

## Judith Linhares at P.S. 1 and Ruth Siegel

Judith Linhares is an acknowledged master of gouache; the question has always been whether she can pull off a large oil. On the basis of *Red Sea* (1982), a big vertical canvas seen last summer at the Venice Biennale, the answer would have to be yes, with some rough going. Linhares tends to lay it on thick, reworking and sometimes overworking her underwater images of sailors and octopuses.

That's why it was such a pleasant surprise to see her enter the realm of women and woodpeckers in 1983 (seen most recently in the show "Ripe Fruit," curated by Lisa Liebmann at New York's P.S. 1). Here Linhares seemed fully at home; her medium-sized oils of nude female torsos, broad and trunklike, evoke Blake's "lineaments of gratified desire." Linhares's woodpecker paintings, on the other hand, have the quality of coruscated paint skins. With feathers that suggest tarnished armor or punk hairdos, Linhares's woodpeckers appear in simultaneous profile and frontal views.

At Siegel, Linhares's newer paintings entered a brave new world of lush-life mastery and risqué command. Her modestly scaled gouaches are almost square, brilliantly colored as always and a lot punchier than many a small painting around town. *Persian Garden* revolves around the peacock theme, one of

her favorites, here boiled down to feathery green strokes laid over peacock blue eyes and set off by a marvelous brown and orange harlequin-checked background. In *Sea Witch*, a stormy sky suggests a huge face in which a little black sailboat becomes merely the monster's sardonic smile and mustache. And in *Dark Charmers*, an extraordinary reprise of Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror* on black paper, the girl is decapitated, a beast's head looms in the mirror, and transparent licks of yellow gouache describe the woman's ascetic rib cage and excitedly up-turned tits.

The oils at Siegel were even more impressive than the gouaches. The medium-sized *Gold Torso* is so tightly squeezed into the format that the beatific body language becomes mildly alarming; in *Sleeping Giant*, a large vertical-format work, a colossal Tiki looks surprisingly diffident, like a Walter Keane child with downcast eyes. *Drought* contains a large infusion of late Guston with clouds of purple and yellow paint that threaten to sprout ears or hatch chicks; the imagery is principally of wild horses. But these are metamorphic horses: one of them in the distance seems to be decomposing to the dinosaur state; another equine head, sporting a Veronica Lake page-boy, grins in the foreground. Self-portrait as a 1940s slowpoke? Linhares wrote in the Venice Biennale catalogue: "A horse fell in

love with me once at the riding school. His name was Charlie." In *Drought* and other horse-related works, it looks as if Charlie has returned to claim his mate.

—Brooks Adams