

Art in America

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Sandi Slone at Acquavella

In her most recent paintings Sandi Slone continues to use the technique

and format that have characterized her work for the past four years: she applies paint to large (usually oblong) canvases with a push-broom, creating sheets or waves of color that move inward from two sides to a central seam where they meet or nearly meet. These expanses of color, and within them the striations left by the stiff broom bristles, have an energy akin to expressionist gestures, but far from being violent or anxious, they culminate in gentle curves that bend into the picture space or ebb like expended ocean waves at the seam. The seam meanders yet usually runs parallel to the long dimension of the canvas, hung vertically or horizontally.

The new paintings, such as *Lark Spur*, are more spatially and rhythmically complex than the works in Slone's large show at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston two years ago. In *Lark Spur* waves of different colors create a differentiated space by their overlapping, by their transparency (which allows the viewer to see through the surface), and by the almost sculptural presence of the paint on the surface. The waves roll lyrically over one another, generating a sense of the passage of time, and each suggests a subtly different mood by the particularities of its shape and kinetic qualities.

Although Slone's paintings are abstractions, their forms and gray/earth colors call to mind aerial views of shorelines, suggesting their emotional content is a response to the natural world. The large-scale format is fully justified by the wealth of detail in the drawing-like striations within each stroke, and by the differing curvilinear rhythms of these striations. The value range in all the works is uniformly high, each painting having a color key consisting of a dominant light tone often related to the color of the canvas that is allowed to show through. Although there is nothing approaching chiaroscuro contrasts, the dramatic, extroverted quality of the emotion, as well as the illusion of a spatial continuum both in front of

and behind the picture plane, results in a sense of baroque expansiveness. —John Baker

Michael Goldberg At Sonnabend

This is his best show in years. The new work brings together impulses that have been in Goldberg's paintings at various times over the past 25 years. Of all the second generation Abstract Expressionists, Goldberg came closest to paralleling de Kooning's war between (or fusion of) paint and subject. More recently he worked with a series of single images, each containing a broken, or irregular, elemental geometric form. The complex and freely worked surfaces of his paintings from the '50s were compressed into dense black forms, carrying the feeling of great weight and power. Goldberg's reductive evolution was never the result of theory but stemmed from an increasing desire to make an "implacable formal object." To achieve the necessary density of black he used powdered metallic pigment and plastic medium. The image was built up through many layers of pigment until it possessed the necessary weight and power. These works suggested the mystery of an emblem from an ancient culture as well as the tough, grimy texture of the city today.

This reduction of means to intensify feeling has, in the recent work, been reversed. The absolute of black and white has been replaced by the complex relativity of color, and the single emblematic form has become a colony of separate yet interacting forms. There are no sensitive or atmospheric passages of transition. Each part has an edge that comes from the build-up of powdered pigment. They look, and feel to the touch, like collage.

The most profound change is the possibility for a new multiplicity of meanings, about which the titles give a hint. They all join the names of Italian Renaissance monuments (or their

makers) with those of jazz musicians. *Brunelleschi* or *Duke Ellington* sets up an unlikely collision of associations but can also refer to Goldberg's intentions. The vaulting aspiration of Brunelleschi's great Florentine dome is grounded in the practical facts of its making, just as the aura of any painting comes from its facts as a painting. Ellington's musicians are also aspirational models, more disembodied than the buildings, but with equal power to stir the spirit.

Goldberg sets his sights high. Since it is almost impossible to write about presence, it is more practical to point to means. In some of these works, joined vertical and diagonal black elements flank central clusters of shapes. They frame the event like partly drawn curtains. In *San Miniato* or *Chick Webb* the center has two areas of green, each pressing against the other. If I see two hills I am also forced by the insistence of the placement of the green shapes to balance the "thereness" of the hills with the "hereness" of the paint. The suggestions of place are not specific. I see the Arches of Southern Utah as much as the Duomo in *Brunelleschi* or *Duke Ellington*, but the possibility of reading place as well as surface adds resonance to the forms.

The risk is that the artist's stance as maker of High Art and its attendant aura is an invitation to hubris, but better to try to rival Brunelleschi or the Duke than to indulge in sly art games. —Paul Brach

Joan Jonas at 112 Mercer Street

Perhaps the strength of Joan Jonas' art lies not in the actual moment of performance, but in the powerful imprint certain visual images leave in the viewer's mind. Her most recent work, *The Juniper Tree*, combined a striking assortment of visual, gestural, theatrical and textual elements to evoke a simple story. In this case, the text, one of the more bizarre of Grimm's Fairy Tales, concerned a stepmother who slaughters her step-

son and then cooks him for dinner—an act of revenge prompted by her husband's neglect of their daughter. Like most fairy tales, the plot sets up strong character types: the good, loving real mother vs. the sensual, bloodthirsty stepmother—woman as creator vs. woman as destroyer.

The performance was a layering of visual imagery and physical decoration atop this horrific tale, which was narrated by Jonas' voice on tape. Her utterances were often charged with longing: "I want a child as red as blood and white as snow, as red as blood and white as snow," she repeated at the tape's beginning. Red and white predominated in the piece: curtains, costume, make-up, props. At one point, Jonas painted faces on pieces of fabric—red on white and white on red, respectively—hanging on the back wall.

The loft was divided into specific areas by large objects: a ladder (the juniper tree), a hanging aluminum roof (the house), a large antique dressing-table box (the guillotine-like murder weapon—the stepmother decapitates the boy after inviting him to peer beneath its lid). A large cracked mirror—a recurring accessory in Jonas' typically self-reflective situations—stood in the background.

Inside this hermetic environment, the carefully worked-out tableau-like imagery was juxtaposed with the increasingly ominous taped text. Jonas acted out the tale in a highly theatrical synchronization of emblematic gesture and movement.

As the young, childless first wife, she climbs the ladder and lies across the highest rungs, balancing silently. As the stepmother cooking her stepson in a bubbling pot, she straddles a light fixture and swirls a diaphanous piece of fabric around the bare bulb, swaying back and forth with a queer demented pleasure. Later, dazed and feverish, the wife/murderer rants mathematical tables and scrawls numerical equations with paint across the broken mirror.

The opening of the work in particular provides a clear illustration of the