

## FIGURATIONS III

NÜART GALLERY  
670 CANYON ROAD, SANTA FE

### FIGURATIONS III IS NÜART GALLERY'S THIRD SURVEY OF CONTEMPORARY

figurative work, and the exhibition takes us from the human form to Hershey's Kisses to miniature horses. On view are paintings and ceramic sculpture by six artists who work in a variety of media and reside in a variety of places. There are oil paintings from Spain and Italy, architectural ceramics from New York, and acrylics from Santa Fe and California.

And then there's the added bonus of discovering the building's historical architectural details from the gallery's earlier days as Gormley's Grocery Store. Not to be missed are the wonderful tin ceilings, the hardwood floors with different-size boards, and the old aqua door that manages to fit an overall pale-turquoise color thread that unites the exhibition.

The mind-confounding ceramics of James Tyler greet us outside the gallery and in one of the front windows. Tyler builds his sculptures—often of enormous human heads—from hundreds of architectural red stoneware bricks. He cuts the bricks from the “finished” wet clay head and then numbers, fires, and reassembles them by hand. The resulting faces appear almost digitized in the clay and have the puzzle-like feel of an archaeological excavation. Behind Tyler's man on the broad windowsill we meet the acrylics of John Tarahteeff, in which intense color is key, but in surprising ways. In *Her Turn* a young girl lures a fish and her orange sweater lures us. But just when you think that the gold reflections in the sweater, the sky, and the girl's hair are the true highlights of the picture, you notice a hidden golden daffodil that steals the show. And the fun continues in other pieces by Tarahteeff. Brightly colored geometric-patterned bikini bottoms are overpowered by a little banana-yellow bird overhead in *Bathers (Friends)*. A green bustier feels like it should be the focal point in *Land's End*, but it's really that little yellow bird again, this time perched on the harlequin's black hat. And in each painting one figure's eyes are wide open and another one's eyes are closed, creating contrast between physical and sensual awareness.

Alberto Gálvez's translucent oil paintings of faces are exactly that: paintings, not portraits. There is an ethereal, muted softness that feels like the diffusion of watercolor. In *Cabeza de mujer*, Gálvez refrains from painting both the top of the woman's head and also her chin. This clipped effect causes us to zero in on her eyes which glance left. Next to her is *Cabeza de hombre* and he is also cropped at hairline and chin. He stares directly at us, which is almost as disconcerting as his “unfinished” left ear. The young

woman in *Cabeza en el mar* has her chin—just touching the surface of the water in a way that ought to tickle—and her head intact, but her eyes bore into the viewer and penetrate in a heartrending way. Gálvez manages to paint tremendous emotion into his subjects' gazes.

Silver and gold mark the work of Carol Mothner and

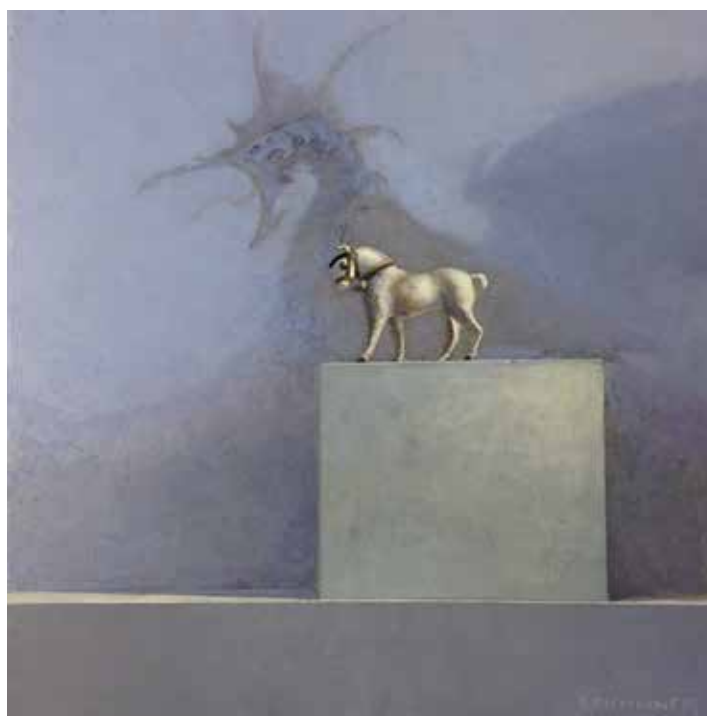
Michael Bergt. Both artists—Mothner in acrylics and Bergt in gold leaf—create otherworldly reflected light. Mothner's paintings featuring the iconic chocolate Hershey's Kiss present the candy's silver foil as a brilliant glow; other pieces displaying horse figurines take us inside her own power, as in *Honor the Little White Horse Dream Shadows*, where the

shadows cast by these tiny creatures morph into huge dragons that, she says, reflect her nature. Bergt's gold leaf shines in a different way—often shimmering from behind his subjects—and he goes further by etching exquisite symbols into each golden background. There is a magnificent crane etched into *Wings*, lotus flowers and stars in *Amanda*, and a Madonna-like halo with eyes and flames in *The Seeker*. The effect of all this gold leaf causes gold tones to pop out everywhere in the paintings. There are little golden lights in the figures' hair, clothing, jewelry, and highly textured skin tones.

Vincenzo Calli's oil paintings round out the exhibition. Here we have larger, full-bodied figures. In *Un mattino d'estate* a young man is shaving and we are the mirror. The floors, walls, window, tree trunks, and the bench he sits on are geometric and angular in a flat, naïve style. Even his hair is wiry, his expression empty. This gives the softness of the cottony tree leaves outside and the swirls in his bowl of shaving cream an expressive lightness. Those same swirls are back in *Profumi*, contained within the pink roses in the woman's green tote bag. Her face, and that of the man she has just passed, is blank with vacant eyes. The man's little white dog with his bared teeth gives off more life. But then there are Calli's shadows for these figures and the surrounding greenery, and they are alive with movement and nuanced colors.

Gallery owner and curator Juan Kelly, an inspirational painter in his own right, says he usually begins with a concept when he hangs a new show, until peripheral vision intrudes, and he begins to care a great deal about how the pictures work together. He explains that the initial concept “usually flies away because the art does what it wants.”

—SUSAN WIDER



Vincenzo Calli, *Un mattino d'estate*, oil on canvas, 47" x 39¼", 2014

Carol Mothner, *Honor the Little White Horse Dream Shadows*, fluid acrylic on panel, 10¾" x 10¾", 2014