



# **Agitated Figures: The New Emotionalism**

Jedd Garet

Roseanne Generalli

Keith Haring

Peter Julian

Cheryl Laemmle

Jody Pinto

Jane Rosen

Terry Rosenberg

Russ Warren

Frank Young

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## **INTRODUCTION**

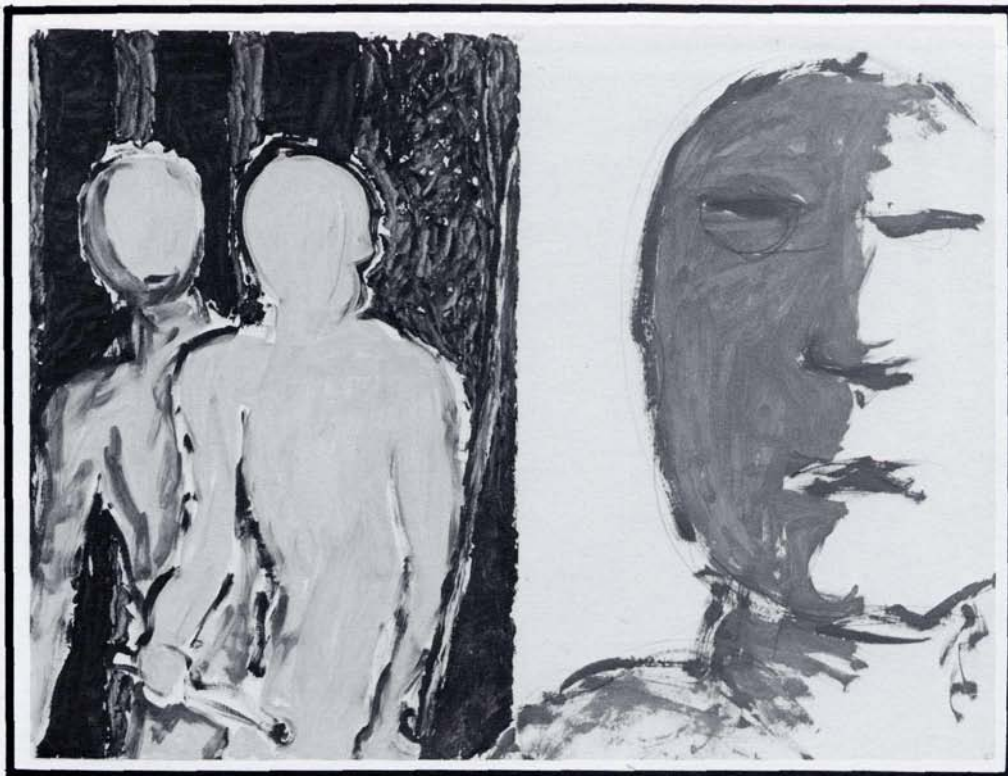
### **"Agitated Figures: The New Emotionalism"**

Focusing on the increased importance of the figure in art today, this exhibition surveys a new tendency toward heightened emotionalism. Figurative imagery has emerged as the key feature of this movement – imagery that often embodies highly emotional themes.

A glance at the principal artists working within this "new emotionalism" exposes a broad range of expression involving allegorical, mythological, and iconographic references. An air of disquiet underlies more evident mystical, spiritual, or ritualistic themes in much of the work.

In the excellent essay which follows, noted critic, Richard Flood, examines the work of ten artists leading this new figurative movement. The emotionalism apparent in their work charts a new and very exciting direction.

Hal Bromm  
26 February 1982

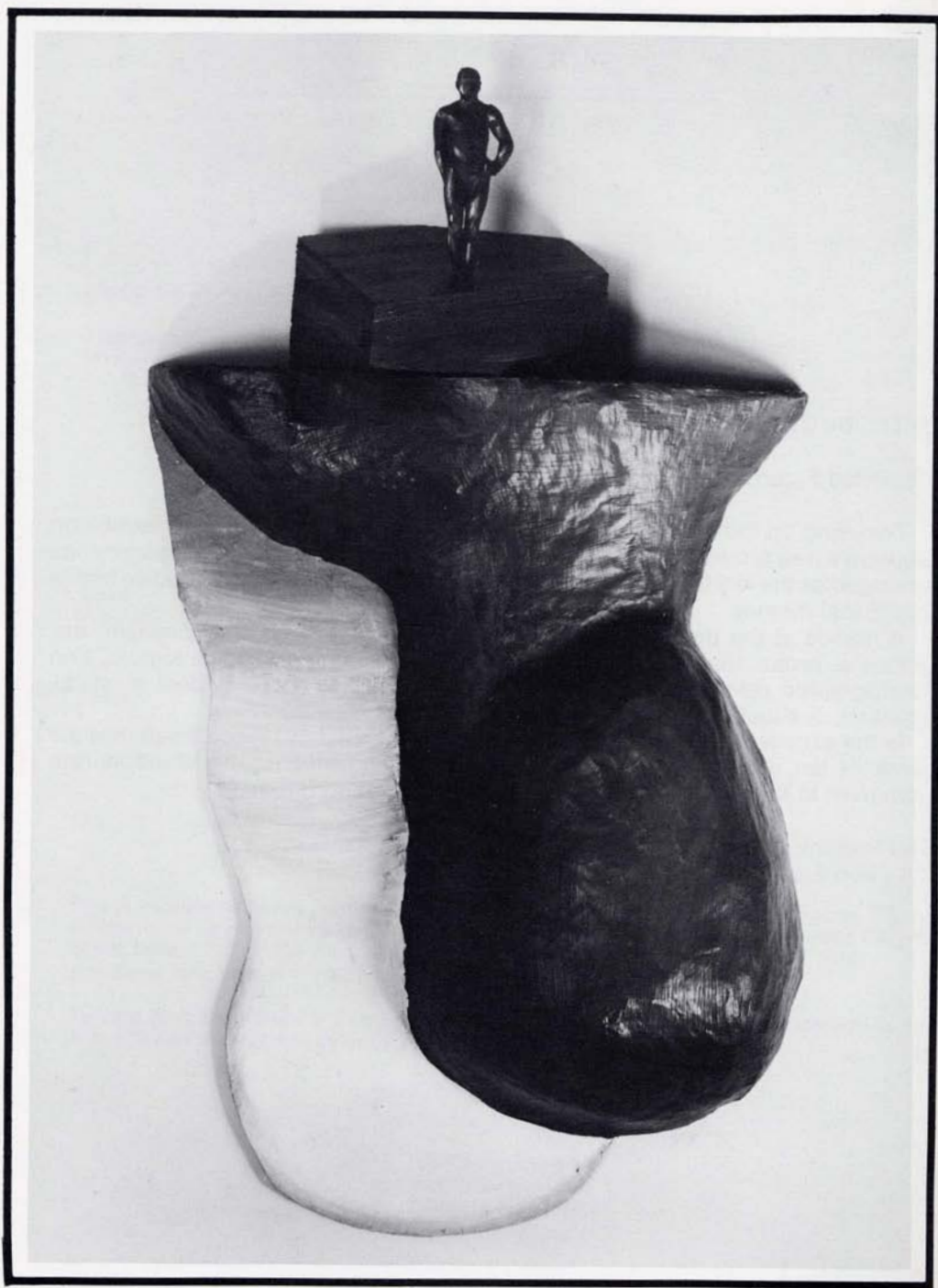


**Peter Julian**  
"A New Deal", 1980  
oil on paper  
40" x 54"  
Courtesy of the artist

tion. There is a sweetness and vulnerability in their ungainly poses, as if they could be easily scattered by a capricious child. Generalli's figures are less lovingly articulated. Their heads are amphibian, like sea-changed Brancusi, and the plastic excess of their bodies is more reptilian than human. They belong to a fixed cultural tradition that anticipated nothing because everything has already been consummated; all that remains is bitter repetition.

Laemmle and Haring are evolving personal mythologies which, despite their coded narrative, are amazingly forthcoming. Laemmle's work appears overtly sympathetic to "veristic" surrealism. Her inevitably isolated protagonist (a sexually undifferentiated monkey) is alternately menaced and enticed by objects and environment. Its encounters read as if they are about the process of selection, but perversely, it's selection as exercised in a vacuum. Haring's narratives are more prolix, implying an entire civilization in the throes of upheaval and, maybe, regeneration. His simple, outlined cartoon figures function in a world where unnatural intervention is a given. All is chaos and Judgement Day is just around the corner. In Haring's artlessly rendered universe, instability and chance are the mainstays. His characters wage war, have sex, purge themselves with antic abandon suggesting that to stop moving is to die, that action – no matter its intent – is to prevail.

Peter Julian and Frank Young operate very much within the expressionist tradition. The urgency of their line and the emotiveness of their paint handling and use of color are as much what their paintings are about as the subjects which they



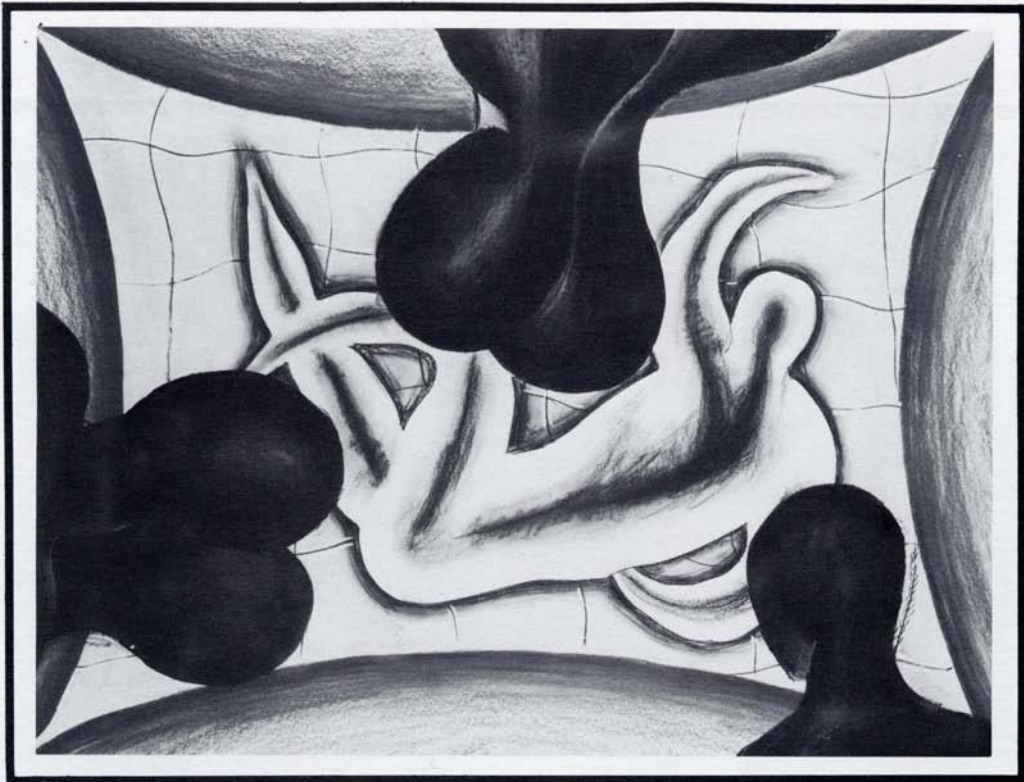
**Jedd Garet**

*"China"*, 1981

painted cast aluminum

55" x 30" x 11"

Courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery, New York, N.Y.



**Jedd Garett**

*"Entertainment"*, 1981

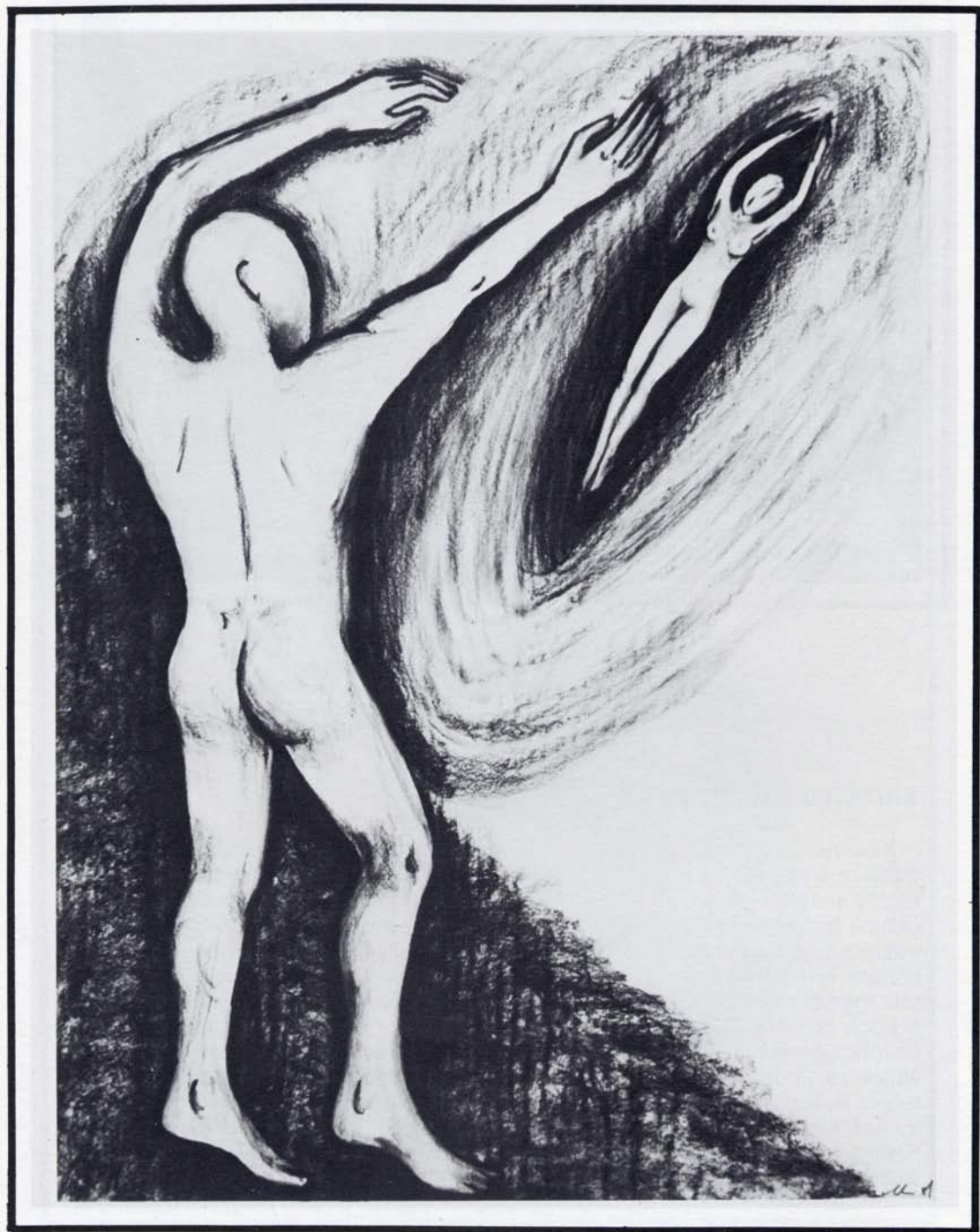
pastel on paper

38" x 50"

Courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery, New York, N.Y.

## AGITATED FIGURES

It now appears that the recent figurative revival has neatly sidestepped the post-modern bias against representationalism by arriving in a guise which mutes its highly suspect origins. That guise has everything to do with a love for painting (which has nothing to do with strategy), and an emotive persuasiveness (which has nothing to do with concept). As contemporary figuration continues to proliferate, one senses that it is a tactic for marking time, an energetic retro-ramble into the not too distant past. Already, much of it seems like a frivolous afterward to a book completed a full sixty years ago. The best suggests that there are still psychological barriers which need to be breached by visceral confrontation, and which result in a kind of **brut**-expressionism where the work itself becomes a totem; Julian Schnabel is the hieratic exemplar of this mode. The worst of it presumes that art is simply one more cracked mirror on the vanity table; Rainer Fetting is the solipsistic princeling of this mode. Couched between these extremes is a range of work which wildly indexes every major stylistic trend of the past two centuries. Much of it is compromised by puerile plagiarism. Some of it exhibits an adaptive intelligence that authoritatively advances its own case while – sincerely or ironically – acknowledging its roots. Virtually none of it suggests the kind of inevitability which heralds a departure; contemporary figuration is definitely a return. However, its idiosyncratic, introverted nature is quite



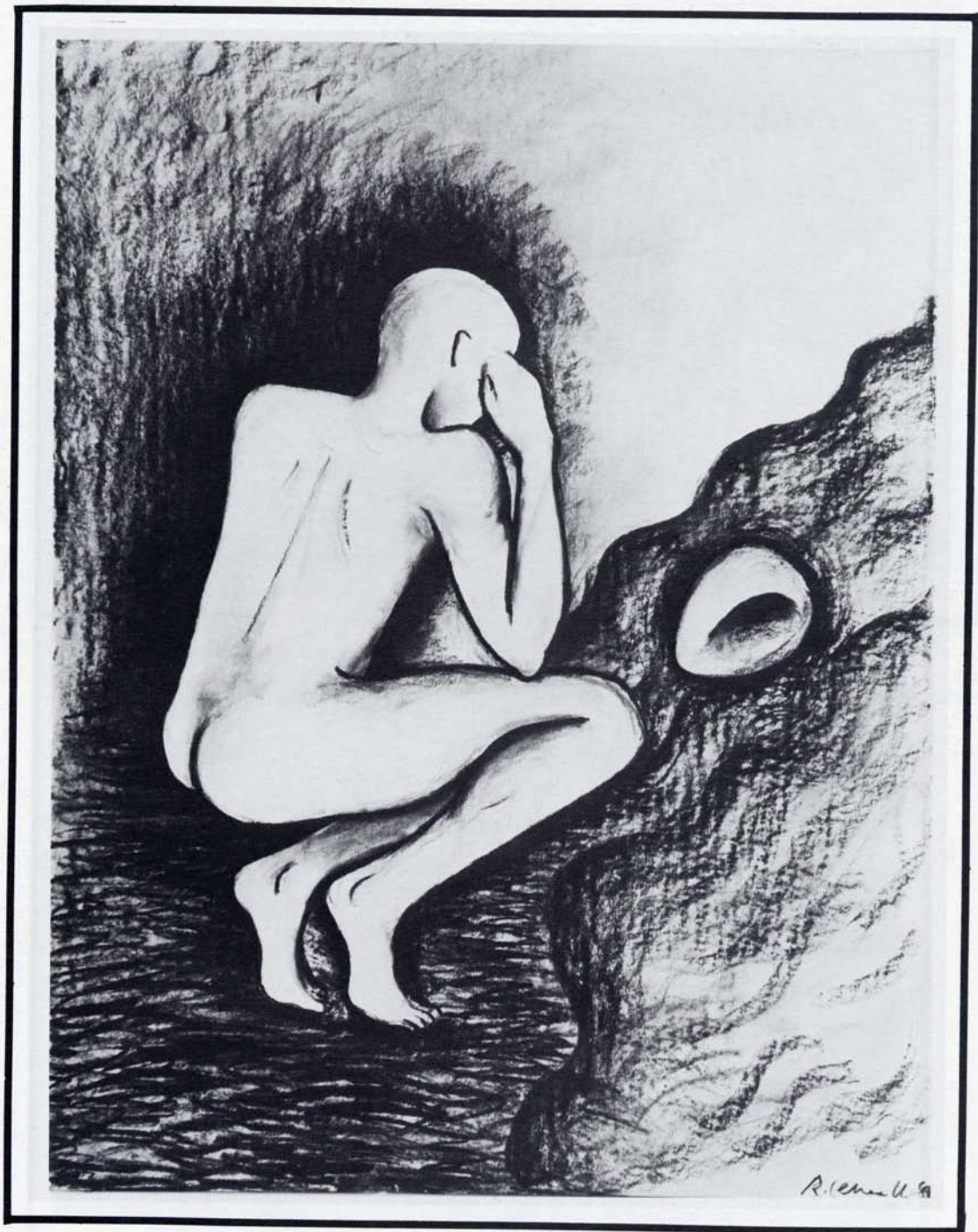
**Roseanne Generalli**

*"Orpheus and Eurydice"*, 1981

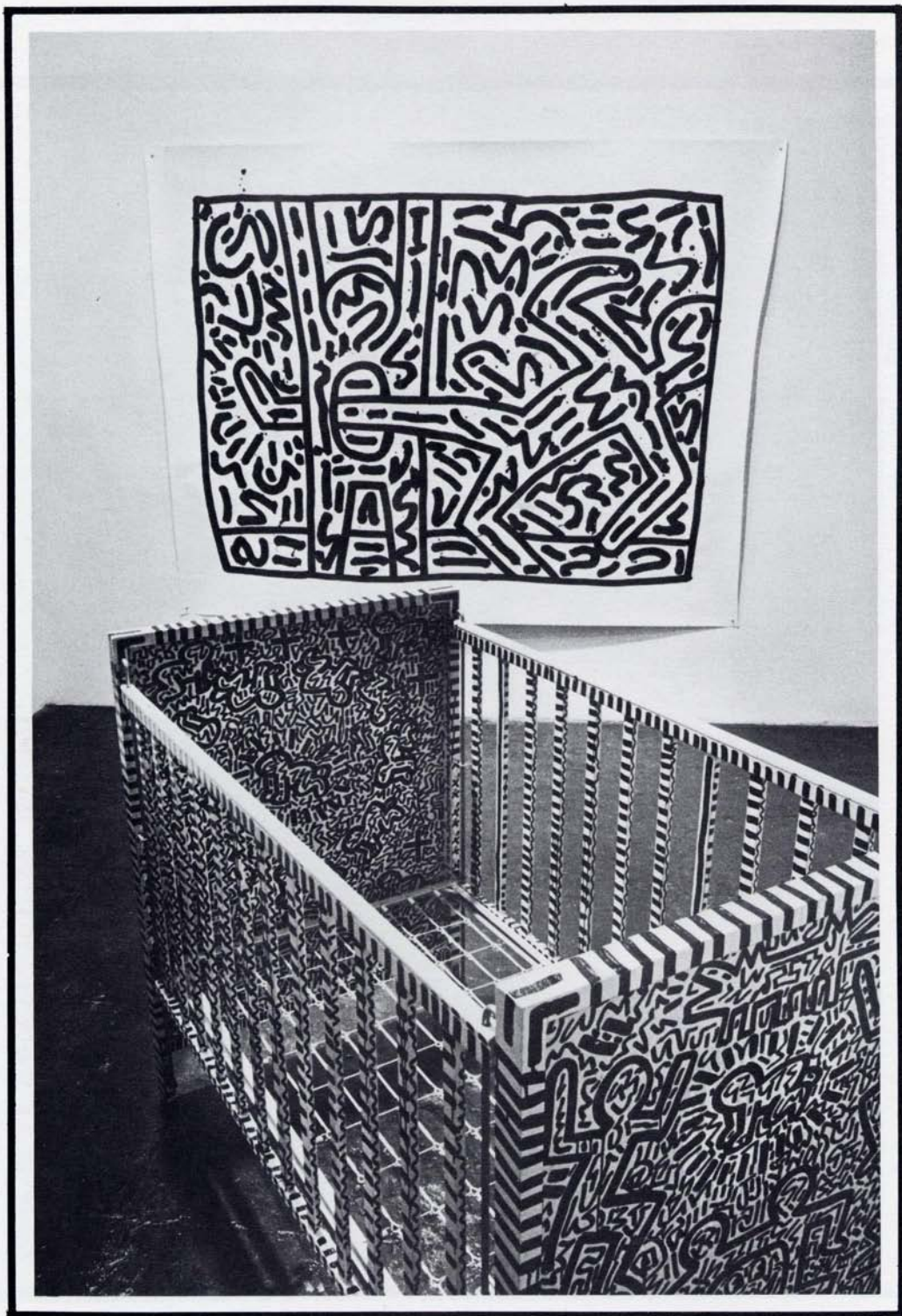
charcoal on paper

53" x 41"

Courtesy of Hal Bromm Gallery, New York, N.Y.

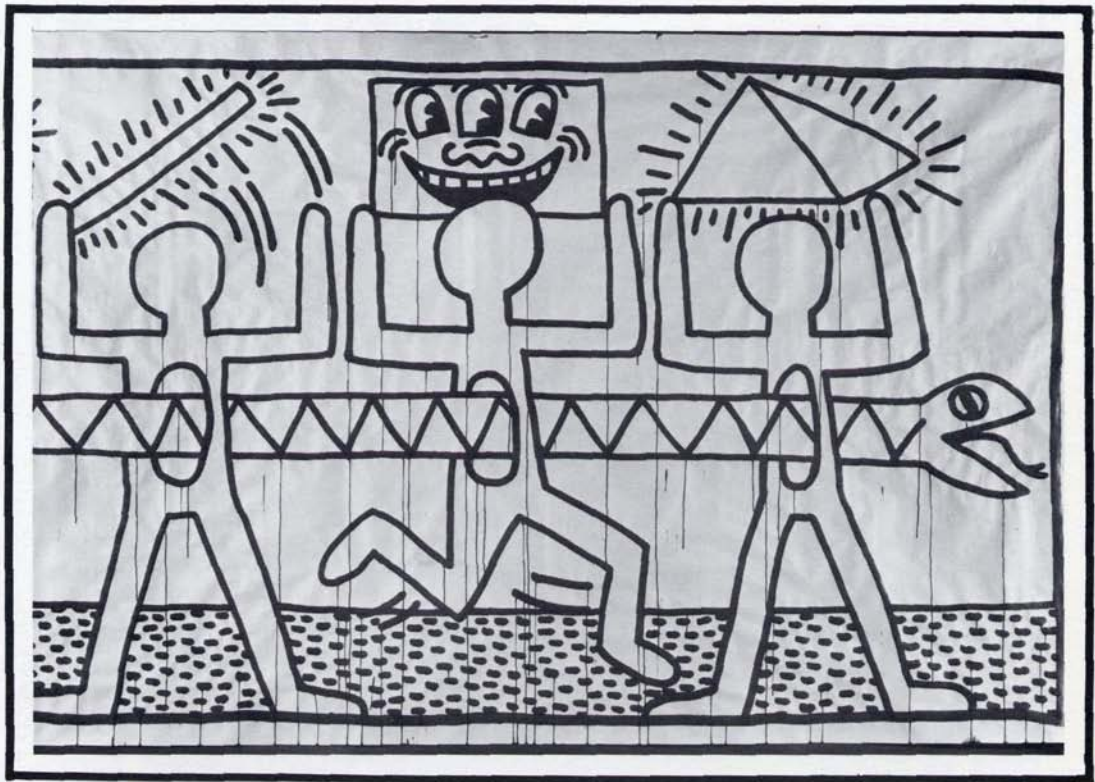


**Roseanne Generali**  
"Narcissus", 1981  
charcoal on paper  
53" x 41"  
Private Collection



**Keith Haring**  
Foreground: "Crib", 1981  
marker and enamel on wood crib  
3½' x 4' x 2'

Background: *Untitled*  
Sumi ink on paper  
72" x 90"  
Courtesy of Hal Bromm Gallery, New York, N.Y.



**Keith Haring**

*Untitled, 1982*

sumi ink on brown rapping paper  
6' x 13'

Courtesy of Hal Bromm Gallery  
and Toni Shafrazi, New York, N.Y.

appropriate for this internationally combustible period when the personal voice is, time and again, lost in the rising din. For the artists in this exhibition, figuration is also a means for spiritual and emotional release.

Jedd Garet's work appears aloof, almost glamorously so. Its cocktail-lounge colors and sinuous Deco line are only minimally tempered by his emphatically awkward modeling and analytically ruptured composition. It hints at a kind of urban alienation that is born of surfeit, not need. Concealment and entrapment are behavioral norms; the sinister power of the work comes from its insinuating celebration of isolation. Jane Rosen's work is also, to a great extent, about isolation, but as an experiential alternative, not an imposition. Her sensuously arched reliefs recall the ecstatic liberation of flight which Leni Riefenstahl sought in the *Olympiad's* diving sequence. The massiveness which Rosen implies in her modeling is wonderfully contradicted by the lyric freedom of the pose. The stylization of the figure – its attenuation into wings and fin – revels in potential, in the idealized union of body and spirit.

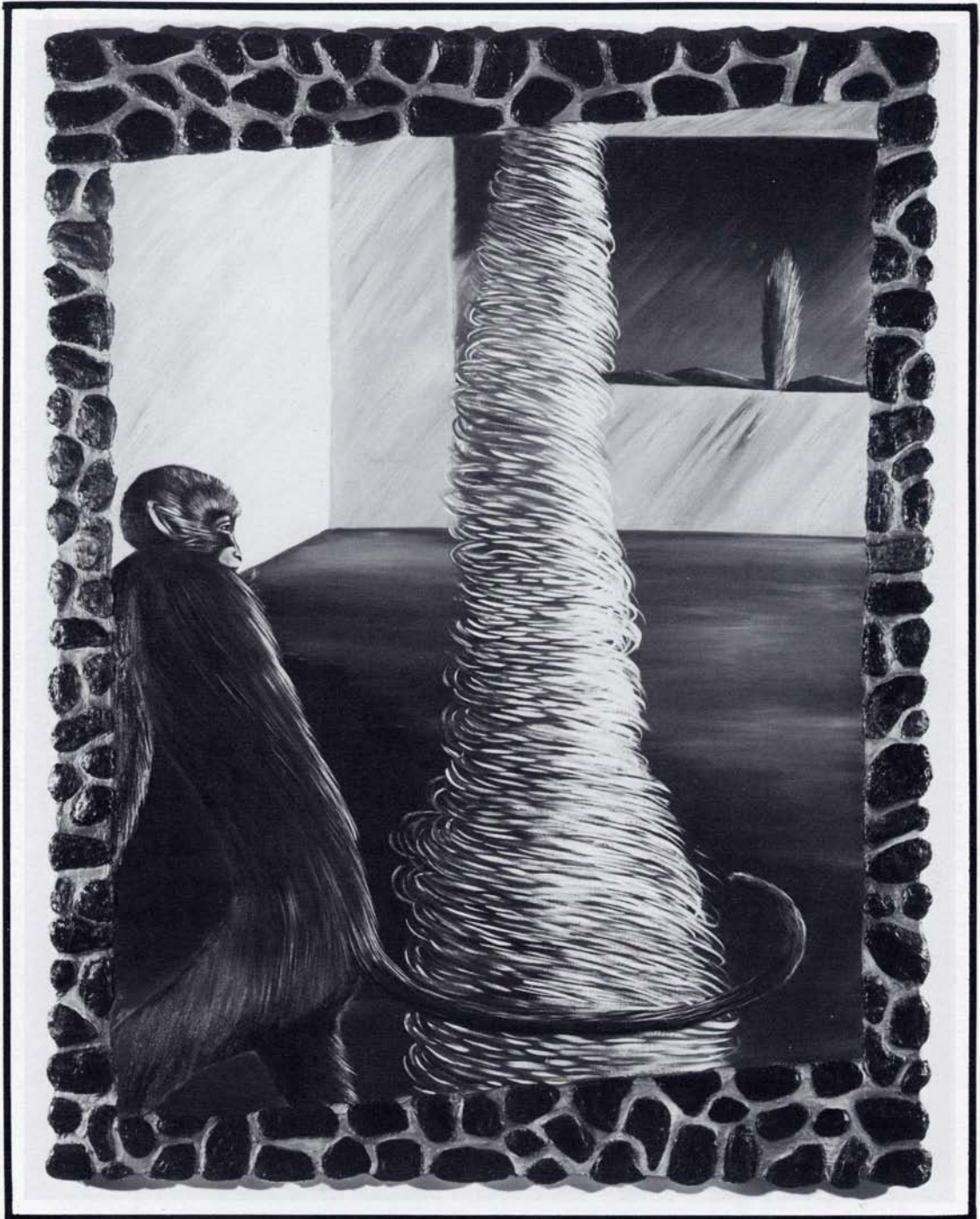
Streamlined stylization is also present in the work of Russ Warren, Roseanne Generalli, Cheryl Laemmle and Keith Haring. Further linking their work is a concern with allegory. Warren and Generalli depend on a cultural shorthand which references their work into traditional mythological and art-historical subject matter. Warren's puppet-like characters inhabit their environments like elements in a theatrical tableaux, dramatically locked into moments of anticipated resolu-



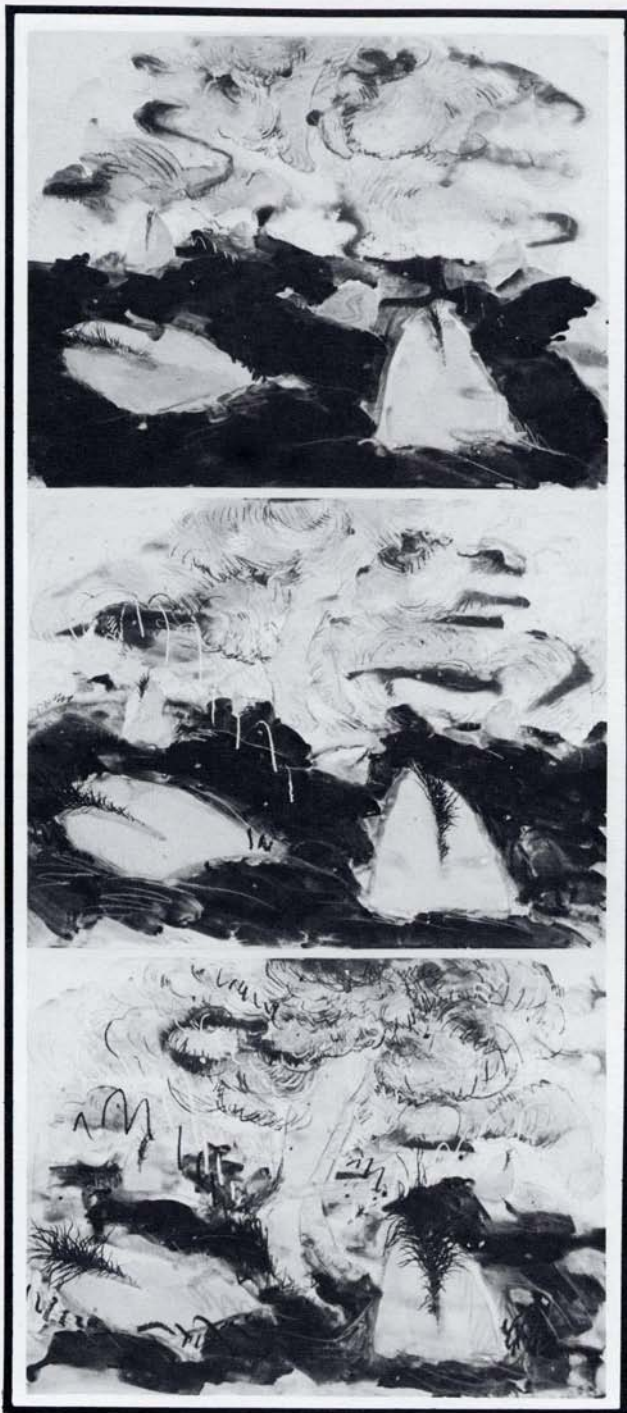
**Peter Julian**  
"Red Head", 1981  
oil on paper  
53" x 31"  
Courtesy of the artist



**Cheryl Laemmle**  
*Untitled, 1980*  
oil on canvas  
40" x 30"  
Courtesy of the artist



**Cheryl Laemmle**  
*Untitled, 1981*  
oil on canvas  
48" x 36"  
Courtesy of the artist



**Jody Pinto**  
*"Henri and Tongues of Fire"*, 1981  
watercolor, gouache, graphite & crayon  
40" x 90"  
Courtesy of Prudential Insurance Co.



**Jody Pinto**

*"Henri and a Sea of Red Tongues"; 1981*  
watercolor, gouache, graphite & crayon  
60" x 72"

Courtesy of Hal Brømm Gallery, New York, N.Y.

portray. Both Julian and Young explore a dark geography where the beast is only barely held in check. Julian's work is more discreet than Young's; his aggressors have the sinister opacity of an lagoon, and the relationship between victim and aggressor exists more by implication than action. Young, on the other hand, veers away from innuendo. His work is all action, filled with maddened grappling and shuddering climaxes. Yet, there is a paradoxical quality in Young's depiction of violence which pivots on his ability to imbue moments of real awfulness with something very close to tenderness.

Jody Pinto is another of the show's artists with strong ties to surrealism. Her anatomically delineated landscapes are as passionately convincing as the topography of a dream. Pinto accelerates the inevitable merger of earth and flesh with a poetic compression that is at once terrifying and exultant. In her ascension drawings, the ecstasy of release merges spirit and ether with a searing romanticism. Terry Rosenberg's work is also disquietingly romantic. In its obsession with masking and costumes, it alludes to ritual. The menacingly reductive heads – the implication of beaks and snouts – lend a shamanistic potency to the work. His creations are more than costumes; they are vestments for anthropomorphic liturgy. Further, in their ability to suggest movement and intent, they are extremely active presences. There is a documentary edge to Rosenberg's work which makes it bristle with weird authenticity.



**Jane Rosen**

*Jumper*, 1982

marble dust, rhoplex, gypsum cement,  
pigment and metal filings

64"34" x 12"

Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, N.Y.



**Jane Rosen**

*Little Swimmer*, 1981

marble dust, rhoplex, gypsum cement

pigment, metal filings

36" x 22" x 10"

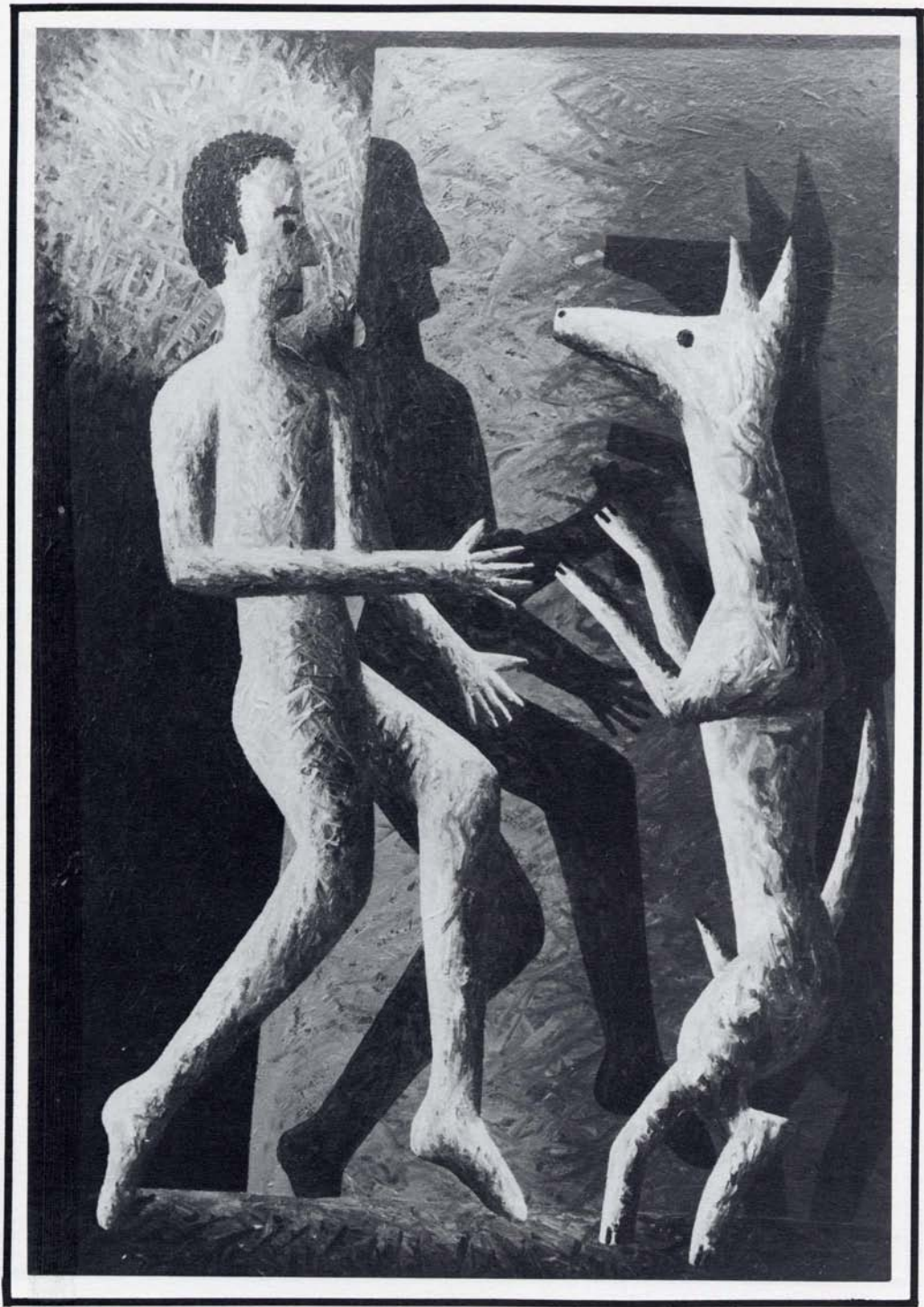
Courtesy of Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, N.Y.



**Terry Rosenberg**  
*Untitled, 1982*  
charcoal on paper  
40" x 28" (framed)  
Private Collection



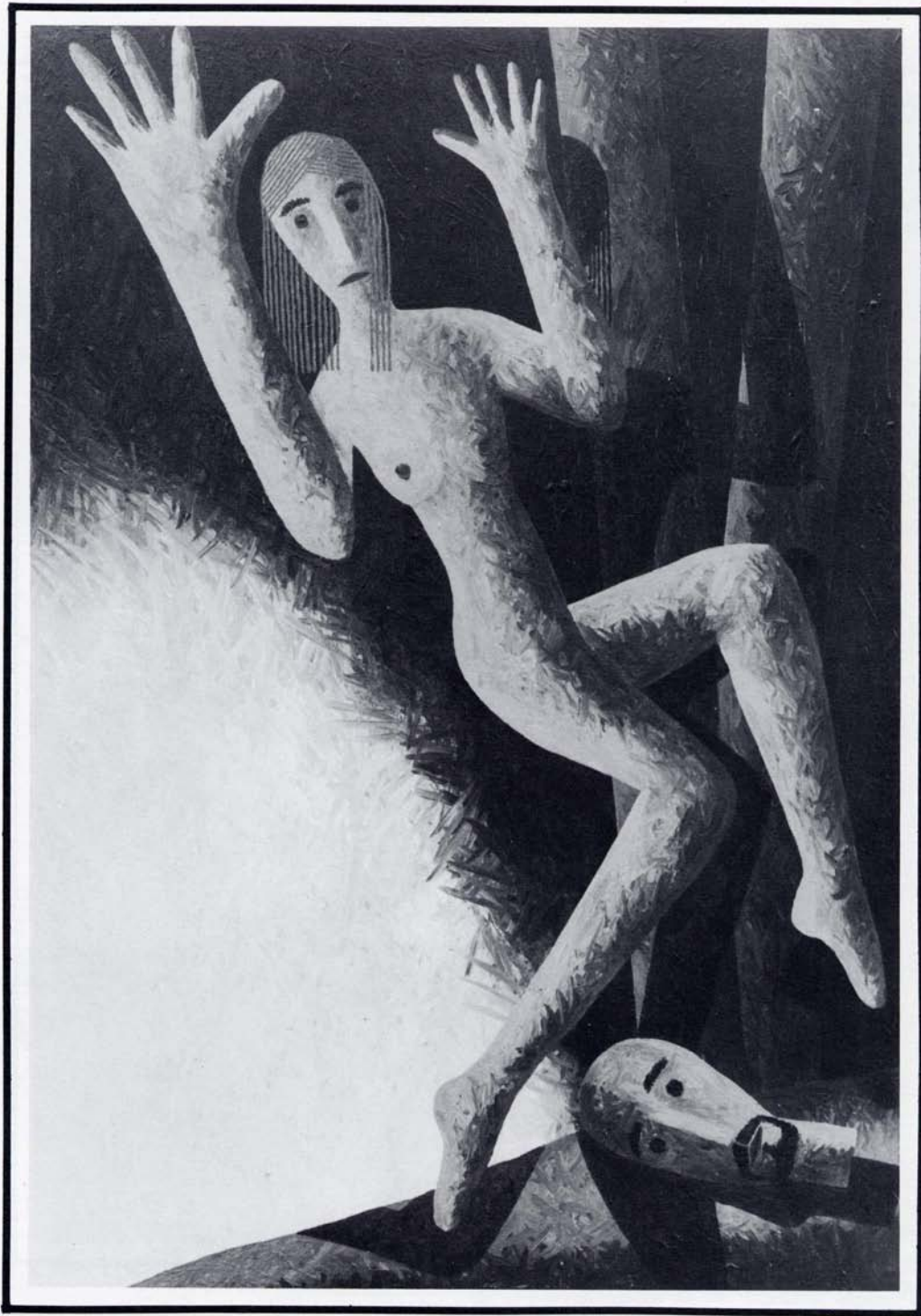
**Terry Rosenberg**  
*Untitled, 1982*  
charcoal on paper  
40" x 28" (framed)  
Collection of Hal Bromm, New York, N.Y.



**Russ Warren**

*"Mars"*, 1981  
acrylic on canvas, 1981  
55" x 38"

Courtesy of Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York, N.Y.



**Russ Warren**  
"Salome", 1981  
acrylic on canvas  
55" x 38"

Courtesy of Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York, N.Y.



**Frank Young**  
*Untitled*, 1981  
oil on canvas  
97" x 77"

Collection of Hal Bromm, New York, N.Y.



**Frank Young**  
*Untitled, 1981*  
compressed charcoal on paper  
24" x 18"  
Collection of Dusty Simi, New York, N.Y.

What unites the artists in this exhibition is their reliance on the figure as an emotional signifier. Removed from a specified context, the figure assumes the freedom and power of gesture. At its most elegant – relieved of the particulars of narrative – it attempts to communicate through sheer rhythmic force. When narrative implications are present, the burden of communication is still borne by the figure (narrative is simply a notation to amplify the artist's emotional intent); and the figure's kinetic semantics are used to recreate and/or document emotional states. This brings us to another factor uniting the work: its diaristic posture. To be sure, these are very mannered diarists – more in keeping with Lautreamont and Huysmans than Boswell or Woolf – but that is in accord with the surrealist license which these artists are utilizing. Their mostly neutered figures are more personifications of emotion than depictions of people. Their occasional elegaic excess acts as a kind of moral caution against the atrophy of feeling. This is not to imply that the work has a social function – far from it – but rather, like the Gothic convention of a tale within a tale, the work seeks to enlighten by sharing the refined anxiety of its vision.

Richard Flood

