

THE NEW YORK OBSERVER

JULY 19, 2004



Currently
Hanging

MARIO NAVES

Still-Life Association Zeuxis Communes With the Inanimate

You've got to hand it to Zeuxis, the self-styled "association of still-life painters." They're a tenacious lot—not least because their ambitions are markedly out of fashion. In naming themselves after a painter who worked in Greece between the fourth and fifth centuries B.C., the group declares its fealty to values that reach beyond the contemporary. Sharing an abiding commitment to "a perceptual response to nature" and "a search for aesthetic value," Zeuxis takes a stand for art that is independent of both history and taste. The group radiates a can-do optimism.

Since forming 10 years ago, Zeuxis has mounted over two dozen shows that have traveled to a variety of venues, from commercial galleries to universities to small museums. Along the way, it has accumulated admirers, among them established painters invited—and, one imagines, happy to participate—in the group's exhibitions. Zeuxis' latest show, *Tabletop Arenas*, on view at Lori Bookstein Fine Art, is its most convincing yet, though the standard complaint still applies—a musty academicism skitters around the edges of the proceedings. The collective does itself no favors by hewing to tradition without casting upon it a critical eye. Having said that, *Tabletop Arenas* gets by on more than good will

and collective enthusiasm: The show is filled with pictures, solid and sure.

Where to start on the good stuff? Eve Mansdorf's depiction of glasses, jugs and seashells is as good a place as any:



COURTESY OF LORI BOOKSTEIN FINE ART

A traveler's tale: Margaret McCann's *Fight the Power* (2003).

Flinty yet lush, the painting's asceticism is offset by a sneaking, full-bodied romanticism. Ken Kewley, channeling the American modernist painter Patrick Henry Bruce, transforms abutting planes of flat color into sumptuous vol-

umetric form. Ruth Miller is, as ever, tough and vulnerable; her rough-hewn brush delineates form with a surprising specificity. Richard La Presti brings crisp, bopping rhythms and clear, juicy tones when painting the abundance of stuff piled up in his studio.

Margaret McCann employs tourist tchotchkes as a means of traveling to Paris, Cairo and the Milky Way within the confines of a single, smallish canvas. After adding mood lighting by way of Giorgio de Chirico and pictorial structure by Leland Bell, infuses the picture with militant underpinnings—or so its title, *Fight the Power*, leads me to believe. Few of Ms. McCann's colleagues approach her in terms of eccentricity or plastic distinction. But that doesn't mean they're not tough as nails (Nancy Flanagan), poetic (Sandra Stone), to the point (Stanley Friedman), or bluntly lyrical (Sussannah Phillips). As for the rest of Zeuxis, they keep things buoyant, and that's not bad at all.

Zeuxis: Tabletop Arenas is at Lori Bookstein Fine Art, 37 West 57th Street, until July 29.