

the artist's hand and the historical clichés of artistic authenticity that often are attached to it.

Amidst the apparent spontaneity of swirling contours of wet and dry brushstrokes, and skeins and slathers of pigment, Lutes and Doremus suggest the presence of an image in what remains, on repeated viewing, resolutely open space.

Lutes's judicious applications of delicately shifting values and intensities of cool blue-grays, and warm earth-tones throughout his crush of thick, muddy brushstrokes, tease one with the palpable quality of decaying flesh and body parts that remain a figment of one's imagination. Though

spatially more open than Lutes's work, Doremus's contours of web-like tendrils and transparent washes, nonetheless, allude to malleable folds of skin that emerge and disappear with equal guile in works that exploit the delicate balance between abstraction and representation.

Creating disquieting viewing experiences, the artists in *Home Grown Cool* reassert painting's provocative potential in contemporary art, while continuing Chicago's rich painting tradition of producing tough, uncompromising images.



Jim Lutes, *Loaf of Woe*, 1993

John Brunetti is a Chicago-based critic and the Illinois Editor of *dialogue*.

## Wake Forest University Fine Arts Gallery

MARK BOOTH

SUSANNE DOREMUS

JIM LUTES

## Recent Painting from Chicago

REBECCA MORRIS

MARK OTTENS

JOHN PHILLIPS

October 19 - November 15, 1998

CURATED BY DAN DEVENING

**Mark Booth** - BFA, Rhode Island School of Design ('87); MFA, School of the Art Institute of Chicago ('95). Exhibitions: Artists Foundation Gallery, Boston; Art Center Museum, Duxbury, MA; Contemporary Art Workshop, Chicago; Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago; Lineage Gallery, Chicago; State of Illinois Gallery, Chicago; RX Gallery, Chicago.

**Susanne Doremus** - MFA, University of Wisconsin, Madison. Exhibitions: MCA, Chicago; Art Institute of Chicago; Terra Museum of American Art, Chicago; Smart Museum, University of Chicago; Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati; Indianapolis Museum of Art; University Art Museum, Santa Barbara, CA; Bill Maynes Gallery, NY; Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago; CompassRose Gallery, Chicago. Grants: NEA, Illinois Arts Council.

**Jim Lutes** - BA, Washington State University ('78); MFA, School of the Art Institute of Chicago ('82). Exhibitions: Whitney Biennial; Documenta IX, Kassel, Germany; 39th Corcoran Biennial, Washington, DC; MCA, Chicago; Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago; MCA, Ghent, Belgium; S. Bitter-Larkin Gallery, NY. Grants: NEA, Tiffany Foundation, AVA 7, Illinois Arts Council.

**Rebecca Morris** - BA, Smith College ('91); MFA, School of The Art Institute of Chicago ('94); Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture ('94). Exhibitions: Ten In One Gallery, Chicago; The Smart Museum, Chicago; Galeria Ray Gun, Valencia, Spain. Grants: Art Matters, Illinois Arts Council.

**Mark Ottens** - BFA, School of the Art Institute of Chicago ('92); MFA, University of Illinois at Chicago ('95). Exhibitions: Phyllis Kind Gallery, Chicago; Brasil Gallery, Houston; Smart Museum, University of Chicago; Muskegon Museum of Art, MI; Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, Champaign; Peter Miller Gallery, Chicago; Grand Rapids Art Museum, MI.

**John Phillips** - BFA, University of Colorado ('75); MFA, School of the Art Institute of Chicago ('79). Whitney Museum Independent Study Program ('78). Exhibitions: White Columns, NY; Shea & Beker, NY; P.S. 1, NY; Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati; MCA, Chicago; Dart Gallery, Chicago; Renaissance Society, University of Chicago; Marianne Deson Gallery, Chicago. Grants: NEA, Illinois Arts Council.

### Exhibition Checklist:

#### Mark Booth

*Swarm of Bees in the Shape of...*(Unit 9), 1995, mixed media on canvas, 26 x 44 in. Courtesy of the artist.

*Swarm of Bees in the Shape of...*(Unit 5), 1995, mixed media on canvas, 38 x 32 in. Courtesy of the artist.

#### Susanne Doremus

*Random Sample*, 1998, graphite, flashe, gouache and acrylic on canvas, 42 x 45 in. Courtesy of Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago.

*Idle Thoughts*, 1998, flashe, gouache and acrylic on canvas, 42 x 45 in. Courtesy of Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago.

#### Jim Lutes

*Portable Perpetrator*, 1993, oil on linen, 24 x 18 in. Courtesy of Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago.

*Loaf of Woe*, 1993, acrylic on linen, 42 x 60 in. Courtesy of Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago.

#### Rebecca Morris

*Level 5*, 1997, oil on canvas, 27 x 28 in. Collection of Donna and Jim Shanley.

*Layover*, 1997, oil and spray paint on canvas, 23 x 24 in. Courtesy of Ten in One Gallery, Chicago.

#### Mark Ottens

*The Progress of a Knobstick*, 1996, acrylic on canvas, 52 x 48 in. Courtesy of the artist.

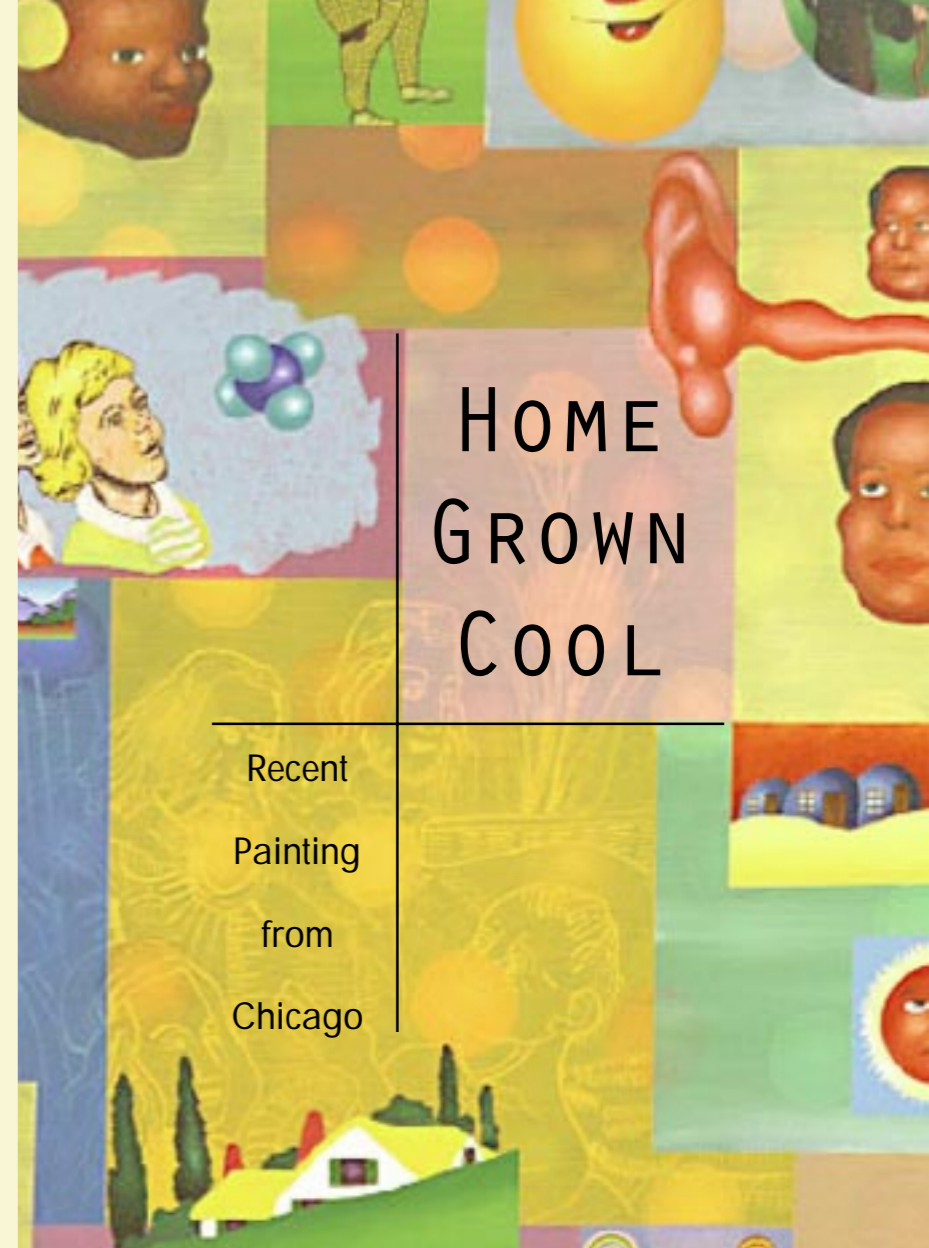
*Appley Ever After*, 1998, acrylic on canvas, 50 x 40 in. Courtesy of the artist.

#### John Phillips

*Double Talk*, 1997, oil and wax on board, 12 x 22 in. Courtesy of the artist.

*Entourage*, 1998, oil and wax on board, 16 x 18 1/2 in. Courtesy of the artist.

*Eddy's Go-Go Train*, 1997, oil and wax on board, 16 x 22 in. Courtesy of the artist.



## Curator's Note:

When I was asked to curate a small exhibition of recent developments in Chicago painting, the diverse work of the six artists in *Home Grown Cool* immediately came to mind. Present in the strategies of these emerging and established artists is a distinctly idiosyncratic view of painting's current disparate state. Inventive processes, skewed and corrupted appropriations, and curiously absurd images, are found combined with dexterous touches and volatile surfaces in every work. As a painter, it was a pleasure to see this work in conversation for the first time in this exhibition. I would like to extend my gratitude to Victor Faccinto, Page Laughlin and the Department of Art at

# HOME GROWN COOL

Wake Forest University for their enthusiastic response to this exhibition. Thanks also to William Lieberman of Zolla/Lieberman Gallery and Joel Leib of Ten in One Gallery for their assistance in gathering crucial works for the show, to John Brunetti for his astute and insightful essay, and to John Diaz for his inventive brochure design; everyone gave generously of their time and expertise. Finally, I want to express my sincerest appreciation to each of the artists; their contributions made *Home Grown Cool* an invigorating reflection of their passion and ideas.

Dan Devening, 1998

Front cover: Mark Ottens, *The Progress of a Knobstick*, 1996 (detail)

## Home Grown Cool: Recent Painting from Chicago

by John Brunetti

The artists in *Home Grown Cool* are skilled iconoclasts. Neither indebted to narrative, or abstract schools of painting, these diverse Chicago-based artists see each genre as raw material to scramble and reassemble in an attempt to shake the dryness out of accepted formal and conceptual approaches. Irreverently subverting familiar painting practices, often taking their influences from low cultural sources, these artists place the viewer in the uncomfortable position of being an active participant in taboo painting subcultures.

Masking the emotional intensity of their work with a seductive nonchalance, these painters quietly entangle the viewer in perceptual and conceptual conundrums. Exploiting the dissonances in their work, the artists in *Home Grown Cool* frequently eschew traditional notions of beauty for more idiosyncratic approaches to color, surface, and mark-making.

The hermetic abstractions of Rebecca Morris and the ebullient wax paintings of John Phillips share an affinity for defining the object-like quality of painting. Inspired by the vernacular language of unusual commercial color harmonies and decorative patterns, both artists substitute the spiritual aims of Modernist painting for a tactile, pedestrian quality that grounds their abstractions in the physical reality of a dysfunctional urban society.

Both Morris and Phillips exhibit a high degree of discipline in their repetitive use of their understated, signature motifs. Morris repeatedly employs two banal designs— an ersatz grid



Rebecca Morris, *Level 5*, 1997

of lozenge shapes and diagonal, lattice-like bands—to push the psychological limits of color relationships inspired by such diverse sources as fast-food packaging and industrial siding. However, allowing the random, unsightly rippling and sagging that occurs to the skin of her paint during the drying process to remain, Morris subtly emphasizes the imperfections attached to the real-world associations generated by her discordant colors.

The seamless, wax surfaces of Phillips's brightly colored paintings would appear devoid of the tactile pessimism of Morris's work. Recalling the optimistic explosions of boomerang-inspired Formica designs from early Atomic Age roadside diners, Phillips's elegantly sparse compositions of bouyant, interlocking shapes would seem to carry little subterfuge. Yet, he is not content to exploit the nostalgia that his paintings initially evoke. Deftly composing his paintings with the undulating rhythms created by scroll-inspired lines and elastic, biomorphic forms, Phillips creates perpetual chess games of incremental moves that ask one to distinguish flatness from depth, inside from outside, positive from negative, with no clear resolution to his beguiling works.

The sensuous investigations of paint and surface by Morris and Phillips could serve as backgrounds for the text paintings of Mark Booth and the carnivalesque, image-based works of Mark Ottens. Whether using language, or appropriated images, Booth and Ottens share affinities with Morris and Phillips in the pursuit of non-linear associations generated by collaging disparate forms and images.

Booth's stark black and acid-yellow paintings resemble cut-away diagrams of subterranean



John Phillips, *Entourage*, 1998

caverns, or body cavities, whose segmented open spaces surround phrases and words of a seemingly encrypted text. Edited by Booth from sessions of automatic writing for their sensorial associations, these unrelated words and phrases, rendered in generic black capital letters, serve as surrogates for Booth's actual images that are the product of one's own response to the text. Evocative, amorphous works, Booth's paintings reveal the deceptiveness of language to provide us with the definitive answers to our questions.

The lushness of Ottens's dense compositions of various cartoons and other popular imagery would seem incongruous to the restraint exhibited by Morris, Phillips, and Booth. Yet, Ottens shares with these artists an interest in finding the subject of his work in the unexpected and open-ended relationships generated through the improvisational compositions of visually strident images. Orphaned panels from long forgotten comic strips, and exaggerated body parts from children's puzzles, are juxtaposed with Ottens's own abstract designs and, in various works, the floral motif from a section of scavenged fabric used as a painting ground. The result is a cacophony of animated images that read like film out-takes played at different speeds, eventually blurred into distorted and resonating abstractions.

While each of the above mentioned artists in *Home Grown Cool* require the viewer, in varying degrees, to be active in making conceptual and perceptual links between the disparate parts of their paintings, few works test the viewer as vigorously as the gestural paintings of Jim Lutes and Susanne Doremus. Both Lutes and Doremus deconstruct the visceral gesture of



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