous scale is quite simply a treat.

—RICHARD SPEER

SEATTLE

Susan Bennerstrom: "Night and Day" at Davidson Galleries

For her seventeenth solo exhibition at Davidson Galleries since 1992, prolific representational landscape and interior painter Susan Bennerstrom presented 20 oils on panel and 11 smaller oils on paper. A poet of the haunted, empty residential space, Bennerstrom has attracted a considerable following, and has had exhibitions in Ireland, New Mexico, San Francisco, Santa Monica, and New York. The new work is