

# Art in America

September 1993

## CRITIC'S DIARY

### Mayday, Mayday, Mayday

*Visiting the extraordinary number of openings that occurred in New York's galleries on May 1, the author counters the season's black mood of distress and decadence with evidence of renewed vitality in a rising generation.*

BY JERRY SALTZ

#### **A Thorn Tree in the Garden**

I think people find it difficult to have an uplifting sense of an art scene without a strong painting movement. As I wandered the streets on May 1, no less than five dealers on Greene Street alone excitedly told me they were planning to do painting shows the following month. So something may be cooking with this oft-maligned and thorny medium.

Painting was not entirely absent on May 1: **Guillermo Kuitca**, who has shown twice in New York (with Annina Nosei) since 1990, opened at Sperone Westwater. Kuitca, an Argentine, is interesting insofar as he paints a number of different subjects—maps, diagrams, stage sets and a recurring apartment floor-plan—in a number of different styles on a number of different surfaces. One work, *Heavens*, is a star map with the names of the stars and constellations written out in a circular pattern on a bumpy black mattress. **Paul Bloodgood** opened his first solo show, a group of paintings at Sandra Gering (a relatively new gallery that seems to be getting things right: Bloodgood's brightly colored, vertical, blotchy, sloppy abstract paintings (which owe something to John Seery) are filled with decisions about color, scale, surface and placement that seem unpredictable and wrong—therefore the paintings feel right and fermenting.

In the early '80s, when painting was about to take the stage big-time, something funny happened. Nearly all the women painters were cast out. It seemed even worse for women painters in the late '80s, although now we can see that a group of midcareer women artists (Heilman, Fishman, Korman, et al.) were leading perpetrators of abstract painting through that whole period. On May 1—and in the days immediately following—you had the feeling that women (and painters in particular) were not only prepared to take their rightful place—they were ready to defend it.

**K.K. Kozick** opened a small show of representational paintings at White Columns. Kozick combines Malcolm Morley's color sense and Roger Brown's social commentary with a folk artist's space. The work is not great but it is original. The same judgment-call could be made of **Peggy Cyphers**, who opened at E.M. Donahue with collaged paintings depicting women's faces and other images suspended in pretty washes of color. But the biggest buzz on the street was about a young woman named **Lisa Ruyter**, who

opened in a two-person show the following week at Wooster Gardens—a gallery whose name sounds like a Chinese restaurant. Ruyter, 25, exhibited five 3-by-3-foot canvases. The raw canvas is covered in a network of fine black lines that camouflage images she has cut from magazines and then collaged. She then fills in areas of the painting with Day-Glo color. The images—bicycles, airplanes, cars or shoes—are difficult to make out, and initially they read like skeletal patterns. There is a stinging banality about Ruyter's work. It's a good beginning, but I found myself wanting less of her thought and more of her hand. In the rear gallery **Margaret Curtis**'s paintings proved you can have your cake and eat it, too. Inherently political yet frivolously beautiful, these drifting gossamer images—which involved the use of cake decorating tools—told tales of the difficult lives of girls and women.

These artists don't represent a movement and it doesn't mean we're going to get a spate of good painting in the near future. But on May 1 it was clear that younger artists were trying to demarginalize painting. We won't know for a while if they will succeed, since painting often takes a long time to get good at.