

MAY 2014

ARTnews

Artists' First Influences

John Cage:
The Sound of Silence

The Ever-Notorious
Marc Quinn

AIDS in the Art World



anything but static. Bursting with organic bounty, both these midnight assemblages and her more traditional still lifes visually echo the mantra expressed by the centuries-old Dutch paintings: *memento mori*, or “remember you will die.” Every flower, every insect, every fruit and vegetable that Tavormina has placed just so in her exquisite arrangements has suffered the fate no living thing can escape. —*Joanne Silver*

UP NOW

‘The Blinding Light of History’

**University of New Mexico Art Museum
Albuquerque
Through May 17**

Russian art of the last 50 years has not spent much time in the limelight, so this concise show of three major figures of the Nonconformist movement, all of them rigorously trained in Socialist Realist attitudes and techniques, is a welcome revelation. More than 20 years separate the careers of Ilya Kabakov and the late Oleg Vassiliev from that of Berlin-based Genia Chef—the youngest of the group—but all three share a measure of cynicism, tinged with humor and whimsy, about the collapse of the Soviet system.

Chef’s fierce portrait of Rasputin, his graying face and gnarled hands sickly realized in thick impasto, greets visitors to the gallery. Beyond it, the similarly monumental *Athlete* and *Venus* (both 2003), in shades of putty brown, suggest Greco-Roman culture collapsing under the weight of its own self-importance. But Chef’s most engaging works are small surrealist gems, such as *Exotic Species* (1995–97), which pits a tiny, brooding Joseph Stalin against a creepy but gorgeous orchid.

Vassiliev, who died last year, brought a formidable graphic style to both straightforward portraiture and wickedly smart satire. In *Khrushchev’s House* (1993), the beaming, pudgy premier strolls away from a block of drab, prisonlike apartments. And in *Red Shoe* (2003), a spin on Khrushchev’s famous 1960 speech at the United Nations when he removed his shoe and slammed it against the podium, the artist envisions a ranting oligarch holding aloft a stylish slip-on loafer.

The best known of the trio is, of



Oleg Vassiliev, *Red Shoe*, 2003, oil on canvas, 18½" x 19¼". University of New Mexico Art Museum.

course, Kabakov, who is internationally celebrated for his powerful installations. The two paintings here—*Before the Exam* (2002) and *Under the Snow #3* (2004)—may be somewhat of a disappointment, even a bafflement, for Kabakov fans, but the show as a whole offers a tantalizing glimpse into a culture that is both foreign and strangely familiar. Ultimately, “Blinding Light” leaves one longing to know more about how the Cold War and its subsequent thaw have affected the best and the brightest Russian talents. —*Ann Landi*

‘On View’

**Scheinbaum & Russek Ltd.
Santa Fe**

In an era when mural-size C-prints seem to be dominating the galleries, it’s a joy to revisit black-and-white photographs that were made during the last century, when a gelatin silver print of modest proportions could pack as much wallop as a Cindy Sherman psychodrama. Titled “On View,” this selection of 20 such images included some of the greats—Edward Weston, Minor White, and Aaron Siskind among them—along with a few surprises.

Henri Cartier-Bresson’s *Seville, Spain* (1933) offered a textbook example of the artist’s signature

“decisive moment” philosophy. Glimpsed through a jagged hole broken into a thick wall, a gaggle of schoolboys is led by a young boy on crutches who seems to be grinning wildly along with the rest—or is he? Closer examination shows that he may in fact be their victim, tormented to a breaking point. A similar ambiguity attends George Tice’s *Buggy and Farmhouse with Windmill, Lancaster, PA* (1965), which may either present an idyllic image of bucolic serenity or depict the bleak, buttoned-down

austerity of country life.

There was a beautiful wall of nudes here: from Walter Chappell’s slyly abstracted *Nude Armpit, Wingdale, New York* (1962) to Judy Dater’s lonesome self-portrait taken atop a craggy rock. Eugène Atget’s four prints offered a glimpse of the elegance and mysteries of Paris in the early 1900s, while Sebastião Salgado’s 1986 image of a Brazilian gold miner was a moving reminder of the contemporary miseries that continue to exist in certain regions of the world. Two images by Paul Caponigro, of a thistle and a rock wall, were gorgeous examples of the mesmerizing power of the close-up. Eliot Porter’s dye-transfer print of a New England pond was the sole color image in the show, and, though it was powerfully sumptuous, it seemed a little out of sync with the rest—like emerging from the spell of a movie house into bright sunlight. —*Ann Landi*



Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Seville, Spain*, 1933, gelatin silver print, 9½" x 14". Scheinbaum & Russek Ltd.