

ARTFORUM

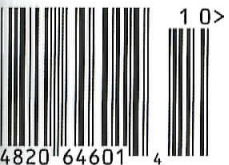
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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

The Art of Production



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luxury-goods and clothing empire, and has licensed, for example, a line of shoes and athletic wear made by Puma, whose logo of a lunging feline predator provided the inspiration for *Hunter-Gatherer*, 2006, a second arrow-studded sculpture. The conflation of one of Catholicism's sexiest images (Sebastian is usually depicted all but naked, in a pose that suggests ecstatic surrender) with powerful animals used as embodiments of speed results in a complicated set of metaphors. Throw in international commerce and globalization and you have what the press release describes creatively as a "symbol symbolic of symbolism."

Not that all of this content is immediately apparent. Unlike much work comment, Robinson's convoluted inventions amount of effort from the viewer. In *Red Ink*, 2006, in front of an artful facsimile of an old schoolroom table, side by side, showing the continents in shades of blue. The table, its legs embedded in what looks like shiny red ink (actually epoxy), holds a large map that has been pressed, repeatedly, all over the map. The map is familiar—the outline of the United States?—but it is not. It takes a while to realize that what's wrong is that the few Democratic strongholds along the coast are missing. Thus the title of the work suggests that our imprint everywhere, as well as who is missing.

With these combinations of "symbolic symbols" that either come out or just seem too easy, as in a pyramid of houses covered in glistening white goo titled *Pyramids*, 2007 (though this unfortunate idea probably takes a lot of time and effort to realize). Still, it's that political content and exacting, even obsessive detail that works in "Represent" succeed far more often than not. Robinson's slick, candy-coated objects suggest a sardonic Geppetto, as odd as they are cute.

—Maria Porges

Terri Heijne

INTERVIEW

As my own, thin, high, and in her nose, with the sound of the mountain sound to it," wrote Woody Guthrie as she had sung into the rifle fire of Sarah Ogan Gunning got the house of people to keep so that his hair sounded like a broomstick rubbed against Sarah Ogan Gunning was the daughter and wife (and widow) of coal miners from Kentucky. She first became a singer-songwriter and activist for mine workers' rights. Her templates for the work of Loretta Lynn, if not of her most popular songs included "I Am a Girl of the South" (feminized take on the standard), "I Hate the System" (known as "I Hate the Capitalist System"), and "O Death" (a dirge appropriately titled "O Death.")

The last of these, electronically slowed down to a maudlin groan, with lyrics stretched out to their perceptual breaking point, provided the haunting sound track for Mathilde ter Heijne's recent exhibition at Susanne Vielmetter. (Pity the gallery staff, who were required to listen to such heartbreaking music for a month.) The centerpiece of the show was the four-minute video *No Depression in Heaven*, 2006, in which the artist performed dueling Depression-era roles of dirt-poor housewife and wealthy Southern matriarch. *No Depression* knowingly borrows from silent-era weepies and employs what initially appears to be classic Hollywood crosscut editing to take the viewer from the poor character's Appalachian shack to the other's well-appointed plantation house. One soon realizes that the spaces are unexpectedly contiguous, and the two opposing characters are brought together for a pistol duel whose outcome—though presumably tragic—is unclear as the screen fades to black.

While ter Heijne's elliptical narrative never quite matches the stark, elegiac tone of her slowed-down version of "O Death"—a tall order to be sure—it succeeds in constructing an intriguing, distorted filmic space that recalls the specific historical materiality and artifice of silent cinema without attempting to simulate it exactly: Even with its theatrical backdrop and painted glass mattes in the foreground, ter Heijne's color video loop, driven by meticulous research and her performance as mirrored personae, is a blatantly contemporary fabrication.

The video was accompanied by the two-part installation *Depression Years*, 2007, consisting of, first, a painted canvas backdrop (used in the video) representing a view of the Appalachians from a veranda with classical Greek columns, and, second, a waxy, life-size dummy of ter Heijne as a barefoot woman standing in a pile of dirt. Like an animatronic model from a low-grade theme park, the dummy sings Gunning's song. Similar dummies have a recurring role in most of the artist's installations and videos—often meeting absurdly tragic ends at the hands of the artist, as in the videos *Mathilde*, *Mathilde* and *Suicide Bomb* (both 2000)—suggesting an ongoing struggle with self-image and the complex construction of personal identity. Here, however, because the artist plays both characters in *No Depression in Heaven*, the role of the dummy seems unresolved, positioning the work as a somewhat awkward double to the more compelling video.

In the project room was *Woman to Go*, 2005–, a simple but provocative series of several hundred black-and-white postcards (to which gallery visitors could help themselves) featuring found nineteenth-century images of anonymous, frequently "exotic" women from around the world. The back of each of these cards features the biography of an "exceptional" woman from the same period—most of whom, like Sarah Gunning, are now largely forgotten. The postcards, like the chant of "O Death," leave a ghostly trace.

—Michael Ned Holte

Terri Friedman

SHOSHANA WAYNE GALLERY

In her second solo show at Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Terri Friedman continued her exploration of fluidity as subject matter, subtext, and

Mathilde ter Heijne, *No Depression in Heaven*, 2006, still from a color video, 4 minutes.



material property in a group of new paintings in transparent or translucent acrylic poured onto Plexiglas surfaces. Friedman's paintings descend from unusual precursors: Janet Sobel and Knud Merrild, who, in 1940s New York and Los Angeles, respectively, prefigured action-oriented uses of liquid paint media with more delicate experiments in mingling and controlling the movement of the material.

Like Merrild's "flux" paintings, Friedman's pictures deal in swirling colors, and in using the flow of one deposit of paint to affect the flow of another. The results are images that, though fixed, feel perpetually nascent. Friedman's works are also fascinating documents of process. We see how material competes and collaborates to give rise to an image, and, in looking, we understand the different effects of a dribble, a slosh, or the impregnation of one puddle of color with a drop of another. But Friedman remains a move ahead, literally working in a highly fluid situation but able to balance her fondness for the serendipitous with a chess player's penchant for strategic thinking.

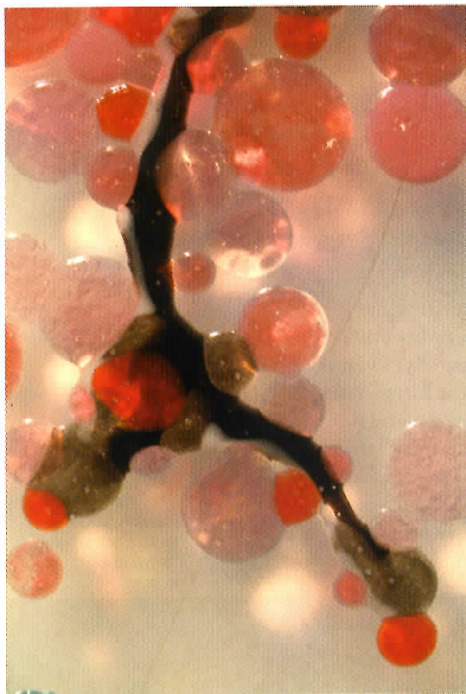
While the legacy of the pour in twentieth-century painting is weighted toward abstraction, Friedman pushes it toward the representational, using marbling and rippling effects to suggest rock formations, torrents, flora, and atmosphere. Resting on small shelves, Friedman's Plexiglas panels lean with

their lower edges a few inches out from the wall. This placement amplifies the effect normally derived from a painter's use of glazing, in which light traveling through transparent paint bounces off the substrate and back at the viewer. In Friedman's works, as the light travels right through the substrate, its bounce off the wall results in an almost palpable luminosity, and because the paintings essentially create projections of themselves on the walls directly behind them, the optical result is a combination 3-D and moiré effect. The works thus channel the tendencies of luminist painting and Op art, putting them in the service of one another.

Appropriately, Friedman's is a world in flux. *Ice Cold Molten* (all works 2007) foregrounds icicle-laden branches against a backdrop of geologically young mountains and mist-shrouded glaciers. *Plastic Fantastic Plunge*, on the other hand, is all hot and bothered, as a pair of green objects that are either trees or peaks appear ready to burst into flame, while a whirlpool of lava wells up beneath them. In *Slippery Grove*, ancient, knobby trees dot a landscape of rocks resembling sliced-open agates that is suddenly bisected by a turquoise torrent—a flash flood so erotic as to make one blush. And in *Harmonic Swell*, a collection of particularly Japanese-looking waves, seen from behind a blossoming tree, gather themselves into a tsunami that seems to pause, as if considering where to let loose.

Unabashedly Pop and decorative, Friedman's paintings are nonetheless far from landscape lite. Rather, they are elegant meditations on a world in which our awareness of nature's movements, once comprehended in glacial time and cyclical predictability, has itself become more fluid.

—Christopher Miles



Terri Friedman, *Harmonic Swell* (detail), 2007, acrylic and Plexiglas, 32 x 27".

TORONTO

Iain Baxter&

CORKIN SHOPLAND GALLERY

Aside from functioning as a mild irritant (it's all too easy to read a typo), the ampersand legally appended to Iain Baxter's name is a conceptual end by designating others as fellow authors of his oeuvre. For Baxter&—a pioneering figure who first adopted a light box format for photographs depicting banal streetscapes in and around Vancouver back in the '60s—this dispersal of authorship has almost too effectively, given the signature styles of more prominent Vancouver School artists such as Jeff Wall and Roy Arden. Baxter's lack of recognition, particularly outside of Canada, is unfortunate given the formal and material inventiveness he has consistently demonstrated in the course of his long career.

The themes of Baxter&'s work often center on outdated technology, the fate of refuse, and ecology in general. His installation *Television Works*, 1999–2006, which employs ten salvaged or secondhand TV sets, was exhibited recently at the Corkin Shopland Gallery. The range widely in scale and style, from a proletarian little Sears model to a more deluxe Toshiba. Most were arranged on discarded plinth pedestals. A few sets were mounted on walls using fixtures normally encountered in a bar or cheap hotel room. The artist has painted seascape and landscape on their screens—an act somewhat less in subversive severity by the appliances' obvious obsolescence, one may (always) argue, than of the pigment itself. Rows of lines have been scratched through the paint, and when the sets are plugged in, the glow of the snowy underlying screen shines through.

The flickering linear patterns located beneath painted trees or suggest a flowing breeze or glistening water. Such effects contribute a meditative flavor to mundane images of nature: One features boats drifting below an array of brown, comma-like clouds, another contains an atmospheric sky in bluish gray above a conical hill rendered in a flurry of autumnal green, red, ochre, and black strokes. The luminescence of color effects provided by the built-in supports—relatives of Baxter&'s light boxes—often had a surprising art-historical resonance: Expanses of deep blue and green, used at times to represent skies or seas, recalled Robert Delaunay's *Océan* discs and late works by van Gogh such as *Crows Over the Field*, 1890.

Indeed, with their primary function as transmitters of popular entertainment negated, the symbolic and psychological potential of the TVs was amplified: A compositional competition was created between the painted imagery and the knobs, dials, and antennae, served strangely fetishistic and regressive functions for those who recall the formative experience of idly fiddling with them as a child. And in the absence of the usual broadcasts, one had to make do with receiving the sets' subtle radiation of warmth and soft humming sounds—as well as consider the sentimental and linguistic significance of dated brand names and antiquated technical features: The Magnavox with its whimsical rabbit ears was placed on the floor; the Toshiba

