

EYES ON THE NATURAL WORLD

From November 16, 2007 through January 31, 2008 The Drawing Room is pleased to present *Eyes on the Natural World*, an exhibition of recent works by John Alexander, Jill Musnicki, Jean Pagliuso, Clifford Ross, Michelle Stuart and Jane Wilson juxtaposed with select historical drawings from France and India. The contemporary artists' exploration of nature - bees, butterflies, birds, poultry, the ocean and sky - has inspired the installation of their work alongside counterpoints by artists with similar interests from different times and places. Committed to showing today's artists with those of the last two centuries, The Drawing Room hopes to further the discourse about the artistic and historical contexts of drawing from life by focusing on similarities and differences of sensibility, training and technique.

The salon style installation of this material invites visual dialogue between unlikely neighbors. Jane Wilson's watercolors of the quintessential Long Island light as it falls on the inlets and beaches of the East End are paired with mysterious nocturnal landscapes by Henri Marchal (French 1878-1949). Carried away by the natural world which they capture en plein air in pastel or watercolor, both Marchal and Wilson are romantics. Compared to the dark, gothic charcoals of Marchal, Wilson's long practice with watercolor under the open skies of Watermill preserves the action of a changing atmosphere with a fresh, modern abstraction.

Clifford Ross' 2 x 3 inch photographs of roiling ocean waves evoke T. S. Eliot's reference to a "still point in a turning world". These intimate frothy stills of hurricanes are paired with a suite of tiny 19th century pen and ink landscape drawings made on a polished white ground. Drawn by an itinerant artist, the pen and ink landscapes on toned gesso cards reveal the meticulous transportable technique of an etching master who walked through the idyllic French countryside to draw. So, too, nearly two centuries later, Clifford Ross takes his Mamiya camera into the waves of a hurricane on Georgica beach. The similarity in conception and execution between these two artists rests on their mutual desire for a graphic precision to monumentalize nature in miniature images.

John Alexander's commanding portrait of a heron, and his charcoal and pastel bust of an owl, share the alert expression of someone caught by the paparazzi cameras. In *Rush to Judgment*, another bravura watercolor by Alexander who is a master of irony, a flock of hummingbirds flutter and seem to bounce off one another exerting intense energy. Alexander's smart contemporary birds are juxtaposed with more innocent early 19th century Indian Company School watercolors of an owl and river fish. With a similar, and yet more refined technique, the Mughal trained Indian painters are equally astute observers. In addition, a 1941 series of watercolors for an atlas of ocean fish by Charles Jean Yver reveals the influence of Surrealism.

Jean Pagliuso's elegant and amusing portraits of poultry resonate with the Indian owl as well as Alexander's to create the full menagerie. With a great sense of humor, Pagliuso captures with her camera the poised postures of her fowl subjects who are brought to her studio and posed under the lights. In all cases the birds are statuesque and isolated on the page, seemingly taking themselves very seriously.

Jill Musnicki's recent painterly abstractions of insects are paired with stark French zoological watercolors of snakes. The nuances of her oil painting of creatures that hover in a mysterious blue space are a striking contrast to the graphic clarity of the black and yellow snakes that hang nearby.

Michelle Stuart's grid of lustrous butterflies transmits equally delicate and earthy memories of the subjects that inspired her. The warm materiality of her process is contrasted by Jean Gabriel Prêtre's (c.1775-1840) cool scientific presentation of wasps whose iridescent wings harken back to the Napoleonic era when naturalists went on political campaigns to record the natural world they were colonizing.

For further information or reproductions, please contact Susan Papa at 631.324.5016 or info@drawingroom-gallery.com