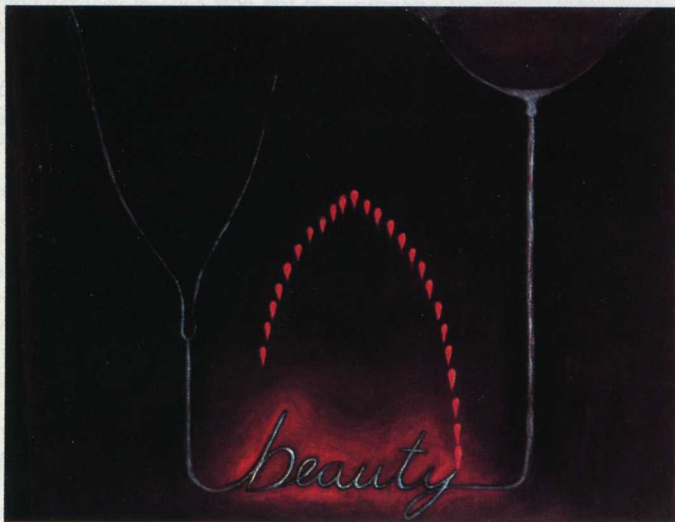


Art/Kay Larson

THE PAINTING PYRAMID

“... Rough as it may be in spots, ‘Slow Art: Painting in New York Now’ is a kinder, gentler experience than touring 400 studios ...”



THE OBJECT OF BEAUTY: Mira Schor's cosmic light show.

IF YOU THINK OF PAINTING CULTURE AS A pyramid, with most artists squashed together at the base and a few famous names at the peak, you glimpse the tricky problem of the group show. Where do you make a cut? Not at the bottom, obviously. And not at the top, unless you don't mind telling everybody what they already know.

“Slow Art: Painting in New York Now” is P.S. 1 Museum's response to this conundrum. Director Alanna Heiss, doubling here as curator, has sliced the triangle differently than most people would dare: In effect, she's cut it vertically, not horizontally. Peak, middle, and baseline cohabit in the same space. Heiss writes that she wanted a “non-denominational and non-generational ‘working’ show.” Deliberate as this strategy is, it can't prevent a rather bizarre melting-pot chaos, and it doesn't quite let her avoid the taste issue.

Somewhere between a third and a half of these 103 New York-resident painters could have easily stayed home to improve the show's gloss and style. But then you would miss the view from the center of the pyramid—of paint in process, thoughts half formed, ideas in the seed stage. Believe me: Rough as it may be in spots, “Painting in New York Now” is a kinder, gentler experience than touring 400 studios. If you care to see where the pot bubbles, this is the show.

“Slow” is a painter's term, and it's al-

capable of doing. Since they, too, started out at the bottom, they are here cut down to size and placed alongside their struggling cohorts.

Stripped of their “genius” labels and allowed one modest canvas apiece, the old hands have to convince you from scratch. Jasper Johns, hashing out a postmodern Picassoid Surrealism—warped green balloon heads on a pink ground—bumps against Mike Bidlo, who rethinks “authorship” by copying a Léger. Johns's cloying Easter Bunny pastels are irritable and difficult, as is David Diao's muddy ochre-green *What Is Modern Painting?* (W.I.M.P.), its title painted onto canvas in the grim typography of a fifties art-book cover. How are they alike and different? You could teach a seminar.

“Slow” is also “tough,” a category arguably evident throughout P.S. 1 in the radical simplicity of Alex Katz's black boatman on a white pond, the splash of Pat Steir's white-on-black Japanese lyricism, and Glenn Ligon's enraged and impacted black letters (excerpting black writers) stenciled on a muddled, scarred, and exhausted white “page.” Heiss clearly thinks that “tough” can be pushed as far as “hideous,” hence the grotesque slag heap by Larry Poons and a confectioner's gilded frosting swirl of paint by Jules Olitski.

Nearly everybody else falls somewhere in the pyramid's middle, a step back from

ways a compliment. The implication: depth, stillness, thoughtfulness, indifference to the market. No flashy, easy, sales-oriented solutions. Just one artist speaking to another. Thus the odd prospect of major names—James Rosenquist, Robert Mangold, Roy Lichtenstein, Ross Bleckner, Neil Jenney—presenting themselves less grandly than they are

“hideous,” in the area called “edgy.” Success is sporadic here, but its fitful gleam is illuminating. You access thoughts sputtering like gaslights in the privacy of the studio. In *Beauty*, Mira Schor sets off a startling cosmic light show of female essences lit by a string of pearls of fire; if you know what it symbolizes, tell me. Marilyn Minter takes a wicked, sarcastic swipe at Pop artists' attitudes toward women in *Chérie*—an obscene set of red-hot lips and lolling tongue oozing a blob of drool: This babe is not only hot, she's brain-dead.

“Tough” and “edgy” span the spectrum at P.S. 1: Elizabeth Murray and Robert Moskowitz, Ida Applebroog and Peter Halley, Byron Kim and Alexis Rockman, John L. Moore and Frank Moore rate these terms, no matter their rank. If some artists have little more to their name than the edge, at least they have that. I would rather suffer through the lows in “Slow Art” than the amphetamine jags of a show culled from the reviews in *Flash Art*. The fashion-enslaved Whitney Biennial-type exhibition is always—rightfully—attacked for its *People*-magazine aesthetics (it's not what you do but who knows your name). So here we have the alternative: not just slow art but slow careers. A more elegant exhibition is not



AD MAN: Untitled, by Richard Prince.