

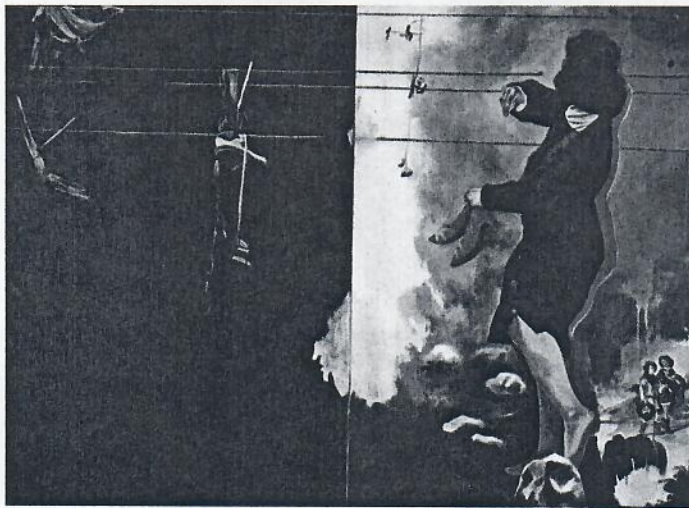
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

By Carol Schwarzman

You dream of receiving a Whitman Sampler in which every paper cup holds a tiny work of art—a painting, an installation, a photograph, a sculpture. Sizing up the box's contents, you refer to the map inside the lid to learn about the artist and materials associated with each piece. You carefully pass your fingers from one frilled offering to the next, decide on a first choice, and bite. Each ensuing ingestion initiates you into the complexities and nuances of another artist's world.

Back here in non-metaphorical reality, such was the peculiar fantasy provoked by **SPECIFICITY** (Riva Gallery, May 1—31, 2003), a group exhibition curated by the painter Odili Donald Odita. A catalogue essay by the critic Denise Carvalho states that, "[s]pecificity is individuality as the utmost proposition of art." This statement recalls the seventies concern with the notion of the personal, and the work in the show is refreshingly and resoundingly so. However, Odita's selection and installation really make the show hum: the work is highly personal and most of it relies on discourse with the public realm—the Commons. The delight associated with opening up a box of mixed chocolates is felt here not because of a confectionery quality or a sameness of taste. On the contrary, it flows from a broadly ranging sensibility brought by one artist to the passionate consideration of other artists' inquiries.

Habib Kheradyar's installation from her performance *Impasse/In the Veil* (2001) is a maze-like corridor fabricated from blood-red nylon, string and video stills. The viewer walks past the photos, enters the spiraling, transparent walls and dead-ends at a discarded red pile of drapery. Links between the body of the pictured woman in the veil, the "body" of her people and culture, and the viewer inside the coiling fabric are beautifully overt, blatant. A symbolic repression of emotion struggles for release when the end of the spiral is reached.



Nadia Benbouda, *Intifada*, 2000, acrylic on canvas, 64 by 90 inches (courtesy Riva Gallery).

Architectural structure figures as elegant spatial delineation and references temporality, movement and boundaries in the freestanding sculpture *Is This Rock* (2001), by **Daniel Robert Hunziker**. Within its chrome and unfinished wooden fence, a fluorescent light hangs in a corner at shin height. In the watery glow, a photograph of a crouching, cowboy-booted singer all but swallowing his microphone and frozen in a fetal, self-reflective wail activates the enclosing frame. A shifting, elusive sense of the iconic loner/rebel/maverick fills the gallery from one angle, or is sometimes hidden from view.

Hybridization of cultures in a global community and notions of contamination and illness as migration inform the entropic work of **Rina Banerjee**. Her installations continue the formal lineage of Judy Pfaff and Jessica Stockholder in their enthusiasm for color, materials and dramatic juxtapositions. Ultimately, her *If our eyes could bear fruit*, from the series "Pink Eye" (2003), travels easily among seductive imagery, lush textures and atmosphere to repulsive corporeality and breaks down into a dissipation. Banerjee allows herself multiple personalities: the ironic, wisecracking know-it-all, the slacker visual merchandiser and the consummate intellectual.

A continuous flickering between micro and macro, from the self as individual to the identification of placement of meaning

within the group, carries into what Carvalho refers to as "[the] conjoin[ing] of a state of difference and the uncountable possibilities in which the discourse of contemporary art lies," and is the Commons of this show. **Charlie Citron** documents his doppelgänger, Joe (a GI Joe doll dressed as a cowboy), in his travels around the world. Photographs shot in China, India, the Middle East and other parts depict Joe with a Buddhist monk, among kitschy figurines from the Cultural Revolution, held by a bunch of boys in Delhi and leaning at the Wailing Wall. He is the American Everyman stumbling his way through cultures he has influenced and shaped, but which he can never know, most of all because of his myopic, get-along-little-dawg-sense of what passes for strength of character. A direct effect of Joe's influence is pictorialized in **Nadia Benbouda's** paintings *Gaza* and *Cisjordanie* (both 2000), in which children play with automatic weaponry and straddle cannons against a pink backdrop of Arabic script or the Israeli flag. In these paintings, the children are grisailed in news photo tonalities. Huge red dots blot out their faces—they are documented, not as individuals, but as hidden collateral damage. The red circles defacing them echo the veils of Kheradyar's work.

Abstract painting visually connects the physical gallery

space of "Specificity." Works by **Stanley Whitney**, **John Tremblay** and **Wojciech Lazarczyk** act as universals seasoned by what Carvalho describes as "...various subjectivities in art that account for its most contemporary aim." But, in the end, critics' words pale beside the work of the artists in this show and its curator's sensitivity to good art.

NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS

By Helena Reckitt

Smart, playful and engrossing, **FANTASTIC** (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, March 8, 2003—March 2004) is propelled by the desire to both educate and entertain. Inspired by the history of freethinkers and utopian societies in Mass MoCA's back yard, a spirit of subversion informs the exhibition. The catalogue is a camp, slightly confusing, yet idea-packed *News of the World* style tabloid with headlines like "Looks Just Like Your Neighborhood ... Or Does It?" (for a discussion of Gregory Crewdson) and "Hippies Levitate, Satan Communicates!" (for Miguel Calderón). Beyond such stylish prankery lies a serious investigation of politics and art, indebted to Walter Benjamin's notion of the fantastic as "a destabilizing pause in the plausible" and "a powerful tool for reconceiving—and reordering—our world."

Gregory Crewdson's new series "Twilight" (1998—2002) is the show's centerpiece. With the sumptuous palette and unabashed sexuality of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, "Twilight" is at once psychologically charged and slightly kitsch. In *Untitled (Ophelia)*, a woman in a white slip lies in the water that has flooded her living room floor. She stares into the middle distance, catatonic or rapt. Light comes from outside the house as well as within. A bottle of pills is open next to a copy of Nora Roberts' *Inner Harbour*; a dressing gown hangs over the banister, a flashlight and pair of slippers are