

of detached observation but, as with film, a delicious surrendering to another's stream of visual consciousness. —Leah Ollman

## SAN FRANCISCO

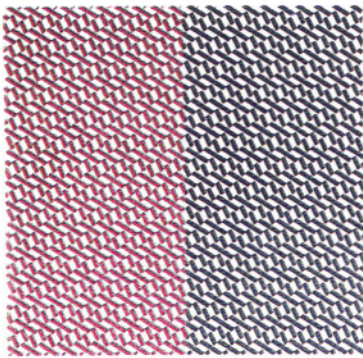
### Thomas Zummer at Marcel Sitcoske

In a suite of 15 drawings (all 23 by 30 inches), Thomas Zummer wittily examined the ways that media technologies such as photography, film, electrostatic copying and digitization have elbowed themselves between perception and reference. For example, one hauntingly abstracted graphite-and-carbon work is a hand-drawn rendering of a photocopy of a fragment of a photograph that depicts a dense multitude of people. This drawing summons up two kinds

explode esthetically, yet we are uncomfortably aware that they really did land on other heads.

Zummer's drawings are exquisite commentaries on the mass media's ambition to restructure our vision by reproducing anything we might possibly want to see. They are also visually seductive and often uncannily beautiful. In one ghostly drawing of a blown-up photocopy of a lightbulb, the copy machine's flash of blinding light has conjured a strange but still recognizable form out of total darkness. The lightbulb glows like a miraculous icon against the drawing's burnished carbon background. With this ensemble, Zummer confirms that the expansion of vision vouchsafed by technological mediums has no doubt permanently altered our apprehension of what we once regarded as real.

—Ernest Larsen



John M. Miller: *Ritual*, 1999, acrylic resin paint on raw canvas, 58 1/2 by 120 inches; at Patricia Faure.

of memories: of actual anonymous crowds and of the countless media representations of heaving masses of humanity.

With the real-life sources of the images at so many representational removes, we become acutely sensitive to the "noise" introduced by the intervention of different mediums. Zummer's appreciation of the vibrant imprecision of current imaging technologies as they endlessly circulate bits and pieces of reality produces a richly contradictory sense of loss. His drawings awaken a nostalgia less for the object of reference than for what such objects once made us feel. One drawing of a detail of a printed reproduction of a photograph centers on a repeated pattern of aerial bombs caught as they drop through the air. For us, such formally composed bombs can only

### Irving Marcus at Joseph Chowning

In this presentation of four medium-size paintings and over a dozen smaller works on paper, Irving Marcus struck a perfect balance between two competing ideals of modernist color. One is the tradition of hard-edged chromaticism derived from Matisse, and the other is the kind of chromatic modeling that is associated with the work of Bonnard. Marcus consistently and persuasively synthesizes the two practices into an efflorescent pictorialism that imbues his figurative flights of fantasy with a stunning visual exuberance.

Perhaps the best way to approach these works is to take note of how Marcus treats the contours of his subtly animated characters. Sometimes the edges

are feathered so as to make them appear to be dissolving in the face of the painterly pressure that surges against them. More frequently, they are decisively crisp, as if rendered with the assurance of a bold choreographic gesture. More than simply the boundary between inside and out, the edges act like protoplasmic membranes, pliant, gelatinous, yet impenetrable. The forms they describe possess an undulating rhythm and seem to serve as containers for libidinal energy.

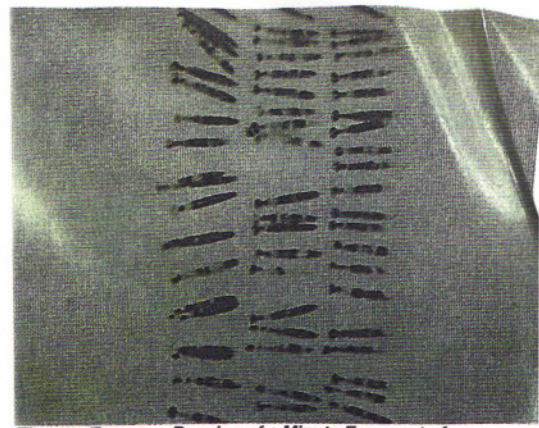
The impression of an instinctive, and perhaps even hallucinatory, level of experience is enhanced by Marcus's improbable arrangements of inanely costumed figures—most of whom are possessed of good humor, even if they sometimes seem perplexed or at wit's end—and ambiguous props in dreamlike mise-en-scènes. In one example, *Dance of the Snails* (1999), we see the pleated gowns of two dancing figures billowing wildly to create exaggerated, foreshortened shapes. The figures form an odd, rhythmic procession as they proceed into the painting's deeper space, their small faces displaying the studied equanimity of a Greek chorus. Pictured near the foreground is a kneeling supplicant rendered in a bright red that may indicate some passionate impulse about to erupt. Marcus's equivocal drama leaves it to the viewer's imagination to decide just what that passion might be about.

—Mark Van Proyen

## LONDON

### Simon Bill at Modern Art

In 1992, Simon Bill began exhibiting nightmarish paintings of cartoon figures, teddy bears and other toy imagery. Additional works borrowed from drawings by outsider artists and schizophrenics. Painted, drawn and spackled onto 4-by-



Thomas Zummer: *Drawing of a Minute Fragment of a Printed Photograph*, ca. 1971, 1999, pencil and pigment on paper, 22 by 30 inches; at Marcel Sitcoske.

8-foot sheets of Peg-Board, these figures could be menacing; despite the building-trade materials, the works were often exquisitely rendered.

In this show of 1999 work—Bill's first major exhibition in London in five years—figurative imagery gave way to biomorphic abstraction while the signature Peg-Board was replaced with plywood of the same size and brownish hue. The five plywood works in the gallery's first room each contained a central biomorphic form created with the unusual mediums of bitumen and an acrylic and corn-kernel emulsion. These are very physical works: the plywood panels have been repeatedly pierced and drilled into, and some of the holes have been spackled up and sanded. Scattered across the plywood surfaces are pencil lines, little sketches of the main image and written notations of possible titles.

The wayward, curvy shapes invite association as they resist outright recognition. In *Ghost of Chance*, a pale red form on a matte gray field looks like a mutant motif from a Paul Feeley painting, but it also resembles a

Irving Marcus: *Dance of the Snails*, 1999, oil on canvas, 42 by 56 inches; at Joseph Chowning.



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