

Revisiting the 20th Century

In viewing twentieth century art from the vantage of its closing decade one may discern four major currents that have ebbed and flowed throughout its winding, temporal course.

One current, running bank-full this past decade, ferried post-modernist representations of the mind across a confluence of image, language and context traceable to the modernist headwaters of *dada* and *surrealism*.

Another, flowing steadily throughout the century, carried a reductive vision of space, time and perception, in form that was orderly, geometric and abstract. It flowed from the same classical springs as those shared by the French Cubists, Russian Constructivists, Italian Futurists and the Dutch *de Stijl*.

We may recall also that early in the century there was yet another deep channel fed from tributaries in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. At its flood it carried the passionate vision of Picasso, the sensual touch of Matisse and *les fauves*, and the hauntingly erotic *Le Sacre du Printemps* of Stravinsky. This current, which seemed to ebb in the latter half of the century, may be again on the rise at its close, refreshed and enriched from the effluence and cross currents of a multi-ethnic vision that is both eager and impatient.

Though one can acknowledge validity in the political preoccupation of many who enter the multi-cultural stream, often the idioms and conventions employed are derivative of the very traditions and prevailing modes being opposed or supplanted. On the other hand, some artists, less politically driven among the ethnically aware, are bringing forth a revitalizing vision and touch that embraces variety, celebrates the sensual, and defines itself through feeling and experience more than through the guidance of doctrine or theory.

In just such a stream is **Peter Wayne Lewis** immersed. He has long insisted on embracing myriad sources; and he fluently mixes idiom and style without the cant and restraint of orthodoxy or stylistic allegiance. In a single work by Lewis one can find Africanesque figuration closely embraced in strong patterns that may recall the abundant flora of his native Jamaica or the ritual body painting and sensual scarification practiced in tribal cultures. But his forms and images may also be, just as easily, vestiges of the more lavish among the works of Picasso-as Gaelic in spirit as they were African.

In other works Lewis may give way to a painterly abandon and in layers of improvisation call to mind big-band jazz, mambo rhythms or-as well-the headlong paint applications of Pierre Soulages, Hans Hartung and their *tachiste* associates.

Indeed, Peter Wayne Lewis has become a strong swimmer in the convoluted currents bearing us to a new century and new cultural definitions. Presented in this exhibitions are selections from his mature works of the past six years-rich amalgams of European, African, and American sources: works which introduce a paradigm of multiculturalism into the ageless art of painting.

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San Jose, CA
March, 1992