

**Saturday 08.21.10**

**Drake Deknatel's Small Paintings at Elizabeth Leach**



Drake Deknatel at Elizabeth Leach Gallery

As a relative newcomer to the greater Northwest art community, I am often at a loss when discussions arise regarding all but the most prominent of local artists. The upside of this situation is that it is still possible for me to be surprised.

Cris Bruch suggested that I see the paintings of the late Drake Deknatel. While I took his recommendation under advisement, I didn't think I'd be writing about Deknatel's work, first, because that would mean two reviews of Leach exhibits in as many months, and because I don't have a strong relationship with a lot of contemporary painting.

I will, however, admit to a long-held notion that fertile ground can be found in the medium when a painter plays with the boundaries of abstraction and figuration. I am not alone in this notion, or in the assessment that Deknatel's painting often succeeds in this challenge, especially in the work just prior to his death in 2005. The surfaces of his canvasses are richly textured, and the figures, while standing apart, also blend with the field in which they are positioned, thereby reinforcing the dynamic quality of the work. To

over-use a phrase, Deknatel is clearly a painter's painter, which is all well and good, for his proficiency with paint will hold one's gaze; however, it is still not enough to make me put pen to paper merely to reiterate what has already been better said elsewhere.

Leach has titled this exhibit, "Small Paintings." The paintings are arranged in two groupings, each with one large painting and several corresponding smaller paintings. One group shows a person holding what appears to be a satchel. The large painting in this first group is titled "Boy Sisyphus" (2005). The smaller ones in this grouping are untitled, but all have notations on the back that read either "Figure with Ammo" or "Man with Ammo". The second group revolves around a large painting in which a figure stands with a similar posture to the other set, yet in this group holds a toy airplane. All of this second set is untitled, although the large piece has the notation "I wish I could fly", and for the small ones, "Figure with plane". The treatment in all of the small paintings from both groupings varies significantly from that of the large paintings, as well as between themselves. As studies, the palette, textures and details of the surface and figure change, and their interest lies in those differences. Even so, one must ultimately return to the large paintings that they reference.



Deknatel's Boy Sisyphus

In Deknatel's "Boy Sisyphus", no mountain is visible, as the background is an over-painted void. However, the figure is shaped somewhat like a pyramid with very large feet and a smallish head. If the boy in the picture has a boulder to push ahead of him time and again up a mountain, it may be an inner struggle. The other large painting, annotated with "I wish I could fly", suggests a desire to escape or rise above. Overall, "Small Paintings" consists of reflections on the artist's youth, and nostalgia of that sort, particularly when life becomes tenuous, necessarily encompasses a meditation on mortality. The mood in Leach's back room takes on a somber tone despite the vibrant colors.

Drake Deknatel died of a heart attack not long after having open-heart surgery. Many of the small paintings at Leach were completed during his presumed convalescence. These facts are thoroughly covered in the number of articles and eulogies written shortly after and since his death, and it is therefore almost impossible to relate to the paintings on any other terms than from the romantic notion that beauty sometimes comes with facing the inevitable. Regret turns to release. But Deknatel's message, not only for those among us who are of sufficient years or similar health, but for all with eyes to see, would not be so poignant without his mastery of the medium.

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# Drake Deknatel's dogged inquiry into his existence

A Portland exhibit spotlight's the late Seattle painter's talent and peers into his psyche

By BRIAN LIBBY  
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

In 2005 painter Drake Deknatel walked into a local cafe on the way to his Seattle studio and, moments later, collapsed from a fatal heart attack. Like the passing a few weeks ago of Terry Toedtemeier, the Portland Art Museum's photography curator, the loss was a bitter one for the Northwest art scene. Yet Deknatel's posthumous show this month at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, "Berlin Portraits," provides a compelling and enduring reminder of the artist's talent. It's also a glimpse into his psyche.

## Drake Deknatel exhibit

**What:** "Drake Deknatel (1943-2005): Berlin Portraits," paintings  
**Where:** Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth Ave.; 503-224-0521  
**When:** Show runs Thursday through Feb. 28  
**Hours:** 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, and by appointment  
**Web site:** www.elizabethleach.com

On broad canvases with layers of paint that the artist actually made himself, Deknatel spent his career straddling representational and abstract imagery. Glimpses of human and landscape forms became cloaked within a dizzying variety of colors and textures. The paintings in this show, created between 2003 and 2005, occupy both sides of that divide.

Please see **DEKNATEL**, Page B8



Courtesy of THE ESTATE OF DRAKE DEKNATEL/ELIZABETH LEACH GALLERY

Drake Deknatel's "Seeflustern," from 2003, is among his earlier works in an exhibit opening later this week at Elizabeth Leach Gallery.



In "Out of the Woods" (from 2005), late artist Drake Deknatel painted himself as a child wearing his father's oversized flak jacket.

## Deknatel: 'Thrownness' is an apt label for paintings

Continued from Page B1

The earlier works from 2003, such as "Seeflustem" and "As I Wash My Sins," are more abstract, displaying an almost Baroque, Henri Matisse-like infusion of red, gray and yellow. However, the most compelling pieces in this show — the pieces that Deknatel made closest to his death — are more explicitly representational. Faintly recalling the haunting portraiture of Lucian Freud or even Portland painter Horia Boboia, pieces such as "Out of the Woods" and "Watch the Night" show the artist as a child wearing his father's oversized flak jacket and are all based on the same photograph. Around the likeness, he adds dense, evocative bursts of color and surreal imagery.

Born in 1943 in New York City, Deknatel's early years were nomadic. After studying at the School of the Art Institute of Chi-

cago and the University of Arizona, followed by a brief sojourn in New Mexico, he moved in the mid-1970s to the Oregon coast and in 1981 finally settled in Seattle. For his last several years, Deknatel divided his time between that city and Berlin.

Wherever his home, Deknatel's painting showed a deep curiosity about the world and his place in it. Describing his work, Deknatel has cited the philosophical concept of "thrownness." We do not choose to be, the thinking goes, but instead we are thrown into existence — into our lives. Even if philosophy class put you to sleep in college, thrownness makes an apt description for the world conjured in Deknatel's paintings.

Leach has devoted both its exhibit rooms (usually shared by two different shows) and a second month to Deknatel's exhibit. While the dealer's friendship with Deknatel dated to the early 1990s, this isn't mere sentimental tribute. One feels pulled by these paintings into a grimy but vivid world just below the surface of human consciousness. One can almost feel Deknatel trying to wake up — or, on some level, maybe to resist doing so.

Once asked about achieving immortality through his art, Woody Allen quipped that he'd

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Describing his work, Deknatel has cited the philosophical concept of "thrownness." We do not choose to be, the thinking goes, but instead we are thrown into existence — into our lives.

rather achieve it through not dying. The reality, of course, is it doesn't work that way. But as with Toedtemeier, who was also an accomplished picture maker devoted to visual chronicles of Oregon, one sees in Deknatel's work not just a distinct voice, but a contagious and enduring sense of wonder, a dogged inquiry prompting his every effort. A guy always headed to the cafe with his paintbrushes.

Brian Libby is a Portland freelance writer; mailbox@brianlibby.com

# DRAKE DEKNATEL GALLERY

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Tuesday, November 22, 2005

Drake Deknatel, 1943-2005: 'Painter's painter' from Pioneer Square

By REGINA HACKETT

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER ART CRITIC

Painter Drake Deknatel was a fixture in Pioneer Square. In the morning, before climbing the stairs to his studio, he'd stop with his German shepherd, Dermot, at Cafe Paloma to read the newspaper, talk with friends and drink espresso.

At lunch, he'd be back for the combo plate of baba ghanoush, hummus, tabbouleh and tomato salad. Friday was his first day out after open-heart surgery. He was on his way to his studio to pick up brushes and paint so he could work at home and stopped for lunch at the cafe, said artist Jane Richlovsky, a friend who shared the studio with him.

"I had just taken his regular order when he slumped over," waiter Louie Gurusco said. "I caught him in my arms. We knew he'd just had open-heart surgery and called 911 immediately. The medics worked on him for more than a half-hour, but he was gone."

Painter, musician and literary light, Deknatel died Friday afternoon at the cafe. He was 62.

"He was a painter's painter," said Elizabeth Brown, chief curator at the University of Washington's Henry Art Gallery. "He did everything he could to engage with his subject as deeply as possible. He paid attention to theoretical developments around painting and constantly asked himself if he were pushing himself in the right way. I so admire his rigor."

Born in New York City in 1943, he was raised in Chicago and lived in Seattle for more than two decades. In recent years, he maintained a studio in Berlin, where he exhibited at the Galerie Michael Schultz.

Bruce Guenther, chief curator at the Portland Art Museum and friend of the artist, said through an e-mail that Deknatel "spent his artistic life inventing and reinventing a place for his painting between representation and abstraction, the fact and the fiction. He moved between Seattle and Berlin with fluidity, relishing the passionate intellectuality of the German art scene and the interiority of his Seattle routine. Every encounter with him was an energizing romp from idea to artwork, theories to new exhibitions around the world. His curiosity was unflagging and his engagement with the making of art inspiring."

His wife of 18 years, Lauren Deknatel, met him at the Two Bells Tavern when he was playing his guitar. "I'm a bass player," she said. "We started playing together and fell in love." She said her husband often accused her of liking Dermot more than she liked him.

"I'd just smile, but when he was in the hospital, I told him I loved him more," she said.

To John Rogers, Deknatel was primarily a guitar player. He and the Deknatels played regularly at various clubs around Belltown.

"He grew up playing slide guitar in Chicago. I'm a drummer, and I loved playing with him," Rogers said. "He was a big-hearted, lovely man and a wonderful singer. I stuck with him because he played from the heart. I look at his paintings, I own about 10, and that's what I see there, too, somebody working from his heart."

There will be a memorial service for Deknatel Monday afternoon at his Seattle gallery, the Catherine Person Gallery, 319 Third Ave. S., in Pioneer Square, said Richlovsky, who is helping organize it. The time hasn't been selected yet, but those who call the gallery (206-763-5565) at the end of the week can get it, Richlovsky said.

"Everybody loved him," she said. "I went to the bank today, and the teller was crying."

He is survived by his wife, Lauren; a daughter, Soleil, from an earlier marriage; three grandchildren; and a nephew.



**Drake Deknatel.**  
Photo: Davis Freeman, courtesy  
of Catherine Person Gallery, Seattle, WA.

## **PIONEER SQUARE BIDS FAREWELL TO PAINTER DRAKE DEKNATEL: 1943-2005**

by Jim Demetre

**O**n Friday, November 18, Seattle lost one of its most consistently dynamic artists and one of its most lively personalities. Drake Deknatel – painter, blues guitarist, art correspondent, and epic conversationalist – died of a heart attack while having lunch at his usual spot, the Café Paloma in Pioneer Square. Having just been released from the hospital after undergoing open-heart surgery, he had stopped by his studio on Western to pick up some pigments and brushes before returning home.

These events, reported by Regina Hackett in the *Seattle P-I*, say so much about Drake: despite his setback, he knew that resuming the act of painting would sustain and rejuvenate him as much as the delicious *meze* plate he was about to eat.

I had met Drake eleven years earlier just a few blocks from this place, a day or so after I had been hired to manage *Reflex*, Seattle's now-defunct visual art publication. Drake sat on the board of the struggling non-profit and had stopped by the office unannounced to pay editor John Boylan and me a visit.



Preceded by the sweet aroma and blue haze of his thick cigar, he bounded into the room in a trench coat and fedora, his eyes staring intensely from behind his glasses. He was, I think, the very first artist I met at *Reflex* and he looked every bit the part. Tilting his head back, he reached out his hand and broadcast the roguish smile that would from that day forth be such a welcome sight in the Square. I was immediately struck by his warmth, candor, masculine bluster, and sparkling sense of humor.

Over the next ten years I met many wonderful people who were professional artists, but I doubt that there were any I enjoyed talking with more than Drake. Whether the subject was the state of painting today, the legacy of the Northwest School, the quality of Seattle's galleries, life in San Francisco during the late 60s, the problems with fine art programs at universities, the lessons of continental philosophers, or the differences between being an artist in Europe versus being one in the United States, he was always thoughtful, entertaining, and unapologetic.

Drake's passion and lust for life were channeled mostly through his work. His uniquely dramatic paintings straddled the realms of abstraction and representation; the relationships between their complex forms and intense colors to moods and metaphysical dilemmas were always apparent. Although he may have been regarded by some as an artist who traveled down the familiar and well-worn path of Abstract Expressionism, he was a great experimenter when it came to materials and I saw his painting evolve over the years as a result of his constant drive to break through to new, uncharted territory.

His final work, some of examples of which were on display during a memorial service at the Catherine Person Gallery in Pioneer Square, reveal a heightened interest in the human figure and, perhaps, the psychological phenomenon of the individual isolated and hopelessly at odds with his surroundings. According to painter Victoria Johnson, a friend and studio mate of Drake's who spoke movingly and eloquently at the event, these works reflect a growing frustration with the war in Iraq and his fears of its effect upon American soldiers, Iraqi citizens, and people worldwide. Regardless of their inspiration, they are quite possibly the best paintings he ever created.

I last spoke to Drake on October 6th – First Thursday – at Howard House, where we both found ourselves admiring Mark Miller's *Evicted* series. I had seen Drake's lone painting *Nightwatcher* in the group show at the newly-opened Catherine Person Gallery the month before and told him I was excited about where he appeared to be heading. He left me with an open invitation to come by his studio to see more, but sadly, events intervened.

It is hard to contemplate being in Pioneer Square without the possibility of ever catching a whiff of that cigar only to turn around and see him smiling or scowling in his jaunty hat, ready to engage in conversation. Alas, I will miss Drake!

**Jim Demetre** is the editor / publisher of Artdish.

# Die nicht kalkulierbare Wirkung der Dinge

Der Maler und Wahlberliner Drake Deknatel: „Für mich ist Berlin wie eine Matresse“

Der deutschstämmige amerikanische Maler Drake Deknatel lebt und arbeitet in Berlin. Seine nächste Ausstellung: Ab 14. Juni in der Galerie Michael Schultz (Mommsenstr. 34). Mit dem Künstler sprach Lisa Grotz.

**DIE WELT:** Sie empfinden Berlin als lebendiger und kulturell vielfältiger als andere Metropolen?

**Drake Deknatel:** Ich habe eine stark ausgeprägte persönliche Beziehung zu Berlin. 1993 kam ich erstmals hierher. Die Stadt war und ist ein Experimentierfeld, das es einem ermöglicht, für relativ wenig Geld zu leben und zu arbeiten. Ich kam aus Seattle, Washington, hierher, also aus einer kleinen, ruhigen und kulturell unterentwickelten Stadt. Meine Geschichte ist typisch amerikanisch: Ich bin in New York City geboren, in Chicago aufgewachsen, habe mich langsam westwärts, Richtung San Francisco bewegt, wo ich mich in der Hippiezeit wiedergefunden habe. In Berlin bin ich geblieben, weil man als Künstler um der Kunst willen auch im Verborgenen leben kann und nicht nur, weil man sich einer bestimmten Szene zugehörig fühlt. Und so habe ich eine Art Liebesbeziehung zu dieser Stadt entwickelt; sie ist für mich wie eine Matresse. Anders als in den Vereinigten Staaten kann ich mich hier ganz der Malerei widmen, frei von Existenzängsten. Im Besitz jener Freiheit zu sein, die es einem erlaubt, ganz und gar für die Kunst zu leben, ist für mich das pure Privileg schlechthin. Berlin bietet mir diese Lebensqualität, und das

stimmt mich hoffnungsvoll. Die Stadt ist ein geschichtsträchtiger, lebendiger Ort, und jeden Tag, den ich hier verbringe, berührt mich diese Geschichte, atme ich sie ein.

**DIE WELT:** Hinter dem vordergründig Abstrakten Ihrer Bilder verbergen sich oft Anspielungen auf Geschichten, die der Betrachter erst auf den zweiten Blick erkennt?

**Deknatel:** Meine Malerei ist abstrakt, aber voller Chiffren einer Symbolsprache, die sich zum Teil unbewusst an andere Maler an-

**Deknatel:** Bis vor zehn Jahren habe ich alle meine Bilder mit Modellen in Bewegung gemalt. Heute brauche ich keine solchen Vorgaben mehr. Der Vielfalt an Farben, die ich verwende, habe ich mich in kleinen Schritten angenähert. Von der Zeichnung über die konkrete, auch photorealistische Abbildung bis hin zu dem, was ich als erzählerische Abstraktion bezeichne. In der opulenten Farbenpracht sehe ich das, was mich als Maler auszeichnet und diesbezüglich möchte ich auch keine Kompromisse mit

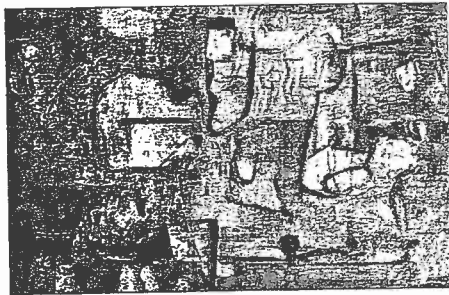
wasche mich rein von meinen Sünden“, erkennen Sie eine Badewanne. Ob ich diese Wanne bewusst als solche gemalt habe, vermag ich nicht mehr zu sagen. Ich möchte auch nicht zu viel erklären. Malerei soll sich meines Erachtens nach der konkretisierenden Abbildung verweigern. Sie soll sich nicht dem Funktionalismus des Fernsehens beugen. Was wir als zu deutlich identifizieren, nistet sich in unserem Gehirn unter der Rubrik „unsichtbar“ ein.

**DIE WELT:** Sprechen Sie von einem Entzug von Zuwendung?

**Deknatel:** Ich spreche von der mysteriösen, nicht kalkulierbaren Wirkung der Dinge. Das Wesen meiner Malerei liegt wahrscheinlich im Überraschungseffekt. Ein Bild, das mir einmal relativ gleichgültig war, vermag ich nach einer gewissen Zeit mit völlig anderen Augen zu sehen. Von meinen Eltern habe ich ein kleines Werk geerbt, ein Gemälde von John Fox, das er in Paris gemalt hatte. Es zeigt meine Schwester als Baby. Ich fand es als ich noch Kind war, ziemlich spießig und langweilig. Heute sehe ich es ganz anders, weil ich das Fingerspitzengefühl des Malers darin erkenne, außerdem hat es mit meinen Wurzeln zu tun, mit der Geschichte meine Herkunft, der ich heute eine andere Bedeutung beimesse als damals.

**DIE WELT:** Sie hatten eine glückliche Kindheit?

**Deknatel:** Ich habe in meinem Leben viel Glück gehabt und habe es gelernt, mich bei meiner Arbeit selbst zu vergessen.



**Drake Deknatel:** „Ich wasche mich rein von meinen Sünden“, ab 14. Juni bei Michael Schultz

REPRO: GROTZ



**Der Maler Drake**

**Deknatel** FOTO: GROTZ

lehnt oder von mir erfunden und weiterentwickelt wurde. Ich reagiere auf Ereignisse mittels einer Farb- und Formsprache, die sich im Laufe von Jahrzehnten herausgebildet hat. Auch wenn ich Formalist bin, entwickelt sich der Kern meiner Aussagen während des Arbeitsprozesses, der mich, wenn alles gut läuft, zu einem „Aha-Erlebnis“ führt.

**DIE WELT:** Sie haben auch mit Modellen gearbeitet?

irgendwelchen Trends in der Malerei eingehen. Im übrigen hindert mich das Zeitgeschehen daran, mich formalistisch zu kategorisieren. Ich lasse alle politischen Einflüsse auf mich zukommen und reagiere darauf, aber nicht, indem ich mich diesen Ereignissen in Form einer Stilrichtung unterwerfe. Oft entdeckte ich erst nach Jahren, dass sich ganz bestimmte Symbole herausgebildet haben und wiederholen. Zum Beispiel in diesem Oeuvre, mit dem Titel „Ich

## Visual Arts

AUGUST 15, 2001

**W** **PICK** ELIZABETH LEACH The group show *Layering* was organized in honor of Portland Art Museum's current *Clement Greenberg* exhibition. Yes, there are some works that include piles of paint on canvas, but, really, *Greenberg* is a loose theme that ties together some astonishing and amazingly different works (best represented by Tony Evanko's cool, analytical code drawings facing Donnabelle Casis' hot-pink erotic abstractions by the gallery's front door). In the back room, Drake Deknabel presents a complicated street-scene collage/painting in greens and oranges called *The Well*. Stand across the room and you'll see simply the outline of a woman with a gigantic booty standing near a small-faced man. Come closer and uncover other faces and expressions hidden in the piece. The heavy paint and myriad faces evoke that dense-city feeling, with people bumping into each other and their individual stories melting together. Chris Bruch is obsessed, it seems, with the spiral. His untitled inks feature tons of spirals bled into the paper. He continues the theme into *Murmur*, a sculpture that looks like an oversized café table turned on its ear or a hurricane that's opted for a horizontal path. Each hunk of the spiral is a different grain of wood, meaning that the piece looks different from different points of view, just like a small, murmured secret can become distorted into one loud, nasty piece of gossip. Norie Sato's books seem to have the least to do with Greenberg. Her *Ghast Book* is more of a tribute to the love of a reading. Book pages are turned into glass wings that are sometimes technical (a sheet of 1's and 0's is covered in editing marks) and sometimes fantastic (beautifully wrought etchings). While the piece is eye-catching, it's too clever for its own good, and you end up wanting to sing "Butterfly in the sky, I can fly twice as high...." Her smaller works, *Last Book #2* (made out of mesh) and *Word Wandering*, where the pages turn into autumn leaves, are more layered with meaning and contribute nicely to the city's recent rash of book art. Peter Drake's exhibition *Motion Pictures* is on display in the back room. 207 SW Pine St., 224-0521. Closes Sept. 1.

## Thinking Locally Acting Globally

Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art  
April 20—June 20, 2001

Art Chicago 2001  
May 11—14, 2001

*This Spring in Berlin it is Cold and Wet.  
In Seattle it is Warm and Sunny.*

### Berlin

You could forget about the opening at the second Berlin Biennale. The lines were impossible and once in everyone stayed until tomorrow which is when I went—the second day—curious: To begin with I couldn't find any painting. "Where are the paintings?" I wondered. "Is painting really so dead, so done, so outré that *no one paints at all anymore?*" There was no sculpture. No stanes. No one has seen a statue in 50 years, but that doesn't make me miss painting any less.

Having shed themselves of the historical trappings of paint and stone ideas develop with video, installation, performance and assemblage. The show is spread out between four locations, the Postfuhramt and Kunst-Werke in Berlin's hip Mitte district, in the cavernous arches under the Jannowitz Bruecke S-Bahn station, and further out in Treptow at the Allianz Towers insurance building, altogether forming a citywide game of hide and seek for the intrepid visitor.

Entering the Postfuhramt, the largest of the four locations of the Berlin Biennale, you are greeted by Patricia Piccinini's "Truck Babies," two large blue and pink, rounded, baby-like fiberglass trucks, surrounded by video screens running clips of Japanese tech "Ko-garu" girls shyly reciting slogans such as "Be the truck that you admire." or "See with your heart, drive with your mind." and giggling. Down a nearby hallway you find Darren Almond's three-screen video, "Traction," in which the father describes his hardworking life and the on-the-job injuries he suffered on the right-hand screen, while the middle screen shows the heavy machinery he used. On the left-hand screen his silent mother's face reflects the pain of the father's working life. The installation is moving, as the mother's face gradually fractures into tears, but this and the other video presentations at the Biennale require patient viewing. Narrative, long banished from painting, is a presence woven into videos, implied installations. "Kitsune" is an hour long narrative spoken over a video of a fog-shrouded Japanese landscape. Although one of the most moving pieces in this Biennale, it might be better experienced in a movie theater setting than in the midst of so many other compelling attractions. Jonathan

Monk exhibits 16mm film loops of books of painting by Sol Lewitt, among others. Esoteric. Ironic. Distanced. Fascinating. Because of their accessibility videos are the dominant feature of this Biennale, but other works such as Katarzyna Jozefowicz' "Carpet," at Kunst-Werke, a 12 x 13 foot floor installation made up of thousands of faces cut and pasted from magazines and mounted on cardboard strips laid out on the floor like a huge rug, are also commanding.

The Second Berlin Biennale is curated by Netherlander Saskia Bos, whose theme "empathy" expresses her view that art is moving in the direction of intercommunication between artists and viewers, that distinctions between art and just about anything are blurring. Spread out over four venues in Berlin, the Biennale features the work of 49 artists from 31 countries. If you define art in terms of painting and sculpture you won't find it here, but you find an always interesting, sometimes intense set of opportunities to interact with work that ranges from eye massage to body massage—begs the question, "is the message the message?" Interestingly, the Frankfurt art fair, which opened just a week after BB2 and features work by artists under 35 years old, is heavily oriented toward painting, eliciting the excited comment from the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* that painting lives and continues to develop vibrantly despite the evidence of the Berlin Biennale 2. In this and other reviews in the German press one senses the hope that painting will rise like some post-Nietzschean god from the ashes and re-emerge as the last refuge of true art.

The Berlin Biennale 2 is less a presentation of "what is art in 2001" than it is a virtual workshop of some trends of contemporary art-think. In an exhibit heavily weighted toward installation and video or film, the few works that are based in painting seem dispirited and contrived. Fred Tomaselli's work, which here mostly consists of pattern and design motifs built around collaged elements, often drugs, submerged in clear acrylic varnish, provided a visual lushness that offset much of the austere, idea-driven work around it. Sometimes ideas that are initially exciting and engaging fade when looked at a second time or described (yes, described). Keith Tyson's "An Open Lecture About Everything That Was Necessary To Bring You and This Work Together At this Particular Time," described as a sound work, also incorporates a large, very entertaining wall drawing reminiscent of Beuy's drawing/diagrams and Duchamp's "Bride Stripped Bare." This is particularly fitting as the ghost of Beuy seemed to hover over much of the assembled work at this Biennale.

Although coming from Seattle, which does not play on the international stage, I didn't feel nearly as much the outsider that I

expected. While there is certainly some very exciting work out there, there is also exciting work here. If there is a fundamental difference, it is that in cities like Berlin much, much more art gets noticed and written about; a dialogue exists in the press and in the public that just does not happen here. The \$1.5 million that was given as budget for the Berlin Biennale (not including corporate and private sponsorship) is another clear indicator of difference. Keep in mind that the Berlin Biennale is an independent exhibition, not part of any museum or public art program. Most larger cities in the world define themselves as world cities in terms of their cultural face. Seattle, god bless her little soul, thinks that sports are the ticket. On the other hand, getting around Berlin is a snap with rail, light rail, subways, and buses everywhere and much more under construction. Priorities. Priorities that point to an optimistic and realistic vision of the 21st century.

Comparing Apples to Wheels  
Art Chicago 2001

On to Art Chicago, the biggest gathering of international galleries in North America, where the overwhelming array of glitzy, glammy big name art supplanted the unrefined conceptualism of the Berlin Biennale with a much more capitalistic vision of art in the 21st century.

At the vast Festival Hall at Navy Pier, where Art Chicago gathered 220 prominent galleries for its annual exposition, the lights were brighter and the names bigger and better known than at the Berlin Biennale. Obviously, the intent was different. The Biennale exists to present the curator's vision of current directions of artistic investigation in a barely commercial context, and the art fair exists to show what the most successful galleries have to offer commercially. Art Chicago was like walking through a year (or a couple of years) of *Art in America*. It was familiar. There were examples from most of the twentieth century: Warhol, Rauschenberg, Picasso as well as bright, young contemporary work. Seattle artists, including Jeff Simmons and Mark Calderon were represented at Greg Kucera's booth; Seattle artist Susan Dory's work resided at Catharine Clark's booth. Also at Catharine Clark was a notable tapestry of photos of faces by Lisa Kokin, reminiscent

of Polish artist Katarzyna Jozefowicz' "Carpet" in Berlin.

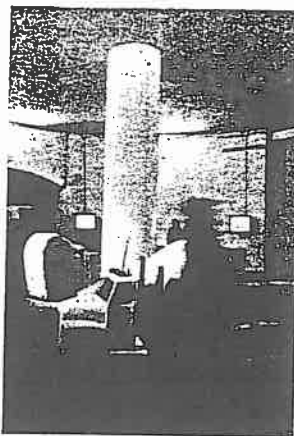
With 2500 artists from 225 galleries from around the world, Art Chicago was overwhelming. The quality of work was amazing and hardly diminished by its quantity, but to focus on the work required discipline and stamina. Periodically something stopped me in my tracks, as Robert Barry's minimalist drawings from the sixties caught my eye at Klemens Gasser & Tanya Grunert. John Walker's large, muscular abstract paintings at London dealer Theo Waddington's booth were another unforgettable experience.

Though Seattle's James Harris Gallery did not have space at this year's Art Chicago, a number of his artists were represented by

other presenters including works on paper, inc. of Los Angeles, which featured work by Harris artist Michelle Fiero.

For Greg Kucera, whose regular presence has kept the Northwest visible in the international context of this event, the intangibles—contacts with curators, meeting new collectors from all corners of the globe, exposure of his artists to over 40,000 visitors—were even more worthwhile than his commercial success at the expo.

Of course in a four day event such as Art Chicago you will not have the opportunity to explore any single artist in depth. What you will get is an intense overview of what is being shown in all of the major art centers. You will see masterworks and minor works, a full representation of styles and 'isms'. You may notice that many artists are fascinated by hares and rabbits, that tires appear to be emerging as a medium. You will note, no doubt, that video is developing rapidly as a medium, with ever more intriguing modes of presentation. In Berlin and Chicago there are also a number of highly worthwhile shows outside of the context of the Biennale and the art exposition. In Berlin the Hamburger Bahnhof, for example, offers an amazing exhibition of Anselm Kiefer's ever expanding oeuvre, and in Chicago there is "A Brief History of Twine," a wonderful overview of Donald Lipski's work at the Chicago Cultural Center. "No Harm in Looking" at the Museum of Contemporary



Patricia Piccinini, "Truck Babies," 1999  
Photo: Jens Liebchen, Berlin • Berlin Biennale



Lisa Robin • "Best Wishes," (detail), 2001, mixed media  
Catherine Clark Gallery • San Francisco, CA  
Art Chicago 2001

Art presents videos, installations, and photographs examining the ways in which we interpret and respond to conflicting images. Tony Oursler's piece, "Guilty," which is constructed of a half-stuffed mannequin peering out from under a mattress with a woman's bitter face projected on the half stuffed head, spews accusatory comments like "I know what you're thinking...." placing the viewer in a confrontational position. This and other work at the MCA is very much in the spirit of works present at the Berlin Biennale. Both cities have museums of the first rank and many galleries of interest. The big, international events are set in a vibrant urban context. There is in both cities vast support for these events, from both the cities themselves and from private sponsorship. In Berlin and in Chicago there are signs all over town announcing the Biennale and Art Chicago. Civic pride in the arts is what makes these, and other major centers, world class. When returning to Seattle you will see that there is interesting new work here as well. The context is much lower key, the crowds...

After returning from Berlin I chanced by the show NW Wood at Madison Audio, where Tom Gormally's work seemed perfectly in tune with the Berlin Biennale, as did videos and paintings by Peter Bill and sculptures by Phil Roach at Nico Gallery, down the street at 619 Western Avenue. Laurie Reid's stunning "Water and Paper" show at James Harris Gallery, which runs until June 9th, is a special treat. Clearly Reid is an artist who can differentiate between essence and appearance. Using the barest means, water, paper, a bit of watercolor, she develops a maximum effect from a mindful, dedicated restraint. Her work, featured at the Whitney Biennial 2000, brings to mind the sublime restraint of Robert Barry whose work at Klemens Gasser & Tanya Grunert at Art Chicago trumped so much of the bigger, brasher work around it. Though small by comparison, Seattle appears connected in spirit with Berlin, Chicago, the world on the other side of the mountains.

#### Drake Deknatel

Drake is a painter represented by Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, OR.



(L-R) artist Drake Deknatel, Christine Bourdetta, gallery owner Elizabeth Leach, and Assistant Director of Elizabeth Leach Gallery Holly Torgerson on the way to Art Chicago

#### Was She Man-Made? Impressions of an encounter with Live Art

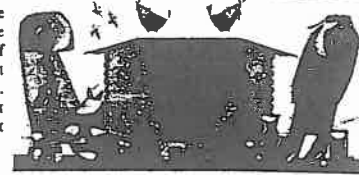
On May 3rd, 2001 in Occidental Square near Torrefazione Italia (Pioneer Square), I thought I saw a carefully crafted floral display with a life-size female mannequin as its center piece. The mannequin (with its back towards me) was draped in a green tissue paper and plastic dress (with an empire waist) held up by yellow plastic tubing. The back of the dress was embellished with an inverted fan of fresh flowers spreading out toward the base. The base was a circle of grass clippings meticulously decorated with yellow petals, purple lilacs, and large pink blossoms. As I walked closer to the mannequin, staring at the naked back sparkling with gold glitter, searching the arms (thinly wrapped in red tulle) for shoulder seams, I realized She was real. Her skin really was that perfect, in the twilight of this First Thursday. I walked around her, to view the performer face to face. She wore a large headdress made of stalks of fresh cut flowers and stood, facing east, in the fourth of seven perfectly round circles of green

grass clippings. The six undecorated circles of grass, three on either side, counterbalanced the effulgent central piece. As she slowly raised her arms, a classical Muzak crescendo came from her lower half-hidden by the fan of flowers. The side seam of her dress (taped with clear packing tape), slightly mangled, and the slight distortion (the speakers were too small for the volume level) reminded me that this was a performance event: a woman pretending to be a man-made model. Someone tried to ask her a question. Someone else mentioned she'd been there for quite a while. Her expression was vacant mixed with distant determination. She had mastered the melancholy of a mannequin. As I walked away thinking about the attention to detail, the superficial versus the natural, my mind wandered to the perfectly manicured yards in Seattle. I wondered if Martha Stewart had ever posed in one of her magnificent creations.

Carrie O'Donoghue

#### Alexander Maltsev at the Global Art Venue

It's always fascinating to trace the footsteps of inspiration and follow the evolution of an artist. The creativity of Alexander Maltsev, a Russian artist living in Seattle, is a case in point. Maltsev's June show at Global Art Venue Gallery gives only a hint about his journey.



An early work by Alexander Maltsev  
Global Art Venue • Pioneer Square/Seattle, WA

An architect by trade, Maltsev is immediately recognized for his unique geometric interpretation of the world. From the most ordinary objects he creates on canvas paradoxical shapes and surprising quasi-Cubist images. The Russian backwater village and its inhabitants are the objects of Maltsev's early works. His characters are Russian "grandfathers" (dedushkas) and "grandmothers" (babushkas),

paintings. "First I started to add more still life objects to the paintings, and to my great surprise ancient bottles, simple jars, and squashed lemons were as fascinating as people." "I call them 'my little creatures,'" he adds.

In the USA Maltsev is developing the ideas of "straightening, simplifying the space," endeavoring to flatten forms by superimposing layers one upon another.

Maltsev's latest works can be thought of as metaphysical still life, but perhaps a better description would be an "entity-portrait" or a "subject icon." He still favors the monochrome approach, but his palette is brighter and reminiscent of Rembrandt's crepuscular colors: brown shades, splashes of scarlet-red, glimmers of volumetric black contours and, certainly, the light. Light in Maltsev's paintings is the powerful vehicle of this mysterious action and the true signature.



Current painting by Alexander Maltsev  
Global Art Venue • Pioneer Square/Seattle, WA

farm animals, and simple household objects, painted always with a subtle and warm irony. All paintings are monochrome, laconic and almost ascetic. The artist's favorite colors are hues of brown with milk-white details.

In 1990, Maltsev came to the United States, a true cultural shock. "Everything was different: the storm of bright colors, new architecture, huge blow of advertisement, different visual art...I hardly could take it...I was absorbing it all; and so was my art." Maltsev's interest gradually shifted from figurative to still life

The current exposition of Maltsev's works at Global Art Venue Gallery includes more than twenty original paintings: still lifes, some experimental landscapes, and several graphic works from his "Russian period." The Artist's Reception is held during Art Walk on Thursday, June 7, 5:00-6:00 P.M.

Global Art Venue is located at 314 First Avenue South. The Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday 11 A.M. - 6 P.M. and by appointment. Please call (206)-264-8755, email global@artvenue.net.

Emiliya Lane  
artist and art historian

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Drake Deknatel is an artist in love with paint. You can feel the studio in his work, the rich smells, the brushes loaded with paint. Always the paint asserts its nature, and the artist brings order, preserving the essential event.

In his process Deknatel scrapes and adds, scrapes and adds, stopping when the painting feels the embodiment of psychological or metaphysical space. Like the existentialists of the post WWII era, he is driven by an ethical imperative. His paintings aspire to understand, appreciate, make peace with.

Part of what's special in Deknatel's work is the concatenation of dynamic experiences. Textures and drips combine with figurative lines. Brushstrokes and layers of color confront archetypal circles, vessels and cones. They stretch across his canvases like mini-epics. Deknatel's style may recall DeKooning and Gorky, but the intense, hard-won beauty is entirely his own. Ten years of practicing Zen Buddhism, and studying photography and perception with Hazel Larsen Archer, who had taught at Black Mountain college, sharpened his sense that even the simplest things of the immediate world must be won. Though the paintings are fluid and energetic, they are virtually tapestries of deliberateness, heavily considered, even romantically brooding.

Deknatel uses drawing to stay rooted in the world, an emotional/physical place where psyche, archetypes and nature whirl together. Drawing is physical knowledge, he says. It's

## DRAKE DEKNATEL

By David Berger

something you do with your body, not your fingers and wrist. He keeps broken shells and bones on hand in studio as inspiration, and regularly draws from the human figure. From them he has developed a repository of lines, circles and spirals that appear as he works in front of the canvas. Drawing makes connections that give his work a generalized, universal flavor. Mood, perhaps influenced by the daily news, becomes intertwined with the spiral of a shell's spine, remembered five years later looking at the hair spiraling on the back of a man's head during jury duty.

Deknatel also stays rooted through material. He adds glass beads to his surfaces to create densities and subtle reflections. He grinds azurite stones to make a brilliant blue pigment. He mines an area near Index in the Cascade Mountains for earthy red iron oxide. He formulates his paints each day from scratch, using a water-based aliphatic urethane medium that behaves like a "Venetian turpentine oil glaze," translucent and bright. These measures enrich the color and surface textures, and their stern physicality is part and parcel of his project to make the paintings as real as possible.

Throughout his career Deknatel has been favored with mentors who helped him stake out the artist's life. The first was his father, an architect and early student of Frank Lloyd Wright. Deknatel senior believed in the idea of pure artistic vision. He paid his son's school tuition at the Art Institute of Chicago until Deknatel announced his intention to marry. You wanted to be an artist, he told his son, but with the responsibility of a family now you can't.

Cut off from his father's tuition support Deknatel went to school at the University of Arizona. There he studied with Charles Littler. Littler had been a student of Hans Hofmann and his secretary for four years, but his influence on Deknatel was more attitudinal than stylistic. Littler taught him to avoid facile ideas and fashionable images, Deknatel says, and "to define — each time anew — the task at hand."

Coming of age in the 1960s Deknatel made moves, documented events and explored new media. Pop art and its freewheeling brethren represented freedom and a new model of creativity; abstract expressionism was the tired old father. We thought painting was dead, Deknatel remembers. It was a joke.

From 1968 to 1974, in school and after, Deknatel lived in Arizona and New Mexico. He drew from plants and created works with a landscape aspect. Around 1970 he saw the gargantuan color field paintings of Warren Davis. That experience was an epiphany that changed how he felt about art, validating painting and opening his eyes to visual language.

Leery of the southwest's emphasis on landscape, Deknatel moved to Newport, on Oregon's coast, and began to work more abstractly.



painting from 1989, a seated woman leans against a man, apparently being comforted. The figures are roughly sketched atop a forest of chaotic red lines and few luscious yellow strokes. The emotions implied are ambiguous but poignant. The painting won an award at the 1989 Center on Contemporary Art (COCA) Northwest Annual.

Deknatel is fond of telling the story of a critic who complained that same year that his works were sitting on the fence between abstraction and representation, and that he needed to choose one side or the other. It bothered him until he realized that's exactly

The repetitive algorithms of nature were an inspiration: the way the tide deposited sand in rhythmic patterns on the beach, for example. He began making abstract paintings using graphite.

In 1981 he moved to Seattle, where he undertook a series of large somber works of a few simple shapes, dramatic, bleak and self-absorbed. One critic called them immense, darkly luminous apparitions. They marked a period of loss and difficulty in his personal life that lasted for several years. The works were often done on free hanging Tyvek, a paper-like material that Deknatel discovered in a kite shop. It was strong and durable but nearly as light-weight as rice paper. Onto it he rubbed and burnished graphite, building dense black surfaces.

As the series drew to a close the deep quiet gave way to dynamic works like *Since the War*, 9 feet by 16 feet, from 1982. It was structured as a grid from repetitions of gestural black and white squares. Each square was built of broad strokes and wispy lines. Though gestural, the works were still cold and theatrical. The similarity of the squares suggested some kind of narrative; but the overall arbitrary arrangement implied the ontological disconnectedness of life.

His responses to these works — the sense of hidden narrative, and finding figures even in the non-representational work (“a cry from my unconscious,” he says) — led Deknatel back to painting on canvas. He began to draw and paint from a moving model. Bold color was introduced, often intertwined with a whirlwind of dramatic and melodramatic figurative lines. Deknatel saw himself commenting on neo-expressionist figuration, which he didn't like, and on how we see. Or, as he says, how the brain reconstructs what we think we see, from lines, movement and swatches of color.

His works became increasingly psychological. In *Lot*, a

where his painting had to be. Pure abstraction leads to the decorative, while figuration was limiting and deceptive. “In my work I literally dance between image and formula construction. It's a metaphor for the place of my humanness.” Now 50, he considers the Abstract Expressionists to have reinvented painting, opening doors that were all too quickly closed.

Deknatel's most recent paintings, exhibited at the Davidson Gallery and Elizabeth Leach Gallery in the Northwest and the Galerie Querformat in Berlin, are airier and more responsive to nature. Large color fields allude to naturalistic light and are used for dynamic compositional ends. It's as if Turner or Monet had wandered into a DeKooning painting. The references to nature give a more balanced, impersonal feel; he's not leading so directly and overbearingly from his emotions. Paintings like *Dithyramb* — referring to Greek choral song, typically of wild or impassioned form — are among his best.

Abstract art is in part a self-created Rorschach test. Images are disgorged, then evaluated in the quiet of the studio. The artist searches in them for resonance, originality, power. The painting is a trail of observations and decisions. In this enterprise the artist's depth and probity count for a good deal.

In the course of his career Deknatel has made good paintings and some overwrought ones. But throughout one senses his integrity. He's always reaching for a privileged balanced where experience and knowledge are one, pursuing his project with passion, intelligence, and craft. These qualities reveal themselves slowly in his works, conferring upon them what one finally realizes is a kind of beauty. ■

*Dithyramb*, 1994, Aliphatic urethane and pigment on canvas, 66 x 66 inches



# REVIEWS cont'd

drake deknatel  
nelleke nix  
henk pander

## Purpose x Three

NORDIC HERITAGE MUSEUM  
SEATTLE, THROUGH JULY 10

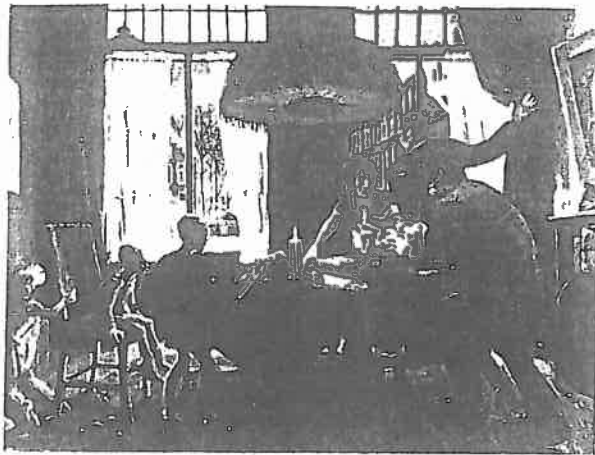
(ALSO, DAVIDSON GALLERY  
SEATTLE, MARCH; APRIL)

**P**urity of purpose is on view at the Nordic Heritage Museum. Despite the show's title, "A Dutch Contribution: Three American Artists of Dutch Descent," ethnicity is not the real common denominator here; style even less so. Rather, this work driven by the inner need for self-expression, not by commercial or careerist considerations.

That being said, Henk Pander's narrative series is directly inspired by a specifically Dutch experience—namely the Nazi occupation of Holland during World War II. Stylistically as well, Pander relies on the pictorial conventions of Dutch painting and illustration, ultimately derived from Rembrandt. As a transplanted, Dutch-trained, American artist who lived through the war as a child, Pander found himself uniquely called to paint this subject. He needed the distance of memory; the longing for home as well as the direct, personal knowledge of events.

These are emotional, powerful pieces. Pander has been able to select—from the experience of his own family and immediate neighbors—incidents which have universality and deep resonance for those who survived the war. Pander uses his impressive gifts of visualization and his skills as a stage designer to recreate the specific environments of memory. Telling details, such as the premature aging of the father of the family, the nudity of the fugitive sheltered between the floorboards, and the particular styles of bourgeois furnishing bring historical richness to the work.

Perhaps the horror of the occupation coupled with its quotidian banality is nowhere more vivid than in *Grace Before Meat*, the record of a dinner of cat, from the perspective of a six-year old.



Henk Pander, *Winter, of an Inn*, 81" x 105", 1987-91.

Formally, however, three multi-figured compositions stand out: *Spilled Milk*, *The Floor*, and *The Kitchen*. Every visual element of these paintings, including the vigorous brushwork, the sense of scale, the lurid palette, the simplicity of the masses, the dynamic movement into space, the compositional organization by means of light and shade—all are mobilized to the single aim of telling the story. Pander makes this orchestration seem natural, straightforward, even obvious, but it is just this stunning clarity that is the strength of his work. (Pander's drawings were also on exhibit at the Davidson Gallery during April.)

Drake Deknatel also presents work (from about ten years ago) of imposing presence and personal importance. Most notable are five black-and-white abstractions done in powdered graphite on Tyvek (a synthetic fabric used for kites.) Deknatel approached these paintings very physically: rubbing, scraping, scratching, cutting, rejoining. His compositions are of two basic types: horizontal bands and central images, sometimes combined. On the simplest level, this work can be seen as sophisticated solutions to textbook Bauhaus design problems.

Yet, paradoxically, the pieces are deeply spiritual. Why? The literal references to figures, cells, and patterns of nature are valuable only as starting places. But Deknatel is exquisitely sensitive to the inherent expressive properties of his material. He creates an atmosphere of winter, death, possibly war, from the dark metallic graphite and the blood-like red oxide. The Tyvek pieces communicate with all their integrity: They are somber to the point of depression. In the colored paintings, by contrast, Deknatel was fighting the conventional associations of the colors, and the pasty substance of the paint.

A decade later Deknatel is using color more effectively, as evidenced in his show of paintings at the Davidson Gallery in March. Most striking was the greater range in his color arrays, the



Nelleke Nix, *Geographical End of the Universe*, oil pigments/stain on linen and panel, 78" x 48", 1988

greater depth of surfaces, and the variety in texture in this recent work. Characteristically, it was Deknatel's experimentation with his materials that led him to this resolution: Mixing his own pigments has allowed him to control the optical properties of his paints—their translucency, opacity, body, shine. In particular, his use of aliphatic urethane (a transparent, water-based, non-darkening medium) has opened his work to the richness of layering, so appropriate to his working process.



Drake Deknatel, *Forest*, aliphatic urethane on canvas, 50" x 60", 1993. (Davidson Gallery)

In his compositions, too, Deknatel seems to have achieved the ease of mastery. Typically, he makes horizontal or vertical divisions of the surface, and plays closed forms—organic or geometric—against them. He uses rosy, transparent washes and answers them with warm tints of white or opaque blue-gray, topped with black linear elements. Most remarkable is the freedom with which he moves in and out of these forms, and the way each painting has its own unique motif which is quite different from all the others. The thing about Deknatel is—he listens. He actually listens to what the painting itself is telling him.

Nelleke Nix, the third artist on view at the Nordic Heritage Museum, lifts the mood a bit with a more light-hearted approach. Nix is a gifted colorist, and her passages of patterning have real possibilities. Her animal imagery is her most appealing theme, especially when humorous (as in *Marriage*). But Nix needs to figure out what is most important. Fanciful creatures, landscape fragments based on observation, parts of figures, graphic signs, and abstract shapes—nothing is excluded. Order is then imposed by mapping the surface into contrasting areas which create figure-ground reversal. The hard boundaries around these zones, unfortunately, contradict the fluid allusiveness that Nix wishes to evoke with her imagery.

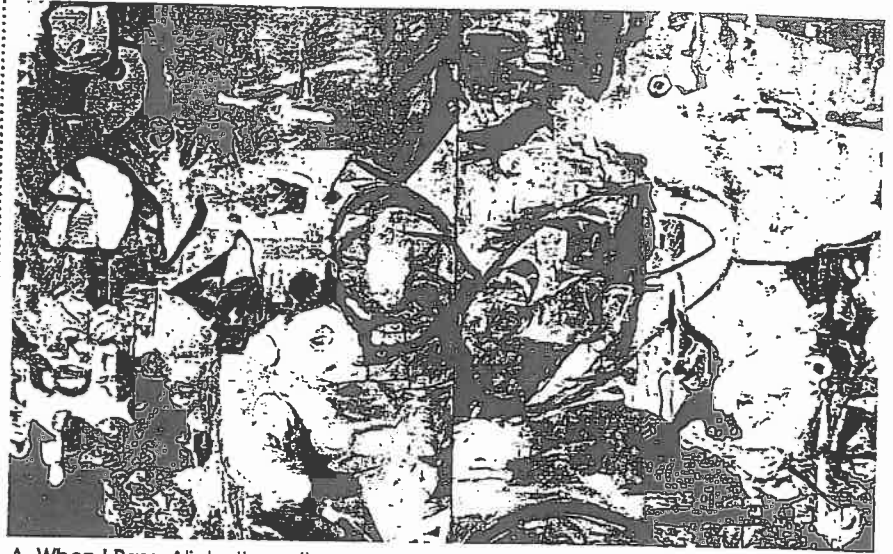
Don't miss Nix's book "1940 to 1945 Remembered," which is totally charming and a labor of love. In the book, Nix's highly personal approach becomes a real strength, and her talents as a designer and illustrator are displayed to best advantage. Finally, we must credit Nix with having the insight to conceive this exhibition. Whatever the curatorial rubric, the work is excellent, and would never have seen the light of day without her efforts. —Lucy Wilner

Drake Deknatel was born in New York City, grew up in Chicago, and now lives in Seattle, where he is a full-time artist. He attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Arizona, where studies under Charles Littler deeply influenced his art and thought. After living in Santa Fe for a time, Deknatel moved to the Pacific Northwest in 1974.

Deknatel develops his paintings without preconceptions, letting the paintings take form from a matrix of inner-outer dialogue, observation, and chance discovery. The paintings record a mnemonic journey, a metaphor rich with possibilities of surprise and revelation. Deknatel finds that his highly personal works generally reveal the truth of a moment for him.

Deknatel has an extensive exhibition record. One-man exhibitions include upcoming 1996 shows of his work on Tyvek at Equinox Gallery (June/July), a nonprofit space in Seattle, and at Elizabeth Leach Gallery in Portland, where his work was presented in 1991, 1993 and 1995. In 1994, Deknatel's paintings were the focus of a show at Galeria Querformat in Berlin.

*Deknatel*



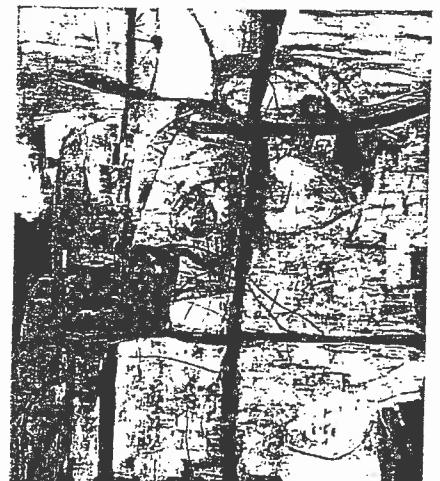
A. *When I Pass*. Aliphatic urethane, pigments and minerals on canvas, 66" x 108".  
Courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, OR.



B. *Premonition*. Aliphatic urethane and pigments on Tyvek, 45" x 45".  
Courtesy of Galerie Querformat, Berlin.

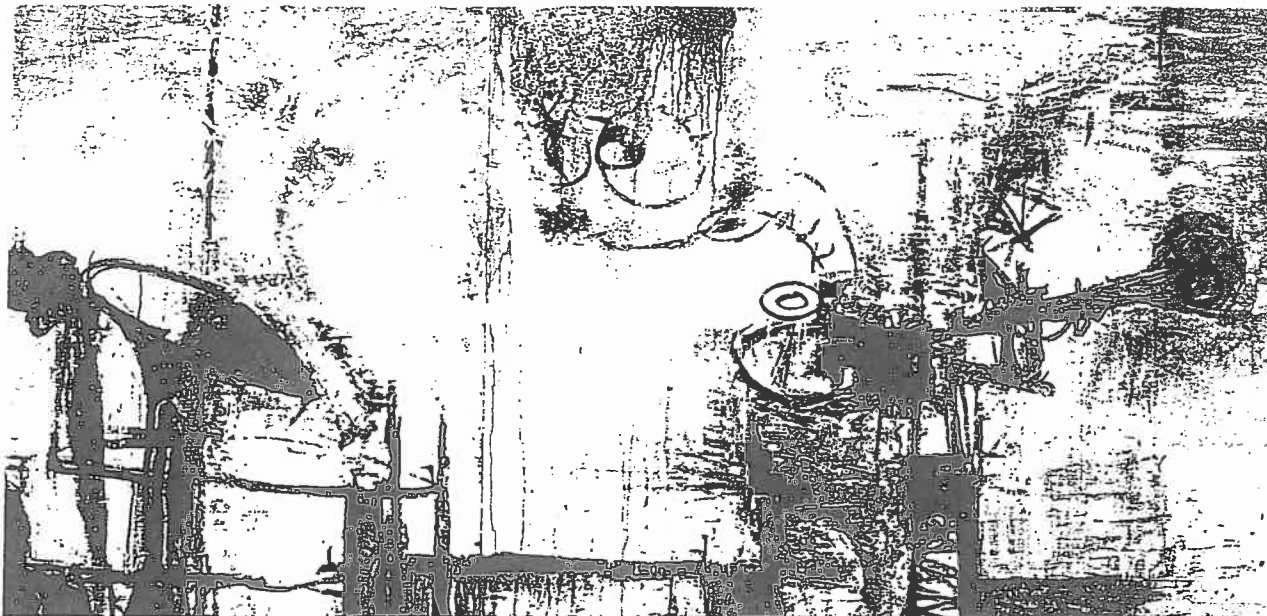


C. *The Emergence*. Aliphatic urethane, pigments and minerals on canvas, 66" x 54".

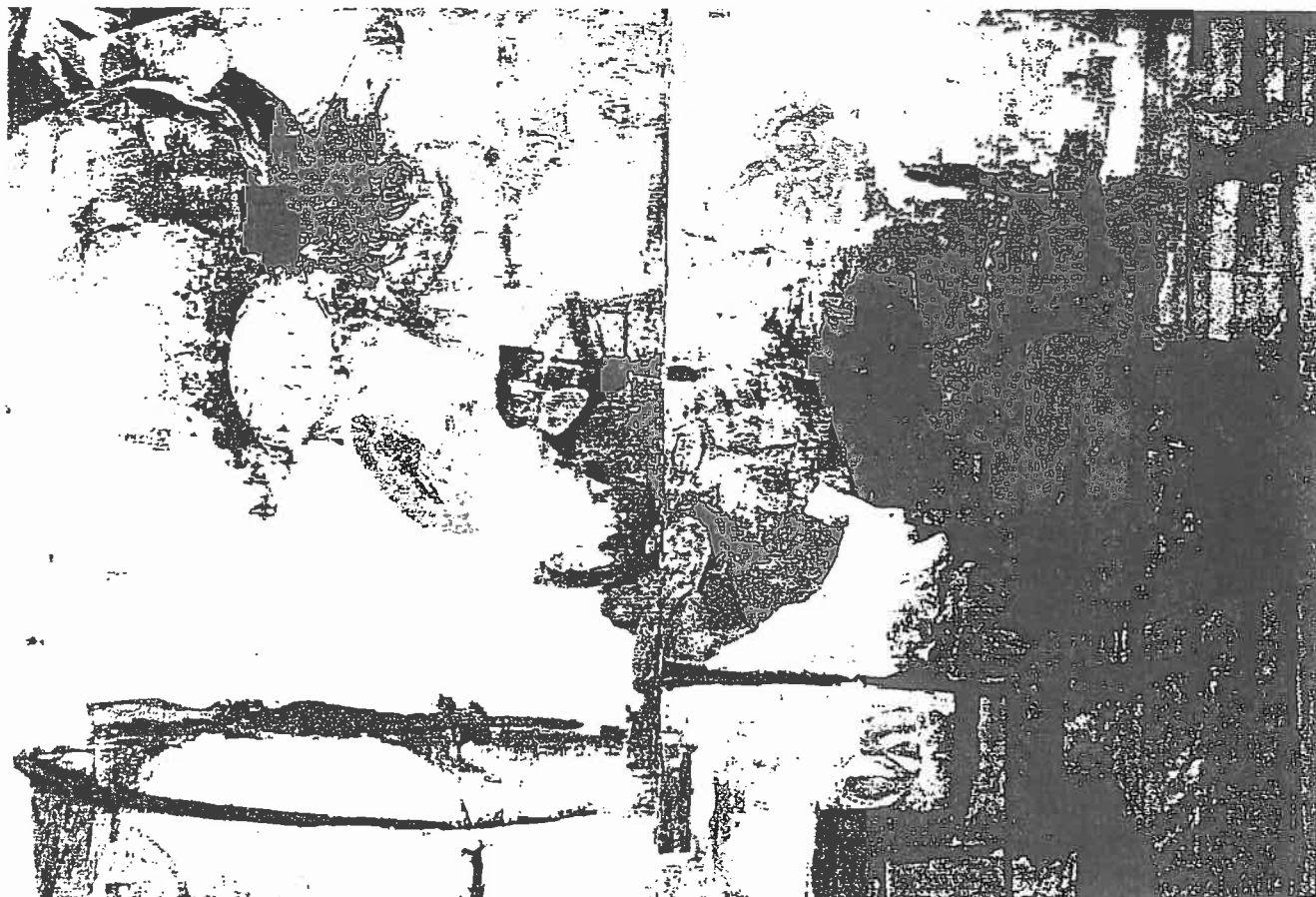


D. *Hero*. Aliphatic urethane, pigments and minerals on canvas, 60" x 54".  
Private collection.

Represented by  
Elizabeth Leach Gallery  
Portland, OR



E. Mechanism/Balance. Aliphatic urethane, pigments and minerals on canvas. 36" x 76". Courtesy of Gallery Querformat, Berlin.



F. The Cauldron. Aliphatic urethane, pigments and minerals on canvas, 48" x 72". Private collection.

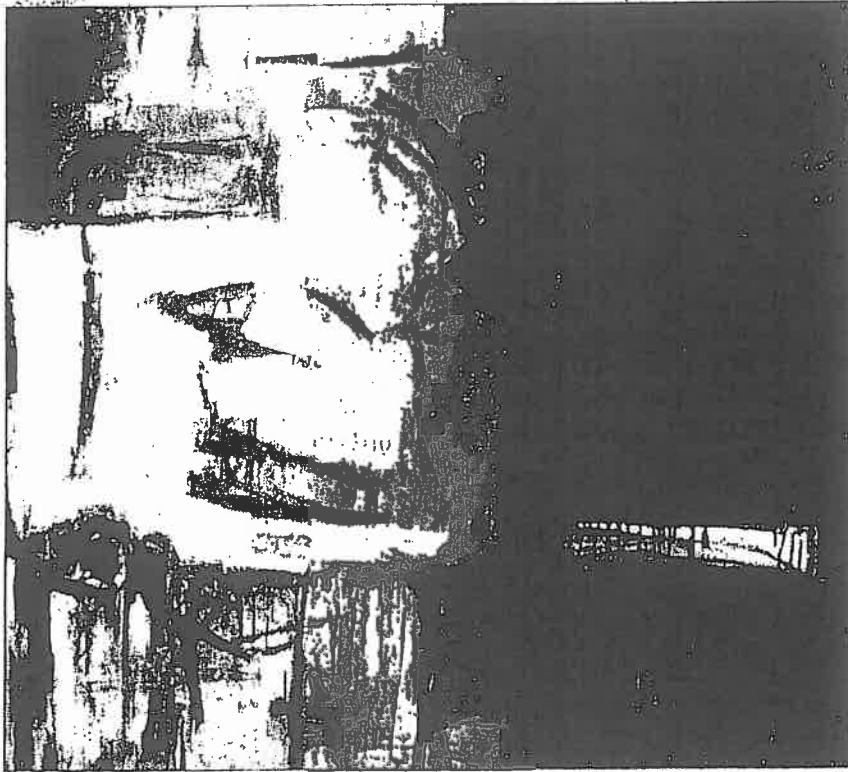
## Drake Deknatel

**T**o create art is one thing. To create the materials used in the process of creation is another. Seattle painter Drake Deknatel has admirably and successfully attempted both realms.

"I make my own paints," Deknatel explained to me over coffee at Bauhaus Cafe on Capitol Hill, as evening descended over us — an apt setting for a discussion of Deknatel's dense, nocturnal, heavily textured work. "I use

beads and... Prozac (fluoxetine), will be ground into the pigment of a future painting dealing with the theme of depression. "I'm using it more for what it represents than its effectiveness as a color," Deknatel adds.

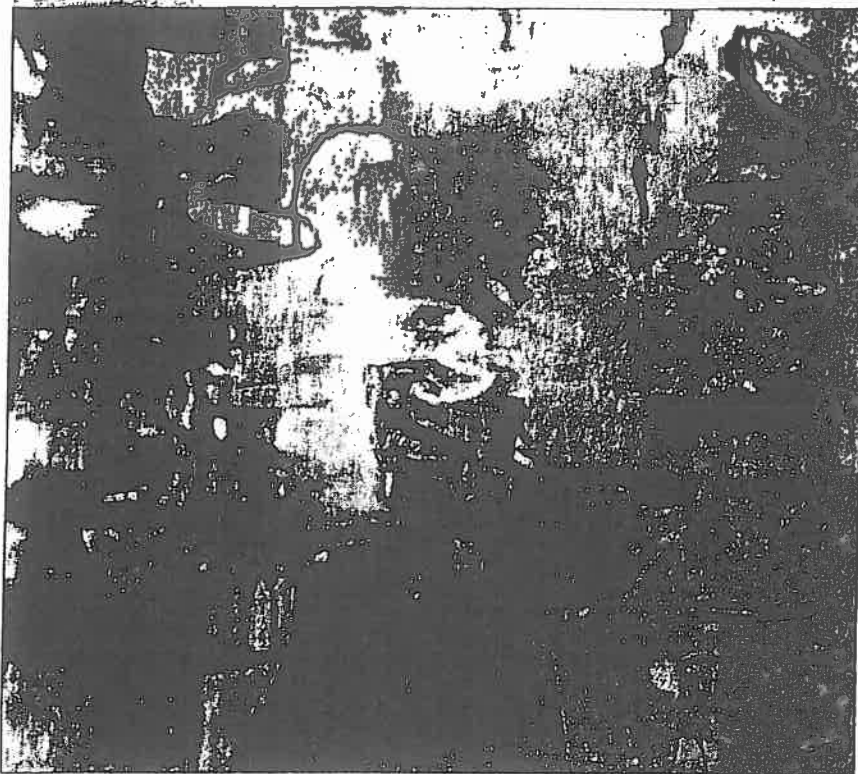
Drake Deknatel moved to Seattle from Oregon in 1981 after several group exhibits and a handful of solo exhibits in that area and a few in New Mexico. Deknatel studied at the University of Arizona with Hazel Archer and his



*Shadow, 1994 Photo: Alan Abrams*

experimental mediums such as aliphatic urethanes and high-solid acrylic emulsions... raw and dispersed pigments." This, coupled with other unorthodox elements, such as silica, manganese, diatomaceous earth, glass

mentor, Charles Littler. Deknatel attributes his originality to Littler, who recently passed away. "My debt to Charles is huge," Deknatel recently told the Nordic News. "His guidance and influence kept me from becoming



Nerald, 1994 Photo: Alan Abrams

a painter of fashionable images and facile ideas. He kept me resolutely on the alert for the new and unexpected."

Although Deknatel has recently traveled as far as Berlin, Germany, where a solo exhibit at Kulturhaus am Treptow is scheduled later this year, he is firmly rooted in Seattle. "It would be extremely difficult to move my studio," confesses Deknatel, winner of Seattle Artists '89, awarded by the Seattle Arts Commission. In addition, his wife, Loren, plays bass in the popular local folk group The Blood of the Lamb Band.

Deknatel's current solo exhibit at the Davidson Gallery in Pioneer Square ("By the brass cow," he informs me with all seriousness) features a collection of his work dating from 1992 to present. The works are his best to date. They range from the scorching macabre of "Caldron," which highlights a seductive shade of red created from the use of "three red pigments - an organic pigment, an inorganic oxide,

and a pyrenthrone red-orange," to the light, airy resonance of "Dithyramb," a particularly large piece with various shades of white, yellow and orange. In the explicit sexual nature of "Lovers," we view a dark, green, phallus penetrating various circular shapes while a fleshy naked woman (?) hovers nearby. Although the bright lights and somewhat sterile environment at Davidson don't fully complement the nuances of light and shade ("reflection and refraction") in the paintings, Deknatel's strengths are immediately evident. All 16 works adorning the Davidson Gallery represent the efforts of an intense and emotionally charged painter.

*Drake Deknatel's work will be part of the exhibition "A Dutch Contribution" at the Nordic Heritage Museum, April 8 through July 10. His piece "La Verguenza" can be viewed on the 17th floor of the Alaskan Building on Second and Cherry.*

ERIC COOLEY

# Deknatel: Hard at play in the fields of Abstract Expressionism

Artist borrows, twists to form own innovations

BY RANDY GRAGG  
of The Oregonian staff

Like a seance, Drake Deknatel's paintings conjure the spirits of artists past. His scrapes and scrawlings, sweeps and drips and layer after layer of translucent paint are haunted by the likes of Aynile Gorky, Willem DeKooning, Barnett Newman, Joan Miro and even Sidney Jackson Pollock.

Yet, despite his obvious affinity for conjuring images from the New York School, in which those artists are historically filed, Deknatel isn't possessed by them. He borrows their techniques, he quotes their images. He often plays jokes with them. And, as a witty reminder that they are still dead, he sometimes even brazenly buries them with his own hard-won stylistic innovations.

"Pygmalion," for instance, recalls the 1930s surrealist experiments in automatic drawing, particularly of Gorky, the one artist who most strongly links the stylistic innovations of the Europeans of that era with the later blossoming of American abstract expressionism.

Deknatel imitates Gorky's delicate lines, bending them into forms drawn equally from biology and calligraphy, and then he covers them up, leaving just enough to pay respect.

In a triptych entitled "Magister Ludi," Deknatel recalls DeKooning's sinister deconstructions of the figure in the outer two panels. The middle panel features a Barnett Newman-style "zip" — a powerful strip of paint that vertically slices the canvas. But with an angled, horizontal extension, Deknatel turns Newman's minimalist gesture into a kind of silly-looking foot that, along with the wizard hats he has placed on the outer figures' heads, boots the whole piece toward the sublimely playful.

Deknatel can play the game more



In "Pygmalion," Drake Deknatel plays with the abstract forms originated by the New York School in the late 1940s.

**The real pleasure of this show, however, is in how current Deknatel's paintings seem.**

projects a sunburst of bright, segmented paint strokes with a series of thin lines. Deknatel connects the circle to a faintly described neck and shoulders.

On one side, this figure is pulled by another, even vaguer, figure. On the other side, it seems to be pushed by a profusion of abstract shapes rendered in scrapes, smears and blood-like lines. Whether it's a painfully allegory of attraction, repulsion and inevitability or just one big Rorschach test, only Deknatel's anatomy can know for sure.

## VISUAL ARTS

**Drake Deknatel**  
Where: Elizabeth Leach  
Gallery  
Address: 207 S.W. Pine St.  
Hours: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.,  
Tues.-Sat.  
Closing: Nov. 2  
Admission: Free

The real pleasure of this show, however, is in how current Deknatel's paintings seem.

In Seattle, he is surrounded by a group of young artists who have traveled and reinvented the galleries with their energetic paintings. Some — like John Layva, who recently had his second show at Quartersaw Gallery, and Robert Yoder, who showed up at Jamison/Thomas last month — are finding their way to Portland, with others no doubt on the way.

The intimate scale, the obvious speed of execution and the studied casualness of these artists' work is a welcome alternative to the crafty grandeur and the plodding sameness of so many of their abstractionist elders. But in the long haul, their work, one suspects, will be like catchy pop songs — here today, gone tomorrow.

Deknatel, by contrast, still strives for symphonies. Complex, dense and somehow satisfying even when he

the simplest. And, in what seems to be a habit with Deknatel (and with a lot of artists who are constantly pushing their own boundaries, the best of the best are the smaller studies — often hints of new techniques and larger paintings to come.

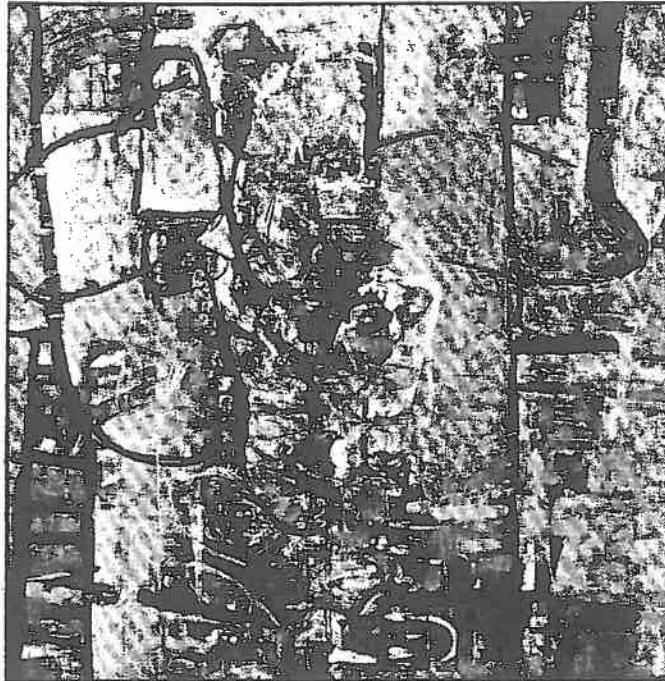
In "Pro Genesis I," Deknatel has found the painterly equivalent of smoke with which he geometrically describes the essence of the human figure. In several other studies, he has begun experimenting with a glaze that delicately cracks, creating portions of the works with the timeworn textures of old master paintings — the pitted, mottled for Deknatel's often earthy Rembrandt-like palette.

As a profusion of young painters are once again discovering the pleasures and possibilities of playing with paint, Deknatel reminds us of history. This 48-year-old Seattle artist (whose seven years living in Newport and shows in Portland allow Oregon to lay a small claim to his

folk, each painting lures you with expectation to another, and this show to the next.

Drake Deknatel will speak about his work at the gallery on Saturday, Oct. 19 at 11 a.m.

F. DRAKE DEKNATEL 675 WESTERN AVENUE SEATTLE, WA. 98104



### It's painting — and that's it

**PURE PAINTING** — Drake Deknatel likes to paint. While his abstract-expressionist style lacks the cultural charge of the late '40s, post-war machismo that spawned the likes of Pollock and DeKooning, there still is romance in his work.

The seductions of what was once thought to be the avant garde but now is clearly just market differentiation have never lured him. Like a loyal husband, Deknatel has never wavered from his commitment to pure painting. In a sense, what he offers as

#### CRITIC'S CHOICE

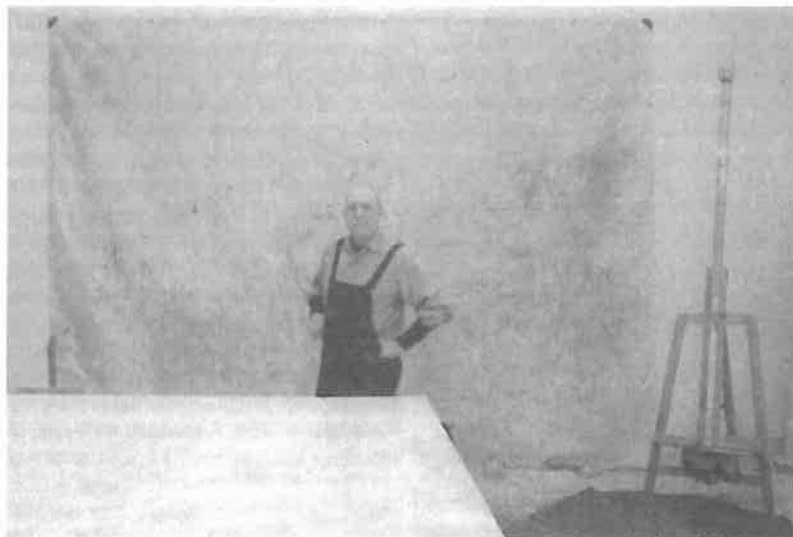
finished canvases can be seen as psychological maps for any long-term relationship. Using the language of gesture with the inflections of pigment, he shows us love, anger, lust and indifference — time spent and history recorded. (Maveety Gallery, 824 S.W. First Ave. Runs through Feb. 24.)

— RANDY GRAGG

"OREGONIAN" Friday, February 2nd, 1990 P. F-10  
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Drake Deknatel in his Berlin studio, Gertolt Strasse

## Frederick H. (Drake) Deknatel

August 4, 1943 – November 18, 2005

Avoid the illusion that there can be any lack for someone who wishes, then fully decides: to be! Silken thread, you were woven into the fabric.

Whatever the design with which you were inwardly joined (even for one moment amid years of grief), feel that the whole, the marvelous carpet is meant.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

Our dear friend, artist and musician Drake Deknatel passed away suddenly on Friday, November 18 at the Cafe Paloma in Pioneer Square, in Seattle. Drake was recovering from open heart surgery. He had been released from the hospital the previous Saturday; this had been his first trip out. He leaves behind his wife, Lauren; his daughter Soleil and her three children, Nirvana (12), Tristan (6), and Eva (9 months); his niece Roxanne Deknatel; nephews Peter and Michael Davis; great-niece Alexandra Deknatel; Aunt Ginnie and cousins Anna, Bill, Jane, and John Deknatel, and hundreds of friends and colleagues in the United States and abroad who loved him for his kindness, his generosity, and his passion.

Beyond his consummate skill as a painter, his full-hearted blues musicianship, his passionate political views, and the dedication with which he lived his chosen life as a professional artist, Drake had developed within himself the gift of presence. And it is with this, I think, that he touched so many people so deeply. To be with Drake was not to be alone. He had trained himself to be as conscious and as open to the moment—and to other people—as possible. And we will miss him dearly.

Drake had arrived at a good place in his life, both literally and figuratively: He was with friends, sitting down to his regular order at a favorite restaurant owned by his good friend, Sedat Uysal, excited about his plans for the future. He had recently discovered his ancestral village in East Friesland, and experienced a kind of homecoming. He loved and was stimulated by the artistic climate of Germany, where he spent half his time. His abstract paintings (always based on the figure) had recently become overtly figurative, and he had been picked up by a major gallery in Berlin. A show of Drake's work was being planned for January or February. This looked to be his big breakthrough.

Drake's new dealer in Seattle, Catherine Person, whose gallery opened in September, was enthusiastic about the new work. His long-time Portland dealer,



Drake Deknatel • "Zeitwende," (Time Turn)  
2003, mixed media, 78.75 x 63 inches  
Galerie Michael Shultz • Berlin, Germany

Elizabeth Leach, who had represented his abstractions in her gallery since 1991, was recommending some New York dealers who dealt in figurative work and whose acceptance might help create a market for his new direction in the Northwest. (Leach had facilitated Drake's initial 2003 exhibit at Gallerie Michael Schultz by agreeing to show some of Schultz's artists in her gallery, but had found it difficult to sell Drake's figurative work to collectors who had come to expect abstraction.) Drake had just signed a five-year lease on his studio in Berlin, where he planned to return in January. But before he left, he wanted to arrange another gig for his blues band, possibly at the Two Bells or the Rendezvous.



Drake Deknatel • "As I Wash My Sins," 2003  
mixed media, 59 x 71 inches  
Galerie Michael Schultz • Berlin, Germany

After three weeks in the hospital, Drake was under house arrest for another five to six weeks, with no lifting, but he was planning ways around such limitations. A friend was making him 100 small 4 x 6 inches deep box canvases he could work on at home and then mass mural style on the wall; he had just bought a steel lap guitar on ebay that had a great rowdy sound. On the morning he died, he had placed a phone call to his close friend, artist Rick Bartow in Oregon: "It's been a good day...I learned how to do something new on the guitar....I'm going with Lauren to get brushes and supplies."

After years of working abstractly, experimenting with new materials with the curiosity of a kindergartner and the skill of a chemist, Drake had begun a series of paintings based on photographs from his childhood. He intended to continue the series on the small canvases. He had found that by repeatedly working from the same photograph, he could enter into a dialogue with it, similar to that which happens between model and painter in portraiture, and which inexorably works its way into

the painting. By reworking the same image, he could interrogate it, finding new layers of meanings within it.

In his latest artist's statement, Drake wrote that he had thought long about the "Dasein," existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger's term for the state of being present, and that he was now exploring the "geworfenheit," the condition of the time and place one has been thrown into life, which influences how one perceives the world. Specifically, Drake's recent paintings refer to being a World War II war baby, and the expectations, burdens, and legacy attendant to that historical moment—a legacy with profound implications not only for himself, but for all sons of W.W.II soldiers and, more broadly, for current national policy of the United States (to which Drake was bitterly opposed).

Many of the works in progress from his Berlin studio from 2004–2005 are based on a photograph taken in 1944 or '45. In the center of this image, the toddler Drake stands engulfed in his father's military jacket, his eyes cast down, his small blond head dwarfed by the uniform. Bisected by the right side of the photograph, the headless, striding figure of his father enters the image, his military boot unfastened, arm swinging forward, the large, long-fingered hand suggesting the possibility of a grab. As the image is reworked, the boy's head shifts and shrinks, becoming ghostly, and then increasingly adolescent. The father figure is reduced, at times, to a menacing hand, the jacket becomes more materially present than the child. Sometimes a steel combat helmet hovers overhead like a trap.

The images evolve: In "Little Patriot," the ghostly gray-green child in the substantial jacket is framed by a background square of red and white stripes, on which a small, white, recumbent figure strains upward as if bound like Isaac on the altar of Abraham. A giant hand looms down from upper right in a field of crimson. In "Imperfect Future," the ghost of the jacket-wrapped child rises from behind a free-standing jacket. The father figure is replaced by a youthful silhouette in green, which turns as if walking away, with one hand raised in a gesture of, perhaps, farewell.

According to Drake's good friend, painter Pat DeCaro, Drake's new work is in line with a movement toward figurative work by the younger East Berlin artists. The subject matter, however, Drake had approached before. "Since the War," a large graphite, pigment, and Rhoplex on Tyvek, from

1982, also dealt with the post war era, although in a much more abstracted sense; Drake had installed the piece as part of a 1984 installation at the Bush Barn in Salem, Oregon with sound loops which referenced poignant childhood memories, such as cocktail chatter, train noises, and the sound of propeller-driven airplanes on V-J day shortly after his second birthday. When the sound loops all intersected they formed an F-sharp minor chord.

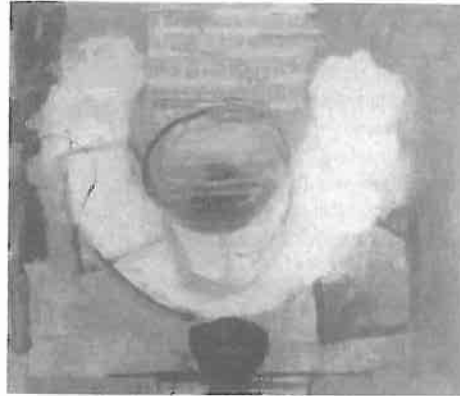
Drake was very much a war baby, born late in life to parents who already had a twelve-year old daughter. His father, William F. Deknatel (1907–1973), was a well-known Chicago architect and his mother, Geraldine (1909–1993), an interior designer and a talented cellist. They had met in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1930. They married and had a child before being called back to the US in 1932, to be among the first to join Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin North in Wisconsin. Wright was Drake's godfather. Drake's father's career suffered a setback after W.W.II because of his decision to join the airforce. While his contemporaries designed skyscrapers, Bill designed landing strips in the Pacific, which were eventually used in bombing raids on Japan. According to Jane Richlovsky, Drake's studiomate, Drake had a souvenir book on the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki which had been given to his father in appreciation for his part in those raids.

The Deknatels lived on the Bohemian-edge of high culture in a Chicago apartment, before moving to the suburbs sometime in the late '50s. Bill was highly respected for a number of well-known residences he and Gerry had designed, but in the late-50s the commissions fell off, and for a time he assumed the management of his father's factory, the Setwell hanger company,



Drake Deknatel, "Resurrection" 2003  
mixed media on canvas 60 x 48 inches  
Catherine Person Gallery  
Pioneer Square/Seattle, WA

before handing the business over to his son-in-law and retiring from architecture in 1963. Drake's nephew, Peter Davis, felt that Drake was determined not to let this happen to him, that he wanted to maintain his professional career as an artist at all costs.



Drake Deknatel • "Rising Angel," 2003,  
aliphatic urethane & pigment, 40 x 48 inches  
Elizabeth Leach Gallery • Portland, OR

In 1962 Drake attended the Chicago Art Institute, where he met his first wife, Elana Elvira Sagura. They traveled to the Southwest, where he studied at the University of Arizona and took independent lessons from Hazel Larson Archer (of Black Mountain College) and Charles Littler (who had been a student of Hans Hoffman.) Drake also wrote art criticism for the *Arizona Daily Star*. He showed his work in galleries in Arizona and New Mexico throughout the '60s, but not much has survived from this part of his life. It is difficult to catch up with someone who is no longer here. There is much to ask, and sometimes no one to ask it of.

During the early 1970s, Drake was living in New Mexico with Joy Walker, who had picked him up in her little pink Rambler convertible in Eureka, CA, when he had sold his teepee to some Native Americans and had no place to go. He delivered their daughter Soleil on the floor of an adobe hut, in Chimayo in 1971. Chimayo was in Tierra Amirillo County, which had seceded from the United States; they declared Soleil a citizen of the world.

During much of this time the family was living in a yellow school bus. Drake was making brass jewelry, fountains, and sculpture, as well as painting. (The fountains, in particular, sold quite well, but he stopped making them when he felt they had become a product.) James R. Mensch, now Professor of Philosophy at St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia, remembers Drake was using an extraordinarily beautiful painting ("which

the three-year old had already poked a hole through”) to prevent Soleil from entering the back of the bus where he was painting. Drake was “blissfully unconcerned.” Mensch owns two of Drake’s paintings from this period: a lovely surrealist night scene, entitled “Mona Lisa Kissing Gauguin” and a desert landscape, in which the falling rain has evaporated before hitting the ground. He recalls Drake’s extraordinary “clear-sightedness,” which he recalled when he recently met him, and his friends, in Berlin. He wrote: “...what impressed me most about them was their kindness and generosity to each other as well as to myself. It was then that I realized that perhaps Drake’s greatest gift was for friendship. The friendship that each of us had for Drake is not just sealed within us. It is something that continues to live, enriching our lives and relations.”



Drake Deknatel, “In Times of Change” 2004  
mixed media on canvas 48 x 60 inches  
Catherine Person Gallery • Pioneer Square/Seattle, WA

This spirit of generosity and friendship was most evident in Drake’s Newport days from ‘73 to ‘77. Joy and Drake had a big house on Nye Beach. It was an artist’s house, a gathering place, and a constant scene of poetry reading, art events, Zen sittings, and performances. Peter Davis recalls that Joy was “a very free spirit, so things would just spontaneously occur.” There was, he said, no money, but always bread and espresso. Joy regularly made Stone Soup, creating food out of nothing. Drake was involved in a poetry magazine, *Fedora*, with beat poet Vaughn Marlow. Artists would trade off modeling for each other. It was, Davis said, beautiful.

Rick Bartow, who had recently returned from Viet Nam, first became involved with Drake at

this time. He credits Drake with most of what is currently good in his life: his art, his sobriety, his connection with the Red Way, his belief in himself. Drake, he says, was his art school. He gave him his first package of real art paper, he put him on the phone to Joe Fedderson and gave him that introduction to the Native community. He taught him that painting is a journal of faith, not making pictures. “He always believed in me,” Bartow said, “He smoked me out of my hole. With Drake around I always felt safe. He was the most incredible ally... someone I could talk to; I didn’t have to worry about what I said. He was truthful, not always telling you what you wanted to hear, but kind about it.” Drake showed him, he says, that being an artist is a kind of sacred pact: He said, “When I called, broke, praying to the bank instead of to God, he said: ‘Did you work in the studio today?’ ‘Yeah...’ ‘Well there was a lot of people who didn’t.’...He was my hero, he was always working”

In 1977, Joy ran off, taking Soleil with her. It was a dark period in Drake’s life, during which he began to create large-scale, primarily black and white paintings on Tyvek (a light but tough industrial material). When Joy returned in 1980, Drake moved to Seattle to leave her the Newport house. In 1984, Soliel joined him in Seattle. In Seattle, he met Lauren while playing guitar at the Two Bells tavern. Lauren plays bass. They began to play together, they fell in love, and they got married. It has been eighteen years. Lauren played bass in the most recent incarnation of Drake’s band, “Drake and the Maxwells.”

Drake always wanted to be a painter, but he was almost equally drawn to music. He had hung out in the black blues bars of Chicago in the early ‘60s, and, according to Drake’s drummer John Rogers, he made something



Drake Deknatel, “Mystery Future” 2005  
mixed media on canvas 63 x 79 inches

of a living playing acoustic blues and Dylan songs in coffee shops. Drake, Rogers says, said to make a living playing blues in Chicago, if you're playing someone else's songs, you have to make them your own or not do it at all. Otherwise, he said, people would just shout you down.

Drake continued to play music alongside making art throughout his life. Somewhere along the line, he became good friends with Mike Bloomfield, and reportedly at some point played on stage with Big Brother and the Holding Company, and Grace Slick. He formed a band, "Rowdy Bob Howdy," with Bartow in Newport, Oregon and released one album, *Painted Tin*, with "Bowling Shoes" as the main cut. Bartow remembers him as constantly tinkering with equipment and guitars, trying out devices that sustained notes indefinitely and adding extra strings to guitars with disastrous results. In Newport, they would lock the doors during practice sessions to keep people from the tavern down the road from wandering into the house, only to find drunken fans crawling in through the bathroom window.

Recently Drake had been jamming with friends in cafes in Berlin. He had also befriended some African musicians in Germany, and was planning on introducing African elements into "Drake and the Maxwells's" repertory. Drake was a crazy guitar and amp fiend, Roger relates, and he still loved to tinker with new guitars, playing three different guitars at a gig and taking five minutes to tell the story of each one during instrument changes. He like to collect odd guitars, and he liked to give them away. Several weeks before going into the hospital, Drake had stopped by his good friend Chris Bruch's studio and handed him a guitar for an "extended loan." He hadn't seen him in a while and thought he might like to play it. It was a typical Drake gesture.

While painting, Bruch says, Drake might be in his existential whatever, but playing blues, he was just happy; like a black lab, in a full sweat by the third song. Playing with Drake was fun, Rogers says, because "you never knew what was going to happen, you can't get too predictable, and blues can get predictable." He was, both Rogers and Bartow said, a natural blues player,

like Lightnin' Hopkins, "...and Lightnin' changes when it wants to change."

Drake's heart rate was also changeable, however. Along with the triple-bypass, Drake had a hither-to unsuspected hole in his heart repaired. Drake and Lauren were hoping his corrected heart rhythm would also help settle his chord changes, making it easier for them to play together. He was practicing on his new steel lap guitar.

Drake went out fast: he got dizzy, reached for his medicine, and was gone. 911 was called but couldn't bring him back. He was an incredible artist, musician, friend. He was a passionate thinker,

a voracious reader, and an inspiring teacher. He was authentic. He was present. He was aware.

And as John Rogers said for so many of us, "Yeah, I miss my buddy Drake."

#### Elizabeth Bryant

*Elizabeth Bryant is writer and friend of Drake. She is currently working on her Master's thesis in Art History and raising her son.*

*Financial gifts to assist the family may be sent to: Lauren Deknatel, c/o Bank of America, 17181 Bothell Way NE, Lake Forest Park, WA 98155. Gifts must reference #84844-984.*

*You may tell your great Drake story or read more about him at [www.artdish.com](http://www.artdish.com).*



Drake Deknatel • "Nightwatcher," 2005  
mixed media on canvas 60 x 48 inches  
Catherine Person Gallery • Seattle, WA



Drake Deknatel • "Dreamer," 2005  
oil/panel, 6 x 4 inches  
(This is last image and note emailed to Art Access from Drake, "As a boy I dreamed of flying.")