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POPULAR PAINTINGS

by Charlie Finch



John Newsom: *The Great Divide*, 2005/6, Oil on canvas, 90 x 120 inches,
Courtesy of Mike Weiss Gallery (New York)

To see what's hot in the current market, you could do worse than to drive down Main Street of the depressed town of Peekskill, N.Y., past boarded-up buildings and auto service centers to a nondescript concrete building, the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art.

Here, a brand new show, "XXL: Recent Large-scale Paintings," assembles the good, bad and ugly of in-demand artists from top galleries in New York, Los Angeles and Europe. The center is only open on weekend afternoons, has a most helpful desk attendant (thank you, Jessica!), and signs sternly prohibiting the taking of photographs and touching the art remind you that you are in a moderately dicey neighborhood.

The two best pieces, jarringly juxtaposed, greet you inside the door to the right, a giant Gustonesque rear view of female holes by naughty boy Carroll Dunham and a searing Maoish *Red Self-Portrait* by Yan Pei-Ming, courtesy of Zwirner Gallery.

These works are atypical of the show, which shows a group of hot artists trying to paint something like Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa* in the Neo-Expressionistic style of the 1980s East Village scene. Francesco DiMattio's *Black Ship* (courtesy Salon 94) and Ryan Pierce's *Lofoten* (from Heller Gallery in Los Angeles) are literal shipwrecks, which leave

nothing to the imagination, drawn detritus and afflatus filling every nook and cranny of large canvases. I would grow weary staring at this stuff in my den every day. Rothko, it ain't!

Worse are three efforts adjoining each other by Bendix Harms, Jonathan Meese and Erich van Lieshout. The van Lieshout is two poorly painted heads that could have been done by Tim Greathouse, Skip Snow or any of a hundred other forgotten stars of the aforementioned East Village

scene. Galerie van Orsouw, Zurich, provided it. The Harms (from Anton Kern) is an ugly purple monster head. The Meese is a giant hodgepodge of photos, squiggles and diary entries which make Sean Landers seem mature by comparison. If you want to know what's bad about an indiscriminate market for indiscriminating painting, Peekskill is the place.

The paintings which deviate from Big Mess in "XXL" are rewarding. There's an excellent orange and green Neo Rauch, of people and robots, reminiscent of the '50s sci-fi classic, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. I don't get Mark Bradford, who is just recycled Nicholas de Stael on a giant scale, but, for lovers of black, there's an ooey gooey oil slick on the wall from Pierre Soulages, via Robert Miller Gallery. Toba Khedoori's *Holes* is not her best, Poosy grayish eggs, but instructive that, in this show, thought and restraint go a long way, as opposed to, say, hot artist Anton Henning's mediocre green beach scene, whose fleshy indisinctiveness has been cribbed, stroke for stroke, from Eric Fischl. London's Haunch of Venison shipped it over for your viewing displeasure. John Newsom has a rather generic red take on his overdone theme of wasps and butterflies, but it is Rembrandt compared to the less-disciplined efforts in "XXL".

This most informative exhibition is up, weekends, through next spring, and Peekskill has a first-class farmer's market nearby on Saturdays, 50 minutes from Manhattan by train or car, and well worth the trip.

"Size Matters: XXL - Recent Large-Scale Paintings," Sept. 16, 2007-Spring 2008, at the Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, 1701 Main Street, Peekskill, N.Y. 10566

CHARLIE FINCH is co-author of *Most Art Sucks: Five Years of Coagula* (Smart Art Press).