Moon River, 1981
In the late seventies, the term New Imagism was coined to describe a return to figuration in painting, an apparent reaction against the hegemony of Minimalism. This renewed commitment to subject matter is not confined to American artists. Many young German and Italian painters, such as Francesco Clemente whose allegorical works were seen recently in MATRIX (MATRIX/BERKELEY 46) are similarly engaged.

Other young artists of the seventies who were searching for an alternative to formalism began producing works in which decorative patterning played a major part. The decorative function of art was celebrated by the French artist, Henri Matisse, but had been relatively ignored, even derided, ever since. Bright color and exaggerated texture are characteristic of the new Decorative painting (see Joseph Zucker: MATRIX/BERKELEY 41). Janis Provisor’s work lies within or adjacent to these two major recent trends which, in fact, often overlap.

However, these five recent works by Provisor are far more disturbing than decorative. Their highly emotional subject matter is ambiguous, though they have in common the juxtaposition of landscape and figurative elements in a seemingly adverse relationship. In After Midnight, the main figure appears to be ensnared in a spider's web, while at the same time is threatened by an enormous plant. The kneeling, Cyclopean figure in Moon River is caught between the petal and stamen of an exotic flower. A male figure in Russian Hill appears to be fleeing a swirling environment of black foliage and a radiant web, while the pink girl in Visitation Valley has lost her footing in the frenzy of Van Gogh-like brushwork and anthropomorphic plant forms.

Provisor uses modeling paste, copper or gold leaf, and layers of oil paint to build up the canvas. The process of layering is painstaking but responsive to change— if Provisor is dissatisfied with an area, she can paint it over and begin anew. The thickness of the material allows Provisor to extend forms beyond the rectilinear support. She often affixes three-dimensional objects to the surface at various stages during the process (for example, the egg-shaped growths on the figure in After Midnight and the jello mold blossoms in Moon River). In works both on canvas and paper, each image or shape is rigidly in place and maintains its own identity.

In comparing these new works with Provisor’s paintings of the last couple of years (see Royal Image in Gallery B after December 1), one notices that Provisor has increased the amount of metallic paint in her palette. She has also broken down the surface of the paintings into multicolored, arc-shaped strokes which create a less regular all-over texture than before. In general, Provisor’s handling of the paint is looser and more expressionistic in the most recent works.

The greater surface agitation is echoed by the increased sense of danger suggested in the paintings in MATRIX, all of which were completed during the past year. The life-sized figures in the two largest and most recent works are a dif-

Constance Lewallen
After Midnight, 1981, oil on canvas mounted on plywood, 92" x 72". Lent by Hansen-Fuller-Goldeen Gallery, San Francisco.

Moon River, 1981, oil on canvas mounted on plywood, 92" x 72". Lent by Hansen-Fuller-Goldeen Gallery, San Francisco.


Selected one-person exhibitions:
University Art Museum, UC Berkeley '72; Grapestake Gallery, SF '76; Protetch-McIntosh Gallery, Washington, DC '77; Hansen-Fuller-Goldeen Gallery, SF '79, '80; Holly Solomon Gallery, NY '80, '81; Nancy Lurie Gallery, Chicago '80.

Selected group exhibitions:
SF Art Institute, Paintings on Paper '71; Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA, Two-Person Exhibition '73; Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, MI, Interstices '75; University of Texas Art Museum, Austin, Faculty Exhibition '76, '77; David Mirvish Gallery, Toronto, Canada '77; University Art Museum, UC Santa Barbara, Bay Area/Contemporary Strengths

Selected bibliography about Provisor:


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