

Daniel Maffia's works startle with powerful images of good and evil

The startling exhibition of paintings and drawings at the Westbroadway Gallery (431 Broadway) could be entitled *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which runs in part as written by Baudelaire: "Blood lake haunted by evil angels the permanent green darkness a forest of furs." The images created by artist Daniel Maffia draw upon similar perceptions of good and evil expressed by the famous 19th century poet.

Art has seemingly come full circle to the point prior to the modernist era. In a series of brilliant insights, Maffia focuses upon subject matter that hasn't been fashionable for more than a hundred years. With few exceptions, most notably in the works of Nancy Grossman and Louise Nevelson, matters of morality and cosmology have been all but eliminated from modern art in the mindless pursuit "action-painting."

The return to realism has its darker side as well. Maffia draws upon an unsavory dream world for his nocturnal visions. The central theme, repeated throughout this show, is one of remorse and sin. All the figures in these paintings have hidden their faces from us, as if racked by some deep shameful sorrow. The scenes are invariably set alongside subterranean pools surrounded by tropical forests of malevolent looking plants and flowers, whose purplish greens and blue colors casts a pervascent pall.

Maffia's considerable skill with flowers reminds one of the craft of Fantin-Latour. These are not photographic works, although it appears that photography may have been a source. Details are subordinated to expressions of mood. These hauntingly beautiful images belong in the Romantic era that flourished in Europe during the middle 19th century. Only the explicit sexuality of its nude figures reveal their orientation.

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The paintings of Alan Feltus currently on view at the Forum Gallery (1018 Madison Ave.) possess a simplicity and grace that is enchanting. His vision of the world might best be described as Arcadian or neo-classical. Indeed, his solitary entry in a group exhibition of Arcadian Art held at the Tatist-

with long flowing hair. Although the women appear tranquil, their eyes betray a fierce doll-like intensity that seems almost menacing. Like Maffia, this artist's painting style was developed in contradiction to the accepted art forms of the last two decades. Both artists are now in their 40s.

Their separate visions compliment one another as if etched on two sides of the same coin. Reality for Feltus is basically Utopian, while Maffia's is centered on man's fall from grace. The strength of Maffia's art lies in his subtle use of color and tone, while Feltus' forte is form and composition. Both artists possess enormous talent and technical skill. More importantly, is their desire to communicate privately held cosmologies, neither one of which are acceptable to the liberal art establishment

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The art of Guy Pene du Bois (1884-1958) is almost an anachronism. He specialized in portraits of high society habitués, executed in a painting style that contained just enough suggestion of modernist affectation (all of it superficial) to satisfy his culturally deprived patrons.

The retrospective installed at the Graham Gallery (1014 Madison Ave.) appears as dated as the worst of the socialist art of the 1930s. Weak on specific detail (befitting the modernist approach), and employing a painfully affected brushwork, the paintings have little to recommend them.

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Morris Louis is an abstractionist who projects his craft directly toward his goal. If his series of "Veils" at the M. Knoedler Gallery (19 E. 70th St.) more closely resemble fans, due to their shell-like opaqueness, it is no matter. These handsome abstract wash paintings are executed with the intensity of an artist who might be rendering an object that actually exists in nature, and not in fact from the imagination of the artist.

Each wash is carefully layered one on top of another with an aesthetic delicacy that reflects a painter's eye who loves color. Unfortunately these paintings are much too large in size to focus upon so simple a theme as Morris creates



(Above) Daniel Maffia: "Figure in the Reeds." (Below) Alan Evan Feltus: "Standing Women, Greensleeves."

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