

Benjamin Menschel Fellowship

Exhibition

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The Benjamin Menschel Fellowship Program to support creative inquiry was endowed by a grant given to The Cooper Union by the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation in 1994 to support work in the fields of art, architecture, design, and engineering. This generous grant was intended to provide funding to exceptional students who propose scholarly independent projects that will in some way provide a culmination to their educational endeavors at The Cooper Union. It is the hope of the Goldsmith Foundation that students designated as Benjamin Menschel Fellows will be encouraged by their awards to complete bodies of artwork, develop scientific protocols, or otherwise further their intellectual investigations in a manner that will provide inspiration and illumination to the community as a whole.

The 2000 fellows express their gratitude to the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation for its generous support.

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Foundation Building
Fifth & Sixth Floor Galleries
New York City



The Cooper Union
for the Advancement of
Science and Art

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Exhibition

Eliza Chaikin
Christine DeMattia
Justin Francavilla
Michal Raz-Russo
Nina Tandon
Augusta Wood

Eliza Chaikin

The images in this body of work fall into two series: Japanese landscapes seen from high-speed trains, and Japanese hyper-designed landscapes.

The hyper-designed spaces were designed as backgrounds or transitional areas, visually and functionally. They are enclosed, sanitary, safe, and miniaturized representations of ideal conditions, whether natural or urban. They function as simulations and idealized versions of the external world. Depth is bluntly fictionalized or dealt with delicately; there are few random acts or accidents.

The images of the Japanese landscape seen from high-speed trains are stills from digital video footage. Depth is exaggerated by using digital compression to show multiple frames of time and space simultaneously in one frame. The focus of the image shifts between the resultant image and how that image was created, as the speed of the train and the use of video become important parts of the final image. For me these images best represent how the landscape appears at high speeds; the background remains static while the foreground exists as glimpses or fragments.



There was a time when visual expression came easily to all of us. As children we all had a natural desire to communicate ideas visually. A drawing done by a child expresses visually what he or she is unable to express in words.

When I worked as a substitute art teacher at Avon Avenue Elementary School in New Jersey I had my kindergarten classes experiment with various themes that got the children intensely involved with drawing. This allowed their mark-making to reflect their emotions. Working closely with these students for six weeks allowed me to learn from them and come to understand the natural energy they brought to their work. This understanding guided me when I began working with the children's marks in my own compositions. By using a computer to rearrange the children's marks, I created non-pictorial compositions of my own. In doing so, I stripped the marks of their original intent and explored the energy inherent in the marks in a sophisticated way. Using the actual marks rather than simply copying them kept the marks fresh and sincere.

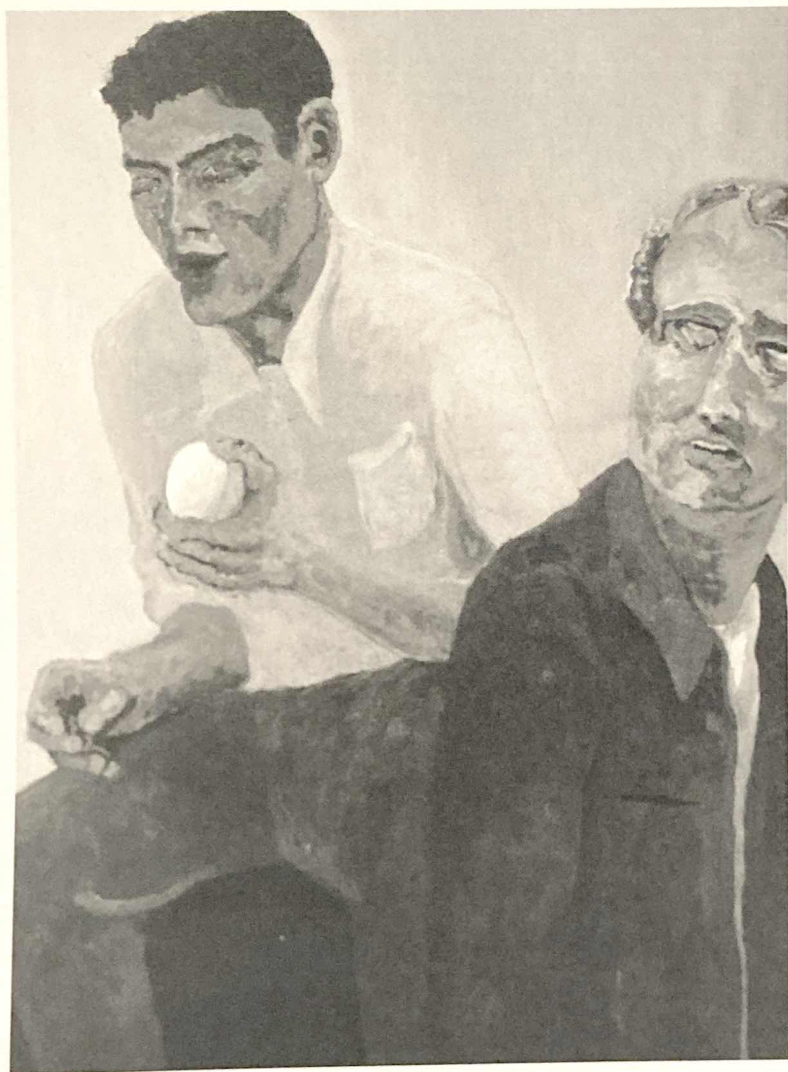
I remain intrigued by the way identical marks can be transformed and manipulated to create new works of art with different intentions.

Christine DeMattia



The number of images produced by the advertising industry far exceeds that of the fine arts world. Advertisers thoroughly dominate the realm of public space with images that tempt consumers with luxury items and other excesses of a booming economy. The world of fine art produces many provocative and profound works, but usually keeps them hidden away in galleries. Even though these galleries are open to the public, they are frequented only by people in the know who have the time to visit them. To address this situation, I created a painting and reproduced it as a poster that I hung in a number of public spaces on the streets of New York in October 2000. This exhibition documents my efforts to bring the underrepresented medium of painting into the public space usually reserved for advertising, and, in so doing, to offer the general public a moment of reflection.

Justin Francavilla



Michal Raz-Russo

The golden age of Sephardic Jewry ended in 1492. For centuries the Sephardim (from Sepharad, the Hebrew word for Spain) had flourished in Medieval Spain. The history of the Jews is one of cultural adaptation, and this was a time when art, culture, and language were marked by a convergence of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic influences. In an attempt to purify Christian Spain, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella's decree of expulsion was enacted on March 31, 1492, ordering the 300,000 Jews of Spain to leave within four months. Those who chose to stay were either forced to convert or face death. All trace of Jewish life was destroyed or taken over. This was an exile from a country many Jews considered to be a second Jerusalem. In 1868, the Spanish Republic declared a pledge to religious tolerance, welcoming small numbers of Jews back. However, the official government repeal of the 1492 expulsion edict did not occur until 1968.

My ancestors were Sephardic Jews who were exiled from Spain and over generations made their way to Israel. These photographs and their stories are not only an exploration of my past, but also aim to express the lingering tensions and hidden aspects of Jewish Spain. These silent streets and buildings are all that is left to remind us of a vanished land of Jewish history.



Nina Tandon

Immigration has been a fact throughout human history, but the mass migrations of the post-imperial age are unparalleled. Where once the shift was from country to town, now the movement is from "third world" to "first." As the poet Amitava Kumar said: "The immigrant is the everyman of the 20th century."

Now, every weekend in Jackson Heights, Queens, I can join my hands to the dozens of others squeezing the mangoes imported from Mexico and Brazil at the Indian grocery. Every Thursday, I can join the yoga class taught by a Frenchwoman at my gym. The same global climate that attracted my father to this country also made it worthwhile to import manhole covers from India.

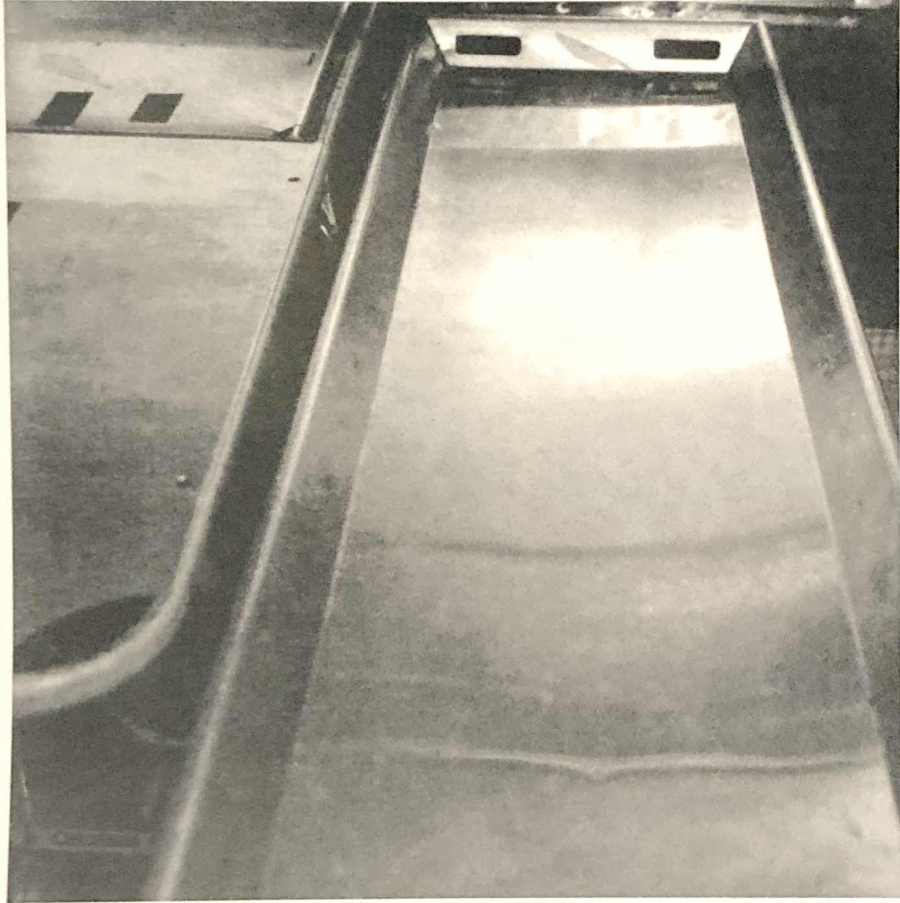
I am hoping to expose not only the way my own roots have interacted with my surroundings, but also to express some of the tensions between persons with multiple cultural identities and the mainstream society which has been shaped by them. Everyone changes when the exotic becomes familiar.



Augusta Wood

preparing for

quietly they tell a history
in a space behind closed doors
they hang loosely, whispering
so as not to move but for gentle undulation,
to hold our shape,
molding memory with our contours.
this is evidence,
proof of how and that we have lived.
present and absent. here
present in the folds, the delicate seams,
fastened with a latch.
we are grafted in a second skin.
we are sensual, vital, also fragile and mortal.
and now cool metal on our backs,
touch our skin, does just our shape stay?
we are undressed and motionless. absent
but for the light illuminating space.
it steps in to take our shape.
care for me here.
gently rub my skin. remove my bandages.
dress my body, comb my hair.
prepare me for an evening. prepare me
in my absence.
only we are allowed to see.



Cooper Collection