

contradictorily, indicates sunny warmth in his paintings while depicting an empty American Dream. Devoid of cars, people and any significant individuation, Selwyn's houses suggest rather ominously that the homeland itself is disintegrating.

—Gerard McCarthy

## Matthew Blackwell at Edward Thorp

You can fairly hear the lonesome fiddles and smell the piney trees in Matthew Blackwell's recent paintings, 21 of which constituted this seasoned artist's third New York solo show, "Over Yonder in the Minor Key." The work is soaked through with a flinty, arcadian sensibility that, dodging folksy sentimentality, conveys urgent opposition to mainstream suburban culture. It offers non-conformity not as a condition of isolation but as an informed choice. Blackwell's funny, muscular, overstuffed paintings (all oil on canvas or linen, and completed in 2007) deftly balance literary, narrative, formal and painterly modes of meaning. You can tell the guy has a fine time at the easel.

It's a stone-cold eye that won't enjoy the pictorial sweep and crunch of a painting like *Progress (Worm)*, in which an enormous, ukulele-wielding earthworm with a mop of hair slithers through a barren, overcast landscape. A mean snarl of activity in the middle distance includes a blue-suited figure, splayed like a scarecrow, drawing fire from a hovering helicopter gunship while a haggard hound lolls in the door of a doghouse labeled "Rummy." Nearby is the grave marker of one "Geo II." On the right side of the painting, a double-barreled superhighway skids out in a smoky tangle at the horizon. Two tramps, elaborate dots in the distance, wait for Godot.

Two-lane blacktop reappears in *Trampoose*, in which a small crowd of onlookers—featuring a blue-headed burro and a gangly gal in a tight skirt and go-go boots—lends moral support to a reeling, drugged-out hitchhiker. "The obstacle [*sic*] is the path," declares a take-charge rooster in the foreground of this unmistakably New England landscape, plunking that Zen saying down in the stomping grounds of Emersonian self-reliance.

In *Over Yonder (for Woody Guthrie)*, Bush, Cheney and bickering cabinet members slide inexorably into a chasm at the paint-

ing's center, while behind them a rickety oil derrick hung with nooses spews crude over a desert dotted with skulls. A jubilant, long-limbed donkey with Guthrie's guitar (inscribed "this machine kills facists [*sic*]") slung around his neck strides away from the debacle, glancing blithely at the viewer as if to take full credit.

Blackwell is an able and daring pusher-around of paint, ready to relinquish control of his surfaces just to see what happens. But he's also good at pulling pictures together. *Procession* is a rich, funny, wonderful painting. Six or seven authentic eccentrics parade along a beach, making a lusty racket with accordion, pipes, ukulele and a squeaky hand truck. In a nod to the tradition of Maine painting, a Marsden Hartleyesque island drifts in the upper right corner, bookmarking the cleft between briny azure sea and pink mineral sky. A big-shouldered bear-guy holds aloft a flag spangled with a solitary star. He's the standard-bearer of this merry band, this ad hoc politburo, this carnival of souls. As in the politically inflected modern mythologies of Max Beckmann and Sidney Nolan, Blackwell grafts a constellation of personal meaning onto a wider, social frame of reference. His work contains echoes of the myth of the frontier, when "do-it-yourself" was not an esthetic alternative but a prerequisite for survival.

—Stephen Maine

## Moon Beam at Kim Foster

In his fourth New York solo, Seoul-based painter Moon Beam presented eight paintings poised between abstraction and figuration. All the pieces come from a series whose title, "Possible Worlds," suggests both the imagined and the actual. The images offer extraordinary detail combined with atmospheric effects; Moon works these pictures with pen and by small, swift motions of his fingers in the acrylic paint. Surreal ambiguity vies with motifs highly reminiscent of traditional ink painting. Yet the billowing clouds of color with remarkably focused ridges and valleys transcend any easy conflation of Asian and Western esthetics.

In *Possible Worlds 510* (2007), a work of acrylic and oilstick on panel, the forms seem to mount in waves around a circular element with a shadow beneath it. An olive-green color pervades



Matthew Blackwell: *Over Yonder (for Woody Guthrie)*, 2007, oil on canvas, 50 by 54½ inches; at Edward Thorp.

the gestural effusions, which unfurl leaflike across the panel, as well as the flat surface behind them. The composition may lack a center, but the syncopated, complex treatment of movement yields a distinct visual structure. Balancing the outright fantastic and the extremely controlled, 510 comments on the process of its own making—a quality that brings Moon into the company of the Abstract Expressionists. The swirling imagery begs several kinds of comparisons—clouds, dust storms, brushstrokes—and shows how deft the work really is.

The rest of the paintings in the series reiterate this conjunction of exquisite particulars and explosive force. In *Possible Worlds 512* (2007), a brown vortex on the right offsets what look like heavy cumulus clouds on the left. The

association with weather is intensified by the sky-blue background, as well the earth-brown band across the bottom part of the work. With such skillfully executed allusions to natural phenomena, these paintings call for a reading open to the imagination, where art and nature can fluidly embrace.

—Jonathan Goodman

## Rhonda Zwillinger at Pavel Zoubok

Those familiar with work from the 1980s by the then East Village-associated Rhonda Zwillinger might recognize in her new mixed-medium sculptures the same tendency to over-the-top glitter, still achieved with encrustations of shiny baubles but to much less kitschy effect. Beads, Czech glass, Swarovski



Moon Beam: *Possible Worlds 510*, 2007, acrylic and oilstick on panel, 48 by 65 inches; at Kim Foster.