

*South*, 2005, acrylic on canvas, view on p. 187.)

(Peyton). Sullivan's work seems wider ranging, modest and intelligent in its ability to intercede between photo and painting, character and depiction, viewer and subject, color and light. Just as he doesn't exhaust the options available in a given photograph (one always feels there are more versions available), he keeps his own personality in check, and lets us observe along with him.

—Joe Fyfe

## Cy Twombly at Gagosian

Tactility is paramount in Cy Twombly's best paintings. Their surfaces, skittish plastically as well as graphically, convey a participatory, even conspiratorial quality, a narrative of engagement, as if the artist were letting the viewer in on the many reconsiderations, reiterations and cul-de-sacs of his decision-making process. The seemingly spontaneous accumulation of detail—of sgraffiti and scribbles—feels genuinely offhand, ever provisional, and is halted when its revision and embellishment divulge just enough. Even on a heroic scale, as in the *Four Seasons* recently on view in MOMA's atrium, the work's coruscating intimacy is the opposite of bombast.

By that standard, the eight paintings in "Bacchus," lately seen at Gagosian, are nothing like Twombly's best. They are named, of course, for the Roman god associated with wine, revelry and madness. Tumbling across uniform, yellowish-pink grounds are

roiling, scrawny clouds painted in blood-red acrylic in familiarly frantic strokes, vigorous but raspy. In a manner that seems contrived to convey ecstatic frenzy, the paint is thinned sufficiently to ensure a ubiquitous downpour of drips. All are untitled and dated 2005; no two paintings are exactly the same size, although each measures roughly 10 by 14 feet. Closely hung, they jammed the walls. Their unruliness is propelled by virtuosity of touch; regarding color, surface, composition and space, they are remarkably unadventurous.

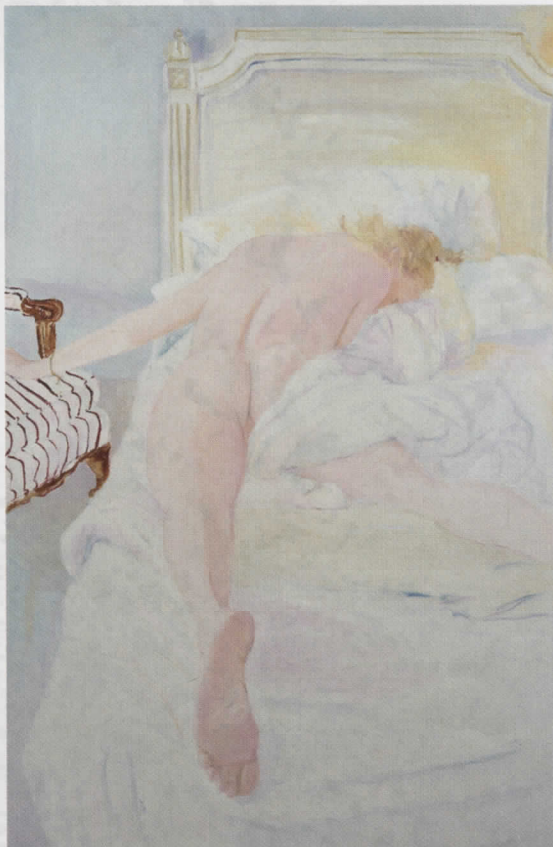
Each wall of the skylit, squarish gallery held a pair of paintings alike in some obvious characteristic. Flanking the entrance were canvases divided between a larger band of vigorous, layered loops occupying the lower three-quarters and a stouter band across the top quarter; the two paintings on the south wall were distinctly denser than the others, bearing a flurry of overlapping, translucent brushstrokes and producing an impression of being veiled, or overgrown. On the east wall were two in which fat, muscular strokes like crumpled beams brush the top and bottom edges. Some of the negative spaces are cleaned up, worked back into the ground with judiciously applied

brushloads of its same sandy pink. That the installation looked preconceived, with few traces of spontaneous, canvas-by-canvas discovery, should come as no surprise, as the suite was designed for the space. As such, it should best be considered a single work. It had the same oppressive, rococo frothiness as the Fragonard Room at the Frick Collection.

In the paintings that hung on the north wall, the attenuated drips coming off the whirling, snarly strokes terminate in eccentrically shaped puddles that resemble legs or scaffolding shoring up the crimson tangle above. (Saul Steinberg's cartoon witticisms come incongruously to mind.) Apparently formed by folding the bottom 18 inches or so of the canvas to a perpendicular angle, it is the only substantial variation alleviating the exhibition's polished sameness of approach. Also on hand was *Turkish Delight* (2000), an inert sculpture about 4 feet high. It is a rough wooden box painted green, topped with a paler green blob the shape of a pineapple and a slablike, alizarin-painted form something like a hat.

To be sure, the physical effort required of Twombly, at 77, to operate on this scale is impressive. Doing little to offend the eye's admiring glance, the suite's

Billy Sullivan: *Sirpa's Back*, 2006, oil on canvas, 64 by 42 inches; at Nicole Klagsbrun.



predictability—its underlying Apollonian agreeableness—would not challenge the poise of many boardrooms or bank lobbies. It plays to one of this great painter's many strengths, the autographic mark, but jettisons the quirky equivocations that give his best work depth, soul and guts.

—Stephen Maine

### Kathleen Gilje at Francis Naumann

Among its many pleasures, art history offers students of the discipline a kind of imaginative time travel to worlds long past. Kathleen Gilje makes this pleasure explicit in a series of portraits of well-known curators and critics substituting for the subjects of even more famous paintings.

An accomplished painting conservator, Gilje puts her skills to good use, miming the polished surfaces of Ingres, the much rougher brushstrokes of Manet, the seductive chiaroscuro of Rembrandt and the sketchy haste of Degas. Her imitations of iconic paintings are excellent, the better to prompt double takes when, for instance, the self-possessed face of Linda Nochlin is trans-

posed to the barmaid in Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, or a dashing Leo Steinberg eyes us from Rubens's *Self-Portrait*.

Part of the fun here is the match between choice of painting and contemporary connoisseur—in most cases, Gilje worked with her sitters to determine appropriate personae. The results are portraits that play with both the subjects' features and their known artistic interests. Sometimes the match comes close to a form of reincarnation. In a portrait completed after his death, William Rubin seems to morph into his favorite subject, Picasso, as captured in a photo by Cartier-Bresson. In another example of the blending of kindred spirits, Arthur Danto appears in a grisaille painting as a Classical bust of Socrates. The portrait that started the series shows Robert Rosenblum taking on the appraising gaze and stiff formal pose of

been equipped with a modern rifle which nestles in her robes, a reference to a famous photograph of Black Panther Huey Newton in a similarly regal pose.

This entertaining show is in many ways an insider's game. It plays on the audience's abil-

The show's title informs us that it presented "Very Different Things about the Same Thing," and while the first part of the phrase is accurate, the second requires some fancy conceptual footwork.

Most in sync with Grigely's earlier concerns is *Remembering*

View of Cy Twombly's exhibition "Bacchus," 2005; at Gagosian.

