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ART IN REVIEW

Alfonso Ossorio

Clifford Odets

Michael Rosenfeld

24 West 57th Street, Manhattan

Through Aug. 2

Alfonso Ossorio was anything but the half-mad outsider that his art implies. Born into a wealthy Philippine family, he was educated at English boarding schools and at Harvard; he lived most of his life in the Hamptons, where his friends included Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner. During World War II, Ossorio served in the United States Army as a medical illustrator, and you can see the hand of a versatile draftsman in his fanciful works on paper from the 1930's and 40's — a zany visionary picture of an exotic bird in an Edenic pool, for example. From the late 40's on, Ossorio worked under the influences of Pollock and Dubuffet, and the works here, in a show titled "Horror Vacui," reflect that. First he favored the all-over graphic activation of Pollock, though almost always with a Surrealistic spin, as in "Beachcomber" (1953), which swarms with small, hard-edged serpentine and spermatoc shapes. Around 1960, he began incorporating more and more found objects, like shells, glass beads, bones, plastic toys, fake eyeballs and lots of paint, blurring the line between two and three dimensions. Almost always in Ossorio's work there is a captivating, colorful density of information, but the appeal remains more a matter of decorative design than psychic weirdness.

Clifford Odets was another sophisticated primitivist, a famous playwright who drew and painted on paper from the mid-40's to the mid-50's as private relief from insomnia and writer's block. Ranging from childlike narrative to Paul Klee-esque abstraction, Odets's pictures here, in an exhibition titled "Paradise Lost," have sweetly charming surfaces and, as in a scarily distorted head called "Punitive Parent," undercurrents more darkly personal than what you find in Ossorio.

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