

An abstract artwork featuring a complex arrangement of overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes in various shades of green and yellow. The shapes include rectangles, triangles, and irregular polygons, some of which are layered to create a sense of depth and movement. Thin, golden-yellow lines crisscross the composition, further enhancing its intricate and dynamic feel. The overall effect is one of vibrant, layered abstraction.

# Art in America

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**MONTREAL BIENNALE**

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which one stitch is never more than a part of the whole, each style of fold here demands attention itself. As a result, one's focus is pulled between the macro of this dazzling network and the micro of each sheet's composition.

Two pieces are 17-foot-long sections of a 8-by-40-foot work called *Sampler*, previously shown in Chicago. Like stitch samplers, these pieces survey a range of textures by defining one type in a block of columns, then altering or replacing it in successive blocks. It is almost paradoxical that something so simple can give such a complex effect.

In a more recent untitled piece from 1998, a field of pink sheets presents a surface that again is activated by dense folds. Here Gierard has abandoned *Sampler's* striped effects to introduce longer compound folds

uration, "Ignacio Iturria: The Time of Things" brought to Mexico a group of new paintings and sculptures by this prominent Uruguayan artist. Curated for the Tamayo Museum by Samuel Morales, the show took as its theme the melancholic-meta-physical aura that Iturria's work has long exuded.

Now 49, Iturria, who lives and works reclusively in his native Montevideo, favors dark palettes reminiscent of the colors of the pampas and of the muddy water of the Rio de la Plata. His thickly textured canvases are marked with broad passages of jittery, abstract, spatula-applied oil paint, while the polychrome sculptures—oversized versions of everyday objects—employ paint, wood and papier-mâché. As in his work of the past decade, Iturria's new paintings and sculptures conjure up an engaging, free-floating sense of memory and collective consciousness. At the center of the interior spaces he depicts, there is often an image of a sofa, an armchair or an open cabinet. These familiar objects are used as staging areas for a range of tiny figures such as anonymous gauchos, lovers, schoolchildren and soccer players, accompanied by seemingly disconnected artifacts such as serving platters, wash basins and bicycles. Similar objects

show up in the painted sculptures such as *La Mesa Grande* (The Big Table).

Iturria's art is imbued with vivid, universally comprehensible references to family, home and quotidian life. Significantly, however, the artist treats this domestic material without sentimentality, endowing it with a quality at once delightful, mysterious and unsettling—and, not least, a presence that is formally compelling. A figure in the grand tradition of Latin-American art whose work gives visual expression to, and reflects a sense of, national cultural identity, Iturria also offers viewers a consideration of fundamental postmodern themes, such as the meaning and construction of culture, identity and community.—Edward M. Gomez



Ignacio Iturria: *The Big Table*, oil on wood, 29 by 160 by 82 inches; at the Tamayo Museum.

## LONDON

### BANK at Gallerie Poo-Poo

Simon Bedwell, John Russell, Milly Thompson and Andrew Williamson constitute BANK, the unconventional London collaborative that organizes shows in its own warehouse space, incorporating other artists' contributions into manic *Gesamtkunstwerke* that have included zombie mannequins, endurance performances, fake waterfalls and Mahler symphonies. With memorable titles like "Cocaine Orgasm," these shows subsume their components into jarring installations where the interactivity of art works is just the point. Far from putting off participants, this forced surrender of autonomy has attracted many prominent artists interested in subjecting their work to radical, and often irreverent, recontextualization. BANK mercilessly critiques the art world at large, in which, paradoxically, it is becoming a central player. The group's ribald exhibition invitations often mock art-world discourse, an assault continued in its erratically published tabloid that tears into the vanities of London's artists and curators.

BANK's recent exhibition was called "Stop short changing us. Popular culture is for idiots. We believe in ART." For the first time, BANK presented work produced only by its own members. In front of four large "history" paintings were three life-sized group sculptures of the artists, all crudely made from wire

mesh, cloth and plaster. In one of these, the artists form a huddle of tar-colored *ur*-figures melting together in a group hug. A second ensemble evokes Soviet propaganda; the figures are dressed in Constructivist-style uniforms with expressionist-painted faces gazing vacantly skyward. In the last, they are posed as naked Cabbage Patch dolls, holding hands in a naturalist's idyll in silent hippie communion.

The eccentricity of these sculptures contrasted well with the mock tendentiousness of the roughly worked oil paintings, each titled *Group Portrait*. In the most memorable of these, the artists stand against a black background, their forearms protruding as wax extensions that turn back to paint themselves. In another, they pose in front of a backdrop of helicopters and explosions as if taking credit for bringing us the "reality" of war. There was no mistaking the parody of Leon Golub's work.

Behind the humor, irony and mischief, the BANK artists



BANK: From the exhibition "Stop Short Changing Us . . .," 1998; at Gallerie Poo-Poo.

that pass from one note to the next, across columns, making broad, easy marks. With this kind of gesture her work jumps into the territory of abstract painting—and midcentury's impasto and space debates leap to mind. The broad sweep of the longer folds is elegant and subtle against the overcharged matrix. There is a mathematical elegance to Gierard's system, and her compositions reverberate like fugues.

—Victoria Milne

## MEXICO CITY

### Ignacio Iturria at the Tamayo Museum

After being seen in Buenos Aires (at the National Museum of Fine Arts) in a slightly different config-

Meylinda Gierard: Detail from *Sampler*, 1998 mixed mediums, 8 by 40 feet overall; at Project 416.



seem to nurture a serious agenda. For them, if art is worth bothering with at all it should entail community while exposing hierarchy; it should involve discussion while ridiculing jargon; and it should value ideas over skill. And all should be delivered with self-deprecating levity. Their public attack on all manner of artistic pretension ensures that their own project remains under scrutiny. This show more than sustained their valuable attitudinizing, and without recourse to other artists' work. —Mark Harris

Sutherland, who moved to the Côte d'Azur in 1947, at age 44. Until his death in 1980 he resided for most of each year in an Eileen Gray-designed house in nearby Menton.

The exhibition began with several examples of the artist's imaginative landscape watercolors from the mid-1930s, inspired by visits to the rugged seacoast of Wales. Unfortunately, the show lacked examples of the artist's first efforts in oil painted around the same time. Included, however, were a number of works on paper showing urban ruins, which he produced during his 1940s experiences as an Official War Artist appointed by the government to document war-ravaged England. Also on view were several of Sutherland's well-known "Thorn Trees" paintings, including the major canvas in the series, *Thorn Tree* (1945-46), on loan from the British Council. These images grew out of the artist's study of thorns made while working on a 1946 commission for a crucifixion.

The core of the exhibition was the group of works that Sutherland produced after moving to the Riviera. He met Picasso and Matisse soon after his arrival, and their direct influences, as strong as the indirect ones of Bonnard and Dufy, are found everywhere in Sutherland's subsequent work. His heightened palette is seen in paintings of tree roots, such as the brilliant yellow *Articulated Form* (1949) and the hot pink and gray *Standing Form* (1952), a large canvas from the Pompidou Center collection, which is a key work of the early '50s.

One of the most critically and financially successful English painters of the day, Sutherland found the Riviera attractive not only for its esthetic appeal, but also as a convenient tax haven. In the late '40s, he and his wife, Kathleen, along with a group of British friends including Francis Bacon and Douglas

Cooper, connected with the area's café and casino society. These contacts encouraged Sutherland's career as a portraitist, which began with his 1949 painting of W. Somerset Maugham. In the show, an oil study for this portrait, as well as a painting of Konrad Adenauer and a self-portrait, demonstrate Sutherland's ability to create intense and fearlessly unflattering likenesses.

In the late works, such as *The Fountain* (1966) and *Picton* (1971-72), which was painted at Menton but inspired by frequent visits to Wales, the artist's palm fronds, banana leaves, tangled vines and other vegetable forms seem like enigmatic beasts. These exquisite monsters were born of a combination of the Mediterranean's incandescent light and the artist's hallucinatory imagination. —Jacques Gantié [Translated from the French by Gerard McCarthy.]

## AMSTERDAM

### Ansuya Blom at van Gelder

The isolated figures or images in Ansuya Blom's drawings on canvas are suggestively rendered in partial outlines. She uses a variety of mediums, including colored pencils, pastel, gouache, ink and charcoal. The works sometimes have the scribbly quality of a Twombly, but they're less random and more coherent than that: they seem to be fragments of dreams, or theatrical tableaux that are partially and momentarily caught by light. In these works, things are not smoothed out, covered over or perfectly finished; Blom's touch has a very personal quality, and one can follow its history in applied line with a sense of sequence that isn't likely to be found in pure painting.

In *Echo II* (1997) a big smoky cloud occupies the center of a horizontal canvas. Drawn over it in white are an arm and fingerless hand and motifs that suggest river rapids and braided rope. At both sides are looped lines that look like skeins of yarn, along with a couple of iridescent cutouts (possibly applied photographs) that are egg- or eye-shaped. At bottom, in soft colored pencil,

are five posts and some draping lines that evoke water flow or a schematic rendering of a winding road. It doesn't quite add up to a scene. Or if it does, essential clues are concealed.

*Web III* clearly shows human images, but the overall import of the piece is just as obscure. Four red figures have strange or missing limbs. The figures are essentially silhouetted in a blotted crimson pigment and linked by black "strings" that run to various points on their bodies, some of which are marked with words in several languages, "home," "heim," "sie" and "mol" among them. The figures at once convey a positive aspect (they are tightly



Ansuya Blom: *Web III*, 1997, mixed mediums, 77 1/2 by 47 inches; at van Gelder.

related to each other) and a negative one (they're deformed and, seemingly, trapped). Other works feature outlined blue wings, toes emerging from what seem to be hair-covered trousers, and a room, defined by walls of collaged-on burned paper, that appears to contain floating furniture.

Blom's drawings are ominous, yet at the same time they're delicate, evocative, tactile and somehow endearing and vulnerable. It's as if she knows too much, and refuses to tell. (Blom also makes films, some of which were shown at MOMA and the Philadelphia ICA in January.)

—Janet Koplos

## ANTIBES, FRANCE

### Graham Sutherland at the Musée Picasso

This was the first full-scale Graham Sutherland retrospective in France since a 1952 exhibition at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris. Curated by museum director Maurice Fréchuret, the Antibes show included 60 paintings and 80 drawings. The works ranged from small sketches to major canvases covering nearly all periods in the long career of the English-born artist known for his abstracted landscapes and quasi-surrealist images of twisted and tortured organic forms. The exhibition's setting, an airy medieval chateau overlooking the Mediterranean, was an ideal place to view work by



Graham Sutherland: *Picton*, 1971-72, oil on canvas 53 by 50 inches; at the Musée Picasso.