

# Art in America

APRIL 2004



KEITH SONNIER

WTC MEMORIAL

PAUL KOS

CHRISTIAN SCHAD

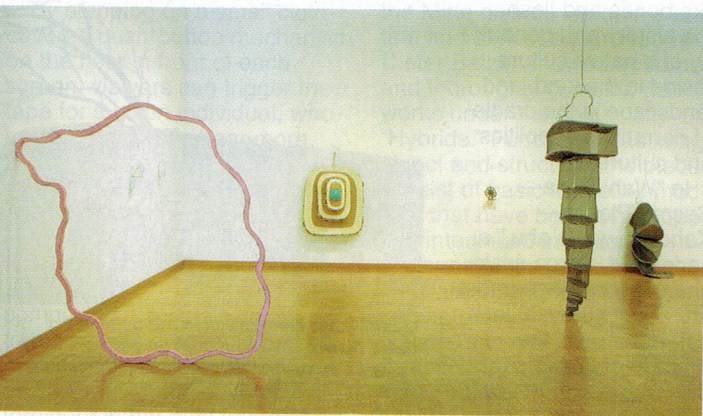
\$5.00 USA  
\$7.00 CAN £3.50 UK

Park (1911-1960) turned his eye to the everyday world. Wedding bravura paint handling to the portrayal of quotidian subjects, he conveyed the specificity of people and places without resorting to descriptive elaboration.

The earlier pieces in the exhibition suggest that Park was responding in part to the art of Max Beckmann, which was the subject of a retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1948 and another show, two years later, at Mills College in Oakland. Beckmann's influence looms particularly large in *The Band* (1955), which pictures a Dixieland combo. Color is subdued and space compressed, and the figures are firmly positioned with respect to one another in a manner reminiscent of Beckmann's structured figure groups of the late 1940s. In this

which features two stolid figures against a painterly froth created by the most aggressively reckless brushwork of any of Park's compositions. Although there is some suggestion that Park didn't consider *Nudes and Ocean* finished (it is unsigned), it remains an outstanding example of breathtaking painterly virtuosity.

The exhibition also offered an ample selection of Park's works on paper, including several figure drawings in ink wash and seven of the gouaches that he executed during the last year of his life, when illness virtually confined him to a chair. While the figure drawings sometimes betray the uninspired competence of routine exercises, the brightly colored gouaches, which typically are studies of the head, are radiantly succinct syntheses of innocent-seeming spontaneity and mature



View of Patrick Nickell's sculpture exhibition, "Built for Speed," 2003; at Luckman Gallery, California State University.

painting, Park is revealed to be a painter of a "carving proclivity"—to use British critic Adrian Stokes's felicitous phrase—as his vigorous brushwork seems to almost chisel the figures into a kind of insistent presence that equates paint with flesh.

Although Park's palette turned toward an ebullient chromaticism in subsequent years, a carving approach to paint handling remained consistent in his work until health considerations forced him to give up oils in 1959. In works executed after 1955, we see Park's brushwork gaining velocity, giving increased drama and urgency to surfaces that seem to oscillate between intimate visual seduction and flamboyant declaration. This is most clearly evidenced in the large (almost 60 by 50 inches) painting titled *Nudes and Ocean* (1959),

stoicism that bear out the exhibition's subtitle: "A Singular Humanity." —Mark Van Proyen

### Kota Ezawa at Haines

Kota Ezawa's animated remakes of modern-day icons remind me of Andy Warhol's portraits. But instead of the latest pop idols and politicians, Ezawa, a young German-Japanese artist based in San Francisco, mines our collective memory for culturally loaded but not necessarily current material: the O.J. Simpson trial, for example, which was the subject of his last film (*The Simpson Verdict*, 2002).

For his new piece, the two-channel digital video loop *Who's Afraid of Black, White and Grey* (2003), Ezawa has translated two clips from the 1966 movie *Who's*

*Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* into a black-and-white cartoon whose simplified, unmodulated images recall Alex Katz's portraits or the cutouts of Henri Matisse. The animations play in large, side-by-side projections, with soundtracks taken from the original film.

Ezawa has distilled the original film to two of its dramatic peaks. The left projection (37 seconds) shows the scene in which Richard Burton chants, "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?" as he spins Sandy Dennis around; she becomes sick to her stomach and rushes to the bathroom. The projection on the right (90 seconds) culminates in Burton scaring everyone to death by aiming a rifle at his wife's head; when he fires it, however, it merely produces a loud pop and an open umbrella. Because of their varying running times, the scenes intersect at different points throughout. The dual soundtracks add to the cacophony, loudly led by Elizabeth Taylor's surly contralto.

Seeing these torrid scenes through the cool semi-anonymity of a black-and-white cartoon is itself a marvel, but what really galvanizes the scenes is Ezawa's editing of the figures so that they shift unpredictably between stillness and staccato or fluid movements. A shot of Taylor sitting on the couch with George Segal is as motionless as a painting until her arm, bending like a lever, suddenly brings a cigarette to her mouth. When Burton wanders off to get his trick rifle, his floating gait and mechanical head movements resemble a moonwalk, part Michael Jackson and part Terminator. The idiosyncratic look of Ezawa's animation is the result of his having re-



David Park: *Nudes and Ocean*, 1959, oil on canvas, 59 by 49 1/2 inches; at Hackett Freedman.

drawn the figures and backgrounds using computer software, rather than processing the original film digitally.

Ezawa is clearly conscious of 1960s painting. Besides the works' Warholian aspects, there are the screen-filling, Lichtenstein-like close-ups of a single laughing or frightened face. (The title may also refer to the famous Barnett Newman series "Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue.") When all the shouting is over, it is hard to say what lingers: the dialogue with appropriation, which is like a secret language between artists, or a timeless tragedy of American marriage and mores.

—Melissa E. Feldman

### Al Payne at SFMOMA Artists Gallery

An inescapable fact of Al Payne's 16 new paintings is that they are all made out of dirt, that is, ordinary backyard topsoil affixed to plywood panels or paper with shellac blended

Still from Kota Ezawa's *Who's Afraid of Black, White and Grey*, 2003, two-channel digital projection; at Haines.





Eva Koch: *Villar*, 2001, interactive installation with six projections. Courtesy Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea.

with thinned dark red or dark blue oil paint. This makes for surfaces that are heavy and dense, appearing to the cursory glance as saturated clots of iridescent compost. The material strategy is visually and metaphorically interesting because each painting also sports an ambiguous translucent shape created by the application of dirt-free colored shellac. These shapes are backlit by reflective white gesso and resemble glistening protoplasm that seems to be either partially buried by or recently unearthed from the surrounding opaque dirt.

It takes the viewer a minute to realize that these shapes are abstractions based on the starkest highlights of photographic source material (which has been subjected to digital manipulation by Payne). Most of the smaller works, each about 15 by 20 inches, carry central shapes derived from close-up photos of magnolia blossoms flattened into silhouettes. Larger works, roughly half the exhibition, are diverse in subject, often presenting the most generic themes associated with a family photo album.

Al Payne: *Bud*, 2003, oil, shellac and dirt on plywood, 60 by 48 inches; at SFMOMA Artists Gallery.



Payne doesn't reveal whether any of these source photos were appropriated from a preexisting collection or made expressly for the paintings. But if the sources are to be taken as representations of fondly held memories, the dirt can be seen as indicating the state of final undifferentiation to which all who bear such memories will sooner or later be consigned. Following this interpretation, the iridescent shellac shapes serve as flickering indexes of an undead light, sustaining hope even as it is about to be engulfed by inevitable nullification.

At 60 by 48 inches, the largest painting, *Bud* (2003), was also the most compelling. It echoed the floral motifs of many of the smaller works but further conveyed a visual double entendre in that it could also be read as an anguished human face, one that has been articulated more subliminally than, say, those famously painted by Francis Bacon. Other images in the exhibition shared this attribute of subliminal articulation, but *Bud* was unmatched in its startling psychological impact, providing a welcome (albeit vaguely frightening) reminder that painting can still attend to the depths of consciousness.

—Mark Van Proyen

## HONOLULU

### Linda Kane at Hawaii Pacific University

The drawings of Linda Kane give us a place to be in nature, a contemplative space in which to think about landscape and what critic Lucy Lippard has called "the lure of the local." Kane, a longtime resident who has taught at the University of Hawaii since 1991, has taken to

heart Lippard's observation that "... the intersection of nature, culture, history and ideology form the ground on which we stand." The entwined impulses of artist and archeologist compel Kane to seek out places marked by physical evidence of a convergence of nature and human presence, and endowed as well with palpable mana, or spirit-power. Stones and earth are like bones and flesh: the history and genealogy of a native culture reside in the land, and landscape is the cradle of narratives of politics and culture.

In "Wahi Pana—Sacred Places—Kaho'olawe, O'ahu," a series of 13 large-scale charcoal drawings (most are about 40 by 60 inches), Kane uses the process of drawing to distill the power of specific sites, intensifying the atmosphere of immediacy. We are transported through her vision to places overlooked or inaccessible.

At times, that vision is quiet and idyllic, as in *Wa'ahila upland forest*, where dark tree trunks are softened by hatch marks of air and light and a path of exploration opens before us. Similar traces of her hand play across the surface of the moon, rendered during harvest season as an enormous, luminous disk caught in a net of tangled branches. Of such things have more romantic and sublime visions of nature been made, but Kane's robust drawings typically work against sentiment in their monochrome austerity, as do the places themselves, which resist the stereotypical expectations of island landscape.

Kane explores sites on urbanized Oahu and on Kahoolawe, a small island in the process of reclamation after decades of violative use as a U.S. Navy

bombing target. The artist moves from the palpable darkness of a sky over foothills in west Oahu, in which clouds bear down on the land with improbable weight, to a large stone once used as a gathering place, boldly silhouetted and balanced delicately on an outcropping in the now-eroded and, for the moment, uninhabited terrain of Kahoolawe.

Ultimately, it is stones that mark the land most tellingly and serve as the most potent reminders of sacred places. In *The chiefs' pathway*, 'Ewa, O'ahu, Kane reveals the remains of a royal trail flanked by sentinel stones partly obscured in tall grass. In *Please come back*, Pu'u Moa'ulanui, a pair of stones



Linda Kane: *The Williwili in the Calm at Kaho'olawe*, 2003, charcoal on paper, 42 by 62 inches; at Hawaii Pacific University.

that rest atop a small altar on Kahoolawe possess a brooding, animate presence as they face the distant slopes of Mt. Haleakala and the rain-laden clouds rising above its summit. Here, Kane brings together the forces of earth, sky, wind and water, concentrated in the eloquence of these stones and their stance of silent yearning.

—Marcia Mors

## SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

### Eva Koch at Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea

Beautifully filmed and meticulously edited, *Villar*, a six-screen video installation, tells the story of how the artist's own mother, Cristobala Martínez, was separated from her family as a child of six or seven during the Spanish