

WEEKEND UPDATE

by Walter Robinson

Nothing quite like a stroll along 57th Street on a hot July afternoon, the sidewalks thronged with tourists, the streets choked with traffic. The sun glitters on the facade of the art deco Fuller Building, and the windows of Louis Vuitton glow with vertical rows of sickly pastel fluorescent tubes. Inside the galleries, the spaces are cool, quiet and all but empty.

A recent visit to the district, starting on the eastern end by Madison Avenue, found **PaceWildenstein** closed for renovation but **Pace/MacGill's** elegantly muffled precincts filled with black-and-white photographs of "The Democrats," notably, **Hillary** and **Obama** on the campaign trail. The reportage was courtesy beatnik photographer **Larry Fink**, who has been covering the election for *Vanity Fair*.

Though he traveled with the press corps, Fink stayed on the fringes, using the now-familiar journalistic language of telling details and odd moments -- the candidate swarmed by fans and photographers, for instance, or a hillbilly selling political t-shirts. You get a lot of shots of important people's backs -- and why not, the artist is the kid sitting in the back of the room.

Ah, if only he'd caught someone making a payoff. Fink is showing at Pace/MacGill for the first time. The photos, made in editions of 25, are priced at \$5,000; larger prints, almost four feet square, are \$15,000.

Across the street in the Fuller Building, **Nohra Haime Gallery** has mounted a 1971 performance piece by **Leopoldo Maler**, a London avant-gardist who was the first dean of the short-lived **Parson's School of Design** in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, where he still lives. For *Silence* (1971), a live nurse sits in a darkened room by a "bed" made of blue neon. Onto the bed is projected a vid of an ailing, older woman.

The sculpture was first shown at the **Camden Arts Center** in London in 1971, and won the grand prize at the **São Paulo Biennale** in 1977. The price is \$180,000.

Around the corner at 745 Fifth Avenue, **Mary Boone Gallery** was closed. At the other end of the vestibule, a pair of untitled color photographs by the Ukrainian-born U.S. artist **Leonid Lerman** could be seen through the open door of **McKee Gallery** -- images of empty wood chairs bursting with sculptured flames.

At the gallery's front desk is a placard advertising the current show at the **Morgan Library**, "Philip Guston: Works on Paper" -- McKee represents the Guston estate -- and a quote from an old review by **Peter Schjeldahl**: "Tropes lifted from cartoonists, notably George Herriman, enabled a marriage of high and low, reason and squalor, which amounts to a beautiful joke that's big as the world."

Half-hidden in a corner, the entrance to **Forum Gallery's** smaller space opens onto a show of magical dioramas by **Charles Matton**, scenes in boxes exquisitely detailed from floor to ceiling, their space multiplied by clever use of mirrors. The focus here is old-fashioned libraries, artist's studios and the occasional detail from some grand hotel. We can marvel at the wit and craftsmanship, but in the end the works hold few challenges.

In one, titled *The Narcissistic Fat Lady* (2003), the viewer can see in a mirror a large and lovely nude reclining on a couch, as if to make a knowing jab at **Lucian Freud's** auction-record-setting *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping* (1995). Matton's equally desirable sculptures are priced at \$35,000-\$60,000.

More interesting is the show down at the end of the hall at **Edwynn Houk Gallery**, where "Edith Maybin: The Tenby Document" is on view. A series of sophisticated color photos of what looks on first glance to be a young girl primping in adult lingerie, "The Tenby Document" -- the pictures were taken in a house in Tenby, Wales -- seems to be an art-world entry in the **JonBenet Ramsey** sweepstakes.

The blue-eyed blond girl's face, so translucently adorable, looks to be about six, but it sits, strangely, on a body that seems to belong to a young teen. As it turns out, the girl's mother -- Maybin herself -- inhabits the images as well, as does some digital manipulation. Both sweet and decadent, the pictures find their innocent heart within the refuge of the family.

In a small side gallery is a group of black-and-white vintage prints by **Danny Lyon**, the modern-day chronicler of immigrant workers, motorcycle gangs, jailbirds and other abject social groups. Oddly, the faces of laborers in his photos, though expressive, remain opaque; it makes me wonder whether any of his films, which should give more clues to what these people are like, have been transferred to **YouTube**. A 1965 joint portrait of sculptor **Mark di Suvero** and Lyon himself, however, is joyfully clear enough.

The Lyon photo, a vintage print, is \$20,000. Maybin's impressive pictures are \$3,500 in editions of ten and \$6,500 in editions of six.

Down the street at **Bernarducci Meisel Gallery**, where "SPF 20: Shades of Summer" was on view, the gallery proprietor was out -- something about playing golf for someone's bachelor party (boy have times changed). One surprise in the show is a drawing of 125th Street by **Chris "Daze" Ellis** (priced at \$8,000). Who would have thought -- a graffiti artist turns into a Photo Realist!

Propped up around the gallery were some just-arrived paintings, seamlessly Photo Realist renderings of glazed fruit tarts and other deserts by the Torino-born artist **Luigi Benedicenti**, which go up in November. It's hard not to like the way his things appeal to bodily hungers. Prices start at \$25,000.

Downstairs at **Lori Bookstein Fine Art** is a group show, "Painting in the Park." Like the gallery group show at **Alexandre Gallery** in the Fuller Building, the paintings here provide plenty of inspiration for those of us who like to spend Sundays with our asses planted in a field, trying to render a landscape vista with watercolor on a pad.

Across the hall at **The Project** is a show more complicated and grim, called "The Left Hand of Darkness," a title taken from "the first feminist science fiction novel" of **Ursula K. Le Guin**, an investigation of gender and sexual role models. Organized by the gallery's **Sarvia Jasso** and **Yasmine Dubois**, the show includes a lot of provocative new work.

A short and strangely inventive video by **Ryan Trecartin**, for instance, invites repeated viewing -- not that its vaguely teenagerish narrative gets any clearer. A large line drawing filling the back wall by **Michael Bilsborough**, called *Within Reach*, shows a daisy chain of naked figures, entwined but apparently passionless. Perhaps the most harrowing of all is a pair of *Man-Made Boxes* by **Matthias Vriens**, which combine classic *Vogue* covers and photos of surgically constructed vaginas on actual **Marc Jacobs** shirt boxes.

The Trecartin vid is not for sale (his work was an immediate hit when shown at **Elizabeth Dee Gallery** earlier this year), but the Bilsborough and Vriens are \$15,000 and \$3,000, respectively.

Across the street, **Franklin Parrasch Gallery** has another good group show, organized by **Chris Churchill** and titled "Everything Else." It's a colorful and festive installation, with a red crate sculpture by **Jason Adkins**, paintings and 3D statues of x-eyed mouse figures by **KAWS**, a garish painting of a family of tigers by **Misaki Kawai** and a huge foam-core bouquet of pink flowers by **Sandra Eula Lee**.

Those artists. When they're not being all destructive and anti-social, they're obsessed with toys, comics and high-school science experiments.

further west, in the new **Hearst Building** at Eighth Avenue, I got a special pass from the guards to go up the escalator, past the glorious **Richard Long** mud mural, to a mezzanine where the digital artist **Lincoln Schatz** is working on a special multimedia commission from *Esquire Magazine* billed as a "Portrait of the 21st Century" (due to be unveiled in September).

Schatz has each sitter -- **George Clooney**, **Danger Mouse**, **Jeff Bezos** -- come up with some kind of performance to do within his set, a translucent cube studded with video cameras. Clooney, for instance, danced with a series of women. The images are automatically mixed and overlaid by a special computer program, and sent to a set of eight LCD screens, where they are randomly displayed. Schatz devised the program -- which gives an almost old-fashioned painterly effect to the digital images -- but otherwise stays clear.

Schatz has previously done public and corporate commissions in Dallas, San Diego and Chicago. Here in New York he works with **Bitforms** gallery, and the work can also be seen online at www.lincolnschatz.com

Since I was so close to Columbus Circle, I decided to take a little detour up to 59th Street and look at the refurbished **Museum of Art and Design**, which has still to open to the public. Sadly, architect **Brad Cloepfil's** new ceramic cladding does make the building look rather like a giant kitchen appliance, and the word "HE" does seem to be written huge on the façade. Well, I guess we'll have to get used to it.

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Painter and art writer **John Zinsser** emails to chide me about the recent *Artnet News* entry on the **Albright-Knox Art Gallery** purchase of a trove of monochrome paintings by young artists, which I had hoped was bought on the cheap. "The great thing about monochrome painting," he writes, "is that it never goes out of fashion." Zinsser is taking one for the team, since **Count Panza di Biumo**, the guy who did the deal with the museum, was never smart enough to collect his work.

Those nice people from *Frieze* in London held a little cocktail party recently at **SoHo Mews**, a fancy development (59 lofts, five townhouses and four penthouses, starting at \$2,425,000) going up on a former parking lot across from the **Deitch Projects** garage, and then later sent some lovely snaps, courtesy of master celebrity photographer **Patrick McMullan**. Means nothing to me, but I like this picture of **Elizabeth Peyton** and **Spencer Sweeney**, who my friend **Carlo McCormick** says has the hottest nightclub in Manhattan, a two-level, 8,000-square-foot place on Lafayette Street called **Santos Party House**. I have to start going out again. . . .

The latest art show to invade the walls of everyone's favorite Ludlow Street bar, **Max Fish**, is work by "The Arteries Group," including the crackpot old East Village married couple, **Marguerite Van Cook** and **James Romberger**, along with their grown son Crosby, who is going by the name **Clockwork Cros** on the occasion.

Cros has made a series of clocks from large head-shots of celebrities and politicians. As for James and Marguerite, they're attending **Columbia University's** art school, on some quixotic quest to learn to

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paint. The hell with that. It's enough the way these two veteran comic-book hands self-portraitize themselves on the invite.

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