

Art in Review

Christina Ramberg

'Corset Urns and Other Inventions: 1968-1980'

Victoria Gitman

'On Display'

David Nolan
527 West 29th Street, Chelsea
Through Jan. 21

Works by Christina Ramberg and Victoria Gitman, in these excellent separate shows, are linked by a shared preoccupation with fetishism and women.

A fetish, in Freudian terms, is an inanimate object that someone finds erotic because of its intimate association with the human body. In the case of Ms. Ramberg, the sadly underknown Chicago Imagist who died in 1995, the objects in question are high-heeled shoes, bras, corsets and similar accoutrements as well as more overtly sadomasochistic forms of bondage.

In many funny and weird cartoon studies on paper, she pictures torsos, feet, hands and heads encumbered by such psychologically charged devices. In "Pinched Corset" (1971), one of her elegant small panel paintings, the index finger of a woman's hand probes between the shiny black fabric of a tight corset and the otherwise naked back of another woman. Painted in severely muted colors — except for the red fingernails — it is slyly suggestive and wonderfully mysterious.

Ms. Gitman, who lives in Florida, paints life-size pictures of beaded purses with a verisimili-



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND DAVID NOLAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

Christina Ramberg's "Untitled (Torso With Pants)," right, and Victoria Gitman's life-size painting of a beaded purse, above, are at David Nolan.



DAVID NOLAN GALLERY, NEW YORK AND THE ESTATE OF CHRISTINA RAMBERG, CHICAGO



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT MCKEEVER/JOHN CURRIN, GAGOSIAN GALLERY

"L'Intimité," by John Currin, on 1815 wallpaper by Joseph Dufour et Cie, is part of "Grisaille."

tude that verges on magic realism. With a fine-tipped brush, she renders every tiny, glittering glass bead and the beautiful mosaic patterns that myriad beads add up to. The type of fetish that Karl Marx identified — the commodity — naturally comes to mind. But the purse also may be seen as the feminine equivalent of the cigar. Sometimes a purse is just a purse, but in Ms. Gitman's hands it is certainly something more. **KEN JOHNSON**

'Grisaille'

Luxembourg & Dayan
64 East 77th Street
Manhattan
Through Jan. 14

"Grisaille," organized by the writer and curator Alison Gingras, breathes life into a stodgy-sounding bit of art terminology. Its title refers to a painting method that dates to the 14th century and was sometimes used to imitate sculpture. Here, though, it's applied to just about any artwork made in shades of gray.

The New York half of this

trans-Atlantic group show (the other half is at 2 Saville Row, the gallery's new London space, until Friday) benefits from a spot-on installation designed by the architect David Adjaye, and from some equally precise choices by Ms. Gingras. Where a number of paintings by Jasper Johns, Brice Marden and Frank Stella would have fit the theme well enough, she has come up with rare or early examples. (Here, for instance, is Mr. Johns's 1968 "Screen Print 5.")

On the ground floor, Glenn Brown's stretched-out version of Dalí's "Autumnal Cannibalism" signals that "Grisaille" will not be another dull show about the monochrome. It faces a lobbey, cast-aluminum wall piece by César, which sets the stage for shimmering metallic works by Carl Andre and Jeff Koons.

On the second floor, John Currin's 2011 painting "L'Intimité" — of a nude woman playfully palpating her right breast — hangs on 1815 wallpaper by Joseph Dufour et Cie. This rococo backdrop brings out the Currin's grisaille underpainting and complements the eclectic, salon-style grouping on the opposite wall. (It includes a Giacometti painting and a tonal 17th-century Dutch harbor scene by Willem van de Velde the Elder.)

Politeness retreats on the third floor, where the walls are hot pink and the pairing of a salacious photorealist painting by Betty Tompkins and an austere grid by Agnes Martin feels deliciously sacrilegious. And up on the fourth level Bjørne Melgaard has turned the bathroom into a serial killer's hideout, with letters to the Antichrist scrawled on chalkboard walls and syringes littering the sink.

The show feels a bit played out by the time you reach the fifth floor, where Dan Colen's trash-on-canvas assemblage and Rob Pruitt's painting over an inkjet print from Ikea seem more concerned with found objects than

color. But this is a show that wears its gray well.

KAREN ROSENBERG

Brian Novatny

'Picture Fishing'

STO

'My Slow Called Life'
Mulherin & Pollard
187 Chrystie Street, near
Rivington Street
Lower East Side
Through Jan. 1

Two types of somewhat familiar but spirited realism negotiate a semipeaceful coexistence in these side-by-side solo exhibitions. Both also emphatically depart from reality to explore different parts of the underbelly of American life.

Brian Novatny, who is having his second show in New York, excels at small chiseled ink drawings of everyday people and scenes that operate somewhat nastily in the vicinity of portraiture, "B" movies, political cartoons and news photos. Rendered in ink with a minuscule brush, his subjects feel like details from some larger narrative. They tend to be only partly depicted, blending into and emerging from the background with various distortions and truncations that bespeak unacknowledged psychic stresses.

Are those two good old boys — one slightly smaller and more sonlike than the other — George Steinbrenner and George W. Bush? Might that blond woman depicted in a drawing with the unflattering title, "feckless," be the actress June Allyson? Only the artist knows for sure. But especially in this show, tacked unframed to the wall, the drawings create a rogue's gallery of recognizable types, misfits and malcontents. They're not exactly ugly Americans, but they're rare-

ly endearing.

STO, an artist-musician who goes by the one name, is an owner of Cinders Gallery, a stalwart of the Williamsburg area of Brooklyn, that is between spaces. He is making his Manhattan gallery debut here with an ensemble of painted papier-mâché sculptures. Striking a marginally more cheerful but at heart no less jaundiced note than Mr. Novatny's images, they recreate the ersatz contents of a studio apartment seemingly occupied by an artist. A bed, a chest of drawers, an unkempt bathroom, a partly eaten pizza and a down-and-out refrigerator figure in the scene, as well as artworks and a bicycle.

The precedents for his efforts include the reality-based sculptures and environments by Claes Oldenburg, Red Grooms and Kevin Landers, but STO manages to keep his distance, primarily with simple, slightly pumped-up shapes and bright flat colors. His objects might have drifted out of some unusually painterly comic book. Especially appealing are a billowy bed and a bowl-like bathtub that almost come across as characters in their own right.

ROBERTA SMITH

Paul Sharits

Greene Naftali
508 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through Jan. 14

Paul Sharits (1943-93) was a pioneer of what the critic Gene Youngblood called "expanded cinema." He made "flicker films" of stroboscopically changing col-

ors and structural films that toyed with the basic properties of the medium.

Both types are represented here. "Apparent Motion" (1975) is an entrancing, 28-minute film of granular particles swarming and flickering like snow all over the rectangular projection. What seems at first like randomness becomes a fascinating, constantly changing system of variously colored flecks running at different speeds, now furiously fast, now slowing to brief stops. Illusions of depth and substance come and go; sometimes the imagery resembles lava, sometimes a watery surface pelted by rain. You oscillate between what the eyes see and what the mind makes of its fleeting perceptions.

More interesting than transporting, "3rd Degree" (1982) involves three loops projected side by side that show film strips with sprockets racing this way and that. The image of a woman lighting a match recurs, along with a woman's loud voice intermittently protesting, "Stop" and "I won't talk." Frequently one of three films stops, melts into foaming bubbles and disintegrates — not in the present but in the alternative universe of the projection. It is all about frames and how they structure experience.

The exhibition includes psychedellic felt-tip-pen drawings, diagrams and gridded abstractions made by sandwiching lengths of film between sheets of plexiglass. It all makes for an illuminating trip back to the predigital history of the moving image. **KEN JOHNSON**



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MULHERIN & POLLARD



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Brian Novatny's small chiseled ink drawings include "feckless," left. Below, a painted papier-mâché room by STO is featured in "My Slow Called Life."