CLEVELAND

JANE HAMMOND

CLEVELAND CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

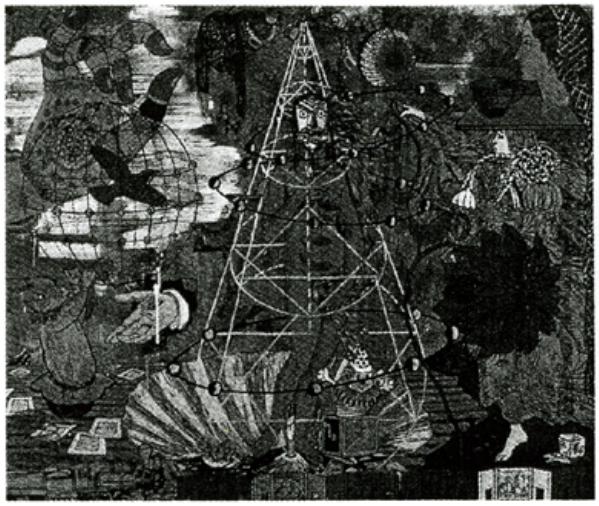
Self-imposed restrictions play a major role in Jane Hammond's art. In the past she has limited herself to two standard sizes of canvas and titled her paintings only by strings of numbers determined by her compositions; since 1988 she has constructed crowded surrealist stories using a fixed repertoire of 276 symbols and images borrowed from books, games, paintings, scientific charts, and various other sources. In 1993 Hammond initiated another kind of process: She asked poet John Ashbery to write down some titles for paintings that she would then execute. He came up with forty-four, and she has been mining that material ever since, sometimes making more than one painting per title.

In the sixty-four paintings of "The John Ashbery Collaboration, 1993–2001" (eighteen of which were on view here), Hammond continued to use only her stock images, but in two new developments, most of the works are on shaped canvases and many are multipanel. *Sore Models #2*, 1994, is shaped like a pair of large feet, and *Irregular Plural #5*, 1995, an open book, with each element on the left page matched to a slightly different one on the right. *Lobby Card*, 2000, presents isolated symbols in silhouette on small white panels attached to a white support. *Mad Elga*, 1996, is a spiral of sixty-three pictures—heads, bridges, dice, flowers—based on a child's game. In several works titled *The Soapstone Factory*, 1999, Hammond floats her elements within a deep, stagelike space.

Like Ashbery, Hammond tells stories that are often difficult to decipher. Looking at *No One Can Win at the Hurricane Bar*, 1998–99, which superimposes dartboards, playing cards and dominoes, a girl's head in a boat, and bits of a broken sail on a map of Florida, we sense the devastation caused by a hurricane. But what on earth is happening in *Wonderful You #2*, 1996, a lineup of self-portraits as Christ crucified, a clown, a jack-in-the-box, a Buddhist deity, a skeleton, an armed knight, an African warrior, Santa Claus, and a young girl? Or in *Long-Haired Avatar*, 1995, in which Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* is given a face from Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* and set among myriad garishly colored objects (including a train, an ice cube, flowers, and teacups)? Perhaps *The Mush Stage*, 2001, gives the best indication of Hammond's method. A theater set complete with stick figures, handheld puppets, and other characters is fronted by a staff of musical notes and backed by an open window and a ship. No doubt all the world's a stage, but here there is no boundary between play and reality.

Walking between the two large rooms of the gallery, the visitor naturally seeks out the repeated symbols. But because each image contains so many elements, the group creates serious sensory overload. You seek some resting point, usually in vain, from which to understand the titles' significance or the reasons behind the combination of elements. Hammond loves games in which the rules are not entirely clear. She wants to bring everything from her life into her art, but you can look at her paintings for a long time without learning much about her personal life. (In fact, you may learn more about yourself, since the images demand subjective interpretations.) Like Joseph Cornell, Hammond assembles cryptic objects; like de Chirico, she loves dreamy spaces; like Duchamp, she is an antiretinal artist; and like Ashbery, she is fascinated by Raymond Roussel's proto-Surrealist techniques of composition. But in the end, whether or not you identify her sources or learn the meaning of her symbols, the mysteries of her paintings remain tantalizingly unresolved.

—*David Carrier*



Jane Hammond, *Long-Haired Avatar*, 1995,
oil and mixed media on canvas, 72 x 86".

Della Brown, *Untitled (Kitche*
oil on canvas, 38 x 44

LOS ANGELES

DELIA BROWN

MARGO LEAVIN GALLERY

Delia Brown's recent show, her first at Margo Leavin, comprised thirty-six drawings, watercolors, and oil and acrylic paintings (all 2001) depicting the intertwined lives of a young woman and her mother. The models for these roles are Brown herself and the gallerist Leavin, respectively. The set is Leavin's home. Together the two women inspect the bounty of their garden, hang out poolside, and have predictable mother-daughter spats. They chat as they go about their daily grooming. A thermometer-wielding Leavin dotes on a sniffly Brown, curled up in bed with the remote control.

If you're not in the know, Brown's works simply look like upper-class mother-daughter vignettes. If you are in the know, you can still choose to think of them that way, or you can see them as scenes of artist and dealer posing as mother and daughter, illustrations of a fantasy in which artist and dealer are mother and daughter, or reflections on the similarities between and psychological conflation of artist-dealer and child-parent relationships.

Unfortunately, the scenes are generally clichéd, and they're delivered with neither sufficient nuance to redeem the cliché nor enough drama to earn the salvation of camp, so the straightforward mother-daughter read is unrewarding. If they are about posing or fantasy, they seem tied up in either uninteresting ego trips or head trips to which I don't care to be privy. And if they are meant to illustrate the connection between business relationships and family dynamics, the analogy falls flat, failing to coax a thoughtful consideration of its implications. The work seems to be about mutual admiration and gratification more than anything else. Leavin and her house get to be the subject of an entire body of work
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