

## ART IN REVIEW

**Fairfield Porter****'A Life in Art'**

AXA Gallery  
787 Seventh Avenue, at 51st Street  
Through May 27

An intimate, domestic painter convinced that the best kind of art lay in closely observed reality, Fairfield Porter (1907-1975) still showed in his work an abstract sensibility. To his paintings of people, still lifes, household interiors and landscapes, he brought not only the intimism of French artists like Bonnard and Vuillard, but also flat painterly areas of color and gesture that have more than a passing relationship to the nonrealist work of his peers.

This display of more than 40 paintings, watercolors and drawings was organized by Justin Spring, author of the recent biography, "Fairfield Porter: A Life in Art." The show makes a visual autobiography, tracking Porter's life through his depictions of family, friends and immediate surroundings in Southampton, on Long Island, and in Great Spruce Head Island, Me., his winter and summer homes. In fact, most of Porter's art, lively and intimate yet cool in its approach, is inseparable from his autobiography.

His human subjects — among them his wife, Anne; his five children; himself; and friends — are often placed in highly specific settings, like "Laurence at the Piano" (1953), in which his teenage son sits absorbed in his playing before a view of the living room and dining room doorway of the Southampton house. A broad swath of ocher defines the floor and a band of orange the living room carpet. "The Mirror" (1966), inspired by Velázquez, shows Porter's young daughter Lizzie, dressed in bright red, seated before a mirror that places her in her father's studio, where he stands in ghostly remoteness, holding a brush near a window conveying a pale outdoor scene.

In his last years Porter turned more to nature and the environment, producing distilled "scapes" like "A Sudden Change of Wind" (1973), a near-abstract view of the ocean at Southampton as roiled, shifting waves break on the beach, with an ominous band of black, whitecapped water in the middle.

The show — complete with memorabilia, samples of Porter's insightful critical writings, and comic relief like a spoofy film of the Porter ménage by Rudy Burckhardt — gives a good account of Porter's achievement in making his quiet, deep domestic perceptions as viable as the charged dynamics of Abstract Expressionism. **GRACE GUECK**

**'Line'**

Arena@Feed  
173A North Third Street  
Williamsburg, Brooklyn  
Through June 25

**Lori Taschler, Jeanne Tremel, Angela Wyman**

Eyewash  
143 North Seventh Street  
Williamsburg, Brooklyn  
Through May 22

The works-on-paper group show "Line," organized by Renée Riccardio, is a collaboration between two veteran Brooklyn galleries that have decided to join forces. It's also an attractive heads-up on some recent tendencies — decorative is an umbrella word sometimes used — in abstract painting.

Arena has been exploring this turf from some time and gave solo debuts to several artists in "Line" who later established reputations in Manhattan. They include Chuck Agro, Joanne Greenbaum, Giles Lyon, Paul Henry Ramirez and Calvin Seibert. (The latter winningly turns fruit-colored organic shapes — they look like papayas and avocados — into space stations.)

Of particular interest on this occasion are their less familiar colleagues. Several of them work in an incremental, connect-the-dots mode. Eric Hongisto — who, like other artists here, also works in an installation format — deploys clusters of colored orbs over pale color grounds. Matthew Deleget threads strings of silver hypens across a black ground to create a kind of radiant, handmade Minimalism, at once rigorous and personable.

Patterning in Conrad Kwiatkowski's watercolors takes the form of allover whorled, petal-like fragments. The artist named Vargas-Suarez Universal surrounds spare geometric structures with eddying currents of blue ballpoint pen strokes. His attention to linear movement finds an echo in Erick Johnson's Brice Mardenish gouache skeins.

Many of these elements come together in the color-pencil drawings of Cotter Luppi, whose immaculately rendered forms suggest DNA chains, Hindu gods and cartoons, all done in the soft pink-browns of Indian sandstone. The work looks both highly polished and promising.

Mr. Luppi has one foot in a figurative realm already occupied by Angela Wyman's images of bare legs and flouncy skirts. A larger selection of Ms. Wyman's paintings can be found in a three-person show at Eyewash, where she shares space with oil-on-panel interiors by Lori Taschler (who first showed in the East Village in the 1980's) and as-

semblages of brooches, buttons and dressmakers' pom-poms by Jeanne Tremel.

Ms. Tremel's work gives the omnipresent painted dot a sculptural presence. And the Williamsburg sampler, supplemented by a sparkling show of intense, embroidery-like paintings by Steve Di Benedetto on view at Baumgartner Galleries in Chelsea through May 27, confirms yet again that the decorative is, at its best, a source of serious pleasure in art at the moment. **HOLLAND COTTER**

**Jeanne Silverthorne**

McKee Gallery  
745 Fifth Avenue, near 57th Street  
Through June 3

Sweat pores, ulcer-causing bacteria and gallbladder parts, all replicated and much enlarged in yellow cast rubber, are the stuff of Jeanne Silverthorne's sculpture, along with yards of complex but functionless black rubber cable, switch boxes and industrial lighting fixtures that snake along the floor and fasten to the wall.

An ironist chipping away at "arty" values, she is concerned, as Eva Hesse was, with the means and materials of sculpture rather than with its end product. And why can't it be body processes and orifices or studio fixtures as well as anything else?

"Fingerprint With Thorns," a blown-up fingerprint in cast rubber framed in a square adorned with writhing rubber thorns, is an easy read. But some of the work is a little more complicated, like "Sweat Pore," a writhing mass of spaghetti-like strands and clumps punctuated by tiny holes. Ms. Silverthorne also takes bits of detritus left over from the casting process and blows them up into swollen, biomorphic shapes, like "Two Fragments," a pair of yellow blobs set like high sculpture on a black base.

The studio where she carries on her inquiries is very much part of the show, in a miniature tabletop version. It contains, among other pieces of equipment, a chair next to a file cabinet that spills over with tiny photographs (also arrayed on a nearby wall), representing a complete archive of drab photographs of studio sites and works in process from 1992 to the present. To paraphrase the Fairway market solgan, it's a show like no other. **GRACE GUECK**

**Ken Price****'Lumps, Bumps, Eggs and Specimens'**

Franklin Parrasch Gallery  
20 West 57th Street  
Through May 20

In the postwar era ambitious artists had two alternatives for making art out of the crafty, precious medium of ceramics. They could, like the sculptors Peter Voukous or Robert Arneson, make it bigger, rougher and more aggressive. Or, like Ken Price, they could embrace its seductive intimacy but give it an eccentric twist.

This show presents eight pieces from the 1960's that combine exquisitely refined surfaces and primordial, sexually or scatologically suggestive forms. The wonderfully attractive and repulsive "Specimen C.F." looks like a big slug, its glossy body the color and texture of a dill pickle, its raised head a dull mauve with dark grooves gouged into it. "L. Violet" is like a sandy-textured, metallic purple ostrich egg, with a shiny button nose emerging from a patch of scrofulous skin.

"S.L. Blue," with its lustrous blue accented by a small chipped spot glazed bright red, attaches sophisticated Modernist form to an amorphous lump that resembles a mountain molded by a small child. Most of these lovingly detailed works are displayed on sleek, oversize wooden bases that enhance their mysterious and comical oddity.

In the show's earliest piece, "Silver" (1961), purple veins escape from a hole in the side of a smooth, silver, helmetlike form. As it would continue to do for some four decades in the work of this valuable, endlessly inventive artist, something dark and visceral disturbs the surface of Apollonian beauty. **KEN JOHNSON**

**John Monti**

Elizabeth Harris  
529 West 20th Street, Chelsea  
Through May 20

Most artworks leave something to be desired. Almost always there is some imbalance, something not fully realized. Often enough, though, an artist hits the sweet spot, achieving in his or her own terms, at least, something just right. You feel that in the buoyant new works of John Monti, a New York sculptor who has for about a decade and a half been working at the confluence of Minimalist, Pop and Surrealist streams.

Most of the works in this show are in a glossy, candy-colored circular form, like a spare-tire cover for a luxuriously customized car. In "Rondo: Orange," which measures two feet across, a bright, rust-colored spot is raised within a cranber-



"Lizzie at the Table" (1958), from the exhibition "Fairfield Porter: A Life in Art" at the AXA Gallery.

ry bowl, and a translucent gold rubber rim encircles the outer edge. The four-foot "Rondo Grande: Rose" has a lush red dome nested within a taxicab-yellow doughnut and a translucent pink rubber rim.

These vibrant, cheerfully absurd confections have a punchy, Minimalist immediacy and a hedonistic materialism that one suspects Donald Judd would have liked. One thinks, too, of Kenneth Noland's target paintings; of California Finish Fetish, and of mock-corporate Pop Art. With their sexy, swelling volumes they suggest a kind of commodified eroticism. (They could be giant, neatly packaged condoms.) And finally they have an iconic, hypnotic effect, like Tantric mandalas for the new millennium. **KEN JOHNSON**

**Amy Adler****'Chapter and Verse'**

Casey Kaplan  
416 West 14th Street, Chelsea  
Through May 20

Amy Adler's subtle, cerebral, sometimes awkward-looking art has become clearer, more fluid and emotionally deeper. Her new images — cinematic sequences of herself reading, writing or talking — add elements of film and performance to her fusion of drawing and photography, and they wear their contradictions on their sleeves.

They first suggest big pastels, firmly drawn, with robust textures and crosshatching. But the gleaming laminated surfaces indicate that the image is not a drawing but a photograph of a drawing made from a photograph. In typical Adler fashion, both the initial photograph and the hand-drawn copy have been destroyed, leaving the photograph of the copy as a unique artwork. This conceptual strategy, while interesting, is outweighed by the slightly larger-than-life images themselves.

In a sequence of 12 white-on-black images, Ms. Adler stands and speaks, her mouth opening and closing, her hands moving up and down. In a six-image piece in color, she writes in a notebook, pausing to shape a word with her hand or mouth, gestures most writers will recognize. In another six-image work, also in color, she sits reading aloud from a book, as if rehearsing a script.

The ease with which these still, silent images imply sound and movement is remarkable, as is their collapsing of drawing, photography and film. But most remarkable of all is the way they show a woman simply, calmly, assertively engaged in various acts of self-expression. Expression of the self has always been at the core of Ms. Adler's work, often stated in sexual terms. Here, in her best New York show, she does it with a simplicity and a universality that speak directly to the heart. **ROBERTA SMITH**

**Tony Berlant**

Lennon Weinberg  
560 Broadway, at Prince Street  
SoHo  
Through May 20

Sometimes an exhibition's strength lies in the simple thrill of watching an eccentric technique jump higher and higher hurdles. This is the case with the new work of Tony Berlant, a Los Angeles artist who has specialized for more than 30 years in nailing pieces of found factory-made painted tin to three-dimensional objects (little house shapes, for example) and reliefs. The results have always had a bristling hand-crafted feeling, like armored quilts.

As time passed, Mr. Berlant turned to flat rectangles, fusing ob-

sessive physicality with smartly tricked-out pictorial illusions. His latest efforts, among his biggest and best, include "Red Hot Honey," whose swirling, galaxylike sense of infinite space is alternately confirmed and contradicted by the individual bits of tin.

In addition Mr. Berlant is finding ways to introduce a sense of the artist's hand, using blotchy factory rejects to suggest artistically puddled paint in the white-on-white "Crosscurrent" and making transfer drawings with still-wet sheets of tin, as in the black-and-white Pollock-like tangles of "What Kind of Bird Am I?"

It should be said that Mr. Berlant has picked up a lot from other artists, among them Frank Stella and Sigmar Polke, but he has assiduously cultivated the part of his work that is his own with sophistication, intelligence and restraint. **ROBERTA SMITH**

**Elizabeth Olbert**

Caren Golden Gallery  
526 West 26th Street, Chelsea  
Through tomorrow

If a midpoint exists between the work of Odd Nerdrum and that of John Currin and Lisa Yuskavage, Elizabeth Olbert's latest paintings may be it. They reiterate some of contemporary painting's hottest ticks: images of vulnerable grotesques pit paint-as-paint against a distorted realism, with asides to both art history and popular culture. But they also exude a melodramatic, conservative obviousness that ultimately talks down to the viewer.

The disparate elements of Ms. Olbert's painting are initially intriguing and seductive, if only for the skill of execution. With their pale translucent skin, her mutant gargoyles are creepily real and ambiguous: transsexual, transracial, even transspecies. These creatures exist in a viscous atmosphere adrift with painterly molecules: pastel dots, jaundiced wave patterns, Klimt-like facets.

The molecules also attach themselves to the faces, forming scatterings of jewel-like liver spots, bizarre stubble or scales. The mottled forehead of the creature in "Johnny Angel" suggests that he might grow up to have the grotesquely furrowed brow of a "Star Trek" Klingon.

Ms. Olbert seems to be after some fusion of the decorative and the corporeal, or perhaps of the skin of painting with the skin of the body. But her dualities are too familiar to coalesce into something original. And her images never convince the viewer that this ambition aims much higher than Hollywood special effects in the first place. **ROBERTA SMITH**

**'The Scientist and Aesthetics'****Selections by Torsten Wiesel**

Pace/MacGill Gallery  
32 East 57th Street  
Through June 17

This selection of 25 works from the collection of Dr. Torsten Wiesel, the Nobel Prize-winning neurobiologist, is a result of a discerning eye that has ranged across cultures and centuries. What's on view is an eclectic mix of choice objects that run from pre-Columbian figures in jade and clay to a 1986 drawing by Brice Marden and a 1997 sculpture-painting by William Christenberry.

In between there are such treasures as a woodblock print of a lavishly robed Etruscan courtesan (circa 1859) by the 19th-century Japanese artist Utamaro; a powerful Fang male reliquary figure from Gabon (undated) with a popped-out belly button; a tiny but

horrific etching by Goya of a bound prisoner (1867); an African-influenced photo-collage (circa 1920) of a grotesquely large-headed woman by the German artist Hannah Höch; a playful box by Joseph Cornell (undated); and a gleeful drawing (1964) by Saul Steinberg of a sniffling bunny caged in a man's head.

Although an attempt has been made through the careful juxtaposition of objects to show relationships across the centuries, the show provides no rationale as to why the scientist made his particular choices. But never mind. Even among scientists, the eye has its reasons that logic knows not of.

Dr. Wiesel, whose research has brought about greater understanding of brain development, structure and function, also contributes an enlightening video that traces the process of visual perception in cells of a monkey's brain. It does not explain, either, why monkeys, artists and collectors latch on to certain images they cherish, but it gives a hint of what happens before they do. **GRACE GUECK**

**'Fresh Produce'**

Taller Boricua Gallery at Julia De Burgos Cultural Center  
1680 Lexington Avenue, at 106th Street  
East Harlem  
Through May 20

"Fresh Produce," organized by Yasmín Ramirez, serves as a compact extension to "Latin American Still Life: Reflections of Time and Place" at El Museo del Barrio (through May 21), further expanding the larger show's already broad formal scope.

Luis Carle's hand-painted photographs of tropical fruits and vegetables are the most "classical" looking pieces here; they forge a contemporary link to the 19th-century still lifes by the Puerto Rican artist Francisco Oller. Javier Cinton makes a Caribbean connection explicit in his jazzy collage paintings spiced with Goya legends. Liza Papi embellishes her pinhole photographs of birthday and wedding cakes from Latino bakeries in Harlem with monoprint borders in confectionary colors.

Two other artists deal in more abstract ways with still-life themes of nourishment, consumption and decay. In a crisp, lucid installation, Liana Emilia turns bread and water into a yeasty version of stripped-down Donald Judd furniture. Enrique Renta sews shirts and trousers from cloth printed with images of raw meat. In this case fashion isn't about adorning the body with an attractive "second skin" but about revealing the unglamorous reality that we are what we kill and eat. Nature morte, indeed. **HOLLAND COTTER**

**D-L Alvarez**

Derek Eller Gallery  
529 West 20th Street, Chelsea  
Through May 20

D-L Alvarez, an American living in Berlin, has created a kind of Gothic mystery story in this psychological maze of a show titled "Sculpture Garden." Visually unassuming, it's pieced together from a patchwork of subtly planted clues — literary references, images of nature, fantasies of illicit encounters — that avoid reaching a clear dénouement.

In the center of the gallery a tree hangs upside down by a noose, with swatches of torn fabric sewn around its branches. A forest scene is depicted as a paint-by-numbers puzzle, each section keyed to a handwritten text. A peephole reveals a video of empty park benches. Four architectural models of shedlike public toilets sit in vi-

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