



Tom Wudl, *The Song and Dance Man from Rotterdam Cycles Into Watery Dreams of Flesh and Paint*, 2005, acrylic and perforations on paper, 81" x 44-1/2", at LA Louver, Venice.

Tom Wudl at LA Louver

Tom Wudl is an articulate artist and an accomplished teacher who seems, in his most recent exhibition at LA Louver, to be letting loose and, to some extent, playing with his knowledge of art and art history, themes and processes. The result is beautiful and evocative. Picasso,

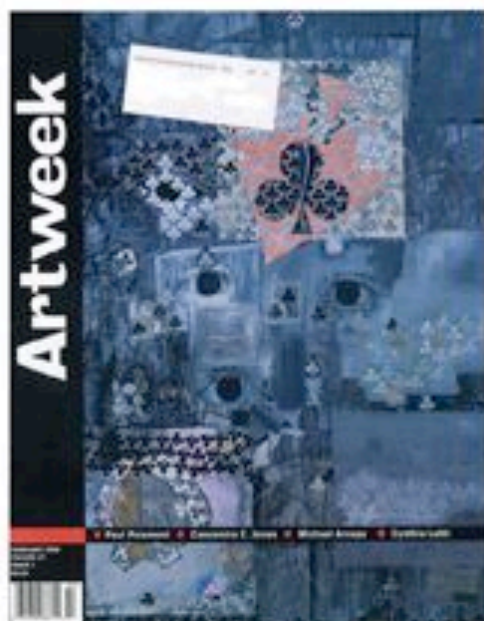
Magritte and Chagall are among many referenced in Wudl's new work but, despite stylistic resemblance, he has more resonance with Warhol's early gold leaf drawings. What they share is a kind of quirky and intelligent sentimentality. Despite highly worked surfaces with inescapable attention to detail, there is a quality of spaciousness, as if Wudl retained ideas and motivations in the back of his mind, but allowed the work itself to lead him, creating one of his best exhibitions to date.

In the main room of the gallery, *The Gift*, a twenty-eight-foot collage, dominates. Roses and eyes, covered by perforated paper linking texture and image in a dreamlike haze, are literal frame and emotional context for a new view of Laurel and Hardy, who figured largely in the artist's last exhibition at the gallery. A blue-faced Stan blows a hat into a swirl of black smoke that conceals Oliver's face in an inky transformation—a theme that echoes through the work in this exhibition. The shifts—from figure to abstract, from now to then, from here to an unnamed elsewhere—are assisted by the repeated shape of a club and, less often, spades or hearts. The clubs move across images like fluttering butterflies or a swarm of insistent insects, magically shifting and turning surfaces into ongoing states of smooth transition.

The change from figuration to abstraction is even more evident in smaller pieces, each alluding to a transformation in form, tense or spirit. *The Song and Dance Man from Rotterdam Cycles into Watery Dreams of Flesh and Paint* is a particularly lithe example and contains one of the lighter palettes in the exhibition. Gray, black and white relocate across the picture plane through multiple repetitions of clubs. Gold shoes with no rider furiously pedal a collapsed yellow bicycle while the churning pedals lift a haze of black and white into the rough form of a large face with a hat. Several brightly lipsticked mouths surround the seat and rise into a field of rectangles and eyes. These brilliant lips are both funny and somehow regretful, affecting a perfect balance to the sedate and marching clubs.

The lips are given even more weight in a striking painting, *The Modernist*, where pink, blue and flesh-colored clubs merge with gray, white and black into something like a face. Multiple green eyes float above many outrageous mouths in a telling homage to the artist's roots that is both sad and reverential. The more loosely realized collage, *Legend*, attempts to provide clues to iconography throughout the exhibition, but it cannot explain the mystifying powers of the clubs, roses or eyes; though it may well have been a precursor, here the piece feels like something of an afterthought.

Wudl is master of color, most notable in his minimal use of neon green and orange and his selective inclusion of



chalky pastels in *Associative Pluralities*'s crescendo of grays. The eyes that appear in so many works peer, large and looming, through a cloudy film of squares and rectangles that coexist with vigorous scribbles through another trick of the omnipresent clubs. The tension between defined geometric spaces with painterly squiggles and pencil scratches is eased by pattern and repetition much like the melody in a song. Wudl's searching surfaces provide a mirror to his process, offering viewers a look into the creative experience and a space for a reflection. As Wudl lets the work breathe in this way, transformations and questions, moods and relationships emerge, diminish and reappear in visual concert.

—Annie Buckley

Tom Wudl closed in December at LA Louver, Venice.

Annie Buckley is a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.