

Mira Schor Opening Momenta Gallery  
Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Friday, March 20, 2009

*SUDDENLY,*

Visual Crystallizations:  
Reflections on New Paintings by Mira Schor

Ellen Handler Spitz 2009

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White walls. Polished gray floor. People stand nattering. Clustered like live statues, they pose nonchalantly in sleek jackets, poofed two-toned hair, pointy boots with spuds, sparkling oversized rings, and, in a flurry of spiked camaraderie, gesture to one another, their plastic cups half-filled with Pernod. It is Friday night before spring's awakening here at the Momenta Gallery in Brooklyn.

Small-scale paintings, mostly black and white and deft of line, by Mira Schor, an acclaimed New York feminist artist and writer, punctuate the space at just above eye level. Unlike the human beings in the gallery, they seem to move mysteriously about circling the room in a recondite narrative sequence or at least to stimulate perceptual and conceptual motion. Bubbles rise up from ovals the way they do in comic strips yet remain blank, without texts, thus daring us to confront and accept their blankness or, if we try to imagine filling them up ourselves *ad libitum*, to risk obliterating their silence. These bubbles spring from hairless heads masked sometimes by enormous sunglasses, featureless heads that connect with other ovoids (one is mirror-like) by threads or worms of artfully applied paint that mingles black with red and umber. Are they necks or tails, these trailing lines? Organic or electric as in bent wire, or are they cyborg-like blends of

nature and artifice, redolent of sperm and ovum too, the primitive and the evolved, in uncanny amalgams that, in fact, each one of us is ourselves and can never not be?

“Suddenly,” a double work arrests my gaze. An apparent parchment divides in two and draws me into a kind of trance as the word itself leaps cursively into an empty square and then breaks as if a fuse had blown and the sparks dispersed. Its sensuous lines all sepia and yellow like agate reach through the broken square while the paper itself, a graffitied epidermis, billows out from against the wall. Finally, after following with our eyes through another broken fuse, we come to a viscous black head shape with dappled tentacles of golden hair, or is this some Ondine-like creature or a specimen of underwater fauna or flora with that almost greenish stem protruding from the right? The work evokes jarring associations --- to girlhood, race, electricity versus organic life, to conception, birth, rupture, thus, to violence and destruction. Yet, staring at it mesmerized, I cannot help but feel its calming influence and find within it a serenity that supervenes and quiets its excitement. Suddenly. Thus the painting makes a statement that far outreaches anything merely intellectual. In purely visual terms, it tells the story of a painfully wrested, perhaps only temporary but nevertheless courageous, containment of life’s breaks and fragile connections...

Another canvas beckons now --- a black one overpainted with a spectral white horseshoe shape that attaches by an almost invisible filament to one small textured turquoise square. This stunning work reminds me of the rich deep silences of Samuel Beckett, of life spent waiting for death and in perpetual consciousness of death, and of making art out of that awareness and of feeling both defiant and undaunted and of mocking one’s self all the while with humor. I find a delicacy here that tempers the

depths of this piece which is all about thinking. Yes! This canvas is about thinking --- thinking blue, thinking the sky, thinking the window out of the darkness (as does blind Hamm and also Clove on his ladder in *Endgame*); about thinking the morning out of the night, about thinking the hope out of despair, yet never denying the latter. This is a piece about the dense ebony of human existence, all thick and viscous and reflecting the gallery light. A gossamer edge of brightness illumines the talismanic horseshoe head, bi-gendered, bi-racial, translucent, transcendent, transparent, and I find this canvas an altogether haunting and beautiful work that---like the others--- rewards contemplation by becoming, suddenly, in the wake of all its contradictions, serene.

Mira Schor's art, as we walk around and around this room, keeps questioning and probing but never does so phrenetically. Acknowledging aloneness and poignancy, it responds without resignation nor yet with any fierce anger but with a strong consistent address, a grappling, an insistence that to be human is to construct one's life and one's world, again and again. Wresting palpable, perceptible meaning from human life and infusing her imagery withall, Schor makes signs that do not translate well into the medium of verbal language. Thus, we are moved and challenged by her set of silent images in ways that cannot, I warrant, be reduced to theory, deduced by argument, or explained in reasoned discourse. Take that painting of the oval with the sunglasses attached by wiggling zoomorphic line to another oval that spells mirror. It signals doubling, self-division, the artist as forever maker and subject of her own making; it tells of blindness, sight and insight, of surface and depth, and yet how fresh it is, how primitive and sophisticated all at once, gesturing back perhaps to Klee, Miro, Magritte, Duchamp, and to the caves of Lascaux but without quotation so the effect becomes

startlingly new. Unable to make use of extant emotional terms, I want to speak of an evolved ambiguity that Schor has distilled here into simple forms that clasp and reward our gaze. Simple forms that hold firmly to their own secrets while eliciting but never demanding ours. Simple forms that are destined to linger long after we have left this gallery and remain suspended on the walls of our own mental museums.

For, in this show, we find the work of an artist fully in possession of her aesthetic, integrative, and constructive powers. The show bursts suddenly upon us with cosmic jolts. Its array of optical questions and declaratives comprise an oeuvre that offers what cannot be ended with an exclamation point or a question mark. Nor does it jump off the walls screaming “Look at me!” But never is it passive or decorative. No: these thoroughly distinctive paintings each become, as we look at them, sites for germination, generation, and expansion of consciousness. They are canvases that do not purport to show “the way” in any specific or obvious sense. They originate from that Ur place of crystallization that many artists never reach. Mira Schor’s new show can be seen as a momentous condensation of practised immersion in art and life--- a pulsating, sensing, questing making, offered graciously here for us to share. Her art is one that tempers high seriousness with buoyancy and which, as you stand quietly in this white-walled space, may send you into altered states of consciousness then bring you back enriched and peaceful, but suddenly... It must be seen.

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