

company she kept. The tabloids loved her, and it all still makes for pretty good reading, transporting us to another era, in which this woman from a modest, evangelical background in Arizona, born Pearl Elizabeth Dobbins, made her way, such as it was, with resourcefulness,chutzpah and good cheer.

The exhibition drew fascinated young crowds. And Renay has some prominent fans: on the gallery counter was the dummy of a large book featuring her life and work scheduled to come out in fall 2009, compiled by New York artist Scott Ewalt. It will include essays by Cindy Sherman and John Waters, who featured Renay in his film *Desperate Living* (1977).

—Elizabeth C. Baker

PETER PINCHBECK

LUISE ROSS AND

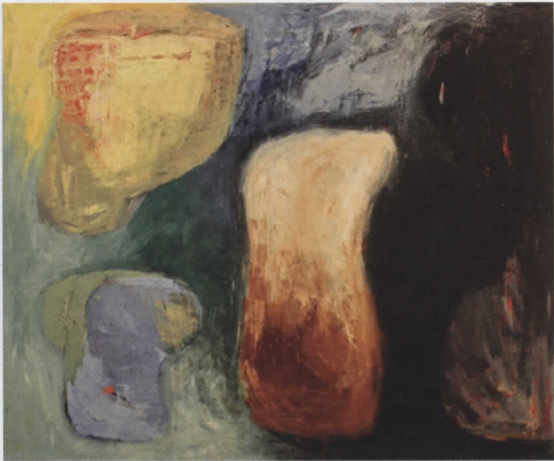
GARY SNYDER/PROJECT SPACE

Born in Brighton, England, and schooled in London, Peter Pinchbeck (1931-2000) moved as a young man to New York, where his playful, reductive sculpture earned him a berth in the seminal 1966 "Primary Structures" exhibition at the Jewish Museum. For his first solo show five years later, at Paley & Lowe Gallery, Pinchbeck showed monochrome plywood panels suspended from the ceiling, hanging a few feet from the wall. His inquiry into pictorial space eventually found more painterly terms, and two recent concurrent exhibitions attested to his restless exploration and his hard-won achievements.

The earliest of the sculptures and works on paper at Ross were clean and

spare, Constructivist in appearance if not origin. An untitled 1981 drawing in acrylic stations three boxy rectangles in another frontier. The three works in acrylic and charcoal that make up *Language of Signs #1,2,3* (1986)—a tense equivocation of black and white, figure and ground—recall the supple geometries of Tony Smith. In seven mixed-medium sculptures, all dated 1995, low-key dramas play out among lumps of plaster or clay and bits of wood, cardboard, wire and hardware. Small and casual (the largest is 16 inches tall), they look like maquettes. In an untitled, acrylic-on-paper work from that year, a quartet of bulbous forms occupies a tremulously brushy space. The palette is grounded in umbers and flashed through with radiant lemon yellow, delicate pinkish grays and briny green-blues.

At Snyder, eight major canvases from the painter's last decade sustain this vocabulary of bulbous forms, in which dense clots of matter seem to precipitate out of their surroundings. The resulting sense of mass in Pinchbeck's "volumetric abstraction," as he called it, creates tremendous pictorial presence. The more intriguing paintings are those that depart from a strict figure/ground dichotomy: their constituent forms touch or are cropped at the painting's edge, or dissolve into the ground. In the 5-by-6-foot *Dusk* (1994), a greenish shadow invades from the right, swallowing one form and throwing another's pale peach highlights into high relief. Its counterpoint is a small blue and violet shape with a hot orange dot like a navel. The umbilical cord may



Peter Pinchbeck: *Dusk*,
1994, oil on canvas, 60
by 72 inches; at Gary
Snyder/Project Space.

be missing, but these inchoate blobs drift as if in amniotic fluid.

Volume emerges from brush- and knifework; color is expressive, not descriptive. A meticulous craftsman, Pinchbeck attended to the corners. He'd nail them down with July-sky blue, slithering gray-green, tropical aqua or mango. He was even good with brown: in an untitled, 4-by-5-foot canvas from 1992, the gritty, muddy ground advances to animate the negative spaces between three vessel-like forms.

As a teacher, curator and colleague, Pinchbeck embraced the rhythms of his adopted city. A fixture in the downtown community of Post-Minimalist painters that included Dan Christensen and Ron Gorchov, he was frustrated but undeterred by an art market that had little use for him. In a recent conversation, the painter Thornton Willis, his friend and SoHo neighbor for 40 years, recalled Pinchbeck's devotion to his work: "He was confident about what he was doing, convinced that he was right and the market was wrong."

—Stephen Maine