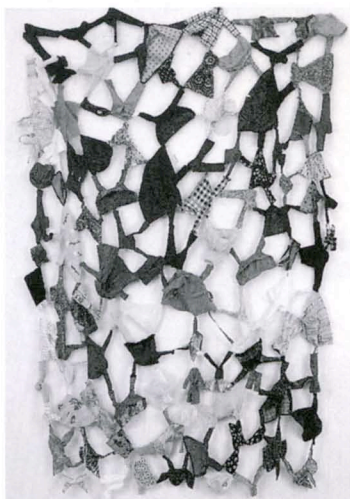


ple narrative of the cosmos that depicts the continuity between humans and other living beings, and between life and death. This world is elsewhere shown to be populated with various Afro-Cuban deities and spirits, such as the towering figure amidst a field of stars in *Senor de la Noche* (Master of the night), whose identity is suggested by a single shooting star. This "flash of the spirit"—discussed by Robert Farris Thompson in connection with Afro-Atlantic art—illuminates Bedia's paintings in the form of magical transformations and the crossing of worldly boundaries. In *Moana Tiene Bilongo* (Woman under a spell) a man near a bedridden woman is shown sacrificing a rooster over a cauldron to invoke a healing spirit that enters the scene from an open door. The animal's drops of blood are echoed by repeated drips of paint, which dominate the field—here the painting process itself is subtly equated with ritual healing.

Bedia brings the material richness and improvisatory spirit of both Santeria and Palo Monte to his mixed-media works, transforming actual ritual elements into original statements. Three of the four installation works shown here were initially part of a larger installation in 1992, *Brevisima Relacion de la Destrucion de las Indias* (A brief history of the destruction of the Americas), conceived as a polemical response to the celebration of Columbus' "discovery" of America. Most dramatic was *Llegada del Christo* (The arrival of Christ), in which three animal pelts were nailed to a wall by arrows as if violently crucified, representing the genocide of indigenous American peoples by European conquerors. Three corresponding silhouettes, simultaneously identified and indicted by the accompanying labels "*La Niña*," "*La Pinta*," and "*Sta. Maria*," rose like ghosts behind the pelts. Bedia's own response to these specters was *The Little Revenge from the Periphery*, which featured a popular poster illustrating "the white man's burden." In this case the tables were turned; the arrows, as well as other weapons, pierced an image of the European man, while members of the four "races"—Indian, African, Asian, and Pacific Islander—looked on. Bedia centered this scene within a circle, a rather benign compositional device but for the fact that it echoes the Kongo "cosmogram," sometimes used to invoke vengeful spirits.

Bedia constantly crosses boundaries between the cultural mainstream and its margins, between art and religion, and between high and low. He enriches the notion of installation space with ritual elements, using it to provide alternative constructions of identity.

—Jennifer P. Borum

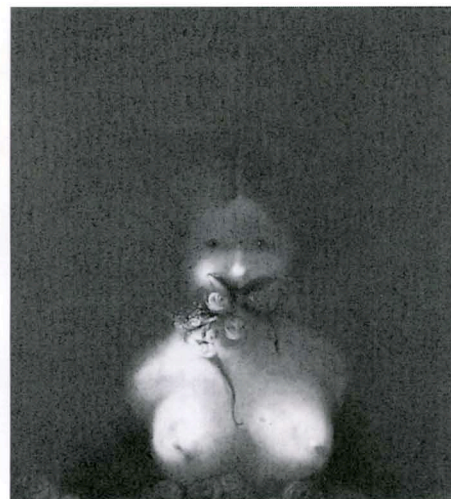


Charles LeDray, *Untitled/Web*, 1992, fabric, thread, and buttons, 82 x 55 x 5½".

## CHARLES LEDRAY TOM CUGLIANI

To the art world's chronic Brobdingnagism, Charles LeDray opposes his own private Lilliput of handmade, obsessively detailed, and generally twee objects. This show of his recent efforts featured tiny garments (like *Becoming/Mister Man* [all works 1992], a checked suit about the size of a one-year-old) and larger works made of tiny garments (like *Untitled/Web*, a web made of various Ken-and-Barbie-sized clothes). However, these Lilliputian duds are no play clothes. LeDray uses scale like the sculptor of an ancient Mesopotamian relief: big means powerful, tiny means vulnerable. In *The Men in the Family*, a pile of male clothes lies on the floor. Each item is of a different scale: Ken-sized jeans (complete with worn knees), baby-sized trousers, boy-sized briefs, man-sized boxer shorts, Jolly Green Giant-sized black-leather belt. What's going on here? Men and boys without their underwear? Incest? While there is no obvious narrative, the black belt with its gold buckle is so obscenely large that it necessarily calls to mind spanking, bondage, and punishment. You don't get the sense that this is good, clean, consensual S/M, either.

Whereas Jonathan Swift satirized Lilliput from the point of view of Gulliver (i.e. the big guy), LeDray takes up the viewpoint of the small fry, and it's not funny anymore. Sometimes it's pathetic: the very deliberate disfigurement of a stuffed animal (its face sewn to its leg, its leg to its arm, etc.) looks like an act of spite on the part of the little guy, hurting something even more powerless than himself. At other times, the work is confrontational and accusatory. Nazis are the only authority figures explic-



Lisa Yuskavage, *The Gifts*, 1991, oil on linen, 30 x 26".

itly invoked by any of these pieces. "Hitler had 1 big ball/Goring had 2 but they were small/Himmler had something similar/Goebbels had no balls at all" is the ditty inscribed on *Untitled/Hitler*, a sort of crudely carved walking stick (or club, maybe). Is it any coincidence that *Untitled/Hitler* is the only piece in the show really scaled to normal human proportions? (It's 36 inches tall, just the right height for a walking stick.) Are we gallery-goers part of a master race, closer in height to Hitler than to LeDray's 14-inch men's suits?

By drawing comparisons between viewers and fascists, LeDray heightens the dreadful sense of oppression immanent in his artworks. (Am I a big critic exploiting a little artist?) The astonishingly meticulous attention that he lavishes on details (like the teeny-weeny "DRY CLEAN" tag on the suit of *Becoming/Mister Man*) starts to look less compulsive than compulsory. Art as slave labor. In another work, *Untitled/Clothesline*, LeDray sews together tiny garments to make a clothesline. However, it was hung not laterally (like a line on which to dry clothing) but vertically, from the ceiling to the floor of the gallery. It was more like a makeshift rope fashioned in a desperate bid to escape. Unfortunately, there weren't any windows to climb out of.

—Keith Seward

## LISA YUSKAVAGE ELIZABETH KOURY GALLERY

This exhibition included both paintings and watercolors. In each of the paintings, a seductive, candy-colored monochrome field is inhabited by a single figure, creating a kind of imaginary portrait of a young girl.

It's really the color that hits first: saturated, lurid, aggressively confectionary—cloying hues that speak of manipulation, of some terrible abstraction from reality, of what your mother told you never to take from strangers. The figures seem to be surfacing from somewhere inside the field while remaining very much within its atmosphere.

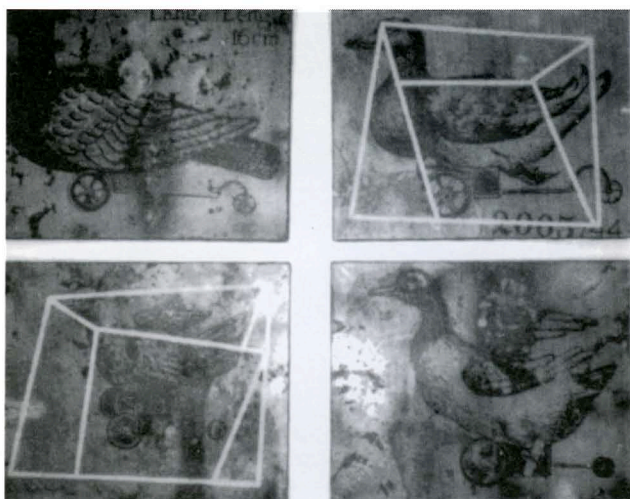
Sometimes naked, sometimes partly clothed, these wan urchins—who seem to have been snatched out of some contemporary working-class suburb and, simultaneously, from 19th-century Symbolist images of pale innocents—exude a shameful consciousness of being looked at, of vulnerability before a sentimentalizing gaze that is also a sexualizing one. In many of the paintings, that gaze is implicitly focused on breasts, which their bearers seem to endure as discomfiting, almost alien appurtenances.

The titles talk about denial: these girls are *The Ones That Shouldn't*, 1991, *The Ones That Can't*, 1991, *The Ones That Don't Want To*, 1992. It's hard not to think of our culture's prurient fascination with the abduction and violation of minors, its excited denial of an erotic life in children except as victims. The faces in these paintings recall the face of Katie Beers as she emerged from her Long Island bunker into the pages of the national press.

Yuskavage's watercolors are something else altogether. All from the series "Tit Heaven," 1992, they seem to depict a state of mind preceding the one the paintings embody: a squishy, infantile wallowing in polymorphously perverse gratifications. Bodies, landscapes, and atmospheres are only hazily distinguished, imagery nearly submerged in this overall fluidity. It's like a blissed-out union of François Boucher and Walt Disney.

While the paintings are mostly about





Anton Solomoukha, *Pigeon d'Amour (Pigeon of love)*, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 20" each.



Graham Durward, *Panorama (detail)*, 1992, color photograph.

seeing and being seen, the watercolors are more about touching and being touched—an interesting reversal, since one would expect oil to be more “tactile” as a medium than watercolor. From the euphoric dreaminess of the watercolors to the conflicted apprehensiveness of the paintings is a tremendous leap, but the two groups are part of the same, highly ramified field of discourse, one in which esthetic and cultural critiques begin to converge. On this level, the paintings can be seen as glossing an inner hypocrisy within Modernist painting (even in its ostensibly most rigorous instance—the monochrome): its anxious hide-and-seek with visibility. The watercolors would then be parodying the free-floating “signifiability” of abstract gesture and how it lends itself to a reading-in of whatever imagery gratifies the viewer’s primal fantasies. In other words, Yuskavage’s heterodox feminism leads by strange and unexpected byways to an equally contrary formalism. The paintings are genuinely hard to take. They deal with shame and embarrassment, and with a Poe-like melodrama threaten to induce hysteria in the viewer. To analyze them thoroughly would probably be something like psychoanalyzing oneself in public.

—Barry Schwabsky

## ANTON SOLOMOUKHA

### ELGA WIMMER GALLERY

Since 1991 the paintings of Anton Solomoukha, an artist born in Kiev but living in Paris, have been playing with imagery derived from a catalogue of mechanical toys printed in the '20s. Not surprisingly, nostalgia and reverie are key elements of these pictures. Yet they are about everything but naïveté or innocence. In earlier paintings

from the series, shown in a four-person exhibition at this gallery in 1991, the images from the catalogue—not always recognizable in the paintings as being of toys—were mixed with fragments of nude figures, or rather fragments of pictures of nudes, since, like the toys, these were clearly versions of already existing images. So this nostalgia, this reverie, this yearning even, in which Solomoukha indulges—and in which he is inviting us to indulge—is at least in part erotic in nature.

In these newer paintings, the images of toys, meticulously rendered as printed, stand alone. Their dialogue is with the surfaces that contain them rather than with other kinds of imagery. Those surfaces are earthy and metallic, at once mineral and organic, but, also, almost too elegant—their highly refined painterly touch and rich, subtly modulated color camouflaged as a moody monotone field. They are the “ground” not only in the usual art-critical sense of the word, but also the ground from which an archaeological find is excavated. For these paintings evoke, if only to contradict it, an archaeological model of memory. Memory is seen as an artifice, a device—a toy.

The images—mostly animal toys and musical instruments, but also guns and airplanes—often speak of the cultivation of the love for exoticism and adventure, of the arousal within a child’s mind of the desire for things distant and mysterious, for worlds to be conquered. Certainly there are references to colonialism and warfare, but more to Solomoukha’s point is how toys can function for children as art does for adults: as models for cognitive and affective behavior. Perhaps even more significant is that in both cases their effectiveness in this role may be dependent on those exposures of artifice or mechanism,

those flaws in verisimilitude or gaps of implausibility which imagination readily fills with its own overflow. This is confirmed by the very construction of Solomoukha’s pictures. There is indeed something “mechanical” about his recourse to the expedient of a ready-made memory, a childhood lived by the artist only through the dissolution into paintings of shards and fragments of imagery, which—accompanied perhaps by cryptic and equally disjointed captions, and planted there by the same hand that unearths them—gather around themselves an atmosphere of suggestive mystery.

“Only the Germans and the Russians, of all Europeans, possess the real genius for making toys,” wrote that great connoisseur of European bourgeois childhood, Walter Benjamin. The reason, he wrote, has less to do with any simplicity of form than with a self-revealing construction that allows the child to imagine how the toy is made. Likewise, even when he is most cunningly contriving an air of mystery, Solomoukha is always even more craftily “baring the device,” not in order to demystify, but to make room for the deeper mystery the viewer’s perception brings to the work. —BS

## GRAHAM DURWARD

### SANDRA GERING

In his recent work, Graham Durward takes on the archetype of the male artist-hero who derives his power from a manifest masculinity. Durward’s earlier work reflected a fluid notion of male identity; his large drawing of a hermaphrodite, *Untitled*, 1991, transformed the body to emphasize the mutability of heterosexual and homosexual practices. Combined with his intentionally schizophrenic writings, which

detail a polymorphously perverse sexuality, this work was located at the edge of identity—where identity begins to fragment. His more recent works question the tenability of culturally defined male roles.

The exhibition began by pumping up the male ego until it exploded in phantasmagoric emissions. Determinedly unerotic, these works depict neither a nude *Übermann* nor Everyman, but, rather, a half-naked Durward, denying the pleasure to be found in mythologized images of masculinity. *Weights*, 1992, presents an inverted zigurat comprised of small photographs of a topless Durward in skin-tight bicycle shorts striking various bodybuilder poses. In *Panorama*, 1992, he appears with “exclusive” stenciled across the waistband of his shorts and a woman ecstatically sniffing his crotch. Durward’s point is that these male fantasies, unpalatable as they may be, are not going to disappear, nor can they be wished away: they must be unapologetically confronted.

As part of this position of intentional provocation, Durward attempts to demythologize the artwork; these pieces are bluntly, banally made, with little thought given to presentation or craft. *Snow Drift*, 1992, a large mound of artificial snow heavily stained with urine, points to the act of physically marking one’s territory as central to the masculine masquerade—with the inevitable tear shed at the white snow’s loss of purity. *Black Emanation*, 1992, is a parody of one of Julian Schnabel’s black velvet paintings in which Durward has seemingly ejaculated on the surface and initialed each of the resulting rivulets. He aspires to the heroics of the '50s and early '80s, but at the same time the self-consciousness and historical perspective of his pieces acknowledge the absurdity of his efforts.

This absurdity not only underlines the humor of Durward’s work but also points to the problematics of intermale identification and the construction of masculinity. Norman Bryson and Eve Sedgwick have outlined the tremendous exertion necessary to maintain the masculine masquerade—the constant cross-censorship of intermale surveillance. Despite the Herculean effort to exude masculinity in *Weights*, 1992, *Snow Drift*, and *Black Emanation*, Durward reveals it to be an ultimately inauthentic, failed, and ridiculous pose.

In order to heighten our sense of the inadequacy of masculinity and of the impossibility of achieving true phallic power, Durward invokes two masculine archetypes in his videotape of Marky Mark, and in *Johnny Carson (Torso)*, 1992. Neither the “pec monster” nor the seamlessly “regular guy” make transparent identification possible: the viewer cannot simply step into either’s shoes, and this