

Artweek

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fabric of the woman's dress and the fabric-like support of the work itself, which seems to likewise react to the penetrating explorations of the viewer's gaze.

—Mark Van Proyen

Ruth Weisberg: *Love, Sacred and Profane* closed in April at Jack Rutberg Fine Arts, Los Angeles.

Mark Van Proyen is a contributing editor to *Artweek*.

D. Ryan Callis at GhettoGloss Gallery

Los Angeles seemingly spawns an endless tide of new art galleries, floating boatloads of bright young artists through their first group and solo shows. Attending the openings of new era prodigies can be inspiring, fun, nos-

Below: D. Ryan Callis, mixed media, at GhettoGloss Gallery, Los Angeles; above: Mark Ryden, *Rose*, 2000, oil on panel, 3-1/2" x 4-1/4", at Earl McGrath Gallery, Los Angeles.



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talig and amusing. Yet, does mingling with a crowd who confide "I'm just here cause I know the DJ," detract from the validity of the artwork, dumbing it down and depriving it of academic worth?

Mementoirs for my Wake successfully challenged any pessimistic accusations about twenty-four-year-old D. Ryan Callis's youthfulness, depth or vision. Trained at a Christian-based arts institution (Biola University in Los Angeles), Callis started his career as a painter and a graffiti artist in high school. His yearning

Callis confessed to a double life, attending lectures in painting and theory by day and sneaking away to the train tunnels and road-sides of LA at night to indulge his love of graffiti.

Having since dropped the street art, Callis's painting style embraces bright hues of color that solidifies the knowledge of life. Through his work, many can perceive the ideas of how we process, build and destroy our progression as people.

Mementoirs for my Wake takes you through a journey that captures the idea that life passes by fast and, as the result of our lives, we leave a memory for people to reflect on," says Callis.

His work speaks of vitality and humor, yet there is no preoccupation with the adolescent urban landscape suggested by his prior infatuation with graffiti, a genre he perceived as bridging a gap between the clinical world of academia and his urge to express something raw and defiant.

Also a practicing Christian and psychology graduate, Callis's imagery is both complex and emotional, combining biblical doctrine and scientific psychology motifs to conjure sublime personal mandalas. Confiding an admiration for latter day Bay Area "mission school" artists such as Barry McGee and Margaret Kilgallen, Callis says he is also influenced by Yves Klein, Arshile Gorky, Wassily Kandinsky, Jackson Pollock and, not surprisingly, Jean-Michel Basquiat.

Many of Callis's works contain phrases not synonymous with the works titles. Unlike the textual dynamic harnessed by artists such as those of the futurist movement, Callis's use of text does not form any cryptic or thematic patterns, but serves as simple embellishment and reference to books or song lyrics.

Omnipotence sees a petite girl posing pensive and forlorn; nearby a man looks through a telescope. The work serves as a comment on the perpetual and habit-

ual patterns of the human condition, voyeurism, sexuality and primalism. *Artificial Bubbles* sees a black outline-styled foot being massaged; the head of a man smoking a cigarette hovers nearby, while the words "Let Go" appear left of center. The artist revealed that it is thematically based on concepts of freedom and empowerment, overcoming personal hang-ups.

Creation #2 looks at Darwinist and Christian versions of creation theory. A light bulb playfully illuminates a realistic



while the words "Slow Down" float enigmatically.

Callis's recurring use of phrasing is, at times, repetitious and naive, though he seeks redemption with stronger pieces that focus on a highly individual and dexterous technique as seen in a painting of Callis's girlfriend (now wife). Occasional paint splashes and softer colors give the piece an ethereal and erotic edge. In *December* a handsome young woman reclines on a large bed foregrounded by the makeshift detritus of a student bedroom. Shelves propped with concrete blocks and a huge ghetto blaster contrast the woman's almost regal beauty with the incongruous and perhaps untimely world of adolescence and immediacy.

Through the miasma of the LA arts scene, occasionally a bright spark shines, a glimmering promise. Artists such as Callis offer redemption for us pessimists, hammering a boisterous reminder that a celebration of youth is more synonymous with dazzling ideas than clichéd bombast.

—Craig Stephens

D. Ryan Callis: *Mementoirs for my Wake* closed May 9 at GhettoGloss Gallery, Los Angeles.

Craig Stephens is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.

Mark Ryden at Earl McGrath Gallery

Blood: *Miniature Paintings of Sorrow and Fear* is not only about viewing the art. It is also about experiencing Mark Ryden's created environment.

The initial room, containing drawings or studies, may typify a gallery space: white walls, wood floors and images. But the second room, containing the paintings, sets itself apart. The ten truly miniature works (on average 4 by 5 inches) adorned with the artist's trademark wooden frames appear as apparitions set off against floor-to-ceiling red velvet curtains.

To view the works in such a setting, the spectator must get extremely close to each piece and must do so against another backdrop: a haunting original musical score by Stan Ridgway and Pietra Weston. The music ranges from sounds of an organ and adult solo to a relatively