



Betye Saar: *Dubl Duty I'se Back Wid a Vengeance*, 1997, mixed mediums, 18 by 8 1/2 by 3 inches; at Michael Rosenfeld.

Light emerges as a major player in these paintings, setting the mood and suggesting the presence of otherwise invisible forces. Sometimes the scenes are drenched in the kitschy golden radiance of a Maxfield Parrish painting. Others are illuminated by light sources that suggest the flicker of unseen candles, an eerie radioactive glow, the orange haze of mercury vapor lights or the blinding explosion of a camera flash.

With these works Yarber builds on the intriguing vocabulary he had begun to construct in his expressionistic paintings. The change of format has allowed him to expand on the essential strangeness of his vision. His waking dreams unearth the irrational undercurrents of life in our millennial age.

—Eleanor Heartney

Betye Saar at Michael Rosenfeld

After lying dormant in Betye Saar's work for over 25 years, Aunt Jemima, the legendary Mammy of the flapjack mix, has returned for what the artist calls "unfinished business." Saar's landmark assemblage *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*

(1972), featured a plastic figurine of the stereotypical domestic, a broom in one hand and a rifle in the other. The intent was to transform a demeaning, racist image into a positive, empowering one. Saar's latest works, a series from 1997-98 called "Workers + Warriors: The Return of Aunt Jemima," address the same issue but with a little less ferocity this time around.

The show consisted of nearly 30 assemblages of vintage washboards decorated with Mammy images and other "black collectibles" from the 1940s-50s (figurines, salt & pepper shakers, whirligigs, miniature African masks). The washboards, which symbolize the countless hours African-American women have spent washing the clothing of white Americans, function as the primary pictorial space in each work. Their ridged surfaces carry found or painted images and printed texts (cheery household brand names, excerpts from the writings of Langston Hughes and Henry Dumas and Saar's own slogans, such as "Extreme Measures Call for Extreme Heroines").

Perhaps the most trenchant of the series is *Sunnyland (On the Dark Side)*. A faded color photocopy of a lynching is pasted to conform to the horizontal grooves of the washboard. In the wooden frame is an American flag, the words "strange fruit" and the brand-name "Sunnyland" against a rising-sun emblem. On top, a whirligig Mammy teeters over her washtub. Equally disturbing is *I'll Bend But I Will Not Break*, a corner installation with an old ironing board and a bed sheet bearing the monogram "KKK" in gold thread. An iron is shackled to the board, which displays on its flat surface a faint reproduction of a woodblock diagram of the inhumanely overcrowded quarters on slave ships.

The inclusion in the show of the early and fiery Aunt Jemima assemblage threw into relief the drier, didactic quality of the new work. While Saar's project is admirable (and, sadly, remains pertinent), the new assemblages fail to deliver a powerful blow. The decision to drive her point home via the repetition—and implied interchangeability—of images and texts blunted the effect. Less might have been more here.

—Maura Reilly

Dan Devine at Pierogi 2000

When Dan Devine decided to turn his 1979 Volkswagen Rabbit inside out, he may have created one of the wittiest and unpretentiously smartest works of the last gallery season. The automobile occupies a privileged spot in the American imagination and Devine is simply the latest in a long line of artists, including John Chamberlain, Chris Burden, Vito Acconci and Nari Ward, to transfer its highly charged semiotic overtones from the realm of popular appeal to the gallery space. Devine's wonderfully absurd vehicle draws much of its appeal from the intellectual friction generated by this relationship. His endearingly deadpan (and esthetically savvy) sense of humor is just as important. Not content to merely transform this everyperson's vehicle into an everyperson's work of art, he has also provided an amusing and somewhat unlikely manual called "How to turn your car inside out" that functions like the instructions for the re-creatable works of Sol LeWitt and other Conceptual artists.

Devine literally deconstructed the VW Rabbit, carving the vehicle into its basic parts and reassembling them (and, in the process, remaking the whole idea of the car). Once done, the headlights, grill, wipers, gas-tank cap and hood have traded places with the steering wheel, brake and gas pedals, dash and glove compartment. Leather interior coverings, door handles, rearview mirror and carpeting have ended up outside, and the engine, power train and seats have disappeared; there doesn't seem to be a trunk, either. The resulting "car" is roofless and, like the Flintstones' foot-powered roadster, floorless. Back is forward and left and right are reversed. And while the car won't actually start, it retains some functionality: the wheels turn and the clock works.

Devine's zany conceptual hotrod happily exploits every subliminal reaction we've ever

had to the symbolic history of the automobile. An idiosyncratic version of the classic artistic verities, it displays its own strange sense of precision, taste and technical facility, all the while alluding to social class, sex, individualism and the vast cultural storehouse of American consumer capitalism.

—Calvin Reid

William Turnbull at Barbara Mathes

William Turnbull's recent exhibition consisted of 15 or so totemic figures and heads, all cast in bronze, many with stone bases. The most impressive pieces were of life-size female figures in a series based on blade and paddle shapes of the sort that I associate primarily with Polynesian art. *Large Paddle Venus 4* (1988) is a 78-inch frontal figure in the form of an upright canoe paddle with a pointed tip. Her head, upper limbs and digits are absorbed into the flat ovoid form of the blade, while her legs join to become the flat bar of the handle. Breasts, facial features, feet, arms and hands are indicated with simple inscribed lines in axial or triangular clusters. The surface of the sculpture, slightly roughened, has been given a greenish-black patina and is also punctuated by a scattering of small holes or dents like those made in a stop sign that has been shot at with a .22.

Although the overall shapes of the other pieces vary, most of them follow this format—simple geometricized silhouette, textured surface, lightly indicated internal features. Those pieces that depart from this formula in some significant way are, on the whole, the more engaging works.

Dan Devine: *How to Turn Your Car Inside Out*, 1998, mixed mediums; at Pierogi 2000.

