



BARBARA ROGERS

MARCH 8 THROUGH APRIL 7, 2007

GRÁFICAS GALLERY

BARBARA ROGERS

“The inner element, i.e. the emotion, must exist; otherwise, the work of art is a sham. The inner element determines the form of a work of art.”

Wassily Kandinsky

The over-arching consistency of Barbara Rogers’ poetic, fleeting, and ambitious art suggests this artist has a very admirable agenda, one set in part by Wassily Kandinsky, amongst a handful of pioneers, a century ago. For Rogers that schema is nothing less than a drive to abolish, through her unique pictorial form, separations between art and life, dreams and consciousness, ornament and abstraction. This artists’ painting, printmaking and assemblage shimmer with the evocative resonance of music, of poetry, and of dance.

It is precisely Rogers’ “inner element” that distinguishes her highly accomplished enterprise. With unquestionable elegance, Rogers’ etudes can make one sense that “all we feel or seem/ Is but a dream within a dream.”¹ As with great perfumes, where an ineffable *scent* takes precedence over the name on the bottle, Rogers’ works instantly arrest us by their mood. Her ethereal titles (such as *Waiting*), are basically verbal footnotes to a visual

message. It is Rogers’ color sense and her unerring gift for pattern and placement which create a sensation of expectation, of breathless anticipation.

In the work entitled *Waiting*, in fact, we immediately, almost miraculously, recollect a pungent scent or mood; only afterward do we label that as memory. This, in much the same way one murmurs *L’Heure Bleu* or *L’Air du Temps*, only after we get a whiff of one of these incomparable perfumes. What gives *Waiting* its mesmerizing aura is the artist’s virtuosic manipulation of her highly personal *mélange*. Not an allusive title or mere subject but above all color, then line and light, rhythm and pattern. *Waiting*, with its eerily hovering, art nouveau mandalas, and its riveting, shocking-pink heart is a tour de force of decorative non-objectivism. This work, atmospherically so exotic, so Indian or Asian, subliminally so labial, suggests the hot-house atmosphere of an opulent, otherworldly *mis en scène*, perhaps some hidden harem.

Rogers orchestrates her diverse ornamental motifs, drawn from nature or from design, within the arena of a shallow color field. This positions her as a confrere of a number of artists, the so-called “Pattern and Decoration” group, many of them first championed by the late, great New York art dealer, Holly Solomon. Chief among these artists are several highly-regarded women, such as Joyce Kozloff, Valerie Jaudon and Miriam Schapiro. What links them and Barbara Rogers is their objective to bring into Western abstraction the seduction and strength of certain non-Western, or at least non-Modern, highly ornamental traditions,



such as intricate patterns found in Islamic tile, Byzantine and ancient Celtic tracery, Far Eastern porcelain and textiles, and Native American weaving. That so much of the ornamental tradition of other cultures is in the hands of women must appeal greatly to Rogers and her décor enthusiasts. Moreover, it is gratifying to find such “women’s work” acknowledged and exalted to the plane of pure abstract art.

Several works in the current exhibition present such borrowed motifs from faraway places and times, particularly *Garden of Feminine Reason #16* (2003), and *No. 4* from the collagraph series *Up From the Deep*. In her garden of reverie and feminine reason, the painter casts floral, leafy and lattice motifs upon a misty, indeterminate ground which recalls the ice and green clouds motifs of celadon porcelain, or the drifting clouds of ancient Sung landscape painting. In *No. 4*, garden motifs seem to recur, yet it is also very possible that Rogers has been peering into a microscope, or illustrated books on botany and aquatic life, the better to enliven her very personal floating world. The transparent gliding discs, and many of the swimming denizens in her new “Up From the Deep” series, look like the amazing things (plankton, diatoms) one marvels at in a single drop of water, or see slithering across the deep ocean floor.²

In this context of the garden”, Rogers own remarks³ reinforce our sense that her new works are, as she says, “emblems of the microcosm.” Rogers further remarks that “when I paint, I am an explorer in the terrain of my psyche”, or her own garden of the imagination where she resuscitates bits and pieces from “the

drowsy dark cave of the mind...dropped from the day's caravan.”⁴ “Still”, the artist hastens to point out, “I don't place too much value on subject matter; my lack of involvement with it enables me to concentrate on [the work]”.

These observations naturally lead to brief considerations of Rogers' deft use of collage stratagems and materials to bridge the gulf between art and life, between the abandoned and the treasured, between detritus and art. Perhaps the greatest gift to the history of modern art was the discovery, by Picasso, Arp, Schwitters, Ernst and Duchamp, that ephemera from life gain huge evocative powers when they are appropriated for the uses of art. Rogers' use of found materials may not always be cut-and-paste collage, but her borrowed imagery is wholly within the intentions of collage altogether. The artist not only makes use of photographic motifs in her works, but incorporates actual plants, and impressions of plants, in her paintings and prints.⁵

Ultimately, for this observer, Barbara Rogers' elusive body of work is a splendid demonstration of synthesis and, more remarkable, of synesthesia.⁶ Rogers' study of art history (she admires both Bosch and Matisse, for differing reasons) is evident in works that partake of qualities from many traditions which she melds as her own. As for “synesthesia” in her art—surely this writer is not the first observer, momentarily enveloped by her effulgent color, vaguely to apprehend wafting scents, or think to hear musical chords.

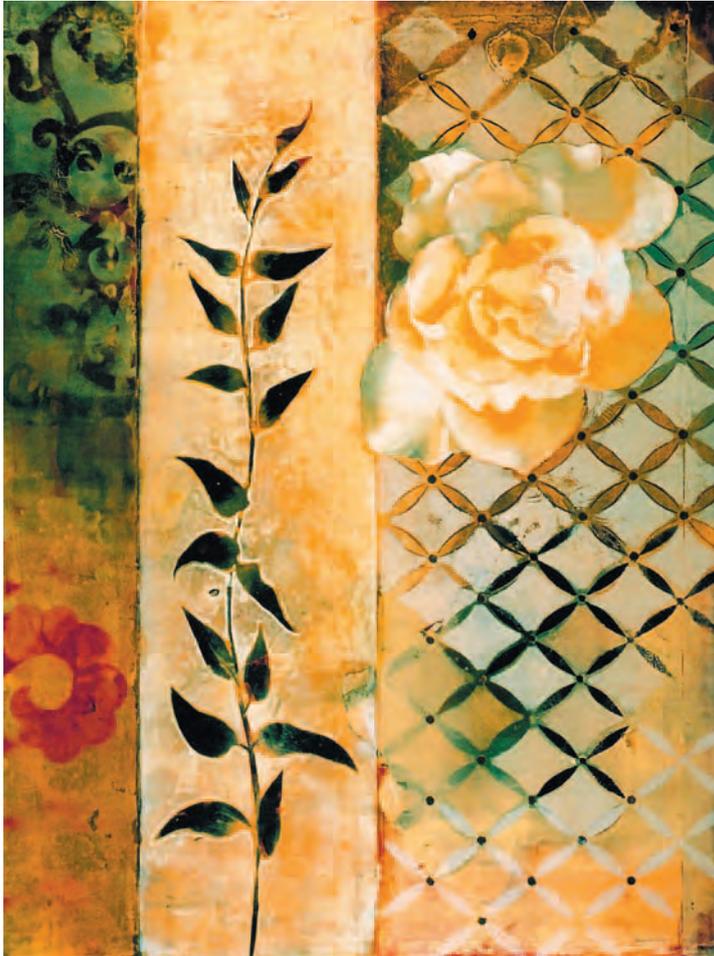
Any viewer could be forgiven if, in the grip of some of Roger's remarkable, pulsing colors—magenta, saffron, cinnabar, mustard,

malachite and lapis—he or she may feel propelled into some Ottoman spice bazaar, or into the strains of some symphonie fantastique. Tellingly, the artistic goal of the first abstractionists, the Symbolists and yes, Kandinsky, was to provoke, in their visual art sensations, emotional vibrations, (the intangible “inner element” once more), of sheer scent and sound. ■

JAN E. ADLMANN

Santa Fe, 2007

Jan Adlmann is an art historian and critic, based in Santa Fe, who has published several artist monographs and the 1996 survey, “Contemporary Art in New Mexico.” He has been director at several art museums over more than two decades. Before removing to New Mexico, Adlmann was Assistant Director at New York's Guggenheim Museum.



FOOTNOTES

1: Edgar Allen Poe

2: Many key artists of the late nineteenth century Symbolist movement found a powerful new impetus for their abstract fantasies once they had opportunities to gaze into the hidden worlds then being revealed by new scientific tools such as the microscope. Redon, notably, often created “beings” inspired by what he saw under the microscope.

3: Private conversation with the artist as well as a recent artist’s statement shared with the writer.

4: *“In the drowsy dark cave of the mind/dreams build their nest with fragment/dropped from the day’s caravan.”* Rabindranath Tagore, “Fireflies.”

5: At the same time Picasso and Braque and Schwitters were incorporating fragments from the real world into their work, scraps of wall paper, discarded trolley tickets, pieces of string. Certain key early modern writers, notably T.S. Eliot, in his “Wasteland”, and Pound, in his “Canto” poems, were “collaging” fragments of overheard conversation or briefly glimpsed bits of advertising into their narratives.

6: *Synesthesia*: A phenomenon in which one type of stimulation evokes the sensation of another, as in hearing of a sound resulting in the sensation of a color, or a color evoking of a scent.

EXHIBITION LIST

Being in Her Garden #2
26 x 18"
1994
oil, encaustic and
plant materials over
toned gelatin silver
print mounted on
100% ragboard

Being in Her Garden #3
26 x 18"
1994
oil, encaustic and
plant materials over
gelatin silver mounted
on 100% ragboard

**Dream Seeds:
Lotusland #1**
13 x 10"
1990
graphite on paper with
beeswax and enamel

**Dream Seeds:
Lotusland #3**
13 x 10"
1990
graphite on paper with
beeswax and enamel

**Dream Seeds:
Lotusland #6**
13 x 10"
1994
graphite on paper with
beeswax and enamel

**Dream Seeds:
Lotusland #8**
13 x 10"
1994
graphite on paper with
beeswax and enamel

**Dream Seeds:
Lotusland #10**
13 x 10"
1994
graphite on paper with
beeswax and enamel

**Dream Seeds:
Lotusland #16**
13 x 10"
1995
graphite on paper with
beeswax and enamel

**Garden of Feminine
Reason #16**
48 x 36"
2003
oil and encaustic
on panel
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Inverness #1
8 x 10"
2005
oil and encaustic
on panel

Seeds of Change #10
6.5 x 5"
2001
oil on ragote paper

Sharjah: Garden Pond
28 x 40"
2005
oil on paper

Up From the Deep #1
30 x 22"
2006
collagraph with
hand-work

Up From the Deep #2
30 x 22"
2006
collagraph with
hand-work

Up From the Deep #4
30 x 22"
2006
collagraph with
hand-work
[page 4]

Up From the Deep #5
30 x 22"
2006
collagraph with
hand-work

Up From the Deep #6
30 x 22"
2006
collagraph with
hand-work

Up From the Deep #8
30 x 22"
2006
collagraph with
hand-work

Up From the Deep #14
30 x 22"
2006
collagraph with
hand-work

Up From the Deep #15
30 x 22"
2006
collagraph with
hand-work

Up From the Deep #17
30 x 22"
2006
collagraph with
hand-work

Waiting
40 x 28"
2006
oil on paper
[cover]

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gráficas
Works on Paper

Lynnette Hyde Mautner, Director
6420 North Campbell Avenue
Tucson Arizona 85718

Telephone 520-577-5440

Facsimile 520-577-5340

www.gallerygraficas.com