

in Paul Pratchenko's recent series of acrylic-on-canvas paintings and works on paper. Each of these modestly scaled works is a magic-realist portrayal of a protagonist or group of protagonists circumnavigating or otherwise escaping from a troubled suburbia beset by some kind of impending disaster, with death-by-falling and death-by-fire the most frequently depicted impending calamities. Whether doll-like acrobats doing back flips in advance of an onrushing flood, stilt-walkers hazarding dodgy terrain or a dog rushing headlong through a ring of fire, these circus-bred heroes are always pictured as having a blithe confidence in their chances of prevailing over menacing situations, even though the viewer can plainly see that the likely outcome is far from certain.

One of the reasons for the apparent confidence of Pratchenko's figures is that they seem capable of altering their own physical mass with as much ease as a chameleon alters the color of its skin. In *Leap* (2002), for example, we see a muscular acrobat clad in tights vaulting a wooden fence to escape a burning building. A stunning mannerist composition highlights the drama, calling attention to how the figure seems to become translucent as it travels through midair. This underscores the allegorical implication of literally picturing disappearance, suggesting that psychic disassociation or a schizoid out-of-bodiness is the preferred way to deal with the overwhelming anxiety of imminent misfortune.

In all of these works, Pratchenko shows himself to be as much a luminist as a magic realist, and the canny combination of these illusionistic styles makes for a stunning visual experience. Indeed, Pratchenko's high-finish technique possesses a lightness that perfectly echoes the comfortable assurance of his self-possessed figures, as the sumptuous light and dreamy atmospherics of the scenes seem to emanate from behind the carefully glazed surfaces without any visible sign of struggle. Our appreciation deepens with close inspection of the many incidental details included by Pratchenko, which seem both subtle and a bit fantastical in the way they appear to grow organically from within the works' own remarkable substance. —Mark Van Proyen

## Manuel Ocampo at Paule Anglim

There were nine new paintings in Manuel Ocampo's recent exhibition, and the majority were painted in a ghostly aqua-tinged grisaille that conveys a dreamy and introspective reticence. As with the artist's more expressionistic earlier work, these large oil-on-canvas compositions teem with cartoon monstrosities and ominous pictograms, frequently including crucifixions, swastikas and crude, quasi-racist graffiti. Different, however, is Ocampo's shift in the direction of a subdued lyricism, stemming from soft-edged, low contrast shapes and running the gamut from the blithely bittersweet to comedy of a dark, ironic flavor.

In several of the new works, Ocampo scraped away areas of paint in a manner suggesting the arbitrary disintegration of layered billboards or the cumulative wear and tear that time metes out to ancient paintings. For example, in *Tú También Esturas de Moda (duck and dinosaur)*, 2002, there is a sizable zone of exposed canvas at the middle of the composition where paint has been abruptly pulled up. This bluntly material technique has the effect of making the other elements of the image seem more psychologically distant, even as their cartoonish articulation works to return them to the foreground of the viewer's awareness. This formal/psychological interplay seems closer to the core of the work's meaning than does the portrayed vignette of a drunken reptile being awakened and rebuked by a grimacing duck.

Occasionally, the figurative elements turn out to represent familiar historical personages. In *Don't Give Them Any Puzzles to Think On/Social Subjects Presented as Enigmatic Hieroglyphs Given the*

David Brody: *Untitled (02/04)*, 2002, oil on wood, 20 by 15½ inch oval; at Esther Claypool.



*Authority of the Crypt* (2002), we find a graffiti-like articulation of the devil-horned, disembodied head of Karl Marx perched atop a thick book in the lower right corner of the composition; a pair of chained fists holding chicken legs reach upward at the left. Additional, less distinct images include a variety of religious symbols and a sneering, astigmatic insect wearing a jaunty top hat. These elements are arrayed more or less equidistant from each other, rather like the stalemated pieces of a half-played game of fantastical chess. Marking our moment as one paralyzed at an ideological impasse generated by an out-of-control media stream, this work did a fine job of illustrating "The Inadequacy of Struggle Against The Inadequacy of Struggle"—the thematic title which Ocampo gave to this absorbing exhibition.

—Mark Van Proyen

## SEATTLE

### David Brody at Esther Claypool

Though viewers should be warned about the "adult" nature of David Brody's subject matter, his sexually explicit paintings conjure the polymorphous perversity of the child. Brody depicts imaginary gratification objects that consist of disembodied breasts with long, red, baby-bottle nipples; vaginal and anal orifices; curious probing fingers that belong to no body. Set in featureless landscapes with occasional puddles, rocks or tufts of grass, the body parts evoke a surreal pre-Oedipal dream world, where the limpid atmosphere and quietude seem eerie; pale breast/buttock forms float blimplike in blue skies or sit passively before low horizons. A sense of mystery pervades these paintings, but the needs giving rise to the strange erogenous organs Brody envisions are nothing if not familiar. Detached, the tender body parts remind us of when we were connected. Impersonal, they hint at repressed yearnings for intimacy. Lacking agency, they disavow the all-encompassing power of the maternal body that once gave us comfort.

Brody's desiring subject, the needy babe in arms, gives way in another group of images to the



Paul Pratchenko: *Leap*, 2002, charcoal and mixed mediums on paper, 29½ by 25¼ inches; at Braunstein/Quay.

inquisitive child, perplexed by the enigma of sexual difference. Here, the body parts are supplanted by solitary female figures, naked except for fetishistic high-heels or black pumps, in vacant interiors or flat, expansive landscapes. Isolation and frontality lend these exhibitionist figures an iconic status as they stand or squat to urinate, staring blankly in the viewer's direction. They are buxom, masquerading as pin-ups, but the slim hips, spindly legs and hairless pudenda are distinctly those of prepubescent girls. An archaic, forbidden curiosity seems to be at stake as these matter-of-fact spectacles reveal the origin of male voyeurism in an insatiable need to know: how are girls "different"?

A highly intelligent artist, Brody has read his Freud and is amused by him. If the cartoony quality of these images betrays a certain wry, humorous approach, Brody is absolutely serious about technique. An emphasis on fine drawing, delicate surfaces and careful considerations of color and light informs all his pictures. One might even wonder whether this obsessive craftsmanship served some sublimatory purpose—were it not, that is, for the unabashedly unsublimated, frankly psychosexual content of Brody's provocative compositions. —Sue Taylor

## LONDON

### Michael Landy at Maureen Paley Interim Art

Michael Landy won extensive public and media attention in 2001 with *Break Down*, his installation