

'East Coast/West Coast: Four Modernist Women'

George Krevsky

This exhibition showcased the work of four early modernist American women painters, two of whom worked in New



Theresa Bernstein, *Sunflowers*, ca. 1927, oil on canvas, 20 1/2" x 24 1/2", George Krevsky.

York, and two in California. Although the paintings ranged from the 1920s through the present, the focus was on the 1930s and '40s, when American modernism was coming into its own.

Like their male counterparts, these women explored the esthetic innovations that later became the pillars of modern American painting: the tension between figuration and the flatness of the picture plane, the evidence of the painter's hand, and the optical effects of color.

New Yorker Theresa Bernstein, the most exuberant of the quartet, made landscapes and images of street life that burst with energetic, all-over brushstrokes. Her paintings from the late 1940s dissolve almost completely in a riot of line and color, prefiguring Abstract Expressionism. San Franciscan Helen Ludwig's subjects are more spare and delicate. Her collage-and-ink cityscapes are charming and moody, in spite of their brevity of line and detail. With similar simplicity, Russian émigré Ruth Gikow used saturated color and flat patterns to evoke both celebratory and contemplative moods in her intimate portraits.

Most surprising was the work of Dorothy Winslade, a British-born California painter. The smooth, rounded forms and reductive, almost Fauvist color schemes of her landscapes are bold and muscular, and seem truly modern.

While the show was too small to support any judgments about differences between the East and West Coasts (much

less between women and men), it's a refreshing reminder that no gender has exclusive claim to modernity.

—Sharon Mizota

Libby Black

Heather Marx

Bay Area artist Libby Black has embraced the commodity status of art to bitterly satirical effect. Reprising and revising Andy Warhol's seminal replicas of Brillo boxes and Heinz ketchup cartons, Black makes simulations of high-end goods that, in the hierarchy of consumption, are closer to artworks than Warhol's grocery-store staples.

Black's show "Picnic" offered an ensemble of real and imagined brand-specific items, from a Cristal Champagne bottle to Prada shoes to an Hermès radio, all realized three-dimensionally in painted paper and arranged in installations. One assembly consisted of a *Gucci Canoe*, a *Louis Vuitton Oar*, and a *Louis Vuitton Life Vest* (all 2005). *Picnic* (2005) featured products arranged on a blanket with Burberry's trademark pattern. These ensembles made an improbable connection between the esthetic rhetoric of late-20th-century installation art and the tradition of pastoral fantasy in painting.



Libby Black, *Gucci Canoe, Louis Vuitton Oar, and Louis Vuitton Life Vest*, 2005, paper, hot glue, and acrylic, dimensions variable. Heather Marx.

Pertinently, the show included graphite drawings in which Black restored the roughness and liveliness of the artist's hand to the manipulative calculus of fashion advertisements, perhaps an effort on Black's part, if not a completely persuasive one, to outdo the commercial

remakes of such artists as Richard Prince. But Black's works on paper served her well by encouraging viewers to read her sculptures not as sketchy imitations of commodities, but as rich materializations of her drawings.

—Kenneth Baker

'Fine Things'

Steel

The title of this charming show of realist still lifes by three artists referred to the pictorial treasures they create from banal subjects.



Kazaan Viveiros, *Antique Fan*, 2005, acrylic and pencil on panel, 30" x 15", Steel.

Kazaan Viveiros collects vintage household artifacts and depicts them in works on paper and panel. She divides each of her paintings into two distinct fields: a single image of an object occupies the top portion, while the bottom is painted in

vivid color. In *Antique Fan* (2005), the quaint appliance appears to rise to the top of the pictorial space as a sinuous black cord tries to hold it down.

Gordon Smedt paints large-scale canvases showing familiar subjects that possess a sense of intimacy, such as a pair of old sneakers. In *Marble Pyramid #1* (2005), the artist manipulates light and color to capture the translucence of dozens of toy marbles. Smedt's delight in exuberant texture and color is infectious.

Steven Skollar uses oils on linen and panel to create meticulous masterpieces. While his brand of realism may be closer in style to the 15th than the 21st century, he updates his works with a hint of irony. He surrounds kitschy objects, such as toy cars and Mickey Mouse statuettes, with trompe l'oeil gilded frames. Bathing each object in a heavenly light, he renders them with the kind of detail usually reserved for more refined subjects. In *American Icon* (2005), a floating baseball seems suspended timelessly.

—Deborah Phillips