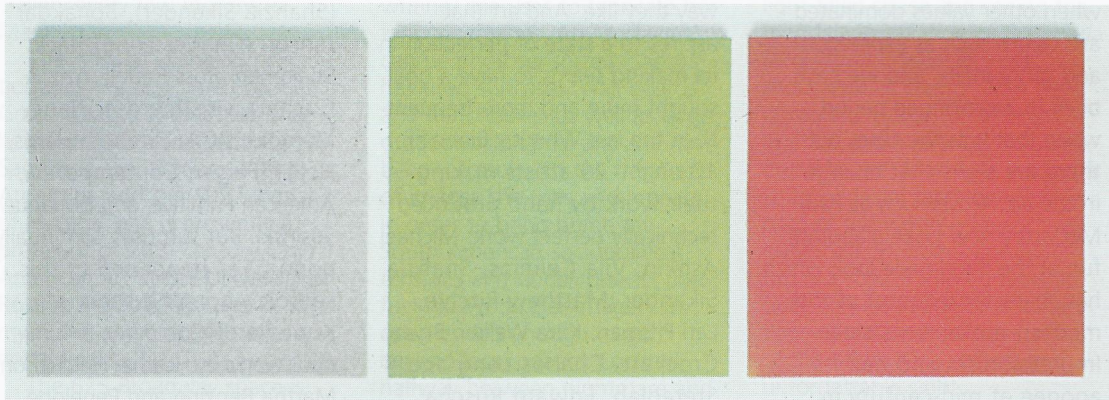


Heather McGill, *Chromaphobia*, 1997, epoxy and urethane, 56 x 52 x 2'.

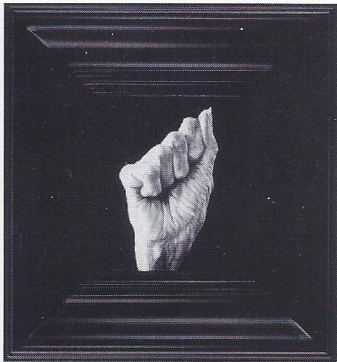
Ann Appleby, *Indian Paint Brush*, 1998, oil and wax on panels, 18 x 18" each, 18 x 56" overall.



Umbrico included in a concept-based group show, *Get Close*, curated by Anne Schoenfeld at Marymount Manhattan College; and even at the Metropolitan Museum of Art where the last flowering of 17th-century Bolognese classicism is to be seen in *Donato Creti: Melancholy and Perfection*. (Apparently the artist's relentless pursuit of perfection was the source of his melancholy.) While not exactly constituting a new movement, the simultaneous presence in New York of so many approaches to the ideal of perfection does confirm a tendency, a common wavelength many seem to be on at the moment. Perhaps the many millennial unknowns are making artists seek the certainties perfectionism can provide.

***Invitational '98 at Knoedler & Company***

Two of the three invited artists seek perfection: Lisa Bartolozzi, in the time-honored tradition of Renaissance realism—in oil and wax on panel no less—that we associate with religious patronage painting; Heather McGill, in the spirit of California finish-



Lisa Bartolozzi, *Fist (old woman)*, 1998, oil on panel, 5.25 x 4" (image).

fetishism. McGill's abstract shapes may have been inspired by mundane things—in one instance, a sneaker insert—but their labor-intensive fabrication and finishing, using urethane, epoxy, fiberglass and lacquer, transform them into enigmatic, strangely heraldic forms with obsessively smooth surfaces. The cartoon cut of their rounded edges is offset by their stately demeanor. Bartolozzi's subjects are enigmatic as well—part religion, part philosophy, part surprise. For example, the panel with a painfully exact rendering of an overweight man's hairy back is inexplicably titled *Untitled: Genesis Series*, while others, such as *Fist (old woman)* and *Fist (infant)*, are literally that. The artist's meticulous observation, coupled with extremely skillful depiction of the transparencies and varicolorations of flesh, is nowhere more beautifully expressive than in the fist of an old woman, determined, perhaps angry, but seemingly powerless.

**Ann Appleby, Jacquelyn McBain at Littlejohn Contemporary**

These two exhibitions epitomize the opposing primary aspects of

pictorial perfection, abstract austerity and *tour de force* realism. McBain's dense little squares of glowing flora and fauna seem like details of an elaborate 17th-century Dutch still life. How lily petals become translucent as their color fades, how dew collects, how insects ingest and tendrils curl are lovingly studied and painstakingly described in oil colors. Titles such as *St. Joseph Invoked for Happy Death* remind us that religious implications were carried over from medieval plant symbolism to this Dutch genre, and from there to American painting and McBain's



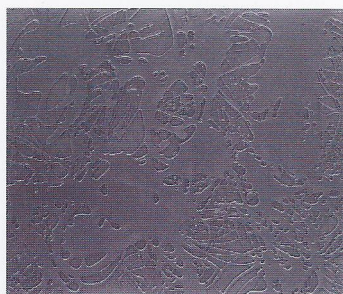
Jacquelyn McBain, *The Axalots & St. Expeditus Invoked Against Procrastination*, 1998, oil on masonite, 8.5 x 8.5".

work. Ann Appleby paints nature too, but abstracts its essence, after prolonged observation in her Montana environs, into the most exquisite blushes of color which seems to have arrived on the surface of her gessoed wooden panels without the intervention of her hand. A rosy gray shifts imperceptibly yellower as it approaches the sprout-green panel to its right in her *Indian Paint Brush* triptych. Somehow, a little of the indescribable red oil and wax incrementally layered on the right panel seems to dust the corners

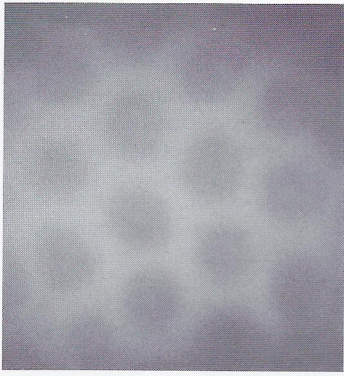
of the green center square with pink. But your mind may be playing tricks, like when you'd swear you can smell the plants whose essences she's extracted. Appleby's surfaces are hand-rubbed to perfection, but a number of other artists concentrate on controlling the natural action of their materials.

**Jason Young at Cristinerose**

Jason Young's monochrome paintings don't look like they were hand-painted; they look like photographs, but are not. Square and covered edge to edge with what looks like puddled water on the surface of a newly waxed car, an icy planet in deep space or a chemical reaction seen through a microscope, they defy normal pictorial assessment. The artist builds them up in layers of epoxy resin that is "etched" by spatters, runnels, droplets and streams of water. Acrylic pigments mixed with catalysts fill in these depressions, and the process is repeated until the final resin skin submerges everything beneath a perfectly smooth surface. Like a weaving, the pictorial incident is in the material, not on its surface. Young uses manufactured products to produce a glimpse of nature—as artists have forever done—but he lets nature make the painting for him.



Jason Young, *Untitled (BL98-03)*, 1998, acrylic and resin on wood, 28 x 33.5".



Oliver Marsden, *Liquemorph v.V.*, 1998, oil/alkyd on canvas, 6 x 6".

**Oliver Marsden: Amorpheus at Spencer Brownstone**

Oliver Marsden's *Monomorphs* and *Liquemorphs*, respectively large and small, are monochrome abstractions full of pulsing optical effects that seem to be happening below a perfectly smooth surface. Like Young's paintings, they have a photographic look, not because of any sharp edges in the internal forms, but rather their seemingly airbrushed softness. Marsden manipulates oil and alkyd paints, capitalizing on their properties of flow and immiscibility to control the shaping of large glowing spheres in the *Monomorphs* and allover "natureforms" that look like soft walls of living coral in the *Liquemorphs*. In either situation the viewer is drawn into a deep whitish or bluish space that is in apparently continual fluctuation, emanation and detumescence. Everything is changing while nothing is happening. It's like Philip Glass's music, ocean waves and Zen.

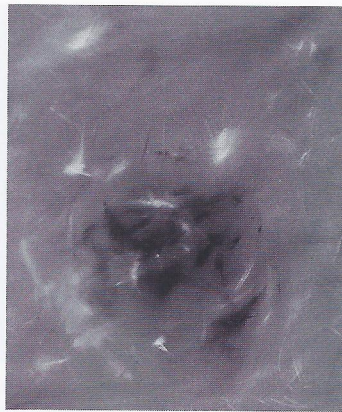
**Malene Bach at DCA Gallery**

The physical movements of the viewer in front of the paintings are important to the optical action in both Marsden's and

Malene Bach's paintings. Bach's small, painted units are meticulously set out in serried ranks on the wall, with white fronts toward the viewer and color oozing out the sides, so the effect changes with your position. Although Bach is using traditional materials—acrylic and spray paint on MDF board or wood—she hides most of her luscious colors behind or between blocks of wood. Every aspect is so neatly executed, from the careful ooze to the perfect edges of the whites and the sharp carpentry, that the works fairly glow with purity. *New Standards*, her latest work, is equally well crafted, but the closeness to its sources in Russian Constructivism makes it less satisfying despite the loveliness of the color. The spirituality of the Russian originals, something of which seems to hover around her other work, is missing here.

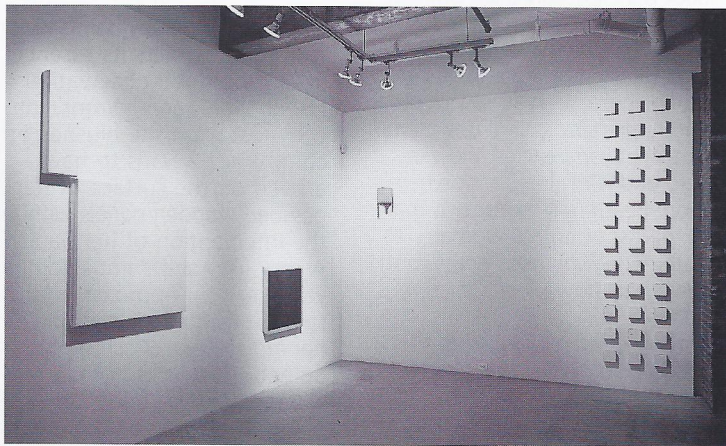
**Lisa Bradley at Donahue/Sosinski Art**

Lisa Bradley's paintings are unabashedly spiritual. They speak of space and time, passage and return, non-linear mental states such as dreaming and

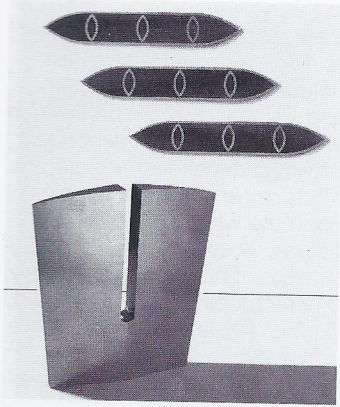


Lisa Bradley, *Silence and Immutability*, 1998, oil on canvas, 47 x 38".

other alternate states of being and consciousness, union and dissolution, flight and never-endingness. Always the same, but different every time, the paintings have an affinity with New Age music and Eastern religions. You can lose yourself in them, taking long journeys on your own mind's waves while following her visual clues or your own inclinations. Because they are abstract and marks of the brush are in evidence, you might think of Abstract Expressionism, but the paintings do not come out of that tradition, nor are the



Malene Bach, *installation view*, 1998.



Carol Ross, *3 Observers*, 1998, wood, 54 x 104 x 1.5" and *Gorge*, 1998, aluminum, 40 x 37 x 5". Digitally represented.

marks of the brush attention-getting as brushwork or personally revealing. Instead, they are light rays; they are movement; they indicate speed or stillness; and they are so sparingly used, so precisely applied, and so silk-like in their subtlety that they are gossamer to AbEx rope, quicksilver to AbEx mud. Bradley's forms shimmer momentarily into existence and just as quickly dart away into space, leaving the viewer searching for firm contours to hold onto, grasping at points of light. They are ideal metaphors for the experience of an unattainable ideal.

#### **Carol Ross at A.I.R. and Janos Gat Gallery**

Carol Ross intends her pristinely crafted work, in aluminum at Janos Gat and in wood at A.I.R., to establish a kind of safe haven of perfectability in a far from perfect world. On the ground, her abstract shapes line up in rows like model soldiers or stand at attention like unassailable guardians; on the wall they are the protective shields, the sturdy wings, the arks in which we

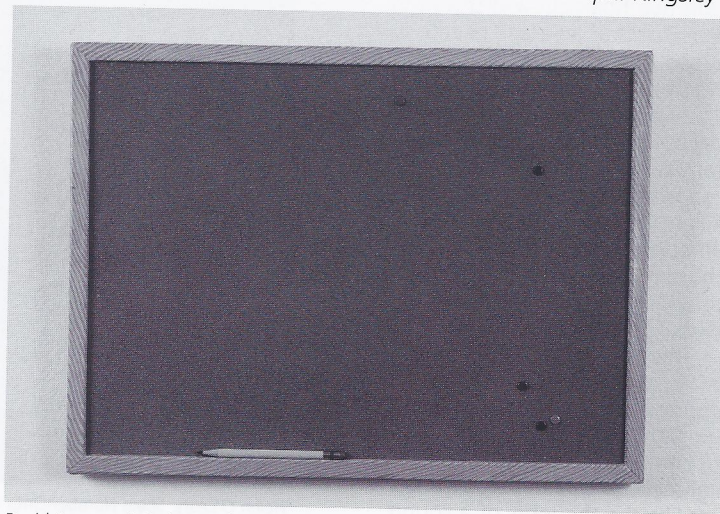
could be carried over life's troubled seas. In the aluminum sculptures Ross is concerned with subtle shaping and the play of light and shadow, while the flat, laminated cherry plywood panels involve geometric and spatial illusions. The elegance of the brushed aluminum surface is not cold, but the warm wood tones are more welcoming nevertheless. Separating them by the 10 miles between her SoHo and uptown galleries was probably necessary, but, together in a catalog for a recent exhibition in Budapest, where they were installed in a vast old storehouse interior, they complement each other and play off the crumbling, timeworn walls to beautiful effect.

#### **Clay Realists at Nancy Margolis**

Illusionism, instead of playing a subtle compositional role as it does in Carol Ross's sculpture, is the *raison d'être* for the artists in this exhibition: Linda Cordell, David Furman, Marilyn Levine, Steve Montgomery, Richard Shaw and Victor Spinski. Clay can take as fine an impression

as plaster; it can survive firing whether paper thin (Shaw) or slab thick; its surface can be textured to look like blue (Spinski) or rusted (Montgomery) steel, corkboard (Furman), leather (Levine) or paper (Shaw); it can be readily coated with silkscreen imagery. Used in Shaw's playing cards, crayon labels, sheet music and book jackets, silkscreening enables him to carry *trompe l'oeil* to the highest level of conceit. One must look carefully for traces of glue on the stacked houses of cards or measure their thickness in mils to catch this magician at his tricks. The impossibility of Montgomery's machinery functioning, the all-over whiteness of Cordell's insect-infested world, and the not-quite-rightness of Spinski's paper bags, give them away ever so slightly, but Furman's studio accouterments and Levine's leather bags resist all doubt. And let's face it. We want to be fooled. We want the artists' artifices to let us into that world where perfection casts our doubts and troubles away.

April Kingsley



David Furman, *Bulletin Board*, 1998, ceramic, 18 x 24 x 1".