Moon River, 1981



In the late seventies, the term New Imagism was coined to describe a return to figuration in painting, an apparent reaction against the hegemony of Minimalism. This renewed commitment to subject matter is not confined to American artists. Many young German and Italian painters, such as Francesco Clemente whose allegorical works were seen recently in MATRIX (MATRIX/BERKELEY 46) are similarly engaged.

Other young artists of the seventies who were searching for an alternative to formalism began producing works in which decorative patterning played a major part. The decorative function of art was celebrated by the French artist, Henri Matisse, but had been relatively ignored, even derided, ever since. Bright color and exaggerated texture are characteristic of the new Decorative painting (see Joseph Zucker: MATRIX/ BERKELEY 41). Janis Provisor's work lies within or adjacent to these two major recent trends which, in fact, often overlap.

However, these five recent works by Provisor are far more disturbing than decorative. Their highly emotional subject matter is ambiguous, though they have in common the juxtaposition of landscape and figurative elements in a seemingly adverse relationship. In After Midnight, the main figure appears to be ensnared in a spider's web, while at the same time is threatened by an enormous plant. The kneeling, Cyclopean figure in Moon River is caught between the petal and stamen of an exotic flower. A male figure in Russian Hill appears to be fleeing a swirling environment

of black foliage and a radiant web, while the pink girl in Visitation Valley has lost her footing in the frenzy of Van Gogh-like brushwork and anthropomorphic plant forms.

Provisor uses modeling paste, copper or gold leaf, and layers of oil paint to build up the canvas. The process of layering is painstaking but responsive to change—if Provisor is dissatisfied with an area, she can paint it over and begin anew. The thickness of the material allows Provisor to extend forms beyond the rectilinear support. She often affixes three-dimensional objects to the surface at various stages during the process (for example, the egg-shaped growths on the figure in After Midnight and the jello mold blossoms in Moon River). In works both on canvas and paper, each image or shape is rigidly in place and maintains its own identity.

In comparing these new works with Provisor's paintings of the last couple of years (see Royal Image in Gallery B after December 1), one notices that Provisor has increased the amount of metallic paint in her palette. She has also broken down the surface of the paintings into multicolored, arc-chaped strokes which create a less regular all-over texture than before. In general, Provisor's handling of the paint is looser and more expressionistic in the most recent works.

The greater surface agitation is echoed by the increased sense of danger suggested in the paintings in MATRIX, all of which were completed during the past year. The life-sized figures in the two largest and most recent works are a dif-

ferent breed from the small figures found frequently in former paintings by Provisor. They look like they have been flayed so that their pink, raw flesh is exposed and vulnerable. The ovoid bumps on the protagonist of After Midnight imply disease or deformation; the figure in Moon River is covered with raised skeins of paint which may represent a network of nerve fibers. Without sense organs, these teings are handicapped in their struggle to survive. One raises a bow (of the kind one makes with a ribbon, a pun perhaps), as if in supplication to an unseen power.

Provisor grew up in Ohio and lives in New York. She spent several years in San Francisco, first as a student at the San Francisco Art Institute where she received her B.F.A. (1969) and M.F.A. (1971) and later as an instructor there. She was assistant Professor of Art at the University of Texas, Austin, from 1975 to 1978.

Constance Lewallen

Works in MATRIX:

After Midnight, 1981, oil on canvas mounted on plywood, 92" x 72". Lent by Hansen-Fuller-Goldeen Gallery, San Francisco.

Moon River, 1981, oil on canvas mounted on plywood, 92" x 72". Lent by Hansen-Fuller-Goldeen Gallery, San Francisco.

The Mission (District), 1981, oil, copper leaf on paper, $41\frac{1}{2}$ " x $29\frac{1}{2}$ ". Lent by Holly Solomon Gallery, New York.

Russian Hill, 1981, oil copper leaf on paper, $41\frac{1}{2}$ " x $29\frac{1}{2}$ ". Lent by Holly Solomon Gallery, New York.

Visitation Valley, 1981, oil, copper leaf on paper, $41\frac{1}{2}$ " x $19\frac{1}{2}$ ". Lent by Holly Solomon Gallery, New York.

Selected one-person exhibitions:
University Art Museum, UC
Berkeley '72; Grapestake
Gallery, SF '76; ProtetchMcIntosh Gallery, Washington,
DC '77; Hansen-Fuller-Goldeen
Gallery, SF '79, '80; Holly
Solomon Gallery, NY '80, '81;
Nancy Lurie Gallery, Chicago
'80.

Selected group exhibitions:

SF Art Institute, Paintings
on Paper '71; Humboldt State
University, Arcata, CA, TwoPerson Exhibition '73;
Cranbrook Academy of Art
Museum, Bloomfield Hills, MI,
Interstices '75; University of
Texas Art Museum, Austin,
Faculty Exhibition '76, '77;
David Mirvish Gallery, Toronto,
Canada '77; University Art
Museum, UC Santa Barbara,
Bay Area/Contemporary Strengths

'79; Douglas Drake Gallery, Kansas City, KS, New New York on Paper '80.

Selected bibliography about Provisor:

Albright, Thomas. "Women Artists Show Their Mettle,"

San Francisco Chronicle (Oct. 25 '72).

Moser, Charlotte.
"Houston, Southern Apocalypse,"
Art News (Oct. '76).

Shere, Charles. "Review,"

The Oakland Tribune (April 2

'78).

Larsen, Kay. "Art,"

Village Voice (Sept. 24 '79).

Murray, Jesse.

"Janis Provisor," Arts Magazine (May '80).

Junker, Howard. "Janis Provisor at Hansen Fuller Goldeen," Art in America (Nov. '80).

Armstrong, Richard.
"Janis Provisor," Artforum
(May '81).

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