



Tyson Reeder, *Woman with Vase*, 2008, acrylic, pen, pencil, and makeup on canvas, 21 x 15".

aren't whimsical; they are too heavy-handed in their mockery for that. Yet their sarcasm is at times accompanied by a pitch-perfect absurdity, and the result is startling. In *Panda Protest*, for example, black-and-white rectangles—laid out in the style of Hans Arp's *Untitled (Collage with Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance)*, 1916–17—become placards for protesting panda bears, themselves blotted dabs of black-and-white paint. The demonstrating pandas poke fun at artists' attempts to connect abstraction to a natural world, particularly one accessed through chance, as in the case of Arp, without ever denying the political significance of Arp's aleatory gestures. Marching chaotically with these blank signs, the panda bears temper Scott's derision through a fey conflation of representation and abstraction. In this balancing act, his lampoon of geometric abstraction shines.

—Rachel Churner

Leigh Ledare

ROTH

A typewritten note describing the artist's mother air-drying naked on a bed, postshower; a napkin on which his mother has scribbled things she would like to be ("a writer like Marguerite Duras and Anaïs Nin"); a grid of thirty-six photos of his mother playing with her labia; a page from a 1966 *Seventeen* magazine profile of his mother as a young ballerina; classified ads his mother placed in the *Seattle Weekly* seeking "a generous wealthy husband (not someone else's) who wants his own private dancer." In all, twenty-three works (images, texts, ephemera) made up "Pretend You're Actually Alive," Leigh Ledare's first New York solo exhibition, which coincided with the publication of an artist's book of the same name featuring even more mementos and cathartic ejecta.

Not since, respectively, the Families of Nan and Mann redefined the stakes for documenting one's own tribe has an artist carved such a dramatic path into the ambivalent territory of the photographer-subject relationship. (Comparisons could also be made to Robert Melee and Richard Billingham, but the former's campy airs and the latter's unreflecting voyeurism don't quite resonate with Ledare's sensibility.) "I do find it difficult that the model often doesn't get any credit for this contribution, for her participation. She's at least 50% of the picture," Tina Peterson, Ledare's mother, argues in an interview

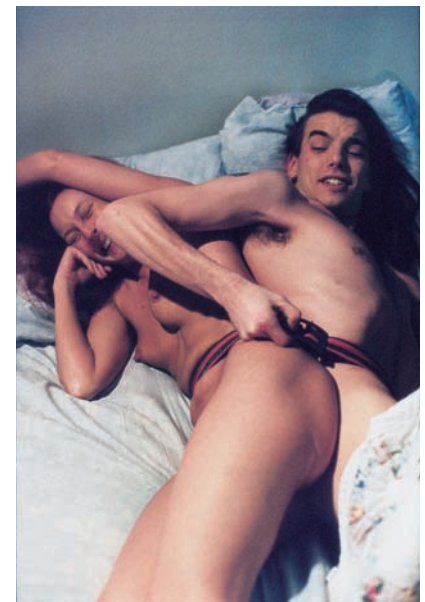
printed on the book's cover. Witnessing the captivating, fiery-haired force majeure splay her legs for *Mom Spread with Lamp*, 2000, or pose soberly for the quiescent *Mother in New Home*, 2006, one could hazard that fifty percent is a conservative estimate.

There's a temptation to read the show diachronically, as the story of a young dancer (Peterson danced with the Joffrey and the New York City Ballet companies) transformed into a modern-day Jocasta, whose two sons attempt to manage and entertain her delusions as she steals one's credit cards and draws the other into bizarre acts of sexual voyeurism. But it is also the loving and patient record of a conversation; that Peterson is a vivid interlocutor is evident not only in the teasing directness of her gaze but also in the texts that she authors accounting for or protesting her plights.

Ledare occasionally teases us, too, by including, for example, his mother (along with Christie Brinkley and Shelley Duvall) on the book's roster of "girls I wanted to do." This libidinal donnée is rendered with histrionic flourish in photo-booth strips featuring him and his mother making out, and in lurid pictures, taken by Ledare, of her being penetrated by unidentified men. It hardly shocks, though, that a son would desire his mother—or vice versa; this is, after all, boilerplate, the central fact in some of the most significant theoretical frameworks of the past century. What is shocking is that neither party seems shy about enacting this fantasy for a broader public. That the erotic pretenses might be a game, that this work, paradoxically, might be an effort in sublimation—that the pair often seem to be in cahoots—only goads the narrative. Ultimately, the photographs are mere titillation: There is some kissing, some nudity. There is sex, but not *that* sex.

Throughout, it is not Ledare's style or photographic talent but his subject—the artist and his mother's unique modus vivendi—that lends the exhibition coherence. But over the lively banter looms an air of portent, owing to certain foreboding images (of Ledare's grandmother in the hospital, of his mother posed as a corpse). "One day I told my Mom jokingly, 'As long as you regard your life as fiction, in the very least you'll have some interesting experiences,'" reads a note scrawled by the artist and reproduced in the book. "She replied, 'Finally somebody who understands me.'" Is a life pretended one more fully lived? *Pretend you're actually alive*, Ledare pleads, and shortens the tether of the simulacrum.

—David Velasco



Leigh Ledare, *Mother and Catch 22*, 2002, color photograph, 35½ x 23½".

Seth Cluett

DIAPASON

Diapason is relatively obscure, owing to its location on the tenth floor of a large, nondescript building on the wrong side of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, its being open strictly on Saturday afternoons, and its particular focus: contemporary sound art. Despite a history stretching back to the cacophonous experiments of Futurism and Dada, and periodic peaks of recognition—sometimes, as with video, attendant on technological developments—sound art remains a niche concern. The reasons for this are legion: To many, sound art remains profoundly confusing in its consistently ill-defined intersection with

music and theatrical or cinematic sound design, and is generally incompatible with the conventional demands of the gallery opening, the print reproduction, and the showboating collection. It tends to demand one's sustained attention but can still be maddeningly abstract.

Seth Cluett's *Doleros (Audio Tourism at Ringing Rocks)*, 2008, seems at first consistent with this characterization, but, while outwardly lacking any concrete point of reference, is in fact based on a real place and a natural phenomenon; the room-filling installation was inspired by the artist's visit to Ringing Rocks Park, an area of unusual geological interest in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Reportedly, this field, home to "the largest diabase (dolerite) deposit in North America," teems with "audio tourists" intent on investigating the mineral's peculiar resonance by wandering around with hammers and striking the rocks to produce a variety of bell-like tones.

Cluett's project consists of an arrangement of speakers illuminated by a series of dim, low-hanging lightbulbs. Some speakers look conventional but others, here placed toward the center of the space, have been integrated into irregularly shaped pieces of salvaged metal and wood. Seating is incorporated into the installation design, but the desire to pad around the carpeted room and press an ear to each speaker in turn proves irresistible. Even those habitually suspicious of art that requires one to remove one's shoes will have seen the wisdom of checking this pervasive source of sonic interference at the door.

The sounds that *Doleros* itself emits are uniformly gentle but range from a subdued crinkle or rustle to a range of more direct metal-on-metal taps, tinks, and chings. Each individually locatable sound continues for a few seconds, up to perhaps half a minute, then dies away to be replaced by another from elsewhere in the room. But far from constituting a whiz-bang dimensional illusion, the effect is rather subtle, the noise seem-

ing to flicker, rather than lurch, from place to place. Sometimes the sounds have a blacksmithing-like rhythm, sometimes they suggest the calls of reptiles, birds, or insects. An underlying drone ebbs and flows over time, evoking the darker depths of ambient music. And therein lies a perhaps predictable problem.

Though *Doleros*'s overall sense of orchestration (while not exactly tuneful, it is highly—if somewhat covertly—structured) and its backing drone contribute to the work's seductive, immersive quality, they also nudge it toward entertainment (albeit entertainment of a very rarified kind). Whatever its origins, the drone in particular has such a standardized "atmospheric" tone that the impact of the installation as a whole is diminished. The specific strangeness of Ringing Rocks and the behavior of its community of visitors is jostled by the addition of this more generic signifier of mystery. The results of Cluett's manifest and unusual interest—in the interaction of noisy old human beings with an acoustic environment that exists independently of them (apparently, the tree falling in the forest when there's no one there to hear it *does* make a sound)—need no enhancement.

—Michael Wilson



Seth Cluett, *Doleros (Audio Tourism at Ringing Rocks)*, 2008, mixed media. Installation view.

Christopher Orr NYEHAUS

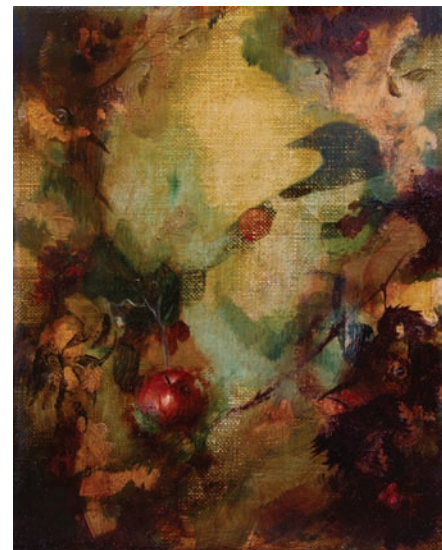
Christopher Orr's dark, diminutive oil paintings seem at first glance to have been salvaged from some alternate past. Employing an earthy palette of browns, reds, and ochers, and building surfaces on which areas of dry, scraped-back pigment are juxtaposed with richer, fresher-looking passages, the Scottish artist conjures a dramatic lost world in which characters, scenes, and objects culled from popular midcentury print media seem to have strayed into the sublime landscape visions of a nineteenth-century Romantic. But though united on the same canvases, these incongruous pairings tend to remain at odds; sharply defined figurative elements drift unmoored across muddily ethereal grounds as if literally cut-and-pasted, and the theme or mood of any given work is hard to establish with any certainty. In many of Orr's most recent works, recognizable images have vanished altogether, subsumed by a cryptic murk.

In *Take It, Take It*, 2008, a small bird with brilliant red-and-blue plumage perches, apparently on thin air, in the top left corner of a composition otherwise defined by amorphous patches of olive green, dusty red, and deep amber ranged over a parched taupe ground. It's as if a John James Audubon ornithological study has been spliced with one of Ivon Hitchens's woodland studies. A clump of berries hovers to the bird's right, just beyond reach, while a wandering line defines something indefinable in the bottom left, and three slim diagonal vectors crisscross the whole: teasing evidence of a stylistic shift, perhaps, or intimations of an underlying structure.

If *Take It, Take It* and *As Above, So Below*, 2008, another delicious bird-and-fruit pairing, belong to Orr's established method, *Internal Emigration*, 2008, is of the newer school. Here, all traces of the precise one-to-one-scale copying that Orr has so often used are absent, replaced by what seems to be an exercise in pure atmospheric. In this painting, which like all of the artist's work adheres to a near-miniature scale, the diagonal vectors have moved to the fore, cutting across floral clumps of scumbled sea-green and rust, and the ground has been scraped even further back, the grain of the canvas showing through quite clearly, making the materiality of the whole—a clever fusion of delicacy and verve—clearer still.

The Farthest Shore, 2008, represents still another route. Depicting a rocky trail leading toward a mountainous horizon, it is a relatively straight take on its subject that nonetheless makes use of a trick or two to throw the viewer off. Drifting in and out of focus, the image looks almost as though it is reflected in an antique dish or foxed mirror. A dun-colored haze around the edges of the frame contributes to the sense of a tarnished vision, the image of a time and place shrouded in neglect. Orr may be immersed, as Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith reminds us in his catalogue essay, in a grand tradition that moves from one oft-quoted name (Caspar David Friedrich) to the next (J. M. W. Turner), but the haunting vein of thrift-store oddity that also runs through his work is equally, and arguably more memorably, affecting.

Mac Giolla Léith, further to this idea, suggests that Orr's project is marked first and foremost by a "hypostasization of uncertainty, mystery and doubt" derived in part from "the Romantic disdain for reason."



Christopher Orr, *As Above, So Below*, 2008, oil on linen, 7 3/4 x 6 3/4".