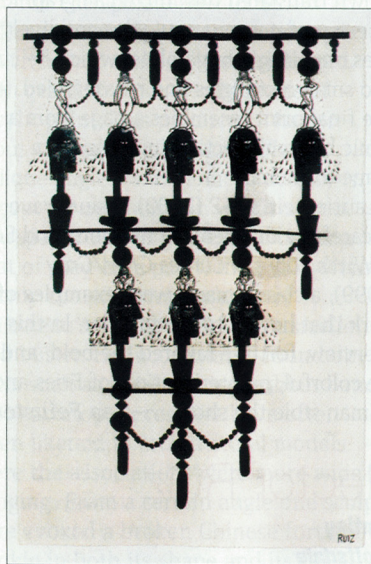


tural elements allude to issues of miscegenation, social hierarchy, status, and conformity.

*B Littled* (2005) shows that Ruiz is a master wood-carver, able to update an ancient medium with his own political observations. His blocky composition of a nude figure trying to cover herself comments on the objectification of women.

A small but substantial Day of the Dead skull titled *See What Happens?* (2008) is



Hector Ruiz, *Chandelier*, 2008, acrylic wood-block print on paper, 60" x 40". Bentley.

the artist's promising first foray into using bronze. The back of the head is carved with Louis Vuitton logos—an emblem Ruiz has used frequently in woodworking—that frame the iconic image of the smoke-spewing towers of the World Trade Center. The face wears a baleful grin characteristic of traditional Mexican totems. Whether the figure is meant to be a menacing specter or a respectful memorial is unclear.

—Lara Taubman

## Audrey Flack

LewAllen Modern  
Santa Fe

This thorough survey of the painting career of Audrey Flack, titled "Abstract Expressionist to Photo-Realist, 1949–1977," revealed an artist who, before she focused most of her attention on sculpture, beginning in 1981, had a decided knack for mimicry.

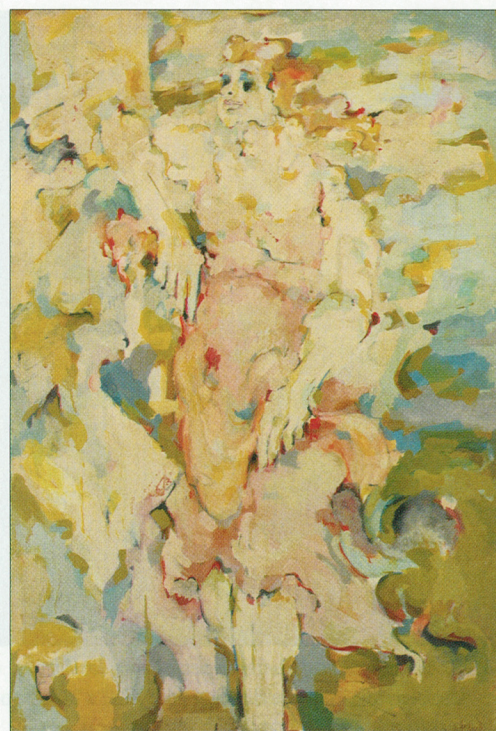
As a student in the late '40s and early '50s, at Cooper Union and then at Yale

under the tutelage of Josef Albers, Flack made paintings and portraits that cannily mirrored the then-reigning Abstract Expressionist approach. The earliest work in this exhibition, *Abstract for Tomlin* (1949–50), has a clear connection with the magnetic energy of Synchromism and Robert Delaunay, while Flack's *Figures & Trees for Bill* (1949–50), with its pattern of suggestive, descending red vertical squiggles, is an obvious homage to Willem de Kooning. A good number of works from this period show the artist developing a style of teasing the faintest resemblance to an identifiable image out of a camouflage of blotches and seemingly automatic markings. What at first looks like an interior expressionism turns out to be closer to an orderly, unemotional abstraction of reality.

With works such as *Figure Group* (Gorky) from 1953 and *Beatrix (after Velasquez)* and *Allegory of War (after Rubens)*, both from 1955, Flack embarked on a full-fledged figurative approach, with large canvases showing bulbous figures emerging from clouds of pale hues.

Flack made a name for herself in the '60s and '70s with her photorealist paintings, in which she embraced the literalness and allegory of the camera-based, mediated image. Early works in this manner, such as the small *Royal Jello* (1962), combine a personal note with a nascent, cool Pop sensibility. But later compositions, such as the heroic *Kennedy Motorcade* (1963–64) and the ennobling *Young Farmer in Oaxaca Market* (1967–68), put this pseudo-Pop manner in the service of political and social causes. This exhibition showed how, to her credit, Flack has repeatedly approximated the artistic style of a particular time and made it serve her own ends.

—Tom Collins



Audrey Flack, *Beatrix (after Velasquez)*, 1955, oil on canvas, 52" x 36". LewAllen Modern.

## Hung Liu

Turner Carroll  
Santa Fe

In this show, Hung Liu, who was born in China and is now an art professor at Mills College, in California, presented 22 multifaceted and moody portraits built upon historical black-and-white photographs.

Liu overpaints enlarged photographic



Hung Liu, *Madame I*, 2008, mixed media on panel, 41" x 41". Turner Carroll.



transfers with such traditional Chinese motifs as lotus blossoms, cranes, fish, birds, and dragonflies. The old-fashioned look of the photos, the use of multiple coats of resin, and the inclusion of gold leaf and paint drips give some works the feeling of antiques. But Liu's penchant for neon-bright colors and slick surfaces infuses the paintings with vitality.

Among the show's most powerful pieces were Liu's portraits of women, which draw on her own experiences during the Cultural Revolution, when she was forced to labor in rice fields and perform in Maoist operas. *Diva I* and *Diva II* (both 2008), two relatively straightforward compositions, each depict an unsmiling female singer against a fire-red curtain. The surrounding lotus, fish, and circle icons appear to be talismans meant to bring luck to the departed subjects.

In more complex paintings, Liu practices a sort of magic realism. The artist seems to be imagining personal histories, excavating forgotten tales so as to present narratives from different eras in a single work. *Madame I* (2008) exemplifies that sensibility: butterflies—which represent transformation in virtually all cultures—swarm around the somber seated figure, who seems oblivious, as if they exist in a different time, beyond her perception.

—Hollis Walker

## Chul-Hyun Ahn

C. Grimaldis  
Baltimore

What does infinity look like? Chul-Hyun Ahn's show of 13 mirrored light boxes (all 2008) answered this question over and over, in subtly different ways. The constructions of plywood and fluorescent light with exposed electrical cords unavoidably recall Donald Judd and Dan Flavin, but Ahn uses these industrial materials to a different end. Rather than clarifying visual phenomena without artifice, Ahn seeks to mystify.

Theatrically staged and technically precise, Ahn's geometric compositions offered the viewer a glimpse into an infinitely receding empty space. *Tunnel*, the only floor



Chul-Hyun Ahn, *Mu Rung Do Won (Infinite Garden)*, 2008, plywood, mirrors, lights, pebbles, plants, and trees, 7' x 10' x 3'.  
C. Grimaldis.

piece, was the most visceral; it provoked the dizzying feeling of falling into a void of otherworldly light. *Forked Series #12* and *Forked Series #13* create equally deep and empty spaces but are neatly contained on the wall. Thankfully, these elegant and fully resolved pieces were just a fraction of the show; Ahn's departure from slick minimalism in the rest of the exhibition saved him from being the David Copperfield of contemporary art.

The addition of organic elements transforms Ahn's work from simple optical illusion to a lyrical metaphor for nature's inclination to multiply and to fill a void. In *Branch*, undulating tree boughs, hacked up and arranged in diagonals, not only complicate the pristine emptiness but repudiate it. In *Mu Rung Do Won (Infinite Garden)*, pebbles and wilting houseplants dissolve into a thousand reflections, yet remain within the rigid confines of the box. The Zenlike paradox of simultaneous artificiality and reality was infinitely more satisfying than dazzling visual effects.

—Cara Ober

## Loriel Beltran

Fredric Snitzer  
Miami

Loriel Beltran presented 13 graceful works—all from this year—in this auspicious debut show, titled "Process/Processed." Painting with brightly colored acrylic and enamel on tree bark, wood panels, and plywood, the artist traces linear forms in the wood itself to create works that ripple with quiet beauty.

Beltran's striking, poetic abstract paintings are dense with allusions that become more apparent the longer one views them. He evokes the rich complexity of landscape with passages that bring to mind gently undulating hillsides, narrow bands of clouds at sunset, and stark horizons. These multiple perspectives coexist in such works as the rectangular *Untitled (process/processed #7)*.

Not all works were as promising. Hewing too closely to a palette of beige, light yellow, and pale gold, paintings such as 4' x 8' (*side*), made from thin bands of plywood, and 4' x 8' (*dripped*), which is loosely painted, failed to engage.

Especially compelling were Beltran's paintings on circular slabs cut from tree



Loriel Beltran, *Untitled (years of belief #5)*, 2008, acrylic and enamel paint, tree bark, insulating foam, and plywood, 37" x 42" x 16". Fredric Snitzer.

trunks, in which thin strands of color are superimposed on the growth rings. In pieces such as *Untitled (years of belief #4)*, framed in bark, Beltran has used physical elements from actual landscapes to create an abstract interpretation of the tradition of landscape painting.

—Elisa Turner