

## Reviews

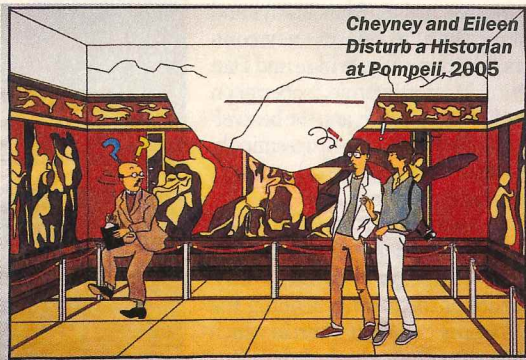
Lucy McKenzie,  
"SMERSH"Metro Pictures, through Oct 8  
(see Chelsea).

The heyday of modernism found many artists obsessing on personal style, working like scientists to develop a secret formula that, once successful, they'd spend the rest of their careers refining. Contemporary (read: postmodern) artists seem so bent on breaking this mold that their exhibitions can sometimes look more like group shows than solo ones.

So it is with Lucy McKenzie, a Glaswegian making her New York debut. But the paradox is that, while her work may be hyper eclectic, her mind is still very much on the modern era. Among the five groups of work at Metro Pictures are a series of charcoal rubbings that look like blown-up black-and-white Mondrians; traditional figurative drawings in the vein of Fairfield Porter; broadsheets with printed text and

ink drawings that recall manifestos and artists' publications; works inspired by cartoon murals; and, finally, paintings inspired by Tintin, a character created in 1929 by the father of European comic realism, the Belgian Hergé.

The trick, of course, is to make all of this hang together (even good group shows, after all, have some kind of thematic connective tissue). And in McKenzie's case, it does. As viewers move through the disparate rooms, the specter of modern history hovers over the exhibition—from *De Stijl* to SMERSH, the show's title, borrowed from a Russian acronym used by Soviet counterintelligence. Style works here, not as an easy way of identifying or even entering the work, but as a diversionary tactic, a series of codes for viewers to crack. Assuming, of course, that they want to play along.—Martha Schwendener

Yin Zhaoyang,  
"Public Space"Max Protetch Gallery,  
through Sat 1 (see Chelsea).

Chinese artist Yin Zhaoyang paints Tiananmen Square, the largest public space in the world, as if it were a tiny fairyland trapped in a snow globe. But the sparkling specks on these landscapes—mostly jewel-toned nightscapes—are not snowflakes or glitter. They represent the millions of visitors who make a pilgrimage to the site each day. This vast empty space in which the individual is subsumed by the crowd once epitomized Mao's vision for "the people." Today, it is a tourist destination, where the site's ignoble past is nearly subsumed by the marketplace as vendors hawk such tchotchkes as cigarette lighters emblazoned with portraits of Mao.

Born in 1970 and educated at the Beijing Academy of Art in the years just after the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising, Yin attempts to redefine this landscape of shifting politi-

cal agendas. He insinuates his own experience by blurring his images, an assertion of personal expression. It's a device stolen from German painter Gerhard Richter, another artist who faced up to a history too terrible to record by smearing photorealism.

Unfortunately, in this case, Yin's aesthetic flourishes come dangerously close to trivializing his complex subject, turning it into a scene worthy of a picture postcard. Still, it's easy to imagine tourists standing before any one of these pictures, happy to squeeze the icon into their viewfinders, just as they do every day at the site itself. In that way, Yin's paintings accurately capture the Disneyfication of today's Tiananmen Square.—Barbara Pollack



Head Wind, 2005

Robert Bordo, "another day"  
Alexander & Bonin, through Oct 22  
(see Chelsea).

Robert Bordo's show of new paintings is a breath of fresh air, a respite from the overheated frenzy of the current art scene. Which is not to say that the artist isn't thoroughly contemporary in his tranquil celebration of the juncture of abstraction and landscape.

In *Open Studio*, tucked into the gallery's back room, a pale border frames a Minimalist wash of pale sky blue; atop the blue, Bordo has scattered a series of shadowy miniature landscapes. The painting offers a key to Bordo's art, in which rigorous formalism is matched by a delight in representation.

Sea as seen from the vantage point of someone leaning over the edge of a boat, the surface is punctuated with blotches of non-oceanic lime green, a reminder that Bordo's pictorial logic defers to painting, not to nature.

The putty-colored background of *Suite* evokes soft clay, and across the painting's surface Bordo has sprinkled rhythmic patterns of brown specks that recall Australian Aboriginal paintings, where such dots map creation stories. As Bordo similarly elevates landscape to the realm of the symbolic, he quietly reinvigorates the practice of painting, restoring the possibility of finding spirit in nature.—Bridget L. Goodbody

Joel Sternfeld, "Sweet Earth:  
Experimental Utopias in  
America"Luhning Augustine, through Oct 22  
(see Chelsea).

The better life! Possibly, it would hardly look so now; it is enough if it looked so then." So reminisced Nathaniel Hawthorne about the year he spent at Brook Farm, an experimental community near Boston in 1841. Hawthorne's keen remark on the idealistic yearnings—and often frustrated outcomes—of utopian ventures is echoed in the recent color photographs of Joel Sternfeld, who traveled across the United States to document the traces, now often mere ruins, of two great generations of intentional communities: the 1820 to the 1850s, and the 1960s to, surprisingly, the present.

Sternfeld explores both well-known and humble endeavors. At upstate New York's stately Oneida mansion, one of founder John Noyes's descendants—herself a product of Noyes's peculiar argument for selective breeding and free love—is shown standing before the riches generated by Oneida's tableware enterprise. Conversely,

Sternfeld depicts the deserted geodesic dome of Colorado's Drop City, where its founders, inspired by Buckminster Fuller's vision of efficient experimental housing, used junked cars to assemble the now-derelict structure.

Dwindling membership and dilapidated architecture are the forlorn features of many of the social experiments Sternfeld portrays in his atlas of utopia. Yet the prospect of a world with a more equitable and ecologically sound distribution of resources remains in evidence. In a tender portrait of Springtree Commune, Virginia, the four remaining members stand together on their farm in a loving cluster, one member stating (according to the accompanying wall text) that "this is my place, these are my people." It is enough, Sternfeld seems to suggest, if, to them, it "looks so now."

—Eva Diaz

Springtree  
Commune,  
Scottsville,  
Virginia, 2005