

Mirror (1963) introduces a cross-sectioned head to suggest perhaps the parts of a mind under analysis, *Evocation of a Human*, *Lunar*, *Spectral Form* (1959–60), in the same medium, is a take on the elusiveness of the physical body and evokes something of the classical tension of Michelangelo's unfinished slaves in Florence. —Hugh Eakin



Joan Nelson, *Untitled* (#453), 2000, oil on wood, 12" x 12" x 2 1/2". Robert Miller.

Joan Nelson

ROBERT MILLER

To understand Joan Nelson's strategy in this splendid show, we have to modify Magritte's "This is not a pipe" into "These are not landscapes." Magritte informs us his painted pipe is paint, neither a thing nor a representation of a thing, and Nelson, whose work appeared here in much larger formats than in the past, demonstrates that landscape painting is not about the imitation of nature, or verisimilitude, but about art.

Nelson's show was a tribute to the idea of art derived from art. So she made allusions to Caspar David Friedrich, Claude Lorraine, and other landscape painters—not excluding the Hudson River School, Arthur Rackham, or Maxfield Parrish. Her *Untitled* (#453), for example, is a view toward a bay in Friedrich style with a sky that evokes N. C. Wyeth. The splash in the foreground is certainly the last we'll ever see of Icarus (whose wax wings melted as he flew too close to the sun). Here, Nelson subtly evokes W. H. Auden's 1938 poem "Musée des Beaux Arts," with its consoled sadness about the eternal flux of the universe and the transience of human life. "In Brueghel's Icarus, for instance: everything turns away / Quite leisurely from the disaster," Auden writes. The painting is concerned only with freezing a moment that contains a tragedy quite irrelevant to its beauty—beauty exists out of time, but its creation and contemplation are a solace to mortal beings.

Nelson's evocations are not all nostalgia and are certainly not parodic. For instance, her *Untitled* (#444) combines both Claude and Corot in a dreamy invocation, again, not of place, but of painting. Nelson's allusions and affinities place her squarely in the best dimension of postmodernism.

What Nelson offers are fictions—not places in the world but places in the world of art. If anything, the paintings invite us to say, "Nature be damned." —Alfred Mac Adam

Martin Kippenberger

METRO PICTURES

This show of work by the eclectic and prodigious German artist Martin Kippenberger, who died in



Martin Kippenberger, *Jacqueline: The paintings Pablo couldn't paint anymore*, 1996, installation view. Metro Pictures.



Nancy Grossman, *Untitled (Double Head)*, 1971, mixed-media collage on paper, 21" x 29". Michael Rosenfeld.

1997 at the age of 43, featured a suite of his provocative, if distinctly minor portrait paintings titled *Jacqueline: The paintings Pablo couldn't paint anymore*, depicting Picasso's widow.

Kippenberger, a Joseph Beuys devotee, wholeheartedly subscribed to the tantalizing, if imperfect, Beuysian syllogism: artists make art; I am an artist; everything I make is art. Despite its logical flaws, the formula proved exceedingly useful for Kippenberger, allowing him to attack virtually all modes of visual-art production with a minimum of inhibition.

Here, Kippenberger modestly aims to pick up where Picasso left off. Picasso loved to paint Jacqueline. Picasso is dead. Who will paint Jacqueline now? Kippenberger. (Picasso died in 1973, 23 years before Kippenberger started this 1996 series; Jacqueline died in 1986.)

The paintings, mostly based on photographs taken of the grieving widow in 1975, are avowedly slapdash. In one (the works are not separately titled), a loosely outlined face and figure collide with casually applied scribbles, drips, smears, and globs. In another, the colors often clash in jarring, obnoxious ruins of pigment. In most, issues of pictorial space and context are entirely avoided, with backgrounds composed of clumsy, flat stripes.

Kippenberger shunned notions of technique, style, and originality. So it comes as a relief that these canvases offer a complex, lingering pleasure. Kippenberger's high-velocity wreckage forces viewers to work hard to find structure, harmonies, and rhythms. And when they do, the paintings turn out to be satisfying, even memorable.

—Rex Weil

Nancy Grossman

MICHAEL ROSENFELD

In her best-known works—leather-bound male sculptured heads—Nancy Grossman packed a lot into what may have seemed a little. And that in part accounts for why these pieces entered the sculptural canon against all odds in the early 1970s and then remained there. This modest-size retrospective revealed how much Grossman continues to cram into

the rest of her output as well.

As in the heads—three, from 1969 to 1991, were here—Grossman everywhere employs strong formal know-how. Her materials are very physically present, but her subject is kept deliberately mysterious, as is its role. Several wall-hung assemblages were dark, brooding, near-monochrome. These are closer to the work of postwar European *art informel* artists like An-

toni Tàpies or Alberto Burri than to that of more painterly Americans or Pop-topical artists like Robert Rauschenberg.

Grossman's materials, like those of Carolee Schneemann or Eva Hesse, were often more personally or privately disturbing than those used at the time by men. In Grossman's case, bindings—zippers, buckles, corset lacings—all refer to the body bound, dressed, or in the process of undress. Coercion and duress are everywhere hinted at. A grid of what looks like soiled and bulging men's underwear, lacquered for longevity and creepiness, makes up *Eldridge Series I* (1966), a work that anticipates "abject" works of today.

In the catalogue, Lowery Sims refers to Grossman's tutelage under painter Richard Lindner, and this seems a pivotal point. Though the means differ, the notion of sex and gender as battlegrounds for both sexes links the artists.

Grossman's more recent collages and assemblages reach more toward a state of grace. The 1994 *Process Piece: Collage Patterns from Works 1982–1992* makes connections among different-colored canvases and papers with highly nonthreatening paper clips, pushpins, and pieces of wire. It aims for harmony through peaceful construction. Time and history seem to be on her mind these days, as obsolete tools and elderly circuitry are lovingly assembled. In *Ozymondias* (2000), metal manual-typewriter keys hang from a wooden shelf. They may seem antiquarian, but recall: this artist did "hard-" and "software" long before the age of the computer whiz. —*Cynthia Nadelman*

This exhibition is at the Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, South Carolina, through April 8.

Marc Chagall

WILDENSTEIN

A wildly popular and often uneven painter like Marc Chagall should be judged by his best work. This splendid survey—covering the years 1917 through 1981, just four years before the artist's death at 96—offered a welcome opportunity to do just that.

In *Vitebsk from Zadunov Mountain* (1917), the 20-year-old Chagall uses a personalized form of Cubism to depict his birthplace in White Russia. An enormous tree's leafy limbs spread across a marble-colored sky like a vast green cloud, dwarfing the tiny town in the distance. If we look carefully beneath the tree, we discover the delicately outlined figure of a seated woman smiling and holding a parasol: perhaps it's Bella Rosenfeld, who traveled with Chagall from Paris so they could be wed in his homeland. Looking more carefully, we find that the base of the tree metamorphoses



Marc Chagall,
*The Violinist with
the World Turned
Upside Down, 1929,*
oil on canvas,
36" x 28".
Wildenstein.

into a man.

Early on, Chagall had found the ideas that would preoccupy him for a lifetime: the fusion of a modern, individuated style with his Russian Jewish roots, and the trans-
portive power of love. These themes reached full bloom in his 1929 *The Violinist with the World Turned Upside Down*. Much that's true about Chagall has already been said. His radiant palette is jewel-like, and his pictures do evoke the world of dreams. A painting like this topsy-turvy tour de force cuts through such truisms. It invites our imagination to somersault back to that time in childhood when fables were facts, and to later, when we fell head over heels in love.

—*Gerard Haggerty*

Harold Edgerton

ARIEL MEYEROWITZ

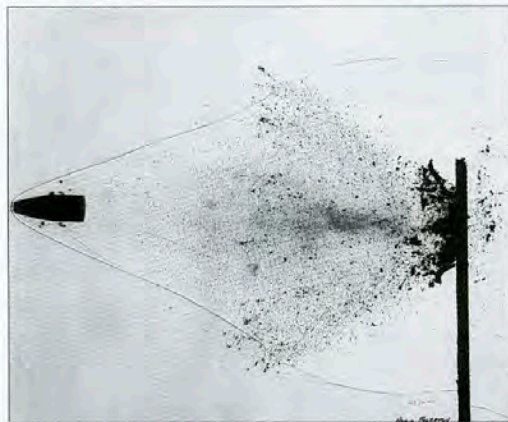
Harold Edgerton, the late M.I.T. professor and photographic pioneer, enjoyed the adulation of the art world—although he considered himself first and foremost a scientist. He was admired by Edward Steichen, and Beaumont Newhall included his iconic image *Milk Drop Coronet* (1936), capturing a drop of milk hitting a surface, in the Museum of Modern Art's first photography exhibition in 1937.

This exhibition, featuring one-of-a-kind vintage silver and color prints from Edgerton's estate, amply conveyed why Edgerton was and still is considered an important modern artist.

Edgerton's studies of sports stars in high-speed action, such as *Gussie Moran, Tennis Serve* (1949) or *Squash Stroke* (1938), featuring champion Jack Summers, easily conjure up Edward Muybridge's motion studies. But in Edgerton, a decidedly modernist esthetic reigns: the athlete's movements are captured as abstract blurs, illustrating a range of action in a single shot. These photographs clearly echo Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* and perhaps suggest a Cubistic desire to capture three-dimensional activity on a two-dimensional surface.

The images were installed here in groups, offering the visual equivalent of rhyming lines in a poem: *Turtledove* (1935), featuring a bird with wings spread to their fullest, was hung beside *Gus Solomons* (1959), a photograph of a dancer raising his elegant arms in birdlike fashion. And two violent but beautiful images possessing a surreal, frank eeriness—.22 *swift bullet passes through cardboard* . . . (ca. 1965), showing a bullet piercing a piece of cardboard, placed near *Test tube filled with water, breaking* (1938)—spoke to the ephemeral nature of objects, while, at the same time, permanently documenting the moments of their destruction.

—*Reena Jana*



Harold Edgerton,
.22 *swift bullet
passes through
cardboard at 4000 ft.
p/second,
single-flash,*
ca. 1965, mounted,
unique vintage silver
print, 18" x 22".
Ariel Meyerowitz.