



Edward Burtynsky: *Shasta Lake Reservoir*, 2009. Chromogenic Print. 41" high. Arthur Roger Gallery.

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# *The Passage of Our Distraction*

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BY MARIAN S. MCLELLAN

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EDWARD BURTYNSKY  
"Intentional Landscapes"  
Arthur Roger Gallery

MARFA INTRIGUE  
A Group Exhibition  
Octavia Art Gallery

FACE TO FACE  
A Group Exhibition  
LeMieux Galleries

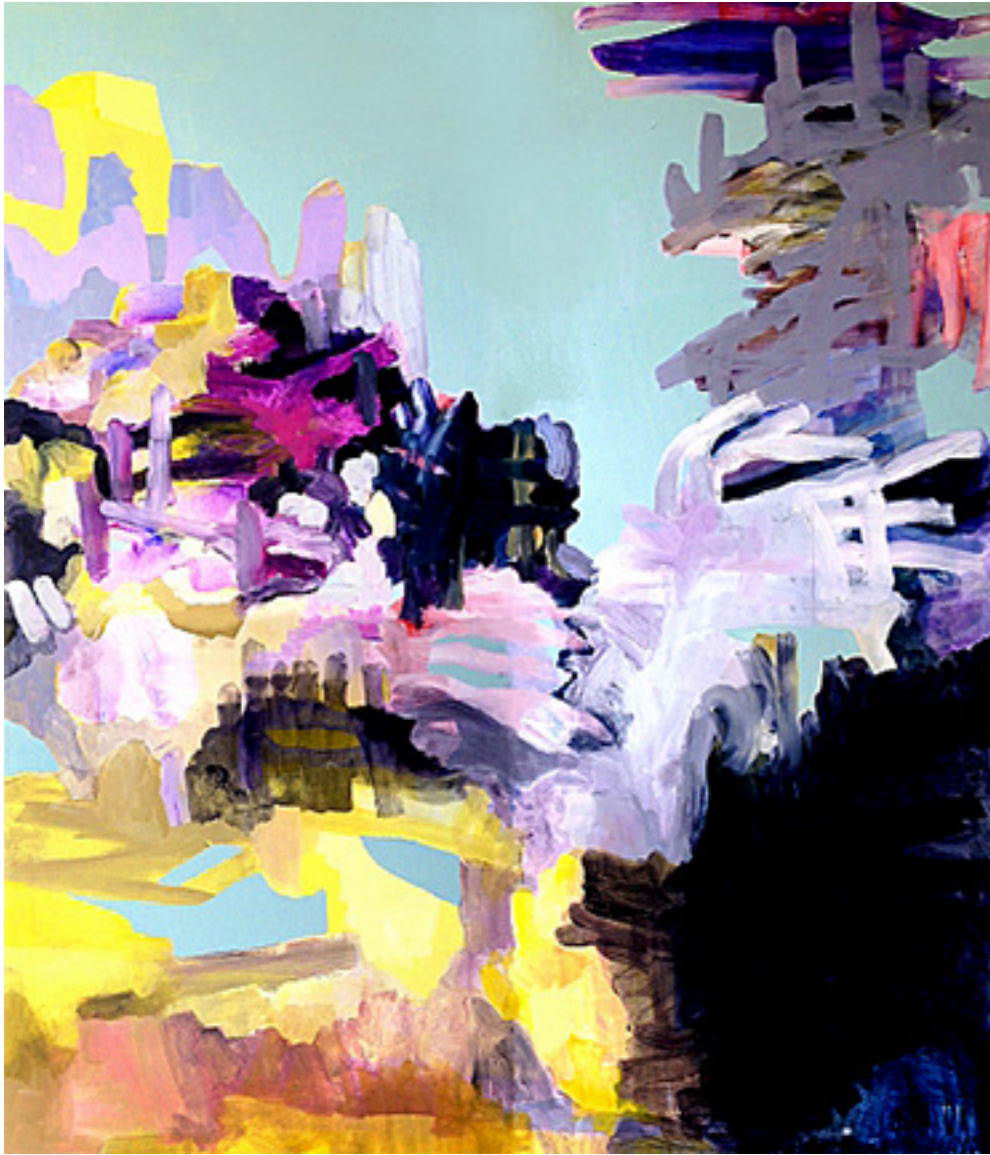
JIM SOHR  
A Retrospective Exhibition  
The New Orleans Art Center

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ARTISTS ARE ALWAYS willing to share the bounty of the view in ways that forever reinforce and redirect our forever-wandering gaze, thus narrowing the passage of our distraction. Perhaps in

an effort to jar us into looking more closely at the aftermath of progress, Canadian Edward Burtynsky presents a series of color photographs collectively titled "Intentional Landscapes" at Arthur Roger Gallery that defy orientation and require detailed titles to let us know just where and what we are looking at in the picture window images. As it happens, the isolated scenes, often shot from airplanes, mountaintops and drones, describe topography transformed by mankind's quest for sustainability. Says Burtynsky, "Our dependence on nature to provide the materials for our consumption and our concern for the health of our planet sets us into an uneasy contradiction." Ain't that the truth.

Paradoxically, it is the scabs of our invention that permit Burtynsky to record the bitter fruits of our comfort. From afar, or to use the term of late, from a "remote" location, we often take offense at the mistreatment of unknown recipients, ignorant that we may in fact play a key role in the crime. Nonetheless, using the tools of our potential demise, Burtynsky beguiles with intriguing-



Ann Marie Nafziger: *Toward The Over There (Purple Mountains Majesty)*, 2016. Acrylic on Canvas, 70" high. Octavia Art Gallery.

ly disturbing views shot from on high. *Oil Spill #16, Mississippi Delta, Gulf of Mexico, USA 2010* evokes Yves Tanguy's distilled landscapes, soothing us with luxurious greens and browns from the spill while the tan colored *Navajo Reservation/Suburb, Phoenix, AZ, USA 2011* contrasts the stark reservation against a congested suburb separated only by a highway. All who've boarded the Coast Starlight from Oregon to California know firsthand that the majesty of Mount Shasta leaves no reason to seek the rewards of heaven. But Burtynsky's *Shasta Lake Reservoir, Northern, CA, USA 2009* depicts a faint view of the mountain foreshadowed by tufts of trees skirted with agate-colored banks that seem to float in motionless water.

THE STUPENDOUS BEAUTY of the land that holds us in limbo is anticipated when hearing the word "Marfa" included in an exhibition. The last time I visited Marfa, Texas was in the early years of the Chinati Foundation. I was impressed with the isolation of

the town and the open environments that the Chinati Foundation afforded its art as opposed to the confinement of a typical gallery. Art in the latter milieu can become devoid of origin whereas art in Marfa becomes a part of the space rather than an addition.

Octavia Art Gallery's "Marfa Intrigue," a group exhibit of six Marfa-based artists, presents something of a time warp and strongly recalls the nonrepresentational styles of the Sixties in which light, space and air helped mold both image and artist. Given the stark landscape of Marfa's high desert terrain and the state in which it resides, this is not unexpected. And, as one might expect, Donald Judd's Minimalist influence is abundantly evident in "Marfa Intrigue." However, grouping art from an arid countryside into a very humid one can have the unsettling effect of displacement. Coming to terms with this dichotomy is Marfa's mayor, Ann Marie Nafziger in *Toward The Over There (Purple Mountain Majesty)*, an acrylic on canvas featuring gestural strokes of fanciful color that befits both the festive side of New Orleans and



Sam Schonzeit: *Untitled*, 2017. Watercolor on paper. 40in high. Octavia Art Gallery.

the sublime energy of Marfa. Devoid of color are Charles Mary Kubricht's black, white and gray pieces that evoke astronomical imagery and make us wonder if she spends time at the McDonald Observatory less than forty miles from Marfa. Resembling a collision in space is the monochromatic *Imperceptible Affinities 29*, an acrylic on linen of multi-planed shards. Apparently taking a cue from Morris Louis is Sam Schonzeit's watercolor on paper *Untitled* of isolated bands of prismatic color.

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THE LANDSCAPE OF THE FACE is a view we never seem to tire of, always comparing "ours" with "theirs," and vice versa. Perhaps in an effort to reinforce and never forget, we humans dedicate much time to describing the topography of this all-important memorial of our being. Le Mieux Galleries' "Face to Face" exhibit presents a traditional approach to portraiture within a wide range of

styles by numerous gallery artists including Paul Ninas who lived in New Orleans from 1932 until his death in 1964. Ninas' 1929 pencil sketch of an Afro-Caribbean model predates his move to New Orleans, done most likely during his time in the West Indies. Eye-catching among the living artists is Aron Belka's *George*. Expressively painted and filled with light and a rich palette, the oil on canvas depicts a three quarter view of an African American male's face. Michael Deas, noted for his success as an illustrator including the 1991 *Columbia Pictures Logo*, uses the delicate medium of silverpoint on clay-coated paper to describe an askew portrait of a Caucasian woman in *La Chemisette*. Self-taught artist D. Lammie Hanson takes a different approach to metalpoint as seen in her dark valued *Portrait of Cherished Yamaye*. Here, Hanson uses lines of silver, brass and gold over charcoal to depict the strong profile of an African American woman. Although not self-taught, David Lambert's calculated naïveté conjures de Chirico's playful wisdom



Paul Ninas, 1929. Pencil sketch. Le Mieux Galleries.



Aron Belka: *George*, 2017. Oil on canvas. Le Mieux Gallery.



Jim Sohr: *Plugs* (aka *American Pigs*), 1993. Acrylic on canvas. The New Orleans Art Center.

as seen in the small acrylic on paper paintings *Visionary* and *Man Woman*. The latter features a blue-eyed person with beard whose oversized head and neck are supported by tiny upper torso adorned with a strand of pearls.

A WIDE-OPEN VISTA of human emotion is found in locally seasoned artist Jim Sohr's retrospective of paintings at The New Orleans Art Center. Eliciting the comedy of errors of life mixed with the onslaught of Red Grooms' human pageantry and Robert Gordy's exaggerated abstraction of human form, we navigate the unpretentious space of the Center in search of message upon message. From the outset, a novelty to this exhibit is the collaboration between Sohr and The New Orleans Art Center to title each of the paintings as the Center saw fit. As it happens, looking at the Center's website, some of those titles have since changed, which may be as it should be. Life is, after all, a state of flux. Labels aside, let us proceed, starting with the acrylic on canvas 1993 *Plugs* (aka *American Pigs*). Filled with more crosshatching than impasto, *Plugs* gives us a one-point perspective view of a city

street complete with buildings filled with robotic characters and cars implanted with plugs in order to connect. What would we do without electricity to keep the juices flowing?

Skipping the years to 2000, *Birds and Ladies* evokes Margaret Keane's "Big Eyes" paintings sans the modeling of form. Maybe twenty-four years from now the relevance of *Birds and Ladies* will surface. Aboriginal Dreamtime seems to have been at play in Sohr's 2008 pair of *Abstract* paintings, albeit with a Fernand Leger regiment of circle and line, while the most recent painting on view, *Triangles*, from 2012, portrays a pair of humanized triangles not unlike Hopi Indian Kachina dolls or even Oscar Uxa's PEZ candy dispenser. For sure, there is relevance in even the most mundane.

According to The New Orleans Art Center's founder Herman Kron, the nearly eighty Sohr has been creating three-dimensional pieces similar to *Triangles* that are too large to leave Sohr's studio. Hopefully soon, these sculptures will find their way into life's thoroughfare. □