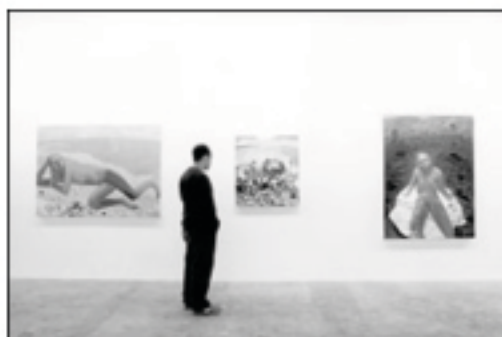


December 13th, 2002 5:00 PM

Wild Card

by Jerry Saltz



The last painter's last subjects:
Dana Schutz's *Reclining Nude*,
Flowers, and *Frank on Rock* (all
2002)

(photo: Robin Holland)

Dana Schutz

LFL Gallery
530 West 24th Street
Through January 11

In her too-controlling but still dear press release, Dana Schutz, 26, writes that for her first solo exhibition she's painted a "fictional man from observation." Whether this means she actually studied or just imagined him, I don't know. Regardless, she says his name is Frank and that she and he are "the last people on earth." Juicier still, she adds, "The man is the last subject and the last audience and, because the man isn't making any paintings, I am the last painter." Sweet, egomaniacal, and bananas, this premise is also a cagey way of clearing a space for herself. Judging from this overhung 12-painting exhibition (titled "Frank From Observation"), that space is enchanted, frantic, and still germinating. Some of the paintings are more confident than others, a few flop, one is riveting, and the premise is intriguing, with Frank as a puppy-eyed, balding cross between the comedians Chris Elliott and Tom Green, who is eventually killed and dismembered.

Which may explain the freaked-out look in Frank's eyes in *Big Day on Earth*, and why he hides behind a tree in *Frank at Night*. Both paintings are comical, but the former is unresolved and the latter is too close to work by Jorg Immendorf and Martin Kippenberger. *Frank as a Proboscis Monkey* is admirably compact but just misses. Of my favorites, *Slugs* is covered with a squall of extruded paint strokes; *Suicide*, a deranged still life of a broken record player, has something of the "rightness" of Marsden Hartley; *Flowers* is a tantalizing mass of off-kilter brushwork, helter-skelter space, and flamboyant color; and *Night in Day* looks like a latter-day Francis Bacon. In it, as well as in *The Gathering*, we see Frank mutilated, with his fingers cut off and his internal organs dangling from a scaffold or in a heap. In two other canvases, perhaps preludes to these, we see him nude—once purple with a semi-erection, and again on what appears to be an ice floe looking pathetic.