

## **Arnold Helbling at Roebling Hall**

A recent series of paintings by Arnold Helbling used X-ray photographs from medical textbooks as a point of departure, and those ghostly images haunt the finished canvases. In his new 2003 series shown here, Helbling, a Swiss-born artist based in New York since 1989, works from photographs of buildings. Yet associations with the external world are abbreviated to

the point of notation. What remains in both series is a quirkiness of structure that hints at specific source material (although they remain abstract for the viewer), and bravura paint handling that shows Helbling's utter commitment to the rightness of the brush-stroke's placement.

Certain motifs emerge in these generally sizable paintings. An oddly segmented, almost horizontal band that may refer to lintels often dominates the composition, as in the 68-by-64-inch *Monument to Architecture (Homage to Bada Shanren)*. The hot blue dot around which this largely red-orange-on-white painting pivots is a case study in economy of means. The title refers to an eccentric, virtuoso Qing dynasty painter and calligrapher whose most radical work shows a like reduction to pictorial essentials and a similarly exuberant, muscular line.

The construction of space in Helbling's paintings is distinctive. The gesso ground is sanded smooth so that acrylic glazes

Helbling's process is essentially additive. The skittering streaks and brushy splashes of color—punctuated by incidental drips and blobs—tend to remain discrete, but when they are allowed to run together, the effect is spectacular. The polarities of control and surrender to chance evoked in the paintings suggest an Eastern outlook. The artist has traveled extensively in China and Taiwan, and he compares his earlier X-ray paintings to Chinese landscapes.

A looming area of virtually untouched white gesso that constitutes nearly half of the 9-by-15-foot *South of the Border, East of the Sun* has the kind of visual weight often seen in Cy Twombly's work, as well as a similar equation of white void with wall. We are told that this painting required the fabrication of a brush with a paint reservoir that would allow strokes to span its length. These strokes are variations on translucent greenish blue, articulated at various points by splashes of orange, magenta and alizarin. The coloristic complexity



Josh Dorman: *Where We Lived*, 2002, oil on panel, 38 by 48 inches; at 55 Mercer.

bead up and acquire a high-resolution look while emphasizing the picture plane. Visually retreating to an indeterminate distance are soft-focus spots or clouds of unbroken color clunkily applied with an airbrush. In the more crowded paintings such as *A Bull, A Rose, A Tempest* (103 by 92 inches), this two-level spatial effect is startlingly similar to looking into a microscope, playing with the viewer's sense of scale.

of the work is theatrical. The scale and gestural strokes may recall Abstract Expressionism, but the overall emotional tone is cool and the effect cerebral. Rather, Helbling might be considered in the context of painters as diverse as Cecily Brown, Gary Hume and Bruce Pearson, who share a concern with ideas about legibility and who obfuscate or even deform their imagery through idiosyncratic approaches to materials. —Stephen Maine

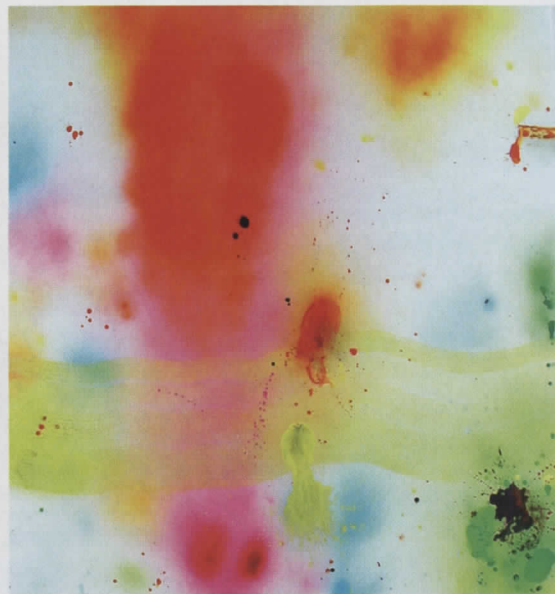
## Perla Krauze at Howard Scott

Perla Krauze lives and works in Mexico City, her place of birth. In her abstract, almost monochrome pictures, she traps time, as she records the processes of pictorial creation. Her paintings are about memory.

They are also about the making of pictures, from the design and piecing together of the stretcher to the application of the final film of paint. The structure of the stretcher, the tautness of the canvas and the transparency of the paint contribute to the total effect. Krauze designs her stretchers so that some of their bars touch the backs of her canvases, while others are slightly recessed. The bars just behind the surfaces of the canvases may be rubbed with charcoal or diluted paint from the front, leaving their imprints upon the picture plane. The vertical and/or horizontal bars that are thereby acknowledged structure a composition that in most cases consists of beige or light brown washes, as delicate as breath exhaled upon the surface of a mirror. The weave of the beige canvas may remain either fully exposed in places or visible through thin layers of pigment, thereby contributing

to the color, tone and texture of the painting; there is hardly any brushwork in Krauze's pictures. However, the canvas is also a skin, wrapped over the stretcher and stapled to the front of it. In this artist's hands, the canvas becomes an elastic membrane with areas of transparency.

*Stillness I* (2003) is concerned with light that reveals form and, consequently, meaning. Here, the canvas



Arnold Helbling: *From the Series of Places I Always Wanted to See and Never Dared Visit*, 2003, acrylic on canvas, 72 by 66 inches; at Roebling Hall.

leaves part of the vertical stretcher bars of blond wood exposed at the left and right. Charcoal rubbing lightly delineates the top and bottom bars through the canvas, while a third bar above center is more heavily emphasized, and thus appears to be sliding downward. There is scumbling with charcoal at the bottom and at the top, some of it painted over with white. Krauze knows that by erasing, one draws attention to what was once there.

When I look at Krauze's work, I think of the "Support/Surface" group, with their occasional emphasis upon stretcher and canvas, but not for long. Twombly's mark-making and

Perla Krauze: *Stillness I*, 2003, oil on canvas, 59 inches square; at Howard Scott.

