

GEORGE D. GREEN

BY DON EDDY

Have you ever walked down the street and been stopped by a stranger, only to find that this was no stranger at all but an old friend that you haven't seen for twenty years. He had put on some weight, lost some hair, and what was left had gone gray. He was now forced to wear glasses. It took some time to recognize the person you once knew. The two of you repaired to a coffee shop to catch up. Hearing your old friend talk about his adventures, you realized that he was the same person you remembered from twenty years back. His personality, world view, sense of humor, and ethics were all similar. The way he approached problems had not changed. And as you talked, he began to look more





Master of Chance and Time, 2009
acrylic on birch panel, 36 x 68 inches

like the man you liked from twenty years ago. Yes, there were real differences, but after a while the similarities were more striking than the differences.

One might be forgiven for having a similar experience relative to George Green's two part exhibition. Uptown, at Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, you will see paintings from the last couple of years - recent work. Downtown, at Louis Meisel Gallery, you will see paintings from the early nineties. If you were only familiar with the older work, you would think that the new work was made by some other artist. And the reverse would be true if you only were familiar with the newer work. On the surface, the two bodies of work appear to be authored by two separate artists. That Mr. Green's paintings have evolved so dramatically is in itself of great interest. It testifies to an ambitious and restless spirit, always ready to

transform a mistake into a valuable and positive resource, a path for the future. It also suggests a critical stance that understands that one's most cherished esthetic positions are tomorrow's rote formulas. For those who are familiar with Mr. Green's oeuvre, it is apparent that there has been a continuing evolution, but not a linear or necessarily logical one. The evolution has been unruly and somewhat untamed, and is all the more interesting for that.

Though there has been the dramatic evolution, there is, nevertheless, a singular spirit that informs all the work, no matter how extreme the change. A careful investigation yields something like our experience of our long lost friend. Beneath the disorienting changes there is a single "world view." I propose to investigate a couple of the themes that inform this world view.

On the occasions that

George Green has been moved to comment on his work, he has been insistent that he has not and does not use advanced technology in its creation. The assertion is interesting because it is both true and barely believable. It is commonly said that the young can be called “digital natives,” while the older generation are “digital immigrants.” We might add a third category of “digital primitive.” George Green inhabits that category. I’m not quite sure if he knows how to turn a computer on. Why is it then, from the perspective of 2010, that the entire body of Mr. Green’s work seems to exude a powerful undercurrent of aspects of popular culture mediated through advanced technology? When I refer to “aspects of popular culture mediated through advanced technology,” I am thinking about a broad but specific area of media. The area that is relevant to our examination begins with animated

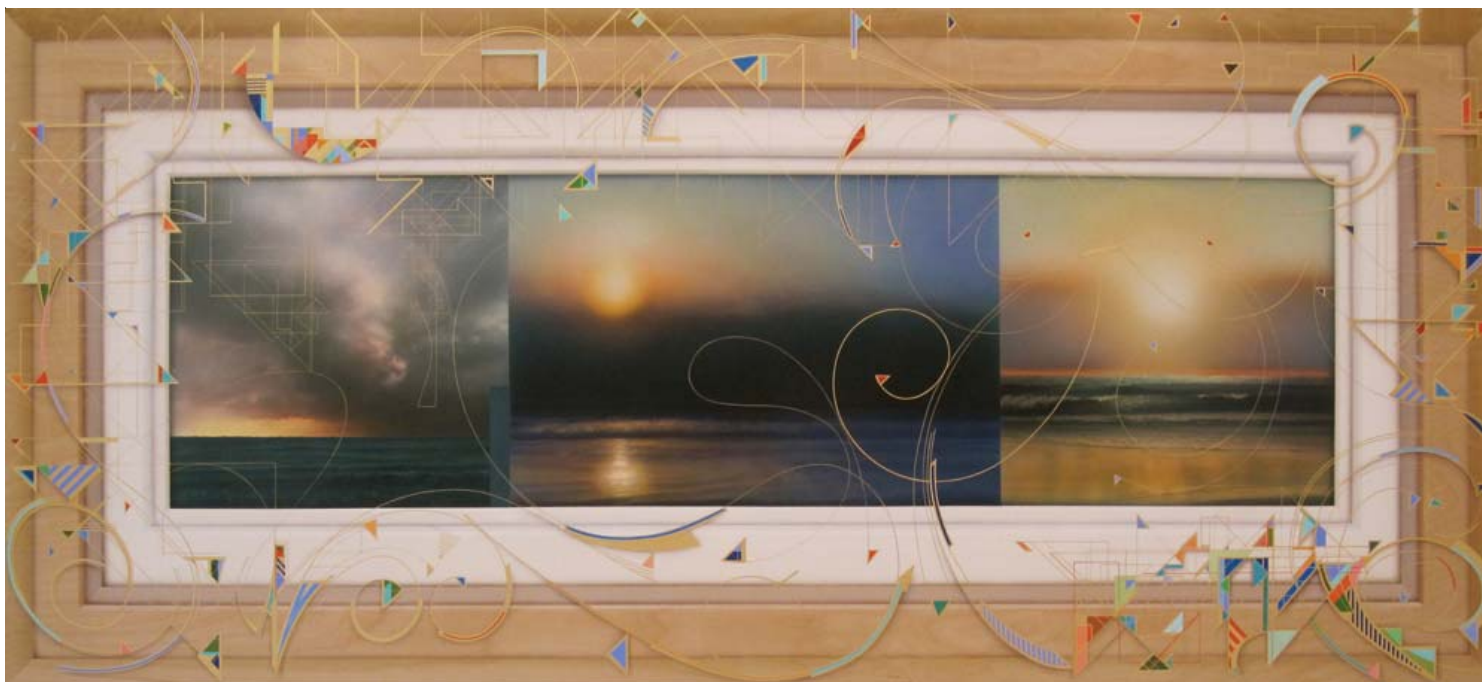
cartoons and progresses to the introduction of computer generated images (CGI) that is now ubiquitous in movie making. The period of history that I am thinking about begins in somewhere around 1941 (with the creation of Fantasia) and continues to the present. As far as I know, Mr. Green is not and has never been interested in or influenced by this part of popular culture. Nevertheless, I would contend that there are real correspondences that warrant examination. It seems to me that Mr. Green’s early work evokes analogies to animated cartoons, while the recent work embodies qualities that are not dissimilar from the effects found in CGI dependent films such as *The Lord of the Ring*.

The work on view at Louis Meisel Gallery was created in the early nineties. It is a kinetic, boisterous, down right funny body of work. Though the images in

these paintings are abstract shapes, they are shapes that seem to have come to life. In a word, they seem *animated*. These shapes arch, twist, cantilever, and bend in space. Somehow, they remind me of the preposterous distortions that I so loved in early animated cartoons, like Wily Coyote's contortions as he ran off a cliff. Sometimes these shapes are contained in a rectangular format, but more often they either begin to or entirely break free of the traditional rectangular. In the most extreme paintings, animated abstract shapes dance across the wall, like so many elephants and crocodiles from Fantasia. Then there are broad, thick gestural paint strokes. These are not the tortured gestural strokes of a Jackson Pollock, but seem more like the marks that Daffy Duck would make if he were to star in a movie about Jackson Pollock. Then add gestures that are more about drawing than painting. For all the



Rainbow in Curved Air: House of Atreus, 2009
acrylic on birch panel, 36 x 80 inches



Rainbow in Curved Air: House of Atreus, 2009
acrylic on birch panel, 36 x 80 inches

world, these remind me of the speed lines or vibration echoes in animated cartoons. Finally, there is the bright and brash color of these paintings that, again, evoke the color of both cartoons and television graphics. To me, Mr. Green's paintings from the early nineties look like abstract animated cartoons. What they lose by not being truly animated they gain in their almost overwhelming physical presence, a presence that is funny, threatening, and deep all at once.

On the other hand, the recent work at Bernarducci Meisel Gallery is far more restrained but equally alive. These works are composed of three imagistic devices: traditional illusionistic space (seascapes); trompe l'oeil space (the frames); and a decorative filagree. The seascapes are the presumptive center of interest in the paintings and are loosely derived from photographs taken by the artist. Anything beyond a casual





Detail on Cover:

La Creation du Monde, 2009
acrylic on birch panel, 20 x 36 inches

glance suggests that these seascapes are not as straightforward as they seem. There is something about the space, light, and imagery that seem unreal. Though certain image characteristics and light qualities come from the photographs, the scene itself is invented, reinvented, or substantially altered. The resultant “scene” seems both real and unreal at the same time. The bits and pieces all seem “right” but the totality has the quality of an altered state that I find deeply reminiscent of movies that are heavily dependent on CGI. It is a world ruled by a set of laws that allow things to happen that should not happen - a world where the physics of Newton and Einstein can be casually overruled. This sense of an altered reality is heightened by the inclusion of a trompe l’oeil frame. These painted frames are magically convincing. I have encountered people who refused to





Rembrandt, 2010
acrylic on birch panel, 48 x 80 inches

believe that they were not “real” until they touched them. For me, the interesting thing about these frames is that their “fool the eye” realness heightens the altered reality of the seascapes. The almost real seascapes seem more dreamlike when surrounded by the trompe l’oeil frames. Finally, there is a decorative filigree that dances over both the seascapes and the frames. It is interesting to me just how utilitarian and useful such a decorative device can be. On the face of it, it seems like a contradiction in terms. It is not. The filigree performs two duties. First, by floating over both the seascape and the frame, it confirms that the frame is, in fact, an illusion and not a three dimensional object. Second, the filigree acts a little like the sound track of a movie. It seems to be in the picture, but not of it. It changes the “tone” of the painting, by introducing a delicate and whimsical note to the rather more





Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps, 2009
acrylic on birch panel, 20 x 36 inches

brooding and threatening feel of the paintings. It is a comforting soundtrack that says: despite appearances, all will be well.

Think back to that chance meeting with the old friend who looked so different but was not so different under the surface. A more or less single personality animated both versions of his appearance. I would suggest the same with George Green's paintings. There is a singular personality, that Proteus-like is manifested in many different bodies over time. There is more, though, than just a singular personality that unifies these diverse physical manifestations. Something deeper and more global is at work; something I would loosely characterize as a *world view*. It's like an attitude toward creation, or maybe a vision of problem solving. It is an existential "posture" in the world.

When Mr. Green embarks on any new painting, no matter





Visual Science, 2009
acrylic on birch panel, 20 x 36 inches

how different, he employs a complex vision about how it is that one goes about making that art. Almost every painting, however different, begins with the minimum necessary percentage of planning and an even larger percentage of unknown “space.” This is true regardless of the period of work in question. I would call the area devoid of planning the “arena of unknowing.” It has two important aspects. First, it allows space for fruitful accident to occur. Walled off from planning, accidents and mistakes can be more easily seen as the trigger for pure creative discovery rather than as the enemy of preconception. Conversely, the “arena of unknowing” keeps preconception and planning from being anything more than a practical and necessary evil, all the while allowing it to have its rightful place in the creative enterprise. The two domains are given separate spaces to inhabit so that each can





Archimedes, 2009
acrylic on birch panel, 20 x 36 inches

be allowed to do what it does best without compromising or polluting its opposite. Though the forces of stability and change occupy separate spaces, they also touch and act upon each other like two dancers. In summary, we have here a highly nuanced single structure for creative action that allows for both preconception and spontaneity. And almost perversely, it is the stability of the structure (which incorporates a space for accident) that is the generative engine of change and growth in the work.

It's a little like life. Most of us lead fairly stable and predictable lives for the most part. We plan our days and have a general sense of how things will go. At the same time, on a daily basis, we experience all manner of unforeseen and unanticipated events. The events often radically alter the expected course of life. Things go very different than





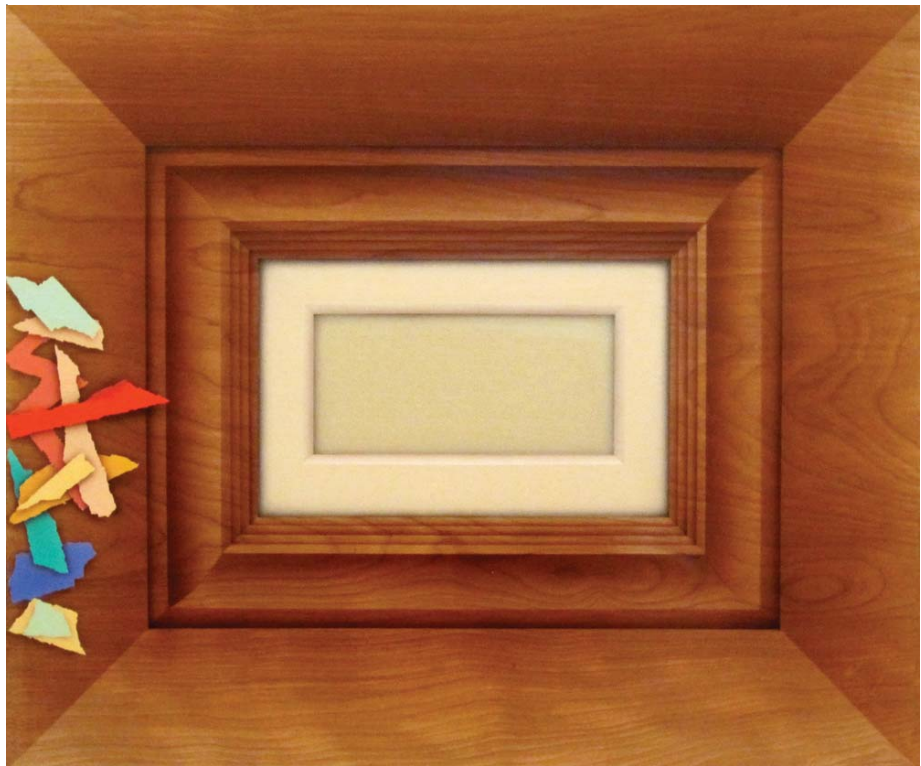
Neskowin: Age Old Instantaneous Hours, 2010
acrylic on birch panel, 48 x 80 inches

expected. Had I received a call and left the house five minutes later I might not have come face-to-face with my friend and the organizing metaphor of this essay would not have existed. But I walked out the door, planning to go to the market and by accident ran into my friend. And that led me to a way of thinking about the nature of George Green's art.

If you are a little surprised by what you have just read, you are not alone. I am, likewise, somewhat surprised by what I have written. When I began this project, my ambitions were modest. I thought to approach the work empirically, first examining the obvious and formidable differences in the two bodies of work and then attempting to see whether I could find singular animating principles that somehow unified or bound the work together. This was expected. What I did not expect was to discover an "ontological truth" at the core of

the work and then find that this notion had been turned into a well structured, foundational principle that guided the generation of George Green's work no matter how disparate the work might look.

Let me summarize the ideas at work here. If we are sensitive to our phenomenological experience of the world we will see that it comes in two flavors: "*that which is*" and "*that which can be*." "That which is" represents our experience of a stable, solid, dependable, somewhat unchanging world. This is the world that allows us to plan our activities and confidently act on those plans. "That which can be" represents the unexpected, the accidental, changing world. Living in a well planned environment, it is sometimes disorienting to realize that there are a multitude of powerful forces at work that care not at all about our plans. In fact, things rarely go as planned.



Nowhere Ubiquity, the Sweet Unknown, 2010
acrylic on birch panel, 20 x 24 inches

Faced with this fact, we recognize that the best we can do is hope, not plan. Further, it is interesting to note that these two aspects of our experience are parallel, integrated, and interactive. Though they are separate domains, they nevertheless act on each other - like a dance. Our “being” in the world is a complex dance between “that which is” and “that which can be.”

George Green intuitively understands the elemental nature of this concept and has turned it into the single and central organizational principle of his work. As I have said, there is an element of planning in all of Mr. Green’s work - and there is space made for the accidental. The actual creation of the work, like life, becomes an elaborate dance between those two forces. The specific character of the individual work of art is partly determined by the unique interaction of these entities. Sometimes the dance is

like a classical ballet and sometimes it’s more like the mosh pit of a punk performance. This creative dance is psychologically and emotionally toned by the personality that is George Green. What emerges from this dance is the vast variety and depth you see represented by these two exhibitions.

Don Eddy

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