

David Remfry: *Dancers*, 2000, watercolor on paper, 40 by 120 inches; at Boca Raton Museum of Art.

enlarged to 6 feet and more in actual size and seem to float in mystical dimensions of psychic time and space.

The religious order she joined, moved by reading an autobiography of the Spanish mystic, Saint Teresa of Avila, followed a strict monastic rule requiring not only poverty, chastity and obedience but also silence. This experience supports her mixed-medium image, *Horizontal Thought*. On a transparent blue expanse, a swaddled figure lies in a passive curve, suspended in a heavenly hammock of spidery filaments, surrendered to the life of the mind. In her installation of the unframed piece, Cohen continued the pencil lines at the upper corners onto the wall and up to the ceiling, reinforcing the idea of unearthly sky-hooks above.

It helps to know that Cohen was born and raised in Cali, Colombia, a place with a reputation for bloody battles between drug lords and the law matching that of Chicago during prohibition. In such a violent ambience, it's not hard to imagine a young Jewish girl seeking refuge in quiet and contemplation.

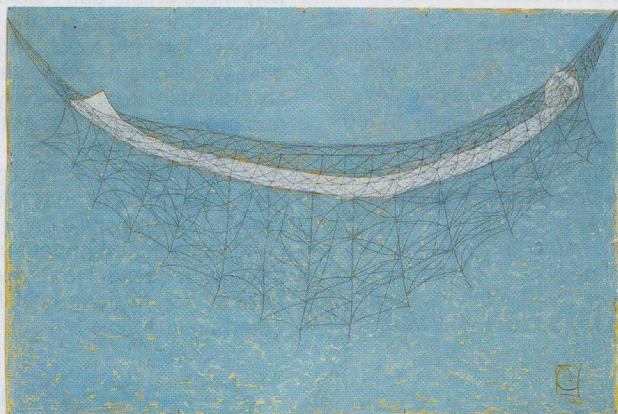
She closed that chapter in her life, came to New York, studied filmmaking at NYU and made several short films. Now, with some distance from her youthful

commitment to the convent, Cohen layers her pictures with intimations of spiritual transports disturbed by the pressures of passion. She repeats the elongated, weightless figure, arms and legs encased in an androgynous habit, above which hovers a pale head with hollow eyes. This pious apparition is often challenged by surrounding areas of hot, textured red. In one image the words "Cali Plaza de Toros" appear, in another, a predatory rooster with a gory spur, both evocations of macho rituals involving flesh and blood.

Cohen's images project a delicate mix of emotions and thoughts, a cool echo of Spanish religious art with its blending of ecstasy and cruelty. They suggest the conflicts and connections between spiritual striving and physical self-immolation. Even though her work is oddly comical, an Edward Gorey-ish combination of strangeness and humor, she doesn't mock the human aspiration toward spiritual purity, but respects it. The final picture in her narrative may represent the extinction of her saintly ambitions, though; the horizontal tube of the monastic figure, as if on a funeral bier, bears on its breast a sexy red flower with a gleefully rampant pistil.

—Paula Harper

Flora Cohen: *Horizontal Thought*, 2002, mixed mediums on paper, 48½ by 72½ inches; at Bernice Steinbaum.



BOCA RATON

David Remfry at Boca Raton Museum of Art and Elaine Baker

Boca Raton recently saw two exhibitions of work by the watercolorist David Remfry, a British artist who has been living and working in New York's Chelsea Hotel since 1995. The exhibition at the Elaine Baker Gallery, which consisted primarily of recent watercolors of women wearing large-brimmed hats, featured consistently strong work displaying a keen formal intelligence. "David Remfry: Dancers," at the Boca Raton Museum of Art, provided a comprehensive survey of Remfry's work in many mediums since 1985 through a focus on figures engaged in dance, a central subject in his oeuvre.

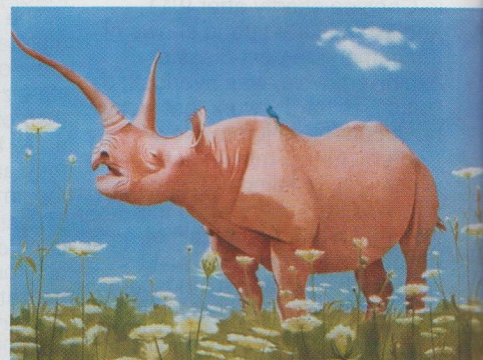
The museum's exhibition traced Remfry's development and shed light on those characteristics of his current work that have brought the artist, at midcareer, to a place of prominence in today's art scene.

(Although the handsome catalogue produced for the museum exhibition featured commentaries on Remfry's art by no less than three prominent writers—Carter Ratcliff, Dore Ashton and Edward Lucie-Smith—as well as an excerpt from an interview with Alanna Heiss conducted at the time of the artist's show at P.S. 1 in 2001, the formal evolution of Remfry's art during the period under consideration was never addressed.)

The survey show's presentation of pages from early sketchbooks and of oils, graphite drawings, lithographic prints and watercolors dating from the mid-'80s revealed that Remfry was at that stage exploring several different directions and manners of execution. In his '80s watercolors, which are small in scale compared to the later works, surfaces tend to be broken and variegated through a brushy handling, the use of multiple colors within small areas, and a close attention to detail. In the best of the early works, Remfry exploits the fluidity and transparency of watercolor to convey a sense of graceful, evanescent movement.

The images of dancing couples, based largely upon the observation of models in his studio, reveal not only Remfry's strengths in conveying appearance and personality, but his consummate ability to capture bonds of intimacy between individuals through facial expression and body language. Some of these early pieces cross the line into caricature, revealing a tendency to emphasize personal idiosyncrasies which is later to disappear.

Around 1996, Remfry's dancing figures became life-size or even larger, the works often assuming (for watercolors) monumental proportions (i.e., up to 120 inches). Whereas the figures in his earlier works wore either non-descript clothing or costumelike garb, those in his later works are



June McAdams: *Pink Rhinoceros*, 1981, oil on canvas, 24 by 32 inches; at Gallery 222. (Review on p. 99.)

urban and fashionable. Large groups of these figures, most of them dancing couples, are intricately organized. Thin, firm outlines now enclose each figure's palpably modeled form and the palette focuses on jewel-like variations on the primaries and black. Remfry's handling of the watercolor medium is nothing short of masterful. In one work, a red satin vest gleams; in another, the flesh of a woman's bare back is perfectly rendered. In a number of works, individual color areas formed by body parts and articles of clothing (head, arm, shirt, pants) and even the spaces between the figures (glimpses of floor and wall) become part of abstracted, formal compositions in a Cubist manner, the quasi-geometric elements overlapping and colliding within a shallow space parallel to the picture plane.

In comparison to his earlier

works, Remfry's recent watercolors are far more sophisticated in subject and execution. It is instructive to contrast Remfry's works with those of Elizabeth Peyton, another artist currently working in the watercolor medium. Peyton's work may be said to simulate a posed fashion shot, his a candid photo. Her figures are aloof, inaccessible and idealized; his are warm, alive, closely observed participants in the dance of life. —Roni Feinstein

SANTA FE

Janet Lippincott at Karan Ruhlen

A small retrospective of the works of Janet Lippincott in conjunction with her 85th birthday in May revealed several things about the artist, and also about art in America and the Southwest. Lippincott was born and raised the privileged daughter of an international banker, came of age during the Depression, and lived in Paris with her family for a short time before returning to New York and making her first studies as a teenager at the Art Students League. During World War II she joined the Women's Army Corps (in those days privilege was often attended by deeply felt social responsibilities) and served on General Eisenhower's staff, enduring many dangers and hardships.

In 1949, having never been west of the Hudson River, she came to Taos, New Mexico on the G.I. Bill to study art with Emil Bisttram. Lippincott followed in the footsteps of many an independent—and sometimes independently wealthy—woman, from Mabel Dodge Luhan to Georgia O'Keeffe (both of whom happened to be in and around Taos in those days). After studies at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and San Francisco Art Institute, Lippincott moved to Santa Fe in 1954, where she still lives and works, and began to paint in a classic Abstract-Expressionist style.

Santa Fe was a strange place to go to make Abstract-Expressionist work. Even Taos would have been more hospitable, with women abstractionists such as Agnes Martin, Bea Mandelman, Louise Ganthers, et al., living and working there at the time. However, Lippincott's first mature works from the late

'50s and early '60s may be her strongest. They are tough, rigorous intellectual exercises that are able to transmit deep emotional intensity at a heroic scale. The best of these canvases, such as the elegiac *Bye Bye Blackbird* (1959), combine a great energy from her rapid gestural brush-drawing with a Cubist ability to integrate and manage the entire pictorial field without choosing between "foreground" and "background." Somehow, the stained, scrubby painted areas of khaki, olive drab and tan, organized by looping lines and blocks of black, impart a sense of some vast tragedy.

Lippincott's palette lightened up in the '60s and '70s, and her nonobjective approach gradually gave way to small, Arthur Dove-like biomorphic abstractions from nature. For the last several years, Lippincott has been making playful little collages and watercolors incorporating elements of design, architecture and nature. This mini-retrospective of her more than competent and at times compelling canvases brings welcome attention to a deserving body of work. —T.M. Collins Jr.

Vicky Colombet at Evo

This was French-born, New York-based artist Vicky Colombet's first solo U.S. show, and it comprised 23 abstract paintings from 2002, all oil, alkyd and wax on canvas, ranging from 8 inches square to 79 by 76 inches. Generally, these compositions, collectively titled "Urban Landscapes," feature blurry geometric configurations in a palette restrained to soft, velvety browns, ochers, grays and cream whites, frequently accented with vibrant shades of blue. Within this framework, several works feature fluid patterns consisting of wide vertical elements linked by short fat horizontal bands, swept with horizontal washes. Delineated by dark shadowy lines, these patterned arrangements resemble chain links or tread marks. Other works feature fewer, less pronounced, tubular bands and amorphous chunks appearing to fade in and out of focus amid striations in muted tones—an effect suggestive of the continuous phases of Polaroid development. These simpler canvases are curiously evocative of Alfred Stieglitz's cloud abstractions, the "Equivalents," as well as of the wiped patternings found in



Janet Lippincott: *Bye Bye Blackbird*, 1959, oil on canvas, 41 by 72 inches; at Karan Ruhlen.

Gerhard Richter's "Abstract Pictures."

Colombet's technique involves a heat-blending process that combines oil and wax to create the mesmerizing illusion of texture and tangibility, translucence and opacity, integral to this body of work. Juxtaposed with the physical flatness of the works' surfaces, these effects achieve diverse spatial relationships and sensations of movement that also serve to counteract the repetitive aspects of her imagery.

The artist's compositions can evoke aerial views of rivers and desert rock formations as persuasively as they do architectural details or sections of woven textile and synthetic fur viewed under a microscopic lens. In *927-02*, the conflation of umber washes and streaks of paint across undulating bands, intermittently highlighted with turquoise, simultaneously suggests rain on sidewalk grating and water rippling over a river bank, while a close-up look at the work's surface reveals webs of threadlike filaments.

By choosing to emphasize textural paraphrases of her surroundings instead of their specific descriptions, Colombet intriguingly manipulates perceptions of place, fluctuating between abstraction and representation, the manmade world and the natural one. In their purposeful ambiguity, these paintings invite—and reward—contemplation.

—Sarah S. King

Gary Komarin at Peyton Wright

At first viewing, Gary Komarin's recent show of mixed-medium works on canvas and paper seemed preoccupied with overt references to

the paintings and imagistic lexicon of his influential teacher Philip Guston, for whom he also worked as a studio assistant. Like Guston, Komarin deploys a set of singular motifs and cartoonish silhouettes that appear frequently in his works. These include a '60s-style flip-haired wig, stacked cakes, lopsided vessels and an array of diagrammatic forms and geometric volumes. In contrast to Guston's work, however, Komarin's compositions, which rely on a broader range of colors, are elementally abstract, eschewing narrative components. Painted in an energetic Abstract-Expressionist vein, the work seems primarily concerned with interactions of light and color, as well as depictions of movement and surface textures achieved through diverse mediums and painterly techniques. These compositions, which frequently feature patchworks of color within larger faceted planes of complementary colors, are also instantly suggestive of Richard Diebenkorn's abstractions. Their heavily worked-over surfaces, generally done in oil and enamel, remain effectively flat, placing emphasis on painterly gesture often accentuated by the creases and joins in the recycled paper and bags that the artist

Vicky Colombet: *927-02*, 2002, mixed mediums on canvas, 18 by 22 inches; at Evo.

