

His skill, though, at creating such irresistibly covetable objects can only be admired.

—N.P.

CHUCK DUGAN

Allan Frumkin

THIS WAS Dugan's first one-man show, and it was an impressive debut. The artist has had the nerve to pursue Action Painting in a time when the rage is expressionist figuration, although there are figures of sorts in his slapdash, multicolored outings. In *Levitating Heart* (1983) the heart seems to be rising off a blue plate, with splatters, splashes and scribbles of green, blue, purple, maroon, wine, yellow and orange making up the broader, more calligraphic body of the painting.

Green Heart (1983), an orange and red extravaganza of wild painting that spares not an inch of the canvas, features a heart at its center—we might think of the work as a heart attack of the most painterly sort. Dugan's paintings also undergo nervous breakdowns. *Brain Scan* (1983-84), which has a slightly more orderly, semigeometric format, revels in its own disorder, with a brain emitting messages that practically overload the painting with color and abstract figuration.

Rules of Engagement (1983-84) was more Gorkyesque in its deployment of vaguely biomorphic forms over a field, and its title hinted at the possibility that there are "rules" to obey even in Action Painting. But the rules apparently are made up as you go along. *Hot Dog Gala* (1983-84), with its sausage-red form at center and wild wiggles of mustard across the canvas, gives the impression that Dugan's titles are arrived at after the fact. The only rule is the unruly: a heart, a hot dog or an O shape—in the big *Double O* (1983-84)—serving as mere pretexts for canvases filled with color and gesture. In a way, Dugan makes a slight bow to the figurative Neo-Expressionists with his clear-cut images—usually one specific image to a canvas. But action is the order of the day. Dugan has a particular flair—even a divine spark—for chaos and is a painter to be watched.

—G.H.

JOAN SEMMEL

112 Greene Street

THERE ARE TWO distinct styles in Semmel's nine new paintings of people: the subjects' faces are meticulously rendered in naturalistic detail, whereas their figures, clothes, hair and surroundings are loosely painted with undulating brushloads of bright colors—orange, violet, green, red—

outlining or highlighting a knee, a mass of squiggly hair, a shoulder, shirt or face. It's as if the parts that "don't matter" in a portrait, at least for identifying the sitter, are suitable for vibrant, almost expressionistic fervor, while the faces must be gotten "right."

Semmel does both parts well—her portraits are photographically exact and convincing, the painting elsewhere looks fast and flowing—and there are lovely aspects to each. Nonetheless, the split is disconcerting. The portraiture loses force next to the luxuriant, confident painting in the rest of the canvas, and not just because it is less vigorous. It suffers by comparison, finally, because the looser areas are paradoxically more lifelike. In *David*, for example, a conventional portrait (albeit with cigarette) tops a skinny, middle-aged nude male body sketched in vivid oranges and yellows, one bicep painted hot pink. A cool blue rectan-

gle—a window or door—is in the background near a mirror in which the figure's shadowy backside is reflected. The man's head is capably done, but his liveliness dwells in his limbs and torso, in the mirror, even in the space of the painted room. The minutiae of resemblance, even in the hands of as good a draftsman as Semmel, are no match for visceral color and handling. It isn't that Semmel—or anyone else—should necessarily choose one way of painting over another, but the unlabored, luminous parts of her canvases look completely relaxed and natural.

There were also three large paintings of horses in this show—grazing nags in green pastures near shady woods. As subjects for paintings, these animals fared well. Faceless, nameless, their individual characteristics subsumed into sunlit scenes, they have the distinction of being parts of a smooth and unified whole.

—M.M.



Joan Semmel, *Siblings*, 1982, oil on canvas, 64 by 90 inches. 112 Greene Street.



Chuck Dugan, *Rules of Engagement*, 1983-84, oil on canvas, 78 by 120 inches. Allan Frumkin.