

Art in America

December 1987 \$4.75

**The New Abstraction: Younger Artists Interviewed/Chicago Abstract
John Graham/Paris 1900 & The Dreyfus Affair/Report from Germany**



David Row: *Sound*, 1987, oil and wax on canvas, 66 by 84 inches: at John Good

sign—even in its foliate ground—yet the ink strokes that enliven its larger-than-life-size subjects suggest a formal symmetry even in their engagingly human messiness.

Himmelfarb's largest recent work, *Giants Meeting*, 1985 (90 by 144 inches), was included in the recent "Monumental Drawings" exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum. As in *February Meeting*, an enormous face, consisting mostly of lips, nose and eyes, encounters a fiercely grinning profile which looks like it's about to bite a dog (although Himmelfarb doesn't actually own one, dogs frequently appear in his drawings). The puffy cheeks of the giant on the left are awash in brushstrokes. The giant is strangely impassive, but his eyes are clear, like those of a businessman making a deal. As in other drawings, the lips of the giant are very elaborately rendered, twisting vegetation forms the ground; and the teeth of the dog are bared for action.

Another quite large work, a monotype called *Underwater Meeting*, 1986 (90 by 138 inches), shown at Nichols, has a rather "pretty" turn to it floating vines and seaweed (or whatever the sinuous ink lines represent) make the gigantic faces look calmer, though not nicer; or perhaps the pressure of the water makes their

features more serene. In any case, Himmelfarb's images tell the human story of how we are with each other in the world.

I first saw Himmelfarb's large drawings at the Municipal Art Gallery in Davenport, Iowa, in January '86, part of a selection of his black-on-white works from the past ten years. Himmelfarb's drawings have become more realistic over time, even as they turn to more elaborate and larger formats. While he is not the only artist observing a truce in the war between representation and non-representation, Himmelfarb is one of the best.

—Frederick Ted Castle

David Row at John Good

David Row's paintings—mostly diptychs—are collisions of bold, mirrored geometric patterns. Ruggedly scaled bands of even width enter each panel, either from the sides or from the top and bottom, in the shape of concentric ellipses, diamonds, DNA-like helixes or staggered ladders. The patterning is often complicated by the overlapping of an angular progression with a curvilinear one, which creates intriguing rhythms and counterpoints within the structuring bands. The paintings are dominated by only

two or three hues each, and the pattern/ground colors reverse where the diptych panels meet. This color reversal generates a further structural complication (these may be the most complex simple paintings you'll ever see, or else the most simple complex ones).

Row integrates his powerful compositions into the *space* of the painting—that is, the world existing in the mind's eye of the artist—through the means of a carefully controlled nocturnal light that is as filmic as it is atmospheric. He achieves luminosity in his work by brushing the paint on and scraping it down over a dark ground that shows through from beneath. Each color appears to have something of the other in it, and the lighter hues glow with a gaslight equivocality. Though the patterns themselves pose sequences of expansion and contraction, the dominant movement in the paintings results from the chromatically softening, scraped-down surface, which flickers like the skips and scratches in an old movie.

Though this was Row's first show in a commercial gallery, his work has been seen several times over the last few years on the alternative-space circuit. This is a body of work that has had time to develop. It doesn't illustrate or capitalize on theory so

much as resonate with experience. The symmetries in Row's imagery and his sense of interior and exterior scale trigger a sympathetic response based on our sense of our own corporeality; further, the depicted light is a remembered light. The echoes of modernist abstraction (European geometries and Abstract Expressionist scale) are both an homage to that tradition and an expression of a will to continue it. Within their deeply considered historicism, these are simultaneously alert and reflective paintings.

The hand of the artist is as much a subject of Row's paintings as their mood and historicism are. The vigor in his canvases springs from this combination. The much-abused word "authentic" comes to mind. Realizing that authenticity is subjectively conferred, I'd still like to suggest that Row's work has it in spades. The debut of an "authentic" painter, then.

—Stephen Westfall

Cindy Sherman at Metro Pictures and the Whitney Museum

Cindy Sherman is a photographer whose awareness of the ambiguities of representation has led her to believe she is not one. The critical encomiums she has received, mostly for the wrong reasons, have further encouraged her self-deception. But as it has been a deception in the service of ideology rather than art, it has not hurt her art. Indeed, her self-deception has probably advanced her enterprise, one I would call conceptual art photography, by enabling her to radically suppress the documentary aspect of photography. Hers is a photography made *solely* for exhibition. This has coincided with the creative narcissism of her well-known practice of photographing herself posing as someone else which, in turn, has led to all sorts of interpretations of her images as a form of "acting out" in a "media age," creating identity through identification, or a type of feminist transgression of male-imposed roles.

To the extent that the pictorial style of her large-scale recent works is rooted partly in painting, Sherman's work recapitulates a significant aspect of early modernism. The status of representation is seminally uncertain in Manet's *Olympia*—who or what is its proper subject? The model, the