

Jane Fine: *First Date*, 2008, acrylic and ink on wood panel, 24 by 30 inches; at Plerogi.



slightly off-kilter layouts. While it is evident that Brown painstakingly cuts each piece and affixes it exactly where he wants it, what emerges are perplexing, irrational-seeming realms. Brown's work bears striking similarities to Dada collage, but he has created a distinct visual language as captivating as it is cryptic.

—Lilly Slezak

JANE FINE PIEROGI

Winning but uneven, the paintings and drawings (all 2008 and '09) in "Glad All Over," Jane Fine's fourth solo here, displayed the artist's quirky touch, antic if sometimes arcane iconography and a few too many antecedents that were less than fully digested. A brainy artist, Fine is well-versed in the dialogue between abstraction and figuration, and keen to participate in it. *Over the Hump* (acrylic on canvas, 78 by 54 inches) depicts, in somber purples, greens and alizarin, a monumental heap of her favored goofy motifs—mushrooms, microphones, gun barrels, wooden planks and less readily identifiable curiosities—crowned with an enormous cherry sprouting still more planks. It is as if Guston, Oldenburg and R. Crumb got together to play exquisite corpse after nicking Rothko's palette. Though lovely, three drawings in colored pencil, among them *Victory Garden* (30 by 22 inches), made Fine's influences even plainer.

The artist is in her comfort zone in *A Fly Buzzed* (30 by 24 inches), executed on wood panel. Here she augmented oozy puddles of tinted, marbled acrylics

with tiny black-ink marker notations: pretzely flowers, smoking cannons, bulging biomorphic silhouettes. She's at the top of her game in *First Date* (24 by 30 inches), in which two awkward lovebirds attempt a walk on the beach. One is a bit too animated, a mass of mechanisms and mannerisms. The other, chunky and stiff, gamely tries to keep up and stay cool. Their story unfolds in a panoramic landscape-like space, between a throng of squabbling doodles in the foreground and, courtesy of the wood panel's grain, a distant sea's lapping waves.

But misfires and incongruities made the exhibition feel rudderless. At 23 works, the checklist was overpopulated, with 10 7-by-5-inch, acrylic-and-marker exercises attesting to little but the artist's facility. Several canvases depict rudimentary landscapes—cousins of *First Date*—that bridge "earth" and "sky" with "figures," roughly speaking: amorphous entities that might be communicating via pantomime, boomerang, stink bomb or semaphore. The largest, worst, yet most memorable of these, *Family Outing* (48 by 96 inches), brings squawky comic artists like Tony Millionaire into the mix.

Now, stylistic inconsistency is not in itself a flaw, but derivativeness is. Fine marks time, equivocates and seems wholly committed to too few of these works. An exception—the ugly and difficult *Family Outing*—suggests that she pursue the so-bad-it's-good approach. (It's worked for Carroll Dunham.) Fine is at a crossroads, where any self-aware artist surely has tarried: play to one's strengths, or take the plunge into the



Conrad Marca-Relli: "Figure Form #2" M-2-66, 1966, collage and mixed mediums on canvas, 39¼ by 45¼ inches; at Knoedler.

nasty unknown? Until she resolves this dilemma, she'll dither.

—Stephen Maine

CONRAD MARCA-RELLI KNOEDLER

Conrad Marca-Relli (1913-2000) figures prominently in the history of Abstract Expressionism. Born in Boston and raised in New York and Europe, he worked for the WPA in the 1930s, was a charter member of the Club, helped organize the famous Ninth Street Show in 1951 and was close enough to Jackson Pollock that the East Hampton police called on him to identify the artist after his fatal 1956 car crash. Given his large body of work, representation in virtually all the major public collections in the U.S., and a distinguished record of museum and gallery exhibitions, including a Whitney retrospective in 1967, Marca-Relli's name should be more familiar today than it is.

Although he is best known for abstract collages, several early Surrealist-inspired paintings were included in "Conrad Marca-Relli: The New York Years 1945-1967." Particularly compelling is *La Città* (1951), a large, thickly brushed composition of white buildinglike forms punctuated by a loose grid of windows. Marca-Relli achieved a measure of success with this type of work, but after a three-month residency in Mexico in 1953, he changed course, abandoning Surrealism for abstraction and straight painting for collage. Collage was scarcely a common path for artists in his circle. Some American artists, notably