

Reviews: New York

Perhaps Schlossberg wanted to suggest that language can go only so far in conveying meaning at the present time. If this was the intent, he best conveyed it in the succinct piece *This is a lens* (1976). Here, an abrasion on the surface of a mirror, mimicking the look of a ballpoint pen scratching the glass, mocked reason and legibility. Proof here that the picture is worth more than a thousand words.

—Barbara Pollack

Sam Cady

Mary Ryan

Sam Cady's clean, plainspoken shaped-canvas paintings of typical Maine subjects, including boats, docks, and landscapes, lack only a boat builder's carpentry and a vessel's seaworthiness. Given the preponderance of wood-based subjects, it's perhaps surprising that Cady doesn't paint on shaped-wood panels. But a well-stretched canvas represents a nice feat of carpentry, too, and these paintings were feats of expertise on their own terms. Cady's cut-out subjects ranged from individual objects, such as a silhouetted dory, to island landscapes—perhaps at low tide, perhaps as seen by a gull, or representing a piece of horizontal coastline on a very long, narrow canvas. Crisp northern light is the customary illumination, although in the painting *Snow-Covered Dock* (2001), which appears to extend into the distance in an ingenious cut-out variation on three-point perspective, the light is that of a



Sam Cady, *Backyard Woodpile, Matinicus*, 2003-4, oil on shaped canvas, 40" x 44". Mary Ryan.

snowy, overcast day, an effect achieved with scant reference—in the form of background, for instance—to anything

other than the subject in question.

On the other hand, the comparatively baroque view of a full-to-tumbling woodpile, *Backyard Woodpile, Matinicus* (2003-4), with its cornucopia of

thrown—not neatly piled—lumber, is bathed in bright, midday sunlight. A wooden stepladder and a red canister are among the elements scattered about this atypical pile of randomness. This work is a standout among these impressive paintings, capturing elements of the semirural, sea-focused life of this place. Some of the pieces of wood could be castoffs from the boat-building taking place in paintings such as *Stem, Ribbands, Forms and Dawgs with Plumb-bob Line* (2003). From the precision of boat construction to the natural sights of a nautically oriented region, Cady at once brings together a sense of history and of being in the moment.

—Cynthia Nadelman

Gustavo López Armentia

Reece

The recent publication in Buenos Aires of a monograph on Gustavo López Armentia's work prompted this retrospective-like exhibition, which provided an opportunity to appreciate the quixotic visual language and highly individual techniques that this Argentine artist has developed.

López Armentia's mediums are wide-ranging, and although this exhibition included paintings and welded sculpture, it also showed examples of the artist's principal technique over the last few years—the casting, from a resin-based recipe of his own devising, of bas-reliefs that are reminiscent of old lithography stones. This lends his work a strangely nostalgic air. He mixes the resin with marble and quartz dust, among other ingredients, and often dyes it or smears the cast with color. He then scratches drawings into the pieces, or builds up little sculptural details on their surface.

His craftsmanship is often exquisite.

A recurrent theme is migration, the experience of the nomad. The character of a somewhat alienated observer—an eloquent artist's alter ego—recurs. López



Gustavo López Armentia, *Mandafu*, 2004, mixed-media bas-relief, 2004, 31" x 44" x 2". Reece.

Armentia is *Un hombre de algun lugar* (*A man of any place*) as the title of a 2001 sculpture has it. This piece includes a tiny, poignant image of the World Trade Center. And it is entirely appropriate that New York City itself—and its social and cultural highs and lows—frequently provides the location for his observations. It is an indication of López Armentia's abilities that, through his eyes, the city is strangely transformed. Weird, absurdly inaccurate maps abound, or the whole city becomes a mass of museums, or simply a place where you must find something to eat.

—Robert Ayers

'Romancing Nature'

Walter Wickiser

Celebrating nature here were four artists, whose work ranged from Sung-Soon Yang's expressions of childlike rapture, to Mark Kurdziel's vibrant, semiabstractions, to Betsy Stewart's scientific playfulness, and James David Thomas's Zenlike stillness. The show nicely balanced East and West.

Stewart's acrylic-and-sumi-ink works depicting pond life, were full of tiny bubbles, protozoa, translucent algae, and frog spawn. The artist paints on wooden boxes, some of which, like *Aquatilis* (2004) have Mondrianesque lines representing DNA codes running up their sides.

Mark Kurdziel's large, crowded, colorful oils recalled a happy Frankenthaler. One has to look carefully to find the feline in his *Cat in Landscape* (2004), so cleverly are the cat's stripes

depicts a black plastic tarp stretched over the rounded forms of stacked tires, the shiny surface of the plastic contrasting with the straw on which the tarp rests. The straw is suggested by nothing but a group of unruly paint gestures. This work is of a mundane subject, eloquently rendered.

Contrasting with the circular tire shapes in this painting, the bales of hay in *Square Bales* are tied with cord, forming grid patterns from which strands of hay seem to be struggling to escape. With the square, the grid overlaying it, the wanton-seeming paint gesture, and a passage of near-classical drapery forming the covering for one section of the bales, much of the history of painting is contained within this deceptively mute subject.

In smaller paintings, Sultan focused on tractor or machine parts, on hoses, on reflective taillights. Unnatural colors were favored, as in the bright blue of a plastic container in *Irrigation Hose* (2004).

Sultan straddles realms: from the self-containment and composure of Walter



Alton Sultan, *Square Bales*, 2002, egg tempera on panel, 42" x 42". Tiber de Nagy.

Murch's machinery still lifes to Catherine Murphy's sometimes perverse explorations of subject matter to Gerhard Richter's musings on the relation between realism and abstraction. Sultan's paintings can seem nearly photorealist from a distance, but up close and in fascinating contrast, their fine lines comprise almost gestural passages.

—Cynthia Nadelman

Subhankar Banerjee

Gerald Peters

Subhankar Banerjee's expansive, crystalline views of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge first got wide public exposure in 2003, when Senator Barbara Boxer (D.-Calif.) used them to argue



Subhankar Banerjee, *Bear Den I*, 2002, ultrachrome print, 30" x 40". Gerald Peters.

effectively against drilling for oil in northeastern Alaska. These powerful photographs were shown here in Banerjee's first solo gallery show.

Born in India, the self-taught artist began as a scientist before switching to art. The 30 large-format, unmanipulated photographs on view here vividly document an arduous two-year, 4,000-mile journey begun in 2001 in which Banerjee traveled with a native guide.

To capture *Bear Den I*, an image of a tunnel freshly dug out of gleaming snow surrounded by big and little polar-bear paw prints on a luminous frosty plain, Banerjee spent 28 days in a tent in minus-70-degree weather waiting for the mother and her cub to leave.

More typical were broad aerial shots of mountains, rivers, lakes, and plains undergoing seasonal changes. Some were punctuated by migrating snow geese or caribou that, from a soaring vantage point, read more as abstract patterns against the ground. The vivid colors were a surprise—whether the tangerine sky of a sunrise in an ice fog over grazing musk ox or the saturated blue water splicing burnt terra-cotta swirls of land in an abstracted composition evocative of paintings by Antoni Tàpies. These images, summoning a sense of the sublime in the tradition of 19th-century American landscape paint-

ing, silently refuted the government's stance that this terrain is a "flat white nothingness." —Hilarie M. Sheets

Edwin Schlossberg

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

At this moment in history, "culture" is a particularly troublesome term for Edwin Schlossberg. Is culture a shared experience? A product of mutual consent? Or a standard imposed by institutions? These were just a few of the questions raised in Schlossberg's exhibition "Reflecting on Culture," a series of some 50 text-heavy meditations affixed to highly polished aluminum panels resting on a narrow ledge lining the gallery's walls.

On one hand, the works functioned as mirrors, reflecting back the audience caught wandering through the gallery. On the other hand, the word-heavy works required substantial reading time; they were too much to be absorbed while standing in a public space. Often, the long-winded haikus—packed with well-intentioned phrases ("Our thinking, our morals, have been focused on the scarcity



Edwin Schlossberg, *Community above scarcity*, 2004, etched poly-polished aluminum, vinyl lettering, acrylic paint, 24" x 36". Ronald Feldman Fine Arts.

of objects needed to survive") or banalities ("A soup so amazing that we did not know the recipe")—seemed more poetry than visual art. But, even to an engaged viewer the awkward esthetics of Schlossberg's casual production values (including cheesy vinyl lettering and arbitrary fonts poorly applied to the annoyingly shiny surfaces) often stood in the way of appreciation of his more subtle points.

This tactic, if intentional, was surprising coming from a formidable pioneer in exhibition design. Schlossberg is noted for his sophisticated interactive multimedia presentations for the American Family Immigration History Center at Ellis Island and the Sony Wonder Technology Lab. Here, his use of mirrors gave the only glimpse of his savvy understanding of viewer response.