Hunt Slonem

Don O’Melveny

Los Angeles

Birds, blossoms, Buddhas, and butterflies rewarded the search for recognizable figures in the haze of pigment that marks Hunt Slonem’s oils. Over the last decade, the artist has recalibrated the relationship between his exotic figurative subjects and the obsessive patterns that fill out his compositions. In this balance he has found the clearest expression of his talent.

The jungle-bright contrasts that enlivened Slonem’s previous work have been replaced by a warm palette. The artist further tempers his earlier tendency toward flash with various technical measures, such as scoring the surface of certain paintings with dense crosshatching. He also has taken to inscribing “ghosts” on top of more concrete images, so that a crude face or pinwheel-like flower might float atop the repetitive imagery of a flock of macaws.

A giddy sense of excess, frequently enhanced by ornate frames, has always infused Slonem’s art. Whereas before the dazzling figures rendered with expressive bravado stood out from distinct backgrounds in simple compositions, these new works, built of nuanced gestures and layers, posed more interesting challenges for the viewer.

—Peter Frank

Marnie Weber

Luckman Fine Arts Complex
and Rosamund Felsen

Los Angeles

Marnie Weber’s work manages to be wildly surreal and disarmingly familiar at once. By photographing sets and costumes of characters of her own creation and integrating those photos in collages, the artist creates fablelike narratives set in fantastical worlds. These shows brought together collages as well as related videos and sculptures from her four major series thus far.

At Felsen, “Ghost Love, the Spirit Girls” featured Weber’s newest body of work, including her most intricate and polished collages to date. Most of these showed young women wearing flowing white dresses in natural settings. In one, a group of them builds a giant treehouse; in another, a pair cares for a bear cub as its mother looks on. Among the sculptures, which often serve as props for the collages and videos, was a bear with a walking stick, wearing a red cape and hat.

“From the Dust Room” at the Luckman Fine Arts Complex at California State University, Los Angeles, encompassed works from the artist’s first three collage series. Notable among these was the compelling “Dollhouse” sequence from 2002, which included the large title sculpture as well as collages showing the rooms’ ethereal inhabitants. This, Weber’s first museum retrospective, gave visitors the chance to see how characters such as the bony recur from one series to the next.

The highlight was the premiere of The Spirit Girls. Songs That Never Die (2005), an operatic performance piece connected with Weber’s current work at Felsen. White-masked women performed dances by turns awkward and graceful amid sets of bare, papery trees and an experimental video backdrop. Although no clear story emerged, the performance brought to life the emotion found in Weber’s videos and the versatility of her collages.

—Annie Buckley