



35, oil on canvas, 77 by 88 inches;

cartoonish, like late Guston drawings, but with his blocky blacks reconceived as rosy blues. Especially fine is *Circus Acts*, which—perhaps because of the loops, seemingly whipped into motion, and the taut, leashlike line rising diagonally from the lower right corner—reminded me of Giacomo Balla's famous wagging dachshund. Similarly joyous was the largest painting in the show, *It's Always Charlie Parker's Birthday* (47 by 69 inches), with its two insectlike forms vibrating away, airborne. More serene is *Liner Notes*, the title perhaps a pun, since the image is like a seascape, with what looks like a distant ship viewed through a tangle of dockside ropes.

The exhibition would have been stronger had fewer paintings been included—half of them were 30 inches square, and a certain repetitiousness resulted. These are works that yield their pleasures from long, slow scrutiny, and there need not be too many of them to convey the artist's skill in making protean a limited vocabulary.

—Faye Hirsch

Alfonso Ossorio at Michael Rosenfeld

Born in 1916 into a wealthy Filipino family and educated at Harvard, Alfonso Ossorio, who died in 1996, played a significant role as both an artist and a personality in the art world of the 1940s and '50s. A good friend to both Jackson Pollock and Jean Dubuffet, Ossorio bridged the

great divide between European art brut and American Abstract Expressionism. Though he began his career as a painter in the '40s, exhibiting with the legendary dealer Betty Parsons, he is best known today for his wall-mounted "congregations" from the 1960s. These assemblages, made from such abject materials as glass eyes, shells, animal bones, driftwood and shards of broken pottery, all glossily varnished, vacillate between a brute primitive energy and the fetishism associated with shamanism.

This exhibition included prime examples of congregations such as the shieldlike *Searcher* (1963) and the later *Root Club II* (1969), whose inclusion of bright blobs of colored plastic and lettering shows signs of the influence of Pop art. But the show's real focus was Ossorio's abstract and semifigurative paintings of the late '50s, many of them Abstract-Expressionist works whose darks, lights and high-keyed colors are built up into areas of heavy impasto. Among these is *Mirror Point* (1959), which appears to mark the transition from painting to assemblage. The lower half of this tall and narrow work contains a mixture of calligraphic brushwork and drip painting, against which is foregrounded a dark, heavily painted form collaged with wood scraps. Rising vertically from this form and climbing to the top edge of the painting is a bifurcated plumelike shape, one side a mottled purple and the other a wood-putty ocher. The whole provokes an association with smoke rising from a bonfire.

Scale-wise, the centerpiece of the exhibition was the 12-foot-wide painting *Beachcomber* (1953), whose overall composition consists of a dizzying array

of biomorphic shapes or creatures executed in crisp, flat, clean colors. This painting's wacky, fanatical rhythms and undulating forms produce a hallucinatory effect. But the most interesting and unexpected works shown were the mixed-medium examples from the '50s, whose overall compositions are fitted into irregularly shaped pieces of paper. *The Crowd* (1950) is a sensuous near monochrome—oranges of differing intensities prevail—executed in ink, wax and watercolor. Embedded in its layers of painterly, calligraphic marks and its tracery of fine lines one discovers surrealist/expressionistic images of figures engaged in struggle. The irregularly rectangular shaped fragment *The Helpful Angels* (1950) consists predominantly of manically scribbled lines in yellow, red and blue wax crayon that form a splayed, multiheaded female figure. In these drawings we find an unexpected merging of the influences of Pollock, Dubuffet and Miró. It is how Ossorio exploits and mixes these influences, and the eccentric results he achieves, that remind us that he is an artist well worth our attention.

—Saul Ostrow

Heather Rowe at D'Amelio Terras and the Whitney at Altria

For her second solo exhibition at D'Amelio Terras, Heather Rowe, a New York-based artist in her mid-30s, presented a skeletal suburban residence that is a memory palace of sorts. Called *On Returning* (2007), it narrows to a delicate prow made of two glass rectangles joined by a metal hinge. Along with suggesting that the entire five-unit structure is collapsible and portable, this prow

Alfonso Ossorio: *Beachcomber*, 1953, oil on canvas, 84 by 144 inches; at Michael Rosenfeld.

