

Huyghe seems to say, is as choreographed as the suburban ceremony on film, and, by extension, this community – the increasingly middling New York artworld – as devoid of coherency of purpose and mission. *CKH*

MORRIS LOUIS

Paul Kasmin Gallery

12 November – 31 December

THE MORRIS LOUIS EXHIBITION at the Paul Kasmin Gallery is an excellent selection of important paintings from the artist's estate, some never previously exhibited.

In the early 50s Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland began staining large expanses of raw canvas with coloured pigment. They were both inspired by Helen Frankenthaler's seminal painting *Mountains and Sea* (1952) which they saw during a studio visit in 1953 with Clement Greenberg, who would later champion their work. The artists shared a formalist approach to abstraction and the use of colour that became known as Colour Field Painting. Noland became best known for his signature shapes, the chevron and the target, while Louis created works with more 'naturalistic' forms that emerged directly from his innovative painting technique. He applied thinned acrylic paint directly onto unprimed canvas with a pouring technique, using gravity and the manipulation of the canvas itself to create his large-scale compositions. This exhibition focuses on the mature works from 1958 to 1960, before the artist became ill from the cancer that led to his death in 1962 at the age of fifty.

Theta Gamma from 1960 consists of dynamic pourings of colour arching diagonally from opposite sides of the canvas, flowing and 'reaching out' to meet the matching strokes of colour in the centre of the 100 x 130 inch canvas. The tension created by such a simple technique is most evident in

Omega II, where Louis created a backgammon board of fronds of colour, gently touching in the centre of this mammoth 145 x 104 inch canvas. *Omega II* dominates the gallery space, pulling the viewer into its orbit as inexorably as a gravitational field.

In *7 Bronze* (1958) seven poured layers of pure colour combine to form a mysterious diaphanous yet monumental shape, with a presence that recalls Rothko's work. *Nexus I* (1959) reflects not only Louis' technical control but also his sensitivity to negative space. The paint surface achieves a pastel-like quality and the soft edges add visual weight to the areas of rich and saturated blue and red colour that anchor the composition.

At times, however, Louis' abstractions can seem sloppy and unsuccessful, as in *Addition VI* (1959), which lacks the compositional rigour of the other works on view. Louis is most successful when he has used an economy of form, highlighting the crisp and clear execution of his painting technique. At its best his work remains as clear and uncompromising, but also as deliciously decorative, as a Damien Hirst spot painting. *AL*

MARCEL DZAMA, JOCKUM NORDSTROM

David Zwirner

12 December – 24 January

THE CONCURRENT SHOWS OF the work of Marcel Dzama and Jockum Nordström at the David Zwirner Gallery offer a fascinating look at two artists who share a talent for idiosyncratic and playful narratives. Marcel Dzama is a prolific artist best known for his association with The Royal Art Lodge, the Canadian artist collaborative in Winnipeg of which he is a founding member. He populates his work with fanciful children's

storybook creatures: cats, owls, elephants, birds, bears, and clean-cut children and adults. However, this is not your usual Beatrix Potter. Many of Dzama's characters have a nightmarish quality. Done in ink and watercolour on paper, scenes depicting bizarre acts of violence and sexual activity are cleanly executed in Dzama's illustrative style. There are monsters amongst the delicate red flowers and strange forest animals inhabiting his pictures; mutant creatures, masked tree-men, a derelict Humpty-Dumpty, aliens, and rabbits with firearms and knives.

In *Untitled* a long line-up of Dzama's characters confronts the viewer with the posturing of a mob ready for action. This work pays homage to Henry Darger's *Vivian Girls*, a resemblance strengthened by Dzama's horizontal format (over 13 feet wide) that echoes the rolls of wallpaper on which Darger worked. Dzama's art is, however, very much in step with work by such peers as Kojo Griffin and Amy Cutler, who share his whimsical – and at times dark – surrealism.

Jockum Nordström also has a surrealist sensibility, but more apparent is the influence of folk art traditions, including the use of patterning and collage. Nordström combines collaged wood and paper with architectural motifs to create dramatic compositions. Several resemble patchwork quilts with their bold and rhythmic forms.

One such work is *The Readers*, where the lightning-bolt composition streaks its way through rows of factories and workers' homes into the foreground interior of a room filled with tables. Here, a man and a woman are seated at adjacent reading tables and appear curiously oblivious to a woman's long ruffled skirt, seen peeking out from under another table.

Nordström often depicts scenes of adult leisure activities that read

like vignettes in a 'comedy of manners'. Many feature musicians playing instruments (the artist is himself a musician). The surfaces of his work merit attention; both the detailed graphite drawings with pentimenti as well as the more rugged collage pieces.

It is not surprising to discover that both Nordström and Dzama have illustrated (and, in Nordström's case, written) children's books. Both artists engage viewers with their visual storytelling, inviting us to enter into their imaginary worlds. However, if you visit Marcel Dzama's version of Alice in Wonderland, watch out for the white rabbit. He is armed and dangerous. *AL*

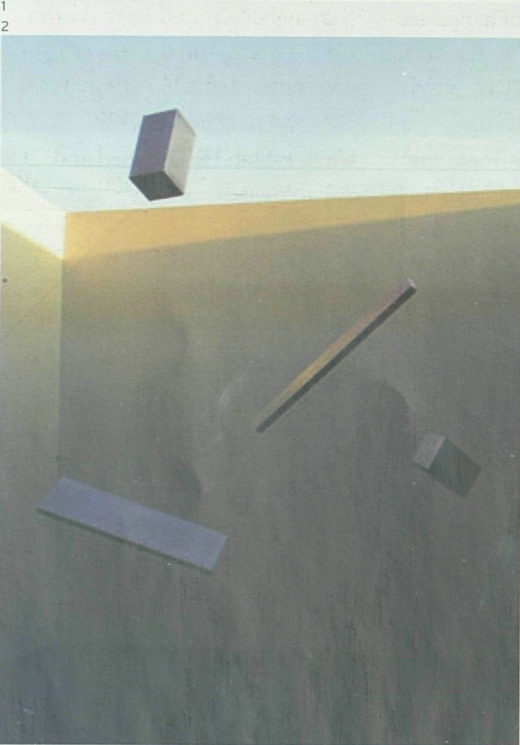
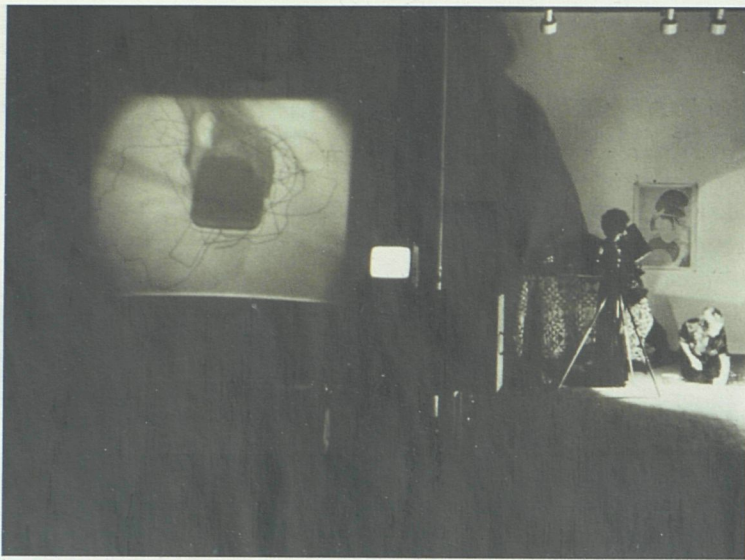
JOAN JONAS: FIVE WORKS

Queens Museum of Art

14 December – 14 March

INTRODUCING THE CATALOGUE TO the first large-scale museum exhibition of the work of Joan Jonas (b. 1936) ever held in New York, curator and Queens Museum director Valerie Smith adopts a positively evangelical tone, emphasising the broadly influential nature of the artist's work, while criticising what she regards as a contemporary cultural climate with little tolerance for the complex, the demanding or the historical. While some might find her damnation of the current state of the art world rather sweeping, it is unarguable that the extended period of relative neglect suffered by Jonas in her home city is a cause for profound embarrassment.

An endlessly innovative practitioner – she began using video as early as 1970 and was instrumental in the establishment of installation and performance as legitimate forms – Jonas has long been admired and referenced, but rarely seen and inadequately



1. **Joan Jonas**, *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, 1972. Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), NY. Photo: Peter Moore

2. **Joel Shapiro**, *untitled*, 2002-03. Courtesy LA Louver Gallery, Venice, CA

contextualised. Starting out as a sculptor but soon veering into uncharted territory, she had, by the early 70s, established herself as a key figure in the New York avant-garde.

Blending choreographed movement with the use of quasi-theatrical props in outdoor locations, she began to construct a language and mythology through which to communicate her ideas about gender and identity and the real and imaginary body. Drawing inspiration from established literary and historical sources, she also continues to revisit and rework her own oeuvre in a continuous play of

story and counter-story, memory and record.

In 'Joan Jonas: Five Works' Smith opts to reintroduce her subject through a tight (though, owing to their sprawling style, still visually labyrinthine) selection of pivotal performance installations from the past four decades. These are fleshed out with related videos, photographs and drawings. Early haunting videos such as *Wind* (1968) and *Songdelay* (1973) prepare the ground for tougher psychological investigations such as *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972), in which Jonas introduces her alter ego (an erotic electronic

seductress, narcissistically captivated by her own image as mediated by video), and *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* (1972), in which the destabilising effects of technology (especially when malfunctioning) on the veracity of the image are emphasised still further.

But significant though these early experiments are, it is in her projects of the 1980s and 90s that Jonas brings medium and message together most convincingly. Though her own descriptions tend to make the work sound rather earnest, even over-ambitious – *Revolted by the thought of known places...* (1992–2003) fuses medieval poetry with a meditation on the fall of the Berlin Wall, while *Woman in the Well* (1996–2002) is based on a Gaelic parable of psychic transformation – their sheer wealth of ideas and images is difficult to resist. While Jonas's work rarely exhibits the neat marketability of a signature look, its energetic curiosity can be just as seductive and ultimately far more satisfying. *MW*

LOS ANGELES

JOEL SHAPIRO LA Louver Gallery

16 January – 21 February

JOEL SHAPIRO HAS REACHED WHAT is perhaps the riskiest point in a successful artist's career, and seems to be negotiating that point with a newfound grace. Having established himself securely in the trajectory of late and post-modernism, Shapiro could, if he wanted, rest on his laurels and respond to the demands of his market – the School of Paris gambit, you might call it. He could reaffirm his signature style with reiterations of his art's salient characteristics and leave it at that.

But rather than churn out 'Shapiros,' Shapiro has built on and opened up his approach. The stick

figures that the artist has sent dancing across countless gallery floors over the last twenty-odd years recur in this latest body of work, but they no longer merely rely on their identity as human ciphers. If anything they revel in an enhanced pictogrammatic presence, taking on new drama and a new pathos. Shapiro poses them against (yet) more abstract forms, expanding their implied kinesis. In one work – whose contrasting combination of materials is itself startling – a white plaster figure hovers over, or falls towards, a blockier, recumbent bronze figure. In another (given a room of its own in this exhibition) a truncated figure tilts at an extreme angle away from a pair of slightly askew rectangular blocks, all cast in white bronze. Several other, simpler structures extend their 'limbs' in ways more awkward than normal for Shapiro's entities. The choreography evident in these and other arrangements almost has the aura of ritual enactment, and it is not too presumptuous to see in them a response to the events of September 11th 2001, which occurred only blocks from the sculptor's home. (Indeed, a number of New York artists have made work, in various ways, based on the particularly horrific images of people falling from the burning towers.)

It would be stretching the point to read the larger, less referential work in this light, as conscious assertions of renewed human (much less American) resolve. But in their architectonic power, their rhythmic vivacity and their landscape-like sweep – not to mention their unembarrassed, if still oblique, conjuration of modernist sculpture, from Brancusi to David Smith – these near-monuments do combine formal gravity with compositional exuberance. They project, if anything, a durable lightness of being. *PF*

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