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Visual Arts

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Dancing in the Paint

Rick Berry's work jumps off the canvas. Figures sketched in oils twist, dance, leap, arch, rear up, strut, scream, pose, stare and if you turn your back they might just move again. Berry's new work and those of Annie Newbold (more below) are showing at Gallery 263 located at 263 Pearl Street, Cambridge, June 11- July 16, 2006. **The opening reception will be Sunday, June 11 from 2-6pm.**

At first glance the evident references of Berry's work are comic art with its mastery of the human figure in motion. And indeed Berry's 20 year involvement in popular culture includes underground comics, movies and book art. He's also credited as the first artist to cross over from the lab to the bookstands, bringing new media to the public's attention as the cover of an award winning novel. In the early 80's, pirating some new computing power at MIT and MassArt, he produced the painting that still graces the cover of the seminal cyberpunk novel by William Gibson, *Neuromancer*.

While a pioneer in digital art and skilled in traditional drawing and painting technique, (and a popular teacher/lecturer on these subjects nationwide), Berry's new oil work primarily revolves around the mechanisms of perception and cognition. How does random line, movement, light and color inform the act of seeing? In a very active physical mode, Berry begins a new surface by wild scribbling until a kernel of recognition triggers the pursuit of a subject. Using no models or photos, Berry generates out of these marks extremely concrete figure works of astonishing precision. "We depend on pattern recognition to live," explains Berry, "how can it not be potent when we use it to make art." His atypical neurology provides him the hyperfocus and clarity to zero in on this for us. His is an inventional approach; not tied to any particular external reference, he can pursue possibilities of human make-up, motion, condition and even evolution.

So, for example, in *Steroid Giant*, Berry explores the contemporary dependence on enhancement drugs. A cautionary tale, in our present society, the muscular male nude is no longer the anatomy of noble character and virtue.

Emergence, a larger-than-life female figure, surfaces in an atmospheric haze. The large canvas at once encompasses the gamut of techniques from quick, dynamic scribbles of the chest, face and neck in lyrical arcs, to lovely atmospheric brushwork of silken fabrics and form.

In effect, the concurrent techniques mimic the viewer's experience of perceiving the image: Wait, is that a body? There's a face. Is it a woman? Where is it? *Emergence* literally comes into view as you study it.

His method is performance-oriented, drawing on skill and execution. In those pieces with a

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stripped down palette, he essentially uses "paint to draw with." The severity of the marks allow for no "averaging your shots and no net; you're either on or you're not." He is.

Berry's credo "cut yourself loose as a way to see" has been an inspiration for Annie Newbold's new work. Using scribble as her entryway into pieces, Newbold brings a new freedom and looseness to her painting.

Painting in a series of small panels, Newbold has created a set of panoramic landscape pieces and a set of close-range figure studies. In both series, she uses acrylic paints to sketch out and discover images, then overlays oils and finally, in several, she has added a layer of ink creating a decorative surface.

Newbold, a Boston resident, is in a period of transition in her work, integrating interests and skills that she has long pursued independently---namely drawing, calligraphy, work with ink and dyes on fabrics. In essence, she is bringing spontaneity to her painting that she has long celebrated in her drawing and work on fabrics.

A second body of work in the show are two striking large-scale self-portraits drawn with ink on cotton. Newbold's bold, confident figure drawing stands out in these works. The figure in *Surrender* bows down in child's pose at a 3/4 view; the black ink strokes are quick and strong and yet sensitively evoke a mood of peace and capture a delicate profile.

The final body of work in the show are a set of calligraphy pieces on dyed and painted silk. The richly colored silks hang gracefully from bamboo poles each with clear, bold Japanese characters of Harmony or Water. These celebrative panels capture the spirit and joy of Newbold's work.

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