

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART

(page 3)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

MARGARITA CABRERA / SHANNON PLUMB

The tree-of-life motif is familiar to fans of Mexican folk art—studded with fruit, birds, animals, angels, and Adam and Eve, it symbolizes creation. Cabrera borrows the image—which evolved from pre-Columbian Olmec traditions—and updates it as a kitschy emblem of Mexican agribusiness. A life-size John Deere tractor, pickax, and wheelbarrow are sculpted in clay and embellished with flowers and butterflies. In Plumb’s video, the artist assumes the dual roles of her grandfather and grandmother, alternately appearing in a wig and a leather blazer, and a housedress and badly smeared lipstick. It’s a winning portrait of the solace and horror of long-term relationships. Through March 15. (Meltzer, 525-531 W. 26th St. 212-727-9330.)

DOUGLAS FLORIAN

The fifty-six gouache drawings on collaged paper in “The Liars and the Moonstruck” are selected from Florian’s ongoing project “Sefer Shel Or.” (When it’s completed, the series will comprise six hundred and thirteen works, per the number of mitzvot commanded by the Torah.) Florian describes the style of his small, uniformly sized works as “abstract regressionist,” which may refer to the fact that his simple gestural marks hover on the edge of symbolism, suggesting suits in an unfamiliar deck of cards. The palette tends toward saturated viridian, tomato, ochre, and ultramarine. The project is abstruse and irresistible. Through March 8. (Bravin Lee, 526 W. 26th St. 212-462-4404.)

ROBERT GOBER

This slender, hypnotic pair of shows—works on paper and sculptures—finds Gober honing his highly personal, Neo-Surrealist take on Americana. In the hand-worked linoleum-block prints, a road winds through green hills until it vanishes under a cloud-flecked sky. The sculptures, which are mounted to the walls, replicate the seat and legs of a ragged wooden chair—the first that Gober owned in New York. A gun wraps around one, a bird’s nest is tucked into another; wax breasts affixed to the seats look uncannily like staring eyes. Through March 29. (Marks, 521 W. 21st St. and 526 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200.)

MATTHEW RONAY

With these six tight Rorschachian sculptures assembled from wood (polished walnut, pine, maple, oak), string, canvas, metal, and so on, Ronay veers into more contemplative, less whimsical territory than in his last show at the gallery. Perhaps the times demand it. Unchanged is Ronay’s impeccable craftsmanship and pristinely economical arrangements. Sections of his ambiguous rebuses suggest Islamic architecture, divining rods, sandbags, bottles, fern fronds—even a corpse. The accumulated mystery only increases with repeated viewing. Ronay is nothing if not deliberate and in control; viewers need only surrender to the reverie of free association. Through March 8. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

RUTH ROOT

Out in some chic precinct of the galaxy, one imagines a sleek spaceship with a holodeck that looks like a Ruth Root painting. Flat, shaped panels of aluminum, with rounded corners and tabs or flanges protruding from the sides, are painted in hard-edged fields of enamel in puce, chartreuse, gunmetal, apricot, beige, rose, and black. The mod lozenges of the supports paired with the parallelograms of color are optically zingy, if cumulatively a little predictable. A bonus comes in the unexpected guise of the press release, a wordless series of thumbnail images in which Root lays out a manifesto of her

sources, from Ellsworth Kelly to shaped bathmats. Through March 15. (Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849.)

MIROSLAV TICHY

Tichy, the eccentric, reclusive Czech photographer whose work from the past several decades began appearing a few years ago, is a man obsessed. Using homemade cameras and unreliable film stock, he surreptitiously photographs small-town women sunbathing, strolling, bending over, walking with the kids, having a beer—ordinary women, ordinary activities, transformed by the unflagging fervor of his attention and the deliberate carelessness of his technique. The fifty little prints here, all unique, are not just badly focussed, they're often dirty, scratched, foxed, or chewed by insects. Yet the effect is never degrading, it's hallucinatory: women are apparitions, amazing, tantalizing, and mysterious. Through March 15. (Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144.)

JUERGEN TELLER

Though his appetite for vulgarity is likely to be more voracious than his viewers', Teller really lays it on this time, exhibiting more than eighty color photographs in vitrines and on the wall. The vitrine pictures—nudes, portraits, and shrugged-off social studies—were made on a visit to Ukraine, where Teller's cold, glossy style rubbed up against a nastier, more pointedly satirical approach that recalls Boris Mikhailov. Most of the other photos come from editorial assignments or Marc Jacobs ads, including an image of Victoria Beckham in a tiny hat that makes her look more foolish than anyone else here. Through March 15. (Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923.)

LUC TUYMANS

The Belgian painter is expected to produce searing political commentary, thanks to the success of past works about colonialism in the Congo and about the Holocaust. This time, Tuymans takes on the most revered and reviled of American institutions: the Walt Disney Company. But while he handled the epic subject of European oppression and genocide with an almost impossibly deft touch, he falls short here. The problem is, he's up against one of the most powerful image manufacturers and disseminators in history. Tuymans wisely sidesteps the sacred Mickey, but his muted, impressionistic paintings of Disneyland and Epcot Center feel wan and lacklustre. Through March 22. (Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

JUAN USLÉ

Uslé is a city painter (he moved to New York from Spain in 1987), and his abstractions recall high-rise windows, streets, and overpasses. Thin washes of color are laid on like glazes, accreting into blocks, bands, and stripes; dry pigments vivify what might otherwise be unremarkable patterns. In almost every painting, a single detail undercuts the regimented order of the whole—a curving sliver of acid orange, a stripe that slips the ranks of its neighbors and kinks into a curlicue. If Uslé's approach seems stretched a bit thin, his reliably exquisite effects—like the thin veils of jewel-tone pigment combed into agatelike patterns in “La Cámara Oculta”—redeem it. Through March 15. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

CARRIE MAE WEEMS

Weems, an artist who uses photography and video to delve deep into issues of African-American history and identity, is the subject of a museum-style survey that works both as introduction to and refresher course in one of the more remarkable careers in art. In a red-tinted series that appropriates early anthropological images, she questions photography's role in defining black subjects. Weems herself appears in a grid of black-and-white pictures staged around a dining-room table, skirting domestic melodrama in linked vignettes about a woman in and out of love. The most recent images find the artist as a stranger in a strange land, wandering through Rome like a ghost or an avenging angel. Through March 8. (Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 212-645-1701.)

BRUCE YONEMOTO

Yonemoto's project sounds almost insultingly simple-minded: dress handsome young Asian-American men in Hollywood Civil War costumes and photograph them in old-fashioned studio settings with swagged curtains, fluted columns, and patterned floors. His results, in crisp, cool color, are as elegant as they are provocative. Yonemoto suggests not just that all portraiture is role-playing, but that all roles are fluid and available. Posing as soldiers from the Union and the

Confederacy, his models reclaim roles in American history that Chinese immigrants actually played, while turning war into costume drama—one more vainglorious reenactment. Through March 15. (Gray, 526 W. 26th St. 212-399-2636.)

Short List

NAYLAND BLAKE: Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200. Through March 8. **BRIAN FINKE:** ClampArt, 521-531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020. Through March 22. **BRUCE NAUMAN:** Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 212-999-7337. Through March 29. **ADRIAN PIPER:** Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545. Through April 19. **SETH PRICE:** Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through March 8. **MICHAL ROVNER:** PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4263. Through March 15. **DAN WALSH:** Cooper, 534 W. 24th St. 212-255-1105. Through March 29. **“MALE”:** White Columns, 320 W. 13th St. 212-924-4212. Through March 30. **“THE VISION AND ART OF SHINJO ITO”:** Milk Gallery, 450 W. 15th St. 212-645-2797. Through March 30.

“Art” continues