



D Dominick Lombardi, *THE KING*, acrylic on Plexiglas

THE ARTIST'S LAMENT: THE WORKSPACE GALLERY • NEW YORK, NEW YORK

I'm at The Workspace Gallery, where such brain heavy, cartoon visionaries as D Dominick Lombardi, Simon Draper, Nancy Brett, Christina Mazzalupo, Jim Torok, Ed Smith, HC Westermann, R Crumb, and Peter Saul are exhibiting drawings which aptly illustrate "The Artist's Lament," a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke. It's an ode to the joy of creating one's own reality, one's own imaginary world or stage, where the artist fulfills his own destiny instead of "taking on things not his own, as if he were a servant whose marketing-bag grows heavier and heavier from stall to stall and, loaded down, he follows and doesn't ask: why . . ." Rilke could be referring to the kinds of modern day entrapments which block or defeat the artist today, as well as in the past.

To that end, D Dominick Lombardi has woven a post-apocalyptic tale with an elaborate cast of characters. He says the underlying thread of this tale is his concern for the environment and how we are all guinea pigs in a larger experiment for power and money. But the elegiac beauty of the portraits, painted in a rich acrylic palette on Plexiglas such as *THE KING* and *THE TWISTER*, overshadows the lean prose. The nature of the narrative, as well as the physical act of painting behind Plexiglas, creates distance and alienation, possibly the real theme of Lombardi's work.

Simon Draper uses a familiar icon, the puzzle, to pursue his search for self. But now the puzzle takes on the form of a man—a confrontational pose, yet a non-threatening figure that appears to be pondering the artist's lament. *HEDWOOD THE FIRST* is a relief of found wood and richly scumbled areas of acrylic paint on plaster. Draper says he uses an image that people can relate to, and then takes them the next step into the unknown. He will rebuild the puzzle anew each time until he achieves his monumental, architectural forms.

Nancy Brett's mixed media drawings also transform the ordinary. Everyday objects become icons of mystery floating in a watery universe. Her delicately painted vignettes of loosely patterned narratives tell dream-like tales of disparate motifs vying for attention, and then seeming to wander off into space.

Christina Mazzalupo ruminates endlessly in her graphite drawing, *OH MY GOD I AM HYSTERICAL*. She's funny and frantic, and oh! so irreverent. One small ink drawing entitled *IF YU (SIC) CAN'T BEAT 'EM* expresses much of the contemporary hand-wringing that goes on in the incessant internal dialogue shared by these artists.

This obsessive turning in on one's self is further pursued by Jim Torok, who frets, in one drawing, "I have to get to work," and goes on to block his progress at every turn with phrases such as, "I Am a Sellout (Every Show!)." A second journal-like narrative is entitled *WHO THE HELL DO I THINK I AM*; he castigates himself for even daring to imagine he can make art.

Ed Smith continues his own self-abusive diatribe in a loosely rendered ink drawing, *RAGE IN THE STUDIO*, and then swings to opposite bipolar-like behavior with his arrogant *ED RULES* drawing. Once more humor and irony rules the show. Nonetheless, a sense of impending doom pervades the scene.

HC Westermann is outrageous and draws on the same vein in *CLIFF LOSING HIS TEETH*. The hero of the drawing says, "We went to a party the other (sic) & there were a bunch of real flying ass-holes there."

In one of R Crumb's wry cartoons entitled, *NEW YORK ART SCENE*, his wily hero comments in a seemingly obsequious manner, "So how 'bout this New York art scene . . . ??"

And Peter Saul's lithograph of a strangely distorted man creature with tube-like growths sprouting from his head, may be offering an answer to R Crumb with his title, *ART CRITICS DID THIS TO ME*.

I've always liked the WorkSpace because Lesley Heller, the curator, often invites independent curators who express offbeat themes and provocative art. It turns out that this is Ms Heller's last exhibition. The WorkSpace is to close after this show.

This current and last show is called "Painter's Forms" and curated by Nell Timmer, an art historian, who also runs an art and music cafe at Dia's new home in Beacon, New York called, *Chthonic Clash*. She says the title of this show does not refer to the works themselves, which are mainly drawings, but rather, comes from the title of one of Phillip Guston's works, *PAINTER'S FORMS*, which inspired Ms Timmer to bring this motley crew together. They are the next generation of artists visibly inspired by Guston's favorite subjects—the artist and the process of making art; it's a visual world of inexplicable wit and absurdity.

Germaine Keller
New York, New York