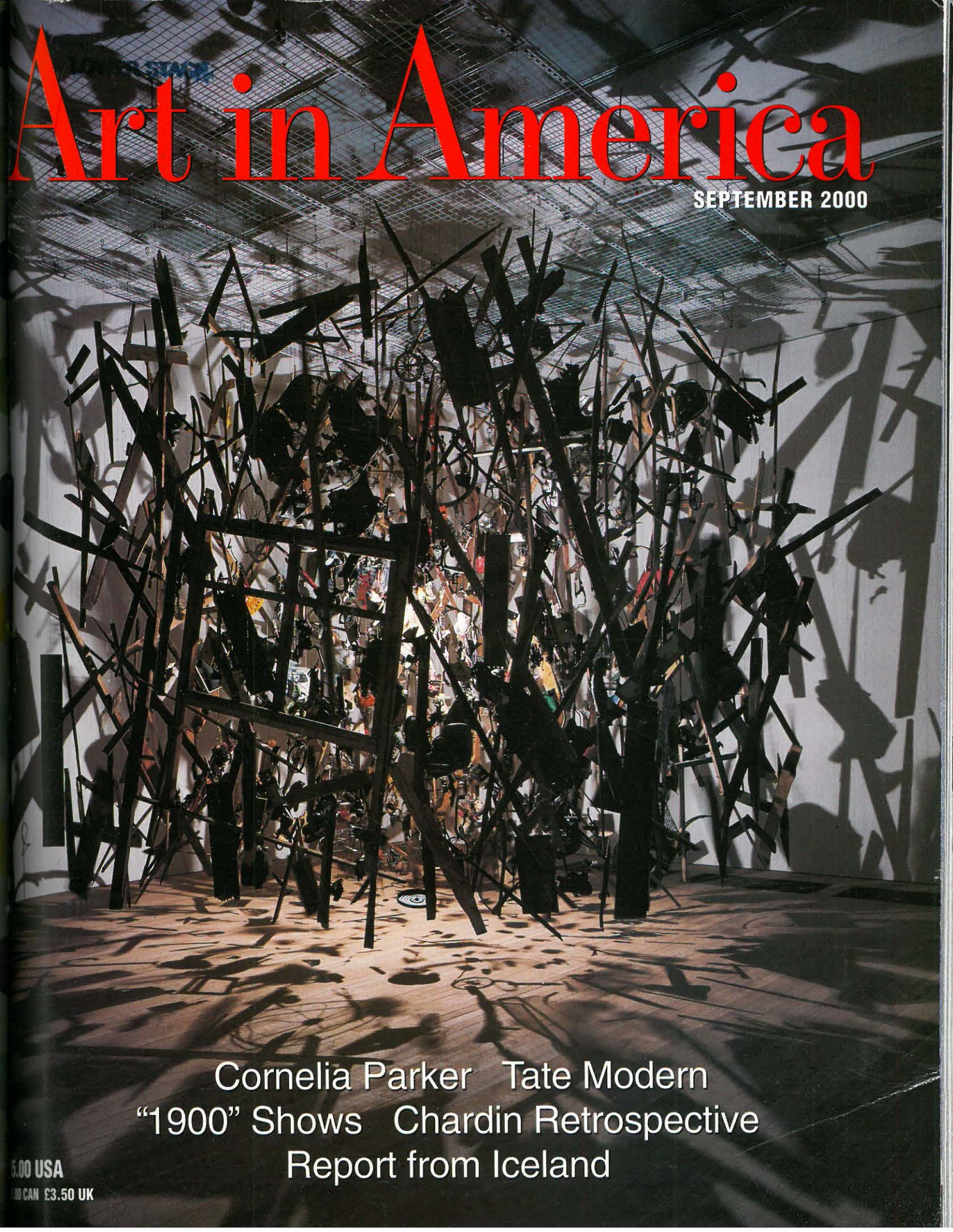

Art in America

SEPTEMBER 2000

Cornelia Parker Tate Modern

"1900" Shows Chardin Retrospective

Report from Iceland

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Sylvia Sleigh: Detail of *Invitation to a Voyage*, 1979-99, oil on canvas, 14 panels, 8 by 70 feet overall; at Deven Golden.

Gardner is good with planes, both when delineated as in *Untitled (Bhoadie, Nick, S, Matt & Tim playing basketball, Victoria)* or when intimated as in *Untitled (S pissing)*. The latter was one of the best pieces in the exhibition. The urine spot on the ground is delicately evoked, as is the stream of urine, which has the precision of a Persian miniature.

Gardner paints politically unconscious middle-class white boys. Some viewers will find them funny, others reprehensible. This wedge works to Gardner's advantage, as it forces viewers to take a position on his work. Although he uses a variety of locales surrounding collegiate life—dormitories, pools, tracks and also travel destinations ranging from Cancún to India—the real focus is the artist's memory of moments with friends, which he portrays without obvious emotion. *—Vincent Katz*

Sylvia Sleigh at Deven Golden

Sylvia Sleigh has long been concerned with turning real people into mythological or sacral beings. Such has been the import, over the years, of her self-portraits as Venus as well as the idealized male nudes of *The Turkish Bath* (1973), art critics all, including her husband, the late Lawrence Alloway.

Perhaps the practice harks back to Sleigh's charmed girlhood in Wales; perhaps it has something to do with a European tendency to allegory and symbol. Whatever the reasons, Sleigh brought the predilection to a high point in the huge, ambitious *Invitation to a Voyage: The Hudson River at Fishkill* (1979-99). In these 14 8-by-5-foot panels, hung edge to edge, the landscape is continuous and makes an enclosure around us, yet characters recur and we're never quite sure where we are, or why, or whom we've already met.

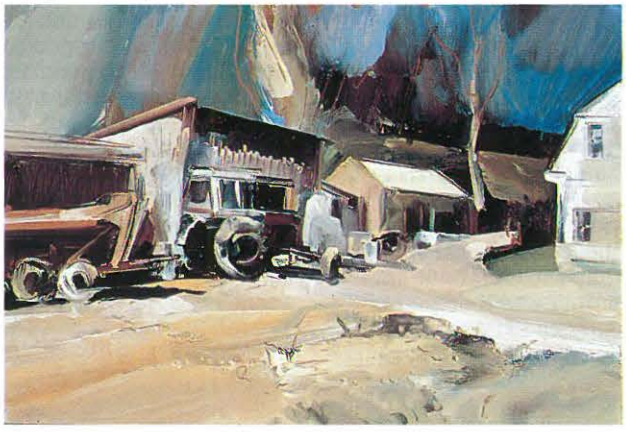
But we are sure this is enchanted territory, based on Watteau's *fêtes galantes* as surely as it refers to a musical version Sleigh had heard of Baudelaire's bluntly exquisite poem *Invitation to a Voyage*. The work is set by a bit of railroad track flanked by the river on one side and woods on the other. Particularly prominent is the ruin of Bannerman's Arsenal, a castlelike fortress built on an island in the early 20th century by eccentric Scottish-American millionaire Frank Bannerman to house part of his military-surplus business.

Sleigh first glimpsed the place from the window of an Amtrak train, and on a mild spring day some time later she organized a riverbank picnic to take advantage of the picturesque scene. This was the takeoff point for her 20-year project, which is strikingly fluid in time. It memorializes her cat, Zelda, and her husband, Lawrence; among the others seen once or even several times in the panorama are the critic John Perreault and his friend Jeff Weinstein, who sit cross-legged on the riverbank; artist Eileen Spikol, who gestures for one and all to come join the revels; and Warren Perkins, one of Sleigh's students at the Art Students League, standing almost in the river, cap in hand. One suspects all the people portrayed were close to Sleigh's heart.

There's a lovely poetic existentialism to the work. The crowning mystery is Bannerman's Arsenal, a staunch building of great beauty, while the characters in the tableau seem as benignly bemused as they are overtly charming. My favorite bit of social poesis is the ever-elegant Alloway lifting a radiant Sleigh to her feet. Sleigh's *Invitation* reminds us that in our goings to and fro are moments of wonder, wit and even luster.

—Gerrit Henry

David Brewster: *Tractor and Farm*, 1999, oil on canvas, 13 by 19 inches; at Spheris.



Rosalyn Drexler at Mitchell Algus and Nicholas Davies

Rosalyn Drexler's witty, tough-girl paintings from the '60s reflect the decade's darker side, bringing hard-edged, often violent imagery from film noir and tabloid culture into the Pop arena. Known also as a playwright and novelist, Drexler in her youth enjoyed a brief stint as a professional wrestler. This dual-venue selection of both '60s work and recent paintings and collages more than proves the lasting appeal of her literate comic sensibility.

Sex and violence are her intertwined themes. *Self-Portrait* (1963) presents a skimpily clad prone woman against a red background with her high heels in the air and her face obscured by a pillow. The large-scale images in what is perhaps

Rosalyn Drexler: *Art History: Ana Falling*, 1989, acrylic on canvas, 80 by 40 inches; at Mitchell Algus.

Drexler's most haunting pair ing, *Marilyn Pursued by Dea* (1967), are taken from a new paper shot of Monroe follow by a bodyguard at the funera a friend. The black, white a blue figures starkly contrast w the lathered, chocolate-bro background, creating an ico image of doom that deserves be placed alongside the disas paintings of Warhol.

Drexler's feisty politics a feminist anger animate h works. *Is It True What They S About Dixie* (1966) speaks v umes simply by floating a b of rednecks on a white-o

background. An eye-popping later work, *Art History: Ana Falling* (1989), depicts the deathfall of Ana Mendieta, dressed in a Wonder Woman-style bikini, as that of a contemporary Icarus. The trajectory of the tragic descent is indicated by bold, cartoony shafts of light against the blackened windows of her high-rise.

In Drexler's hothouse world of boxers, gangsters and abused molls, women have to fight back. In *Self-Defense* (1963), a woman's red fingernails claw the face of a bruiser as she wrestles for his gun. Ever cautious, Drexler paints *Embrace* (1964) as an indistinguishable lump of entangled silhouettes against a brown background.

Recent work is more free-wheelingly comic. Taken from a news photo of Lech Walesa and Poland's communist leaders in conference, *Getting to Know You* (1997-98) depicts the gesticulating bigwigs as con-fabbing rock stars in Bob Dylan sunglasses and KISS face paint. A triptych, *Manny & Dick* (1997-98), is accompanied by a text-panel short story about a frustrated punk musician who blows up his neighborhood. The most delectable new works are surreal collages from computer scans printed on acetate (1997-99). Under a drawn skeleton with the logo for Passion perfume is scrawled "In the bones of the beholder." Never afraid to get her hands dirty, Drexler is a key missing player in the Pop All-Boys Club. Given half a chance by a few museums and collectors, she could wrestle her way into art history.

—Michael Duncan

David Brewster at Spheris

David Brewster is a fairly humble man. As I was preparing this piece, he not disapprovingly told me that a critic had pronounced his work perfectly representative of "the 60-second landscape." Why not? It's been a good long time since Abstract Expressionism has had so apt a pupil (and at 38, Brewster is still a pupil). Jackson Pollock's easy way with the apocalypse (in landscape form, this time out), Franz Kline's exclamatory ingenuity of line and even Willem de Kooning's high-cal neo-expressionism all are there.

The painterly realists who directly succeeded the Action painters in the '60s and '70s might seem like Brewster's natural neighbors. But he sought new territory. His Vermont and New Hampshire are wilder, and prettier, than the rolling flatlands of the painterly-realist-inhabited Hamptons. Still, Brewster is anything but a prettifier. There is a gargantuan grit to his work, a kind of bucolic push 'n' pull, as if Hans Hofmann had gone inexplicably farm boy. This is some of the toughest, roughest painting around: *Thurber Hillside* is more fantastical than idyllic, with its creamy greens and stately light blues, while *Round Mountain* shares with it a quavering romanticism of brush and palette.

The trick to Brewster, as it was indeed with the Abstract Expressionists, is this very painterly romanticism, called up from psychic depths and executed with an overwhelming conviction. The problem for Brewster, which the Abstract Expressionists largely didn't have, is his choice of sternly less-than-romantic subject matter in some of the canvases. Not since Cole Porter, in his musical *Silk Stockings,* had the "great Soviet composer" Sneloff called upon to write an "Ode to a Tractor" have there been less likely romantic subjects than Brewster's: *Thurber Manure Spreader* and *Tractor and Farm,* for instance. In fact, many of the canvases in this show were of such agricultural workings.

It is a measure of the solidity of his passions that Brewster brings these works off with such flair, even such sweeping, unequivocal beauty. The paintings are thick with diagonals; light is pure color, color is pure stroke. So many things geometric are going on compositionally that the eye dances. This is some of the best painting-as-painting around today.

—Gerrit Henry

Joseph DiGiorgio: *New York City at Night No. 2*, 1995, oil on canvas, 56 by 68 inches; at Kouros.

Joseph DiGiorgio at Kouros

For 40 years, Joseph DiGiorgio has been known for his romantic, neo-Pointillist American landscapes. That these works are widely respected is not surprising: he has been lyrically limning land injured by industrialization, holding out its beauty as a promise.

The artist was born in Brooklyn (where he would later create the substantial oil-pastel "Prospect Park" series). He chose to paint from notes and cursory photos alone, never en plein air. His subjects are as far-flung as the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, the coastal waters of the Atlantic and Pacific, the Grand Canyon and the Northwest rain forest. The influences come thick and fast: Thomas Cole (especially, perhaps, for his poetic theatricality), George Inness (the pervasive, ambient light) and Winslow Homer (steady chronicler of things and places American), and such Post-Impressionists as van Gogh and Cézanne, to say nothing of Signac, for their rich, painterly surfaces and pure color.

DiGiorgio, who died at age 68 not long after this exhibition closed, worked in series, and his last one was "New York City at Night." His studio was on the Bowery; looking north he saw beauty in a broad, rising roadway against the skyline, the latter featuring the Con Ed Tower on 14th Street, the Metropolitan Life Tower on 23rd Street and the Empire State Building on 34th. Looking south he saw the Brooklyn Bridge and Brooklyn itself. The air was rich with the urban picturesque.

DiGiorgio brought a strong, unstudied and remarkably fresh kind of romanticism to veils of darkness as well as sheets of summer rain or winter sleet. In *New York City at Night No. 14*, a highway heading for a far-off vanishing point is painted a slick, wet red glistening with auto lights. *New York City at Night No. 7* reads as an almost de Kooningesque bedazzlement of blacks, yellows, whites, even a splash of mustard. What New Yorker, resident or visiting, could resist the musky majesty of the skyline seen above darkest pavement and through a low-slung huddle of black rooftops in *New York City at Night No. 8*? Perhaps the remaining beauties of Manhattan—which is lit up like

Tim Gardner: *Untitled (Going Away Party)*, 1999, watercolor on paper, 16½ by 24 inches; at 303.