

October Picks



Lawrence Berzon, *Bent*, 1999
 Courtesy Caelum Gallery

So – my friend and I are driving around Williamsburgh the other day. We spot three trendy looking white people strolling up the block. He leans out of the car window and hollers, "Yo! Where's the art galleries at?" One of the three looks up at us coyly and offers, "Chelsea." Well anyway... over in Chelsea, Paul Rodgers' ghastly inaugural exhibition by Lucinda Devlin dwells on such lethal subject matter as could be found in the American prison system's extant death chambers. Shocking! Lawrence Berzon's second New York solo is at Caelum Gallery. He portrays figures engaged in repetitive, myopic tasks. A few of the works are in oil paint on linen and wood, other pieces are more sculptural; incorporating painted three dimensional cast resin elements. The narrative aspects carry over onto some of his frames as well. Dia center for the arts hosts British artist Bridget Riley's first U.S. exhibition in decades. She will display paintings from the 1960s and 70s. Her work focuses on shifting rhythms and patterns to form expansive Op Art fields. If, by chance, you missed Alice Neel's portraiture at the Whitney (as I did), we have another chance because a goodly selection of her later efforts is on view at Robert Miller. Uptown at Marian Goodman are two simultaneous exhibitions: bronze castings of trees by Giuseppe Penone which are somewhat reminiscent of Alan Sonfist's earlier efforts, and photographs and a video of modern youth in environments natural and not by Rineke Dijkstra. Although there wasn't any planned correlation between these tandem shows,

a case could be made that they are both studies of wild life. So sorry if you missed "small" at Joseph Helman Gallery. This timely exhibition was organized by gallery staffers Alison Abrams and Peter Ryan. Timely because it highlighted a trend of the last two years or so involving staged sets and miniatures, which are generally photographed, painted, or both. However, this show focused on Lilliputian, sculpted microcosms intended as such, with the exception of Drew Cline who would like to see a bigger version of his entry. The other artists were: Steven Brower, Jeff Burch, Robert Kalka, Peter Kreider, Rob de Mar, David Opdyke and Charles Simonds. You might still be able to catch Harvey Quaytman at McKee Gallery. Quaytman's work is pretty much the last word on minimalism. His (hard-edge) paintings utilize a cruciform structure to exquisitely define absolute abstraction. Well, wait a minute, the absolutely latest last word might be made by "Simply Complex: Monochrome Paintings from L.A.," organized by Reuben and Joan Baron for the Dorsky Gallery in SoHo. The show's intent is to demonstrate that there is more yet to explore in this sensualist, intellectual direction as demonstrated by Maxwell Hendler, Scot Heywood, Lies Kraal, Marie Rafalko, Roy Thurston, and Alan Wayde. And making the real abstract - James Cohan Gallery has melted lawn furniture and stuff by Ian Dawson. His work makes all sorts of comments about contemporary society, and looks pretty odd to boot.

Christopher Chambers



Robert Kalka, *Nature / Nature*, 2000.
 Courtesy Joseph Helman Gallery

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LAWRENCE BERZON

By Christina Saylor

Somewhere in the realm of suburbia, circus animals, mythical creatures and extinct species perform circus acts in three stacked columns upon a neatly-manicured lawn in front of a homogenous family home. A very ordinary squirrel sits on the sidewalk watching the curious display unfold. It is a moment of extraordinary circumstances occurring within a pedestrian setting and it is one of many such moments created by Lawrence Berzon. This particular episode evolves in *Myth of Performance*, a fantastical painting in dramatic colors on a canvas with disintegrating edges that leave the boundaries between viewer and painting fissured, a ploy which allows the layered reality to seep into the viewer's world.

Berzon's work is narrative art which utilizes multiple realities and the resulting possible transmutations to convey social commentary. This theme takes several forms. In some cases, the spectator is lured into a world inhabited by characters captured in moments of inner conflict or impending change. As Berzon describes these characters, they have become the protagonists from one state to another. Their world is littered with talismans of their consciousness, and through this commingling of realities, their predicament is communicated.

The idea of people becoming what they do for a living through day-to-day

repetition of their jobs is one type of entrapment that Berzon revisits in several pieces. Elements of the objects involved in the execution of employment-related tasks take on a life of their own and manifest in the character's appearance. In a monochrome relief entitled *Alligator Man*, a wrangler transforms into his prey. A full moon shines through the trees in the background shedding light on both his predicament and his face which has begun to grow scales. He paddles a boat filled with rope-bound reptiles through a drab world almost

tries on an ear admiring her new look in a hand-held mirror. The psychology of consumerism is further integrated in works like *The Trophy Store*. Where patrons can purchase accomplishments in the form of trophies like cash-and-carry dreams.

In a single canvas painting there is only one image to communicate a moving story. In explorations of achieving motion in art, Berzon has created multi-framed works to render the passing of time. In *Path of Least Resistance*, a tiny, c=sculpted proletarian figure creeps through two panels forming a subterranean channel. As the figure crawls, an effect successfully achieved through repetition, tentacular roots impede his path, feeding off his short-sighted choice and quickening the plants above. This piece achieves a kinetic chronology, a concept that Berzon continues to probe through long, thin animated panels that chronicle time in stop-action moments.

Berzon interlaces realities and investigates parallel worlds in a dramatic and vibrant manner. As the characters he creates navigate the ensuing peculiar microcosms, parables unfurl belying souls caught in self-made entanglements of lost identities or narrow goals. Whether it is ideas about the intertwining of realities, the transformation of the characters, or the passing of time that are delved into, the work of Berzon invited the witness into a realm where anything is possible.



completely colored in alligator green.

In many of Berzon's paintings,

The Ear Salesman, oil on panel, 11 x 14 inches

elements of the unreal and real intertwine to create dreamlike events in conventional circumstances. In *The Ear Salesman*, a door-to-door salesman displays a briefcase full of his merchandise over a living room coffee table to eager consumers sitting on a sofa. The merchant will sell anything, and in this case his product is human ears. With a taste for frivolities, the customers will buy anything, even unnecessary adornments. A woman