

July / August 2005



Gretchen Heilman, *Mistress of Ceremonies*, performance, April 8, 2005 (photo courtesy of Stewart Mostofsky)

work addressed the relationship between sexual participant and voyeur, creating an uneasy connection with the audience. Titillation quickly gave way to annoyance as the "ooohs" and "yesses" continued far too long to be sexy.

PaperRad, a Boston-based trio, explored a childlike sense of play while indulging in media overload. Combining pre-recorded video animation, live music, painting, and pantomime, PaperRad's human performers played in front of a *Candyland* inspired backdrop painting. Vaguely narrative, 1980s videogame style graphics were projected on a screen as synthesizer music blared. Occasionally, **Benjamin Jones** came out from behind the screen to bang away on a red drum set and **Jessica Ciocci** jammed out on a homemade cardboard guitar, shaking her body to the music. At one point, they both came out wearing huge lucky troll heads, like oversized puppets, and flapped around as floating trolls were projected. The complete overload of sound, noise, color, and silliness successfully explored the nature of humans' relationship to fantasy, escapism, and technology.

Combining music, video, and a Brechtian attitude towards theatrical performance, **Tracy and the Plastics** raised questions about the extent of a human's relationship with technology. New York artist **Wynne Greenwood**, featured in the 2004 Whitney Biennial, performed live as Tracy. Costumed as the other two band members, Cola and Nikki, she simultaneously played in a prerecorded video projected behind her live performance. Hip and nerdy, the band members play invisible instruments. Narrative

and nonsensical, the work shows them discussing various social and political issues, and bickering over who was late to practice. In an age where musicians can become hugely successful without ever interacting with other band members or an audience, Greenwood's bumpy relationship with her other selves both embraces and rejects the ease at which technology can replace people.

Many of the acts in *Transmodern Age 2005*—predictable body-based performance, and conceptually-inflected works of the types that have been dominant since the sixties—added a feminist pedigree. They contributed little more to the meaning of post-humanism, however. The festival nonetheless did provide a platform for authentic collaborations. It also featured an ambitious line-up of regional and national performers, and created an opportunity for both audience and performers to develop new relationships—a most human undertaking.

—Cara Ober

GLEN ALLEN, PA

Curated by Elizabeth Schlatter and Gwen Van Ostern, **Thick & Thin** [Gumenick Family Gallery, The Cultural Arts Center at Glen Allen; March 20—May 14, 2005] features work by six contemporary regional abstract painters, five of whom operate within the legacy of modernist abstraction. Neither anti-theory nor reactionary, the exhibition displays an almost too calm confidence in the inherent formal and expressive possibilities of pure painting—a curious (post)modernism driven by an earnest loyalty to certain tenets of Abstract

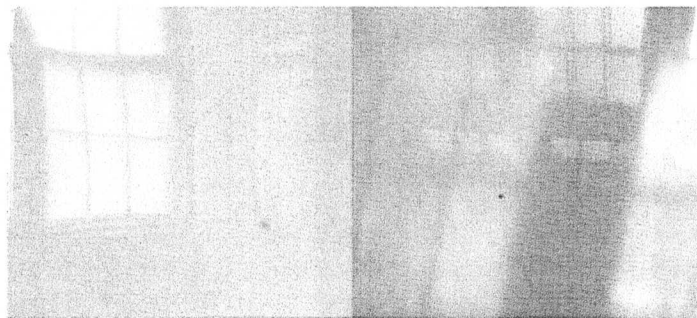
Expressionism, and its investigations of space and surface. The title invokes the elasticity of painting, both physically and in terms of its vitality as a creative medium.

Of the six artists, **Bernhard Hildebrandt** is the only one who engages in a painting practice driven by contemporary theory, questioning the options for painting in the context of new technologies and the pervasiveness of image culture. Consequently, his work seems somewhat out of place. Yet, Hildebrandt's conceptual-critical investigations and the alluring surfaces of his paintings—simultaneously placid and intense, inviting and repellent, high and low—serve an important role in the exhibition: they slow the currents of nostalgic reverie and promote a wider dialogue.

Hildebrandt creates large-scale diptychs that function literally and figuratively as tête-à-têtes for painting and photography, displaying the sensuousness of this

extend beyond the picture plane, across and into the wall. Patiently fabricated by the application of multiple layers of paint with wide, soft brushes, the works level in their production of a new kind of opacity through a transparent medium. The intrigue of these matte fields lies in their uncanny density, and the artist's commitment to its construction—a painted *substance* that has the consistency of fine, very thick felt and is poised to absorb every ray of light and sound wave in the gallery.

Three paintings by **Mary Shand**, a quiet and relatively unknown artist who died in 2003, are hung in the second room. Guided by an intimate relationship with nature, her paintings enlist processes that establish patterns visually akin to those of the natural world. Reminiscent of the poured vocabulary of Pat Steir while distinct in their calmer pictorial resolution, two paintings seem to picture the vertical traffic between



Bernhard Hildebrandt, *Untitled*, 2005, left panel: polyurethane enamel on Plexiglas; right panel: digital c-print on Plexiglas, 43 x 96 inches (courtesy of the artist)

longstanding and flourishing relationship. Each of his three large-scale works juxtaposes an immaculately painted field on the left (polyurethane enamel on Plexiglas) with its full-scale photographic representation on the right. These representations capture moments of the soft reflected forms of window structures and shadows in the artist's studio; and, the reflective surface of each diptych functions in the present tense, capturing moments of viewing in the gallery. In works that echo the unadulterated surface of the glossy c-print, Hildebrandt pursues painting's envy and imitation of the photograph. Through a reciprocated simulation, he confirms the visual wealth of both media.

Diane Szczepaniak's four nonobjective, spare watercolors face Hildebrandt's paintings. The rectangular space of these cropped color fields begs to

skybound condensation and large bodies of earthly water. Obscure web-like structures across the middle of the compositions suggest the interplay of wind with rain.

Alluding to nature in different ways, the works of **Joanne Kent** and **Sandi Ritchie Miller** are exhibited in the same room. Improvised compositions of nebulae on Plexiglas, Miller's work is informed by photographs of the cosmos. Kent proceeds through a tactile and sculptural build-up of paint to suggest the layered irregularities of aging tree bark or the prickly husks and seed pods of plants. Sixteen small paintings by **June Shadoan** occupy the hallway between the gallery's two rooms. Installed as two facing grids of eight paintings, Shadoan's slabs initially evoke Richter's squeegeed nonobjective surfaces, but gradually assert themselves as stout building blocks of pure paint.

—Paul Ryan