

Art in America

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Rosemarie Trockel

Al Held

Rediscovering Gego

Report from Rome



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white prints, also part of the "For Example" series, that document his pilgrimage to *Grande Dixence, Val de Dix, Switzerland* (1993). In homage to a master of modern cinema, he traveled to the location of Jean-Luc Godard's first film, *Opération Béton*, which itself documented the building of the Grande Dixence Dam in 1954. However unexplained his systems of reference in the immediate gallery context, Williams's images resonate with the contingency and complexity of the human condition, and they are beautiful.

—Edward Leffingwell

Carrie Mae Weems at P.P.O.W.

With her new work in photography and—for the first time—film, Carrie Mae Weems continues to help recenter American and Caribbean social history by finding middle-class black experience in its mainstream. "May Days Long Forgotten" is a suite of black-and-white and color photographs that constitutes a kind of turn-of-the-century pastoral, featuring sylphic African-American girls with flowered dresses and grave expressions stretched out in decorous repose on shady lawns, or posing for tight-framed portraits. These images, mostly oval or round, were hung in close symmetry, as if in a formal drawing room: on one wall, the portraits alternated with photographs of pale, velvety, full-blown roses; on another, with framed expanses of deep blue sky punctuated with a few fleecy clouds.

Screened as a big projection, a segment of a film in progress called *Coming Up for Air* also features beguiling young black girls, in full color and full sunlight. They revolve slowly around a maypole, hair-ribbons flying, smiling broadly, eyes bright. One of the photos in "May Days Long Forgotten" is titled *After Manet*. Certainly the sun-dappled leisure of Weems's photographs revisits the Impressionist cultural landscape, populating it with subjects the Impressionists never imagined in any but supporting roles.

Grouped with these photographs was a single image of a corridor at Versailles called *Let Them Eat Cake*. This image is shadowed by text etched into the protective glass: describing "shrill pearly laughter," it quotes the famously doomed queen saying, with unwonted lack of delicacy, "Merde, qu'ils mangeant de la brioche." The slightly harsher note this photograph strikes is anomalous among Weems's new works.

"Dreaming in Cuba," the other group of photos shown here, is a broad and nuanced portrait of a place, realized in tonally and compositionally complex gelatin silver prints. We see a middle-aged woman and an older man in domestic situations as complicated and suggestive as those of Weems's well-known 1990 photo-narrative "The Kitchen Table Series." There are photographs of sugarcane farmers, of an abandoned rural estate and of an urban interior. The women (including the artist) and occasional men who populate these images seem to have been coached, their poses naturalistic but psychologically and socially determinate, in the manner of 19th-century realist fiction. In several photos, Weems positions herself as history's ghost, striding the abandoned corridor of a once-stately residence. Less polemical than some of her previous work, Weems's new photographs suggest narratives that we are invited to enter mid-

Christopher Williams: *Argentina (from Angola to Vietnam)*, 1989, gelatin silver print, 14 by 11 inches; at David Zwirner.



Carrie Mae Weems: *May Flowers from the "May Days Long Forgotten" suite*, 2002, C-print, 34 inches in diameter; at P.P.O.W.



stream, without promise of easy resolution. —Nancy Princenthal

Shahzia Sikander at Brent Sikkema

In her first show at the Brent Sikkema Gallery, Shahzia Sikander, best known for her unconventional application of traditional Indo-Persian miniature painting techniques, continued her subversive and witty cross-cultural dialogue. A pair of digitally animated drawings and over two dozen works on paper explored timely questions of hybridity and nationalism.

The show's centerpiece was the installation *SpINN*, an earlier version of which appeared in 2001 at San Antonio's ArtPace.

Two parallel white free-standing walls, set on a diagonal in the center of the gallery's main room precisely four feet apart, created a confined corridor that magnified the unresolved tension between a digital animation and a Wasli paper drawing. On a flat DVD monitor affixed to the wall at eye level, a parade of imps, lovers and other colorful personages taken from traditional, imaginary and mass-media sources faded in and out against a slowly mutating background of a Mughal throne room and a wide-open landscape. The title of the installation refers to the central episode in the animation, when dozens of nude gopis (the Hindu goddess Krishna's attendants) disappear,

until only their black hairdos remain. Like Braque's bird silhouettes, these forms begin to multiply into a dense flock that rotates counterclockwise, emphasizing the Pakistan-born artist's fascination with shape shifting and metamorphosis. Hung on the corridor's other wall directly opposite the DVD monitor, the complementary drawing looked like a still from the animation, with the added element of a female figure of Justice, bearing sword and scale and presiding over a host of gopis.

A second room contained 26 drawings and watercolors that elaborated Sikander's liberal appropriations and personal iconography. "Pink Pavilion" is a suite of 18 works on various shades of pink and white handmade paper. The series demonstrates Sikander's continual play with forms such as gopi hairpieces and armless human figures. *No Fly Zone*, a small watercolor and dry pigment on Wasli paper, undermines the tired terminology of East and West by freely conflating diverse imagery, in this case industrial trusses, Pegasus, shadowy plunging devils, and angels with wings painted in the Stars and Stripes, all arrayed in a typically craggy Indo-Persian landscape.

In a second DVD, an elephant, slowly rendered from an Arcimboldo-esque collage of dozens of lesser animals, falls to pieces in the end. A New York City resident, trained in Lahore in the grand tradition of miniature painting, Sikander probes the fateful ruptures of translation.

—Daniel Belasco