

## You are the space between: Joe Park at Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, OR

Michelle Dunn Marsh

September 24, 2025

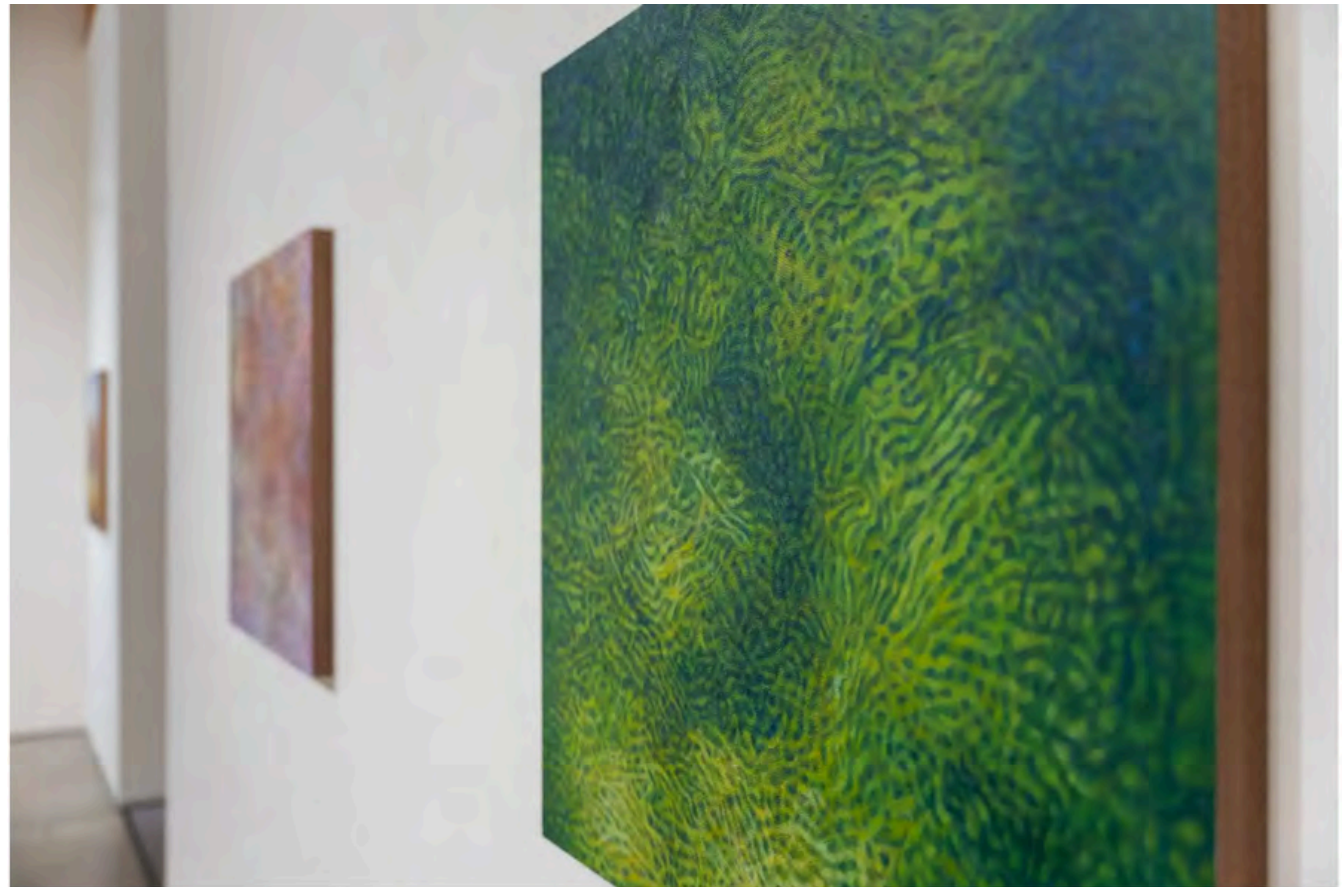
Review



Joe Park, *The Day After This Day*, 2025. Detail.

In ***You Are The Space Between***, painter Joe Park has released a series of visual harmonies. Pulsating with energies he has quietly conjured and invited into his work over the last fifteen years, these transcendent paintings hover at the intersections of stillness, movement, anticipation, and release, beckoning each viewer and inexorably binding them, for a moment, together—to the paintings and to one another through the act of shared seeing.

Park describes this latest body of work as “a world where all the energy and matter are porous and fluid, and where one thing is no different than another. I was inspired by the physicists who started to wonder about atomic particles simply by focusing on the random paths of dust floating around a room! From particles and gravity to magnetism and waves, to quantum physics...it all renewed questions I’ve long carried about how any of this really works.”



Joe Park, *You Are The Space Between*, 2025. Installation view, Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, OR.

These paintings are the zenith of what has been a consistent, multi-decade pursuit for the artist. In 2011, with equal parts humor and confidence, Park introduced “Prizmism” through a gallery exhibition in the Bay Area. Long interested in the relationships between observation, mark-making, and human awareness, Park, through his “ism,” articulated his unique inquiry through a painting technique that made visible the faceted, crystalline particles of screen-based seeing, a reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that has only proliferated since he began producing those works. In the eponymous monograph of the work published in 2014, curator Toby Kamps notes in the introduction that Park had “merged recognizable subject matter with abstract representations of energy in all its visible, subatomic, and metaphysical forms.”

In the current paintings on view through August 30 at Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland (all made in 2025), Park has accelerated forth to the transmutation of his own energy into matter. Leaving aside representation, he nevertheless acknowledges in the title of the exhibition that the limbic system of every individual seeing the work will cast its own answers to the fluid possibilities of who, or what, lies within.





Visitors engage with Joe Park's paintings at Elizabeth Leach Gallery. Photo: Michelle Dunn Marsh.

In discussing these works with the artist, he referenced a newfound, or at least deepening acceptance of “the interconnectedness of all things,” a statement he later revised to “the interconnectedness of living things.” Having followed his work for three decades and experienced the paintings on view, I challenged his revision, and he acknowledged that perhaps inanimate objects (including the paintings themselves) are forces of energy, and therefore offer the opportunity of some form of nonverbal communication.



If living and inanimate beings have multiple dimensions, then clearly our perceptions of them will be informed by our physical and emotional proximities, positions that can change with knowledge, time, and circumstances. Likewise, these paintings emanate a dimensional force that varies by viewer and by distance to the plane. Each surface belies the collision of two senses—sight alone is stimulated, and yet the intense desire to touch, to enter inside these portals and reach for what is hovering just beyond one's vision, is palpable as viewers experience the work.



Joe Park, *Glint*, 2025.

Park, a master of his chosen medium of oil and an intermittent college lecturer well versed in the canons of art history, has created fields that nod to the painstaking work of the Abstract Expressionists and Mark Tobey's White paintings. Futurism's frenetic belief in the supremacy of the machine—certainly hinted at in some of Park's previous works—is bested here. What triumphs is dynamically, essentially human, summoning the primordial in tandem with our ever-increasing understanding of the capabilities of the brain and how it relates to sight, memory, and movement.

Within the human, there is, inevitably, the question of the divine. Darshan, the sustained beholding of a deity, revered person, or sacred object, has been a part of the philosophies and practices of the Indian subcontinent for millennia, and has also found its way into Western spiritual practice. The experience is believed to be reciprocal—as in, the viewer seeing is also being witnessed by the entity being seen, and is blessed through that exchange. Are Park’s paintings sacred? They have not been anointed by a holy person or declared so by a canonical body. Yet in observing the paintings themselves, and people experiencing them, the first word that came to mind was darshan, because of the intensity of viewers’ interactions with the works.

This body of work both delights and destroys me. Piercing directly into our visual perceptions, the paintings awaken elements of the brain I have also sought to trigger in educating others about how deeply our personal associations contribute to our perceptions of the world around us. The paintings succeed, subtly and immediately, without the heady science my method seems to require.

Yet as a publisher of art and ideas, with a commitment to the fidelity of original works of art, I am keenly aware that the depth of vibration these paintings contain will never fully translate to the screen (that ephemeral world initiating Park’s dive into interconnectedness) or to the page. They demand a participatory experience, and so I must accept that I will never be able to fully possess them through reproduction in book form. My only hope is that at least a few of them land in public collections and on view. That will be the only opportunity to continue the conversation Park has initiated.

**Joe Park: You Are The Space Between**

Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, OR

July 17–August 30, 2025

# *International Examiner*

Arts

May 1, 2019 – Arts Etc.

By **Alan Chong Lau** -  
April 30, 2019

“Key to the Collection” is a group show that opened Dec. 22, 2018 and it lets TAM show off some of the treasured gifts from their collection including their legacy of Japanese woodblock prints and various other items. Familiar Faces & New Voices: Surveying Northwest Art” stays on view through the summer of 2019. This group show is a chronological walk through of Northwest art history, illustrated with the works of noted artists from each time period as well as lesser-known but just as important figures. Different works will be displayed throughout the run of this show. Includes the work of Patti Warashina, Roger Shimomura, Joseph Park, Alan Lau (full disclosure, that’s me) and many others. Tacoma Art Museum at 1701 Pacific Ave. 253-272-4258 or email [info@TacomaArtMuseum.org](mailto:info@TacomaArtMuseum.org) or go to [www.TacomaArtMuseum.org](http://www.TacomaArtMuseum.org).

<https://iexaminer.org/may-1-arts-etc/>

**The Seattle Times**

## **Seattle-area artists spin variations on a master's work in 'The Arc of Picasso'**

Originally published November 3, 2010 at 7:00 pm *Updated November 4, 2010 at 2:34 pm*



*Joseph Park plays with cubism in "Prizm (Kevin Levrone)," 2009.*

By Michael Upchurch  
Special to The Seattle Times

If you've sated your curiosity about Picasso with the Seattle Art Museum's big retrospective of his work, you may want to check out "The Arc of Picasso" at Greg Kucera Gallery: a group

show of 10 Pacific Northwest artists finding varied ways to acknowledge the influence of the Spanish-born master.

Whiting Tennis, with “Drummer” and “Man with Guitar” — acrylic and collage works — comes closest to straightforward homage, explicitly echoing Picasso’s cubist collages on music themes of the 1910s. But a few others use Picasso as a springboard into something entirely new.

Joseph Park spins a variation on cubism with a method he calls “Prizmism.” It works to dynamic effect in “Prizm (Kevin Levrone),” portraying a bodybuilder who either emanates or is being assailed by a whirlwind of intersecting slants. Vorticism seems as much an influence on Park as cubism, and his rich color palette is more akin to Salvador Dali’s than Picasso’s.

Deborah Butterfield cites Picasso’s 1943 “Bull’s Head,” made from a bicycle saddle and handlebars, as a catalyst for her marvelous depictions of horses. “All Ball” is an equine constructed from scavenged, welded steel. On the deck at Kucera, you’ll find “Madroño,” a magnificent steed built of curving boughs of madrona.

Picasso’s Minotaurs and other mythic subjects have prompted some of Michael Spafford’s mostly memorable work. His monumental oil on canvas “Minotaur Triptych I,” which surely some museum should snap up, depicts a slumping Minotaur, a standing Minotaur (in silhouette) and a Minotaur engaged in bloody sword battle. Kept in storage for much of the time since Spafford painted it in 1988, it’s not to be missed.

Michael Upchurch: [mupchurch@seattletimes.com](mailto:mupchurch@seattletimes.com)

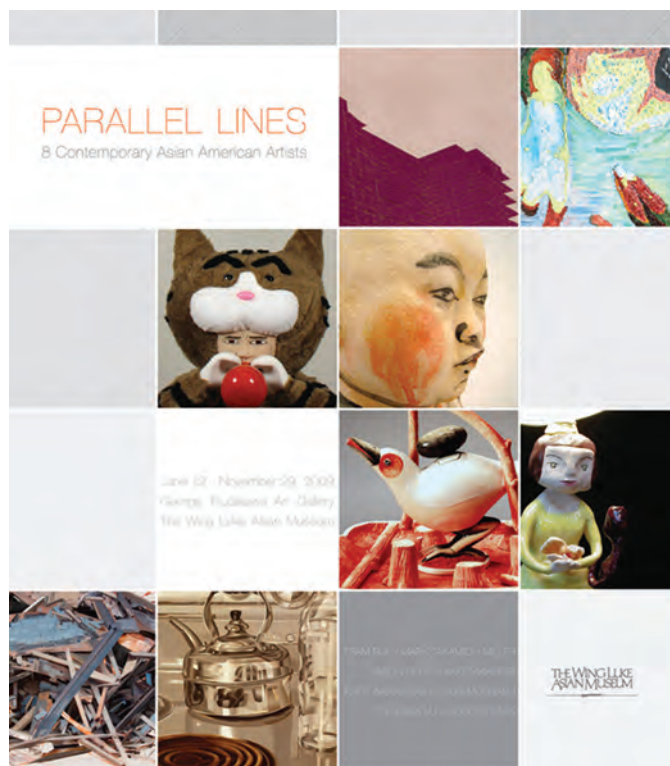
Michael Upchurch: [michaelupchurch@comcast.net](mailto:michaelupchurch@comcast.net). Michael Upchurch is a novelist (“Passive Intruder,” “The Flame Forest”) and frequent book reviewer. He was the Seattle Times’ staff book critic (1998-2008) and general arts writer (2008-2014), before resigning to concentrate on fiction and literary journalism. His reviews have appeared in the New York Times Book Review, Washington Post, Oregonian and numerous other publications.



# THE WING LUKE ASIAN MUSEUM

member's newsletter | spring + summer 2009

**On view June 12 through November 29, 2009 | George Tsutakawa Art Gallery**



Featuring Tram Bui, Mark Takamichi Miller, Jason Huff, Akio Takamori, Patti Warashina, Saya Moriyasu, Thuy-Van Vu, Joseph Park. Curated by Tracey Fugami.

This special exhibit highlights eight contemporary Seattle artists. Each artist is paired to accentuate thematic or biographic similarities within their work and lives. This exhibit provides a context for art making practices today by Asians living in America.

Thematic commonalities in the pairings of artists provide a lens for which to view their work including Figure, Surrealism, Still Life and Photography. While the theme discussed highlights two artists' works, additional intersections amongst other artworks become apparent. *Parallel Lines* places the artist's practices in context of art history, as opposed to a strictly biographical lens.

**Learn more about the artists and their art and join these events:**

**Saturday, June 27, 2pm  
Exhibits Exposed!**

Tour and take part in an in-depth comparison of the artwork and the artists themselves. For tickets, call (206) 623-5124. \$10.

**Saturday, July 11,  
10:30am-12pm  
Favorite Five Art Workshop**

With artist Saya Moriyasu  
See page 4 for more information.

**Friday, October 9, time TBD  
Asian American  
Artist Reception**

Network with Asian American artists, curators and other arts professionals in a catered event by Salima Restaurant. For more information, contact Community Programs at (206) 623-5124 ext. 104.

## PARALLEL LINES: 8 Contemporary Seattle Artists

**Sponsored by:** 4Culture, Adobe, ArtsFund, David Woods Kemper Foundation, Little Family Foundation, Marguerite Casey Foundation, Nordstrom, Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs – City of Seattle, Washington State Arts Commission.

**Media Sponsor:** Comcast

## ***Yellow Terror: The Collections and Paintings of Roger Shimomura***

**Opening reception: Thursday, September 10, 2009 at 5:30pm**

**On display September 11, 2009-April 18, 2010**

**Safeco Insurance Foundation Special Exhibition Hall**

Throughout his career, Roger Shimomura (b. 1939) has been devoted to addressing—through his art—issues of his ethnic identity as a third-generation Japanese American. His paintings tackle socio-political issues of Asian America and invite audiences to question their own and society's perceptions about race and culture. This special exhibit will feature Shimomura's collection of ephemera as well as art works created by him that were inspired by the collection, along with recent discriminatory experiences faced by him and others. The collection encompasses the sheer volume of stereotypical images of Asian Pacific Islander Americans produced in many media: binders of World War II prints and postcards, nearly 700 salt and pepper shakers, and over 50 Halloween masks.



*Continued on page 5*

# Artists selected for temporary artworks at Westlake Park

---

 [artbeat.seattle.gov/2013/05/29/artists-selected-for-temporary-artworks-at-westlake-park](http://artbeat.seattle.gov/2013/05/29/artists-selected-for-temporary-artworks-at-westlake-park)

May 29, 2013 by Tamara Childress [Leave a Comment](#)

Seattle artists [Elizabeth Gahan](#), [Joseph Park](#) and [Claude Zervas](#) will create temporary artworks for downtown's [Westlake Park](#) this summer. The projects will take place mid-July to September.

**Gahan** creates work that represents the intersection of constructed and natural beauty. By investigating architecture, advertising, technology and consumerism she visually responds to the built environment. She uses corrugated plastic, colorful vinyl and found materials to create elaborate, crystalline growths. She has created projects for the South Park Community Center, Storefronts Seattle, and the University of Washington in Seattle and has artwork in the collection of the city of Claremont, Calif.

**Park** is a painter who applies his sculptural background to create mechanisms and technologies that, in turn, influence his painting practice. Following this process he has created a painting methodology called Prizmis, painting that fractures subject and ground in the manner of a prism. He has exhibited at the Gwanju Biennale in Gwanju, South Korea; had solo shows at the Portland Art Museum in Portland, Ore. and The Frye Art Museum in Seattle; and is collected widely in both public and private collections.



**Zervas** is a sculptor and multi-disciplinary artist represented in Seattle by the James Harris Gallery. Zervas has exhibited widely in the U.S. and Canada, and his work is in many public and private collections, including the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the Seattle Art Museum, the Tacoma Art Museum, the city of Seattle and others.

The artists were selected by a panel of artists, arts professionals and [Seattle Parks and Recreation](#) (Parks) staff. The artwork is commissioned with Parks 1% for Art funds.

; 2012; corrugated plastic, vinyl and found materials; 192" x 168" x 48"; located at the University of Washington; photo by the artist. Middle: Joseph Park, *still life 2*, 2007, oil on panel, 24" x 36", in the collection of Herb and Lucy Pruzan, photo by Art and Soul. Bottom: Claude Zervas, *Log and Beam*, 2009, wood and paper, 47" x 40" x 60", located at Ambach & Rice, Seattle, Wash., photo by the artist.



Joseph Park, *Pigeon*, 2009, at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, Ore., at Pulse Miami 2011

## Miami Art Week

### PULSE, SCOPE AND MORE ON MIAMI 2011

by Walter Robinson

On the flight to Miami I was startled to see none other than *Work of Art* judge **Bill Powers** on the TV screen, wishing us a good flight, courtesy of **NBC**, which owns **Bravo**, which airs the art-reality show.

Powers showed up in person in Miami to help launch, via his ingenious photomultiples operation **Exhibition A**, a suite of ten reproductions of hyper-realist paintings of young celebrities by [Richard Phillips](#), called “Most Wanted,” which are benefiting something called “Youth Insights” at the **Whitney Museum**. Each of the ten prints is in an edition of two, priced at \$5,000 apiece,



which means the Whit gets about \$100,000 when everything is sold, which is going to be pretty soon. **Yvonne Force Villareal** bought one, and both copies of the **Taylor Momsen** portrait are already gone.

I have all this via Phillips' publicist -- didn't quite make it to the party, sorry -- who adds that the artist is off to Moscow for the launch of *Interview's* Russian edition, which features on its cover his portrait of **Leonardo DiCaprio**, and that Phillips is to appear as a guest judge on *Work of Art* next week. Sounds like synergy to me.

On the way back to New York, I found myself seated next to a real celebrity, **Isabelle Dufresne**, the 80-year-old former [Andy Warhol](#) superstar otherwise known as [Ultra Violet](#). She had been in Miami to show her 9/11 memorial sculpture, which consists of the Roman numerals IX and XI set up like the letters in [Robert Indiana's](#) iconic *LOVE*.

George -- she said people call her George, though she may have been kidding -- then quizzed me a little bit about what it takes to be a success in the art world, as if I'd know, and next showed me a brochure with some of her Rorschach-style paintings of cloudy blue skies, which I told her had real success potential.

In between the two flights, I managed to go to seven art fairs, out of [about 18](#). For one that I missed I have an excuse: **Pool**, the French-accented New Yorker [Thierry Alet's](#) fair for unaffiliated artists, was shut down on opening night by the city when the hotel owner failed to obtain a permit -- 27 participating artists had paid \$2,000-\$2,500 -- and only later relocated in the 45th- and 50th-floor condos of Miami art patron **Deborah Tynes**.

As for two of the top B-level fairs, **Pulse** and **Scope**, they were doing very well, thank you. Both appear much expanded, with new annexes and gardens, and were thronged with touristy locals on the weekend. And the air conditioning was pumping.

Among the dealers at Pulse was **Max Davidson IV**, who had red-dotted a kind of mobile of scrap wood painted fluorescent orange, made by [Sarah Hardesty](#), whose first show at the New York project gallery is coming up in a month or so. The sculpture was \$8,500 (I think he said).

Down the aisle at [Danziger Projects](#), the suave New York photo dealer **James Danziger** was touting his portfolio of photos of **Kate Moss** along with [Yuji Obata's](#) high-focus black-and-whites of falling snowflakes. My eye was caught by a photo diptych painted with dripping [Takashi Murakami](#)-type color **Louis Vuitton** logos by [Zevs](#), priced at a healthy \$25,000.

More value for the money could arguably be found at the booth of **Elizabeth Leach Gallery** from Portland, Ore., where small (24 x 18 in.) oil-on-board nudes by [Joseph Park](#) -- sharply shadowed monochrome figures done with simple sweeps of the brush -- were on offer for \$1,500.

More treasures were to be found at the table manned by members of the 27-year-old **ArtCenter South Florida**. There, small white plaster bunny planters held succulents and cacti, and could be had for \$240. The artist is **Paloma Teppa**. "We've sold tons of them," said a volunteer. "The princess **Aga Khan** bought one at the 2010 **Verge Art Fair**." Move over, [Jeff Koons](#).

The traffic was swarming at Scope, housed in a giant tent at Midtown Boulevard and NE 30th Street, just across the street from **Art Miami**. Inside, the New York private dealer [Hamburg Kennedy Photographs](#) had an open-booth set-up right on the aisle, with a 40 x 60 inch C-print by [Guido Argentini](#) -- a bit of erotica featuring a girl in her underwear -- that was marked sold, twice, at \$12,000.

Down the way I ran into my old pal **Luis Accorsi**, at the booth of the tiny East Village space **Dorian Grey Gallery**, filled with works by [Keith Haring](#) and [Richard Hambleton](#), including a golem-like figure on canvas priced at \$10,000.

Though **Art Asia** is marketed as a separate fair from Scope, it shares half of the tent. Even the celebrated **Ullens Center in Beijing** had a booth, with multiples by [Liu Ye](#), [Yang Maoyuan](#) and others.

On the way out, a long line of people had gathered to have a fortune told by the **Amazing Ultraman**, a bearded, turbaned fellow sitting in a vaguely Orientalist booth and writing rather lengthy predictions in longhand for \$1. As blogger **Jerry Mullins** puts it, “that’s a business plan?”

In between fair visits I met *Zingmagazine* publisher **Devon Dikeou** for lunch at the **Betsy** on Ocean Drive and 14th Street, a nice place with free copies of the *New York Times* in the lobby. Devon had done an installation at **NADA** of what she calls “a digital reinscription” of [Robert Rauschenberg](#)’s signature in the wet cement outside his studio on Lafayette Street in New York, which had been dug up by Con Ed several years ago while in pursuit of a gas leak.

Then we found out that the autograph was actually not by Rauschenberg at all, but rather by his grandnephew, **Dylan Rauschenberg Begneaud**, who some say fancies himself to be Bob’s reincarnation. In classic artist fashion, Dikeou pronounced the new backstory as improved and better.

Before lunch, a tan and healthy-looking [Tracey Emin](#) passed through the lobby. She said she was headed to New York to promote her new book, a memoir titled *My Life in a Column*, with a reading and book signing at **BookMarc** at 400 Bleecker Street on Tuesday, Dec. 6, 2011, 6-8 pm. That’s tomorrow.

I also managed to motor down to Coconut Grove for a visit with the celebrated Florida art couple, [Mette Tommerup](#) and [Robert Chambers](#). Robert immediately enlisted me in one of his signature “ribbon drop” performances, where brightly colored ribbons unspool from a gnarled tree in the backyard with modest assistance of participants such as myself.

Next we traveled via backroads to a show they were both in, “Ping Pong Miami 2011,” organized by the Swiss artist **Sue Irion**, who runs **Projektraum M54** in Basel. “Ping Pong” is installed in a soon-to-be-demolished storefront building at NE 2nd Avenue and NE 38th Street, and includes Irion’s own faded-out images of Miami tropicalia.

Next door was **Locust Projects**, which was presenting an estimable installation by [Ruben Ochoa](#), for which he had sawed square chunks out of the concrete floor, dug holes down into the

dirt, and elevated the minimalist chunks of floor into the air on steel girders. He also produced a benefit edition of concrete pieces, measuring 12 x 41 inches, priced at \$4,000 a piece.

In the vacant lot next door was a space-age geodesic dome by [Buckminster Fuller](#), along with a beautifully restored green **Dymaxion Car**. The car never went into production, Chambers explained, because at speed the rear wheel would lift from the road -- and that was the one the auto steered with.

The Fuller was purchased by Miami real estate mogul **Craig Robins** -- for a sweet \$1 million, they were saying, though that sounds a lot -- who is soon to build a giant new development on the site. And Locust Projects? It is simply relocating to another property nearby.

Tommerup was also exhibiting her paintings at **Dorsch Gallery** at NW 24th Street, one of the first to set up in Wynwood (founded by **Brook Dorsch** and directed by his wife, **Tyler Emerson-Dorsch**), in a show titled "Full Salute" -- which she tells me is sexist street slang that refers to the anthropomorphic attitude of the painted vegetables -- tumescently deformed eggplants, peppers and tomatoes. Also on view, paintings of a couple of cakes, a green velvet-lined gun box that resembles a [Mark Rothko](#), and a **Barack Obama** garden gnome.

The show's star lot is *Les Demoiselles Stand-ins* (2011), a version of [Pablo Picasso](#)'s Cubist masterpiece with what look like dark-skinned wrestlers and bandidos substituting for the original women. Tommerup's figures are actually based on the **Village People**, giving the picture a homoerotic spin and adding a bit of contemporary vogue to the primitivist western nudes of Picasso's pioneering modernist "philosophical brothel."

**WALTER ROBINSON** is editor of *Artnet Magazine*.





Isaac Layman's "Bookcase," 2006. Archival inkjet prints, 61.25 x 78.25."

## Quite a group at Leach

By CHAS BOWIE  
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Of the many wonderful and well-documented reasons to be grateful for the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, its occasional group exhibitions must be counted near the top of the list. While the gallery's one-person shows are formidable in their own right, its group shows offer particularly compelling dispatches from Leach's tireless schedule of international studio visits, art fairs, biennials and gallery hopping.

The current exhibition, "Re-Present," is smart and tasteful in the ways we have come to expect from Leach's group shows. Namely, the artists, who do not regularly show with the gallery, are not only strong talents with serious voices but their work also speaks a common language, albeit in diversely nuanced dialects.

"Re-Present" examines how five contemporary artists, including three from the Pacific Northwest, are investigating themes of visuality, cognition and optical psychology. With unwaveringly meticulous craftsmanship and extraordinary subject matter, the artists analyze and occasionally subvert the complex men-

tal processes through which we decipher and decode visual information.

Isaac Layman's unnervingly banal color photographs of household items are astonishingly subtle in their perception-based tomfoolery. The Seattle artist's earliest work on view presents an almost-seamless image of a bookcase whose spines are turned away from the camera, so that the books become little more than nameless swathes of bound paper. The viewer's impulse to scan the shelves for familiar titles is doubly thwarted when they notice that the photograph almost seems to shift its perspective, depending on where the viewer looks. Almost imperceptibly, Layman has combined photographs taken from different vantage points in creating *Bookcase*, resulting in a deceptive network of impossible sightlines.

Our capacity to mentally reconstruct images is hypnotically envisioned by Adam Chapman's kinetic drawings. Framed somewhat awkwardly as traditional works on paper, two computer screens display a floating nebula of squiggly lines and atmospheric bursts of color. These scrappy elements drift about for a few minutes, screen saver-

style, eventually lining up to create momentary portraits of the artist's friends and family. Randomized by Chapman's computer program, the formless drawings never repeat themselves in precisely the same way and drift back into abstraction without so much as a pause.

In her "NYT Little People" drawings, which were included in her recent show at Marylhurst University's Art Gym, Pat Boas re-creates the front pages of *The New York Times*, omitting everything except for photographs of everyday citizens, which she impeccably copies in gouache. With broad chunks of "data" missing from her depictions of the front page, Boas demands the viewer supply their own content.

Paintings by Joe Park and Xiaozhe Xie round out the exhibition. Park's slick, quasi-Cubist panels look better here than they did a few months ago at the Portland Art Museum, thanks in no small part to their contextualization and relatively small dosage. Xie, a Chinese-born painter living in the Bay Area, made his Portland debut in a group show last year at Reed College, and the two photorealistic canvases in "Re-Present" argue further

for a larger examination of the artist's work.

417 N.W. Ninth Ave.; 503-224-0521, [www.elizabethleach.com](http://www.elizabethleach.com). Hours: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. Exhibition closes March 27. Free admission

## Artist re-masters the masters

By Marie Lo  
The Asian Reporter

Seattle-based artist Joseph Park's recent paintings, on display at the Portland Art Museum, showcase a rare talent hitting his stride. Drawing from a variety of aesthetic traditions, Park's work tells complex stories that offer no closure or easy resolution.

His early paintings, inspired by film noir and animation, depict cartoon-like figures trapped in a monochromatic world. Rather than providing the Technicolor we associate with cartoons, the limited palette casts an ominous and dark shadow on these conventional symbols of childhood. They reflect the transitions between the purity of childhood and the melancholy over the loss of innocence that growing up entails.

The selected works at the museum highlight Park's fascination with the process and techniques of representation. "Paint is a seductive medium," explains Park, and his recent paintings try to resist its seduction by laying bare the artifice of painting. According to Park, the physical details of painting — how the paint is applied, the texture and force of the brush stroke — are as significant as its subject matter. The laying down of paint, according to Park, is "metaphorical," and his paintings play with the associations of meaning rather than literal depictions of objects.

Park's paintings combine a range of aesthetic traditions ranging from neoclassicism and impressionism to cubism and futurism. However, his paintings



**MASTERS RE-MASTERED.** Seattle-based artist Joseph Park's recent paintings, on display at the Portland Art Museum through November 15, showcase a rare talent hitting his stride. Pictured are Park's "P Leonilla" (left) and "Still Life #2." (Photos courtesy of the Portland Art Museum)

are not just about the post-modern play of visual styles, which can sometimes lead to sterility and flatness. They are gorgeous and visually lush, kaleidoscopic in colors, textures, and perspectives, and they shimmer between reflections and refractions, light and darkness. What is most impressive is that the surface of the painting betrays no trace of his brushstrokes; the surface is as smooth as a window pane.

In playing with aesthetic traditions, Park reclaims famous paintings of 19th-century masters such as Ingres and Degas and reinvents them in his own unique style. On display is "P Leonilla," Park's interpretation of Franz Xaver Winterhalter's 1843 "Portrait of Leonilla, Princess of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Sayn," which in turn cites Jacques-Louis David's famous painting of Madame Récamier.

Park explains that his fascination with neoclassical painting stems from its interest in the Orient. And in Winterhalter's portrait, the codes of the exotic Orient — the Turkish rug, the oriental sash, the Black Sea in the background — highlight the princess' exceptional upbringing and unconventional personality.

Drawing on cubist fragmentation, Park reworks the original, transforming the image into a dynamic portrait with movement and luminescent layers, as if the painting had crystallized and then shattered. The colors and shards are evocative of mother-of-pearl inlays, and the painting is opalescent. In Park's "P Leonilla," the richly adorned regal woman who is lounging in her palace in Crimea is transformed into a futuristic android reminiscent of the robot in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*.



"Still Life #2" is based on a photograph Park took of his mother's coffee table. The table has a glass display case, and inside are artifacts of his family history: the wedding shoes worn by his great grandmother, which were then passed on and worn by his maternal grandmother at her wedding and then by his mother at her wedding. The wedding shoes house a pair of boy's shoes, which Joseph and his brother might have worn on their first birthdays. The smaller shoes are a pair for girls bought for decoration. On the bottom right of the composition lie *yut* sticks, a popular Korean game. A lamp sits atop of the glass, and we can see the reflection of the lamp from the bottom up. Coasters and a couple pencils also sit on top of the glass.

The multiple perspectives of this painting — of simultaneously looking down and up, its sepia tones, the various spatial depths — provide no fixed point of observation. The painting's sepia

tones age the scene and invoke feelings of nostalgia for the past.

Park, who was born and raised in Canada, settled in Seattle in his early twenties. Though he has worked independently outside of an Asian-American artistic tradition, his artwork resonates with those of contemporary artists Seonna Hong and Saelee Oh, who also explore animation and the dark underbelly of childhood narratives.

In these beautiful and technically masterful paintings, Park is poised to be an important figure in American and Asian-American art.

Joseph Park's work is on display as a part of the "APEX" series, which showcases Pacific Northwest artists, on display through November 15 at the Portland Art Museum, located at 1219 S.W. Park Avenue in Portland. Join the artist for a discussion of his work Sunday, September 27 at 2:00pm. To learn more, call (503) 226-2811 or visit <[www.portlandartmuseum.org](http://www.portlandartmuseum.org)>.

## Review: Joseph Park at Portland Art Museum and 'Out of the Booth' at Ampersand

Posted by drow August 10, 2009 08:57AM



"P Leonilla" by Joseph Park at the Portland Art Museum

Joseph Park is a dazzling painter. Flat as sheets of Plexiglas, his oil-on-board compositions exude a highly specialized virtuosity normally reserved for slam-dunk contests, sleight-of-hand demonstrations and breakdancing competitions.

The critical hazard of making dazzling artworks, of course, is that you fall so in love with your refined flourishes that you fail to notice that you've drifted into the unseemly realm of razzle-dazzle.

Park, a 44-year-old Seattleite, seems intent on sidestepping this pitfall, but teeters precipitously in his exhibition at the Portland Art Museum.

Park's whoa-inducing skill set is evidenced by six recent paintings, each of which showcases his deft ability to simulate the polished grain of carved mahogany, the glancing coils of shaved metal, the prismatic twinkle of crystal.

The lead-off painting, "p leonilla," re-imagines an 1843 portrait by Franz Winterhalter as a quasi-Cubist hallucination. The Rhineland princess Leonilla reclines in a sultry skin of dark wood rather than flesh in Park's surreal version --more Gepetto than Tintoretto. The soft folds of fabric and the Arcadian landscape behind her are rendered as small tubes and units of twisting metal, as if the clinical eye of analytic Cubism had surrendered to the world of sensual pleasures.

Park revisits the art history texts once again in "Absinthe," an ultra-vibrant cover of Edgar Degas' sullen canvas. Park replaces the dingy greens and hangover browns of the original bar scene for canary yellow and cobalt blue bursts of energy, applying them with the kinetic verve of an Italian



Futurist.

Two sepia-toned still lifes --one depicting a floral bouquet, the other a glass surface and collection of personal effects --require viewers to shift gears without a moment's notice. Clearly stemming from another series, the paintings are technically superb and visually gratifying, but their disconnection from Park's art history paintings is jarring.

The same can be said for "Machinist," an astonishing, Photorealist-inspired depiction of a common bench vice. The twist is that Park paints the sleek, curving tool as if it's made of wood a distant cousin, perhaps, of the reclining Princess Leonilla. In our age of special effects and high-tech visual manipulations, it's still hard to believe that oil paint can accomplish such polish and refinement. The effect is, as previously mentioned, dazzling.

Unfortunately, the human mind was not intended to withstand prolonged exposure to dazzle, and requires meatier sustenance to thrive. Looking beyond Park's attention-grabbing visual flair and how'd-he-do-that pizzazz, his paintings offer little to grab hold of. Park is a stylist above all, and his thematic meanderings --previous series have included cartoony animals, empty, moody rooms, and commissioned portraits --too often feel like thin excuses to strut his flashy stuff.

Granted, audiences generally respond well to flashiness. But by playing only to the delighted gasps of viewers, many a showman has been lured down the treacly trail of razzle-dazzle way.

*Joseph Park at the Portland Art Museum, 1219 S.W. Park Ave; [www.portlandartmuseum.org](http://www.portlandartmuseum.org), 503-226-2811. Tuesday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. (until 8 p.m. Thursday-Friday); through Nov 15; \$8-\$12*

### **In the photo booth**

Early photographers, by their own estimations, didn't count for much when it came to taking pictures. Many said their photographs were the work of the sun or "Nature herself," while British inventor William Henry Fox Talbot went so far as to credit a brick building in one of his pioneering photos with having "drawn its own picture."

Actual photographers, their language suggested, barely factored into the equation. None of the early practitioners, however, could have foreseen the 20th-century photo booth --half-camera, half-confessional, and completely photographer-free.

"Out of the Booth" features 32 anonymous but joyful photo booth portraits from the heyday of the automated machines. Enlarged from vintage strips belonging to esteemed Seattle collector Robert E. Jackson, the head shots run the gamut of age, race, gender and social class, momentarily fulfilling photography's promise as a democratic medium.

The sitters themselves are heartbreakingly endearing. Standouts include a preteen girl posing solemnly with her ventriloquist's dummy; a jazz-age beauty radiating bohemian allure; a sneering rascal flipping off the camera; and an older woman who somehow squeezed her best church hat into the tiny booth.

What unites the collection of sitters is a distinct lack, or at least a drastic reduction, of self-consciousness. This should come as no surprise, though. Without a live photographer lurking about, the sitters were free, like Fox Talbot's brick building, to "draw their own pictures."

*"Out of the Booth" at Ampersand Vintage, 2916 N.E. Alberta St., Suite B; [ampersandvintage.com](http://ampersandvintage.com), 503-805-5458. noon-6 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, noon-5 p.m. Sunday, through Aug. 23; free*

# 'CENTURY 21': Youth is elusive

FROM C1

Like every other city with a thriving gallery scene, Seattle's galleries run on different tracks. Most specialize in intimate home decor. As long as there is a market for art that contains no criticality in its approach to content, there will be galleries to provide it.

Even those galleries that regularly rise beyond it have a tendency to cushion their bottom lines by providing at least a sampling of what is easy to swallow. But when asked to pick three artists whose work will help define the region in the new century, it is not surprising that dealers who deliver little more than a space for visual niceties have difficulty imagining what ambition might look like. What is surprising is that almost everybody found at least one plausible candidate.

In Seattle, apparently, if you're under 45, you're young. Originally, young was going to be 35 and under, but too few dealers had candidates. I tend to think of youth as an advantage in the art world, but that's not true in Seattle. If you're under 35, few SADA dealers have heard of you.

But "Century 21: Dealer's Choice" is not the disaster I envisioned when first perusing the list of participants. Walking into the Wright Space, I thought it looked plausible.

This exhibit will not mark its moment. There are too many essential artists left out and too many minor ones included. On the other hand, it doesn't entirely miss its moment, either.

Art is not a test. Artists who pass do not gather on one side of a line with failures on the other. Each artwork engages its own arena of meaning, and what is crucial to one is irrelevant to another. If the modestly ambitious keep their own company, they can be charming.

The real problem is a lack of common purpose. The magnificent brutality of Michael Spafford's painting ("Two Greeks, Two Trojans")



Joseph Park's "Winogrand" is a silky homage to "Women Are Beautiful," not the prints but the book.

bies with their own aftershocks.

► **Scott Fife's** cardboard head of Geronimo, as grave as the Sphinx.

► **Lauren Grossman's** version of Lot's wife, the salt of her body turned to practical use.

► **Victoria Haven's** "Double or Nothing," a roller-coaster flattened and abstracted. It looks lackluster reproduced, but in person the intricacy of its cut-out shiny metal is a clean, clear thrill.

► **Gaylen Hansen's** "Sleeping Cowboy," a home-on-the-range update of Henri Rousseau.

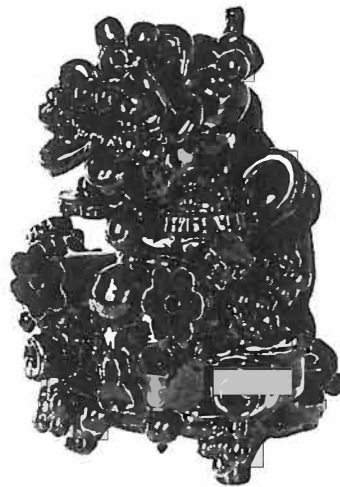
► **Denzil Hurley's** "Glyph-D," paint pulsing with a bone-weary beauty.

► **Doug Jeck's** "Figurine," a small ceramic homage to the ancient Greeks, with wit and horror.

► **Lead Pencil's** "Accumulation," which is a critique of painting and a closet, and a room with a ceiling, a floor and walls made of paint drips. It takes up more space than it actually has.

► **Alden Mason's** "Summer Blusher" from his Burpee Garden series, abstraction from the 1970s that holds its own with the Color Field painters of Washington, D.C.

► **Peter Millett's** "Weeping



Jeffry Mitchell's glazed earthenware "Black Fu Dogs."



ders," approaching the figure as a smear on silence.

► **Jeffrey Simmons's** paintings in his "Larger Chorus" series, their buried heat.

► **Preston Singletary** for his magisterial glass version of Pacific Northwest Coast design.

► **Michael Spafford's** oil painting "Two Greeks, Two Trojans," which brutalizes the space

scruffy abstraction built from road signs.

► **Claude Zervas** for his slippery green fish, the only video in the show.

Kucera says the show turned out better than he expected. To those who complain that there are 37 male artists to 13 female, he points out the majority of dealers in SADA are women.

"To the extent that my col-

ETY IMAGES  
year-old  
ark."

st

ETS

as born  
n, N.Y., to  
)  
erchant.  
usic  
d at his

itar as a

a fencing

ng as the  
Jack

gwriter for  
an Alley in

a  
/ and  
and the  
1965.  
s songs  
le Bit Me,  
Out (Here  
"Love to



# VISUAL ART

## Hold Still

This Is the Final Show in James Harris Gallery's Current Location

BY JEN GRAVES

**A**t the entrance to James Harris Gallery, a peculiar document hangs on the wall. It's a stainless steel shelf with a yellow tag that says, "Collection of James Harris." On the shelf is a still

life of bottles of liquid—moisturizer, glue, conditioner, vodka, coconut oil, spot remover, silver dip. These were all once clear or white, but they've changed color as they've aged.

It seems appropriate that this still life portrait of Harris, made by the artist Nayland Blake in 1993, stands at the entrance of Harris's final show in the distinctive space where he has run his gallery for the last nine years. (He's moving a block away, to a place with double the room, and will open April 3.)

Still lifes are always in the position of pointing out that there's nothing very still about life. As Harris likes to point out, still lifes are as much about the objects pictured as about the spaces between them. In *Message in a Bottle*, the show that contains the Blake piece—a pleasurable wide-ranging survey of contemporary still lifes in painting, installation, and photography—there is only one work that approximates the size of a person. It's a cabinet with a painting above it, and the objects divided by a stretch of blank wall space. They're linked in the mind by a shared pattern. Together they might be seen as shorthand for the Cartesian mind-body split. But which is the mind and which the body? The painting-head bears the marks of the hand, while the cabinet-body is manufactured according to plan.

*Message in a Bottle* includes artists who are young and new to the gallery, especially recent University of Washington MFA graduate Eric Elliott, who buries scenes from his studio—a trio of paint cans, a bunch of vessels piled together—in mounds of luscious gray oil paint. What's there is almost invisible in the force fields of gooey mist.

By contrast, Adam Pendleton's shiny black cubes with rounded-off edges are visually overdetermined, unmistakably there. But they are secretly mutable. Visit the show twice and you may see them in different con-

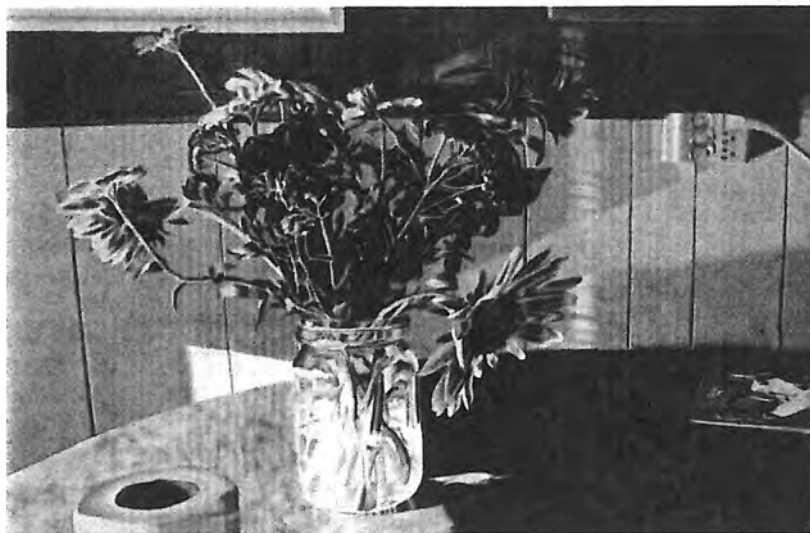
shined to glassy perfection, locking it down as if it were a scene under ice.

Francisco Guerrero, also of Seattle, is a painter who, like Park, has roots in graphic culture. What is a still life painting after advertising? Yet another sale? Guerrero's slick-surfaced portrait of two emptied drinks and a fragment of a woman's torso with her skirt hiked up is juicy and sad.

San Francisco-based Stephanie Syjuco sets objects together in allegories of broader

The objects appear most often in pairs—two different versions of the same news story, the same to-do list written twice, brochures for two slightly different cell phones, two books by Robert Smithson next to two records by Sonic Youth (and near three signatures from Tim Hawkinson's autograph machine)—so that the table becomes a complex study of relationships that gives more the more you look at it. The opposite is true of Swedish artist Helga Steppan's groupings of her belongings according to their color. The monochromatic photographs of these groupings are inviting, only to be obdurate. The objects coalesce into alien landscapes.

Of all the dealers in Seattle, Harris is



JOSEPH PARK Untitled (Still Life), 2007.

CARRIE E. A. SCOTT

environmental disjunction. *Pacific Super* is a photograph of Asian supermarket products lined up in the shape of Stonehenge. Her reconstruction of a pawn shop in cutouts of castoff electronics set on shelves is a facade more desirable than the original—at least its paper can be easily recycled.

Boston-based Andrew Witkin has different reasons for lining up objects on a tabletop.

most known for his meticulous installations, which in themselves are quite like still lifes. They have an air not only of care but also slight melancholy. It will be fascinating to see Harris—and gallery director Carrie E. A. Scott—arrange in and animate another location. ■

[jgraves@the stranger.com](mailto:jgraves@the stranger.com)

### VISUAL ART CALENDAR

Free. Reception Sat Feb 23, 3-5 pm. Tues Sat. Through Mar 29, 300 S Washington St. 5074033.

★ GALLERY 63 ELEVEN  
Myscapes: Mike Leavitt's paintings of Seattle landmarks, including

imagined view up and out from the bottom of a bog. (Listen to a podcast with the artist at [www.](http://www.)



### INSIDE/OUTSIDE

Nonstop for the last three days, some little part of me has been occupied by Timea Tihanyi's first solo show in Seattle, at Gallery 4Culture. The gallery is dimly lit and what you encounter first is a single-channel video of blurry, flashing landscapes, to the noise (through headphones) of dull, regular beats. It sounds like **whoever is holding the camera is running.**

A little farther in, the main room of the gallery has been turned into an enclosure marked by no-trespassing signs. One, straight ahead, is a rusty old sign that reads "POSTED. Private Property." Next to it is a chain-link fence. But both the **sign and the fence are made of hot-pink felt**, not just cut out but sewn precisely and in layers so that even the tiniest bits of felt are sturdy as well as soft.

Past the fence is the outdoors—have we already been trespassing?—in the form of a forest landscape on the walls. The landscape is made of squares of thin, **occasionally rustling handmade paper** and cut black felt. Projected across the forest is serene video of a snowfall. The serenity is interrupted when you cross the threshold marked by the chain-link fence; you trigger a few seconds of the running video you've already seen, and then the snowfall returns. Also hanging in this outdoors area is a row



Posted, 2007.

of 12 identical white cast-paper no-trespassing signs, the bright-pink message bleached.

Whenever I think of Tihanyi, who graduated with an MFA from the UW ceramics program in 2003 but **10 years**

**earlier earned a**

**medical degree in her home country of Hungary.** I think of the first pieces of hers I saw, at Davidson Contemporary. They're portraits in cut felt based on historical photographs of the first use of ether—which are then suspended in bubbly, brown-yellow latex. It's an allegory of the body's state during anesthesia.

At the heart of her enterprise is the question of penetration, and the desire to gain access to knowledge through touch.





# Portrait of the Artist as a Portraitist

## Why Joe Park Started Painting People

BY JEN GRAVES

**W**hen Timothy Fichtner had his portrait made by a leading Seattle artist, he

did it up. He threw a private party, invited everybody who was anybody, played "You're So Vain" on repeat, and, when a buzz had settled across the room, finally unveiled the painting.

"I mean, we need to go back to *that*," artist Joe Park says when he recalls the evening, referring to the courtly tradition of dramatic unveilings of portraits, followed sometimes by gasps of shock (Goya's portrait of his ugly queen comes to mind).

That was 2001, and the Fichtner painting was Park's first taste of commissioned portraiture. Being paid to make a likeness couldn't be more different from Park's signature work. He is known for paintings that derive entirely from his imagination, and are, themselves, imaginary environments. His 2005 survey at the Frye Art Museum, *Moon Beam Caves*, was full of anthropomorphic animals in colorful settings influenced by anime and cinema—a hardened factory-working bunny on a smoke break, a domestic bear doing the ironing in the basement.

Which is why it was surprising to see hardened, sepia-toned portraits of real, recognizable people (Austrian artist Erwin Wurm and San Francisco dealer Rena Bransten) by Joe

**He picked people who were recognizable in the art world so that the paintings could be at once intimate and public.**

Park on the walls of Howard House last year. Even more surprising, there was a note with the portraits, advertising the artist's services for anyone interested in commissioning him.

It seemed about as likely as a note saying Park will design tattoos.

That's an exaggeration, but only slight. Few artists do formal portraiture-for-hire these days. It's an antiquated practice, something most artists—and sitters—consider the bailiwick of the Sears studio or some fusty boardroom. Park isn't particularly public about his portrait practice. He sees it as somewhat separate from his "regular" paintings. Since 2006, when he began working on portraits in earnest, he has made about 40 of them. None of those—even the ones that weren't commissioned but were instead made for Park's own reasons (he estimates about a half dozen are commissions)—will appear in Park's solo show of new works at Rena Bransten Gallery in San



PAINTER TIM EITEL (2007) By painter Joe Park.

thing was individuals," he says. That's when he hung his public shingle at Howard House: open for business.

When he chose subjects, he deliberately picked people he knew, and who were generally recognizable in the art world, so that the paintings could be at once intimate and public: curators Michael Darling, Chiyo Ishikawa, and Eric Fredericksen; artists Gretchen Bennett and Alfred Harris; dealer Kirsten Anderson. Seattle Art Museum commissioned a portrait of its departing board president, Susan Brotman, and the museum acquired it for its permanent collection.

Park found himself hooked on portraiture

as more than a practice device. He was drawn to the challenge of finding a way to maintain his own vision without losing the very real, live subject. He had been wondering about this conundrum ever since he noticed the stiffness in one of David Hockney's very few commissioned portraits, a majestically chilly 1971 picture of Sir David Webster, head of the Royal Opera House. Was the sitter a stifling personality, or was it being a brush for hire that froze up the picture?

"That's one of the things I wanted to know," Park says in an interview in his studio. "I like the idea of acting—the idea that you walk out onstage and rehearse what you're

going to do when nobody's there, but then, being able to do the exact same casual walk and act when everyone's watching. I'm not sure I'm totally there."

Portraiture has been stretched beyond the point of recognition in the last century, and plenty of portraits bear no resemblance to their ostensible subjects. But there's an emotional charge between artist and subject when the artist intends to be at least somewhat faithful to the subject. Hockney, for instance, ups the ante by setting up a mirror for his subjects so that they can see what he's painting. (This has, reportedly, led to some funny arguments between Hockney and his father.)

Park calls that extra electricity in the air "a little accompaniment of worry when you raise your brush." While he says it would be "bad for the paintings" to capitulate to somebody else's idea about how they should be portrayed, he nevertheless walks the line by inviting outside forces into his studio. Where he used to have total control over his (inanimate) source materials, now he has to contend with them. When Park ran into the German painter Tim Eitel recently, Eitel said to Park, "I saw the portrait." That's all he said. Park has no idea what this means.

Another subject, Judy Wagonfeld, whose husband commissioned her portrait, delayed picking up her visage for weeks because she was worried that she wouldn't like it. "That's how crazy portraiture is," Park says. (Wagonfeld did like it, in fact, and had this praise for Park for doing portraits at all: "He's really putting himself on the line.")

The effects of studying the discipline of portraiture are already appearing in Park's still-lives. Mounted on the easel at his home studio now is an unfinished scene, based on a photograph Park took, picturing a bouquet of pink roses in a grocery-store case that are lit from the left by a neon tube. The painting is full of the same cubistic geometry and wild shading that he was practicing in his portraits, and it includes a reflection of Park's body as he photographed the glass case.

Unlike in his past works, these paintings have an aliveness that can only come from observation, and a tension fueled by Park's new dialogue with things he can't control. He intends, he says, to expand the portrait practice, from the current head shots to full-body works, and from photographed subjects to live sittings. "It looks like my whole career's done in reverse," he says, "where I'm working toward observation." ■

jgraves@thestranger.com



**Joseph Park: Amagansett**  
**Visionary Output: Work by Creative Growth Artists**  
**September 7 - October 14, 2006**  
**Opening reception, Sept. 7, 5:30–7:30pm**

For his exhibition at Rena Bransten Gallery, Seattle based artist **Joseph Park** has created paintings inspired by his recent sojourn in Amagansett, New York. Mining this area of rich artistic activity, Park uses lush, swirling brushwork to create powerfully stark depictions of the tree outside Pollock's studio, for example, or a rocking chair that belonged to de Kooning. The region's famed light and physical features — including the Walking Dunes — are strikingly captured in Park's restrained palette of cobalt based ocean blues and sepia browns, conjuring winter colors and seasonal nostalgia. His dynamic style seems equally inspired by Pollock's powerfully kinetic technique as by the motion of the wind and waves.

Park was born in 1964, in Ottawa, Canada, and graduated with a BA from Cornish College of the Arts, Seattle and with an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia. He recently had a solo exhibition, *Moonbeam Caress*, at the Frye Art Museum, Seattle (2005), and his work has been featured in group exhibitions such as *Drawn Fictions*, The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, Marylhurst, OR (2004) and *Comic Release: Negotiating Identity for a New Generation*, Regina Gouger Miller Gallery, Carnegie Mellon University (2003).

Now in its 32nd year, **Creative Growth Art Center** is the world's first independent visual art center for adults with developmental, physical, mental and emotional disabilities. This exhibition brings together 12 artists working across a broad spectrum of media from ceramics to painting and woodwork to drawing. Remarkably personal visions and aesthetic sensibilities are evinced in these unique bodies of work which include William Scott's visionary urban planning project for his home neighborhood of Hunter's Point; Donald Mitchell's labor-intensive and variously peopled drawings; Kerry Damianakes' particular blend of recipe-based pop seriality; Daniel Miller's obsessive numerical renditions; Charles Nagle's strikingly beautiful coil pots, and Kimberly Clark's celebrity homages, as well as the work of more emerging artists being seen outside Creative Growth for the first time. Featured artists: Kimberly Clark, Kerry Damianakes, Louis Estape, Dan Hamilton, Daniel Miller, Donald Mitchell, Charles Nagle, Aurie Ramirez, William Scott, Dinah Shapiro, Gerone Spruill and William Tyler.

Gallery hours are 10:30am to 5:30pm Tuesday through Friday and Saturdays 11am to 5pm. For more information, visit our website at [www.renabranstengallery.com](http://www.renabranstengallery.com).

SF BAY GUARDIAN, Sept. 6 - 12, 2006  
by Katie Kurtz

## "Amagansett"

BY KATIE KURTZ

 Printable version of this article

 Email this Article

**PREVIEW** The anthropomorphic creatures of Seattle artist Joseph Park's lush oil paintings exist between human and animal, light and dark, the concealed and revealed. There are cigarette-smoking bunny rabbits, ponderous elephants, and fighting bears. As human-animal hybrids, they are free to convey a twilit existential haunting that is usually inexpressible by anything purely human. The expectation of how they should act is negligible. Instead, interpreting human behavior through an animal form makes our actions more intelligible; Park's works become a mirror held to the positive and negative aspects of ourselves.

Looking at another area of Park's work, we see that some of his human figures are imbued with a kind of animalism. Or maybe it's the anthropomorphic work that makes the view possible. Either way, we begin to recognize how the distance between humans and animals is not so great. Then there are Park's interiors and exteriors, rooms and buildings that shimmer with a miragelike nostalgia. Lines waver and shadows recede, demonstrating how our memory of place and space is never quite as accurate as we'd like to believe.

Last year Park spent six months in the Hamptons with his family and painted this recent body of work. The

area has long served as a refuge for artists and writers from Manhattan, its mythic status reinforced by a slew of new books describing the activities of such art and literary luminaries as Jackson Pollock and Truman Capote. These books also lament the changes the Hamptons have undergone as celebrities and the uberwealthy have moved in (more traffic seems to be the most frequent complaint). A benefactor made it possible for Park to decamp there — interested perhaps in seeing how he would capture the twilight of a place that is fixed in the memories of its itinerant residents one way but has reached mythic proportions to those who have never been. (Katie Kurtz)

"AMAGANSETT" Opening reception  
Thurs/7, 5:30–7:30 p.m.

Tues.–Fri., 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m.;  
Sat., 11 a.m.–5 p.m.

Rena Bransten Gallery, 77 Geary, SF.  
(415) 982-3292,  
[www.renabranstengallery.com](http://www.renabranstengallery.com)



a.m.-9 p.m. today and 10-6 tomorrow at the Qwest Field Event Center, between the stadium and Safeco Field. No home project is so big or so small that you won't find something helpful from the exhibitors, whether it's contractor help or just a great gadget from one of the commercial product booths. Do it now or wait 12 months for the next opportunity at a show this big.



for live music and memorabilia celebrating the glory days of the long-defunct Spanish Castle ballroom, a hub for the Northwest rock scene in the "Louie, Louie" era. Dave Erickson, drummer for early Northwest rock band The Statics, is host of the free weekly jam session dubbed "Spanish Castle Memories." "We'd be happy to get anybody still living who played on the scene back then to come in and join us," Erickson said. The Statics will take the stage tomorrow night after an opening set at 8 by the Tim Turner Band. The Statics were among more than a dozen local bands who packed the Spanish Castle, on Pacific Highway South in Des Moines, on rock 'n' roll nights. Erickson recalls seeing a young Jimi Hendrix at the legendary local club. "He'd show up with a guitar and an amp and beg to play," he said.

with your teen?  
To P-I columnist  
Susan Paynter,  
snipping a hair  
sample for a  
drug test or  
attaching a  
bumper sticker  
to their car so  
other drivers can  
rat on them is  
not parenting.

MONDAY

## A MASTER OF FUSION

Painter Joseph Park borrows freely from others, but the results are strictly his own



BY REGINA HACKETT  
P-I art critic

When 19th-century poet Alfred Lord Tennyson wanted to be rude, he compared women to moonlight. "All thy passions, matched with mine / Are as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine..."

Times change. Moonlight is magic in Joseph Park's painting, at the Frye Art Museum and Howard House. "Joseph Park: Moon Beam Caress" is the first exhibit Robin Held has curated for the Frye and it signals she's rethinking the museum's commitment to realism, and not a moment too soon.

Realism was never the same as reporting. It was always interpretative, more about versions of reality

### ART REVIEW

#### JOSEPH PARK PAINTINGS

**WHERE:** Frye Art Museum, 704 Teny Ave., and Howard House, 604 Second Ave.

**WHEN:** Through May 22 at the Frye. Hours: Tuesdays-Saturdays, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; till 8 p.m. Thursdays. Sundays, noon-5 p.m.; through March 12 at Howard House. Hours: Tuesdays-Saturdays, 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m.

**ADMISSION:** Free

than definitions of it.

Park's version, in oil paint on linen, is fluid. In the best postmodern manner, he borrows freely but not randomly. What appears in his work is limited to what moves him and

what he can make his own. That includes Asian anime, American cartoons, 18th- and 19th-century French painting, 19th-century "floating world" Japanese prints, old-school American pinups, Technicolor sunsets from postcards, intimate moments from the movies as well as fantasy-kitsch from Las Vegas.

His work is intimate in size, never larger than two arms extended. High and low, bad and good fuse. Most attempts in this vein look cheap and seem automatic, a device instead of an inspiration. Park's have brains, skill to burn and authentic originality. The complexity of his painting looks effortless, but beneath its cool surface is a wealth of emotion.

"Moon Beam Caress" at the Frye concentrates on Park's figures, nearly

all of whom are Park's own brand of bunnies, bears and elephants. In Park's world, evolution is another word for fusion, and intelligent life pours itself into a small variety of similar containers.

"La Grande Odalisque" takes Jean Auguste Ingres' famously boneless paintings of nude women (all flesh, little structure), and sets not only the figure (an elephant) but the ground around her in motion. Curtain, bed, tassel, turban, tail and trunk arc seamless, one thing, a lost time looked at again with humor and a strange gravity.

In "Track," the subject is poised to move away from the audience. A bear in a subway train presses his

SEE PARK, E4



Joseph Park's "La Grande Odalisque," above, borrows the figure from Jean Auguste Ingres' sultry "Odalisque" and infuses it with elephantine allure. In "Honorific," top, Park transforms My Little Pony into a Farrah Fawcett pinup.

**Joseph Park**  
Howard House, Seattle



Photograph courtesy of Kimberly Bodnar.

My work is almost a parody of myself, a reflection of what I've thought of, done, or dreamt of doing. In one painting, I see myself as an angel approaching arms outstretched to receive his audience. In another, my wife and I are caught playing Cowboys and Indians. Laying on the floor, my wife becomes a rabbit basking in the sunlight.

It is important that my characters feel "at home" in the environment of the paintings. For example, the painting of my wife takes place on the second floor of my grandmother's house in Korea. A rabbit takes a smoke break in a market I frequent. An elephant becomes an odalisque (her parlor modeled after one by Ingres, who himself was fantasizing the look of the "Orient"). These slightly comic and slightly exotic characters inhabit settings with an air of familiarity, whether from my personal experience or from a cultural memory of well-known images.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bullis, Douglas.  
100 artists of the West Coast / by Douglas Bullis.  
1st ed.  
ISBN 0-7643-1931-0  
1. Art, American--California--20th century. 2. Artists--California--Psychology. I. Title. II. Title.  
III. Title.  
969.03 C3 B88 2003  
709.2 Z475-0241

2003019657

Copyright © 2003 by Douglas Bullis

*La Belle*, 2002. Oil on linen, 52" x 43".  
Collection of Kimberly Bodnar. Courtesy of Roberts and Tilton, Los Angeles. Photograph courtesy of Roger Schreiber.  
Depending on how specific the image will be, my process involves a lot of pre-visualization. I make most of my choices during the drawing phase. There I compose the image, make color choices, and so on. I usually paint it with very few changes.



My preoccupation with animals has much to do with their place in today's vernacular. We grow up with bunnies telling us what cereal to eat, what chocolate milk mix to drink. In comic books and cartoons certain animals reflect certain psychological traits. They also enable me to slip past racial impressions or stereotypes. More simply, some animals look good in turbans.

I set no agenda as to what a viewer should realize or understand. A high degree of specificity in a picture makes it easy for viewers to accept the piece at first glance, even when the "meaning" is ambiguous. The princess is bewildered, but why? A painting angel arrives on the scene, to accomplish what? I want the combination of simplicity and ambiguity to encourage viewers to enter the work and complete it on their own terms.



*Arrival*, 1998. Oil on canvas, 24" x 30". Collection of Chris and Joanie Bruce, Seattle. Photograph courtesy of Arthur Aubry.  
Friends say my work has a coy or wry quality. That is fairly accurate. I make pictures that I want to enjoy. They may have a little twist of some kind, but they do not satirize, and since they are so often about me, they never criticize.

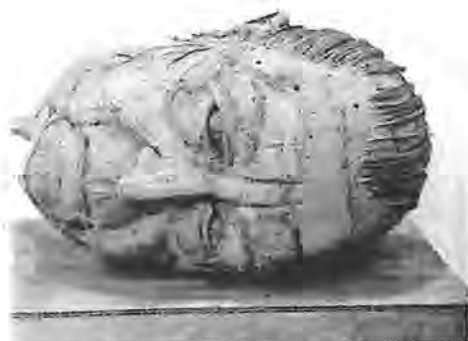
*La Grande Odalisque*, 2001. Oil on linen, 30" x 36". Collection of Ben and Aileen Krohn. Courtesy of Howard House, Seattle. Photograph courtesy of Roger Schreiber.

This painting was inspired by a trip to the zoo. The impossibly elongated spine of Ingres' *Odalisque* popped into my mind as I stood there looking at a reclined elephant with its seemingly unending vertebrae.



*Great*, 2000. Oil on canvas, 52" x 43". Schwartz Family Collection. Courtesy of Roberts and Tilton, Los Angeles. Photograph courtesy of Arthur Aubry.





Scott Fife: *Ludwig Mies van der Rohe*, 2004, cardboard, screws and glue, 20 by 40 by 30 inches; at Platform.

bridge is the subject of her "Crescent Bridge" paintings of the following year.) Another work from 1973 features six of her extracted teeth piled in a large clam shell. In this plainspoken memento mori, the armor is off, all defenses are down.

DeFeo's imaginative craft transforms everyday objects into resonant symbolic forms. A surreal-looking vacuum cleaner, a violin with a frayed bow and a shoe hanging on a wooden wall become forlorn vehicles of empathy and immense loneliness. DeFeo learned developing and printing techniques from her students at the San Francisco Art Institute and set up her own darkroom in 1973. Several pictures are darkroom manipulations involving smeared and dripped fixative. These reveal DeFeo's attention to surface effects and painterly process. Demonstrating a dazzling range and quality, the exhibition, curated by Stephan Jost, is an important step on the way to a full-scale museum survey of DeFeo's multifaceted career.

[On view at Mt. Holyoke College Art Museum, Sept. 3-Dec. 18.]

—Michael Duncan

Joseph Park: *Repasseur*, 2002, oil on linen, 30 by 36 inches; at the Frye Art Museum.



## SEATTLE

### Joseph Park at the Frye Art Museum and Howard House

At the heart of Seattle figurative painter Joseph Park's work is suspicion about the medium itself. Park did not want to be a painter, though today he produces interior scenes and landscapes mostly populated with anthropomorphic ani-

mals. He earned his MFA in 1990 from CalArts, where he made theory-based installations. Afterward, he picked up the brush only to sketch ideas for sculptures, telling himself it wasn't really painting. In 1998, he painted an angel descending from heaven holding brushes and a palette, titled *Arrival*, and thereafter he projected his conceptual concerns about representation onto the canvas full time. His first museum survey, of 21 modest-scale paintings from the last five years, resonates with rigor, dislocation and yearning, bringing to mind the elusive exaggerations of Lisa Yuskavage. The survey was accompanied by a gallery show of newer works.

The surfaces of the oils on linen and canvas are as smooth as television cartoons. Park often substitutes bears, bunnies and elephants for human subjects and makes the light moody and cinematic. His scenes, in which the characters wear stylized masks, are cloaked in the conventions of film, photography, animation, pin-up posters or French painting of the 18th and 19th centuries. Each mode is a filter of perception, thrown up to elicit active viewing.

The images invoke a specific, usually anxious, moment within a story that is never explained, only suggested. *Repasseur* (2002) depicts an anime-style teddy bear in undershirt and suspenders quietly ironing at the bottom of the basement stairs. A halo of light falls on his shoulders from the window behind him, casting a shadow that pools on the floor in paint-by-numbers swirls. A sink

is out of focus, as in a photograph. The crashing of disciplines in this lonely basement suggests that multimedia culture itself is feeding the sense of locked-up tension, alienation and mystique.

Park's animals wear subtle, tender expressions, while his humans are props upstaged by dramatic light. Character and setting are bound together. The sepia tones of *Still* (2001) fall like dusty heat on the weary laborer bunny in a tank top who slumps on an overturned box, his cigarette dangling, in the doorway of his dreaded workplace. He nurses his disaffection in shadow. *Petite Folie* (2002) is Park's twist on Fragonard's *The Swing*. No longer in heady love, the couple assumes a posed, balletic embrace, bearing cynical resemblance to a movie poster. They are made creepy by their facelessness, Park's way of inserting two disconcerting blanks in the middle of the composition.

The most recent works, at Howard House, have no figures at all. They picture buildings distorted by dazzling sunspots that physicalize the relationship between image and viewer. The effect is both entrancing and bracing. That is what it's like to follow Park, who has become a leading Northwest painter, on his skeptic's explorations.

—Jan Graves

### Scott Fife at Platform

This small grouping of four sculptures by Scott Fife followed a larger survey at the Tacoma Art Museum. The 55-year-old Seattle artist showed his painted-cardboard figurative sculptures in Germany and Switzerland throughout the 1980s and '90s. The current work represents an evacuation of color that gives the heads, busts and reliefs a ghostly quality.

Initial impressions of Fife's work might recall Red Grooms, but Fife's subjects and differing fabrication processes appear more solemn and visibly labor-intensive. Archival cardboard is cut into sections and layered to perfectly define facial features, here those of four important cultural figures: Frida Kahlo, Andy Warhol, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Popeye. As Fife builds up the cardboard using nails, screws, staples and glue, each figure's features can take on a Frankenstein's-monster-like appearance that does not inhibit the remarkable, lifelike gaze.

*Frida Kahlo* (2005; 25½ by 12

by 16 inches) is a small effigy of deathly pale white and blue skin with the characteristic unibrow and mustache. The head sports elaborately braided cardboard hair that is offset by earrings and by tears beneath each eye drawn in red pencil. Fife's version of Kahlo, idol and cult figure as well as artist, suggests either a cheesy monument or a tattered mockup for a larger bronze.

*Popeye* (2005; 24 by 15 by 20 inches) is closer to Grooms with its cartoon subject. The character's exaggerated features lend themselves well to Fife's mixture of delicate surface-drawing and comparatively crude method of slicing, molding and forcing cardboard sections into a large three-dimensional head.



Peter Millett: *Steps*, 2004, welded steel, 60 by 17 by 60 inches; at Greg Kucera.

With a background as an architect, Fife makes his sculptures resemble reverse blueprints (blue on white instead of white on blue) for structures that are unlikely to be built. He reinforces the satirical quality of his depictions by presenting his subjects in a provisional state.

A wall-mounted diptych of two relief heads, 18 by 16 by 1½ inches each, *Study: Young Andypies* (2005) borrows a youthful image of Andy Warhol complete with a carefully crafted floppy wig. Empty holes replace the artist's pupils. Like Warhol, Fife makes the heads differ slightly. The white-painted cardboard is perfect for Warhol's real-life pallor.

Most successful at exploiting the fallen monument theme is



## WHAT'S ON DISPLAY

# Park's bent for cartoon imagery touches universal emotions

BY JUDY WAGONFELD  
Special to the P-I

Although you won't need to line up outside Howard House for a ticket to Joseph Park's show, consider bringing popcorn. After all, Park thrives on artifice, steeping himself in movie and comic book fantasy. He loves drama and kitsch; the romance of Paris, Wyland Gallery's ocean art, paint-by-the-numbers and anthropomorphizing emotion.

Tapping into theatrical and cartoon traditions, Park bestows human attributes and Tinseltown pizzazz on animals. Currently, elephants tickle his fancy, representing tales as timeless as the sagas of Babar.

In the front gallery, he raises the curtain on seven oil on Mylar sketches. In four of these, everyday elephants negotiate Paris; strolling in a top hat, stepping sheepishly from an orange Citroen, driving a carriage and stuck as if a Dudley Moore drunk in a monster American sedan.

Park's bent for cartoon imagery hails to the 1960s Pop Art of Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol as well as his contemporary, Roger Shimomura. Instead of playing on Americana such as Campbell's Soup cans, Dick Tracy or Marilyn Monroe, Park infuses moody cinematic settings and narratives with hip Japanese manga (comics) and old master lighting and shading techniques.

Heeding Pop predecessors, Park hides brush marks in strikingly flat surfaces and prevents color bleeds between crisp graphic lines. But instead of Pop's punchy colors, Park favors muted hues.

In the darkened back gallery, shielded lights give his oils on canvas a garish luminosity that has been mistaken for projected imagery. As an installation, it works. Presentation elsewhere might be trickier.

Nevertheless, the red and blue phosphorescence piercing the steely gray interior of "Fathom's" submarine reads tension. Its glowering elephant captain silently warns, "I have a crisis so bug off." As the silhouetted couple in "Naturally" steal a furtive Snow White kiss, their icy blue forest hideaway explodes in shafts of light, a glorious fairy-tale finale.

Cloying brown and pink electrify "Honoric," an equine tribute to Tina Turner's wild



In "Naturally" the silhouetted couple steal a kiss and the forest hideaway explodes in light.

## ART REVIEW

### JOSEPH PARK: NEW WORKS

**WHEN:** Through July 12. Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-6p.m.; closed July 4

**WHERE:** Howard House, 2017 Second Ave., 206-256-6399, [www.howardhouse.net](http://www.howardhouse.net)

mane, defiant stare and taut, twitching body. This horse prances, not on a strobe-lit stage, but fenced in a sunset drenched, banal barnyard lifted from "Oklahoma." You wonder if the moral's an ironic comment on enslavement by gender or race.

Park, it seems, should have been born earlier than 38 years ago. Though Dinah Shore

never hit his radar screen, he paints "Deluxe" as if intimate with her 1950s TV theme song, "See the USA in your Chevrolet." His luxurious gas-guzzler laps up a rosy Bali Hai sky. Preening on glistening pavement, it's a radiant prime time ad, a drama paying homage to Impressionist paintings such as Gustave Caillebotte's "Paris, a Rainy Day" (1877).

Park, of Korean ancestry, grew up in Ottawa near French Canada and now lives in Seattle. His Disneyesque style betrays no cultural identities, deftly translating universal emotions, strengths and frailties. Motifs, like his shimmery wet streets, are slippery. On his stage, Park is a master of make-believe, illusion and wit. ☺

Judy Wagonfeld is a free-lance Seattle art writer. She can be contacted at [judywagonfeld@msn.com](mailto:judywagonfeld@msn.com).

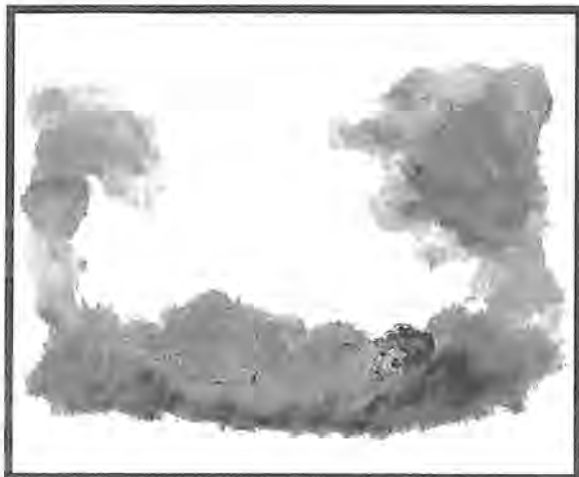
## Through Carter's lens the ordinary becomes poetry

Keith Carter photographs leaps of imagination. With a child's innocence and an artist's intuition, he grabs vulnerable moments that hang by a hair. Their clout arises, not from the black and white of his riveting photos now at G. Gibson Gallery, but from mystical au-

Carter exalts childhood; being tossed in the air, pulling a wagon and puzzling over circus magicians. He celebrates life; playing with a ball, living as he does in a rural Texas town and reading the news.

A self-taught artist, Carter has eight acclaimed





Joseph Park, (left) *Pastoral*, 2003, oil on Mylar, 24" x 36"; (right) *Honorific*, 2003, oil on linen, 20" x 24", at Howard House, Seattle.



lines throughout the flow of the thin paint on plastic.

with the large automobile, *Naturally* is a celebration of happy endings: a nineteenth-century couple locked in an embrace is caught in a gentle triangle of flood lights. Pure Park, these pictures are "feel good" stuff. The artist manages to tap into the nostalgia of cartoons and clichés with just the right amount of adult ennui to make us leave smiling without feeling silly.

—Frances DeVuono

Joseph Park: *New Works* closed in July at Howard House, Seattle.

Frances DeVuono is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

## Casey Keeler at James Harris Gallery

Casey Keeler's paintings and sculptures are sharp, funny and fresh. So it's surprising to hear him say: "My art acknowledges the sentimental. I started as a graphic

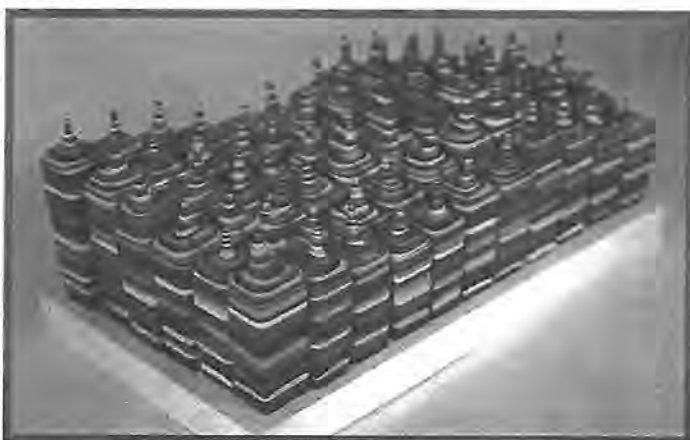
designer and I've always been drawn to pattern and decoration. I'm trying to be honest about what I like—bright colors and attractive surfaces."

Keeler's elaborately pooled and poured paint dots contradict the etiolated, flat calligraphic forms of his canvas's surface. He lays down a white ground, then, working on one-half of the canvas at a time, he lifts the canvas carefully and starts a series of acrylic paint drips running down. While still wet, he dots the surface with paint and pulls elegant curvilinear lines and scratches into the paint with the brush-end. After the first half dries, the process is repeated on the other half, creating a similar, but not exact, mirror-image. The end result, as in *Untitled #12*, is a startling design. The viewer thinks of fossils, disassembled skeletons or exploded protozoa under a microscope.

He chooses his palette deliberately, from the hundreds of color charts in his studio and he seems particularly drawn to combinations that vibrate with a quiet electricity. But the growing viscosity of his canvases is a new fascination for him and recently he has begun sculpting odd, modular pieces. "More and more, my compositions included a raised middle, and the surface of the canvas had increasingly thick layers of acrylic drips and lines. At some point, I saw that these were paintings trying to become sculpture."

*Peristaltic Wave* is a good example. It's an assortment of identical 3-inch wood blocks which Keeler has carefully and repeatedly dipped into multiple layers of acrylic paint. Each paint line succeeds the one below it, as neat and organic as the sedimentary lines in limestone. The colors are a sweets shop: root beer, peppermint and crème de menthe. All of these blocks are hung upside down so that each layer of pigment dries in sequence. Last, at the very tip of the block, Keeler places a plaster nipple and dips it in paint.

When all seventy-five blocks are dry, Keeler arranges them together into a tabletop sculpture. The cumulative image of *Peristaltic Wave* is that of a modern block of flats, but drenched with honey and topped with green icing. The work has both a childish and controlled appearance as if a toy chest has



Casey Keeler, *Peristaltic Wave*, 2003, latex paint on wood, 4' x 9-1/4' x 5-1/2', at James Harris Gallery, Seattle.

offer a respite from environmental disasters, not to mention the irony and negativity found in so much contemporary art. He doesn't ignore darkness but cloaks it with allegorical "tall tales" and visual gratification. He knows that humor and beauty are coping mechanisms.

—Lois Allan

Gaylen Hansen: *Tall Tales* closed August 23 at the Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, Salem.

Lois Allan is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

## Washington

### Joseph Park at Howard House

In his third exhibition at Howard House, Joseph Park's paintings continue in the cartoon-inspired style for which he is well known. What sets Park aside from the legions of young (and younger) artists who mine anime or otherwise flattened imagery is that his pictures are warmer than mere irony. Similar to what the three writing Davids (Eggers, Sedaris and Foster Wallace) do with the memoir genre, Park takes sentimental images and makes them sharp enough to give pleasure.

This exhibit is divided into two rooms. The first is filled with paintings on frosted, translucent Mylar that create a strong contrast to the smooth, highly finished quality of the oils on canvas in the second room. The Mylar works have the loose quality of sketches: stiff brush fibers incise a mass of faint but complex

Park's elephant man—one in the artist's collection of characters—is featured in what appear to be historical vignettes, ambiguous in content and awash in colors. In *Le Parisian*, the elephant, bathed in an orange-yellow haze, emerges from a Citroën. *L'aube* is dominated by eggplant purple and *Belarus* by cool gray and a top hat sporting elephant. Other images include a car and a Virgin of Guadalupe, but most affecting is the painting of a pregnant woman resting odalisque-style in a garden. It pushes all the other images—camp and comic—to the background. Titled *Pastoral*, it is nearly votive, a stylish rescue of the nude that doesn't need to declare itself cynical, simply sweet.

The back room is overtly theatrical with gray walls and lighting that consists of one lamp focused exclusively above each picture. As a result, there is a clear white and blue lined light around the individual works that reinforces the obvious link between Park's painting and Disney cartoon cells. In *Fathom* an elephant man stands with his hands behind his back, pensively monitoring the work of his crew in a control room. The room is lit with red highlights on the left and blue on the right, re-creating the baroque drama of pop movies and TV shows with a goofiness just short of pure parody.

Other nods to popular culture include *Honorific*, reminiscent of the 1970s toy, Pretty Pony, and *Deluxe*, which depicts a Lincoln Continental stretching out in madly heroic perspective. Rendered in purples, aquas and peach colors, it is a funny, beautifully painted image of the American romance

**JOSEPH PARK: THE HIGH, THE LOW, AND THE ROCOCO**

by Jim Demetre

**JOSEPH PARK, *La Belle*, 2002.**

Oil on linen, 52 x 43 inches. The Bodner Family Collection, Los Angeles. Courtesy of Roberts & Tilton Gallery, Los Angeles.

**Moon Beam Caress**

Frye Art Museum

Through May 22nd

**As contemporary artists** have turned increasing to figurative painting over the last decade, they have been forced to reinvent the medium and restore its once considerable power to move the viewer. Here in the Pacific Northwest, there is perhaps no artist who has more boldly answered this challenge than Joseph Park.

Park's paintings — which incorporate both scenes and technique from classic movies and Japanese *anime*, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century French painting and traditional Japanese landscapes, American cartoons and Japanese *manga*, as well as pin-up posters, print advertisements and other visual ephemera — reassert the primacy of the medium through emotion that stems from personal history, dramatic story-telling, and — frequently — the use of anthropomorphic animals as human surrogates.

In her first move as Curator of Exhibitions at the Frye Art Museum, Robin Held has chosen to redefine the institution's long-standing emphasis on figurative art by putting together a retrospective of his work.

Park, at forty, one of Seattle's most acclaimed and best-loved artists, would appear an excellent choice for a museum that seeks both to align itself more closely with the world of contemporary art and strengthen its ties to the region's own art scene. Like paintings that make up the Frye's collection, Park's work is grounded in historical and popular idioms. The fact that they often have bunnies, elephants, or bears as their subject gives the show a special connection to this unique, animal-populated venue.

Regardless of subject matter, there are characteristics common to all Park's paintings: the barely-discernible brush strokes are sublimated within his soft, rounded, and seamless forms. In recent years his

Ads by Goooooogle

**Paintings**

Switzerland builds its own mountain at the 2005 World Expo in Japan.

[www.swissinfo.org](http://www.swissinfo.org)

**Artist's Studio**

Award Winning

Paintings, Sculptures

Direct From the Artist,

Wholesale

[www.damonmaxwell.com](http://www.damonmaxwell.com)



palette has become bolder, brighter, deeper — and more nuanced. Most significantly, he seems to have grown fascinated — obsessed, even — with subtle illuminations and reflections within a wide spectrum of darkness and haze.

Park reinvigorates painting by instilling it with the dramatic flourishes of the sub-genres he embraces. Movies — with their brilliant colors, elaborate stage designs, and sophisticated lighting effects — loom large in these works.

In *Petite Folie* (2002), a young man and woman, dressed in outfits of the *Ancien Regime*, have a romantic tryst in a woodland clearing. Their faces, obscured by the thick rays of light that penetrate the shadows, have no discernible features. The force that propels them towards one another manifest itself in the empty swing the man has leapt from and the woman's shoe, which flies off the foot of her kicked-back leg. In the similar *Naturally* (2003), a couple kiss passionately in a horse-drawn carriage: the moon's rays break through a canopy of darkness, showering its soft light upon them.

Both works remind me of the prolonged fantasy sequences that break out with great exuberance at the climax of Gene Kelly's movies. While such representations of passionate joy and romantic love were once common-place in American popular culture, they have seldom found sincere expression in its high art. Confident in his approach to these subjects, Park has conquered sentimentality — the last great taboo of modern and contemporary painters.

*Petite Folie* is, of course, a variation on Fragonard's famous *L'Escarpolette*. Indeed, if there is any historical antecedent for Park's paintings and their unique spirit, it can be found in the Rococo style of Fragonard, Watteau and other French painters.

The Rococo — fragile, full of color, pastoral, and embracing trivial subject matter — allowed Europeans at the beginning of the 18th Century to recognize the ways in which religious conviction had given way to the uncertainties of humanism and the enlightenment. It also enabled them to engage in new pleasures. Originally a pejorative term for a ""decorative"" style, Rococo has since come to represent a state of mind.

It is not simply the lighthearted and spontaneous nature of these amorous scenes that connect Park to the period: the modes of expression in his work range from the humorous to the sublime to the melancholy. His ability to deftly move from one to the next, as demonstrated in these paintings, reflects a fluidity and psychological complexity characteristic of the style.

As with the Rococo, this is achieved through the appropriation of high and low genres from the distant past and recent present.

In *Honorific* (2003), a highly-stylized horse with a flowing mane struts before a dramatic sun-drenched horizon. Inspired both by the pony sketches of pre-teen girls and the hair of 70s pin-up Farah Fawcett-Majors, it possesses a quality of adolescent sexual longing and discovery. In *Venice* (2002), Park sees the landscape of the realist painter Canaletto through the artificial prism of the Las Vegas strip, a place which also inspired the Detroit muscle and palm tress of *Deluxe* (2003).

Park, who is Korean-American, has frequently used *anime* and *manga*-derived human figures as self-portraits. In a lecture at the Frye on February 23, he revealed the autobiographical nature of many of his paintings. In *Twilight* (1999), for example, the two drunken samurai stumbling through the moon-lit temple is a depiction of Park and his brother. In paintings such as *Noon* (1999), in which two women pull at the arms of an exasperated young man, we see the drama of Park's pre-marital romantic life.

The most significant of these is *Almond Blossom* (1999), a portrait of the artist as avatar of the confluence between both East and West, high and low. Inspired by a flower-decorated Japanese label that read "'Van Gogh,'" Park envisions an ear-bandaged artist in traditional Asian garb who clutches his wife while holding a handful of brushes defensively above his head. Above the pair floats a large blossom-laden almond bough.

Park's use of animals as subjects comes into play when he turns from his own history to Western art history. When asked "'what's with the animals?'" at the Frye lecture, Park explained that he wanted to strip his figures of specific human associations such as race. At first glance these insertions may strike us as merely ironic, but Park imbues his animal subjects with a vulnerability that speaks to our own disassociation and estrangement from the cultural history we feel obliged to carry on.

Two of the best examples are explorations of Ingres and Neoclassicism. As we gaze at the smooth back of female nude in *Bather* (2001), we are surprised to discover a discreet cotton-tail and long, floppy ears. In *La Grande Odalisque* (2001), the languorous reclining figure stares back at us, her face framed around an elephant trunk; her spine culminating in a narrow pachyderm tail.

The tradition of re-visiting and re-imagining familiar subjects and scenes is as old as painting itself. Park's approach, however, is very reminiscent of the Rococo painters.

In *Still* (2001), a rabbit sits in his undershirt taking a smoking break amidst the hustle and bustle of a hot afternoon. The casual melancholy of the figure brings to mind Watteau's *Giles*, a painting that reflected — perhaps more than any work of the era — the sense of alienation that would characterize the coming Romantic Era. There is also a displacement of subjects in Watteau's painting that links it to Park's work.

In *Giles*, Watteau depicts a group of actors who wear the traditional costumes of the Italian *Commedia dell'arte* somewhere in the countryside. A sad-faced man dressed as *Pierrot* stands in the foreground while his companions laugh and smile behind his back. As art historians frequently point out, the composition is based upon many centuries of paintings of Christ's Passion. By suggesting this historical precedent but offering his viewers instead a group of clowns, Watteau created a quality of emotion both subtle and surprising.

Joseph Park, who borrows wisely and liberally from pop culture, has managed to achieve something similar in our own age.



Student evaluates an oil painting that symbolizes the blend of eastern and western American culture. The piece above is an interpretation of movie director John Ford's classic tales. ADAM BYRNES/Daily Titan

## Hollywood spotlight recast

■ **EXHIBIT:** Graduate students Michele Cairella and Juliet Rosati explore old Tinseltown's glamour with interactive displays

BY ELANA PRUITT  
Daily Titan Copy Editor

About 200 people entered the doors of Cal State Fullerton's Main Arts Gallery last Saturday evening in order to understand the meaning behind Hollywood cinema.

Opening night of the "Recasting the Past: Beneath the Hollywood Tinsel" art exhibit featured fancy-dressed attendees, controversial artwork and loud television. Curators of the event, Juliet Rosati and Michele Cairella, proudly strolled from gatherings of friends to family, both breathing sighs of relief. Their two-year, planned project is finally on display.

"I can breathe now," Cairella said, holding a glass of sparkling champagne. "I only got two hours of sleep last night."

From oil paintings to three-dimensional art installation, the show depicted a variety of popular Hollywood-esque scenes, with each

piece challenging society's misconceptions about Hollywood glamour.

"This show is totally different," said Carlos Gonzalez, a post-graduate student of 2000. "It is a complete Hollywood experience."

The 26-year-old who left CSUF as an art major remembers a past on-campus exhibit featuring art and entertainment, but hardly brushed the depth of symbolism that Rosati and Cairella's show emphasizes. Roberto Parada was Gonzalez's favorite artist of the show, due to the exaggeration in his paintings.

Actress Linda Hamilton with bulging biceps and actor John Cusack blowing air into an inflatable John Malcovich, are among Parada's paintings.

Vibrating sounds are heard from behind a bloody-red, velvet curtain, as tortuous death scenes hide in black rooms. Artists portray that as a collective whole, society finds excitement in violent scenes on TV. Interactive situations are exhibited to challenge a person's preconceived notions of Hollywood drama.

Women screaming in black-and-white film, projector flashes of a man being shot against a black wall, and 136 rapid scenes of nerve-wracking telephone rings sustained many people's interest, while others walked away from uncomfortable scenes.

"It's a great show- I'm very impressed," said Agne Liv, a 34-year-old student at the Art Institute in Laguna Beach. Liv's favorite, featured art pieces, are by Carole Caroompas, as she describes the pop art collage of mixed media on canvas as interesting.

Rosati points out that every detail in the exhibit is on purpose and hope that she can answer any confusing aspects of it.

Opening night also welcomed a visit from a Croatian artist, Dalibor Martinis and a male performer in drag. Richard Littlefield was adorned in a beret, jewelry, black sleek outfit and heels. He was playing the part of the girlfriend to Tallulah Bankhead.

Being taped as he walked around with dramatic gestures and intensely eyeing many pieces, his theatrical performance as a character blended with the evening's Hollywood theme.

Andrew Frausto, a 20-year-old student at Mt. San Antonio College, spoke vividly about photographer John Water's pictures.

"The shots make me feel uncomfortable," the video production major said. "Waters looks like he's trying to show us that Jesus is just a character or maybe he became fascinated with death."

The exhibit in the Main Arts Gallery can be explored through Oct. 11, with various hours to attend.



# issues.

# Art

November | December 2000

Number 65

published in Los Angeles  
five dollars

\$5.00



0 74470 92045 8

## Joseph Park

at ROBERTS & TILTON, 9 September–7 October

Combining kitschy images with edgy subtexts, Joseph Park's enigmatic oil paintings look as if they could be individual panels excised from Japanese *manga* magazines. In one, a pint-sized cowboy lassos an angry bull; in another, a guitarist serenades his crying female fans; in a third, three businessmen slump against one another, eyes closed, glasses askew. The *manga* influence is apparent in the clean-lined precision of Park's almost imperceptible brushwork, his caricaturish style of rendering human and animal figures, and his conscious use of stock character types,

like Cowboy, Princess, Bear, and Rock Star, along with workaday personages such as Businessman and Chef. Although these images are banal in the extreme, the paintings are surprisingly complex in structure. Park doesn't ask viewers to identify with his flimsy subject matter. Instead, he keeps the focus on the context in which his works are viewed, utilizing a range of distancing devices that foreground artifice, self-conscious display, and overt sentimentality.

The layered compositional framework of Park's medium-size to large-scale paintings makes their theatrical nature clear. Trees, swinging doors, and spotlight beams function like proscenium arches, framing the tableaux as staged scenes. Park uses a neutralized type of grisaille that yields surprisingly rich results, in part because of the hints of muted yellow, brown, and red he sometimes mixes into his gray-scale palette to achieve various burnished, sepia-toned effects. His newspaper-friendly images emphasize his art's comic-strip lineage while also bringing to mind the expressionistic (and self-consciously artificial) lighting effects of film noir.

The show's most memorable—and haunting—painting is *Summit* (all works, 2000), in which the bodies of three young businessmen sag against one another in what

stead is directed from somewhere outside the frame. This anguished scene takes place onstage, and we are witness to a scene within a scene.

Something similar transpires in *Great*, which depicts a fairy-tale princess standing in the middle of a forest, a crown perched atop her head. Holding one hand to her heart and another to her open mouth, she strikes a beauty-contest winner's "who, me?" pose, although her openmouthed expression could just as easily signify real fear. Glints of light in her eyes again point to the presence of an external light source. Twinkling stars and tiny highlights shining from a young woman's huge round pupils is a familiar trope in *manga*, symbolizing the often rapturous dreams, romantic yearnings, and inward longings of youthful innocents. But whereas *manga*'s starry-eyed teens are by nature incapable of self-consciousness, Park's figures cannot escape it. And neither can the artist.

Both Park and his viewers know that he's serving up warmed-over kitsch for our viewing pleasure. In fact, we could think of the grinning chef in *Le Boeuf* as Park's alter ego, proudly unveiling an undistinguished side of beef as a female assistant at his side winks conspiratorially. Like the chef, Park takes obvious pleasure in finding new ways to make bland leftovers seem fresh and appetizing. Yet, he also realizes that this requires a complicit audience willing to lap them up. If the hack chef doubles as a debased version of the artist, the rock star in *Feelings* must certainly be his apotheosis. This androgynous figure is caught within an X formed by criss-crossing spotlights and framed by the superimposed images of adoring groupies. Is he trapped by the ubiquity of his image? Or free to act out whatever fantasy he desires? All that's clear is that neither the rock star nor his fans can exist within this sublime bubblegum moment without the other's presence. Park's stagy, supremely self-conscious paintings neatly illustrate the fact that once-invigorating debates about the role of kitsch and irony in contemporary art have become clichés. What keeps his works from following suit is his willingness to re-stage such arguments in terms that embrace and strategically exploit the productive contradictions within.

Claudine Isé is a writer and Assistant Curator at the UCLA Hammer Museum.



appears to be despair, exhaustion, or both. The visages of two women hover above inexplicably, like clouds brushing over a mountain range. We have no idea why the men are so distressed, or what their relationship to the women might be. Look closer, however, and you notice the harsh shadows cast across the men's unlined foreheads, the small white ovals of light reflecting from the lenses of their glasses and gleaming off the women's pupils. The light source isn't depicted in the painting but in-

Joseph Park  
*Feelings*, 2000  
Oil on canvas  
66" x 78"

# Art walk warms to the colors of summer

By REGINA HACKETT  
PI ART CRITIC

August is traditionally a slow month for galleries, with some of the best extending their July shows in order to take vacations or closing outright, but it's a good month for Pioneer Square's First Thursday Gallery Walk, taking place tonight from roughly 6 to 8.

Summer nights make the Square a draw, and a party atmosphere prevails. Joining in is easy: Head for the Square and follow the crowds, gallery to gallery.

"Planes of Color" is the best show in the Square, at Greg Kucera, 212 Third Ave. S., through Aug. 28. It features a wide range of contemporary painters who bring new life to the old theme of color field abstraction. Hours: Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Outside the Square and opening this weekend, Joseph Park continues to mine his smooth-as-silk, comic/corny kitsch in his new oil-on-canvas paintings at Howard House, 2017 Second Ave., through Aug. 29. (Opening Saturday, 6 to 9 p.m.; regular hours, Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.)

Also notable is "Sixth Sense" at Elliott/Brown Gallery, 619 N. 25th St. in Fremont, opening tomorrow, 6 to 8 p.m., and running through Aug. 28. It's a showcase for the 1998 emerging artists-in-residence at Pilchuck Glass School.



**"Crisis" is among Joseph Park's kitschy oil paintings on display at Howard House.**

(Hours: Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.)

Francine Seders Gallery, 6701 Greenwood Ave. N., continues to make a visit to the Phinney Ridge neighborhood necessary, this month with "Ordinary People," featuring figurative painters Jacob Lawrence, Pat DeCaro, Spike Mafford and Kimo Minton. Opening tomorrow and running through Sept. 3, with artists' reception Sunday 3 to 5 p.m. (Hours: Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sundays by appointment. Call 206-782-0355.)



# Meyerson & Nowinski's final 'New Year Show' is a winner

By REGINA HACKETT  
PI ART CRITIC

**B**ecause the year is going to be short at the soon-to-expire Meyerson & Nowinski Gallery, the "New Year Show" is first of all a joke.

On another level, it isn't a joke at all, because this show is probably the best thing the gallery has produced. With style and wit, the "New Year Show" asserts its place in the contemporary moment, coming out strongly for subversively dopey banality.

In a solid lineup of artists, Seattle's Joseph Park manages to make a strong impression. Like John Currin in New York, Kim Dingle in Los Angeles and Masami Terakoya in Hawaii, Park is a painter attracted to the dark side of dumbing down.

"Flowers" (30 inches high, 24 inches wide, oil on canvas) looks as if it might have been painted by André Derain in his post-cubist, pseudo-classical phase, but with a twist. It's 1930s Derain filtered through Walt Disney. In darkening shades of blue and green, the flowers and vase look carved and ready to spring into animate action, perhaps to bow in appreciation as Betty Boop trips into the room.

"Oly" (36 inches high by 40 inches wide) is also tipping its clown's hat in the direction of art history, this time giving Edouard Manet's 1863 "Olympia" a makeover. Park is of course aware that "Olympia" was Manet's version of the shock of the new and in its turn a makeover of Titian's "Venus of Urbino" from 1538.

Titian painted a lounging goddess displaying her naked body with an air of submissive modesty. Manet presented a prostitute in the same pose, staring frankly and appraisingly at the viewer.

Park offers a unisex squirt swaddled not in sheets but in battle-field camouflage, signifying sex: role confusion and come-hither fatigue. There's precision in Park's lazy charm and real depth in his seemingly shallow style.

L.A.'s Maura Bendett first exhibited in Seattle last year at CoCA in a grim group show from Los Angeles. Amid the swine, it was hard to find her pearls. They shine here, little loopy collages whose awkward



Joseph Park's "Oly" plays off of Edouard Manet's 1863 painting "Olympia," itself a makeover of Titian's "Venus of Urbino" from 1538.

## ART REVIEW

■ **New Year Show** at Meyerson & Nowinski, 123 S. Jackson St. Through Jan. 24, Tuesdays-Saturdays, 11 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

grace packs a wallop.

Portland's Tad Savinar sometimes falls flat, but when he scores he does it big.

"Mother's Pride" is his slyly original commentary on the new age of organic mechanical reproduction. Savinar commissioned Sean Cain to paint an oil portrait from a black-and-white photocopy of an Associated Press wire photo of Dolly, the world's first cloned sheep, and her first natural offspring.

The painting's pedigree he embossed into a copper plate and hung from a chain attached to the painting's frame, ending his credit line by listing its omissions: "The father of the offspring wasn't credited in the photos, neither was the photographer."

Early 20th-century modernists agreed on one point: the necessity to "make it new." Nicola Vruwink wants to update the message and render it foreign to its founders.

Instead of new, she's making it sweet.

For her entry into last year's master of fine arts degree exhibit at the University of Washington's Henry Art Gallery, she constructed a full-scale garden landscape made of marshmallows.

At Meyerson & Nowinski, she filled half a gallery with an enormous pink foam wedding cake decorated with ceramic flowers and topped with a girl mannequin standing tough and solitary with her hands on her small hips.

Vruwink has been accused — quite wrongly — of borrowing heavily from L.A.'s Charles Ray. His mannequins are all about scale. Hers is about attitude. The title of the piece says it all: "You Can Look But You Can't Touch."

Seattle's Jeffrey Simmons certainly isn't marching to Vruwink's make-it-sweet orders. Instead, he's determined to make it sour. His drippy acrylic pinwheel paintings give dissonance new visual meaning.

Rounding out the "New Year Show" are Paul Berger's Iris-jet prints, the visual art equivalent of channel surfing. Berger cruises through the image world, making collages from its apparitions. Something ominous lurks behind his innocuous surfaces. Once in your head, they linger to become the equivalent of selective memory erasures: your life without you in it.

■ Regina Hackett can be reached at 206-448-8332 or e-mail her at reginahackett@seattle-pi.com

In a solid lineup of artists, Seattle's Joseph Park manages to make a strong impression. Park is a painter attracted to the dark side of dumbing down.