

Art in Review

Cheyney Thompson

Quelques Aspects de l'Art Bourgeois: La Non-Intervention

Andrew Kreps
525 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
Through Jan. 6

Cheyney Thompson's second New York gallery show is not as dazzling as his debut at this gallery two years ago, when he created a sense of multiple, detonated perspectives by covering the walls with small trompe l'oeil paintings of cobbled-together brick and wood. It was something like what they said of Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase": an explosion in a shingle factory. Plunked into the center of this was a barricade/bunker made of sandbags and sheets of faux, cast-plastic wood. It was not clear if we were set for revolution, target practice or street repair.

This show, whose title translates as "Certain Aspects of Bourgeois Art: Nonintervention," is drier, but it explores further and perhaps more clearly the tensions between street and studio, skill and skepticism, painting and nonpainting, and touches on mixed feelings about display and the market. It has a similar elegance.

This exhibition acknowledges the gallery's base-line functions as a place to show, sell and store art. It centers on four large, pale representational paintings of pretty much nothing; they are based on smudged and wrinkled paper that was put through a photocopier numerous times, then blown up and carefully rendered in shades of gray and cream. Sometimes they suggest a close-up of surf or rumpled fabrics. They bring to mind Warhol's Shadow Paintings or something by Rudolf Stingel, until you get close enough to see the paint-by-fractions care with which they were executed.

Meanwhile, "Tables Displaying Properties of an Image" spells out the paintings' condition: the light to dark palette and availability for purchase.

The eight tables are of the lightweight folding variety favored by street vendors; they extend from the front of the gallery to the storage space in back, evoking a train of flat-bed railroad cars and a path from light to dark. The 16 panels of their bisected tops are literally photographs of nothing that progress from white to nearly black, paralleling the tones of the paintings.

On view in different parts of the gallery are five constellations of five framed photographic offset lithographs, each showing the storage shelves visible in the back space. Each image is a slightly different one of gray (blue, green, mauve) and shows the contents of the shelves in slightly different arrangements, as they might change during a workday — along with the daylight itself.

Mr. Thompson is an artist with radical intent who can't help but make beautiful objects; this gives his work a clarity and restraint that offsets, and even conventionalizes, the harshness of his thought. His dedication to painting combined with his refusal to follow it blindly is very compelling, but his distrust of it needs to become as explicit in his canvases as it is in the contexts he creates for them.

ROBERTA SMITH



Thomas Mueller

A view of Cheyney Thompson's installation "Quelques Aspects de l'Art Bourgeois" at Andrew Kreps.

Matt Greene

Surrender!

Deitch Projects
76 Grand Street, SoHo
Through tomorrow

Matt Greene's résumé includes lots of the right names in terms of galleries, critics and museum shows, but the paintings in his New York gallery debut disappoint. They seem conservative, thin and calculated to appeal to young, straight, male hedge-fund managers with a yen for lap dances and a taste for magazine illustrations from the 1960s.

Perhaps it is a sign of the times that Mr. Greene's art hasn't been treated like David Salle's paintings, which were decried in the 1980s for incorporating images of nude or partly clothed women into evocative, original and unsettling works. Mr. Greene places a much greater emphasis on babe appeal and offers a lot less in terms of convincing or innovative artistic qualities. His skillful paintings consist of layered, chalky panoramas of buxom blondes in garters and stockings bending this way and that. These figures are surrounded by evocations of geometry that suggest lighted disco floors or the multiplying effects of a strip club's mirrors, and are sometimes partly obscured by pours and drips of paint. Netherworldly blasts of light, the odd skeleton and a coven of witches vary the mix without mitigating its clichés. There are sizable debts to Mel Ramos, Allen Jones, Richard Prince and Rita Ackerman.

The gallery's news release credits these works with using "erotic and its screenic image as a vehicle to address formal concerns such as surface, color and space" and says their disparate interests include "the weighty themes of gender, sexuality and epistemology."

Whatever. Mr. Greene's formal preoccupations display a promising deliberation but are as yet far too anemic to be very engaging. In terms of gender and sexuality, he is a more interesting painter when he

skips the Playboy/GQ illustrational style and subject matter. In "The Secret Garden," the multiple silhouettes of an attractive woman who seems to be practicing dance steps rather than vamping for the male gaze offers a much more psychically complicated body language. It's a start.

ROBERTA SMITH

The Searchers

EFA Gallery
323 West 39th Street, Manhattan
Through Jan. 6

An Internet search for "The Searchers" yields several recurring results. The most frequent is John Ford's epic 1956 western starring John Wayne. Second place goes to an early-'60s Liverpool band named after the movie. Those with a mental search engine skewed toward contemporary art may recall Miranda Lichtenstein's recent photographs of modern-day enlightenment seekers.

This exhibition sticks with the Internet search itself — and considers the ripple effects and ramifications of this quest. Searchers include Lucien Samaha, whose funny, frightening and ridiculous slide show features images and ads culled from gay Internet chat rooms.

Online commerce provides fodder for Andrew Dickson, a bona fide, high-volume eBay PowerSeller who performs as AC Dickson and preaches the gospel of financial independence.

Jenny Vogel's eerie black-and-white photos capture anonymous subjects sitting in front of their Webcams, while Joan Grossman's Wikipedia searches of wars, massacres, acts of terror and genocide produce more chilling data. Ms. Grossman has come up with an estimate, displayed here in computer printouts, that the number of "deaths caused by humans" throughout world history hovers around 500 million.

Likening the Internet to the primordial database of memory and history suggests that the relationship is hardly casual. Ann Craven's multi-

ple paintings of the moon from memory leave the Internet out of the equation, but "The Searchers" implies it's only a matter of time before these repositories of information, natural and artificial intelligence, merge. In this context, Nuno Cera's horror-film-inspired video of a woman transforming from ghost into zombie serves as a portent for humans on the way to becoming cyborgs — or, in the short term, Internet addicts.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER

Charles Jones

Howard Greenberg Gallery
41 East 57th Street, Manhattan
Through Jan. 6

For most of his life, Charles Jones (1866-1959) was a humble English gardener, tending fruit trees and vegetable gardens on estates in West Sussex. But from about 1894 to 1910 he made spectacularly beautiful, breathlessly simple black-and-white photographs of fruit, vegetables, seed pods and flowers from large-format glass negatives. Thirty are on view here.

Mr. Jones took the photographs for his own pleasure, never exhibiting or publishing them. He left no explanatory records or photographic negatives; his creativity came to the attention of the art world only in 1981 when a cache of annotated and signed prints was found in a trunk at an antiques market in London.

This show, the most extensive of Mr. Jones's vintage photographs in the United States to date, is a testament to his understated genius. It is stocked with cleareyed, often beige-toned images of tomatoes, beets, celery, grapes, carrots and beans. The specimens are arranged against drapery, as if they were so many models posing for a fashion shoot. There is also a minute attentiveness to elements of form, composition, shadow and lighting, suggesting an artist of immeasurable delicacy and subtlety.

BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO