

## SPANNING THE WORLD

by April Kingsley

**T**he Babcock Gallery has mounted a very special show of Edwin Dickinson's paintings and works on paper, many of which have not been previously shown.

Any exhibition of Dickinson's work is special because of his singular vision and beautiful technique, so if you've never seen his work, don't miss this opportunity.

Among the *Revelations*, as the exhibition is titled, is a marvelous canvas, *South Wellfleet Inn, 1950/59*, which is a *tour de force* of perspectival play while still being loosely, even smokily executed. It was painted during the same time frame as the Met's *Ruin at Daphne* and on a similar scale. The style in both, and in *Stone Tower, 1941*, another Dickinson *magnum opus* in the show, is a painterly and idiosyncratic version of Cubism in which the subject is viewed from different, overlapping perspectives simultaneously. According to curator Dr. John Driscoll, it was Dickinson's practice to work on more than one of the big, complex paintings at once, keeping them on the easel for many years while working on smaller, less elaborate paintings and on drawings.

A number of Dickinson's obsessive interests — perspective, semaphores, polar expeditions, Foucault's pendulum, and music — found expression in the works included, among which is a drawing from each decade of his artlife. Committed to lower Cape Cod (Wellfleet to Provincetown at the tip) since his arrival there in 1913, its beaches and dunes and its distinctive cubic architecture, was among his most frequent subject matter. One never tires of seeing it through his chastely monochromatic imagery, which always seems to have arrived on the paper as if by magic. Poof! The sparkling whites of his page are equally receptive to the imagery of Greece, which he also loved, and a dazzling 1961 drawing, *Athens*, proves that beyond doubt.

✕

*Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions* is literally at the other end of the world from Dickinson's highly developed Western vision. One would be hard put to find a connection, except perhaps a tendency toward the monochromatic. Whereas Dickinson — and Western art in general — has always concerned itself with the individual and particular, Asian art, seems

instead to encompass the many and the general. Profusion, wholes comprised of many parts, repetition, massing dominates. In cases where an individual face is the subject, it is like the Buddha's impassive visage, generalized or symbolized out of any humanlike specificity, as happens with Ravinder G. Reddy's *Head IV, 1995*.

Many of the 59 works by 27 artists from India, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand at Asia Society, the Queens Museum of Art, and Grey Art Gallery are installations. Even though China and Japan aren't represented, much of the work brings to mind the throngs of Bodhisattvas on cave walls in China, in Japanese temples, and on hanging scrolls and screens everywhere. The multitude of heads in Dadang Christanto's *Kekersan, 1995*, and FX Harsono's *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers, 1994*, and the many portraits in Korean Cho Duck Hyun's *vis-a-vis* are just three examples of this effect at work. Asian religious and esthetic traditions are most in evidence at the Asia Society and the Grey Art Gallery. In Queens the emphasis is on gender politics and challenges to tradition.

The ambiance throughout the three venues feels Asian because of the textures, the bronze bells, wood, and ceramics, the gold and the reds. But content overrides esthetics more often than not, here as everywhere in the late conceptual, international artworld of today. This means a lot of reading of wall panels, and study of the catalogue to fully appreciate the work. I was spared the latter chore since the PR department at Asia Society couldn't spare one for a poor reviewer.

✕

The Queens Museum has a satellite gallery in the Bulova Building in Jackson Heights where Chakaia Booker's dramatic rubber sculptures are on view until January 4, 1997. (She will be having a concurrent solo show at the Max Protech Gallery opening on November 7<sup>th</sup> as well.) Booker's rubber is not the thin, stretchy kind Bruce Nauman and Eva Hesse used. No. She uses rubber tires, car, van, bus, and truck tires, both worn and sharply treaded. After salvaging these products of capitalist overproduction and our obsession with cars

she cuts and shreds them, twists and contorts them into massive sculptural configurations and huge reliefs. The shiny black surfaces with patterned, scarification-like treads, inevitably relate to "black" skin and the curving interlocking shapes she forms augment this figural reading.

Surprisingly though, instead of African sculpture, one is put in mind of Renaissance and Baroque art, because of the feeling of grandeur and intensity, of muscular power and contained energy it has.

Recently, in some of the reliefs, landscape imagery has emerged and it is as expressionistically alive as a Van Gogh or Vlaminck. It is strikingly original work, though the idea of using discards is certainly not new. The ambitiousness of her work, like that of Leonardo Drew and others who were artists in residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem seems to be establishing an identifiable, as yet unnamed esthetic of abstract, but content-rich and heritage-conscious large scale work.

✕

Speaking of heritage, there is a wonderful show on until December 7th at the American Indian Community House. *Contemporary Art of the Dine* (Navaho peoples) is a fine demonstration of the way tradition and innovation can successfully coexist in Native American art. Perhaps because of my curatorial role at the American Craft Museum, I was particularly drawn to and impressed by the exquisite silver jewelry of Mercedes Bell and Patrick Smith, who honor tradition, but take it down their own distinctive paths. Curtis Benally's three dimensionalized sand painting is fascinating, and is full of implications for other approaches to those ever so flat, ever so ancient images.

◆ ◆ ◆

Edwin Dickinson at the Babcock Gallery through November 22. Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions at Asia Society through January 5, 1997. Chakaia Booker at Queens Museum, Bolova Building in Jackson Heights through January 4, 1997. Contemporary Art of the Dine at the American Indian Community House through December 7.

## Carol Diehl

paintings 1991-1996

through November 30

### Hirsch & Adler Modern

21 East 70th Street  
New York, NY 10021  
212. 535. 8810

## Thomas Loeser

This Ain't No Floor Show

## Michael Hurwitz

Furniture

through November 30

**PETER JOSEPH GALLERY**  
745 Fifth Avenue New York New York 10151  
212 / 7510 - 5500