

# ARTnews

FEBRUARY 2010

## Artists to Watch

**Artists Take Center Stage at the Opera**  
**Bronzino: Sketches of a Perfectionist**  
**Mafia Canary Sings about Caravaggio**

\$6.00 02>



0 74851 64607 6



figures such as Sebastião Salgado and Graciela Iturbide and by lesser-knowns. Some offered viewers the disorienting sensation of seeing small objects made monumental, while others reduced the grand to an intimate dimension. Despite this curatorial conceit, it was hard to escape the sense of looking at a grab bag of unrelated pieces.

Some pieces worked well together to sustain the theme; others didn't quite fit, but were compelling nonetheless. Among the latter was Franz Jantzen's *Grange Hall Exhibits at the Preble County Fair* (2008); an enormous collage depicting a table of vegetables; it was notable for its evocation of a decorative Asian scroll print.

The team of Eduardo del Valle and Mirta Gómez photographed castings of toy-size huts arranged atop a rock wall against a blue sky to produce an intriguing collapsing of scale in *From the Ground Up: Plaster Molds, Tekal de Venegas, Yucatán, Mexico* (2000). Likewise manipulating our perception of architectural subjects, Max Hirshfeld's color photo *W 5th Street, L.A.* (2008) reduces skyscrapers and traffic to a tiny jewel of a composition.

The juxtapositions could be theatrical. Frank Day's diptychs of cartoon-character parade balloons held down with nets, awaiting their triumphant march, posited an almost comic counterpoint to Margaret Bourke-White's photograph of a dirigible in its hangar, *U.S.S. Airship Akron, 1933*.

A more menacing union was that of Colby Caldwell's clinical study of a spent shotgun casing, *empties (82)*, 2009, whose wax surface gives it a painterly texture,



David Burnett, *Inauguration: President Barack Obama, January 20, 2009*, archival pigment prints, each 44" x 55". Hemphill Fine Arts.

juxtaposed with David Burnett's pigment-print diptych across the room, depicting President Barack Obama's inauguration.

With a soft focus that dissolves scale, Burnett's work evokes that of Hiroshi Sugimoto, who, come to think of it, would have fit nicely in this pleasant, somewhat confused show. —Roger Atwood

## Melville Price

McCormick  
Chicago

Melville Price, who died in 1970, at the age of 50, never quite developed the distinctive voice and visual language of



Melville Price, *USA, 1967*, magna oil and mixed-media collage on canvas, 81" x 61". McCormick.

artists like his colleague and close friend Franz Kline. But he clearly had tremendous potential—just not enough time.

The centerpiece of this show of paintings and collages, for the most part completed in the '60s, was a series of three eight-foot-tall canvases from 1967 titled *Lion and Girl*. The assemblages (which should have been shown together on one wall) offer a hodgepodge of imagery and techniques popular at the time. Collaged elements such as burlap sacks and crumpled newspaper bring to mind Rauschenberg's Combines; abstract black-on-white strokes hint at the canvases of Kline; a pale, faceless nude recalls the work of Tom Wesselmann; and targetlike icons suggest that of Jasper Johns. A grandiose record of a very specific time and place, the triptych series

acts as an homage—whether or not Price intended it as such.

With its crisp Pop shades of cerulean and peach, *The Day* (1970) was one of the stronger works on view. It lies somewhere between abstraction and surrealism, suggesting human body parts (lips, a phallus) while actively rejecting certain styles and conventions embraced by Price's peers. Painted in the artist's last year, the piece shows a new direction for Price—one that was regrettably cut far too short. —Rachel Wolff

## Michael Roque Collins

LewAllen Contemporary  
Santa Fe

Often approaching the heroic in scale, Michael Roque Collins's impastoed oil landscapes and manipulated black-and-white photographs have a claustrophobic, hothouse atmosphere. The intensely physical works constantly shift from realism to abstraction in thickets of scumbled brushwork and blizzards of palette-knife crosshatching. Layers of fetid greens, blacks, and grays and a welter of dirty whites produce a vision that is grim and gothic.

As one might expect in a show titled "From Ruins to Resurrection: The Sacred Landscapes of Michael Roque Collins," these physical landscapes were like symbolic memoryscapes, freighted with historical references ranging from ancient Mesoamerica to the Inquisition, the Holocaust, and New Orleans after the deluge. Everywhere one turned there was a feeling of apocalypse in the air. *The Volcano* (2008–9) is a cinematic scene of primordial devastation; in *Ascending from a Bridge of Sighs* (2009) the small enclosed arch looks as woeful and perilous to us as it must have to the prisoners who were dragged through it; and the large *Three Ruins* (2009) portrays a trio of steep roofs arrayed in a jungle clearing, their main structures apparently sunk into the scarred and desolate earth.

Several works incorporated the simple form of railroad tracks as a haunting reference to the Holocaust. Collins even mixes historical metaphors in works such as *Broken Rails II* (2008–9), featuring twin sets of tracks running through a setting of ancient ruins with huddled figures that look like pre-Columbian statuary.





Michael Roque Collins, *The Volcano*, 2008-9, oil on linen, 42 1/4" x 48". LewAllen Contemporary.

Stylistically and thematically, Collins's works summon a host of esthetic forebears, from the Expressionists to, most obviously, Anselm Kiefer. Indeed, these landscapes cover a lot of ground on their dark journeys. —Tom Collins

## Leonor Fini

Weinstein  
San Francisco

Leonor Fini (1908-96) deserves greater recognition than she has had to date. This extensive retrospective went far toward elevating her into the Surrealist pantheon. Fini was seriously talented as a painter and draftsman, and she certainly had a backstory ripe for mythologizing. Born in Argentina, she was raised in Trieste by her Italian mother, who



Leonor Fini, *Portrait of Cesare Pavani*, ca. 1948, oil on paper on canvas, 14" x 10". Weinstein.

dressed her in boys' clothing until she was five. In her early 20s, the free-spirited beauty moved to Paris, where she designed stage sets for the Paris Ballet and worked with Elsa Schiaparelli and other Paris designers. She always dressed the part of the fashionista and threw legendary costume parties. Fiercely independent, she was able to earn a living from her art. Nevertheless her emphatically female, proto-feminist stance probably contributed to her being eclipsed by other Surrealists—André Breton, a notorious misogynist, was not her champion.

And during World War II, while many painters fled to America, she remained sidelined in Paris, and her name never took hold on this side of the Atlantic.

Sexuality pervaded the early pieces shown here, be they portraits of beautiful full-lipped young men (such as Cesare Pavani, seen in two ca. 1948 works on paper), or of society ladies—middle-aged Mrs. Hasellter appears naked and entwined in vines in a 1942 image.

*La fille du maçon* (The Mason's Daughter, 1950) is a precise depiction of a self-possessed prepubescent girl standing among shards of tiles; a pink garment peeks through the rips and slits of her tattered work clothes. In technique and tone, the painting evokes the sexual ambiguity and emotional remoteness of Balthus.

Over the course of her career, Fini zigzagged stylistically and sometimes revisited old themes. One wonders if Surrealism weren't passé when she was still mining that vein for accomplished works like *Métamorphoses equivoques* (Ambiguous Metamorphoses, 1953), *Lieu de naissance* (Place of Birth, 1958), and *La victime est reine* (The Victim is Queen, 1960). All feature human-animal hybrids, with animal and insect attributes, set in an indeterminate landscape of hot vapors.

Later in life, Fini produced a series of

remarkable lesbian love scenes, represented here by *L'entre deux* (The Intimate Couple, 1967) and *Les aveugles* (The Blind Ones, 1968), that still appear ahead of their time. Beautifully painted, they manage to be simultaneously chaste in their description and highly erotic.

—Lea Feinstein

## Stephen Hannock

John Berggruen  
San Francisco

*Recent Adventures in Art in the Napa Valley, Flooded River for Wayne Thiebaud* (Mass MoCA #125), 2009, was the central work in this show's cycle of paintings. In that sweeping aerial view of the cradle of California wine country, Hannock seems to be channeling the artists



Stephen Hannock, *Vineyard Hillside with Clearing Fog* (Mass MoCA #118), 2009, polished oil on canvas, 14" x 18". John Berggruen.

of the Hudson River School, who sought to infuse a specific landscape with a universal grandeur. Like Martin Johnson Heade and Thomas Church, he is in love with the diffusion of light across the land, and he has a way with the peculiar fog of Napa.

Unlike Heade and Church, though, he seems less interested in precisely representing his subject than in connecting with the tradition of modern painting. Beneath the paint of *Recent Adventures*, viewers could see fragments of photocollage and handwritten text. On top of this, he rendered the landscape with a pumped-up palette and then effaced the texture of his brushwork by buffing it with a power sander. The fragments of art history, geography, and wine diary, however, seem forced and curiously at odds with the picture's realistic, though