

An abstract painting with a textured surface, featuring large areas of blue, purple, and brown. The colors are layered and blended, creating a sense of depth and movement. The texture appears to be that of a canvas or a similar material, with visible brushstrokes and some areas where the paint has been applied more heavily.

PRISCILLA
HEINE

Bloom

Guild Hall

October 24 - November 29, 2009

Priscilla Heine: Bloom

In 2007 the distinguished awards juror for the 69th Annual Guild Hall Artist Members Exhibition was Faye Hirsch, Senior Editor at Art in America magazine. She awarded Priscilla Heine's *Pick Me a Place*, a mixed media sculpture, the award of Top Honors. I was intrigued with the sculpture from the start. It was composed of painted fabric that had been twisted and crushed and encased in a Plexiglas box. It exuded a tactile sensuality from behind the Plexiglas wall, creating an internal/external tension. In this way her sculptures are caught in the various stages of bloom, forever remaining in that stasis.

When I first visited Priscilla Heine's studio I was struck by the vibrant colors and abstract canvases placed around the bright white studio that stands in the midst of dense woodlands. Heine's abstractions contain remnants of representational forms, often from nature, that have crept to the surface or subsurface of the work. They act as starting points that give the viewer a firm ground to enter the work and fully engage it. Some of the canvases are thick with rich layers of oil paint while others appear merely stained by pigment, allowing the raw canvas to become the central core of the work. All her works have a tremendous energy that is empowered by her firm, confident brushstroke. As curator of Guild Hall it has been a great pleasure to work with this tremendously talented artist and to witness the passion she has for her art.

Christina Mossaides Strassfield
Museum Director/Chief Curator, Guild Hall

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Catalog Designed by Janet Goleas
Graphic Design by Angelica Ruiz
Photography by Gary Mamay ©

ISBN#0-933793-61-8

On the cover: **Bay Beauty**, 2009, oil on canvas, 8" x 10"

All works courtesy Wally Findlay Galleries International, Inc.

For Moki Cherry



The Conversation, 2006, oil on linen, 68" x 80"



Walker Evans, *Coal Dock Workers, Havana*, 1933, gelatin silver print



Angel, 2008, oil on linen, 80" x 58"

Priscilla Heine: Under the Lilies

At the far end of a summer day, as shadows smudged the white of his Springs studio Willem de Kooning once said, "You yourself are like a big stew."

"There's a lot in there already," he mused, contemplating the day's work. "But the stew doesn't know that. Somebody has to pick it out. So you start doing it."¹

In her own Cedar Point studio a tangled skein of roads away, Priscilla Heine has for many years been excavating the stew that is herself through painting, and, more recently, sculpture. She's sly about it. She pushes the formal pleasures of charcoal line, lavish color, syncopated rhythms, and teeming activity up front and center, so that the eye at first glosses over the turmoil, peril and eddying emotion beneath.

Like de Kooning and the painters of the abstract expressionist generations, she paints in the present tense. Vagrant thoughts unmoored by the physical act of painting are apt to bump against sensibility and history – both art and personal – as well as the fluid possibilities of endless incremental decision-making.

"Since I was quite young," Heine says. "I believed that painting is just a recording of that time and that moment. It's about being very present, following an idea. Following an idea. Following an idea: showing a human being thinking a thought and just following it to the very end."²

Her paintings are records of a real person in real time who is responding, remembering, processing: dreams, appetites, desires, beauty and the grotesque, tranquility and entropy. In her chaotic childhood, seem and be seldom bore any relationship to one another. The glittering surface of exotic adventure and scintillating company was cosmetic, masking turmoil and deprivation. In her paintings, luminous color and voluptuous forms often scumble what lies beneath.

Under the Lilies, a painting which she began in 2007 and completed in 2008, is her most arresting and succinct statement of the paradox. A fountain of white erupts across the upper half of the painting, with the buoyancy and lyricism of blaring trumpets. It outshouts layers of cursive charcoal gesture and of swimming pool ultramarine propelled into droplets and spray. The trumpeting white tendrils are a rather more blowsy version of a motif that recurs often in Heine's paintings. They riff on a bouquet of calla lilies, her emblem of harmony and joy.

She has rapturous memories of calla lilies: of watching women in black dresses picking calla lilies in Portugal, where the flowers grow wild, and of her honeymoon, in Perpignan, in the foothills of the Pyrenees, where late one night she was transfixed by restaurant tables dressed with great vases of calla lilies.

"We could hear the men in the kitchen talking and cooking, and could smell the food. Perfection! So any time I am stuck in a painting I bring in calla lilies and the painting is resolved."

In *Under the Lilies*, a gush of lilies arcs from a ghoulish pod, prying it open to reveal a monstrous creature with a head the mottled ultramarine of a swimming pool gone putrid, and a lacerated lozenge of blood red for a body. This is the cartoony menace of the late Philip Guston, which continues as favored territory for young artists today.

Heine integrates all of it. Her art may be rooted in the eternal present of the abstract expressionist gesture, but it hardly stops there.

She was born in 1956. Her time and her moment, have straddled the final decades of the 20th century, and the early years of the 21st. So her tools of excavation and ever deepening thought include much of what has happened since de Kooning ladled his stew. In particular, she's infected with the Fluxus focus on anti-art and garbage as the open sesame of everyday existence, most notably in her sculpture. Like the post-minimalists who emerged just as she was coming of age, her images sometimes materialize out of and dominate their background, as in the 2008 *A Very Fine Woman*.

She subverts the irony of pop and the surreal zaniness of Carroll Dunham and his generation with a highly personal, emotion-laden iconography, as in the 2009 *Mr. Sweetlove*. Somehow Heine discerns in the painting's urgent scramble of layers, colors, emerging and submerging images, swirls and scrapes, "A man in a dashiki crossing 125th street." There's also a rooster in there somewhere, and the cacophony of existential angst pushed and pulled to the edge of buffoonery.

She grew up in New York, with summers on the Mediterranean, studied art at Tufts and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and soon after exiled herself for a series of summers in a cabin without electricity on a lake in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. The water, like a minimalist plane, and the swimmers emerging out of it instigated her first mature subject matter. Back in the hullabaloo of the Lower East Side, however, she discovered her affinity with movement - the movement of children at play; of girls twirling; of paint careening, cascading, splashing; of layers scraped, wiped, and washed. In paintings such as *Birdland*, 2009, the act of addition and subtraction attains a furious velocity.

Her most extraordinary gifts are as a colorist. She's fearless with color, which can be as pure as Yves Kline pigment, as in *Prussian Thrust*, 2008, or as psychedelic as the lurid opposition of an electric lemon cadmium yellow to ancient ochre and burnt umber in the 2007 *High Seat*. The colors part to reveal and conceal the looping charcoal line that underlies so much of the work, so that drawing and painting are in constant play, together with image and abstraction, surface and the abyss, seem and be.

In the diptych *Angel*, 2008, she brings it all together. The adamant burst of swashbuckling color describing a sensuous line or bulbous form is intensified by a white ground constructed out of layer upon agitated layer of dark, light and dripping hue. The tenuous balance of the blatant elements emanates raw energy and unabashed sexuality.

There's often a primal kind of sex in these paintings, as in the matted vaginal aggressiveness of *Lady's Swamp*, 2008. In this, as in other ways Heine has taken permission from Louise Bourgeois' forays into autobiography and the unconscious.

"Whenever I felt stupid about my connection to the psychological, I thought about Louise," Heine says.

In particular, Heine remembers seeing an exhibition of the soft sculptures that Bourgeois began making out of her own clothes in the mid-1990s. Heine's sculptures cannibalize not only her own clothes closet, but that of her husband and children, as well as the jars and containers of beauty products in which she, like so many other women, encapsulates dreams and disguises despair. She crushes, mutilates, stacks and manipulates these artifacts of her life, in a process similar to the one she brings to painting. Not that the sculptures keep any distance from painting. They drip with color and brushwork.

Except for that dynamism, the sculptures sometimes evoke the vanity table of Miss Havisham, the Dickensian anti-heroine who presided in overdressed faded splendor in a disintegrating house kept precisely the way it was on the day she was left at the altar.

That is the entropy that Heine's art so lustrously flails against. In its conflicted quest towards the harmony of color and beauty it achieves the clamorous poetry of a present dynamically reworking the past.

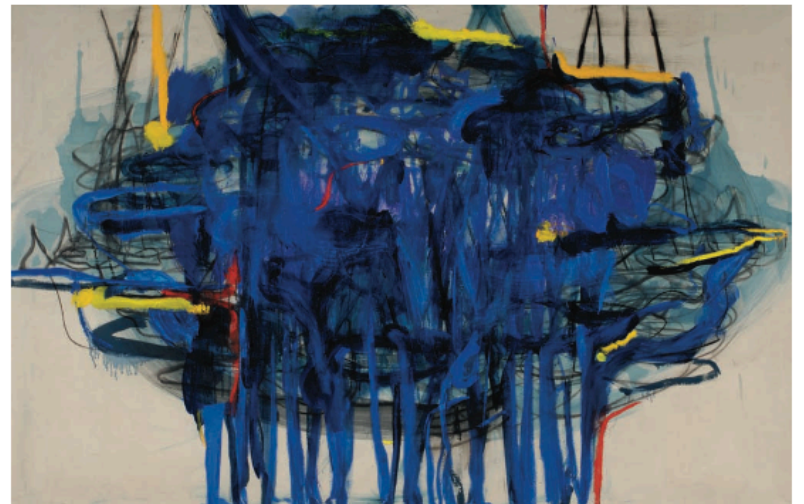
Amel Wallach

1. Willem de Kooning to A. Wallach, Springs, East Hampton, 5/10/78

2. P. Heine to A. Wallach, East Hampton, 9/3/2009. Unless otherwise noted all Heine quotes are from this conversation.



Under the Lilies, 2008, oil on linen, 80" x 68"



Lady's Swamp, 2008, oil on linen, 50" x 78"



Rough Red, 2007, oil on linen, 68" x 80"



Stack, 2009, mixed media, glassine, gesso, oil paint, 9 1/2" x 9" x 7"



Bag of Blue, 2007, oil on linen, 68" x 80"



Out of the Box, 2008, glassine, gesso, oil paint, 10" x 6" x 5"



A Very Fine Woman, 2008, oil on linen, 56" x 48"



Sea, 2009, oil on linen, 80" x 64"



Birdland, 2009, oil on linen, 60" x 48"



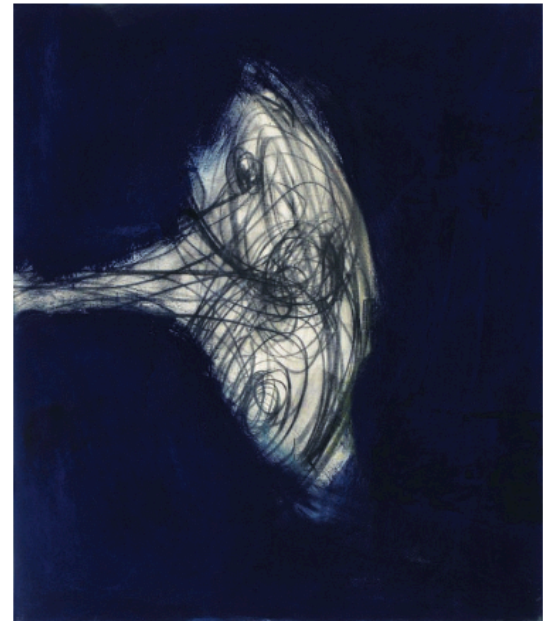
Lucy Goosey, 2008, cardboard, glassine, gesso, oil paint, 9" x 6" x 5"



High Seat, 2007, charcoal and oil on linen, 48" x 48"



Bunch, 2007, charcoal and oil on linen, 60" x 50"



Prussian Thrust, 2008, charcoal and pigment on linen, 54" x 47"



Corazon, 2009, metal, rags, gesso, oil paint, 15" x 22" x 9"



Emperor's Blue, 2009, 15" x 22" x 9"; **Beauty Cream Jar Box**, 2009, 6" x 6" x 6"; **Corsage**, 2009, 12" x 12" x 5"

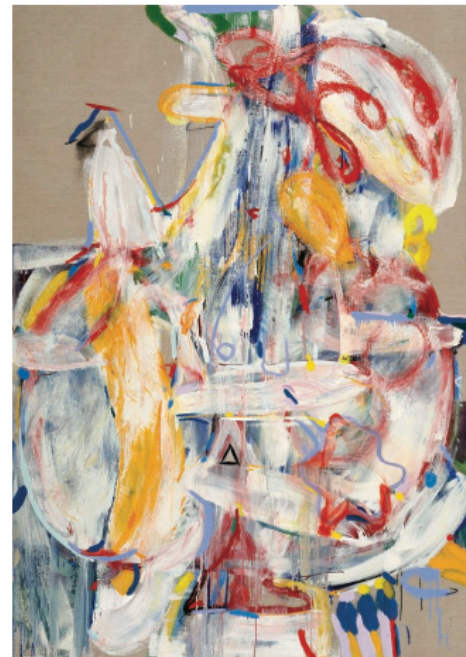
Orchid Face, 2009, 9" x 6" x 6"; **Sculpture**, 2006, 6" x 6" x 5"; **Make Sense**, 2009, 6" x 4" x 4"



Rag Sconce, 2008, rags, gesso, oil paint, 10" x 10" x 4"



Dancing Chicken, 2009, oil stick and charcoal on paper, 40 1/2" x 26 1/2"



Mr. Sweetlove, 2009, oil on linen, 80" x 56"

Exhibition Checklist:

Under the Lilies, 2008, oil on linen, 80" x 68"

Bag Of Blue, 2007, oil on linen, 68" x 80"

Rough Red, 2007, oil on linen, 68" x 80"

Bunch, 2007, charcoal on linen, 60" x 50"

High Seat, 2007, charcoal and oil on linen, 48" x 48"

Prussian Thrust, 2008, charcoal and pigment on linen, 54" x 47"

Lady's Swamp, 2008, oil on linen, 50" x 78"

A Very Fine Woman, 2008, oil on linen, 56" x 48"

Mr. Sweetlove, 2009, oil on linen, 80" x 56"

Angel, 2008, oil on linen, 80" x 58"

Sea, 2009, oil on linen, 80" x 64"

Birdland, 2009, oil on linen, 60" x 48"

Shadow Lake, 2009, oil on linen, 48" x 60"

Orchid Face, 2009, rags, gesso, oil paint, 9" x 6" x 6"

Sculpture, 2006, rags, gesso, oil paint, 6" x 6" x 5"

Emperor's Blue, 2009, 15" x 22" x 9"

Corsage, 2009, rags, gesso, oil paint, 12" x 12" x 5"

Lucy Goosey, 2008, cardboard, glassine, gesso, oil paint, 9" x 6" x 5"

Corazon, 2009, metal, rags, gesso, oil paint, 15" x 22" x 9"

Rag Sconce, 2008, rags, gesso, oil paint, 10" x 10" x 4"

Pick Me a Place, 2007, mortar and passel, discarded products, plastic gloves, gesso, paint; 22" x 10" x 10"

Still Life, 2008, discarded boxes, glassine paper, gesso, paint; 18" x 10" x 10"

Impending, 2009, discarded boxers, paper, gesso, paint; 9" x 7" x 7"

Flower, 2009, cosmetic jar, paper, gesso, paint; 7" x 7" x 4"

This exhibition would not be possible without the enthusiastic effort of the following individuals: thank you to Christina Mossaides Strassfield for her curatorial expertise and to Michelle Klein for her dedicated assistance; to Art in America's Senior Editor Faye Hirsch for her critical eye; to Janet Goleas for absolutely everything having to do with this catalog, as well as her savvy and keen understanding of how to proceed with clarity; to Amei Wallach for blessing this catalog with her insights and scholarship; for the continuing support of Jimmy Borynack of Wally Findlay Galleries and the hard work of Angelica Ruiz; to Linda Briscoe Meyers at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin for ushering through the copyright for Walker Evans's photograph, "Squeekie Burroughs Asleep," 1936; and to Eileen Sullivan at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Jennifer Belt at Art Resources for similarly making copyrights available for Walker Evans's, "The Coal Dock Workers, Havana," 1933; and a special thanks to Miriam Ayres and Robert Myers for helping me in the beginning of this process to articulate my intentions as they relate to the foundation of this catalog. P.H.

"In the immediate world, everything is to be discerned with the whole of consciousness, seeking to perceive it as it stands: so that the aspect of a street in sunlight can roar in the heart of itself as a symphony, perhaps as no symphony can: and all consciousness is shifted from the imagined, the revisive, to the effort to perceive simply the cruel radiance of what is."

James Rufus Agee



Squeekie Burroughs, *A Day in the Park*, 2006, oil on linen, 68 " x 80"



Walker Evans, *Squeekie Burroughs Asleep*, 1936, gelatin silver print

Photo Credits:

Image Copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY

Evans, Walker (1903-1975) © Copyright. **Coal Dock Workers, Havana, 1933**. Gelatin silver print, 12.7 x 17.7 cm (5 x 7in.).
Purchase, The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation Gift, through Joyce and Robert Menschel, 1990 (1990.1143). © Walker Evans

Walker Evans, **Squeekie Burroughs Asleep**, 1936, gelatin silver print, 5 7/8" x 5 1/8"
Photography Collection, Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

