
Phyllis Yampolsky

Phyllis Yampolsky was active at Judson Church and at the Judson Gallery in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

How Bud Scott came to my loft at Little West 12th Street to look at my paintings, I don't remember, and neither does he. What I do remember is that I was a two-year-old transplant from Philadelphia having just completed a few semesters at Hans Hofmann's Eighth Street Atelier. Since I had been recognized as an artist from the time I was old enough to hold a pencil—in a family and an environment that had never seen an artist and few paintings—I figured that the next sequence in my life would be as an exhibiting artist.

Accordingly, I went up to the galleries whose exhibits appealed to me and asked them to come see my work. I should probably have brought slides, but I may not have known that. I don't remember the style of the rejections except the one from Andre Emmerich, the owner of the gallery who exhibited Hofmann. Perhaps he was amazed at my innocence; perhaps he took my request to be amazing chutzpah. In either case, he came to my studio. He looked, smiled gently, and said: "In a few years, come again." I never went back.

But Bud Scott looked and said simply, "OK." I became one of the six members of the first group of Judson Gallery artists. The others were Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, Marc Ratliff, Dick Tyler, and Tom Wesselmann. During my association with the Judson Gallery I had two one-man shows of my paintings. They were called "one-man" shows at the time. I didn't mind, and I don't mind now. "Man" was short for "mankind," and I have always felt pinched at being identified with one half of the world's population.

The first show, in 1960, was called "Inside Out." It was the culmination of all I had learned at Hofmann's—the transformation of a flat surface into volume in which each stroke is a directional signal thrust into space, reverberating its energy into, out from, and about the environment, interweaving with the dynamics of all the other form/color energies until all of them together click into a balance, seizing the space into a unit of stillness.

By the second show, held in 1962, the struggle to achieve this balance had found resolution. There emerged a series of very simple paintings: a horizon line, a green field pushing up against it, a gray field pushing down on it from above. These became landscapes to me. The green field then gave birth to a very small, hesitant creature. In the dicta of abstract expressionism it felt like heresy and it was frightening. The creature persisted, however. It grew and eventually burst through the horizon as a woman. Though none of my works has ever been guided by literal intentions if any, in recalling this time I realize that the series was developed during the years of two pregnancies. This second show was called "Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and Other Short Stories." The primitive green/gray landscape had become inhabited with men and women, often making love.

Eight of the pictures in the show were bold brush drawings on brown wrapping paper, each of a man and a woman in the act of making love. They were called "Embrace #1," "Embrace #2," and so forth, to "Embrace #8." One day a man phoned, wanting to buy "The Embrace." "Which one," I asked, "there are eight of them." "You know," he answered, "the one of two people fucking." He was from Westchester and wanted to buy it to hang in a bar. At that time, I suffered a big disconnect between internal and external realities. His calling what the two people were doing "fucking" and his wanting to put the painting in a bar incensed and embarrassed me. My trigger response was an outlandish price. I can't remember whether it was to make sure he recognized this was "art" or to make sure he did not buy the picture. He chose not to buy it. I still have not learned not to give trigger responses.

The Judson Gallery was in the basement of Judson House. The door had a window in it to welcome passers-by with a view of the exhibits. The idea of barring or blocking the windows did not exist. One of the paintings in the second show hung on the wall opposite the window. One day someone aimed a rock at it and blew it apart. I don't think it was the man from Westchester. It was probably yet another person moved to respond. I guess the show was a success.

Since the 1960s, **PHYLLIS YAMPOLSKY**

has concentrated on participatory arts. Driven by a "burdensome missionary consciousness," she continues to be engaged in community projects in New York City.