



Philip Pearlstein: *Two Models with Balloon Chair and Neon Mickey Mouse*, 2007, oil on canvas, 72 by 48 inches; at Betty Cuningham.

ism, Stevenson's painting chimed perfectly with the show's presiding spirit, Alain Robbe-Grillet, author of *The Voyeur* (1955) and *Project for a Revolution in New York* (1972), among many other novels. Displayed on the walls in the gallery's reception area were stills and a shooting schedule from some of Robbe-Grillet's films, including the metafictional thriller *Trans-Europe Express* (1966). If the elegant, oblique sadomasochism of Robbe-Grillet's work pervaded much of the art here—art that, it must be said, often indulges in the now-suspect pleasure of the male gaze—this show also lived up to its title by challenging some longstanding Manhattan prejudices. One can only hope that solo exhibitions by Monory, Klasen, Stämpfli and others will follow in the wake of this provocative show.

—Raphael Rubinstein

Philip Pearlstein at Betty Cuningham

The octogenarian master realist Philip Pearlstein—at the top of his game—ornaments and enlivens his recent paintings (dating from 2006 and 2007) with arresting emblems. Here Pearlstein supplies his typically angular, near-

gothic models with an unusually fertile gathering of props that at once delight and puzzle. A Mickey Mouse picked out in neon is introduced in four of these paintings, each element of the red, white, blue and yellow tubing sufficiently abstracted that on first take the lights read as cuneiform.

In the roughly 37-by-48-inch oil-on-canvas *Nude with Exercise Ball, Neon Mickey Mouse and Diamond Patterned Cloth*, a model at rest or sleeping leans against a large, luminous, emerald-green ball, her head positioned in such a way that she seems to dream the neon above her. The mouse appears again in the much larger (72-by-48-inch) oil *Two Models with Balloon Chair and Neon Mickey Mouse*. This remarkable painting has one model in fetal rest, curled in a clear, reflective blow-up chair (the globe of the chair transformed with reflected neon), while the other's legs and feet extend toward her from the painting's lower edge. The two intersect like the hands of a clock at an eternal 10:30 as they rest on a finely patterned, somewhat worn kilim.

Two Models, Neon Mickey Mouse, African Chair and Ladder finds the mouse seeming to tap-dance on a bar stool,

caught happily between two models and the furnishings that couch them. But he is not alone in this studio. There are such toys as a sailing boat and whirligig, an elaborate butterfly and a hunter's decoy goose. There are patterned bedclothes, kilims and other rugs. Finally there are exotic furnishings: the African chair and an antique gynecological examining chair in acid green. This apparatus is ironic, given that the paintings' primary subject is the nude female. There are other elements that broaden the experience of these paintings further. An enameled Andrea della Robbia terra-cotta tondo of an infant wrapped in white on a blue ground, arms outstretched, appears below the dog icon of "his master's voice" in the 36-by-48-inch *Model with HMV Dog and Renaissance Bambino*. These paintings command attention, summoned through Pearlstein's thoughtful arrangement of objects, models and light, bringing to mind related qualities in the work of Janet Fish and Alfred Leslie.

Pearlstein shares the cool, monumental scale of Leslie and the engaging interest of Fish's elaborate tabletop still lifes and, like his colleagues, continues to embrace his esthetic as fashions in representation come and go.

—Edward Leffingwell

Jo Baer at Alexander Gray

That Jo Baer has thought long and hard about the nature of painting is clear. In her early (1960s-'70s), radically minimal and superbly elegant paintings, defined by their empty, glowing white centers and edged by simple bands of black and another thin line of color, she was attempting to expunge all hierarchy, ambiguity and illusion from her work. Apparently she got the need for such austerity out of her system, because her paintings since that time are chock-full of images and depend almost entirely on implied, and very obscure, narrative.

The four paintings shown at Alexander Gray were from 1990, 1991, 2000 and 2001, and in contrast to her early paintings, where the image mimics the stretcher beneath, these oils are done on canvases that are simply tacked to the wall. This formatting decision contributes to their unfinished, almost temporary feel, and Baer may well have chosen to employ this device, successfully or not, as a way of separating her work from the standard painting tradition. Indeed, the results resemble sketches more than paintings, in that she's not exploring the medium's expressive possibilities but using it

Jo Baer: *Testament of the Powers That Be (Where Trees Turn to Sand, Residual Colours Stain the Lands)*, 2001, oil on canvas, 71½ by 60½ inches; at Alexander Gray.

