



Richard Artschwager: *Some People*, 2004, acrylic on fiber panel, artist's frame, 51 1/4 inches in diameter; at Gagosian.

This exhibition brought together new color prints of images Slavin produced 30 years ago and published in 1976 in the book *When Two or More Are Gathered Together*. Along with the gingers, we see the Capitol Wrestling Corporation of Washington, D.C., a Star Trek convention in Brooklyn, the Lipko Comedy Chimps out of Zanesville, Ohio, and the dancers at the Troc Theater, a burlesque house still operating at the time in Philadelphia. But Slavin's project was not just a cross-country search for kookiness. He also photographed workers: at the Statue of Liberty, on the Staten Island Ferry, in the New York Public Library and dozens of other locales. His egalitarian approach to subjects renders his Trekkies as everyday as his civil servants, but also tends to make his civil servants seem as peculiar as midget wrestlers (a group he photographed in Columbia, S.C.).

When he wrote about the project, Slavin noted, under the heading VANITY, FRAILTY, AND EGO: "I want to photograph who we are trying to be in order to discover who we really are." Presented with these groups in their formal compositions, you inevitably search out individuals. When the groups are relatively small, this is easy. You can imagine you know something about each of the five members of the VFW post in Baldwin, N.Y., from their respective ages, the way they salute and the physical shape they've kept themselves in since leaving the military. But at other times Slavin, who has said himself that he is interested in the "conflict between individuality and belong-

ing," gives us only an anonymous mass, whether of high-school cheerleaders or transit workers.

—Charles Dee Mitchell

## PHOENIX

### Hector Ruiz at the Heard Museum

The sculptural centerpiece of Hector Ruiz's "La Realidad (Reality)" exhibition was a gargantuan but slightly pin-headed papier-mâché blonde in a black mini-dress and high heels, a broad-shouldered, cylindrical-limbed, busty vision rising 21 feet toward the ceiling of the Heard's rotunda. She was called *Westernization* and carried a Murakami-style Louis Vuitton handbag as well as, in her left hand, a tiny man with a briefcase. Suspended in the air around her head were a spouting oil derrick, the Statue of Liberty, and two men riding on the fuselage of a plane, Dr. Strange-love-style—all papier-mâché and paint. She was crudely constructed, garish and hard to ignore, and maybe that was the point.

The other elements in the busy show—wooden sculptures, drawings, paintings and linoprints—were more modest in size but equally rough and vivid. The carvings are usually squared off, sometimes of multiple parts pinned together and often highlighted with paint. The imagery is cartoonish or folk-art-like, but there's nothing naive about the message, usually made explicit through labels chiseled into the figure and often accompanied by an inscribed legend, in addition

to ordinary wall labels. Sometimes funny and sometimes anything but, these works convey a sophisticated social commentary that apparently derives from Ruiz's "border" identity as an American of Mexican and Kickapoo Indian descent. Traveling literally, emotionally and intellectually between those cultures, he chooses to emphasize the handmade as an embodiment of the humanity of his work.

A 28-inch-high table labeled "machismo" in carved letters is also embellished with relief vignettes of a hand slapping a woman, a bull with big testicles and the like. A large wooden nude with a grape-leaf on her pubis holds a tiny man in her left hand in a piece called *B Littled*. There wasn't a work in the show that made do with a single image; Ruiz multiplies impact by packing-in carved or painted figures, emblems and comments.

One of the sharpest works is *M.I.A. (Mexicans in America)*, 2003. It is a large carved-wood hand (31 by 14 by 4 1/2 inches) with a gold-edged red wound at the center of the palm. A papier-mâché figure hovers above each finger on a resilient wire: a skeleton in a coffin, a guy carrying a huge load in a backpack with a carrying strap around his forehead, a guy in a suit with a briefcase, another in a cage, one pushing a broom. Such a range of opportunities. There's also a mixed-medium-on-canvas work called *The Border As a Laboratory, Not a Melting Pot* (2005), which takes as its principal motif a figure climbing a fence. The design recurs across a field that includes cut paper, painted red dots (some in graduated rows) and carved-wood shapes and partial figures. The whole evokes tension, disorder and frustration. Everywhere, that guy keeps climbing the fence. The show as a whole stood right on the border between cynicism and amusement.

—Janet Koplos

## BEVERLY HILLS

### Richard Artschwager at Gagosian

One does not readily associate landscape, narrative or chromatic complexity with the work of Richard Artschwager, but all three figured in his recent show of paintings from 2004 and 2005, most of them acrylic on fiber panel, roughly 4 by 6 feet or the reverse and mounted, as usual, in conspicuous, heavy frames. Of the three, narrative gives the artist the most trouble.

*The Ladder*, depicting an old man in a chair in the corner of a bare room, gazing at an enormous ladder leading up out of the frame (and, presumably, his predicament), seems a bit too obvious, like a quickly readable illustration. The same applies to *Holding*, wherein a young girl displays, at arm's length, her own likeness.

In the more intriguing *Horizon/Horizon*, a projectile resembling the Washington Monument, rendered in the artist's familiar grisaille technique, rises from the lowest register to pierce from below a color-saturated world, skewering a rope that inexplicably tethers two candy-colored sets of stone or slab steps. Something, maybe shock waves, distorts the appearance of the red brick wall beyond; adding to the mystery is the absence, despite the painting's title, of a literal horizon line. But that badge of landscape is explicit in four other works; it is low in the frame of *Janus* and, softened by distant purple mountains, establishes a pastoral setting for the looming, jagged abstraction that sits atop a fluted column, like a Corinthian capital gone haywire. In *Janus*, the artist looks both to the materiality of surface and to deep, illusory space.

For decades, Artschwager painted on Celotex, an industrially produced panel embossed with innocuous yet insistent textural patterns and used as drop ceilings in office buildings. Celotex is no longer produced to his liking, so Artschwager now has fiber panels fabricated. These, while more randomly textured, similarly interfere with the image applied. At their best, the paintings on Celotex utilized the pulverizing effect of the texture to suggest impermanence, either in concert with the image,

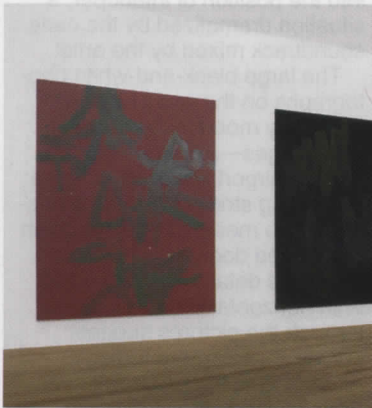
Hector Ruiz: *M.I.A. (Mexicans in America)*, 2003, carved wood, 31 by 14 by 4 1/2 inches; at the Heard Museum.





as in paintings of collapsing buildings and sinking battleships, or in contrast to it, as in grand, ornately appointed rooms. Legibility is an issue in *Search for Tomorrow*, the one painting in this show based on an obviously appropriated rather than invented image. Four corporate types rendered in near-monochrome gray face the viewer with inscrutable expressions and stiff gestures, while in the background, flickering orange flames or wallpaper lend an infernal note to the boardroom formality.

Artschwager's sculpture, clunky faux furniture of dubious function, is recalled by *Rug II* (2004), in which a long, gray carpet, its generic Oriental diamond motif sketchily painted on fiber panel, stretches into perspectival space. It is flawlessly set into a smooth, marbled darker-gray Formica ground. Gleaming laminate is depicted in *Some People*, a tondo 51 inches in diameter, in which three figures are arranged at a hovering, legless tabletop. This foreshortened circle echoes the painting's format. The frame's swirling, blue-and-black zebra striping



**View of three oil paintings by Gérard Traquair**

is characteristic of the artist, but the impressionistic rendering of reflected light reflecting off the veneer is a surprise and a far cry from the hybrid of Minimalism and Pop that put Artschwager on the map over 40 years ago. —Stephen Maine