PETER HUJAR & PAUL THEK

CHARLES LEDRAY
MARCEL BROODTHAERS
JOAN JONAS
HUMA BHABHA
plus
JULIE MEHRETU:
DIAGRAMMING NETWORKS
(1956), just under 9 by 10 inches. It consists of a foregrounded rectangular shape of thickly troweled white and violet-pink sitting atop thin background glazes of blue-green and pink. Here we see equal consideration given to color—redolent of water and earth—and the distinctive weight of paint. This attention to material and color is more pronounced than the abstract imagery, and offers an alternative to what Fyfe refers to as the exhaustion of the device of "the flattened picture plane" (an allusion to Leo Steinberg's important essay on American postwar abstraction).

A focus on facture and color is evident in several more thinly painted works as well. In John Zurier's Swedish Green (2006), washes of green distemper lightly cover most of a white background, turning the viewer's attention primarily to the lean- ness of the paint. The red-on-pink shape in Jean François Maurige's 2006 untitled painting is downright watery; while in Bernard Piffarati's enormous untitled work from 2009, just shy of 10 feet tall, plenty of white-painted ground stands between small, just-off squares and diamonds, their colors painted over in light washes of different hues (blue over red, yellow over green, etc.). All three paintings were hung in the final room along with an imposing Joan Mitchell and a diminutive Jonathan Lasker, making the space feel like a case study in varying paint densities.

Several of the artists in the show deal directly with the issue of the support. Miquel Mont's Pore XXXIV (2007), a hefty monochrome with circles and half circles cut out in its plywood surface, shares a similar mango color with one of the three fabrics that, glued together onto a stretcher, compose Fyfe's own After Corot (2007), placed opposite. Sarah Rapson's ghoulish Clearing (2003) consists of six slender, slightly misshapen canvases hung together. Their matte surfaces look like parched skin, and their variant thicknesses and deathly flesh tones conjure up corpses of differing vintage. Claude Viellat, now 74 and one of the original members of Supports/Surfaces, was represented by Untitled No. 318 (2008). Consisting of red and blue dyed gauze affixed to an open-weave curtain hanging from two clear pushpins at the top corners, the piece balances prismatic intensity with a seemingly insouciant use of materials. Its astringent beauty, while sharp, leaves one with the hope that more such paintings will cross the sea.

—Julian Kreimer

SHEN SHAOMIN

ELI KLEIN

While some members of China's post-Mao avant-garde have, in effect, patented a signature style or motif—big grinning faces, doe-eyed family groups, bald-headed thugs, heroic proletarian figures juxtaposed with global brand names—Shen Shaomin (b. 1956) has taken the opposite tack, producing a body of work so diverse as to defy the very notion of artistic identity. His recent "Distortion" show at Eli Klein, comprising 36 pieces made over the last eight years, offered Western viewers a rare—and remarkably comprehensive—sampling.

Raised in the folklore-steeped far northeastern province of Heilongjiang, bordering Inner Mongolia, Shen began as a self-taught artist making Cultural Revolution propaganda. Later, as the graduate of a teachers college in Harbin rather than one of the country's elite art academies, he was a peripheral figure, even after having a one-person show at Beijing's National Art Museum in 1989, the year of the Tiananmen Square crackdown. Following more than a decade of self-imposed exile in Australia, the artist gained star status in mainland China in 2002 with the inception of his ongoing "Unknown Creature" series. Represented here by two beak-headed works—the roughly 16½-foot-long Multiped and 5¼-foot-long Dog (both 2002)—the suite features skeletons of animals and insects, fancifully concocted out of human and animal bones. Some pieces (like Sagittarius, 2005, recently in the group show "Dead or Alive" at New York's Museum of Arts and Design) are bizarre man-beast hybrids. All seem to arise from a mix of myths, scientific models, horror films and uneasy dreams, and to share an ontological anxiety—what are we all, really?—with the contemporaneous animal composites stitched together by Xiao Yu and the inflated multihued creatures that Yang Misyun makes from animal hides.

Continuing in the show's nightmare vein were five examples from the 2004 series "Experimental Field No. 1 Peapod": human fetuses emerging, in Invasion of the Body Snatchers fashion, from approximately yard-long plant pods, all elements made of bone, bonemeal and glue. The same materials compose 10 nearly 40-inch-
high blooming stalks set in glass vases from the series "Experimental Field No. 3 Poppy Flowers" (2004). That these works might reflect the social-engineering experiments of the Macbain era was suggested by components from Shen's "Bonsai" project (2007-present). On pedestals at the center of the main room sat two bonsai trees, their leaf-bearing twigs pulled upward by wires attached to a metal grid, their trunks twisted and tortured by guy wires, braces, stretchers and clamps. The surrounding walls bore watercolor-and-ink renderings of the bare trees, the devices alone and, violating the serenity of traditional Asian nature painting, the trees subjected to the devices. On a stand nearby sat a manual illustrating standard bonsai-shaping techniques in impassive, clinical detail.

Darkly humorous political implications also infuse works like Oil Gambling Machine (2007), two wooden Ping-Pong paddles, each inscribed with a world map and bearing three miniature low-tow oil pumps, their up-and-down motion controlled by strings attached to a wooden bomb. Greeting visitors just inside the door was Obama (2009)—an example from the "G8 Summit" series, in which large oil-on-canvas portraits of world leaders are displayed on the floor in wavy, twisted frames. Such mordant works add an overtly satiric dimension to an oeuvre already rich in disturbing psychological and social critique. —Richard Vine

"TUNNELING"
FAMOUS ACCOUNTANTS
The group show "Tunneling," on view at this Bushwick venue, offered more groundbreaking media, mind-expanding imagery and diverse sensory experiences (performance included) than its claustrophobic-sounding title might imply. More than half the works by 13 participating artists were technology-based, with elements ranging in sophistication from a Geiger counter (measuring minute levels of radiation released by an innocent-looking piece of 1930s-era "uranium glass") to Second Life avatars. The curator, Will Pappenheimer, a new-media professor at Pace University in New York, advised in the show's literature that we should interpret "tunneling" in a trippy sense, as in "hallucinatory, near death, out of body." Offering up insights into how new media can be used to create art that is compelling formally as well as conceptually, Pappenheimer nonetheless eschewed what he could easily have relied upon: novelty, and the sexiness of the cutting edge.

Not all of the works in the show were tech-based, though even the more traditional (drawing, sculpture) yielded optically powerful results. To make her small-scale collages on paper, Meg Hitchcock allies up diverse source texts ranging from the Old Testament to Darwin and glues the individual letters into mandala-like compositions, to near phantasmagorical effect. Cooper Holoweski's videos magically orchestrate imagery from biology (CAT scans of the brain), mechanics (piston engines) and architecture into seamless—and infinitely watchable—wholes, while Susanna Starr's color-saturated sheets of Mylar have latticework surfaces so intricately patterned that they appear to have been cut with a laser—though they were, in fact, done by hand.

At the heart of the show, however, was The Leak in Your Home Town (2010), by artist-programmers Mark Skwarek and Joseph Hocking, who, to create their work, used augmented-reality software, a method for superimposing 3-D images over live video feed. When visitors pointed an iPhone at a British Petroleum logo installed on the floor, the viewscreen ignited with the image of a swirling toxic oil plume in Flash animation, which leapt out of the corporation's once benign-looking green-and-yellow sunburst. Leak, it should be noted, will work on any BP logo, anywhere, and at press time Skwarek and Hocking were deciding whether to make the smartphone application that runs it available to the general public for "next-to-free." Let's hope they do just that. Leak is a one-liner, but it's a good one—a work of interventionist art so deliciously acerbic it deserves the broadest audience possible.

—Sarah Schmerler

SARAH WALKER
Pierogi
Sarah Walker's paintings hew to the information-overload esthetic favored by this Williamsburg gallery. Layered linear structures, mutant polyhedrons and pseudo-diagrams in thinned acrylic on smallish, squarish (from 10 by 11 to 36 by 38 inches) wood panels, Walker suggests force fields and event horizons. Partially Seen Things (all works 2010) sports intersecting cantilevered dumbbell shapes—looking something like a misbe-