

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

by David Pelfrey

AMY PLEASANT (*University of Alabama at Birmingham, January 8—February 8, 2003*) has created a series of large paintings on canvas and smaller drawings of plaintive characters involved in mundane activities such as sleeping, cleaning house, and getting dressed. Each work presents the figures and their actions in several stages, as though discrete events had been captured over time. The series is called "Time Lapse," yet the images so effectively convey the passage of time that the title does not labor to contextualize these paintings, which evoke a number of cinematic possibilities.

In *She Loved Her Husband* (2002), an elderly woman enters and exits a room, sits in a chair, holds a cup and saucer, and stares into space. *While I Was Having My Bath* (2002) shows a character preparing to bathe and then suffering a fall in the tub. Both light sketches and bold silhouettes outline characters, while "past" moments are almost evanescent and more current ones appear in bolder lines and colors, locating discrete moments on separate planes. Not that these planes imply a specific chronology, but because the scenes narrate common activities, it is easy to infer a narrative path. More significantly, it is easy to regard each moment as a "shot," and each series of events as a "scene." In addition, the contrasting light and bold "shots" recall (or mimic) the cinematographic device of fading in and fading out to represent the passing of time and/or the transition between scenes. In this exhibition, by the time we get to scenes from a kitchen entitled *Cuts And Pans* (2002), Pleasant's sly pun assures us that we are in the realm of cinematic reference.

It might be reasonable to suspect that we are subsequently in the realm of pure device, but the peculiar cumulative effect of the series transcends the primary technical features. Pleasant's quiet, intimate scenes largely are private human events. The matter of privacy or intimacy might not arise in a "traditional" depiction on canvas. But here we contemplate what an imagined camera has captured, so these images offer the attendant concerns of voyeurism



Amy Pleasant, installation view from the series "Time Lapse," 2003 (courtesy the artist).

(certain characters' silhouettes may signify the capacity of a cinematic gaze to reduce subjects to mere form, in turn alluding to a dehumanizing facet of voyeurism). In this context, the cinematic potential of the works emerges, even if that emergence depends upon viewers' familiarity with certain American films.

That may be due to a clever hint (like the *Cuts and Pans* pun) that Pleasant provides in *Untitled* (2002). A struggle takes place between two characters, one of whom looks back at the "camera" as though aware he's being watched. Another of Pleasant's trademark silhouette figures appears in this scene, and the image strongly suggests the famous profile of Alfred Hitchcock. This image is a catalyst for locating all the paintings along a continuum running from the innocuous *The Morning After* (2002) to the sinister *The Birth Of Violence* (2002), and it is intriguing that, Hitchcock notwithstanding, these works often make sex indistinguishable from violence. With all of these aspects in mind, a complete perusal of the paintings and drawings initiates an astonishing mental process.

To view these works all at once (to "pan" around the gallery) is to gaze at instance after instance of discrete, intimate, but mundane human events, while fixing on scenes that are vaguely sinister or definitely violent. If only metaphorically, such a panorama situates viewers in a role similar to the one James Stewart plays in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. In that film, Stewart gazes through a camera lens and binoculars at the often dull, but distinctly private, activity in several adjacent apartments before coming across the scene of a murder. In depicting lapses of time, Amy Pleasant may wish simply to exper-

iment on canvas with representations of double exposures, multiple shots, fades, and dissolves. It turns out, however, that once she begins manipulating an imagined motion picture camera, she's inevitably manipulating an audience whose collective visual index is overloaded with modern cinema's images, tropes and conventions.

GAINESVILLE, GEORGIA

By Edward Epstein

Gainesville doesn't seem like a place where you would expect to see a major Robert Rauschenberg exhibition. Arriving in town, you

encounter an agribusiness plant, a few banks, the picturesque Brenau University—and not much else. But in another coup for Brenau, curator Jean Westmacott has organized an outstanding array of exhibitions that include the work of Robert Rauschenberg and Darryl Pottorf individually and as collaborators in a series called "Quattro Mani," or "Four Hands" (*Simmons Visual Art Center & Castelli Gallery, Brenau University, February 6—March 30, 2003*). This is the second major showing of Rauschenberg's work at the university's galleries, which have also featured the work of Jasper Johns, Nancy Graves, Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. Instrumental in obtaining work from artists of this stature was the late dealer Leo Castelli, who was also a Brenau trustee.

Rauschenberg's portion of the exhibition is unique in its focus on recent developments in his work. Known since the 1950s as a progenitor of Pop, the artist has expanded his rich vocabulary of screened on photographs and gestural brushwork to include cool, reflective surfaces, vegetable dyes and acid-incised metals. The 1994 work *Ruby Climb*, for example, lays furtive, semi-transparent red brush strokes over a photograph of steps leading to an unknown location. All of this appears on shiny aluminum, creat-



Robert Rauschenberg and Darryl Pottorf, *Quattro Mani Marrakech III, 2000*, color screen print on paper, 36 by 36 inches (edition of 40 published by Gemini G.E.L. LLC) (courtesy Brenau University).