

low-key landscapes done in acrylic on birch panel. With their cartoon- and graffiti-inflected esthetic, both collections demonstrate a penchant for pictorial complexity that uses cheesy Gen Y imagery to update and westernize the dense patterns and symbols of Balinese painting.

The mechanically and chemically distressed paintings could at first glance be taken as abstracted landscapes describing low, mountainous regions of rust cut into dominant expanses of milky white enamel across the top. But the reddish brown contours are far from monolithic. In works such as *Downtown* and *Astoria*, the rust embraces a panoply of urban imagery—smokestacks, bridges, drain age pipes—as well as more-fanciful groupings of skulls and crossbones, faces and mummies, all pressed together as tightly as puzzle pieces. *Empire* and *Phoenix* balance the heavy cityscapes



Michael T. Hensley, *Astoria* (detail), 2002, rust, enamel, and polyurethane on steel, 22" x 18", Mark Woolley.

with ethereal scratches and arboreal forms hovering above.

The artist's acrylic-on-panel works are every bit as fastidious as the large etchings, and they make use of a similarly restricted palette—shades of blue rather than azules—although they offer less texture. If the rust-on-steel works succeed primarily as juxtapositions of positive and negative space, these paintings make their statement through sheer graphic prolificacy. *Southern* is populated variously by Jirochi balloons, Pac Man figures, negotiating totems, robots, and Godzilla himself. Overall the

works are feverish meditations on the relationship between high technical accomplishment and low-class iconography.

—Richard Speer

## 'How Artists Draw'

Menil Collection

Houston

This show, subtitled "Inward: the Menil Drawing Institute and Study Center," accompanied the announcement of plans for a new building and an ambitious program of acquisition and scholarship centered around the museum's core collection of modernist drawings. The curator, chief curator, Renée Rose, called the exhibition a rough sketch of the questions the new study center might address.

Beginning with the Center's inauguration that John de Menil brought to life in his briefcase in 1953, the show of 200 works surged ahead from there, making no attempt at connections or conclusions. In a smuggy Secor, a factory defines its own decay soul. Jackson Pollock struggles to get it right in three pieces on mulberry paper from 1941. The rough-hewn notes by Claes Oldenburg, Ellsworth Kelly, and Bruce Nauman offer too brief glimpses into the artist's heads.

The 17 works shown here from Fred Sandback's ultra-refined *System: Variations of Two Horizontal Lines* (1973) focus on the absolute logic of ruled lines, while Vija Celmins's pernickety *Unfinished* (Medium Desert), 1974-75, foreshadows a view of figurative conceptual pieces. A couple of Bruce Marden's "Cold Mountain" drawings that were dominantly fresh in 1990 still avoid any hint of cynicism.

A long far black slope installed by Richard Serra and a woolly counter of intense scribbles, one of Sol LeWitt's last wall drawings, embody a radical change in the status and scale of



Georges Seurat, *Coin d'Usine (Corner of a Factory)*, ca. 1883, Charcoal crayon on paper, 9 1/2" x 12 1/2", Menil Collection.

drawing. They capped off a show that fit perfectly at a museum famous for championing intimate, unexpected encounters with modern art.

The exhibition jostled viewers through too much history too quickly for real satisfaction, and begged to be filled in and slowed down. That was, of course, the whole point.

—Bill Davenport

## Daniel Phill

Each of Daniel Phill's botanical paintings consists of two separate paintings. Working with the canvas laid flat, he applies thin layers of soft pastel colors in horizontal stripes, overlaying these with even vertical streaking to create a dy-



Daniel Phill, *Emblem*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 36" x 36".

dynamic ground. Then, with the canvas upright, he paints with the seeming abandon of an Abstract Expressionist, creating flowery "gardens" of exuberant strokes, splashy blobs, and splatters of solid strong hues. In this show, "In Full Bloom," all 15 works shared this duality, sitting on the fence between abstraction and representation.

The lines in the background divide the picture plane and can take on representational meaning from the flowers. In *Mist* (2008) the canvas breaks easily into thirds, suggesting a large area of sky, a horizon line at center, and earth below. On this rudimentary landscape, the overpainting seems to capture a floral bouquet bursting forth as in a time-lapse photograph. Likewise, *Sainfoin* (2008) indicates sky in a blue and white upper section of the background, and earth in a darker area below.

Phill most nearly achieves what he seems to be aiming for in *Hypericum* (2008), whose large flowers take up a greater than usual area of the canvas. The overall sense is more abstract, more gestural, and freer. Here we follow the artist into a landscape of completely unreal, but utterly convincing, combinations of color and form.

—Hollis Walker

## Peter Vey

Gallery on Greene

Key West

In this show featuring more than a dozen large paintings of tropical scenes, it was Peter Vey's technique that made his images come alive. Using a bold mix of pigments, he vigorously works the entire canvas with just a palette knife, his confident strokes leaving richly textured surfaces.

Vey's subjects are the fluttering palms, charming native cottages, and dinghies bobbing in the turquoise waters of his adopted Key West, represented with barely contained joy. A soft morning atmosphere permeates *First Light* (2008), which captures, in the gentle motion of two low trees, the feeling of a briny breeze blowing off the still sea. The

artist understands the twist and rustle of palms so well the viewer could hear it.

*33040* (2006), its title referring to the



Peter Vey, *Coconut*, 2007, oil on canvas, 50" x 40".

Gallery on Greene.

*Key West* zip code, shows a little blue boat resting in the sand outside the vine-covered picket fence of a beachside bungalow. The work is crisply drawn, its nuanced hues dappled with sunlight and cool shadows. The chunky patterns of the paint application made the trilling dance of light almost palpable.

A palette knife is difficult to control, and many artists use it only for loose interpretations, but Vey wields it with precision. *Harbor Island* (2008) illustrates his mastery over architectural detail and identifiable flora while still maintaining the wildness of the technique.

—Judi Bradford

## Nancy Wolf

Marsha Mateyka

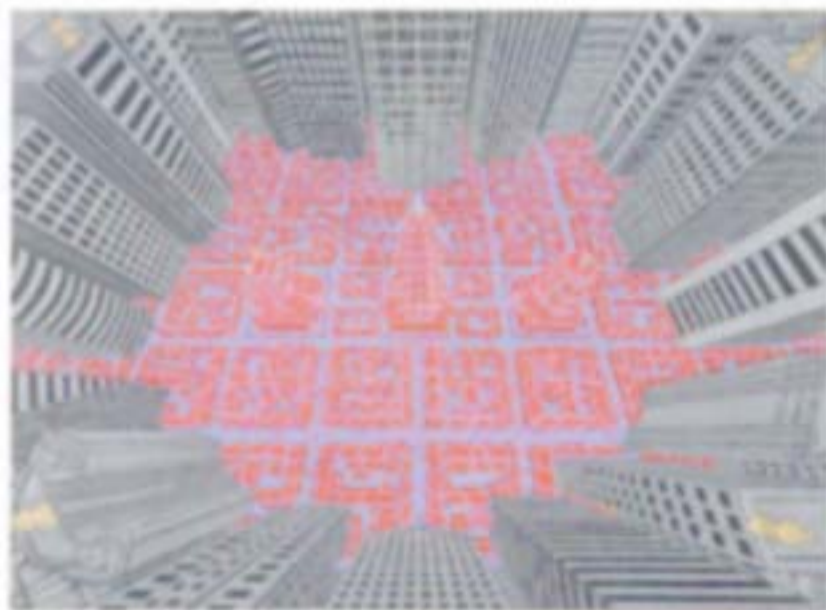
Washington, D.C.

For more than 30 years, Nancy Wolf has aimed her formidable drafting skills at depicting the deleterious effect of real-

estate development on life in U.S. cities. With "Dragons Adrift," an exhibition of 14 pencil-and-gouache works, she mounted an impassioned assault on the building craze transforming urban China.

*From Hutong to High-Rise* (2005) is a meticulous drawing of a city block of anonymous skyscrapers. Critics have made the connection between Wolf's vision of modern cities and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, and the similarity was striking here. However, Wolf's picture is not merely dystopian fantasy—it is, in fact, based on photographs of a block in Hong Kong the artist took during a 2004 residency there. In the drawing Wolf added a procession of densely packed huts on a bridge that leads into the glass-and-steel maw of the featureless new architecture. In contrast to the sharp perspective of the new buildings, the huts are drawn in a style reminiscent of traditional Chinese painting.

*Vertigo Landscape with Three Temples* (Mandala Series), 2007, presents a dramatic aerial view of an old city ringed by skyscrapers. To accentuate the dark desolation of the soaring buildings, Wolf used black paper as the ground for the drawing. The old city, by contrast, is rendered in lavender and hot pink. Its quadrangles and temples appear to be boiling up through the pavement like lava.



Nancy Wolf, *Vertigo Landscape with Three Temples* (Mandala Series),

2007, colored pencil and gouache on black paper, 22" x 30".

Marsha Mateyka.

It may be presumptuous for a visitor to judge China's recent development so harshly—particularly against the romanticized version of the past recorded in traditional art and architecture—but Wolf's impressive technique makes for a powerful expression of her concerns.

—Rex Weil