

is and valleys from the o's — should not be underestimated. There are two fine figurative the show, too: a near Abstract Expressionist beach scene, "Water," from 1961; and, 3, the monumental image of "Ading."

KEN JOHNSON

Koether

Erben Gallery
20th Street, Chelsea
May 7

otion of seriously unserious g has existed at least since Picabia painted pulp-fiction in the 1930's. It is part of the work of Martin Kippenberger, work is highly visible at the t, but it also underlies the de-ly ersatz, curiously visionary

ness being a social product. A black canvas with the outline of a veiled head is too slight for the words of Guy Debord, the founder of Situationism.

A small, pink, checked painting from 2004, reflected in the shimmering surface of hanging Mylar, suggests that beauty is fleeting. Take it where you find it. The metallic gleam recurs in a recent relief incorporating liquid glass, images of coins, skulls and crossbones and the inverted silhouette of what seems to be an eagle about to strike its prey. The combination doesn't seem promising, but it has the ersatz factor that has always served Ms. Koether well.

ROBERTA SMITH

Joshua Smith

Reena Spaulings
371 Grand Street, SoHo
Through April 29

Taxter & Spengemann
504 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
Through tomorrow

The conflicting notions of the artist as protean creator and Warholian machine meet in the art of Joshua Smith, who works by hand in rote-like, almost obsessive ways and likes to highlight the conventions of the

identity and the tawdry facts of 21st-century life that the paintings depict.

A cheerful real estate agent shows a big cardboard box to a bemused homeless man on an upscale street festooned with signs bearing legends like "Rich & White Unaffordable Properties." A geyser of black gold shoots up from a fountain in "Oil Discovered in Front of the White House," a deadpan political cartoon that becomes funnier the more you think about it. And in one of the most incisive critiques of opportunism at the Guggenheim Museum ever committed to paper, a small grisaille painting depicts the Wright building as an abandoned roller skating attraction, with a sign on the front reading "Skate the ramp of Death!"

KEN JOHNSON

'Odyssey by Artemis'

Onassis Cultural Center at Olympic Tower
645 Fifth Avenue, near 52nd Street
Manhattan
Through May 21

The hair-raising adventures of the ancient Greek hero Odysseus (a.k.a. Ulysses) must certainly have been told before in tapestries. But this abstract version by Artemis, a weaver from Liechtenstein who works on the

two dozen beat-up cardboard boxes faithfully rendered in glaze and clay. A doghouse made of cut-up boxes stands on this Warholian platform and a life-size dachshund is next to — the source of the numerous life piles of droppings scattered about. Thus the artists mock the pretensions of modern art. (Incidental: Bertozzi & Casoni are not as good with animals as they are with inanimate things.)

"Skeletal Madonna" depicts a life-size human skeleton, made entirely of silver, cutting through a bed of ramic daffodils with an industrial-strength mower. "Pot Pourri" features an ape sitting on a travel trunk studying a paperback copy of Darwin's "Origin of Species." There are also dirty medicine cabinets stocked with pill bottles, art supply pornographic photographs and odds and ends; full-size oil barrels leaking garbage and toxic waste and a white ape sitting on a marble cafe table partly covered with disgustingly realistic vomit.

Bertozzi & Casoni's symbolism is crude, and their message, that mankind is in a devolutionary spiral, is sophomoric. Nevertheless, their work is absorbing to study for its attention to detail, and their ingenuity and industry are undeniable.

KEN JOHN

STORM
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Art in Review

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The hair-raising adventures of the ancient Greek hero Odysseus (a.k.a. Ulysses) must certainly have been told before in tapestries. But this abstract version by Artemis, a weaver from Liechtenstein who works on the

tiny sunstruck Greek island of Tinos, has a zing that brings new life to the hoary saga. The 12 works of her cycle — woven in wool, cotton, silk and light-catching viscose — are based on Homer's "Odyssey" and "The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel" by the 20th-century Greek poet Nikos Kazantzakis.

They are deployed on the walls of the Olympic Tower's public atrium — some rather too high up — in lively groupings. In each work, jagged, torn, angular and polygonal shapes dance with organic ones — lobes, splotchy circles, forms with arcs and circles bitten out of them — on contrasting grounds to collagelike effect. The colors play off each other in subtle modulations.

In the six-panel "Resourceful Man," relating to Ulysses's cleverness, the rose-and-red ground of each panel is dominated by a sunny yellow motif. The motif changes shape from panel to panel as its placement steps up from low to high. Satellites in other colors nudge, invade or float around it. In the last panel, the yellow motif hovers exultantly at the top. The path was steep but I made it, it seems to sing.

"The Cyclops" evokes the barbarous one-eyed giant Polyphemus, a shepherd who imprisoned Ulysses and his men in a cave before they blinded him and escaped disguised as his sheep. In this playful work, multicolored shards and other shapes are scattered on a black ground around a central motif in streaked white that suggests a head, with "features" that could be read as a black hole for an eye and a mouth open in angry shock.

Most — not all — of the other works here also live up to the Ulysses story. Were Penelope, Ulysses' wily weaver wife, around, they might even meet with her approval. That conceit aside, Artemis scores high as an inventive designer, a fine crafts-woman and a sensitive translator of written to visual narrative.

GRACE GLUECK