

From the Former Eastern Bloc, Wielding Color

By SUSAN HODERA

SOON after entering the common studio space at the Universitatea de Arta si Design in Cluj Napoca, Romania, Livia Straus spotted a dreadlocked young man working alone in a corner. “All of his canvases were facing the wall,” recalled Ms. Straus, the director and co-founder with her husband, Dr. Marc Straus, of the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art in Peekskill. “And, of course, if a canvas is facing the wall, I want to see it.”

What she and Dr. Straus saw

A Romannian artist ventures beyond Shades of gray.

when the artist began turning his paintings around impressed them enough to invite him to spend three months as an artist-in-residence at the art center. A year and a half later, the results of that residency, which took place this summer, are on view in “Leonardo Silaghi,” an exhibition of large-scale paintings by the 23-year-old Mr. Silaghi.

The nine works in the exhibition, all oil on canvas and all but

one measuring an imposing 84 by 120 inches, represent both a continuation of and a departure from the artist’s previous work. In Romania, Mr. Silaghi was painting commercial vehicles reminiscent of the post-World War II industrial era in Eastern Europe; he used a palette exclusively of shades of gray.

In this show the paintings are still of vehicles, but they include a racecar and go-kart derived from photographs taken during a visit to the Monticello Motor Club upstate, and a truck under an overpass inspired by the construction along Route 9 in Peekskill.

And there’s color: blue highlighting a three-wheeled motorcycle, splotches of yellow bouncing off the hood of a rickety bus. “I started to gamble with color,” Mr. Silaghi said from Romania via telephone.

Consistent with his earlier work, the landscapes in “Leonardo Silaghi” are devoid of

“Leonardo Silaghi” is on view through Dec. 19 in the mezzanine gallery at the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, 1701 Main Street. Information: hvcca.org or (914) 788-0100.



PAINTINGS BY LEONARDO SILAGHI

ON WHEELS “Untitled #10349,” oil on canvas, 2010.

people, but Mr. Silaghi has endowed his machines with personality. “He was adamant about his vehicles replacing the human figure,” said Jessica Denaro, the center’s deputy director. “He gives the attributes he sees in people to his vehicles — not literally but in a more organic way.”

Perhaps reflective of those attributes are certain off-kilter elements in each piece — “especially the wheels,” Ms. Straus said. “They never quite line up.”

Mr. Silaghi is the first of three artists-in-residence to come to the center during the run of its larger exhibition, “After the Fall,” a show of Central and Eastern European artists who were born during the Communist era and educated after its collapse. “In ‘After the Fall,’ ” Ms. Straus said, “many of the pieces have a kind of grayness, a heaviness. In Leo’s work, there’s gray, but there’s not the same heaviness. He’s the next generation.”



PERSONALITY “Untitled #10318,” oil on canvas, 2010.