

contemplation, ask Ezra Pound: "The Image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perforce, call a Vortex, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing. . . ."

It is this rush of *ideas*, rather than feelings, which makes Schoolwerth's new work so bracingly alienating. Here is the "expressionism" that is routinely harnessed to supposed emotional honesty, deployed instead to serve a cerebral, mechanistic agenda. So those who condemn these paintings as "reactionary" understand at least that they represent an absolute break with the usual liberal pieties.

—Adrian Dannatt

## Charles G. Shaw Archives of American Art, Michael Rosenfeld and D. Wigmore

Among the many American abstract painters active in New York during the interwar period, those working in Cubist-inspired veins present special problems. Charles G. Shaw (1892-1974), who was recently the subject of three concurrent exhibitions, is a perfect case in point. The prevailing problem is one of creative influence: Shaw's quasi-Cubism (a sort of "Manhattan Metro" idiom) is strangely derivative yet surely his own, having arisen from a visual culture fundamentally distinct from that of his Parisian sources. Supported by well-researched if modest catalogues published by Michael Rosenfeld and D. Wigmore, these shows came as close to a Shaw retrospective as we are likely to see for some time. Nevertheless, for a painter widely regarded as the most successful of the "Park Avenue Cubists" (Albert E. Gallatin, George L.K. Morris and Suzy Frelinghuysen round out the lot), Shaw

continues to beg a truly comprehensive critical reckoning.

One of the heirs to the Woolworth fortune, Shaw set out comfortably in the mid-1920s as a society columnist for *Vanity Fair*, *Harper's Bazaar* and the *New Yorker*, among other journals. At about the same time, he briefly studied drawing at the Art Students League under Thomas Hart Benton, and painting in the private studio of George Luks. By the advent of the Great Depression, Shaw had discovered Cézanne and Picasso. With apparently dutiful if effortless aplomb, he pitched his full energies to painting more seriously around 1932, just as a host of resplendent skyscrapers, such as the Chrysler and Empire State buildings (completed in 1930 and 1931, respectively) were reconfiguring the Manhattan skyline. The stepped profiles of such setback behemoths contributed decisively to Shaw's signature invention in the mid-1930s of geometrically shaped and reductively painted canvases.

In retrospect, such works have come to look like precursors to Frank Stella's polygonal canvases, if not prototypes for full-fledged Minimalism. Shaw was, however, no Minimalist in any truly historical sense of the term (and to suggest such comparisons is to veer radically off course from the reality of his unique perceptual and social horizons). This crucial issue was hardly broached by these otherwise enlightening exhibitions. Including only a single example of Shaw's shaped panel pictures, the installation at Rosenfeld comprised a sterling cross section of the artist's little seen 1930s Cubist easel pictures—each drafted neatly, as though by T-square, after the example of Juan Gris—as well as a series of wooden cutouts dating from his ensuing abstract Surrealist period of the early 1940s, when Shaw mimicked Hans Arp's 1930s "Constellations." Other canvases revealed Shaw's fascination with the wiry and exuberant sensibility of the widely celebrated, if then still up-and-coming, Alexander Calder.

D. Wigmore, which represents the Shaw estate, exhibited a sprawling array of pictures dating from the '30s through the onset of World War II. Here, one was able to readily retrace Shaw's evolution through Wigmore's smart, salon-style hanging of the work in eight stylistically varying sections. That said, this approach inevitably betrayed the uneven range of Shaw's talent, from the early tentative cityscapes to his comparatively masterful geometric reductions.

Rounding out these two shows, like a well-placed footnote, was the Archives of American Art's selection of Shaw ephemera: first-edition books, letters, drawings, photographs and the like. Any one of these venues qualified on its own as a well-hewn window onto Shaw's larger achievement. Collectively, they posed the question whether Shaw was,

more or less, a true American Cubist master, something that only a more sustained curatorial and critical effort will answer.

—Gregory Galligan

## Steven Brower Parker's Box

For his latest show at Parker's Box, Steven Brower brought together some eight years of work, filling the gallery with models and gadgets in vitrines, and lining the walls with corporate memos, documentary photos and project archives, all presented under the aegis of Brower Propulsion Laboratory (BPL), the artist's one-man corporation modeled on NASA. With his recent founding of BPL (its inauguration was backdated to include all his NASA-inspired projects), Brower joins artists who purposely obfuscate the distinction between fiction and reality, such as Walid Raad (who, under the moniker Atlas Group, documents events associated with the Lebanese War that could have happened but didn't) and Jim Shaw (who created the paintings and detailed the life of the fictional Adam O. Goodman, failed modernist painter and O-ist disciple).

When I arrived at the gallery, Brower was making unexpected repairs at his "mission control" desk—a compact hand-built module painted gray and outfitted with a computer, a surveillance camera and various other contraptions (e.g., a lamp with Carl Sagan's head as its base). The primary purpose of the control center is to broadcast live-camera feeds from and manipulate the functions of a model spacecraft that looks very much like the Mars Sojourner Rover. Brower based his Rover, named LIMPER (Limited Intelligence Marginally Produced Exploration Rover), on information gathered from sources including the Internet, aerospace museums and NASA libraries. The corporate press kit attached to the vitrine containing LIMPER explains its mission and mechanisms in a tone echoing that used by the space industry. While, in fact, LIMPER is an actual semi-autonomous robot programmed to accomplish several basic tasks, the press kit admits that the "alien environments" LIMPER will explore are "exclusively terrestrial."

Since the exhibition was something of a retrospective of Brower's NASA-based projects, previously shown works were included. "MUNIN and the Search for Life on Earth" was exhibited at Michael Steinberg Gallery in 2007 and takes its inspiration from the Mars Viking mission, the goal of which was to detect signs of life on the red planet. Brower proposes a series of tasks for the robotic spacecraft MUNIN that he claims just might prove there is no life on Earth.

Brower also displayed a glossy poster that recounts the story in words and pictures of his Lunar Excursion Module (LEM). Money is one item on his list of otherwise standard building materials for the rocket-to-surface vehicle. Not unlike NASA, Brower is constantly in need of funds for his projects. The life-size object features detailed reproductions of the exterior and the interior of the spaceship. It was shown in 2004 at Parker's Box and at Art



Charles G. Shaw: *Untitled (Cubist Still Life with Telephone)*, ca. 1932, oil on canvas, 24 by 20 inches; at Michael Rosenfeld.