

actors with their roles. The actor who plays the doctor has had many calls for counseling. (The identification of actor with role is ancient. Remember the nineteenth-century rube in the theater audience who jumped up on the stage to sock the villain.) When these actors talk about being idealized as inhabitants of a marvelous other world, only a few of them come close to saying that they are just performers who were lucky to snare remuner-

ative jobs in a long-running series. They believe, rightly, that their admirers do not want to glimpse the scaffolding beneath the set. There *is* such a thing as a need not to know.

I put aside all attempts at large-scale observation, all sighs about deterioration of standards through the *Star Wars/Trek* mania. I will allow myself only a single sigh: I still haven't seen an SF film as good as the best science fiction that I've read. ■

Jed Perl on Art Dream Team

BARBARA GOODSTEIN'S landscapes are constructed of latex plaster, plywood, and bits of driftwood or other found objects. Chris Macdonald makes trucks and trains out of massive lengths of wood, some of which are leftovers—"salvage," as he calls it—from construction projects around New York City. Joel Shapiro keeps a supply of pre-cut wood in his studio, out of which he constructs his dancing, clambering figures. Joan Snyder's big symphonic paintings include papier-mâché, nails, cloth, straw, and just about anything else. David Rabinowitch makes his drawing materials himself by mixing beeswax and ground charcoal.

Each of these artists is dreaming up a technique, using unconventional materials for imaginative ends. They represent no one school or tendency, but the knock-about craftsman-like ease with which they incorporate stuff from the street, the junkpile, the lumberyard, and the hardware store—and, in addition, their unusual use of more typical art supplies—speaks volumes. In the work that each of these artists has shown in New York this season, I see an expansive approach to questions of craft, and this makes perfect sense at the end of a century that began with the experimental thunderclap of Cubist collage.

We all know that the range of materials that artists call their own has expanded to include anything and everything, from video monitors and computer printouts to the entire inventory of Kmart. Yet what is widely regarded as the forward march of technological innovation masks a deeper, century-long evolution in the studio, where the struggle to wrest meaningful forms from unconventional materials has sometimes focused and energized an artist's imagination. By now all sorts

of nontraditional materials, from scrap metal to plywood, are part of a living tradition. And this non-traditional tradition is so full of paradoxes, ambiguities, and criss-crossed developments that an artist needs an especially powerful mind in order to pull things together.

To paint with oil paint is to be a painter. You slip right into the tradition; your identity is clear, even if nothing else is clear. Unconventional materials have a more amorphous freight of allusions and implications. We are always thinking about where they came from. And what artists are doing with them is not simple. Just consider the tangled evolution out of Cubist collage and assemblage, which led to both the Olympian impact of Constructivism and the psychological labyrinths of Surrealism. If that were not strange enough, consider that a contemporary sculptor who decides to use the methods and the materials of a carpenter has made a personal artistic choice that is in fact grounded in the socialist artistic ideals which were shaped by the Bauhaus. At the Bauhaus, painting and sculpture were located on a continuum with woodworking, metalwork, and weaving, almost as they might have been in a medieval workshop, where altarpieces, banners, and furniture were done by the same team.

Plywood and rusted metal can be trash or treasure. It all depends. You certainly can regard such materials as anti-art, as the ever-changing yet ever-present bugbears of Dadaist or Neo-Dadaist insurgency, which is of course by now an academy with its own rules and regulations. Then again, there are many artists who see no reason to let the people who don't give a damn about structure and sensibility get away with all the goodies that you can't buy at the art supply store.

Just because junk has been made out of the junkyard is no reason to give away the junkyard. An artist can be as ardent about scrap metal as about marble. Unconventional materials inspire a more extreme sense of vocation, and a cruder one, too. They are anti-art until somebody proves otherwise.

ONLY AN ARTIST with a virtuoso exuberance can keep all of this in perspective. Joan Snyder has this kind of almost operatic aplomb, at least when she is working at the sky-high level of *Orchard* and *Oratorio*. These two mixed-media compositions, exhibited at opposite ends of a large empty room in a show called "Immediacies of the Hand: Recent Abstract Painting in New York," at Hunter College this winter, added up to the best installation of Snyder's work that has ever been seen in New York. When Snyder attaches a five-inch-deep shelf to the bottom of *Orchard*, the idea is Constructivist, even Minimalist. When she heaps the shelf with bits of earth and straw and globs of paint, she is more of an assemblagist, a sort of naturalistic Surrealist. Then Snyder unites her assemblagist's mixture of nature and culture with a canvas on which she unwinds a meandering, purple-and-green landscape of trees and rolling hills that feels Chinese or Sieneese. What is so interesting is how seamlessly all this flows together, suggesting that the distance between oil paint and found object is not as far as some may have believed.

Oratorio, the other work at Hunter, is one of Snyder's vast, symphonic, everything-all-together inventions, the whole world boiled down to fifty-four square feet. There is a skull-face, a house, a sunflower, and, in the middle of it all, a bleeding heart. Given the inclusive mood that Snyder is in here, how could she not have needed to use, in addition to oil and acrylic, plastic grapes, feathers, fabric, nails, herbs, papier-mâché, paper, and more? The unselfconscious improvisational assurance with which Snyder brings all this together could probably only come from an artist who had grown up amid the anti-paint turmoil of the 1970s—and yet remained fully engaged with painting. Snyder's plastic grapes are not Pop Art grace notes; they suggest a riff on one of art's oldest stories about verisimilitude, the legend of how the Greek artist Zeuxis painted some grapes so finely that several birds came and pecked at them. By now unconventional materials are natural (second nature, maybe); and an artist can use them as the vehicle for an expedition into realms of myth, mystery, and metaphor.

Unconventional materials turn the