

# NEW ART EXAMINER

ART & VISUAL CULTURE FROM THE GREATER MIDWEST

## REVIEWS

HELIDON GJERGJI

*Kaleidoscope (detail), 2001. Three painted TV sets, Mylar mirror, plexiglass mirror, 55" x 24" x 24".*



sources generated by a computer program that averages the colors of each frame of film, the work exudes a warm organicism, rather than purely cool analysis.

Less interesting and also less convincing is a suite of three digitally manipulated photographs revealing what appear at first to be diffuse and indistinct landscapes. Gradated sky blue at the top to sepia at the bottom, the images also present a kind of averaging. Small, centered labels within the works clue us as to the content of the depictions. For example, *121 Homes for Sale, LA/Orange County/\$250,000-\$350,000/Fall* graphically presents a pictorial averaging of the hundred or so homes in this county in this price range that were pictured in the daily newspaper at a particular time, the artist having digitally layered a sequence of found images of the individual houses. Salavon also pictured similar homes for sale in the Midwest and New York. Both the hazy, amorphous imagery and Salavon's intent come off as non-descript and puzzling, notwithstanding vague allusions to changing market forces and their impact on the fast-fading American dream of home ownership.

All Salavon's works without their informational titles seem purely optical: kinetic light configurations and glossy, patterned chartings visualizing concentrated points of information; almost biological in their shifting, metamorphic character. The exhibition seemed to encapsulate, either wit-

tingly or otherwise, recognizable instances of historical modes of representation: *The Top 25 Grossing Films of all Time* is an instance of Victor Vasarely's Op, perceptual witticism, and the "Homes for Sale" series is an abstruse rendition of late Impressionism. Imbued with an almost science-project-like approach to visual representation, Salavon's works are rather noncommittal, presenting statistical sets that allude to issues of class and capitalism, without imparting overt political conclusions. An ambiguous drift between concept and visuality, the works entertain prosaically, emphasizing high-tech effect for its own sake while retaining as their source systems of pop culture data as pure fact. For the most part, their impact lies in their visual theatricality.

*Olga Zdanovics is an art historian.*

### HELIDON GJERGJI

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Lari Pittman boldly proclaims painting's "uselessness" every time he is offered a public forum. Initially, one might think that his claim is self-effacing or even contemptible especially for such an important contributor to painting's present vitality.

But the contrary is true. His observation aptly levels the practice, severs it from historical hierarchies, and leaves it with no cultural expectations. As a result, this reassessed value of painting is extremely healthy and fertile for the practice. Just look at the ease with which all manner of paintings are being produced today. Optical abstraction, parodic portraiture, gestural figure painting, and graphic appropriation are only a few examples from a seemingly endless field of styles, genres, and attitudes. Painting as a language has never been more encompassing or more (in)consequential. Enter Helidon Gjergji and his two new installations.

*Tele Television* is one of the most beautiful and redeeming paintings I have seen in a very long time. A darkened gallery space revealed an office-size room painted gloss black. Viewers were not allowed into the room but could stand at the entrance partitioned off by an unassuming and symbolic length of chain. Reflected rectangles of colored light pulsed on the black wall. The source of the light was an arrangement of televisions playing normal channels and stacked just out of sight from a viewer's position at the entrance. Gjergji selectively coated some of the television screens with a translucent glass paint made specifically to provide stained-glass effects. The result was painterly and abstract, like an animated Rebecca Morris painting or a fragmented Jennifer Steincamp projection.

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Gjergji heightened the beauty of television's color and glow, at the same time sacrificing its nature as a communicative medium. He did not eliminate the audio, but the multiple broadcast TV channels playing simultaneously mixed into a clamorous drone and individual programs were rendered indiscernible. Only once in a while would a jingle or theme song rise above the babble and assert an unmistakable presence. For example, the insidious theme song from "Entertainment Tonight" jarred what could be seen as a formal foray into the entertainment context and the vernacular of the everyday.

The second installation has an object at its core. *Kaleidoscope* is a large cylinder of reflective Mylar that houses three small TV monitors. Each screen is glazed with either yellow, orange, or blue glass paint giving the black-and-white television programming a hand-colored sensibility. Gjergji's placement of these monitors within the mirrored geometric form creates a human-scale, free-standing kaleidoscope that nods to painting—color, light, and repetition—as much as to physics. Viewers could peer in from the top and see an unlimited world of delicate hand-stained soap operas, commercials, and news programs.

Gjergji injects television, its interior light source, narrative structure, and flatness with a kind of beauty that was once the purview of stained glass. The result is a profound expansion of painting. As for television,

I am thrilled to think that it not only ceaselessly albeit effectively entertains masses of viewers for hours on end, but it can also be a wellspring of pure abstraction.

*Michelle Grabner is an artist and writer who lives in Oak Park, Illinois.*

## JENNIFER REEDER

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Jennifer Reeder's work, while still young, has come a long way from the riproaring camp, comic-bookishness of *White Trash Girl* to the somber, aloof indeterminacy of "Double Image Both in Focus Simultaneously"—or so it seemed to me the first time I saw this show. Over the last several years Reeder's work has charted the artist's transition from active participant to passive watcher, from superhero to disembodied eye—a relatively rapid shift that seems a bit like a retreat. But from a quieter and perhaps more adult position, Reeder is still making work about the quintessential art-nerd experience of feeling like an alien trapped in a suburban adolescence. "Last night I went to fucked up again and I realized that it is always the same place just with different drivers," read the puffy white-felt pillow-letters that make up an untitled wall piece.