

scarlet rectangles are far from opaque. Painted with diluted oils, they allow the yellow ground to seep through from behind, like light penetrating swathes of sheer fabric.

—Matthew Guy Nichols

Pierre Soulages at Robert Miller and Haim Chanin

Two concurrent Pierre Soulages shows were the first substantial New York exposure for this towering figure in, astonishingly, nearly 30 years. For decades routinely compared, in this country, to Kline, Soulages returned with tough, textured paintings balancing black against black and strongly suggesting a goth Rothko. "Outrenoir" (roughly, "Beyond Black"), at Miller, was as somber as a chapel. Recent works on paper, at Haim Chanin, are far more approachable and even let slip a glimmer of humor.

All the works shown at Miller are titled *Painting*, followed by their dimensions and date. But in the absence of pictorial space or interaction of hues, the leathery black surfaces of several, like the 5-by-6-foot canvas secondarily identified as *May 2, 2004*, are really bas-relief. Thick, nearly parallel furrows of moderately glossy acrylic stretch sideways across the canvas, as if it were loosely wrapped in black plastic. The slightly larger, vertical *September 14, 2004* recalls the pounding rhythms of the artist's earlier work; at the corners and along the edges, notches of white canvas remain as negative space, so that these tarry blacks depict, rather than constitute, a looming presence.

But Soulages is more invested in the 5-by-6-foot panel, in a format of two stacked horizontal panels of slightly different heights, as in *January 28, 2005*. Both are a smooth, tactile black, but the upper, slightly shorter panel

is a little glossy, like a vinyl seat cushion, the lower one matte. A difference in how they entertain light is visually equivalent to a chromatic shift. The suggestion of velocity owes less to the whizzing grooves at top and bottom than to the painting's streamlined resemblance to the side of a bullet train. This format is a modular unit; variously combining textures and finishes, three glowering, stacked pairs occupied the gallery's grand rear wall, provoking the viewer to recombine them mentally.

In *April 5, 2005*, the lower panel has been underpainted with a hard, hot blue over which a membrane of black has been scraped smooth, turning it sooty. Similar atmospheric effects, born of the absorptive nature of paper, relieve the melodrama in 14 untitled works in walnut stain on paper, at Chanin. Not large, mounted on canvas, they are vertically oriented sheets divided along a few horizontals, many with familiar slivers of white between umber-black slats, as if the viewer were peering out of a boarded-up window. Less predictably, squeegees subtly modulate mid-tones; skins of residual stain impart a sepia glow. Illusionism rushes in. One work, a collage, intermittently reads as a sharply underlit rail against deep, brooding space; another, with its glistening, near-white bottom band, wavering shadowy midsection and inky upper half, demands to be seen as a moonlit lake stirred by a gentle breeze. —Stephen Maine

Tobias Putrih at Max Protetch

When Tobias Putrih debuted his work here in 2003, the sculpture that generated the most critical chatter was a cardboard-and-plaster construction that resembled two opposing movie screens hung against rocky cliffs. Though rich with formal contrasts, this meditation on the cinematic

divide between Europe and America was best understood with the aid of the gallery's press release. The Slovenian-born artist's recent sculpture (all 2005) appears to stem from this ambitious earlier effort, but achieves greater conceptual clarity by tackling topography and cinema in separate bodies of work.

Three new pieces in the gallery's rear room belong to Putrih's "Macula" series, several more of which appeared in "Greater New York 2005" at P.S. 1. For all of these, Putrih cuts thin sheets of corrugated cardboard into roughly circular shapes, slightly altering the contours and diameter of each irregular ring. When stacked into 5-foot-tall mounds, the layered cardboard resembles rock formations, their surfaces seemingly furrowed and pitted by centuries of erosion. This initial geologic impression is cleverly undermined by the sculptures' spindly cardboard pedestals, which could never support the weight of actual stone. More

Deren, two sculptures made from rear-projection screens that mimic the dimensions of movie screens found in New York's Anthology Film Archives. Both of these large white rectangles are wrapped around taut ribs of monofilament that Putrih stretches from floor to ceiling in generous S-curves. The pair sliced through the main gallery like sails caught in a strong wind, lending physical substance to cinema's demand that viewers mentally project themselves into filmic space. To Putrih's credit, one can appreciate these elegantly contorted movie screens without a degree in film theory or specific knowledge of his titles, which refer, respectively, to a gallery at Anthology devoted to multimedia performance and the experimental filmmaker whose movies are often screened there.

Putrih also presented a seven-minute video loop in this show. *Quasi-Random Construction* could be viewed on a small monitor recessed into a wall at eye level. Peering into the boxlike

Pierre Soulages: *Painting*, 162 x 181 cm., April 5, 2005, 2005, acrylic on canvas, 63 3/4 by 71 1/4 inches; at Robert Miller.

