

# The New York Times

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## Arts

### ART: NEO-EXPRESSIONISTS OR NEO-SURREALISTS?

By VIVIEN RAYNOR  
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DESPITE Shakespeare to the contrary, there's a lot in a name. Cubism, Dada and Pop, for instance, not only sound like the movements they denote, but also describe them admirably. Even Abstract Expressionism, though contested as a label by some of its exponents, is accurate enough, but Neo-Expressionism is another matter. Aside from having the same makeshift ring as Post-Modernism, it's at best a misleading term for the still newish figurative revival.

Such musings may be the stuff of scholarly journals, but the Robert Miller Gallery, 724 Fifth Avenue, at 57th Street, has made them concrete. Asserting in a brief introduction that Neo-Expressionism derives at least as much from Surrealism as from Expressionism, the gallery has assembled work by 13 painters and sculptors to prove it.

Titled "Surreal," the show is a little confusing because it includes names not normally associated with the movement, however named. This makes it seem as if the evidence has been shaped to fit the proposition. Yet, looked at from another angle, the presence of, for example, Lynda Benglis, Louise Bourgeois and Lucas Samaras (represented by richly colored pastels from the early 1960's) strengthens the argument in a way, for it doesn't take much intellectual maneuvering to see them as Neo-Expressionists. Another unexpected visitor is the late Philip Guston, whose "Head and Lamp," from 1978, looks perfectly at home in this company. On the other hand, the crusty abstract imagery of Gregory Amenoff doesn't fit too well, despite its landscape connotations, and Kenny Scharf's wildly colored paraphrase of Romulus and Remus tilts more toward Chicago funk than anything else.

Among the strongest cards played are a trompe l'oeil cave by Louisa Chase, with its screaming yellow interior, and one of Jonathan Borofsky's science-fiction figures posed against a kind of aurora borealis. The ace, though, is Giorgio de Chirico. Needless to say, it isn't the early metaphysical genius without whom Surrealism could scarcely have come into being, but the figure who fell into disgrace for having reneged on his own art, parodied it and, in general, sullied the fair name of Modernism.



Also of interest this week: Sandro Chia (Castelli, 142 Greene Street): One of the heavies in Italian Neo-Expressionism, Sandro Chia, is now a resident of New York City. His 10 monster canvases and tall bronzes, measuring up to eight feet, lend weight to the theory propounded by the "Surreal" show at the Robert Miller Gallery. And, in their size alone, they could support a notion or two about megalomania. This is art that floods the mind with associations. Several of the figures have manneristically tiny heads, but the haunches on one bronze female, who is withdrawing an arrow from her back, are worthy of Niki de Saint Phalle. In this and one of the male figures, the technique is reminiscent of Medardo Rosso. However, the largest and latest bronze, "Man and Vegetation," has a head and feet that speak of Diego Rivera, while the bricklike forms breaking through the flesh and the vines growing over it are pure Magritte. As a painter, Mr. Chia has moved from classically robed figures in mythological situations to something more Puckish. "Two Men With Crocodile," for example, shows the humans from behind standing breast-deep in water the consistency of a rag rug. The Pogolike crocodile is on the shore in the foreground. America is certainly having its way with Mr. Chia. (Through June 3.)

Joel Shapiro (Cooper, 155 Wooster Street): There's no Expressionism of any kind in Joel Shapiro's sculptures, and only a hint of Surrealism - in the improbable stances some of them take. Bronze, cast iron and wood are the materials, and they are superbly worked. Regardless of medium, the shapes are basically beams and planks, and it's in their joining that the interest lies - in the subtle disjunctions between two similar forms, in small shapes set askew on larger ones and, of course, in the angles at which the finished pieces lean. There's a bronze involving three elements joined end to end that stands at about a 60 degree angle to the floor. This balletic extension is so convincing that it seems Mr. Shapiro has found a way of defying gravity, rather than of bolting the work to the floor, as he has. Actually, the simple shapes that in the drawings look Suprematist are all, figural or not, quite evocative of the dance when translated into three dimensions. Laconic and beautiful, Mr. Shapiro's sculpture richly deserves the acclaim it has received. (Through June 4.)

William Scott (Gimpel & Weitzenhoffer, 1040 Madison Avenue, at 79th Street): William Scott, a British painter who hasn't been seen in New York for some time, hasn't changed greatly. The elegant skillet, the shapely pitcher and other items from the ideal kitchen are still his subjects, along with the occasional clutch of fish. The shapes, suspended in a white limbo or laid on tables, are flat, their colors mostly uninflected blues, grays, browns, whites and black. Maybe Mr. Scott's contours are more insistent than they were. The green pears outlined in blue and arranged on white are undoubtedly new. Otherwise, he remains an artist dedicated to repose and, perhaps, to the kind of English country life that induces it. (Through May 28.)