

sided vessels, visibly hand-built and roughly fingered, are coated with several layers of paint in a deliberately mismatched shade of fluorescent red/orange—less yellow and deeper. The color dissonance is not of the vibratory, complementaries-in-opposition kind; it's more unstable, and more engrossing. Arranged singly or in congenial threesomes, the pieces are accented inside and out with little vestigial handles, the vaguely arterial character of which rounds out a set of associations to internal organs—or to the body as a vessel.

The final component of the installation was a trio of mats made of standard commercial Band-Aids. The biggest, an oval assembled entirely from the familiar peach-colored plastic strips taped together in overlapping concentric rings, occupied the floor like a large hooked rug. Its color was bleached to near invisibility by the competing reds and oranges of cloth and clay all around, rendering this floor piece a kind of perceptual void—a weirdly compelling chromatic sinkhole. Two smaller Band-Aid mats were affixed to the wall, both made with the brightly patterned strips meant for children in which fantasy characters, from Tweety Bird to Bert and Ernie, help ease the pain.

Semmes called the installation *In the O*, to suggest that viewers would find themselves both bodily encircled, and metaphorically inscribed within a narrative of unmistakably sexual coloration.

But Semmes is also happy to indulge appetites for the comforts of home, for tender care and sustenance. Leading us toward rosily veiled forbidden pleasures, she also entertains yearnings toward infantile, even prenatal merging with the maternal, body and soul—and all without losing her sense of humor.

—Nancy Princenthal

### Dona Nelson at Cheim & Read

Dona Nelson has chosen an interesting moment in her career to cut back against the stylistic grain. Her last show at Cheim & Read, "The Stations of the Subway," suggested that a geometric classicism might be emerging from her process-intensive expressionistic aesthetic. Grids and rows of circles were rising out of her pours of paint in a manner that suggested the architecture of the city from a distance and Viennese and Deco ornament from close up. The palette was reminiscent of Al Held's go-go colors of the early '60s.

Nelson has always had a vigorously physical way with paint, but until the "Stations" show her imagery had been dominated by collage elements—paint-soaked fabric that coalesced into figural passages or physically enhanced signage. The "Stations" were a breakthrough to a new synthesis of abstraction and representation that was weighted toward the abstract and urbane.

But Nelson's Symbolist streak may be stronger than her classi-



Partial view of Beverly Semmes's *In the O*, 2003, chiffon, painted ceramic and Band-Aids; at Leslie Tonkonow.

cism. Her most recent exhibition returned with a vengeance to the organic imagery of her paintings from the late '70s and '80s, while invoking a great deal more personal history than we have come to expect from any abstractionist project. Several of the paintings, most obviously *Mountain Road IV*, are copies of landscapes by her mother—Opal Marie Cook—blown up to monumental scale. This shift in scale, together with Nelson's expressionist elaborations, such as the milky ropes of gel in *Mountain Road IV* or the applied fabric elements to which she has returned in about a third of the works, imbue the rather conventional forms of her mother's paintings with a deep strangeness. In addition to copying her

mother's paintings, Nelson also makes rubbings of the more textured of her own paintings, using graphite and charcoal on raw canvas. Both the copies and the rubbings are completely different in spirit from postmodernist appropriation. In Nelson's recyclings, the original image lives on in the new painting as a kind of alternative universe that is defined by an entirely different approach to material than that evident in the source work.

A number of the stronger paintings in this texturally diverse

show were, in fact, rubbings—essentially big charcoal-and-graphite drawings on canvas. The warm tone of the raw canvas provides such a beautiful surface for Nelson's graphic materials that it is a surprise to find so little precedent for this practice in the painting canon. One thinks of Picasso's charcoal washes and Lee Krasner's collages of cut-up charcoal figure studies—neither of which involves rubbing—as well as of Max Ernst's fleshed-out nightmare landscapes that use frottage as a starting point. But there's nothing out there with the scale or impact that these canvas drawings have, and when the contrast deepens, as in the dark, turdlike clouds of *Black Sheep/December House Two*, the image monumentalizes Freud's concept of the uncanny.

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins proposed the term "inscape" to suggest the way psychological states may be analogized to the forms and textures of the natural world. This seems an apt description for Nelson's project, except that by reclaiming her mother's art as source, she suggests that it is memory—i.e., consciousness—that ignites and shapes the meaning we assign to nature.

Nelson is making art for our moment, when confidence in the utopian address of geometric order has faltered, and the roiling organic surfaces of a reinvigorated Symbolism give form an unexpected beauty to our anxieties and longings.

—Stephen Westfall

Gary Simmons: *Lost Ones (for L)*, 2002, chalk and slate paint on wall and *Big Still (background)*, 2001, wood, metal, foam, fiberglass; at the Studio Museum in Harlem.



## Emily Mason at David Findlay Jr.

Those suffering from chromophobia should steer clear of Emily Mason's luminous abstractions in oil. Partial to extravagant, close harmonies, she abuts intense magentas and blood oranges, pale violets and deep yellows, often adding a light green or cerulean blue exactly calibrated to produce an optical vibration. While some of her recent paintings are of an allover, full-tilt intensity, in many cases a counterforce, say, a thinned yellow washed over an area of dark underpainting, undercuts the sweetness with a dash of vinegar. Her variegated surfaces may be opaque or layered as transparent washes, glazed or scraped, scumbled, wiped down or sanded. Drawing may be accomplished by accidental flows of paint, by a bold gesture or by the edge where one color meets another.

While some paintings appear reworked over time, others, like *Summer's Embers*, with its cadmium yellow, hot pink, tomato red and bolt of light green, seem almost to have happened by themselves. Titles such as *Beyond the Dunes*, *Eye to the East* and *When*

*Rivers Overflow*, along with her implied horizons, atmospheric effects and, in some works, aerial views, evoke landscape. Her colors are not precisely after nature, except where they might be taken from flowers or tropical plumage, but the paintings give off a resplendence that could only be outdoors.

Mason works within the improvisational model of Abstract Expressionism, though notably without angst or bravado and at a more tractable scale. The poetry of these paintings is lyric, not epic. Her closest affinity

is with Hofmann, whose robust hedonism and interplay of paint's opacity, fluidity and gestural grandeur she transforms into an art of intimacy. And, as with Hofmann, her range includes structural frameworks that intimate a Cubist heritage, as well as open, intuitively generated spaces that can seem without precedent. For all her exuberance, Mason's modesty is integral to her work, and she is, perhaps, at her best in her smaller paintings. *Within My Garden*, at 32 inches square, demonstrates the dual sense of decorum and excitement, in what seems an effortless interplay of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, that runs throughout her work. A group of gemlike oils on clay board measuring 7 by 5 inches each, sometimes employing metallic leaf and a collagelike geometry, are tantalizing indications of other directions available to her. —Robert Berliand

## Jenny Hankwitz at Cheryl Pelavin

In Jenny Hankwitz's riotous large-scale paintings, flat vivid colors and explosive splash patterns bound and swirl, slipping giddily toward the edges as if daring the canvas to contain them. Many of the 14 oil paintings in her third solo show in New York were painted during a sojourn in New Mexico, a landscape that has inspired artists as diverse as Georgia



Emily Mason: *Within My Garden*, 2001, oil on canvas, 32 inches square; at David Findlay Jr.

O'Keeffe and Krazy Kat creator George Herriman.

*Blasting Hot Day* and *Cool Starry Night*, each 90 by 42 inches, play off the extremes of the desert in their use of color. In the former, a bright blue field is obscured by a boldly outlined white shape that could be a hybrid of fan blades and cartoon bunny ears; this is obscured in turn by beige splotches and orange splats, as if someone had dropped paint-filled balloons on the canvas. The white shape shows up again in the latter, now against a dark background and festooned with a swirling stroke and pastel blue and yellow splats.

The seemingly wild abandon of the splash patterns might suggest that these compositions are dependent upon random occurrences, until one notices that, like the white shape, suspiciously similar forms recur in several paintings. The work *Fearless*, for instance, has green, blue and gray splashes moving in from separate corners. The contours of the gray shape are repeated in *Slip*, only now it is blue, with contrasting black, white and red splats against pink.

These recurrences are rooted in Hankwitz's process, which begins at the computer, where scans of brushstrokes and ink spills are worked into compositions that are then transferred to canvas. She does not follow the design by rote, as revealed by the pentimenti of alterations made during the painting process. A selection of watercolors and prints, also on view, made it clear that she also works

quite handily with direct processes and a more muted palette. Any artist working with flat colors and cartoonish imagery is inevitably compared to Roy Lichtenstein—in this instance, his later brushstroke paintings leap to mind—but the works on paper bear equal comparison to Brice Marden's calligraphic drawings.

—Grady T. Turner

## Robert Colescott at Phyllis Kind

The parody in Robert Colescott's early "history" paintings, such as his send-up of

Emanuel Leutze's icon, recast as *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware* (1975), was explicit and, with its lumpy modeling, deliberately heavy-handed. By the '90s, his antic, cartoony pictures had become more expressionistic and less clearly programmatic. The latest work rises to new levels of pandemonium, with images that, though less legible than before, cut closer to the bone. The familiar gutbucket blues vernacular and the affectionate rowdiness of northern California painterly funk are still in evidence, but the recent work shows Colescott freely indulging in stream of consciousness, expressed through a raw, improvised, fragmentary figuration.

*Tastess lik chickens* (2001) includes a pierced valentine heart, echoed by a palette pierced with brushes, a cascade of hamburgers, three little pyramids and a bunch of Kilroy-was-here, wide-eyed guys tucked into the general confusion. Loosely painted forms splay out from the quizzical lovers at center. Throughout the painting are less clearly defined shapes and stabs of the loaded brush. Like Guston (in his work of both the '50s and '70s), Colescott seems to be telling himself a story with every mark, though not one that you can always follow. The lightbulb in the upper left-hand corner might be an homage to Guston. (The title, written onto the picture, sounds like Eddie Murphy as Alfalfa riffing on oral sex.)

He begins this and other of his recent large acrylics by laying

Dona Nelson: *Black Sheep*, 2002, charcoal and acrylic medium on canvas, 126 by 72 inches; at Cheim & Read. (Review on p.117.)

