



Steven Charles: *get off the cross, the wood is needed*, 2003-06, enamel on canvas, approx. 26 inches in diameter; at Marlborough Chelsea.

mediums including graphite and pencil, pastel, crayon, traces of oil and charcoal. Indicative of the artist's great and abiding interest in the depiction of women, the show began with *The Kiss* (1925), an absorbing, hard-won graphite work on paper depicting in close-up a couple locked in a torrid embrace. At roughly 19 by 13 inches it was among the larger works in the show. Featuring long fingernails and lowered eyelids along with dreamy gradations of a rolling sky and space defined by lines in receding bands, it recalled the northern light of Edvard Munch more than the developing style for which de Kooning became known.

In the page-size *The Inquest* (ca. 1938), attendants gather around a supine figure in a composition based on a deposition from the cross, an autopsy or surgery. The intersecting planes and abstract elements that make up the complex scheme of the 1937 *Untitled (Study for World's Fair mural "Medicine")* seem more ambitious. This was a commission facilitated by de Kooning's colleague Burgoyne Diller. In these years, de Kooning's figures became increasingly accomplished, as revealed in a small, untitled drawing in a classical manner, ca. 1938, a fragmented study of a man's hands and sleeved forearms deployed in empty space.

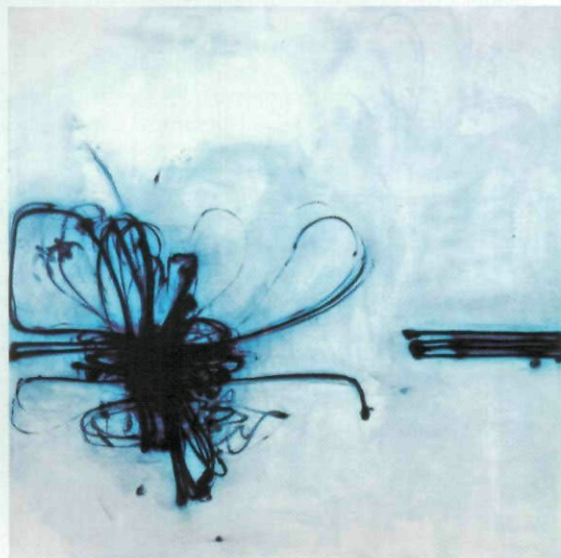
In the manner of Ingres, de Kooning's *Portrait of*

1950, whose generous eyes and smile figure against an expanse of what seems to be plank flooring, a plane of window or wall at the far end. Several abstract drawings from the '40s are enlivened with passages of pastel and crayon.

The artist's wit is displayed in *Untitled (No Fear but a lot of Trembling)*, a small 1963 charcoal on paper, its title inscribed along the length of a recumbent female, legs spread in an encouraging repose. The 1963 charcoal *Drawing of a Woman (Clamdigger)* places de Kooning's favored figure in the Long Island light and landscape, presaging a series of "Clamdigger" drawings and paintings to come.

Standing large and alone in a special frame, an untitled double-sided 67-by-41½-inch drawing in charcoal and oil on vellum

Jill Moser: *Tryst*, 2007, oil on canvas, 30 inches square; at Lennon, Weinberg.



Elaine (1940-41) depicts the artist Elaine Marie Fried, shortly before their marriage, with one arm resting on a chair. Her eyes are prominent. Fine curls reveal a single ear and ear-ring. Anticipating work to come is a 1939 untitled portrait of a woman, not 6 inches on a side. Her hands are raised to her breasts as though in delight, suggesting de Kooning's abstract romps of the 1940s and his "Women," including his voluptuous *Untitled (Woman)*,

dated ca. 1972-74 resembled a Gahan Wilson cartoon of smiling, ghostly dancing creatures locked in some ultimate tango.

—Edward Leffingwell

Steven Charles at Marlborough Chelsea

One of two shows inaugurating Marlborough Chelsea's new two-story space was English-born, Texas-raised, Brooklyn-based Steven Charles's debut at the gallery. Charles paints in overwhelmingly minute detail, and this was his first solo exhibition in four years; all the works shown were made since 2003. Titled "Thirteen Monsters for Lightning Bolt," the exhibition was dedicated to the Providence-based noise-rock duo Lightning Bolt, whose deafening live shows seem a fitting analogue to the paintings' blinding visual overload.

In a skeptical 2002 statement, the artist wrote, "Painting is a vehicle for me to dedicate myself to something I know won't work. Abstract painting is the most confusing dilemma I have encountered—it is this confusion that motivates me. I am not a believer." It is perhaps compensation for this conflicted attitude—along with nearsightedness that renders him legally blind—that drives his intense mark-making. The 18 paintings here ranged from a few inches high to 18 feet wide. All are marked by obsessive, all-over patterning in enamel paint with liberal use of gold and silver leaf, which results in shiny, seductive surfaces. Modeling paste gives some of the surfaces three-dimensionality.

Made without sketches or plans, the paintings often begin with drips or splashes of paint, or a collaged image or other foreign object, upon which Charles builds doodlelike concentric patterns of tiny marks in bright, usually contrasting, colors. It would be hard to do better, for visual and textural contrast, than the brownish-red fur with which Charles adorns (or mars?) the rust, pink, blue, white and green enamel surface of *thwhissm*. The canvases have the look of insanely detailed topographical maps or microscope slides of teeming

bacteria—or, as artist Dona Nelson has pointed out, computer circuitry. They find close cousins in the similarly detailed and patterned paintings of James Siena and Bruce Pearson. Blobs within blobs often recall Ellen Gallagher's work and sometimes create the impression of dozens of tiny eyes staring out of the canvas.

The gleefully overstuffed visual character of Charles's paintings often finds an echo in playfully aggressive, nonsense-word titles, such as *qubumealabthblpayotw*. A wry humor emerges in others, as with *get off the cross, the wood is needed*. These two paintings are both circular, with tendrils of enamel extending several inches beyond the canvases' edges.

Though Charles normally restricts himself to painting, the show had one three-dimensional work, *The Quiet Dignity of William Henry as a Sculpture*, which is constructed with the same additive method as the paintings. A milk bottle, laid on its side, is thickly covered with objects: a sponge, a drawer knob, coins, corks, a bobble-head baseball player, gold leaf, modeling paste, etc. Many of the objects are painted with the same excess as the canvases, as if, faced with any surface, Charles just can't help himself.

—Brian Boucher

Jill Moser at Lennon, Weinberg

In her first exhibition at this Chelsea gallery, Jill Moser included two dozen oil paintings (2006 or '07) and two etchings (2006), abstractions all, showing her signature looping, calligraphic, indigo-blue forms suspended in whitish grounds. Emanating from cores of a denser blue, the forms—something like loosened knots—are smudged along their edges, making them appear as if they are coming in and out of focus, or as if they are in constant motion—a blur. Blue halations, ever so faint, invade the surrounding whiteness like barely perceptible puffs of exhaust. These effects serve to transform background into atmosphere and physical support into ambient illumination; the imagery is buoyed, so that in this installation of so many works, the impression was one of extreme lightness.

Yet the paintings are far from purely evanescent, forced into physicality by the confident gestures that made them, their blue forms quite various in

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