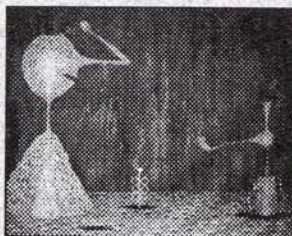




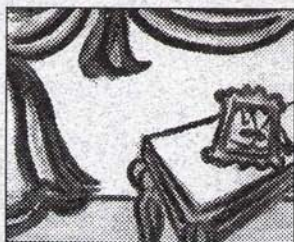
1994

## HALLWALLS



Critics

## CONTEMPORARY



Residency

## ARTS CENTER





1994  
CRITICS  
RESIDENCY  
AT HALLWALLS  
CONTEMPORARY  
ARTS CENTER

This years Critics Residency is the first in what will be an annual project of Hallwalls' Exhibitions Program. This project is funded by the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, and is designed to foster an exchange of ideas between artists and writers in the mid-atlantic region. Organizations are invited to apply to bring a critic from outside their home state for up to a month to have studio visits with area artists, and write about their observations of the artists, their work, and the arts community. This year, Hallwalls chose Susan Isaacs of Wilmington, DE to participate in this program. Isaacs is an art historian, independent writer and critic, painter and former gallery owner. She currently teaches at Towson State University and is an active member of the board of directors of Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts. She reviewed the entire contents of the Western New York Slide File and chose 19 artists throughout the region to visit in their studios. In a whirlwind journey that took us from Dunkirk to Buffalo to Syracuse, we visited a very exciting group of artists, and had wonderful discussions about the art being made in Western New York. My thanks to all of the artists who participated, and to Susan for the time, energy and patience she devoted to the project.

*Sara Kellner, Exhibitions Curator*



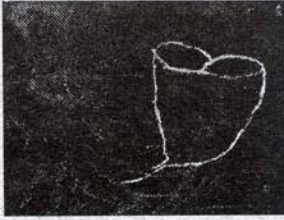
## HALLWALLS AND NEW YORK STATE: ART IN CONTEXT

By Susan Isaacs

Buffalo is a gritty urban core within Western New York State with reminders of its past glory as a commercial and shipping center in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and its emergence as a major industrial and chemical nucleus just before and immediately following the Second World War. Filled with wildly ornate Victorian houses left-over from the days of the Erie Canal, many now turned into apartment buildings, post-modern Buffalo connects the suburban housing developments of the glorious chemical age to their later shopping malls, which, like similar operations across the United States, have literally killed inner cities' retail efforts. Also marked by the few still functioning industrial complexes and pocked with the skeletons of the long exited or downsized chemical plants and their towers and tracks, Buffalo and its environs suffer from economic and ecological problems of tremendous scale. Artist Charles Clough addressed this issue in 1980, at the fifth anniversary of Hallwalls, when he wrote: "Buffalo is cold, depressed and depressing." No more telling indication of this is an outsider's first visit to one of the great wonders of the world, Niagara Falls, whose water thunders down in a vaguely phosphorescent shade of green. The drive to Niagara sadly emphasizes the industrial wasteland around Buffalo, lined by long empty sites that are simply too expensive to cleanup, forever denying the possibility of their being recycled.

It is human nature to struggle for survival. Buffalo's arts community is a powerfully moving example of the relationship between civilization and culture and can, more than any written or verbal justification, stand as witness to the primary role of the arts in our lives. Robert Longo, another key artist from the early Hallwalls years, recognized the need and desire for an active contemporary art community on the part of Buffalo when he wrote: "Hallwalls was the training ground. The city was ready. The timing was right. The building was there. And the people were smart and hungry." Despite the often extremely difficult economic conditions, Buffalo artists continue to grow and contribute, making statements that are expressive of their internal and external positions. Buffalo reverberates with creative energy, perhaps a reaction to the less than ideal economic





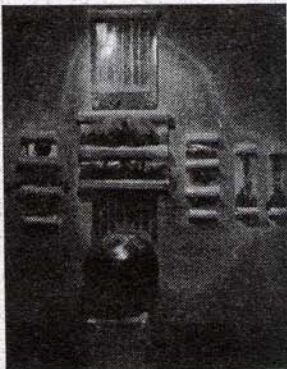
Alberto Rey

and physical climate. Artists are serious in Buffalo; it's not easy to make art there. But, there is, too, some other force at work. Contemporary art is clearly of primary importance. The major institution, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, operates exclusively as a modern museum, concentrating on post-1945 art. Moreover, the collection continues to grow, not simply with fifty-year-old Abstract Expressionist work, but with new objects by living artists. The Castellani Art Museum of Niagara University also concentrates on extremely current exhibitions, and its growing permanent collection reflects a commitment to younger artists. Complemented by the alternative space of Hallwalls, one senses a unique kind of dynamism in Buffalo.

Quite differently, the art communities of Fredonia and Syracuse are connected to the universities there, and within that framework the artists reflect a more outward vision. All of the artists visited in these communities are either graduates of the university or teach there. Almost all of them originally came from outside the region. Nonetheless, these artists, too, are involved in one way or another with Hallwalls, and content and materials often relate to those of the Buffalo artists.

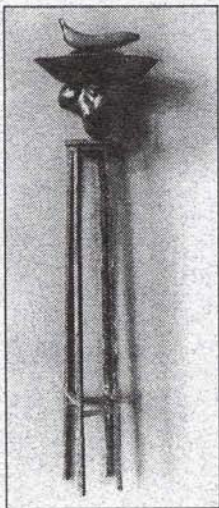
Religion, gender, and inner vision and private worlds are some of the themes that connect the many artists and communities of western New York State. Today's art world defies categorization and denies the art historian the privilege of shaping history into neat stylistic categories. Despite the lack of associated schools or groups of artists with similar visual characteristics, certain motifs in content and approach to material do present themselves, and artists' works may be examined along these lines, if not as a thorough foundation for individual artist scrutiny, certainly as a basis for looking at the larger dynamic of the Western New York region.

Religion and religious subjects have made a return to the imagery of front-line artists. Spiritualism informed the work of modernists, such as the abstract landscapes of Arthur Dove, the improvisations of Wassily Kandinsky, and the color field visions of Mark Rothko, but truly religious painting remained in the hands of the more academic artists (for instance, John La Farge and one of his successors, Augustus Vincent Tack). It required figurative elements and a narrative quality that was problematic for abstract artists, many of whom had also turned away



Bonnie Gordon



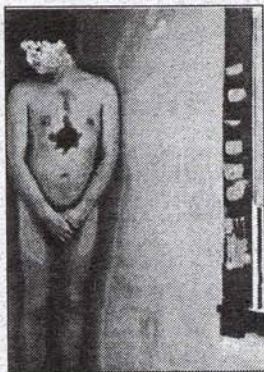


Robert Booth

from traditional religion to embrace a spiritual system established first on Transcendentalism, then Theosophy and the occult, and later, on the philosophies of Nietzsche and Sartre. A return to figuration in the 1980s meant that younger artists working in new styles could engage in a narrative dialogue that dealt with religious issues. This is quite different from the spiritual art that marked the earlier part of our century and the figurative art of New-Realism and Pop. Several artists in Western New York base their imagery and ideas on religious themes and iconography; among them are Josh Iguchi, Larissa Marangoni, and Endi Poskovic. Interestingly, two of these artists, Marangoni and Poskovic, are not originally from this country, instead coming from geographic areas where figurative art never lost its position in the cultural hegemony, Latin American and the former Eastern Block, respectively.

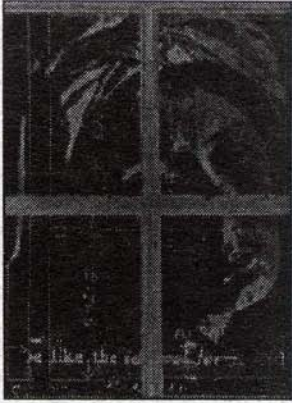
Iguchi's background is also culturally diverse. Of Catholic and Japanese heritage, Iguchi is a Buffalo-based photographer who works in large altarpiece formats with pieced color images based on classic Italian Renaissance themes like the Crucifixion, the Nativity, and the Last Supper. Incorporating the modern devices of neon lighting and contemporary dress and objects, Iguchi's interest lies in combining the grandeur of historical religious imagery with today's sound bites; his work is often quite humorous. In the central panel of *The Nativity*, his modern-day Mary looks down adoringly at the Christ Child, while a large box of Cheerios dominates the foreground. Colors are garish, contrasting with the traditional triptych format and the gold frame. Iguchi's images depend upon a general art history survey understanding of art, the kind taught at universities and art schools across the country, and in that capacity demonstrate that soundbites do not exclusively refer to television.

Poskovic came to this country as an adult student, earning his graduate degree in the Buffalo area, but his work remains strongly connected in content and style to his Eastern European heritage. He has significant training as a printmaker, and he often utilizes prints in his installations. Originally from Sarajevo, Bosnia (part of the former Yugoslavia), Poskovic is, like many Bosnians, of mixed heritage, including Christian, Muslim, and Jewish, and symbols of all three religions permeate his imagery. Technically proficient, he concentrates



David Pruden





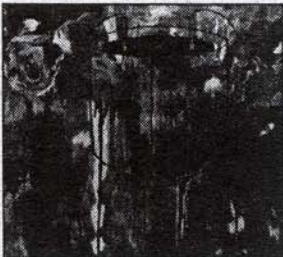
AnJanette Brush

on individual works and installations that examine war and peace. He considers them icons and they do function within that tradition. Singular forms, sometimes architectonic, sometimes calligraphic, float on a background that is at once flat and spatial. Although not using the shimmering gold of Byzantine icons, he indicates the heavenly sphere through a meditative central subject floating on a non-dimensional surface, and this, as well as his choice of symbols, connects Poskovic more to the East than to the West.

Marangoni's father is Italian and her mother from Ecuador. Raised as a Catholic in a humanist and intellectual household, she examines the lives of religious women in the history of sainthood. After months of careful research, she creates installations centered on such figures as Joan of Arc and Catherine of Siena. Marangoni's materials include wood, cloth, and cast metal; her forms are elegant and simple. She is fascinated with the spiritual side of women's lives and of their tendency for self-flagellation. Form and content are integrated; neither is sacrificed for the other. Marangoni creates shrines that link the spiritual and reductive modernism of Brancusi with the narrative imagery of recent years, using the traditional directly-carved wood of modernism and the less heroic melted wax and stitched fabric of post-modernism. She is equally concerned with gender issues and she strives to indicate the power and inspirational aspect of her heroines without the overt feminist imagery of ovaries and vulvas.

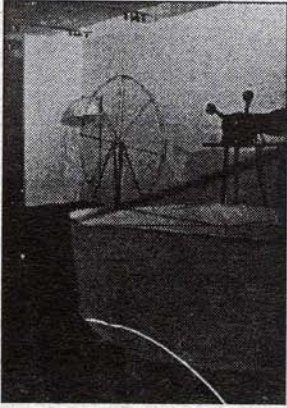
A number of other New York State artists share Marangoni's interest in feminist themes, especially fellow Syracuse sculptor Mary Giehl. In works like *Playing-ground*, Giehl explores the issues of childhood and the loss of innocence. It is impossible to discuss the role of children in the United States without addressing the role of women. Giehl pursues these themes in life, as well as in her art. Her experiences as an emergency and pediatric intensive care nurse inform her imagery, and she is active in feminist circles, especially in connection with the arts. Predicated upon her personal knowledge of abuse and exploitation, she studies the damages of victimization.

In *Playing-ground*, an installation of several different, nearly lifesize pieces of equipment—a see-saw, merry-go round, slide, and swing—Giehl constructs realistic children's playthings. However, their materials and



Becky Koenig



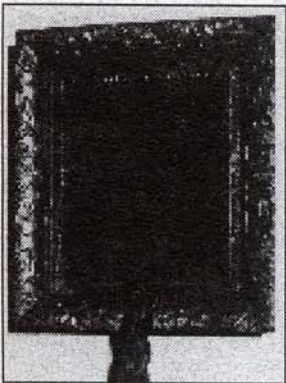


Michael Greuninger

surfaces are cruder than those of true playground equipment, and she installs remnants, echoes of childhood, not representational figures, on the toys. Cast bronze pampers sit on the see-saw, missing the tiny infants that should fill their forms. Faceless, limbless children, capped in cast bronze bonnets circle on the merry-go-round, and a single cement teddy-bear rides the slide. There is a sense of loneliness to this scene, and yet a feeling of grace as well. Although the materials are roughly finished wood, cement, and bronze, the forms retain a balance and symmetry that still connects them to a strong visual tradition. The power of Giehl's images and content relies upon the underlying sophistication of her forms.

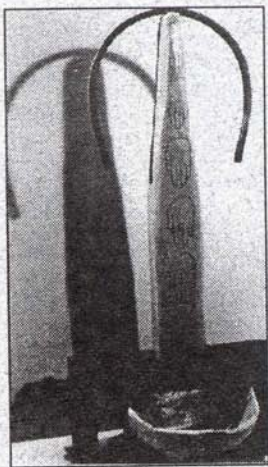
With a foundation of appropriated commercial photographs, long-time Buffalo resident Jackie Felix employs a figurative style in which she addresses the changing sexual roles that constitute today's complex modern world of ambiguity and alienation. Finding inspiration in cinematic stills and magazine and newspaper photos, Felix paints powerful figures whose forms are cut off by the edges of her large canvases and whose frontal and forceful compositions confront the viewer in form and content. More recent work reveals a theatrical influence in a stage-like setting where a metaphorical sexual dance takes place. In one work, *The Lady or the Garden*, curtains are pulled aside revealing hot pink columns outlined with black. A male figure stands to the left and a female semi-nude figure sits looking into a mirror, with her back to the audience. Harsh contrasts of light and color accentuate the dramatic narrative, and the continued distortions of space and structure charge the hot atmosphere with an electric shock.

Felix's outward vision of sexual mores contrasts with the inward vision of another Buffalo painter, Alfonso Volo. While Volo too examines eroticism and sexuality, his imagery is that of the enlarged miniature world found on a biology slide under microscopic scrutiny. He creates sculpture and video in addition to his painting, and all function with the same vocabulary. There is a sense of the Gothic to his private universe; within an historical context the magical world of Hieronymous Bosch stands as a precursor, as well as that of the twentieth-century Dadaist, Francis Picabia. In the large painting *Porcupine Eye*, a huge blue hairy sperm-like creature ends in an eyeball as it swims downward vertically in the composition. *Cutting the Cord* and *Worm's Crown* employ similar



Patrick Robideau



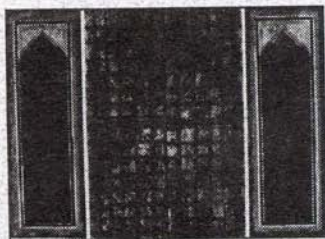


Larissa Marangoni

organic shapes, with small and large floating forms signifying procreation and division. Whimsy and charm balance an undercurrent of danger.

Volo's personal universe is filled with fear and wonder. It requires us to enter carefully, and in some ways, Buffalo artist Bonnie Gordon's poetic image and vocabulary map installations suggest a similar entree into a particular and extraordinarily special world. The Victorian combining of picture and word, "Ut Pictura Poesis," comes to fruition in Gordon's man/word constructions. Trained as a printmaker, Gordon worked in the field of medical illustration early in her career, which was a natural match for her own inclination toward uniting image with language. For the last twenty years she has developed a process where she prints halftone images of a man with text on a clear polymer medium, which is then organized into units of waves, scrolls, and globes. When stretched and drawn, this blue-toned vision of "Everyman" in his polyester suit swirls and expands, extending into a dazzling array of designs. Text is key to the work, and Gordon spends considerable time connecting individual words from her Merriam-Webster Third International Dictionary, which she later adds to her constructions. "Stretch" becomes "drawn," then broadens to "pulled;" "film," "chromatic," "screen," and "color" all link in a kind of linguistic bridge. Language and image are fluid ever-changing organic elements which repeat themselves in a series of unending, unique configurations. Given titles like *Perpetual Fluidity* and *Fluent Microcosm*, Gordon's installations change character from the associative image of fossils and geographic maps to modern type and offset lithography. Her works are linked through an underlying grand vision that is at once individual and universal.

Similarly, Buffalo artists are individual in their approaches, yet remain connected to a larger national scene. Buffalo's art community pulsates with an urgency and intensity that is exemplified by Hallwalls' history, as well as its curatorial contributions. Artists who live in the Buffalo region both participate in this creative energy and benefit by the many exhibitions of artists' works from within and outside of the larger Western New York State, and the unique power that defines Buffalo reverberates outward beyond the city's borders.



Endi Poskovic



OTHER  
STUDIO  
VISITS

ROBERT BOOTH's works rely on an interdependence between painting and sculpture. Creating objects that initially appear real and functional, like *Transient Nature*, a quasi-birdhouse structure, Booth explores metaphors that deal with universal functional systems. He finds that his images exist somewhere between reality and illusion and that sculpture is plastic and real, while painting is merely illusion. As an artist he makes objects that don't really operate, even though they look genuine, and he dissolves their surfaces with colored pigments, making sophisticated commentaries upon the role of art and the nature of reality.

ANJANETTE BRUSH's background is literary criticism and this fact is critical in understanding the nature of her work. Her images are layered in content and form, either photographs of book illustrations or twice removed photographs of xerographic copies of pictures, often of women in history. This removal from direct contact with subject eliminates many aesthetic decisions, instead emphasizing the textual component of the work. Signs and systems of communication, representations of culture, and the understanding of art as independent language rather than the property of an individual artist underscore Brush's approach.

MICHAEL GRUENINGER's mid-western origins demand a certain self-reliance and his aesthetic approach is directly predicated upon his rugged individualism. Creating installations that comprise hand-made objects constructed out of ordinary materials, including wood, metals, and fabric, Grueninger's works demonstrate a sense of humor and a fondness for the America of Gilligan's Island, drive-in theaters, and amusement rides. His kinetic constructions play music, run movies, turn, spin, and demonstrate a bootstraps kind of American know-how and inventiveness that is at once charming and commendable.

DANA HATCHETT's oil on panel paintings rely upon color harmonies and abstract compositions. The artist's work is connected to the tradition of color-field painting and post-painterly abstraction, where the relationship of hue and form is the content of the work. Organic floating forms float across the surface of the compositions, sometimes jumping forward and sometimes moving back in space. Hatchett's interests lie exclusively in developing color harmonies and relationships of shapes and forms.



JOHN KIRCHMYER's medium is weaving and basketry. His palette depends upon the huge array of spools of colored thread that fill an entire wall in his studio. Many of his forms are based on basket weaving techniques, such as wrapping and coiling, and his brightly colored compositions suggest organic and dynamic shapes connected to the non-western tradition of art making. Often based on highly saturated color schemes, Kirchmyer's works are designed both in relief and in-the-round.

BECKY KOENIG explores the larger human condition through a series of abstracted and simplified images based on the interior world of organic and scientific organization. Using technological and medical diagrams as a foundation for the symbols in her paintings, Koenig establishes a metaphysical parallel for the mechanical structures of human physiology as well as the fundamental dynamics of the physical world. Mood is suggested with color which, for Koenig, acts as a unifying element.

POLLY LITTLE boldly applies quick expressionist strokes of oil pigment to canvas, connecting these to large black and white woodcut prints. The combination of print and paint strengthens the aggressive nature of her style, which reinforces her animal imagery. Through her subjects she comments upon endangered species, the symbiotic relationship of the food chain, and the fragility of nature.

DAVID PRUDEN is a photographer in Rochester who also acts as Program Director for Pyramid Arts Center. A complex technology underlies Pruden's color images which appear as simple dream-like compositions. Often self-portraits, sometimes nude, within an interior or exterior setting, Pruden sets up a series of symbolic suggestions about the relationship of man to nature and of the artist's identity in an enigmatic world of shifting values.

ALBERTO REY, an extremely skilled artist, approaches his work through serial themes, examining his ties to family and culture. Preparing approximately four inch deep, square wooden panels, Rey floats representationally painted scenes in the centers. The mood is nostalgic. These compositions are taken from historical photographs of Cuba or are of religious imagery, the madonnas of Rey's catholic childhood. Quite



different from the small panel paintings are the monumental depictions of objects and symbols from Rey's Cuban/American culture, also rendered in a representational style and with a limited palette.

PATRICK ROBIDEAU's lyrical industrial constructions demonstrate the beauty of ordinary, impoverished materials. Utilizing metal, rope, blackened wood, and found objects culled from the Buffalo landscape, Robideau constructs elegantly balanced compositions that depend upon a simple organization of dissident textures and weights. The fundamental, coarse nature of the materials contrasts with the formal elegance of the compositions, establishing a tension of opposites that actively engages the viewer.

ELLEN STEINFELD constructs boldly colored reliefs based on landscape subjects. Her work is expressionist and vivid, able to hang on the wall next to images by pop or neo-expressionist artists. Depth is determined not by perspective or chiaroscuro, but by superimposed planes that are actually cut out of wood, so they physically, as well as visually overlap. Mountains thrust upward, streams rush downward, and trees grow in stylized patterns. Sharp edges and angled forms play against organic shapes, colliding in an exciting melange of trees, grass, mountains, and streams.

Cover credits: (Left to right, top to bottom) Ellen Steinfield, Mary Giehl, Alfonso Volo, Dana Hatchett, Jackie Felix, Polly Little, Josh Iguchi, Robert Kirchmyer



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