

Art in Review

■ Healing, physical and emotional ■ A man who liked artists ■ Light at the end of the gallery.

'Mojo Hand'

Recent Work by Richard Yarde

The Studio Museum in Harlem
144 West 125th Street
Through Sept. 28

This exhibition by the Boston-born painter Richard Yarde pushes the watercolor medium, often used for incidental effects, in dramatic directions both in terms of scale and subject matter.

In 1991 the artist, then 51, was hit by a traumatic illness that resulted in kidney failure and debilitating stroke-like symptoms. All of the work in the show, which was originally organized by Jeffrey Keough for the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, has been produced since that time, and it stands as an affecting and unsentimental record of physical and emotional healing.

A small set of images and themes is repeated throughout, many of them in the show's 12-foot-long title work. Here six pairs of disembodied hands, palms open, surround the nearly abstract painting of an X-rayed body. A block of bright dots — the 23d Psalm spelled out in Braille notation — vibrates like constellations against a midnight-blue sky. Elsewhere, Mr. Yarde himself appears in a series of self-portraits, often set against a gridded, quiltlike ground, like a figure coming in and out of focus.

There's no question that this kind of material has seen hard service in the body- and mortality-obsessed art of the 1990's. But Mr. Yarde, through his expressive concentration and restraint and his virtuosic control of a difficult medium, makes it very much his own.

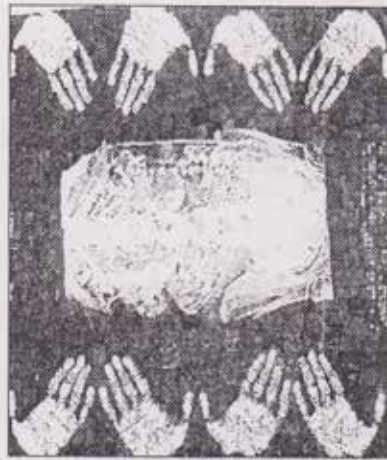
HOLLAND COTTER

'Art and Friendship'

Selections From the Roland F. Pease Collection

Tibor de Nagy Gallery
724 Fifth Avenue, near 57th Street
Through Sept. 13

This lovely, inspired show is tinged with melancholy only because it seems to be, in various ways, about a time in American art gone and irretrievable. In the early 1950's, Roland F. Pease, a reporter for United Press, recently widowed, moved into a house on 53d Street opposite the gallery that Tibor de Nagy, a Hungarian refugee, and John Myers had opened in 1950. The gallery showed Helen Frankenthaler and Jane Wilson and Fairfield Porter and Grace Hartigan, and published poems by John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara. Mr. Pease wandered in one day, and "on impact, this creative spirit addressed my suffering, as it had Tibor's, expressing the underside of American materialistic life," Mr. Pease recalled.



Studio Museum in Harlem

A detail from Richard Yarde's "Mojo Hand" (1996), at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

"A new world opened up through art and friendship — la vie bohème."

Over the years Mr. Pease bought works by these artists or was given them as gifts. When Porter needed grocery money, Mr. Pease paid him to paint his portrait. Because Larry Rivers loved to play jazz on Mr. Pease's piano, Mr. Pease swapped the piano for a painting. The art was mostly small, but fine: the kind of work one can actually imagine owning because it is domestic in scale and intimate and refined; a taste advanced but not chic.

The show includes more than two dozen paintings and drawings and one sculpture, an abstraction of welded steel by Peter Reginato. Among the other works, a small

Frankenthaler from 1957 and a Hartigan inspired by Rubens are particular gems, as are a Jane Freilicher watercolor (wet on wet, spring fresh chartreuse and yellow); a Rivers still life; some abstractions, like jigsaw friezes, by Maurice Golubov, now little remembered, and an early Red Grooms painting from 1964 of a house at night, moody and lush.

Porter's painting of Mr. Pease is the highlight: thin and unassuming, he sits straight-backed in a soft chair that seems almost to engulf him, his hands decorously resting one on the other. He looks, like his collection, sincere, modest, intelligent and sweet.

MICHAEL KIMMELMAN

'Collective Action'

Exit Art/The First World
548 Broadway, near Prince Street
SoHo
Through Sept. 20

In terms of the art of the last 50 years, Conceptual Art was arguably the shot heard most completely around the world. The full extent of its influence remains unmeasured, but this exhibition offers additional data: a trove of unknown if somewhat mysterious evidence in the form of big grainy black-and-white photographs, each illuminated by a single blue light within the otherwise darkened gallery space.

These 50 or so images record 26 of the 61 performance pieces by Collective Action, a group of about 10 Russian artists, mostly born in the late 1940's and early 50's, who worked together from 1976 to 1989.

Their chief theoretician was Andrei Monastyrsky; the most stalwart participants were Nikita Alexeyev, Georgi Kizevalter, Nikolai Panitkov, Igor Makarevich, Elena Elagina, Sergei Romashko and Sabine Haensgen.

Desiring to be left to their own devices and with few resources at their disposal, these artists chose as their primary stage a big open field near a small village outside Moscow. Perhaps euphemistically, they called their works "Trips to the Country," and executed them either for themselves or for small audiences, always photographing and sometimes videotaping their activities and also recording the individual reactions of participants and observers.

Although a catalogue is forthcoming, here the images are presented with titles, but little explanation.

It is hard to know exactly what is going on, although in this regard the images have much in common with those recording the efforts European and American Conceptualists made a few years earlier. One of the more amusing is "Slogan," which simply shows a large banner strung up across several trees of the forest that bordered the field. To Western eyes, it reads as a droll comment on the ubiquity of Russian propaganda.

Other works are more generically Conceptual. In "Ball," a man pushes a sack taller than himself that seems filled with what are probably volleyballs. "Time of Act" involves yards of string spanning freshly plowed earth. "Gaps" con-

sists of squares of a vinyl-like material with circles cut out of the centers; in different images, we see the circles laid on the ground; the excised squares hanging from trees.

In many ways the most impressive visual element is simply the vast Russian field, seen in all seasons, a fitting metaphor for the vacuum in which these artists work. Less visible, but nonetheless palpable, is the courage, persistence, ingenuity of the participants.

ROBERTA SMITH

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