

# ART WORLD

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## NEW YORK EXHIBITIONS

BY BARNABY RUHE

**CAROLEE THEA** (Adam L. Gimbel Gallery, 15 E. 49th St., 15 March through 9 April)

Thea presents wall constructions, and counterpoises them with four drawings of heroic proportions. While the constructions are formal and robust shallow relief works, the drawings are garrulous and immediate. Both deal with predicaments that are fraught with anti-formal incursions and confrontations with psychological intrusions onto personal spaces.

Thea makes constructs that deal with both painting and sculpture. She elaborates off the square, with sculptural eccentricities projecting off in shallow relief. The works perpetrate a dialectic between the private disorders painting can elicit and the public formal ordering given to some sculpture. The paint has teeth, and the sculptural scaffolding has a formalist rigor that is both thoughtful and physical.

Thea's strategem is to establish a refined sculptural framework, and then to set about "injuring" the corners. She introduces relief zigzags and a vicious and unruly paint. Her formalist relief arrangement is met with paint that can only be guilty of aggravated assault.

The central square that sets off each construction establishes a picture plane. A square, which has no scale sense, makes the idiosyncratic projections possible, and lethal. The sculptural construct can be read two-dimensionally, as the projections out of the square play along the wall and not off it. A recurring dome shape in each construct asserts, in Thea's private language, the "holy place of the canvas...to be violated." Here we witness the descent of a formalist element.

Thea's work has the precision of a locksmith, with each aspect a clue to another part of the work, cuing in each item off the other. A camel statuette, in one work, serves the larger concept of the essential flatness of the construct.

The rough paint and the formal framework interpenetrate in insinuation of a locked-in design. Their aesthetic interaction is at first seen as cool, diplomatic, and contractual. Shortly it is discovered, however, that the renegade paint serves the formalist design nicely, that the refined and resolved sculptural relief is threatening to explode at the seams, and that the images are messing with subliminal crimes. Nothing exists in isolation, for each element is implicated in the intent of other devices and perpetrations. Intent and context and emotional thermodynamics are only resolved in the interchangeable aesthetic. The poise achieved elicits a liminal response, a betwixt and between, the paradox of the encounter of mutually annihilating tendencies.

The 5 x 10 foot drawings in oil stick and graphite are simply exhilarating. Unfettered by sculptural form, they rather burst the bounds of the unframed paper.

Thea's latest paper piece, "Exit Parnassus", contains a rampage of figures in her own image, worked into abstraction through intertwining rhythmic thrusts. Where a Raphael could relate figures architectonically in Apollonian confinement, Thea regenerates here with a spontaneous release factor, from a Modern

Dance-informed option for body kinetics unsuspected by the Raphael's and the Poussins.

Reading back to the wall constructions after the encounter with the paper pieces, we see entirely comparable predicaments. Eccentric asymmetry informs both ways of working. And an innate kinesthetic sense pulses throughout.

Thea's works in the last ten years have proved her to be an artist of major significance.