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ART ARCHIVES

# Knox Martin at Woodward Gallery, Robert Wilson at Paula Cooper, Charlotte Schulz at Smack Mellon

by ROBERT SHUSTER

October 20, 2010



**Daydreaming the females: Knox Martin's Mary Ellen, 2010**

COURTESY WOODWARD GALLERY

How many artists in their ninth decade find themselves as vigorously inventive as Knox Martin? In 34 new paintings, most of which concentrate on the female figure (a favorite subject), the 87-year-old artist steers away from his familiar style—a brightly colored, geometric Pop of playfully figurative elements—and, like a man reviewing the past, directs his energy into a kind of restless brooding. On backgrounds of foggy white, fretful black strokes roughly outline fragments of women's bodies—their parts, like memories, lie scattered across the frame in flattened space. The cubism—cartoonish in the way of late Picasso—evokes the fleeting nature of daydreams. In *Colette*, a pair of spiky elongated hands appear to play a piano, while nostrils, mouth, and large round eyes (prevalent in the show here) rise in a jumble above, pushing beyond the picture's edge.

Sometimes the black is so densely massed it all but obscures the figure. The primitive



*Looking*—can resemble the dour woodblock prints of German expressionism, but Martin lightens the mood with touches of color, adding red or orange to lips, nipples, and high-heeled pumps.

The sparer works, with their crudely rendered features, are more obviously joyful, verging on the comic. In the lively *Mary Ellen*, hands lifted and clasped run parallel to breasts that jut out like candelabra, while the woman's head, with giant dilated eyes, floats above—a glimpse, it would seem, of sexual fervor. Martin's infectious enthusiasm for the expressiveness of paint leaves you feeling giddy yourself.

### **Robert Wilson: 'Deafman Glance'**

Watching an original production by Robert Wilson is a little like staring at one of Ad Reinhardt's black paintings—you may not enjoy the experience, but the work somehow seems like an essential piece in the puzzle of cultural evolution. So it is with this 27-minute excerpt from the opening of Wilson's hours-long silent opera, *Deafman Glance*, which premiered at BAM in 1971. Adapted for television in 1981, the video-taped sequence depicts a mother—a mannish African-American woman dressed in Victorian black—murdering her two boys. Typical for Wilson, the drama shuns interpretation—comparisons to Medea are just superficial—and exists solely as a study in (terrifying) movement, stretching every moment with painstaking Kabuki-like deliberation, all without dialogue. Blank and robotic, the mother washes dishes, pours milk into a glass, allows each child to drink it, and then pushes a gleaming kitchen knife into their guts. The boys die bloodlessly, lowering themselves to the floor in slow motion.

The video's claustrophobic minimalism was never a match for the original production's immersive nightmare (akin to Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty), but Wilson tries to create a similar experience here by displaying the work on six time-delayed monitors and placing before each one an unnerving, impossibly tall chair. Though roars of traffic outside and too much light in the gallery windows largely defeat the effort, this piece—essentially an



killing has become a regular televised event. *Paula Cooper Gallery, 465 W 23rd St, 212-255-1105. Through November 6*

## Charlotte Schulz: 'The Uneven Intensities of Duration'

Realist drawing, too often considered old-fashioned or a student exercise, seems to be having a renaissance in the realm of the fantastical. In recent years, Dana Melamed, Jared Buckhiester, Dominic McGill, and Ion Birch have all skillfully produced dreamlike visions in black and white, with nothing more than a draftsman's tools. Add to that list the talented Charlotte Schulz, who uses charcoal to sketch surreal and deserted landscapes, where graceful interiors appear threatened by a dark, sinister environment. Folds in the paper, a fresh idea, further skew your sense of the space.

The meanings of it all may not be clear, but Schulz's long, nearly indecipherable titles, which read like language poetry, mirror what's happening in each picture: Juxtaposed elements (curving walls, jet planes, billowing smoke) aren't delineating obvious narratives but rather forming complex moods that move between comfort and fear, sometimes with hints of 9/11. Among the seven works here, the effect is consistently haunting. *Smack Mellon Gallery, 92 Plymouth St, Brooklyn, 718-834-8761. Through November 21*

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