

NEW YORK REVIEWS

GROUP SHOW (Artists Space): By now, just about everyone is familiar with that hybrid of the '70s, "the alternative space." The notion of independent centers for art activities of all sorts that sprouted then has clearly taken tenacious root for the '80s. The Canadians have developed a more graceful term for these miniature Kunsthalles—"the Parallel Gallery." And certainly Artists Space—one of the very first New York showcases for raw talent, established in 1973—has always seemed to course along lines parallel to (rather than "alternative to") existing commercial galleries and museums.

Artists Space generally puts on group and solo exhibitions that are intelligently conceived and minimally curated. The idea is to catch artists at their most promising moment, as they evolve toward emergent styles and original issues—just at the moment, in fact, before a parallel tributary joins the mainstream. Part of the excitement in following its shows, of course, lies in the risk of unevenness. The recent installation

of work by five younger artists presented widely varying styles and content. It included text and photographic work by Silvia Kolbowski; nonnarrative color blowups by Richard Prince; small, apparently faceless paintings by Allan McCollum; super-8mm films by Jeff Balmsever; and an ambitious series of gouaches and acrylic drawings by Jenny Snider. A group show at Artists Space is frequently less bland than those at commercial galleries. If it does not comfortably define a trend in the making, it often gauges a prevailing attitude—or mood—among younger artists.

Certainly this show reflected a taste for irony and enigma, rich with a wit that playfully skirted—rather than confronted—grim issues of any sort. The three titled works give this away in their wall labels alone: Balmsever's *Giving Peasants Agricultural Advice*; Kolbowski's *What Was the Right Answer* [sic]; Snider's *All Painted. All Black and White. All Dancing*. Balmsever's simultaneously projected loops depict an endless and seemingly pointless series of agricultural activities as practiced by West Indian men and youths. However, their very lack of point *is* the point: the newest methods are not great technological or chemical advances, but "ingrown versions" of age-old, basic methods. Bals-

meyer's homegrown snippets from a travelogue—complete with ragged color—perfectly fit his subject matter. Kolbowski's cryptic, modular photographic vignette intentionally defies a single interpretation, while inviting many. We see fragmented images that might be film stills: what appear to be kissing lovers, a naked back, a young girl perhaps preparing for erotic play. One possible reading is of an Oedipal drama unfolding, but presumably that information tells the artist—who is investigating "the different readings . . . based on cultural training"—more about this viewer than it tells the viewer about the work. Whatever else, the fragments are highly charged and very clever.

McCollum's paintings are, of course, not what they seem. (Or are they?) At first glance, the small-scale square and rectangular objects lining the wall appear to be a latter-day exercise in mannered minimalism. But the artist has another intention in mind: "I am trying," he says, "to create objects which represent artworks in general . . ." Again, it's a question of multiple interpretations, enhanced by the elegant restraint of the objects themselves. Unfortunately, Prince's untitled photographic blowups do not achieve the level of irony and intelligence of the other works in the show: a series of gentlemen in blazers, they do not fulfill the artist's intention "to produce a set of images that is questionable to the point of being believable." But Snider's installation of almost 300 drawings was—quite simply—enchanting entertainment. The drawings are indeed "all painted, all black and white, all dancing." Lithe, quick-limned couples tango, strut, fox-trot and boogie, depicting every fantasy from a Fred Astaire film to those of *Saturday Night Fever*. The series, begun in 1978, is charmingly drafted, pulsing with warmth, life and a startling compassion, and proved to be the centerpiece of a quirky and intriguing show.

—Jane Bell



Jenny Snider, *Couple*, 1978, acrylic, 12 by 18 inches. Artists Space.