

STEPHEN VITIELLO

RICHMOND

Heaven and Hell, Stephen Vitiello's multi-channel sound work [Solvent Space; September 9—October 29, 2005], marries cover versions of Led Zeppelin's *Stairway to Heaven* and AC/DC's *Highway to Hell* to produce a culturally fluent soundscape that, bearing no recognizable similarity to its sources, suggests that heaven and hell are identical. Created in collaboration with Scanner (Robin Rimbaud), *Heaven and Hell* is broadcast from four black tower speakers positioned in the four corners of Solvent Space's high-ceilinged, concrete industrial cube.

Black and off-white rectangular carpet remnants are arranged asymmetrically in the center of the room, like a Suprematist composition by Kasimir Malevich. Participants can sit or lie down on them to listen to the recombinant sounds. A sonorous chiming and tocking escalates, builds reverberating chords, and sustains them for a moment before they fade, evoking a human voice's emergence and weakening. Listen is too-limited a word in this context, however, since the entire body, inhabiting the central stage provided by the carpets, hugging the perimeter between two speakers, or occupying a position between them, is totally implicated in the reception of sound. It, too, resonates and collects noises through the limbs, the torso, and the skull. In the multi-channel clamor, sounds trade places and travel through the space. The periphery offers different patterns from the center, and the participant's movements or position affect the encounter, a fusion of Fluxus-like event and aurally nonobjective structure, a manipulation of mixed found sound producing an abstract composition.

The provenance of Vitiello's source material is, however, curious. Both are country covers of heavy metal songs: Dolly Parton's post-9/11 cover of *Stairway to Heaven*, whose lyrics she rewrote with a fervid religiosity, and Hayseed Dixie's version of *Highway to Hell*. *Heaven and Hell* is also an expansion of *Dolly Ascending*, an earlier six-channel work. Written in 1971 and 1979, respectively, the original songs retain a strong cultural currency. Both have been covered by a spectacularly broad and funny list of artists, especially *Stairway to Heaven*, which has been reworked by everyone from Frank Zappa to Pat Boone to Those Darn Accordions. There is, of course, the legendary play-it-backwards-for-the-satanic-message buzz about *Stairway* that already ties it notionally to *Highway to Hell*.

—Ann Millett

2002-2004. Michael Schultz presented ornate industrial facades in *New York and Virginia*, 2004, luminous color photographs articulating the modern machine aesthetic of buildings often considered eyesores. In contrast, Jeff Whetstone's large, intimate photographs documented the backwoods in works such as *Mingo Boys with Water Snakes in the Eno River*, 2004, where the natural world dominated in an image of leisure and danger. Among the strongest pieces in the show, Whetstone's photographs combined the local and the metaphysical.

Many works responded to current events. Pat FitzGerald, Ted FitzGerald, David Millsaps, Dana Raymond, and Amanda Robertson, the members of the artists' collection EAT presented *The Consumer Culture Garden*, 2005. This multimedia, interactive video installation centered on a simulated pond of Japanese koi fish, which, in 3D animation, morphed their colorful scales to Flash advertisements: Budweiser, Energizer, Disney. With engineered splashing and cooing sounds, these traditionally meditative, if here bionic, fish appeared virtually alive. The mesmerizing work spoke to the powerfully subliminal messages of consumer advertising.

Literature and art history inspired Stacey L. Kirby's sculptural artist's books, *to follow*, 2002, Hayley Kyle's small *Untitled* paintings, 2004, and Jennie Bireline's glazed ceramic towers, *Sentinel Pots*, 2004. Anne Kesler Shields collaged images from art history, contemporary advertising, and the media in *For the Flag*, 2004, a collection of framed photocopies hung to create a cross-cultural mural. The images' subjects, such as a Byzantine warrior saint, Superman, Condoleezza Rice, Middle Eastern war protestors, and mass military funerals, shared evocations of death, martyrdom, revolution, violence, and demands for both freedom and power.

Also aiming at political protest, elin o'Hara slavick assembled nine mixed media panels, *Protesting*

Cartography or Places the US has Bombed, 2000-2004. Colorful stains, drips, and designs were layered over maps of territories and targeted sites in works about war and contemporary imperialism. Time lines and event descriptions narrated history, yet poignantly, these facts were blurred in cultural memory and visual representation. Slavick's movement away from photographic documentation to artistic abstraction suggests the news media's dangerous aestheticization of political agendas, violence, and the human repercussions of invasion.

The exhibition's final room showcased Lauren F. Adams' installation, *Bread and Bullets*, 2005, where society and politics were made eerily decorative and strategically domestic. Saccharine, aqua-green walls, tacky embellishments, and artificial plants, fruit, and bread composed an uncomfortable dining room. This subversion of a traditional North Carolina country design seemed purposeful as the curtain print repeated ethereal but all too topical scenes of exploding vehicles, armed soldiers, and graveyards against Islamic architecture, along with pseudo-pioneer American scenes of canoeing and hunting, suggesting both a collision of the public and private, and the contemporary, volatile rhetoric of patriotism and gun control. The deserted table was set for six, with dinnerware ornamented with bullets and leaves. "Yours is the Earth & Everything," stated a stitched sampler on the wall—a moralizing quote in a craft tradition sounding like a justification for world power under the guise of protecting human rights and domestic security. Global events hit home as bomber planes emerge from flower blossoms on the tablecloth corners.

above: Susan Brenner, *Migrations #0305*, 2003, digital chromogenic print, face-mounted on Plexiglas, 30 x 40 inches [courtesy of the artist and the North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh] opposite, left to right: Stephen Vitiello [in collaboration with Scanner—Robin Rimbaud], view of sound installation *Heaven and Hell* during the opening [courtesy of the artist and Solvent Space]; Dana Schutz, *Untitled [Charlotte]*, 2003, oil on canvas, 65 x 60 inches [courtesy of the artist and Zach Feuer Gallery; collection of Dean Valentine and Amy Adelson, Los Angeles]

DANA SCHUTZ SANTA FE

The two songs exist on a kitschy, bubbling frequency of pop sacredness and sacrilege, of secular mysticism and emotionalism. Their snarled, iconic status is simultaneously lightweight and intense—incidentally not unlike the pairing of home-built technology and sophisticated engineering in Vitiello's body of work. They accrue strata of connotations to a point where the original and its expanded cultural field become indistinguishable, while *Heaven and Hell* transcends references to its sources.

If *Heaven and Hell* is in some senses analogous to a nonobjective artwork created through the dexterous manipulation of materials, much of Vitiello's oeuvre might be called representational, drawing its material from direct recording of sounds as in the well-known *World Trade Center Recordings: Winds after Hurricane Floyd*, 1999-2002. Produced in collaboration with Andrew Deutsch, a second installation at Solvent Space, *Light Readings (Performance Mix)*, 2005, is a direct recording of a performance at Eyebeam in New York where the artists processed the feeds from a micro video camera and a photocell device that translates light frequencies into sound through a video synthesizer (a "wobulator") to create a fluidly pulsating audio-video work. Together, the installations at Solvent Space illustrate the range of sound art, and the conceptual and formal possibilities offered by technological processes. More importantly, however, they reveal the flexible parameters of an environment of which we are usually unconscious, as if Vitiello were teaching us how to breathe under water.

—Dinah Ryan

When you sum it all up, Dana Schutz is making some very funny pictures. And sum it all up is just what she does in an amalgam of styles that owes as much to the history of twentieth-century figurative and abstract painting as it does to the Cartoon Network. She comes to Site Santa Fe [September 24—December 24, 2005] via the big city of New York, on her way to her next exhibition in Berlin. Gracias to curator Laura Heon for the chance to look at these creepy-sweet paintings. Schutz was born in 1976 in Livonia, Michigan. Was it De Tocqueville who said, "Art will come from the Midwest?" Gosh and shucks and dang if he weren't right.

In her most shocking images, Schutz takes as her subject the dark side of suburban girlhood, a realm extensively explored by cartoonists Lynda Barry and, to a lesser degree, Roz Chast. Schutz however pushes her little actresses beyond allegory, and into surrealistic acts of self-cannibalism and dismemberment using a disarming post-pop palette of high key color masterfully manipulated for maximum zing. Recalling Dubuffet, her drawing is exuberantly broad and brutal. Her paint application moves from the flow of thin washes to a thick loopy Gustonesque impasto, and everything in between.

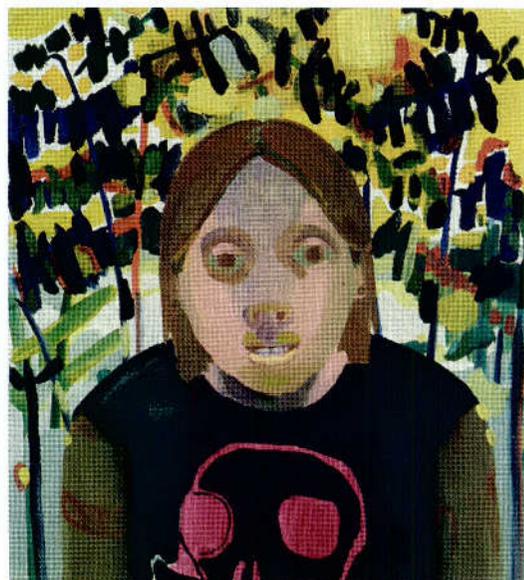
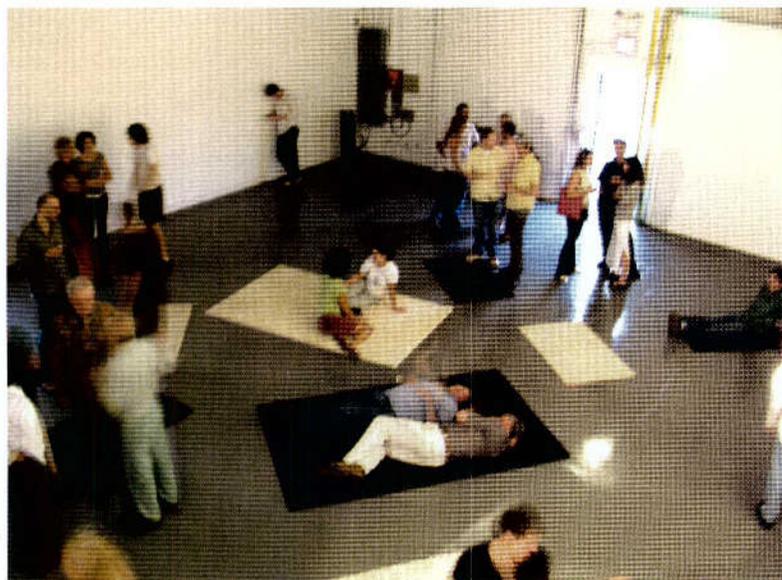
Bataille would be proud of these works, and they are obviously related to Balthus'. In a neat post-feminist reversal of the gaze, she posits his Lolitas as their own auteurs, seizing the brush from the master's hand and painting to let him know how they're made of less sugar and spice than even he imagined; less everything nice than all men—Bataille, Balthus, and Nabakov included—ever thought. When she gets to the explicitly male figure, she gives us Frank—the last man on earth,

leaning back on his elbows, sunburnt and scorched, gazing up from a rock in an horizonless ocean, positively pink and passive as a fish. This time, the gaze-reversal produces endearment for a vulnerable male nude. As goofy as this picture is, and despite its eye-popping rhetorical style, it has something of the affection of Rubens' full-length portrait of his wife.

Naturalism, however, this is not. Mutant hybridism is more like it. A short list of the artistic influences Schutz wears on her sleeve runs to pages. Beside Balthus and Bataille, place Nauman and Ensor. The anything-goes quality of her fast and loose approach to pushing pigment makes her strange style seem virtually inclusive of all the possibilities that painting has rehearsed over the past century and a half, figurative and abstract, and then some. This is hardly a pure amalgam.

Her zany accumulative style is simply the subterfuge for a cultural critique with terrible implications. It is the comic facet of what makes for very black humor. Put plainly, our society replicates its tendency for torture and depravity in children. Her faux naivety is simply the gloss and goop that allow us to laugh uneasily about this indictment. Is this what Barthes refers to as "the castrating laughter that allows us to look away?" While in this case it might best be changed to read "genital-mutilating laughter," the mechanism is the same. The pure pictorial pleasures of these paintings allow Schutz to make subversive, and accurate accusations, to bring them before our eyes. At the same time, however, these frothy pleasures also allow us to ignore them at the extreme peril of our future generations.

—Jon Carver



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