

World War II and all my brothers and sisters had pilot's licenses. I also saw a photo in the paper of dismantled B-52 bombers, hundreds of them with the wings off, lying next to the body of the plane. So the layers of association move from personal to historical and from the past to the present. The longer you look at an object, the more of the world you see in it.

AW *Technically, these paintings are quite different from your previous work. Instead of creating a surface with many layers of varnish, you "glazed" the paintings with translucent paper.*

DO I made a decision to move away from toxic paint materials because I was pregnant. The translucency of the paper offered a quality I've always had, of obfuscating an image with paint. It also was a more immediate way to work on a large painting, which is very hard to do. It allowed me to work on large surfaces without getting overly detailed and killing the life out of it. In that way, I felt very freed up by it.

I'm reluctant to keep bringing my pregnancy into this, but it was the most difficult thing I've ever had to do. There were weeks I couldn't even walk into my studio because of the smell. I couldn't wear a small respirator so I had to use this thing which has a whole headpiece with an air filter and pump hooked onto an IV bottle on a stand, which I had to roll around with me. It was very limiting physically. One day I was complaining to my husband about my frustration because I couldn't get around in that thing and I could barely see through the mask and he said to me, Deborah, just think about Chuck Close. I never complained about it again, because it's temporary.

AW *Apart from safety concerns, what has the pregnancy meant for your artistic life?*

DO You're afraid that you'll be taken less seriously or that it shouldn't be mentioned. As a woman who's an artist, without any connection to an institution, you're so far outside the system. I needed support for a maternity leave. But you could never say that on a grant proposal. To say that I want a Guggenheim so I can have a baby is like blasphemy. So I say I want to do some digital imagery or something, but in the back of my head I'm thinking that pregnancy is one of the best reasons why a woman would need a grant.

I also thought about it good and hard before talking about these issues. But then the other day I saw yet another *Vogue* article on Julian Schnabel's children. Magazines find this such a

romantic thing. And yet a woman artist is not seen in that way. People find romance in Schnabel's little twins crawling around the floor. But when a woman artist has children, her seriousness and commitment to her work are questioned.

—Meredith Tomble

Meredith Tomble, a contributing editor to *Artweek*, is a painter who also does art commentary for KALW-FM.

Southern California

'Under Construction' at Armory Center for the Arts

S ometime during the brief presidency of George Bush, "identity" replaced "commodity" as the topic-du-jour within the critical branch of the art world. The body emerged as a final frontier of sorts, the last battleground between our belief in autonomous self-determination and what Gilles Deleuze has called "the Societies of Control." The idea that human identity was constructed and could therefore be recon-

figured (or colonized) quickly led artists to stake out their own territory and solidify what they regarded as their own particular set of traits. Negative stereotypes were adopted by underrepresented segments of society as badges of honor and force-fed back into the collective eye, while others sought out and mined new territory, those limbo spaces between gender, race and sexuality, to create hybrids, new identities which defied classification and compelled us to rethink previous notions of self.

As assembled by curators Sue Spaid and Michael Anderson, *Under Construction* presents a host of artists who have employed these various strategies and, at the same time, it manages to raise a number of questions relevant to the discourse surrounding identity politics. Its most valuable contribution, however, is its focus on figurative painting, which is especially appropriate to self-representation since it literally renders the body, reifies it, and seeks to give it solidity.

Seven of the eleven artists here are painters, and their styles are as varied as the identities they have constructed for themselves. From Kerry James Marshall's portraits of young African-American men, executed in a style reminiscent of outsider art, to Monica Majoli's exquisitely detailed miniatures depicting gay sex scenes, to Hugh Steers narratives concerning an AIDS patient and his fashionably shod doppelgänger, the emphasis seems to be on revealing aspects of identity that have been kept in the shadows by a society whose conduct is based on intolerance and fear.

Other painters, such as Catherine Howe and John Valadez, offer more straightforward representations—the isolated centrality of their subjects and the way in which they coolly meet our gaze animates them as individuals rather than as stereotypes. The large-scale works of both Carole Caroompas and the late David Wojnarowicz bring a broader, cutting political context to bear on the issues of representing women and gays.

The four non-painters here are the most didactic and refreshingly ambiguous. Identity-politics pioneer Adrian Piper's photo-panel of an authoritative-looking African-American woman with the text, "Why guess? Let me explain it for you," requires no explanation, while Laura Howe's *Timeline* seeks to single-handedly correct the absence of women in history (though I wonder what it can mean for the future that she ends her piece with an image of Winona Ryder?). Nancy Burson's computer-generated composites, while wonderful in themselves, seem somehow out of place here—what "politically disenfranchised constituency" is represented by a hybrid

image of Marilyn Monroe and a six-month-old baby?

Part of the problem with an undertaking like *Under Construction* is the way in which it aligns an artist's work to the artist's own particular identity as a member of an underrepresented minority. The work consequently seems impossible to understand without knowledge of the artist's ethnic or sexual identity. Is Catherine Howe a Caucasian or an African American, for example? Is Laura Howe gay or straight? Normally, these questions would be irrelevant, but in the context of *Under Construction*, which revolves around the labels attached to individuals, they'll greatly inform any reading of the work.

Thankfully, Joseph Santarromana, whose wildly impressive installation, *A Failed Attempt at Invisibility*, all but disappeared in the far recesses of the Armory, manages to cast this very issue in high relief. The piece, which utilizes a video projection of the artist, clad in pajamas, fidgeting impatiently as he waits (or perhaps struggles) to achieve invisibility, addresses the frustration of trying to "fit in." What makes it so poignant, however, is the way in which it suggests that the most radical aspects of identity aren't necessarily the most taboo. There's something extremely subversive about a sense of self that refuses to be labeled.

—Charles LaBelle

Under Construction: Rethinking Images of Identity through March 12 at Armory Center for the Arts, 145 N. Raymond Ave., Pasadena.

Charles LaBelle is an artist and writer in Los Angeles.

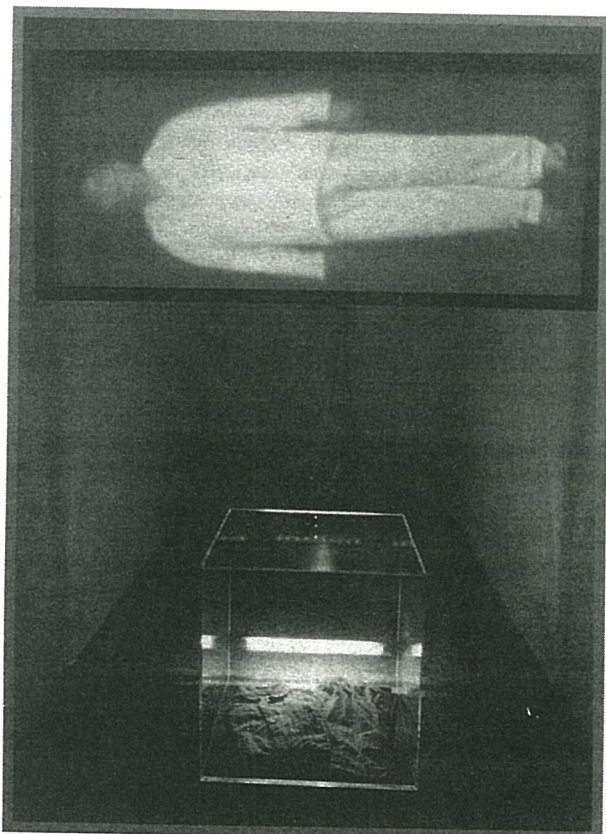
A conversation with Sue Spaid, art dealer and curator

A rt dealer, curator and writer Sue Spaid has earned a reputation in Los Angeles for promoting the idiosyncratic in art and for spawning some of the most philosophically audacious pulp ever to leave a dealer's desk. Her decision to close her Hollywood space after five years reflects her desire to enable Sue Spaid Fine Art "to mirror [her] artists' ambitions."

Artweek *Why did you become an art dealer?*

Sue Spaid I had been an art writer, and I came to the conclusion that what the LA art world needed more than art writers was art dealers. I moved from

Joseph Santarromana, *A Failed Attempt at Invisibility*, 1992, video installation, at the Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena.



tures, presumably of recent decades, are ravaged by an all-consuming bonfire.

More alarming are the panoramas with political overtones, which tend to leave an aftertaste of evil. In *Incidents at Half-Past Five*, for example, scattered observers are painted with Seurat-like stillness, while hints of racism and brutality disturb the golden afternoon haze. What at first appears to be a Sunday outing takes on an aura of anxiety. Isolated acts imply that the horrors here have not been fully comprehended, leaving the viewer to wonder both at the lack of human awareness and the tendency of the human mind to shut out the full scope of evil. Like the farmer calmly plowing his field in Brueghel's *Icarus*, as Auden reminds us, humans are unable to bear very much reality; they simply turn away.

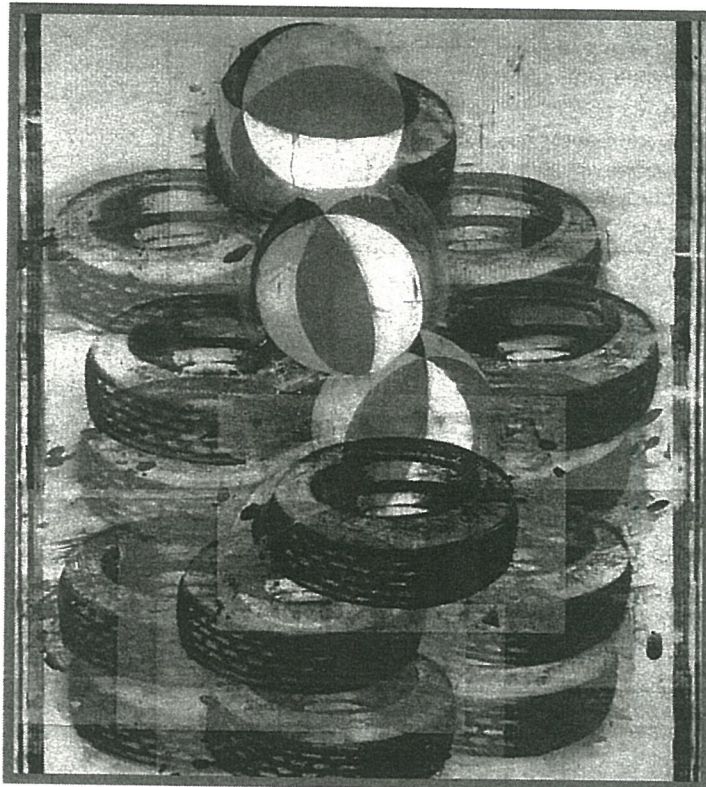
Douglas Schneider's paintings unshrink a conventional view of figurative painting in another direction. This artist's style is related to early Larry Rivers and the gestural freedom of Raymond Saunders. With bold and expressive sleights of hand, Schneider combines the remains of earlier renditions on the canvas, partially deleted, with sharp-focus realism and half-formed sketches. This hierarchy of images produces paintings caught between the acts, where process suggests that reality itself, or at least memory, has an erratic focus. These image-fields are born on the blurred edges of sight, vignettes moving toward formation or disintegration. Schneider's contingent vision, in which events exist in conjunction with other events, captures the power of context to shape experience.

As recollections of a small town childhood, Schneider's paintings are littered with traces of home and school: apples, blackboards, front porches and little girls. In *Different Than the Dream*, horses move transparently through the figure of a pensive, solitary woman, causing a sensation of simultaneous stasis and motion. As farmhouse roofs fold in and out of view and apples align with a crucial geometry, one feels that this nostalgia is edged with ironic twists of circumstance. This work has a vitality marked by sadness: a painter's delight in the physical nature of things, belied by brooding notions of what might have turned out differently. *The Sounding* may be Schneider's best painting here. The central image of a hand pulling the rope of a large school bell resounds with a riveting clarity, muted in turn by a haunting echo of loss.

—Monroe Hodder

Chester Arnold through March 10 at de Saisset Museum, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara. Douglas Schneider through March 10 at Plaza Gallery, Bank of America, 555 California St., San Francisco.

Monroe Hodder is a Bay Area artist and writer.



Deborah Oropallo, *Barricade*, 1994, oil and paper on canvas, 96" x 76", at Stephen Wirtz Gallery, San Francisco. (Photo: Ben Blackwell.)

Deborah Oropallo at Stephen Wirtz Gallery

Lessons, Deborah Oropallo's show of recent paintings at the Stephen Wirtz Gallery, marks a new development for the artist. In her earlier work, she characteristically presented a public icon or figure against a gurgling ground of half-observed images or texts, and the effect was a kind of initial defocusing and incipient appropriation of a charged yet oppressively empty icon through the very reverie it provoked. Memory-images, personal but not fully recalled or controlled, bathed and softened the too-strident symbol. In her current work she abandons the pathos of an appeal to a vivifying though ultimately inaccessible individual memory for a more public yet still mysterious exploration of a fuller temporality of perception, and rethinks the elements of her art accordingly.

This rethinking appears most clearly in her choice of figures, typically the tires, woodpiles, beach balls and coils of rope announced in *Begins with B*. What these objects share is volumetric depth without mystery; though necessarily only one face of the object can be shown, no other view would reveal anything unexpectedly different. There is nothing to explore. The interest in using these objects as types can lie only in their sheer thereness in the very moment of being perceived. But having

focused attention on the visual presence of the objects, Oropallo undercuts it by multiplying the image. Repeating the already de-contextualized image deprives its presence here and now of any commanding quality of quotidian epiphany. By stacking and heaping these images into rectangles, cylinders or pyramids, and thereby giving them a quasi-sculptural solidity, she induces a sense of paradox wherein part

and whole ceaselessly try and fail to gain some density and outweigh each other. Both lack the weight to command attention.

But the most important difference from her earlier work comes in the altered sense of time. Instead of soaking the object in memory, she now leaches its presence backwards and forwards in time. Within a heap, one or two of the images are saturated with paint, while the rest are their more thinly painted apparitions. The reference to after-images is inevitable, but also invoked is what Sartre called the "poverty" of the projective image: visualize something you know well and then look at the thing itself. The freedom of the visual imagination to picture something otherwise is paid for by the poverty of its imagination of what is. Oropallo recruits both the projective and the afterimage to splay perception temporally; the object's visual presence stretches from past to future, with the present marked by greater but not qualitatively different vivacity. By using its repetitions to soften the image itself, she no longer invokes some other private realm, but instead uses processes that could be called either public or pre-personal. Analogously, for the most part she no longer uses murky imagery as a ground, but instead lays down softened grids or striated fields.

Everything here works towards depicting and acknowledging the vivacity of a present perception, while withholding assent from its command for attention and refusing to allow it to occupy consciousness fully. Oropallo does not paint what she sees; she paints to loosen the grip of what she sees. She

no longer simply turns from the poverty of the present moment towards inaccessible memories but enriches it through a fuller contextualization. There remains the question whether this strategy does justice to the density and enigma of any moment. The gamble here, and the hopeful "lesson" of these works, is that a strategy accomplished with such skill is satisfaction enough.

—John Rapko

Deborah Oropallo—new paintings closed February 23 at Stephen Wirtz Gallery, San Francisco.

John Rapko is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

A conversation with Deborah Oropallo, artist

Deborah Oropallo's work emphasizes the magical quality of images. The artist received her MFA from the University of California, Berkeley, and currently maintains a studio in the East Bay. Her work, which has been exhibited widely, was included in both the 1989 Whitney Biennial and the 1993 Corcoran Biennial.

Artweek *What was the starting point for the body of work in your recent exhibition at Stephen Wirtz Gallery?*

Deborah Oropallo The images were taken from my childhood workbook, which was part of the Dick and Jane reader series used in the fifties. These are the earliest painted images I can remember, and I remember them pretty exactly. Barbara Kruger said something to the effect that the work you do can be determined by where and when you grew up, what you've lost in life, what's been lavished upon you, your gender, and the color of your skin. This is my history, my childhood. I think that when you're pregnant, you start to recall your own childhood as you think about becoming a mother.

AW *Why were these simple images of objects so meaningful for you?*

DO They trigger other memories. From the workbook, I tended to select images that I've always used—a log, the apples, the rope, the airplane—so they overlap with earlier paintings. The painting *Dismantled* incorporates the balsa wood planes my brother and I had as kids. They still sell them in hardware stores. Flying was a big thing in my family. My father was a bomber pilot in