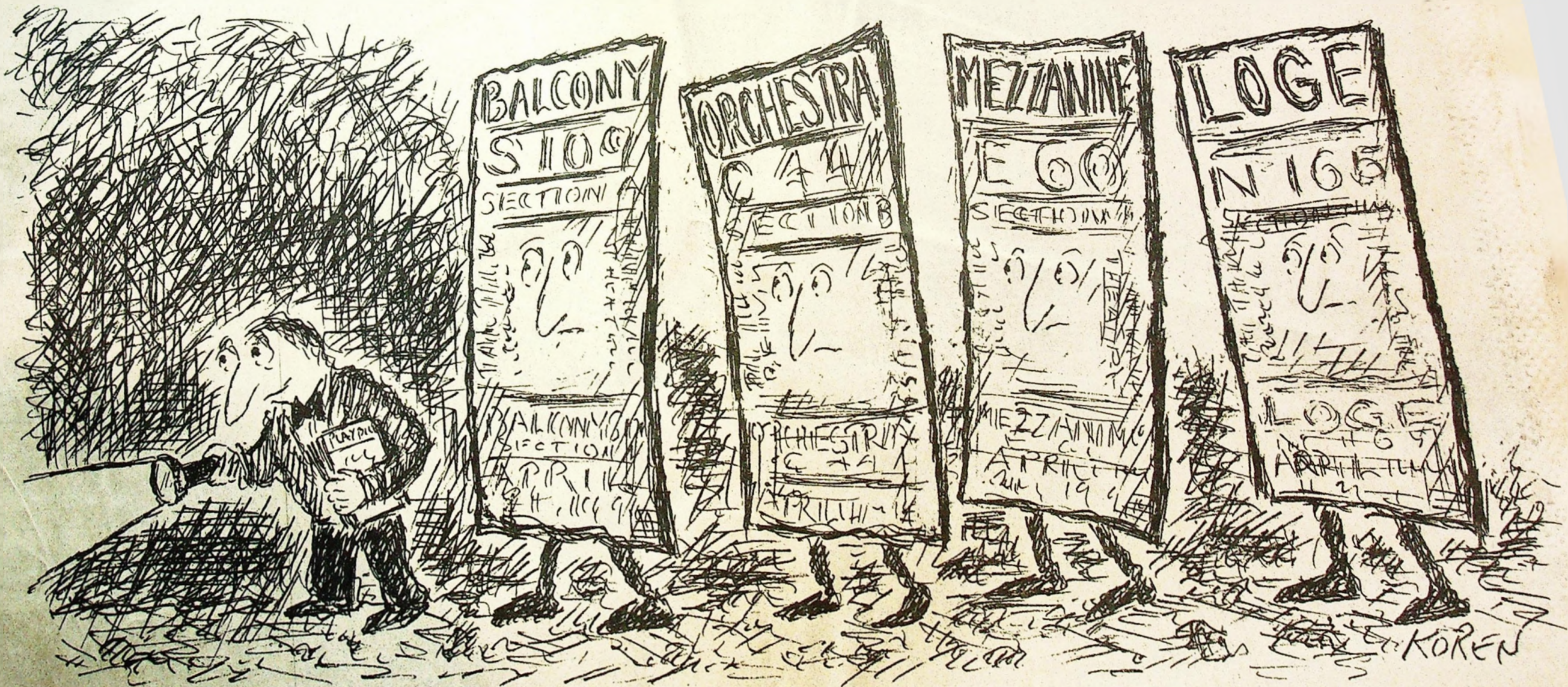


'Totally Nude' (Theater Review, C3) 'I Shot Andy Warhol' (Film Festival Review, C10)

Why a Good Seat Is Hard to Find



By PETER MARKS

AUDREY COUGHLAN, a veteran theatergoer from Ardsley, N.Y., was determined to beat the crowds to "The King and I." So last Nov. 4, five months before the musical revival was to open on Broadway, she dialed Ticketmaster, looking for a few good seats.

She told the operator she wanted center orchestra seats between the 2d and 14th rows in June. But for any date she requested, whether it was a weekend, weeknight or matinee, the agent could not oblige. She wound up spending \$163.50 (including phone-order surcharges) for two tickets for a Friday night, in the front row of the mezzanine on the side.

which kind of surprised me," said Ms. Coughlan, who thought that calling just a week after telephone sales had begun would have guaranteed her choice seats. "The tickets are O.K. But they're not what I wanted."

Ms. Coughlan's experience was not a nightmare, but it left her upset about how Broadway treats loyal customers. "There are always exceptions, but in an awful lot of cases, I don't feel that they make any effort to serve the public," she said.

For a Broadway producer, the birth of a new show is fraught with anxiety. But must the ticket buyer feel it, too? It should be the most satisfying of transactions: you pay your money and you see the show. All too often, however, theatergoers find the task of buying a Broadway ticket a challenge rather than a lark. Despite advances in the technology and convenience of ticket buying, the path to Broadway remains a bit mystifying,

Negotiating the perilous twists and turns of the Broadway ticket game.

"It is perceived as difficult," observed Nancy Coyne, the chief executive of Serino Coyne, an advertising agency that specializes in Broadway shows and has done focus groups on the issue. "There is a problem endemic to Broadway: there are a limited number of tickets you can sell, and a limited number of days you can sell in advance. While our job is to make it as easy as

the theater as it is to get them to a movie."

Ticket selling on Broadway is a meshing of traditions and new, a kind of shotgun marriage between the ways business traditionally has been done, and innovations brought on by technology and modern marketing. Old-style agencies, selling tickets for many face value, exist in the shadow of the TKTS booth at Duffy Square, where they are sold at a discount. They can be bought at a theater box office, by mail, by phone and will soon be available via the Internet arrangement between Tele-Charge and Playbill.

The old and the new clash in odd ways. For example, telephone sales today account for nearly 20 percent of Broadway ticket transactions. To the frustration of marketing people like Ms. Coyne, however, the industry has not been able to agree on establishing a

DESIGN REVIEW

Nature and Artifice in Bloom

By HERBERT MUSCHAMP

MOVE over, Central Park. The Macy's Flower Show is back in town. For two weeks each year, the world's biggest store is home to New York's most fantastic park: a colorful hybrid of commerce and nature in full and fragrant bloom. For those too old for Santa, the Flower Show is the true miracle on 34th Street. Occupying the grand ground-floor space in Macy's flagship store on Herald Square, the Flower Show, which opened this week and continues through April 13, is one of the great seasonal landmarks of New York City. Like the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center, or Times Square on New Year's Eve, the Flower Show proves that the city's vitality depends as much on transient events as on the buildings around them.

Central Park, of course, is irreplaceable. It's a durable, reliable escape from the

pressures of urban life. But the Macy's Flower Show is also one of a kind. Like flowers, like spring, it has the charm of evanescence. And there's something indelibly American about the landscape it rolls out: a vision of paradise in which the glories of plant life are closely intertwined with the goods of consumer culture.

This is a perfumed garden whose powerful scent arises in roughly equal measure from cut flowers, potted plants and the tester bottles atop the cosmetics counters that dominate Macy's ground floor. Here, orchids, azaleas and rhododendrons blossom beside handbags, wristwatches and

Concerts, egg hunts,
garden parties and other
holiday events, C4-C5.

lipsticks. A rose is a rose is a brand-new bonnet, or maybe the face it frames. In one corner of the main floor, cactuses cluster around skin creams, as if in search of the perfect moisturizer to treat desert-dry skin. Cut flowers come fresh (free) or packaged dry, as potpourri (for a price). This is an Eden free of serpents, but packed with temptations to run up bills.

First presented in 1946, the Flower Show was discontinued in the late 60's, a casualty of the years when the great city department stores withered beneath the dual assault of suburban malls and the proliferation of urban boutiques. The show was revived in 1975, yet it still retains a 40's flavor: orchid corsages, doilies on the lunch counter, the dream of recreating prewar gentility for the postwar mass society. "Sixth Floor! Lingerie!"

Like Central Park, the Flower Show is an artifact of the industrial city. But where Frederick Law Olmsted's bucolic land-

Continued on Page C4



Monica Almeida/The New York Times

An all-American vision of paradise: Spring plantings and spring merchandise at the Macy's Flower Show at Herald Square.

THEATER REVIEW



Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

Adversaries: George C. Scott, left, and Charles Durning in "Inherit the Wind."

Of Monkeys, Reason And the Creation

By VINCENT CANBY

INHERIT THE WIND

AT long last Tony Randall's National Actors Theater has a production that deserves to be a hit. It's John Tillinger's crisp, handsome, very entertaining revival of Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee's "Inherit the Wind," which opened last night at the Royale Theater with George C. Scott and Charles Durning in the seductively actable leading roles.

Not since its 1993 production of "Timon of Athens" has Mr. Randall's company seemed to be on such firm ground. This "Inherit the Wind" is big and fully inhabited, not only by its two stars and supporting players, but also by its nearly two dozen extras identified in the program as "townspeople, jurors, scientists, etc." You haven't seen so many etceteras on one stage since

your last Passion Play. There's also a monkey.

That's not the only surprise.

The courtroom drama itself, though it's not exactly "Saint Joan," remains as pertinent and theatrically satisfying today as it must have been when it first arrived on Broadway 41 years ago. The source material is rich: one of the most colorful and briefly riveting of the trials of the century that seemed to be especially abundant in the sensation-loving 1920's. It's the so-called "monkey trial" of 1925, when John T. Scopes, a biology teacher in Dayton, Tenn., was charged with having broken the state statute barring the teaching in public schools of Darwin's theories of evolution.

Continued on Page C21

BOOKS OF THE TIMES

Ingredients of Artistic Immortality

By MICHIKO KAKUTANI

In his last book, "Reinventing Shakespeare" (1989), the scholar Gary Taylor offered a provocative reassessment of the playwright's enduring fame: Shakespeare's reputation, he suggested, was less a function of pure esthetic achievement than a byproduct of complicated "mechanisms of cultural renown." "The virility of British imperialism," the lack of serious competition from other playwrights and the boosterism of prominent actors and critics, Mr. Taylor argued, were all primary factors in Shakespeare's canonization and his subsequent institutionalization in academia.

These arguments are expanded into a general theory in Mr. Taylor's new book, "Cultural Selection," a wildly uneven volume that attempts to explain why some artistic works are remembered for generations, while others quickly fade away. The first half of the book provides a fascinating, if not always convincing, explanation of Mr. Taylor's laws of cultural selection; the second half, which attempts to examine some of the practical implications of those laws, devolves into a strident and ill-reasoned attack on cultural traditionalists.

What Mr. Taylor has tried to do in these pages is apply the Darwinian laws of evolution to the realm of culture, and in doing so, he has appropriated the scientific language of biology, often with incongruous results. "The English did not colonize so much of the globe because they had Shakespeare," he writes. "Shakespeare was like a local parasite — attached to a species that eventually dominated its own niche and migrated out into others, taking the parasite along and introducing it into new ecosystems that had, often, no defenses against it."

As Mr. Taylor sees it, lasting reputations tend to be earned by artists who work in more than one "niche" at a time: Shakespeare wrote poetry and plays; Michelangelo was a painter and sculptor; Aristotle labored in the fields of ethics, rhetoric, politics and science. "A maker's adaptability in mastering different genres," Mr. Taylor writes, "increases the likelihood that his work will continue to be remembered, even at times, in places and by persons hostile or apathetic toward certain kinds of cultural work." He adds that complex artistic works, capable of supporting a variety of interpretations, are simi-



Celia R. Darleader/Basic Books

CULTURAL SELECTION

By Gary Taylor

325 pages. Basic Books. \$26.

larly more likely to survive the vicissitudes of history.

Talent alone, however, is no guarantee of immortality. For Mr. Taylor, it is no coincidence that famous artists frequently surface in clumps: Ovid, Horace and Virgil were literary contemporaries; Bosch, Botticelli, Leonardo, Dürer, Michelangelo, Raphael and Titian were all painting between 1490 and 1505, and Shakespeare, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, John Webster and John Ford were all born within a 20-year period. These gifted contemporaries not only had one another to compete against, but they were also engaged

Trying to explain how a work is registered in the collective memory.

in the collaborative enterprise of defining a new literary niche, an enterprise that spurred them to continuing experimentation and innovation.

New niches, Mr. Taylor goes on, tend to result from social and technological change. New 16th-century theaters like the Globe, for instance, depended on "the historical evolution of concentrated urban populations, which provided a market dense enough and affluent enough to support a capital-intensive leisure industry." Such niches, of course, are also dependent upon a generous supply of talent, that is, a community of individuals, possessing the sort of education and mental outlook that might predispose them toward artistic

dominates the host society," and he also argues that artistic achievement usually flourishes in politically, militarily and economically dominant societies. "Cultural historians," he writes, "speak naturally of the 'silver age' of Roman literature, the 'golden age' of Spanish or Dutch culture, because cultural pinnacles coincide with periods of material abundance."

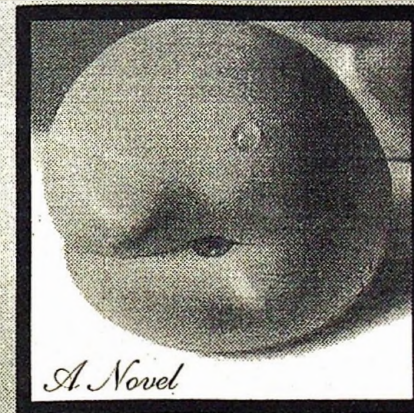
Such powerful societies tend to have expanding spheres of influence, and they tend to endure for extended periods; as a result, Mr. Taylor reasons, the work of their artists is often widely disseminated and insured of a certain longevity. After all, the reputation of an individual artist depends upon the transmission of his or her work to future generations by editors, scholars, critics and translators, cultural mediators who help determine how that work will be entered into the collective memory.

Because Mr. Taylor emphasizes the social dimension of memory and the role that politics can play in galvanizing or debunking an artist's reputation, his book raises important questions relevant to the current academic debate about multiculturalism and the reformation of the traditional canon. Unfortunately for the reader, the logical tone and arguments used by Mr. Taylor to discuss the mechanics of cultural selection are summarily abandoned when he turns to these more emotionally loaded issues.

By the end of the book, Mr. Taylor's desire to "offer an interpretation of culture compatible with a more progressive social agenda" has curdled his writing and muddled his thinking. He simplistically argues that Shakespeare's "Othello" has endured "because many mediums between the early 17th century and the late 20th century chose to reproduce and circulate that representation of a seemingly civilized, Christian black man who collapses in the end back into his natural state of barbarism, a barbarism epitomized by sexual violence." And in another startling passage, he lumps together "the Soviet Union, Red China, North Korea, South Africa, Israel, Iran, Kampuchea, Jonestown, Waco" as "violently constructed and violently maintained ideological enclaves."

This unwillingness to make distinctions, this eagerness to rely upon gross generalizations, undermines the more plausible arguments in "Cultural Selection" and ultimately tarnishes Mr. Taylor's credibility as an original thinker.

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man England, male students happened to be schooled in oratory, philosophy and classical literature, developing just the sort of skills that helped distinguish them as playwrights.

Mr. Taylor contends that "a cultural niche is almost always dominated by persons from the class that

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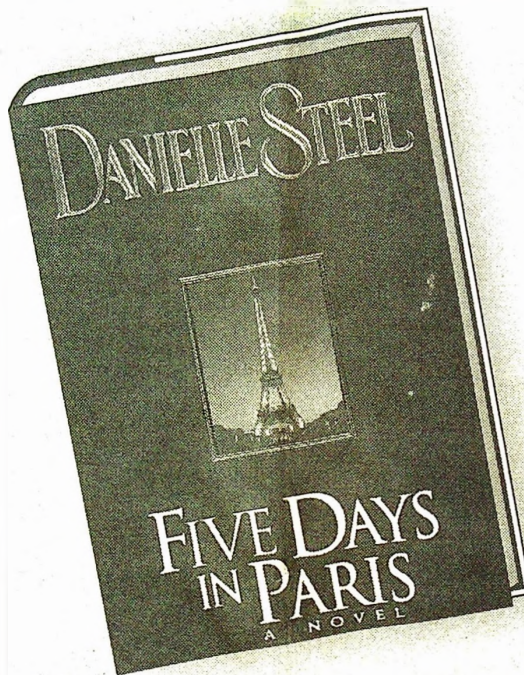
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"THE FUNNIEST PLAY"



On Stage, and Off | Peter Marks

■ A star is born ■ A musical is born ■ Will Jujamcyn buy another theater? ■ Analyzing a trend: 50 minutes of fame.

Suddenly, an Overnight Sensation

All her life, Melissa Errico has been waiting to be an overnight sensation. Now it has happened.

On Saturday, after the adoring reviews for her commanding performance in the Encores concert version of "One Touch of Venus" at City Center started appearing, this 25-year-old actress's telephone began to ring. Broadway producers wanted to take her to dinner. Hollywood studios wanted to fly her out. When she walked into Sardi's on Sunday for a party, the room burst into applause. And it wasn't even her party.

For those who did not see Ms. Errico in the Kurt Weill musical, which in Encores fashion played for only four performances, here is what happened: as Venus, the Roman goddess of love, Ms. Errico stole the show. After one of her songs, "That's Him," the ovation went on and on. "By Saturday afternoon, I was getting entrance applause," Ms. Errico said.

The Encores series, which draws many of the industry's movers and shakers, can serve as an audition on a grand scale. But the intensity of the reaction to Ms. Errico, who played Eliza Doolittle to Richard Chamberlain's Henry Higgins on Broadway in "My Fair Lady" two years ago, was more than a response to one young talent. It was an expression of an industry's yearning for new people to clap for.

"If we do not make a concerted effort to create musicals for the new talent that we breed, we're not going to have any," said Jay Binder, the casting director for the Encores series. "You have Faith, you have Donna and now you have Melissa," he said of Faith Prince and Donna Murphy. "And we have Nathan," he said of Nathan Lane. "That's not enough."

Ms. Errico, who grew up in Manhasset, L.I., and graduated from Yale with a degree in art history and philosophy, says the response has been odd: people express condolences because there are so few musical parts like Venus.

"Everyone is sort of melancholy about the success," she said.

She's not. She recently finished a movie, "Loose Women," as well as a season playing a reporter on the CBS nighttime soap "Central Park West." Attention Broadway: what she really wants, she says, is a part in a big musical.

So how did Ms. Errico come to spring forth as Venus? Obviously, she was known — she had a featured part in the Encores version of "Call Me Madam" last season — but she was not the kind of star performer like Tyne Daly, Robert Morse or Patti LuPone whom the series normally seeks out for a major part. That's where Mr. Binder, artistic director Walter Bobbie, and the show's direc-



Sara Krulwich/The New York Times
Melissa Errico as Venus, in the Encores production of the musical "One Touch of Venus."

tor, Leonard Foglia, came in.

Names like Vanessa Williams and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio had been bandied about. But Mr. Binder said thoughts turned to Ms. Errico — who had been lobbying for the role — as an experiment. "Walter and I looked at each other and decided that there were probably stars for 'One Touch of Venus' who would have a lot of box-office appeal," Mr. Binder said. "We thought this was a real opportunity for Melissa, an opportunity for Encores to have this happen to someone."

When Mr. Binder read the reviews, he laughed. It was his triumph, too.

A New Musical

Years before Encores discovered old musicals, the Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn, N.J., was staging them. (Its newest offering, "Call Me Madam," with Leslie Uggams, is directed by Charles Repole, who had staged it for Encores.)

But now, suddenly, Paper Mill has a new musical attracting interest. "Comfortable Shoes," an original pop musical by Clint Holmes, the nightclub singer who had a talk show on Channel 9 a few years back, just finished at Millburn, in a run

so well received that the Shubert Organization is expressing interest in its future.

"We hope that it will see its way clear to perhaps winding up in New York," said Angelo Del Rossi, Paper Mill's executive producer.

The show, a kind of docu-musical, tells the story of Mr. Holmes's experiences as the son of a black father and white mother. "I have never received more letters about a production," Mr. Del Rossi said. The hope is to go to Broadway, perhaps with a stop first at a regional theater.

Another Jujamcyn?

Jujamcyn Theaters, which has five Broadway houses, has been considering adding a sixth: the vacant Selwyn theater on 42d Street. Rocco Landesman, Jujamcyn's president, says the company has been crunching the numbers over the last few weeks to see if assuming a long-term lease for the old theater, now part of the Times Square redevelopment project, would work.

Other theatrical tidbits:

At the Laura Pels Theater on April 29, Ralph Fiennes, Francesca Annis and Alan Rickman are to read poetry and prose to benefit the Almeida Theater in London, where Mr. Fiennes's "Hamlet" and Diana Rigg's "Medea" originated. The evening is to be directed by Jonathan Kent, who plans to direct Mr. Fiennes in David Hare's translation of "Ivanov" at the Almeida in February.

In search of a crossover audience, the Dicapo Opera Theater, a 204-seat subscription theater on East 76th Street, is offering "The Threepenny Opera," the Brecht-Weill musical, next weekend and the weekend of April 19.

Nell Carter has agreed to play Miss Hannigan in a 20th-anniversary production of "Annie," planned for Broadway next season.

A Trend Analyzed

Theater audiences seem to have a fixation with psychiatrists. The long-running "Mrs. Klein," about Melanie Klein, the child analyst, remains a hit at the Lucille Lortel. Now, "Sabina," a play about Sabina Spielrein, a patient of Carl Jung's who also figured in the life of Sigmund Freud, is packing them in at Primary Stages on West 45th Street.

Willy Holtzman, who wrote "Sabina," says that in earlier workshops of the play, analysts from various schools of psychological theory would come up to him after the show.

"This one woman was like the last Freudian Marxist," Mr. Holtzman said. "She said: 'You got Freud just right!' Then I had the Jungians, who said, 'You know, you have to dirty up Jung a little bit.'"

Mr. Holtzman, who has written several films for television, was initially commissioned by the producers Jacqueline Judd and Susan Rose to write a play about Freud and Jung. In his research, he became fascinated with Spielrein, who went on to become a psychoanalyst herself. And the mysteries of her life, he added, made her irresistible to a playwright.

ON BROADWAY!"

— Dick Schapp, ABC-TV World News Now

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Art in Review

■ The boat as metaphor for escape ■ Wistfulness and beauty's funny side ■ Conceptualism with a Pop flavor ■ Cubism translated into sculpture.

Kcho

Barbara Gladstone Gallery
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SoHo
Through April 20

Kcho (pronounced KAH-tcho and originally Alexis Leyva Machado) is 26, Cuban, an artist who's created a buzz lately. His New York debut is a mixed bag and not easy to make out. His main motif is the boat, and his best works are bentwood towers of them. Open-form constructions joined by shiny C-clamps, they're playful like Erector Sets but elegant like Alvar Aalto chairs, and the clamps add a sense of latent tension, as if, were one of them undone, the whole thing might burst at the seams. They're dreamy, ad hoc, slightly surreal concoctions that could just keep going up and up, à la Brancusi's "Endless Column."

Cuba's an island, and boats are how people get off it, so they also connote escape, freedom. Other Cuban-born artists, like José Bedía, exploit the motif to this end. Besides the bentwood towers, Kcho has drawn boats made of baseballs and hot dogs (allusions to Uncle Sam?) and constructed, out of paperbacks

of Marxist tracts, a boat whose lack of seaworthiness may imply something about the sinking prospects of Fidel Castro's regime.

The drawings and paperback boat aren't nearly as fanciful as the bentwood sculptures, and since Kcho is Cuba's government-approved artist, as it were, you may also wonder just what kind of political message they intend, if that's even what they do intend.

MICHAEL KIMMELMAN

Amy Sillman

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SoHo
Through April 20

There's a group of artists now mixing cartoons, art history and surrealism in various combinations, and the group includes Nicole Eisenman, Lari Pittman, Jane Fine, Sue Williams; if you stretch it a bit, you can count someone like Albert Oehlen. Amy Sillman, who's 40, from Chicago, is among the best of them. Her latest show has six paintings. They're dreamy, Boschian whirlpools of biomorphic shapes, scumbles, drips and other abstract incidents, with allusions to

Masaccio, Turner and Disney. It works because Ms. Sillman paints with finesse, wit and a breezy, open-ended affection for her sources.

"View From Lake Michigan" shows a tiny figure watching a squall of faces from Hindu paintings. Funny and absurd, it's wistful, somehow, with its boat in the distance, and it hints at something gone, half-remembered. "Miss New York" is appealing in another way: part monochrome, like an Ellsworth Kelly, part sketchy faces based on contestants in the Miss Universe pageant, it is an airy joke about beauty, abstract and otherwise.

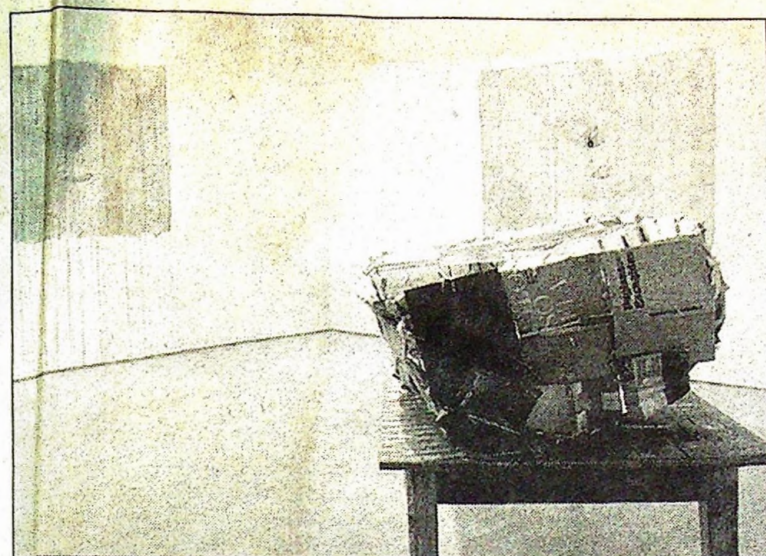
MICHAEL KIMMELMAN

Simon Grennan and Christopher Sperandio

American Fine Arts
22 Wooster Street, near Grand Street
SoHo
Through April 13

There is no end in sight to the permutations of Conceptual Art. The latest wrinkle comes from two young artists, Simon Grennan from Manchester, England, and Christopher Sperandio from New York City, who, despite living on separate continents, have been working together since 1988. In their New York debut, they funnel Conceptualism's love of concepts, narratives and self-reflexive explanation through familiar forms of popular culture. The result: a rather pleasant accessibility that is one of Mr. Grennan and Mr. Sperandio's goals.

First, there's the artists' state-



Zindman-Fremont/Barbara Gladstone Gallery

A section of an exhibition at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery devoted to various works with a boat motif by the Cuban artist known as Kcho.

ment, drawn in the form of a comic book spread, that details their "practice," their interest in collaboration and their meetings with the owner of American Fine Arts. Then there's the work itself: a series of large silk-screen images whose off-register color separations require 3-D glasses to be properly viewed. Still, the woozy effects of viewing them without glasses is appropriate to the subjects: each image highlights the story of a supernatural experience obtained by interviewing people who answered ads that the artists placed in newspapers.

The interest in ordinary people plays well against the ordinary means of mechanical reproduction, which is used with enough artistic ingenuity to look crisp and strangely new in the gallery context, while retaining some semblance of the personal. Mainly Mr. Grennan and Mr. Sperandio tweak our notion of what art is and who it is for, making one curious about the form their practice will take next time.

ROBERTA SMITH

Jacques Lipchitz

'The Paris Years'

Marlborough Gallery
40 West 57th Street
Manhattan
Through April 13

Scholars have lost interest in the expressive, neo-Baroque sculptures that seemed, in the years after World War II, like Jacques Lipchitz's crowning achievement. This large retrospective of the sculptor's work from 1910 to 1940 seems to reflect the current consensus that his most important achievement was to translate the formal language of Cubist painting into a new

black infant, and black women suckle from each other's breasts.

No one is really flattered here. Blacks come off almost as badly as whites, and Ms. Walker softens her blows by extending the campy historicism to herself: her announcement card identifies her as "a Free Negress of noteworthy talent" in stilted tones that recall the artist team of McDermott and McGough. But her explanation seems as true, and sick, as any. One concludes — as Frederick Law Olmsted did when he wrote of his travels through the Southern states in the 1850's — that slavery corrupted the humanity of all involved.

The exhibition also includes small watercolors tracing the genesis of some of Ms. Walker's motifs and two variations on her black silhouette technique. One involves giving the cutouts moving parts, like 19th-century puppets; the other incises her images directly into the wall. This last approach replaces Ms. Walker's sharp, pop-out visibility with images that are nearly invisible, but also more physical, and could open new vistas in an art that is already spacious with promise.

ROBERTA SMITH

Bill Jensen

'Recent Drawings'
Joan T. Washburn
20 West 57th Street
Manhattan
Through April 13

Bill Jensen's paintings, sweet and clotted as simmering molasses, draw the viewer in without offering any point of entry. The 11 pencil sketches exhibited here, all done in July 1995, are more open and legible, although in the end equally

tive registers of tiny horses and chariots, and human figures, from the Warring States period (fourth to third century B.C.), and a complete set of pretty Western Han (second to first century B.C.) cosmetic cases and boxes, whose alternating bands of black lacquer and silver would look right at home on an Art Deco vanity.

Among the ceramics, a Ruyao bowl is outstanding and sits, appropriately, in a vitrine by itself. And the few bronze figurative sculptures include a small seated Buddha of the Liu Song dynasty, with an abstracted body and an aureole of whirlpool-shaped flames.

Paintings worth seeking out include a landscape titled "Mountains in Clouds" by the Ming Dynasty painter Ho Ch'eng; another, ash-toned and fantastic, by Yang Hsun; and a third by Lan Ying titled "Flying Snow on Myriad Peaks, after Wang Wei," in which individual tree branches are luminously frosted with white paint.

The show comes with an excellent catalogue, written by the gallery's owners, Howard and Mary Ann Rodgers, American art historians based in Japan. With plans to alternate shows of pre-modern with contemporary Asian art, as well as to present lectures and seminars, Kaikodo promises to be a valuable addition to New York's growing Asian art field. This show gets the venture off to an impressive start.

HOLLAND COTTER

James Hill

Bill Maynes Contemporary Art
225 Lafayette Street, at Spring Street
SoHo
Through April 13

This is a fine show by an artist born in Texas and now living in Southern California. Mr. Hill works in the terrain between painting and sculpture, and crowds his small, thickly brushed canvases with bits and pieces of far-flung cultures, then wraps them around with cage-like webs of metal wire.

In one work, a little bronze figure of the Indian god Shiva stands on a protruding wooden shelf against a backdrop of slathered paint through which swatches of patterned African cloth are visible. In another, a horse figurine meets two head-to-head jade-green Buddhas. And in a third, titled "Navajos in Love," a piece of amber-colored desert quartz sits below a pink enamel heart floating like a moon in a sky.

Many of these elements could be prizes spilling from a multicultural Cracker Jack box, but Mr. Hill's work looks distinctly American, a frontier version, you might say, of

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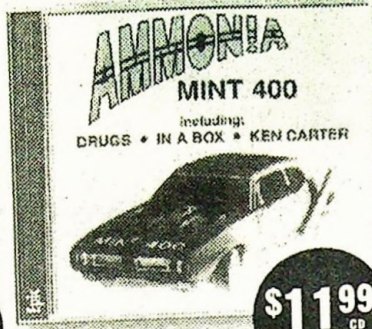
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Lipchitz's debt to Picasso is unmistakable, both in sculptures of 1915 and 1916 that treat the human figure as a series of abutting vertical slabs and in still-life reliefs of 1918 to 1923 that flatten mandolins, guitars and clarinets into a field of interlocking planes. Many of these works (especially the constructed wooden sculptures) are beautiful, but Lipchitz's individual vision seems to be submerged in a period style shared with sculptors like Henri Laurens and Alexander Archipenko.

Cubism's crystalline forms become heavy and clunky in Lipchitz's hands, and as he progresses from the 1920's to the 30's, it becomes apparent that this clunkiness is in some way his peculiar gift as a sculptor. Like many sculptors of the period, he seems to turn to the example of Pacific art with its openwork pattern of solids and voids. But his sculpture is never light or transparent: the hollows seem to have been drilled into a recalcitrant mass, ready to close up again at any second.

Struggling or embracing, the writhing limbs of Lipchitz's figures are knotted so tightly around one another that they cannot move. Sometimes they give the impression of titanic energy; sometimes they are merely inert. It is clear, by the end of this show, that Lipchitz's later Baroque style was not an aberration, but the logical outcome of a long and heartfelt evolution.

PEPE KARMEI

Kara Walker

Wooster Gardens
558 Broadway, near Prince Street
SoHo
Through April 13

Kara Walker's second solo show is an impressive hodgepodge that includes installation works, drawings and a couple of new ideas. Ms. Walker continues to cast a jaundiced eye back to the antebellum South to explain the complex tragedy of race relations in America.

The picture she renders — in the inherently elegant 19th-century medium of black-paper silhouette expanded to installation-art scale — is grimly funny. Tensions between the races are enacted in terms that are almost relentlessly violent, sexual and scatological, yet strangely familial, even intimate. They are also absurd in the extreme: a little white girl slices off her hand, a pipe-smoking mammy slaughters a dog, an old man with a single peg leg sodomizes a little black girl, his saber puncturing the chest of a

They give a sense of twisting, tree-like forms seen in extreme close-up. Hollowed-out ovals climb the page like the cicatrices of amputated branches. Roots sprawl horizontally like Schiele nudes. Mr. Jensen's long, loopy pencil strokes sometimes act as independent forms, and sometimes consolidate into areas of shading. The spaces between them are as important as the strokes themselves.

The two larger works in the show seem more conventional. Drowned in a charcoal haze, the large masses of "Cries and Whispers" look all too much like cliffs from a Symbolist seascape. "Ishmael," painted with egg tempera and gouache on paper, evokes a forbidding landscape of brown and green hills and ravines, ready to swallow up the rejected Hagar and her unfortunate progeny.

In both pictures, the sense of a framed landscape, seen from a distance, points up by contrast the intimacy and intensity of Mr. Jensen's smaller pencil studies.

PEPE KARMEI

Group Show

Kaikodo Gallery
164 East 64th Street
Manhattan
Through April 20

This newly opened gallery instantly ranks as one of the city's most spectacular commercial art spaces. Housed in a converted town house, with a single tall window letting in natural light on each level, its airy rooms are devoted entirely to the arts of Asia.

The current show, timed to coincide with the recent groundswell of Asian art activity in New York, cuts a wide historical swath with some 80 pieces ranging from a Neolithic jade pendant from China (circa 3500 to 2000 B.C.) to 19th-century Japanese hanging scrolls.

The early Chinese work is particularly fine. It includes an extraordinary four-sided vessel with narra-

cies but with a lot less Europe and a lot more paint. Even the wire wrappings have a vaguely Cornelian sense of protection and enclosure.

Like Cornell, Mr. Hill works at home (he teaches in a public high school by day and paints in his garage at night). Now 50, he has had a steady if low-profile career. For anyone who has not seen his work before, he is a genuine find, and there's more of him to see in the exhibition "A Labor of Love," at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in SoHo through April 14.

HOLLAND COTTER

David Vestal

Robert Mann Gallery
42 East 76th Street
Manhattan
Through April 27

Well known as a teacher and a photography magazine editor, David Vestal here offers evocative black-and-white photographs of New York City, made since the 1940's. Rain spattering on a rooftop and an army of water towers marching through the dawn above the city are typical of the quiet scenes that have attracted Mr. Vestal's eye.

Unusual qualities of light play an important role in many of the pictures. In a 1950 shot, pedestrians are reduced to dark silhouettes against a white street as they scurry to avoid a rainstorm; a 1963 shot, taken from the front of a moving subway train, shows the stark lights of the coming station in a blurred, jittery image.

Two shots from the 1940's of painted signs in store windows recall Berenice Abbott's work, while later images reflect the gritty lyricism of Sid Grossman, with whom Mr. Vestal studied. But his best works capture atmospheric moments, particularly at dusk or night, when the city's workday hustle is transformed into a softer beauty.

CHARLES HAGEN

Also of Note

Critics' choices of some other Manhattan art shows:

HERBERT BRANDL, Jack Tilton Gallery, 49 Greene Street, SoHo (through April 13). Big sheets of color sweep across these canvases by Herbert Brandl, a young Austrian painter. Sometimes they look like lush Symbolist landscapes; sometimes they just look like paint. The video in the back room, showing sparks of sunlight dancing on running water, is unexpectedly entrancing (Pepe Karmel).

MILTON W. BROWN, "Watercolors, 1932-1995," Gallery Schlesinger, 24 East 73d Street, Manhattan (through April 13). At the age of 84, this well-known historian of American art has his first solo show and makes it look easy: a display of 20 watercolors whose subjects include modest views of Fire Island, East Hampton and Cape Cod. In the tradition of Homer and Hopper, these works have a clarity of light, as well as a softened, understated technique, that is very much their own (Roberta Smith).