

Paul Gagner, *Hairscaping*, 2015, oil on canvas, 30" x 26"

ReVision All Over Again A Group Exhibition Curated by D. Dominick Lombardi at Galerie Protégé in New York City

by Steve Rockwell

As the legendary New York Yankees baseball manager Yogi Berra liked to say, "It's déjà vu all over again." With déjà vu, I reference the show at Galerie Protégé in Chelsea titled *ReVision*. Running further with the analogy, Yogi Berra's part here was played by D. Dominick Lombardi. As the manager, or curator of the exhibition in this case, he would have laid out his strategy to the players and barked, "Get out there and play ball!"

We have hints to what Lombardi's game plan might have been from his catalog introduction, directed here, not so much to the participating artists, but the viewer. "Living in the moment," is

described by Lombardi as a lost art, but he acknowledged that, "even the most benign or inane occurrences, have to be recorded and passed along via social media."

ReVision is an attempt by the artists, Paul Gagner, Stacy Greene, Eric Ramos Guerrero, Bill Gusky, and Jeanne Tremel, "to make sense of it all." My part as a reporter resulted in a retelling, or a further re-vision, the "all over again," part of Berra's quip. I was careful not to revise, or emend my impressions to excess, but attempted as closely as possible, to call it the way I actually saw the work, without further malapropisms.

From the outset, it seemed necessary to confront and deal with a persistent aspect of art, the tension between fidelity and fiction. Are artists truth-tellers or liars? Are they true reflectors of their experience, or clever fabricators of an elaborate make-believe? Can such a distinction even be made? If we are to believe Bruce Nauman as his 1967 neon window or wall sign purports, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*, they are truth-tellers, the "true" artists, in any case.

Paul Gagner's *Hairscaping* cuts as close to the hair follicle of the problem as is possible. The work is a penetrating examination and exploration of the limits of vision. It asks the questions, "Where does the image reside?" and having located it, "How can it be conveyed?" The image might be seen as a *Paul Through the Looking-Glass* version of the Lewis Carroll story, a climbing through a mirror into the world that Alice saw and beyond it, an attempt to get behind the image, or as it is here, to get to the image at the back of the artist's head. Gagner sets his *Hairscaping* in a hair salon and submits to, what amounts to an imaginary scalping, the "cross-cutting" of the forest of Gagner's mop of hair into a landscape or "hairscape," as he calls it. In any case, the shaving of the back of the head is a form of violation, even as it appears to be self-inflicted.

Gagner's brush is deadpan with a comic twist, the hook tilting to the surreal, not unlike Magritte in the posing of a metaphysical problem. His *Occupational Hazards* painting closes the gap between a frown and a grin. Instead of crying about the disaster of a giant rock crashing through the window, we can laugh at the absurdity of the artist's easel and painting being flattened. The work echoes Magritte's *The Anniversary* (1959), where a large boulder crams a room.

Stacy Greene's circular *Searching for Pierre Loti* collages at 7-1/2" across are about the size of a dinner plate serving, her knife having carefully positioned each morsel just so, separating the greens from the reds.

The subject of Bill Gusky's watercolor on paper *A Change of Venue* appeared to be a man in a hat and long coat in the process of texting someone, perhaps sending off the notification for the venue change. His *Diet of Worms* acrylic and colored pencil on canvas featured the caricature of a smiling boy hoisting a bouquet of flowers. Gusky's paintings are invitations to construct narratives, or at the least nudges to make logical sense of the elements in his work. In this we are frustrated by a circularity, or slippage in meaning, the persistence of a metanarrative.

The cheery note in *Diet of Worms* was clouded by the repeating motif of an outline of, what at first glance might have been a vase and flowers, but seemed instead to be a propane torch, or even a Molotov cocktail. The wryly comical phrase *Diet of Worms* itself, signifies the rupture of Christendom into Catholic and Protestant sects

with the branding of Martin Luther as a heretic. Forms, images and text float unanchored, overlapping in places, with possible meanings recombining and multiplying from one layer to the next. Gusky has left the door open for viewers to draw their own conclusions.

Jeanne Tremel's use of the word contraction in the title of her work *Shrub Contraction*, connoted a touch of modesty – an overly-complicated rigging together of disparate parts. Perhaps, to keep it from rolling or wandering away, the piece was moored to a beam in the gallery. The "shrub" held the aura of a galaxy of the animal, mineral, and vegetable. Tremel made a point of situating the work on the floor. Many of us, especially if we have desk jobs, live and work in the top half of our bodies, between head and elbow, with hours spent gazing into monitors and screens. Tremel signals downwards to the world at our feet, where we can connect with nature. In order to

appreciate that world, it is required that we bend down. The gossamer world that the artist has introduced us to, may only be perceived in the stooping – her contraption having been threaded and woven into a delicate whole, much as a spider might have done.

To summarize, what mystic truths have the five *ReVision* artists unfolded? Gagner concedes that there are limits to what we can know and control. Through a journey of the imagination, Greene has demonstrated that all experience may be connected. Guerrero elucidates the veil between the private and the public. Gusky acknowledges that there are truths, but that they are elusive. Finally, Tremel points to nature as an essential source of understanding.

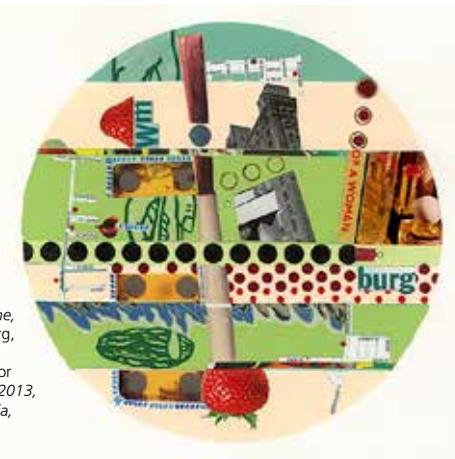
With the *ReVision* exhibition, one might have burrowed deep to mine the nuggets of insight out the individual creative tracts, or stepped back to see the forest, where the sum may have been greater than its parts.



Bill Gusky, *Diet of Worms*, 2013, acrylic and colored pencil on canvas, 30"x 24"



Jeanne Tremel, *Shrub Contraction*, 2013, wood, yarn, oil paint, ceramic, plastic, metal and fabric, 30"x 30" x 24"



Right:
Stacy Greene,
Williamsburg,
Brooklyn –
Searching for
Pierre Loti, 2013,
mixed media,
7.5" x 7.5"



Eric Ramos Guerrero, Habitat, 2009, ink and gouache on digital print, 48" x 36"



Above:
Bill Gusky,
A Change of
Venue, 2015,
watercolor
on paper,
12" x 15"



Paul Gagner, Occupational Hazard, 2015, oil on canvas, 48" x 44"



Jeanne Tremel, Bygones, 2008, mixed yarn, thread and safety pins, 30" x 30" x 24"