



SoHo

...The diversity and aesthetic excellence demonstrate the value of the co-op

by Ellen

SoHo 20, a New York women artists' cooperative gallery, opened in October 1973 with two one-artist shows by Sylvia Sleight and Maureen Connor. Though the gallery since then has had arguably some of the best shows in SoHo, it remains relatively obscure, a name but not a place to the media and most gallery goers.

As a reviewer for *Arts Magazine*, I have written often about the exhibitions at the gallery since its inception, and have gotten to know many of the members. The women, currently 21 in number, are warm and supportive, turning out in full force for each other's openings, and transmit a firm sense of unity, despite the wide diversity of their work.

Two of the members, Mary Ann Gillies and Joan Glueckman, are responsible for SoHo 20's formation. They had met at meetings of Women Artists in Revolution, at which they also met Agnes Denes, who in August of 1972 told them of the plans for the soon-to-open A.I.R. co-op gallery. Denes suggested formation of another co-op, citing "much need for women's galleries", and also suggested they maintain a loose structure for flexibility. In March, 1973, Glueckman, Gillies, and Marilyn Raymond, a busi-

nesswoman and friend of Glueckman's, got together to form the new gallery. They chose the co-op structure, new at that time, as they did not have the financial means for any other structure, and it afforded the opportunity for the women to achieve something for themselves and to spread knowledge and information to other women. Raymond was given the business end, while the other two women were responsible for gathering the art. She relieved the artists of financial and practical tasks, by finding the gallery space, arranging for electricians, etc.

Meanwhile, Glueckman and Gillies, working on the feminist theory that women are able to fend for themselves without becoming "victims of commercial galleries like men", were searching for women artists to join them. Denes gave them names of likely prospects. In May-June they advertised in *The Village Voice* for women who were "financially able and had time" to join the "feminist co-op gallery." In addition, the two artists searched through the Women's Slide Registry. By July, 1973, Sylvia Sleight, May Stevens, Marge Helenchild, Rachel Rolon de Clet, Maureen Connor, Lucy Sallick, and Rosalind Shaffer had

joined, and the search for a suitable loft space began. Halina Rusak, Marion Ranyak, Elena Borstein, Barbara Coleman, Eileen Spikol, Sharon Wybrants, Suzanne Weisberg, Morgan Sanders, and Eunice Golden joined, and formed the gallery's initial membership. Cynthia Mailman and Tania joined during the first season; Shirley Gorelick, Kate Resek, and Susan Hoeltzel joined in 1974. Vernita Nemeo, Carol Peck, Diane Churchill, and Noreen Bumby joined at the beginning of the current season. Of these women, Sleight, Stevens, Helenchild, Weisberg, Coleman, and Tania have since left the gallery. Raymond remained "president" of the co-op until 1974.

The criterion for membership was and

Sylvia Sleight, *SoHo 20 Gallery*, 1974. Oil on canvas, diptych, each 72x96". Left panel: standing, left to right: Rachel Rolon de Clet, Halina Rusak, Mary Ann Gillies, Suzanne Weisberg. Seated: Marilyn Raymond, Barbara Coleman, Eileen Spikol, Sharon Wybrants, Elena Borstein, Joan Glueckman.



SoHo 20

...ce within this women's co-op gallery

...perative in today's art system...

by Lubell

is quality work. The initial core group chose the new work, and as they joined, the newer members became part of the selection process. In order to show enough of the artists in a season, two solo shows at a time became the exhibition format. There are now no directors or leaders; committees execute the various tasks. Slides of other artists are viewed continuously during the season. A studio committee visits promising applicants and chooses new members for the group.

The committee looks for work that would add to the diversity of the group, in addition to quality. Aesthetically, the group is wide-ranging, with a common denominator in an emphasis of the

objective, i.e., an intensification of the qualities of the particular objects the artists produce. One has the impression that the artists work very hard at the crafts of making paintings and sculptures; they command a strong physical presence.

The work can be divided into three broad categories: painting, sculpture, and work in various media displayed in the formats of painting and sculpture. Ten of the 12 painters are involved in representational images. Whether painting figures, places, or objects, they are concerned with the content of their images, and strive as hard for the descriptive/narrative aspects of the images as for the formal aspects.

Many of the subject images are based on transformations of the observed. Elena Borstein's paintings isolate portions of Mediterranean structures and spaces; she keeps their feel but alters their appearance to increase the expressiveness (of a particular aspect) of the scene. Cynthia Mailman's landscapes, seen through car windows, are comprised of flat areas of color in which the descriptiveness is provided by the color and the silhouette outline of their shapes. The space and the mood of the sites are

heightened by the views in the automobile mirrors, generally included in the compositions, that reflect the scene behind the point of view of the unseen onlooker. Present and passed are combined. Morgan Sanders combines painting and photo-collage to create portraits of old buildings on Manhattan's Upper West Side. One sees a combination of details large and small, and though lacking an overall view, receives an almost impressionistic report of the ambience and era of each particular building. Susan Hoeltzel isolates small, everyday objects on canvases with pale gray-brown washes. Her subjects are the only sites of intense color and activity in each work. They appear singly, or, if combined in one composition, are compartmentalized and separated. The objects grow in intensity and three-dimensionality through her treatment, which includes writing, notes referring to the painting or to her environment at the time of the painting. Lucy Sallick's approach to her still lifes also results in their intensification. She places her colorful studio objects on white floors; no horizon line and no other colors compete for attention. Her approach also forces our attention to the

Right panel: top row: Sylvia Sleight, Maureen Connor, Marge Helenchild, Lucy Sallick, May Stevens. Bottom row: Eunice Golden, Cynthia Mailman, Rosalind Shaffer, Marion Ranyak. Founding member Sleight first displayed this painting at her inaugural exhibition on joining A.I.R. Gallery in 1974. Courtesy A.I.R. Gallery.

Elena Borstein

Noreen Bumby

Maureen Connor

Diane Churchill

Joan Glueckman

Eunice Golden

Susan Hoeltzel

Cynthia Mailman

Kate Resek

Morgan Sanders

Eileen Spikol

objects, and are hung on the wall, like sculptural paintings. Eileen Spikol's mixed media sculptures, including both wall and leaning pieces, are like transformed anthropological finds. The casts of man- and ape-like faces, with other rough, pseudo-artifacts create the look of unearthed relics.

The remaining two members, Joan Glueckman and Carol Peck, create neither paintings nor sculpture, but different kinds of work presented as framed and hung on the walls. Glueckman's needlepoint compositions extend for us the possibilities of the medium beyond the homey and the cute; she displays a mastery of texture and color achieved through the manipulation of the stitches. Peck makes color copier reproductions of small pieces of printed matter, most often comic strips, and combines the square-shaped originals and grids in shaped compositions. She uses color, image, and repetition to turn the component "real" images into abstract totality.

I have saved the description of the women of SoHo 20 for last. Prior to writing this piece I distributed a questionnaire to the members of the gallery in order to get a direct, personal relation of why they had joined and where they had come from. The answers were, in some ways unexpected, and in others, demonstrative of the value of a cooperative gallery in general as well as of SoHo 20. Before joining the gallery, the member artists reported they ranged in status from

"no shows and a closet full of paintings" to having 20 years of exhibitions behind them. The norm was a history of less than 10 years of exhibitions in group shows outside of New York City. In response to the question, "Why did you join SoHo 20?" several women mentioned their need to escape their isolated circumstances. One reported she had been "discouraged and isolated in the suburbs with three little kids" while another suburbanite felt "isolation from the mainstream" of the art world (though she already belonged to a women's co-op and had been painting for 20 years). All felt SoHo 20 was an opportunity to become part of the art world and to simultaneously gain the support of the group of women. A number of artists expressed dissatisfaction with commercial galleries. An artist who had previously been represented by four commercial galleries found most of them "stultifying and unreliable", while another artist did not want to show her slides to these galleries. Of course, there were many women who joined simply because the opportunity afforded itself, but most preferred the women's co-op structure.

When questioned about the advantages and disadvantages of membership in a women's co-op, most of the artists complained of the amounts of time and money required of them, the difficulties of group decision-making, and the lack of sales and publicity representation. The advantages described, however, seemed to

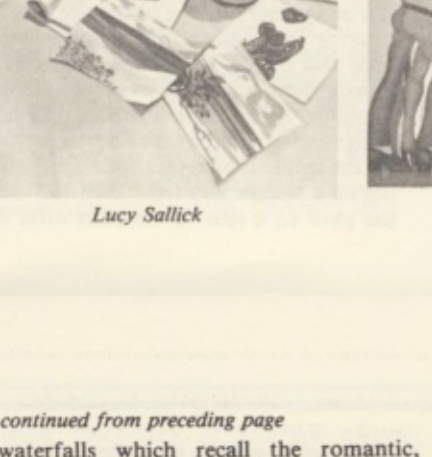
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Carol Peck

Rachel Rolon de Clet

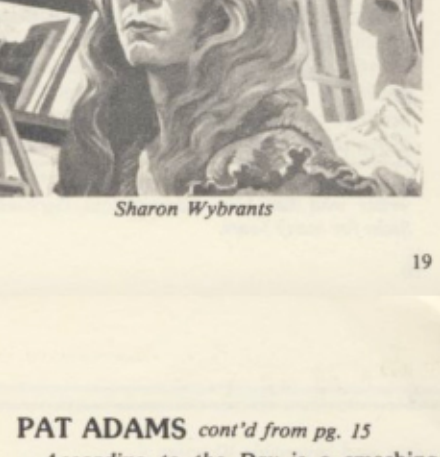
Halina Rusak

Sharon Wybrants



Lucy Sallick

Rosalind Shaffer



Sharon Wybrants

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waterfalls which recall the romantic, pastoral works of the nineteenth century Hudson River school. The artist focuses on rugged motifs, but the mood they evoke is gentle and benevolent. In contrast to this idyllic calm, the atmosphere in the ambitious compositions that incorporate archetypal figures—for example, *Earth, Air, Water* (1976)—is more dramatic and harsher. The mythical nudes may seem stiff and unnatural in these landscape settings where soft outdoor light and warm tones have yielded to the characteristically fine, controlled draftsmanlike lines which permeate throughout the show, which includes works dating from 1969 to the present. In addition to the extensive timeless landscapes, there are very careful and accurate plant studies and two sanguine figure drawings, as well as several small oil sketches. The latter are pastel-like sky studies executed in a looser and softer technique.

—Judith Tannenbaum

Helen Quat

(*Alonzo Gallery, Mar. 9-Apr. 3*) The first one-woman exhibition of Helen Quat's work in Manhattan reveals this artist's polished draughtsmanship and technical virtuosity within the etching medium. Her method is color viscosity, a means, she explains in her demonstrations, by which intaglio and surface colors can be printed on one plate and in a single printing without blending. The results achieved by her skillful manipulation of color and surface on the deftly-worked plate are rather stunning and almost science-fiction like evocations of the metamorphosis of organic forms—rocks, shells, coral glide and roll in space like luminaries on an astral plane. These are in part derived from such natural objects which she brings to the surface during scuba diving excursions on vacation.

In a surreal vein, she is obsessed with the swirling motion of a large flower-coral form which seems affected by wind, water, fire in its nomadic wanderings. Her imagery is suggestive of the associations of many levels of nature from the flight of a bird to intimate parts of the femininity. Titles such as *Cosmic Encounter*, *Fire Dance*, *Peaks and Valleys* conjure up such symbolic overtones which accord well with her complex working of the etching medium.

Although the etchings are the most inventive and successful, the show also includes a number of delicate and accomplished silverpoint drawings rendered with great finesse. Paintings continue similar imagery; the tones are strikingly like planetarium views of the twisted surface of some strange planet. But they are rather more of an extension

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outweigh these disadvantages. The gallery's pursuit of self-criticism and quality work was generally praised, as was the sense of SoHo 20. As exhibiting members of a New York gallery, their attitudes and careers seem to have taken on new definitions and goals, as if the rigors and realities of their memberships have made them aware of what they are able to do, as artists and as women. Over the past three years, I have watched the gallery as a whole improve in physical appearance and in functioning. More importantly, I have seen the work of the individual members undergo changes which have almost always been for the better. I have seen styles change, compositions tighten, ideas clarified in the work of most, if not all, of the artists. It is a gratifying, wonderful aesthetic experience to watch "young" artists develop and progress with the gallery.

The detailing of the SoHo 20 experience by its members leads me to conclude that women's cooperatives are vitally needed, as both alternatives to the male-dominated commercial gallery system, and as sources of communication and support for women "out of the mainstream" who require exposure and education in order to establish themselves in the art world. SoHo 20 has served, and continues to serve, these functions, providing a strong impulse to follow, and showing the art world that one need not be a victim of the system in order to be successful within it.

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than a primary concern so far. For the present, it is her astuteness in the print shop which stands out.

—Barbara Cavaliere

PAT ADAMS cont'd from pg. 15

According to the Day is a smashing little painting. A blue/gray ground, that looks a bit like marbled end papers, is interrupted by a red scalloped right angle, a brilliant rainbow of green, yellow and blue bands, and a solid triangular slab of pinkish tan cutting off the left side. Beneath this element is another corner device filled with three geometric forms in brilliant colors. (These right angles remind me of picture frame samples the framer puts around the corners of a picture to see what it will look like.) Shiny spots sparkle unevenly over the whole surface. The increasing size, firmness, and unitary quality of her geometric shapes is epitomized by *Rose* with its huge plane of connected triangles and a rhombus. She floats complete squares, circle segments, rectangles, and squares with less and less temerity all the time. Her lines seem tauter, more like spring steel, less malleable and calligraphic over all.

The recent emphasis on the geometric brings a new clarity to Adams' content. It's a break with the more hermetic attitude that seemed to dominate before. The new paintings look less like enlarged details and more like enormities contracted to manageable size. They have so much built-in scale and formality they could be any size. She has always known that she needed to keep the hands made look out of her pictures to separate them from the beautifully designed, well crafted appearance of manuscript illumination or Oriental miniatures. That's why she developed her arsenal of automatic techniques for applying paint. On the other hand, she has studiously avoided the gesture or the calligraphic line as a "seismograph of the soul" the way Mark Tobey used it, for instance. She's not interested in the obsessive drive, the tiny mark or the emotional line. She gives even her looping lines, the most easy-going part of any of her paintings, the snap of being intended and of having some definite place to go. Their meanderings never seem purposeless or accidental, but carefully planned instead.

It is a narrow path she treads between these two essentially contradictory modes. A similar duality occurs in her surfaces, which she wants to be supple and malleable but not soft or penetrable. She needs to make them exert maximal optical and haptic pressure (to feel full) without becoming closed or jewel-like. It is a desire for the deeply intimate experience of miniature painting without its smallness of ambition. As she says, "What I want for most of my work is a ranging accuracy, yet a locus where everything is hugging to bear; it has to do with a close hugging of the contour of reality. And by reality I mean a very complex experiential density. Painting, then, is my report on that reality."