

fs were scarred and and sections of paint d back to reveal the undereath. Though mented, this work ex-formal relationship of tangle (as found in a with the same intensity ists explored still life.

cent show, however, exhibited paintings in oil on canvas. No long-by architecture, Magis-ts in these works to some unspecified tropi-pe into a personal and sion. In his reliefs, the provided the structure; aintings, this function is by vertical, horizontal al lines. Over this grid aints swirling leaflike forms

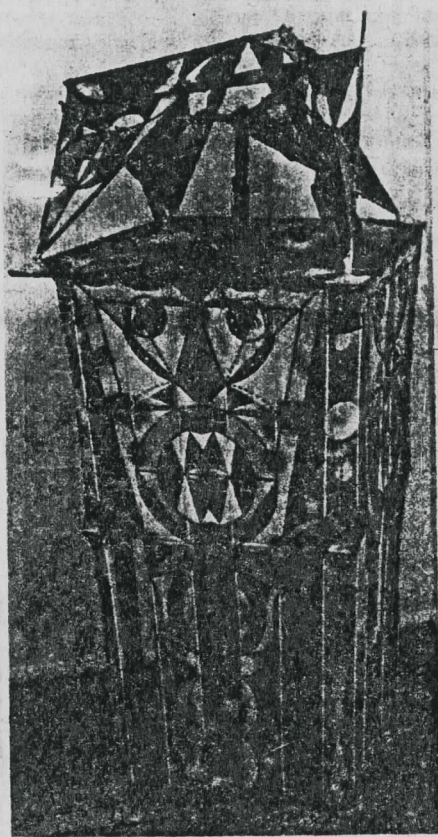
is color ws and almost p the jung painting siveness subtleties. Per erences o objec agistro. e is ev -a desir l world problem is not ce ited forr ough. The oo much ns (fo ape alm center ess sug after is direct int, the p edge. ticism is Magistro ods, has and of h given th is reliefs far off.

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zarre self-awareness.

Characteristically the works are composed with Ukiyo-e simplicity. Mussoff's drawing style is mannered rather than objective. Although she invents the figures and situations, they are based on her determined effort to distill some sort of essence from the behavior of her friends: out of her responses comes this stylized world of her art.

Mussoff is immensely influenced by Egon Schiele. Some of her backgrounds recall the simple linear treatment of backgrounds in the watercolors Schiele did in prison (where he was sent in 1912 for "immorality" and "seduction"). And yet where Schiele conveyed a spastic eroticism and anguish by wavy lines and colored washes, Mussoff's work is characterized by sharp, defiant



Martin Johnson: *Close Dirty Hair*, 1982, mixed mediums, 44 by 20 by 21 inches; at Phyllis Kind (review on p. 177).

Mussoff at the Knowlton

Mussoff's energetic colored-drawings of women and race apart—feisty but v wavers, with spiky hair ing, jewellike eyes, car-the odd routines of their d. Their apparel has a style (obviously, these choose to exist at the the cultural scene), and vements are theatrical like, stiffened by a bi-

lead the eye from section to section. These montagelike breaks serve to vary her images and to layer their meanings. At the same time, they formally abstract the images by fragmenting and re-combining them.

The most successful of these drawings is *Three-Headed Figure with Hats*, a centered, cruciform work. In the lower part of the horizontal section Mussoff depicts a woman in a transparent slip and belted lower garment. She is drawn with an open line; only her upper body, cut off at the collar bone, is hatched with color. A

head fragment, nodding in a Christ-like way, is centered over the torso; a blazing pink completes the background above. Flanking this head are two more head fragments wearing Tom Wolfe Panamas—an intimation of chic that denies the potential solemnity of this "martrydom."

So far, Mussoff's public oeuvre has consisted only of works on paper; recently, however, she has taken up oil painting. Certainly, Mussoff's strong design sense, punchy draftsmanship and gritty, rebellious social attitude make her one of the more interesting representational artists to come down the pike in recent years.

—Joe Shannon

Martin Johnson at Phyllis Kind

Martin Johnson's sculptures belong in the sideshow of a traveling circus. They have the aura of freaks on a holiday, exhibiting themselves disdainfully for our astonishment, yet denying their own abnormality—pushing us back on our own. We are as much observed and commented on by these works as observing and commenting on them. The self-recognition they force on us makes our curiosity about them as pathological—freakish—as they are. The whole effect is of the slipperiness of relationship between knower and known in modern art, a sardonic demonstration of the evasiveness of even the most ordinary meaningfulness in the art context. Johnson's sculptures are all the more sardonic because they present themselves to us as commonplace objects, masquerading as monsters by reason of their profound cosmetic ornamentation. An atmosphere of deception is crucial to the work; it shows us the power of ornament as comment. As with Kurt Schwitters—and with a similar formal rigor—Johnson gives us objects with an intriguing autonomy, strange hybrids of the colloquial (folk and funk), which are simultaneously irrational, perverse acknowledgements of the nightmarishness of the familiar. The conversion of an ordinary object into an obscene ornament is the key to this work; the pieces demonstrate ornament's power to be revelatory of the uncanny, and thus of ornamentation's peculiar independence as an artistic process.

Beginning usually with a found object—chairs are common—Johnson wittily adumbrates it into a perverse idea. He cocoons his object in a Rhoplex web—a dense matrix the object seems spontaneously to secrete. The object's transformation is completed by

bright color, confirming the effect of uncontrollable fiercely kaleides-copic proliferation. It is this run-riot effect—the result of a construction principle applied relentlessly—that gives the pieces their predatory look. Johnson's sculptures are like old-fortune-telling machines in a penny arcade, grimacing their routine truths at us. Indeed, the grimace, like that of the Joker in the old Batman comic strip, is a favorite expressive form for Johnson, reminding us that it is the malleable root underlying both tragic and comic masks. Here we see Johnson's "fundamentalism," his pursuit of archetypal origins. The slipperiness of surface meaning is the sign of that pursuit.

Johnson is a 20th-century E.T.A. Hoffmann, offering a collection of quirky dolls, seemingly trivial yet like all personal junk subtly erotic and constituting a semi-independent dream world—a world of almost indecipherable moods, for all the brazenness of its contents. He carries forward H. C. Westermann's project of sardonically revealing the double meanings of a seemingly straight reality, although with more artificial, less organic means. At the same time, Johnson has clearly understood the anatomy lesson of Cubism; he mingies planes, creating an effect of ornamental excess, which not only dissects space but disperses its parts in a seemingly random way. The total effect is of an arbitrary mingling of the purist ("engineered") and surrealist ("literary") sides of modernism, creating a sense of organized irrationality.

Johnson's sculptures are gargoyles in search of a secular cathedral on which to roost, reminding us of the macabre character of everyday life, the profanity that engulfs us all. They are household gods come alive while we sleep and grown possessive of our private space. Their collective effect—the studio vista Johnson used for his exhibition announcement shows its importance—is of a bizarre world built on a precise logic, mockingly shadowing our waking world. These works are the products of the same critical paranoia which Dali experienced as one of the basic sources of creativity in the modern world. This paranoia produces hallucinatory visions of the known which show just how unknown it really is, because it is so encrusted with our half-known intentions.

—Donald B. Kuspit

Self-Portraits at Allan Frumkin

This two-part invitational show of contemporary self-portraits repre-