

EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Richard Allen Morris:
Welcome to Indonesia,
2007, acrylic on board,
5½ inches in diameter;
at Peter Blum Chelsea.

that reflected a leafless tree silhouetted against the white sky. It continued, revealing nothing of much interest, with four additional mirrors mounted high on the walls of the gallery's first and second rooms, above the other artwork. Finally, deep in the last room, which was unlit as if the room were empty, a small mirror hung near the ceiling caught the reflections of the others to reveal an unexpected glimpse of the winter sky that stretched above you when you first entered the gallery. In the midst of so much suspension—spinning coins, bubbles ready to burst—a way out suddenly seemed possible, and as you exited the gallery, you found yourself looking up.

—Casey Ruble

RICHARD ALLEN MORRIS PETER BLUM CHELSEA

The best work by the veteran San Diego artist Richard Allen Morris is striking, witty and materially eccentric. This was only his second New York solo, though he has a healthy track record on the West Coast and, lately, in Europe. Self-taught but no outsider, Morris has pursued, in the last half-century, not a singular vision but a wide-ranging sequence of enthusiasms. Several of these were represented among the 49 works in "Morris Code, Works from 1957-2007."

In *Flex* (1968, 53 by 22 inches, acrylic and enamel on canvas), one of five comix-influenced, forehead-to-chin profiles, a graphic ocher square replaces the mouth of the jolly, blue-faced subject. A subtle, near-symmetrical exercise in warm and cool tones, the

ragged, compact *Gray Matter* (1977, 11 by 14 inches, mixed-medium recycled painting) is a retort, perhaps, to the serene surfaces and expansive spaces of Abstract Classicism.

Redolent of sand, sun and sea, the ethereal palette of the tiny *Tan Junction* (1992, 6 by 5 inches, acrylic-on-wood panel) is as light as a breeze off the Pacific, a surprise given its comically impastoed surface. A similar concentration of attention underlies *Mercedes Benz* (1999, 10 by 8 inches, acrylic on canvas), in which out-of-the-tube trails of black, earth green, yellow and white paint step smartly across a purple ground. Newer works are denser, more cultivated—like hothouse blossoms of pigment. The show's most recent, a tondo called *Welcome to Indonesia* (2007, acrylic on hard board, 5½ inches in diameter by 3 inches), is a roiling, sculptural mass of purple, black and green whipped to stiff peaks.

Since the 1960s Morris has produced wall works, variously stocky and attenuated, which sort of resemble machine guns. In the California assemblage tradition, the 10 included here are funky and rough-hewn, more humorous than menacing; they are patched together from bits of wood, wire, printed cardboard, the carcasses of sneakers and work gloves, and humble hardware. Among the largest and most painting-like, *For Mexico* (1992, 25 by 42 by 2 inches) is an old board bedecked with scraps of apparently discarded paintings, duct tape, cheap weavings and so on. A nail suffices for a trigger; the sight is a screw eye.

Reclaiming Pop, hard-edge and Ab-Ex painting, and polychrome sculpture, Morris has approached his studio like a laboratory, with an experimental attitude many professionally schooled artists might profitably consider adopting. In recent years, John Baldessari and David Reed have been instrumental in bringing Morris to a New York audience. This show was a reminder, if one were needed, of the vagaries of renown. Legion are the artists, equally committed and accomplished but less well-connected, whom you and I will never hear of.

—Stephen Maine

PETER SAUL DAVID NOLAN

This show of new work by Peter Saul followed on the heels of the well-received touring museum retrospective organized by the Orange County Museum of Art, where it debuted last year. The six large canvases and the group of works on paper in the more recent show proved the San Francisco-born Chicago Imagist veteran to be in fine, acerbic form. Saul uses his twisted cartoon imagery to tackle, or rather attack, a host of topics ranging from Cold War politics (*Stalin + Mao*, 2009) and gratuitous sex (*Viva la Difference*, 2008) to Joe the Plumber (*Plumber Joe Meets Francis Bacon*, 2008) and Bernie Madoff (*Testicles of a Billionaire*, 2009), part of a series of raunchy portrayals of the Ponzi schemer as a self-emasculating oaf.

Swipes at art-world values appear in a number of works, including *Better*