

MARCH 2010

ARTnews



LOOKING AT ART

**Wrestling
with Goya**

**Uncovering
Matisse**

**Posing for
Alice Neel**

**Jumping with
Yves Klein**

Chasing Calder



what architecture might be if only it could be freed from its everyday political, social, and economic constraints. Greg Lynn's *Blob Wall* (2007) is composed of interlocking bulbous shapes—a riff on the classic brick building—precast in colorful polymer. A collaboration among artist Matthew Ritchie, architects Aranda\Lasch, and the design firm Arup AGU turned complex mathematical formulas into a lacy aluminum sculpture that grows and spreads to envelop the visitor. Cerith Wyn Evans's columns, constructed from dozens of neon tubes, appear to be

tural representation than about architecture itself, it captures the fear and awe that once swirled about the plot of land.

—Helen Chang

Jean-Michel Alberola

Daniel Templon

Paris

"La sortie est à l'intérieur" (The exit is inside), read a striking vivid blue fresco painted on the gallery wall. This engaging riddle set the mood for this show of paintings, drawings, and neon pieces by French artist Jean-Michel Alberola.

Although Alberola first became known as part of the Figuration Libre movement that helped revive painting in the '80s, his work seems now to be more closely linked to Duchamp. Abstract passages, fragmented bodies, and texts ranging from enigmatic political slogans to existential prophesies combine to form indecipherable rebuses. Attempting to decode these puzzles

results in a shifting tension and sense of disorientation.

Celui qui sentimental (2009) features several gray faces linked by squiggly lines, hovering above a pink box bearing the word "communiste"; the smiling mouths and bulbous clown noses lend the work a cheerful air. In *Celui qui cy-*



Matthew Ritchie with Aranda\Lasch and Arup AGU, *The Evening Line* (detail), 2008, aluminium alloy and black epoxy with aggregate coating, 9' 11" x 19' 8 1/2" x 10' 6". Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary.

placed with the randomness of trees in a forest rather than with the order and purpose of structural engineering.

These are projects that make no attempt to meet the mundane demands of real buildings. They allude instead to a yearning for more organic construction methods. The results are technically stunning, yet few of the architectural objects incorporate the sort of narrative dimension that infuses buildings with purpose, and few distinguish art from design. François Roche and Stéphanie Lavau's *thegardenofearthlydelights* (2008), also known as *Toxic Garden*, is a rare exception. The project takes off from an actual Renaissance garden in Lopud, Croatia, and the rumor that monks had cultivated poisons there. In the topographical model of the site, the terrain is represented by regimented, hard-edged glass terraces, and the garden takes the form of a carefully nurtured green mold, which grows down over the terraces. While the piece is arguably more about modes of architec-



Jean-Michel Alberola, *Celui qui cycliste*, 2002, oil on canvas, 39 1/2" x 31 1/2". Daniel Templon.

cliste (2002), a sturdy shoe stands out as the rest of a man's body fades beneath a jagged blue rectangle marked with the Dadaist declaration "Donne moi de l'air" (Give me to the air). The exhibition also included a display of several large drawings in charcoal, pastel, and watercolor. In these, the sometimes cartoonlike figuration was especially appealing.

Fittingly the exhibition began in a rather illogical manner: the large wall in the gallery entrance was covered with a large, bright, graphic fresco stating "Reprendre la conversation" (Picking up the conversation where we left off)—right from the start blurring notions of beginning, middle, and end.

—Laurie Hurwitz

Simon English

Volker Diehl

Berlin

Simon English's new paintings mostly resemble collages. With a characteristic mix of charm and obsession, they integrate



Simon English, *Song for Drawing (Lucky Charm)*, 2009, oil on linen, 94 1/2" x 74 1/2". Volker Diehl.

references to poetry, authors, and music with allusions to friends and relatives.

Almost all the works here made use of an apparently endless variety of muted, fleshy neutral tones that softened the sense of conflict in the knotted imagery of fragmented forms, shadowy figures, and grotesque portraits. His style of "painted drawing" was exemplified by the opening work, *Song for Painting (Galloway)*, 2009. Emotional lyrics—"You are my first, my last, my everything," "I drew a line for you, what a strange thing to do," "What's this strange

relationship?"—wrap around cluttered images rendered with rhythmic little brushstrokes. These lines reveal the artist's loving and sometimes heart-breaking unrequited feelings toward painting.

For 16 smaller works, grouped together here, English homed in on single figures or actions. Some pieces are overtly erotic.

Release the Monster (2009) shows two men having sex; *Gangster Guinea* (2009), titled after the artist's 25-year-old nephew's late pet, is a rough sketch of a penis-shaped rodent. Victorian-style portraits underlined with simple labels such as "crook" and "head boy" come across as both tributes and accusations.

The texts on the larger works read like stream-of-consciousness rants that, like the pictures, offer a clash between sharp observation and flashes of fantasy and despair.

—Alicia Reuter

'New Acquisitions 2007–2008'

Louisiana Museum of Modern Art
Humblebæk, Denmark

Among this impressive display of recent additions to Denmark's most important museum of modern art were works by Tacita Dean, Julie Mehretu, Pipilotti Rist, and Ann Lislegaard, as well as by artists not often seen in American museums, like Eugène Leroy (1910–2000). The French master was represented by three strange dense paintings that, although ostensibly figurative, read as lyric abstractions.

The star of the show was native son Per Kirkeby, showing both sculptural works and several fine large paintings. *End of the World* (2001), an abstracted landscape in browns, greens, gold, and deep blue-black, acted as a sort of backdrop to 40 bronze models (1997), whose lumpy shapes, stretching across several tables, read like an alphabet of architectural forms. David Hockney's gutsy *A Closer Grand Canyon* (1998), in radiant magenta, stretched across the entire

back wall of the same gallery. Assembled from 60 small paintings, the work skillfully demonstrates Hockney's take on how we see: visual bit by visual bit. Completing the grouping of oversize contemporary landscapes was Peter



Peter Doig, *Music of the Future*, 2002–7, oil on linen, 78" x 118". Louisiana Museum of Modern Art.

Doig's *Music of the Future* (2002–7).

While painting took the spotlight, the museum did not shy away from difficult works, as the inclusion of Jonathan Meese's 2008 demonic portrait, *Dr. Metabolists (The Vampire Princess Is Sucking Your Metabolism)*, attested. The deliberately ugly work is a confusing collage of rubber gloves, tubes, and paint. Photographic works included Rineke Dijkstra's noteworthy paired images of young Israeli citizen-soldiers, female and male, and Al Taylor's funny and smart *All Thumbs* (1997). These marker-enhanced photos of the artist's thumbs were sophisticated on a modest scale.

Olafur Eliasson's work does depend on scale and vastness, and the wall-size projection *between inside and outside* (2008) doesn't measure up to his larger installations. But this was a small disappointment in a conceptually rich show.

—Lea Feinstein

Leon Steinmetz

Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts
Moscow

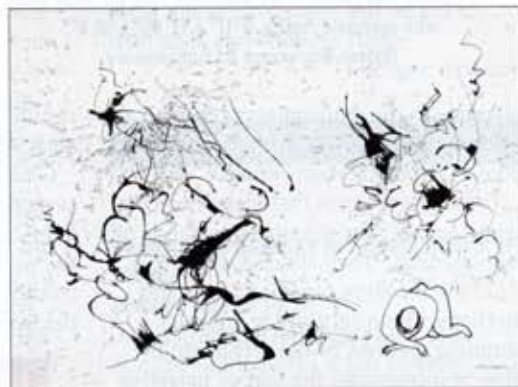
The 200th anniversary of the birth of the great Russian writer Nikolai Gogol spawned a number of tributes last year, generally more along the lines of patriotic commemoration than genuine es-

thetic investigation. But Leon Steinmetz's modest, compelling exhibition of works dedicated to the writer offered some insights.

In dozens of paintings and drawings, Steinmetz, who was born in Siberia and emigrated in the 1970s, conveyed the simultaneous madness and lightness, despair and redemption in Gogol's works. Delirium is palpable in the fine, tangled lines of a series titled "The Portrait" (2003), after Gogol's short story exploring the relationship between art and religion. In these pen-and-black-ink drawings, Steinmetz depicts figures that look trapped behind a delicate web of wire mesh, both literally and metaphysically.

The four sheets of "Temptation of St. Anthony" (2006) are alternately sarcastic and spiritual, expressing earthly fears and religious yearnings in views of a solitary crouched figure enveloped in multiplying black swirls. Steinmetz, who is also a writer, gave the works short, powerful titles: *Help Me*, *Save Me*, *Protect Me*, and *They Surrounded Me*.

Madness is the theme of "Poprishchin's Diary" (2008), a series of drawings incorporating hand-scrawled excerpts from



Leon Steinmetz, *Help Me*, 2006, pen, brush, and black Higgins ink on Arches paper, 22" x 30". Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts.

Gogol's short story "Diary of a Madman." The collaged sheets, incorporating colored ink and watercolor, were created with John W. Cataldo and were also published as a book. "Poprishchin's Diary" captures Gogol's protagonist's descent into insanity, punctuated by brief bursts of clarity and hilarity, in combinations of a whirlwind of letters to signify his diary and ever-larger stains of black covering them to illustrate his decline.

—Sophia Kishkovsky