



Katherine Bowling

BLUMHELMAN GALLERY

More tricky painting. It's quite good if one likes tricks, and I do, because they seem to be (almost) all that's left of painting. Out of a wonderful mesh of gestures Katherine Bowling builds a nest and lays her egglike flowers in them. The pseudonaturalness of the surrounding broad, green brushstrokes (slightly ominous in their darkness) supports the flurry of thinner, drippier black and white marks that, like a final act of magic, generate the nest's aura. The painting is now more deliberate than spontaneous, in line with the Caesarian birth of the image. It is as though Bowling's paintings are a labor of love in which a sacred heart is cut out of the matrix of gestures.

What is left of painting is a blur of art-artifice-archness-artiness. Another boundary has collapsed, not only between avant-garde and kitsch, the pure and the narrative, the abstract and the pictorial, but between the archaic and the anecdotal. This is because all the techniques have melded: spontaneous painterliness and coolly calculated line, free form and composition. Painting has become a Whitmanesque jumble of methods and aristocratic cynicism: ironic and dandyish, but also freewheeling and compulsive. The result is some kind of glory and transcendence, but also a peculiarly self-deprecating, hesitant quality. Bowling's works may or may not be superior kitsch, but at least they aren't coy, even though they're clever and, perhaps inadvertently, ironic.

Her works pay a certain homage to painting itself—painting celebrating its own fluidity (taken together, her paintings are a remarkable tour de force of gesturalism)—along with a certain hopefulness, a sense that a meaningful mirage will emerge from the sheer rush of the paint. This is what gives them a certain durable interest. I have always thought that in abstraction mysticism went underground, but Bowling's intense paintings, for all their post-Modern trickery, keep alive the mystic impulse—the impulse to merge with what is larger than oneself yet can be found there. For this, I value them; her secularization of abstraction keeps its flame from flickering out.

—*Donald Kuspit*

REVIEWS

happy to go along with it, but why does the past feel better? I can see through the simulacrum, and I need something I can't see through, something that forces me to see. Will the real Miró please stand up and make itself known? Parody is a parasite that sooner or later destroys its host, which leaves the parasite high and dry until it finds another one, though no doubt there's an almost endless supply in the Modernist past. Granted, the painterly blood sucked out by the parodying parasite is perhaps the only nourishment left in the corpse of abstraction, so let's give credit where credit is due. If, like Weinstein, you can get wine out of stone you're no doubt as good a painter as Moses was a prophet, but, then again, his brother's snake ate up the snakes of the false magicians.

—Donald Kuspit

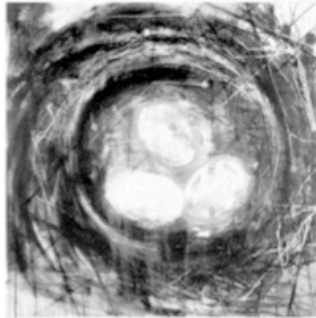
KATHERINE BOWLING

BLUMHELMAN GALLERY

More tricky painting. It's quite good if one likes tricks, and I do, because they seem to be (almost) all that's left of painting. Out of a wonderful mesh of gestures Katherine Bowling builds a nest and lays her egglike flowers in them. The pseudonaturalness of the surrounding broad, green brushstrokes (slightly ominous in their darkness) supports the flurry of thinner, drippier black and white marks that, like a final act of magic, generate the nest's aura. The painting is now more deliberate than spontaneous, in line with the Caesarian birth of the image. It is as though Bowling's paintings are a labor of love in which a sacred heart is cut out of the matrix of gestures.

What is left of painting is a blur of art-artifice-archness-artiness. Another boundary has collapsed, not only between avant-garde and kitsch, the pure and the narrative, the abstract and the pictorial, but between the archaic and the anecdotal. This is because all the techniques have melted: spontaneous painterliness and coolly calculated line, free form and composition. Painting has become a Whitmanesque jumble of methods and aristocratic cynicism: ironic and dandyish, but also freewheeling and compulsive. The result is some kind of glory and transcendence, but also a peculiarly self-deprecating, hesitant quality. Bowling's works may or may not be superior kitsch, but at least they aren't coy, even though they're clever and, perhaps inadvertently, ironic.

Her works pay a certain homage to painting itself—painting celebrating its own fluidity (taken together, her paintings are a remarkable tour de force of gesturalism)—along with a certain hopefulness, a sense that a meaningful mirage will emerge from



Katherine Bowling, *Nest*, 1993, oil on spackle on wood, 48 x 48".



Manuel Ocampo, *Istasyon Libre/Eighth Station*, 1994, oil on canvas, 60 x 90".

the sheer rush of the paint. This is what gives them a certain durable interest. I have always thought that in abstraction mysticism went underground, but Bowling's intense paintings, for all their post-Modern trickery, keep alive the mystic impulse—the impulse to merge with what is larger than oneself yet can be found there. For this, I value them; her secularization of abstraction keeps its flame from flickering out.

—DK

MANUEL OCAMPO

ANNINA NOSEI GALLERY

Manuel Ocampo's solo debut in New York was a vivid send-up of his native Philippines, particularly the role of the Catholic Church in a culture that has brought us, among other spectacles, Imelda's famous shoe-filled room. The 13 relatively large paintings featured here, aptly titled "Stations of the Cross," (all works 1994) formed a blasphemous send-up of Catholic excess, particularly the pious self-mortification practiced yearly by penitent Filipinos who reenact each of the Fourteen Stations of the Cross—including the crucifixion, nails and all.

Although often presented within the context of emerging Asian artists, the 28-year-old, Los Angeles-based Ocampo has more in common with Mexican painters like Frida Kahlo and Julio Galán who have reinvented the religious genres of the retablo and the ex-voto. But Ocampo's repertoire is not reducible to a single strategy—his solid grounding in Spanish colonial painting is enriched by the use of both high and low visual vocabularies. Cleverly manipulated Expressionist and neo-Expressionist tropes mingle freely with passages indebted to Asian sign

painting, edgy cartoon characters, and mass-media images. These works are an outrageous mix of horror and decorative beauty.

Needless to say, Ocampo's "stations" do not replicate those recounted in the Bible. In *Eighth Station*, a horned devil spews blood onto a host of skeletons being picked clean by crows, while a banner reads "Paradiso Abierto A Todos" (Paradise is open to all). Even more grotesque is *Twelfth Station*, in which a giant cockroach defecating its young and wearing a crown of thorns is dutifully worshipped by a boy and his dog. What makes these images so effective is Ocampo's utter mastery and subversion of the language of religious painting—including the weathering of each work to give it an "authentic" colonial look. In his dedication to damning societal hypocrisy through manic cultural reclamation, Ocampo shares an unmistakable kinship with the late Jean-Michel Basquiat.

This show's tour de force was *Istasyon Libre/Eighth Station* a painting that summarizes the major formal and iconographic concerns of Ocampo's oeuvre. A diaphanous figure with a globe (turned to the Philippines) for a head and a bloody stump for an arm stands at the center of the composition, wielding a can of pesticide. A regular in the artist's lexicon of symbols, this character embodies the blindness that results from rejecting one's own cultural heritage, which in Ocampo's case includes the many different strains that comprise the protean cultural landscape of the Philippines. Flanked on all sides by figurative, textual, and decorative caricatures that symbolize his country's violent, cross-cultural history—ranging from indigenous totems to evil-looking American eagles—Ocampo's infant is, Christ-like, willfully

reborn, albeit into a sublime ignorance that also appears, not surprisingly, to be a method of survival. This painting epitomizes the ambivalence that pervades and charges Ocampo's work as he attempts to retrieve and reconstruct something resembling an identity from the ruins of history.

—Jennifer P. Borum

URSULA VON RYDINGSVARD

GALERIE LELONG

Like many of Ursula von Rydingsvard's exhibitions, this show paradoxically celebrated the monumentality of the everyday. Autobiographical in content, these new sculptures also reflect the artist's process-oriented mode of working: her engagement with the wood's physical qualities.

Iconographically, these works draw on the same sources as her earlier pieces: common handmade farm tools, domestic implements, the wooden architecture of peasants' dwellings and small country churches as mythical prototypes, and the emphatically "mechanical" concerns of Minimalism and post-Minimalism. They refer to both the tenacious memory of rural life in Poland and the Ukraine—her parents' homelands conceptualized through the filter of a childhood spent in a refugee camp in Germany during World War II (refreshed but not altered by the artist's recent visits to Poland)—and to her formative years as a sculptor in the early '70s.

That von Rydingsvard's artistic vocabulary is born of a dichotomy was evident in *Dla Gienka* (For Gene), 1991–93, a solid and solemn wall-like structure made of doweled and glued four-by-