

ARTnews

SEPTEMBER 2010

The New Chicano Art

The **BEST** Underrated Artists

Chinese Ink Painting: The Cutting Edge

Monet ■ Matisse ■ Benglis

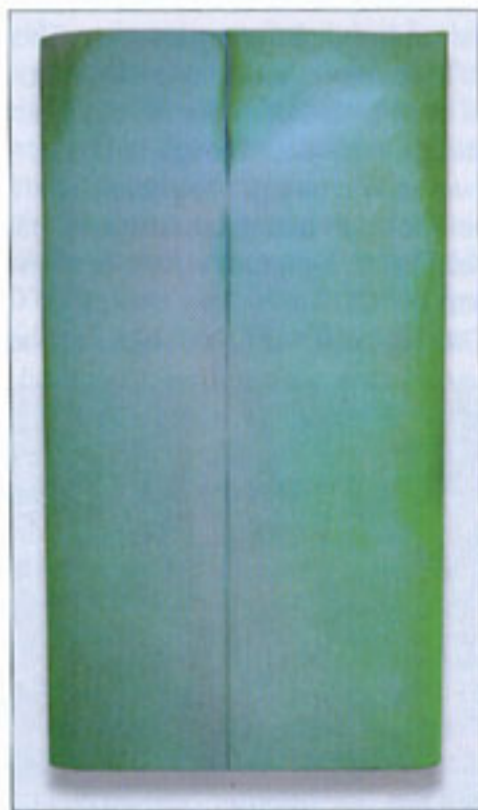


led to the '80s "Infinity Field—Torino," to which his method of overlapping "shrouds," or paint stains, seemed especially suited. Stamos worked into the '90s, exploring nature and abstraction. But what turned out to be one of the greatest charms in this show was a 1935 painting of a child, seen from the back, dressed in green. —*Cynthia Nadelman*

Robert Yasuda

Sundaram Tagore

Hawaiian-born artist Robert Yasuda's wall works successfully navigate the gaps between painting and sculpture. Composed of more or less rectangular-shaped canvases—some broad, others narrower than a two-by-four—the pieces either abut or balance atop one another in sculpturally harmonious T formations. The majestic panels here were carved, swaddled in fabric, and subsequently layered in sly, color-changing, iridescent paint. Initially appearing almost monochrome, the color fields were actually anything but solid or minimal. They appeared to



Robert Yasuda, *Ancestor*, 2009, acrylic polymer on fabric on wood, 80" x 44". Sundaram Tagore.

simultaneously radiate and absorb the paint. Even the grays glowed.

Despite the imposing scale of the 20 works here (all 2009), the canvases seemed ethereal and weightless. *Ancestor* is a seven-foot, minty green duet that consists of two pillarlike panels with subtly curved edges, the central line between

them serving as a meeting place. Yasuda's focus on softening the edges of his monoliths effectively thwarts the geometric aspect of the works and adds to their otherworldly qualities.

Hung in the corner of the main gallery was *Guardian*, a thin but commanding piece in similarly shimmering acrylic polymer. It appeared as if it were part of the gallery's structure. Indeed the installation overall was masterfully laid out, with the architectural quality of the works contributing to the cathedral atmosphere. The large two-paneled work titled *Natural Selection* was created from a mixture of muted shades that moved—exhaled, if you will—as viewers passed by and the light shifted. The piece was raised almost imperceptibly off the wall and gave the impression of being the gallery's set of lungs.

Ultimately the exhibition addressed permanence and ephemerality, and color as form. All of the artist's pearly gateways here, blank save for their sparkle, were as confident as they were unnatural and mysterious. Yasuda's paintings are like shields or tablets awaiting a future generation to record its history on them. —*Doug McClelland*

UP NOW

Leon Levinstein

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Through October 17

"I want to look at life—at the commonplace things, as if I just turned a corner and ran into them for the first time," street photographer Leon Levinstein told *Photography Annual 1955*. And this show, "Hipsters, Hustlers, and Handball Players: Leon Levinstein's New York Photographs, 1950–1980," reveals him doing just that, capturing the apparent chance encounter and, in so doing, rendering it permanent.

These 45 untitled gelatin silver prints from the Met's collection show New Yorkers leaning, leaping, lurching, and preening, or caught in action playing handball. Most of the shots were taken on weekends and in the evenings. In one, a jumble of limbs resolves itself into a man resting his boot on a garbage can; in

another, a hipster perfects his coiffure, unaware of the photographer checking him out from behind. Men parade satyr-like with hulking shoulders and skinny pants in the '60s, and with bellbottoms in



Leon Levinstein, *Handball Players, Lower East Side, NY*, 1950s–'60s, gelatin silver print, 12 1/4" x 10 1/2". Metropolitan Museum of Art.

the '70s. A werewolf-like figure, cigarette dangling from his mouth, lopes across the cobblestones.

Levinstein was also a graphic designer, and virtuoso compositions are not absent from his oeuvre—the sweat-stained shirt of a Lower East Side man arcs across a composition of inky shadows and perspectival slopes worthy of Steichen or Käsebier. However, Levinstein's true subject is human vulnerability. He finds it in unusual places. Tough guys are rendered fragile, while the weaker ones subsist with considerable grace. When a street punk ogle a teenage girl, Levinstein directs our focus to the nape of his neck, exposing him, in turn, to scrutiny. Images of old age are marvelously unsentimental. An elderly gentleman thrusts his walking stick toward the pavement, fending it off. A kerchiefed woman raises her hand to her face in a classic gesture of melancholy. She appears to be alone, and then one notices small birds on her park bench.

Levinstein didn't quite know what he was looking for until he found it. In that way, he was a stand-in for the part of the viewer that doesn't quite know either.

—*Johanna Ruth Epstein*