



Pedro Barbeito: *Forgiveness*, 2004, acrylic on canvas, 71 by 96 inches; at Lehmann Maupin.

*Bee*; the title is a reference to their hero, Muhammed Ali. Some of the figures have a decidedly *commedia dell'arte* feel to them, as with *Don Giovanni*, who sports a feathered cap and a cape that he raises menacingly, his threat deflated somewhat by his T-shirt and underwear. The lovely *Ghost Fairy*, cunningly shrouded in a transparent cloth veil (this work is in mixed mediums), is less readily identifiable, with her bizarre headdress that at once resembles both a pincushion and a space-age satellite. Throughout, Agee's allusion to the ordinary gives poignancy to the figures' attempts to transcend their identities.

Agee graduated from Yale in 1986, the same year as painters Lisa Yuskavage and John Currin. Like them, her inspiration comes from the past, in particular 18th-century Europe; but hers is a "minor" art in which she wields an appropriately light touch. Agee remains, perhaps, truest to the spirit of the Rococo.

—Faye Hirsch

## Pedro Barbeito at Lehmann Maupin

"The Conversation" is the loaded title of Pedro Barbeito's fifth solo show, and once the search is on, dialogue can be discerned everywhere in these ambitious paintings: between male and female, abstraction and figuration, *disegno* and *pittura*, the artist and art history. Gone are this Spanish-born, New York-based artist's references to astrophysics and chemical compounds, in favor of that parallel universe, the bedroom. In *You & Me* (94 by 122 inches, 2004-05),

shards of greens, grays, pinks and blues, some modulated with an airbrush or spray gun, obfuscate but do not wholly conceal monstrous, flanking figures teetering on the brink of illegibility, stenciled in a pencil-thick, unraveling line that shifts in color from coffee to wine. The figure on the right is either gratifying or disemboweling himself; the figure on the left looks on askance.

*Forgiveness* (71 by 96 inches, 2004) eventually reveals a huddled pair of kneeling figures, praying hands and a bit of camouflage on the left; an ovoid grid like a mandala dominates the right, adorned with a jagged, parti-colored heart shape in high relief. A languorous odalisque lolls within the frenzied, fragmented *Reclining Defiant II* (69 by 83 inches, 2005), a paradigm of every artist's intention to lure the viewer into a state of perpetual desire, always tantalized and never satisfied. Its bristling thatch of black lines cut through with rods of electric blue, and the glassy, splintery background shoving its way forward, make this more spatially impenetrable than the other paintings.

But the drawings associated with it are among the most open of the 11 on view. Though studies for specific paintings, these drawings, in ink, pencil and running-dry felt marker, instantly recall Picasso's later graphics, bifurcated portrayals of painter and model wherein the master equates painting with sex even as he diagrams his distance from his conquest. Pictorial complexity is sketchily abbreviated in a lattice-work of notational marks, building

toward an open architecture of lines in great variety, where form and void exchange identities in true Cubist fashion.

The largest, least chromatic and most iconographically diffuse of the paintings is *The Conversation II* (94 by 144 inches, 2004). In the related drawing, one figure peeks under the skirt of another, but in the painting such vivid narrative detail is subsumed among jagged wedges of pale secondary colors and pearly grays. Meticulously crafted areas of pale acrylic film, one in the shape of an angular, stretched question mark, force the issue of surface versus depth. Two contorted, poised figures can be made out, shouting at each other from above and below center. Behaving like professional wrestlers, they are artist and subject.

—Stephen Maine

## Benjamin Butler at Team

In his third solo at Team Gallery, Benjamin Butler, who resides in New York and New Haven, showed five drawings and 10 paintings, two of which lay parallel to the floor on low platforms (all works 2004 and 2005). Butler's last exhibition at Team featured renderings of individual trees against rhythmic backgrounds of short, piled-up strokes of pulsating colors; the abstract particularity of the trees called to mind early Mondrian paintings. Butler's more recent works feature larger groupings of trees and other elements, likewise embedded in fields of color.

In three of the paintings (*Trees in the Forest*, *Orange-Yellow Autumn Forest* and *Green Tree Pink*), picture planes are broken up by overlapping branches and broad vertical brushstrokes of

Benjamin Butler: *Trees in the Forest*, 2004, at Team.

