

LISA SETTE GALLERY

2009-2010

FALL/VOLUME 12





CLAUDIO DICOCHEA

A casual viewer could be forgiven for not realizing that painter Claudio Dicochea's mischievous and multilayered acrylics are in fact inspired by 18th century Spanish *casta* paintings. Simultaneously pastoral and deeply disturbing, *casta* images depicted families of various ethnic backgrounds in New Spain (the recently colonized Mexico). The original *casta* paintings, remarks Dicochea, "look like a table of elements, showing different families from lightest-skinned to darkest-skinned," and illustrated a colonial taxonomy that included such racial categories as "mestizos, mulattos, coyotes and lobos." One of the many ironies of the *casta* painting genre is that while such cultural propaganda encouraged European intermarriage with indigenous populations, the children of these couplings were inevitably relegated to lower social status or casts. It's no stretch to see Dicochea's works as the hybrid New World offspring of the *casta* paintings, enlisting both lowbrow and high art stereotypes to examine how power relationships affect the contemporary structuring of cultural identity.



Dicochea's frenetic pop interpretations are unrepentant in their investigation of modern-day successors to the strange cultural obsessions illustrated in the original *casta* paintings. But rather than being an art historical critique of 18th century tropes, Dicochea's work instead takes on distinctly 21st century concerns with gender, race and class—that all-powerful trifecta that Dicochea succinctly rephrases as "blood, money and sex—the great themes that inform my work."

To start with, Dicochea reverses the original *casta* convention of light-skinned European fathers engendering mixed-race families: in Dicochea's versions, blond or fair-skinned female media icons are paired with well-known swarthy father figures (for example, the Queen of England paired off with Sitting Bull). Says Dicochea, "the figures of the *white*

mother and the *dark* father come to us masked in stereotypes. Consequently, the child is a result of two signifiers reproducing. But what happens next? What do stereotypes reproduce?"

In Dicochea's bizarre family portraits, the result of such a collision is an unruly, humorous, and ultimately phantasmagoric juxtaposition of media idols and cultural stereotypes. Like their *casta* predecessors, which often displayed objects signifying New World wealth and conquest, Dicochea's collage-like acrylic panels draw in multiple cultural signifiers, and the paintings' backgrounds reveal a material landscape in which further transgressive mixing takes place. On closer inspection, we may find an Atari joystick, a typical suburban foyer, or the graphic elements of concert posters or urban subway maps framing Dicochea's "mixed families."

If these contemporary *casta* paintings frequently reference low-culture mediums like comics, movies, and science fiction, all the better to explore how power operates in our culture. Dicochea explains that while such genres don't have the same lofty cultural status as realism, "they're very real and popular with millions of people because they do deal with issues of power, authority, dominance and the frailty of our bodies... It's about thwarting the narrative lens that was used in these original paintings by replacing it with other more popular lenses, like science fiction and horror." One look at Dicochea's boisterous paintings underscore his contention that while each component may

be culturally significant, ultimately such genre-crashing is one way "to create a conflict in the work that provides relief through humor."

Just as stereotypes and signifiers build up and break down within society, creating the surreal mutations that arise every day in our frenzied media culture, Dicochea's paintings employ a method in which layers build up to create surprising incarnations. Starting with a printout of an actual *casta* painting onto which

he juxtaposes pertinent cultural metaphors culled from a vast database of images, Dicochea then layers on strata of acid-hued acrylic paint, adding additional graphic elements as he works. The medium is so fast drying and Dicochea's process so spontaneous that, the artist remarks, "I never know what will make it to the surface." And yet it is clear from the final results that Dicochea is an expert in the unexpected. His intense acrylics offer us the voyeuristic pleasure of observing cultural procreation in action, as our own pursuits and conquests engender an endless series of toxic and beautiful combinations.

Dicochea's frenetic pop interpretations are unrepentant in their investigation of modern-day successors to the strange cultural obsessions illustrated in the original casta paintings.



Page 1: Claudio Dicochea: *De Queen y Sitting Bull el Presidente (of the Queen and Sitting Bull, the President)*, 2009, acrylic, graphite, charcoal, transfer, wood, 48" x 36"

Page 2: Claudio Dicochea: *De la Guerra y el Rey Puro Cabron (of the Blonde and the King, the Pure Bastard)*, 2009, acrylic, graphite, charcoal, transfer, wood, 48" x 36"

Right: Claudio Dicochea: *De Slayer y Vampiro Lobita (Of Slayer and Vampire, the Little Wolf)*, 2009, acrylic, graphite, charcoal, transfer, wood, 48" x 36"

Cover: Angela Ellsworth: *Seer Bonnet IV*, 2009, 19,872 pearl corsage pins and fabric, 33" x 11" x 15"



Above top: Ariana Page Russell: *After Party*, 2009, archival inkjet print, 18" x 26"
Above lower: Ariana Page Russell: *Morning Glory*, 2009, archival inkjet print, 26" x 18"
Left: Mayme Kratz: *Pale Dream*, 2009, resin, cicada wings, wood, 36" x 36"

A flurry of shimmering; an iridescent clamor in the atmosphere: a flickering storm of wings descending through the air following a morning insect hatch in central Arizona. Alan Bur Johnson traces the inspiration for his *Swarms* series to this momentary epiphany, capturing an instant of transcendence and transience. Multitudes of photographic transparencies are arranged in larger patterns that, in the words of the artist, “Can read like vibrations or sound, like the buzz of a swarm, or a human pulse on a monitor.” The installations resemble haiku in their enchanting, simple grammar—and, like precise syllables come to luminous life as each framed, wing-like component flickers independently in the wake of an exhalation or current of air passing through the room.

ALAN BUR JOHNSON

From a fragmentary epiphany distilled in the desert air, Johnson’s work depicts processes of vast systemic purpose—an aesthetic of biology. The individual photographic images and the general organic contours of his swarms echo one another in their emergent cellular structures. Johnson remarks that he possesses “an enduring interest in understanding not only how structures develop and function, but also what causes them to break down and how they become reassembled or assimilated into a new structure.” Johnson’s photographs underscore this abiding concern; he incorporates images of insect hives and wings with the brain scans of a friend stricken with Alzheimer’s disease. The dark lacework of these subjects is remarkably similar, a mysterious confluence of intertwining cells and fraying structures.

In flesh-like sepia and the ghostly blacks, whites and grays of medical imaging, Johnson creates transparencies in a range of scales and exposures; they can resemble X-rays, the magnified texture



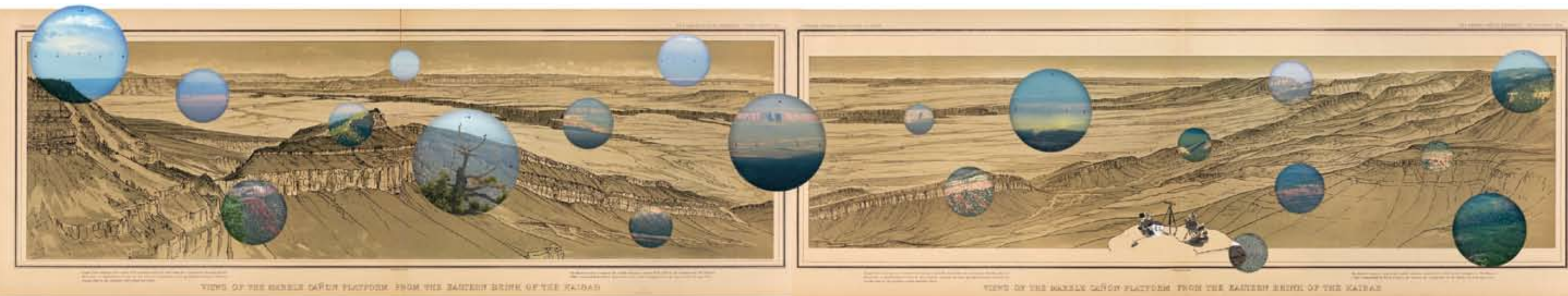
of molecular structures, or the bright and winding patterns experienced behind closed eyes. In groupings consisting of as little as three and as many as 600 components, the artist composes each piece from the top of a tall ladder, formulating a shape for the isolated parts that, when assembled as a whole, will produce new structures and significances. The photographic transparencies are contained in delicate metal frames and affixed to the wall with dissection pins. Says Johnson of his *Swarms*, “Some create a recognizable form, while others result in structures reminiscent of bacteria, viruses, or cells dividing.”

Johnson’s familiarity with these images and the metaphors they present reveals an understanding of human vulnerability and strength that surpasses subjective experience. His work examines the fleeting moments of biological design and decay as representative of not just our transitory individual lives, but within the larger framework of earth’s biology and human existence. Our precious collections of distinct moments and memories buzz for a brief moment in the fierce, fertile wasp’s nest of our minds, but inevitably these patterns of self must deconstruct to become the genetic matter of new structures.

In some of Johnson’s recent pieces, transparencies are juxtaposed within a single frame and the images form a latticed pattern, refracted through convex glass, that Johnson sees as reminiscent of Victorian mourning wreaths. In this context, the human hair of loved ones is replaced with the interwoven networks of coexisting biological structures, creating a composite image of biological and spiritual life cycles. We are ephemeral and vulnerable as individuals, but endure as components in a more universal pattern, and, in the wind of a sunny morning, we will be reborn again in the sky, hanging in the bright atmosphere, humming in the early morning air.

Left: Alan Bur Johnson: *Icarus: Sunset*, 2009,
325 photographic transparencies, metal frames, dissection pins,
57” x 93” x 2”
Right: detail





Above: Mark Klett with Byron Wolfe: *Confirming the details of the moment across the geologic horizon of Marble Canyon. Telescopic views from the platform where William Holmes drew the eastern edge of the Kaibab (1882)*, 2008, pigment inkjet print, 24" x 118"
Bottom: Beverly Penn: *Rhizome*, 2009, bronze, 24" x 108"

CARRIE MARILL

Spend some time with Carrie Marill's paintings and you start to see the world on their terms: Formerly ordinary colors become vivid phenomena, each worthy of further contemplation, and the parameters of everyday objects begin to glow with purpose. The lines that delineate the things of our world—whether man-made or organic—look as though they were positioned there intentionally, as part of a grander graphic scheme we have yet to comprehend.

Marill's elegant gouache paintings reference reality, but their true purpose seems to be the delineation of a dream geography. Swaths of pale brickwork hang like printed cloth, while leafy vines stand upright as fenceposts, forming a kind of botanical architecture. Just as the flora in Marill's works is not quite real, neither is the fauna: human figures hiding on a garden path merge with a winding stream of image as it surges across the paper, becoming an enchanted abstraction.



An avid observer of graphic forms of all kinds, Marill's work has drawn from a diverse range of influences and traditions, from reinterpretations of 18th century European landscape paintings and natural-history illustrations to series inspired by digital imaging and objects in a Sotheby's auction. Inspired by materials found on the Internet, in books, magazines and French flea markets, Marill appropriates and assimilates an incredibly varied menagerie of influences while consistently creating work that is unique to her own aesthetic. Addressing her tendency for extensive research, the artist remarks that on close inspection the resulting paintings may seem to have a collage-like quality: "I find one thing that I think will anchor the composition, and from there I begin to pull in

other elements. Sometimes it's literal, and sometimes I'm taking the idea of a shape or figure and abstracting that. It's an organic process that starts by painting one shape, then responding to that shape with another shape and color. It's intuitive and visceral."

Marill's recent body of work explores a fantasy topography in which two distinct graphic traditions meet: "I'm looking at the closeness of Persian miniatures and the expansiveness of Japanese screen painting," says Marill, noting that Persian miniatures were generally closed away in books of illuminated manuscripts—an intimate form created for individual viewers—while Japanese screen paintings depict a shared, public expression of color and landscape. In *Pattern Maker*, Marill references Japanese screen paintings portraying recently dyed clothes hanging to dry, but in her version the cloths themselves feature a selection of rich, detailed patterns found in the robes and backgrounds of Persian miniature paintings. "I'm playing with minute detail and broad graphic elements," says Marill, "You can see them from across the room, but they're detailed enough that you may want to spend some time looking up close."

A playful, fearless approach to such graphic paradoxes is one of the constants in Marill's aesthetic palate. Human and natural environments merge into ethereal parallel dimensions, wry cityscapes bend the corner of a square frame—or climb to unlikely heights—while the edges of swelling, organic forms are painted with surreal sharpness. No matter their subjects, Marill's paintings are each graceful occasions for pigment, formally precise and presented in a controlled space on the canvas. Yet her spare compositions, whether they are abstract or representative or some intriguing meeting of the two, are all animated by a sleek inquisitiveness, an attention to both the painted spaces and the wild abyss of the empty canvas.

Such enthralling contradictions point to an underlying concern of Marill's diverse body of works: the imaginative realms of human existence versus untouched natural environments.

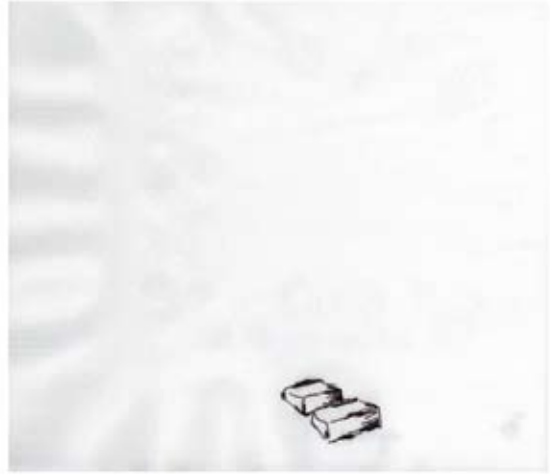
Subjective and objective spaces, intimate areas and architectural components, enacted and merely imagined realms are enduring themes in Marill's work. "How nature affects us and how we affect nature are two themes that continually crop up in my work," says Marill. Like a narrator of contemporary fairy tales, Marill examines this concept by conveying a supernatural intensity to the human spaces we inhabit, all the while reminding us of the ancient, enchanted gardens that we can never fully occupy.



Left: Yu Fan: *W-4*, 2007, bronze, automotive paint, 55" x 10" x 8"

Center: Enrique Chagoya: *Pyramid Scheme*, 2009, archival pigment print on ten cans, silkscreened box, dimensions variable

Right: Enrique Chagoya: *Illegal Alien's Guide to Political Theory (detail)*, 2009, acrylic and water based oil on Amate paper, 11.75" x 102.5"



EXHIBITION SCHEDULE 2009/2010

November. 5, 2009 – January. 2, 2010 Opening November 12th, 7-9 PM	Mayme Kratz / Carrie Marill
January 7 – February 27 Opening January 7th, 7-9 PM	Beverly Penn / Brad Durham
March 4 – 27 Opening March 4th, 7-9 PM	Claudio Dicochea / Ariana Page Russell
April 1 – 24 Opening April 1st, 7-9 PM	Jessica Joslin / Alan Bur Johnson
May 6 – June 26 Opening May 6th, 7-9 PM	Mark Klett with Byron Wolfe

ART FAIRS 2009/2010

2009	2010
Art Miami	AIPAD
December 2 – 6, 2009	Association of International Photography Art Dealers
The Miami Midtown Arts District NE 1st Ave between NE 32nd and NE 31st Street Miami, Florida	March 18 – 21, 2010 Park Avenue Armory New York, New York

LISA SETTE GALLERY

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Gallery hours: Tuesday-Friday: 10 am to 5 pm | Thursday evening: 7 to 9 pm | Saturday: 12 to 5 pm
Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day

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Essays written by Megan Bates. Design: P.S. Studios

Above: Angela Ellsworth: *Sister Wife Laurie and Tool of Translation (Duets on Ice, 1974-75)*, 2008, black thread on paper napkin, 16" x 34"